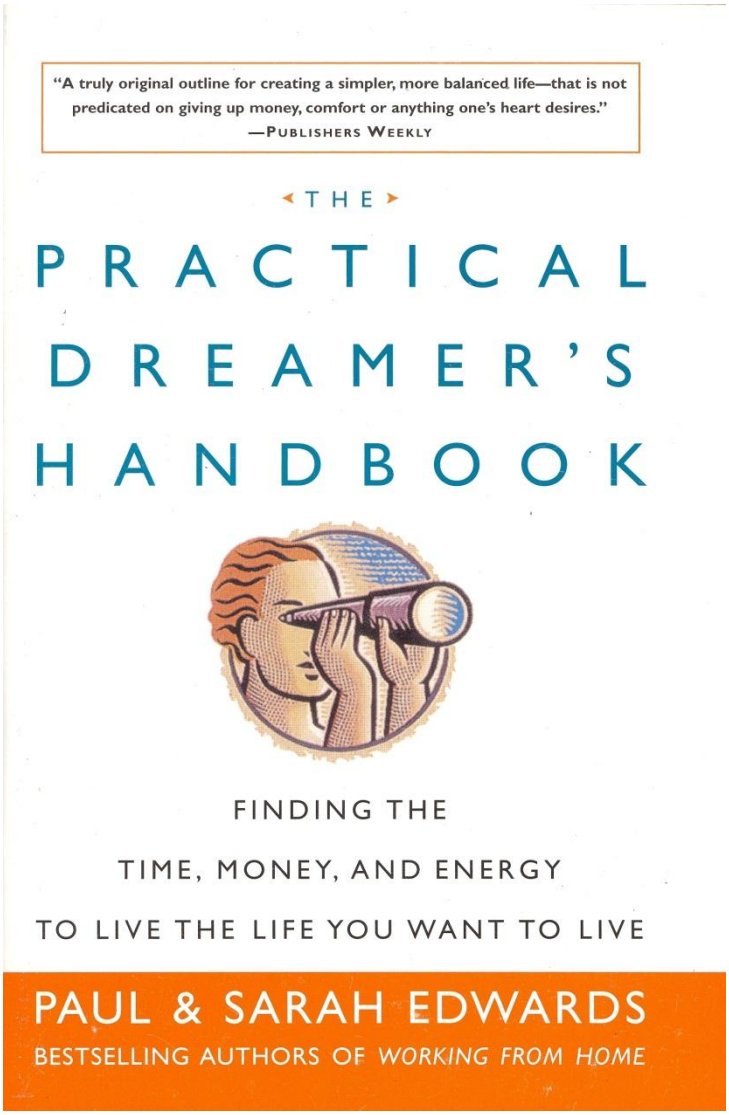
Sample Content



SNIPPETS FROM THE CHAPTERS

Introduction

It's so easy. We have a desire. We do something to fulfill it. And once we do, we feel satisfied...until we have another desire. Then the cycle begins again, and again and again. Desire, action, satisfaction. We go through this cycle every time we take a breath. We do it every time we get hungry, or thirsty, or want to get up from a chair, or need to go to the store, or decide to look out the window. It's such a natural cycle, so much a part of who we are, that we don't even think about it. We've been doing it since the moment we were born.

But when we have to dream up some way to fulfill a desire, it's not so easy. The process is the same: We have a desire, we imagine how we might fulfill it, we take whatever action is needed, and once the desire is met we feel satisfied. But when it comes to fulfilling a dream, there's usually nothing automatic about it, because dreams are from another world. They come from our imagination. Taking a breath or getting a drink of water, walking over to the door or opening the blinds to let in some light are part of the world that already exists. No one questions whether it's practical to get a drink of water or whether we should get thirsty in the first place. But dreaming up something that doesn't exist anywhere except in our own minds is quite another matter.

