

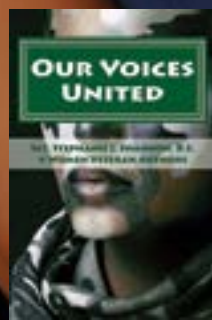
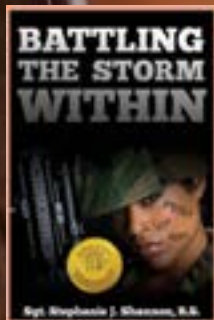
WOMEN 2 WOMEN MICHIGAN MAGAZINE

W2W

Friendship
Mimi Matthews

**The Power of
Lifelong Female
Friendships**
Lynn Turner

**Females,
Finances,
& Friends**
Kristin Prieur



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Sgt. Stephanie J. Shannon
Battling The Storm Within

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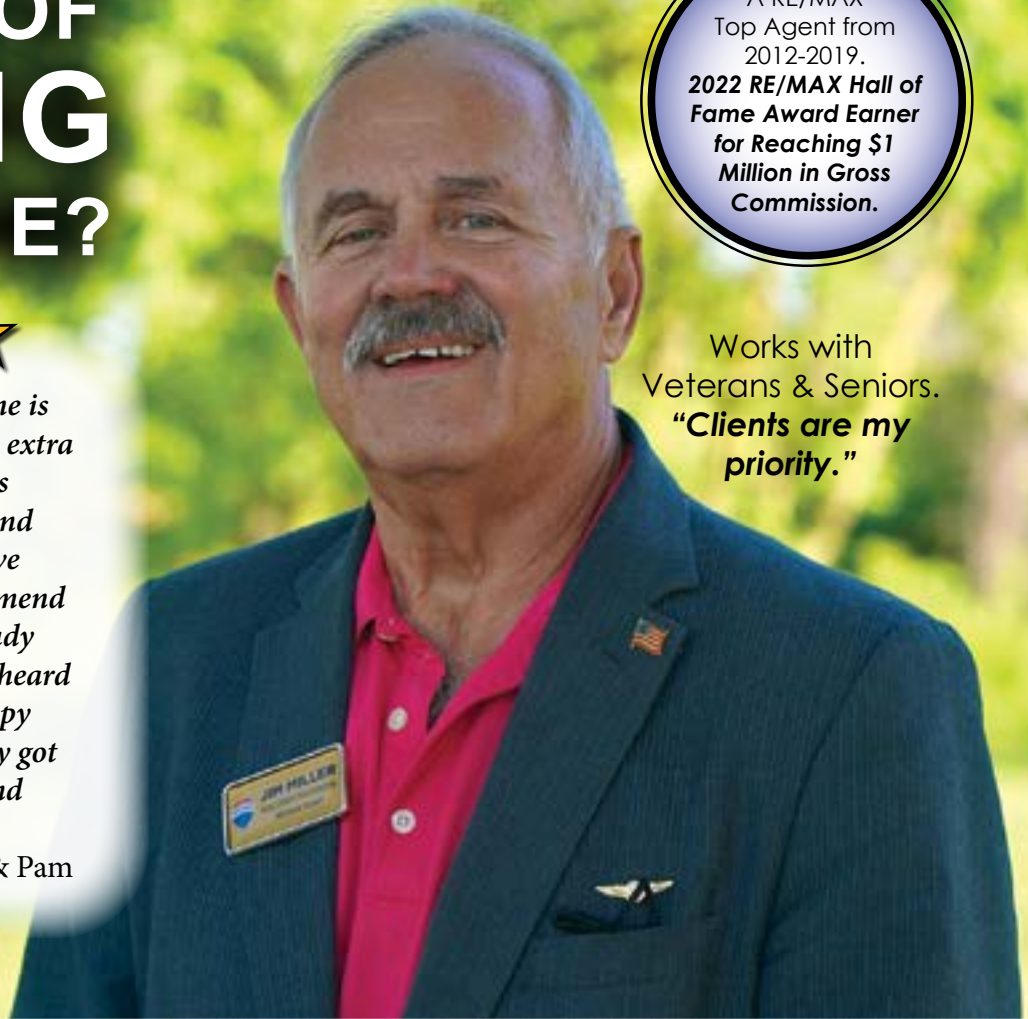


Jim is a great guy to work with, he is very knowledgeable and goes the extra mile for his client. He was always available when we needed him and helped us in many areas where we needed advice. We would recommend him very highly and in fact already have to a few of our friends. We heard so many stories of friends unhappy with their agent, we feel we really got a gem! He went above and beyond any thing we asked.

~ Rob & Pam

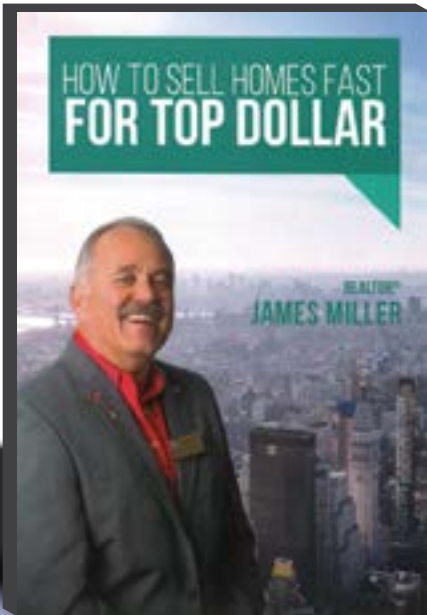
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note from our publisher & editor



Debra K. Collins
Publisher



Mimi Matthews
Editor



Lesley Howe
Executive Assistance/
Marketing



Jennifer Gardner
Creative Director

fall theme

Friendship

Our theme of "Friendship" is perfect for this time of year as the days are getting shorter and cooler and people are anticipating cozy visits ahead. It's often difficult for friends to meet during the summer because people are seizing every opportunity to do the things they can't enjoy as much during the fall and winter. But as activity slows down a bit friends are re-connecting.

As usual, our writers share diverse and valuable articles on our theme. Do you ever discuss money and finances with your friends? Our "finance girl", Kristin Prieur, tells why you should on page 20. For some pointers on unconditional friendship go to Stacey Kimbrell's article on page 12.

Would you be interested in being an **Ambassador** for Women2Women? We are looking for women interested in collaborating with us on a variety of different projects throughout the year. If you support what W2W stands for and like to be out in the community, this could be you! Please email our publisher, Debra, at deb@w2wmichigan.com if this sounds like something you would be interested in.

Our Girlfriend Gathering Speaker Series event is October 12, with this issue's cover girl, Sgt. Stephanie Shannon as our speaker. Please go to our Facebook page for more details about the event. Our last Girlfriend Gatherings event of this year will be November 9. The speaker will be announced soon so please make sure you have liked our Facebook page to stay informed.

And so, friends, here is another great issue for you to enjoy. Hope to see you soon!

Happy Fall,

Mimi & Deb

"A day without a friend is like a pot without a single drop of honey left inside."

~Winnie the Pooh

contributors

Contributing Writers

Sgt. Stephani J. Shannon • Lynn Turner • Deborah St. Hilaire • Suzanne Young • Mimi Matthews
Kristen Prieur • Amaya Johnson • Stacy Kimbrell • Arlene Crane-Curns • Jennifer Gardner

W2W

Women *Inspiring* Women *for Good!*

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Women2Women Michigan was created to connect women with women for good to encourage, support, have fun, do business and provide links for women's resources.

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Women make the majority of purchasing decisions. They buy goods and services for their homes, gardens, businesses, entertainment, health and nutrition, the list is endless. They want to be informed and connected in their communities. Event-driven marketing makes education fun and rewarding. You can reach these women in a heartwarming environment at Women2Women Michigan events and through our magazine.

READERSHIP & DISTRIBUTION

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Would you like to subscribe? Subscribe online or email us at office@W2Wmichigan.com.

