The book cover features an abstract watercolor background with soft washes of green, brown, and yellow. A large, white, hand-drawn circle is centered on the page, containing the title text. The author's name is at the top, and the subtitle is at the bottom.

NICOLE JOHNSON

CREATING

Calm

IN THE CENTER OF

Crazy

MAKING ROOM FOR YOUR SOUL
IN AN OVERCROWDED LIFE

Nicole has the ability to enter tough places and connect us to light and hope. Thanks, Nicole, for doing it again.

—DR. HENRY CLOUD, AUTHOR, *POWER OF THE OTHER*

Nicole is unbelievably funny, incredibly familiar with her own unconscious (and everybody else's), and has the rare talent of making you want to read every word she writes. It's unusual to find this kind of wit with this much brilliant psychological insight.

—DR. NEIL CLARK WARREN, FOUNDER, eHARMONY.COM

I love the promise of this book. We are all familiar with the crazy pace of life. What a gift to be guided to the calm.

—SHEILA WALSH, AUTHOR, *IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MESS*

Nicole deftly reveals what brokenness looks and feels like, and with humor and vulnerability, invites us to walk with her through the necessary, painful, and ultimately liberating steps toward wholeness and joy. If a truly more integrated life is what you are looking for, this is the place to start.

—CURT THOMPSON, MD

In her new book, my dear friend Nicole bravely shares her journey, draws a map we can use, and hands us the keys. If you've ever thought something has to change in your crazy life, this book will be your guide.

—ANGELA THOMAS PHARR, SPEAKER;
BESTSELLING AUTHOR, *REDEEMED*

Nicole is not only one of the best communicators we know, she's also one of the most winsome and wise friends we have. Witnessing her journey has profoundly changed our lives, and this book will no doubt change yours too.

—JAY AND KATHERINE WOLF, COAUTHORS
AND COFOUNDERS OF HOPE HEALS

With unusual candor, humor, and insight, Nicole shows women how to experience inner peace, joy, and sanity in the “center of their crazy.” She offers practical tools for finding calm and thriving amid a chaotic schedule, home life, and career.

—DOREE DONALDSON, DIRECTOR, CONVOY: WOMEN

In a world wrought by distraction and busyness, Nicole offers an easy to follow pathway that will lead you to a more focused and calm life. No matter what your life looks like now, it will be enriched by the reading of these pages.

—PEPPER SWEENEY, ACTOR AND DIRECTOR

During the first few pages of Nicole's book, you will laugh knowingly and look around sheepishly. Then she will take you on a journey to recover your own soul. Her book is a gift.

—LAURIE POLICH SHORT, AUTHOR, *WHEN CHANGING
NOTHING CHANGES EVERYTHING*

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IN AN OVERCROWDED LIFE

NICOLE JOHNSON

 ZONDERVAN®



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*For the Seasons Weekend community;
without you there would be no story*



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THE PERFECTION GARDEN

If I could plant a Perfection Garden
I'd grow a lot of peaceful parsley to stop the meanness
in the world.

It's a tall beautiful purple plant that calms people down!
When you eat it, it changes frowns into smiles.

My mom would plant the Time Thyme.

She always needs more time to take care of our family!

Time Thyme is amazing!

When you eat it, it makes the clock go backwards for
two hours

So my mom can get more done!

—MY SON, ELLIOT, AGE 7, 2013



Preface

THIS BOOK was nine years in the making.

I tell you this not to raise your expectations but to lower them. It has taken me that long to get enough space and calm in my life to write this book.

My recipe for crazy is not one I would recommend, but most of us have the ingredients on hand—busy work schedule; relationships and responsibilities that don't respond to our timetable; full social calendar; parenting activities; and so on. Depending on the mix and the amount of each ingredient, we create crazy or we create calm.

Of course, no one sets out to create crazy. I certainly didn't. Crazy is what happened to me when I was too overwhelmed to pay attention to my life. After my two babies were born in the midst of my full-time touring schedule, I wasn't paying attention to my name, much less whether I was living a meaningful life. I was in survival mode and so grateful we were all still alive at the end of each day!

