

# No Regrets

When you see Divine Order at work in your life, you accept that at every stage each experience is exactly what you've needed.

By Noelle Sterne

**D**o you regret choices you've made, opportunities you think you've lost, time you see as wasted?

When we succumb to such self-condemnation, we cultivate a downward-spiraling sense of self-worth. Our energies dissipate, our health is jeopardized, and we subliminally tell ourselves we've given up on the rest of our lives.

There is a way to free ourselves from those habitual regrets and judgments about the past and their consequences. This is by recognizing a universal principle that's always at work: Divine Order.



Divine Order holds that our lives are not the perverse exception, as we so often lament. Rather, like the steadfast movements of the planets, the annual renewal of leaves on the commonest tree, and the casually assumed daily workings of our bodies, all of our experiences are part of the whole.

We can choose to see our lives in this Divine Order by accepting that at every stage each of our experiences is exactly what we've needed. This principle is clearly expressed by Martha Smock in a poem aptly titled "No Other Way":

Could we but see the pattern of our days,  
We should discern how devious were the ways  
By which we came to this, the present time,  
This place in life; and we should see the climb  
Our soul has made up through the years.  
We should forget the hurts, the wanderings, the fears,  
The wastelands of our life, and know  
That we could come no other way or grow  
Into our good without these steps our feet  
Found hard to take, our faith found hard to meet.  
The road of life winds on, and we like travelers go  
From turn to turn until we come to know  
The truth that life is endless and that we  
Forever are inhabitants of all eternity.

This poem tells us several things.

First, divine order is actual. Our habitual narrow mental vision prevents us from stepping back and seeing the "pattern" of our days and lives.

Second, let us accept all the roads we've taken. Too often, we cling to our head-shaking guilt and aching regret, repeatedly labeling our choices as catastrophes.

Third, without these "wasteland" experiences, we couldn't be where we are now. Our experiences have come precisely because we've needed them. Of course, this recognition is difficult and embarrassing. But we'll live with ourselves much more easily when we realize that we've chosen each event, consciously or not, for growth. As we admit our choices, we become open to the lessons we needed to learn, and then we're ready to allow the next good that's before us.

Hard to swallow? Maybe, but look more closely at people's evolutions. An industrialist's life-threatening illness, the result of excesses of diet, work and pressure, impels him to seek alternative cures. With these and medical treatment, his body is healed. Deep gratitude leads him to found a cancer center at a major hospital that combines traditional and alternative therapies, giving hope and life to thousands of others.

A woman dreams of a career in business but is detoured by marriage and raising a large family. To keep her kids busy and learning, she develops innovative games, techniques and activities. After her children are grown, she returns to school and obtains a master's degree. On graduation, launching her own company, she draws on those child-centered years, creating and selling educational toys and resources. The company has developed rapidly, and two of her grown children are now indispensable aides.

Many other examples come to mind, from Famous Amos to unfamous but highly successful people of all kinds. They have one thing in common: their mistakes, delays and wrong turns turned out to be exactly the right preparation for what they later needed and wanted to do.

The legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis said, "Do not fear mistakes. There are none" (quoted in *I Believe in You*, compiled by Dan Zadra, Compendium, 1999). We rarely, if ever, see where the path is leading. That's why we fear, shudder and rage at its turns. And often, what we so fervently crave now we may be nowhere near ready for.

So what are the lessons?

1. Let go of your lamentations and labels.
2. Forgive yourself for your perceived errors in decisions and actions.
3. Think about the ways in which past "bad" experiences have helped you later.
4. Affirm continually that Divine Order is ever active in your life.
5. Through meditation, cultivate a sense of inner listening for guidance in right decisions and actions.
6. And, above all, keep going.

If you're protesting that it's too late, do I really need to remind you otherwise? Today more than ever, the horizons of longevity, health and vibrant activity increase daily, even among the medically orthodox.

Examples abound. The late actress Janet Leigh published her first novel at age 68. Political activist Maggie Kuhn was forced to retire from her job at 65. Within a few years, she founded one of the first organizations to ignore chronological limits, the Gray Panthers. The consummate comedian Jerry Lewis was a star in his 20s and only reached his lifelong goal of appearing on Broadway at 70. Michelangelo was 74 when he began painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. At 81, Benjamin Franklin created the compromise that led to adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

The late renowned contemporary photographer, writer, composer and filmmaker Gordon Parks said, "At 83, I'm a better writer, a better photographer, a better musician—a better everything" (Wallace Terry, "He Refuses to Limit Himself," *The Miami Herald* July 21,

1996). In 1999 at age 87, he mounted a national touring show that included works with new media in completely different styles from anything he'd done previously, and he was also finalizing his 17th book (Elisa Turner, "His Weapon Against Poverty, Racism was a \$7.50 Camera," *Miami Herald* November 7, 1999).

There are truly no limits. We don't have to succumb to stereotypes. Only our acceptance of them as inevitable and self-judging keeps us depressed, fatigued and collecting illnesses. Once we scrape away the guilt and self-blame, we're free to shake out our dusty dreams. Only then can we express that shimmering, childlike excitement that recognizes our lives' Divine Order and propels us to our lifelong vision.

