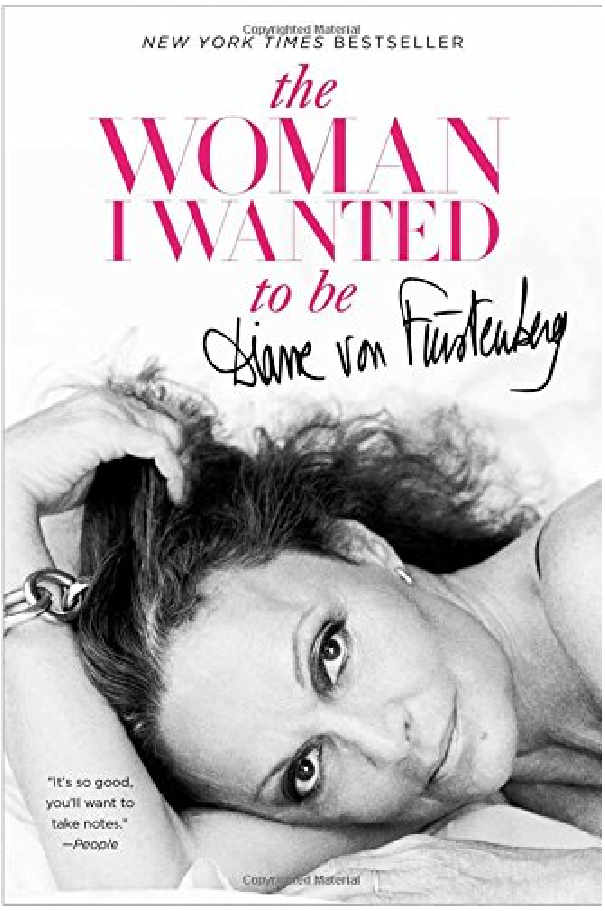
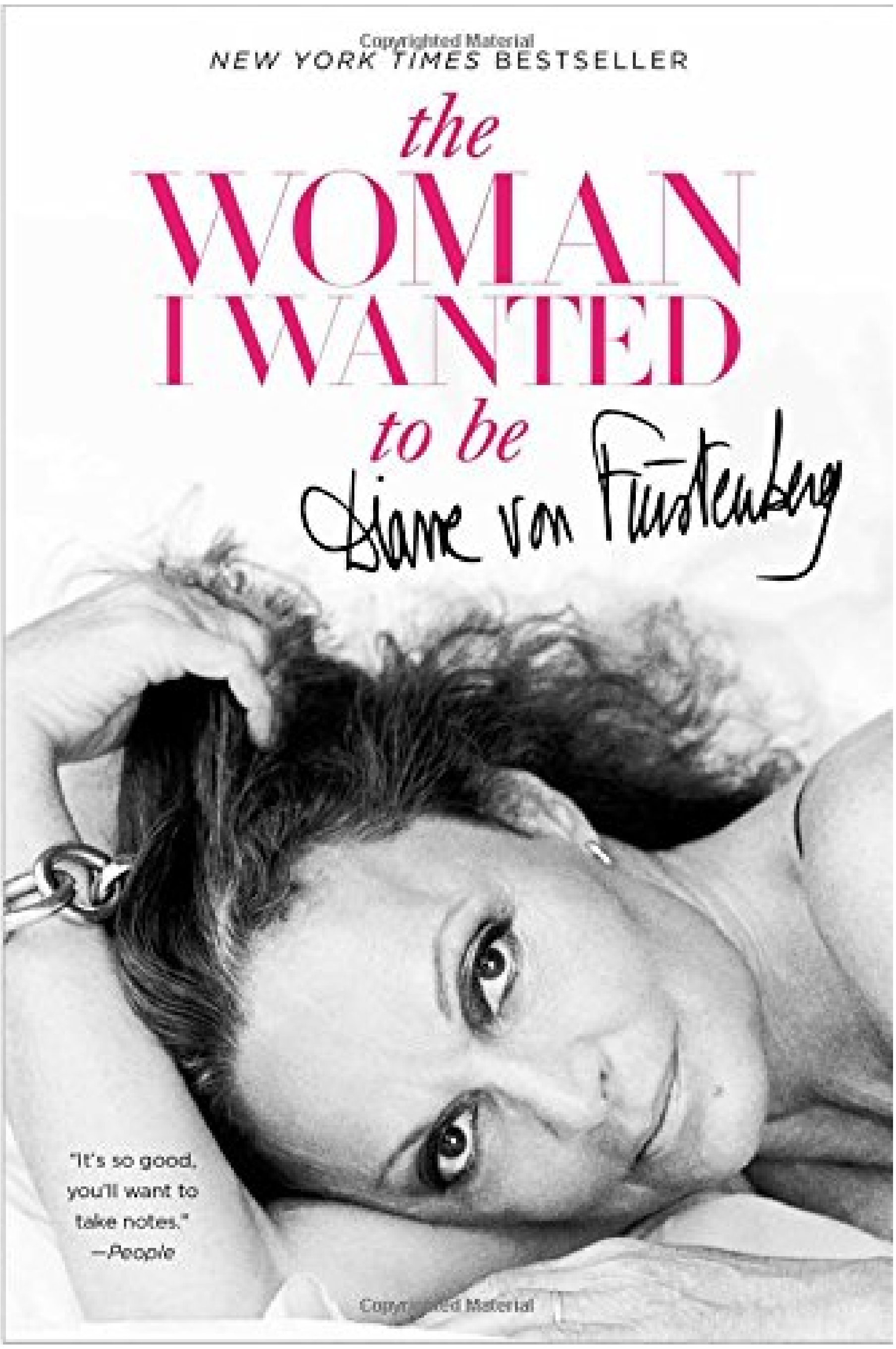
THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG


Copyrighted Material
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
the WOMAN I WANTED to be
Diane von Furstenberg
"It's so good, you'll want to take notes." —People
Copyrighted Material

DOWNLOAD EBOOK : THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG PDF

Free Download


Copyrighted Material
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
the WOMAN I WANTED to be
Diane von Furstenberg
"It's so good, you'll want to take notes." —People
Copyrighted Material

Click link bellow and free register to download ebook:
THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG

DOWNLOAD FROM OUR ONLINE LIBRARY

THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG PDF

From the combination of understanding and actions, somebody could enhance their skill as well as ability. It will certainly lead them to live as well as function better. This is why, the pupils, workers, or even companies ought to have reading routine for publications. Any kind of book The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg will certainly provide particular understanding to take all benefits. This is what this The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg informs you. It will add even more expertise of you to life and function better. The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg, Try it as well as show it.

Review
“[a] warm, confiding memoir.” (VOGUE)

“It’s so good, you’ll want to take notes.” (PEOPLE)

“Diane’s book evokes everything she has lived through. It is honest, direct and fascinating — just like the author herself!” (Anna Wintour)

“In this era when girls are made to think it’s better to be a princess than a person, Diane von Furstenberg’s The Woman I Wanted to Be is just the reverse. I thank her for honesty, spirit, encouragement to be one’s own self in public and professional life, and a memoir that covers more human experience than most novels. Pick it up — you won’t put it down.” (Gloria Steinem)

“Diane von Furstenberg’s story offers a behind-the-scenes look into the ups and downs of building a global business, creating an enduring brand, and finding true love. By sharing the path that enabled her to become the woman she wanted to be, Diane shows all of us how to live a life of focus and passion.” (Sheryl Sandberg)

“Diane is the original modern princess who created the iconic wrap dress and has influenced fashion everywhere with her talent, lifestyle, elegance and beauty. Every girl will love reading her book.” (Kate Moss)

“It has been a gift to read this book, and a true privilege to learn and discover that much more about DVF. What a thrill to be given an opportunity to peek even further into her life.” (Sarah Jessica Parker)

“The legendary designer Diane von Furstenberg has a lot in common with her iconic wrap dress: practical yet sexy, demure yet revealing, sturdy yet fragile. This memoir is an intriguing page turner filled with her revelations about life, business, family and love. Fearless about naming names and probing her own failings, she analyses a ‘little fling’ with Richard Gere as sincerely as she does her midlife retreats from the fashion area—and her dynamic comeback. Her core philosophy? ‘Turn negatives into positives and be proud to be woman.’ She emerges, at 67, as a witty and reflective grownup, albeit one with plenty of surprises up her beautifully draped sleeve.” (MORE)

“. . . an honest an introspective look into the labyrinthine history behind one of the most iconic female entrepreneurs in fashion. Written in elegant yet straightforward prose . . . The designer candidly speaks of missteps and periods of her life which guided her away from what she truly wanted out of her life, and how she dealt with each situation, with grace and aplomb.” (Bustle.com)

“Diane von Furstenberg’s life combines the hallmarks of a fairy tale with the more sober reality of a career woman—and single mother—who longs to have it all. . . . The book is as charming and erratic as von Furstenberg herself . . . the early pages paint a vivid picture . . . her account of those first years is colorful and poignant.” (Finanacial Times)

“[N]ow I find Diane the super person that folks are most curious about. Diane never let herself fail at anything; or if she faltered, she climbed back up. It is a pleasure to read a ‘positive’ book that is not just manufactured nonsense . . . We get a real look at a woman in her 60s who's still in her prime. She has a lesson for all of us.” (Worcester Telegram)

“von Furstenberg’s candid memoir contains hard-earned wisdom that she eagerly shares with women of all ages and backgrounds. A fascinating read for anyone interested in the behind-the-scenes world of contemporary fashion.” (Booklist)

“In this captivating memoir, fashion powerhouse von Furstenberg thoughtfully reflects on her colorful life—and doesn’t skimp on the juicy details. Von Furstenberg begins movingly by writing of her need to please her mother . . . then moves on to her life as a jet-set princess and fledgling designing in New York City, her invention of the iconic jersey wrap dress in the early 1970s, and stories of her children . . . She outlines her many positive contributions to the fashion industry, but admirably doesn’t sugarcoat business missteps . . . This is a fascinating glimpse into the life of one of the fashion world’s more enduring stars that will fascinate fashionistas and fans of strong, creative women.” (Publishers Weekly)

“With humility and honesty, von Furstenberg's reflections on a life lived in the grandiose couture spotlight will delight both trendy, fashion-forward readers and budding designers eager to follow in her footsteps.” (Kirkus Reviews)

“Designer Diane von Furstenberg’s life readslike a fairy tale. She details it all with sincerity and humility in thismemoir.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“No stranger to the spotlight DVF's most recent venture, a book entitled The Woman I Wanted to Be chronicles how privilege opened certain doors in her early success, how much is still needed to be done to achieve equality, an insight into the behind-the-scenes ups and downs of running a global business and a story that is in equal parts wisdom, sobering reality and fairy tale.” (Los Angeles Fashion)

“Designer Diane von Furstenberg’s life reads like a fairy tale. She details it all with sincerity and humility in this memoir.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“an inspiring, compelling, deliciously detailed celebrity autobiography, the book is as much of a smashing success as the determined, savvy, well-intentioned woman who wrote it.” (Chicago Tribune)

About the Author

Diane von Furstenberg entered the fashion world in 1970 and four years later introduced her famous wrap dress. Her luxury fashion brand, DVF, is now available in more than fifty-five countries all over the world. Director of the Diller-von Furstenberg Family Foundation, she is an active philanthropist and supporter of emerging female leaders and social entrepreneurs. In 2015, she was named one of the Time 100 Most Influential People. She is the author of The Woman I Wanted to Be and Diane: A Signature Life.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.
The Woman I Wanted to Be 1 ROOTS
There is a large frame on the bookshelf in my bedroom in New York. In it is a page torn from a German magazine of 1952. It is a photo of an elegant woman and her small daughter in the train station of Basel, Switzerland, waiting for the Orient Express. The little girl is nestled in her mother's tented coat and is eating a brioche. That was the first time, at the age of five, that I had my photo in a magazine. It is a sweet picture. My mother's older sister, Juliette, gave it to me when I was first married, but it is only recently that I realized its true importance.

On the surface, it is a photograph of a glamorous, apparently wealthy woman en route to a ski holiday with her curly-haired little girl. The woman is not looking into the camera, but there is a hint of a smile as she knows she is being photographed. Her appearance is elegant. Nothing would indicate that only a few years before, she was in another German-speaking railroad station coming back from the Nazi concentration camps where she had been a prisoner for thirteen months, a bunch of bones, close to death from starvation and exhaustion.

How did she feel when the photographer asked her name to be put in the magazine? Proud, I imagine, to be noticed for her style and elegance. Only seven years had passed. She was not a number anymore. She had a name; warm, beautiful, clean clothes; and most of all she had a daughter, a healthy little girl. "God has saved my life so that I can give you life," she used to write me every New Year on my birthday. "By giving you life, you gave me my life back. You are my torch, my flag of freedom."

My voice catches each time I speak publicly about my mother, and I do in every speech I make, aware that I wouldn't be giving that speech if Lily Nahmias had not been my mother. Sometimes it feels odd that I always bring up her story, but somehow I am compelled to. It explains the child I was, the woman I became.

"I want to tell you the story of a young girl who, at twenty-two years old, weighed fifty-nine pounds, barely the weight of her bones," I say to a seminar at Harvard about girls' health. "The reason she weighed fifty-nine pounds is that she had just spent thirteen months in the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. It was a true miracle that that young girl didn't die, though she came very close. When she was liberated and returned to her family in Belgium, her mother fed her like a little bird, every fifteen minutes a tiny bit of food, and then a little bit more, making her feel as if she was being slowly blown up like a balloon. Within a few months her weight was close to normal."

There are always murmurs in the audience when I get to that point in my mother's story, perhaps because it is so shocking and unexpected or maybe because I am living history to a young audience that has heard only vaguely about Auschwitz. It must be hard to imagine the high-energy, healthy woman speaking to them having a mother who weighed fifty-nine pounds. Whatever it is, I want and need to honor my mother, her courage and her strength. It is what made me the woman she wanted me to be.

"God has saved my life so that I can give you life." Her words resonate with me every day of my life. I feel it is my duty to make up for all the suffering she endured, to always celebrate freedom and live fully. My birth was her triumph. She was not supposed to survive; I was not supposed to be born. We proved them wrong.

We both won the day I was born.

I repeat a few of the lessons my mother drummed into me that have served me well. “Fear is not an option.” “Don’t dwell on the dark side of things, but look for the light and build around it. If one door closes, look for another one to open.” “Never, ever, blame others for what befalls you, no matter how horrible it might be. Trust you, and only you, to be responsible for your own life.” She lived those lessons. In spite of what she endured, she never wanted others to feel that she was a victim.

I didn’t used to talk nearly as much about my mother. I took her for granted, as children do their mothers. It was not until she died in 2000 that I fully realized what an incredibly huge influence she had been on me and how much I owe her. Like any child, I hadn’t paid much attention. “OK, OK, you told me that already,” I’d brush her off, or even pretend not to hear. I bridled, too, at the unsolicited advice she persisted in giving my friends. In fact, it annoyed me. Now, of course, I feel I have had the experience and earned the wisdom to hand out my own unsolicited advice, and I press every lesson my mother taught me on my children, grandchildren, and anyone I talk to. I have become her.

I didn’t know, as a very little girl in Brussels, why my mother had two lines of blue tattooed numbers on her left arm. I remember thinking they were some sort of decoration and wished I had them, too, so my arms wouldn’t look so plain. I didn’t understand why the housekeeper often told me not to bother her when she was lying down in her bedroom. I instinctively knew my mother needed her rest and I would tiptoe around the house so I wouldn’t disturb her.

Sometimes I’d ignore the housekeeper’s instructions and, gathering my beloved little picture books, I would sneak into her darkened room in the hope she would smile and read them to me. More often than not she did. She loved books and taught me to cherish them. She read my little picture books to me so many times I memorized them. One of my favorite things to do was to fake reading them, carefully turning the pages at the right time and showing off, pretending that I could read.

My mother was very strict. I never doubted that she loved me, but if I said something she didn’t approve of or failed to live up to her expectations, she would give me a severe look or pinch me. I would be sent to the corner, my face to the wall. Sometimes I would go to the corner by myself, knowing I had done wrong. She spent a lot of time with me, sometimes playing, but mostly teaching me anything she could think of. She read me fairy tales and would tease me when I got scared. I remember how she amused herself by telling me that I was an abandoned child she had found in the garbage. I would cry until she took me in her arms, consoling me. She wanted me to be strong and not be afraid. She was very demanding. Before I had learned how to read, she had me memorize and recite the seventeenth-century fables of La Fontaine. As soon as I was old enough to write, she insisted I write stories and letters with perfect spelling and grammar. I remember how proud I was when she praised me.

To train me never to succumb to shyness, she made me give a speech at every family gathering, teaching me to be comfortable speaking in public no matter the audience. Like many children I was scared of the dark, but unlike most mothers, she shut me in a dark closet and waited outside so I would learn for myself that there was nothing to be afraid of. That was just one of the times she’d say “Fear is not an option.”

My mother did not believe in coddling children too much or overprotecting them. She wanted me to be independent and responsible for myself. My earliest memories are of traveling with my parents and being left alone in the hotel room while they went out to dinner. I did not mind nor did I feel lonely. I was so proud that they trusted me to stay alone. I liked entertaining myself and feeling grown up. To this day, I have the same feeling and sense of freedom when I check into a hotel room alone.

When my parents allowed me to join them in a restaurant, my mother often encouraged me to get up and check out the room, and sometimes, even to go outside and report to her what I'd seen, who I had met. That instilled curiosity in me—watch what other people do, make friends with people I do not know. When I was nine, she sent me on the train from Brussels to Paris all by myself to visit her sister, my favorite aunt, Mathilde. I felt so proud to be responsible for myself. I think, deep down, I was a bit nervous, but I would never admit it and pride overcame the fear.

I still like to travel alone, and at times prefer it. Even on business trips, I don't like traveling with an entourage because it limits my freedom and reduces the fun of the unpredictable. I love the adventure, that feeling of excitement and satisfaction I had when I was a little girl. To be alone on the road, in an airport, with my bag, my passport, my credit cards, my phone, and a camera makes me feel so free and happy. I thank my mother for always encouraging me to "go."

Independence. Freedom. Self-reliance. Those were the values she was drumming into me, and she did it with such naturalness that I never questioned or resisted her. There was no other way but to be responsible for myself. As much as I loved and respected her, I was certainly a little frightened of her, and never wanted to displease her. I understand now that she was processing all of her past frustrations and unhappy experiences and putting them into a package of strength and positivity. That is the gift she prepared for me. It felt occasionally like a heavy burden, but I never questioned it, even if I sometimes wished I belonged to some other family.

Happily she let up on me somewhat when I was six and my baby brother, Philippe, was born. I adored him. To my surprise, having never played with dolls, I felt maternal, and to this day I think of him as my first child. As the older sister, I played with him and sometimes tortured him a bit, but as my mother had done to me, I taught him everything I knew and was very protective. When we played doctor, I asked him to urinate into a little bottle, only to then laugh at him that he had actually done it. We also used to play travel agency with my parents' airline brochures, scheduling and booking imaginary trips all over the world.

Philippe says he realized that I loved him the day I transcribed all the words from a Beatles record while I was at boarding school in England, and sent them to him. There were no computers then, no Internet, no iTunes, just a doting sister with pen and paper, listening to the lyrics and transcribing them. We're still extremely close, and he is still my baby brother, whom I always try to impress and tease. Philippe is a successful businessman in Brussels, has two amazing daughters, Sarah and Kelly, and his wife, Greta, launched and runs DVF Belgium. Philippe and I talk on the phone every weekend and whenever I miss my parents, I call him.

I don't think my mother was half as hard on him as she'd been with me. He was a boy, after all, and we are much softer and less demanding toward boys in our family. It was I she related to, the daughter she was determined would survive whatever life threw at her. As I grew older, I understood. Independence and freedom were key to her because she had lost both. Self-reliance had kept her alive.

