

## Dear Nieces and Nephews:

### YOU HAVE TO LEARN SOME THINGS THE HARD WAY

*“Education is learning what you didn’t even know you didn’t know.”*

—Daniel J Bursting

This is the book that I wish someone had written for me. I remember being a teenager and searching for someone who would talk to me about growing into adulthood. If there were books written to address the issues I was struggling with, they never found their way into my hands. The “generation gap” was being promoted: if you were young, the message went, you shouldn’t trust anyone over thirty. And yet, those very people had a wealth of life experience that could have saved me a lot of heartache. My problem with the “older” generation was that they had plenty of rules but no one was talking about why those rules were in place. But I was hungry to know about life. So I looked for answers where I could find them. I reached for popular books and listened to popular songs. And I made a lot of stupid choices. Today I joke that I learned too much “the hard way.”

I’m hoping I can pass on to you some of the knowledge I have gained, on my own and from others, in order that your way can be smoother, more joyful, and more fulfilling. I’m hoping to save you a little trouble, or guide you in a way that might shorten the time you spend in the places you don’t want to be. At the same time, I hope my words can support you in reaching high and living up to your best potential.

In these pages, I want to encourage you, teach you, laugh with you, and cry with you. I care about how your life goes. I may not know you personally. Or perhaps I do. Either way, I know enough about life to know that we are all connected. Your joy lights up the world. Your pain is part of giving birth to yourself, as it is for us all. I’ll hold your hand for a little time, coach you, cheer for you, encourage you. I want to tell you the truth about cause and effect. For each action there is a consequence—nothing personal, it works like that for everyone, even when it doesn’t seem to at first glance.

There are laws and rules that exist whether you know about them or not. You may or may not like them. You don’t have to believe in gravity or

agree with it for this book to fall if you hold it out and let go. As a child, you can be told “HOT!” and it really doesn’t mean a thing until you get burned for the first time. After you get a burn and cry, you have a frame of reference for “hot.” So, some things you have to learn the hard way. You just do.

You don’t, however, need to learn the same things over and over. The interesting thing about life is that you will get knocked on the head as many times as it takes to learn a lesson. Life is a patient teacher that way. This book is about mapping some of the terrain of life and showing you a few places that might be “hot.” You decide for yourself how you want to approach things. I hope my words will help you listen to the inner voice you have to guide you and hear it a little more clearly. And I’ll whisper some of the things I’ve learned along the way so you don’t have to learn EVERYTHING the hard way. Through sharing stories of my own and other people’s lives, I hope to support you in creating the life you dream of, in becoming the best you.

In the world of finance there is a term: OPM. It stands for “other people’s money.” The idea here is that you can use other people’s resources to invest and make a profit for yourself. In this book there is a similar concept for you to use to your advantage. It’s also OPM, but here it stands for “other people’s mistakes.” Where others have shared their life experiences and learned from them, you have an opportunity to benefit. Use other people’s mistakes (and successes!) to your advantage.

Making your own mistakes is an essential part of life. Struggling through challenges does make you stronger. Yet knowing that you are not alone in your effort to grow can be enormously encouraging. The journey of life is taking one step at a time. Each new step brings us another chance to grow, strengthen our character, or connect. When you think you have “arrived” at mastery, when you think that you know everything you need to know, that is precisely when life will send you a “wake-up call.”

I hope you will see that you are never alone in your experiences, never. There is a paradox here. Because at the same time that you are never alone, you are the only one who can do what you need to do. There are thousands of writers, but I am the only one who can write this book. You are the only one who can make that particular movie, or be a good friend to that particular person in need. A paradox is when two seemingly contradictory things exist at the same time. Even though millions of other people have

the same kinds of experiences, each one of us has our own sacred perspective. We each carry a spark of the Divine, and it is that which we honor in our uniqueness. It is also that spark that is always with us no matter how dark life may seem.

We each get to decide for ourselves the kind of life we want. We each have to live our own adventure in life, but we each don't have to reinvent the wheel. Author and teacher Tony Robbins says it very well: "To have good judgment, you have to have life experience. To have life experience, you have to have made bad judgments (and learned from them)."

Experiment for yourself with the concepts presented here. Think of the ideas and life lessons in this book as a cafeteria. You go through and taste different things. You may read out of order or read some chapters more than one time. You may be hungry for certain ideas and find others to be a nice complement for support and balance. Bon appétit!

Love,  
Aunt Laya

*"Experience is the worst teacher;  
it gives the test before presenting the lesson."*

—Vernon Law