

CHRISTINE LEE

*with*

PEGGY MCCOLL

BOB PROCTOR

SANDY GALLAGHER

# DESTINIES

MOTIVATING STORIES  
FROM ORDINARY PEOPLE  
WHO CREATED  
EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS



# Des·ti·ny

'destinē/

noun

- 1 The events that will necessarily happen to a particular person or thing in the future.
- 2 The hidden power believed to control what will happen in the future; fate.

When asked about his own destiny, Paulo Coelho, author of *The Alchemist*, said: “I can control my destiny, but not my fate. Destiny means there are opportunities to turn right or left, but fate is a one-way street. I believe we all have the choice as to whether we fulfill our destiny, but our fate is sealed.” While this book is one of destinies, it often feels as if my destiny happened to be fate all along. Over the course of my own journey, I made many decisions along the way that led me to my fate, but in hindsight, it always seemed like I was headed in one direction, and one direction alone. In the end, it often feels like my destiny was my fate.

I wasn't born in America. But a series of decisions, maybe even destiny, brought me to this beautiful country. I was originally born in South Korea, and came to the United States with my family just after turning 14. My father had already immigrated to the US, but we remained in South Korea. However, because of substantial political turmoil and unsettlement in my home Country, we decided to leave. So, we followed behind with my mother and siblings and came to America. We arrived from a small village in South Korea, and culture shock would have been a nice way to describe our experience. The US offered me and my family great opportunity, but it was quite a transition for us all.

There were substantial changes occurring back home, and we were all feeling the burn post-World War II. We experienced great poverty, but my father's job offered us the occasion for change. He was a translator for the US army, and worked to assist American soldiers to understand Korean during the beginning of the Vietnam War. That offered us the chance to advance in life, and receive a strong education in the US.

We were a Christian family, and my mother always considered herself to be a daughter of God. She was extraordinarily humble, and worked hard to raise each of us with strong character and high morals. Surrounded by poverty in South Korea, that wasn't always an easy task. I still remember my mother tending to the homeless within our neighborhood, offering them food and water. She would care for them, and would never turn them away. She'd greet them, and make every single one feel like he or she was the most important person in the world. It was her gift, and her generosity trickled down to her children. My mother was often sick, but that didn't stop her from always putting the needs of others before her own. She had terrible Asthma, and was regularly on an oxygen tank, gasping for her breath as if it would be her last.

Even then, I still remember awaking each morning to see my mother praying. She would start her day extremely early, 4:00AM or so, and begin her daily prayers. Mom did this until she passed away, and it instilled a sense of purpose and faith within us. Faith quickly became an important part of our belief system. We weren't always old enough to

truly understand to whom we prayed, but we easily recognized just how crucial maintaining a strong belief system was to our parents. So we followed in tow, and respected the wishes of our mother. As the siblings grew, faith became an important part of our existence and relationship with the world around us. Perhaps it was blind faith that led me in the direction of my destiny.

As I entered my adult years, I carried a number of different jobs. But I was a real estate agent on the day I met my destiny. I can still remember almost every detail, able to paint a vivid picture of it every time I close my eyes. It is ingrained in my mind, and I will never forget that fateful car ride. A close friend of mine owned a rickety car, and it was always breaking down. So it was no surprise he called me on a warm California day, asking that I give him a ride to see a friend of his. I agreed to pick him up, and he asked that I take him to a small school outside of California.

He told me of this school on numerous occasions. He also indicated he thought I should consider meeting the head-master. My friend went on and on about the school, offering me detail after detail, indicating he thought it would be a great place for me to work. I had never once thought of entering the educational realm, so I thought his request to be completely silly. But as we drove the thirty or so miles, he started in again. We jokingly exchanged jabs at one another, as most friends do, eventually entering into the driveway of the school. I intended on pulling in, having my friend jump out, and then moving on to the listing appointments I had scheduled for the day.

As we pulled in, my friend insisted I come out of the car and survey the quaint little University. Begrudgingly, I agreed to do so. As I exited the vehicle, my friend grabbed my hand and said, "This is the University you will be working at." I laughed at the statement, and then followed him up the driveway. As I approached the entrance of the school, I saw a large red and white sign, with the name of the University emblazoned on the front in a deep red color. I saw a small mission statement etched under the name. It said: "At the University, our students not only learn to find success, they learn how to give it meaning—in the classroom, studying abroad or through volunteer work. It's all about getting the most from your college experience—so you can get the most of life." For whatever reason, I smiled upon reading this statement. The University seemed like a nice place, but surely not one I intended on staying at for long.

As we made our way to the entrance of the University, the head-master greeted us. She was a middle-aged woman that seemed to be exuding energy. The head-master immediately introduced me to her. Before I could even say "hello," my friend said: "Hi, this is Christine. She is going to work at your school." I couldn't believe my ears. At first I thought this was some kind of joke. But the woman's response was not indicative of any type of joke. She appeared to be completely serious and focused. As I looked around, I realized my friend had retreated into the school. I was completely isolated, alone with this woman I had just met. And she meant business. She said, "Christine—thank you so much for coming. I know this may seem crazy to you, but I would like to give you the keys to this school. I need help, and our mutual friend has told me he thinks you can run my school. I was confused. I said, "Thank you so much. But I do not want

to work at a school, and I certainly do not want to run one. I have no experience in education, or running much of anything. In fact, I am not even looking for a job. This is all very strange. It is so kind of you to offer me this opportunity, but this is not for me.”

