1

UNDERSTANDING REGRETS

ROBERT FROST'S POEM "The Road Not Taken" begins with an intriguing question introduced by the memorable phrase: "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood." Which road to take? the poem asks. The narrator chose "the one less traveled by," a choice that "made all the difference." But what if he hadn't taken the road less traveled by? What if he had chosen the road *more* traveled by? That choice, too, would have "made all the difference." But what was the "difference" between the two roads, between the one he took and the one he didn't take? Neither he nor we will ever know, because it was the road not taken.

The road not taken is the source of all regrets. It seduces us with its fantasies of what might have been, limitless possibilities that would have unfolded for us "if only . . ." When we are unhappy, we explore these roads through rich and varied fantasies, creating a world of regret around our hopes and dreams that never came true. In our "if only" daydreams, the roads not taken entice us with their infinite possibilities, poisoning the road we did take or were forced to take and the present in which we live.

Life is filled with many choices—and the uncertainty that inevitably accompanies them. We never know what our choices in life will bring. Sometimes we think we know, but we can never really know—we can only guess. Even after we have made a choice, we cannot know what the other

choice would have brought. It's still a guess. Whatever road we took—whether a subtle shift in direction or a major change in destination—the road not taken will always be a mystery to us. We cannot know where it might have led us or to what people or events it might have taken us, for good or for ill. But we can imagine. . . .

While many choices in life are easy, some are difficult. Perhaps we are forced to choose between the city we love or the job we covet. Or we have to decide whether to accept or reject a marriage proposal or to make such a proposal. Other choices are less significant or so they appear at the time we make them. We choose between two movies, for example, but the movie we chose reinforces our desire to change careers, which we then do. What seemed to be an inconsequential decision led to a significant change in the direction of our lives.

Sometimes there is no fork at all in the road—only an abrupt turn that produces a dramatic change in our fortunes and in our lives. We have a heart attack, for example, or develop cancer, and we face difficult medical decisions that we had not anticipated. We don't like any of the options, but we have to choose among them or a choice will be made for us by our indecision and inaction. Casey's sister and brother-in-law were killed in a car accident, leaving her with two young nieces to raise. Casey was single, with a glamorous, exciting, and demanding life that left no time for anything more. Suddenly she faced the prospect of raising two little girls. She felt woefully unprepared to be their mother and dreaded the thought of taking them. But there was no one else to take the children except a stranger, which she couldn't bear. The sudden turn in her life was shocking and unwelcome, bringing deep sadness, great fear, and sweeping change. That it later worked out well for her and the children, bringing great rewards to the trio, did not seem a possibility at the time.

But a more welcome turn in the road is also possible. Charlie had all but given up hope of finding a lover when he encountered a woman giving a cooking demonstration at a department store where he was shopping. They started a conversation about the right way to prepare an omelet. The next thing he knew, he had bought an omelet pan and their conversation had turned to other dishes and then to other possibilities. They started

dating and eventually married. In such positive but unexpected twists, we move from what appears to be a dead end to a broad highway and an entirely new destination.

Some choices we create ourselves and call them opportunities. Don endured substantial sacrifices to pay for college and earn a degree in computer science. He worked two jobs, ate all his meals at home, and gave up the chance for any meaningful social life. He put up with the long hours and the exhausting schedule because he wanted an enviable job that would pay well and afford him the status he sought. He wanted more choices.

With some roads, we may have spent days pondering the opportunities and the risks a particular fork offered. We had to answer big questions: Should I have children or not; accept that job offer or settle for what I have; seek a divorce or try to forgive? Which choice would make me happier? What should I do? We may have doubted our final choice even as we made it, hoping only for the best, lost in the uncertainty that characterizes life. Our restricted knowledge of the future deprives us of the certainty that retrospection guarantees. Looking back, it is easy to see where we went "wrong" in some of the choices we made in our relationships, careers, investments, and lives. In hindsight, almost any decision is one that we can later regret to some degree. Because all we have to compare that decision to is the mystery of what might have been and the fantasy we hold of it.

