

*Chicken Soup for the Soul: From Lemons to Lemonade*  
101 Positive, Practical, and Powerful Stories about Making the Best of a Bad Situation  
Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Amy Newmark  
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# Chicken Soup for the Soul®

## From Lemons to Lemonade

101 Positive, Practical,  
and Powerful Stories  
about Making the Best  
of a Bad Situation

**Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen  
& Amy Newmark**



Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, LLC  
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## The Adventures of a Middle-Aged College Student

*You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.*

~C.S. Lewis

I was staring into the abyss. A month earlier, my supervisor Ana had called me into her office. She had been fighting to keep me on amid massive budget cuts in the city of Reno, Nevada, but seniority trumped skill, so I was laid off.

A layoff is never good, but this was worse. It was the end of 2008 and, with the highest unemployment rate in the nation, Reno was the worst place to look for work.

In Hollywood, they call it the inciting incident. In 2006 I was a stay-at-home husband, living a mundane life of cooking, cleaning and taking kids to school. Then one day, my world ended when my wife left. This incident changed my life for the good, although I didn't see it that way at the time.

I lost more than 100 pounds, my health improved, I got my driver's license and I filed for divorce. I worked at Walmart for about a year, looking for a job in accounting, my specialty.

When Ana called me, telling me I got the job at the city, I was thrilled. The pay was low, but I didn't care. I wanted to work, to prove to myself what I could do. After a few months, however, I

began to realize something: I hated working in accounting. But that is what I was trained to do.

And that's when Ana dropped the hammer and I went home. A month later, after sending out hundreds of résumés and applications, no one called. I was out of money and slipping back to my old complacent self. I felt like I had gotten in shape, physically, emotionally and spiritually, to run the race of life, only to trip at the firing of the starting gun. It was then that I wrote this in my personal journal:

*It is the last day of the year and, in a way, the final day of my previous life. I turned forty this year, to no fanfare whatsoever. As I reflect on the past year and take stock of my current condition, I can't help but come to the conclusion that I've accomplished nothing in this life. ~December 31, 2008.*

Robyn, a friend of mine I had met working for the city, had just graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). I went to her commencement and, while a bit bored with the event, noticed that some of the graduates received degrees in journalism. A seed was planted—deep in my subconscious—that people made money writing, something I did happily for free.

Robyn and I kept in touch. She commented frequently that she had written and read hundreds of essays while in school and I wrote better than many of the professional writers she was exposed to in school.

But I wasn't really listening, my hearing dulled by whispers in the darkness. I was at that abyss, wondering why I should go on. My myopic vision only saw blackness ahead.

One day she called me. "Hey, are you dressed? No? Well get dressed. I'm on my way. We are going somewhere."

Trusting her, and pretty sure she wasn't taking me to a vet to get fixed, I got dressed, ran downstairs and got in her car. We chatted about the usual day-to-day stuff, but she refused to tell me where she was taking me.

We ended up at Truckee Meadows Community College. She said she started there before transferring to UNR and she just wanted to show me around.

Within an hour, before I could even absorb the surroundings, I had registered for classes at the community college. She had tricked me!

Classes started just a few weeks later, so I was nervous. Not only had it been more than twenty years since I had gone to school, I had dropped out of school at the beginning of my sophomore year because of a previously held religious ideology. I took the GED exam a few years later, getting a ninety-three percent. Leaving school had been a long-held regret, something I had nightmares about.

After the first day of school, I saw the light. I moved away from that abyss. Sitting in class, older than everyone but my professor, I felt, not like a non-traditional student, the politically correct term for old geezer, but like a real student, ready to learn and work toward becoming a journalist.

Still, a voice in my head kept saying I should give it all up. My ex-wife, upon hearing I was going to school, laughed and told my kids that I would give it up in a few weeks. My father used to tell my mother that I was “inept at everything.” Those voices started growing louder and I thought that maybe this old dog should just roll over and die.

Then I began to reap what I was sowing. My first English essay came back: ninety-eight percent. Soon the second essay came back to me with a 100 percent. My professor told me I was the first student she ever gave a perfect score to on an English essay. An extra credit project I submitted to my journalism professor got published in the school's paper.

I may have felt like a failure, but the feedback told me I was lying to myself. And I started to feel, for the first time in decades, happy.

Four years later, on the verge of graduating from UNR with a degree in journalism, the voices still rise at times, but I know now that these ghosts of the past do not have my best interests at heart. I have work to do and things to learn. Learning at an older age is not that hard. An older student may need to clear a few cobwebs from the mind, but learning is about desire and open-mindedness, not age.

I started learning when I trusted a friend to take me for a ride.

She knew I wouldn't listen to her, but believed that, once set free, I would thrive in college.

The lesson is that I have the ability to change my future. It may not be easy and it requires a willingness to be open to change, but it is so much better than living in the immutable past.

One of the oldest proverbial sayings in the English language is “you can't teach an old dog new tricks.”

My commentary on the proverb: It's a lie. Don't believe it.

~Paul George

