

Chapter One

I Don't Think I'm Going Home Tonight Planes, Trucks and Red Lights—Oh My!

Affirmation: I have all the faith, hope, humor, optimism,
and love I need.

*"Faith is not complacent; faith is action. You don't have faith and wait.
When you have faith, you move."*

—Betty Eadie

*I*t was a balmy Miami night in August of 1990. I had finally earned my doctorate and my friend Duke had offered to take me on a diving trip to Belize for some long awaited R&R.

Upon our return to Miami we flew commercial. And once we arrived in Miami a friend of ours, who piloted a small aircraft, was to pick us up and take us back to upper Captiva Island, a quick boat ride from where we both lived on Captiva. I was in the back seat of the four-seater reading the book I had started in Belize.

The drizzle and dusk was turning into nightfall. The pilot was talking to the control tower and the plane idling. My friend was in the passenger seat up front. Suddenly there was a loud noise and our plane was jolted forward a few feet.

"Did another plane hit us?" was my first thought.

"Oh, my neck," my friend groaned.

The pilot yelled obscenities and exited the plane. I looked around and was shocked to discover there was a hole in the back of the plane.

"I don't think I'm going home tonight," I said to myself. "I have to call the neighbor to feed my cat Josh."

I remember telling the pilot and my friend Duke that I was sure someone would soon be there to help us. And in what seemed like seconds, peo-

ple in funny looking suits were approaching the plane, and vehicles, sirens blaring, were racing to the scene.

It was then I realized it was the escort vehicle that had hit the plane. The woman driving the truck suffered a concussion—to this day we don't know why she rear-ended that plane.

My friend and I were rushed by ambulance to the hospital. I thought I was fine at the time; it was my friend I was concerned about. He blacked out for a few seconds and was taken away on a stretcher.

Despite the seriousness of it all, the driver was smiling as he asked me just what had happened. It actually was a bit comical—I mean, a truck hits and totals an airplane. How bizarre.

I was treated and released with the initial diagnosis of whiplash. (Duke was admitted and kept for five days and administered every test imaginable.) I was then taken to the airport hotel at Miami Airport.

Ironically, the pilot asked *me* if I would call the owner of the plane who lived in Miami.

Great—now I had to be the one who had to break the news to a man whose airplane was hit by a truck and totaled. The bad news—he answered the phone. The good news—he was very nice and, once he was reassured that no one was seriously injured, he laughed in disbelief.

I woke up the next morning with an incredible stiffness and was forced to return to the hospital to get a neck brace. When I look back, I am grateful that it was no worse than it was—but, I realized that although I thought I was fine, I was actually in shock—choosing to minimize my injury.

The way I coped with my stress was not to let on that I was hurting.

My body underwent a series of events. First, the sympathetic nervous system sent messages throughout the body to *prepare for action*. My heart rate went up, my metabolism increased, my pupils dilated, my breathing was shallow and labored, and my muscle tension increased. I was prepared for fight or flight. A quick source of energy, as extra glucose, was sent into my bloodstream, this burst of energy I needed to exit the plane since there was the chance it could have exploded and I could have gone up in a fireball. Of course, I didn't think in those terms at the time! So I was all hyped up with no place to go but the runway.

Although my airplane ordeal was a physical stressor, most stressors are emotional or simply a threat to the ego.

For example, how many times have you been embarrassed in public for some reason or another? Chances are these were not physical threats, rather emotional ones. I cannot tell you how many people including therapists have said to me that they could *never* speak in front of other people. Whatever stressors we are faced with are merely our *perception* of situations and how

we choose to see them and deal with them. Many of us have never learned how to effectively cope with common problems.

I like to use the example of the two sisters who visited their father in the hospital after he suffered a near fatal heart attack. One sister enters the room and says, "Oh my God, look at him. He is so weak, hooked up to all these machines and suffering so. He looks like he might not make it. This is just awful!" While the other sister replies, "I am so grateful for this incredible technology. If it were not for all of this advanced equipment and skilled staff I would have my doubts too, but I feel so positive about his recovery."

Which sister is in the right?

Neither is right or wrong. Each obviously has a very different perception of the situation. Unfortunately, the sister with the pessimistic outlook has managed to stress herself out to a far greater degree than the sister who is optimistic and positive.

Best selling author and Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck discloses in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, "Life is difficult." It is inevitable that as we go through it we will face much pain and suffering. There will always be issues we had not anticipated—loss, trauma, financial insecurity, pain, setbacks, grief, and sadness. How we *choose* to handle these situations determines ultimate survival and/or love of life.

Now more than ever, we live in a society of unprecedented change. Despite our technology and convenience we lead busier, more demanding lives. I shake my head at the ever-increasing violence in real life and on the Internet, the rampant increase in cancer, depression, and general dissatisfaction with life.

Stress requires a multifaceted approach: an approach that addresses the whole mind, body, and spirit.

Take a Bite out of Life

Recently I spent quality time with a close friend who lives on the island. This wonderfully whimsical, talented, creative soul has decided to open a restaurant, which is really not a big surprise. Having made a name for herself already, Katie has a fabulous reputation for cooking, and been a successful owner of a previous restaurant. No doubt that this restaurant would be a hit.

Still, after I gave her my blessing I asked: "Katie, do you have energy pills because this is going to be a huge task?"

"You know, we're here for such a short time, I'm ready to take a bite out of life," she replied.