

## SYNOPSIS

### NAVIGATING SHITSTORMS

#### How To Find Your True Course When Life Gets Rough

##### PROLOGUE / INTRODUCTION

November 20, 2022: After a series of personal events and losses – health setbacks, a reneged marriage proposal, the onset of Covid, business launch challenges – and overwhelming feelings of burnout, grief, and shame, coupled with long suppressed feelings from childhood that begin to leak out, culminate in suicidal ideation, the author heads off to a self-imposed stay at an in-patient treatment facility referred to as The Place. Liz begins her journey of healing from the familiar feeling of being collateral damage and starts to gain clarity about the impact of childhood trauma.

When a close family member, Lynda White, disappears from the University of Western Ontario in 1968, six-year-old Liz is forced into a shitstorm of epic proportions as her mother must manage the crisis. The not knowing if Lynda is alive or dead for five years has radical consequences; the premature birth and death of Liz's baby sister, family divorces, and her grandfather's debilitating stroke combine to force a move into her mother's family home where Liz is given Lynda's bedroom. The on-going crisis and unintended parental neglect cause Liz to carefully craft a set of coping mechanisms to manage her own needs and those of her younger brother. Meanwhile, her mother adopts her own plan to prevent Liz from a fate similar to Lynda's. The discovery of Lynda's body in 1973 only leads to more conjecture and unanswerable questions as an unrelenting stream of events continues to unfold: random evidence discoveries, regular visits from psychics with new insights, and retiring detectives stopping by to tell the family they're not giving up.

Liz is fifty-eight years old when people at The Place force her to examine her childhood. With a rip-off-the-Band-Aid attitude, Liz also unpacks an abusive marriage while she's there. And a few other failed relationships. The Place humbles her as she sees firsthand that shit happens and no one is immune. She's not a psychologist or a therapist. She doesn't hold a medical degree. She's just like you and me. She wants to be happy, to feel fulfilled, to stop thinking that "there's gotta be more to life."

## PART 1: CHILDHOOD

### Chapter 1: It All Starts in Childhood

Every human is born as pure love. With hearts strong and wide open, they are whole. Their perfection is uncontested as they love themselves without limits or conditions. They don't judge or compare. Everyone honors their intrinsic human value and believes they are worthy of their unique place in the world. Everyone begins their journey full of peace, love, freedom, and joy – it's part of our hearts' DNA.

Feelings arrive, and we don't know what to do with them. Emotional intelligence is rarely taught. It's learned, developed, and strengthened by trial and error. We learn that feelings are subject to judgement – that some are unacceptable and that some should be avoided at all costs. Children don't realize that their feelings provide the guidance required to find their true course, like a Happiness GPS.

### Chapter 2: Shit Happens

Childhood is when relationships are formed for the first time. Children must learn how to be with themselves, other people, and the world at large. They must figure out what everything *means*.

An ACE is an Adverse Childhood Experience. About 61 percent of adults have experienced at least one type of ACE before age eighteen. Little traumas can add up to a big trauma over time, and neglect is also traumatic. Every child responds uniquely. The severity of the ACE isn't the most influential component. The fact that has the greatest impact on a child's future is how they responded to it. The meanings they came up with to explain it are what drives their internal dialogue and the subsequent coping mechanisms that they then carry into adulthood.

The human brain must make a connection between the event and its meaning. Any crazy story will do. Only then can the brain relax knowing its work is done. After children make up what something meant, they adopt one or more of three new beliefs that result in negative feelings, unequipped to do any better.

The Three Shitty Beliefs:

1. **I am unlovable.** This includes "I am not \_\_\_\_\_ enough." Feeling incompetent, self-conscious, inferior, ashamed.
2. **My needs are not important.** Feeling unworthy, burdensome, responsible for others.
3. **The world is unsafe.** Feeling helpless and afraid.

The next task for children is to come up with a way to protect themselves from the event happening again. Or, at the very least, how to comfort themselves when the fear, or the pain, is too much. If a child's new coping mechanisms are not conscious and deliberate, they will manifest by default, subconsciously – things like boundary issues, numbing, controlling, people pleasing, lying, angry outbursts, or self-harm. . . you get the idea.

