

Creating Moments That Matter

*Excerpts from Mariah's TIM Talk at the Lutheran Synod
in Washington, DC.*

Mariah Fenton Gladis

Inspirational Living Series

Books by

Mariah Fenton Gladis

Tales of A Wounded Healer

INSPIRATIONAL LIVING SERIES:

Bitterness Is Not An Option

Creating Moments That Matter

Asking For What You Want

The Art Of Receiving Well

Your Relationship With You

Magic Words To Fulfilling Relationships

The Experience of Forgiveness

ISBN -13 # 123-0-1234567-1-2

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Published by

WindWhispers Press

Malvern, Pennsylvania

610-647-4754

About The Author



In 1981, Mariah Fenton Gladis was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), more commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. Three prominent neurologists gave her a 10% chance of surviving more than 2 years.

Yet, three months after the diagnosis, Mariah married and proceeded to have two children. Today, she continues to be a loving wife, a doting mother, an author, a renowned psychotherapist and motivational speaker. Mariah’s courage to continually go forward with grace and determination—and without bitterness—demonstrates the amazing survival capacity of the human spirit.

Mariah continues to conduct workshops across the globe, addressing a wide range of human challenges: from early life emotional trauma to debilitating grief and loss, from life threatening illnesses to people seeking more meaning and joy in their lives.

In Mariah’s words:

“People often ask me how I do it, listening to people’s problems all day long. I tell them that I don’t hear problems. I hear people wanting to change, wanting to be better human beings, wanting to create happier families. From every continent and all walks of life I hear people wanting to love and be loved more effectively. I hear people wanting to remove barriers in their lives and provide a healthier environment for their loved ones. This is a privileged position that I have, sharing so many compelling and heartwarming moments of laughter and tears with people working toward healing.”

Creating Moments That Matter

Mark Nepo, in his brilliant and inspiring book, *The Exquisite Risk*, wrote about the power of directing your life, “It is the drifting and steering along the way, and the turning of experience into that which keeps us alive—this is the necessary art from which we live and breathe. It is how we find our way.”

I believe Nepo is talking about the power of moments in your life. Moments large and small. Moments that can transform, connect, elevate, and sometimes heal.

At age 33, I was doing great. I was running, skiing, and riding horses. Then came the twitch in my right thumb. That was followed by cramping in the whole hand. In June of 1981, that little twitch turned into a diagnosis of ALS, Lou Gehrig’s disease. Out of nowhere, I was given a 10% chance to live 2 years. It was a moment I won’t ever forget.

But there’s more to the story. That same evening, Ron asked me to marry him. My hero. He said he believed in my health and that we had a life to live. And let’s get on with it. Now that was an exhilarating moment.

What a day! First, I’m dying... then I’m getting married! Within the next 22 months, and against all medical advice, I had two children. Try that one on.

My personal journey as a 37-year survivor of ALS and my 45 years as a psychotherapist has taught me that when we look back on our lives, it is those special moments we recall; the ones that formed us, shaped our lives and filled our hearts and souls. We are all capable of being moment

makers and moment receivers and have the opportunity to change the lives of others and ourselves.

Spontaneous moments can drop like a gift from the heavens. We've all had them. Someone opens a door for you, or you receive a compliment or.(INSERT)...Recognize them and receive the moment. Inhale, and let it saturate your being. Be grateful. (adjective)Moments can happen anytime, anyplace, around the bend, out of the blue. Be open for these moments and take joy in them.

I was thinking about my own journey today. As a young woman in my 20s, I began to descend into despair. I lost my father very early in life. He left our home when I was 2 ½. I would never see him alive again. And I grew up as the only child of a single, loving, yet severely depressed, alcoholic mother. I knew I needed help.

So, I found a psychiatrist who was this fatherly, kind, smart man and I would go to see him every Tuesday and Thursday at 6 in the evening. And we had these wonderful conversations. One night it was very cold and snowing. And it was quite a long ride, over an hour.

When I arrived at his office in his home he had a warm fire burning. What he did next completely surprised me; when I sat down, he brought a blanket and gently placed it over my shoulders.

Now, as I look back on all our wonderful, deep talks about life, I don't remember one specific conversation, not one. But I do remember the moment he placed that blanket over me. His warmth. His caring. He touched a place in me that I didn't know I had; a longing for the comfort of a father. He had created a perfect moment.

We are all capable of being moment makers and moment receivers. We have the opportunity to change the lives of

others and ourselves. These moments offer you the chance to respond: either you seize the moment or you miss it.

I was in a supermarket on the Main Line of Philadelphia in the sixties and I remember an African American boy around age 7, trying to get a bottle of soda high off the shelf. He dropped it and it exploded all over the floor. He looked up at me with eyes of terror. At 18 years old, I froze right along with him. I didn't move. It wasn't that I didn't care. I just didn't do anything.

Now when I remember that moment, I would love to go back to the supermarket and help him; kneel down at eye level and tell him it's fine, that I've done that before. Give him money if they were holding him accountable. I learned from that moment. He was my teacher. I missed the moment.

Think about the moments that shaped your life. They can be small moments or large moments. While the larger moments like a terminal diagnosis or a marriage proposal are easy to recognize and feel, it's the smaller moments that often need awareness. If someone opens a door for you or tells you how nice you look or that they enjoyed talking with you. Bring that in. Appreciate it. If you held a door for someone or offered a stranger help with something. Bring that in too. You have the ability to make each moment matter.

As a disabled person I often tell my friends to come with me for a day and see another part of life, a display of moments of human kindness. Opportunities to experience life in new enriching ways.

If my husband, Ron, is stroking my hand, I feel the touch, the sensation. I hold the power to make his touch impotent or nourishing; I want to receive and appreciate every ounce of what I am being given. From the gift of this moment, I may feel safe and a sense of belonging, precious and loved, attractive and desired. The ordinary moment can become a

sweet, extraordinary moment of aliveness and maybe even healing.

You are the master of your moments in life, so create them. Apologize to someone you hurt. Feel the care when someone opens a door for you. Express love and respect to someone you care about. Forgive someone who hurt you. Deeply receive a compliment. Make contact with someone in a checkout counter and say hello. Tell someone they look pretty today or that you're glad to see them. The possibilities to deepen and enrich your life are endless. Make and receive moments that matter. Believe me, you will make memories and possibly change someone's life.

ALS has been my teacher. It has propelled me into the arms of those I love. It has shown me that now is the only moment I have for sure. Most of all, it has heightened my awareness of the preciousness of this moment...right here...right now...with you.

BIOGRAPHY: Mariah Fenton Gladis, MSS, LCSW, BCD

Founder and Clinical Director of the Pennsylvania Gestalt Center for Psychotherapy and Training since 1976, Mariah has been a faculty workshop leader at *Esalen Institute* since 1987. She received a Social Worker of the Year award from *NASW*, a Living Legacy Award from the *Women's International Center*, and is one of "Pennsylvania's Best 50 Women in Business."

Mariah is on the Board of Advisors of *Camp Dreamcatcher* – a camp for children affected/infected with HIV/AIDS, faculty and trainer for *Center for a Healthy World*, a volunteer-driven psychotherapy cooperative, and belongs to the *National Association of Social Workers*, where she is a

Board Certified Diplomate. Mariah is the author of *Tales of a Wounded Healer*, an accessible description of her psychotherapy practice.