

# *The Journey to Unexpected Pathways: Fearless ... Moving on with Hope, Courage and Informed Spontaneity*

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*It's never too late to create good memories ... It's never too late to create a good life ... It's NEVER too late to begin again! —Dr. Anne*

**D**o we really know the women—our colleagues, our friends, our relatives—we encounter on a daily basis? Do we know their history? Do we know their hearts? Do we make assumptions based upon our own experiences and beliefs? Or, do we simply co-exist and move through our own busy lives without knowing the richness of their stories and the lessons that they may teach us? These were some of the questions that drew me to creating *Unexpected Pathways*—a journey that has been ten years in the making and one that has certainly been unexpected.

The journey began with the words: “I have feelings for someone else.” Those words started a spiral resulting in the collapse of a thirty-five year marriage; precisely at the end of my successful thirty-five year career as an educator. And ... I was so looking forward to retirement—to enjoy time together—you know, golf, travel, rest and relaxation! With those words, my expectations about the future were dramatically altered. My life was dramatically altered. And the trajectory of my career journey was dramatically altered. Enough said. Onward!

## **Lesson #1: Survive and thrive ... No! Prevail! Take whatever time YOU need ... but do not give up!**

In the midst of the cyclone, ten years ago, the word “survival” was in the forefront of my mind. How could I go on? What would I do? How would I take care of myself? How would I navigate this new life? I was not sure, but I did know that I wanted, as I was taught, to proceed with as much grace and dignity as I could muster. I wanted that for myself and for my two daughters. Yes, it was an incredibly sad, devastating and disappointing time. I felt betrayed and rejected, but I would survive. No. I would: *Survive, thrive, prevail and ... never, never, never give up!* - as my life mantra soon came to be. Something inside of me willed me to move forward, very slowly at times—very slowly, but forward I moved; working through the sorrow, the self-doubt and the nearly disabling fear. Fear loomed large but somehow I fought it off. Survival was paramount in my mind. Faith and the will to survive ultimately trumped fear and offered hope. I drew upon resilience born of childhood experiences. I drew upon the love of my children and their love for me. I drew strength from friends who took me under their wings, listened and spent time with me. I prayed. I prayed a lot.

What would I do? I was retiring and it would be necessary to again find work. For thirty-five years, I had known only education—working as a teacher, a school counselor, a director of school counseling and a transition coordinator for four school districts—rural, urban and suburban—in Southeastern Pennsylvania. I had a wonderful career serving youth, families, schools, communities

and fellow educators; and I was also a volunteer serving my profession most notably on the Governing Board of the Pennsylvania School Counselor's Association for thirty years.

## **Lesson #2: Revisit your dreams ... Invest in yourself ... It is NEVER too late to begin again.**

As I said, I knew education and in my mind, the next logical step was to teach at the collegiate level. To achieve that goal, I would need a doctorate, so ... I took a risk and I embarked on *The Doctoral Journey* as my professors called it. Thinking back, the decision to get my doctorate was the fulfilment of an unrealized dream. Maybe I was simply fulfilling my destiny? Who knows? At any rate, back to school I went at the age of fifty-eight! It is never too late to begin again!

Ultimately, the rigorous doctoral curriculum and the extensive research required, proved to be extremely healing. Nightly study required of me a healthy life-style. That incredible academic exercise kept me focused and "out of trouble" for sure! In reality; there was little time for anything else but study, managing my home and my consulting work. And please know that I had a lot of fear—the challenge was one of the most difficult of my life—I just could not let the process beat me.

In 2011, at age sixty-three, I earned my Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Phoenix Online. I learned much. I learned that I can do anything! I learned to step out in faith without fear. Honestly ... I sort of made up my adventure as I went along and did it my way! Let's call it informed spontaneity.

Oh, did I mention that in the midst of my doctoral work, I moved from Pennsylvania to North Carolina? I left my family, friends and business network—my support system. Why you ask? The driving factor in my decision was to be *present* in the lives of my children and grandchildren— a story to be continued in my next book, *The Legacy of Six*. Next book? Yes. It is a promise I made to myself.

There were also financial considerations surrounding the move, now that I was single. In North Carolina, I had the opportunity to support the design and development of an online Masters of Education in School Counseling program at an area college—I love school counseling—it is among my passions. Teaching pre-service school counselors is a dream come true.

Now please understand—obtaining a doctorate or going back to school may not be the solution for everyone, but it was the right solution for me. There is no right or wrong way to react to great challenge, but without question investing in oneself—emotionally, socially, physically, intellectually or spiritually—will pay dividends.

