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THIS IS NOT THE LIFE I THOUGHT I WAS LIVING

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Born into a very traditional Chinese family in Hong Kong, I was the second daughter of parents who were desperate for a son. Then my mother gave birth to three boys and cemented my position at the bottom of the totem pole. With three younger brothers I grew up an unwanted, neglected, and abused child in a culture where dirt was more valuable than a useless second daughter.

My one blessing was the name given to me by my grandfather. A very unusual honor for a Chinese girl, he named me Hay Lit after two respected Chinese emperors. This proud name empowered me to grow up believing that someone in my family cared about my future and inspired me to think that one day I could do something important with my life.

I knew there were other children who were much worse off than me. One of my schoolmates and her family of five lived in a single room where they shared a kitchen and bath with two other families. With both parents working, my friend still didn't have proper clothing or enough food to eat. It didn't seem fair that she had to live this way. At the age of 11, I knew that making a positive difference and helping people in need was my true destiny.

As a teenager, I came to the United States alone for a college education. I was driven to making positive change in the world. Working my way through school, I completed my undergraduate studies and earned a master's degree. From the bottom of the totem pole, I climbed to the top of the corporate ladder in high-level executive positions at well-known international companies (vice president at Nike Inc., president of Reebok Apparel & Retail Group, CEO at Aveda Corp.). From there I became an entrepreneur, author (*How to Use What You've Got to Get What You Want* is now in several languages, and *Living the Life of Your Dreams* won the Global eBook of the Year 2011 award in the Inspirational/Visionary category), and co-founded a nonprofit

organization (Us Foundation) dedicated to promoting the highest common good for humanity and the planet. I even received an honorary doctorate from Old Dominion University in Virginia for the body of work I've done over the years. Wow, if only I knew all this would happen when I was young, alone, and scared.

Along the way, I never forgot my life's purpose: to make a positive difference. As an executive in the apparel industry, one of my proudest accomplishments was helping to create positive change in labor standards for workers in developing countries.

Some years ago, in addition to running my foundation, I was writing, speaking, and consulting with global companies and governmental organizations on leadership, diversity, life balance, and other business issues, and through my health and wellness center, teaching clients around the world how to enjoy a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Then one day, my sister, who lives in Vancouver, B.C., called and said that she wanted to come to California and spend Christmas with me. "I'm sorry," I heard myself say to my sister who I dearly love and hadn't seen for over two years, "but I'm just too tired to even think about the holidays. In fact, I'm going to cancel Christmas entirely this year."

Listening to myself, I thought, "What am I saying? This is just ridiculous! This is crazy!" I suddenly realized that in giving so much to help other people, I had completely forgotten about taking care of my personal needs. The truth hit me like a ton of bricks. I was shocked and embarrassed. My own labor standards were completely out of balance! The second daughter, Hay Lit, had been putting *herself* at the bottom of the totem pole.

My sister was speechless at first, but then she understood that I was just so burned out. I realized then that my priorities were all mixed up. Because I had been giving everything I had to

other people and to so many worthy causes, at the end of the year I had nothing left for me—or my own sister!

Travelling around the world, I had been teaching business, nonprofit and government leaders to honor their physical and emotional health, spend time with family and friends, and pursue their intellectual interests and spiritual calling. But I had not made time to do many of these things myself. Could pushing oneself beyond her limits into a state of total exhaustion be an example of low self-worth, self-neglect, or even self-abuse?

Reflecting upon how the role of women in the United States has changed, I realized that today we are expected to wear many different hats—daughter, friend, career woman, wife, mother, and community leader. Juggling all these things, we struggle to stay in shape, look beautiful, have a spiritual core, and become self-actualized—expectations that we, as well as society, have placed upon us. Every now and then, we have to stop ourselves and ask, “Am I taking care of the most important person in the world?” Yes, that’s you.

While keeping all the traditional roles, women of our generation have taken on many additional responsibilities. Multitasking comes naturally to the female gender leading us to believe that we can do everything, all the time, and all at once. But this is impossible, and sometimes in order to achieve what’s critical and to remain sane, we just have to say no.

Whenever you feel overwhelmed, stop, take a deep breath, and then take another one, and then ask, “What would happen if I didn’t do this task at this very moment? What is really most important? What is the truth here for me?” Pull yourself back enough to get distance and perspective. Listen to the voice of your inner wisdom. The answer will come.

In order to stay true to my life’s purpose, I have learned to put my own needs high on the list of priorities and practice what I

preach. Only by striving to make certain that my life is sustained in a balanced way can I make the positive difference that is my destiny.

After all, how can I help to heal the world if I can't take care of me? And you? Are you neglecting yourself to take care of others? Is that really working for you and your loved ones? When you are giving from *lack*—it's unsustainable and will eventually not only drain you but destroy the very relationships and structures you are working so hard to build.

Stop, take a deep breath, and repeat the above instructions as needed. Remember that you are part of the whole—if you neglect or abuse yourself and become a hole—instead of a valuable part of the whole—the whole will also have a hole.

Yes, we know the bills have to be paid and the work assignment and laundry done—somehow all *will* get done. Believe us, it will. Continue to read with us, please; this book will show you the way.

I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element.

It is my personal approach that creates the climate.

It is my daily mood that makes the weather.

I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous.

I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.

I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.

In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis is escalated or de-escalated, and a person is humanized or de-humanized.

If we treat people as they are, we make them worse.

If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.

—*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1749–1832*