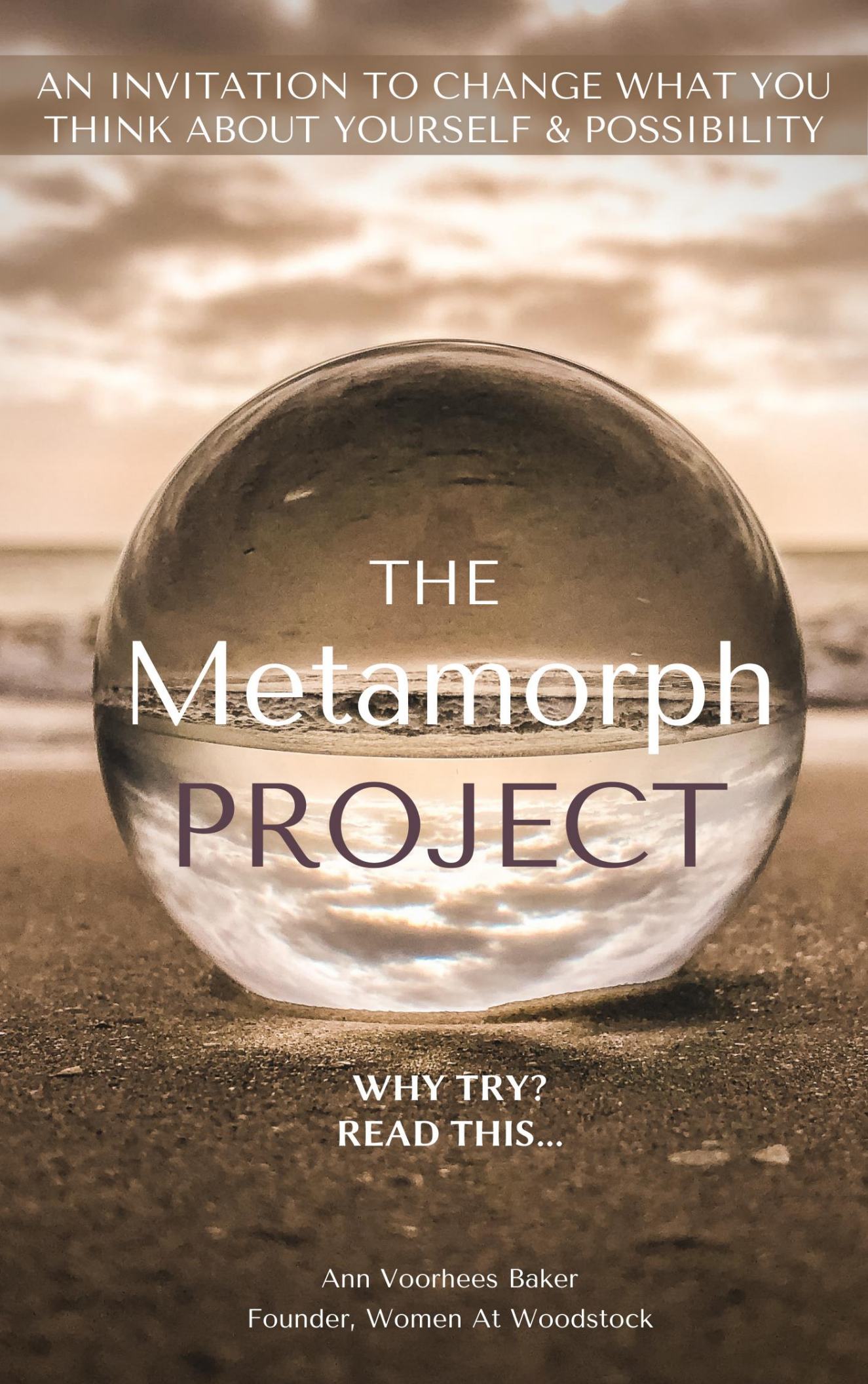
AN INVITATION TO CHANGE WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT YOURSELF & POSSIBILITY



THE Metamorph PROJECT

WHY TRY?
READ THIS...

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Founder, Women At Woodstock

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AN INVITATION TO CHANGE WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT YOURSELF & POSSIBILITY

BY ANN VOORHEES BAKER
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THE WISH FOR CHANGE

Just about everybody wishes they could make some kind of change in their life. Get back in better shape. Learn to have a more positive attitude. Find a better job. Figure out how to retire. Add something fun into their life – culinary arts, dancing, growing a kitchen garden. Write the book they've always wanted to write. Find a new love relationship. Figure out how to get out of a bad relationship. Sell their website. Start a new business. Revive old friendships.

It could be big or small. But if it's a desire toward a positive change, then it's worth doing.

