



QUEST  
RETREATS

# 5 THINGS I LEARNED AS A STUNTWOMAN

And How You Can Use Them in Everyday Life

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# 01:

## FEEL THE FEAR AND DO IT ANYWAY.

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When I was a young stuntwoman, I used to buy into the popular notion that in order to be a successful heroine you had to be fearless.

I felt like such a failure. I was NEVER without fear. Even if the stunt as a simple fight scene, which I excelled at and loved doing, I would find something to worry about.

One of the times I was the most scared was on “Long Kiss Goodnight” when I was the last of Geena Davis’s stunt doubles. I did some of the hardest stunts I have ever done on that film.

Like being dropped through a vat of hard wax (which was supposed to simulate ice on camera) as an experiment to see if it could be done with a human being. Or hanging 50 feet up on the wall of a soundstage, tied to a net (which would become Niagara Falls in the movie) while doing battle with the “bad guy.”

Or my personal worst nightmare, hanging 80 feet in the air at the end of a wire over a quarry floor without the safety of an airbag, all the while knowing that any second they were going to unlock the winch and send me plummeting toward the ground.

I mean, you’re talking to a gal who gets queasy on the escalator at the mall!

Yes, these were definitely scary situations. But to be completely honest with you, I get just as scared sometimes thinking about doing mundane things. Like talking to someone I am in conflict with. Or putting myself out into the world in a brand new way. Or, hell, sometimes even balancing my checkbook!

So what’s going on here? Why the disproportional disconnect?



## FEAR WAS DESIGNED TO KEEP US ALIVE

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*Fear was originally designed for one purpose: to keep us on our toes so we'd stay alive. For this reason, our ancient brain, the amygdala, doesn't know the difference between various kinds of fear. As far as it's concerned, ALL fear is life and death.*

*Either you're fine and picking berries, la-dee-dah, or you're about to be eaten by a sabertooth tiger. Nothing in between.*

*In other words, even in our modern world, your brain doesn't know the difference between discovering an overdraft on your bank statement or being knifed in a dark alley. It all feels like you're going to die.*

## BUT MOST FEARS ARE JUST PHANTOMS!

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So fear never goes away. It's hard-wired into our brains as part of our design, so we had better learn to work with it!

The good news is that that about 85 percent of what we worry about never happens. We spend all that time stressed out, frozen in self-doubt and not taking some kind of action that would make our lives SO much better – all because of a phantom fear.

So it's not about overcoming fear as much as it is understanding it and right-sizing it. By that, I mean really looking at what you're afraid of. This takes courage, but if you have courage, you can be honest about your fear and see it for what it is. Most of the time, it's really not as big as you thought it was.

Are you afraid because you are hanging off a cliff? That's reasonable.

Is it because you have to make a sales call? That's just holding you back.

So my best advice about fear? **DO THE THING!** Take the trip! Go to the event! Ask her out! Put in for the raise! Make the first move! Start that business! Close the sale! Have the baby!

Feel the fear, and do it anyway. And watch your life change!





