



# LIVING WITHOUT RESERVATIONS

*a journey by land and sea  
in search of happiness*

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Living Without Reservations  
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Go confidently in the direction of your dreams.  
Live the life you have imagined.

Henry David Thoreau

# Chapter One

*Driving Home from Atlanta*  
*May 2006*

I slide behind the wheel of a borrowed silver Honda. It is a beautiful sunny Monday morning and I have seven hours of solitary driving in front of me.

I just kissed the cheek of my sleeping daughter and grabbed my carry-on-only size suitcase and blow up mattress bag as I snuck quietly from her apartment, trying not to wake her and her roommate. My only child is successfully set up in her first apartment; she is a third-year college student. Just four days ago Brittany, Seth (her high school sweetheart and fellow Emory student), and I headed out of Orlando at o-dark-hundred with the car packed to the gills with everything we could think of to outfit her newly rented apartment.

We did the *Design on a Dime* reality TV show in two days, but in real life. Brittany's room turned out adorable, serene yet hip. She had a vision, walked into Home Depot and within thirty seconds of scanning the millions of colors of paint, picked out Durango Blue. Armed with a brush, a roller and a tray, we were ready to transform her empty slate into a vision of deep smoky blue walls, white platform bed, and black accessories. The centerpiece of the room was an Andy Warhol style black and white Audrey Hepburn piece of art for over the bed.

Now I head for home, just me and the road. In typical Barbara Singer style, I have a plethora of books on tape planned out to the minute so that I won't waste any time. Making the best use of every minute of my life has been my driving force for the past forty-four years.

After an hour or two or three, the quiet monotone hum of the road gets to me. What am I going back to? What am I doing? What am I going to do with the second half of my life? I am going back to no job, no husband, no family and a one-bedroom garage apartment that houses the remnants of a life I no longer have.

How can this be? I am a girl who did everything right! I contributed the

maximum to my 401K, I was a good wife and devoted mother. I had lots of friends, fought my way through college and taught myself how to behave in the world of the “haves”. I learned how to be successful, had a big, beautifully decorated pool home in the suburbs, and won many sales achievement rewards and trips. I stayed thin, ran an efficient household and in my spare time, finished two Ironman competitions and three marathons.

But now it is all gone. I am an empty slate just like Brittany’s bedroom, except I don’t have a vision of what should come next. I am a girl who has had every second of my life planned since I can remember. I had the one-year plan, the three-year plan, even the five-year plan. I had a list of the 100 things I wanted to do. I had a list of places I wanted to go; I even had a list of things I didn’t want to do. I knew every event going on in town, but I couldn’t wait for Brittany to grow up so I could do something else.

Maybe my mother was right. “Stop being in such a hurry,” she would say. “You will run out of things to do and places to see.” This was mind-blowing to me. There is a whole world out there to be conquered. Run out of things to do, please! But now, here I sit driving along without a plan, no list, nothing.

What do I really want to do this summer, this year, for the rest of my life?

If money were no object, what would I be? Probably a travel buddy where I would take people on the trips of their dreams using my travel experience, or maybe an Italian tour operator, a travel writer or a personal coach. The thought of throwing myself into a new job in the same field has zero appeal. Maybe I’ll move to an island, or as I have always dreamed, move to Italy. I am just too tired. When I had obstacles, I could overcome them, but now without hurdles, I cannot see the road. Given the option to choose anything, I can’t decide what to do next.

What do I really want to do this summer?

I am enjoying this driving thing, hours of scenery just passing by; me and the highway. I have always wanted to drive across the United States in an RV. Tom, my former fiancé, and I had always planned on taking such a trip, but we never got around to it. Now, on this day, I do have the time. My dad has a camper just sitting in the driveway at his home in Pennsylvania. I am sure he would let me borrow it. Why not? It would give me some time to think.

I look at the clock. It's noon on a Monday; I will never get him on the phone. Surely he is not home and he never answers his cell phone. I dial anyway, thinking I'll leave a message.

To my surprise, he answers the phone. "Hey Dad, I was thinking of doing a little driving trip this summer and want to see if I can borrow your RV," I ask.

"Well, where are you going?"

"I am thinking of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Washington. You know, places I have never been, hit all the big national parks." I explain.

"I see," he says, "Well, when do you want to do this?"

"Right now," I say firmly, "I can be in Pennsylvania in a few days, then I'll hit the road for a month or two. I want to be back for Mom's seventieth birthday party on July 28th. So, can I borrow your camper?"

"No."

"No! What do you mean no?" I say, stunned.

"I won't loan it to you, but I will go with you," he says.

"You will? I am talking about going next week, Dad."

"I know. Would you consider driving to Alaska?" he asks.