Choices and Expectations

Every decision involves a set of expectations about the future. We may articulate these expectations as predictions or leave them as vague hopes, as much feelings as thoughts. But when we choose a road to travel, we do so on the basis of those expectations. When the expectations aren't realized, we regret the decision. We wish we had done something different. If we don't let go of the regret, we begin to revisit the decision—sometimes in sadness, sometimes in anger, sometimes in despair. Perhaps we revisit it over and over. The choice seems so obvious now! How could we have been

so foolish? How could we have been so careless? How could we have been so blind? These repetitive visits to the decision gather steam, and we become increasingly angry at ourselves over what we have done or have not done.

On the other hand, perhaps our regret stems not from our own action or inaction but from something someone else did to us—or didn't do for us. Or from an event over which we had no control. A tree falls on our car. The house is flooded. A fire burns up the garage and the two cars inside. We say to ourselves: "If only I had left earlier." "Why didn't I buy flood insurance?" "I should have checked the wiring." Or we contract a debilitating illness that changes our life.

Whatever the cause of the problem, we begin to regret, and our regretting builds until it spirals out of control. We want so much for it to be different, to be the way we had hoped or dreamed, that we cannot accept what has happened as the way it is. We jump into anger, plunge into sadness, or sink into self-pity. We whine in the hope that someone or something will change it, make it better, or take it away. We complain as if we were children believing that our parents will fix it if only we cry enough. Instead of being empowered, we are victimized by the thought of our regrets. Our anger and despair grow, and the conviction develops that we have messed up our lives beyond correction or that life has messed us up beyond redemption. Nothing, we tell ourselves, can help us now. We are sinking in the quicksand of regret.

We return to our regrets over and over, repeatedly thinking:

- "If only I had . . ."
- "If only she hadn't . . ."
- "Why didn't I? . . ."
- "Things would be different if . . ."
- "I can't believe I didn't . . ."
- "If I had it to do over again . . ."
- "If only I had known . . ."
- "If only I hadn't . . ."
- "I'd give anything if . . ."
- "Why, oh, why didn't? . . ."

When we have these thoughts on a repetitive basis about the same regret or when our regrets are intense and painful, we have identified our burdensome regrets—the regrets we need to let go.

Regretting is the act of revisiting past decisions or events, comparing them to what might have been and wishing they had been different. *When we give those past decisions or events the power to hurt us in the present, we have created burdensome regrets that corrode our lives.* Regretting is a trip to the past for which we pay by losing the present. Regretting takes us from today to yesterday, from what is to what was. It carries us from the present, where we are actors with the power to change our lives, to the past, where we are victims lacking that power, victims of what might have been.

Why is it that we regret? Regrets arise from unfulfilled expectations, from shattered hopes and lost dreams, from failures and tragedies, mistakes and misjudgments. They arise naturally out of life's events and are woven into the fabric of the human experience. Regrets are to be expected as part of being alive. They are inevitable, but they don't have to be burdensome. They can be accepted as part of the unique life we have led. All of us have practice in letting go of regrets—we do it many times a week. But these are usually small regrets and easy to manage. "I shouldn't have ordered dessert." "How could he have forgotten my birthday?" "I shouldn't have bought that sweater." These little regrets bother us only briefly and then we let them go.

But some regrets are bigger, more urgent, and not so easy to release. The stakes are much higher than a few added calories or a forgotten birthday, and the consequences are much more severe. Unlike small regrets, these are difficult to release. They are the regrets that entrap us. We become obsessed with the repercussions of our past actions and with the past and present sadness of their consequences. We board the merry-go-round of regret and ride in endless circles of, "If only I had . . . ," "If only I hadn't . . ."