My mother was twenty and engaged to my father in 1944 when the Nazi SS arrested her on May 17 for working in the Belgian Resistance. She was living in a "safe house" and her job was to go around Brussels on her bicycle to deliver documents and fake papers to those who needed them. Immediately after her arrest, she was thrown onto a crowded truck, which took her and many other suspected saboteurs to a prison in Malines, Flanders, a city twenty-five kilometers from Brussels. To avoid being tortured into giving information about others in the resistance, she said she knew nothing and that she was hiding in the safe house because she was Jewish. The woman who was interrogating her advised her not to say she was Jewish. She ignored it and was deported on the twenty-fifth transport, which left Malines on May 19, 1944. She was sent to Auschwitz and given prisoner number 5199.

My mother often told me how she'd written her parents a note on a scrap of paper and dropped it from the truck onto the street. She hoped but had no idea whether anyone ever picked it up and delivered it. It wasn't until after her death that I found out that the message had been delivered. I'd loaned the house she'd owned on Harbour Island in the Bahamas to my first cousin Salvator. Salvator left me a thick envelope full of family photographs, in the midst of which was a sealed envelope marked "Lily, 1944." Inside was a piece of torn paper with faint handwriting. I stared at it until I finally made out the words:

Dear Mommy and Daddy,

I am writing to tell you that your little Lily is leaving. Where, she does not know, but God is everywhere isn't he? So she will never be alone or unhappy.

I want you both to be courageous, and not forget that you have to be in good health for my wedding. I am counting more than ever in having a beautiful ceremony.

I want you to know that I am leaving with a smile, I promise. I love you very very much and will soon kiss you more than ever.

Your little daughter,

Lily

I couldn't breathe. Could I be holding the actual note my mother had told me she had written to her parents on that truck, using a burnt match for a pencil? On the other side of the note was a plea for anybody finding the piece of paper to please deliver it to her parents' address. Somebody had found it and delivered it to her parents and my aunt Juliette, Salvator's mother, had kept it in a sealed envelope all these years!

I was in shock; I'd only half-believed her story of the note. All these stories about her arrest and deportation seemed surreal, more like a movie script, and yet they were true. She had always told me that she was more worried about her parents than herself. I held the proof in my shaky hands.

I walked out of the house in a daze and across the beach into the clear blue water. "This explains who I am," I said out loud to myself. "I am the daughter of a woman who went to the concentration camps with a smile."

The sayings she had drummed into me as a child and which had sometimes annoyed me took on whole new meanings. She had often illustrated one of her favorites—"you never really know what is good for you; what may seem the absolute worst thing to happen to you can, in fact, be the best"—by her story of the inhuman train ride to Auschwitz and her arrival.

No food. No water. No air. No toilet. Four days jammed in a cattle car. An "older woman" in her forties who spoke a little German comforted my mother and gave her a sense of protection. My mother made sure never to leave her side, especially when they arrived at Auschwitz and were unloaded onto a ramp. Women with children were immediately separated from the rest and sent toward long, low buildings while the others were forced into a long line. At the head of the line, a soldier directed the prisoners into two groups. Looking on, from the top of the ramp, was an officer in white.

When it came her turn, the older woman was directed to the group being formed on the left and my mother quickly followed her. The soldier did not stop her, but the white-coated officer, who had not interfered until then, did. Striding down the ramp, he walked directly to my mother, yanked her away from her friend, and threw her into the group on the right. My mother always said that she'd never felt such sheer hatred for anyone as she felt for that man.

That man was Dr. Josef Mengele, she found out later, the notorious Angel of Death, who killed or mutilated many, many prisoners in medical experiments, especially children and twins. Why did he go through the trouble of saving her? Did she remind him of someone he cared about? However evil or not his intentions were, he saved her life. The group the older woman was assigned to went directly to the gas chamber. The group my mother was thrust into did not.

I always use that story when I want to console anyone, just as my mother told it so often to me: You never know how something that seems the worst thing turns out to be the best.

After that, she was determined to survive, no matter the horror. Even when the unmistakable smell of the smoke coming from the camp crematorium seemed unbearable and her fellow prisoners would say “We're all going to die,” my mother would insist: “No, we're not. We're going to live.” Fear was not an option.

Nearly one million Jews were murdered at Auschwitz, many in the gas chamber. Others were executed, or killed in Dr. Mengele's experiments, or died from starvation and exhaustion from slave labor. My mother was fortunate, if anyone could have been considered fortunate in those unimaginably cruel surroundings. She was put to work on the twelve-hour night shift in the nearby weapons factory making bullets; so long as she worked she was useful and was kept alive. She was tiny, barely five feet tall, and naturally slender. She had never eaten much and could exist, albeit barely, on the miniscule rations of bread and watery soup she and other prisoners were given. Heavier prisoners, radically deprived of anything close to the amount of food they were used to, she told me, were the first to succumb to starvation.

If ever I think I'm too lazy to do a necessary chore, if I hesitate to go out because of the cold or complain about having to wait in line, I remember my mother. I envision her being marched out of Auschwitz with sixty thousand others in the winter of 1945, just nine days before the Soviet troops reached the camp. The SS hastily executed thousands of inmates and marched the others fifty kilometers through the snow to a train depot where they were stuffed into freight cars and sent to Ravensbrück in the north, and from there force-marched again to their new camps, in my mother's case to Neustadt-Glewe in Germany. Some fifteen thousand prisoners died on that Death March, of exposure, exhaustion, illness, or being shot by the SS for falling or lagging behind.

In what can only be described as a miracle, my tiny mother survived it all. She was one of the 1,244 who survived the camps out of the 25,631 Belgian Jews who were deported. Her will and spirit to live were her defiance of the evil she had endured, a declaration of her future. When Neustadt-Glewe was liberated a few months later by the Russians, followed closely by the Americans, my mother's weight was barely the weight of her bones.

She was hospitalized at an American base and wasn't expected to live. She defied the odds again. When she was stable enough to return home to Belgium she had to fill out a form, as did all survivors returning to their countries. I found that form. It had her name and date of birth on it and a question: “in what condition” she was returning from her thirteen months in captivity. Her astonishing answer was, in impeccable handwriting: “en très bonne santé” (“in very good health”).

My father, Leon Halfin, was very different from my mother. Where she was strict and somewhat distant, he was relaxed and affectionate. In his eyes I could do no wrong and he loved me unconditionally. As a child I loved him much more than my demanding mother, though maybe I respected her a little more. When I needed to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, I would call for my father and that made him laugh. “Why do you call me and not your mother?” he’d ask. And I would reply: “Because I don’t want to disturb her.”

My father never scolded me. He simply adored me and I adored him. I was as affectionate toward him as he was to me. I loved to sit on his lap, covering him with kisses and drinking all of his after-dinner lemon tea. To my father I was the most beautiful thing in the world and I felt entitled to his love and devotion.

My father and I looked alike and we had the same kind of relentless energy. He loved American cars, and when I was nine or ten he would often take me for a drive in his beautiful, sky-blue and navy American Chevrolet Impala convertible, a bicolor combination that was very popular in the late fifties. In that era, before seat belts were common, I would kneel on the front seat instead of sitting, because I thought that that would make people think I was a grown-up. I always, always wanted to be older than my age. I never wanted to be a little girl. I wanted to be a woman, a sophisticated woman, a glamorous woman. I wanted to be important.

My father, unknowingly, hastened that wish. When he came to say good night to me and kiss me in my bed, he was often cautioned by my mother. “Be careful, don’t wake up her senses,” she’d say. My father used to think my mother’s warning was hysterically funny. How could he, a man, wake up the senses of a little girl? Looking back now, however, no matter how funny he thought it was, he did wake up my senses. My father made me feel like a woman, so my mother was clever actually to say that.

The feelings were not sexual. It was the awareness that he was a man and that my relationship with him was therefore different from one I’d have with a woman. How lucky I was that this first man in my life loved me uncritically, unguardedly, without judging. I did not have to work for his love, I did not have to please him; his approval required no effort. That made an important impact on my life, and though I didn’t know it then, I now know it has made my relationships with men much easier. What I owe my father, and what I am so thankful for, is how comfortable I always feel with men. He gave me confidence.

That first love and affection marks the way I presume men feel toward me. I simply take their fondness for granted, neither expecting nor looking for it. The biggest gift my father gave me was not to be needy. I had so much love from him that I didn’t really need any more. In fact, I sometimes had to push it away because his display of affection in front of people embarrassed me.

My father was a successful businessman, a distributor of General Electric electronic tubes and semiconductors. He did well, so we lived very comfortably.

My parents were a striking couple. My father was very good-looking with high cheekbones and a mischievous smile. My mother had an elegant build and beautiful legs. She dressed very well and had a lot of allure. She was very much the boss of the house and I always saw her as the brains of the family. As much as I adored my father it was to her I went for advice.

She was not a traditional housewife, and only on Sundays, the housekeeper’s day off, did I occasionally see her in the kitchen. She would make a delicious grilled chicken with crispy potatoes and my father would bring pastries for dessert. My favorite petit gâteau was called a Merveilleux and was made of meringue, chocolate, and whipped cream. We were, after all, in Belgium, the land of chocolate. In fact, most of what my mother did at home was to instruct everyone else, but she did it very well. Our apartment was beautifully decorated, full of antiques she had collected. I have a clear memory of her looking for and finally finding the Empire chandelier she so desired. It now illuminates my Mayfair shop in London.

Since my mother died, my father having died six years before, I have searched for clues in my parents' lives as to what formed them and why I am who I am. That quest has taken me to Eastern Europe and the city of Kishinev, then the capital of Bessarabia, now the capital of Moldova, where my father was born in 1912, and to Salonika, Greece, where my mother was born in 1922.

Both my parents' families were in the textile business. My father's father, a wealthy Russian merchant whose relatives included many intellectuals and artists—one relative, Lewis Milestone, directed the 1930 Academy Award–winning war film All Quiet on the Western Front—owned several fabric stores in Kishinev. My mother's father, Moshe Nahmias, a Sephardic Jew (a Jew of Spanish origin), moved his family from Salonika to Brussels when my mother was seven and ran La Maison Dorée, the large department store owned by his brother-in-law, Simon Haim. My maternal grandmother's sister, my great-aunt Line, was married to the wealthy Simon Haim and had urged her sister to join her in Brussels with her family. So, although I had never made the connection before, I do indeed have a legacy of the fashion and retail business from both sides of my family.

There is nothing I could find in my mother's childhood that would give her the unimaginable strength to survive the death camps. As far as I could tell, she had a pleasant, uneventful young life in Brussels, rather spoiled as the youngest of three girls in the family. The only challenge for her and her two older sisters, who had gone to an Italian school in Greece, was to become more fluent in French when they moved to Brussels so they could do well at school. My maternal grandparents, who spoke Ladino, the language of the Sephardic Jews, at home, changed the birthdates of the girls when the family arrived in Brussels, passing them off as two years younger so they would have more time to adapt, learn French, and be successful at school. My mother went to the Lycée Dachsbeck, the same school I went to years later, and we even had the same kindergarten teacher and the same headmistress, Mademoiselle Gilette. I found out recently that Mlle. Gilette had ignored the racial laws of the Nazi occupation and allowed my mother to graduate from high school. It is probably why she chose me to blow out the candles on the cake at the school's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1952; I was the daughter of an alumna who went to the death camps and survived.

My father arrived in Brussels two years after my mother and her family moved to Belgium. He was seventeen in 1929 and was planning to follow in his brother's footsteps and train to be a textile engineer, when something went very wrong in Kishinev. My grandfather's business went bankrupt, which actually killed him, and my grandmother was no longer able to send money to my future father. He stopped studying, although I am not sure he ever officially entered school in Belgium, and went to work, taking any job he could find. He had no plan to go back home and enjoyed his freedom as a young, good-looking man even though his life as a refugee was not always easy.

It was the war that brought my parents together. When Germany invaded and occupied Belgium in 1940, many people fled south in what was called L'Exode. Thousands of cars jammed the roads escaping from the occupation. My father and his best friend, Fima, drove south to France and settled, temporarily, in a small hotel in Toulouse. They were young and very handsome and even though it was wartime and the situation was serious, they laughed a lot and had many women along the way. My mother also arrived in Toulouse with her aunt Line and uncle Simon. They made the trip rather regally in a Cadillac with a driver.

Fima had money but my father did not. He hated being dependent on his friend, so every morning he went around on a bicycle looking for the jobs that had been posted, but in every place he arrived, the job had been taken. "Try the train station," a sympathetic would-have-been employer suggested. There he met a man named Jean who began the sequence of events that would draw my mother and father together.

“I know someone who needs to go back to Belgium and has to sell a very large amount of dollars because Belgium won’t allow anyone to bring in foreign currency,” Jean told him. “Do you know anyone who wants to buy dollars? He paid thirty-four French francs for them and is willing to sell at thirty-three.” My father certainly didn’t know anyone who wanted to buy dollars, so he paid little attention. A few days later, completely by accident, he met another man called Maurice who had a friend looking to buy dollars and was willing to pay a rate of seventy-six French francs for them.

My father couldn’t believe his ears. Was he understanding right? Jean had a seller at thirty-three and Maurice had a buyer at seventy-six. So much profit could be made with the difference. The problem was that my father had no idea how to find Jean. He didn’t know his last name or where he lived, so he raced around Toulouse on his bicycle for three days and three nights, looking for him. On the fourth day, my father went to the cinema and, realizing he had left his newspaper when he came out of the theater, went back for it—and bumped into Jean!

It took days to smooth out the many complications and finalize the transaction, because the sum was very large and my father had to prove he could deliver the money. He had to borrow some from his friend Fima to do a small sample transaction first, to prove he was trustworthy and, after a few days, completed the whole exchange. Overnight he went from having no money at all to actually being rich. In his diary my father recalls feeling so ashamed of his worn-out suit during the transaction that the day it was completed he bought three suits, six shirts, and two pairs of shoes. His good fortune didn’t end there. As fate would have it, the man who was buying the dollars turned out to be my mother’s uncle Simon. And that is how my parents met.

Theirs was not an immediate romance. Leon Halfin was twenty-nine, ten years older than my mother, and very interested in being a ladies’ man. But Lily was a Jewish girl, and as far as he was concerned, you didn’t touch Jewish girls—you married them.

The news from Belgium was that things weren’t so bad under the German occupation, and in October 1941, my parents returned separately to Belgium. My mother couldn’t go to university because of the racial laws, so she went to fashion school, studied millinery, and learned how to make hats. My father, who now had a lot of money, did not go back to Tungsram, the electronics company he had worked for, but became an independent businessman in the radio field in Brussels. They saw each other at gatherings of older relatives and family friends, but my father always treated my mother like a little girl, teasing her and pinching her cheeks. There was no romance although they clearly liked each other. Leon didn’t know my mother had a secret crush on him.

It wasn’t until the summer of 1942, when the SS started rounding up Jews in Belgium and deporting them that the danger began in earnest. Lucie, my father’s very good friend and ex-colleague at Tungsram, advised him to get out of Belgium and flee to Switzerland. He bought fake papers from the Belgian underground and began to plan his escape under the assumed and typical Belgian name of Leon Desmedt. He did not go alone. Lucie arranged for Gaston Buyne, a nineteen-year-old Christian boy to accompany him through France to the Swiss border. In a surprising turn of events, they were joined by Renée, a nineteen-year-old girl my father had just met. She was a Belgian Catholic girl who had fallen in love with my father and wanted to run away with him. Her mother had recently died and she didn’t like the woman her father had taken up with. That was the unlikely trio who set out together on August 6, 1942.

The train ride to Nancy, where they would transfer to another train to Belfort, was very dangerous. Gaston, a Belgian with legal papers, carried a lot of Leon’s money—banknotes in his shoulder pads, gold coins in his shoes and socks, and more Swiss notes in his toiletry bag. Because Gaston looked Jewish, much more so than Leon, he turned out to be the perfect foil. There were many, many checkpoints at which the German SS would randomly order male passengers to pull down their trousers to check whether they were circumcised. Gaston was ordered to drop his pants. “Sorry,” the SS man apologized to him, and didn’t bother with my father who was sitting next to him.

They arrived in Nancy at night and checked into a hotel. The train to Belfort left at 5:15 a.m. and they had another run-in on board with a young SS soldier who wanted both Gaston and Leon to drop their pants. This time it was Renée who saved Leon by smiling coquettishly at the young soldier until he moved on to other passengers.

Belfort was even more dangerous. There were many, many Jewish refugees checking into the same hotel, but my father’s fake ID saved him. The German SS raided the hotel that night and arrested all the Jews, but not Leon Desmedt. (My father’s diary records that he made love to Renée twice that night.) Later they heard that all the people arrested that night were killed.

Leon and Renée parted ways with Gaston the next morning as they approached the Swiss border. They took a bus to Hérimoncourt, at which point Leon hired a local guide to lead them through the mountains and pastures into Switzerland just six kilometers away. That last leg of the escape cost fifteen hundred French francs with no guarantee of success. A few more refugees joined in as they met the guide at five a.m., among them a woman with a baby. She gave the baby a sleeping pill so he wouldn’t cry, and they set out on foot through the alpine mountains to the border. “Run, run, run in that direction,” the guide pointed and sent them off on their own. I remember my father telling me that it was the cows and their noisy bells that made their escape possible. By following the bells, Leon and Renée arrived at the Swiss border town of Damvant on August 8, 1942.

“Why do you carry so much money?” the border police asked my father. He told them that he was an industrialist from Belgium, but the police did not believe his story. “Your papers are fake,” they said. They confiscated his money but did allow him to enter Switzerland. “You can claim it back when you leave,” the police told him.

My father was very lucky. Although he remained under surveillance by the Swiss authorities, and was unable to travel freely or have access to his money without going through long bureaucratic requests, he spent a few fairly pleasant years there. He separated from Renée, who eloped with a policeman soon after their arrival, and began to miss Lily, the vivacious “little” girl he’d left behind in Belgium. The occupation of Brussels had become very severe and he was worried about her. Lily and her parents had to abandon their apartment and live separately. She was hiding in a resistance house where she worked. My aunt Juliette sent her son, my cousin Salvator, to live with his Christian Belgian nanny.

Curious Lily went to her family’s apartment one day and discovered that the SS had ransacked it and stolen all their belongings. She also discovered something that would change her life. There was a letter in the mailbox, an unexpected letter from Switzerland, from Leon, the man she had met in Toulouse and never forgotten. After reading and rereading it many times, she responded. It started a daily correspondence between them, carefully crafted because all the letters had to go through censors as the wide blue stripe across the stationery indicated. I am lucky to possess those letters, which, over time, became more and more intimate and passionate. They wrote about their love and about the moment they would meet again after the war, that they would marry, build a life together, have a family, and be happy forever. It was all about hope and love.

Then, suddenly, Lily’s letters stopped. (It was then, I recall my father telling me, that the mirror in his bedroom, on which he had taped a photo of my mother, fell and broke.)

He wrote to her again and again, begging in vain for an answer. On July 15, two months after my mother’s arrest, he received a letter from Juliette, my mother’s older sister, written in code to get through the censors.

“Dear Leon,” she wrote. “I have very bad news. Lily has been hospitalized.”

When my mother returned from Germany in June 1945, my father was still in Switzerland. By the time he came back to Brussels four months later, she had gained back much of the weight she had lost, but she wasn’t the same naïve, mischievous, fun-loving, passionate girl he had been corresponding with and planned to marry. That girl was gone forever. This new young woman had endured true horrors and would carry the wounds forever.

In his diary, my father wrote with great honesty about their reunion. He admitted that he barely recognized the girl he had been separated from for more than two years. She was different, a stranger to him. Lily sensed his unease and told him he was under no obligation to marry her. The love was still there, he reassured her as he hid his doubts away. They were married on November 29, 1945.

The doctor warned them, “No matter what, you have to wait a few years before having a baby. Lily isn’t strong enough for childbirth and the baby may not be healthy.” Six months later, I was accidentally conceived. Remembering the doctor’s warning, both my mother and father were concerned. They thought they could get rid of the pregnancy by taking long rides on his motorcycle over the cobblestoned streets, but it didn’t work. Finally one morning my father brought home some pills to induce a miscarriage. My mother threw those pills out the window.

I was born healthy and strong in Brussels on New Year’s Eve, December 31, 1946, a miracle. Because of the price my mother paid for that miracle, I never felt I had the right to question her, complain, or make her life more difficult. I was always a very, very good little grown-up girl, and for some reason felt it was my role to protect her. In his diaries, my father confesses that at first he was disappointed that I was not a boy, but within a few days he had totally accepted me and fallen in love with my mother again.

