



Two

WHAT A PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR TAUGHT ME

Hundred

ABOUT LIFE, LOVE, AND FAITH

Tuesdays



DIANNE DERBY

with T. L. Heyer

What a beautiful and honest story of faith, friendship, and transformation, all thanks to a chance encounter. We can all learn something from both the 104-year-old war hero and the forty-something journalist, both on a quest to leave the world better than they found it. There is something—a lesson, a truth, a question—for all of us in *Two Hundred Tuesdays*.

LAUREN FERRARA, journalist and founder of Why Wait Stories

The World War II generation left us a blueprint for how to be better people and how to coexist in a better world. Jim Downing is one of the many architects of that blueprint. Dianne Derby captures the true essence of this incredible man, who was there in the crucible of Pearl Harbor and went on to make sure we never forget December 7, 1941, and the lessons of that day, which still resonate in all our lives.

TIM GRAY, filmmaker and founder and president of the World War II Foundation

Dianne Derby once confidently faced her future with a headstrong tenacity. Then she met “Grandpa Jim,” her life mentor. Raised in the Christian faith, Derby met Jesus in a fresh way thanks to this unlikely friendship. In *Two Hundred Tuesdays*, she reveals how Jim Downing’s impact gave her the resources not simply to navigate life but also to enjoy life fully.

MARK CONFORTI, DMin, United Methodist pastor and author of *Clergy Mentoring*

Honest, vulnerable, and engaging. A beautiful picture of friendship and discipleship. A must-read!

DR. MARK MAYFIELD, counselor, speaker, coach, and author of *The Path out of Loneliness*

Dianne Derby's *Two Hundred Tuesdays* is a delightful, emotional guide of resiliency and perseverance filled with inspiring anecdotes of positivity and her perilous journey of self-discovery with an American hero as her mentor. I LOVED this book, a must-read for all empaths and anyone who's faced adversity, and also a gift to the world, filled with positive core values, self-love, and paying it forward. I can't wait to share this incredibly thoughtful book with my friends and family.

PHIL MARTINEZ, president and CEO of PM Productions

This is a book that captures a friendship across generations, across gender, and even across faith traditions. It is a gem of a book that reminds readers that sometimes Truth transcends. Dianne is a newscaster bent on finding and breaking the next big story. (She is very good at that, by the way.) Jim was an aging war hero who had The Story that just had to be shared. Put on the spot, Dianne unflinchingly took on the challenge, and the result is this charming book. Read it and be blessed.

DON PAPE, curator of Pape Commons

Dianne's faith journey is brutally honest, touching, and inspiring. Anyone who wants to know what it is like to walk humbly with God must read it!

VINH CHUNG, MD, author of *Where the Wind Leads*

*Two Hundred Tuesdays: What a Pearl Harbor Survivor Taught Me about Life, Love, and Faith* is much more than the story of a Pearl Harbor survivor; it's also a book about relationships, marriage, and lessons learned from Jim. Dianne's boldness to

be authentic is captured immediately. This book will inspire kindness toward one another; I confidently recommend it for those wanting more out of life, love, and faith.

LARRY DOZIER, MBA, veteran and chairman of the board at  
Mt. Carmel Veterans Service Center

Accomplished people in their last stage of life are in a unique position to impart wisdom and understanding to those immersed in the day-to-day struggles of work, marriage, and child-rearing. *Two Hundred Tuesdays* is a great example of the healing power of such meaningful relationships between young and old.

JOHN SUTHERS, mayor of Colorado Springs



*Two Hundred Tuesdays*



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NavPress 

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*Two Hundred Tuesdays: What a Pearl Harbor Survivor Taught Me about Life, Love, and Faith*

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*To Claire and Chip:*  
*May you know the peace*  
*that surpasses all understanding.*

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## INTRODUCTION

WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER about the last newscast you watched? Since I work in a business that is driven by ratings, I sincerely hope you remember the news anchor at the desk—but the truth is, you probably don't.

You probably remember only one story. We are wired to crave stories, to value authenticity, to long for the truth. We want to know about tomorrow's forecast, crime in our community, and what's happening with the latest recall. We want to leave the newscast feeling okay enough about the world that we will come back and watch more tomorrow. That's why the final story in a newscast is usually a positive one.

Now you know the secret to broadcasting the news.

Like you, I usually only remember one story from each newscast. You know the kind—the story that tugs at your heartstrings. I never forget the sobs of the

mother whose young daughter is missing, the sound of her voice as she begs her daughter to come home; the family huddled in a corner of a shelter after they evacuated their home when high winds whipped a fire into an inferno; or the widow who won't see her husband again.

