

CHAPTER 1

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

I was born in Yorkshire, England where people call a spade a spade. Life is exciting, simple and straightforward, even if it's not fair. The joy of being a Yorkshire lass at heart is that I feel we "say it how we see it," We are up front, like us or hate us, we are who we are. I love my Yorkshire roots, it's where my sense of family, connection with the land, and community was seeded. There is nothing hidden, I wear my heart on my sleeve and I'll be up front with the good, the bad and the ugly.

Saying it how I thought it was through my own lens has got me into a few pickles over the years. As I reflect back, I can see I have often spoken my opinion rather than the truth through the lens of love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. As a young person, I didn't have the wisdom or insight to ask questions to gain the understanding of the other person's perspective before opening my mouth and speaking. I wanted to be liked and to be right.

Growing up, I went to four primary schools, where my capacity to "get on with it" was born. It was not helpful to think about the friends I had left behind or miss the previous school I had been at. I recall a song by

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Paul Young “wherever I lay my hat, that’s my home”—this was it. Wherever I was, I made the most of it. I made friends easily and had fun, but I was never in one place long enough to form any deep relationships. It was during this time that Mum walked out on Dad without any notice. Mum put my brother, Richard, and me in the car one day, and we drove to a new home. We went to live with my godmother, her daughter, three horses, four ponies, and the dogs. As a ten-year-old, I asked questions, was given answers and accepted this as normal. I had no other frame of reference. I was so excited to be with the animals and to be in the country.

The only thing I really remember about my primary years was how the world began, that there was a God who created the world and everything in it, including me. I had a real sense of feeling safe and loved, that my father in heaven was looking out for me and all was going to be well. Whether we lived with Mum and Dad, or Mum and my godmother at the riding school, we had food on the table, a roof over our heads, clothes to wear, and there was always something to do.

Another three schools saw me through the next phase. I had two years at a Prep School in Scarborough. It was here I had my first kiss... it was awful, and I decided not to do that again in a hurry.

In my first year at Scarborough College, a local high school, I got caught by the headmaster taking a shortcut through the boys' changing rooms and was suspended. In this beautiful, co-educational school, the boys' and girls' changing rooms were out of bounds to the opposite sex. I was late for supper and thought I'd cut through. However, the headmaster was right behind me and had to take action on what he had seen. I was then promptly sent off to an all-girls boarding school eight hours away from home. The shame and embarrassment for Mum was too much, so off I went down south to “learn to be a young lady.”

I have two anchor memories during my time at Scarborough College. One was where an amazing Sixth former noticed me. He would have been seventeen years old at the time, and in his last year of high school. It was super lonely as a boarder in my first year in high school. I was feeling lost, missing my dad and was desperate for someone to

see and hear me (not that I knew this at the time). This young man would sit with me for hours in the careers room and just chat, sometimes I sat on his knee. I would have been all of thirteen years old at this point. He took time to listen and be present and was like a “dad,” asking me questions and engaging with me. It was a real act of service and compassion. Gentleness, kindness and trust were sown into me in these times. It always amazed me that there was nothing more in this, no romantic or sexual passes of any kind. I remain deeply touched by this young man’s heart.

The other vivid memory I have of my year there was singing my heart out one evening, on the rugby field out in front of the school in the rain, thinking I was Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*. I was so free that evening, so full of joy as I sang and danced. It was dusk, and no one could see me (they would probably have thought I was a nutter). Singing released so much joy in my heart. I really sensed complete freedom and I guess—looking back—His presence. I felt safe, free, timeless and limitless.

In the midst of all the confusion and angst at the time, I realise now I was never alone. God always placed someone in my life to see, to care and to let me know I mattered. And no matter how lonely I felt, there was an incredible sense of His presence in my heart, which often came through when I sang. While I was friendly, I was a bit of a loner. Many of my year group had little groups or cliques, especially the day girls. I didn’t have a best friend, and because I got on with everyone, didn’t fit the cliques.

Other pivotal moments came from my time down south. I had to write an essay in my first term there. I remember my pen flowing as I reflected on the world around me. I saw my world as a stage and I was the main part. The key people in my life had main roles, and others were crowds or understudies. I was fascinated by this perspective and it kept me well occupied for hours in my head, considering everyone else’s play and stories that they had to tell. Looking back now, I can see that it was how I made sense of all the chopping and changing of my family situation, schools and friendships. It was the only A+ I ever got in English, and I remember

being asked lots of questions about Shakespeare, who I had no clue about at the time. It was another wonderful seed being sown, that my inspiring perspective was in line with one of the greatest playwrights of all time.

