

**The Only 21 Stories
You Will Ever Need to Be Successful
in Life & Business**

**From hardship to a purposeful life
How to be the best version of yourself**

*Compiled
By
Lucinda Douglas*

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Foreword

Are these the only 21 stories you will ever need to read in order to succeed in life and business? In a manner of speaking; yes. Even though the individual circumstances and experiences differ, the common thread running through all 21 stories is perseverance, tenacity, triumph and satisfaction through sacrifice and service and more often as a result of deep personal pain. The key is not in denying who we have been but acknowledging that which we are becoming.

A line in one of my favorite songs ‘Long Walk’ by Jill Scott says: ‘Your background it ain’t squeaky clean, shit; sometimes we all have to swim upstream.’ We are all swimming upstream from something, someone, some situation...the muscles we build as we navigate the turbulence empowers and affords a deeper insight. Only personal experience can bring enabling one to illuminate the way for others in diverse ways ...even sometimes just by sheer existing.

Hide not from mistakes nor shy away from imperfections for they do not diminish who we are but if allowed, provides each with a distinct flavor that would only increase one in value.

Rauf Abdul captures it so succinctly, in his analogy of the twenty dollar bill. It didn’t lose its value regardless of the wear and tear it had experienced. Everybody still wanted, why? It could still do what a twenty dollar is supposed to do regardless. And think, in the right hand under the right care and supervision, 20 can become 40, 40 60... 60 80... and so on and so on and so on...

Ireti Doyle, Nigerian award winning actress

21 stories compiled by Lucinda Douglas



This Truth of Mine

Terré Holmes

When I was seventeen, my mother gave me the gift of her sobriety and it was the best gift she could have ever given me, coupled with the power of the truth. My mother sobering up meant that she was finally admitting that she had a problem and that it was much bigger than her. From this decision, I would learn that we cannot free ourselves from a bondage we are unwilling to accept exists.

The truth used to bring me great sorrow. I would sob lonely, gut wrenching cries where the tears flowed like a river and each next breath seemed almost impossible to take. It was a cry that wouldn't cease and left my head pounding and my heart aching. I now realize that I was wounded and when we are still wounded from the pain of our past, it's difficult to talk about it and therefore, very implausible to overcome it.

My mother and father became addicts while in their youth. His drug of choice was heroine. Hers; alcohol and crack cocaine and though I carried the guilt and shame of being their daughter for years, none of this was my fault. I had done nothing wrong, but it would take over half of my lifetime to accept this truth.

Both of my parents were born during the 50's on the East Side of Cleveland, Ohio in similar homes to hard working parents. Both becoming habitual drug users before I was ever thought of. So, it was only logical that bringing a child into the world, wouldn't necessarily change that, but I would spend many years wishing that it had.

Their addictions were never about me, but I did not know that at the time. Honestly, there was so much to their stories that I didn't know and therefore, I didn't quite get them. Like an unfinished puzzle, it's hard to see the entire picture when there are pieces missing. My parents' lives were like those pieces to me. I couldn't really understand how or why people would choose to be parents and then abandon their responsibilities. I spent many sleepless nights wondering what could have happened to them to cause them to neglect and abandon me in more ways than physical and why wasn't I enough for them to finally 'get it together'?

My feelings of inadequacy caused me a lot of heartache. No one had to hurt me, because I caused enough damage on my own. In fact, I was my own worst enemy and deemed myself worthless. I didn't just tell myself this, it played out in my life in multiple ways and in my mind for over twenty years.

Abuse

When you believe you are worthless you will do unthinkable things to yourself and anything that causes you pain and prevents you from looking at yourself in the mirror the next day, falls into that category. As a result of my parents' addictions, I internalized the pain and allowed it to overcome me. Everyone deals with pain differently. When you deny that it exists, you cover it up with drugs and alcohol, gambling or food addictions and even sex. Both sex and overspending became my pain killers and like an addict, true to form, the more I indulged, the more I wanted.

I was twelve years old when I had my first sexual encounter. It was with a young man who lived in our apartment complex. Little did I know, but my mother had started experimenting with drugs about a year prior to that. So it gave me plenty of time to do some experimenting of my own. She was never home and when she was, she slept so hard that a tsunami could hit and she would peacefully ride the wave as if nothing had ever happened. Her new addiction served as the catalyst for what would become my new addiction.

At first, I was having sex simply because I was curious and thought I loved him. Imagine that, a twelve year old in love. I just knew that if I gave him my body that he would give me the love I craved for in return, but I was wrong and not only was I wrong with him, I would spend the next twenty or more years of my life being wrong about who I was, my value, and what I had to give up in order to be on the receiving end of love.

Have you ever heard that hurt people, hurt people? I learned that not only do they hurt people they hurt themselves the most. I know this because I abused myself in more ways than you know. I destroyed relationships, my finances, and abused my body. I judged myself harshly and measured my success by the success of others. Not knowing then that there is no comparison between the sun and the moon. They both shine when they are supposed to.

Retrospect, forgiveness and understanding

There came a time in my life when I realized that in order for me to heal the hurt of my past I had to begin to let go of the pain that had brought me to some of the darkest moments of my life. Like my mother, I had to admit that I was powerless and asked God to intervene on my behalf and replace my destructive thoughts and dangerous behavior, first with love for myself and next with forgiveness.

I had began the journey of forgiving my parents years prior. I was helping others to transform their lives through my work on forgiveness, when one day it hit me. The person I needed to forgive the most was staring back at me in the mirror. I wept like a baby from this revelation and cradled myself with loving arms. The healing was finally beginning.