And yet many of us just wish, and go on wishing, until it's too late.

Since launching Women At Woodstock, the annual workshop retreat for women over 50 and the annual writers retreat for women writers of all ages, I've been struck by something:

Change isn't about just doing. Change is about changing your mind, changing the way you think, changing the way you believe in possibility, or not, and most importantly, changing the way you see yourself.

To see what Women At Woodstock is about, visit
https://womenatwoodstock.annvbaker.com

CHANGE AT WOMEN AT WOODSTOCK

It's that *change in thinking* that spurred these Women At Woodstock alums to *take the leap* and finally **do the thing** that for years they had been wishing for:

Alice

For a lifetime, Alice had wanted to be a screenwriter. After three years of attending Women At Woodstock and talking about this dream of hers in workshops, during mastermind sessions, and in private conversations, she finally applied to film school at the age of 51. Two years later she emerged from Chapman University with an M.F.A. in Screenwriting, and she now lives in LA and is actively working in the film industry.

Linda

Linda wanted to host an informative talk show on NPR, but as a one-time host of a small local radio program, she felt intimidated by the stature of National Public Radio. She felt it was "out of her league." She attended Women At Woodstock two years running, and after attending workshops, being heard, and receiving encouragement and advice from many smart and caring women her age, she finally pitched her concept to the broadcasting company. One of the best "belief changes" that spurred her action was seeded by a women's business coach, who said "Don't pitch your idea as an underling who is going to offer extra work or cut rates in order to induce NPR to give 'just little old you' a chance. Pitch your idea as the great thing it is, and then shut your mouth, sit on your hands, and wait for their response."

This Linda did, and at the point that her lifelong instincts urged her to offer to do the show for a small stipend per episode, she instead waited silently. And NPR liked the idea, accepted her proposal, and offered her ten times per episode what she was going to ask. Linda went on to co-host a successful weekly medical-issues talk show.

Missy

Missy wanted to do something really different to take her out of the rut her life had fallen into. After four years of coming to Women At Woodstock and receiving inspiration, suggestions, and friendly encouragement, she registered for Ragbrai, a border-to-border bike ride across Iowa. A year later she posted her photo on Facebook at the end of that ride, surrounded by fellow cyclists. Her smile was radiant.

Helen

Helen wanted to enjoy ballroom dancing once again, a pastime she had loved when she was younger. She attended Women At Woodstock four years in a row and initially felt silly talking about it, at her age and in her condition, but she was encouraged to explore what she loved about it, why she had stopped, and how she could go about bringing ballroom dancing back into her life once again. Finally, she actually went back to her old school and started taking classes. Despite being older and not as fit as she had been when she was younger, she loved it! A year and a half later she starred as “Wonder Woman” at her school’s annual showcase.

Jill

Jill wanted to write a memoir about her extraordinary love affair early in life and her subsequent journey to self-realization. She was full of ideas about the book when she attended Women At Woodstock for the first time – and she found interest and encouragement from the women she talked to about it. Finally, she began to actually write, and two years later her book, *The Currency of Love*, was published by Simon & Schuster.

And So Many More

There are so many more stories among these women from Women At Woodstock, ranging from physically courageous to creatively expressive to emotionally freeing to financially rewarding. They're all over the map. But they all have one thing in common: somehow, and for some reason, each of these women experienced a change in their thinking along the way from wishing, to believing, to acting, to achieving.

How did they do that? How did they change their minds? How did they change the way they think, the way they see possibility, the way they see themselves? What clicked in their heads?

METAMORPHOSIS

In thinking about Alice and Linda and Helen and Jill and all the rest of the extraordinary transformations I've witnessed over my years of leading Women At Woodstock, I've realized that there is no "click." Instead, there's one little grain of sand moving at a time; a thousand little steps taken many times over; new thoughts emerging, receding, and emerging again; all of these miniscule shifts happening day after day, week after week, month after month, until one day their thinking is different. And it's not, "one day they *make a change*," but rather "one day they realize that they *have* changed." During a long and self-reflective path, these women went from *wishing* that they could, to giving themselves *permission to try*, to actually *doing,* and ultimately to *achieving* what they wished. That is a metamorphosis.

And that is what I'm trying to urge you to do yourself through The Metamorph Project, which evolved from the Women At Woodstock process.

Change isn't an aha! moment or a sudden life-shattering revelation or a hard and final decision to Do or to Be something you're not. Change is a matter of exposing yourself to new thoughts. Finding voices of others who see life as you would like to. Seeking out those voices again and again. Receiving encouragement from people who listen to your dreams and believe that you can achieve them. Envisioning yourself doing the thing that you want to do. Opening your eyes to the truth that you have the right, and no one can say otherwise. Gathering the courage to give yourself permission to try.

