

The Real Brass Ring

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Change Your Life Course Now!



DIANNE BISCHOFF JAMES

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First published in 2013 by
Turning Stone Press, an imprint of
Red Wheel/Weiser, LLC
With offices at:
665 Third Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94107
www.redwheelweiser.com

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ISBN: 978-1-61852-055-5

Cover design by Jim Warner

Printed in the United States of America

IBT

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I also met up with "Brutus," a bodybuilder who told me a dumb joke and then smacked my bicep so hard he bruised it. I moved to escape, and the 230-pound guy "playfully" pushed me into a wall. Terrified, I dashed to my car and slammed down the lock. That was it: the sign to give up dating forever.

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On one hand, Jeff was intelligent, entertaining, and adorably cute. And, on the other hand, he was a recovering alcoholic who was living with his mother and didn't have a driver's license. My Pragmatic Survivor yelled, "He's not a dating prospect. Dianne, walk away!"

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In retrospect, the past decade was an organic voyage, each event emerging without structure or order. I took the roller-coaster ride from middle income to wealth to poverty, from fat to fit, from a mountain of lies to truth, from a broken body to strength, and from a loveless connection to standing side by side with a soul mate.



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Preface

A Journey of Reinvention

I wrote the *Real Brass Ring* over a ten-year period on a tiny Victorian piano desk that was shoved into the back corner of our house. There, I recorded a personal story filled with many Universal lessons. It was written through a myriad of personal challenges, divorce, waves of economic decline, physical aches and pain, and tears. During the day, I did my best to earn a living and tend to the needs of my three children. From midnight until two a.m., I forced myself to hit the keyboard.

The entire voyage was an organic journey, an unstructured process that was completely unfamiliar to me. The words also didn't come easily. They flowed like a river, randomly starting and stopping across both charted and uncharted land.

I didn't compose the manuscript because I wanted to. Often times, I imagined myself with a whip and a chair. I was my own lion tamer, poking and prodding the little girl inside who just wanted to sit and watch TV or take a walk down the street. Yet, there was a driving force that compelled me to articulate the minute details of my life's transition post-forty. "Get back on the computer and keep on typing!" bellowed the voice within my

mind-space. “Don’t ask yourself if you ‘want’ to write it. You don’t get to ask that question. You have to!” Slave-driver girl would not let me opt-out or quit because there was a gnawing unrest that lay beneath my breastbone and it grew larger and stronger as the years passed, becoming too great to ignore.

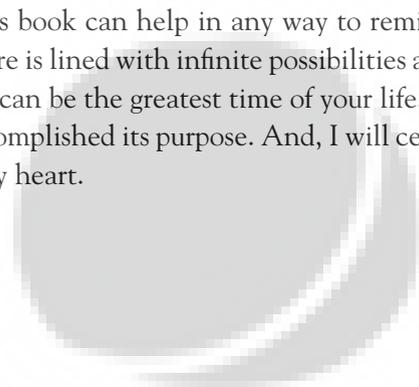
At the same time, I was burdened with shame and doubt. In midlife, I’d opened Pandora’s Box, the raw, ugly truth hidden behind the well-crafted, ornate parade that I called “my life.” I loathed the contents. I was not proud of myself or of what I’d accomplished. Instead, I was horrified and ashamed of the lies surrounding my big house, marriage, and the monstrously false trappings of the North Shore. This was not me. I inch-wormed my way through the muck. I stood toe-to-toe, facing the most powerful of all questions, “Who am I and what did I come here to do in this lifetime?”

Without an answer for the first half of my life, I’d truly morphed into a flaccid societal mannequin, following rules my soul had never agreed to. I only wish I’d had the courage to expose the cover-ups that coated my heart throughout my early years. But it took me until forty to grant myself permission to self-reveal and expose the raw personal truths. And now, my path can exemplify the fact that no matter how hard or how long it takes, it’s never too late to become a successful Midlife Reinventionist.