I have long suspected that if I hadn’t been born, my mother might have killed herself. If nothing else, my existence gave her a focus and a reason to keep going. For all the strength and determination of her personality, she was extremely fragile. She hid it very well, and when people were around she was always light and fun. But when she was alone, she was often overtaken by uncontrollable sadness. When I came home from school in the afternoons, I would sometimes find her sitting in her darkened bedroom, weeping. Other times, when she picked me up from school, she’d take me to have a patisserie, or antiques shopping, laughing with me and giving no hint of her painful memories.

The people who went to the camps didn’t want to talk about it and the people who weren’t in the camps didn’t want to hear about it, so I sensed she often felt like a stranger or an alien. When she did talk about it to me, she would only emphasize the good—the friendships, the laughter, the will to go back home and the dream of a plate of spaghetti. If I asked her how she endured, she would joke and say, “Imagine it is raining and you run in between the drops!” She always told me to trust the goodness of people. She wanted to protect me, but I realized that it is also how she protected herself . . . denying the bad . . . always denying the bad and demanding that the good forces win and, no matter what, never appearing a victim.

She did the best she could to put the war behind her. She had the two sets of tattooed numbers removed. And in a wonderful gesture of defiance, and to override her memory of the bitter cold she'd endured, she bought a very expensive, warm sable coat with the restitution money she got from the German government.

I spent a lot of time alone as a child, reading and imagining a grand life for myself. My childhood went smoothly, though life in Brussels was often gray and boring. I loved my big school, I loved my books, and I was a very good student. I loved my brother and my girlfriends, Mireille Dutry and Myriam Wittamer, whose parents owned the best patisserie in Brussels. On the weekends, our family spent Sundays in the country at my great-great-aunt and -uncle's villa. They had a beautiful house on the edge of a large forest, the Forêt de Soignes. I loved walking in the woods, picking chestnuts in the winters and berries in the summers. My father would play cards with the men and my mother gossiped with the women. We ate a lot of good food. On the long, gray days, I lost myself reading Stendhal, Maupassant, Zola, and, on a lighter note, my favorite, The Adventures of Tintin, comic books about a daring young boy reporter created by the Belgian cartoonist Hergé. I lived vicariously through Tintin's travels and exploits. Would I ever discover all these exotic places in the world? It seemed like nothing would ever happen to me.

When I had a few days off from school and my parents could not travel, I would often visit my aunt Mathilde in Paris. She had an elegant boutique off the Faubourg Saint-Honoré catering to a loyal, international clientele. She sold printed cashmere sweaters and jersey dresses and suits. I would spend entire days in the shop. My job was to fold the clothes and put them back in order. It was my first encounter with fashion, retail, and the secret virtues of jersey fabrics.

In Paris, I also visited my cousins, Eliane and Nadia Neiman, the two daughters of my father's rich cousin Abraham, who had invented the theft alarm for cars. The girls spoke perfect Russian, gave piano recitals, and were very sophisticated. I felt terribly awkward and provincial when I visited them for tea or lunch at their villa in Neuilly. During the summers, my brother and I would go to summer camp near Montreux in the Swiss Alps or in the North Sea resort of Le Coq-sur-Mer in Belgium. We would also go on trips with my parents and my aunts and uncles to the South of France or the Swiss mountains.

My parents were a good-looking couple, and they loved each other very much, but my father wasn't as sensitive around my mother as he should have been. He didn't want to acknowledge her wounds, so he ignored them. He was a hardworking, generous man, but he could be indifferent and sometimes verbally harsh. I don't think he had any real love affairs after he married my mother. He traveled frequently on business, and I am sure he did not always spend his nights alone, but that was not the problem between my parents. It was his insensitivity toward her that made her feel vulnerable. So the scene was set for what came next. And what came next was a man named Hans Muller.

The letter, addressed to my mother, was on the table in our front hall that day when I came back from school. For reasons that I still cannot fathom, I opened the blue envelope with the very clear handwriting. It was from someone named Hans Muller, who, I realized as I read, was a friend of hers. I did not know who this Hans was and I do not recall what the letter said, but I remember that my heart started to beat fast. I felt something major had happened, something that would change all of our lives, and that something was Hans. Knowing I had done something wrong, I carefully put the letter back in the blue envelope and left it on the table, but the damage was done. My mother came home, saw the envelope, and I confessed I'd opened it. I had never seen her so upset and angry. Though I was twelve at the time, she reacted in a very violent way, slapping me across the face with all her strength. I was desperate, I was in pain, I was ashamed. Whatever had come upon me to open that letter?

My face was only a little bruised the next day when I went to class, but my insides were crushed. I had disappointed my mother. I had betrayed her trust. We never discussed it again and I am not sure what she told my father that night when he came home. Was he home anyway or was he traveling? I don't remember. I felt terrible, and to this day I have never again opened a letter or looked at a document or an email that was not addressed to me.

The following year, over my father's objections but to my own excitement, my mother sent me to Pensionnat Cuche, a private boarding school by the Lake Sauvabelin in Lausanne, Switzerland. It did not escape me that Lausanne is very close to Geneva, where Mr. Muller lived.

During the two wonderful years I spent at that school, living my own life, making many friends, and for the first time relishing my independence from my parents, I pieced together the story of my mother and Hans Muller. My father traveled a lot for his business, often taking my mother with him. When the travel entailed planes, they flew separately as insurance for my brother and me in case anything happened.

Hans Muller was my mother's seatmate on one of those trips, a long flight from Brussels to New York. He was a very handsome young Swiss German businessman who worked in the fruit business. Separated from his wife, he lived with his small son, Martin, who was the same age as my brother, Philippe. Monsieur Muller was polite and considerate, a stark contrast to my father, whose manners could be coarse and who sometimes belittled my mother in public. Hans was quite a bit younger than my mother and very taken with her. He would tell me, over the years, that he had never met a woman so attractive, interesting, and intelligent. They developed a friendship, which eventually led to a secret love affair and later to a long relationship.

I was not happy when my father insisted I be brought back to Brussels after my two years at boarding school in Switzerland. There I was, stuck at home again, and not a pleasant home at all. My mother and my father argued all the time and there was a lot of tension. I was relieved when they decided to officially separate. I think they both expected me to be upset that the family was splitting up. I wasn't, but I felt sad for my little brother. He was only nine and my parents would continue to fight over him for years after their separation and divorce.

As for me, I was fifteen in 1962. I felt grown up and secure, eager for whatever change lay ahead. Never once did I make my mother feel guilty about leaving my father, but instead I encouraged her and supported her completely. What she wanted, I'm convinced, was her freedom and independence after sixteen years of marriage, and I felt she deserved it. Was Hans an excuse or the reason? I never knew for sure. "Go on," I said. In turn, she would never make me feel guilty about anything either. When, years later, I told her I was leaving my husband, Egon, her response was "All right" and that was the end of it.

My father was devastated when my mother left him. His whole life revolved around his work and his family. I was not very sympathetic. Though I looked exactly like him and I loved him so very much, it was my mother I identified with. She wanted to move on, to experience life, to travel, learn, grow, expand her horizons, meet people, live her life. I understood it.

And so my parents parted and my childhood ended. One door closed, many others opened. I went on to another boarding school, this one in England, for two years and later to the University of Madrid in Spain. My mother lived with Hans for the next twenty years before separating from him, too. And I, with my mother as my role model, started to become the woman I wanted to be.

If anyone had the right to be bitter, my mother did, but never, ever did I hear her express any bitterness. She looked for the good in everything and everyone.

I’m often asked what was the worst thing that ever happened to me, what were my biggest challenges. I find it difficult to answer because I have this habit I inherited from my mother that somehow transforms what’s bad into something good, so in the end, I don’t remember what was bad. When I have an obstacle in front of me, especially of someone else’s making, I say “OK. I don’t like it, but I can’t change it, so let’s find a way around it.” Then I find a different path to a solution, which so satisfies me that I forget what the problem was in the first place. Of all the lessons my mother drummed into me, that was perhaps the most important. How could you possibly better yourself if you didn’t face your challenges up front or if you laid your problems off on someone or something else and didn’t learn from them? I offer that lesson often in my talks to young women. “Don’t blame your parents, don’t blame your boyfriend, don’t blame the weather. Accept the reality, embrace the challenge, and deal with it. Be in charge of your own life. Turn negatives into positives and be proud to be a woman.”

It doesn’t happen overnight, of course, and I never stopped learning from my mother. Over and over, she reinforced the lessons she’d taught me as a child.

When I was in my thirties, I suddenly developed a fear of flying, but when I told her I was afraid, she looked at me, smiling, and said, “Tell me, what does it mean to be afraid?” When once I was conflicted about starting a new business, she said, “Don’t be ridiculous. You know how to do it.” When I was diagnosed with cancer at forty-seven, predictably she told me not to worry, that I had nothing to fear. I wanted to believe her, but I had my doubts. Because she never showed any sign even in private that she was afraid, I wasn’t either. When my treatment was all done, she collapsed, and I realized that she had, in fact, been afraid for me, but by never showing it to me, she had made me strong and trusting that I would be fine.

After Egon and I married in 1969, she spent several months each year living with us in New York and formed close, loving relationships with my children, Alexandre and Tatiana. Her relationship with them was very different from the relationship she had had with me. She had never been very affectionate to me and there had always been a distance between us. As a result, I was reserved around her and never told her my intimate thoughts, except in letters. It was much easier for me to open up in letters, and I think easier for her, too. In her letters to me at boarding school in Switzerland and then in England, she would often call me her “pride,” but actually she never told me that to my face until much, much later when she was about to die.

She was much more open with my daughter as a grandmother and my daughter was more open with her than with me. They had an amazing complicity and spent hours together on her bed, telling each other stories. Tatiana became an excellent storyteller and filmmaker.

My mother was superb at handling money. She had taken half my father’s assets with her when she left him and invested them so well that she was, in her later years, able to feel secure and buy herself a beautiful house on the beach in Harbour Island, Bahamas. Had she been born at a different time and under different circumstances, she would have made a sought-after investment banker.

My son, Alexandre, benefited greatly from her financial skills. She taught him what stocks and bonds were, what kinds of companies were good investments, and about yields and dividends. Every afternoon when he came home from school, the two of them studied the stock market pages in the afternoon edition of the New York Post so he could see which stocks were going up and which down. When he was six or seven, my new boyfriend, Barry Diller, wanted to give him one share of stock for his birthday and told him he could choose which one. “Choose the most expensive,” my mother advised him. Alexandre chose IBM.

There is no doubt the financial education she gave him turned him into the financier he is today. He manages the family money, sits on prestigious boards, and has proven to be a superb adviser to all of us.

My mother was my rock. For all that I thought I'd conquered my fear of flying, I remember a very scary, bumpy flight to Harbour Island with her and Alexandre when she had just gotten out of the hospital. When the plane dropped suddenly and made loud creaking noises, I closed my eyes and thought, "OK, I am afraid. Where do I go for strength? Do I take the hand of my big, strong son or of my weak, dying mother?" And there was no question that I would go to my mother for strength. I put my hand over hers.

At about the same time as that plane trip, I remember being anxious when my daughter, Tatiana, was about to give birth. It's one thing when your son has a child, but for some reason, when your daughter has a child, you feel it in your own flesh. It is physical agony. I was frightened for my little girl, thinking of all the things that could go wrong. I called my mother, in tears, while driving to the hospital. She was very frail, but she summoned the strength to make me strong, though happily it turned out I didn't need it. Antonia was born without any complication and Tatiana was fine. In yet another testament to her strength, my mother clung to life so that she could see Tatiana's baby. Though her body was almost nonexistent, her mind and her will were strong. So many times in her life she was ill and on the verge of dying, but her incredible strength and determination kept her alive.

We had already welcomed her first great-grandchild, Talita, the daughter of Alexandre and his then wife, Alexandra Miller, and just as intense in my memory is the astonishing day when Alexandre brought the one-year-old Talita in her carriage to visit me and my mother in the Carlyle hotel in New York. It was Mother's Day and Alexandre gallantly brought each of us a bouquet of flowers. All our eyes were on the adorable little girl who pulled herself upright, clinging to a chair, then suddenly launched off on her own and took her first steps! We all clapped and praised her, but then something unbelievable took place. I was watching my old mother, wrinkled and sick in her chair, looking at this little girl on the floor and that little girl looking back at her, when suddenly I saw a flash of something white, almost like lightning coming out of my mother and going into Talita. I believe that that day my mother's energy and spirit transferred to my granddaughter. I saw it happen, that white flash going from my mother into Talita. I saw it.

My mother did not die peacefully. I think she was reliving the horrors of the camps and fighting giving in to death, as she had in Auschwitz. It was not the first time she'd relived those horrors. As much as she had tried to bury the past and concentrate on looking forward to life, she had had a breakdown twenty years before during a visit to Germany with Hans and some clients of his. My heart had nearly stopped when Hans called me in New York to tell me he'd woken up that morning in the hotel to find my mother missing. He'd finally found her hiding in the lobby of the hotel, underneath the concierge's desk, disoriented, speaking loudly and making little sense. "Why? What happened?" I'd asked him, in a panic myself. He thought it must have been the dinner they'd had the night before with his clients at a restaurant. It was very hot and the people at the tables around her were speaking loudly in German. I suspected that she and Hans had also had a fight, but whatever the reason, she'd completely come apart.

Hans thought she might snap out of it if I talked to her and I tried to talk calmly to her over the phone, but all she could do was babble nonsensically. Hans drove her back to Switzerland and put her in the psychiatric ward of the hospital and we all flew to her side—my brother and I and even my father—but she remained very confused, laughing one minute, crying the next, raving and incoherent. She wouldn't eat and she wouldn't drink nor would she surrender the fur coat she insisted on wearing in her hospital bed. We thought we'd lost her. But she was a survivor through and through, and three weeks later she was well enough to leave the hospital to convalesce in a clinic. She was a miracle once again, coming back to life from far away.

In her final illness in 2000, even though lovingly cared for by Lorna, her nurse, she no longer had the strength to fight off death or the demons that had always haunted her.

My brother, Philippe, and I buried her in Brussels, beside our father. She knew there was a spot for her there, and was happy about it. They had been each other's big loves in life, even though they separated, and it was appropriate that they end up together. We had our father's headstone engraved: "Thank you for your love," and our mother's: "Thank you for your strength."

The Mullers did not come to the service. Hans had married after they separated and in our agitation after my mother's death, we did not manage to reach his son, Martin, in time for the funeral . . . I feel very bad about that because Martin had remained very close to her; I love him and Lily was a mother to him.

"Today, we're taking Lily, my mother, for her eternal rest," I wrote to her friends and my friends who couldn't be there. "Our hearts are heavy but they should also be light because she has been liberated from all pain and has left on her eternal adventure surrounded by so much love.

"Fifty-five years almost to the day, Lily was liberated from the death camps. Twenty-two years old and less than 28 kilos. In that little package of bones, there was a flame, a flame that was life. Doctors forbade her to have children, she had two. She taught them everything, how to see, question, learn, understand and more important, never to be afraid.

"She touched all the ones that she met, listened to their problems, brought solutions and inspired them to find joie de vivre again. She looked so frail and fragile but she was strong and courageous, always curious to discover new horizons. She lived fully and will continue to do so through her children, her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren and her friends who loved her so."

I signed the letter from all of us—"Diane, Philippe, Alexandre, Tatiana, Sarah, Kelly, Talita, and Antonia." (My grandsons Tassilo and Leon were not born yet.)

I found a sweet note among many others my mother had written to herself, had it printed with an embossed lily of the valley because it was her favorite flower, and included it with what I had written.

"God gave me life and luck with my life," she'd written. "During my life, I've kept my luck all along. I have felt it like a shadow. It follows me everywhere and so I take it wherever I go, saying, 'Thank you, my luck. Thank you, my life. Thank you. Thank you.'?"

THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG PDF

Download: THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG PDF

The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg Exactly how can you alter your mind to be a lot more open? There several resources that could assist you to enhance your thoughts. It can be from the various other encounters and also tale from some people. Book The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg is among the relied on sources to obtain. You could locate numerous books that we share right here in this web site. As well as now, we reveal you one of the most effective, the The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg

Yet, just what's your issue not as well liked reading *The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg* It is a wonderful activity that will constantly provide wonderful benefits. Why you end up being so unusual of it? Numerous points can be affordable why people do not prefer to read The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg It can be the dull tasks, guide The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg compilations to read, also careless to bring nooks almost everywhere. But now, for this The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg, you will certainly start to enjoy reading. Why? Do you know why? Read this page by completed.

Starting from seeing this website, you have actually attempted to begin loving checking out a book The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg This is specialized website that sell hundreds compilations of books The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg from whole lots resources. So, you won't be tired more to pick guide. Besides, if you likewise have no time to search the book The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg, merely rest when you're in office as well as open the web browser. You can locate this The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg inn this website by linking to the net.

THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG PDF

One of the most influential, admired, and colorful women of our time: fashion designer and philanthropist Diane von Furstenberg tells the most personal stories from her life, about family, love, beauty and business: “It’s so good, you’ll want to take notes” (People).

Diane von Furstenberg started with a suitcase full of jersey dresses and an idea of who she wanted to be—in her words, “the kind of woman who is independent and who doesn’t rely on a man to pay her bills.” She has since become that woman, establishing herself as a major force in the fashion industry, all the while raising a family, maintaining that “my children are my greatest creation.”

In The Woman I Wanted to Be, “an intriguing page-turner filled with revelations” (More), von Furstenberg reflects on her extraordinary life—from her childhood in Brussels to her days as a young, jet-set princess, to creating the dress that came to symbolize independence and power for generations of women. With remarkable honesty and wisdom, von Furstenberg mines the rich territory of what it means to be a woman. She opens up about her family and career, overcoming cancer, building a global brand, and devoting herself to empowering other women. This “inspiring, compelling, deliciously detailed celebrity autobiography…is as much of a smashing success as the determined, savvy, well-intentioned woman who wrote it” (Chicago Tribune).

- Sales Rank: #50332 in Books
- Published on: 2015-10-13
- Released on: 2015-10-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .90" w x 6.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

Review
“[a] warm, confiding memoir.” (VOGUE)

“It’s so good, you’ll want to take notes.” (PEOPLE)

“Diane’s book evokes everything she has lived through. It is honest, direct and fascinating — just like the author herself!” (Anna Wintour)

“In this era when girls are made to think it’s better to be a princess than a person, Diane von Furstenberg’s The Woman I Wanted to Be is just the reverse. I thank her for honesty, spirit, encouragement to be one’s own self in public and professional life, and a memoir that covers more human experience than most novels. Pick it up — you won’t put it down.” (Gloria Steinem)

“Diane von Furstenberg’s story offers a behind-the-scenes look into the ups and downs of building a global business, creating an enduring brand, and finding true love. By sharing the path that enabled her to become the woman she wanted to be, Diane shows all of us how to live a life of focus and passion.” (Sheryl Sandberg)

“Diane is the original modern princess who created the iconic wrap dress and has influenced fashion everywhere with her talent, lifestyle, elegance and beauty. Every girl will love reading her book.” (Kate Moss)

“It has been a gift to read this book, and a true privilege to learn and discover that much more about DVF. What a thrill to be given an opportunity to peek even further into her life.” (Sarah Jessica Parker)

“The legendary designer Diane von Furstenberg has a lot in common with her iconic wrap dress: practical yet sexy, demure yet revealing, sturdy yet fragile. This memoir is an intriguing page turner filled with her revelations about life, business, family and love. Fearless about naming names and probing her own failings, she analyses a ‘little fling’ with Richard Gere as sincerely as she does her midlife retreats from the fashion area—and her dynamic comeback. Her core philosophy? ‘Turn negatives into positives and be proud to be woman.’ She emerges, at 67, as a witty and reflective grownup, albeit one with plenty of surprises up her beautifully draped sleeve.” (MORE)

“. . . an honest an introspective look into the labyrinthine history behind one of the most iconic female entrepreneurs in fashion. Written in elegant yet straightforward prose . . . The designer candidly speaks of missteps and periods of her life which guided her away from what she truly wanted out of her life, and how she dealt with each situation, with grace and aplomb.” (Bustle.com)

“Diane von Furstenberg’s life combines the hallmarks of a fairy tale with the more sober reality of a career woman—and single mother—who longs to have it all. . . . The book is as charming and erratic as von Furstenberg herself . . . the early pages paint a vivid picture . . . her account of those first years is colorful and poignant.” (Finanacial Times)

“[N]ow I find Diane the super person that folks are most curious about. Diane never let herself fail at anything; or if she faltered, she climbed back up. It is a pleasure to read a ‘positive’ book that is not just manufactured nonsense . . . We get a real look at a woman in her 60s who's still in her prime. She has a lesson for all of us.” (Worcester Telegram)

“von Furstenberg’s candid memoir contains hard-earned wisdom that she eagerly shares with women of all ages and backgrounds. A fascinating read for anyone interested in the behind-the-scenes world of contemporary fashion.” (Booklist)

“In this captivating memoir, fashion powerhouse von Furstenberg thoughtfully reflects on her colorful life—and doesn’t skimp on the juicy details. Von Furstenberg begins movingly by writing of her need to please her mother . . . then moves on to her life as a jet-set princess and fledgling designing in New York City, her invention of the iconic jersey wrap dress in the early 1970s, and stories of her children . . . She outlines her many positive contributions to the fashion industry, but admirably doesn’t sugarcoat business missteps . . . This is a fascinating glimpse into the life of one of the fashion world’s more enduring stars that will fascinate fashionistas and fans of strong, creative women.” (Publishers Weekly)

“With humility and honesty, von Furstenberg's reflections on a life lived in the grandiose couture spotlight will delight both trendy, fashion-forward readers and budding designers eager to follow in her footsteps.”

