

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

HOW LISTENING TO OUR INNER VOICE QUIETLY SHAPES WHO WE BECOME

Jenny Brandemuehl

When I was ten years old, I knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up: either a writer, or an archaeologist. I was fascinated by stories, by buried truths waiting to be uncovered. I imagined myself discovering lost worlds, whether through words or artifacts.

Like many childhood dreams, they quietly slipped away.

I chose the practical path instead: a corporate career that was fulfilling in its own way, intellectually engaging, and financially responsible. Life moved forward: marriage, children, work, responsibility. And yet, somewhere beneath the surface, that creative longing remained. It never left. It simply waited.

Years later, during a brief pause between jobs, I felt an unmistakable pull, I wanted to learn how to write a novel. I had an idea I'd been carrying for years, autobiographically inspired, about a woman who discovers her father lived a secret life she never knew about. I enrolled in creative writing classes at Stanford, thrilled and terrified in equal measure.

When the courses ended, the enormity of writing an entire novel felt overwhelming. That's when my husband, Mark, offered advice that would quietly change everything.

"Creating something new begins with one small step," he said. "Just write every day."

"When are you most productive?" He asked.

"Mornings until early afternoon", I told him.

"Then schedule it. Every weekday. Treat it like a job."

So, I did. Every morning, after coffee and peanut butter toast, I sat down to write until my teenage boys came home from school. At first, it felt

indulgent. Then it became essential. I fell in love with the freedom of fiction, the limitless possibilities, the ability to create worlds and characters from nothing. It felt like being both actor and playwright at once.

Fourteen months later, I had written a 400-page novel draft.

And then, with college tuition looming, I returned to paid work. The novel went into a drawer. Not abandoned, just waiting.

Years passed. Our sons graduated from college. Mark and I made plans to retire to Lake Tahoe, where we would ski, hike, and spend more time with the people we loved. Mark, a recreational pilot, bought a small plane. He dreamed of flying us to concerts and weekend adventures. Flying gave him an exhilarating sense of freedom, unlike anything else.

We gave notice at our jobs. He planned to tinker with cars. I planned to finally return to that novel.

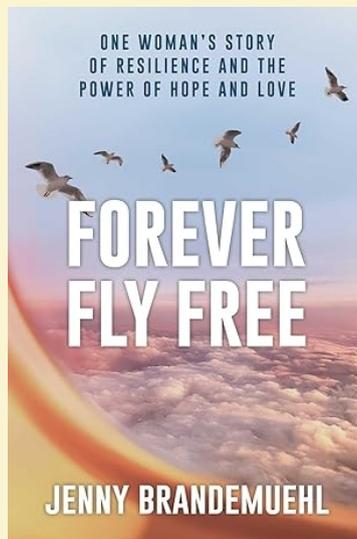
And then, seven minutes after takeoff from Scottsdale Airport, everything changed.

Mark suffered a catastrophic plane accident. He survived the crash but sustained burns over 80 percent of his body. For five months, I lived beside him in the burn ICU, far from home, far from everything familiar. There were surgeries, infections, amputations, moments of hope, and moments of devastation.

After 147 days, an antibiotic-resistant infection took his life.

In the year that followed, I existed in shock and a kind of suspended animation. The second year was devoted to discovering who I was without the person who had been my partner for 31 years.

Throughout Mark's hospitalization, I had posted daily updates to an online caregiver community,



initially clinical and factual, later raw and deeply personal. I wrote because I had no other way to survive the isolation. The posts spread far beyond the original group. Thousands of strangers followed our story. Faith communities prayed for us. People told me my words gave them hope.

After Mark died, friends gently suggested that I write a book.

I resisted at first. I still wanted to finish my novel. But something inside me shifted. I felt called, not pressured, not forced, to tell the story I had lived. I put the novel aside and began writing my memoir.

I worried the process would retraumatize me. I found a therapist to support me through it. Instead of reopening wounds, the writing brought clarity. The story flowed. I hadn't realized how much I had been carrying.

At one point, my writing coach said, "You're not hard to coach. You have a voice. You know what you want to say."

She was right. The years I spent writing fiction, learning dialogue, pacing, and scene, had quietly prepared me for this moment. I wrote the memoir scene by scene, allowing readers to walk beside me rather than observe from a distance.

When my national bestseller, *Forever Fly Free: One Woman's Story of Resilience and the Power of Hope and Love*, was released, I suddenly remembered that I had dreamed of being a



published author since I was ten years old.

I just never knew my memoir would come first.

Looking back, I see now that my life didn't change through one dramatic leap. It changed through a series of small pivots, each one preparing me for the next. Timing mattered. I couldn't have written that novel earlier. I couldn't have written the memoir before I was ready. Life unfolded in its own season.

After Mark died, I spent long stretches in nature, skiing through mountain silence. There, I noticed the rhythm of the natural world: the ebb and flow, the seasons of rest and renewal. I stopped rushing. I allowed stillness. In that quiet, intuition became audible again.

We are taught to push, to hurry, to optimize. But some truths can only be heard when we slow down.

If I could speak to my pre-pivot self, I would tell her this: it is never too late to change your life. Sometimes the bravest transformation comes not through dramatic reinvention, but through a series of small steps over time. Individually it may not feel like much, but each small step leads to the next step. One day, you'll surprise yourself with how far you've come.

Your next chapter may already be whispering to you—in nature, in stillness, in the small voice you've been ignoring.

Make space to hear it.

Jenny Brandemuehl is a national bestselling author, speaker, and entrepreneur. Following the tragic plane crash that claimed her husband's life, Jenny transformed her personal story into a message of healing and connection. Her memoir, *Forever Fly Free*, chronicles that journey and the lessons she's learned about courage, compassion, and rebuilding after unimaginable change. Today, Jenny helps leaders and entrepreneurs embrace vulnerability as a strength — reminding them that success and healing are never solo acts.

Find more on [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#).