## **Lesson #3: Stay positive. Be open to new opportunities and options. Cherish YOUR journey!**

As Mike Dooley AKA *The Universe* would say, "Thoughts become things, think the good ones!" Did I tell you that I have a strong belief that things will work out? Not always the way we envision, but somehow life will work out—if work is put into life. It is not always easy to have a positive attitude, but I find that approaching life from a positive perspective, in general, has served me well. I am grateful for that perspective, although at times over the past ten years, I have faltered. When I slip away from the positive and from positive people, I am not joyous. My creativity does not flow. I find

joy in life, particularly when I am able to look at the beauty and promise of life—when I look beyond the negative and work to stay positive. There are myriad options and opportunities, if we can only remain positive and open to the possibilities.

As I was working on my doctorate, I took the risk to create an LLC (Limited Liability Corporation) so that I could work as an educational consultant. The risk was rewarded when I was asked to consult at three area career and technical centers; specifically working with high school career and technical students—young women and men—pursuing non-traditional career pathways, such as women working in the electrical, welding, automotive, construction or engineering professions. At the same time, I was also asked to manage a high-priority industry partnership for the Chester County Economic Development Council in conjunction with the local Workforce Investment Board. It is amazing how things fall into place. These positions were made possible because of the work and networking I did throughout my career and my willingness to volunteer on many educationally based committees, representing my school districts and in support of the students, families and communities I served.

It is amazing how the choices we make impact our future and position us for the next chapters of our career journey. I hasten to add, that managing the industry partnership ITAG—*The Information Technology Action Group* focused upon the IT (Information Technology) field—brought more than a little anxiety and fear; as the dynamics of the position and the IT field in general were foreign to me. I learned a great deal—quickly. Fortunately, I was able to draw upon my creativity and the leadership and organizational skills that I garnered over the years to successfully navigate the steep learning curve. I was also a member of an amazing team of women who supported each other every step of the way.

My work with the career and technical students coupled with my experiences supporting and developing workforce initiatives such as *GETT: Girls Exploring Tomorrows Technology*—a workforce development activity especially designed for girls in grades 6-12 and their parents, teachers and counselors, to meet and interact with successful business women. GETT was and continues to be an opportunity for parents, girls and educators to learn the facts about how careers in technology can be fun and rewarding—personally, professionally and financially. Again, I was a part of an incredibly dedicated group of women who spearheaded the G.E.T.T. project. In 2015, GETT will celebrate fifteenth years educating students and parents.

My experience with GETT and other workforce development programs led me to develop a program called *B.I.G: Business, Industry and Girls*. *B.I.G.* was designed as a career and educational development initiative to prepare high school girls for the STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) workforce and to encourage them to think BIG! During the school year, the girls visited a series of corporations to learn from and speak with women in leadership—CEOs, engineers, managers, etc. Generally, the events began with a panel of women, sharing their work/life history—how they arrived in the position in which they currently worked and moving on to discuss their careers, including topics such as work-life balance. During these sessions, the seeds of *Unexpected Pathways* were being sown.

As I observed the interaction between the corporate leaders, I noticed that the members of the panels, while working closely together in the corporate environment, were not necessarily aware of each other's career or life histories. As the women on these panels related their stories to the girls, the

other women on the panels were clearly in awe of the amazing backgrounds and experiences shared. The girls were enthralled by the career/ life journeys related by these corporate women and the way each came to be in their current positions. I personally noted the “unexpected” nature of many of the women’s journeys. I will admit, it was exciting to hear the stories of women, it was exciting to see how motivated the girls were after listening to the stories and it was exciting to observe these women truly “meet” each other for the first time—bonds of awareness, understanding and friendship were unquestionably formed—the experience was terrific! Seeds of the future were sown.

#### **Lesson #4: Seek to understand yourself and soar!—Keep promises to yourself and others.**

Events foreshadowing our future seemingly occur throughout our life time. However, they may not be realized as lessons at the time.

Flash back: “Sourbeer, what do you want now?” The words of my high school Algebra II teacher resound in my ears to this day. I had raised my hand to ask a question. The state math and science fair winners—both male—were also enrolled in that class. They clearly did not need to ask basic questions. The other students, I surmise were afraid to ask. The teacher played to the class elite—predominately male. The teacher was male. The remark essentially ended my high school career in mathematics. I became a victim of stereotype threat—clearly girls in general and I specifically were not good in mathematics. It was the message I received. Years later, I had the epiphany that I was probably pretty good in math—after all, I had been placed in the class with the math elite! Ah, the power of a remark—intentional or unintentional.

My high school experiences, my doctoral work, and my work with students pursuing nontraditional career pathways led me to question the barriers faced by individuals, specifically girls and women, who attempted to navigate non-traditional career pathways. In my case, stereotype threat impeded my academic progress, as I believed that I—a girl—did not belong in the mathematics or science field. Societal stereotyping may cause even the most capable student to feel academically inferior. The belief may negatively affect test scores and academic advancement. My doctoral research confirmed that stereotype threat based upon negative stereotypes about gender or race is alive and well today, decades later.