"Alaska—you can't drive to Alaska, can you?" I respond. "I thought you have to cruise there."

"Well, it is far, but we can do it."

I have never been there and I have always wanted to go, so why not? Within three minutes, we have a plan. My dad and I are driving to Alaska in a camper. I will fly to Pennsylvania, we will leave right away, and be back for the birthday party.

I call my girlfriends to tell them the news and, and of course, the phone lines are burning up. What are you going to do with your apartment? What about your car? Who's going to take care of your rental properties? I hadn't thought of any of this, and yet I was completely unconcerned and 100 percent certain that it didn't even matter.

Within three days I rent my completely furnished apartment to my girlfriend who is building a new home and needs a temporary place. I loan my car to my friend with five children who loves driving my two-seater BMW convertible—this, of course, in exchange for gas money—and find a reluctant volunteer to check the mail at the first of the month and deposit the rent

checks. The rest I can manage from the road. I buy an airline ticket. And just like that, it is done.

In a matter of ten days, I go from leaving a job without a clue of what to do next, to embarking on a journey. . . . I send an email blast and it goes like this:

I have news. I am driving across the United States in an RV to Alaska with my Dad. On June first, I am flying to PA then we're off to Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington, Alaska and back.

I have sublet my apartment and car for the summer. I have lost my mind and found my soul. I am completely out of control and couldn't be less afraid and more happy. I am in the right place at the right time and I am eager and open to see what comes next. I know, you are saying, "I thought she had her mid-life crisis a few years ago?" The saga continues!

Barbara

And the responses I got were amazing. My email struck a cord.

*I'm so glad Dad has a travel partner this summer. I think you will make a good team. Thanks for helping fulfill his lifelong dream of traveling to Alaska. Sharon*

*Go for it Barbara, life should be gulped not sipped. Keep in touch. All the best, David.*

*You have lost your mind . . . good for you . . . wish I could lose mine! Glenda*

*You go girl and have the time of your life! Cherish the time with your Dad & be safe. Best Wishes, Kim*

*Tickled for you!!!! Follow your heart and soul! Great stuff. Robin*

*Perfect!!!! Enjoy and congratulations.  
"No risk no gains." Jake*

*You are my hero!!!! Have a blast and keep us  
posted along the way. xxoo Susan*

*I got cold chills reading your email.  
You are sooooo on the right track. David*

*You're a mess! and I can't wait to  
hear all about it :-) Thearon*

*Sweeeet, have fun and don't look back. Peter*

Lewis and Clark  
Me and Dad  
Barbara and Clarence

# Chapter 2

*Leaving*

*May 2006*

My ride drops me at curbside check-in for my early morning flight. The pile of luggage being unloaded is mind-boggling to me. I have traveled all over the world and as a rule, don't check luggage unless I'm skiing or traveling for two weeks or more. I hate waiting for the bags at the airport and have terrible luck. But this time, I have packed two huge cases, a carry-on and, of course, my shoulder bag. I have more than I will need for the trip. One case is filled with just reading materials, travel guides, a fat journal, books on tape and electronics, including my laptop. I packed for months, not a few weeks. Looking at this pile of luggage, I realize I am not coming back. I can't go on this way. I am in love with a man whose life I cannot live in; I have to get away and make a clean start. Am I running away from or running to? I have waited my whole life to make decisions with just myself in mind. Now, here it is. I am running *to*, yes, I must believe I am running *to*. Be Brave.

Goodbye is much harder than I thought it would be. My heart is pounding. My ride pulls away from the curb and I wait in line for the skycap. Big dark sunglasses hide the tears washing my carefully applied make-up down my cheeks. I can barely speak by the time it is my turn at the check-in counter. It feels so permanent.

"Where are you going?" the skycap asks.

Good question, I say to myself. I don't know. Wherever the wind blows. No, I am going in search of it. I want to go to that place I know. I want to go to that place that makes my heart sing. That place where I can be who I really am and where I can slow down enough to hear what I need. Is that a place or a level of consciousness? I just know that I need to make a change, and that is really what this summer is all about.

"I am going to Philadelphia," I announce. I am going home to where I grew up; to where my seven brothers and sisters live with their families and

where my parents are. I moved away right after college and only went back over the years to visit. I am the only one who moved away. The black sheep.

“You can go, Gate 59. Here are your boarding documents.” The agent instructs.

I am doing my best to remain composed and hold back the flood of emotions that has caught me off guard. Get to the gate and find a quiet spot and you will be fine, I tell myself. You are running to, not running from. I round the corner and head for the security check, but I am stopped by a huge line.

