

BOOK NOTES

Joan Ruddiman

Cahills turn 'Adversity into Advantage'

By Joan Ruddiman
Special Writer

Teena Cahill, Psy.D., has a wealth of practical and professional experience to share with those who face some tough challenges.

First, she establishes that she does not see adverse moments in life as challenges, but rather as "opportunities to grow and learn." From her life story, Ms. Cahill has had many such opportunities.

She was raised by hard-working folks who did not understand her drive for higher education — which she pursued in part from a scholarship won at the county fair. She persevered through a doctoral program in psychology and established a successful practice as a cognitive behaviorist — all while raising three children.

Ms. Cahill was happily enjoying the fruits of all these "opportunities" when life took an unexpected and newly wonderful turn. She met Brooks, a retired Marine who was a captain for a large international airline. In her late 30s, she had found the love of her life.

Over the next seven years, Teena and Brooks crammed their days with professional and personal challenges of the best sort. Brooks was flying, and Teena was working in her practice and as an adjunct professor. Both were supportive parents of their kids, who ranged from "late adolescence to early Adulthood," and loving caregivers to their own aging parents.

They traveled widely, pursued their passions for tennis (Teena) and skiing (Brooks), living life to the fullest.

Then, on a cold December night, their idyllic, dynamic world came to a screeching halt. Brooks was rushed to the hospital with a cerebral hemorrhage. In the proverbial flash, everything changed. Forget being in control, giving orders, having the answers. A strong man — physically, emotionally and mentally powerful — was flattened by the damage to his brain and body. The strong woman had to dig deeply into her knowledge and experience in what she calls "resilient living."

"The Cahill Factor: Turing Adversity into Advantage" (SterlingHouse, 2007) was recently released. It premiered at the Book-Expo America in early June — quite a coup for a first book, even more so given that the book does not fit easily into expected genres.

"It is a boomer love story," Ms. Cahill says, chuckling, as she attempts to classify what is a mix of a very human story with solid advice for those who face health crises.

Given the number of aging boomers and the frightening increase of debilitating ill-

Teena Cahill's 'instructional memoir' frames psychological theory in chapters that tell of her life, love, marriage and intense struggle not to lose her husband — first to death and then to disability.

nesses, it is not surprising that Ms. Cahill's book would hit a publishing nerve. But Ms. Cahill intends for the book to serve even beyond those who are caregivers.

"We live in an unpredictable and demanding world. We all have to learn to take care of ourselves," she says, noting "it is not selfish to practice self-care."

"We do not live in a culture that says it is 'the good wife' who takes care of herself first," she says. "Yet in taking care of ourselves we are also taking care of those who rely on us ... There is harmony to the dance of humankind."

Ms. Cahill passionately maintains her belief that "we were born tough" and that "knowing we are born with innate resilience" allows her to reach out with the book "to teach how to enhance it."

Ms. Cahill's term for the book is "instructional memoir" that reflects her purposeful teaching of science through art. The book frames psychological theory in chapters that tell of her life, love, marriage and intense struggle not to lose Brooks — first to death and then to major disability.

Like many, Ms. Cahill and her extended family came to understand that the stroke was just the first salvo in a long battle; a spinal cord injury left him unable to walk. Brooks and Teena have mastered mobility (and world travel) with a wheelchair.

At every point in this journey, the family faced the "what ifs."

What if the high altitude in the mountains triggers another stroke? What if skiing snaps the fragile spine? What if Brooks doesn't accept that he will never fly again?

They faced down every "what if" with "then so what!" The title of her book is her mantra — "turning adversity into advantage."

Local readers may recognize Ms. Cahill's name — and dynamic approach to life — from columns in a local paper and as a speaker at many local events, including serving as master of ceremony at the Princeton Memorial Day parade.

They may also appreciate her reference to people and places — unnamed but recognizable — that continue to sustain her and her family. For example, the role of Princeton University in their lives is endearing, such as the strolls on campus that provided physical and emotional healing.

In what was one of the most moving

parts of the story for me, Brooks is literally saved by a noted historian who is an expert in the Civil War.

Ms. Cahill, when she realized that her training on the brain's resiliency is dated and that Brooks's brain is not doomed to stagnate, decides his intellect needed as much exercise as his limbs. Though she never does meet the man, Ms. Cahill telephones the famous professor to request that Brooks be approved to audit his class.

"The history professor had given Brooks what no medicine could provide, what no therapist could create, what no wife could instill. This learned man, who understood both history and life, gave Brooks a precious gift, a gift that all of us need if we are to flourish. The gift was opportunity: a chance to use his strengths, to follow a passion, to make mistakes in a protected setting, to share his newfound knowledge with other, to rebuild his self-esteem and to have a purpose worth getting up for each day."

The study of the Civil War led to an extended study of the Lewis and Clark expedition, complete with trips to historic sites and extended collections of books and artifacts — and a renewed enthusiasm for life.

Ms. Cahill draws on a lifetime of personal experiences and professional expertise to educate readers how to draw on "our biological hardwiring" that allows us to "bounce back from adversity."

She believes that we are, by nature, resilient. We "benefit from challenges" — the human mind thrives on achieving. And "responsibility and expectations force us to dig deeply until we find our strengths."

The secret to unleashing this power is to find our "authentic leadership" in order to go forward.

Her message is wonderfully optimistic and practically realistic. Yes the book reads more like a story ("it is a love story!") than a self-help book, yet all the elements for support are included.