And then there was a conversation with my youngest daughter, who despite having had great academic and athletic success in high school and college and later, taking on significant leadership and responsibility in a rigorous internship; still expressed the fear that she was *not good enough* to get to the next level of her career—imposter syndrome! Despite evidence proving the opposite, she felt inadequate. I spoke with other women and girls. I performed research. What? How could this be? Our best and brightest individuals feeling that they are not good enough—another barrier to success.

Frankly, I recall feeling the same way and having to fight through the feelings and the fear that someone might find out that I was an “imposter.” There was a time when I felt that my thoughts had no value ... that I was not worthy. Author a book? No way! I believed that others were better, smarter or more worthy of success than I—even in the face of evidence to the contrary. And there has been significant evidence, but how one feels deep inside may differ from the achievements witnessed by the world.

All of these and other experiences propelled have me on the *Journey to Unexpected Pathways*—a journey that seemingly has taken ten years, but in reality has taken a lifetime. I have learned to trust myself and my ability. As I reflect on the wonderful career I have had and the future that lies before me—as I seek to understand myself—I have come to understand that I am worthy to express my thoughts. I have learned that my thoughts have value. They always have. Open the flood gates!

The reality is that I have always been what you might call a *brain-stormer*—an idea person! I love to generate ideas as many colleagues will attest—I love that sort of creative process. I think the doctoral experience took me *over the edge* to truly believing in myself or maybe it was the wisdom and maturity of decades lived. Maybe life is simply too short to worry about what others might think. I still have much to do in my life—to continue to educate and to serve—to make a difference. I continue to evolve.

In any case, now, concepts and ideas overflow—*Futures Inspired! ... The Unexpected Pathways Project ... Create Futures by Inspiring Futures ... The Legacy of Six ... The Promise of Hope ... The Grandteacher Morris Sagas ...* All ideas that I have promised myself that I would nurture and give life. First, my website—*Futures Inspired*—and now, the *Unexpected Pathways Project* have become a reality. I believe that the ideas have come from a power far greater than I. I am grateful.

The completion of *Unexpected Pathways: The Journey of Women in the Workforce* is the fulfilment of a concept born of experiences. It is a promise to *me* that I would see the journey to completion. Most importantly, the completion of this volume is the fulfilment of a promise to the women who joined me on this great adventure. All have remarkably and amazingly *shown up* in my life. I am grateful.

## **Lesson #5: Who knows where life will lead?**

Letting go of disappointment and forgiving has been critical to my survival and success. My journey has been driven by love. My heart is again filled with joy, anticipation and hope.

My life is very different now than I had anticipated it to be ten years ago, in 2005, when the *Journey to Unexpected Pathways* began, but my life and my new career journey are rich with adventure. I continue to learn and to grow through success and challenge. Without question, my work and life experiences prepared me for my current unexpected career and life journey.

I am a connector. My colleagues have referred to me as a *broker of resources*. Knowledge sharing is among my passions. I must continue to do so. My future is full of opportunity and options. I look forward to my next great adventure. Who knows where life will lead?

## **Dr. Anne's Five Inspired Lessons**

**Lesson #1:** Survive and thrive ... No! Prevail! Take whatever time you need, but do not give up on yourself or your goals.

**Lesson #2:** Revisit your dreams ... Invest in yourself ... It is NEVER too late to begin again.

**Lesson #3:** Stay positive. Be open to new opportunities and options. Cherish YOUR journey!

**Lesson #4:** Seek to understand yourself and soar!—Keep promises to yourself and others.

**Lesson #5: Who knows where life will lead?**

**Dedication**

To my mentors ... past, present and future.

**Anne Sourbeer Morris, Ed.D.**

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**Inspiration and Introspection**

*Fear may attempt to derail us. We must not let fear deter us from following our destiny.*

**U**pon reflection, if I could give YOU anything, I would banish the fear of achieving your dreams of success—whatever success means to you. Your dreams are intimate reflections of you. Your success is unique to your vision. Hold on to your dreams. At the very least, remember the dreams of your past; so that they may be re-kindled, possibly modified but never dismissed.

*Escape the burdens of your fear.*

Fear of the unknown, fear of change, fear of failure or fear of success may prevent us from taking the first steps to building our future. As I embarked upon the *Journey to Unexpected Pathways*, I was fearful many times—even now, as I write these final sentences, there is doubt; but there is more pride—pride in myself, but more significantly, pride in the women who joined me on this journey—who shared deeply of themselves with the sincere goal that their words would make a difference in the lives of others. Our most basic motivation was to inspire another individual to move forward with courage and the hope of a better future to come—to embark upon the career and life of her or his dreams—to believe in herself or himself.

*Faith crushes fear and offers hope.*

It is my wish that YOU will follow your heart and your dreams ... that YOU will move forward with courage and confidence ... that YOU will never, never, never give up!

May your journey be driven by love.

Be inspired!

*Today, take one step, just one in the direction of your dream. Be inspired; be open to opportunities and options. Who knows where life will lead?*