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A Short Guide to a Happy Life



ANNA QUINDLEN

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to a
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Century · London

Published by Century in 2002

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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Published in the US by Random House, Inc., New York, and simultaneously in Canada by Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto

First published in the United Kingdom in 2002 by Century
The Random House Group Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 2SA

Random House Australia (Pty) Limited
20 Alfred Street, Milsons Point, Sydney,
New South Wales 2061, Australia

Random House New Zealand Limited
18 Poland Road, Glenfield
Auckland 10, New Zealand

Random House (Pty) Limited
Endulini, 5a Jubilee Road, Parktown 2193, South Africa

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

The excerpt from 'The Womanhood X' by Gwendolyn Brooks, which appears on page 25, is from *Blacks*, by Gwendolyn Brooks (Chicago, Ill.: Third World Press, 1987).
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www.randomhouse.co.uk

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

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ISBN 0 7126 20095

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham plc, Chatham, Kent

Book design by Barbara M. Bachman

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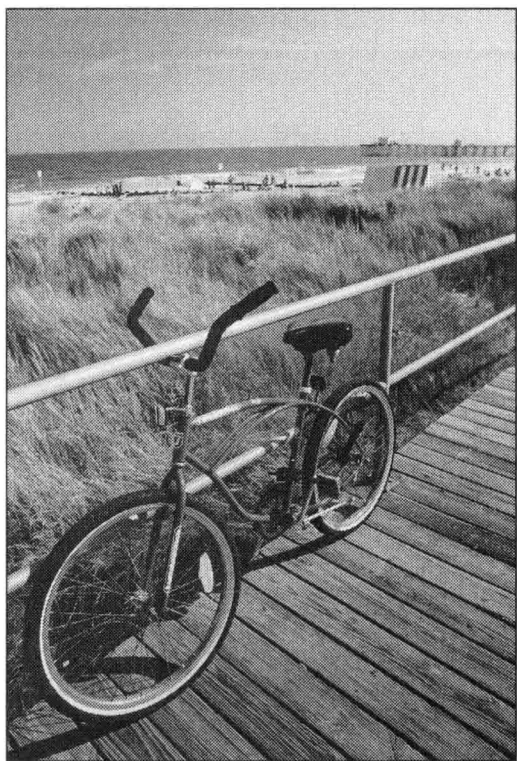
I'm not particularly qualified by profession or education to give advice and counsel. It's widely known in a small circle that I make a mean tomato sauce, and I know many inventive ways to hold a baby while nursing, although I haven't had the opportunity to use any of them in years. I have a good eye for a nice swatch and a surprising paint chip, and I have had a checkered but occasionally successful sideline in matchmaking.

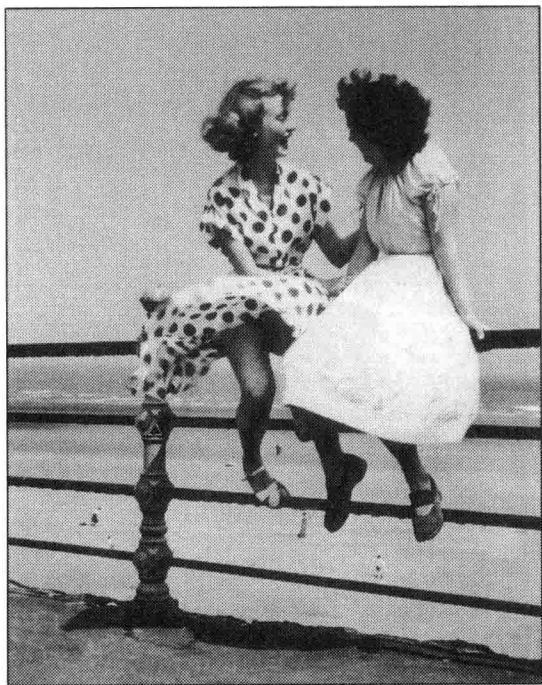
But I've never earned a doctorate, or even a master's degree. I'm not an ethicist,

or a philosopher, or an expert in any particular field. Each time I give a commencement speech I feel like a bit of a fraud. Yogi Berra's advice seems as good as any: When you come to a fork in the road, take it!

I can't talk about the economy, or the universe, or academe, as academicians like to call where they work when they're feeling kind of grand. I'm a novelist. My work is human nature. Real life is really all I know.

Don't ever confuse the two, your life and your work. That's what I have to say. The second is only a part of the first. Don't ever forget what a friend once wrote to Senator Paul Tsongas when the senator had decided not to run for reelection because he'd been





diagnosed with cancer: “No man ever said on his deathbed I wish I had spent more time at the office.”

Don’t ever forget the words on a post-card that my father sent me last year: “If you win the rat race, you’re still a rat.”

Or what John Lennon wrote before he was gunned down in the driveway of the Dakota: “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”

That’s the only advice I can give. After all, when you look at the faces of a class of graduating seniors, you realize that each student has only one thing that no one else has. When you leave college, there are thousands of people out there with the same degree





you have; when you get a job, there will be thousands of people doing what you want to do for a living.

But you are the only person alive who has sole custody of your life. Your particular life. Your entire life. Not just your life at a desk, or your life on the bus, or in the car, or at the computer. Not just the life of your mind, but the life of your heart. Not just your bank account, but your soul.

People don't talk about the soul very much anymore. It's so much easier to write a résumé than to craft a spirit. But a résumé is cold comfort on a winter night, or when you're sad, or broke, or lonely, or when you've gotten back the chest X ray and it