How I Felt: The Unseen

School really wasn't much fun for me. I felt isolated and unloved, like I didn't belong. I hated getting out of bed in the mornings and was always the last to breakfast. The dinner ladies loved me as I ate everything and was always grateful. I really enjoyed singing and loved being with people. Consequently, my favourite time of the day was morning chapel, where I got to sing with others. It set my day up for success. These ten minutes would set up my thinking for the day, from the songs that were sung and the words that were spoken. I would unwittingly meditate on this all day. Not that anyone would have known, I was always in trouble for laughing and giggling. It was such a place of joy and connection for me. It was here that my heart was filled, my inner being was processing and I was starting to make sense of the world around me.

I saw my early days as a time of disconnection, of feeling dumped, neglected, unloved, unwanted, out of sight and out of mind. I had no contact with my dad, and was stuck at school for three months at a time. I was allowed one miserly phone call a week on a payphone that only took ten pence pieces. Dad got remarried when I was fifteen—that was another dagger in my heart. My “Mum, Dad, brother and me” bubble that I had in my head got burst right there. I am reminded of lyrics from a song in the eighties by Paul Young: “Wherever I lay my hat, that's my home”, which became my mantra. Wherever I ended up, I unpacked my bags and made it home for that season.

However, it is not what happens to us that counts; it's what we do with it. I love the fact that we get to choose how we frame our lives. After walking through this time with a coach nearly ten years ago, I choose to look for the wins, the gains, the growth and the learning as these lift me up. For example, if I hadn't got caught taking the shortcut through

the boys changing rooms, I may have ended up in a much bigger pickle with boys, looking for love in all the wrong places.

In many ways, I had an amazing childhood. At a young age, I learnt to ride ponies. We would get up at 7am to make sure yards were mucked out, horses fed and everything swept up, clean and tidy for the clients arriving at 9am. I thoroughly enjoyed my time on borrowed and gifted ponies, competing and hunting, having fun. I won many singing competitions and learnt how to make friends and connect with people. Those were amazing days.

I learnt to stand when I fell, how to bounce back up. I'd fall off, get up and go again. I learnt to overcome my fears, like the massive cross-country fences that don't move, so I had to get my line right and have faith that the pony I was riding would carry me safely to the other side. Choosing this lens was where an inspiring perspective was born: the ability to look at the positive and focus on the outcome rather than the fear in situations and circumstances. The fear just points us to the problem. Being able to see beyond the moment enables me to discover the possibilities and opportunities that are always attached to every problem. It is a life-enhancing skill that literally improves your health and well-being. It transformed my future from one of failure and limitations to possibility and success.

An Inspiring Perspective

It is an incredible phenomenon that in all of this, there is always more than one narrative, more than one perspective, more than one person's way of seeing things. I passionately believe that it's not what happens in our lives that shape it; it's how we respond to it that makes the real difference.

Nelson Mandela said, "I win... or I learn." This beautiful quote has sat with me for many years. I love this perspective. We either get the results as we win or we learn from our "miss-takes." The joy is taking the action; and for every miss (loss or failure), we learn and keep going until we win. Either way, we are progressing, we are being brave and

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courageous and taking ground. The key, I believe, is to keep moving and to measure progress along the way. Winning and learning as we go. This inspiring perspective opens so many doors. It has freed me from performance mentality, worry, guilt or shame. I have found it to be invigorating to live this way.

Anaïs Nin said, "We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are." I wish someone had shared this with me when I was younger. I thought everyone thought the way I did and could never understand why people would not act the way I expected them to. Knowing that everyone has their own story, their own wounds, hurts and pains, would have massively shifted my thinking at this time. It has opened the door to me asking questions, to being curious and to understanding others and myself better, and to connecting and collaborating on a much higher level. I am not the answer. I am often, however, part of the answer. When I work with others, asking, listening, hearing and considering their perspective, the outcome is always much better than I could possibly have achieved myself.

I agree with these great leaders and add my own saying: "Look for the good and you'll find it; look for the bad and you'll find it. Both are fully available. The choice is always yours; which one will you choose?"

When we look back on our lives, we can look with regret and with hurt. We can look for all that was wrong, that didn't measure up to our own expectations, what we think it should have been, comparing it to the ideal, to the perfect world we have in our heads. This can leave us bitter, with a sense of regret, rejection and feeling less than.