Dreams are, by nature, not practical. Practical has to do with what is; dreams have to do with what could be but isn't yet. So we do question them, we question ourselves and so does the world. Should we have such a desire? Why aren't we satisfied with what we have? Is it appropriate? Is it possible? Realistic? Dreaming about a return to simpler times, for example, may be understandable when three out of four people report feeling stressed out, but do we dare think we could actually live a simpler life with time for family, personal fulfillment, nature, and meaningful work? To many that seems impractical, unrealistic, and even impossible.

Yet bridging these two worlds, the actual and the desirable, is the practical dreamer's challenge. The practical dreamer is both the architect and the builder, creating what could be from the reality of what is. So the practical dreamer must walk with one foot in the world of imagination, hopes, wishes, dreams, and possibilities, and the other firmly planted in the world of physical reality with all its limitations; like time, money, space, form, material, and the needs of other people. While our imagination is limitless, reality is not.

Many people choose not to walk the path of the practical dreamer, disliking the inconvenience and discomfort of having to straddle two very different, seemingly incompatible worlds. Some people prefer to live in the comfortable, imaginary world of their dreams, always talking and thinking, wondering and planning about what they will do, could do, or should do...someday...but never actually acting on their ideas. Without using some type of mind-altering substance, however, those who only dream are never truly satisfied with this choice. "Reality" has a perverse way of intruding into our awareness whether we want it to or not, reminding us again and again, often at the most unexpected moments, in the most unexpected ways, that our lives don't match our fantasies. So, as the Everly brothers' song bemoaned in the 50's, inevitably we realize, "Only trouble is, ghee wiz, I'm dreamin' my life away."

Others prefer to live strictly in the world of practical reality; they choose not to wander into the "unrealistic" and impractical realm of dreams. "It's never been done before," they say; or "That's not the way we do things here." But those who never dream rarely feel truly satisfied with life either. They become enslaved to what is, and sooner or later sense that there could be more, especially when someone else attains what they would have enjoyed but never dreamt possible. It's a tedious, gray, and gloomy world that's never lit by glimpses of a treasured dream.

Part One: Desire—Awakening the Dream

Chapter 1 Yearning for Yesterday...or Someday

What happened to your parents' dreams? Do you know? How has their experience affected your willingness and ability to feel and follow your desires?

As I sit here filled with a yearning for who-knows-what, I can't help but wonder what my father would be saying to me now. What would he say about the fact that within the last year, my husband and I left behind life as we've known it with no clear plan for what we'll be doing, except to follow a yearning that seems destined to become a bigger dream? Would he roll his eyes and shake his head in dismay as he often did so long ago at my harebrained, adolescent schemes? I think not. I remember on his deathbed the still-hungry-for-life look in his eyes so misty, gray, and glossy with morphine; and I know what he would say. Perhaps it's what he was trying to say near the end when all that remained was a glance and a touch:

"Don't do what I did, Sarah. Listen to the wild beatings of your heart and dance to them...before it's too late." I always wanted to hear them. I always wanted to dance to them. Sometimes I did. But like him, often I didn't.

SIGNS OF DISCONTENT

Here are sixteen signs that there's something missing in life and a new desire is waiting to be born. Are any of them familiar?

___ *Not wanting to get out of bed*

___ *Difficulty motivating yourself to do routine tasks* ___

Losing interest in things that once engaged you

__ *Nagging doubts about yourself and the course of your life*

__ *Worrying about how you'll keep things together*

__ *Feeling bored and restless*

__ *Wishing you were someone else*

__ *Having frequently bad dreams or nightmares*

__ *Feeling mildly depressed for days on end*

___ *Overeating, using alcohol, drugs, or TV to feel better or escape*

__ *Feeling chronically tired, de-energized, and listless*

___ *Losing a sense of enthusiasm*

__ *Getting frequent headaches, stomach upset, and other aches and pains*

__ *Sleeping too much or too little*

___ *Nagging, complaining, and bitching*

__ *Feeling constantly overwhelmed and irritable*

As you read this handbook, let your feelings of dissatisfaction and restlessness surface and heighten.

