



SURVIVING UNCERTAINTY

TAKING A HERO'S JOURNEY

by LANE WALLACE

Copyright © 2009 Lane Wallace

All rights reserved.

You are encouraged to further distribute this E-Book for non-commercial purposes provided the full copyright notice and the www.nomapnoguidenolimits.com Web site address are included, and no changes are made to the E-Book. We welcome your feedback!

First E-Book Edition
March 2009

ISBN 978-1-4276-3955-4

www.nomapnoguidenolimits.com

Cover design by Susanne Wehl: www.folio2.com
Layout and marketing by Mike Singer: www.mikesingeronline.com

*"This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know
what to do with it."*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Prologue

We are living in unsettling times. World markets are tumbling. Layoffs and foreclosures are spreading. Retirement accounts look shaky. And nobody seems to have a clear idea of how to turn it around. The next stretch of life is looking rocky and uncertain, and it doesn't feel good at all.

This book can help.

Twenty years of experience as a pilot, adventurer, and self-employed writer have taught me a lot of valuable lessons about surviving ... and thriving ... in uncertain times and situations. And one of the most valuable things I've learned is that uncertainty isn't always a bad thing. It can spark more creative thinking, wake up our senses, teach us valuable lessons about

ourselves and life, make us stronger and more resilient, and give us the opportunity to reshape our lives in ways that make us far happier, in the end.

That doesn't mean the process is easy. But if you embrace uncertainty—look at it as a great adventure, instead of a terrible turn of events— and learn to navigate successfully through it, the best part is ... you never have to fear uncertainty again. Why? Because like every epic hero, from Ulysses to Luke Skywalker to Dorothy of Oz, you will have learned that the power to prevail and find your way home through any uncertain landscape lies not in some external rescue, but within yourself.

I can't tell anyone else exactly how to find that strength. Every hero's journey is unique, and it's by figuring out the way yourself that the answers come. But the pages that follow offer at least one explorer's take on surviving and making the most of an uncertain adventure or journey—regardless of whether the adventure is chosen or forced, big or small, physical, professional, or personal. After all, adventure can be found anywhere, and anytime. Because in the end, “adventure” is what happens anytime you step out of what is known and comfortable into a place where your footing is a little uncertain, the outcome is a little

unpredictable but ... and this part is important ... the possibilities are suddenly wide open.

So whether you're thinking of climbing a mountain, starting a new business, changing paths in mid-life, or are simply trying to figure out how to survive changing and uncertain times ... I hope this book offers you a banquet of food for thought, spiced with inspiration and a healthy dose of practical, panic-averting advice. *Bon appétit!*

Table of Contents

Prologue	4
Introduction	8
The Gifts of Uncertainty	17
I Rethinking Uncertainty.....	18
II The Truth About Adventure	26
III The Gifts of Adventure	31
IV The Hero's Journey	39
Taking a Hero's Journey	48
V The Departure.....	49
1. See Your Life as a Hero's Journey	51
2. Know That the First Step is the Hardest	52
VI The Initiation	57
1. Don't Panic.....	58
2. Keep Moving	61
3. Keep Perspective.....	63
4. Embrace Your Freedom.....	65
5. Navigate, Evaluate, Innovate.....	67
6. Swim Downstream.....	69
7. Trust The Force	71
8. Remember the Night is Darkest Right Before the Dawn	74
9. Learn from your Mistakes	76
10. Seek and Nurture Friends and Kindred Spirits.....	79
11. Enjoy the View	82
V The Return	84
1. Take Notes and Reflect.....	85
2. Remember Growth Happens Slowly	90
3. Apply What You've Learned.....	93
Conclusion.....	95
About the Author	102

Introduction

The first thing that hits me is the silence. Silence as profound and unbroken as the field of ice and snow stretching out in front of me, 11,000 feet up in the French Alps. The jagged rock peaks of Petite and Grand Fourche jut up sharply behind me, and it's chilly in the shadows of the early morning air. I look around from my precarious foothold on the steep slope of rough glacial ice, and a second thought begins to sink in. I am completely and utterly alone. No companions, no distant climbers in sight, no other humans or mammals as far as the eye can see. Just ice, snow, and jagged rocky pinnacles rimming a frozen expanse of white. I look down, and a third thought registers. I'm wearing

tennis shoes. Shorts, a T-shirt, a light fleece jacket ... and tennis shoes.