The older we are, the more potential regrets we have to keep or give up. There are more roads not taken, more years to appreciate what has happened to us, and less time to "correct" our mistakes. We will experience many regrets in a lifetime, always with the same two options: Hold onto them or let them go. That choice is always ours.

Ways of Regretting

Regrets come in many forms, but they can be grouped into seven categories, depending upon the cause of the regret. Some regrets develop from multiple causes and so fall into more than one category. As you read through the categories, match them in your mind to your own regrets. Later you will match them on paper. This process of categorizing regrets is part of a larger process of systematic analysis through which you will gain control over your regrets and reduce their power to hurt you.

The seven categories of regret are:

1. Acts you committed (but wish you hadn't)
2. Acts you didn't commit (but wish you had)
3. Acts others committed (that you wish they hadn't)
4. Acts others didn't commit (that you wish they had)
5. Acts of fate or circumstances
6. Inevitable losses (that you regret)
7. Comparisons (that lead you to regret)

Let's take a look at each.

1. Acts You Committed (But Wish You Hadn't)

Regrets in this category arise from *actions that you took that you wish you hadn't taken.* "I shouldn't have said that" is a common such regret. Usually the misspoken words don't produce long-term effects, except in the case of public figures or in families when the words create lifelong rifts between members. Many other actions in this regret category, however, do produce long-term effects and are complex and difficult to let go. One woman regrets her abortion, for example, while another regrets her illegitimate child. A young man squanders his inheritance on cocaine. Another accidentally causes the death of a friend, while another makes an error in judgment that costs him a leg. A woman steals from her com-

pany and gets caught or tells a lie that leads to tragic consequences. A man diagnosed with lung cancer stops smoking but it's too late. These examples are *regrets of commission,* acts people committed that they wish they hadn't.

2. Acts You Didn't Commit (But Wish You Had)

These regrets arise from *actions that you did not take that you wish you had taken.* "I should have called on her birthday" is a regret at the minor end of the spectrum. More serious regrets in this category stem from a failure to act that resulted in grave consequences or lost dreams. A woman neglected her child, who now struggles with abandonment issues. A man loses a parent to a sudden heart attack, leaving him with "I love you" left unsaid. Perhaps a passion for writing fiction was squelched in order to pursue a more stable career, despite an obvious talent and a dream of becoming a great novelist.

Missed opportunities are common in this category of regret. Bob didn't buy Microsoft in the 1980s when he predicted its future rise and had plenty of money to buy it. He played it safe instead, investing in blue chips and watching his portfolio underperform the market even as he spent its principal. Now all he can think about is how rich he would have been today, "If only . . ." "How could I have done that?" he continually asks himself. "How could I have been so stupid?"

Julie struggles in a menial job, barely able to make ends meet, because she has no skills and no education beyond high school. She didn't go to college even though her aunt offered to pay for it. She wanted to see the world, hang out with musicians, drift with the wind, and avoid the tedious life of her parents in their boring factory jobs. Somehow the months turned into years. The men who shared her life grew less reliable, the easy jobs less attractive. Now Julie regrets her lack of education. It would all be different, she tells herself, if only she hadn't turned down her aunt's offer. If only she had gone to college. If only . . .

These examples are *regrets of omission,* acts people did not commit that they wish they had.

3. Acts Others Committed (That You Wish They Hadn't)

Regrets in this category arise from *actions that someone else took in relation to you that you wish they hadn't taken.* You may have played a big role, a minor role, or no role at all in creating these regrets, but their consequences were painful. A thoughtless comment about you falls into this category but is generally easy to dismiss. More serious actions may not be. You were defrauded by your best friend and lost everything. Your spouse cheated on you and then sued for divorce, ending the marriage and your dreams for a stable home that would nurture your children. A stranger rapes you. Your best friend commits suicide. You lose your dream job in a power struggle you did not initiate. Whether the actions of others were deliberate or inadvertent, they still hurt. These regrets are caused by *acts of commission by others.*