# 02:

## KEEP YOUR ATTITUDE POSITIVE

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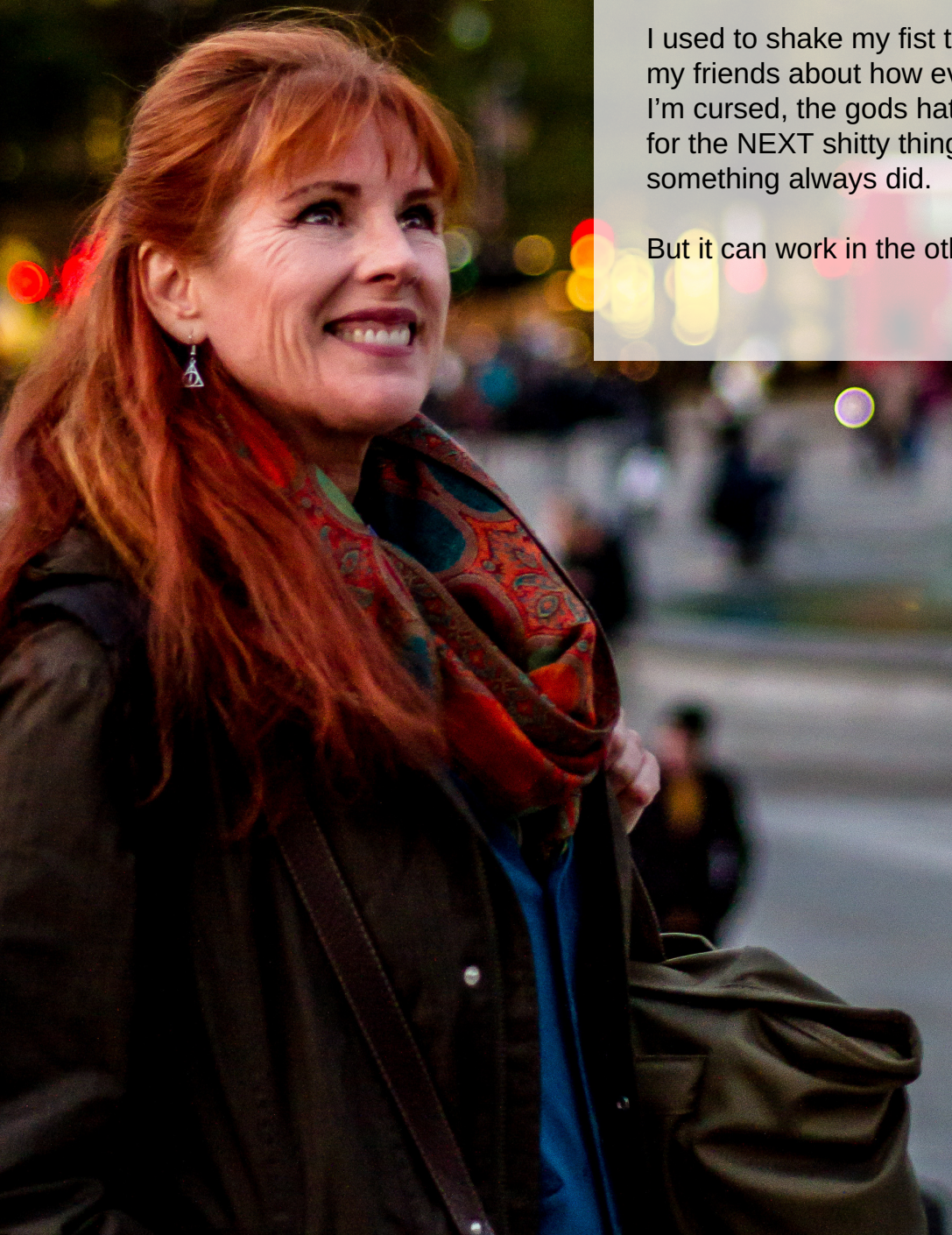
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Have you ever noticed when a crappy thing happens, things seem to snowball? The dryer stops working, the dog suddenly needs to go to the vet, the kids get chicken pox and a project at work gets totally derailed.

I used to shake my fist to the heavens, proclaiming to my friends about how everything was going wrong, I'm cursed, the gods hate me. Then I'd fume and wait for the NEXT shitty thing to happen. And of course, something always did.

But it can work in the other direction, too!





## IT CAN TAKE YOU TO THE STARS OR THE PITS



For example, right after I moved from New York to Los Angeles, determined to “make it” in the movie industry, I had a long winning streak where everything was up. For years, I had that bright, shiny attitude that attracts and inspires others. I was full of hope and anticipation, ready for every little unfolding of apparent luck or happenstance.

People liked being around me because I was so upbeat. I drew in folks who were curious about me. Almost everyone around me liked my team spirit and determination, my positive attitude.

