

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**Four Magic Questions
You Will Thank Me for Asking**

*There is no one out there to save us, to take care of us, to heal the hurt.
But there is a very fine person within, one we barely know, ready and
willing to be our constant companion.*

— Hollis, *Middle Life*

CHARLES JOHNSON writes in *Necessary Wisdom* that “in pausing and listening within I am not just noticing what is within; I am, in ways I can never fully comprehend, participating in creating what is within.”¹ This quote beautifully defines the process I call “simmering.”

Simmering is the slow process of piecing together partially formed thoughts and images as they bubble up. It is the stuff of Post-its and the internal process of creation. It is also the process of accepting that on a certain day you can still feel weaker than you ever expected and the next day feel stronger than you ever thought possible.

“God gives every bird a worm, but won’t throw [the worm] into the nest.”

This Swedish proverb hits the nail on the head, doesn’t it? You have learned that your life is not over, but to live it fully you must leave your nest to get what you want and need.

When I help clients decide what their new lifestyle will include, we commence by working with the following key questions:

- What do I want to include in my life?
- What do I never want to include in my life?
- What do I have now that I would like to eliminate?
- What do I have now that I want to keep?

The first question may seem quite simple but, in reality, people find it difficult to specifically articulate what they want. Women in particular have a hard time defining what they want because many have been preoccupied with filling others' needs. One widow said to me, "What? What do *I* want? No one has ever asked me that before!"

Whether it is difficult to conceive of what you would really like to include in your life or simply hard to admit, answering the remaining three questions above will help you indirectly arrive at the answer to your primary question. Keep in mind that while you may have physical limitations, it doesn't mean you must think of yourself as handicapped, and while you may have financial limitations, it doesn't mean you can't find joy in the precious parts of life that are inexpensive and often free.

To help you understand exactly how your answers to the last three questions will apply to your answering your main question, let me walk you through a sample step-by-step process. Don't make the mistake of assuming that the following lists should be your lists. They shouldn't. You are unique and your lists should be as well.