

Prevailing in the Pandemic: Some Motherly Advice

Go forth. Shine your own special light into the world, and help others.

By **M.C. Sungaila** | May 07, 2020 at 06:00 PM



M.C. Sungaila (left) and Jane Sungaila (Courtesy photo)

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As an appellate lawyer, I write a lot. I write legal briefs to persuade judges to rule for my clients. I write articles analyzing cutting edge trends in the law, and contribute to and edit many legal treatises and books.

But during the COVID-19 shutdown, I published a different kind of book. A nonlegal book. A gift book.

It is the second volume of a two-volume set.

After I graduated law school and throughout my career, my mother sent me near-daily notes with inspiring quotes and words of encouragement. Many of these handwritten notes were written on stationery she created expressly for this purpose: “Mother’s Thought for the Day” was emblazoned across the top.

I kept many of these notes and culled through them to prepare two colorful gift books containing Mom’s best advice. The books’ messages focus on the essentials of a happy, successful and meaningful life, and they celebrate the mother-daughter relationship.

“Mother’s Thoughts for the Day: 25 Years of Wisdom” and “More Mother’s Thoughts for the Day,” are now carried by Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Target, Walmart and booksellers in Australia, the U.K. and Germany. The second book was published last week, just in time for Mother’s Day.

The first worldwide pandemic in over a century highlights the need for the books’ motherly advice. As we begin to return to our workplaces but continue to social distance, it seems we could all use some warm hugs and encouragement from Mom.

Some bits of advice seem particularly important now.

Be courageous. It takes courage to ride the health and economic challenges of the pandemic and government shutdowns. Courage, too, is required to continue to build your skill set, to develop business development skills, and put yourself “out there” over and over again to look for a new job, or to gain new clients. My mother had two pieces of advice for this: “Don’t let a challenge become an excuse for not doing something” and “You cannot control the challenges you encounter, only how you respond to them.”

Get outside your comfort zone. Become comfortable with the uncomfortable. To grow, you need to take chances and explore the outer boundaries of what you are capable of. Never presented a video argument in court before, or published a book? So what. Everyone at some point must learn new skills, and every author had to start somewhere. Or, as my mother says: “Figure out a way to get it done.”

Trust your gut. The books came into being because I trusted my gut. I had kept most of the daily notes from my mother. One day I started compiling a running list of my favorites. I realized I had enough for a book. I had a gut feeling that this book would help other people, especially women and girls, just as my mother’s words had helped me. My mother’s special gift is knowing exactly what to say when it needs to be said to uplift and encourage others—she is an unpaid and informal executive coach to me and many other women. I felt compelled to share her gift with the world. I had no idea where it might lead. I just had a strong feeling that whatever happened as a result of these books, it would be a positive force in the world, and would bring light to those who needed it.

If you are similarly called to do something positive, don’t question it. Do it. Or, as my mother says: “Don’t let anybody tell you that you can’t.”

Embrace excellence. Striving for excellence is important. This is not easy to do. It requires discipline. It is hard work. But it is essential. After all, as my mother says: “Always do and be the best that you can.” And: “Excellence is not achieved by changing rules and goals to meet your present skills. Instead, excellence is achieved by building your skills to achieve your goals.”

Serve others. One of my mother’s favorite quotes reminds us that “none goes his way alone. All that we send into the lives of others comes back into our own.”

The books came into being because I had a gut feeling they would serve others, and help them achieve their best. Both mothers and fathers have shared the first book with their children, sometimes using it as bedtime reading or a way to start the day; female executives keep the books at their desks to inspire themselves throughout the day as well; professional women's groups have shared the first book with, and gifted it to, members at conferences. In short, the first book has reinforced familial bonds, and encouraged readers to shine and contribute their best to the world.

The first book has uplifted communities in other ways as well.

A portion of the net proceeds supported (1) Sir Bruno Serato's Caterina's Club, which feeds motel kids, helps their families move into apartments, and trains them for careers in the restaurant industry, and (2) the community and youth programs of Pacific Symphony. During the pandemic shutdown, Caterina's Club fed thousands more families each day than the organization usually does, and Pacific Symphony has continued to provide music lessons to children over the Internet.

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M.C. Sungaila anchors the California appellate practice at Haynes & Boone. Her *"Mother's Thoughts for the Day"* books are available on Amazon, and excerpts of the books are available [here](#).