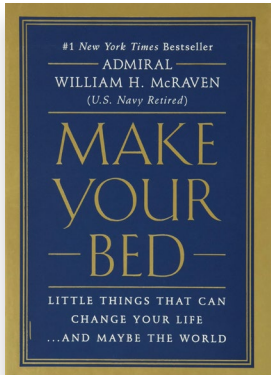


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Admiral William H. McRaven (U.S. Navy Retired) served with great distinction in the Navy. In his thirty-seven years as a Navy SEAL, he commanded at every level. He is now Chancellor of the University of Texas System.

Make Your Bed

THE SUMMARY

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Chapter 1: Start Your Day with a Task Completed

“Attention!” shouted the class leader, Lieutenant Junior Grade Dan’l Steward, as the instructor entered the room. Standing at the foot of the bed, I snapped my heels together and stood up straight as a chief petty officer approached my position. The instructor, stern and expressionless, began the inspection by checking the starch in my green uniform hat to ensure the eight-sided “cover” was crisp and correctly blocked. Moving from top to bottom, his eyes looked over every inch of my uniform. Were the creases in the blouse and trousers aligned? Was the brass on the belt shined to a mirror like radiance? Were my boots polished bright enough so he could see his fingers in their reflection? Satisfied that I met the high standards expected of a SEAL trainee, he moved to inspect the bed.

The bed was as simple as the room, nothing but a steel frame and a single mattress. A bottom sheet covered the mattress, and over that was a top sheet. A gray wool blanket tucked tightly under the mattress provided warmth from the cool San Diego evenings. A second blanket was expertly folded into a rectangle at the foot of the bed. A single pillow, made by the Lighthouse for the Blind, was centered at the top of the bed and intersected at a ninety-degree angle with the blanket at the bottom. This was the standard. Any deviation from this exacting requirement would be cause for me to “hit the surf” and then roll around on the beach until I was covered head to toe with wet sand—referred to as a “sugar cookie.”

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Standing motionless, I could see the instructor out of the corner of my eye. He wearily looked at my bed. Bending over, he checked the hospital corners and then surveyed the blanket and the pillow to ensure they were correctly aligned. Then, reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a quarter and flipped it into the air several times to ensure I knew the final test of the bed was coming. With one final flip the quarter flew high into the air and came down on the mattress with a light bounce. It jumped several inches off the bed, high enough for the instructor to catch it in his hand.

Swinging around to face me, the instructor looked me in the eye and nodded. He never said a word. Making my bed correctly was not going to be an opportunity for praise. It was expected of me. It was my first task of the day, and doing it right was important. It demonstrated my discipline. It showed my attention to detail, and at the end of the day it would be a reminder that I had done something well, something to be proud of, no matter how small the task.

Throughout my life in the Navy, making my bed was the one constant that I could count on every day. As a young SEAL ensign aboard the USS Grayback, a special operation submarine, I was berthed in sickbay, where the beds were stacked four high. The salty old doctor who ran sick bay insisted that I make my rack every morning. He often remarked that if the beds were not made and the room was not clean, how could the sailors expect the best medical care? As I later found out, this sentiment of cleanliness and order applied to every aspect of military life.

Life is hard and sometimes there is little you can do to affect the outcome of your day. In battle soldiers die, families grieve, your days are long and filled with anxious moments. You search for something that can give you solace, that can motivate you to begin your day, that can be a sense of pride in an often times ugly world. It is not just combat but daily life that needs this same sense of structure. Nothing can replace the strength and comfort of one's faith, but sometimes the simple act of making your bed can give you the lift you need to start your day and provide you the satisfaction to end it right. If you want to change your life and maybe the world—start off by making your bed!

Chapter 2: You Can't Go It Alone

I learned early on in SEAL training the value of teamwork, the need to rely on someone else to help you through the difficult tasks. For those of us who were "tadpoles" hoping to become Navy frogmen, a ten-foot rubber raft was used to teach us this vital lesson. Everywhere we went during the first phase of SEAL training we were required to carry the raft. We placed it on our heads as we ran from the barracks, across the highway, to the chow hall. We carried it in a low-slung position as we ran up and down the Coronado sand dunes. We paddled the boat endlessly from north to south along the coastline and through the pounding surf, seven men, all working together to get the rubber boat to its final destination.