Chapter 2 Imagining It Now

GO IN THE BACK DOOR

There's nothing like picking a target to make the other foot drop, the one that likes walking in the real world! At the very hint of actually doing something about an otherwise ideal fantasy, reality usually rears its head with the same old, familiar refrains: "You can't do that." "That's just not possible." "It's not a good time." "We can't afford it." Most dreams sound, look, and feel unrealistic, at least at first. From a practical point of view, it's never a good time and you rarely think you can afford it. So, you can't turn infant dreams over to the practical side of yourself to be number-crunched and analyzed until you can make a cogent case for them.

A number of years ago, for example, we certainly couldn't afford, nor was it the right time, to get a *third dog.* But I decided I *had to have* a female whippet. At the time I was running a mile every morning through the streets of Sierra Madre. On my run one morning I came upon two doe-like creatures that looked like nothing I'd ever seen before. They were standing side by side on the sidewalk seemingly lost, but looking like they stepped right out of an art nouveau etching. I was enchanted and once I saw that their owner was coming to retrieve them, I ran home as quickly as I could to look the breed up in the American Kennel Club manual.

From that moment on, I had to have a whippet. So, first came Wiley. He was a marvelous dog, but I wanted a matched set. Now that, even I had to agree, was really impractical, considering we already had a second dog, a Scottish terrier, and these were thoroughbreds, thereby expensive. But when it comes to wanting the impractical I never try going through the front door anymore to get it. It just stirs up too many inner battles I can never win and buries my desires in too many solid arguments I can't yet refute. So I set a target and go in the back door.

The inner dialogue goes something like this: "I want to get a female whippet—not now of course. Right now I'm just going to go looking at whippets. Then we'll see, you never know what might happen."

This approach always pacifies the practical side of me, which instead of stomping all over my ideas with why I can't do what I want, just lets me go off and play make-believe. So I spent several Sundays reading the want ads and going to look at whippets. Sure enough, they were too expensive. But then one Sunday, I spied an intriguing ad. It read: "Whippet pups. Free." What? Free whippet pups? How could that be? Of course I couldn't get there fast enough, but, alas, the "free" pups were as unappealingly gawky to me as they were to their owner.

But there was one absolutely stunning pup remaining in the pen. "That one," I blurted out. "How about that one?" "Oh," the woman replied, "that's Pleasure. I'm keeping her." Crestfallen, I continued looking at the gawky pups she'd brought out for me to consider. Meanwhile, I started to tell her about how I wanted a female companion for our wonderful male whippet, Wiley, and got out his picture to show her.

"Wiley!" she exclaimed. "You have Wiley!" It turns out she knew all about Wiley and just loved him. She talked animatedly with me about how he'd been destined to become a grand champion when, at six months, he drew one of his testicles up out of the scrotum during a cross-country flight in jet cargo bay. There it remained, undescended, thus ending his much-anticipated show career. She ooh'ed and aah'd over his picture and promptly decided to bring Pleasure out of her pen, "just so I could take a closer look." And thus it was that shortly thereafter I left carrying Pleasure, my free female Whippet, to my car, having gladly agreed to co-own and show her.

It was in this spirit that we began looking at houses in Pine Mountain. "Let's just go and look. Then, we'll see. You never know what could happen."

Try it. It works even if it doesn't always work out as intended, because often when you see what happens, you know what you need to do next, and next, and next.

Chapter 3 Believing It Could Be

I thought I was a good writer, for example. After all, I was an English major. I'd gotten mostly A's on the papers I'd written in class and I'd written well-accepted materials for the agency where I'd worked. But our first editor for *Working from Home* concluded, after a year of many drafts, that we couldn't write. Assuming she knew more than I did about our abilities, we went along with her judgment and she hired a ghostwriter with forty books to his credit to work with us. Another year and many more drafts later, she concluded he couldn't write either. He was so distraught over the situation that he left the field and the editor began looking for another ghostwriter.