At the time I'm writing this, I have not cracked the

PREFACE

code to having a completely sane and calm life. I'm not sure there is such a thing. It's more like one day my heart and soul were cracked open through a crisis. Forced by emotional pain to sit still, I discovered a deeper place inside myself, partly by accident and partly by choosing to remain still in the midst of the pain. Resisting the pull to return to crazy, I discovered some new ways to create calm amid a life that too often floods its banks.

So if you bought this book thinking I have all the answers you need to create calm, don't feel bad for asking for your money back. I am not living on a serene island, enjoying umbrella drinks and having spa treatments.

When I started this book, it was about ways a person could have a calmer life. I was several chapters in, feeling great about what I was writing, when it dawned on me that I wasn't sharing the whole story. I think subconsciously I was avoiding the awful truth: a crisis was the catalyst for creating calm. Suddenly, I wasn't as keen on writing this book. I feared the emotional effort involved to write *that* book would take way more time and explanation than I had in me. *You're trying to help people find calm, for crying out loud! Why make yourself crazy trying to write about something so difficult and so intensely personal? Why not just journal about it and look back on it privately as needed? Better still, why not pick another subject altogether,*

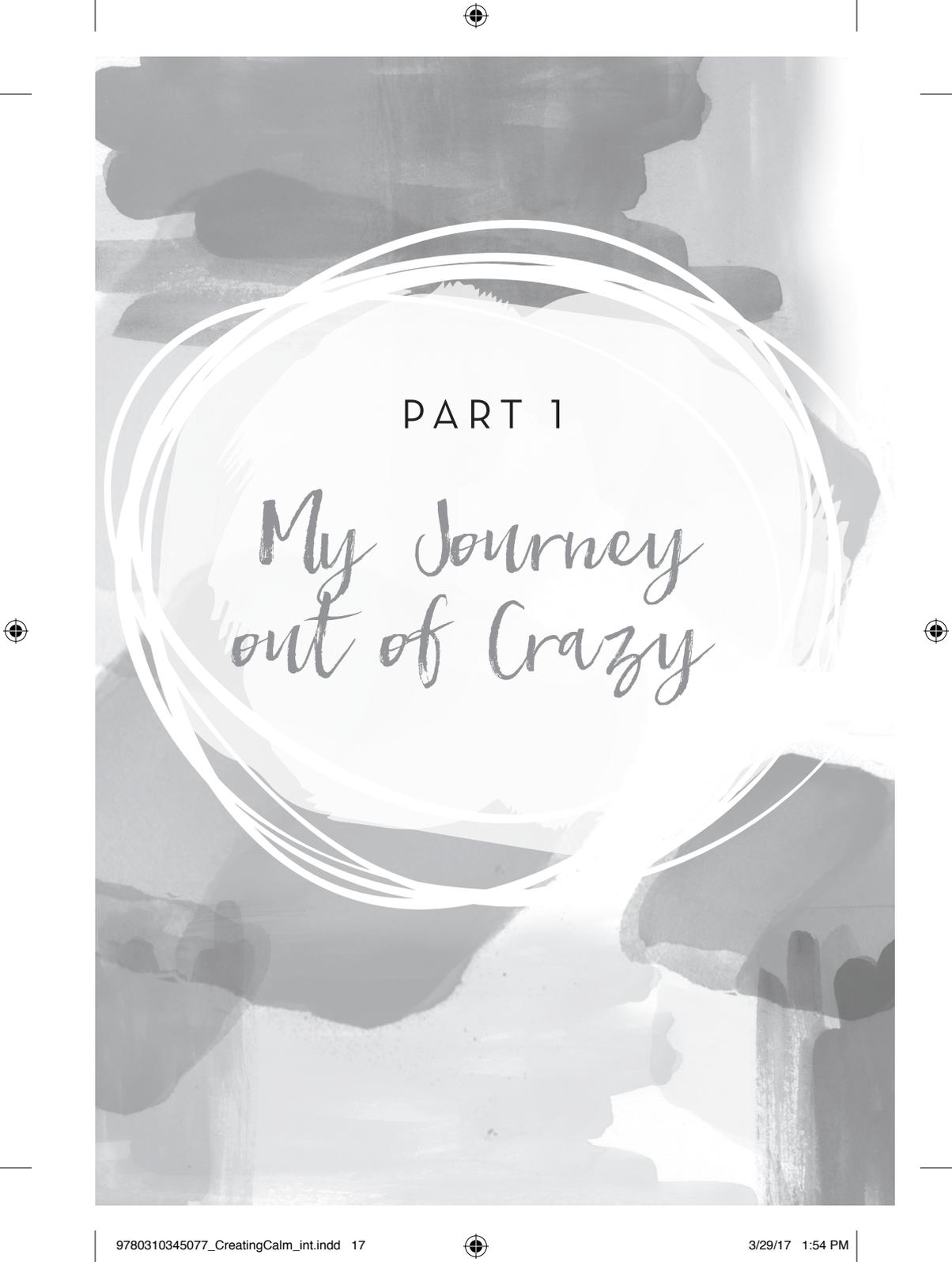
like Seven Simple Meals for Busy Families? Surely that will create calm somewhere in the world!