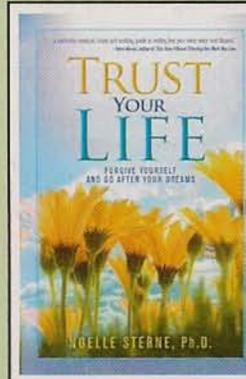
However you've denounced yourself for your past, know that there was truly no other way. Your experiences have been far from wrong—they've been perfect. Instead of rejecting your past, embrace it, thank it, and forgive yourself.

Trust your intuition and inner guidance, your drive and desire. Whatever you haven't done, wished you'd done,

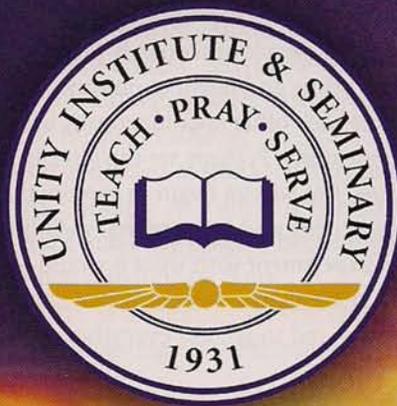
and want more than ever to do toward fulfilling your dream, just take a simple step. Make a call, get a university catalog, sign up for piano lessons, buy a computer, unearth your water colors, write for 10 minutes.

As you let go of past guilt and release the energy to act, you'll probably be surprised, even shocked, at what you're remembering, using and building on from experiences you had considered wasted.

It's time to trust your life, now. ■



Adapted from Noelle Sterne's *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams* © 2011 Noelle Sterne. Unity Books, 2011.



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# CONTRIBUTORS



**Robert Brumet**, who wrote about the enneagram on page 13, is the author of the widely read books *Finding Yourself in Transition* and *The Quest for Wholeness*. His latest is *Birthing a Greater Reality* (Unity Books, 2010). Brumet is an ordained Unity minister and teaches courses in pastoral counseling, meditation and spiritual development at Unity Institute and Seminary, Unity Village, Missouri.

**Dennis Ashley**, whose article “Tell Me What You See” appears on page 18, has been a part of the Unity movement for 30 years. He is a licensed Unity teacher and the director of pastoral care at Unity Church of Truth in Spokane, Washington.



**Deborah Frieze**, whose article “From Transacting to Gifting: Walking the Path of Right Livelihood” appears on page 21, is a board member at The Berkana Institute, a public foundation that connects and supports community leaders. She has also worked with the Mastery Foundation, leading peace and reconciliation programs in Northern Ireland and Israel. Her book *Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey Into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now*, which she co-authored with Margaret Wheatley, was published this year.

**Deborah Shouse**, who wrote “Conversations About Dying” on page 25, is a writer, speaker, editor and creativity catalyst whose writing has appeared in such places as *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Spirituality & Health*. Visit her website at [www.thecreativityconnection.com](http://www.thecreativityconnection.com) and subscribe to her blog “DeborahShouseWrites.”



**Laurie Gray**, whose article on affirmations appears on page 10, is an experienced trial attorney and child advocate. She is the founder of Socratic Parenting LLC ([www.socraticparenting.com](http://www.socraticparenting.com)) and the co-creator of “Token of Change™”. Her young adult novel *Summer Sanctuary* is the winner of a Moonbeam Children’s Book Award Gold Medal. Laurie attends Unity Christ Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana.



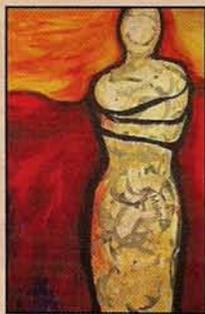
**Noelle Sterne** is an author of articles, essays, stories, poems and novels. Her book *Trust Your Life*, which uses Unity principles and complementary wisdom to help readers vanquish blocks, forgive themselves, and achieve their dreams, was published this year. Noelle holds a doctorate from Columbia University and has had a coaching and editing practice for 28 years, guiding clients to completion of their doctoral degrees.



**Elliott Robertson**, whose poems have previously appeared in *Daily Word*® and *Miracles* magazine, wrote “A Visit to a Lake,” which appears on page 12. Elliott’s volume of poetry, *Chaos and Surrender: Poems for Difficult Times*, was published earlier this year. He currently lives in Philadelphia where he works as a grant writer.



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Cover painting *Embrace* ©2004 by Jenny Hahn.

Using bold colors and vibrant iconography, the spiritual narrative paintings of Kansas City artist Jenny Hahn uplift and inspire.

“Painting is my connection to the mystery,” Hahn says of her process. She finds inspiration in her meditation and yoga practices.

To view more of Jenny’s work, including giclée print reproductions, visit [www.jenspaintings.com](http://www.jenspaintings.com).

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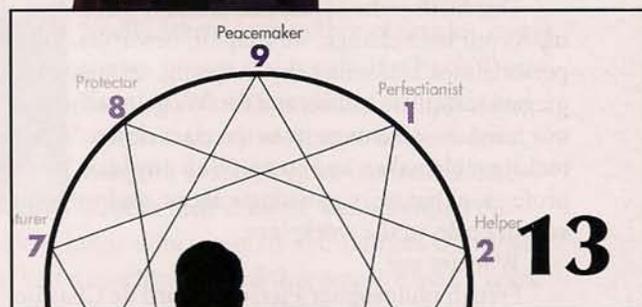
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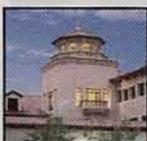
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PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR DAILY LIVING



JULY/AUGUST 2011  
Vol. 191 No. 4

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