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We learned something else on our journey with the raft. Occasionally, one of the boat crewmembers was sick or injured, unable to give it 100 percent. I often found myself exhausted from the training day, or down with a cold or the flu. On those days, the other members picked up the slack. They paddled harder. They dug deeper. They gave me their rations for extra strength, and when the time came, later in training, I returned the favor. The small rubber boat made us realize that no man could make it through training alone. No SEAL could make it through combat alone and by extension you needed people in your life to help you through the difficult times.

During my time in the SEAL Teams I had numerous setbacks, and in each case, someone came forward to help me. It was always someone who had faith in my abilities; someone who saw potential in me where others might not; someone who risked their own reputation to advance my career. I have never forgotten those people and I know that anything I achieved in my life was a result of others who have helped me along the way.

None of us are immune from life's tragic moments. Like the small rubber boat we had in basic SEAL training, it takes a team of good people to get you to your destination in life. You cannot paddle the boat alone. Find someone to share your life with. Make as many friends as possible, and never forget that your success depends on others.

Chapter 3: Only the Size of Your Heart Matters

I ran to the beach with my black, rubber flipper stuck underneath my right arm and my mask in my left hand. Coming to parade rest, I anchored the flippers in the soft sand, leaning them against each other to form a teepee. Standing to my right and left were other students. Dressed in green t-shirts, khaki swim trunks, neoprene booties, and a small life jacket, we were preparing for our morning swim.

The life jacket was a small, rubberized bladder that inflated only when you pulled the handle. Among the students, it was considered shameful if you had to use your life jacket. Still, the SEAL instructors were required to inspect every life jacket before each swim. This inspection also gave the instructors an opportunity for more harassment.

The surf off Coronado that day was about eight feet high. The waves were coming in lines of three, plunging with a roaring sound that made each student's heart beat a bit faster. As the instructor slowly moved down the line he came to the man directly to my right. The student, a seaman recruit and brand-new to the Navy, was about five foot four inches in height. The SEAL instructor, a highly decorated Vietnam vet, was well above six foot two and towered over the smaller man. After inspecting the student's life jacket, the instructor looked over his left shoulder toward the pounding surf and then reached down and grabbed the student's flippers. Holding them close to the young sailor's face, he said quietly, "Do you really want to be a frogman?"

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The sailor stood up straight, with a look of defiance in his eyes. “Yes, instructor, I do!” he shouted.

“You’re a tiny little man,” the instructor said, waving the flippers in his face. “Those waves out there could cut you in half.” He paused and glanced toward the ocean. “You should think about quitting now before you get hurt.” Even out of the corner of my eye I could see the student’s jaw begin to tighten.

“I won’t quit!” the sailor replied, drawing out each word. Then the instructor leaned in and whispered something in the student’s ear. I couldn’t make out the words over the breaking waves.

After all the trainees were inspected the instructors ordered us into the water, and we began our swim. An hour later, I crawled out of the surf zone, and standing on the beach was the young seaman recruit. He had finished the swim near the head of the class. Later that day, I pulled him aside and asked what the instructor had whispered to him. He smiled and said proudly, “Prove me wrong!”

SEAL training was always about proving something. Proving that size didn’t matter. Proving that the color of your skin wasn’t important. Proving that money didn’t make you better. Proving that determination and grit were always more important than talent.

Chapter 4: Life’s Not Fair—Drive On!

I ran to the top of the sand dune and without hesitation sprinted down the other side, heading full speed toward the Pacific Ocean. Fully clothed in my green utilities, short-billed hat, and combat boots, I dove head first into the waves as they pounded the beach off Coronado, California. Emerging soaking wet from the water, I saw the SEAL instructor standing on the dune. With his arms folded and a piercing glare that cut through the morning haze, I heard him yell, “You know what to do, Mr. Mac!” Indeed, I did.