Let's face it—I don't bring the good news; I tell you the bad. In newsrooms, we search for the sound bite that cuts straight to the heart of the matter, to the truth of someone's soul. That's what makes television news compelling. Until you hear the story firsthand from the person most impacted, you can't really get it. Journalists are trained to find those ten-second, meaningful sound bites, because those ten seconds are the reason you watch.

Because I am a journalist, I tell stories for a living. I don't make things up, and nothing I report is fiction. I'm a truth-teller, and I present each story as it happened—even if it's hard to say, hard to hear. I chase after authenticity. When I interview someone, I expect them to tell the truth. Without truth and authenticity, what can we really hold on to?

There's a dichotomy in journalism, though. Because I am a journalist, I have been taught not to share my own emotions, and I'll be honest with you about that too: This part of the work is hard for me. Growing up, my nickname was "Teary" because I cried all the time. I

cried over the things that made me sad, and I cried over the things that made other people sad.

I finally found a word for all of this in my forties: *empath*. My dear friend Alyssa sent me an article about people with this trait and said, “Derbs, I think this is you.”

I read the article over and over, feeling so understood for the first time. An empath feels everything, including others’ emotions *as if they were their own*. Sometimes the stories I report are enough to tear me in half. Sometimes I want to cry on the air, and it feels inauthentic to hold back. How can I not show what I’m feeling?

For seventeen years, I have been trained to show just enough emotion, but not too much. To share my thoughts, but not too much. To react to the interview sound bite, but not too much. The feedback I have heard time and time again? “Dianne, stop being so much.”

But that’s the problem: I simply *am* too much. How can one who is TOO MUCH not react too much? This is the balancing act of my life.

Everyone longs to be known, to be seen, to be heard. This basic need is right up there with oxygen, food, and shelter. When someone listens to you—truly wants to see who you are—well, that kind of knowing can change you.

That's what happened to me when Jim Downing came into my life: He saw me. He wanted to know me. He taught me a path to a life where my TOO MUCH found its home.

So in the pages of this book, I am coming as myself. My whole self. I want to show you who I am, and I want to show you who Jim was.

This is my story—and the story of the man who changed my life.

CHAPTER 1

A MILLION CHANCES  
TO SAY YES

*A New Job, a New Haircut, and a Whole New Image*

WE AREN'T YET out of the South Carolina city when my eyelids start to feel heavy. I tend to get immediate symptoms of narcolepsy as soon as I start any road trip longer than twenty minutes. This cross-country drive to Colorado is going to be a drowsy one.

“Mom, I have to pull over. I can’t drive.”

“Seriously? Already?” she says.

“Sorry. You know how I am. I can’t help it.”

“Well, pull over then. I guess I’ll be driving this whole trip.”

We pull into the nearest gas station and switch seats,

with my husband, Pete, trailing in the car behind us. I know Pete isn't even remotely surprised.

The cars are packed to the ceiling with clothing, makeup, and jewelry. That's all I've brought with me. The rest will stay in storage until move-in day at our townhome under construction in Colorado Springs. Something tells me Pete is happy to be all alone, blasting his music in his Volkswagen Jetta. Nobody back there is telling him what to do. He has nothing to worry about but his obstructed rear view.

Mom takes the wheel, and I take our Chihuahuas, Lily and Rosebud, putting the girls in my lap as we hit the road again. A long drive for a fresh start.

I snap a picture of the sunset and post the obligatory Facebook status update that accompanies a major life change. I decide to include lyrics by singer Jason Aldean: "With a windshield sunset in your eyes, like a watercolored painted sky, you think heaven's doors have opened."<sup>1</sup>

*Yes, heaven's doors are opening for me. I just don't see how wide yet.*

Excitement and nervousness are similar emotions, and they have spun together as butterflies in my stomach. I'm not sure which one I feel more at any given moment.

My departure from my job was unpleasant and

unexpected. I'd been put in a situation where I felt like I had to choose my job or my integrity, and so I left with about fifteen minutes' notice. Call it a black-and-white decision, call it all or nothing—call it whatever you'd like. But in a moment of perfect clarity, I realized I hadn't been heard, I wasn't valued, and my voice had been silenced. I wasn't going to compromise my integrity for any position or amount of money.

Now I'm driving away, with the city I love and a hard piece of my story in the rearview mirror.

