

# LOOK FOR THE HOOK

by

Susan Jane Bodell

*A guide to finding happiness, purpose and  
fulfillment*

*One Baby Step at a time*

*“Optimists are right. So are pessimists. It’s  
up to you to choose which you will be.”*

*Harvey Mackay (author and  
motivational speaker)*



**SPRIG MEDIA GROUP**  
NEW YORK

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Library of Congress – Cataloging Data  
Bodell, Susan Jane  
Look For The Hook / by Susan Jane Bodell  
Registration Number: TXu 1-659-906

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First Sprig Media Group Edition  
Web Site: [www.lookforthehook.com](http://www.lookforthehook.com)  
Published by Sprig Media Group, New York  
Designs and Photos by Sprig Media Group  
For information about bulk purchases  
E-mail: [Lookforthehook.sprigmediagroup@sprigltd.com](mailto:Lookforthehook.sprigmediagroup@sprigltd.com)

*To Jerry, your love and support has inspired me to look for the hook despite the circumstance*

*and*

*To all who have endured, persevered and conquered life's challenges in pursuit of serenity and happiness in their lives.*

*Your strength has inspired, encouraged, and motivated many and perhaps you were never aware that you were our role models.*

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## **FOREWORD**

For the past twenty-seven years, I've had the pleasure of sharing my life with an amazingly positive and resilient man named Jerry. Jerry's life story is one with a message of hope, inner strength, determination and perseverance. At the young age of twenty-six, Jerry realized that he was an alcoholic. Unfortunately, forty-three years ago, the knowledge and sophistication of dealing with alcoholism by the medical profession, was not what we know it to be today. The repetitive event of landing in an alcoholism treatment center or psychiatric ward, of a state operated hospital, was played out many times while Jerry sought to end the drinking and the devastation it brought into his life. The outrageous circumstances that ensued, brought about by a brilliant mind saturated with alcohol, included pan handling in front of the Bank of New York in downtown Manhattan.

I wouldn't be writing this book if Jerry's saga had ended badly, but I feel compelled to bring his story and his life's philosophy to these pages.

Jerry stopped drinking thirty-five years ago, and is now living the life he was put on earth to live. In the course of his career, he held many impressive jobs in the world of banking, accounting and finance and built a technology consulting company that landed him lengthy

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consulting assignments in, among many other prestigious organizations, the United Nations. In 2002, in the U.K. Room of the United Nations building on First Avenue in Manhattan, Jerry addressed hundreds of people and spoke of the technological advances that he was implementing for their organization. As he stepped down from the podium, he asked himself “how the hell did I get here?” The answer to that question was simply “one baby step at a time”.

This book is not about one man finding sobriety or about the challenges of alcoholism. Its’ purpose lies in identifying the tools, tricks and positive techniques utilized by Jerry and other positive thinkers like him to assist you, the reader, in your quest for happiness, purpose and fulfillment.

I have encountered many positive souls throughout my life, like my husband, who have inspired me, encouraged me and motivated me to be all that I can be. My hope is to share the lessons that I have taken from my role models and pass along their message of hope and strength to you.

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*“What we call the secret of happiness is no more a secret than our willingness to choose life.”*

*Leo Buscaglia (author and motivational speaker)*



## 1 – *'LOOK FOR THE HOOK'*

In the course of our twenty-six year marriage, my husband, Jerry, has altered my thinking and as a result, my actions, with his extremely positive outlook on life. Prior to our marriage, I was struggling financially, working full time and attending evening college to complete a degree in Computer Science. My cash reserves were low, or more accurately, non-existent, and therefore any problem out of the realm of my daily drudgery was huge. At least, that's how I viewed my place in the world at that time. My mental attitude was one of negativity. I believed my life was difficult. Some of those difficulties were self-imposed like becoming a twenty-five year old divorcee struggling to feed myself and maintain a condominium that I didn't earn enough money to comfortably afford. On reflection, I now believe that there were few people in my life, up to that point, that were able to find a hook and pick themselves up, no less help me to do so! In short, I was a person with a defeatist attitude that never thought I would overcome my perceived inherited obstacles.