While approaching the end of my writing process, my eldest daughter asked me, “So Mom, what is the ‘real brass ring’?” The answer erupted like a volcano spewing ash across the surrounding land. The “real brass ring” is our world filled with endless possibilities. I explained that the ring starts to form when you know yourself well and understand what brings you joy. Eventually, it solidifies

with a focused vision and an open expression of your clear desires, even if others tell you it can't be done. And finally, when an opportunity arrives, you need to grab the brass ring with all of your might. The ring might not come in a traditional package, so be ready to climb in the "window" and not the door because even the smallest step forward will make you feel happier and align you more closely with your greatest potential.

If this book can help in any way to remind you that your future is lined with infinite possibilities and the middle years can be the greatest time of your life, then it will have accomplished its purpose. And, I will celebrate with you in my heart.



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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the young woman who kept me motivated over the many years it took to develop this book. I would like to honor the individual who assured me that in the end my efforts would not be in vain. I would like to thank with eternal appreciation the glorious soul who encouraged me to keep going despite mountainous fears and doubt. And, I greatly admire her courage and willingness to share the sensitive experiences of our past so that others may possibly relate, learn, and grow.

I dedicate my heart-felt journey to Alexandra, my beautifully spiritual daughter, who is an open channel for all that is good in this world.

With love and much gratitude,
Mom



SECTION I

*Midway On Life's Journey
and On the Wrong Path*



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Outed by a Psychic

Sonia stood up, leaned forward, and whispered a final note of caution to me: "Change your course now, Dianne. Fix your ways, or soon it will be too late."

I'll always remember February 6, 2000, because it was my thirty-eighth birthday and the day I gave myself an expensive gift, a reading with world-renowned psychic Sonia Choquette.

I arrived at Sonia's home office both nervous and excited, expecting to hear words of great promise and praise for my life filled with marvelous accomplishments. After all, I had what everyone wanted: a profitable marketing business, a house in the high-rent district, a long-term marriage, two small children, a cat, a dog, and a fish. I was a supercharged helicopter parent and a business professional with well-groomed skills in marketing and advertising. Surely, this intuitive woman would paint a picture of my future as rosy and bright.

I took a seat in the waiting room and stared at colorful oversized posters that lined the walls featuring Sonia's literary work: metaphysical books woven around the topic of trusting your vibes. I nervously wrung my hands and chatted with her assistant, Ryan. We spoke about her international publicity tour and certification training course. It was all quite impressive.

When the clock struck ten, the enthusiastic young man hopped up and led me into the inner sanctum, a cozy private office filled from floor to ceiling with whimsical paintings, eclectic gadgets, and a slew of New Age books. Sonia entered, tall, thin, and fresh-faced, without a trace of makeup, as if she had just woken up. She greeted me with an impish, childlike grin.

I sat down at a small circular table and watched with curiosity as she pulled out a deck of tarot cards decorated with vibrant Gothic imagery. She pushed them in my direction and instructed me to shuffle the deck so I could become more "grounded," as she put it. Then she grabbed an old, tattered astrology book and dropped her face down low, carefully studying the planetary data surrounding my date of birth.

Suddenly, she jerked up and shook her tight russet curls back and forth. The silence was broken. Sonia spoke in a robotic fashion, as if the information was being downloaded. "Dianne, you are a talented writer, healer, teacher, and performer. But regrettably, your life is heading down the wrong path." She paused and cast her brown eyes upon my face. "Your brass ring is coming by and you need to grab it before it's too late. You've modeled yourself after your parents' desires. You're completely stuck in the make-believe role of being a 'good girl' and

you live with depression because nothing about your life is your own.”

My fingers dug deep into the plush armrest. A surging pulse throbbed through my veins. She continued aggressively, “You are standing directly in your own way and not following your purpose. You are like an unlit Christmas tree; none of your bulbs are firing. You’re here on this planet to help people become more aware of their own abilities and find their given course.”