Meanwhile, a prestigious magazine asked us to write an article about working from home. Despite the fact that I now knew I couldn't write, with great trepidation I decided to give it a try and sent in an article, certain that they would either reject it or have to do extensive editing. To our amazement, the magazine editor loved the article! In fact, she complimented us on how she didn't have to change a word and wished all her writers would make her job so easy.

It was an important lesson in learning to stand up to yourself and for yourself. If someone can undermine your confidence in your dreams, you haven't fully resolved your own doubts. Lesson learned and armed with the successful article, we went to the publisher to ask for the rights to our book back. He heard our case, looked at the article, and asked us to give him twenty-four hours. We were assigned to another editor, and *Working from Home* was accepted for publication six months later. We'd written every word ourselves.

Clearly, the more effectively we can stand up to and take on our own doubts, the stronger our beliefs in our dreams will become. But, if we don't face down our own doubts, they will hound us mercilessly. They will always be there, even if we proceed toward our goals. They'll be nipping at our heels, undermining our confidence, and constantly distracting us with having to fight them off. So, better to take a stand and make the best possible case for our desires. If we can't convince ourselves, how will we ever convince anyone else?

Chapter 4 Committing to Creating It

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

FEAR OF FALLING

We lay wide-awake late into the night. The excitement was too intense to sleep. Our offer on the dream house by the pond had been accepted and we had put our house on the market. We were moving. "This place will sell in three weeks," the agent said of our condo. Three weeks. I was struck with a near-incapacitating fear. I'd felt this fear before. We always think we're past this gripping, stomach-wrenching feeling, but then there it is again.

It was the fear I'd felt when I quit my job with the government to open my private psychotherapy practice. The day I turned in my resignation I was confident, almost bold, as I declared what I was going to do. I'd read everything I could, talked to everyone I knew, taken several classes. I was sure of myself...until things didn't go according to plan, which was right away. I'd been told to develop a business plan, and I had. That plan was my security blanket. It showed me exactly how many clients I would need each week and exactly how much I needed to charge per hour. According to plan, I'd established my business name, obtained my business license, set up my business bank account, printed my cards and letterhead, and even prepared my first brochure. I had been told how to announce the opening of my practice and I followed to the letter the guidance I'd received.

Then I waited for the phone to ring. It didn't. The only business call I got those first two weeks was a wrong number. That was when I realized there was more to building a practice than anyone had mentioned. The next few years were not pleasant ones. The shift from having a position of influence where I wielded the power and authority of the federal government to being a sole practitioner on my own was a jolt. I went from feeling powerful to feeling powerless. The logical and dependable world I had known had given way. I was no longer being controlled, but I was not yet in control. I had taken the leap and was free-falling in the chasm between what had been and what I hoped could be.

This was also the same fear I felt when I started my radio show. To break into radio I'd purchased the time for my first show—thirteen weeks, one hour a week. I was excited and so confident. I'd already booked six weeks of great guests. I'd been a guest on hundreds of shows myself. I'd read everything there was to read. I'd talked to reams of people. I'd lined up a salesperson to sell commercial spots on the show to cover the cost of my time, which was substantial. Again, I had a plan, and I'd cleared my calendar of other work to have time to put my plan into action. I was ready...until the next day when the salesperson backed out to pursue other commitments! There I was free-falling again.

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

That was the feeling. It was the fear of falling. Falling hopelessly and helplessly into the unknown where anything is possible from the dreadful to the delightful. As I felt its immobilizing grip close over me once again I thought of one of my favorite quotes from explorer Douchan Gersi.

I learned to master the trembling of my limbs, to control my heartbeat and my breathing, to wipe away the sweat that burned my eyes...I was intoxicated by the satisfaction of having overcome my fear.

PART I: REMEMBER THIS

Anytime you have difficulty tapping into your desires, imagining the possibilities for fulfilling them, believing you can do what it takes, and making the commitment to do it, turn here to this section and remember...