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Battling The Storm Within

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W2W

Women 2 Women Michigan Magazine
presents

Girlfriend Gatherings

Speaker Series



October 12th
November 9th
5:30 - 8:00pm at Gateway Hotel
Tickets at W2WMichigan.com

Our Cover Girl, Sgt. Stephanie J. Shannon, is the Founder and CEO of Michigan Women Veterans Empowerment. Although Stephanie addresses many topics, for our gathering she will be speaking to us about finding our voice.

Give a Girl
the *right* shoes, and she can
conquer the world.
Marilyn Monroe



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10 thoughts for Fall

1

Affirmation.
"I flow with
this season of
change."



Detox.

Cleanse your
digestive system
before winter, so
your body has better
momentum to stay
healthy.

2



Comfort.

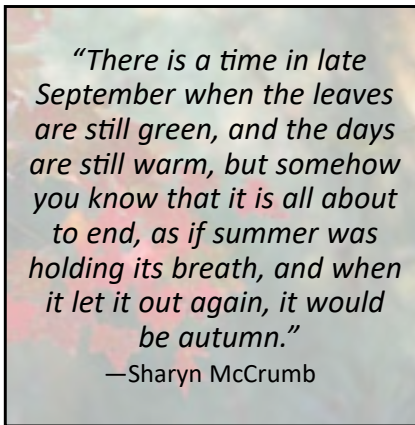
It's finally
time for cozy
sweaters and
warm chili.

3



**Pre-holiday Season
Preparation.** Get
started on your
Thanksgiving plans
now, as well as your
Christmas lists.

4



*"There is a time in late
September when the leaves
are still green, and the days
are still warm, but somehow
you know that it is all about
to end, as if summer was
holding its breath, and when
it let it out again, it would
be autumn."*

—Sharyn McCrumb



5

Expand your finances.

Now is the best time
to research a new
investment like gold
& silver, crypto, or
converting your
existing 401k.



Enjoy Local Apples.

Tis the season for
apple delicacies.
Apple pie, apple
dumplings, apple
butter, drink cider,
it's your prerogative.

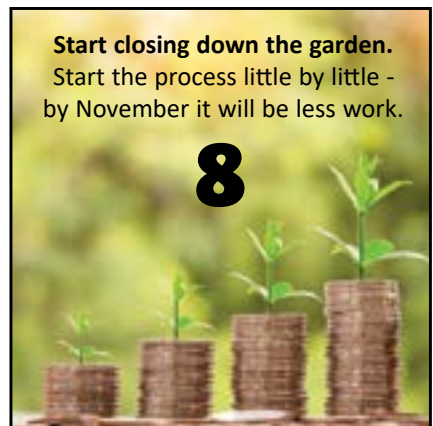
6



Self-care.

Take time everyday to be
still and listen to yourself.

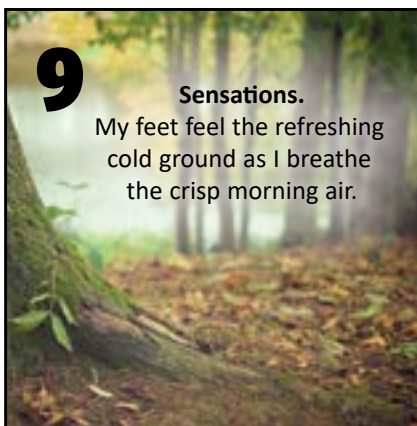
7



Start closing down the garden.

Start the process little by little -
by November it will be less work.

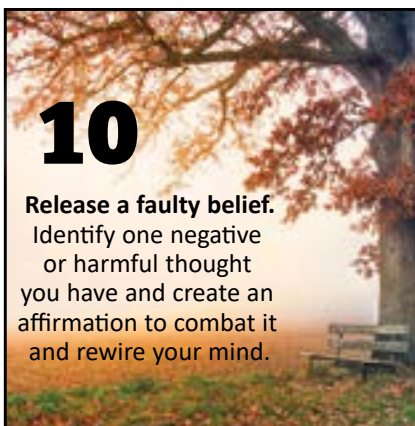
8



9

Sensations.

My feet feel the refreshing
cold ground as I breathe
the crisp morning air.



10

Release a faulty belief.

Identify one negative
or harmful thought
you have and create an
affirmation to combat it
and rewire your mind.



*Jennifer Gardner is
a wife and mother
of two girls. She
loves being creative
with the ladies of
Women2Women
Michigan Magazine.*



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Sgt. Stephanie Shannon

I am a trailblazer, a pioneer, and a visionary who has the ability to take pain and turn it into power. I am a leader that empowers other women to take charge of their lives. I am able to see problems and provide solutions. I am empowering women to be great, step out on faith, and be the best they can be. I tell them that there is nothing that they cannot do and to not let anyone or anything get in their way. I believe in breaking stereotypes and shattering glass ceilings and limitations that are put on us by others. I believe I was chosen to lead. I know that God called me to be the trailblazing leader that I am. I was chosen before the very foundations of this earth were established. I have several gifts. My best gift is a spiritual gift of discernment. I am able to read people and know what they are thinking before they even say it. I am able to help others heal by empowering them to put themselves first because self-care isn't selfish, it's self-preservation. I am also a mentor to

many people who call on me for counsel, prayer and guidance. They ask me for my wisdom when making tough life decisions and they seek my support and counsel as well.

I am founder/CEO of a faith-based organization called Michigan Women Veterans Empowerment. I am compelled to

empower veterans, service members, and youth in the eight dimensions of wellness through education, training, workshops, conferences, and programs that are tailored to fit their needs.

Note from Women2Women
Congratulations to Sgt. Shannon who received the MLive 2023 Women that Shape the State Award!

My motivation comes from my ancestors who have suffered and endured racism, slavery, and discrimination due to their race. They have suffered so much and I am honoring them by doing something they didn't have the privilege to do. It's my motivation to never give up. They didn't so I can't. I am determined to be a trendsetter and leave a legacy for my descendants as well.

The strength of my ancestors is in my DNA. They were strong black women who endured so many obstacles and challenges and didn't make excuses for the oppression and abuse they endured and suffered. They showed me how to make the most out of the little they had and to shift the dynamics of any given situation. My strength also comes from my relationship with God. I am a woman of faith. If it wasn't for my relationship with my God, I wouldn't have been able to endure such adversity and hardship. I don't see anything as impossible; all things are possible with my God because he gives me the power and the wisdom to handle it.

I often say as a BIPOC – Black indigenous person of color– to farm by choice not by force. I believe that I am a sum total of my choices. I didn't have the power to choose where I was born, how, and who I was born through, but I do have the power to make choices to change and shape my destiny.

Special experiences that give “validity” to do what I do include: I am a combat woman veteran who served in the Desert Storm/Desert Shield Persian Gulf War, I am a Bestselling Author of 2 books, I am a Founder and CEO of a faith-based organization and I am a minister that continues to serve within the communities of Flint and Grand Rapids, Michigan my hometown. I validated myself by preparing through education and working in the field where I have done the work needed to achieve greatness. I continue to educate myself and surround myself with people who are able to impart into my life as well. I don't seek validation from others, I only seek God's approval and my inner peace and joy is all the confirmation I need that I am good with all that I am doing.

My calling is to be a servant leader, one that is focused on empowering the population I

am called to serve. My passion is really for the youth. We need to teach them to become productive members of society. Investing in the youth is investing in our future. We have to leave a legacy that will inspire them to be greater than the ones that have come before them.



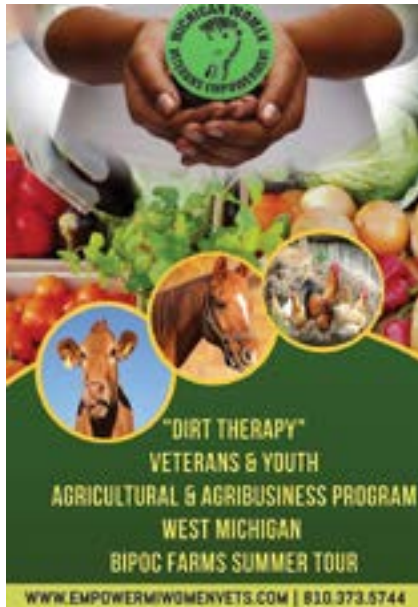
The books I've written are inspirational because they give people insight on how to use their voice, and help them learn that it is actually their super power and that it's all they really have to invoke change. It is your true identity. No one has a voice like yours and finding your voice is key to becoming a confident and secure person.