### **Chapter 3: Childhood Fears**

Children are not born with fear. They learn it. They make up stories and they concoct meanings with their young and undeveloped brains. They're also taught specific fears from people they trust. Everything changes when children learn to see the world through a lens of fear. And then, to compound matters, they learn that fears are not created equal – they come to understand that fears are judged and categorized.

### **Chapter 4: You Did the Best You Could**

Everyone, parents included, are doing the best they can in the moment with the resources they have available. We place blame on others to make sense of a situation or to give ourselves a free pass, but that excuse is an illusion.

Through no fault of their own, all humans become inadvertent victims of their childhood.

## **PART 2: VICTIMTOWN**

### **Chapter 5: Welcome to Victimtown**

A yearning arrives when we're unhappy for too long. It's undeniable, unstoppable, and innate. It's our heart voice wanting to be heard. Yearnings typically are for one of four sentiments: peace, love, freedom, or joy.

Many months after returning home from The Place, Liz struggles yet again with depression and suicidal ideation. Through a dream, Liz comes to an unwelcome realization of her victim mentality, but it's not what you think. We don't realize that the majority of people in this world are one type of victim or another.

All victims are not created equal:

1. **The Whiners** have an attitude of entitlement. Nothing is ever their fault. Their victim status defines their personality.

2. **The Private Victims** have secrets. Full of anxiety or depression, they're embarrassed or ashamed and view themselves as not good enough.
3. **The High-Functioning Victims** have no idea they hold a victim mentality. They appear to have everything together, but they continue to produce unwanted behavior patterns and they feel unfulfilled.



Liz creates Victimtown and all its places. Victimtown is where we go when we're not ready to face the pain. Every person on earth shows up here – including detectives and perpetrators. Naming these places has the power to jolt us into awareness, which is a gift. Victimtown is where we learn life lessons, but it's not where we'll find our true course. Fulfillment of our yearnings doesn't happen here, either.

Every single reader will recognize one or more of the places in Victimtown and be forced to acknowledge the time they've spent there. Victimtown is where we end up when we drag our childhood coping mechanisms into adulthood. With this new awareness, Liz embarks on the final expedition to heal her childhood and learn to love herself without limits or conditions

## Chapters 6: The Ego Arena

At the Ego Arena, voices on a loudspeaker amplify the shitty voice in everyone's minds. Gossip, competition, scarcity, judgment, and ranking human worth are expected activities. The singular

mission of the arena voices is to instill fear. But there's another quieter voice that talks back. This is your heart voice, the real you. The Ego Arena can be inspiring or demoralizing.

Story: The Night of The Wailing – Liz's first memory is of her mother's unrelenting grief and fear having learned that her sister is missing.

Story: EMDR Therapy – at The Place, Liz undergoes EMDR therapy for this traumatic memory.

## Chapters 7: The Control Factory

The Boss says, "It's your job to fix their problem," and "You'll only be happy when \_\_\_\_\_ happens." The Boss teaches us to judge and label, emphasizing that our happiness is dependent on controlling outcomes. The work is endless. To be successful here, you must always be right.

The skills required in the **People Department** range from advice-giving and blaming to gaslighting and guilt-tripping all the way up to threats and abuse. These skills are tactics used to change people, but the Boss mandates that you practice on yourself.

The mission of the **Circumstances and Events Department** is to create safety, organization, and predictability because the Boss knows that, unless our environment is exactly the way it should be, happiness is impossible. Mistakes and failure are not tolerated. Resignations are not accepted.

Story: The Pee Story – Terrified to be alone, Liz refuses to use the school bathroom and pees her pants on the way home. . . in the winter.

Story: The Boob Story – Without boundaries or self-worth, adult Liz is easily convinced that breast implants will make her loveable and her husband more faithful.

