

FOREWORD BY **JON GORDON**
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE ENERGY BUS*

AMBERLY LAGO

JOY

**THROUGH
THE**

Journey

Shift YOUR MINDSET,
Embrace THE PRESENT MOMENT,
AND *Cultivate Resilience*
THROUGH LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS

Praise for *Joy Through the Journey*

“Very few people I meet put off an immediate impression of increase like Amberly Lago. She gets you in the mindset of expansion and increase. Her stories are transformational and her method is proven. I can’t wait to see how many people she impacts with this book and message.”

—Coach Micheal Burt,

22-time author of books including
Wall Street Journal bestseller, *Flip the Switch*

“In Joy Through the Journey, Amberly Lago masterfully blends personal anecdotes with actionable strategies to help readers navigate their darkest moments. This book is a powerful guide to rediscovering joy and living with renewed gratitude. Amberly’s insights will inspire you to embrace life’s journey with resilience and hope.”

—Leah Amico,

three-time Olympic Gold medalist and speaker

“Joy Through the Journey by Amberly Lago is a powerful and transformative guide for anyone seeking to reclaim their joy and live authentically. This book will ignite the reader’s inner fire, encouraging them to embrace their imperfections and align with their true self. An inspiring and life-changing read!”

—Rudi Riekstins,

leadership visionary, business mentor
and coach, and speaker

“Whether attending her live event, joining her Mastermind, or within the pages of this brand-new book, spending time with Amberly Lago is always an inspiring and uplifting experience. She is the real deal! I love this new book and how it guides me to tap into indeed more joy in the journey. What a gift this book is and one that I’ll return to again and again!”

—Tiffany Peterson,
TEDx speaker, top 1% podcast host,
and coach

“This book is an unparalleled guide to finding joy even in the midst of sorrow and pain. Amberly reminds us that no one is exempt from life’s challenges—whether it’s addiction, abuse, depression, or loss—but we all have access to the profound well of gratitude within us. Through her deeply personal experiences, she not only shares her journey to accessing joy but also provides practical steps to awaken authentic joy in your life, no matter the circumstances. Her raw, real, and honest voice transforms challenges into opportunities to draw gratitude and joy closer. If you’re navigating a difficult season or climbing to the next level, this book is an essential companion.”

—Brooke Hemingway,
speaker, high-performance coach,
and creator of Align for Success

JOY

THROUGH
THE

Journey

FOREWORD BY **JON GORDON**
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE ENERGY BUS*

AMBERLY LAGO

JOY

**THROUGH
THE**

Journey

Shift YOUR MINDSET,
Embrace THE PRESENT MOMENT,
AND Cultivate Resilience
THROUGH LIFE'S UPS AND DOWNS

WILEY

Copyright © 2025 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial technologies or similar technologies.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.
Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permission>.

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Is Available:

ISBN 9781394265541 (cloth)
ISBN 9781394265558 (ePub)
ISBN 9781394265565 (ePDF)

Cover Design: Wiley
Author Photo: © Johnny Lavallee

*For my husband, Johnny, who holds my hand and has my heart.
For my daughters, Savanna and Ruby Lee, my biggest inspirations.*

Contents

<i>Foreword by Jon Gordon</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction: Falling off the Wagon</i>	<i>xv</i>
Chapter 1 The Moment I Discovered Joy	1
Chapter 2 The Power of Acceptance: A Path to Inner Peace and Personal Growth	19
Chapter 3 Shift Your Perspective: Serving Others with Gratitude	33
Chapter 4 Forgiveness: The Liberating Journey to Emotional Freedom	45
Chapter 5 The Power of Mindful Living: Finding Joy in the Present Moment and Celebrating Everyday Achievements Along the Way	57
Chapter 6 The Art of Letting Go: Releasing the Past to Embrace a Brighter Future	67