OK, flash forward a few years, and the story becomes not-so-pretty. I worked hard – SO hard that gradually I burned out. I said yes to every opportunity, trying to please everyone, afraid to turn down a single job.

I started to panic because I couldn’t understand or control my growing anxiety. As my life spiraled out of control, my attitude turned fearful. The universe heard that, and the work dried up. Now I had new problems. And it snowballed from there.

It took me years to hit bottom. Well before I got there, my attitude was firmly in the victim camp. And a victim I became, in just about every conceivable way. The same force that had taken me up had now taken me down. And it had taken me down about as far as a person can go.







What I found down there in the Pit of Despair, was my own desire to change. I wanted change for my kid, and I wanted it for myself. I was willing to learn, but in order to do it, I would have to change my attitude. This was easy, because CLEARLY I didn't know what to do.

I realized I needed a mentor, and I needed to do what she said no matter how I felt about it. So I got one, and the first thing she urged me adopt was an attitude of humility, of being teachable.

Again, no problem. Or so I thought.

When she suggested I also adopt an attitude of gratitude, I said, "Whaa? Gratitude? For being dumped, broke, about to lose my house, my big butt, no work, no hope, no life?" And she said, "Yes."

Then she added, "Do you have food enough for today? Do you have a place to sleep tonight? Is your heart beating? Yes? Then start there."

I followed my mentor's advice. I listened carefully to what she and other wise ones told me to do. My attitude was humble, so I learned. I admitted what I didn't know. I started to feel better, which moved my attitude into hope and beyond.

### I'M HERE TO TEACH YOU, IF YOU'RE WILLING

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Now, I'd LOVE for you not to have to hit rock bottom and waste years not living the life you want. So I am here to teach you, if you are willing.

It's simple stuff, if perhaps not easy. It's starts with attitude. The nutshell version is this: Be humble. Be honest. Be teachable. Be hopeful. Take action. And above all . . .

**Keep your attitude in a positive place.**

Monitor it daily, because it can move you in either direction very quickly.

You CAN do it! I believe in you!



## VISUALIZE THE OUTCOME, THEN LET GO

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# 03:

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When I was young, I used to rush home from school to watch “Dark Shadows” on TV. It was my favorite show.

I also loved “Star Trek,” the original series, “Sherlock Holmes,” with Basil Rathbone, and anything with Errol Flynn or Tyrone Power. These were old movies, even to me, but I loved the swashbuckling adventure. I wanted more than anything to buckle some swash!

I spent hours with my cousin Susan in make-believe worlds that we based on “Dark Shadows” or “Star Trek”-type adventures. We were the heroines, the captains of the ship or the leaders of a band of merry folk who were outlaws and robbed the rich to give to the poor.

The Universe takes note of that kind of deep, purposeful focus. Flash forward: I became best known for my work in science fiction and horror films and television shows. Coincidence? I think not!







When I was doing stunts in the film world, I naturally used visualization each time I did one. We all did. The stunt coordinator would talk about the action and what the stunt was going to be, and sometimes the director would join in, too. We'd all get together and talk over the whole scene, from the various movements of the actors right on down to what each of us would be wearing.

As I'd walk through the action over and over, discussing all the possibilities, a pathway through the action would reveal itself to me. I could literally "see" what I needed to do!

For example, I once did a stunt in a film called "Benefit of the Doubt," where I played Donald Sutherland's wife in a flashback scene. In the scene, I catch him in bed with our daughter, and in the ensuing struggle, he throws me down the stairs, killing me.

Before the filming, we mapped out the action: Repeatedly I imagined Donald picking me up (the actor was very strong) and throwing me toward the stairs. I visualized how I would control my fall and somehow roll down the stairs without hurting myself too badly. I also needed to make sure my head ended up right where I said it would; otherwise, the camera wouldn't capture my lifeless stare at the end of the scene.

After we marked the action, I walked through the fall over and over, each time hitting that same mark in my mind's eye. I kept this up until the camera was ready, about 45 minutes later.