## Chapters 8: The Guilt & Shame Café

The Maître D' decides where people dine. If you're sent to the secluded back room, he'll whisper, "You should hate yourself because you're a terrible person," as he hands you some *self-loathing meatloaf* and a *dishonored dessert* along with copious amounts of alcohol. Patrons here recount every single deficiency of their being with painstaking detail.

Story: The Wooden Blocks - Liz tells on her three-year-old brother and discipline gets out of hand by their stressed-out mother.

Story: The Greyhound Bus – Fourteen-year-old Liz runs away with her friend who is being sexually abused by her stepfather.

## **Chapters 9: The Resentment Parking Lot**

Deep hurts, betrayals, and rejections are what everyone talks about here. Grudge telling abounds as the Attendant makes his rounds and reiterates, “what they did is completely unforgiveable!” Righteousness is everywhere. The Revenge Lot offers long-term parking, but the price is never posted.

Story: Lynda’s Bedroom - Liz and her family move into her grandparents’ home and Liz is given Lynda’s unaltered bedroom.

## **Chapters 10: The Denial Trails**

Endless hiking trails where reality is skewed begin at the Issue Building where one of many Dirtbags will accept and store whatever issues you’ve got. Dirtbags provide never-ending diversions: shopping, exercise, work, drugs, alcohol, whatever you want, as they spew advice like “your issue is impossible to figure out” and “have some drinks and you’ll feel better.”

Unaware of the slippery slopes, false peaks, and mudslides, hikers trudge onwards. Nobody notices the ambulances lined up at the bottom.

Story: The Brown Paper Bag - Random evidence is discovered, and Liz accompanies her mother and grandmother to pick it up and deliver it to the police.

Story: The Ballistic Missile Threat - Adult Liz is in Hawaii during the ballistic missile threat.

## **Chapters 11: The Anger Gas Station**

We learn how to pump gas when we’re kids. Car crashes, collateral damage, joyrides, drag racing, and clubs promoting rally days – all this and more happens in Victimtown. A high-octane additive called hate is endorsed by the owner of the gas station. He tells us, “You have every right to be furious. Someone needs to put that guy in his place!”

Story: The Lynda Boxes - At nine years of age, Liz is tasked with cutting out newspaper articles relating to Lynda before the newspapers are allowed in the house.

## **Chapters 12: The Sorrow Swampland**

Worry rafts and Ruminant rafts are available for rent. People form flotillas for fellowship. The longer we use the rafts, the more our fear and anxiety grows. Through the mist you hear a benevolent voice singing “It’s just not possible to overcome this” and “Your life is hopeless.”

If our hearts bear too much weight to keep us afloat, the lyrics will drag us to the bottom where we meet the singer of the songs, the Swamp Monster. He says, “Your pain will never end,” seeking to hold us hostage as high toxicity levels trap us in the mucky bottom. Like the other town voices, the Swamp Monster is a liar who will put you into a trance.

Story: Rogue Waves - Adult Liz travels across the world to find her brother having not seen him in over eighteen years.

## **Chapters 13: The Meditation Meadow**

A magical destination, the Mediation Meadow is the only place of reprieve amid the chaos of Victimtown. This environment makes the town voices uneasy. Always a solo experience, the meadow is where we can hear our heart voice. Paths out of Victimtown exist here.

Story: The New Girl at School - Liz swallows a fly on her first day at school and learns a method to find calm.

## **Chapters 14: The Epiphany Hospital**

At this world class facility, all the best opportunities and outcomes are offered, but nobody knows how many chances they’ve got left. There’s a chance for a big change of heart, but lots of people refuse treatment if they listen to the advice from the Victimtown council volunteers.

The Boss: “You don’t have time for this shit. Get your ass back to work.”

The Maître D’: “You brought this on yourself. You’re weak and pathetic.”

The Lot Attendant: “You got your father’s genes. Your body has betrayed you.”

The Dirtbag: “Don’t worry, this is just a freak thing. The doctors don’t know what they’re talking about.”

The Gas Station Owner: “Life is so unfair. Someone should pay for this!”