THE WOMEN AT WOODSTOCK PROCESS

That's the whole process that Women At Woodstock sets in motion for so many; exposure to new thoughts, time to absorb them in an intensively reflective retreat from your everyday life; formation of friendships with others who believe in you and continue to encourage you for weeks, months, and even years after; repetition of the thought, "what if I did?" so many times that the question imperceptibly morphs into "when I do."

I wish everyone with a desire to change something in her life could come to Women At Woodstock and experience the life-changing alchemy that Linda, Alice, Helen, Jill, and many others did, but I know that it isn't possible. Not everyone can get away, travel to the Hudson Valley, or spend the money for a weekend or a week off from their everyday responsibilities.

So I've been working on something that I hope will give you nearly the same experience—a daily practice that you can do in your regular day-to-day life. It's my own program, based not on some great knowledge that I possess (I don't), but from the wisdom I've gleaned from the positive and compassionate women of the Women At Woodstock community. It's utterly simple. It involves 10 to 20 minutes every few days, tops, but it can create change in your life by the same process described above: Exposure to new thoughts. Encouragement. Envisioning yourself in a new way. Considering your right to do what you want to do. Giving yourself permission to try. Taking your first step. Keeping on going.

This ongoing, every-few-days practice is a drop-by-drop experience of all the things that I've observed, I've heard, I've felt, I've learned to foster, and I've refined over the years since we first started gathering in 2012 for Women At Woodstock. I've distilled all of that into "The Metamorph Project."

You won't change in one day. But one day you will see that you have changed.

The Metamorph Project will roll out in the beginning of 2022. Meanwhile, read on for the Metamorph Project Manifesto, and let these thoughts simmer in your head for now.

THE METAMORPH MANIFESTO

**Loving yourself is not a feeling.
It's a commitment to do the things that are right and necessary for you, regardless of anyone else's opinion.**

In the last analysis ... you are the one who knows what's best for you.

~ John-Roger, DSS

OUR CORE LIFE LESSON

We are told by teachers, books, proselytizers, and hucksters that we can do anything.

We like hearing that. We smile at the notion. We nod our heads – yes, yes. Yes, we can!

But inside are our "real" thoughts, and in that space, we know that we are lying to ourselves. We know that as we nod our heads, we are lying – not for others, but for us. We know, and we have always known, the irrefutable truth that we cannot do anything we wish – and particularly that we cannot do that one thing that we deeply desire or that we deeply fear and that we have never dared try. This truth is our Absolute Truth, and it is immutable.

How can this be? It must be that while we are being told things here and there with intentional words, we are actually learning every day all day long through other, unintentional words, or through silence when there should be words, or through marketing or pop culture or a look on the face of someone from whom you seek approval or even more subtle means. We are learning through the message delivered to us a hundred times, a thousand times, a million times over on a daily basis, that we – I – you – me, cannot in fact do the thing that we are smiling and agreeing is our goal, our belief, and our action-to-come. Because those once-in-awhile encouraging, inspiring, uplifting words delivered by people with good intentions are but a passing whisper in the breeze; while all the air that surrounds us is filled with a constant cacophony of "no you can't."

A single "yes, *you*" cannot stand a chance against a million instances of "nope, not a chance." Those million instances have formed a concrete, unshakable belief at the core of our "real" thoughts – thoughts of me not her, me not you, me not like special people, me not like most people, me since I can't, me because I don't have talent, me because I don't have the guts, me because I didn't try and I never will, me because I wish I had, me… just, not me. This is Our Truth: that I cannot, could not, *must* not even consider doing that *one* thing – that deep desire or that deepest widest fear.

WE BELIEVE IN NOT BELIEVING IN OURSELVES

These “not me” beliefs that plague us, that I’m talking about here, are not about wishes that are in fact just fanciful and fun but not really our honest desires. I’m not talking here about becoming the president of the United States, or a leading actor, or the scientist who discovers the final, definitive cure for all cancers, although in your case, maybe that is exactly what applies.

But for the point I’m making, I want to make clear that I’m not talking about those big, free-floating dreamy dreams of Life Perfect and Improbable and Probably Not What You Actually, Really Want Anyway, but rather I’m talking about the here-and-now dreams and fears that are the themes of *your* life that haunt you, and that you have chosen not to try or to conquer – dreams and fears that are actually available and wholly attainable and there for the taking – dreams that actually, really could be, can be, and in fact *are* for others, but that are not for you because of what you have learned and truly believe in your deepest down-est inside-est self. Dreams that you have chosen not to take or to conquer because you believe with fundamental, immovable certainty, that you cannot.

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE "NOT ME?"

