

You loved your last book...but what
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Life's Little Detours

**50 Lessons to Find and Hold
onto Happiness**

Written by Regina Brett

Published by Orion

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Life's Little Detours



50 LESSONS to FIND and
HOLD onto HAPPINESS

Regina Brett



An Orion paperback

First published in 2010 by Grand Central Publishing as *God Never Blinks*

First published in Great Britain in 2010 by Orion

This paperback edition published in 2011 by Orion Books Ltd,
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Regina Brett 2010

The right of Regina Brett to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to quote from the following:

Columns that originally appeared in the *Plain Dealer* are reprinted with permission of the Plain Dealer Publishing Co. *Plain Dealer* holds the copyright for columns written by Regina Brett from 2000 to 2009. All rights reserved.

Columns that originally appeared in the *Beacon Journal* are reprinted with permission from the Beacon Journal Publishing Co. Inc. The *Beacon Journal* holds the copyright for columns written by Regina Brett from 1994 to 2000. All rights reserved.

Lines from 'A Father's Story' by Andre Dubus, *The Times Are Never So Bad*, copyright © 1983 (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1983) are reprinted by permission.

The excerpt from Alcoholics Anonymous is reprinted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. (AAWS). Permission to reprint this excerpt, which originally ran on page 552 of the Third Edition, does not mean that AAWS has reviewed or approved the contents of this publication, or that AAWS necessarily agrees with the views expressed herein. A.A. is a program of recovery from alcoholism only – use of this excerpt in connection with programs and activities that are patterned after A.A., but that address other problems, or in any other non-AA context, does not imply otherwise.

David Chilton, *The Wealthy Barber: The Common Sense Guide to Successful Financial Planning* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998). Excerpt used by permission. Pastor Rick Warren for permission to use the quote in Lesson 31.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-4091-2096-4

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays, Ltd St Ives plc

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

www.orionbooks.co.uk

Introduction

My friend Kathy once sent me an excerpt from the book *Dandelion Wine*. In Ray Bradbury's book about one vintage summer, a boy has taken ill. No one can figure out what is wrong. He's simply overwhelmed by life. No one seems able to help him until Mr. Jonas, the junk man, comes along.

He whispers to the boy who lies asleep on a cot in the yard. Mr. Jonas tells him to rest quiet and listen, then reaches up and picks an apple off a tree. He lingers long enough to tell the boy a secret he carries inside him, one I didn't know I carried in me. Some folks arrive in this world fragile. Like tender fruit, they bruise easier, cry more often, and turn sad young. Mr. Jonas knows all this because he's one of those people.

The words stir something in the boy and he recovers.

The words stirred something in me. Some people bruise easier. I'm one of those people.

It took me 40 years to find and hold on to happiness. I always felt that at the moment I was born, God must have blinked. He missed the occasion and never knew I had arrived. My parents had 11 children. While I love my parents and my five brothers

and five sisters deeply, some days I felt lost in the litter. As Kathy often pointed out, I seemed to be the runt of that litter. I ended up confused by the nuns at age 6, a lost soul who drank too much at 16, an unwed mother at 21, a college graduate at 30, a single mother for 18 years, and finally, a wife at 40, married to a man who treated me like a queen.

Then I got cancer at 41. It took a year to fight it, then a year to recover from the fight.

When I turned 45, I lay in bed reflecting on all life had taught me. My soul sprang a leak and ideas flowed out. My pen simply caught them and set the words on paper. I typed them up and turned them into a newspaper column of the 45 lessons life taught me. My editor hated it. So did his editor. I asked them to run it anyway. The *Plain Dealer* readers in Cleveland loved it.

Cancer made me bold enough to speak up to the bosses. Once you've had cancer and been sick, bald, and weak from chemotherapy and radiation, there aren't a lot worse things anyone can do to you. Turning 45 was a victory for me. Breast cancer left me doubting I would see the odometer roll over that far. Three of my aunts died from it at 42, 44, and 56, so it didn't look good.