Women need to know that their life matters and they do not need to seek to be equal to men. They need to learn to use the power of their feminine energy to do great things that naturally born men cannot do. They can look at my life and see how I have overcome so many challenges and adversity and have

used my voice to advocate for myself and others. I have learned how to take care of myself and set boundaries and they will as well.

Also, investing in themselves first is important. Taking care of your mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health is imperative, and establishing a good work/life balance is key to success. Women need to know that being a people pleaser doesn't do anything but devalue them. Another tool I've used is grounding myself through nature and my Dirt Therapy program. Spending time with youth gives me life and renews my energy.

One's quality of life can be improved once a person decides what it is they want, and that everything they need is within them. So they must believe in themselves and God within them.



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Sgt. Stephanie J. Shannon is the Founder and CEO of Michigan Women Veterans Empowerment. Sgt. Shannon is an honorably-discharged disabled U.S. Army veteran who has served her country for eight years including in the 1990-1991 Desert Storm/ Desert Shield Persian Gulf War I. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Grand Valley State University and has served in the community as a woman veteran trailblazer.

She has authored two books and has amazing accomplishments too numerous to mention here! Please visit her social media links below for more about her.

MIWVE - FACEBOOK - www.facebook.com/MichiganWomenVeteransEmpowerment/

MIWVE - TWITTER - twitter.com/MIWVE

TWITTER - Battling Storms - twitter.com/BattlingStorms

Instagram - www.instagram.com/sgt_stephanie_shannon/

LinkedIn - www.linkedin.com/in/stephanieshannon/

Books by Stephanie Shannon are available for purchase at Amazon: *Battling The Storms Within* and *Our Voices United*

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**For more info: Contact Sgt. Shannon
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Reginald Howard - Vet.
Hero's Corner
Founder/Ex. Director



Dr. Michele Leno Ph.D. LP
"Mind Matters" - TV Show Host
DML Psy. Services PLLC. - Fdr./Owner



"Sunny"
Songstress
Entertainer

What is Unconditional Friendship?

Growing up, I never fully grasped why some people found it important to have a diverse array of friends, each serving a different purpose in one's life—someone to trust, a party companion, one who always tells you what you want to hear, and so on. It may sound cliché to say that life is short, but when you consider that our time is limited to around 75 Springs, Summers, Falls, and Winters you realize life is truly short.

We must set boundaries to invest our time wisely on what truly matters most to us. I'm not referring to friendships born from envy, attention-seeking, or drama, nor those driven by romance, acquaintanceship, peer pressure, neighbors, community affiliations, or even family ties that lack genuineness. I'm talking about individuals who genuinely know you, not for what you can do for them, but for who you are. Friends who contribute positively to your life and journey, creating a mutual exchange of support and growth as much as humanly possible.

From a young age, I've held the belief that true friends can be counted on a single hand. Such relationships are a rarity

and a treasure. They cannot be manufactured or forced; they must evolve organically. The beauty lies in discovering a shared understanding of truths, forging a natural emotional connection, and embracing vulnerability. It's about an unbreakable bond where the friendship isn't constrained by conditions, circumstances, or expectations.

In a world where connections are often superficial, having a friend who understands you to the core, accepts you without judgment, tells you the truth, and walks alongside you through the seasons of life is a gift beyond measure. It's a reminder that, despite life's brevity, the impact of a true, unconditional friendship can last a lifetime.

Unconditional Friendship Involves:

TRUST & TRUTH

Trust is the cornerstone of unconditional friendship, woven from unshakable faith, shared honesty, mutual respect, and genuine candor. It's a reciprocal bond where trust flows seamlessly between friends, nurturing the very essence of their connection. In these profound relationships, summoning the courage to confront

uncomfortable truths resonates deeply with sincere care, transcending the fear of potential discomfort. Opting for silence or evasion in such moments does not mirror love, but rather reveals an inclination towards personal comfort over fostering the growth and strength of the relationship.

ACCEPTANCE

You accept your friend for who they are, flaws and all, without trying to change or judge them.

SUPPORT

You offer your friend emotional, practical, and moral support regardless of the situation.

LOYALTY

You remain committed to the friendship even during challenging times or disagreements. Loyalty means being there for your friend through thick and thin.

NON-JUDGMENT

You refrain from passing judgment on your friend's choices, actions, or decisions. You provide a safe and non-critical space for them yet still can speak the truth to them.

FORGIVENESS

Mistakes and conflicts are inevitable, but in an

unconditional friendship, forgiveness is readily given. You are willing to work through issues and move forward together. Overall, unconditional friendship is characterized by genuine care, empathy, and a deep connection that transcends external factors and challenges. It's a bond that enriches both individuals' lives and provides a sense of belonging and emotional support. I truly hope you find, and will let yourself experience, a true unconditional friendship that will last you a lifetime.



*Stacey Kimbrell is a Speaker, and Author of Living Balanced. Stacey's passion for over 15 years is transforming families to a natural way of living through natural remedies, premium essential oils, and living a toxic chemical-free lifestyle. She mixes humor as she exposes the hidden chemicals in products we unknowingly ingest and use in our daily lives. **Live with Hope & Zeal in all things!** 810-423-5721 StaceyKimbrell.com.*



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Woman to Woman Friendship

Understanding Change & Growth

Friendship

is a fundamental aspect of human life, providing support, companionship, and a sense of belonging. Among the various types of friendships, female-to-female friendships hold a special place. You know how it is...These connections are often characterized by shared experiences, emotional understanding, and a unique bond that can withstand the test of time. Empathy, comfort in silence, shared secrets, and laugh-'til-you-cry moments are all part of this special bond. Each friendship is uniquely precious.



However, it is important to acknowledge that friendships, like any relationship, can evolve and change over time. Sometimes, it becomes necessary to let go of certain friendships and embrace new ones. Let's explore the value of female-to-female friendship and the significance of allowing growth and change within these relationships. Even though the pain of letting go can be overwhelming.

Female friendships are often characterized by deep emotional connections and understanding. As women, we experience similar challenges and societal pressures, creating a sense of shared understanding

and support. These relationships can provide an invaluable space for vulnerability and the sharing of life's ups and downs. Female friends often act as sounding boards, offering advice, empathy, and encouragement during difficult times. They celebrate our victories and provide a shoulder to lean on during moments of hardship. These friendships create a sense of unity, strength, and empowerment, fostering personal growth and self-confidence.

However, it is crucial to recognize that friendships, like individuals, evolve and change over time. As we grow and develop as individuals, our needs, values, and interests may shift. It is natural to outgrow certain friendships that no longer align with our current selves. This does not diminish the value of past connections but rather highlights the importance of embracing change and allowing new friendships to blossom.

Letting go of friendships that no longer serve us can be challenging, as it often involves acknowledging the changes within ourselves and accepting that it is okay to move on. It is important to remember that the act of releasing a friendship does not negate its significance or the memories shared. Instead, it allows both individuals to seek new connections that align with their present selves and foster personal growth.

Embracing new friendships can be exciting and rejuvenating. It opens doors to fresh perspectives, experiences, and opportunities for personal development. Each new friendship brings unique qualities and strengths, ultimately enriching our lives. These connections have the power to inspire us, challenge us, and help us grow into the best versions of ourselves.

In the journey of female-to-female friendship, it is crucial to prioritize our own well-being and personal growth. This

may involve letting go of friendships that no longer align with our values, interests, or personal development. While it can be difficult and even painful to let go, it is equally important to embrace the possibility of new friendships. By doing so, we create space for growth, new experiences, and connections that align with our evolving selves.

Let's remember that the value of female-to-female friendship is immeasurable. These connections provide a unique understanding, support, and empowerment. However, it is essential to recognize that friendships, like any relationship, can change over time. Letting go of friendships that no longer serve us and embracing new connections is a natural part of personal growth. By allowing change to occur, we open ourselves up to new experiences, perspectives, and friendships that can contribute to our ongoing journey of self-discovery and fulfillment.