"Expectations create our future," said John O'Donahue. We've all heard about the self-fulfilling prophecy, but perhaps we do not realize that it applies to our own expectations. Research has clearly shown that we tend to live up to what is expected of us. A study in a Colorado school district illustrated this point dramatically. The researchers shuffled the records of two groups of students so that those with the lowest grades were placed in a class designated as gifted, while those students who had the best grades were placed in a class designated as average students. Can you guess what happened? The poor students in the "gifted" class dramatically outperformed the gifted students in the "average" class. If a classroom teacher's misunderstanding about students' past performance can produce such a dramatic result, just think what effect your own expectations have on your performance! So, check your expectations as you start each day; they may well shape tomorrow's reality.

Part Two: Action—Building a New Reality

Chapter 5: Following the Thread

PUT ON YOUR HIKING BOOTS AND GAS UP THE SUV

There are no paint-by-number kits for creating a balanced life that fulfills our particular personal desires and values. Nor is there a procedure manual or cookbook for how to create a life that makes room for

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

what we're missing. We each have to cook up our future from scratch if we want something different from the standard fare. We may wish someone would just give us a recipe, but we don't really want a cookie-cutter plan because we don't want a cookie-cutter life. That's exactly what we're trying to escape, the limiting confines of stuffing more and more into the narrow perimeters of the way things have been.

We're needing a life with a lot more breathing room, a lot less pressure, and a lot more balance; but to find it, we have to go off road and get off the map. If we're going to walk between the worlds of the life we want and the life we have, we probably won't know exactly where we're headed or just what we need to do to get there until we get off the road and start hiking out a ways. Fortunately, not knowing what to do needn't be a problem.

Practical dreamers often don't know what to do, but we usually have a hunch. The threads of our desire, like an inner compass, provide us with an inkling of what we need to do inch by inch, step by step. As with Jon and Laura and Tom and Marilyn, what comes next often won't be clear until we get to the bend ahead, but if we wait to start walking until we know precisely where we're headed and how we're going to get there, we'll never find out.

We need to start thinking of ourselves as explorers, or detectives or private investigators, following our instincts instead of some map or manual in our back pocket. Maps and manuals are great for going places where lots of people have already gone, but they're not of much use when you're heading into the uncharted territory of a custom-made life. Out there, we have to *discover what to do.* We figure out what we need to do by working our way through it.

Chapter 6: Finding the Money

IF IT WEREN'T FOR MO NEY

Each of these individuals is ready to follow the thread of a desire, but they've been waylaid by one of the earliest realities we learn as children: money doesn't grow on trees, so you can't have what you want, do what you want, or be what you want. Evidently this lesson is being ingrained in yet another generation because, to my horror, I read recently that the number-one desire children ages three to twelve have for their parents is for them to earn more money! We've come to regard money not as a tool with which to craft our dreams, but as the gatekeeper that allows us to pursue them or not. If we have money, we can pass "Go"; if not, there's nowhere to go.

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

Whether it's $20 for a paperback book, $2,000 for a workshop, $200,000 for a mortgage on a house, the amount doesn't matter. Many people believe if they DON'T HAVE THE MONEY, they're out of luck. This belief is so firmly entrenched in our culture that when Paul and I first started teaching our courses on how to change your life, we had to move the section on financing your dream ahead of the section on discovering your dream. Like the five people above, most of those in the courses simply wouldn't explore pursuing a dream unless they not only had the money in the bank to do it, but also saw how the dream would itself be a moneymaker.

Practical dreamers have a different attitude toward money. For them pursuing a dream is not about money. It's about following the thread. They don't wait to win the lottery, or to inherit a lot of money, or to stumble into a stock windfall. Nor do they expect the money to somehow be provided for them. If they have money, great. They'll put it to work. But usually they don't already have it, so instead of bemoaning the fact that they don't have the money, they get busy figuring out how they can come up with it. To the practical dreamer, finding the money to create the dream is part of the job, another test of their belief and commitment to what they desire in life.

What would it cost to finance your dream? How could you come up with that much money? Does it seem impossible? Consider this.