She responded. “I have run this school for 35 years. This is not for me anymore. I am tired and aging. This calls for excitement and energy. You have both of those. Please, we have money in our operating account to run the programs. We have dozens of students enrolled, so more tuition money will be coming in.”

In that moment, the head-master reached into her pocket and pulled out a single key. She took my wrist, and opened my hand, placing the single silver key into my palm while still grasping my wrist. We both looked down together, and then our eyes met. I felt drawn to her. For some reason, I wasn’t able to pull away, even though I was much younger than she. She then closed my hand, and I clinched it into a fist, with the key in the middle. She asked me to come back on January 12<sup>th</sup>, just a few days later, to take over my position as the head of the school. It all seemed like a complete world wind, and I stood there dumbfounded and speechless.

But education meant so much to my family and me, and I knew my mother would be proud. So, I decided to do it. I agreed to take over the school, and return just a few days later to begin running the show. In that moment, I went back and forth between sheer fear and excitement. It seemed like a wonderful opportunity, but who starts their day as a real estate agent and ends it as the head master of a University? My real estate business was slow, so it wasn’t a great loss. I figured I’d jump right in and do it for a year or so, and see what happens.

But as you know, sometimes you have to be careful what you wish for. As I began my work at the school, I came to realize there were many problems with the University. The staff was pleasant and the students enjoyed the learning process. However, we’d receive regular correspondence from the State Government that regulated the school. The agency exists to promote and protect the interests of students and consumers: (i) through the effective and efficient oversight of California's private postsecondary educational institutions, (ii) through the promotion of competition that rewards educational quality and employment outcomes, (iii) through proactively combating unlicensed activity, and (iv) by resolving student complaints in a manner that benefits both the complaining student and future students.

You’d think the governing body would act as our ally, but I came to understand there was a substantial amount of tension between the faculty, Dr. Kingston, and the State. Even then, I did everything needed to ensure the University followed the rules and regulations outlined by the Government. I registered the University, and ensured I had all the necessary pieces in place. There was a great mess to clean up, and the letters continued to pour in. I came to find out that the Government was challenging our accreditation, which presented a substantial problem for us. Without our accreditation, we could no longer operate as a University. We would have to completely shut down. While I had just started my job there, I decided I would fight to keep this University open. I couldn’t

quit explain it, but I just felt connected to the University and all the wonderful opportunities we offered the students that attended.

As I approached the mailbox each and every day, I relished at the thought of the continued correspondence from the Government. With each passing letter, it appeared we were edging inches closer to having no choice but to shut down. It almost felt as if there was a target on our back, and the Government was firing warning shot after warning shot at us, getting closer and closer to hitting the bull's-eye. I opened the mailbox and my heart sunk as I saw yet another letter with the Government notary on the envelope. I riffled through the rest of the mail and quickly tore open the letter. It was my worst nightmare. The letter indicated that the University would have no choice but to close down on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. A Government attorney wrote the letter, and it indicated they'd sue me and file an emergency injunction if I chose not to cooperate with their demands.

I couldn't believe it. I was falling in love with the school. I enjoyed awaking and driving to the University, greeting the students and closely working with the faculty to implement new curriculum. And now they wanted to take that away from me. I hadn't wanted this in the first place, but now that I had it, I couldn't let them take it away. I wasn't a lawyer, so I didn't understand why they would close the school on me. Their problems were with the previous owner, Dr. Kingston, and I had nothing to do with those issues. But unfortunately, the State decided to take out their anger out on me. I learned that Dr. Kingston carried quite the reputation with the Government, and he faced 31 different violations during his time as owner/headmaster. And I would have to pay for his mistakes.

I thought of my options, and decided I would not close the school. They'd have to come put the lock on the door themselves. It took me numerous lawyers and tens of thousands of dollars before I found an attorney willing to fight for me. We began reviewing the case together, and through our correspondence with the Government, learned that they believed the Dr. Kingston was a fraud. They thought the University was selling degrees, and only issued less than ten legitimate degrees since its existence. The accusations were substantial. The case seemed to be daunting, so much so that my lawyer recommended I just settle with the State, and move onto something else.

But I couldn't do it. I just couldn't quit. This was my destiny. I had made the choice to take the school, and I had to deliver on my promise. So we decided to fight, and not give into the threats of the Government. I continuously argued with my lawyer about the case. He thought I was an idiot for fighting. He didn't see a path to victory, only defeat. But he agreed to fight, even though I knew he only did it for the money. Even then, I knew I did nothing wrong and ran an honest and morally sound program. From day one, I instilled the character in the University that my parents taught to me. We would not give in for the sins of our fathers.

The trial was set to begin in October of 2015. I was nervous, but I always felt a sense of calmness through the process. On the first day of the trial, I told my lawyer I was scared.