"Time heals" so don't be afraid to move on and *please*, don't avoid making new friends because of past experiences, although do give yourself time to heal.

Stay open, live harmoniously and take care of YOU!

Much Love,
Coach Deb



Deborah St. Hilaire is a unifier, enlightener and catalyst for change in the way women are treated and treat each other. Author, speaker, transformational coach and teacher, Deb, the founder

of MyBodyMindSpirit.com, is dedicated to enriching lives through selfcare, meditation, movement, thought and journaling. She can be reached at 989.450.4200 or deb@mybodymindspirit.com.

AMAYA JOHNSON

Amaya is a 14 year old aspiring fashion designer and Etsy seller, with dreams of studying and starting a business in New York.



My name is Amaya Johnson, and I'm 14 years old. I started selling my totes and bag accessories so I could start learning about business management and could also start practicing my sewing.

What I really want to do is work in the fashion industry as a designer, so if I practice these skills while I'm young I'll be better prepared for when I get older.

Right now my shop only offers small items, like my key chains and totes, but in the future I'd like to expand to selling clothing, and possibly even my own custom patterns. I'm still in the beginning phases of running a business.

My advice for someone else starting a business? Just practice and learn as much as you can now, as opposed to learning on the spot once you get older. The information and experience you gain now will come in handy in the future.



***You can visit Amaya's Etsy Shop at
[www.etsy.com/shop/
ButterflyByAmaya](http://www.etsy.com/shop/ButterflyByAmaya)***



Women Providing Help & Creating Hope

Catholic Charities Newest CEO

KATIE BAXTER

On January 1, 2023, Katie Baxter took up the helm as Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Charities of Shiawassee & Genesee Counties. While historically, the appointment of CEO's has been male-dominated, Catholic Charities has a long, deep track record of women in leadership roles.

Catholic Charities, known for its commitment to serving the less fortunate and upholding the values of compassion and social justice, greatly benefit from the contributions of women. With their innate nurturing qualities, empathy, and dedication, women play an integral role in driving the mission of Catholic Charities forward.

In fact, without the dedication of women, Catholic Charities in Flint

might not even exist! The need for the Agency became evident in the 1930's when residents of Flint were reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. Unemployment was at 20% and food, gas and clothing were in short supply and impacting city life. To help counteract these needs, the League of Catholic Women based out of Detroit, rounded up volunteers to visit needy families and do what they could to help. The League later joined the Flint Community Chest and was able to hire a full-time social worker to assist in the cause. When Father Earl V. Sheridan was given the task of forming the Catholic Social Service Bureau (Later to be renamed Catholic Charities) in 1941, it was 3 Franciscan Sisters of the Poor who were vital to the success of the fledgling agency.

Over the next 30 years many remarkable women played their part, such as Miss Mildred Carroll and Mrs. Zeta Studer, foster mothers who shared their farmhouse in Montrose with more than 150 youth over a 35-year time span. By the late 1970's Sister Claudia Burke, a feisty nun affectionately known as the Bingo Queen, founded the Catholic Outreach Program, North End Soup Kitchen, the Holy Angels Sandwich Program and the Displaced Workers Center to help those who lost jobs find employment or access social service agencies. She also played an instrumental role in the formation of the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan. In December 2008, Burke's contributions were honored with a Congressional resolution.



Sister Claudia Burke, affectionately known as the Bingo Queen.

In 2016, Catholic Charities was one of the first agencies on the scene to assist with the Flint Water Crisis, receiving an outpouring of donations from all 50 states for relief efforts. Vicky was even paid a visit from President Obama to thank her for the Agencies dedication to providing clean water to Flint residents. The following year, renovations to the Center for Hope were completed, the Shiawassee office moved to a larger space, the Offender Success Program was created, Catholic Charities became the Genesee County HARA (Housing Assessment Resource Agency) ... the list goes on and on! When the pandemic struck, Catholic Charities doors remained open and continued to provide essential services to those in need.

empowering and uplifting of women. But it's not just the leadership at the agency that have made an impact on the community. Today, of the 102 employees at Catholic Charities, almost 70% are women in roles from counselors and social workers to finance and housing case managers. Not to mention Board members, and the countless women volunteering in the Community Closet and Soup Kitchens.



In 1991, Deborah McCormick became the first female CEO and she continued to expand the services and grow the agency until

they moved to the current location, transforming the old St. Michael's convent into usable office space. After 16 years of dedicated service, and tripling the Agencies budget, Deborah passed the baton to Vicky Schultz in 2007, and boy did she run with it!

Female leaders at Catholic Charities bring a unique perspective to the table. They understand the challenges faced by women and children, who often form the majority of those seeking assistance. This understanding helps shape programs and initiatives that prioritize the

When Katie joined the Catholic Charities family, she inherited a virtual army of talented and dedicated women. Whether it's providing food and shelter to the homeless, counseling victims of domestic violence, or helping single mothers make ends meet by providing clothing and personal hygiene products, women play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of Catholic Charities.

This fact is not lost on Katie as she leads the agency into the future, and plays her part in the long legacy of compassionate women who have influenced the lives of

Under Vicky's leadership, the agency expanded yet again by securing contracts with Genesee County Community Mental Health to incorporate a Women's Specialty Program, Role Induction, and Intensive Outpatient Therapy. In 2010, after the acquisition of the former St. Michael's School, the Community Closet was expanded to include furniture and household items. The Warming Center was established during the coldest months of the year and by 2013 services expanded to include utility and rent outreach assistance, food bag give-a-ways, and the St. Christopher Medical Transportation Program for medically fragile children.



President Obama thanks Vicky Schultz for the Agencies dedication to providing clean water to Flint residents.

some of the most marginalized individuals in our community.

One of her guiding principles is that families must be supported and strengthened, for the common good and well-being of all. In the short time Katie has been at the helm, it has quickly become apparent that she leads from a place of deep faith and compassion. When asked what word describes her best, she simply said, **Blessed**. Mother of seven and wife to her husband Scott for 31 years, she holds dear the importance of family and considers it her primary vocation and her greatest joy.



“As a mother, I can’t imagine being faced with having to decide between paying the bills or providing food for my family,” said Katie, “which is what makes our work here so important. Anxiety over money, joblessness and poverty are all contributors to depression, substance use and domestic violence. At Catholic Charities, we have many programs to help strengthen families and connect them to resources to get back on their feet.”

The role of women in Catholic Charities is undeniably significant. Their enthusiastic, empathetic nature allows them to form meaningful relationships, providing

a safe space for those seeking support, fostering a sense of community and belonging, empowering those in need to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

What is on the horizon for Catholic Charities? There are so many exciting projects in the works! This fall renovations will be complete on the former St. Michael’s Church and the launch of the St. Michael’s Conference Center will begin with a **Vender Expo & Open House** on November 1, 2023.

“St. Michael’s was beloved by many, and we are excited to repurpose this beautiful building in this way,” said Katie, “the revenue generated from the Conference Center will provide sustainable support for our programs and services, making it easier for us to respond to the needs of the community.”

The Agency is also gearing up for perhaps its largest expansion of services yet! At a press conference this month they will announce the **Sacred Heart Village: A Comprehensive, Transitional Housing Program for Veterans**. The first of its kind in Michigan, the program will serve Veterans, regardless of discharge status, who

are not living independently in a safe environment. Participants will be actively engaged in improving their mental, spiritual, and physical well-being, substance abuse, financial literacy, education, community inclusion, increased natural supports, and employment while preparing for permanent housing. The village will also include a Community Center for Veterans involved in the program, as well as Veterans in the community at large.

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13. “I often think of this bible verse when I think of the commitment veterans make when they enlist in the military, never knowing how great their sacrifice may be”, said Katie. “We all know too well that our service men and women face many challenges when they return from military duty. Unfortunately, the trauma veterans experience can lead to many poor outcomes including mental health and substance use disorders and homelessness. We want to be part of the healing and stability for veterans who have served our country and risked their own safety for freedom for all Americans”.