I had to ask myself whether writing such a personal book about creating calm would warrant the added crazy (walking through the crisis again, spending more time writing than I'd anticipated, having less freedom to enjoy the open space I'd created, putting more pressure on my husband) that this kind of writing requires of me. I wasn't sure. I'm still not sure. (Don't ask my kids whether it was warranted—unless you can wait a few more years.) Either way, I committed to restart the book and share more about what started me on the journey, not just the benefits that I have experienced since. This became a better book and I became a better student of myself and of the world around me. A world, I firmly believe needs more voices willing to examine the crazy way we live these days. With overcommitted schedules, pressure-filled homes, mad racing about, and way too much wine drinking (but enough about my life), this “crazy” way of our culture is not healthy, nor does it seem deeply satisfying to anyone. Not only does it not produce what we have been led to think it will, this insanely busy living is stealing from the marrow of our souls the very richness we need to create meaningful lives.

PREFACE

I wish I could promise that simply reading this book will create a center of calm in your life. But nothing of great value has ever come to me without hard work. I don't know where I got the idea that it should, but I'm guessing it came from writers who didn't share the full story in their writings. People who wanted to make hard things look easy so people like me would buy their books and they could move to a serene island and enjoy umbrella drinks and spa treatments.

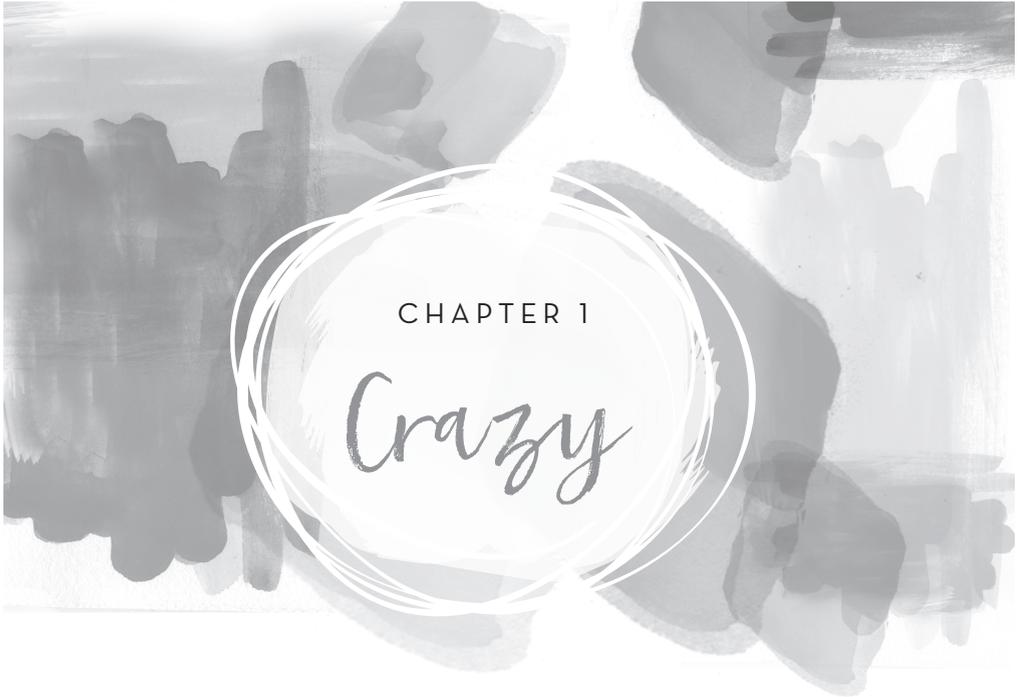
I hope that in sharing the truth of my unconventional path in this personal way, those who long for something more will know that while it isn't easy, it is indeed possible. You really can stop. You really can create calm in the center of crazy. But I also want to say to those who consistently live with a high level of pressure and craziness because they enjoy it or think it doesn't really matter: Believe me, it matters. Slow down, and do it now while you still have something worth slowing down for. You won't regret it. That I can promise you.