Dear God. How in hell did I get *here*?

Five minutes earlier, I'd been comfortably ensconced in the left seat of a small mountain ski plane, taking some instruction from an expert flight instructor. Since the morning conditions were so nice, he asked if I'd like to try landing on one of the Alpine glaciers high up in the Mont Blanc range. I said sure. We circled over the landing site, checked the winds, and came around to land. The plan was to land uphill, turn 180 degrees, and take off again downhill.

But in the shadows of Grand Fourche, the icy snow gripped more tightly than I expected. We began the turn, but the skis got stuck in the snow halfway through the turn. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts to free the plane from the ice, the instructor leaned over and opened up my half of the canopy. "I need your help," he said over the noise of the running engine. "Go to the wingtip and push back as I add full power. That should rotate us. But once the plane turns, I don't have brakes, so I'm going to have to take off. Make your way down to the tracks down there..." He gestured to some tracks further down

the glacier, where the slope was shallower and the snow was in the sun. "...and I'll come back and pick you up there."

I DID think to grab a fleece jacket as I nodded and climbed out of the plane. But focused on the needs of the mission, I didn't take anything else. I climbed gingerly off the plane's low wing and made my way carefully around the down-slope wing until I was at the front edge of the wingtip. The ice was thick this morning, I noted as I kicked two toe-holds through the crusty surface to give me some traction to push against.

I leaned into the wing as the instructor ran up the engine and the plane started to shift. I ducked under the wing as it pivoted sharply toward me, turning in time to see the plane lifting off and heading out toward the lower end of the glacier.

I watched the red and white ski plane get small in the distance, the sound of its retreating engine quickly swallowed by the vast, uninhabited silence of the glacier and its surrounding mountain peaks. And there I was. Standing in the midst of all that majestic snow, rock and ice.

Alone.

It all seemed vaguely amusing until I took my first step downhill. My foot shot out from under me on the slick ice and I

very nearly fell. And falling a long distance across such rough ice in shorts ... I cringed as I envisioned the shredded skin, blood, friction burns and pain. My heart started pounding. This was actually quite serious. And I didn't have a clear vision as to how I was going to make it come out okay even without the added challenge of what I might be facing if the pilot and plane *didn't* come back to get me.

While the drama of an icy glacier high in the French Alps may make this story particularly gripping, the emotions that ran through me as I surveyed the seriousness and uncertainty of my situation that morning would be very familiar to anyone who's found themselves on unexpectedly shaky ground, with no clear map or guide to tell them where to go next, or how to safely get there. It's what every adventurer feels when exciting plans morph into uncertain and risky reality. It's what every entrepreneur feels when they finally sever their ties to their previous career, and what every successfully employed person feels when they're told that the company is closing its doors, or their job has been eliminated or outsourced.

Uncertainty is inherently stressful and uncomfortable. When I was a kid, I'd sometimes skip ahead to the end of a book to reassure myself about how it all turned out so I could enjoy

the uncertainty of the hero's fate along the way. But when we have to live that uncertainty in real-time, there's not a lot of comfort available to us. Especially if we didn't choose or plan to put ourselves in a situation where the outcome was so unknown ... or unknowable.

But here's an important reality check. Certainty is an illusion. Just ask anyone who's ever unexpectedly lost a job or gotten one of those dreaded family emergency phone calls. Life turns on a dime, and the only constant is change. On a very long transcontinental night flight, a number of years ago, when I'd gotten a phone call saying there'd been an accident and my father wasn't expected to live the night, I found myself sitting next to a man who was in the same awful boat that I was. I'd bought the only available seat on the next flight to New York, which happened to be in first class. My seat-mate traveled first class as a matter of course. But he'd been camping with his two sons in California when his only sister had been in a terrible car accident. By the time his family got word to him, she'd died. All his wealth hadn't managed to protect him from the loss, or even get him home soon enough to say good-bye.