To learn more about how you can get involved visit www.ccsqc.org

Katie holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work from Michigan State University and several credentials from the Michigan Board of Addiction Professionals. She served as Senior Clinical Director at Genesee Health System in Flint, and various management roles for nearly 20 years. She also has extensive experience as a licensed social worker and therapist. Katie is a member of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Otisville where she serves as Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist and Proclaimer of the Word.

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Females, Finances, & Friends

Chatting About Money

MONEY. It is one of the more hesitantly discussed topics among close friends, especially women. Why? One main reason is history. For many years, it primarily was the man's role in the household to handle finances, deciding who it was necessary to discuss it with. Even as women began to take on more of a financial role, it tended to be a secondary role, and it was still not something that was the norm, so why discuss it among friends if most were not in the same boat? As time went on and society evolved, more women have been taking a front seat role in family finances. In fact, it's not uncommon for a woman to be the SOLE financial decision maker. Times have changed ladies, and it is okay to discuss financial topics with those close to you, just as you would your health or your job. These reasons to chat about money will have you reaching out to your closest BFFs before you know it!

You'll never find answers if you don't ask questions. Ladies, there is NO comprehensive guide of financial information out there. The internet is plagued with hundreds of "free" financial resources that turn into sales approaches. You don't have an advisor, don't really know about hiring one, and don't know who to trust. Well, call your friends you DO trust for help! Maybe one or two stand out as a mentor or role model in the financial realm, and asking how they handle certain things or any advice they may have can actually benefit you greatly. Never be afraid to ask a good, reliable friend for their opinion or story. If nothing else, they might be able to provide you with a perspective that provides some light along your financial pathway.

We learn from each other's mistakes. Ever had a friend get a real bad bob haircut, so you will NEVER go short? Maybe a horrible spa

experience at a place you have avoided ever since? How about a bad injury running, deterring you from signing up for that 10k you promised yourself you would get to? Bottom line ladies, we learn from others' mistakes! There is no shame in sharing your horror stories or listening to those of your friends, as we are all learning from each other on this journey. Use what didn't work well for others as examples of things to maybe shy away from, whether that be purchases that were deemed silly later on, or investments that did not work out.

Transparency has its benefits. If you don't talk about things, you won't know what the "norm" is. The gender pay gap would not have even been discovered if it were not for women discussing topics like their salaries. How will you really know how over- or under-paid you are without discussing those matters among like individuals? Also, conversations about savings techniques, family struggles, and employee benefits can be meaningful learning experiences.

While women are more reluctant to hire professionals than men, we are over twice as likely to seek advice from family and friends. As we have always said, "It takes a village." Learning to deal with money is no different! Varying perspectives can provide clarity for your own personal path. If you are curious about your financial path and what others are doing to meet their goals, don't hesitate to ask your girlfriends for insight.



Kristin Prieur is a Compliance Manager at My RIA Lawyer. She has a passion for providing financial education for women. In her spare time, she is also a Yoga Instructor and Reiki Practitioner.

Apple orchards, apple picking and apple desserts all scream fall. Glowing with bright yellows and reds, apples are juicy and more than ready to be used in your favorite fall recipes. If you're looking for something sweet and full of texture that can turn your taste buds upside down, look no further.

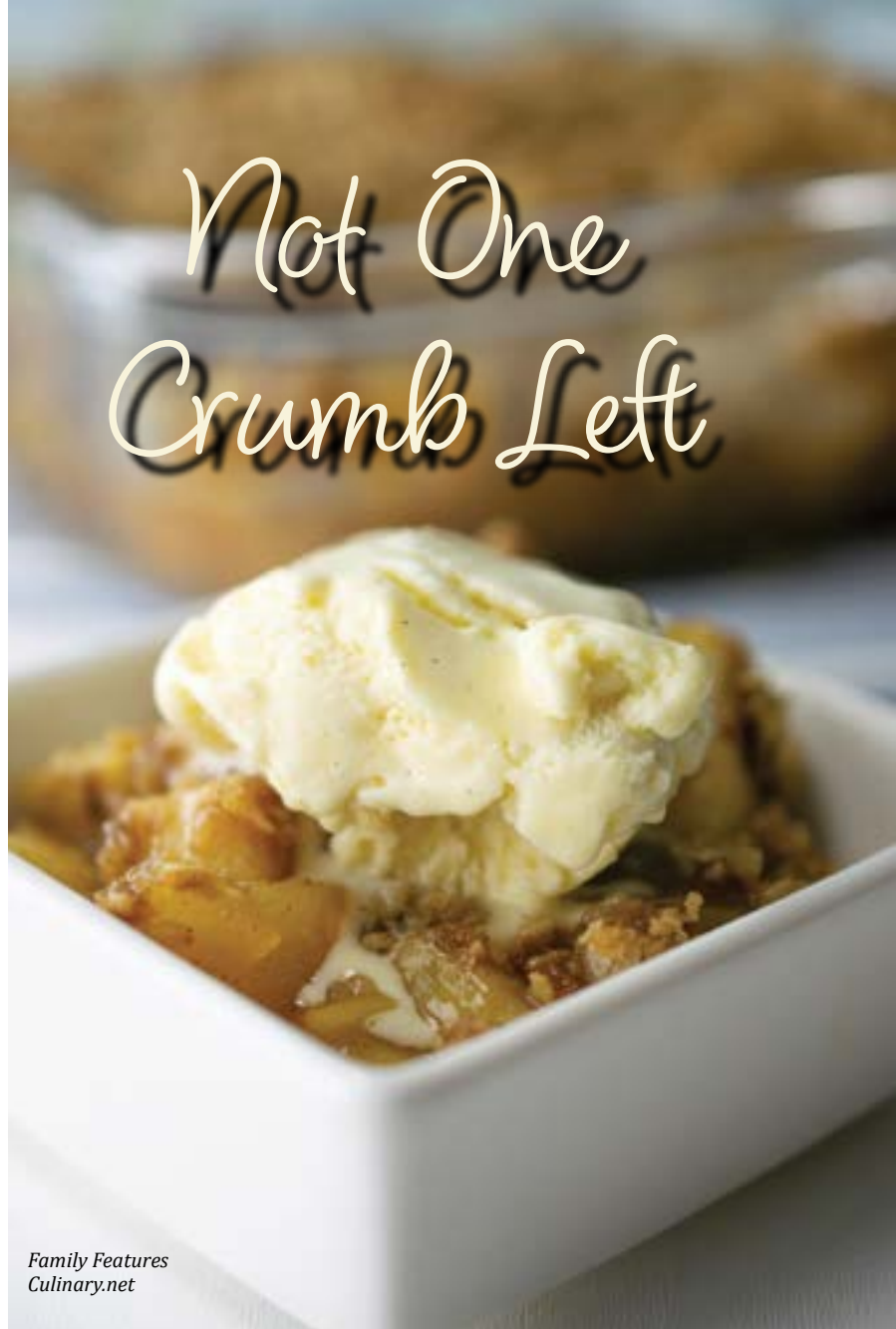
This scrumptious Spiced Apple Crumble is not only a family favorite but a holiday must-have. It's the perfect dish to pack up and deliver to your next gathering of loved ones. Kids and adults love the deliciously sweet apple chunks filling the bottom of the pan along with the crumble topping. Top this killer sweet treat with vanilla ice cream for a sensational, melty, oozing-with-goodness dessert no one can forget.

It's one of those recipes your friends will call you about after the gathering wondering "where did you get that recipe?" The best part: It's perfect for crowds of any size. The bite-size chunks of apple and oats are appetizing for any sweet tooth.

The fall season leading up to the holidays is one of the times of year family and friends traditionally come together most. Nearly everyone loves a satisfying apple, especially when it is baked to perfection, covered with a crumble and topped with creamy, cool vanilla ice cream. Not to mention the splash of lemon added to this mixture brings out a unique tart twist.

Make your next fall festivity or holiday gathering just a little sweeter for all. Spice things up then cool things down. This dessert does it all in just one bite.

Find more recipes for the fall season and holiday fun at Culinary.net.



*Family Features
Culinary.net*

Spiced Apple Crumble

Servings: 6-8

Filling:

- 6 medium Honeycrisp apples, peeled and cubed
- 1 tablespoon white flour
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 2 lemons, juice only

Topping:

- 1 cup quick oats
- 1 cup white flour
- 1/2 cup light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon powder
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- vanilla ice cream (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 F.