With feigned enthusiasm, I screamed a hearty “hooyah” at the top of my lungs and fell face down into the soft sand, rolling from side to side to ensure that no part of my uniform was left uncovered. Then, for good measure, I sat up, reached deep into the ground, and tossed sand into the air to guarantee it found its way into every crevice in my body. Somewhere during the morning’s physical training, I had “committed a violation of the SEAL training rules.” My punishment was to jump into the surf zone, roll around in the sand, and make myself a “sugar cookie.”

In all of SEAL training there was nothing more uncomfortable than being a sugar cookie. There were a lot of things more painful and more exhausting but being a sugar cookie tested your patience and your determination. Not just because you spent the rest of the day with sand down your neck, under your arms, and between your legs, but because the act of becoming a sugar cookie was completely indiscriminate. There was no rhyme or reason. You became a sugar cookie at the whim of the instructor.

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To many of the SEAL trainees this was hard to accept. Those that strived to be the very best expected that they would be rewarded for their stellar performance. Sometimes they were and, then again, sometimes they were not. Sometimes the only thing they got for all their effort was wet and sandy.

Feeling like I was sufficiently coated with sand, I ran to the instructor, yelled “hooyah” again, and came to attention. Looking me over to see if I met his standard of excellence in sugar cookies was Lieutenant Phillip L. Martin, known to his friends as Moki. I, however, was not on a first-name basis with Lieutenant Martin. “Mr. Mac, do you have any idea why you are a sugar cookie this morning?” Martin said in a very calm but questioning manner.

“No, Instructor Martin,” I dutifully responded.

“Because, Mr. Mac, life isn’t fair and the sooner you learn that the better off you will be.”

It is easy to blame your lot in life on some outside force, to stop trying because you believe fate is against you. It is easy to think that where you were raised, how your parents treated you, or what school you went to is all that determines your future. Nothing could be further from the truth. The common people and the great men and women are all defined by how they deal with life’s unfairness: Helen Keller, Nelson Mandela, Stephen Hawking, Malala Yousafzai. Sometimes no matter how hard you try, no matter how good you are, you still end up as a sugar cookie. Don’t complain. Don’t blame it on your misfortune. Stand tall, look to the future, and drive on!

Chapter 5: Failure Can Make You Stronger

In SEAL training your swim buddy was the person you relied on to have your back. It was your swim buddy who you were physically tied to on the underwater dives. It was your swim buddy who you were partnered with on the long swims. Your swim buddy helped you study, kept you motivated, and became your closest ally throughout training. As swim buddies, if one of you failed an event, both of you suffered the consequences. It was the instructors’ way of reinforcing the importance of teamwork. As we finished the swim and crossed onto the beach, a SEAL instructor was waiting for us. “Drop down!” the instructor yelled. This was the command to fall into the push-up position: backstraight, arms fully extended, and head up.

“You two call yourselves officers?” There was no point in answering. We both knew he would continue. “Officers in the SEAL Teams lead the way. They don’t come in last on the swims. They don’t embarrass their class.” The instructor moved around us, kicking sand in our faces as he circled. “I don’t think you gentlemen are going to make it. I don’t think you have what it takes to be SEAL officers.” Pulling a small black notebook from his backpocket, he looked at us with disgust and wrote something in the book. “You two just made The Circus list.” He shook his head. “You’ll be lucky if you survive another week.”

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The Circus was the last thing either Marc or I wanted. The Circus was held every afternoon at the end of training. It was another two hours of additional calisthenics, combined with nonstop harassment by SEAL combat veterans who wanted only the strong to survive training. If you failed to meet the standard on any event that day—calisthenics, the obstacle course, the timed runs, or the swims—your name was on the list. In the eyes of the instructors, you were a failure.