4. Acts Others Didn't Commit (That You Wish They Had)

Regrets in this category arise from *actions that others did not take in relation to you that you believe they should have taken.* These regrets often involve someone you know—a member of your family, a friend, or a coworker—but not always. A relatively harmless example, although temporarily painful, is having a spouse forget your anniversary. But there are much more serious examples with potentially devastating long-term consequences. Perhaps your parents didn't teach you self-discipline as a child so that you have had to learn it slowly and painfully as an adult. Perhaps you didn't get the promotion to partner that you had been promised and now have to leave the law firm. Perhaps your parents never told you that you were adopted and you only found out after their deaths—when it was too late to talk to them about it or to find out something about your birth parents.

Sometimes, these acts of *omission* by others can also be categorized as acts of *commission.* For example, a woman rejects a man's request to marry her. He can consider it an act of omission—"she didn't marry me"—and that's how he will probably categorize it. But he can also see it as an act of commission instead—"she rejected me." Either way, it hurts, and whether

he classifies the regret as an act of commission or reverses it and classifies it as an act of omission makes no difference. In classifying your own regrets, choose the category that seems more appropriate to you.

5. Acts of Fate or Circumstances

These regrets arise *as the result of fate or life circumstances over which you had no control.* A devastating illness, for example, a physical handicap about which nothing could be done, a childhood of poverty, or the early death of a parent are all circumstances beyond the control of people who are nonetheless deeply affected by them. Accidents also fall into this category. A loved one dies in a plane crash or is killed in a drive-by shooting. These are all acts of fate or circumstances over which you have no control.

6. Inevitable Losses (That You Regret)

Regrets in this category arise from the *inevitable losses that life brings.* These regrets are different from regrets born of events or circumstances perceived as negative, because they are shared by everyone who lives long enough. They include losses associated with growing older and with major life transitions. Inevitable losses characterize every age: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and old age. As they grow older, adolescents, for example, must give up the illusion of omnipotentiality (their ability to become anything in life), not to mention their belief in their invulnerability to harm and their own immortality—quite a price to pay for young adulthood. If they are unwilling to pay this price, however, they are doomed to unhappiness. The loss of omnipotentiality, invulnerability to harm, and immortality on earth are inevitable. How we respond to them is not. The loss of youthful beauty, energy, or dexterity, and the decline in physical ability or stamina are, likewise, merely the inevitable losses of staying alive.

Inevitable losses also include those that arise from *favorable events.* In order to get something, we generally have to give up something. Even though the new may be better than the old, most people still do not like having to give up the old. They would prefer to have both. But life doesn't

work that way. Where inevitable losses are concerned, the old and the new are mutually exclusive—one must be given up. This giving up makes the change inherent in inevitable losses painful—even when the change brings significant rewards. Giving up—even to get—is experienced as a loss, a kind of death that has to be grieved, accepted, and let go. Great gains often require great losses. We do not have to like this principle, but it governs our life nonetheless.

Keith, for example, accepted a promotion that he had worked hard to earn, but it required him to move from a town where he had many friends to a city where he had no friends. He liked the job but hated the city in which it was located. Keith regretted taking the promotion and making the move, a regret born of good fortune. He wanted the promotion, but he resented what he had to lose to get it. In fact, he resented even having to make the trade. Keith's focus gradually shifted from the gains of his early promotion to the inevitable losses that accompanied them, and he grew bitter, resentful, and unhappy.

7. Comparisons (That Lead You to Regret)

America is a competitive society that loves its lists and rankings: "The Ten Best-Dressed Women"; "The 50 Most Eligible Bachelors"; "The 100 Best Companies to Work For"; "The 500 Wealthiest People . . ." All of these lists compare the "best" to all the rest. In our success-oriented society, rankings are important, which is why these lists fascinate us. Do you agree that *Citizen Kane* is the best motion picture ever made (traditionally number one) or do you prefer *Casablanca* (traditionally number two)? Do you agree with the choices of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences when it honors the best actor, actress, director, and motion picture with its annual Oscars?