Chapter 7	Discovering Your Joy: A Blueprint for Uncovering Personal Passions and Pursuits That Ignite Happiness	79
Chapter 8	Building Meaningful Connections: Nurturing Relationships That Foster Joy	91
Chapter 9	Mind–Body Harmony: Cultivating Physical and Mental Well-Being for Lasting Joy	107
Chapter 10	Thriving in Transition: Embracing Change as a Catalyst for Personal Growth	117
Chapter 11	Gratitude Is Alchemy/Gratitude in Action: How Practicing Gratitude Transforms Your Outlook on Life	129
Chapter 12	Radiating Joy to the World: Creating a Ripple Effect of Positivity and Happiness	135
Chapter 13	Bouncing Forward from Life’s Hard Knocks	149
	<i>Conclusion: The Purpose in Pain Opportunity</i>	167
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	173
	<i>About the Author</i>	177
	<i>Index</i>	179

Foreword

Jon Gordon

I am an encourager and I often find other voices of encouragement who are making a big difference in this world. When I meet these encouragers, I love supporting and sharing their work with others.

In this spirit I'm excited and honored to write the foreword to this book, written by my inspirational and encouraging friend Amberly Lago.

You might know Amberly from her appearances on NBC's *Today Show* or one of her numerous features in magazines like *Shape*, *Fit Pregnancy*, or *Health and Disability Magazine*. Perhaps you've been inspired by her TEDx Talk or one of her other excellent speaking engagements, subscribed to her podcast, followed her on social media, or read her first book, *True Grit and Grace*. Amberly is truly a person of fortitude, grit, and determination.

No one survives what she has—a near-death motorcycle accident, being told she had a 1% chance of saving her leg from amputation, 34 surgeries in a span of just a few years, and narrowly avoiding being in a wheelchair for the rest of her life—without Amberly's particular brand of fortitude. *True Grit and Grace* tells that story and more. No spoilers here, but suffice it to say that

relearning how to walk—and eventually, run—was not the first mountain Amberly had to summit in her life.

Amberly invited my wife, Kathryn, and me to appear on her podcast, *The Amberly Lago Show: Stories of True Grit and Grace*. The experience was so good that I asked her to be a guest on my podcast in the following year. In true Amberly fashion, she showed up focused and ready to share the compelling story of her motorcycle accident. She spoke passionately about how she'd learned through her painful recovery process to turn tragedy into triumph and live a life of grit and grace.

After we finished recording her episode, I remember being struck by how joyfully she spoke—both on the podcast and off. It gave me an idea. “Amberly,” I said, “I am really good at book titles, and your next book should be titled *Joy Through the Journey*.”

It was so clear to me. The way Amberly continually works to be positive and cultivate joy for herself and those around her, regardless of circumstances, is simply *inspiring*. Told through the lens of her unique experience, a book about joy had the potential to help so many others live with more joy.

Today, having read *Joy Through the Journey*, I can attest not only to the potential of her message but also to its power.

In this book, Amberly mines her experiences to share the techniques and tips she uses to redirect her focus away from pain and toward joy. Using storytelling and strategies, she provides resources and guidance for readers who want more positivity and resilience in their lives. For the first time, Amberly also delves deep into her journey with addiction, sobriety, and living with complex regional pain syndrome. At times hilarious, raw, and vulnerable, her candid message will inspire you to cultivate joy in your own life.

Most of us need to learn how to choose joy and bring joy into our life, and that's why I believe this book is going to speak to you and all who read it.

Amberly had to work at being joyful, and due to this process she has become a great teacher, and we, her readers, are the beneficiary of the lessons she has learned and the joy she shares.

That's the true power of *Joy Through the Journey*. With every sentence, Amberly assures us we can keep going, joyfully, and become better versions of ourselves.

Because we are better together.

—Jon Gordon,
17-time best-selling author of *The Energy Bus*
and *The Power of Positive Leadership*

Introduction

Falling off the Wagon

Not long ago, when I'd just begun writing this book, something horribly embarrassing happened to me. It was the kind of thing that makes a person want to crawl under the covers and never come out.