The background is a grayscale watercolor wash. A large, white, hand-drawn circular frame with multiple overlapping lines is centered on the page. The text is contained within this frame.

PART 1

*My Journey
out of Crazy*





CHAPTER 1

Crazy

“PAIN IS THE MEGAPHONE God uses to rouse a deaf world,” wrote C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*.¹ I wouldn’t have said I was deaf, but pain was the megaphone that halted my crazy world. Pain brings life screeching to a halt, sometimes for days or months, and sometimes just for a moment. Fortunately a moment is all it takes.

In the spring of 2012, I experienced a crisis. Not in my marriage, not with my children, but in a long-standing, cherished friendship. Since it happened, I have tried to put many words on this experience in an attempt to make sense of it, but I’ve been unable to. I can, however, describe the way this pain felt. It was as though:

PART 1: MY JOURNEY OUT OF CRAZY

- my heart was the *Titanic* and I'd hit an iceberg that ripped through my hull.
- my heart was a tomato that got dropped from the top of the Empire State Building.
- my heart was a box of china that got backed over by a Mack truck, three times.

I'm sure your mind wants details; I get that. We think we need all the information in order to make sense of things, but we're wrong. Sometimes all the details in the world can't make the pain we feel make sense because the "why" still eludes us. Such was the case for me. I'll spare you the specifics and ask you to trust me that the details don't matter. For some reason, unknown to me, a friend of fifteen years rejected me. Closed the door to discussion and locked it from her side. No matter how many times I tried to make sense of it, I couldn't. And like the *Titanic* steaming along in the night, I never saw the iceberg coming.

Here is what I know now: when everything hits the ground or the fan or whatever metaphor we use to describe it, if it's happened to you, the details quickly fade as the awful enters the picture and changes life forever.

When the phone call comes, when the doorbell rings, when the letter arrives, when the doctor says

_____, we cannot recall the specifics. We condense the memory of what happened to “the day life fell apart.”

MY RECIPE FOR CRAZY

In the years leading up to this crisis, I'd been in a long stretch of crazy. I call it crazy because that's the term I picked up from our culture when the busyness of life goes past busy. When busy redlines, we call it crazy busy. Some call it insanely busy. I have used those very words to describe my life to others. It didn't seem like hyperbole, because it wasn't. Life was out of control. That's not crazy busy, that's just plain crazy.

I got there honestly. This long stretch of crazy began for the very best of reasons. Complete, heart-stopping, soul-throbbing, mind-numbing love that engulfed my being the day my first child was born. I was baptized in it again when my second one arrived. The happy immersion that had me swimming in the deep end of love the first few years turned into a fear of drowning when I felt I couldn't come up for air. Here are the CliffsNotes of the last ten years:

I was on tour full-time as a dramatist with Women of Faith, a Christian women's conference, from 1999 to 2011. In 2003, I met Roy. We married in 2005. Our

PART 1: MY JOURNEY OUT OF CRAZY

son, Elliot, was born in 2007; our daughter, Abigail, was born in 2009. Even though I'd already reduced my travel schedule, cutting back from twenty-eight weekends to fifteen, life on the road with kids was not easy to manage. It wasn't what we saw for the future of our little family, the family we'd waited so long for and felt so grateful to have. Because of our desire for something more than hotel kids' menus and dressing room play areas, as well as some changes in Women of Faith, I retired in 2011. Elliot was in preschool, Abigail was two, and Roy and I were learning a new way of life. Raising little ones in our forties brought an alternate reality that we'd never imagined or prepared for when we dreamed of starting a family.