My fresh start is a full-time job as an evening anchor at a news station in Colorado Springs. I'll finally get to tell the stories that matter most to me. I won't have to go out on the crime beat or the consumer beat. Now I get to tell stories about people who have faced the hardest things, walked the darkest paths, and found life on the other side—"the overcoming beat," if you will. I love these stories best, and I sense that viewers are hungry for them too. If you are like me, you stare at the screen in awe, and you listen to these people who have overcome, and you want to ask them, "How did you do it? How can life ever be happy again after the tragedy you have experienced? How, how, how are you okay?" I am hungry for stories of victory, of people who know that life must go on.

After three days on the road, Mom, Pete, and I pull

our two-car caravan into the parking lot of the extended-stay hotel that Pete and I will call home for the next several months. The hotel is lovely, located where the mountains meet the interstate, a quick ten-minute drive to the KKTU 11 News studios.

Pete and I fill our room in record time as we unload all my clothing. Let's just say . . . the closet fills quickly. When the hotel staff see just how many clothes I've brought, they let me borrow one of those rolling carts to keep in the room. I have so much stuff—jewel tone dresses to wear on the air (no pastels, no prints, of course), evening gowns to wear to emcee events, and accessories to accent my outfits but not distract from the stories. (I do confess I love giant chandelier earrings, and I sneak those in sometimes.) I even purchase renter's insurance, just in case my wardrobe gets destroyed. It sounds silly, I know, but these details matter in the news industry. If a news anchor is poorly dressed, the trolls of the internet will gladly let everyone know.

Pete and I quickly learn to enjoy vacation amenities in our everyday lives. The staff offer us breakfast every morning, Pete enjoys happy hour at night, and our Chihuahuas learn to ride the elevator like city girls, their toenails clicking like high heels on the polished floor. Our new "home" is just what we need.

We explore our new city with wide eyes and wonder.

New restaurants, new people, new stories—and all in front of a Rocky Mountains backdrop. I start each day with a long look at the majesty of Pikes Peak. “Yep,” I say, “this will work just fine.”



In my first minutes on the job, I meet Barb, a boisterous lady with a roaring laugh you can hear throughout the building. Barb is very clearly in charge of who and what gets into the building, and she greets me quickly before she rushes to get my boss, Liz Haltiwanger.

Alone for a moment in the studio, I take a deep breath and look around at the lights, cameras, screens, and giant glass anchor desk, polished to shine. How strange for everything to be so quiet, even for a moment.

*So this is where I'll be for the next five years, I think. Or at least that's what my contract says.*

I hear Liz's ballet flats glide across the floor as she bustles toward me with a brisk walk and a welcoming smile. “Hello, Dianne. Hurry. You have a phone call with our image consultant in two minutes.”

And that's how I learn—quickly and immediately!—that Liz doesn't waste time, and she speaks and listens at double time speed. Liz does everything fast, and I swear her thoughts roll in ten-second-interview sound

bites. She runs the newsroom, and she has too much to do to even think about slowing down. I match her stride, and we hit the ground running. She whisks me into the newsroom, ushers me into an editing booth, and launches me into a phone call with the image guru.

Now, let me say this: I usually like working with consultants. Newsroom staff typically complain about them, their big ideas, and their bossy tone when they arrive to tell you everything you're doing wrong. But I've learned to smile, listen, take the advice I want to use, smile again, and thank them. They're not always kind, but I've held on to some golden nuggets from them over the years.

Something is different about this consultant, though: She feels like a friend to me—which is good because she's about to redo my image with a sparkly coat of fresh paint. She quickly becomes the honest sister who will tell me if my makeup foundation is too light or too dark, if I have lipstick on my teeth, or if my smile looks fake. She studies my taped on-air test with my coanchor, and she says I look washed-out on TV. She tells me I need brighter lipstick and more eyeliner. She sends me to get a few inches cut off my hair, and she forwards me a picture of NBC anchor Amy Robach. "See those voluminous layers, Dianne? We need those on you."

I can do all of that. I even have Velcro rollers that

will do the trick. I go to the hair salon the next day, and I stop by Sephora and buy the brightest red lipstick I can find.

Lipstick. Eyeliner. Haircut. Layers. Check, check, check, check.

I spend most of my first days watching the newscast, improving my “look,” and learning how things work at this station. The producers help create a Facebook fan page for me, and they start posting updates announcing that I’ll be on-air soon. The local print reporter for the *Gazette* comes by to interview me for a quick article about my pending debut on KKTV, and the studio records promotional commercials. The consultant evaluates my new image and gives me a thumbs-up. New and improved, rebranded and remarketed, Dianne Derby is ready to go on the air.

