

— ADMIRAL —  
WILLIAM H. McRAVEN  
*(U.S. Navy Retired)*

MAKE  
YOUR  
— BED —

LITTLE THINGS THAT CAN  
CHANGE YOUR LIFE  
...AND MAYBE THE WORLD

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*To my three children: Bill, John, and Kelly.  
No father could be prouder of his kids than  
I am of you. Every moment in my life has  
been made better because you are in the  
world.*

*And to my wife, Georgeann, my best friend,  
who made all of my dreams possible.  
Where would I be without you?*

## PREFACE

On May 17, 2014, I was honored to give the commencement speech for the graduating class from the University of Texas at Austin. Even though the university was my alma mater, I was concerned that a military officer, whose career had been defined by war, might not find a welcoming audience among college students. But to my great surprise, the graduating class embraced the speech. The ten lessons I learned from Navy SEAL training, which were the basis for my remarks, seemed to have a universal appeal. They were simple lessons that deal with overcoming the trials of SEAL training, but the ten lessons were equally important in dealing with the challenges of life—no matter who you are. Over the past three years, I have been stopped on the street by great folks telling me their own stories: How they didn't back down from the sharks, how they didn't ring the bell, or how making their bed every morning helped them through tough times. They all wanted to know more about how the ten lessons shaped my life and about the people who inspired me during my career. This small book is an attempt to do so. Each chapter gives a little more context to the individual lessons and also adds a short story about some of the people who inspired me with their discipline, their perseverance, their honor, and their courage. I hope you enjoy the book!

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## ***Start Your Day with a Task Completed***

*If you want to change the world...*  
start off by making your bed.



The barracks at basic SEAL training is a nondescript three-story building located on the beach at Coronado, California, just one hundred yards from the Pacific Ocean. There is no air-conditioning in the building, and at night, with the windows open, you can hear the tide roll in and the surf pounding against the sand.

Rooms in the barracks are spartan. In the officers' room, where I berthed with three other classmates, there were four beds, a closet to hang your uniforms, and nothing else. Those mornings that I stayed in the barracks I would roll out of my Navy "rack" and immediately begin the process of making my bed. It was the first task of the day. A day that I knew would be filled with uniform inspections, long swims, longer runs, obstacle courses, and constant harassment from the SEAL instructors.

"Attention!" shouted the class leader, Lieutenant Junior Grade Dan'l Steward, as the instructor entered the room. Standing at the foot of the bed, I snapped my heels together and stood up straight as a chief petty officer approached my position. The instructor, stern and expressionless, began the inspection by checking the starch in my green uniform hat to ensure the eight-sided "cover" was crisp and correctly blocked. Moving from top to bottom, his eyes looked over every inch of my uniform. Were the creases in the blouse and trousers aligned? Was the brass on the belt shined to a mirrorlike radiance? Were my boots polished bright enough so he could see his fingers in their reflection? Satisfied that I met the high standards expected of a SEAL trainee, he moved to inspect the bed.

The bed was as simple as the room, nothing but a steel frame and a single mattress. A bottom sheet covered the mattress, and over that was a top sheet. A gray wool blanket tucked tightly under the mattress provided warmth from the cool San Diego evenings. A second blanket was expertly folded into a rectangle at the foot of the bed. A single pillow, made by the Lighthouse for the Blind, was centered at the top of the bed and intersected at a ninety-degree angle with the blanket at the bottom. This was the standard. Any deviation from this exacting requirement would be cause for me to "hit the surf" and then roll around on the beach until I was covered head to toe with wet sand—referred to as a "sugar cookie."

Standing motionless, I could see the instructor out of the corner of my eye. He wearily looked at my bed. Bending over, he checked the hospital



corners and then surveyed the blanket and the pillow to ensure they were correctly aligned. Then, reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a quarter and flipped it into the air several times to ensure I knew the final test of the bed was coming. With one final flip the quarter flew high into the air and came down on the mattress with a light bounce. It jumped several inches off the bed, high enough for the instructor to catch it in his hand.

Swinging around to face me, the instructor looked me in the eye and nodded. He never said a word. Making my bed correctly was not going to be an opportunity for praise. It was expected of me. It was my first task of the day, and doing it right was important. It demonstrated my discipline. It showed my attention to detail, and at the end of the day it would be a reminder that I had done something well, something to be proud of, no matter how small the task.