I have time, but desperately want to find a quiet place to regain my composure. Instead, I wait. People are looking at me with my big dark sunglasses still on. Keeping my head down, I squirm and tap my foot. Can they tell I am crying? I try to hide behind my long blonde hair that is hanging down around my face. I am wearing a brightly colored chartreuse and pink floral jacket, white pants and heels. I always dress up to travel. I have been rewarded handsomely in my lifetime by looking the part. I am really feeling like I am in a fish bowl. People are staring at me. Breathe, just breathe. I am sure it is the sunglasses, but I can't take them off right now.

After an eternity of waiting, the security officer reviews my documents. Holding up the photo ID, he asks me to remove my sunglasses, which I do. My eyes are red and watery. He tells me he is sorry for making me do this, but it is just his job. I nod understandingly because I can't speak. I can hear the lady next to me whisper to her friend, “She is not someone famous, she is crying.” On any other day, that would have made me laugh out loud, but not today. Today I am holding on to every shred of courage I have. Be brave. Just get to the gate.

As I get on the plane, I repeat my new mantra again and again. *I am open and eager to see what comes next. I am in the right place at the right time. Life is meant to be fun and I am willing to enjoy it.*

The man sitting next to me is trying to be pleasant, but I can do nothing but weep. I am so embarrassed that I try to sink down into the seat and just disappear, but there is nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. I don't want anyone to know that I am struggling. I try to hold back the tears, but they just keep coming. He hands me his napkin and asks if there is anything he can do.

Everyone asks that same question. “Is there anything I can do?” Oh how

I wish there were. Make the sorrow go away. Make the ache in my heart stop for just one day or just one minute. I feel like I am being punished for bad choices I have made and then, in the next moment of consciousness, I know that that is completely untrue. I am traveling down an unfamiliar path. Change is scary. After all the years of self help, motivation and personal development books I have read, I know intellectually what is happening, yet I never imagined it would be so emotionally difficult. I am way outside of my comfort zone. Nothing is the way it used to be. I am operating without a plan, going on the fly. Some days there are moments of total clarity when I know I am doing exactly what I should be, and I am not scared for a second. And other days, I am totally gripped with fear that is completely paralyzing. I couldn't make a decision if my life depended on it.

This trip is exactly what I need to do. It is an adventure of a lifetime. This is what I have always dreamed about doing. I am driving across the United States in an RV, even though it is with my dad—not Tom; he is gone. Better yet, this is my dad's lifelong dream. I get the chance to take my dad to Alaska. I wish this made me happy, but the pain in my heart hurts too much to leave room for anything else.

How I wish this trip were with Tom. Oh, how I miss him. How did things go so desperately wrong? Thinking back, I know I was living the American Dream, and yet I didn't want it. I had it all—life in the suburbs with the perfect home, a boat on the lake, a well-adjusted, bright daughter in private school, a loyal husband with a secure job and the time and energy to pursue my interests. To put the icing on the cake, I had a dream job as membership director of a private club that allowed me to socialize amongst the Who's Who of Orlando. I hosted parties, attended wine tastings, and was involved in the community. Our club was wildly successful, partly due to my efforts and those of Debby, my partner in the membership department. We had a huge quota and knocked it out of the park year after year.

On the outside I had it all, but underneath something was stirring. Something just wasn't quite right. For years, I dismissed it. My first priority has always been my daughter. I took motherhood very seriously and made sure she had a stable home life. I needed to stay still so she could grow. There was no doubt, though, that when she went off to college, things would

change. I wanted to move, live different places and experience different lifestyles. Perhaps I would live a season on an island, live a season on a boat, live a season in Italy, and live a season in Aspen. I'd give up the treadmill of sales in corporate America and give up the American Dream for freedom. I wanted to stop living for the future and live only for today.

My then husband, Gary, said he bought into my dream, yet as time went by, I learned it was more a mild accommodation than a belief that it would really happen. He was as steady and predictable as the rising sun. Taking a risk was not for him. This lifestyle would take enormous leaps of faith over and over again. It was not something he could stomach. He was raised in a fear-based home by a father who was a former World War II soldier and an engineer. Gary was taught to look for problems, not to just wing it. We always treated each other with true respect. We didn't argue. Things had settled into a routine. There was plenty for everything.

I pursued my interests, worked, traveled, competed in triathlons and so on. We worked hard and lived below our means. We saved our money for retirement. The harder I worked and the more money I made, the more complicated life got. It was a never-ending search for tax write-offs and second businesses, and being a landlord while investing in real estate. The hamster wheel just kept going faster and faster. The more I accumulated, the more it weighed me down. I wasn't even interested in accumulating stuff, I was interested in financial freedom. It got to the point that I just wanted to get Brittany graduated from high school and off to college so I could do something else. I knew in my heart that working this way for twenty more years until retirement was never going to happen.

I didn't think that Gary and I would stay together after Brittany moved away, but I certainly didn't think it would end the way it did.