(Kirkus Reviews)

“Designer Diane von Furstenberg’s life readslike a fairy tale. She details it all with sincerity and humility in thismemoir.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“No stranger to the spotlight DVF's most recent venture, a book entitled The Woman I Wanted to Be chronicles how privilege opened certain doors in her early success, how much is still needed to be done to achieve equality, an insight into the behind-the-scenes ups and downs of running a global business and a story that is in equal parts wisdom, sobering reality and fairy tale.” (Los Angeles Fashion)

“Designer Diane von Furstenberg’s life reads like a fairy tale. She details it all with sincerity and humility in this memoir.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“an inspiring, compelling, deliciously detailed celebrity autobiography, the book is as much of a smashing success as the determined, savvy, well-intentioned woman who wrote it.” (Chicago Tribune)

About the Author
Diane von Furstenberg entered the fashion world in 1970 and four years later introduced her famous wrap dress. Her luxury fashion brand, DVF, is now available in more than fifty-five countries all over the world. Director of the Diller-von Furstenberg Family Foundation, she is an active philanthropist and supporter of emerging female leaders and social entrepreneurs. In 2015, she was named one of the Time 100 Most Influential People. She is the author of The Woman I Wanted to Be and Diane: A Signature Life.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.
The Woman I Wanted to Be 1 ROOTS
There is a large frame on the bookshelf in my bedroom in New York. In it is a page torn from a German magazine of 1952. It is a photo of an elegant woman and her small daughter in the train station of Basel, Switzerland, waiting for the Orient Express. The little girl is nestled in her mother’s tented coat and is eating a brioche. That was the first time, at the age of five, that I had my photo in a magazine. It is a sweet picture. My mother’s older sister, Juliette, gave it to me when I was first married, but it is only recently that I realized its true importance.

On the surface, it is a photograph of a glamorous, apparently wealthy woman en route to a ski holiday with her curly-haired little girl. The woman is not looking into the camera, but there is a hint of a smile as she knows she is being photographed. Her appearance is elegant. Nothing would indicate that only a few years before, she was in another German-speaking railroad station coming back from the Nazi concentration camps where she had been a prisoner for thirteen months, a bunch of bones, close to death from starvation and exhaustion.

How did she feel when the photographer asked her name to be put in the magazine? Proud, I imagine, to be noticed for her style and elegance. Only seven years had passed. She was not a number anymore. She had a name; warm, beautiful, clean clothes; and most of all she had a daughter, a healthy little girl. “God has saved my life so that I can give you life,” she used to write me every New Year on my birthday. “By giving you life, you gave me my life back. You are my torch, my flag of freedom.”

My voice catches each time I speak publicly about my mother, and I do in every speech I make, aware that I wouldn’t be giving that speech if Lily Nahmias had not been my mother. Sometimes it feels odd that I always bring up her story, but somehow I am compelled to. It explains the child I was, the woman I became.

“I want to tell you the story of a young girl who, at twenty-two years old, weighed fifty-nine pounds, barely the weight of her bones," I say to a seminar at Harvard about girls' health. "The reason she weighed fifty-nine pounds is that she had just spent thirteen months in the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. It was a true miracle that that young girl didn't die, though she came very close. When she was liberated and returned to her family in Belgium, her mother fed her like a little bird, every fifteen minutes a tiny bit of food, and then a little bit more, making her feel as if she was being slowly blown up like a balloon. Within a few months her weight was close to normal."

There are always murmurs in the audience when I get to that point in my mother's story, perhaps because it is so shocking and unexpected or maybe because I am living history to a young audience that has heard only vaguely about Auschwitz. It must be hard to imagine the high-energy, healthy woman speaking to them having a mother who weighed fifty-nine pounds. Whatever it is, I want and need to honor my mother, her courage and her strength. It is what made me the woman she wanted me to be.

"God has saved my life so that I can give you life." Her words resonate with me every day of my life. I feel it is my duty to make up for all the suffering she endured, to always celebrate freedom and live fully. My birth was her triumph. She was not supposed to survive; I was not supposed to be born. We proved them wrong. We both won the day I was born.

I repeat a few of the lessons my mother drummed into me that have served me well. "Fear is not an option." "Don't dwell on the dark side of things, but look for the light and build around it. If one door closes, look for another one to open." "Never, ever, blame others for what befalls you, no matter how horrible it might be. Trust you, and only you, to be responsible for your own life." She lived those lessons. In spite of what she endured, she never wanted others to feel that she was a victim.

I didn't used to talk nearly as much about my mother. I took her for granted, as children do their mothers. It was not until she died in 2000 that I fully realized what an incredibly huge influence she had been on me and how much I owe her. Like any child, I hadn't paid much attention. "OK, OK, you told me that already," I'd brush her off, or even pretend not to hear. I bridled, too, at the unsolicited advice she persisted in giving my friends. In fact, it annoyed me. Now, of course, I feel I have had the experience and earned the wisdom to hand out my own unsolicited advice, and I press every lesson my mother taught me on my children, grandchildren, and anyone I talk to. I have become her.

I didn't know, as a very little girl in Brussels, why my mother had two lines of blue tattooed numbers on her left arm. I remember thinking they were some sort of decoration and wished I had them, too, so my arms wouldn't look so plain. I didn't understand why the housekeeper often told me not to bother her when she was lying down in her bedroom. I instinctively knew my mother needed her rest and I would tiptoe around the house so I wouldn't disturb her.

Sometimes I'd ignore the housekeeper's instructions and, gathering my beloved little picture books, I would sneak into her darkened room in the hope she would smile and read them to me. More often than not she did. She loved books and taught me to cherish them. She read my little picture books to me so many times I memorized them. One of my favorite things to do was to fake reading them, carefully turning the pages at the right time and showing off, pretending that I could read.

My mother was very strict. I never doubted that she loved me, but if I said something she didn't approve of or failed to live up to her expectations, she would give me a severe look or pinch me. I would be sent to the corner, my face to the wall. Sometimes I would go to the corner by myself, knowing I had done wrong. She spent a lot of time with me, sometimes playing, but mostly teaching me anything she could think of. She read me fairy tales and would tease me when I got scared. I remember how she amused herself by telling me that I was an abandoned child she had found in the garbage. I would cry until she took me in her arms, consoling me. She wanted me to be strong and not be afraid. She was very demanding. Before I had learned how to read, she had me memorize and recite the seventeenth-century fables of La Fontaine. As soon as I was old enough to write, she insisted I write stories and letters with perfect spelling and grammar. I remember how proud I was when she praised me.

To train me never to succumb to shyness, she made me give a speech at every family gathering, teaching me to be comfortable speaking in public no matter the audience. Like many children I was scared of the dark, but unlike most mothers, she shut me in a dark closet and waited outside so I would learn for myself that there was nothing to be afraid of. That was just one of the times she'd say "Fear is not an option."

My mother did not believe in coddling children too much or overprotecting them. She wanted me to be independent and responsible for myself. My earliest memories are of traveling with my parents and being left alone in the hotel room while they went out to dinner. I did not mind nor did I feel lonely. I was so proud that they trusted me to stay alone. I liked entertaining myself and feeling grown up. To this day, I have the same feeling and sense of freedom when I check into a hotel room alone.

When my parents allowed me to join them in a restaurant, my mother often encouraged me to get up and check out the room, and sometimes, even to go outside and report to her what I'd seen, who I had met. That instilled curiosity in me—watch what other people do, make friends with people I do not know. When I was nine, she sent me on the train from Brussels to Paris all by myself to visit her sister, my favorite aunt, Mathilde. I felt so proud to be responsible for myself. I think, deep down, I was a bit nervous, but I would never admit it and pride overcame the fear.

I still like to travel alone, and at times prefer it. Even on business trips, I don't like traveling with an entourage because it limits my freedom and reduces the fun of the unpredictable. I love the adventure, that feeling of excitement and satisfaction I had when I was a little girl. To be alone on the road, in an airport, with my bag, my passport, my credit cards, my phone, and a camera makes me feel so free and happy. I thank my mother for always encouraging me to "go."

Independence. Freedom. Self-reliance. Those were the values she was drumming into me, and she did it with such naturalness that I never questioned or resisted her. There was no other way but to be responsible for myself. As much as I loved and respected her, I was certainly a little frightened of her, and never wanted to displease her. I understand now that she was processing all of her past frustrations and unhappy experiences and putting them into a package of strength and positivity. That is the gift she prepared for me. It felt occasionally like a heavy burden, but I never questioned it, even if I sometimes wished I belonged to some other family.

Happily she let up on me somewhat when I was six and my baby brother, Philippe, was born. I adored him. To my surprise, having never played with dolls, I felt maternal, and to this day I think of him as my first child. As the older sister, I played with him and sometimes tortured him a bit, but as my mother had done to me, I taught him everything I knew and was very protective. When we played doctor, I asked him to urinate into a little bottle, only to then laugh at him that he had actually done it. We also used to play travel agency with my parents' airline brochures, scheduling and booking imaginary trips all over the world.

Philippe says he realized that I loved him the day I transcribed all the words from a Beatles record while I was at boarding school in England, and sent them to him. There were no computers then, no Internet, no iTunes, just a doting sister with pen and paper, listening to the lyrics and transcribing them. We're still extremely close, and he is still my baby brother, whom I always try to impress and tease. Philippe is a successful businessman in Brussels, has two amazing daughters, Sarah and Kelly, and his wife, Greta, launched and runs DVF Belgium. Philippe and I talk on the phone every weekend and whenever I miss my parents, I call him.

I don't think my mother was half as hard on him as she'd been with me. He was a boy, after all, and we are much softer and less demanding toward boys in our family. It was I she related to, the daughter she was determined would survive whatever life threw at her. As I grew older, I understood. Independence and freedom were key to her because she had lost both. Self-reliance had kept her alive.

My mother was twenty and engaged to my father in 1944 when the Nazi SS arrested her on May 17 for working in the Belgian Resistance. She was living in a "safe house" and her job was to go around Brussels on her bicycle to deliver documents and fake papers to those who needed them. Immediately after her arrest, she was thrown onto a crowded truck, which took her and many other suspected saboteurs to a prison in Malines, Flanders, a city twenty-five kilometers from Brussels. To avoid being tortured into giving information about others in the resistance, she said she knew nothing and that she was hiding in the safe house because she was Jewish. The woman who was interrogating her advised her not to say she was Jewish. She ignored it and was deported on the twenty-fifth transport, which left Malines on May 19, 1944. She was sent to Auschwitz and given prisoner number 5199.

My mother often told me how she'd written her parents a note on a scrap of paper and dropped it from the truck onto the street. She hoped but had no idea whether anyone ever picked it up and delivered it. It wasn't until after her death that I found out that the message had been delivered. I'd loaned the house she'd owned on Harbour Island in the Bahamas to my first cousin Salvator. Salvator left me a thick envelope full of family photographs, in the midst of which was a sealed envelope marked "Lily, 1944." Inside was a piece of torn paper with faint handwriting. I stared at it until I finally made out the words:

Dear Mommy and Daddy,

I am writing to tell you that your little Lily is leaving. Where, she does not know, but God is everywhere isn't he? So she will never be alone or unhappy.

I want you both to be courageous, and not forget that you have to be in good health for my wedding. I am counting more than ever in having a beautiful ceremony.

I want you to know that I am leaving with a smile, I promise. I love you very very much and will soon kiss you more than ever.

Your little daughter,

Lily

I couldn't breathe. Could I be holding the actual note my mother had told me she had written to her parents on that truck, using a burnt match for a pencil? On the other side of the note was a plea for anybody finding the piece of paper to please deliver it to her parents' address. Somebody had found it and delivered it to her parents and my aunt Juliette, Salvator's mother, had kept it in a sealed envelope all these years!

I was in shock; I'd only half-believed her story of the note. All these stories about her arrest and deportation seemed surreal, more like a movie script, and yet they were true. She had always told me that she was more worried about her parents than herself. I held the proof in my shaky hands.

I walked out of the house in a daze and across the beach into the clear blue water. “This explains who I am,” I said out loud to myself. “I am the daughter of a woman who went to the concentration camps with a smile.”

The sayings she had drummed into me as a child and which had sometimes annoyed me took on whole new meanings. She had often illustrated one of her favorites—“you never really know what is good for you; what may seem the absolute worst thing to happen to you can, in fact, be the best”—by her story of the inhuman train ride to Auschwitz and her arrival.

No food. No water. No air. No toilet. Four days jammed in a cattle car. An “older woman” in her forties who spoke a little German comforted my mother and gave her a sense of protection. My mother made sure never to leave her side, especially when they arrived at Auschwitz and were unloaded onto a ramp. Women with children were immediately separated from the rest and sent toward long, low buildings while the others were forced into a long line. At the head of the line, a soldier directed the prisoners into two groups. Looking on, from the top of the ramp, was an officer in white.

When it came her turn, the older woman was directed to the group being formed on the left and my mother quickly followed her. The soldier did not stop her, but the white-coated officer, who had not interfered until then, did. Striding down the ramp, he walked directly to my mother, yanked her away from her friend, and threw her into the group on the right. My mother always said that she’d never felt such sheer hatred for anyone as she felt for that man.

That man was Dr. Josef Mengele, she found out later, the notorious Angel of Death, who killed or mutilated many, many prisoners in medical experiments, especially children and twins. Why did he go through the trouble of saving her? Did she remind him of someone he cared about? However evil or not his intentions were, he saved her life. The group the older woman was assigned to went directly to the gas chamber. The group my mother was thrust into did not.

I always use that story when I want to console anyone, just as my mother told it so often to me: You never know how something that seems the worst thing turns out to be the best.

After that, she was determined to survive, no matter the horror. Even when the unmistakable smell of the smoke coming from the camp crematorium seemed unbearable and her fellow prisoners would say “We’re all going to die,” my mother would insist: “No, we’re not. We’re going to live.” Fear was not an option.

Nearly one million Jews were murdered at Auschwitz, many in the gas chamber. Others were executed, or killed in Dr. Mengele’s experiments, or died from starvation and exhaustion from slave labor. My mother was fortunate, if anyone could have been considered fortunate in those unimaginably cruel surroundings. She was put to work on the twelve-hour night shift in the nearby weapons factory making bullets; so long as she worked she was useful and was kept alive. She was tiny, barely five feet tall, and naturally slender. She had never eaten much and could exist, albeit barely, on the miniscule rations of bread and watery soup she and other prisoners were given. Heavier prisoners, radically deprived of anything close to the amount of food they were used to, she told me, were the first to succumb to starvation.

If ever I think I’m too lazy to do a necessary chore, if I hesitate to go out because of the cold or complain about having to wait in line, I remember my mother. I envision her being marched out of Auschwitz with sixty thousand others in the winter of 1945, just nine days before the Soviet troops reached the camp. The SS hastily executed thousands of inmates and marched the others fifty kilometers through the snow to a train depot where they were stuffed into freight cars and sent to Ravensbrück in the north, and from there force-marched again to their new camps, in my mother’s case to Neustadt-Glewe in Germany. Some fifteen thousand prisoners died on that Death March, of exposure, exhaustion, illness, or being shot by the SS for falling or lagging behind.

In what can only be described as a miracle, my tiny mother survived it all. She was one of the 1,244 who survived the camps out of the 25,631 Belgian Jews who were deported. Her will and spirit to live were her defiance of the evil she had endured, a declaration of her future. When Neustadt-Glewe was liberated a few months later by the Russians, followed closely by the Americans, my mother's weight was barely the weight of her bones.

She was hospitalized at an American base and wasn't expected to live. She defied the odds again. When she was stable enough to return home to Belgium she had to fill out a form, as did all survivors returning to their countries. I found that form. It had her name and date of birth on it and a question: "in what condition" she was returning from her thirteen months in captivity. Her astonishing answer was, in impeccable handwriting: "en très bonne santé" ("in very good health").

My father, Leon Halfin, was very different from my mother. Where she was strict and somewhat distant, he was relaxed and affectionate. In his eyes I could do no wrong and he loved me unconditionally. As a child I loved him much more than my demanding mother, though maybe I respected her a little more. When I needed to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, I would call for my father and that made him laugh. "Why do you call me and not your mother?" he'd ask. And I would reply: "Because I don't want to disturb her."

My father never scolded me. He simply adored me and I adored him. I was as affectionate toward him as he was to me. I loved to sit on his lap, covering him with kisses and drinking all of his after-dinner lemon tea. To my father I was the most beautiful thing in the world and I felt entitled to his love and devotion.

My father and I looked alike and we had the same kind of relentless energy. He loved American cars, and when I was nine or ten he would often take me for a drive in his beautiful, sky-blue and navy American Chevrolet Impala convertible, a bicolor combination that was very popular in the late fifties. In that era, before seat belts were common, I would kneel on the front seat instead of sitting, because I thought that that would make people think I was a grown-up. I always, always wanted to be older than my age. I never wanted to be a little girl. I wanted to be a woman, a sophisticated woman, a glamorous woman. I wanted to be important.

My father, unknowingly, hastened that wish. When he came to say good night to me and kiss me in my bed, he was often cautioned by my mother. "Be careful, don't wake up her senses," she'd say. My father used to think my mother's warning was hysterically funny. How could he, a man, wake up the senses of a little girl? Looking back now, however, no matter how funny he thought it was, he did wake up my senses. My father made me feel like a woman, so my mother was clever actually to say that.

The feelings were not sexual. It was the awareness that he was a man and that my relationship with him was therefore different from one I'd have with a woman. How lucky I was that this first man in my life loved me uncritically, unguardedly, without judging. I did not have to work for his love, I did not have to please him; his approval required no effort. That made an important impact on my life, and though I didn't know it then, I now know it has made my relationships with men much easier. What I owe my father, and what I am so thankful for, is how comfortable I always feel with men. He gave me confidence.

That first love and affection marks the way I presume men feel toward me. I simply take their fondness for granted, neither expecting nor looking for it. The biggest gift my father gave me was not to be needy. I had so much love from him that I didn’t really need any more. In fact, I sometimes had to push it away because his display of affection in front of people embarrassed me.

My father was a successful businessman, a distributor of General Electric electronic tubes and semiconductors. He did well, so we lived very comfortably.

My parents were a striking couple. My father was very good-looking with high cheekbones and a mischievous smile. My mother had an elegant build and beautiful legs. She dressed very well and had a lot of allure. She was very much the boss of the house and I always saw her as the brains of the family. As much as I adored my father it was to her I went for advice.