Two separate times, I'd gotten an infection that put me in urgent care. The second time, the doctor laid out my choices: I could be admitted to the hospital for IV antibiotics or try a different prescription I took on my own.

She did *not* recommend the second option.

"I'll take the prescription," I said.

"The side effects are really bad," she countered. "You could rupture a tendon."

I assured her I would be fine. *I have grit*, I thought. *I know how to push through physical pain and discomfort*. After all, I live every day with a nerve disease that's ranked highest on the pain scale—I get through days when it feels like there's an ice pick jabbing me in the foot and fire ants covering my feet all the time. I knew I could just keep going.

The doctor didn't look happy, but I smiled and did what I could do to comfort her and set her mind at ease. "I have a big day ahead," I said. "This is going to work."

Boy, was I wrong.

I got my meds from the pharmacy and swallowed them on an empty stomach. I'd skipped my morning workout to go to urgent care; I'd skipped my morning ritual of reading, writing, and asking God to walk with me through the day. And there was no time for food. I had three virtual events to deliver a keynote to, a client, and I was going live on Instagram to help another client promote her new book.

I was off to the races.

Thankfully, adrenaline kicked in and my pain seemed to disappear for a bit. I gave those three keynotes every last bit of my energy. *One more thing to do*, I told myself, *and then I can come up for air*. I'd eat something, maybe even rest. My mind agreed with the grit in my work ethic, pushing right along with me. My body decided, *nah*. It couldn't push anymore.

But I had no time for giving myself grace. I logged on for the live Instagram event, where thousands of people were waiting.

And crashed.

It was almost like I was blacked out but still conscious enough to know everything was going horribly wrong. *Come on, brain!* I told myself. *WORK!* But my words weren't even coming out right. I cut the event short and passed out. I didn't even make it to the bed—just collapsed right there on the sofa and slept until morning.

As horrible as that might sound, it was far worse when I woke up to dozens of concerned messages from clients and friends. The particulars varied, but the main concern was pretty consistent: they could all tell something was off. I hadn't been myself. One person even thought I'd fallen off the wagon after years of hard-won sobriety.

Well, I hadn't. I was still sober as they day was long. But what had happened seemed far more damaging. I felt like I'd fallen off the wagon emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

I was beat.

I was embarrassed.

I was scared.

Going Bankrupt

The day of that fateful Instagram Live, I reminded myself, I *had* just gotten out of urgent care. But long before that I'd begun to let my workouts slip so I could take an extra coaching call if one of my clients had an "emergency." I'd started skipping the 12-step meetings that fueled me spiritually so I could help promote someone else's podcast. I'd made a practice of skipping meals so I could stay on Zoom just a little longer. Forget "falling off the wagon." I'd become mentally, physically, and spiritually *bankrupt*.

Something had to change.

After apologizing for my actions and behavior on that Instagram Live, I took a good hard look at the part I'd played in that potentially career-decimating outcome. Of course there had been warning signs, like when I missed a recent appointment for the first time in 20 years because I was feeling sick enough to lie down in the middle of the day—and had slept right through my alarm. At the time, it worried my client because it was so out of character for me.

Truth was, it had worried me, too. So did the fact that I'd been feeling anxious enough to tell my sponsor, "I feel my heart beating all the time—almost like palpitations—kind of the way I feel sometimes before I get onstage." The difference was, when I got onstage, adrenaline always kicked in when I stepped into the spotlight and everything felt awesome. But these anxious palpitations happened nonstop from the moment I woke up through trying to fall asleep at night.

"You're not taking care of yourself," my sponsor had responded.

"I know," I told her. Not for the first time, I was funneling all my energy into taking care of other people. I knew it. But I still couldn't quite shift gears enough to take care of me.

I thought back to that Instagram Live. When I got on that interview and wasn't myself, I thought, *What am I doing? I'm going to destroy everything I have worked so hard to build if I keep pushing this hard.* I remembered what my friend Jessie told me once, years before, when she'd seen me doing the same thing. "Amberly," she'd said, "your impact is only as strong as you are healthy."