But I kept living. When I hit 50, I added five more lessons and the paper ran the column again. Then something amazing happened. People across the country began to forward the column. Ministers, nurses, and social workers requested reprints to run in newsletters, church bulletins, and small-town

newspapers. People of all religions and those of none at all could relate. While some of the lessons speak of God, people found in them universal truths. I've heard from agnostics and atheists who carry the list of lessons in their wallets and keep it tacked to their work cubicles and stuck under refrigerator magnets. The lessons are posted on blogs and websites by people all over the world. Every week since the column ran, people have e-mailed from Australia to Zanesville, Ohio, asking for copies. That column is the most popular one I've written in my 24 years as a journalist.

Most of these essays originally appeared in the *Plain Dealer* or the *Beacon Journal*. Some of them are originals.

These lessons are life's gifts to me, and mine to you.



1

Life isn't fair, but it's still good.

The hat always came back, more faded yet stronger than ever.

Frank started it.

I had undergone my first chemotherapy and couldn't imagine being bald. Then I saw a guy wearing a baseball cap bearing these words: *LIFE IS GOOD*.

Life didn't feel good and it was about to feel worse, so I asked the guy where he got the hat. Two days later, Frank drove across town and stopped by my house and gave me one. Frank is a magical kind of guy. A house painter by trade, he lives by two simple words: *Get to*.

They remind him to be grateful for everything. Instead of saying, "I have to go to work today," Frank tells himself, "I get to go to work." Instead of saying, "I have to get groceries," he gets to. Instead of saying, "I have to take the kids to baseball practice," he gets to. It works for everything.

The hat on anyone but Frank might not have carried the same power. It was navy blue with an oval patch that announced its message in white letters.

And life was good. Even though my hair fell out, my body grew weak, my eyebrows fell off. Instead of wearing a wig, I wore that hat as my answer to cancer,

as my billboard to the world. People love to stare at a bald woman. They got a message back when they gawked.

Gradually, I got well, my hair grew back, and I put the hat away until a friend got cancer and asked about that hat I used to wear. She wanted one. At first I didn't want to part with mine. It was like my binky, my security blanket. But I had to pass it on. If I didn't, the luck might run out. She made a promise to get well and pass the hat on to another woman. Instead, she gave it back to me to pass on to another survivor.

We call it the Chemo Hat.

I don't know how many women have worn it these past 11 years. I've lost count. So many friends have been diagnosed with breast cancer. Arlene. Joy. Cheryl. Kaye. Sheila. Joan. Sandy. Woman after woman passed it on.

When the hat came back to me, it always looked more tired and worn, but each woman had a new sparkle in her eyes. Everyone who wore the lucky Chemo Hat is still alive and thriving.

Last year I gave it to my friend and coworker Patrick. He was diagnosed with colon cancer at age 37. Patrick got the hat, even though I wasn't sure it could tackle any kind of cancer. He told his mom about the hat, how he was now a link in this chain of survival. She found Life is good, Inc., the company that made the hat and makes other products with the motto. She called the company and told them the story of the hat and ordered a whole box of caps.

She sent them to Patrick's closest friends and relatives. They took pictures of themselves wearing the hats. All over his refrigerator he put up photos of college friends and their kids and dogs and lawn ornaments wearing the LIFE IS GOOD hat.

Meanwhile, the folks at Life is good, Inc., were moved by Patrick's mom. They held a staff meeting and challenged their employees, "in the spirit of the traveling lucky Chemo Hat," to pass their hats on to someone needing a lift. They sent Patrick a photo of all 175 of them each wearing a hat.

Patrick finished chemo and is fine. He was so lucky; he never lost his hair, it just thinned out. He never wore the hat, but it touched him. He kept it on a table at the bottom of the stairs where he could see that message every day.

It got him through the really bad days when he wanted to quit chemo and give up. Anyone with cancer has known those days. Even folks who have never had cancer have known them.

Turns out it wasn't the hat but the message on it that kept us all going, that keeps us all going.

Life is good.

Pass it on.