"The Cahill Factor" is a valuable gift to anyone who is in the role of caregiver and for people of all ages as an inspiration that life may change — but it can still be lived well.

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Books

Using Personal Adversity to Help Others, Local Author Celebrates Resilience

Remember Alice from the Brady Bunch?

Alice was the ultimate sitcom prototype. The kind of person you could turn to when you had trouble with your annoying, more popular sibling, when you were suffering from marital strife, or just when you needed a hot meal. Alice had it all, and rarely showed fatigue, unless, of course, for comic relief, evoking reaction from a laugh track.

Most people probably know that life does not follow the neat storylines of the sitcom world, but Teena Cahill, a Princeton author and psychologist who has dealt with her share of adversity, says that while people are largely cognizant of that fact, they have a tendency to look for "Alice."

When Dr. Cahill's hus-

band, Brooks Dyer, a former Marine Corps fighter pilot and a captain with a commercial airliner, was stricken with a cerebral brain hemorrhage, a stroke, and later a spinal cord injury in 1992, she used her experience to improve upon her and her family's life, taking cognitive behavior psychology "to the kitchen table."

In her new book, *The Cahill Factor: Turning Adversity into Advantage* (Sterling House Books; \$18.95), Dr. Cahill, who is now traveling on a book tour, frames her story around that traditional family unit, luring the reader into the sitcom world of suburban family life, only to tell the reader that things can change, and change quickly. To stick with the analogy, Dr. Cahill's life resembled the Brady's in that she and Mr. Dyer both had children

from a previous marriage who came to live under one roof. That's really where the sitcom ends and real life kicks in.

"Brook's cerebral hemorrhage happened in the darkness of an extraordinary morning just before Christmas. It was sudden, unexpected, and mind-numbing," Dr. Cahill writes. From there, however, her account shows, almost step-by-step, how she, her husband (who has lasting physical impediments from his bout but is doing well), and her family built a solid structure atop a potentially shaky foundation.

"Everybody's story is different: my life is nowhere near as tough as some other people, but we all know that tough times can dampen our resilience, if there's no support, but there are also skills and strategies we can use to enhance resilience," Dr. Cahill, 61, said in an interview.

Without those strategies, "I would have never been able to support and stabilize my family over the last 15 years," Dr. Cahill said, pointing to six children, now fully grown, educated, and living successful lives. "It took us about 10 years to stabilize everything." The director of Wisdom and Beyond, LLC, Dr. Cahill offers educational programs on topics ranging from workplace to home to education. She also takes a cue from the working class struggles of her grandmother in overcoming obstacles. Her grandmother was widowed twice by the age of 34 and had virtually no professional training. "We're not so much defined by what happens to us, but by the choices we

make," she said.

Dr. Cahill will appear at the Princeton Public Library next Wednesday, September 19, at 7:30 p.m. to discuss her new book, which will be sold at the event, and is for sale at Chicklet Books at the Princeton Shopping Center.

—Matthew Hersh



Using Personal Adversity as Means to Help Others, Local Author, Psychologist, Explains *The Cahill Factor* . . . 16



The Cahill Factor— Turning Adversity Into Advantage

Authors: Teena Cahill, Psy.D — *Reviewed by Anita Finley*

I literally couldn't put this book down until I finished it. There are so many people in my life that I need to buy this book for, some with debilitating illness, others needing the motivation that Teena Cahill exudes on every page. The question that she asks of the reader and of the participants in her many seminars is, "What would you do if everything in your life changed in a heartbeat?" It's a difficult question to answer, yet it has happened to so many that seem to be at a total loss to move out of their circumstances.

Cahill's "Wisdom and Leadership" series run a full spectrum—from people retiring, looking for their next adventure, to those who are caregivers and need to nurture and be nurtured. Her credentials are strong as an educator, expert on human behavior and nationally known speaker. If her speeches are anything like her book, all I can say is "WOW."

The Cahill Factor is "full of wit and wisdom, feisty, smart, gritty and honest," reports Sterling House Publishers, and the chapters hook you with empathy, disbelief, hysteria and amazement. For example, in Chapter 12 titled "Opportunity," she quotes Einstein: "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." And yes, she does know about that. For the first few chapters, difficulty is her middle name. Her supportive family and friends did their best, but when it came right down to it, she and her husband, Brooks, were totally enmeshed with each other to get through his major illness. Although all the medical professionals told them to prepare for the end, his

death was not an option for Teena Cahill.

The title of her chapters say so much about its contents: **Adversity; Power; Listening; Decisions; Hope; Courage; Change; Growth; Humanity; Choices; Strengths; Opportunity; Support; Closure; Resilience;** and **Authenticity.** Her quotes in front of each of her chapters also are inspirational as she chooses them

well. For example, "Action is the antidote to despair," by Joan Baez; "You cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore." (Anon)

The Cahill Factor... Turning Adversity into Advantage is a book that you can read very quickly and yet you will want to read it over and over as it is filled with so much philosophy,

love and warm-heartedness. Kudos to you, Teena (and to you, too, Brooks).



About the author:

Teena Cahill has a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, Masters in Counseling and Bachelors in Education. As director of Wisdom and Beyond LLC, she presents strictly educational programs which are enlightening, lively and rich in both content and humor. Teena speaks at corporate, association, convention, health care, educational, graduation, and fund-raising events across the country.

(To order *The Cahill Factor...Turning Adversity into Advantage*, please go to www.teenacahill.com or go to your local bookstore. The publisher is SterlingHouse Publisher, Inc.)