One morning I came out to my recently purchased new car to begin the long commute to my office and found that the car had been vandalized, while I slept, and all of the windows smashed.

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I had traded in my ‘dream car’ with all the fancy bells and whistles I always wanted for my new ‘crap box’, as I affectionately called it, in order to save money on the gas. What ensued was a long string of expletives running out of my mouth, and feelings of anger, and self pity. Why was this happening to me? None of my emotional reactions were doing anything positive to fix this problem and get myself to work.

I phoned my then ‘boyfriend’, Jerry, and asked what I should do and he immediately began ‘looking for the hook’ and fixing the problem!

“First, we need to find a glass company that accepts your insurance and can repair the broken windows. I haven’t left for the office yet,” (we worked in the same company at that time) “so I will come by and follow you to the repair shop and then you can ride with me.”

In that brief conversation, my problem was already beginning to dissolve with a ‘step by step’ plan to right it and I believe I knew then that I would marry that man one day! How did he do this and make it look so simple? How could I adjust my negative thinking and make an unpleasant problem less devastating by only focusing on the positive steps to put it behind me. For starters, one sure way of becoming a ‘glass is half full’ person, as opposed to the ‘glass is half empty’ is to surround yourself with positive people.

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One of the many optimistic phrases that Jerry and I use regularly is 'look for the hook'. What exactly does 'look for the hook' mean? Simply stated, when something or someone has you down, look for something positive to grab hold of and pull yourself back up! Your personal 'hook' may take on many faces. It may be a person in your life that brings you joy and serenity. Perhaps a passion that you've enjoyed that makes you feel fulfilled. Or even a beloved pet that has brought you unconditional love and makes you feel happy to be alive. It may be a tranquil walk on a beach that helps you restore your positive thinking. Whatever or whoever helps bring you a renewed optimism and restoration of motivation and well being is your 'hook'. You must force yourself to seek out that 'hook' and restore yourself with the strength of that connection. However, that 'hook' must not then become an anchor to the status quo. It should merely be an aid, assistance, or a motivating factor to then conjure up the true source of strength that lies within you. This philosophy can be put to practice not only with seriously difficult challenges, such as overcoming alcoholism, but within our daily living so that we may continuously inspire ourselves to live our lives to their fullest potential. We all face challenges, obstacles or hard times throughout our lives, but I've come to believe that it is the way we address those difficulties with our mental attitudes that make all the difference in

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our feeling of contentment. In my attempt to put into writing some of the personal accounts of my life and relay how 'looking for the hook' came into play, it occurred to me that the more time that I've spent approaching my life from a positive standpoint, the easier it has become to 'look for' and 'find a hook' to grab on to when needed. The farther away from my old, negative 'poor me' approach to difficulties I've become, the more challenging it is to even recall the most difficult and dark chapters of my existence. In other words, 'looking for the hook' becomes similar to an 'auto reflex' reaction and almost as automatic as breathing! The way we handle the events of our daily lives has more to do with how we view our position in the universe. If we are negative and feel that we will never reach our goals or live our dreams, that end will be met. However, if you tell yourself that you will set a path of 'baby steps' that will assist you in accomplishing your goals, suddenly it becomes a realistic and doable thing.

*“You are everything that is, your thoughts, your life, your dreams come true. You are everything you choose to be. You are as unlimited as the endless universe.”*

*Shad Helmstetter (author and behavioral researcher)*

## **2 - SET A PATH WITH 'BABY STEPS'**

In order to reach an objective, any objective, we must obviously first set a goal for ourselves and then outline a plan for obtaining it. It is important to break the journey to the objective into realistic goals so that we may experience the plateaus of accomplishment along the way. In other words, take 'baby steps' towards the desired end result to make certain you stay focused and don't get discouraged.