She marched on with a tidal wave of personal critiques: “You’re overly burdened by the role of being a parent, and yet you smother your children. Instead of finding support, you’ve mastered the art of not needing anything from anyone. You really don’t have any true friends, people whom you can consider peers. But the most disconcerting part is, you came here to find your heart, this being one of the most difficult of all Earthly lessons. Unfortunately, your marriage is fraternal and this, my dear, is not a true heart connection.” I sank even lower into the chair and felt a constriction in my chest as if I were being suffocated.

Her psychic barrage continued. She commanded, “Go back to the stage. You will make a nice name for yourself in acting and theater. Write a little bit every day, because the world will benefit from your stories. Build a strong foundation for a successful public life. Go to the Hoffman Institute to release the stubborn childhood patterns that have led you astray. I’ll give you a list of books at the end of our session. Read them and expand your understanding of the world. Also, schedule a session with my husband. He’s a massage therapist and can help you manage the body issues you’re currently developing.”

Sonia stood up, leaned forward, and whispered a final note of caution to me. “Change your course now, Dianne. Fix your ways, or soon it will be too late.”

As she turned to run out the doorway, I squeaked out a single burning question, “What happens if I don’t find my heart?”

Sonia spun around and quipped, “Then you have to come back and do it all over again!” In a flash, she was gone.

I put on my coat and gloves and walked unsteadily onto the snowy sidewalk in a state of post-traumatic shock. I yanked open the icy car door and sat down inside, fumbling, trying to shove the keys into the ignition of my now frozen vehicle. I shuddered uncontrollably, spouting tears that soaked my red leather gloves. I sat there, alone, crying and shivering on my blustery birthday for what seemed like hours, shaken to the core. Sonia had peered into the desolate, shadowy corners of my soul. She had seen my unspoken terrors and detailed every aspect of my faulty life.

This soft-spoken woman had put me through a penetrating “Life Review.” She inventoried my secrets and exposed all the lies. Then, she neatly piled them up like freshly folded laundry and swung her bat. On the outside, my résumé looked perfect, with a busy household, entrepreneurial career, and long-term marriage, but at the subterranean level, it was a grand personal charade. My entire adult existence was a sham.

After such a personal attack, I couldn’t help but self-righteously blame the messenger. “I hate her! Who does she think she is? How could she say those things to me?” I screamed loudly, hitting my fists on the steering wheel as my heavy breath steamed up the windows. My brain was racing: *I’m thirty-eight years old. How can I be going down*

the wrong road? Did I really miss the brass ring? Why didn't I see it coming? Oh God, I'm a total failure!

I swallowed hard, thrusting my heaving emotions back down inside where they belonged. I used a finger to wipe underneath my swollen eyes in an attempt to repair the smudged makeup. I had a client meeting in the city in less than an hour. I sniffed back the weepiness and reassured myself, "I'll tell my clients I have allergies." Forcing analytical thoughts back into my brain, I drove onto the snow-covered street. After all, I was a dedicated business professional.



About the Author



Dianne Bischoff James graduated magna cum laude from Northwestern University with an MS in Integrated Marketing Communications

and has a BA in Psychology from Marquette University. In 1995, she launched Core Marketing Solutions, a branding consultancy located in Chicago and received both Platinum and Gold MarCom Awards in honor of corporate branding excellence. Despite her business success, Dianne felt great personal unrest. At forty, she embarked on a journey to find her heart and reignite a childhood passion for the dramatic arts. In 2003 she kicked off an acting career on the community theatre stage and over the course of eight years became a SAG-AFTRA union actor with numerous film, television, commercial, and industrial credits. At age forty-five, she began writing *The Real Brass Ring: Change Your Life Course Now!* In keeping with her entrepreneurial spirit, in 2012, Dianne also established Live Your Everything, a company that offers products, services, and resources to support the path of life reinvention and personal

transformation. Dianne currently resides in a suburb of Chicago with her three children and fiancé and enjoys adventure sports, hiking, boating, yoga, art festivals, and dance. Visit Dianne online at: www.liveyoureverything.com.



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