When it comes to our own life, we also maintain lists, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. In these private lists, we rank ourselves in relation to those we know and those we don't know but have heard of or read about. We even create lists in which we rank ourselves in comparison to the selves we had hoped to be but never quite became (or even came close to becoming). Where do you stand in the secret rankings of this in-

ternal list? Are you at the top of your list, at the bottom, or somewhere in the middle?

These internalized rankings are a potent source of regrets. In fact they can be among the most painful and debilitating of all regrets. By comparing where you are to where you think you ought to be in relation to your idealized self or in relation to others, you create painful "should haves." "Should haves" arise when you compare what you are to what you *"should have"* been, to what you *"should have"* done, or to what you *"should have"* acquired. Regret-producing comparisons come from "losing out" in the:

- Comparisons that you make between yourself and people you know or have read about.
- Comparisons of your life and accomplishments to the expectations that other people or, in some cases, society itself placed on you.
- Comparisons of your present life to the standards that you set for yourself, the dreams that you once had for yourself, or to the potential that you once possessed.

Comparisons such as these create regrets whenever you make them and find yourself lacking.

Holding onto Regrets

We all experience regrets. They are a natural consequence of being alive. Any action we take can conceivably produce a regret. Likewise, any action we *don't take* can produce a regret. While there is no escape from regrets, there *is* escape from *burdensome* regrets. Regrets themselves are not the problem. *The problem is what we do with the regret.* It's easy to dismiss minor regrets, and we have a lot of practice doing that. "I wish I had gone to the movies after all," we tell ourselves and let this little regret go.

Other regrets are more significant, falling into the "lessons learned" category, but we still let them go. These regrets arise from our own acts of commission or omission and even from those of others. With these regrets, we say to ourselves, "I wish I hadn't done that, but I've learned my

lesson. I won't do it again." Or, "He was a terrible boss, but he taught me what not to do as a manager." In such cases, we accept that experience is the best teacher, and we move on. Sometimes the "failures" we regret not only bring us lessons but later work out for the best. For example, someone admits, "I felt like hell when I was fired, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me."

When we consider our mistakes objectively and ponder their lessons, we grow in knowledge and, sometimes, wisdom. If we reject the opportunity to learn from our mistakes, we do not grow and may repeat them. Many of us can admit, "I've learned as much from what I've done wrong as from what I've done right." And so we take the lesson in stride and move on with our lives, continuing to meet the present in all its possibilities.

But some regrets are not easily abandoned. "Why didn't I?" becomes a troubling refrain. Even when we continually revisit a regret, however, we are likely to come to terms with it eventually, accept its lessons, and accommodate ourselves to the reality of what happened. We let time heal us and chalk up the regret to experience. And we let it go.

But not always. When the price we paid for the regret seems too high to accept, we balk at releasing it. We conclude that whatever we have learned or could have learned wasn't enough. Whatever fork in the road we took or were forced down, we didn't like it. The consequences devastated us, and we continue to regret them. We revisit the choices that we made or the circumstances that were forced upon us. Instead of reviewing our regrets to mine their lessons, we return to them over and over to bemoan their consequences, still trying to change the outcome, still trying to have things the way we want them. In so doing, we sink into self-pity and inaction, trapped in an ugly past that we refuse to leave.

Regrets pose a problem for us when we revisit them intensely or repeatedly, wishing that things had been different and blaming ourselves or others that they are not. To harbor a regret means to continue to experience the emotions it generated and to suffer from them long after it was appropriate to have worked through them and let them go. When we harbor a regret, we make it an agonizing destination for our reveries and fantasies. We return to it repeatedly in terrible anger or deep grief or recall it periodically with an intense pain that threatens our sense of wholeness, chal-

lenges our worth as a person, and sours our happiness. In such instances the regret is no longer a regret. It has become an intolerable burden.