While I had retired from the kind of touring that required me to be gone from home fifteen weekends a year, I still wanted to continue performing and writing. I decided this was the opportunity to pursue the direction that had been simmering on the back burner for a few years. I envisioned creating a weekend experience for people like me—people who are tired, overwhelmed, partly burned out, slightly cynical, and more than a little leery of weekend experiences. I longed to see an intimate gathering that focused on getting still and learning to rest in the presence of God in every season

of life. I decided to name it Seasons Weekend and hold it four times a year.

While I wanted to create this weekend for people like me, I had no idea how much I needed it myself. Had I been standing outside my life in 2012 and watching it unfold, this is what I would be witnessing: a distracted, overcommitted, multitasking wife and mother too often comparing herself with others, living under enormous pressure to do meaningful work—all to create a wonderful life.

Again, I trust I ended up in crazy with the best of intentions. But only hindsight holds perfect clarity, and I can see now that what began in the cozy, warm water of motherhood slowly, and without my awareness or consent, became the boiling water of a pressure cooker.

There were five main ingredients in the recipe that created crazy in my life.

1. Distraction

In some strange twist of fate, distraction, ever the enemy of my grown-up mind, became something to embrace, even celebrate, when I had kids. Many parenting experts agree that in the middle of a major meltdown in the grocery store, church, or public bathroom stall, distracting a child from what's bugging them pays great dividends.

PART 1: MY JOURNEY OUT OF CRAZY

I confess, this was a foreign concept to me at first. I don't like being distracted or distracting others, especially on purpose. I wasn't sure distracting my kids when they were upset was the right thing to do. I wasn't even sure I could do it. Turns out, I could do it and do it well.

"No, we can't take Charlie's favorite stuffed platypus home with us, but quick, look over here! Mommy is standing on her head for you!"

"I know we didn't bring your favorite DVD, but look at this! A wallet. See, it has compartments and cards. Okay, sure, it tastes good too." Who cares if it's Louis Vuitton? Chew away, tear it apart.

"I know you can't talk yet and that you don't understand this, but if you'll stop crying, I'll buy you a horse."

Authenticity took a back seat to circus acts and magic tricks. Motherhood makes multiple personalities look normal and necessary. *Crazy* is a very suitable adjective. Of course, I had never previously loved anything enough to allow it to drag me around like a wheeled pull-toy, so I was learning crazy and was happy as a clam.

I was learning (in important ways) how to lay down many of my task-oriented, focused ways and just be with my children without an agenda or even a complete

thought. What I didn't realize was how hard it might be later to hone my work skills back into something sharp enough to cut more than a grilled-cheese sandwich. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

2. Overcommitment

My propensity to overcommit didn't start with children, but preschool brought it out of remission. I'd been so protective of my time with the little ones and so discouraged by my inability to shower regularly that I became much more of a homebody than I'd ever been in my life—until preschool hit. Then my preexisting condition came roaring back.

“We are a very hands-on, parent-involved school,” we heard on the tour. They weren't kidding. I think many of the other mothers were coming out of their nests too, and we all were breathing the heady air of newfound freedom from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. I tried to pack as much into those three hours as humanly possible. I had to work out, catch up on email, pay the bills, and spend special time with Abigail. I forgot all I had learned about meander and went straight to sprint.

When Elliot entered preschool, I dived in, wanting to be hands-on and involved, but also (and this one was new to me) wanting to demonstrate my commitment

alongside other mothers. I heard what was said about the ones who weren't "involved." I saw the praise heaped upon the parents who consistently volunteered to do construction projects and clean-up days. There were too many activities to be hands-on for, and I didn't have enough hands! What kind of mother could miss the pancake breakfast? There were so many things to create; we *need* your help; please work to build the mosaic on the wall as your class legacy to the school! Be sure to sign up for pajama night on Friday. And don't forget to bring the snacks when it's your family's turn!