The Monster: “You’re probably gonna die. Even if you live, you’ll never be the same.”

There are three ways to leave Epiphany Hospital:

1. Exit through the door you came in and return to Victimtown.
2. Decide to begin your healing journey and arrange whatever support you need to help you find a way to a better place.
3. Your time on earth ends.

Story: The Track Team - Liz has an intuitive ‘knowing’ while running a track race that Lynda has been found.

## **PART 3: LEAVING VICTIMTOWN**

### **Chapters 15: The Shitty Life Circle**

Nobody plans to be a victim. Our familiar and trusted childhood coping mechanisms lead us to continue navigating shitstorms with fear.

Insert shitty life circle

Minimizing our struggles, overemphasizing the struggles of others, judging and quantifying what feelings we’re entitled to have, not speaking our truth, not feeling at all – all these things are more ways to keep us on the shitty life circle and stuck in Victimtown.

### **Chapters 16: Exit Stage Left**

Our childhood beliefs cut us off from the only muscle capable of defeating the town voices – our hearts. Designed to gain strength through suffering, our *heartfelt* insights are precisely what will lead us out of Victimtown. No one can save us. We always get to choose what things mean. Some friends won’t want us to leave, and the town council will work overtime to keep us there.



## **Chapters 17: The Heart Voice Power Plan**

Our heart voice is our intuition and our soul's GPS. Based entirely in love, our heart voice has all the answers. It can defeat the town voices, transform your shitty childhood beliefs, help you navigate any shitstorm imaginable, and pave the way for you to love yourself unconditionally so you can spend more time in Freedomville.

We are all more than enough, exactly the way we are. Self-worth is the fertile ground in which to grow our heart voice.

The Heart Voice Power Plan:

1. Put the town voices in their place.
2. Entice your heart voice to get loud.
3. Listen and act on your heart voice wisdom.

## **Chapters 18: Put the Town Voices in Their Place**

Distinguishing the voices by feeling. Fear is a pretty shitty friend. Although there's no way to get rid of the town voices entirely, we can learn to manage them. Tactics include agree to disagree, know their motives, "what if. . .," voice your fears, H.A.L.T., interrupt them, and the here and now.

## **Chapters 19: Entice Your Heart Voice to Get Loud**

Liz introduces concepts such as the same way we help our friends, formal invitations, affirmations, and – the biggest one of all – feeling our feelings. The shitty feelings, the great feelings, and the scary feelings are unpacked. All feelings carry valuable messages meant to be decoded. All feelings need to be felt in their entirety. Anger and pain are explored along with the relationship between feelings and responsibility and how our physical body reacts. Clarity is essential.

Story: Red Light, Green Light – In the midst of divorce angst, adult Liz has an acute anxiety attack while driving.

## Chapters 20: Listen and Act on Your Heart Voice Wisdom

Liz introduces **Newsight**: what we acquire when we get curious and open ourselves up to the world of possibilities, be they known or unknown. The Hearty Life Circle is an option at the “shit happens” choice point. Here’s how to utilize it:

1. **Catch it.** Recognize the choice point and pause to see the opportunity.
2. **Hold onto the pause.** Identify and manage the town voices.
3. **Use the pause.** Tune into your heart voice and your body. Trust it. Get curious. Stay calm. Choose a response based in love.

Healthy outcomes arrive only when we rely on our heart to gauge our own needs. Heart voice power isn’t something we obtain but rather something we’re meant to grow and release.

## PART 4: FREEDOMVILLE

### Chapters 21: Get Radical About Self-Care

Freedomville isn’t freedom from shitstorms; rather it’s about the freedom to choose how to respond when shitstorms happen and the awareness and knowledge of how and why to make that choice. It takes effort to live here. Some days more than others. In Freedomville there’s no chaos in our heads, competition doesn’t exist, we’re no longer yearning, we like who and where we are. While our lives may not be exactly the way we want, we trust that we’re headed in the right direction.

The basics of self-care are the healing power of food, the benefits of sleep, giving up alcohol and time in nature. By practicing radical self-care, we stay rich with love and compassion, and that’s a gift to the world.