Chapter 7: Making the Time

A NEW OUTLOOK ON TIME

Instead of thinking of time in terms of twenty-four-hour blocks into which we can never quite fit everything that needs to be done, the practical dreamer sees time as a plentiful resource from which we can create what we desire; an endless, flowing supply that never runs out. As long as we're still alive we have plenty of time. All we have is time, in fact, all the time in the world. It greets us anew with each new breath, to waste, to savor, to manage, or to invest.

Practical dreamers see time as the most democratic of all resources because we all get the same twenty-four hours every day no matter who we are, how rich or poor we are, who we know, or what other resources we may have. We get this fresh supply every day no matter how well or how poorly we've used yesterday's supply. To practical dreamers, time is like a brand-new shopping bag that's waiting beside the bed each morning to be filled with whatever we'd like as we shop through the day. We can take some of

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

this and some of that, sampling whatever seems closest to our dreams and passing over that which we'd prefer not to have in our lives.

That's how I wanted to think of time, but often, even years later, that still wasn't the way *my* day went! More often than not I'd get up in the morning to find my day was already filled with deadlines and other leftovers from the day before. Sometimes I'd awake to find someone else had filled my bag with things *they* needed me to do. Often, too often, I had placed a standing order, so I'd awake to the anticipation of the same, less than desired routine as the day before.

Do you start each morning afresh, free to create a new day from your desires? How do you go about filling your day? Do you approach your day like a cafeteria line, taking some of everything that's presented to you until your life is chronically overstuffed? Do you pick and choose how you will use the hours of your day with your dreams in mind or are you taking potluck and just accepting whatever's dumped into your life? Would your life be fuller if you emptied it out? Or do you need to exchange its contents?

Chapter 8: Having the Energy

Concentrate

Concentration is focused energy—the ability to direct our energy toward accomplishing the task at hand. But how can we concentrate when we're surrounded by so many distractions and pressures? How can we respond readily to the many things that are pertinent to our goals and ignore all else? Practical dreamers learn how.

First, because they're following an inner compass, they know what they want to do and what it takes to do it. They aren't asking themselves, "Do I really want to do this now or should I wait until later?" They aren't wondering, "Should I go in this direction or some other one?" What they do may not always be the right thing, but if it's not, by taking action they soon discover what is.

Second, at key and decisive moments, their goal becomes the sole focus of their efforts. They are not multitasking. That means they have the phones covered, someone else is watching the kids, there's a do-not-disturb sign on the door. For me, focusing has meant no longer taking phone calls while I'm writing. It has meant dropping certain writing projects so I can concentrate on the most important ones and still have time to develop a new dream that's taking form. It's meant turning down out-of-town speeches and even some L.A. speeches. With too much on my plate, I can't concentrate fully on any one thing.

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

Third, they stay in the moment. Once the preparation, practice, study, strategy, and so on are behind them, they give 100 percent of their energy and attention to what they're doing second by second, step by step. They're not looking back at what they did the last time. Nor are they looking ahead at what might happen next time. They're not thinking about how they're doing or if they're doing it right. They're focused on doing the best they can do in the moment.

Part II: Remember This

Don't let your music go unsung. Unless we start singing our tune, the world will never hear it. As Rabindranath Tagore has said, "I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing is still unsung." Too often we plan and talk about what we are going to do. Then we plan and talk about what we're going to do some more. Sometimes we think we need to take one more course, get one more degree, have just a bit more money set aside, and so forth...meanwhile our life goes by like a moment in time. We all have great ideas dancing in our heads to tunes we hear only in our dreams. What a loss to all if we're the only ones who ever hear these melodies. It's time to start singing.

