

Shirley Smith

A personal interview by Kristie Kellahan

With a thirst for life and a passion for learning, Shirley Smith is providing support and solutions to people looking to enrich their lives.

Shirley Smith is so full of energy, she could almost be called the human power grid. And that vibrant energy and enthusiasm is so infectious, it can't help but inspire you. She influences you, she makes you think, just by being around her.

Her honesty and the authentic interest she has in you as an individual shines through. You can hear the care and inspiration in Shirley's voice as she tells of clients who have made great improvements in their lives – everything from leaps into career transition, lifestyle change, overcoming addictions and daring to reach for what they truly want. Often they emerge from challenging backgrounds to richer lives, more satisfying relationships and renewed vitality.

“You know,” she says, conspiratorially handing me a selection of photos taken over her lifetime, “if you are truly satisfying what your mind, body and soul really want to do, it's amazing how much better you feel, let alone look.”

She is a living example. Looking back on photographs taken of this native-born Californian twenty six years ago, the 56-year-old Shirley Smith sitting in front of me – a grandmother – looks happier, fresher and dare I say it, younger than the woman in the pictures I hold in my hand. Her life story is an interesting case study in following your heart, with all the courage, determination and focus it takes to realise your dreams.

“I was a very successful sales and marketing manager. I was living in an affluent Californian suburb in a gorgeous home, devoted husband, two great kids, nice car, a full-on ‘successful’ life,” she explains. “You could say I was the envy of all my friends. It seemed that I had it all. The problem was, I didn't. I felt empty, because I knew something was missing.”

Like many driven, successful women, Shirley felt that no matter what she achieved, it still never felt like it was enough. “I was unhappy and thought I shouldn't be. That made me feel guilty – why couldn't I just be happy with my life? I wanted more creativity, passion and fulfilment than I was getting. I guess you could say I had my first mid-life crisis at 28.”

By chance (some would say divine intervention), Shirley came across the work of Terry Cole-Whittaker, a Minister and spiritual teacher. Her book, *What You Think of Me is None of my Business* made a profound impact on Shirley's life, providing her with the promise of that elusive ‘something more’.

“When I read Terry's book, it lit my fire. Her words resounded with authenticity, confirming what I had always believed to be true,” says Shirley. “It's funny how the books we love are usually telling us what we already know. Being a fiercely logical

person, I instantly liked the practical way this philosophy could work in everyday life. And so I began to study.”

With her trademark gusto and relentless energy Shirley threw herself into acquiring the knowledge she would need for her life’s calling: helping people be the best they can be. She gained a Ph.D. in Philosophy, a Doctorate in Divinity (from a private theological university) and the training needed to be a minister, counsellor and teacher. She became certified in addiction intervention and interned at two major treatment centres. She also undertook training with teachers such as Marvin Oaka and the as-yet unknown Anthony Robbins in the educational applications of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and generative learning.

In 1985 she founded the “Centre for Spiritual Freedom” in San Diego, which she continued to run until 1988. During that time she helped countless people find their way through major life transitions, with the end result of gaining a sense of meaning and healthier relationships.

However, there is a great difference between helping and enabling. Over time, Shirley felt that many of the Centre’s members came to seek the absolution of a minister rather than to take responsibility for their own life. Although countless people were helped by working with Shirley, there were still a number who were not willing to take the personal responsibility needed to make profound changes in their lives. Eventually she resigned out of integrity.

“It was a time of change for me, as I started a private practice and was invited to work in Sedona, Arizona,” Shirley explains. However, not everything in life goes as we expect, as Shirley was to discover. Proving that ‘if you really want to make God laugh, just show him your plans’, Shirley headed for Sedona, took a left turn and ended up in Australia!

“In 1988 my daughter announced that she was going to marry an Aussie. I thought I was just coming out for a wedding, but instead discovered a whole new life Down Under,” she says. While in Australia, Shirley was snapped up by a Brisbane counselling centre to train practitioners in the latest shame reduction and family of origin techniques from the USA. She also found her expertise sought by TV and radio stations for interviews. Her personal visit became a professional resounding success and led to an offer of sponsorship and employment from the Brisbane centre. She had no idea how the visit was to change her destiny forever.

“When I returned to the USA to pack up my affairs in order to return to Australia, the newspaper **Sober Times** wanted to run an interview on my trip,” says Shirley. “A few weeks later, at a state conference I literally ran into a publisher who had seen the piece. He happened to be the President of Health Communications, a company which publishes hundreds of self help books in the USA. He recommended me to an Australian publisher, who commissioned me to write a book on codependency.” That book, the groundbreaking *Set Yourself Free* was an instant success and sold out its first Australian print run within two days of release. In 1993 she released her second book, *The Game of Life Playbook*, and is currently working on her third book, a novel.

“How I came to be a proud Aussie was a perfect example of how beautifully the universe supports you to fulfil your dreams. I never said I was going to take Australia by storm and write a bestseller...I really just came out for a wedding,” she explains. “What I did have was a very clear intention. I wrote out my ideal life scenario and in it were all the ingredients for a better life. Once the subconscious gets going you move forward in ways even you could never plan or control.”

The popularity of her books indicated the depth of interest in codependency and family of origin issues at the time. In 1991 Shirley started her self-development organisation Recovery Resources, offering the latest and most effective techniques in recovering from codependency, compulsive-addictive behaviour and addictions of all types. Over time the practice grew to incorporate skills-based learning, emotional healing workshops, and personal and business coaching. She has trained health practitioners, medical doctors and holistic healers in the application of family of origin issues, as well as helping countless people move forward in their personal and professional lives.

“I have been running personal development programs in Australia since 1989 in a variety of formats. These programs help people break free from personal limitations,” she explains. “What has remained constant is the stream of successful, smart, high achieving people who flock to the courses in pursuit of means of bettering their lives.”

Shirley’s work has been featured in an array of national Australian publications including **The Bulletin**, **The Sydney Morning Herald**, **Doctor’s Weekly** and **New Woman**. She has been a guest on the Midday Show, Good Morning Australia and hundreds of radio talkback shows.

Busy people especially, are drawn to Shirley’s brand of practical, proven strategies for getting more out of life. It is not surprising to hear that her latest project blends her passion for accelerated learning and removing stumbling blocks, with her rich life experience. “I feel the time is right to acknowledge the importance that spirituality plays in our success, as well as the feminine approach to business,” says Shirley. “High value is finally being placed on creativity, intuition and the power of interpersonal relationships in business. I am delighted that people are learning to attract success, rather than burn themselves out chasing it.”

The Radiant Group is the name of Shirley’s new project, offering resources for better relationships and simple solutions for a rich and rewarding life. Shirley explains, “I know that everyday heroes are so courageous and wonderful in their day-to-day lives,” says Shirley. “But I also see that they are tired, and looking around for that ‘something more’ to enrich their lives.”

“I am dedicating my work for the next decade to the Spirit within us and to having more fun! It’s time let go of the old ‘driven’ ideas of work and success. A rich and rewarding life is really about unleashing your spirit, giving yourself permission to create the life you want and finding the resources to help you. I guess it still comes back to setting yourself free.”