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SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS SHARE THE BEST ADVICE THEY EVER GOT

SHIFT HAPPENS

If You're Going
Through **Hell**
You Don't
Have to Buy
REAL ESTATE
There.



"My husband died... I'm going broke," she sobbed to her friend. "Everyone's telling me to sell the company. I don't know what to do!"

This wasn't the first time LuAn Mitchell-Halter had felt completely lost. As the youngest of five, she grew up on the brink of poverty in Melfort, Saskatchewan, watching helplessly as her brilliant father deteriorated with Alzheimer's Disease. In high school, city girls uttered death threats and called her 'Elly Mae' because she wore plaid shirts and no make-up. Then at 16, she made one rebellious mistake and got pregnant. Her mother said she ruined her life, so she ran away.

By Sheila Reesor



LuAn did return home, but decided to put her baby up for adoption. "It was hell," she says. "The Social Services gal came when I made the call and I couldn't look at her. She took my child and walked out the front door and I just sat on the step and turned into lead as she drove away." When she got up she made the decision to go on with her life. "I decided right then that I would make it a good life, that I would help others."

LuAn dreamed of becoming a television broadcaster. At one point, she had three jobs while studying broadcasting by day, literature by night, and volunteering at a local television station. "One thing about that pregnancy," she says, laughing, "It did change my dimensions."

Everyone was telling her to enter a beauty pageant. She still hated make-up, but she entered and became 'Miss Saskatoon'. The win took her on her first plane ride to Toronto for the Miss Canada Pageant in 1984.

While still juggling jobs and working on plans to start her own salon and modeling school, Fred Mitchell entered her life. It was a quiet evening at the nightclub where she worked as a hostess, and Fred found LuAn with her nose in a book—*I Ain't Well But I Sure Am Better*, by Jess Lair. For weeks she turned down Fred's advances, but he persisted. In 1986, two and a half years after that first meeting, they were married.

After what she'd been through, LuAn earned the right to live happily ever after. Unfortunately, her difficulties had only begun. Just one month before getting married, Fred was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis. He was given five years to live, with less than a three percent chance to father a child. They went on to have one child, adopted a second, and then, after Fred survived a double lung and heart transplant, they had a third.

Soon after she and Fred were

married, LuAn became involved with the reputable family-owned business, Mitchell's, a meat-product empire known since 1940 as Intercontinental Packers Ltd. A family feud erupted between Fred, his mother, and siblings and turned into a decade-long battle for control. By 1996, the company was split, leaving LuAn and Fred with the pork-processing assets and dangling on the verge of bankruptcy. They poured in everything they had to try and turn things around, and by 1998 they had secured new investors and revived the ailing business. They made a comeback, and what was now 'Mitchell's

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Yeah. right!"**

Gourmet Foods Inc.' was turning a profit, and Fred was awarded "Turnaround Entrepreneur of the Year." One week later, during a medical check-up, he died.

Flooded in grief, with vultures circling the company, and three children to care for, LuAn turned to her friend, Christie. She could hear her critics saying, "You blond piece of fluff... You think you're going to run a meatpacking plant? Yeah, right!" Christie's message was different, "You are going to get through this, you know. And when you do, man, look at all the people you're going to help. I can't wait to see how you do it."

LuAn went on to do just that, and insists that everyone needs a Christie in their head reminding them to listen to their own voice. Despite knowing nothing about running a meatpacking plant, LuAn took the reins and persevered. She realized she was their greatest asset—their target market

and ideal consumer.

From 2000 to 2003, LuAn was named the "Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year" by *Chatelaine* and *Profit* magazines. In 2001, Madrid voted her "Leading Woman Entrepreneur of the World". In 2005, she became American Biographical Institute "Woman of the Year", and she remains one of 40 leading women entrepreneurs in the world.

In recent years, this master of transformation has re-married and pursued her passions for writing and speaking. With her autobiography, *Paper Doll: Lessons Learned from a Life Lived in the Headlines*, and several other titles to her credit, LuAn is now an International Bestselling Author and Motivational Speaker.

One of LuAn's greatest talents has been her ability to transform challenges into victories, for herself, and for others. In memory of her late husband, she spearheaded an annual scholarship fund for youth at risk. Fred

Mitchell believed in human potential and now his widow is living proof. "I never dreamt that any of this would happen to me," she says. "If you had seen me sitting on my front steps watching that lady walk out with my baby... It's funny how things work out."

According to LuAn, no matter what situation you find yourself in, there is always something good. You may look at life and wonder why something happened. The sooner you realize it's probably the greatest thing that could ever happen to you, the better off you'll be. "Shift happens," she says. "If you're going through hell, you don't have to buy real estate there! Just keep on going. Take something good from it that you can give to someone else and maybe they can avoid going through it too".

Sheila Reesor is a freelance-writer and can be reached at sreesor@rogers.com