To make filling: In medium bowl, add apples, flour, sugar, cinnamon, cloves and lemon juice. Toss to evenly coat. Spread evenly in 8-by-8-inch baking dish.

To make topping: In medium bowl, add oats, flour, brown sugars, baking powder, cinnamon, melted butter and salt. Fork mixture to create crumbles. Pour crumble topping over apple mixture.

Bake 30-40 minutes, or until golden brown. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

Serve warm with vanilla ice cream.

Arlene & Becky

A Friendship Worlds Apart

ARLENE'S STORY

How is it possible that one of my dearest friends lives half a world away? We may never meet, but she is precious to my heart. It's miraculous that our lives crossed, but it was meant to be.

When I celebrated my 90th birthday, my grandson Michael, who has a worldwide ministry, put a post on Facebook asking his thousands of friends to send me a happy birthday wish and tell what country they were from. Many responded, and one person by the name of Rebecca Lee Kushemermerwa sent me a lovely greeting and also a friend request. I clicked "accept" and the door was opened to a loving, unique friendship with Becky who lives in the city of Kampala, in the country of Uganda, in the nation of Africa.

Almost from the beginning of our friendship, Becky shared personal, intimate things from her life about her troubled marriage. She had no one to confide in -- no sympathy, no support from her parents or siblings -- they all loved her husband, and of course, knew nothing of the circumstances Becky was living with. I was a good listener, did not judge or criticize, and being so far away, I was safe to share things with.

Becky was so distraught, stressed, and unhappy that she was actually contemplating taking her life. In our long conversations -- sometimes multiple times a day, I continually reminded her that God loved her, I loved her, her children needed her, she was a child of God, and that she had great value. Becky's life didn't change quickly -- it took time but gradually her self-esteem returned. She overcame the stigma of divorce, no longer feeling rejected. She has completely turned her life around.

With help from a relative, she was able to open a small grocery store. As that expanded successfully, she acquired a second business -- a men's clothing store. Recently she was awarded a contract by Pepsi to distribute mineral water throughout her city.

I am so proud of her. When I consider the place she was when I met her and where she is now -- it's nothing short of miraculous. She gives me much of the credit. I give the credit to the Lord and to my dear Becky for having faith in herself and not giving up. She's independent, self-assured, successful, and such a loving Mum to her two little ones.

Her fondest wish is to visit America and give me a real live hug. Who knows? All things are possible and my arms are wide open in welcome. I love you forever, my Sweet Girl.



Arlene on her 90th birthday.

BECKY'S STORY

Our friendship has been one of the greatest divine encounters of my life.

I remember vividly --- We met in 2017 when I was still 26, going on 27 and I was tired of my life and all I wanted to know was how you made it to 90 when I was 26 and didn't care if I lived or died.

We met when I had so many challenges with my marriage and I knew nothing about parenting with love. Now, as a single Mum, I am able to care for my children and love them because you taught me how to love amidst the storms. You taught me that my babies still needed a loving Mama. They know I'm always available for all the hugs they ever need.

You also walked with me and supported me when I lost my Mum in 2018 -- such a major loss. Because you had your share of losses through the years you understood my need and patiently kept speaking hope to me. We used to text for hours and you were there to listen and give godly advice.

You were there when my mental health was tested and the days when I thought I was better off dead than alive, you were there to remind me of all the beautiful things around me. You never failed to remind me how much God loved me. Every text you sent me, you always told me that you loved me. You always concluded your messages with "I love you, My Sweet Girl," or "I love you forever." My eyes are tearing up and tears are falling because you were the only human being who constantly told me that I was loved. Your words have always been direct to my spirit because when you say them, I know them as truth.

You have walked with me through my separation and divorce, the hardest season of my life. All I know is when I met you, my life changed for the better. I am forever honored and humbled to have you in my life. I'm not sure if I would even be alive but thank God I'm still here. I bless God for keeping you and causing our paths to cross. So many miles apart, but closer than those I live in the same house with. For this reason, you're my forever angel on earth that God used to speak love to my heart. I didn't have any love in my heart -- only pain. Thank you, My Dearest Grandma, I can't imagine life without your affirming words of love. Where would I be? I love you forever.



Becky and her children.



Arlene is an author, encourager, and matriarch of a family of 44, spanning five generations. She is enjoying life in northern Michigan surrounded by family and friends. She can be reached at estimada27@aol.com.

When Caregiver's Stress Gets the Best of You

Are you one of the 1 in 3 adults in the U. S. who serves as an informal or family caregiver? It's no secret that caring for someone can be stressful. Most of us just keep putting one foot in front of the other, not seeing much of a choice, and getting through each day the best way we can. However, we need to be conscious of the toll caregiving takes on our mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Hopefully you will find these warning signs and management suggestions helpful.

SIGNS OF CAREGIVER STRESS

As a caregiver, you may be so focused on your loved one that you don't see how caregiving affects your own health and well-being. The signs of caregiver stress include:

- Feeling burdened or worrying all the time.
- Feeling tired often.
- Sleeping too much or not enough.
- Gaining or losing weight.
- Becoming easily irked or angry.
- Losing interest in activities you used to enjoy.
- Feeling sad.
- Having frequent headaches or other pains or health problems.
- Misusing alcohol or drugs, including prescription medicines.
- Missing your own medical appointments.

Too much stress over time can harm your health. As a caregiver, you might feel depressed or anxious. You might not get enough sleep or physical activity. Or you might not eat a balanced diet. All of these increase your risk of health conditions, such as heart disease and diabetes.

TIPS TO MANAGE CAREGIVER STRESS

The emotional and physical demands of caregiving can strain even the strongest person. Many resources and tools can help you care for your loved one and yourself. Make use of them. If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to care for anyone else.

To help manage caregiver stress:

Ask for and accept help. Make a list of ways in which others can help you. Then

let them choose how to help. Ideas include taking regular walks with the person you care for, cooking a meal for you and helping with medical appointments.

Focus on what you can do. At times, you might feel like you're not doing enough. But no one is a perfect caregiver. Believe that you're doing the best you can.

Set goals you can reach. Break large tasks into smaller steps that you can do one at a time. Make lists of what's most important. Follow a daily routine. Say no to requests that are draining, such as hosting meals for holidays or other occasions.

Get connected. Learn about caregiving resources in your area. There might be classes you can take. You might find caregiving services such as rides, meal delivery or house cleaning.

Join a support group. People in support groups know what you're dealing with. They can cheer you on and help you solve problems. A support group also can be a place to make new friends.

Seek social support. Stay connected to family and friends who support you. Make time each week to visit with someone, even if it's just a walk or a quick cup of coffee.

Take care of your health. Find ways to sleep better. Move more on most days. Eat a healthy diet. Drink plenty of water.

Sleep. Many caregivers have trouble sleeping. Good sleep is important for health. If you have trouble getting a good night's sleep, talk to your health care professional.

See your health care professional. Get the vaccines you need and regular health screenings. Tell your health care professional that you're a caregiver. Talk about worries or symptoms you have."

RESPIRE CARE

It may be hard to leave your loved one in someone else's care. But taking a break can be one of the best things you do for yourself and the person you're caring for. Types of respite care include:

In-home respite. Health care aides come

to your home to spend time with your loved one or give nursing services or both.

Adult care centers and programs. There are centers that give day care for older adults. Some also care for young children. The two groups might spend time together.

Short-term nursing homes. Some assisted living homes, memory care homes and nursing homes accept people who need care for short stays while caregivers are away.

WORKING OUTSIDE THE HOME

Caregivers who work outside the home can feel burdened. If this describes you, think about taking a leave from your job for a time if you can afford to do so.

Employees covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act may be able to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year to care for relatives. Ask your human resources office about choices for unpaid leave.

YOU AREN'T ALONE

Ask for the help you need. Besides asking family and friends, use local resources for caregivers.

To start, check out the national Eldercare Locator or contact your local Area Agency on Aging to learn about services in your area. Or try your state's Aging and Disability Resource Center. You can find these resources online or in a telephone directory.