She was not a traditional housewife, and only on Sundays, the housekeeper’s day off, did I occasionally see her in the kitchen. She would make a delicious grilled chicken with crispy potatoes and my father would bring pastries for dessert. My favorite petit gâteau was called a Merveilleux and was made of meringue, chocolate, and whipped cream. We were, after all, in Belgium, the land of chocolate. In fact, most of what my mother did at home was to instruct everyone else, but she did it very well. Our apartment was beautifully decorated, full of antiques she had collected. I have a clear memory of her looking for and finally finding the Empire chandelier she so desired. It now illuminates my Mayfair shop in London.

Since my mother died, my father having died six years before, I have searched for clues in my parents’ lives as to what formed them and why I am who I am. That quest has taken me to Eastern Europe and the city of Kishinev, then the capital of Bessarabia, now the capital of Moldova, where my father was born in 1912, and to Salonika, Greece, where my mother was born in 1922.

Both my parents’ families were in the textile business. My father’s father, a wealthy Russian merchant whose relatives included many intellectuals and artists—one relative, Lewis Milestone, directed the 1930 Academy Award–winning war film All Quiet on the Western Front—owned several fabric stores in Kishinev. My mother’s father, Moshe Nahmias, a Sephardic Jew (a Jew of Spanish origin), moved his family from Salonika to Brussels when my mother was seven and ran La Maison Dorée, the large department store owned by his brother-in-law, Simon Haim. My maternal grandmother’s sister, my great-aunt Line, was married to the wealthy Simon Haim and had urged her sister to join her in Brussels with her family. So, although I had never made the connection before, I do indeed have a legacy of the fashion and retail business from both sides of my family.

There is nothing I could find in my mother’s childhood that would give her the unimaginable strength to survive the death camps. As far as I could tell, she had a pleasant, uneventful young life in Brussels, rather spoiled as the youngest of three girls in the family. The only challenge for her and her two older sisters, who had gone to an Italian school in Greece, was to become more fluent in French when they moved to Brussels so they could do well at school. My maternal grandparents, who spoke Ladino, the language of the Sephardic Jews, at home, changed the birthdates of the girls when the family arrived in Brussels, passing them off as two years younger so they would have more time to adapt, learn French, and be successful at school. My mother went to the Lycée Dachsbeck, the same school I went to years later, and we even had the same kindergarten teacher and the same headmistress, Mademoiselle Gilette. I found out recently that Mlle. Gilette had ignored the racial laws of the Nazi occupation and allowed my mother to graduate from high school. It is probably why she chose me to blow out the candles on the cake at the school’s seventy-fifth anniversary in 1952; I was the daughter of an alumna who went to the death camps and survived.

My father arrived in Brussels two years after my mother and her family moved to Belgium. He was seventeen in 1929 and was planning to follow in his brother’s footsteps and train to be a textile engineer, when something went very wrong in Kishinev. My grandfather's business went bankrupt, which actually killed him, and my grandmother was no longer able to send money to my future father. He stopped studying, although I am not sure he ever officially entered school in Belgium, and went to work, taking any job he could find. He had no plan to go back home and enjoyed his freedom as a young, good-looking man even though his life as a refugee was not always easy.

It was the war that brought my parents together. When Germany invaded and occupied Belgium in 1940, many people fled south in what was called L'Exode. Thousands of cars jammed the roads escaping from the occupation. My father and his best friend, Fima, drove south to France and settled, temporarily, in a small hotel in Toulouse. They were young and very handsome and even though it was wartime and the situation was serious, they laughed a lot and had many women along the way. My mother also arrived in Toulouse with her aunt Line and uncle Simon. They made the trip rather regally in a Cadillac with a driver.

Fima had money but my father did not. He hated being dependent on his friend, so every morning he went around on a bicycle looking for the jobs that had been posted, but in every place he arrived, the job had been taken. "Try the train station," a sympathetic would-have-been employer suggested. There he met a man named Jean who began the sequence of events that would draw my mother and father together.

"I know someone who needs to go back to Belgium and has to sell a very large amount of dollars because Belgium won't allow anyone to bring in foreign currency," Jean told him. "Do you know anyone who wants to buy dollars? He paid thirty-four French francs for them and is willing to sell at thirty-three." My father certainly didn't know anyone who wanted to buy dollars, so he paid little attention. A few days later, completely by accident, he met another man called Maurice who had a friend looking to buy dollars and was willing to pay a rate of seventy-six French francs for them.

My father couldn't believe his ears. Was he understanding right? Jean had a seller at thirty-three and Maurice had a buyer at seventy-six. So much profit could be made with the difference. The problem was that my father had no idea how to find Jean. He didn't know his last name or where he lived, so he raced around Toulouse on his bicycle for three days and three nights, looking for him. On the fourth day, my father went to the cinema and, realizing he had left his newspaper when he came out of the theater, went back for it—and bumped into Jean!

It took days to smooth out the many complications and finalize the transaction, because the sum was very large and my father had to prove he could deliver the money. He had to borrow some from his friend Fima to do a small sample transaction first, to prove he was trustworthy and, after a few days, completed the whole exchange. Overnight he went from having no money at all to actually being rich. In his diary my father recalls feeling so ashamed of his worn-out suit during the transaction that the day it was completed he bought three suits, six shirts, and two pairs of shoes. His good fortune didn't end there. As fate would have it, the man who was buying the dollars turned out to be my mother's uncle Simon. And that is how my parents met.

Theirs was not an immediate romance. Leon Halfin was twenty-nine, ten years older than my mother, and very interested in being a ladies' man. But Lily was a Jewish girl, and as far as he was concerned, you didn't touch Jewish girls—you married them.

The news from Belgium was that things weren't so bad under the German occupation, and in October 1941, my parents returned separately to Belgium. My mother couldn't go to university because of the racial laws, so she went to fashion school, studied millinery, and learned how to make hats. My father, who now had a lot of money, did not go back to Tungsram, the electronics company he had worked for, but became an independent businessman in the radio field in Brussels. They saw each other at gatherings of older relatives and family friends, but my father always treated my mother like a little girl, teasing her and pinching her cheeks. There was no romance although they clearly liked each other. Leon didn’t know my mother had a secret crush on him.

It wasn’t until the summer of 1942, when the SS started rounding up Jews in Belgium and deporting them that the danger began in earnest. Lucie, my father’s very good friend and ex-colleague at Tungsram, advised him to get out of Belgium and flee to Switzerland. He bought fake papers from the Belgian underground and began to plan his escape under the assumed and typical Belgian name of Leon Desmedt. He did not go alone. Lucie arranged for Gaston Buyne, a nineteen-year-old Christian boy to accompany him through France to the Swiss border. In a surprising turn of events, they were joined by Renée, a nineteen-year-old girl my father had just met. She was a Belgian Catholic girl who had fallen in love with my father and wanted to run away with him. Her mother had recently died and she didn’t like the woman her father had taken up with. That was the unlikely trio who set out together on August 6, 1942.

The train ride to Nancy, where they would transfer to another train to Belfort, was very dangerous. Gaston, a Belgian with legal papers, carried a lot of Leon’s money—banknotes in his shoulder pads, gold coins in his shoes and socks, and more Swiss notes in his toiletry bag. Because Gaston looked Jewish, much more so than Leon, he turned out to be the perfect foil. There were many, many checkpoints at which the German SS would randomly order male passengers to pull down their trousers to check whether they were circumcised. Gaston was ordered to drop his pants. “Sorry,” the SS man apologized to him, and didn’t bother with my father who was sitting next to him.

They arrived in Nancy at night and checked into a hotel. The train to Belfort left at 5:15 a.m. and they had another run-in on board with a young SS soldier who wanted both Gaston and Leon to drop their pants. This time it was Renée who saved Leon by smiling coquettishly at the young soldier until he moved on to other passengers.

Belfort was even more dangerous. There were many, many Jewish refugees checking into the same hotel, but my father’s fake ID saved him. The German SS raided the hotel that night and arrested all the Jews, but not Leon Desmedt. (My father’s diary records that he made love to Renée twice that night.) Later they heard that all the people arrested that night were killed.

Leon and Renée parted ways with Gaston the next morning as they approached the Swiss border. They took a bus to Hérimoncourt, at which point Leon hired a local guide to lead them through the mountains and pastures into Switzerland just six kilometers away. That last leg of the escape cost fifteen hundred French francs with no guarantee of success. A few more refugees joined in as they met the guide at five a.m., among them a woman with a baby. She gave the baby a sleeping pill so he wouldn’t cry, and they set out on foot through the alpine mountains to the border. “Run, run, run in that direction,” the guide pointed and sent them off on their own. I remember my father telling me that it was the cows and their noisy bells that made their escape possible. By following the bells, Leon and Renée arrived at the Swiss border town of Damvant on August 8, 1942.

“Why do you carry so much money?” the border police asked my father. He told them that he was an industrialist from Belgium, but the police did not believe his story. “Your papers are fake,” they said. They confiscated his money but did allow him to enter Switzerland. “You can claim it back when you leave,” the police told him.

My father was very lucky. Although he remained under surveillance by the Swiss authorities, and was unable to travel freely or have access to his money without going through long bureaucratic requests, he spent a few fairly pleasant years there. He separated from Renée, who eloped with a policeman soon after their arrival, and began to miss Lily, the vivacious "little" girl he'd left behind in Belgium. The occupation of Brussels had become very severe and he was worried about her. Lily and her parents had to abandon their apartment and live separately. She was hiding in a resistance house where she worked. My aunt Juliette sent her son, my cousin Salvator, to live with his Christian Belgian nanny.

Curious Lily went to her family's apartment one day and discovered that the SS had ransacked it and stolen all their belongings. She also discovered something that would change her life. There was a letter in the mailbox, an unexpected letter from Switzerland, from Leon, the man she had met in Toulouse and never forgotten. After reading and rereading it many times, she responded. It started a daily correspondence between them, carefully crafted because all the letters had to go through censors as the wide blue stripe across the stationery indicated. I am lucky to possess those letters, which, over time, became more and more intimate and passionate. They wrote about their love and about the moment they would meet again after the war, that they would marry, build a life together, have a family, and be happy forever. It was all about hope and love.

Then, suddenly, Lily's letters stopped. (It was then, I recall my father telling me, that the mirror in his bedroom, on which he had taped a photo of my mother, fell and broke.)

He wrote to her again and again, begging in vain for an answer. On July 15, two months after my mother's arrest, he received a letter from Juliette, my mother's older sister, written in code to get through the censors.

"Dear Leon," she wrote. "I have very bad news. Lily has been hospitalized."

When my mother returned from Germany in June 1945, my father was still in Switzerland. By the time he came back to Brussels four months later, she had gained back much of the weight she had lost, but she wasn't the same naïve, mischievous, fun-loving, passionate girl he had been corresponding with and planned to marry. That girl was gone forever. This new young woman had endured true horrors and would carry the wounds forever.

In his diary, my father wrote with great honesty about their reunion. He admitted that he barely recognized the girl he had been separated from for more than two years. She was different, a stranger to him. Lily sensed his unease and told him he was under no obligation to marry her. The love was still there, he reassured her as he hid his doubts away. They were married on November 29, 1945.

The doctor warned them, "No matter what, you have to wait a few years before having a baby. Lily isn't strong enough for childbirth and the baby may not be healthy." Six months later, I was accidentally conceived. Remembering the doctor's warning, both my mother and father were concerned. They thought they could get rid of the pregnancy by taking long rides on his motorcycle over the cobblestoned streets, but it didn't work. Finally one morning my father brought home some pills to induce a miscarriage. My mother threw those pills out the window.

I was born healthy and strong in Brussels on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1946, a miracle. Because of the price my mother paid for that miracle, I never felt I had the right to question her, complain, or make her life more difficult. I was always a very, very good little grown-up girl, and for some reason felt it was my role to protect her. In his diaries, my father confesses that at first he was disappointed that I was not a boy, but within a few days he had totally accepted me and fallen in love with my mother again.

I have long suspected that if I hadn't been born, my mother might have killed herself. If nothing else, my existence gave her a focus and a reason to keep going. For all the strength and determination of her personality, she was extremely fragile. She hid it very well, and when people were around she was always light and fun. But when she was alone, she was often overtaken by uncontrollable sadness. When I came home from school in the afternoons, I would sometimes find her sitting in her darkened bedroom, weeping. Other times, when she picked me up from school, she'd take me to have a patisserie, or antiques shopping, laughing with me and giving no hint of her painful memories.

The people who went to the camps didn't want to talk about it and the people who weren't in the camps didn't want to hear about it, so I sensed she often felt like a stranger or an alien. When she did talk about it to me, she would only emphasize the good—the friendships, the laughter, the will to go back home and the dream of a plate of spaghetti. If I asked her how she endured, she would joke and say, "Imagine it is raining and you run in between the drops!" She always told me to trust the goodness of people. She wanted to protect me, but I realized that it is also how she protected herself . . . denying the bad . . . always denying the bad and demanding that the good forces win and, no matter what, never appearing a victim.

She did the best she could to put the war behind her. She had the two sets of tattooed numbers removed. And in a wonderful gesture of defiance, and to override her memory of the bitter cold she'd endured, she bought a very expensive, warm sable coat with the restitution money she got from the German government.

I spent a lot of time alone as a child, reading and imagining a grand life for myself. My childhood went smoothly, though life in Brussels was often gray and boring. I loved my big school, I loved my books, and I was a very good student. I loved my brother and my girlfriends, Mireille Dutry and Myriam Wittamer, whose parents owned the best patisserie in Brussels. On the weekends, our family spent Sundays in the country at my great-great-aunt and -uncle's villa. They had a beautiful house on the edge of a large forest, the Forêt de Soignes. I loved walking in the woods, picking chestnuts in the winters and berries in the summers. My father would play cards with the men and my mother gossiped with the women. We ate a lot of good food. On the long, gray days, I lost myself reading Stendhal, Maupassant, Zola, and, on a lighter note, my favorite, The Adventures of Tintin, comic books about a daring young boy reporter created by the Belgian cartoonist Hergé. I lived vicariously through Tintin's travels and exploits. Would I ever discover all these exotic places in the world? It seemed like nothing would ever happen to me.

When I had a few days off from school and my parents could not travel, I would often visit my aunt Mathilde in Paris. She had an elegant boutique off the Faubourg Saint-Honoré catering to a loyal, international clientele. She sold printed cashmere sweaters and jersey dresses and suits. I would spend entire days in the shop. My job was to fold the clothes and put them back in order. It was my first encounter with fashion, retail, and the secret virtues of jersey fabrics.

In Paris, I also visited my cousins, Eliane and Nadia Neiman, the two daughters of my father's rich cousin Abraham, who had invented the theft alarm for cars. The girls spoke perfect Russian, gave piano recitals, and were very sophisticated. I felt terribly awkward and provincial when I visited them for tea or lunch at their villa in Neuilly. During the summers, my brother and I would go to summer camp near Montreux in the Swiss Alps or in the North Sea resort of Le Coq-sur-Mer in Belgium. We would also go on trips with my parents and my aunts and uncles to the South of France or the Swiss mountains.

My parents were a good-looking couple, and they loved each other very much, but my father wasn't as sensitive around my mother as he should have been. He didn't want to acknowledge her wounds, so he ignored them. He was a hardworking, generous man, but he could be indifferent and sometimes verbally harsh. I don't think he had any real love affairs after he married my mother. He traveled frequently on business, and I am sure he did not always spend his nights alone, but that was not the problem between my parents. It was his insensitivity toward her that made her feel vulnerable. So the scene was set for what came next. And what came next was a man named Hans Muller.

The letter, addressed to my mother, was on the table in our front hall that day when I came back from school. For reasons that I still cannot fathom, I opened the blue envelope with the very clear handwriting. It was from someone named Hans Muller, who, I realized as I read, was a friend of hers. I did not know who this Hans was and I do not recall what the letter said, but I remember that my heart started to beat fast. I felt something major had happened, something that would change all of our lives, and that something was Hans. Knowing I had done something wrong, I carefully put the letter back in the blue envelope and left it on the table, but the damage was done. My mother came home, saw the envelope, and I confessed I'd opened it. I had never seen her so upset and angry. Though I was twelve at the time, she reacted in a very violent way, slapping me across the face with all her strength. I was desperate, I was in pain, I was ashamed. Whatever had come upon me to open that letter?

My face was only a little bruised the next day when I went to class, but my insides were crushed. I had disappointed my mother. I had betrayed her trust. We never discussed it again and I am not sure what she told my father that night when he came home. Was he home anyway or was he traveling? I don't remember. I felt terrible, and to this day I have never again opened a letter or looked at a document or an email that was not addressed to me.

The following year, over my father's objections but to my own excitement, my mother sent me to Pensionnat Cuche, a private boarding school by the Lake Sauvabelin in Lausanne, Switzerland. It did not escape me that Lausanne is very close to Geneva, where Mr. Muller lived.

During the two wonderful years I spent at that school, living my own life, making many friends, and for the first time relishing my independence from my parents, I pieced together the story of my mother and Hans Muller. My father traveled a lot for his business, often taking my mother with him. When the travel entailed planes, they flew separately as insurance for my brother and me in case anything happened.

Hans Muller was my mother's seatmate on one of those trips, a long flight from Brussels to New York. He was a very handsome young Swiss German businessman who worked in the fruit business. Separated from his wife, he lived with his small son, Martin, who was the same age as my brother, Philippe. Monsieur Muller was polite and considerate, a stark contrast to my father, whose manners could be coarse and who sometimes belittled my mother in public. Hans was quite a bit younger than my mother and very taken with her. He would tell me, over the years, that he had never met a woman so attractive, interesting, and intelligent. They developed a friendship, which eventually led to a secret love affair and later to a long relationship.

I was not happy when my father insisted I be brought back to Brussels after my two years at boarding school in Switzerland. There I was, stuck at home again, and not a pleasant home at all. My mother and my father argued all the time and there was a lot of tension. I was relieved when they decided to officially separate. I think they both expected me to be upset that the family was splitting up. I wasn't, but I felt sad for my little brother. He was only nine and my parents would continue to fight over him for years after their separation and divorce.

As for me, I was fifteen in 1962. I felt grown up and secure, eager for whatever change lay ahead. Never once did I make my mother feel guilty about leaving my father, but instead I encouraged her and supported her completely. What she wanted, I'm convinced, was her freedom and independence after sixteen years of marriage, and I felt she deserved it. Was Hans an excuse or the reason? I never knew for sure. "Go on," I said. In turn, she would never make me feel guilty about anything either. When, years later, I told her I was leaving my husband, Egon, her response was “All right” and that was the end of it.

My father was devastated when my mother left him. His whole life revolved around his work and his family. I was not very sympathetic. Though I looked exactly like him and I loved him so very much, it was my mother I identified with. She wanted to move on, to experience life, to travel, learn, grow, expand her horizons, meet people, live her life. I understood it.

And so my parents parted and my childhood ended. One door closed, many others opened. I went on to another boarding school, this one in England, for two years and later to the University of Madrid in Spain. My mother lived with Hans for the next twenty years before separating from him, too. And I, with my mother as my role model, started to become the woman I wanted to be.

If anyone had the right to be bitter, my mother did, but never, ever did I hear her express any bitterness. She looked for the good in everything and everyone.

I’m often asked what was the worst thing that ever happened to me, what were my biggest challenges. I find it difficult to answer because I have this habit I inherited from my mother that somehow transforms what’s bad into something good, so in the end, I don’t remember what was bad. When I have an obstacle in front of me, especially of someone else’s making, I say “OK. I don’t like it, but I can’t change it, so let’s find a way around it.” Then I find a different path to a solution, which so satisfies me that I forget what the problem was in the first place. Of all the lessons my mother drummed into me, that was perhaps the most important. How could you possibly better yourself if you didn’t face your challenges up front or if you laid your problems off on someone or something else and didn’t learn from them? I offer that lesson often in my talks to young women. “Don’t blame your parents, don’t blame your boyfriend, don’t blame the weather. Accept the reality, embrace the challenge, and deal with it. Be in charge of your own life. Turn negatives into positives and be proud to be a woman.”

It doesn’t happen overnight, of course, and I never stopped learning from my mother. Over and over, she reinforced the lessons she’d taught me as a child.