My coanchor, Don Ward, is a seasoned journalist with multiple Emmys, and he can write stories faster than anyone I’ve ever known. He is quick-witted and brutally honest, and I immediately trust his wealth of experience by my side. We hit it off as coanchors, and he claims he told my managers to hire me. He says he’s the reason I got the job.

Our consultants plan an anchor retreat that Don teasingly calls “Trust-Fall Camp,” complete with ice-breaker activities meant to bond Don and me. We need

to fast-forward our chemistry on set, to appear as if we have known each other for years.

I become his best audience in the newsroom; Don can poke fun at anything, and I laugh at everything. He is sarcastic, intelligent, and a wizard with words, and he absolutely goes bonkers in the newsroom over a grammar mistake on the air. The man knows his work well. Our bosses say I'm his equal, but I feel like I'll never catch up.

My first on-air moment is with a soldier surprising his daughters on our news set. He had been deployed and now wants to share his return with the world. That means as the viewers and I finally meet each other, I get to greet them with a happy story: a hero reunited with his family. Mine is now a voice they'll hear in their living rooms at night, and I pray they keep coming back to me for more. We're off and running this new leg of the race.

Only two months into my new job, the Waldo Canyon Fire ignites just west of Colorado Springs. I have never even heard of Waldo Canyon, the Flying W Ranch, Glen Eyrie, or Mountain Shadows, a neighborhood that lies in the path of the flames. The city is at risk of being consumed by fire.

I have never covered wildfires before, and everything feels scary, new, and profound. Don is out of town, so I am alone on the set when our general manager

directs me to get on the air. General managers usually do not show up for breaking news—that's how big of a disaster Colorado Springs is facing. It's time to sink or swim. I hope I look presentable, but sweat covers me from the chest down. My dress is soaking wet by the end of the day.

I tread water for the next five days, covering stories on the air for sixty hours in a week, five twelve-hour shifts. I report evacuations of thirty-two thousand residents and the destruction of more than three hundred homes as the station stays on-air for a total of one hundred twenty hours. It's absolutely nuts. The breaking news comes in faster than anyone can update with a teleprompter. I ad-lib for five days. I have never done anything like this in my career. I feel as though I were flying blindly through the air, not knowing what's coming next but knowing I have to stay calm. This is my moment to lead the community as a trusted voice, someone they can rely on.

The fire continues to burn for a few weeks, but it does most of its destruction in just one day. I interview people who lost their homes, standing in the rubble of their properties. I try to offer any bit of comfort to these families whose possessions have been reduced to ash. Charred chimneys and only occasional houses that survived the flames are scattered about the neighborhoods. There are so many questions and so few answers,

and so much heartache. People scour the depths of their exposed basements, looking for anything that survived, like a coffee mug that could withstand the temperatures. Our chief photojournalist, Mike, invites us to join him for both sides of his story—as police officers shout for him to evacuate with his family, and then when he returns to the skeleton of his home. Every story wrenches my heart.

Once the baptism of the Waldo Canyon Fire is over, nothing seems stressful on-air anymore. Lots of community requests start rolling in for the new journalist in town. I get invitations to events and parades, am asked to make appearances at every fundraising event in town, and am offered opportunities to emcee galas and balls. It is nonstop. Emails, letters, and phone calls come every day, and Liz coaches me in the fast pace of my new role.

She says, “Dianne, let’s get your name out there. I want you to do as many events as you can so you can get a lot of visibility, but don’t get burned out. You still have several obligatory events we’ll expect you to do, too, like anchoring nearly every weekend of the Broncos season. That nonprofit who asked you to emcee their gala . . . Yep, that’s a good one. Just know they’ll expect you every year after. Say yes to everything you want to say yes to.”

*Ask and you shall receive, Liz. I'm a people pleaser, I'm married with no children, and I have time.*

Before I know it, the open hours before my workday—from 7:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.—are filled with emcee events. I'm busy at luncheons and functions as many as four days a week. My coworkers keep warning me, "Don't let it consume your life," but I don't care what they say. Ultimately, each event brings someone special into my life, gives me an invaluable contact, and offers me a chance to become more closely connected with the community. So I say yes.

Dinner request? Yep.

Go to the top of Pikes Peak for a story? Yep.

Emcee this fund-raiser? Host that celebration? Attend this luncheon? Yep, yep, and yep.

I say yes to everything, and my boss approves it all. I'm always packed, ready, and mic'd up for the next thing. I burn every wick I have, run as fast as I can, and still I am starving for more. I have very little margin and even less rest, but I know this is my chance. I'll sleep later, in another life stage. For now, the answer will always be yes.

I have no way of knowing it yet, but the very best yes is just up ahead.