When the time came to do the stunt, Donald threw me perfectly, and my fall went exactly as planned. I hit the floorboards and rolled topsy-turvy down the stairs. At the very bottom of the stairs, my head hit the mark, and my eyes open and unfocused, revealing a body that was as dead as a doornail.

Perfect!



## LETTING GO MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE!

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When I was in a good place, my innate creativity would take over, no problem. But what if I was stressed or something unexpected happened during the audition? A slight change in the plot, the character or the lines could throw me for a loop. Or I might be reading with another actor, or the assistant might be godawful; you just never knew.

I can't tell you the number of auditions I blew because I couldn't let go of how things were "supposed to be."

If my attitude was open, everything went fine. But if I was rigid and fearful and didn't let go, any of those things could throw me and the whole thing would be a waste of time.

It took me years to put the two together, but when I did, life was SO much easier! Visualizing gave me the confidence to know I had done my best, and letting go allowed me to enjoy the rest of my day. With the two together, instead of dreading the audition, my attitude became, "Oh, good! I get to act today!"

So my advice to you? Every day, do a little meditating and visualizing. Even 10 minutes a day will make a big difference. Just do the best you can, and then surrender and let life unfold. And lo and behold, most days it will probably work out even better than you imagined!

*Visualizing is your mutant power!*

**Visualize the outcome, then let go!**



## 04:

### LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

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#### **Ooh I love this one!**

Maybe it's because I live so deeply in the physical as a stuntwoman, dancer, athlete and lover, but the idea of my organic body being even more than a vehicle of experience is thrilling to me!

Once thought to be the province of the mind, science has opened the stage door on the intelligence of the body. In fact, the body might well steal the show!

For our purposes, here's the quick scoop: Science is revealing that the body has more ways to take in information and can process it much faster than our marvelous brain. Hence, gut reactions that save our lives, or impulses we don't understand that help us avoid a car crash, or instincts we can't put into words that compel us to check on the baby or call that friend.





## STUNT CREWS STAKE THEIR LIVES ON GUT FEELINGS!

On the movie set, I used to follow my stunt coordinator around, just listening to his musing, and wait. Eventually he'd tell me to go check on a harness, or a car rig, or ask for additional protective pads. Or we'd have another stunt pow-wow and adjust an important element in the action.

In "The Stand," a mini-series I worked on based on the book by Stephen King and starring Molly Ringwald and Rob Lowe (I was doubling for Molly), we had a scene with an explosion that was a major plot point. In the script, one of the lead characters is killed in the explosion and the home is destroyed. My character, seven months pregnant, was supposed to be out of harm's way.

Just before the shoot, our stunt coordinator, "Dan Awesome Dude," gathered us together and said, "I have a bad feeling about this. I want you all to use extra pads and gel up. Even you, Pat." (Dan was referring to a fireproof gel called Nomex that gave you about five more seconds before you turned into a crispy critter.)

I took one look at Dan and trotted over to my stunt bag and put on my Nomex, even though I wasn't supposed to be anywhere near the fire. It was a hot day in Utah, and I hated wearing the itchy stuff, but I knew I would hate losing my skin even more.

We all stuffed gel everywhere. I thrust it up under my wig and over all my exposed skin. We trusted Dan's instinct implicitly.

Thank goodness we did. The explosion was so huge it sent me flying across the lawn, wig on fire. The lawn was full of shattered glass and patches of flame, some of which I inadvertently put out during my rolling tumble away from the burning house. All of the stunt people ended up in the hospital except me.

Everyone was treated for burns but basically OK, except for one stuntwoman who broke her pelvis. It was a mess. If we hadn't listened to Dan, it would have been much, much worse.





It's amazing to me that I trusted my body so completely in my stunt work and ignored it utterly when it came to my day-to-day life. Now I know different. Now I know to listen to my body all the time. And when I do, I get some pretty useful messages.