When I was in my thirties, I suddenly developed a fear of flying, but when I told her I was afraid, she looked at me, smiling, and said, “Tell me, what does it mean to be afraid?” When once I was conflicted about starting a new business, she said, “Don’t be ridiculous. You know how to do it.” When I was diagnosed with cancer at forty-seven, predictably she told me not to worry, that I had nothing to fear. I wanted to believe her, but I had my doubts. Because she never showed any sign even in private that she was afraid, I wasn’t either. When my treatment was all done, she collapsed, and I realized that she had, in fact, been afraid for me, but by never showing it to me, she had made me strong and trusting that I would be fine.

After Egon and I married in 1969, she spent several months each year living with us in New York and formed close, loving relationships with my children, Alexandre and Tatiana. Her relationship with them was very different from the relationship she had had with me. She had never been very affectionate to me and there had always been a distance between us. As a result, I was reserved around her and never told her my intimate thoughts, except in letters. It was much easier for me to open up in letters, and I think easier for her, too. In her letters to me at boarding school in Switzerland and then in England, she would often call me her “pride,” but actually she never told me that to my face until much, much later when she was about to die.

She was much more open with my daughter as a grandmother and my daughter was more open with her than with me. They had an amazing complicity and spent hours together on her bed, telling each other stories.

Tatiana became an excellent storyteller and filmmaker.

My mother was superb at handling money. She had taken half my father’s assets with her when she left him and invested them so well that she was, in her later years, able to feel secure and buy herself a beautiful house on the beach in Harbour Island, Bahamas. Had she been born at a different time and under different circumstances, she would have made a sought-after investment banker.

My son, Alexandre, benefited greatly from her financial skills. She taught him what stocks and bonds were, what kinds of companies were good investments, and about yields and dividends. Every afternoon when he came home from school, the two of them studied the stock market pages in the afternoon edition of the New York Post so he could see which stocks were going up and which down. When he was six or seven, my new boyfriend, Barry Diller, wanted to give him one share of stock for his birthday and told him he could choose which one. “Choose the most expensive,” my mother advised him. Alexandre chose IBM.

There is no doubt the financial education she gave him turned him into the financier he is today. He manages the family money, sits on prestigious boards, and has proven to be a superb adviser to all of us.

My mother was my rock. For all that I thought I’d conquered my fear of flying, I remember a very scary, bumpy flight to Harbour Island with her and Alexandre when she had just gotten out of the hospital. When the plane dropped suddenly and made loud creaking noises, I closed my eyes and thought, “OK, I am afraid. Where do I go for strength? Do I take the hand of my big, strong son or of my weak, dying mother?” And there was no question that I would go to my mother for strength. I put my hand over hers.

At about the same time as that plane trip, I remember being anxious when my daughter, Tatiana, was about to give birth. It’s one thing when your son has a child, but for some reason, when your daughter has a child, you feel it in your own flesh. It is physical agony. I was frightened for my little girl, thinking of all the things that could go wrong. I called my mother, in tears, while driving to the hospital. She was very frail, but she summoned the strength to make me strong, though happily it turned out I didn’t need it. Antonia was born without any complication and Tatiana was fine. In yet another testament to her strength, my mother clung to life so that she could see Tatiana’s baby. Though her body was almost nonexistent, her mind and her will were strong. So many times in her life she was ill and on the verge of dying, but her incredible strength and determination kept her alive.

We had already welcomed her first great-grandchild, Talita, the daughter of Alexandre and his then wife, Alexandra Miller, and just as intense in my memory is the astonishing day when Alexandre brought the one-year-old Talita in her carriage to visit me and my mother in the Carlyle hotel in New York. It was Mother’s Day and Alexandre gallantly brought each of us a bouquet of flowers. All our eyes were on the adorable little girl who pulled herself upright, clinging to a chair, then suddenly launched off on her own and took her first steps! We all clapped and praised her, but then something unbelievable took place. I was watching my old mother, wrinkled and sick in her chair, looking at this little girl on the floor and that little girl looking back at her, when suddenly I saw a flash of something white, almost like lightning coming out of my mother and going into Talita. I believe that that day my mother’s energy and spirit transferred to my granddaughter. I saw it happen, that white flash going from my mother into Talita. I saw it.

My mother did not die peacefully. I think she was reliving the horrors of the camps and fighting giving in to death, as she had in Auschwitz. It was not the first time she’d relived those horrors. As much as she had tried to bury the past and concentrate on looking forward to life, she had had a breakdown twenty years before during a visit to Germany with Hans and some clients of his. My heart had nearly stopped when Hans called me in New York to tell me he’d woken up that morning in the hotel to find my mother missing. He’d finally found her hiding in the lobby of the hotel, underneath the concierge’s desk, disoriented, speaking loudly and making little sense. “Why? What happened?” I’d asked him, in a panic myself. He thought it must have been the dinner they’d had the night before with his clients at a restaurant. It was very hot and the people at the tables around her were speaking loudly in German. I suspected that she and Hans had also had a fight, but whatever the reason, she’d completely come apart.

Hans thought she might snap out of it if I talked to her and I tried to talk calmly to her over the phone, but all she could do was babble nonsensically. Hans drove her back to Switzerland and put her in the psychiatric ward of the hospital and we all flew to her side—my brother and I and even my father—but she remained very confused, laughing one minute, crying the next, raving and incoherent. She wouldn’t eat and she wouldn’t drink nor would she surrender the fur coat she insisted on wearing in her hospital bed. We thought we’d lost her. But she was a survivor through and through, and three weeks later she was well enough to leave the hospital to convalesce in a clinic. She was a miracle once again, coming back to life from far away.

In her final illness in 2000, even though lovingly cared for by Lorna, her nurse, she no longer had the strength to fight off death or the demons that had always haunted her.

My brother, Philippe, and I buried her in Brussels, beside our father. She knew there was a spot for her there, and was happy about it. They had been each other’s big loves in life, even though they separated, and it was appropriate that they end up together. We had our father’s headstone engraved: “Thank you for your love,” and our mother’s: “Thank you for your strength.”

The Mullers did not come to the service. Hans had married after they separated and in our agitation after my mother’s death, we did not manage to reach his son, Martin, in time for the funeral . . . I feel very bad about that because Martin had remained very close to her; I love him and Lily was a mother to him.

“Today, we’re taking Lily, my mother, for her eternal rest,” I wrote to her friends and my friends who couldn’t be there. “Our hearts are heavy but they should also be light because she has been liberated from all pain and has left on her eternal adventure surrounded by so much love.

“Fifty-five years almost to the day, Lily was liberated from the death camps. Twenty-two years old and less than 28 kilos. In that little package of bones, there was a flame, a flame that was life. Doctors forbade her to have children, she had two. She taught them everything, how to see, question, learn, understand and more important, never to be afraid.

“She touched all the ones that she met, listened to their problems, brought solutions and inspired them to find joie de vivre again. She looked so frail and fragile but she was strong and courageous, always curious to discover new horizons. She lived fully and will continue to do so through her children, her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren and her friends who loved her so.”

I signed the letter from all of us—“Diane, Philippe, Alexandre, Tatiana, Sarah, Kelly, Talita, and Antonia.” (My grandsons Tassilo and Leon were not born yet.)

I found a sweet note among many others my mother had written to herself, had it printed with an embossed lily of the valley because it was her favorite flower, and included it with what I had written.

“God gave me life and luck with my life,” she’d written. “During my life, I’ve kept my luck all along. I have felt it like a shadow. It follows me everywhere and so I take it wherever I go, saying, ‘Thank you, my luck. Thank you, my life. Thank you. Thank you.’?”

Most helpful customer reviews

67 of 72 people found the following review helpful.
Less about her amazing accomplishments as a business woman and designer, more about her stifling love affairs with men.
By Go Idaho
I have painfully pushed through 40% of this book and can't go on any longer. This is not about the woman she wanted to be, this is about the woman and every single stifling love affair with countless men. I wanted to read about this amazing woman, her business, how she grew it, her ideas, her hardships and successes. The stories of her children and mother are wonderful, however, they jump around like a child's maze, left, right, around and back again. Time in this book jumps forward and backward. She explains in the beginning the book is organized based on how these things influenced her life. However, it comes out as a disorganized pile of clips of her life. Maybe it gets better as the book goes on, but I am moving on.

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.
I bought audio book on CD--read by the author. Jumped around a lot--not as good as I expected. Hard to relate to her story
By D. Christofferson
The book hopped around all over the place, from men, years, periods of success in or out of business. I could not relate to it overall--not because she succeeded, but because how she got the money and how she got her start--was not really viably explained. I did really appreciate the opening and the later references to the impact of her mother in a concentration camp. I do not believe that made Diane the "independent woman who lives like a man" that she sees herself to be. I do see that she has achieved great success and that never occurs on it's own, so she seems to be talented hard working women who achieved success. However, Diane lived a life of luxury and privilege which in no way reflects somebody starting their own business. She was a socialite and designer, who got her fame from who she originally married. Yes, she designed and achieved a lot and said she did it on her own, but that was not apparent. She was defined by men, who she used as much as she chased them. I am impressed by her success, and she was self-empowered because she had money--and let's not forget the connections. The people she operated in from her young twenties, are just not people or a lifestyle we would be exposed to. I do not believe her business would have been created or grown without any of those connections and lifestyle--especially from marrying the title--I can't believe she got all the money all on her own.

29 of 32 people found the following review helpful.
Quick, fun read, but wouldn't read it again
By VK
I enjoyed reading DvF's The Woman I Wanted to Be. I was really excited about this memoir, which seems to have been timed perfectly with the recent launch of DvF's reality TV series. Aside from the first chapter, which tells the story of Diane's mother surviving the Nazi concentration camps, the rest of the book feels like an impersonal account of Diane's personal and professional milestones, with random stories sprinkled in between. Her tone in this book feels distant and her powerful personality, charm, and sense of independence didn't really shine through. She glossed over the hardships she endured in her personal and professional life, almost sounding like an E! News reporter recapping an update instead of speaking about her thoughts and emotions as she experienced these hardships. I like that she included an interesting glimpse into her childhood, her "boring" youth, and all the different stages of her life until now, complete with all the whirlwind romances and big loves (aided by the journals she kept). It was a quick, fun read written honestly about Diane's life as a princess, socialite, designer, daughter, mother and more.

See all 237 customer reviews...

THE WOMAN I WANTED TO BE BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG PDF

Get the connect to download this **The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg** and also begin downloading. You can desire the download soft documents of the book The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg by undergoing various other activities. Which's all done. Now, your resort to check out a book is not constantly taking and also lugging guide The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg all over you go. You can conserve the soft data in your gadget that will certainly never ever be away as well as review it as you such as. It resembles reviewing story tale from your device after that. Now, begin to like reading The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg and also obtain your new life!

Review
“[a] warm, confiding memoir.” (VOGUE)

“It’s so good, you’ll want to take notes.” (PEOPLE)

“Diane’s book evokes everything she has lived through. It is honest, direct and fascinating — just like the author herself!” (Anna Wintour)

“In this era when girls are made to think it’s better to be a princess than a person, Diane von Furstenberg’s The Woman I Wanted to Be is just the reverse. I thank her for honesty, spirit, encouragement to be one’s own self in public and professional life, and a memoir that covers more human experience than most novels. Pick it up — you won’t put it down.” (Gloria Steinem)

“Diane von Furstenberg’s story offers a behind-the-scenes look into the ups and downs of building a global business, creating an enduring brand, and finding true love. By sharing the path that enabled her to become the woman she wanted to be, Diane shows all of us how to live a life of focus and passion.” (Sheryl Sandberg)

“Diane is the original modern princess who created the iconic wrap dress and has influenced fashion everywhere with her talent, lifestyle, elegance and beauty. Every girl will love reading her book.” (Kate Moss)

“It has been a gift to read this book, and a true privilege to learn and discover that much more about DVF. What a thrill to be given an opportunity to peek even further into her life.” (Sarah Jessica Parker)

“The legendary designer Diane von Furstenberg has a lot in common with her iconic wrap dress: practical yet sexy, demure yet revealing, sturdy yet fragile. This memoir is an intriguing page turner filled with her revelations about life, business, family and love. Fearless about naming names and probing her own failings, she analyses a ‘little fling’ with Richard Gere as sincerely as she does her midlife retreats from the fashion area—and her dynamic comeback. Her core philosophy? ‘Turn negatives into positives and be proud to be woman.’ She emerges, at 67, as a witty and reflective grownup, albeit one with plenty of surprises up her beautifully draped sleeve.” (MORE)

“. . . an honest an introspective look into the labyrinthine history behind one of the most iconic female entrepreneurs in fashion. Written in elegant yet straightforward prose . . . The designer candidly speaks of missteps and periods of her life which guided her away from what she truly wanted out of her life, and how she dealt with each situation, with grace and aplomb.” (Bustle.com)

“Diane von Furstenberg’s life combines the hallmarks of a fairy tale with the more sober reality of a career woman—and single mother—who longs to have it all. . . . The book is as charming and erratic as von Furstenberg herself . . . the early pages paint a vivid picture . . . her account of those first years is colorful and poignant.” (Finanacial Times)

“[N]ow I find Diane the super person that folks are most curious about. Diane never let herself fail at anything; or if she faltered, she climbed back up. It is a pleasure to read a ‘positive’ book that is not just manufactured nonsense . . . We get a real look at a woman in her 60s who's still in her prime. She has a lesson for all of us.” (Worcester Telegram)

“von Furstenberg’s candid memoir contains hard-earned wisdom that she eagerly shares with women of all ages and backgrounds. A fascinating read for anyone interested in the behind-the-scenes world of contemporary fashion.” (Booklist)

“In this captivating memoir, fashion powerhouse von Furstenberg thoughtfully reflects on her colorful life—and doesn’t skimp on the juicy details. Von Furstenberg begins movingly by writing of her need to please her mother . . . then moves on to her life as a jet-set princess and fledgling designing in New York City, her invention of the iconic jersey wrap dress in the early 1970s, and stories of her children . . . She outlines her many positive contributions to the fashion industry, but admirably doesn’t sugarcoat business missteps . . . This is a fascinating glimpse into the life of one of the fashion world’s more enduring stars that will fascinate fashionistas and fans of strong, creative women.” (Publishers Weekly)

“With humility and honesty, von Furstenberg's reflections on a life lived in the grandiose couture spotlight will delight both trendy, fashion-forward readers and budding designers eager to follow in her footsteps.” (Kirkus Reviews)

“Designer Diane von Furstenberg’s life readslike a fairy tale. She details it all with sincerity and humility in thismemoir.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“No stranger to the spotlight DVF's most recent venture, a book entitled The Woman I Wanted to Be chronicles how privilege opened certain doors in her early success, how much is still needed to be done to achieve equality, an insight into the behind-the-scenes ups and downs of running a global business and a story that is in equal parts wisdom, sobering reality and fairy tale.” (Los Angeles Fashion)

“Designer Diane von Furstenberg’s life reads like a fairy tale. She details it all with sincerity and humility in this memoir.” (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)

“an inspiring, compelling, deliciously detailed celebrity autobiography, the book is as much of a smashing success as the determined, savvy, well-intentioned woman who wrote it.” (Chicago Tribune)

About the Author

Diane von Furstenberg entered the fashion world in 1970 and four years later introduced her famous wrap dress. Her luxury fashion brand, DVF, is now available in more than fifty-five countries all over the world. Director of the Diller-von Furstenberg Family Foundation, she is an active philanthropist and supporter of emerging female leaders and social entrepreneurs. In 2015, she was named one of the Time 100 Most

Influential People. She is the author of The Woman I Wanted to Be and Diane: A Signature Life.

Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.
The Woman I Wanted to Be 1 ROOTS
There is a large frame on the bookshelf in my bedroom in New York. In it is a page torn from a German magazine of 1952. It is a photo of an elegant woman and her small daughter in the train station of Basel, Switzerland, waiting for the Orient Express. The little girl is nestled in her mother's tented coat and is eating a brioche. That was the first time, at the age of five, that I had my photo in a magazine. It is a sweet picture. My mother's older sister, Juliette, gave it to me when I was first married, but it is only recently that I realized its true importance.

On the surface, it is a photograph of a glamorous, apparently wealthy woman en route to a ski holiday with her curly-haired little girl. The woman is not looking into the camera, but there is a hint of a smile as she knows she is being photographed. Her appearance is elegant. Nothing would indicate that only a few years before, she was in another German-speaking railroad station coming back from the Nazi concentration camps where she had been a prisoner for thirteen months, a bunch of bones, close to death from starvation and exhaustion.

How did she feel when the photographer asked her name to be put in the magazine? Proud, I imagine, to be noticed for her style and elegance. Only seven years had passed. She was not a number anymore. She had a name; warm, beautiful, clean clothes; and most of all she had a daughter, a healthy little girl. "God has saved my life so that I can give you life," she used to write me every New Year on my birthday. "By giving you life, you gave me my life back. You are my torch, my flag of freedom."

My voice catches each time I speak publicly about my mother, and I do in every speech I make, aware that I wouldn't be giving that speech if Lily Nahmias had not been my mother. Sometimes it feels odd that I always bring up her story, but somehow I am compelled to. It explains the child I was, the woman I became.

"I want to tell you the story of a young girl who, at twenty-two years old, weighed fifty-nine pounds, barely the weight of her bones," I say to a seminar at Harvard about girls' health. "The reason she weighed fifty-nine pounds is that she had just spent thirteen months in the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. It was a true miracle that that young girl didn't die, though she came very close. When she was liberated and returned to her family in Belgium, her mother fed her like a little bird, every fifteen minutes a tiny bit of food, and then a little bit more, making her feel as if she was being slowly blown up like a balloon. Within a few months her weight was close to normal."

There are always murmurs in the audience when I get to that point in my mother's story, perhaps because it is so shocking and unexpected or maybe because I am living history to a young audience that has heard only vaguely about Auschwitz. It must be hard to imagine the high-energy, healthy woman speaking to them having a mother who weighed fifty-nine pounds. Whatever it is, I want and need to honor my mother, her courage and her strength. It is what made me the woman she wanted me to be.

"God has saved my life so that I can give you life." Her words resonate with me every day of my life. I feel it is my duty to make up for all the suffering she endured, to always celebrate freedom and live fully. My birth was her triumph. She was not supposed to survive; I was not supposed to be born. We proved them wrong. We both won the day I was born.

I repeat a few of the lessons my mother drummed into me that have served me well. "Fear is not an option." "Don't dwell on the dark side of things, but look for the light and build around it. If one door closes, look for another one to open.” “Never, ever, blame others for what befalls you, no matter how horrible it might be. Trust you, and only you, to be responsible for your own life.” She lived those lessons. In spite of what she endured, she never wanted others to feel that she was a victim.

I didn’t used to talk nearly as much about my mother. I took her for granted, as children do their mothers. It was not until she died in 2000 that I fully realized what an incredibly huge influence she had been on me and how much I owe her. Like any child, I hadn’t paid much attention. “OK, OK, you told me that already,” I’d brush her off, or even pretend not to hear. I bridled, too, at the unsolicited advice she persisted in giving my friends. In fact, it annoyed me. Now, of course, I feel I have had the experience and earned the wisdom to hand out my own unsolicited advice, and I press every lesson my mother taught me on my children, grandchildren, and anyone I talk to. I have become her.

I didn’t know, as a very little girl in Brussels, why my mother had two lines of blue tattooed numbers on her left arm. I remember thinking they were some sort of decoration and wished I had them, too, so my arms wouldn’t look so plain. I didn’t understand why the housekeeper often told me not to bother her when she was lying down in her bedroom. I instinctively knew my mother needed her rest and I would tiptoe around the house so I wouldn’t disturb her.

Sometimes I’d ignore the housekeeper’s instructions and, gathering my beloved little picture books, I would sneak into her darkened room in the hope she would smile and read them to me. More often than not she did. She loved books and taught me to cherish them. She read my little picture books to me so many times I memorized them. One of my favorite things to do was to fake reading them, carefully turning the pages at the right time and showing off, pretending that I could read.

My mother was very strict. I never doubted that she loved me, but if I said something she didn’t approve of or failed to live up to her expectations, she would give me a severe look or pinch me. I would be sent to the corner, my face to the wall. Sometimes I would go to the corner by myself, knowing I had done wrong. She spent a lot of time with me, sometimes playing, but mostly teaching me anything she could think of. She read me fairy tales and would tease me when I got scared. I remember how she amused herself by telling me that I was an abandoned child she had found in the garbage. I would cry until she took me in her arms, consoling me. She wanted me to be strong and not be afraid. She was very demanding. Before I had learned how to read, she had me memorize and recite the seventeenth-century fables of La Fontaine. As soon as I was old enough to write, she insisted I write stories and letters with perfect spelling and grammar. I remember how proud I was when she praised me.

