

# In the **FACE** of **CHANGE**

*Local women tackle life while embracing reinvention*

**T**HE CHINESE SYMBOL FOR “CRISIS” OFTEN IS TRANSLATED as containing two disparate characters: one signifying change, the other opportunity.

And for those encountering a major life shift, these two concepts often intersect with remarkable results.

“Significant events in our lives often take us on a journey from the known to the unknown,” says Jan Early, a Reno-based marriage and family therapist. “But we humans tend to not like change. Yet if these transitions never happened, there’d be no catalyst to move us into the next phase.”

The following Reno women have embraced the opportunities inherent to a potentially unsettling change. They all have found the strength to navigate the ominous unknown despite potentially jarring experiences like divorce, an empty nest and major illness.

“Regardless of what inspires the change, life transitions can be life altering for the better,” Early says. “And they give us new opportunities to determine a new path.”

Check out how these women are rediscovering themselves and blazing new, rewarding trails.

## *Filling an empty nest*

“I RECENTLY TURNED 50. My daughter just moved out. And retirement is not too far away,” says Elizabeth Wright, director of accountability and public relations for the Washoe County School District. “So yeah, there’s a whole lot of ‘whoa’ happening.”

The Reno resident and newly empty-nester says the most surreal aspect of current life is the dichotomy between how she feels and how society may portray people in her period of life.

“I feel so young at heart, but there are a whole lot of external signals saying, ‘No, no you’re not,’” she laughs. “This is a pivotal time, clearly. So I’m just focused on staying positive and healthy.”

She attributes her youthful attitude to good relationships — with her daughter, Abby, who recently

graduated with honors from Galena High School; with her husband of 21 years, Gary; and with her friends and colleagues.

“I’m comfortable in my own skin, which has just really happened since my 40s,” she says. “I know I’m not perfect. I won’t be wearing skinny jeans any time soon, but I’m good with it.”

She says that with her daughter now living on her own, Wright will be able to spend even more time taking care of herself — through exercise, eating right and just having fun with life.

“I have the best relationship I’ve ever had with my daughter,” she says. “We text and talk all the time, and she brings her boyfriend and puppy over for dinner once a week. I just want to keep taking care of myself and my family, making my now-empty nest even more fun.”

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— ELIZABETH WRIGHT







# Seek

## Meeting a trial with style

RENO ATTORNEY KARENA DUNN'S TRANSFORMATION is evident through a revealing look at numbers.

She has undergone 13 surgeries in 17 years; has had two shoulders and one knee replaced; has lost 160 pounds; has been diagnosed with one debilitating disease and started an entirely new career.

"To say I've undergone change may be an understatement," she laughs. "I can't think of anything about me that hasn't changed — dramatically, in fact."

In 1998, she was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, and the disease wreaked havoc on her joints as well as her ability to stay active. So a gastric bypass was performed years later, resulting in a weight-loss equivalent to an entire person.

"Obviously I've had to learn how to dress my new body," she says. "I may be a size 6 or 8 now, but I still see a 24 when I look in the mirror. I have to rely on my friends to tell me, 'No really, that's too big on you.'"

But a new body isn't the only thing she's dressing for; she recently embarked on a new career trajectory, passing the Nevada Bar in 2009 at the age of 37.



"It's all about finding balance," she says. "There are very few women in the criminal defense field, so I feel like I have to find a way to dress like a woman in a field dominated by men. I want to still have fun with my style and be unique, but I have to do so while meeting the mandates of looking professional in courtroom attire."

## "No more bad days"

IN TODAY'S SOCIETY, too often the concept of "divorce" evokes negative feelings of failure and loss; but for Reno's Jill Marlene, her own divorce shifted her focus to the prospect of unexplored horizons.

"I took my wedding dress to Burning Man," she recalls of the symbolic purge marking the end of her 9-year marriage. "I had my girlfriends write all over it — inspirational messages like 'No more bad days.' But the best one said, 'The love you are capable of is the beauty in every tragedy.'"

She says the message was like holding up a mirror to herself, one that forced her to examine her sadness in a new way: as a reflection of her capacity to love and subsequently feel great loss.

So she relied on her background — a master's degree in behavior analysis — and decided to transform herself as a reflection of her newfound understanding about love, loss and life.

"I sort of blossomed after the divorce," she says. "My intuition became so refined. I was sexually abused as a child, which made it difficult for me to discern when I was being manipulated or devalued. But now I began seeing how easily I could pick out people who were emotionally manipulative."