What made The Circus so feared by the students was not just the additional pain but also the knowledge that the day after The Circus you would be exhausted from the extra workout and so fatigued that you would fail to meet the standards again. Another Circus would follow, then another and another. It was a death spiral, a cycle of failure that caused many students to quit training.

We had come in last on the swim, so the instructors had tailored The Circus just for us that day. Lots of flutter kicks (abdominals and thighs) so you could power your way through long ocean swims, but also designed to break you. The Circus was punishing. Hundreds of flutter kicks as well as push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, and eight-count body builders. By the time the sun went down Marc and I could barely move. Failure had a price.

The next day brought more calisthenics, another run, another obstacle course, another swim, and unfortunately another Circus. More sit-ups, more push-ups, and a lot more flutter kicks. But as The Circuses continued a funny thing happened. Our swims got better, and Marc and I began to move up in the pack. What had started as a punishment for failure was making us stronger, faster, and more confident in the water. While other students quit, unable to handle the occasional failure and the pain it brought, Marc and I were determined not to allow The Circus to beat us.

As training was coming to an end, there was one final open ocean swim, a five-miler off the coast of San Clemente Island. Completing it in the allowable time was essential to graduating from SEAL training. The water was bitterly cold as we jumped off the pier and into the ocean. Fifteen swim pairs entered the water and began the long trek out of the small bay, around the peninsula, and over the kelp beds. After about two hours, the swim pairs were so spread you couldn't tell where you were in the pack. Four hours into the swim, numb, exhausted, and on the verge of hypothermia, Marc Thomas and I crossed the beach. There waiting at the surf's edge was the instructor. "Drop down," he yelled.

My hands and feet were so cold I couldn't feel the sand beneath my fingers and toes. With my head straining to keep upright, all I could see was the instructor's boots as he walked around Marc and me. "Once again you two officers have embarrassed your class." Another set of boots appeared in my view and then another. Several instructors were now surrounding us. "You have made all your teammates look bad." He paused. "Recover, gentlemen!"

As Marc and I got to our feet we looked around the beach and suddenly realized we were the first swim pair to finish. "You embarrassed them all right." The instructor smiled. "The second pair isn't even

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in sight." Marc and I turned to look toward the ocean and sure enough, there was no one in view. "Well done, gentlemen. It looks like all that extra pain and suffering paid off." The instructor paused, stepped over, and shook our hands. "I'll be honored to serve with you when you get to the Teams."

We had made it. The long swim was the final tough event of training. Several days later Marc and I graduated. Marc went on to have a distinguished career in the SEAL Teams and we remain close friends to this day. In life you will face a lot of Circuses. You will pay for your failures. But, if you persevere, if you let those failures teach you and strengthen you, then you will be prepared to handle life's toughest moments.

Chapter 6: You Must Dare Greatly

Standing at the edge of the thirty-foot tower, I grabbed the thick nylon rope. One end of the rope was attached to the tower and the other end anchored on the ground to a pole one hundred feet away. I was halfway through the SEAL obstacle course and I was on a record pace. Swinging my legs over the top of the line and holding on for dear life, I began to inch my way off the platform. My body hung underneath the rope, and with a caterpillar-like motion I slowly made my way, foot by foot, to the other end.

As I reached the end, I released my grip on the line, dropped into the soft sand, and ran to the next obstacle. The other students in my class were yelling encouragement, but I could hear the SEAL instructor calling out the minutes. I had lost a lot of time on the Slide for Life. My "possum-style" technique of negotiating the long rope was just too slow, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to slide down the rope head first. Going head first off the tower, using a method called Commando Style, was much faster but also much riskier. You were less stable on the top of the rope than hanging underneath, and if you fell and injured yourself, you would be washed out of the class.

I crossed the finish line with a disappointing time. As I was doubled over, trying to catch my breath, a grizzled old Vietnam vet with highly polished boots and a heavily starched green uniform stood hunched over me. "When are you going to learn, Mr. Mac?" he said with an unmistakable tone of contempt. "That obstacle course is going to beat you every time unless you start taking some risks." One week later, I pushed my fears aside, mounted the top of the rope, and thrust my body head first down the Slide for Life. As I crossed the finish line in a personal best, I could see the old Vietnam SEAL nodding his approval. It was a simple lesson in overcoming your anxieties and trusting your abilities to get the job done.