There also are mobile apps and web-based services that give support to caregivers. These services can help build coping skills and teach about caregiving."

*Was any of this helpful? Remember, **you** must take the steps to alleviate your stress. As women, we tend to just accept more and more of the burden without taking care of ourselves. But when you are burned out and sick, who will take care of your loved one? Here's hoping that you can advocate for your own health and make it a priority.*

This article was taken from Mayo Clinic's website. Go to www.mayoclinic.org for more info.

The Power of Lifelong Female Friendships

Nurturing Mental Health & Resilience

They say that good friends are like stars; always there to brighten our lives. As a woman who has been blessed with lifelong friendships, I can attest to the profound impact these enduring connections have on our mental health and resilience. Having these kinds of relationships are, in my humble opinion, extremely important.



Long-lasting friendships among women are more than just companionship; they play a vital role in nurturing our mental health and fostering resilience. As women, we often face unique challenges and societal pressures, making the support and understanding of our female friends all the more valuable. The emotional support and validation received from long-lasting friendships can contribute to improved mental well-being, reduced stress levels, and increased self-esteem.

Growing up I was lucky enough to see strong connections and the value they can bring to life by watching my mom (Ladonna) and her best friend (and my Godmother) Patricia. These two magnificent ladies laid the foundation for me as far as what a positive, respectful and trustworthy friendship should look like. I witnessed how their relationship provided a safe space for vulnerability, sharing their joys, struggles, and fears without judgment.

In my personal experience, my best friend, Arlynn, has been an integral part of my life since we first crossed paths in kindergarten. I can attest to how her unwavering support and our mutual accountability have shaped my growth and development, and why these aspects are crucial in fostering a strong and meaningful friendship. Throughout the years, our friendship has grown and evolved, weathering the storms and celebrating the triumphs together. Arlynn's unwavering presence and genuine care have been instrumental in my personal growth and development. From childhood dreams to navigating the complexities of adulthood, she has been my confidante, cheerleader, and sounding board. Through her support, I have gained the confidence to take risks, pursue my passions, and face challenges head-on. Our friendship has been a constant

source of strength, reminding me that I am never alone in this journey of life.

One of the key foundations of a long-lasting friendship is the ability to hold each other accountable for our actions. Arlynn and I have always believed in the power of honest communication and constructive feedback. We challenge each other to grow, offering gentle guidance and

perspective when needed. Holding ourselves accountable for our words and actions ensures that our friendship remains built on trust and respect. Equally important is the unwavering support we provide for one another. Arlynn has been there during my darkest hours, lending a listening ear and offering solace. She has celebrated my successes with genuine joy and provided a shoulder to lean on during times of sorrow. This reciprocal support creates a safe space where we can be vulnerable, knowing that we are accepted and loved unconditionally. It is through this support that our friendship has thrived, becoming a source of motivation and strength.

Through my 37-year friendship with Arlynn Hill, I have experienced firsthand the transformative power of an enduring connection. I would hope that everyone would have an "Arlynn" in their life. These kinds of friendships provide a sense of belonging, emotional support, and validation that are essential for our well-being. Holding each other liable and offering unwavering support are key elements that nourish these relationships. As women, let us cherish and cultivate these lifelong friendships, for they are the pillars that uplift us, empower us, and remind us that we are never alone on this beautiful journey called life.



Lynn Turner is a seasoned mental health professional with 20+ years of experience. Specializing in suicide prevention and high acuity patients, she is a trusted counselor, addiction treatment specialist, and certified life coach. Lynn's dedication extends to mentoring young women and advocating for the vulnerable in mental health. www.linkedin.com/in/lynnnturner

law of attraction

The image shows two women in athletic wear performing a yoga pose on a beach at sunset. They are standing on the sand, with their bodies reflected in the shallow water in the foreground. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, and there are some reeds or grasses on the left and right sides. The text "BBF: We Must Be It to See It" is written in white cursive over the center of the image.

BBF: We Must
Be It to See It

Most of my life I was deceived and taken advantage of by various girlfriends and two ex-husbands. After being introduced to the Law of Attraction/LoA, I was very intrigued to see if the LoA could help me stop this repetitive pattern. Even though I really wanted to believe that the LoA worked, I found myself doubting it because I'd been taught to think that ***I had to see it before I could believe it.***

Back in 2006 when I began designing my Women's Self-Awareness Class, I came across Dr. Masaru Emoto's, New York Times best-selling book "The Hidden Messages in Water". His verifiable experiments demonstrated that thoughts, words, and even sounds changed the shape of water molecules. When frozen water molecules were exposed to both spoken and written words of (high frequency) love, gratitude, and appreciation etc., the photographs of the ice crystals had a beautiful iridescent quality and were symmetrical in shape and resembled sacred geometry. On the other hand, the water crystals that were exposed to words (of low frequency) such as guilt, anger, and hate, were grayish in color, had dark holes in them and were asymmetrical in shape. This fascinated me and I quickly added it to the material I would present in my class.

Since I knew that about 70% of our body was made-up of water and that our reality is created via the thought energy we send out into the universe, I began to practice catching and then eliminating my negative/bad-feeling thoughts. I then purposefully replaced them with better feeling thoughts. I began to see the quality of my friendships improve as I changed the quality of my thoughts.

The safe and comfortable atmosphere that I provided in this program resulted in beautiful bonding experiences between all the women attendees. Much to my surprise and delight, some of them even became my BFF and even today we continue to enjoy growing and expanding together.

The top 4 things I learned through practice.

Awareness #1 The universe is a giant mirror. The truth of the matter is we are the one common ingredient in every relationship we have, so now is the time to take a good look in the mirror. I know it's not easy to look at our reflection and hold ourselves accountable for the things that happen to us (both good and bad) but from my own personal experience, it's the only way to grow, evolve, and change our lives for the better.

Awareness #2 The true feelings we have inside, whether it's spoken or unspoken, determine the kind of people we attract. When we're numbing our emotions (through various addictive behaviors) and not paying attention to what we're thinking or feeling, we will subconsciously attract people with an identical vibration. Let's notice what our friends are saying. Are they negative, judgmental, and complaining all the time? Have we've been silently thinking the same things too? Maybe we've been putting on a smile in public and pretending everything's OK, but the truth of the matter is, we don't like our life right now or the relationships we have. Our relationships always reflect the (deep inside) thought energy we are producing.

Awareness #3 Before we can attract an ideal friend or life partner, we must have total clarity on what our definition of a BFF is. An easy way to do this is to take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle. On the left side of the paper list all the aspects we did not like in our past friendships. Now begin to list (on the opposite side of the paper) all the qualities we'd like to experience in a future BFF.

After doing this process, my definition of a BFF ended up as: one who is compassionate, caring, kind, nonjudgmental, accepting, loyal, full of integrity, a good listener who is fully present when they're with me (instead of looking at their phone or multitasking on something else), and last but not least, has unconditional love for me and everyone else, including themselves.

Awareness #4 After three years of continual practice, I became aware that the most important ingredient to **successfully attracting a BFF (and even a husband) was this.** I had to become the energy field of what I wanted to attract before I could attract it. I dropped all self-defeating patterns in my life and developed a new habit of treating myself with the same love and respect I would want my best friend to give me. I adopted all the qualities and characteristics I had put in my definition of a best friend and became the energy field of what I wanted to attract. Clarity appeared and this is how I learned "we have to **BE** it to **SEE** it".



Suzanne Young is an intuitive life coach who specializes in the Law of Attraction. She is also an inspirational speaker, author, and co-owner of Personal Success Programs, since 2007, with her husband Kevin Young. You can email her at suzanne@psprograms.com and their website is www.psprograms.com. Her office number is 248.349.6225.

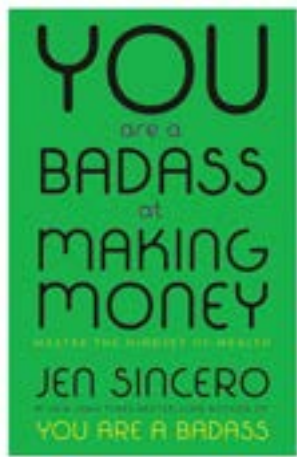
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Book Club Classics

Books that Change You



You are a Badass at Making Money

Maser the Mindset of Wealth

by Jen Sincero, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *You Are a Badass*®

“A cheerful manifesto on removing obstacles between yourself and the income of your dreams.”