Throughout my life in the Navy, making my bed was the one constant that I could count on every day. As a young SEAL ensign aboard the USS *Grayback*, a special operation submarine, I was berthed in sick bay, where the beds were stacked four high. The salty old doctor who ran sick bay insisted that I make my rack every morning. He often remarked that if the beds were not made and the room was not clean, how could the sailors expect the best medical care? As I later found out, this sentiment of cleanliness and order applied to every aspect of military life.

Thirty years later, the Twin Towers came down in New York City. The Pentagon was struck, and brave Americans died in an airplane over Pennsylvania.

At the time of the attacks, I was recuperating in my home from a serious parachute accident. A hospital bed had been wheeled into my government quarters, and I spent most of the day lying on my back, trying to recover. I wanted out of that bed more than anything else. Like every SEAL I longed to be with my fellow warriors in the fight.

When I was finally well enough to lift myself unaided from the bed, the first thing I did was pull the sheets up tight, adjust the pillow, and make sure the hospital bed looked presentable to all those who entered my home. It was my way of showing that I had conquered the injury and was moving forward with my life.

Within four weeks of 9/11, I was transferred to the White House, where I spent the next two years in the newly formed Office of Combatting

Terrorism. By October 2003, I was in Iraq at our makeshift headquarters on the Baghdad airfield. For the first few months we slept on Army cots. Nevertheless, I would wake every morning, roll up my sleeping bag, place the pillow at the head of the cot, and get ready for the day.

In December 2003, U.S. forces captured Saddam Hussein. He was held in confinement during which time we kept him in a small room. He also slept on an Army cot, but with the luxury of sheets and a blanket. Once a day I would visit Saddam to ensure my soldiers were properly caring for him. I noticed, with some sense of amusement, that Saddam did not make his bed. The covers were always crumpled at the foot of his cot and he rarely seemed inclined to straighten them.

During the ensuing ten years, I had the honor of working with some of the finest men and women this nation has ever produced—from generals to privates, from admirals to seamen recruits, from ambassadors to clerk typists. The Americans who deployed overseas in support of the war effort came willingly, sacrificing much to protect this great nation.

They all understood that life is hard and that sometimes there is little you can do to affect the outcome of your day. In battle soldiers die, families grieve, your days are long and filled with anxious moments. You search for something that can give you solace, that can motivate you to begin your day, that can be a sense of pride in an oftentimes ugly world. But it is not just combat. It is daily life that needs this same sense of structure. Nothing can replace the strength and comfort of one's faith, but sometimes the simple act of making your bed can give you the lift you need to start your day and provide you the satisfaction to end it right.

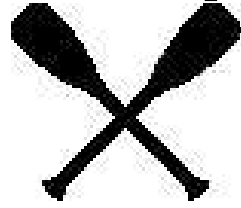
If you want to change your life and maybe the world—start off by making your bed!



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### ***You Can't Go It Alone***

*If you want to change the world...*  
find someone to help you paddle.



I learned early on in SEAL training the value of teamwork, the need to rely on someone else to help you through the difficult tasks. For those of us who were “tadpoles” hoping to become Navy frogmen, a ten-foot rubber raft was used to teach us this vital lesson.

Everywhere we went during the first phase of SEAL training we were required to carry the raft. We placed it on our heads as we ran from the barracks, across the highway, to the chow hall. We carried it in a low-slung position as we ran up and down the Coronado sand dunes. We paddled the boat endlessly from north to south along the coastline and through the pounding surf, seven men, all working together to get the rubber boat to its final destination.

But we learned something else on our journey with the raft. Occasionally, one of the boat crew members was sick or injured, unable to give it 100 percent. I often found myself exhausted from the training day, or down with a cold or the flu. On those days, the other members picked up the slack. They paddled harder. They dug deeper. They gave me their rations for extra strength. And when the time came, later in training, I returned the favor. The small rubber boat made us realize that no man could make it through training alone. No SEAL could make it through combat alone and by extension you needed people in your life to help you through the difficult times.

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Never was the need for help more apparent to me than twenty-five years later when I commanded all the SEALs on the West Coast.

I was the commodore of Naval Special Warfare Group ONE in Coronado. A Navy captain, I had by now spent the past several decades leading SEALs around the world. I was out for a routine parachute jump when things went terribly wrong.

We were in a C-130 Hercules aircraft climbing to twelve thousand feet preparing for the jump. Looking out the back of the aircraft, we could see a beautiful California day. Not a cloud in the sky. The Pacific Ocean was calm, and from this altitude you could see the border of Mexico just a few miles away.