### Chapters 22: Forgiveness Feeds Our Yearnings

(Stories: A Random Group Therapy Question)

C<sup>2</sup>: A Forgiveness Formula: Curiosity x Compassion = Forgiveness

Curiosity about another person—their childhood, their coping mechanisms, their adult experiences, and their unprocessed pain—leads us to compassion and opens the door to forgiveness. Forgiveness is not forgetting. We also apply the C<sup>2</sup> forgiveness formula to ourselves.

Liz explores mistakes and failures. Transforming our past by rewriting the stories we tell both ourselves and others is explained.

Victimtown version: That asshole made me so mad that I smashed the window. I couldn't help it. He's lucky I didn't smash his face.

Freedomville version: I'm not proud of how triggered I got and the damage I did. I'm working on better responses.

When we own our stories, they no longer hold any power over us.

### **Chapters 23: Design Your Life with Boundary Basics**

Establishing, expressing, and defending our boundaries is how we honor our heart voice wisdom. Boundaries benefit both ourselves and others. They're about protecting – and sharing – our personal resources: our love, our time, our bodies, our environment, our knowledge, our money, and our things. They're unique and subject to change. Healthy boundaries *feel* right. They're based in love, not fear.

Frameworks for expressing boundaries is offered, and defending boundaries is explored.

Loving with detachment is presented as an approach for parents or when other people we love are struggling or in crisis.

### **Chapters 24: Courage is Learnable**

Liz writes her ultimate definition of courage - **Intrinsic Courage:**

**“Intrinsic courage  
is our ability to view  
every past experience,  
every current situation, and  
every person involved  
with love and compassion.”**

Sounds smart, yes? Honorable, too. Liz admits it's not so easy to live it. It can be tough to apply it to others and sometimes even tougher to apply it to ourselves. However, we were all born with an unlimited amount of love and compassion. We may be out of practice putting it to good use, but it's there inside all of us. That's why it's called intrinsic.

Courage and our heart voice work together. They're faithful partners conceived to inspire, support, and enhance each other. Intrinsic courage makes it possible for us to have ***complete trust in all outcomes***. Together, they provide the support for us to let go of our fears. We can modify old patterns and behaviors.

Intrinsic courage inevitably leads us to understand the role that every experience, situation, and person played in creating an opportunity for us to learn, heal, and find joy. Liz believes that our collective ability to embrace intrinsic courage when we're in pain has the power to change our world, and she begins to hope for a chance to forgive whoever is responsible for her Aunt Lynda's death.

Story: Heart Voice Plea – Liz's message to whomever is responsible for Lynda's death and to anyone who might know something.

## **Chapters 25: Victimtown vs. Freedomville**

Liz eats a weed cookie and suddenly finds herself back in Victimtown then unpacks how and why visits can happen and how to handle it. Visiting and rescuing people in Victimtown are also discussed. An invitation is extended to use the language of all the places in Victimtown to open conversations for both sharing what's going on with us as well as asking questions in order to support the people we love. By eliminating the stigma, the place names provide a less vulnerable way to express both feelings and circumstances. The sooner anyone is aware of where they're at in Victimtown, the sooner they can formulate a plan to get out.

Even after we've healed our past traumas and hurts, there are always more lessons. Always. Some new lessons won't require a visit to Victimtown because now we know how it all works but many will. It's fair to expect that the hardest lessons might land us in at least one of the places, for a little while anyway. That's okay. Our lessons last a lifetime. That's why we're here. That's why Victimtown exists: to offer us gifts.

Instinctively you've always known what it takes to live in Freedomville: heart voice power and intrinsic courage. You were born with both. Neither is effortless or always straightforward, but they're a surefire way to find the peace, love, freedom, and joy that we all yearn for. Practicing radical self-care, forgiveness, and boundaries provides us with the strength to maintain our heart voice power and to act with intrinsic courage when shit gets real. Your complete trust in all outcomes provides solace through the worst hardships. This is how to navigate shitstorms.