—New York Magazine

You Are a Badass at Making Money will launch you past the fears and stumbling blocks that have kept financial success beyond your reach. Drawing on her own transformation—over just a few years—from a woman living in a converted garage with tumbleweeds blowing through her bank account to a woman who travels the world in style, Jen Sincero channels the inimitable sass and practicality that made *You Are a Badass* an indomitable bestseller. She combines hilarious personal essays with bite-

size, aha concepts that unlock earning potential and get real results.

Learn to:

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- Give your doubts, fears, and excuses the heave-ho
- Relate to money in a new (and lucrative) way
- Shake up the cocktail of creation
- Tap into your natural ability to grow rich
- Shape your reality—stop playing victim to circumstance
- Get as wealthy as you wanna be

The Power of Your Voice

Your voice is your true identity. It's your Superpower! As you use it effectively it will awaken you to walk into your divine purpose. Discover how to find your voice, amplify your voice, and use your voice to advocate for yourself and for others and to change your world.

No one has a voice quite like yours. It's tied to your life experiences, shaped by your upbringing, and the challenges and adversity you face in life will cause your voice to become amplified. As magnificent as it is, the larynx is where the sound of your voice is produced, but it doesn't mean you "have a voice". Your voice will affect someone else. It is powerful; you are either speaking life or death. You are either building someone up or tearing them down just with your words. Often it is difficult to discover one's true voice, especially if it's been minimized, muffled, oppressed, and dismissed as not being significant.

What is silence? It's the absence of sound. It means not speaking up when you should have. Have you ever been in a situation where you know you should have spoken out, but you didn't? You feared the consequences you might receive if you acted upon what you thought. Did you know that every time you don't speak you arrest the development of the sound of your voice? You experience a loss of growing your ability to speak effectively. Inflicting silence creates a kind of concealment. Use your voice to speak out against what is arresting and holding you in fear. Anger can make your voice loud because that's an expression of something being held captive.

The most detrimental captivity of our voices is when we afflict and damage our souls by not facing our pain and trauma. The experiences that brought pain, grief, and trauma in our lives can cause a lifetime cycle of pain, fear, anger, and all sorts of negative emotions. When you experience hurt, pain, rejection, and loss it is so easy to not use your voice in a healthy matter. It's time to break that cycle and begin to address and handle those effects of enduring traumatic incidents that have held you bound. Those types of life events, and especially if they are multiple, can cause a deep spiral into the abyss of loss of identity. They can be a sentence of being solitarily confined in an emotional prison of suffering and inner turmoil.

Our life experiences may leave us with scars, but it shouldn't alter our identity and take our voice. Something good comes out of experiencing adversity; it is an opportunity to reshape your voice for the new dimension you enter. Deep hurts require deep healing, traumatic life experiences steal pieces of your voice, and your true natural expressions are tainted and disturbed by something else like rage or depression. Suppression of your voice causes anger and frustration; you must be willing to face the pain to overcome it. Yell, shout, and scream it you want to but just speak your story, your truth, fearlessly. Our voices were created to be heard, we can heal ourselves through speaking words of life and love and what you speak is what you will believe. When the intrinsic power that lies within us sustains injury, overcome it by being resilient and selectively choosing to mute the voices of pain and traumatic life experiences.

Silence the negative voices that seem to infiltrate your thought life, for it impacts your ability to hear correctly. Speak yourself free from the gripping fear of trauma that caused you to be oppressed and bound. Turn on the mute button and take action on the responsibility of healing yourself. Healing is natural; give yourself a gift of healing by boldly speaking your truth from your heart and soul to the world. Your voice comes from your soul, your mind, will, and emotions. Your voice is shaped by your experiences, environments, and the things you allowed in. Unlock the superpower within you by freeing your voice. It is an extension of you; it needs to be solid, unshakable, alive, and powerful. Listen to your own voice. It does matter. Empower, and celebrate yourself by freeing yourself to speak boldly and courageously without fear.



Sgt. Stephanie J. Shannon is the Founder and CEO of Michigan Women Veterans Empowerment. Sgt. Shannon is an honorably-discharged disabled U.S. Army veteran who has served her country for eight years including in the 1990-1991 Desert Storm/ Desert Shield Persian Gulf War I. She earned a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Grand Valley State University and has served in the community as a woman veteran trailblazer. More about her on page 8.

Friendship

I'VE HAD WOMEN TELL ME that they are frustrated at their inability to gain friends. It makes me sad, but I have been in their shoes, so I completely understand.

Friendship is hard. It's messy. But so is love. And can you live without love in your life? You really can't have any quality of life without friends. It's in our nature to want to have friends, to belong.

But we must become vulnerable! Ugh! Anyone here particularly enjoy putting yourself in a place to be hurt or rejected? Is it any wonder it's hard?

But as long as you have walls around your heart, you keep the love and friendship from happening too.

Just in case you feel that I don't understand about our first response of building walls when we've been hurt, I will share.

Because I moved six times between my first and eleventh grades, I didn't have many "best" friends. In fact, it felt like my friends were always jerked from me. Finally, my last two years of high school I established some wonderful friendships. It was a bit rocky at first—a new school where my classmates had been together for a long time. But I was determined.

Many years later, through a very emotional and hurtful period of time, I had a group of close friends betray me. It devastated me and I wore the scars from this for years. I was really beaten up emotionally. I'd lost those that I thought were my support group of friends.

Moving on, I had to choose to make friends. Those of you who know me now may think this sounds unlikely. But, I was very wounded and I can also be an introvert at times. It's a choice to reach out. I did it, though. Why? Because we are created as social beings. We need each other.

And now, at gatherings like our Speaker Series I try to find all the people I don't know and meet them. I do it because I know what it's like to be new. To be on the outside and unsure of what is going on. Changing schools many times gave me empathy and guts.

"A friend knows the song in my heart and sings it to me when my memory fails."

~Donna Roberts

If you have problems making friends, I have a question for you. Are you looking at the world through your own broken heart and the filters you have in place? Are you offended by someone's look, or what you think is avoidance?

Remember, you have no idea what someone else is going through. *Do not let your own low self-esteem or feelings of unworthiness* make you decide the person just does not like you. Walk right up to that person and talk to her. If you don't understand, use your words, my dears. You have to be brave. And chances are that you imagined what wasn't there in the first place.

No one has *taught* us how to be friends, which is a shame. So let me share with you from my many years of experience and wisdom gained.

CONNECTIONS ARE SO IMPORTANT.

Meet new people. Make those connections. We need to reach

outside of ourselves. Our lives are made richer from knowing others. You won't know of the potentially deep friendship waiting for you in a new person until you make an effort to connect with other women.

BE LOYAL AND DEPENDABLE. Be trustworthy and someone that can be counted on.

BE FORGIVING. We all have flaws. Be gentle and full of grace. When we are forgiving, our friendship grows, but when we hold on to grudges, we alienate a friend.

Encourage each other, support them any way you can.

TELL YOUR STORY. When someone else is afraid to talk about their past experiences, ask if they'd like to hear your story. But don't just take over the conversation! Share what you think will help them.

LISTEN! When a friend needs a sounding board, needs to vent, or is sharing wonderful news, ask questions and genuinely listen. (It's not always about you, sister! Contrary to what social media portrays.)

KEEP SECRETS! Absolutely nothing should convince you to share what someone told you in confidence. Not even to your significant other unless your friend gives you permission. Gossip is a cancer, and has no place in your life, but especially among friends. Ill-placed words can destroy someone.



Mimi Matthews is in the "encouragement business" as the owner of Empowordment Cards by Mimi, which features greeting cards that inspire and encourage. She is also a speaker, workshop leader, writer, and our editor. Visit her shop at www.etsy.com/shop/EmPOwordmentCards, her blog at www.particularpassions.me.

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