For example, I often get a tightness in my chest that tells me to look for sources of anxiety or stress. I can get a very weird, excited feeling in my throat or tummy when I'm going in the right direction. And if I feel an actual revulsion that's out of proportion to the situation, that's usually a tipoff for past trauma.

This is all new to me, and very exciting stuff. It's like having my own Sherlock Holmes with me, and I'm Watson taking notes.

As I work with it, I'm getting better at noticing the nuanced signals.

And so can you! Just taking note of what's going on in your body will help you to start to calibrate your inner compass. Before long, it will become a habit that can change the course of your entire life!

**Listen to your body!**

*It will guide you on the path to your own Treasure Island!*





## FIND YOUR COMMUNITY

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05:

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Being in a community that has your back is invaluable. All this crap I'm talking about? I didn't do any of it alone. I didn't have a successful stunt career on my own, and I wouldn't be rocking my life right now without the people who have been guiding me and holding my hand (and sometimes my head) along the way.

When I first came to Los Angeles, a lovely woman named Cherie Rae mentored me in the ways of being successful as a Hollywood stuntwoman. She introduced me to other stunt people and helped me learn about the biz. We looked up where films were shooting around the city, who the stunt coordinators were, and whether or not they were doing stunts that day.

Visiting the sets of current films that are shooting is the way a stunt person networks for future jobs. We would gather intel, then head out with headshots and resumes in hand to visit the set and talk to the stunt coordinator and other folks who were employed that day.







## NETWORKING CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The labyrinthian task that this was would be way too long and boring for you here, but doing it determined who would be successful and who would stay wannabes.

So just showing up on a set was a win. There were many days the intel was wrong, or the set was vigilantly safeguarded against visitors, but we tried anyway.

This is how I met many a stunt coordinator, including Dennis Madalone, who was one of the most significant relationships in my professional career. He hired me on all the “Star Trek” shows. Even today, over 20 years later, we are still friends.

Cherie and I became fast friends, and I helped her get many jobs, too, as I invited her onto the sets of films I was working on. It was the least I could do after her amazingly kind gesture of getting me started. What goes around, comes around.

I eventually joined a stunt association because I admired the women in the group and liked their rep in the biz. We supported each other, helped each other find jobs and network and stay on course.





## ALL OF US HAVE SOCIAL NEEDS

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Human beings are not meant to be alone all the time. We have social needs, some a lot more than others. There are all kinds of studies that prove people with deep friendships and community live longer and happier lives.

But you need to know who your friends are, and you need to show up for them. If they don't show up for you, they are not your tribe. Form a community of people you can count on. It doesn't have to be a multitude! Just one friend or family member that you can count on is huge.

## FIND YOUR PLACE OF UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT

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There are times when you need a leg up, or some very real advice, or a heart-to-heart when yours is breaking. Everyone goes through these moments. Make sure you have some people you can count on, and make sure they can count on you.

I have made the mistake of wishing certain people were my friend, and pretending they were. Then I could be a victim when they let me down, over and over again. I finally woke up. I still care about them, but I don't rely on the unreliable, because my life is too precious to me now.

If you want to be successful and happy, look at who you're hanging around with, what they say and do. If you need help, notice who listens, who shows up, who doesn't take your calls. Be honest with yourself. They are showing you who they are. Believe them.

### **Find your community!**

*It lightens the load and helps you on the adventure-filled road to realizing your dreams!*





## WRAPPING IT UP

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*I hope you've enjoyed this little tour of my life as a stuntwoman and some of the lessons I've learned along the way.*

*After all I've experienced, my wish for you is that you will remember these 5 simple principles and use them to change your life into the adventure of your dreams.*

*These are exactly what I used to get my life to ROCK, and I know they can do the same for you!*

- 1. Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway**
- 2. Keep Your Attitude Positive**
- 3. Visualize The Outcome Then Let Go**
- 4. Listen to Your Body**
- 5. Find Your Community**

***I WILL BE THERE FOR YOU, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY!***



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