It hit me hard when she said it—hard enough to stick. So why had I continued to push so hard? Why had I chosen to grit it out instead of giving myself grace? Why did I always seem to put others' needs before mine to the point of nearly destroying everything I've worked for years, *decades*, to achieve? Yes, I love helping others.

But why wasn't I helping myself?

Limiting Beliefs: The Little Girl That I Was

It took some soul-searching, but I had my answer. When it came right down to it, I didn't feel like I deserved help. And let me tell you, that limiting belief was deep-seated. I had long ago convinced myself that my needs were secondary (if they even ever rose as high as second on my list of important things). And in supporting others, I had lost sight of my own self.

But sometimes we have to get to such a low place—and get real humble—so we can remember what's really important. For me, in that moment, it took looking at why I had those feelings of unworthiness—why I felt everyone else deserved to feel safe, taken care of, and worthy of grace and compassion—in the first place.

Eventually I realized that those feelings, and the certainty they'd grown into, came from a moment when I was a little girl. If you've read my first book, *True Grit and Grace*, you know a little of my background. You know that my stepdad hurt me for

years, and that when I gathered enough courage to tell my real dad about the sexual abuse I was routinely subjected to, Dad did nothing to stop it. He had his reasons, and when I was an adult he explained them to me. But when I held that experience up to the light, I understood how it made me feel like he didn't protect me *because I didn't deserve protection*.

That little girl, who felt like she wasn't worth protecting or loving or being taken care of, was still with me as an adult. In other words, my spectacular Instagram fail had begun long, long before I started feeling sick or even missing appointments. It started that day at my Dad's house.

I couldn't have known that or seen this particular public consequence coming. But, as I said, all this unfolded while I was in the process of *writing a book about joy*. The irony didn't escape me. *If I'm going to write a book on joy, I thought, well, my gosh—I better spark some.*

Like so many things in life, I couldn't change what had happened. I couldn't change that I'd gotten caught up in the momentum of my career and, as a result, wound up stuck in my little office for 12 or 14 hours a day, with no sun, no breaks, no exercise, doing back-to-back Zoom calls. What kind of life is that?

I wasn't doing it anymore.

Instead, I recommitted to practices that would help me come into realignment with my own well-being.

Reflect and Recommit

Without your health, you lose your relationships, business, reputation, and even your mind. Even worse, you could lose your life. It's not like I didn't know all that, and you would think that going septic once after a kidney infection and winding up in the intensive care unit—and hearing a doctor tell me that if I'd waited one

more day to come in, I would be dead—would have scared me enough that I would've paid attention to the alarms going off in my body. But I've always been good at grit, to a detriment. It was only when I realized I couldn't make an impact and help others if I was unhealthy that really got me.

"You know what, Amberly?" my sponsor said. "I want you to do something every day that's going to take care of you the way you take care of other people. I want you to do something to take care of yourself."

Of course, she was right. I could—and needed to—tell that little girl in me that I am worthy of being taken care of and doing things that bring me joy.

Right out of the gate, I also had to let go of the shame I felt over making a fool of myself in front of thousands of people. So I shined a light on it. I made apologies, faced every text from concerned friends. *Heck*, I thought, *I'm glad they cared enough to reach out*. I returned phone calls and assured everyone that I was going to take care of myself—and this time, I meant it.

I decided I would even do an episode on my show, *The Amberly Lago Show*, and share all the lessons I had learned and what I was doing to improve. Sure, I did this to help listeners, but I also did it to hold myself accountable.

I also looked at the part I'd played that day of the Instagram Live to see what I could change. I couldn't *unmake* a fool of myself, but I could show up differently from that point on.

If you're reading this and have experienced this kind of embarrassment from your own hand (the worst kind, isn't it?), get radically honest with yourself. Take a good hard look at what isn't working. Ask yourself, "How's that working for ya?" and accept the fact that everything you do is either helping you or hurting you. It's either moving you closer to your goal—moving the needle on your business *and* your health—or it's hurting you. Get objective with you and call it like it is.