One way to harbor a regret is to ruminate on it. When applied to cows, to ruminate means to chew a cud. When applied to humans, to ruminate is to ponder the same issue at length, to continue, in a sense, to chew it over and over. Rumination is the psychological term for a repetitive thought pattern. But we do not have to ruminate on our regrets to harbor them. We can still be tormented by them whenever their memory is triggered even if we do not regularly revisit them.

A harbored regret assumes a special status in our lives and serves up a special form of suffering. Harbored regrets carry lies that plunge us into unhappiness: We are incapable of success, unworthy of friendship, or guilty beyond forgiveness. Or they make us angry, defensive, and overreactive to the actions or comments of others. We find ourselves unwilling to forgive, consumed with spasms of hatred or thoughts of revenge that cast their shadows over days that might otherwise be festive and light. Burdensome regrets are dark wellsprings of discontent and blame that restrict our possibilities, curtail our pleasures, and hamper our loving.

We all know people whom we admire, who have successful lives, whose company we enjoy, and yet who feel diminished because of their regrets. We see them as admirable, even enviable people. We would like to be like them. How can they not see how unimportant their real or imagined mistakes are in the context of their whole lives? How can they give so much of themselves now and yet live with so much pain and so little pleasure because of things that happened long ago? As mystified as we might be about them, we have no such mystery about ourselves. *They* have no reason to regret, we tell ourselves, in view of their lives—but we do.

Harbored regrets shift our attention from the reality of what life is to the fantasy of what life might have been—a comparison that cannot be made without feelings of sorrow. If we did not pay such a high price for holding onto our regrets, we might indulge them. But unless our regrets are minor enough to be dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders or a nod to experience, we cannot afford to keep them. And we don't have to keep them. We can let them go. But many of us don't. Why not? If the burden of harbored regrets is so heavy, why do we continue to harbor them?

One of the reasons we hold onto our regrets is that we don't know *how* to let them go. We don't know how to begin the process of eliminating these burdensome memories that have become familiar companions and so part of our lives. We have been told by others to "get over" our regrets, and we have even demanded the same thing of ourselves. But how do we do it? How do we let go of regrets without having a plan that lays out the steps we need to take? Without guidance or a structured means of letting go, most of us can't find our way to freedom from regretting.

There is a second reason for holding onto some of our regrets. They are supported by unrealistic thought patterns that we have never examined or challenged effectively. Believing that we have to be perfect is one such pattern that creates many regrets. Taking on undeserved guilt is another. Sometimes regrets provide a "justification" for our inaction, as when we say that it's too late to change from a hated career to something we really like, and so we don't try. Overcoming these unrealistic thought patterns and their negative effects is part of letting go of our regrets. We'll explore how to do that in Step Three ("Changing Toxic Thought Patterns") in chapter 6.

Letting Go of Regret

When I was deep into my regrets and the shambles they had created in parts of my life, it seemed inconceivable to me that I could let them go. That belief was fueled, in part, by a misunderstanding of what it means to let go of a regret. Letting go does not mean denying the regret or the events that created it. Nor does it mean minimizing the serious effects of the regret on me or others: the pain, the harm, and the fear it caused. Rather, it means coming to terms with the actions and circumstances that created the regret, releasing the painful emotions associated with it, and ending the distortions that the regret is creating for me in the present.

Although I acknowledged the regret and the harm it caused, I came to recognize that I no longer had to be a prisoner of it. I could leave the past where my regret still held sway and step into the present where I could change myself and the circumstances of my life. In the process, I let go of

the feelings of anger, shame, guilt, and sadness that surrounded my regrets and that had infected my life. That's what healing is.

The spiritual and psychological tools used in conjunction with the Ten Steps to letting go of regret are designed to bring about such healing. And they work. They will lead you to a new understanding of your regrets and a new perspective on your past that will free you from those regrets. Ultimately, the Ten Steps will lead you to forgiveness—of others and yourself.