Over the course of the next decade I would come to realize that assuming risk was typical of our special operations forces. They always pushed the limits of themselves and their machines in order to be successful. In many ways this is what set them apart from everyone else. However, contrary to what outsiders saw, the risk was usually calculated, thoughtful, and well planned. Even if it was spontaneous, the operators knew their limits but believed in themselves enough to try.

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Throughout my career, I always had great respect for the British Special Air Service, the famed SAS. The SAS motto was, "Who Dares Wins." The motto was so widely admired that even moments before the bin Laden raid, my Command Sergeant Major, Chris Faris, quoted it to the SEALs preparing for the mission. To me the motto was more than about how the British special forces operated as a unit, it was about how each of us should approach our lives.

Life is a struggle and the potential for failure is ever present, but those who live in fear of failure, or hardship, or embarrassment will never achieve their potential. Without pushing your limits, without occasionally sliding down the rope head first, without daring greatly, you will never know what is truly possible in your life.

Chapter 7: Stand Up to the Bullies

The water off San Clemente Island was choppy and cold as we began our four-mile night swim. Ensign Marc Thomas was matching my sidestrokes one for one. With nothing but a loose-fitting wet suit top, a mask, and a pair of fins, we swam hard against the current that was pushing southward around the small peninsula. The lights of the naval base from which we had started began to fade as we made our way out into the open ocean. Within an hour we were about a mile off the beach and seemingly all alone in the water. Whatever swimmers were around us were cloaked in darkness.

I could see Marc's eyes through the glass in his face mask. His expression must have mirrored mine. We both knew that the waters off San Clemente were filled with sharks. Not just any sharks, but great white sharks, the largest, most aggressive man-eater in the ocean. Prior to our swim, the SEAL instructors had given us a briefing on all the potential threats we might encounter that night. There were leopard sharks, mako sharks, hammerhead sharks, thresher sharks, but the one we feared the most was the great white.

There was something a little unnerving about being alone, at night, in the middle of the ocean, knowing that lurking beneath the surface was a prehistoric creature just waiting to bite you in half. But we both wanted to be SEALs so badly that nothing in the water that night was going to stop us. If we had to fight off the sharks, then we were both prepared to do so. Our goal, which we believed to be honorable and noble, gave us courage, and courage is a remarkable quality. Nothing and nobody can stand in your way. Without it, others will define your path forward. Without it, you are at the mercy of life's temptations. Without courage, men will be ruled by tyrants and despots. Without courage, no great society can flourish. Without courage, the bullies of the world rise up. With it, you can accomplish any goal. With it, you can defy and defeat evil.

Bullies are all the same whether they are in the school yard, in the workplace, or ruling a country through terror. They thrive on fear and intimidation. Bullies gain their strength through the timid and faint of heart. They are like sharks that sense fear in the water. They will circle to see if their prey is struggling. They will probe to see if their victim is weak. If you don't find the courage to stand your

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ground, they will strike. In life, to achieve your goals, to complete the night swim, you will have to be men and women of great courage. That courage is within all of us. Dig deep, and you will find it in abundance.

Chapter 8: Rise to the Occasion

I stood on the small sandy spit of land, looking across the bay at the line of warships that were moored at 32nd Street Naval Base. In between the ships and our starting point was a small vessel anchored in San Diego Bay that would be this evening's "target." Our training class had spent the last several months learning to dive the basic SCUBA and the more advanced, bubbleless, Emerson closed-circuit diving rig. Tonight was the culmination of Dive Phase, the most technically difficult part of basic SEAL training.

Our objective was to swim the two thousand meters underwater from the starting point across the bay to the anchored vessel. Once underneath the ship, we were to place our practice limpet mine on the keel and then, without being detected, return to the beach. The Emerson diving apparatus was morbidly referred to as the "death rig." It was known to malfunction occasionally, and according to SEAL folklore a number of trainees had died over the years using the Emerson.