The jumpmaster yelled to “stand by.” Now on the edge of the ramp, I

could see straight down to the ground. The jumpmaster looked me in the eye, smiled, and shouted, “Go, go, go!” I dove out of the aircraft, arms fully extended and legs tucked slightly behind my back. The prop blast from the aircraft sent me tilting forward until my arms caught air and I leveled out.

I quickly checked my altimeter, made sure I wasn’t spinning, and then looked around me to ensure no jumper was too close to me. Twenty seconds later I had fallen to the pull altitude of 5,500 feet.

Suddenly, I looked below me and another jumper had slid beneath me, intersecting my path to the ground. He pulled his rip cord, and I could see the pilot chute deploying the main parachute from his backpack. Immediately, I thrust my arms to my side, forcing my head to the ground in an attempt to get away from the blossoming chute. It was too late.

The jumper’s chute popped open in front of me like an air bag, hitting me at 120 miles an hour. I bounced off the main canopy and spun out of control, barely conscious from the impact. For seconds I spun head over heels, trying to get stable again. I couldn’t see my altimeter and was unaware of how far I had fallen.

Instinctively, I reached for my rip cord and pulled. The pilot chute jettisoned from its small pouch in the back of the parachute but wrapped around my leg as I continued to tumble toward the ground. As I struggled to untangle myself the situation got worse. The main parachute partially deployed but in doing so twirled around my other leg.

Craning my neck toward the sky, I could see my legs were bound by two sets of risers, the long nylon straps that connect the main parachute to the harness on my back. One riser had wrapped around one leg, the other riser around the other leg. The main parachute was fully out of the backpack but hung up somewhere on my body.

As I struggled to break free of the entanglement, suddenly I felt the canopy lift off my body and begin to open. Looking toward my legs, I knew what was coming next.

Within seconds, the canopy caught air. The two risers, one wrapped around each leg, suddenly and violently pulled apart, taking my legs with them. My pelvis separated instantly as the force of the opening ripped my lower torso. The thousand small muscles that connect the pelvis to the body were torn from their hinges.

My mouth dropped open and I let out a scream that could be heard in

Mexico. Searing pain arched through my body, sending waves pulsating downward to my pelvis and upward to my head. Violent, muscular convulsions racked my upper torso, shooting more pain through my arms and legs. Now, like having an out-of-body experience, I became aware of my screaming and tried to control it, but the pain was too intense.

Still head down and falling too fast, I turned myself upright in the harness, relieving some of the pressure on my pelvis and back.

Fifteen hundred feet.

I had fallen over four thousand feet before the parachute deployed. The good news: I had a full canopy over my head. The bad news: I was broken apart by the impact of the opening.

I landed over two miles from the drop zone. Within a few minutes the drop zone crew and an ambulance arrived. I was taken to the trauma hospital in downtown San Diego. By the next day I was out of surgery. The accident had ripped my pelvis apart by almost five inches. The muscles in my stomach had become detached from the pelvic bone and the muscles in my back and legs were severely damaged from the opening shock. I had a large titanium plate screwed into my pelvis and a long scapular screw drilled into my backside for stability.

This seemed like the end of my career. To be an effective SEAL you had to be physically fit. My rehabilitation was going to take months, maybe years, and the Navy was required to conduct a medical evaluation to determine if I was fit for duty. I left the hospital seven days later but remained bedridden at my home for the next two months.

All my life I had the feeling I was invincible. I believed that my innate athletic abilities could get me out of most perilous situations. And, up to this point, I had been right. Many times during my career I had encountered life-threatening incidents: midair collisions in another parachute; uncontrolled descent in a minisub; nearly falling hundreds of feet off an oil rig; getting trapped beneath a sinking boat; demolition that exploded prematurely; and countless more—incidents where a split second decided the fate between living and dying. Each time I had somehow managed to make the right decision, and each time I was physically fit enough to overcome the challenge before me. Not this time.

Now, lying in bed, all I felt was self-pity. But that would not last for long. My wife, Georgeann, had been given nursing duties. She cleaned my

wounds, gave me the required daily shots, and changed my bedpan. But most importantly, she reminded me of who I was. I had never given up on anything in my life and she assured me that I was not going to start now. She refused to let me feel sorry for myself. It was the kind of tough love that I needed, and as the days went by, I got better.

My friends came by the house, called constantly, and helped with whatever they could. My boss, Admiral Eric Olson, somehow found a way around the policy that required the Navy to conduct a medical evaluation of my ability to continue to serve as a SEAL. His support for me likely saved my career.