To train me never to succumb to shyness, she made me give a speech at every family gathering, teaching me to be comfortable speaking in public no matter the audience. Like many children I was scared of the dark, but unlike most mothers, she shut me in a dark closet and waited outside so I would learn for myself that there was nothing to be afraid of. That was just one of the times she’d say “Fear is not an option.”

My mother did not believe in coddling children too much or overprotecting them. She wanted me to be independent and responsible for myself. My earliest memories are of traveling with my parents and being left alone in the hotel room while they went out to dinner. I did not mind nor did I feel lonely. I was so proud that they trusted me to stay alone. I liked entertaining myself and feeling grown up. To this day, I have the same feeling and sense of freedom when I check into a hotel room alone.

When my parents allowed me to join them in a restaurant, my mother often encouraged me to get up and check out the room, and sometimes, even to go outside and report to her what I’d seen, who I had met. That instilled curiosity in me—watch what other people do, make friends with people I do not know. When I was nine, she sent me on the train from Brussels to Paris all by myself to visit her sister, my favorite aunt, Mathilde. I felt so proud to be responsible for myself. I think, deep down, I was a bit nervous, but I would never admit it and pride overcame the fear.

I still like to travel alone, and at times prefer it. Even on business trips, I don’t like traveling with an entourage because it limits my freedom and reduces the fun of the unpredictable. I love the adventure, that feeling of excitement and satisfaction I had when I was a little girl. To be alone on the road, in an airport, with my bag, my passport, my credit cards, my phone, and a camera makes me feel so free and happy. I thank my mother for always encouraging me to “go.”

Independence. Freedom. Self-reliance. Those were the values she was drumming into me, and she did it with such naturalness that I never questioned or resisted her. There was no other way but to be responsible for myself. As much as I loved and respected her, I was certainly a little frightened of her, and never wanted to displease her. I understand now that she was processing all of her past frustrations and unhappy experiences and putting them into a package of strength and positivity. That is the gift she prepared for me. It felt occasionally like a heavy burden, but I never questioned it, even if I sometimes wished I belonged to some other family.

Happily she let up on me somewhat when I was six and my baby brother, Philippe, was born. I adored him. To my surprise, having never played with dolls, I felt maternal, and to this day I think of him as my first child. As the older sister, I played with him and sometimes tortured him a bit, but as my mother had done to me, I taught him everything I knew and was very protective. When we played doctor, I asked him to urinate into a little bottle, only to then laugh at him that he had actually done it. We also used to play travel agency with my parents’ airline brochures, scheduling and booking imaginary trips all over the world.

Philippe says he realized that I loved him the day I transcribed all the words from a Beatles record while I was at boarding school in England, and sent them to him. There were no computers then, no Internet, no iTunes, just a doting sister with pen and paper, listening to the lyrics and transcribing them. We’re still extremely close, and he is still my baby brother, whom I always try to impress and tease. Philippe is a successful businessman in Brussels, has two amazing daughters, Sarah and Kelly, and his wife, Greta, launched and runs DVF Belgium. Philippe and I talk on the phone every weekend and whenever I miss my parents, I call him.

I don’t think my mother was half as hard on him as she’d been with me. He was a boy, after all, and we are much softer and less demanding toward boys in our family. It was I she related to, the daughter she was determined would survive whatever life threw at her. As I grew older, I understood. Independence and freedom were key to her because she had lost both. Self-reliance had kept her alive.

My mother was twenty and engaged to my father in 1944 when the Nazi SS arrested her on May 17 for working in the Belgian Resistance. She was living in a “safe house” and her job was to go around Brussels on her bicycle to deliver documents and fake papers to those who needed them. Immediately after her arrest, she was thrown onto a crowded truck, which took her and many other suspected saboteurs to a prison in Malines, Flanders, a city twenty-five kilometers from Brussels. To avoid being tortured into giving information about others in the resistance, she said she knew nothing and that she was hiding in the safe house because she was Jewish. The woman who was interrogating her advised her not to say she was Jewish. She ignored it and was deported on the twenty-fifth transport, which left Malines on May 19, 1944. She was sent to Auschwitz and given prisoner number 5199.

My mother often told me how she’d written her parents a note on a scrap of paper and dropped it from the truck onto the street. She hoped but had no idea whether anyone ever picked it up and delivered it. It wasn’t until after her death that I found out that the message had been delivered. I’d loaned the house she’d owned on Harbour Island in the Bahamas to my first cousin Salvator. Salvator left me a thick envelope full of family photographs, in the midst of which was a sealed envelope marked “Lily, 1944.” Inside was a piece of torn paper with faint handwriting. I stared at it until I finally made out the words:

Dear Mommy and Daddy,

I am writing to tell you that your little Lily is leaving. Where, she does not know, but God is everywhere isn’t he? So she will never be alone or unhappy.

I want you both to be courageous, and not forget that you have to be in good health for my wedding. I am counting more than ever in having a beautiful ceremony.

I want you to know that I am leaving with a smile, I promise. I love you very very much and will soon kiss you more than ever.

Your little daughter,

Lily

I couldn’t breathe. Could I be holding the actual note my mother had told me she had written to her parents on that truck, using a burnt match for a pencil? On the other side of the note was a plea for anybody finding the piece of paper to please deliver it to her parents’ address. Somebody had found it and delivered it to her parents and my aunt Juliette, Salvator’s mother, had kept it in a sealed envelope all these years!

I was in shock; I’d only half-believed her story of the note. All these stories about her arrest and deportation seemed surreal, more like a movie script, and yet they were true. She had always told me that she was more worried about her parents than herself. I held the proof in my shaky hands.

I walked out of the house in a daze and across the beach into the clear blue water. “This explains who I am,” I said out loud to myself. “I am the daughter of a woman who went to the concentration camps with a smile.”

The sayings she had drummed into me as a child and which had sometimes annoyed me took on whole new meanings. She had often illustrated one of her favorites—“you never really know what is good for you; what may seem the absolute worst thing to happen to you can, in fact, be the best”—by her story of the inhuman train ride to Auschwitz and her arrival.

No food. No water. No air. No toilet. Four days jammed in a cattle car. An “older woman” in her forties who spoke a little German comforted my mother and gave her a sense of protection. My mother made sure never to leave her side, especially when they arrived at Auschwitz and were unloaded onto a ramp. Women with children were immediately separated from the rest and sent toward long, low buildings while the others were forced into a long line. At the head of the line, a soldier directed the prisoners into two groups. Looking on, from the top of the ramp, was an officer in white.

When it came her turn, the older woman was directed to the group being formed on the left and my mother quickly followed her. The soldier did not stop her, but the white-coated officer, who had not interfered until then, did. Striding down the ramp, he walked directly to my mother, yanked her away from her friend, and threw her into the group on the right. My mother always said that she’d never felt such sheer hatred for anyone as she felt for that man.

That man was Dr. Josef Mengele, she found out later, the notorious Angel of Death, who killed or mutilated many, many prisoners in medical experiments, especially children and twins. Why did he go through the trouble of saving her? Did she remind him of someone he cared about? However evil or not his intentions were, he saved her life. The group the older woman was assigned to went directly to the gas chamber. The group my mother was thrust into did not.

I always use that story when I want to console anyone, just as my mother told it so often to me: You never know how something that seems the worst thing turns out to be the best.

After that, she was determined to survive, no matter the horror. Even when the unmistakable smell of the smoke coming from the camp crematorium seemed unbearable and her fellow prisoners would say “We’re all going to die,” my mother would insist: “No, we’re not. We’re going to live.” Fear was not an option.

Nearly one million Jews were murdered at Auschwitz, many in the gas chamber. Others were executed, or killed in Dr. Mengele’s experiments, or died from starvation and exhaustion from slave labor. My mother was fortunate, if anyone could have been considered fortunate in those unimaginably cruel surroundings. She was put to work on the twelve-hour night shift in the nearby weapons factory making bullets; so long as she worked she was useful and was kept alive. She was tiny, barely five feet tall, and naturally slender. She had never eaten much and could exist, albeit barely, on the miniscule rations of bread and watery soup she and other prisoners were given. Heavier prisoners, radically deprived of anything close to the amount of food they were used to, she told me, were the first to succumb to starvation.

If ever I think I’m too lazy to do a necessary chore, if I hesitate to go out because of the cold or complain about having to wait in line, I remember my mother. I envision her being marched out of Auschwitz with sixty thousand others in the winter of 1945, just nine days before the Soviet troops reached the camp. The SS hastily executed thousands of inmates and marched the others fifty kilometers through the snow to a train depot where they were stuffed into freight cars and sent to Ravensbrück in the north, and from there force-marched again to their new camps, in my mother’s case to Neustadt-Glewe in Germany. Some fifteen thousand prisoners died on that Death March, of exposure, exhaustion, illness, or being shot by the SS for falling or lagging behind.

In what can only be described as a miracle, my tiny mother survived it all. She was one of the 1,244 who survived the camps out of the 25,631 Belgian Jews who were deported. Her will and spirit to live were her defiance of the evil she had endured, a declaration of her future. When Neustadt-Glewe was liberated a few months later by the Russians, followed closely by the Americans, my mother’s weight was barely the weight of her bones.

She was hospitalized at an American base and wasn’t expected to live. She defied the odds again. When she was stable enough to return home to Belgium she had to fill out a form, as did all survivors returning to their countries. I found that form. It had her name and date of birth on it and a question: “in what condition” she was returning from her thirteen months in captivity. Her astonishing answer was, in impeccable handwriting: “en très bonne santé” (“in very good health”).

My father, Leon Halfin, was very different from my mother. Where she was strict and somewhat distant, he was relaxed and affectionate. In his eyes I could do no wrong and he loved me unconditionally. As a child I loved him much more than my demanding mother, though maybe I respected her a little more. When I needed to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, I would call for my father and that made him laugh. “Why do you call me and not your mother?” he’d ask. And I would reply: “Because I don’t want to disturb her.”

My father never scolded me. He simply adored me and I adored him. I was as affectionate toward him as he was to me. I loved to sit on his lap, covering him with kisses and drinking all of his after-dinner lemon tea. To my father I was the most beautiful thing in the world and I felt entitled to his love and devotion.

My father and I looked alike and we had the same kind of relentless energy. He loved American cars, and when I was nine or ten he would often take me for a drive in his beautiful, sky-blue and navy American Chevrolet Impala convertible, a bicolor combination that was very popular in the late fifties. In that era, before seat belts were common, I would kneel on the front seat instead of sitting, because I thought that that would make people think I was a grown-up. I always, always wanted to be older than my age. I never wanted to be a little girl. I wanted to be a woman, a sophisticated woman, a glamorous woman. I wanted to be important.

My father, unknowingly, hastened that wish. When he came to say good night to me and kiss me in my bed, he was often cautioned by my mother. “Be careful, don’t wake up her senses,” she’d say. My father used to think my mother’s warning was hysterically funny. How could he, a man, wake up the senses of a little girl? Looking back now, however, no matter how funny he thought it was, he did wake up my senses. My father made me feel like a woman, so my mother was clever actually to say that.

The feelings were not sexual. It was the awareness that he was a man and that my relationship with him was therefore different from one I’d have with a woman. How lucky I was that this first man in my life loved me uncritically, unguardedly, without judging. I did not have to work for his love, I did not have to please him; his approval required no effort. That made an important impact on my life, and though I didn’t know it then, I now know it has made my relationships with men much easier. What I owe my father, and what I am so thankful for, is how comfortable I always feel with men. He gave me confidence.

That first love and affection marks the way I presume men feel toward me. I simply take their fondness for granted, neither expecting nor looking for it. The biggest gift my father gave me was not to be needy. I had so much love from him that I didn’t really need any more. In fact, I sometimes had to push it away because his display of affection in front of people embarrassed me.

My father was a successful businessman, a distributor of General Electric electronic tubes and semiconductors. He did well, so we lived very comfortably.

My parents were a striking couple. My father was very good-looking with high cheekbones and a mischievous smile. My mother had an elegant build and beautiful legs. She dressed very well and had a lot of allure. She was very much the boss of the house and I always saw her as the brains of the family. As much as I adored my father it was to her I went for advice.

She was not a traditional housewife, and only on Sundays, the housekeeper’s day off, did I occasionally see her in the kitchen. She would make a delicious grilled chicken with crispy potatoes and my father would bring pastries for dessert. My favorite petit gâteau was called a Merveilleux and was made of meringue, chocolate, and whipped cream. We were, after all, in Belgium, the land of chocolate. In fact, most of what my mother did at home was to instruct everyone else, but she did it very well. Our apartment was beautifully decorated, full of antiques she had collected. I have a clear memory of her looking for and finally finding the Empire chandelier she so desired. It now illuminates my Mayfair shop in London.

Since my mother died, my father having died six years before, I have searched for clues in my parents' lives as to what formed them and why I am who I am. That quest has taken me to Eastern Europe and the city of Kishinev, then the capital of Bessarabia, now the capital of Moldova, where my father was born in 1912, and to Salonika, Greece, where my mother was born in 1922.

Both my parents' families were in the textile business. My father's father, a wealthy Russian merchant whose relatives included many intellectuals and artists—one relative, Lewis Milestone, directed the 1930 Academy Award–winning war film All Quiet on the Western Front—owned several fabric stores in Kishinev. My mother's father, Moshe Nahmias, a Sephardic Jew (a Jew of Spanish origin), moved his family from Salonika to Brussels when my mother was seven and ran La Maison Dorée, the large department store owned by his brother-in-law, Simon Haim. My maternal grandmother's sister, my great-aunt Line, was married to the wealthy Simon Haim and had urged her sister to join her in Brussels with her family. So, although I had never made the connection before, I do indeed have a legacy of the fashion and retail business from both sides of my family.

There is nothing I could find in my mother's childhood that would give her the unimaginable strength to survive the death camps. As far as I could tell, she had a pleasant, uneventful young life in Brussels, rather spoiled as the youngest of three girls in the family. The only challenge for her and her two older sisters, who had gone to an Italian school in Greece, was to become more fluent in French when they moved to Brussels so they could do well at school. My maternal grandparents, who spoke Ladino, the language of the Sephardic Jews, at home, changed the birthdates of the girls when the family arrived in Brussels, passing them off as two years younger so they would have more time to adapt, learn French, and be successful at school. My mother went to the Lycée Dachsbeck, the same school I went to years later, and we even had the same kindergarten teacher and the same headmistress, Mademoiselle Gilette. I found out recently that Mlle. Gilette had ignored the racial laws of the Nazi occupation and allowed my mother to graduate from high school. It is probably why she chose me to blow out the candles on the cake at the school's seventy-fifth anniversary in 1952; I was the daughter of an alumna who went to the death camps and survived.

My father arrived in Brussels two years after my mother and her family moved to Belgium. He was seventeen in 1929 and was planning to follow in his brother's footsteps and train to be a textile engineer, when something went very wrong in Kishinev. My grandfather's business went bankrupt, which actually killed him, and my grandmother was no longer able to send money to my future father. He stopped studying, although I am not sure he ever officially entered school in Belgium, and went to work, taking any job he could find. He had no plan to go back home and enjoyed his freedom as a young, good-looking man even though his life as a refugee was not always easy.

It was the war that brought my parents together. When Germany invaded and occupied Belgium in 1940, many people fled south in what was called L'Exode. Thousands of cars jammed the roads escaping from the occupation. My father and his best friend, Fima, drove south to France and settled, temporarily, in a small hotel in Toulouse. They were young and very handsome and even though it was wartime and the situation was serious, they laughed a lot and had many women along the way. My mother also arrived in Toulouse with her aunt Line and uncle Simon. They made the trip rather regally in a Cadillac with a driver.

Fima had money but my father did not. He hated being dependent on his friend, so every morning he went around on a bicycle looking for the jobs that had been posted, but in every place he arrived, the job had been taken. "Try the train station," a sympathetic would-have-been employer suggested. There he met a man named Jean who began the sequence of events that would draw my mother and father together.

"I know someone who needs to go back to Belgium and has to sell a very large amount of dollars because

Belgium won’t allow anyone to bring in foreign currency,” Jean told him. “Do you know anyone who wants to buy dollars? He paid thirty-four French francs for them and is willing to sell at thirty-three.” My father certainly didn’t know anyone who wanted to buy dollars, so he paid little attention. A few days later, completely by accident, he met another man called Maurice who had a friend looking to buy dollars and was willing to pay a rate of seventy-six French francs for them.

My father couldn’t believe his ears. Was he understanding right? Jean had a seller at thirty-three and Maurice had a buyer at seventy-six. So much profit could be made with the difference. The problem was that my father had no idea how to find Jean. He didn’t know his last name or where he lived, so he raced around Toulouse on his bicycle for three days and three nights, looking for him. On the fourth day, my father went to the cinema and, realizing he had left his newspaper when he came out of the theater, went back for it—and bumped into Jean!

It took days to smooth out the many complications and finalize the transaction, because the sum was very large and my father had to prove he could deliver the money. He had to borrow some from his friend Fima to do a small sample transaction first, to prove he was trustworthy and, after a few days, completed the whole exchange. Overnight he went from having no money at all to actually being rich. In his diary my father recalls feeling so ashamed of his worn-out suit during the transaction that the day it was completed he bought three suits, six shirts, and two pairs of shoes. His good fortune didn’t end there. As fate would have it, the man who was buying the dollars turned out to be my mother’s uncle Simon. And that is how my parents met.

Theirs was not an immediate romance. Leon Halfin was twenty-nine, ten years older than my mother, and very interested in being a ladies’ man. But Lily was a Jewish girl, and as far as he was concerned, you didn’t touch Jewish girls—you married them.

The news from Belgium was that things weren’t so bad under the German occupation, and in October 1941, my parents returned separately to Belgium. My mother couldn’t go to university because of the racial laws, so she went to fashion school, studied millinery, and learned how to make hats. My father, who now had a lot of money, did not go back to Tungsram, the electronics company he had worked for, but became an independent businessman in the radio field in Brussels. They saw each other at gatherings of older relatives and family friends, but my father always treated my mother like a little girl, teasing her and pinching her cheeks. There was no romance although they clearly liked each other. Leon didn’t know my mother had a secret crush on him.

It wasn’t until the summer of 1942, when the SS started rounding up Jews in Belgium and deporting them that the danger began in earnest. Lucie, my father’s very good friend and ex-colleague at Tungsram, advised him to get out of Belgium and flee to Switzerland. He bought fake papers from the Belgian underground and began to plan his escape under the assumed and typical Belgian name of Leon Desmedt. He did not go alone. Lucie arranged for Gaston Buyne, a nineteen-year-old Christian boy to accompany him through France to the Swiss border. In a surprising turn of events, they were joined by Renée, a nineteen-year-old girl my father had just met. She was a Belgian Catholic girl who had fallen in love with my father and wanted to run away with him. Her mother had recently died and she didn’t like the woman her father had taken up with. That was the unlikely trio who set out together on August 6, 1942.

The train ride to Nancy, where they would transfer to another train to Belfort, was very dangerous. Gaston, a Belgian with legal papers, carried a lot of Leon’s money—banknotes in his shoulder pads, gold coins in his shoes and socks, and more Swiss notes in his toiletry bag. Because Gaston looked Jewish, much more so than Leon, he turned out to be the perfect foil. There were many, many checkpoints at which the German SS would randomly order male passengers to pull down their trousers to check whether they were circumcised.

Gaston was ordered to drop his pants. “Sorry,” the SS man apologized to him, and didn’t bother with my father who was sitting next to him.

They arrived in Nancy at night and checked into a hotel. The train to Belfort left at 5:15 a.m. and they had another run-in on board with a young SS soldier who wanted both Gaston and Leon to drop their pants. This time it was Renée who saved Leon by smiling coquettishly at the young soldier until he moved on to other passengers.

Belfort was even more dangerous. There were many, many Jewish refugees checking into the same hotel, but my father’s fake ID saved him. The German SS raided the hotel that night and arrested all the Jews, but not Leon Desmedt. (My father’s diary records that he made love to Renée twice that night.) Later they heard that all the people arrested that night were killed.