I really had learned to say no in my other life. I had learned, at least well enough, to make my commitment level match my availability. But I wasn't Nicole Johnson anymore; I was *Elliot's mom*. What would they say about *Elliot's mom* if she wasn't committed enough? "Poor Elliot, his mother doesn't volunteer very much. Bless her heart, she must have to work a lot to afford this preschool." This kind of thinking got me in real trouble.

Then along comes Abigail, heading to the same school. I can't back off from what I did for Elliot or it would be "poor Abigail." Not to mention by this time Elliot has started kindergarten, thrusting me into a new circle of parents who will be trying to decide what they think about Elliot's mom. Such a trap, then and now. Always.

I was also juggling the commitments and responsibilities that came with work. None of these things were bad or wrong. These are good things, but I still had a marriage to maintain, two kids in school with different demands, neighbors to love, aging parents to care for, church involvement, birthday parties to attend and throw, music lessons to practice, craft projects to make, holidays to plan, and vacations to enjoy. I wasn't enjoying much of anything. I was losing the capacity for real enjoyment.

3. Multitasking

Multitasking is the engine that drives overcommitment because it creates the illusion that we can successfully handle multiple tasks simultaneously as well as switch quickly from one task to another. I really believe women invented this word with their actions, while men talked about it as a new emphasis at work, where they were learning to talk on the phone *and* write something down! This is one area where we women really outshine our male counterparts, perhaps because we've been required to multitask since the beginning of time. It was an early survival skill to be able to hold the baby while cooking a meal over the fire and chasing away wild animals! Fortunately, these skills still serve us well,

whether at home with kids or coordinating the endless tasks of modern life.

Women are good at multitasking, period. I'm good at it. I multitask as a way of life. There are days when I think it might be my greatest talent. I can wrap a present and write the birthday card for a party, get a snack for one child, pour a glass of milk for another, check the caller ID when the phone rings, find the email with the address for the party, and have time to pat myself on the back for having remembered to get fuel in the minivan the day before! This is right about the time my husband yells from another room, "Do we have a birthday party to go to today?" I smile at what others before me have called job security.

About fifteen years ago, I wrote a comedic vignette on multitasking called *Hats!* It portrays about ten different hats that women wear on any given day, at the drop of a hat, pun intended. From the mom hat to the chauffeur hat, to the chef hat to the psychologist hat, we are hilarious multitasking maniacs.

But recently neurologists have discovered that what multitasking is doing to our brains is not so hilarious. Turns out *multitasking* may be the worst word invented in the twenty-first century, basically because while our brains can sometimes function like computers, they are

not computers. When we multitask, we become less effective at everything. We become faster at doing certain things, but slower at accomplishing anything.

Multitasking is often a clever and inoffensive euphemism for not paying attention. If I am in the middle of ten different things, surely I can't be held accountable if I'm not giving you my full attention. I can think of many times I've dialed the wrong number because I was in the middle of writing a note to one of my kids' teachers at the same time. I count many instances when I've sent an email to the wrong recipient because my computer autofilled the wrong name, and because I wasn't paying attention, I didn't even notice it. I've woken up with multitasking hangovers, having agreed to something the kids were asking me for that I didn't intend to agree to, but they caught me in the middle of doing three things at once and took advantage of my distractedness. All the devices designed to help me multitask are limited by one flawed, rushed woman who is trying to do too much at one time.

Looking back I can see so clearly how multitasking contributed to the feeling that I was drowning in the middle of my own life. I was doing more stuff than ever yet getting less done. I was working harder than ever but having much less to show for it. Multitasking

led me to feel productive when actually it was keeping me from real and meaningful productivity. Which only meant that soon I was going to feel more overwhelmed, and that I'd have to try even harder to feel a sense of accomplishment. Multitasking was increasing the speed of the very treadmill I was trying to get off.

So was comparison.