Life is uncertain, no matter how successful we are or how much money we have. So what do we do about that? If we're

smart, we dig our heels in a little less firmly and learn to work with uncertainty, instead of simply trying to ward it off. Because somewhere underneath all the discomfort and stress that comes with it, uncertain times and situations actually contain some valuable lessons, gifts, and opportunities.

Take my predicament on the French glacier. I may have found myself dressed in appallingly inappropriate clothing, on a hazardous slope, with no clear or safe route between point A, where I was, and point B, where I could be rescued. But I had a secret weapon at my disposal: *I am no stranger to uncharted landscapes*. Somewhere long ago, I found peace with the uncertainty of my life's path and all the planned and unplanned adventures it entailed. So while I didn't know exactly how to cope with traversing a rough and slippery glacial slope in tennis shoes, I knew what steps I had to take to figure it out.

One. Focus. Falling is not an option, so balance is key and each step has to be very sure. Two. Prioritize. How do I MAKE each step very sure? This answer is very important. Three. Experiment. Kick a heel-hold in the ice. That works. Step firmly. Yes, I can make that hold. Kick another step. Whoa! Too far!!! Note to self: To keep center of gravity and balance, steps must be very small. Four. Remember to breathe. Don't panic. Ask self

– are you okay *right now*? Yes. Okay. This can work. Five. Keep perspective. One step at a time. Don't get overwhelmed by the distance to be covered. Take it one step at a time. Six. Take another step. WHOA! Okay, going straight downhill is too steep to manage. Back to three. Experiment. Try cutting diagonally across the slope. Four. Breathe. Five. Keep perspective. Stop, catch your breath, and remember to look around. When are you likely to find yourself alone on a glacier again? Wow. These peaks are staggeringly beautiful. Let me not forget that this isn't just stressful. It's also magical, beautiful, and vividly breathtaking. Be present. Be alive, and be thankful. Funny how that calms the heart. Okay. Back to one. Focus. Two. Step. Four. Breathe. Five. Repeat.

It took longer than I ever would have imagined, but I eventually made my way down safely to the flatter portion of the glacier, where the ski plane awaited me. All ended well. And for all the stress and uncertainty that morning entailed, I now have a sense of how profound silence can be, and a memory of a stark but breathtakingly unspoiled landscape burned indelibly into my mind.

All of which is to say ... coping with uncertainty is never comfortable or easy. But learning to deal with it can make fu-

ture encounters less overwhelming. And that, in turn, not only makes uncertainty easier to cope with, and gives you far more ability to succeed in the face of it ... it also frees up enough brain space to allow you to see some of the unexpected gifts that might be traveling in its pockets.

So ... how do you come to terms with uncertainty? First and foremost, you stop looking at it as something evil and awful that should be avoided at all cost. Because uncertainty can actually be a wonderful gift. Don't believe me? Keep reading.

Did you enjoy these sample pages?

Get the entire E-Book at:

www.nomapnoguidenolimits.com

About the Author

Twenty years ago, Lane Wallace left a successful corporate career to become a pilot and an adventure writer. Since then, she's climbed mountains in Nepal and Europe, kayaked the Na Pali Coast of Hawaii, gone



wreck diving in French Polynesia, and explored glaciers in Alaska. Her adventures have also included flying relief supplies in both the Amazon jungle and conflict zones in Africa, as well as donning a space suit to fly an Air Force U-2 above 70,000 feet.

Lane is an internationally-known columnist and editor for *Flying* magazine and has written articles for various national and international publications, including *ForbesLife* and *Wired* magazines. She's also authored six books for NASA on flight and space exploration. In addition, Lane has worked as a writer and producer for a number of television and video projects, including a three-part series for The Learning Channel, Microsoft's Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight video game, and the documentary "Breaking the Chain"—which won a 2006 Telly Award.

Lane is the founder of **No Map. No Guide. No Limits.**[™]