At night the visibility in San Diego Bay was so bad that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. All you had was a small green chemical light to illuminate your underwater compass. To make matters worse the fog was rolling in. The haze hung low over the bay, making it difficult to take an initial compass bearing on our target. If you missed the target you would find yourself in the shipping channel, never a good place to be when a Navy destroyer was pulling into port.

The SEAL instructors paced back and forth in front of the twenty-five pairs of divers preparing for the night's dive. The instructors seemed as nervous as we were. They knew that this training event had the highest potential for someone to get hurt or die. The chief petty officer in charge of the event summoned all the divers into a small circle. "Gentlemen," he said. "Tonight we find out which of you sailors really want to be frogmen." He paused for effect. "It's cold and dark out there. It will be darker under the ship. So dark that you can get disoriented. So dark that if you get separated from your swim buddy, he will not be able to find you."

The fog was now closing in around us and the mist encircled even the spit of land on which we stood. "Tonight, you will have to be your very best. You must rise above your fears, your doubts, and your fatigue. No matter how dark it gets, you must complete the mission. This is what separates you from everyone else." Somehow those words stayed with me for the next thirty years. At some point we will all confront a dark moment in life. If not the passing of a loved one, then something else that crushes your spirit and leaves you wondering about your future. In that dark moment, reach deep inside yourself and be your very best.

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Chapter 9: Give People Hope

The night wind coming off the ocean was gusting to twenty miles an hour. There was no moon out, and an evening layer of low clouds obscured the stars. I was sitting in chest-deep mud, covered from head to toe with a layer of grime. My vision was blurred by the caked-on clay. I could see only the outline of my fellow students lined up in the pit beside me.

It was Wednesday of Hell Week, and my SEAL training class was down at the infamous Tijuana mudflats. Hell Week was the seminal event for the First Phase of SEAL training. It was six days of no sleep and unrelenting harassment by the instructors. There were long runs, open ocean swims, obstacle courses, rope climbs, endless sessions of calisthenics, and constant paddling of the inflatable boat small (IBS). The purpose of Hell Week was to eliminate the weak, those not tough enough to be SEALs.

Statistically speaking, more students quit during Hell Week than at any other time in training, and the mudflats were the toughest part of the week. Located between South San Diego and Mexico, the mudflats were a low-lying area where drainage from San Diego created a large swath of deep, thick mud that had the consistency of wet clay. Earlier that afternoon, our class had paddled our rubber boats from Coronado down to the mudflats. Soon after arriving we were ordered into the mud and began a series of races and individual competitions designed to keep us cold, wet, and miserable. The mud clung to every part of your body. It was so dense that moving through it exhausted you and tested your will to carry on.

For hours the races continued. By the evening, we could barely move from the bone-chilling coldness and the fatigue. As the sun went down the temperature dropped, the wind picked up, and everything seemed to get even harder. Morale was declining rapidly. It was only Wednesday, and we all knew that another three days of pain and exhaustion lay ahead. This was the moment of truth for a lot of the students. Shaking uncontrollably, with hands and feet swollen from non-stop use and skin so tender that even the slightest movement brought discomfort, our hope for completing the training was fading fast.

Silhouetted against the distant lights of the city, a SEAL instructor walked purposefully to the edge of the mudflats. Sounding like an old friend, he softly talked into a bullhorn and offered comfort to the suffering trainees. We could join him and the other instructors by the fire, he said. He had hot coffee and chicken soup. We could relax until the sun came up. Get off our feet. Take it easy. I could sense that some of the students were ready to accept his offer. After all, how much longer could we survive in the mud? A warm fire, hot coffee, and chicken soup sure sounded good. But then came the catch. All he needed was for five of us to quit. Just five quitters and the rest of the class could have some relief from the pain.

