

## INTRODUCTION

I was one of those guys in high school that I suppose a lot of people thought was really going to make it. And yet, I've failed at a lot of what I've tried to do in life. I've had—and lost—well over 35 jobs in my adult life. I've invested in so many get-rich-quick schemes, I'm sure I've made at least a couple guys rich. I lost my shirt on my own entrepreneurial projects as well. Two marriages have slipped right through my fingers. I so loved being a daddy, but divorce only lets you be a daddy part time. To me, the role of daddy was never designed to be part time. So, for years, I grieved with the lonely heartache of missing my precious children! Missing the normal moments in their lives when they came home from school, did their homework and had friends over. Missing what Life gave, then viciously took back. Misery became my mistress and Stress became my significant other.

And then, I developed a chronic illness and spent over two years in unbelievable daily torture. At times, I couldn't stand to breathe the air! I'd hardly been sick a day in my life. Life took that back, too. I hadn't appreciated how basic and foundational good health is. I wound up in the hospital several times, near death, until they finally performed 3 major operations over 7 months. Within a month after the last operation, by a mere fluke, they discovered kidney cancer and removed part of my kidney during the fourth major operation I'd had in 9 months.

When I was lying there on that hospital bed and life didn't look so permanent, like it wasn't going to last that much longer—I began to do a lot of self analysis by reflecting on my life and what it had meant. Gradually, something was born and grew over a period of 3 years. You're holding it in your hands right now.

The life I've lived as described above couldn't be recommended as an inspiration to anyone. But the lessons I learned from the failures I experienced were invaluable. It's impossible to live, and live to the fullest, without failing! Failure is there to *grow* us! It's not as important to question our trials as it is to allow our trials to question us! Where we need to *be*. I first began to see these lessons visually, as I re-visited the different stages of my life. I began to draw, and as I did, thoughts came from the lessons I had learned. I suppose I was doing it to have something to pass on to my children, maybe help them avoid some of my mistakes. Help them appreciate the most important things and skim over the least important things. But as I shared these drawings and words with friends and family, I was encouraged to share them on a larger scale and the *12 Stages of Life™* came to be.

As I look back over my life, I can truly say that I've danced the dance of life, but I've also danced right on death's doorstep. I've eaten caviar and escargot, and I've eaten beans right out of a can. I've been homeless, living out of an old car, and I've lived in a beach house in Malibu. I have loved with everything I had...and lost everything I loved.

Out of all that has come this: my interpretation of 12 of the major stages of Life. As you turn through the pages of this book, please take time to ponder the pictures and think about the thoughts I wrote down. My hope is that they will be a blessing to your life.

Bruce Carnahan  
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