Leon and Renée parted ways with Gaston the next morning as they approached the Swiss border. They took a bus to Hérimoncourt, at which point Leon hired a local guide to lead them through the mountains and pastures into Switzerland just six kilometers away. That last leg of the escape cost fifteen hundred French francs with no guarantee of success. A few more refugees joined in as they met the guide at five a.m., among them a woman with a baby. She gave the baby a sleeping pill so he wouldn’t cry, and they set out on foot through the alpine mountains to the border. “Run, run, run in that direction,” the guide pointed and sent them off on their own. I remember my father telling me that it was the cows and their noisy bells that made their escape possible. By following the bells, Leon and Renée arrived at the Swiss border town of Damvant on August 8, 1942.

“Why do you carry so much money?” the border police asked my father. He told them that he was an industrialist from Belgium, but the police did not believe his story. “Your papers are fake,” they said. They confiscated his money but did allow him to enter Switzerland. “You can claim it back when you leave,” the police told him.

My father was very lucky. Although he remained under surveillance by the Swiss authorities, and was unable to travel freely or have access to his money without going through long bureaucratic requests, he spent a few fairly pleasant years there. He separated from Renée, who eloped with a policeman soon after their arrival, and began to miss Lily, the vivacious “little” girl he’d left behind in Belgium. The occupation of Brussels had become very severe and he was worried about her. Lily and her parents had to abandon their apartment and live separately. She was hiding in a resistance house where she worked. My aunt Juliette sent her son, my cousin Salvator, to live with his Christian Belgian nanny.

Curious Lily went to her family’s apartment one day and discovered that the SS had ransacked it and stolen all their belongings. She also discovered something that would change her life. There was a letter in the mailbox, an unexpected letter from Switzerland, from Leon, the man she had met in Toulouse and never forgotten. After reading and rereading it many times, she responded. It started a daily correspondence between them, carefully crafted because all the letters had to go through censors as the wide blue stripe across the stationery indicated. I am lucky to possess those letters, which, over time, became more and more intimate and passionate. They wrote about their love and about the moment they would meet again after the war, that they would marry, build a life together, have a family, and be happy forever. It was all about hope and love.

Then, suddenly, Lily’s letters stopped. (It was then, I recall my father telling me, that the mirror in his bedroom, on which he had taped a photo of my mother, fell and broke.)

He wrote to her again and again, begging in vain for an answer. On July 15, two months after my mother's arrest, he received a letter from Juliette, my mother's older sister, written in code to get through the censors.

"Dear Leon," she wrote. "I have very bad news. Lily has been hospitalized."

When my mother returned from Germany in June 1945, my father was still in Switzerland. By the time he came back to Brussels four months later, she had gained back much of the weight she had lost, but she wasn't the same naïve, mischievous, fun-loving, passionate girl he had been corresponding with and planned to marry. That girl was gone forever. This new young woman had endured true horrors and would carry the wounds forever.

In his diary, my father wrote with great honesty about their reunion. He admitted that he barely recognized the girl he had been separated from for more than two years. She was different, a stranger to him. Lily sensed his unease and told him he was under no obligation to marry her. The love was still there, he reassured her as he hid his doubts away. They were married on November 29, 1945.

The doctor warned them, "No matter what, you have to wait a few years before having a baby. Lily isn't strong enough for childbirth and the baby may not be healthy." Six months later, I was accidentally conceived. Remembering the doctor's warning, both my mother and father were concerned. They thought they could get rid of the pregnancy by taking long rides on his motorcycle over the cobblestoned streets, but it didn't work. Finally one morning my father brought home some pills to induce a miscarriage. My mother threw those pills out the window.

I was born healthy and strong in Brussels on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1946, a miracle. Because of the price my mother paid for that miracle, I never felt I had the right to question her, complain, or make her life more difficult. I was always a very, very good little grown-up girl, and for some reason felt it was my role to protect her. In his diaries, my father confesses that at first he was disappointed that I was not a boy, but within a few days he had totally accepted me and fallen in love with my mother again.

I have long suspected that if I hadn't been born, my mother might have killed herself. If nothing else, my existence gave her a focus and a reason to keep going. For all the strength and determination of her personality, she was extremely fragile. She hid it very well, and when people were around she was always light and fun. But when she was alone, she was often overtaken by uncontrollable sadness. When I came home from school in the afternoons, I would sometimes find her sitting in her darkened bedroom, weeping. Other times, when she picked me up from school, she'd take me to have a patisserie, or antiques shopping, laughing with me and giving no hint of her painful memories.

The people who went to the camps didn't want to talk about it and the people who weren't in the camps didn't want to hear about it, so I sensed she often felt like a stranger or an alien. When she did talk about it to me, she would only emphasize the good—the friendships, the laughter, the will to go back home and the dream of a plate of spaghetti. If I asked her how she endured, she would joke and say, "Imagine it is raining and you run in between the drops!" She always told me to trust the goodness of people. She wanted to protect me, but I realized that it is also how she protected herself . . . denying the bad . . . always denying the bad and demanding that the good forces win and, no matter what, never appearing a victim.

She did the best she could to put the war behind her. She had the two sets of tattooed numbers removed. And in a wonderful gesture of defiance, and to override her memory of the bitter cold she'd endured, she bought a very expensive, warm sable coat with the restitution money she got from the German government.

I spent a lot of time alone as a child, reading and imagining a grand life for myself. My childhood went smoothly, though life in Brussels was often gray and boring. I loved my big school, I loved my books, and I was a very good student. I loved my brother and my girlfriends, Mireille Dutry and Myriam Wittamer, whose parents owned the best patisserie in Brussels. On the weekends, our family spent Sundays in the country at my great-great-aunt and -uncle’s villa. They had a beautiful house on the edge of a large forest, the Forêt de Soignes. I loved walking in the woods, picking chestnuts in the winters and berries in the summers. My father would play cards with the men and my mother gossiped with the women. We ate a lot of good food. On the long, gray days, I lost myself reading Stendhal, Maupassant, Zola, and, on a lighter note, my favorite, The Adventures of Tintin, comic books about a daring young boy reporter created by the Belgian cartoonist Hergé. I lived vicariously through Tintin’s travels and exploits. Would I ever discover all these exotic places in the world? It seemed like nothing would ever happen to me.

When I had a few days off from school and my parents could not travel, I would often visit my aunt Mathilde in Paris. She had an elegant boutique off the Faubourg Saint-Honoré catering to a loyal, international clientele. She sold printed cashmere sweaters and jersey dresses and suits. I would spend entire days in the shop. My job was to fold the clothes and put them back in order. It was my first encounter with fashion, retail, and the secret virtues of jersey fabrics.

In Paris, I also visited my cousins, Eliane and Nadia Neiman, the two daughters of my father’s rich cousin Abraham, who had invented the theft alarm for cars. The girls spoke perfect Russian, gave piano recitals, and were very sophisticated. I felt terribly awkward and provincial when I visited them for tea or lunch at their villa in Neuilly. During the summers, my brother and I would go to summer camp near Montreux in the Swiss Alps or in the North Sea resort of Le Coq-sur-Mer in Belgium. We would also go on trips with my parents and my aunts and uncles to the South of France or the Swiss mountains.

My parents were a good-looking couple, and they loved each other very much, but my father wasn’t as sensitive around my mother as he should have been. He didn’t want to acknowledge her wounds, so he ignored them. He was a hardworking, generous man, but he could be indifferent and sometimes verbally harsh. I don’t think he had any real love affairs after he married my mother. He traveled frequently on business, and I am sure he did not always spend his nights alone, but that was not the problem between my parents. It was his insensitivity toward her that made her feel vulnerable. So the scene was set for what came next. And what came next was a man named Hans Muller.

The letter, addressed to my mother, was on the table in our front hall that day when I came back from school. For reasons that I still cannot fathom, I opened the blue envelope with the very clear handwriting. It was from someone named Hans Muller, who, I realized as I read, was a friend of hers. I did not know who this Hans was and I do not recall what the letter said, but I remember that my heart started to beat fast. I felt something major had happened, something that would change all of our lives, and that something was Hans. Knowing I had done something wrong, I carefully put the letter back in the blue envelope and left it on the table, but the damage was done. My mother came home, saw the envelope, and I confessed I’d opened it. I had never seen her so upset and angry. Though I was twelve at the time, she reacted in a very violent way, slapping me across the face with all her strength. I was desperate, I was in pain, I was ashamed. Whatever had come upon me to open that letter?

My face was only a little bruised the next day when I went to class, but my insides were crushed. I had disappointed my mother. I had betrayed her trust. We never discussed it again and I am not sure what she told my father that night when he came home. Was he home anyway or was he traveling? I don’t remember. I felt terrible, and to this day I have never again opened a letter or looked at a document or an email that was not addressed to me.

The following year, over my father's objections but to my own excitement, my mother sent me to Pensionnat Cuche, a private boarding school by the Lake Sauvabelin in Lausanne, Switzerland. It did not escape me that Lausanne is very close to Geneva, where Mr. Muller lived.

During the two wonderful years I spent at that school, living my own life, making many friends, and for the first time relishing my independence from my parents, I pieced together the story of my mother and Hans Muller. My father traveled a lot for his business, often taking my mother with him. When the travel entailed planes, they flew separately as insurance for my brother and me in case anything happened.

Hans Muller was my mother's seatmate on one of those trips, a long flight from Brussels to New York. He was a very handsome young Swiss German businessman who worked in the fruit business. Separated from his wife, he lived with his small son, Martin, who was the same age as my brother, Philippe. Monsieur Muller was polite and considerate, a stark contrast to my father, whose manners could be coarse and who sometimes belittled my mother in public. Hans was quite a bit younger than my mother and very taken with her. He would tell me, over the years, that he had never met a woman so attractive, interesting, and intelligent. They developed a friendship, which eventually led to a secret love affair and later to a long relationship.

I was not happy when my father insisted I be brought back to Brussels after my two years at boarding school in Switzerland. There I was, stuck at home again, and not a pleasant home at all. My mother and my father argued all the time and there was a lot of tension. I was relieved when they decided to officially separate. I think they both expected me to be upset that the family was splitting up. I wasn't, but I felt sad for my little brother. He was only nine and my parents would continue to fight over him for years after their separation and divorce.

As for me, I was fifteen in 1962. I felt grown up and secure, eager for whatever change lay ahead. Never once did I make my mother feel guilty about leaving my father, but instead I encouraged her and supported her completely. What she wanted, I'm convinced, was her freedom and independence after sixteen years of marriage, and I felt she deserved it. Was Hans an excuse or the reason? I never knew for sure. "Go on," I said. In turn, she would never make me feel guilty about anything either. When, years later, I told her I was leaving my husband, Egon, her response was "All right" and that was the end of it.

My father was devastated when my mother left him. His whole life revolved around his work and his family. I was not very sympathetic. Though I looked exactly like him and I loved him so very much, it was my mother I identified with. She wanted to move on, to experience life, to travel, learn, grow, expand her horizons, meet people, live her life. I understood it.

And so my parents parted and my childhood ended. One door closed, many others opened. I went on to another boarding school, this one in England, for two years and later to the University of Madrid in Spain. My mother lived with Hans for the next twenty years before separating from him, too. And I, with my mother as my role model, started to become the woman I wanted to be.

If anyone had the right to be bitter, my mother did, but never, ever did I hear her express any bitterness. She looked for the good in everything and everyone.

I'm often asked what was the worst thing that ever happened to me, what were my biggest challenges. I find it difficult to answer because I have this habit I inherited from my mother that somehow transforms what's bad into something good, so in the end, I don't remember what was bad. When I have an obstacle in front of me, especially of someone else's making, I say "OK. I don't like it, but I can't change it, so let's find a way around it.” Then I find a different path to a solution, which so satisfies me that I forget what the problem was in the first place. Of all the lessons my mother drummed into me, that was perhaps the most important. How could you possibly better yourself if you didn’t face your challenges up front or if you laid your problems off on someone or something else and didn’t learn from them? I offer that lesson often in my talks to young women. “Don’t blame your parents, don’t blame your boyfriend, don’t blame the weather. Accept the reality, embrace the challenge, and deal with it. Be in charge of your own life. Turn negatives into positives and be proud to be a woman.”

It doesn’t happen overnight, of course, and I never stopped learning from my mother. Over and over, she reinforced the lessons she’d taught me as a child.

When I was in my thirties, I suddenly developed a fear of flying, but when I told her I was afraid, she looked at me, smiling, and said, “Tell me, what does it mean to be afraid?” When once I was conflicted about starting a new business, she said, “Don’t be ridiculous. You know how to do it.” When I was diagnosed with cancer at forty-seven, predictably she told me not to worry, that I had nothing to fear. I wanted to believe her, but I had my doubts. Because she never showed any sign even in private that she was afraid, I wasn’t either. When my treatment was all done, she collapsed, and I realized that she had, in fact, been afraid for me, but by never showing it to me, she had made me strong and trusting that I would be fine.

After Egon and I married in 1969, she spent several months each year living with us in New York and formed close, loving relationships with my children, Alexandre and Tatiana. Her relationship with them was very different from the relationship she had had with me. She had never been very affectionate to me and there had always been a distance between us. As a result, I was reserved around her and never told her my intimate thoughts, except in letters. It was much easier for me to open up in letters, and I think easier for her, too. In her letters to me at boarding school in Switzerland and then in England, she would often call me her “pride,” but actually she never told me that to my face until much, much later when she was about to die.

She was much more open with my daughter as a grandmother and my daughter was more open with her than with me. They had an amazing complicity and spent hours together on her bed, telling each other stories. Tatiana became an excellent storyteller and filmmaker.

My mother was superb at handling money. She had taken half my father’s assets with her when she left him and invested them so well that she was, in her later years, able to feel secure and buy herself a beautiful house on the beach in Harbour Island, Bahamas. Had she been born at a different time and under different circumstances, she would have made a sought-after investment banker.

My son, Alexandre, benefited greatly from her financial skills. She taught him what stocks and bonds were, what kinds of companies were good investments, and about yields and dividends. Every afternoon when he came home from school, the two of them studied the stock market pages in the afternoon edition of the New York Post so he could see which stocks were going up and which down. When he was six or seven, my new boyfriend, Barry Diller, wanted to give him one share of stock for his birthday and told him he could choose which one. “Choose the most expensive,” my mother advised him. Alexandre chose IBM.

There is no doubt the financial education she gave him turned him into the financier he is today. He manages the family money, sits on prestigious boards, and has proven to be a superb adviser to all of us.

My mother was my rock. For all that I thought I’d conquered my fear of flying, I remember a very scary, bumpy flight to Harbour Island with her and Alexandre when she had just gotten out of the hospital. When the plane dropped suddenly and made loud creaking noises, I closed my eyes and thought, “OK, I am afraid.

Where do I go for strength? Do I take the hand of my big, strong son or of my weak, dying mother?” And there was no question that I would go to my mother for strength. I put my hand over hers.

At about the same time as that plane trip, I remember being anxious when my daughter, Tatiana, was about to give birth. It’s one thing when your son has a child, but for some reason, when your daughter has a child, you feel it in your own flesh. It is physical agony. I was frightened for my little girl, thinking of all the things that could go wrong. I called my mother, in tears, while driving to the hospital. She was very frail, but she summoned the strength to make me strong, though happily it turned out I didn’t need it. Antonia was born without any complication and Tatiana was fine. In yet another testament to her strength, my mother clung to life so that she could see Tatiana’s baby. Though her body was almost nonexistent, her mind and her will were strong. So many times in her life she was ill and on the verge of dying, but her incredible strength and determination kept her alive.

We had already welcomed her first great-grandchild, Talita, the daughter of Alexandre and his then wife, Alexandra Miller, and just as intense in my memory is the astonishing day when Alexandre brought the one-year-old Talita in her carriage to visit me and my mother in the Carlyle hotel in New York. It was Mother’s Day and Alexandre gallantly brought each of us a bouquet of flowers. All our eyes were on the adorable little girl who pulled herself upright, clinging to a chair, then suddenly launched off on her own and took her first steps! We all clapped and praised her, but then something unbelievable took place. I was watching my old mother, wrinkled and sick in her chair, looking at this little girl on the floor and that little girl looking back at her, when suddenly I saw a flash of something white, almost like lightning coming out of my mother and going into Talita. I believe that that day my mother’s energy and spirit transferred to my granddaughter. I saw it happen, that white flash going from my mother into Talita. I saw it.

My mother did not die peacefully. I think she was reliving the horrors of the camps and fighting giving in to death, as she had in Auschwitz. It was not the first time she’d relived those horrors. As much as she had tried to bury the past and concentrate on looking forward to life, she had had a breakdown twenty years before during a visit to Germany with Hans and some clients of his. My heart had nearly stopped when Hans called me in New York to tell me he’d woken up that morning in the hotel to find my mother missing. He’d finally found her hiding in the lobby of the hotel, underneath the concierge’s desk, disoriented, speaking loudly and making little sense. “Why? What happened?” I’d asked him, in a panic myself. He thought it must have been the dinner they’d had the night before with his clients at a restaurant. It was very hot and the people at the tables around her were speaking loudly in German. I suspected that she and Hans had also had a fight, but whatever the reason, she’d completely come apart.

Hans thought she might snap out of it if I talked to her and I tried to talk calmly to her over the phone, but all she could do was babble nonsensically. Hans drove her back to Switzerland and put her in the psychiatric ward of the hospital and we all flew to her side—my brother and I and even my father—but she remained very confused, laughing one minute, crying the next, raving and incoherent. She wouldn’t eat and she wouldn’t drink nor would she surrender the fur coat she insisted on wearing in her hospital bed. We thought we’d lost her. But she was a survivor through and through, and three weeks later she was well enough to leave the hospital to convalesce in a clinic. She was a miracle once again, coming back to life from far away.

In her final illness in 2000, even though lovingly cared for by Lorna, her nurse, she no longer had the strength to fight off death or the demons that had always haunted her.

My brother, Philippe, and I buried her in Brussels, beside our father. She knew there was a spot for her there, and was happy about it. They had been each other’s big loves in life, even though they separated, and it was appropriate that they end up together. We had our father’s headstone engraved: “Thank you for your love,” and our mother’s: “Thank you for your strength.”

The Mullers did not come to the service. Hans had married after they separated and in our agitation after my mother’s death, we did not manage to reach his son, Martin, in time for the funeral . . . I feel very bad about that because Martin had remained very close to her; I love him and Lily was a mother to him.

“Today, we’re taking Lily, my mother, for her eternal rest,” I wrote to her friends and my friends who couldn’t be there. “Our hearts are heavy but they should also be light because she has been liberated from all pain and has left on her eternal adventure surrounded by so much love.

“Fifty-five years almost to the day, Lily was liberated from the death camps. Twenty-two years old and less than 28 kilos. In that little package of bones, there was a flame, a flame that was life. Doctors forbade her to have children, she had two. She taught them everything, how to see, question, learn, understand and more important, never to be afraid.

“She touched all the ones that she met, listened to their problems, brought solutions and inspired them to find joie de vivre again. She looked so frail and fragile but she was strong and courageous, always curious to discover new horizons. She lived fully and will continue to do so through her children, her grandchildren, her great-grandchildren and her friends who loved her so.”

I signed the letter from all of us—“Diane, Philippe, Alexandre, Tatiana, Sarah, Kelly, Talita, and Antonia.” (My grandsons Tassilo and Leon were not born yet.)

I found a sweet note among many others my mother had written to herself, had it printed with an embossed lily of the valley because it was her favorite flower, and included it with what I had written.

“God gave me life and luck with my life,” she’d written. “During my life, I’ve kept my luck all along. I have felt it like a shadow. It follows me everywhere and so I take it wherever I go, saying, ‘Thank you, my luck. Thank you, my life. Thank you. Thank you.’?”

From the combination of understanding and actions, somebody could enhance their skill as well as ability. It will certainly lead them to live as well as function better. This is why, the pupils, workers, or even companies ought to have reading routine for publications. Any kind of book The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg will certainly provide particular understanding to take all benefits. This is what this The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg informs you. It will add even more expertise of you to life and function better. The Woman I Wanted To Be By Diane Von Furstenberg, Try it as well as show it.