If you've ever watched the process of a toddler learning to walk, you will understand that it is an accomplishment that must be fulfilled on the child's timetable. The skill of walking upright cannot be simply acquired by turning two years old or because Mommy or Daddy will it to happen. In our family, we had the opportunity and pleasure to watch our nephew's first born son learn to walk. First, he taught himself to crawl on hands and knees which led to chaffed knees and sore hands. The baby's answer was to modify his crawling technique and the adjustment was made by crawling on his hands and feet while maintaining his bottom high in the air with knees up off the floor. This is not an easy feat, even for a two year old. Then came the realization that our Cro-Magnon ancestors arrived at of standing upright, the toddler then patiently taught himself to stand on his two feet, very briefly, only to

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fall abruptly to the ground. That routine became stronger when he realized if he held on to a sofa, chair, or convenient leg of someone nearby, he had the ability to continue to stand without dropping painfully to the floor. Ultimately, the grandest reward to propel himself forward, backward, and sideward while standing independently on his own two feet was attained!

If we had that tenacious perseverance and determination to conquer, at such a young age, we still possess that inner strength; perhaps we've just forgotten we have it. By applying that same mental attitude of 'slow and steady' one baby step at a time until we reach the plateau of a reasonable and realistic goal, our greatest objectives are achievable.

If you have ever had a personal tragedy or been close to someone who has, you may have witnessed the power of taking 'baby steps' towards an ultimate goal as a successful means to that end. In this past year, a dear friend, Colette, had a tragic fall fracturing her skull causing multiple hematomas. After brain surgery, she spent more than two weeks in a coma and on life support. The doctors were not very optimistic that she would awaken from the coma and if she did, there was a high probability that there was extensive brain damage which would prevent the possibility of ever walking, speaking or having a quality of life again. This was not only a long time friend, but my ballet

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instructor of many years. Her not being able to dance or even walk ever again was more than I wanted to allow my brain to comprehend. There were many additional health complications, following surgery, such as pneumonia, neurological concerns and brain swelling. However, just as the tenacious toddler put one foot in front of the other to take his first steps, so did Colette.

I recall one of the many hospital visits while she still lay in a coma. Jerry always accompanied me on those visits as he knew her “lifeless” condition was taking a toll on my ability to remain positive. On this memorable and joyful day, Colette, although still lying in bed motionless, with closed eyes and providing no obvious responses, was connected to brain monitoring devices. I began speaking to her about those she loved the most, her husband and son. I continued to bring her up to date on the successful career of one of her former ballet students and talked of all those who loved her and were anxiously awaiting her return to health. I glanced over at Jerry as I was certain that he might be thinking that I had lost my mind in talking to our friend as if she was not in a coma, and the excitement on his face was priceless. He encouraged me to continue my discussion with her along the same lines as he observed that when I did talk to her about people and things near and dear to her heart, her brain waves on the monitoring devices



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were going crazy! That day my heart and mind were flooded with optimism and I believed she would find her way back to life. I knew the road ahead would be long and arduous, but she was a fighter and stubborn enough to do it!

She did battle her way back from the brink of death and fifteen months after this unfortunate accident, has miraculously proven all of the physicians worst fears to be unwarranted. On a daily basis, I witnessed the setting of her next goal and the baby steps taken until she reached that plateau. Then she moved on to the next hurdle. Obstacles that were so huge, and fortunately unfamiliar to most, somehow she managed to overcome. The relearning of the automatic reflex reaction of breathing once her tracheotomy and breathing apparatus was disconnected, expanding her lung capacity with breathing exercises multiple times a day, adapting to first liquid, then semi-solid and eventually solid foods again after a feeding tube was removed after six long months. There were also excruciating physical, mental and vocal therapy sessions to regain the use of her now degenerative muscles, brain and vocal chords.

First, a wheelchair was utilized by using her arms to push the wheels to strengthen her upper body. She progressed into learning to walk with her feet on the ground while sitting in the wheel chair. On to a hand-

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held “walker” to support her own weight while standing and attempting to put one foot in front of the other. I could continue on for many more pages describing the enormous, painful challenge Colette undertook to work her way back from the “near death” experience, but the most relevant point to take away from this example is that each of us possess an amazingly strong will to survive and to overcome difficulties far beyond our own expectations.

I watched as each ‘baby step’ brought her closer to her goal of returning to her former self and joined in each celebration of yet one more renewed strength that she fought so hard to attain. Colette had always considered herself to be a negative and easily defeated personality, yet now her inner strength reminded so many of the wondrous human spirit and what it can conquer when challenged.