The student beside me started to move toward the instructor. I grabbed his arm and held him tight, but the urge to leave the mud was too great. He broke free of my grasp and began to lunge for dry

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ground. I could see the instructor smiling. He knew that once one man quit, others would follow. Suddenly, above the howl of the wind came a voice. Singing. It was tired and raspy, but loud enough to be heard by all. The lyrics were not meant for tender ears, but everyone knew the tune. One voice became two and two became three and then before long everyone was singing.

The student rushing for the dry ground turned around and came back beside me. Looping his arm around mine, he began to sing as well. The instructor grabbed the bullhorn and shouted for the class to quit singing. No one did. He yelled at the class leader to get control of the trainees. The singing continued. With each threat from the instructor, the voices got louder, the class got stronger, and the will to continue on in the face of adversity became unbreakable. In the darkness, with the fire reflecting on the face of the instructor, I could see him smile. Once again, we had learned an important lesson: the power of one person to unite the group, the power of one person to inspire those around him, to give them hope. If that one person could sing while neck deep in mud, then so could we. If that one person could endure the freezing cold, then so could we. If that one person could hold on, then so could we.

Hope is the most powerful force in the universe. With hope you can inspire nations to greatness. With hope you can raise up the downtrodden. With hope you can ease the pain of unbearable loss. Sometimes all it takes is one person to make a difference. We will all find ourselves neck deep in mud someday. That is the time to sing loudly, to smile broadly, to lift up those around you and give them hope that tomorrow will be a better day.

Chapter 10: Never, Ever Quit!

I stood at attention along with the other 150 students beginning the first day of SEAL training. The instructor, dressed in combat boots, khaki shorts, and a blue and gold tee shirt, walked across the large asphalt courtyard to a brass bell hanging in full view of all the trainees. "Gentlemen," he began. "Today is the first day of SEAL training. For the next six months you will undergo the toughest course of instruction in the United States military." I glanced around and could see some looks of apprehension on the faces of my fellow students.

The instructor continued. "You will be tested like no time in your life." Pausing, he looked around the class of new "tadpoles." "Most of you will not make it through. I will see to that." He smiled. "I will do everything in my power to make you quit!" He emphasized the last three words. "I will harass you unmercifully. I will embarrass you in front of your teammates. I will push you beyond your limits." Then a slight grin crossed his face. "And there will be pain. Lots and lots of pain."

Grabbing the bell, he pulled the rope hard and a loud clanging noise echoed across the courtyard. "But if you don't like the pain, if you don't like all the harassment, then there is an easy way out." He pulled the rope again and another wave of deep metallic sound reverberated off the buildings. "All you have to do to quit is ring this bell three times."

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He let go of the rope tied to the bell's clapper. "Ring the bell and you won't have to get up early. Ring the bell and you won't have to do the long runs, the cold swims, or the obstacle course. Ring the bell and you can avoid all this pain."

Then the instructor glanced down at the asphalt and seemed to break from his prepared monologue. "But let me tell you something," he said. "If you quit, you will regret it for the rest of your life. Quitting never makes anything easier." Six months later, there were only thirty-three of us standing at graduation. Some had taken the easy way out. They had quit, and my guess is the instructor was right, they would regret it for the rest of their lives. Of all the lessons I learned in SEAL training, this was the most important. Never quit. It doesn't sound particularly profound, but life constantly puts you in situations where quitting seems so much easier than continuing on. Where the odds are so stacked against you that giving up seems the rational thing to do.

Life is full of difficult times, but someone out there always has it worse than you do. If you fill your days with pity, sorrowful for the way you have been treated, bemoaning your lot in life, blaming your circumstances on someone or something else, then life will be long and hard. If, on the other hand, you refuse to give up on your dreams, stand tall and strong against the odds—then life will be what you make of it—and you can make it great. Never, ever, ring the bell!

Remember to start each day with a task completed. Find someone to help you through life. Respect everyone. Know that life is not fair and that you will fail often. But if you take some risks, step up when times are toughest, face down the bullies, lift up the downtrodden, and never, ever give up, then you can change your life, and maybe the world, for the better!