Overtime, I learned not to greet myself with judgement, but with understanding. Life had been tough for me. I had endured a lot and I had been forced to learn a lot on my own. I wasn't making excuses, I was merely stating my truth, but it was a truth that I wanted to put behind me. I wanted to tell a different story. A story of overcoming. A story of hope. A story of redemption.

Yes, I had been bruised along the way, but I wasn't broken. I could choose to wallow in the past or create a brighter future and allow my pain to fuel my purpose, find the message in my mess and the blessings amidst the bruising. The blessings were there and through my struggles, I also learned that my story is a gift, not for me, but to be given away to others. So I choose today to put pen to paper and hold microphones to my lips whenever I am asked, so that I can offer someone else the hope I didn't always have, but that I certainly have now. Thank God for forgiveness. Thank God for second chances.

About the Author

Terré Holmes (United States) is a serial-preneur, master business strategist, world traveler, mentor to women globally, an expert on resiliency, as well as a human development coach and enthusiast. She lives just outside of Washington, DC and when she's not traveling, writing, teaching, speaking, or running one of her businesses, you can find her in the kitchen whipping up something tasty and adventurous.



Fortune Favours The Brave

Rauf Abdul

I am a husband, a father, a son, and a brother. I am an uncle, a nephew, a cousin, and a friend. I am a researcher, teacher, speaker, and synergistic HRM consultant. I'm an experienced instructor. I hold a Doctorate in Philosophy degree in the field of HRM. I am not a great cricketer; I am a klutz. I am one who loves to help others, and I believe in one God. I am a sports freak and a smart phone junkie. I am blessed with amazing family and friends. I am strong, but an allergy sufferer. I am one who loves to laugh. I am happy. And I am not, what a lot of people would think, lucky to be born into a privileged class. I made it thus far because I told myself one thing: I am not a loser; no matter what, I can conquer whatever I wish. I am.

But I didn't decide to become a teacher and researcher. Amazingly, it just happened. I believe success is a product of great dreams, determination to do something, and the great resolve to achieve it.

Christopher Reeve said: 'So many of our dreams at first seem impossible, then they seem improbable, and then, when we summon the will, they soon become inevitable.' Lupita Nyong'O puts it this way: 'No matter where you're from, your dreams are valid.'

My story starts with my first-ever formal conversation with my dad during a spring afternoon over an English cup of tea. I have many stories, but this is one that defines my life journey and one that I will carry with me until my last day.

My father was a school teacher in Burewala, a small town in Pakistan and his one single dream was to provide his children with the best education possible. Like many others, I was determined to carve out a better life for myself. My dad, a strict and authoritarian man, asked me what I would like to do now that I had completed secondary school (remember, I was sixteen). It was a pleasant surprise for me as he hardly gave us any choices. I lived in a culture with hardly any freedom, few choices, and limited exposure to the world outside of school. I took a deep breath and replied that I would love to start a business.

He reacted in his (typically) over-protective style that he did not ask about my work interests, but about my study interests. More specifically, he wanted to know whether I would prefer to pursue an engineering degree or a medical science degree. I said no to both.

I was young with hardly any exposure to the complex practical world, but I was very sure that engineering or medicine was not part of my career aspirations. It wasn't easy, but I convinced my dad that if I wasn't allowed to start a business, business administration was the only field I would study. I am grateful for parents who lovingly allowed me to pursue my dreams, even when it wasn't what they had in mind for me. I completed a PhD in HRM at a world-renowned Dutch university. I then reached a leadership position at one of the top international Business Schools in the Netherlands at a young age.

Step by step

It is true that fortune favours the brave, but it is never just sheer luck. You must not only dream big, but also build your dreams, step by step, with determination and hard work. It comes down to making the right choices at the right times. I remember wanting a marketing job at a big multinational company after my MBA. Instead, I ended up teaching BBA students in a commerce college. In an economy with the highest level of unemployment, even today I am willing to take an entry-level job despite holding the highest academic degree and best possible career position at this moment. This attitude was the very reason I accepted my first-ever less attractive academic position, which completely transformed my thought philosophy. I remember there were several of my BBA students older than me, including a married man and father of one-year old son.

I did my best during my first few years of teaching and did not compromise the quality of my work, but I soon realised I needed to sharpen my research and teaching skills if I wanted to reach academic heights. I decided to obtain a research degree from a foreign university. Excited that my little savings could afford me a plane ticket and cover my expenses for the first few months, I was accepted at one of the renowned UK universities. But the sheer disappointment struck when my visa was rejected for no obvious reasons.

Distraught, my determination to pursue a research degree from a reputable western university remained resolute. I believe in positive thinking as suggested by this great quote: 'I am capable, I am strong. If I believe in myself, I can turn my dreams into a plan, and my plan into my reality.' Within one year, I managed to get a 100% scholarship for a four-year research degree from a university with a great track record for research and higher education in beautiful Holland.

Milestones versus destination

I remember calling one of my favourite MBA teachers for advice before leaving for Holland. To his dismay, I outrightly rejected the only piece of advice he offered: 'Rauf, please do not resign from your current job.' He thought that completing further education or finding a new job might not prove easy, especially in a different culture far away from home. But I knew what I was up for and I said, 'Sorry, sir, I can't accept this piece of advice as I am ready to burn the bridges and not look back.' I was clear that if I couldn't manage to find a similar job, then I did not deserve to have this job. This decision helped me set a principle of moving forward and never looking back. It may seem difficult at times, but eventually you will reach your destination. There is no shortcut to real success and if most things in life is a piece of cake, either there is something wrong with the direction or the destination. A clear direction not only helped me to achieve some important milestones in my life, but also the great success I am enjoying now.

It is important to mention that