Why do you believe "not me" when you dream of generally attainable wishes: The dream of becoming a writer, let's say. If that's the dream that's plagued you, why have you chosen not only not to attain it, but not to even try? Why have you chosen not to give yourself permission to sit down and write, to think of yourself as one who could write, is writing, will write>

Or why do you have a certain fear? Let's say it's the fear of singing in front of others. The fear is so terrorizing that you cannot even consider the possibility of standing up, taking the microphone, and singing karaoke to a group of friends, or strangers, or even blind drunk nobodies who won't remember a minute of it tomorrow and will never see you again anyway. Why can you not even imagine singing in front of a roomful of people who are themselves, each and every one of them, standing up and doing just that thing that you cannot allow yourself to do, and some are good and some are terrible and you know, you *know* you won't be the worst and even if you are, there will be no judgment of you, and still, you can't?

Or why do you believe that you are absolutely unable to eat normally each day, without hurting your body – either because of too much food, or too much sugar, or too much salt, or too much fried or processed or nutritionally void products marketed relentlessly to you so that you will want them want them want them even though they don't make you feel happy or good or satisfied at the end of the day.

I'm talking about any or all of the *There Is No Real Reason* decisions you have always made while you say to yourself, "for them, sure, but not for me."

Why for them and not for you?

Why does that make sense to you?

How is it that with your intelligence, your talents, and your sincere wish that things were otherwise—how is that your irrational, logically refutable, clearly absurd belief about yourself is, for you, *ir*refutable?

IF NOT BELIEVING IN YOURSELF IS A CHOICE, SO IS THE OPPOSITE

The biggest realization you can make is that a lack of belief in yourself is a choice that *you* make not to believe in yourself. You are choosing. You are choosing against yourself. And why not? You always have. You always will.

Except… except if you learn to choose otherwise. To choose for your dreams.

No. Let me rephrase that.

Except if you *decide* to choose otherwise. If you *decide* to choose not *against* yourself, but *for* yourself.

You *can* learn – you *will* learn, you *will decide* for yourself, if you can adopt the concept of this Metamorph Manifesto. I don't mean read all of the words that follow and take them as gospel, word for word, like a religious tract. I mean adopt the basic principle that The Metamorph Manifesto is telling to you – that you *can*, that you have *every right*, and that your habitual decision to choose against yourself is the *only* thing that is a true bar to your achieving your dream.

Will you read, and consider, and understand, and—I sincerely hope—take into your mind the basic, fundamental truth of The Metamorph Manifesto?

It's not a matter of turning your life on its head right here, right now, and pursuing what you've never allowed yourself to pursue before. That would be highly improbable.

It's a matter of deciding to consider one little thing. One tiny little thing, today – to consider the option of trying. Not making a vow that you'll suddenly undertake an enormous overhaul of yourself, take a dramatically different path, change everything about your life all at once.

It's instead a matter of saying, "Sure, I'll look at this. I'm not saying I'll commit to it; I'm not actually saying I'll turn my life into what I've always wanted it to be." (And isn't it odd how strange and maybe even ridiculous it sounds to you when you assure yourself that you're

not really committing to try to turn your life into what you've always wanted it to be?" Like that's not something you have a right to?)

LOOKING AT POSSIBILITY IS THE HARDEST

Deciding to open your eyes and look at something sounds so ridiculously small and insignificant - and yet, did you know that it is impossible for most people? Just opening your eyes. Looking. Considering. That's all. If you summon the courage to do that, you can then decide if you want to take a step on the path that's shown to you, or not. You might not. OK, no harm done, right? In fact if you look, and consider, and then decide that actually, you don't really want to have that dream that you've haunted yourself with for the major part of your life, then that can actually be good too – perhaps you will rid yourself of that sense of denial and failure and regret for not pursuing something that you thought you wanted but that, in actuality, you realize now that you don't really want.

Or you could open your eyes. Look. Consider. And then clearly see the next step that is right in front of you, there for the effort only of sticking out your foot and placing it down one single step in front of where you are today. And you can then take as much time as you need to get your bearings, get comfortable, become OK being where you are in this space one step beyond where you were before – and you can keep your eyes open, and look, and consider, and see where the next step can be, and you can decide whether put out your foot again and take that next step too.

And on and on until you've taken two steps, three, four, five—each time taking the time to become comfortable with where you are, and then continuing on until it's ten, twenty, a hundred; and one day you've gone a mile, a hundred miles – on and on until you find that you have moved yourself across an entire continent of thinking, and you are in an entirely different place, and you feel comfortable and secure right where you are, because you're just one single step beyond where you were yesterday, and the fact that you are a thousand miles away from where you started three hundred days ago seems both miraculous and completely logical at the same time.

A thousand miles away, living your dream.