4. Comparison

There was a span of about a year and half after Abigail was born that I was so mentally and emotionally fatigued from the strain of sleep deprivation and volcanic spit-up, I would have had to guess my name. And I wouldn't have cared if I got it wrong—it didn't matter anyway. I couldn't tell you about current events and couldn't remember past ones. I think I went three years without seeing a movie in the theater—maybe longer, who knows? This came with a great deal of shame for me as others discussed what movies were good and what they had seen. I remember thinking, *How do you even get out of the house? Why is motherhood so hard for me? Women have done this before. For millennia, actually. I'm certainly not the first woman over forty to have two kids. I should be able to do this. Other moms are doing it, and doing it well. What is wrong with me?*

As women, it seems we come out of the womb comparing ourselves with those around us. We compare everything—houses, husbands, rear ends, clothes, toys—you name it and we can tell you who has a better one than we do. We compare our lives, our gifts, and even our struggles.

If we used comparison to help us recognize some of our negatives and then we made positive changes, this would be effective. But we don't stop there. We take our comparisons and use them as measuring sticks for our worth. When we compare ourselves with others and we believe we come out favorably, we gain a false sense of pride. This can lead to smug and judgmental behavior. When we compare ourselves with others we deem better or at least better in a certain category, like the house she lives in, we place our own score in the minus category. I don't even think we're fully aware of how often we rank ourselves in light of others.

This kind of comparison creates shame, an ungrateful heart, bitterness, and envy; I know this firsthand. Comparison is the evil twin of contentment. It is the thief of gratitude, and it sneaks into my heart and robs me so blind that I can no longer see or appreciate all that I have and all that I am truly capable of. Comparison opens wide the front door and invites crazy to sit at my kitchen table.

When I glance at the magazine rack while in line at the grocery, I end up on the rack of comparison. I start to think to myself, *I don't look like that in my small sparkly dress. Why, I don't even have a small sparkly dress. I don't have a small, sparkly anything*, and something inside me crumbles: my gratitude for the enormous amount I do have.

Shame can also enter the picture when we compare our struggles. Again, because I choose to compare myself with those who I think are doing it better, I feel shame when I struggle with something I perceive other women don't struggle with. If something is hard for me and I see it comes easily to you, I can feel badly that I struggle at all. But isn't it possible that there is something for me to learn by struggling? Perhaps this is a vital piece of my journey that I would miss if I didn't struggle. Comparison never reveals the whole story, only as much of the story as we need to feel inferior. It's hard to admit, but we are doing this to ourselves.

Comparison creates emotional craziness. It uses the things we see around us to whisper our worst fears to our souls: *You're not good enough. You're not a good mother. You're not smart enough. You're not pretty enough. You're not whatever enough.* You fill in the blank with what your comparison tells you. It's important to know what it says, if only so you can know that this is not the voice of love. This is not the

voice to listen to. But when I found myself distracted and overcommitted and multitasking on the treadmill of performance, it was the loudest voice I heard. *Keep going! Run harder! If you stop, everything will come crashing down.* This leads to enormous pressure to keep it all together.

5. Pressure

I think I'm pretty good at managing a busy life. I'm a star performer at getting things done. I am good at crossing stuff off my list. I think I have an excellent reputation for being a go-to person for accomplishing things. I wouldn't want to trade this (the good part, not the prideful part), but coupled with my propensity to overcommit, I create the perfect environment for pressure. Given a choice, I frequently choose high-pressure intensity over low-pressure calm, and I'm not sure why. Some women are slow cookers. Like Crock-Pots, they take a long time to heat up and everything cooks at a very low temperature all day. While I like to think like a slow cooker, I mostly work like a pressure cooker.

Here's how pressure cookers work. When liquid inside the pot boils, the liquid is trapped inside the pot. Having no release, the steam builds up pressure. The pressure of the trapped steam creates the PSI (pounds per square inch) that makes pressure cookers do their

work in a fraction of the time it takes conventional methods. But if for some reason the pressure inside the cooker doesn't shut off, the contents will no longer be recognizable as food.

When it comes to too much pressure, our lives don't fare much better.