He told me I could still throw in the towel. There were times when I wanted to just quit. It was scary to face the unknown and the enormous resources of the Government. I knew I was outmanned and couldn't keep up. But deep down in my heart, I felt a strong purpose. I owed it to my students, my faculty, and my family. I would do all I could. I would fight. The show must go on.

For purposes of scheduling, the case was eventually reset to March of 2016. The trial then began, and the Government called a number of witnesses against the University. They detailed the allegations to the judge, and outlined the specific violations, one after the other. I was scared and in complete shock. I couldn't believe how real it all was. But I remembered the words of my mother: "God will watch on you from the front, not from the back." These words kept me strong, and I continued on. The trial lasted for weeks, and during one of the shorter breaks, I enjoyed coffee with Bob Proctor, my mentor.

I met Bob at a coffee shop in Los Angeles. I sat there, sipping coffee, while Bob enjoyed a sandwich. He inquired about the trial. I was hysterical. Through tears, I told him:

"I think it will close down. No one is helping me. My lawyer's more scared than I am. What do I do?"

He didn't respond. He continued to eat.

"Bob-I'm all alone. No one is listening to me. I have nothing but my school. I gave up my career for this. I have nowhere to go. Next Monday will probably be my last day. They will close me down. Are you even listening to me? Bob? Bob?"

He still didn't say a word.

"Bob, are you listening to me? Are you really listening to me, Bob? Do you know that my school's closing down? Is there anything that you can do for me? Can you tell me? What can you tell me?"

Finally, Bob finished his sandwich and looked up at me. He smiled and said:  
"Christine—write down what you want."

That's it. After all that, that was all he said. I responded: "What do you mean write down what I want? I can't just write this down. What are you talking about?"

He looked at me again and said: "Just write it down."

"All I want is for the school to remain open. I want the Government to leave me alone and let me run my school. That is it."

Bob said: "Then write it down. Don't forget to also write down what you are happy and grateful for. And don't forget 'thank you' at the end. Once you write it down, your turning your whole universe around within the world. And write it down 3000 times."

I almost laughed. The trial was set to begin again in just three days. How could I write this down 3000 times in just three days? But I decided I would at least try. I looked at Bob and smiled, still thinking this wouldn't really work. But I left that coffee shop and went directly to the University. I walked into my office and I wrote down the following:

"I am so happy for the school remain open. I am so happy that the litigation is over and I am the new owner. I am so happy I can provide these wonderful children with an education." And then I wrote it again and again.

Over the next three days, I spent almost every waking minute writing down that statement. I thought my hand would fall off. But I did it. And on the last repetition, I took the small piece of paper, folded it up, and placed it in the pocket of the jacket I would wear the next day in court.

I was hopeful Bob was right....

My trial started again the following day. More witnesses. More testimony. More of the same. I was still scared, but I put my hand in my jacket pocket and rubbed that small folded piece of paper. As the day ended, my lawyer confronted me and said: "Christine, I'm just letting you know that if we don't show up tomorrow, you'll be okay. You'll be out of everything. You don't even have to be here. We can pay the fines, and you can close the school. One day, you can open a new one. It will be ok."

But I refused to listen to him. This was my choice, this was my destiny. I told my lawyer I would show up. I asked that he sit beside me and have faith. God will let me win. He called me an idiot. As we appeared in court the next day, we took our places and awaited the Judge. The Judge took the bench, and asked that both my lawyer and the lawyers from the Government approach the bench. I could tell by his facial expressions that he was upset. What more could I handle? He then motioned for the lawyers to return back to their respective desks. He then looked up and said the following:

"This case has no merit. The Government has no case here. You are suing the wrong person. She did not commit these violations. Dr. Kingston did. Where is he? Why didn't you bring him to court? Why would you waste the court's time with this nonsense? This case is over. I am dismissing the allegations and closing this matter. The University can continue to operate so long as Ms. Lee is the new owner and has no ties to previous management."

And then like that....it was done. Bob was right. I was right. My faith was right. My choices were right. My destiny was delivered. But I wasn't alone. Another destiny was sealed that day.

Just a few months after my trial concluded, I went to the mailbox that rested in front of the University. I used to dread this moment each day, awaiting yet another letter from the Government. But that was no more, as the University continued to operate and enrolling

new students. I opened the mailbox, and immediately saw a letter from the Administrative Board. The letter indicated that the State was shutting down the governing body that sued me. I couldn't believe it. The same governing body that tried to shut me down was now shutting down itself. As I said, two destinies were sealed on that day in court. As of the publishing of this book, the University is enjoying close to full capacity and regularly graduating students with post-secondary degrees. It has become an environment for learning and cultural development. I am proud I didn't give up. I am grateful I did not succumb to the fear I felt. It wasn't always easy, but mentors and support appeared when I needed it the most. While I know much of what occurred did so because of my choices, I cannot help but think my mother and her faith guided me along the way. Perhaps I was destined for this, but it always seemed like an unexplained force was guiding the path. It might have been destiny, it could have been faith. But I am grateful for whatever it was that drove me to close my hand around that key. That moment now allows me to work diligently as an educator to shape the destinies of our students each and every day.