She enrolled in the Marriage and Family Therapy program at the University of Nevada, Reno — within a year after her divorce. And just recently, she began her internship.

"My goal is to work with families in which at least one member has an empathy challenge or is on the autism spectrum," she says. "Differences in empathy and reciprocity can affect the whole family as a system in monumental ways. And based on the life-altering experiences of my own divorce and recovery and those of so many people who are wired differently or have different or incompatible world views, I am driven to understand how it works and how it hurts."



### SPECIAL ADVERTISING FEATURE

## Featured Restaurants

### Your guide to Reno/Sparks-area dining.

#### PRICE SYSTEM

- \* \$10 or less average
- \*\* \$11-15 average
- \*\*\* \$16-20 average
- \*\*\*\* \$20 or more average

Note: Prices are for dinner items, unless it is a breakfast-lunch restaurant only.

Breakfast (B), Lunch (L), Dinner (D)

Listings are in the 775 area code.

#### AMERICAN

**FAMOUS MANHATTAN DELI** L, D \*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 335-3114  
 A great deli has a New York accent. Featuring authentic deli favorites, piled-high pressed sandwiches, bagels & lox, scrambled french toast, Manhattan club salad, famous New York Cheesecake and much more! Freshly baked bread, soups and dips available all day. Serving lunch and dinner from 11 a.m. Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

**PURPLE PUMOT** B, L, D \*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 627-4511  
 Wood "Bun Salad Bar" and "Bun Love Night Breakfast" Check-out-the-burger from our Big Burger bar featuring like portions of 100% certified Angus beef. Home o' farmies see the juicy slow-cooked primo steaks at lunch, the Mamma Cicco and New York steak & eggs. Breakfast and American favorites 24-hours a day! Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

#### BUFFET

**TOUCAN CHARLIE'S BUFFET & GRILLE** B, L, D \*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 624-4433  
 Wood "Bun Salad Bar" and "Bun Love Breakfast" year after year by locals. Don't miss our specialty steamed buffalo Wednesday steak & ribs special! Friday specialty seafood feast, Sunday smorgasbord steak & seafood, Sunday Champagne brunch, plus hand-crafted primo steaks at lunch daily! Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

#### CALIFORNIA CUISINE

**BESTO NAPA** D \*\*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 335-4537  
 Featuring an all-new 100% seafood beef Espagnole innovative small plates, perfect for sharing, inspired big plates and playful desserts, complemented by our 4,000 bottle wine cellar. Social hour nightly 4pm-6pm, includes half-priced select small plates, specialty cocktails and wine. Dinner served nightly from 5pm. Reservations welcome. Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

#### ITALIAN

**CAFE ALFRESCO** L, D \*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 624-4431  
 Wood "Bun Salad Bar" Dive into our seasonal hot-to-go wood-fired pizza, creative pasta, specialty salads and sandwiches. Favorites include garlic fries, house-made empanada soup, shrimp & lobster salad, Tuscan chicken pasta. Open past 10pm and more. Be sure to save room for our house-made Italian gelato! Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

#### SEAFOOD

**OYSTER BAR ON THE SKY TERRACE** L, D \*\*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 624-4434  
 Fish and wine and wood "Bun Salad Bar" Enjoy our house specialty, the savory seafood pan roast prepared before your eyes in the exhibition kitchen. Deliciable favorites include the Seafood Voyage for two, the Colonial Merlot Cocktail and Shrimp Scampi. Serving lunch and dinner from 11am. Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

#### STEAKHOUSE

**ATLANTIS STEAKHOUSE** D \*\*\*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 624-4438  
 Featuring Allen Brothers, high-quality, core-3rd USDA prime steaks, chosen for the superb quality, marbling and flavor. Experience the art of traditional Southern white-stick cooking, uncompromised service and attention to detail. Groups of 15-50 are invited to join us for a private dining. Dinner served Wednesday-Sunday at 5pm. Reservations recommended. Visit AtlanticCasino.com/Dining.

#### SUSHI

**SUSHI BAR ON THE SKY TERRACE** D \*\*\*  
 Atlantic Casino Resort, Spa - 3000 South Virginia St. 624-4434  
 Wood "Bun Salad Bar" All-you-can-eat mix of 20 or 50 types of nigiri and maki sushi, along with plate sushi, Japanese bar and specialty sake cocktails. Complete with miso soup or salad and green tea ice cream. The unique Sky Terrace and Spicy Atlantic rolls are favorites, along with traditional offerings. Serving lunch and dinner from 11am.

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