During my time in the SEAL Teams I had numerous setbacks, and in each case, someone came forward to help me: someone who had faith in my abilities; someone who saw potential in me where others might not; someone who risked their own reputation to advance my career. I have never forgotten those people and I know that anything I achieved in my life was a result of others who have helped me along the way.

None of us are immune from life's tragic moments. Like the small rubber boat we had in basic SEAL training, it takes a team of good people to get you to your destination in life. You cannot paddle the boat alone. Find someone to share your life with. Make as many friends as possible, and never forget that your success depends on others.

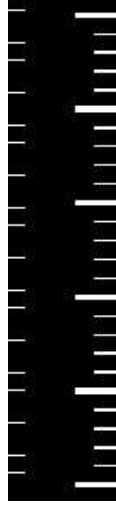




## **CHAPTER THREE**

### ***Only the Size of Your Heart Matters***

*If you want to change the world...*  
measure a person by the size of their heart.



I ran to the beach with my black, rubber flippers tucked underneath my right arm and my mask in my left hand. Coming to parade rest, I anchored the flippers in the soft sand, leaning them against each other to form a teepee. Standing to my right and left were other students. Dressed in green tee shirts, khaki swim trunks, neoprene booties, and a small life jacket, we were preparing for our morning two-mile swim.

The life jacket was a small, rubberized bladder that inflated only when you pulled the handle. Among the students, it was considered shameful if you had to use your life jacket. Still, the SEAL instructors were required to inspect every life jacket before each swim. This inspection also gave the instructors an opportunity for more harassment.

The surf off Coronado that day was about eight feet high. The waves were coming in lines of three, plunging with a roaring sound that made each student's heart beat a bit faster. As the instructor slowly moved down the line he came to the man directly to my right. The student, a seaman recruit and brand-new to the Navy, was about five foot four in height. The SEAL instructor, a highly decorated Vietnam vet, was well above six foot two and towered over the smaller man.

After inspecting the student's life jacket, the instructor looked over his left shoulder toward the pounding surf and then reached down and grabbed the student's flippers. Holding them close to the young sailor's face, he said quietly, "Do you really want to be a frogman?"

The sailor stood up straight, with a look of defiance in his eyes. "Yes, instructor, I do!" he shouted.

"You're a tiny little man," the instructor said, waving the flippers in his face. "Those waves out there could break you in half." He paused and glanced toward the ocean. "You should think about quitting now before you get hurt."

Even out of the corner of my eye I could see the student's jaw begin to tighten.

"I won't quit!" the sailor replied, drawing out each word. Then the instructor leaned in and whispered something in the student's ear. I couldn't make out the words over the breaking waves.

After all the trainees were inspected the instructors ordered us into the water, and we began our swim. An hour later, I crawled out of the surf zone,

and standing on the beach was the young seaman recruit. He had finished the swim near the head of the class. Later that day, I pulled him aside and asked what the instructor had whispered to him. He smiled and said proudly, “Prove me wrong!”

SEAL training was always about proving something. Proving that size didn't matter. Proving that the color of your skin wasn't important. Proving that money didn't make you better. Proving that determination and grit were always more important than talent. I was fortunate to learn that lesson a year before training began.

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As I boarded the city bus in downtown San Diego I was excited about the prospect of visiting the basic SEAL training facility across the bay in Coronado. I was a first-class midshipman attending my summer cruise as part of the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC) program. As a first-class midshipman I was between my junior and senior years in college, and if all went well, I hoped to be commissioned the following summer and head off to SEAL training. It was the middle of the week and I had received permission from my ROTC instructor to deviate from the planned training aboard one of the ships in port and make my way to Coronado.

I got off the bus outside the famed Hotel del Coronado and walked about a mile down the road to the beach side of the Naval Amphibious Base. I passed by several Korean War-vintage buildings that housed Underwater Demolition Teams Eleven and Twelve. Outside the one-story rambling brick building was a large wooden sign depicting Freddy the Frog, a large green web-footed amphibian carrying a stick of TNT and smoking a cigar. This was the home of the West Coast frogmen, those intrepid mask-and-fin warriors whose military ancestors had cleared the beaches of Iwo Jima, Tarawa, Guam, and Inchon. My heart began to beat a little faster. This was exactly where I wanted to be in a year.

As I passed the Underwater Demolition Teams the next building belonged to SEAL Team One, at the time a new breed of jungle fighters who had earned their reputation in Vietnam as some of the toughest men in the military. Another large wooden sign showed Sammy the Seal, a dagger in one hand and a dark cloak wrapped around his shoulders. As I would later learn, the frogmen and the SEALs were one and the same. All the men