The Rewards of Letting Go

When you have harbored regrets for a long time, when you relive them intensely or revisit them frequently, you may find it frightening to contemplate letting them go. Regrets can become such a part of your life that you don't know what it would be like to live without them. You may even fear that their absence would leave an emotional hole that would be difficult to fill. Yet as you work the steps, you will discover that letting go brings many rewards that are far greater than the imagined benefits of harboring the regrets. Some of these rewards are:

- Relief from the pain, anger, shame, and guilt of your regrets
- Escape from the domination that regrets exercise over your life, freeing your thoughts and emotions for more productive purposes
- Recognition of the lessons and gifts that have come from your regrets and how you can use them for your own benefit and the benefit of other people
- Greater acceptance of yourself and others
- A new perspective on your unique life experience and a better appreciation of it
- Increased awareness of your ability to be of service to others
- Greater compassion for those who struggle and have struggled, empathy with those who suffer and have suffered, and love for those who are failing and have failed
- A new sense of being comfortable in the world and being a worthy part of the world

- A commitment to living in the present with all its joys, pain, and possibilities

These rewards may seem remote when you are mired in the pain of your regrets, but they are real nonetheless. They come with the healing of regrets. Healing is possible because you are more capable of growth and deserving of grace than you realize, and because you have at your disposal powerful and transforming steps and spiritual and psychological tools to assist you. Your feelings of helplessness in dealing with your regrets will be converted into a mastery of those regrets, bringing joy, satisfaction, and happiness in greater measure than you can presently imagine.

Something remarkable happens when you invoke spiritual power and apply proven psychological techniques to letting go of your regrets. When your purpose is to heal those regrets and live a more rewarding and productive life, you will be aided in many unanticipated ways. You will be introduced to greater forces—forces that will carry you to the edge of the impossible and to the realm of the miraculous. You will dare to renew your hopes for a richer life and to reclaim longed-for goals that your regrets have denied you. The love affair with life that you once experienced will be rekindled and you will perceive new and startling possibilities that will sweep you from the confines of the past to the lush potential of the present.

The Timing of Letting Go

No Regrets allows you to work the Ten Steps at your own pace, with no set timetable except your own. Proceed in a dedicated manner, working steadily and avoiding procrastination whenever possible. Some procrastination is inevitable but acceptable as long as progress is continuing.

Each of us is different, and each of us has different regrets. For some of us, letting go can be accomplished relatively quickly. An "ah-ha" moment takes place, then another and another, and the pieces of the puzzle fall swiftly together. The way out of our regrets is clear, and our release from regrets can be accomplished with some ease and speed. For others, the process of letting go will require more effort and will take longer, but it will

bring the same result. Regardless of the timetable, release from burdensome regrets is virtually assured for those who commit themselves to working the Ten-Step program described in this book.

Your timetable for completing the steps will be determined primarily by the priority you place on letting go of your regrets. If it is a high priority, you will start now and stay with it until you have made peace with the past that holds you. We inevitably spend time on what is important to us. How important is it to you to let go of your regrets? If you are serious about letting go, consider how much time you are willing to spend on the steps. Be realistic but compassionate. You are setting these goals for yourself, not for someone else.

What if you don't meet your timetable? Then you don't meet it. Flexibility is important. Unexpected events may arise that will prevent you from devoting the time to which you are committing now. If so, revise the time estimate as you become more familiar with the process. You may want to increase or decrease it. When you have determined what your time commitment will be, write it on a sheet of paper in the form shown below and insert it in this book as a bookmark. You may set the time commitment in minutes per day or hours per week.

My commitment is to spend _____ minutes per day (or _____ hours per week) reading *No Regrets* and working the Ten Steps. If necessary, I will revise this time commitment as my journey progresses.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Congratulations. You have begun to let go of your regrets.