I could have looked back and focused on the loneliness, the hours I spent with one girl, chatting, hugging and sometimes falling asleep together in the communal bathrooms because we were so empty and lonely. She had her story, and I had mine. I could have been labelled as a gay, as I was close with another female, but this was not the case. I was looking for empathy, understanding and compassion and following the path that was being demonstrated around me. My mum

lived with another woman. I believe a huge amount of our lives is caught, not taught.

I recall a headmaster of one of the top boys schools here in NZ once shared that it isn't poverty that is the biggest tragedy and downfall of our society, it is "the abuse of absent parents." He was referring to the rise in behavioural issues in schools, where vaping, alcohol and drugs were now used to fill the internal void. My parents were absent from my life, with limited or no contact from one term to the next. I was often the only child in school productions or competitions that never had a parent in the audience or on the sidelines to support and cheer them on, fuelling the "not good enough" lie inside me.

I believe that "hurt people hurt people." And that "healed people heal people." We pass on whatever we have been given, generation after generation. It is only when we stop to reflect and start to question our thinking, tune into our inner being, our conscience and heart that we start to get things into perspective and have the capacity to change things.

Caught, Not Taught

As children, we do not have the wisdom, insight or discernment to know what is helpful and what is unhelpful; what to hold onto and what to let go of; what is ours to carry and what isn't. Our worlds are small, often with only one point of reference. We accept life as we experience and see it. It isn't until later in life that we start to question and look for truer ways and different answers.

I look back now in love, grateful for the beautiful families that took me in on those long weekends, who treated me as their own. I am truly thankful for the same parents who came to productions when their daughters weren't performing to support me. I am blown away with the amazing friends I made, for the opportunity to go to every West End musical and to experience London, a fabulous holiday in France and in Washington DC, all with friends and families from school. I was loved. I was seen and heard. I had great staff who believed and

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encouraged me. I was never alone, even though that was not how I felt at the time.

I also firmly believe that when God says, "Seek me first and my righteousness and everything will be given to you," He really means it on more levels than I can possibly imagine. Kingdom principles work whether you believe in God or not. If we seek to find the good and do what is noble, right and true, a whole new world of joy, peace, abundance and prosperity opens up. If we seek only for ourselves, our world darkens and without knowing it and closes in on us.

The choice is always ours, and it is often made in our heads.

Dear Reader

I encourage you to come on a journey of discovery and adventure with me; and to consider that for every negative, there is a positive. For every problem there is always a promise or possibility attached. I call this "The Great Exchange."

We can look through the lens of doubt, anxiety, not being good enough, fear, rejection, hate, loneliness, depression and worry, and then wallow in where it takes us, which is our default mode. Or we can exchange it and look through the lens of good character, by focusing on love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, joy, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. These nine character traits trump any of the limiting beliefs and negative thoughts we have every time. For example; sadness or depression can be exchanged for joy. Anxiety, stress or worry can be exchanged for peace and rest. It's all about facing the right direction, the direction that will lift and build you up, not break you and take you down.

I encourage you to take a moment today and consider what you would like to exchange or trade up. The choice is ours in every moment of every day and it comes by living intentionally, living by design rather than default. Come on the journey with me as I reframe every season in my life... from what it was to what it is, from the perceived bad to the good, from victim to victory. Enjoy the journey; it has been and

continues to be an exhilarating adventure, where the unknown becomes known.

Call to Adventure: It is Written

Out of the darkness into the light. I love Tony Robbins' expression "if it's in your head, it's dead." We can get really stuck in our heads, mulling things over and over again, growing and building the thought good or bad, each time. The simple act of writing a thought down, letting the pen flow as the images and feelings pour out onto the page can be massively therapeutic in itself. It clears the mind of the memory and allows you to see it for what it really is.

I encourage you to treat yourself to a notebook and take time each evening to consider anything you'd like to get rid of. I encourage you to write down how you feel, what hurts or is coming against you in the back of the book. You may rest and ponder over this for a moment, so you can acknowledge it and then release it. I ask God for the truth, the possibility, the promise that is always attached to the current problem. The joy for me is the peace that comes over me as I write down the possibility or promise at the front of the book. This lifts me up and builds my confidence and sense of worth. I then choose to focus on what is written at the front of the book, the new, and let the old at the back of the book go, as it no longer serves me.

Have fun with this exercise. It takes a bit of practice to flex these new brain muscles, but once you get into the rhythm of this, you'll become truly unstoppable, full of love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, joy, faithfulness and self-control.

"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6, NIV)