Part Three: Satisfaction—Enjoying Yourself

Chapter 9: Feeling Fulfilled

GET OUT OF THE WHALE'S STOMACH

Carey's story illustrates so graphically how, as in the tale of Jonah and the whale, our dream can swallow us whole if we don't pause to experience the best of what our lives have to offer. When we get lost in the dream, we lose ourselves, and when that happens, not only does the dream collapse, but we collapse. We become the character in the novel instead of ourselves. Our life becomes about the play. We're the corporate manager, the media personality, the mother, the community leader, an actor on the stage we've created instead of a living, breathing human being.

Carey's story could as easily be about a stay-at-home mom who lives twenty-four hours a day for her children or an environmentalist who has become obsessed with his cause. If what we're seeking prevents us from living, we've been eaten by our dream and must climb out from the belly of the whale and take our lives back.

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

Moving to Pine Mountain, I hoped, would be my way out of the whale's belly. What's yours?

Here now I'm in Pine Mountain—living my dream! It does feel like a living dream. I often get a feeling of deja vu, like right now as I'm sitting at my computer, looking out on a stand of ancient ponderosa trees and the small pond where the ducks are making V-shaped trails across the surface of the water. There's a stellar blue jay foraging on our lawn, and the air is alive with a chorus of other birds. It feels so familiar here because I'd been imagining it for so long, living in my novel experience of it.

Stepping into the reality of my dream has been like returning home. I felt comfortable immediately. But the real thing is even better than I imagined. So...we're happy. The kind of glowing happy you feel when the world is young. The kind of happy you feel when you fall in love for the first time. Or when you wake up on Christmas morning as a child, eager and ready to discover what you'll find as you unwrap the day.

The kind of happy of a child at play, running in the wind, catching fireflies at dusk, making angels in the snow, weaving clover chains under a shady tree, frolicking in a sudden rain shower on a hot summer afternoon. So happy you're afraid to feel that happy, afraid it will end if you get caught feeling that way. But it's so delicious you throw caution to the wind and dare to let it fill you until you simply fall on your knees in gratitude and wish only to share it with everyone and everything.

I've felt this delicious feeling before, the feeling of living your dream...but only for a brief interlude before rushing on to something new. How long would it take this time, I wondered, for all this beauty, all this joy to fade into the background? Would I bring my harried, hassled life here? Would the whale pursue me and swallow me whole once again? I knew it would come for me, but could this time be different? Like Max Carey, must I always dash on to something new? What would life be like if it were savored extendedly? What would emerge on the other side? How much joy can I stand? And for how long?

We do change when we move to a new place. Environments do affect us and determine our behavior to some extent. So it's much easier to change who we are and what we do when we change where we live, but our personal habits and our career and family demands come along with us. So, as the saying goes, wherever you go, there you are. Until *we* change who we are and what motivates us, the same things that made the whale so attractive to us will continue to keep us under its influence. Am I ready to climb from the belly?

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008

Chapter 10: Appreciating the Process

Are you stuck in a dream of the person you used to be? Do any of these sound familiar?

-

- *Does it take a lot of energy to project the happiness and contentment you want to convey to the world?*

- *Are you exhausted after telling people about yourself and your life?*

- *Are you doing more drinking, smoking, binge eating, or any other addictive behavior?*

- *Do things that once left you feeling fulfilled seem more like responsibilities than opportunities? Do you drag your way through them?*

- *Are you sighing a lot throughout the day? Do you hear yourself complaining or whining about things you used to look forward to?*

PART III: REMEMBER THIS

Carry out your life with love. It seems that if you do whatever you do with love, as an expression of yourself, your life and your work are not only infinitely more enjoyable and meaningful, but the result is also infinitely more enjoyable and meaningful to everyone else you interact with.

If you're going to do it—enjoy it. Surveys show it's not success that makes someone a happy person. It's their attitude day in and day out. Many happy people have yet to attain the success they desire. Likewise, some people aren't all that happy even after they've achieved the success they sought. Whether you're as successful in creating your dream as you want to be or not, following that dream requires doing a variety of tasks you may just as soon not do. These tasks are part and parcel of creating a dream; so since you'll have to do them, why not just enjoy them?

Copyright Paul and Sarah Edwards, 2000 and 2008