Beginnings of any sort are stressful and pressure filled. Starting anything new—working a new job, kids attending a new school, moving to a new city or even into a new home—there is always more work to do than we anticipated, and it always costs more than we'd planned to pay. There is a learning curve, and even if we crest the curve, it sends us careening downhill faster than Shaun White on the half-pipe. Such was the case for me in starting Seasons Weekend, the nonprofit I mentioned earlier. I was no longer earning income, and the cost of this endeavor was more than I imagined. I took a very big risk and used my retirement savings to get the weekend off the ground, fully believing I'd be able to put that money back in once Seasons was up and running. (I do not recommend this, by the way.) The pressure was enormous, not only for me but for my family as well. There was too much steam trapped inside the pot! The pressure per square inch in my household was dangerously high, with no relief in sight.

I've heard it said that stress doesn't come from what you're doing; it comes from what you think you *should* be doing. So when you should be working on a project or when you should be making money by now in your new company, or when you should be creating more family memories and you're *not* doing those things, it generates pressure and stress.

My point is this: when we have a lot of responsibility and are expected to be holding everything together, because we are women and that is exactly what we do, we put too much pressure on ourselves. Because we've consistently done too much—and done it well—we are expected to keep up that level of accomplishment. We try to make it look effortless. We would never want anyone to feel bad that we have to work so hard, so we keep buying the birthday presents for all the parties the kids are invited to; we keep picking up the gluten-free, sugar-free, dairy-free cookies for the bake sale; we keep making sure homework gets done; we keep the family attending church activities; we keep calling Mom, not as often as she would like, but as regularly as we can; we keep working extra hours; we keep paying bills, finding socks, driving carpool, changing light bulbs . . . *Mayday! Mayday! She's gonna blow!*

No one can say ahead of time how much pressure

she can handle. The only way a person can really find out is by getting it wrong, by taking on more than she can handle. But that is dangerous. What could be worse than turning everything inside my pressure-filled life into mush? And only because I discovered I couldn't manage as much pressure as I thought I could? Too costly.

I laugh at the thought of putting this on my tombstone: "I almost got it all done!"

NOT A PRETTY PICTURE

That, my friends, is how I got to such a high level of crazy in my life. I'm sure you can see the way these ingredients connect to each other and feed off each other. Multitasking leads to distraction, comparison leads to overcommitment, overcommitment creates pressure that needs to be relieved by distraction, and so on and so on. Round and round and round it goes, and where it stops, nobody knows, because it doesn't stop. I had to stop it.

My life was forever changed with the birth of my children, and over the years, the sweet warmth of family love has only grown and intensified. But looking back, I can see the ways I was inviting crazy and all that inevitably came through the door with it. I had no idea there was any other way. I feel fortunate that we did

survive living under that much pressure and that nothing exploded that couldn't be repaired or wiped off the walls, but I would never do it that way again.

Sometimes I close my eyes and picture those days. I can clearly see myself running around like crazy, distracted, overcommitted, constantly multitasking, and way too often comparing myself with others and coming up short. I put too much pressure on myself. I thought I should be able to do it all, handle it all, and love every minute of it. It was so unfair of me to do this to myself, and I can cry just thinking about it.

No woman likes looking at unflattering pictures of herself, let alone showing those pictures to others. But to rip up these photos and forget about them would be to waste what they have taught me. It's not that I was a bad person during this time or that terrible events were happening. I loved my husband and children, created memories that will last a lifetime, and did meaningful work. But I never stopped long enough to identify the crazy in these pictures of myself, and honestly if I had seen the crazy, I don't think I would have recognized it as crazy at the time. I'd gotten caught up in my desire to get it all done, make everyone happy, keep the plates spinning, and look good while doing it. But I was distracted, and at times distraught, as I kept looking to the

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left and to the right and seeing others I thought were doing it better.

Something had to give. I just never imagined *everything* would have to give. I had no idea my heart would have to shatter into a million pieces to show me how to be whole again. Or how a miserable and horrible crash could end up being the very thing I needed to stop the crazy train. Or that this crisis could do something for me I never would have been able to do for myself.