

# WINNERS TRAVEL

A Doctor's Guide to Mental, Physical  
and Spiritual Health



Clay Lowder, MD

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CHAPTER 1

# Everything Happens for a Reason

*“Never a dull moment, never a wasted second!”*

— Coach Faulkner, Seventh-Grade History Class

**H**E WAS NOT BREATHING. HE was soaking wet. I rolled him over; he was blue.

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It was the summer of 2015, and my family and I were on vacation. We had rented a place at DeBordieu Beach, a secluded, coastal spot near Georgetown, South Carolina, that offers such activities as tennis, golf, and fishing. Although it's thirty minutes from Myrtle Beach, DeBordieu is not developed commercially. It's an old-school Carolina beach with sprawling live oaks and we love how removed from the world we feel. As

a family, we love to fish, and deeply enjoy the quiet backwater DeBordieu provides.

Earlier that day, my son Coker got out of his car and said, “Dad, something isn’t right.”

I got in his car, drove it around the block, and boy, was that an understatement. His brakes were gone.

Kelliegh, my wife, followed me into Georgetown to an auto repair shop.

On the way back to the beach house, she said, “Oh, I need to go to the grocery store. Let’s go now while we’re in town.”

I shook my head in stark refusal.

“Coker and I are playing golf,” I explained.

After a minute or so of heated discussion, she gave in.

“Typical,” she sighed, and shook her head. “I guess I’ll go alone.”

Lowder men are stubborn. (We also don’t like the grocery store.)

Kelliegh reluctantly drove me through the guard gate and then the five miles it took to get back to the house while carefully obeying the strict 25 mph speed limit. On her way back out, she stopped at the guard gate. DeBordieu charges a fee

to have a boat at one's vacation rental, and we had both paid the boat fee by accident the day we checked in, so Kelliagh decided she might as well ask for a refund while she was headed back out.

She had just walked up to the window at the gate when she heard the speaker from the radio scanner come to life: "Call all! We've got a drowning! Get 911 here quick! It's a kid!" It was loud and clear.

The male guard froze and looked directly at my wife, clearly hoping she hadn't heard the alarming words.

The female guard tried to dismiss the shocking announcement by asking, "What can I help you with, ma'am?"

The details of the emergency continued to emanate from that small box on the desk of the security booth as Kelliagh attempted to explain that we needed a refund for the boat fee, but she could not seem to get the words out. She and the two guards were distracted by the chilling words they continued to hear from the dispatcher.

"My husband is a doctor!" my wife blurted out. "He is in DeBordieu right now. Where is the kid? What's the address?"

The other guard turned to Kelliagh and dismissively said, "Look, let's just let the EMS handle it."

The three of them stood there awkwardly.

The scanner went off again: “Get them here quick! It looks bad. He was in the pool for a long time! He’s blue!”

My wife couldn’t stand it any longer.

“Tell me the address, please! My husband is a family doctor. He’ll go! He can get there fast, and he can help!”

The female guard, who had been standing on the other side of the booth, heard my wife’s plea. She shouted to the male guard, “Oh just tell her!” After the male guard continued to stay silent, she yelled to Kelliagh, “It’s 1411 Beach Boulevard! Tell your husband to go . . . now!”

Immediately, my wife called me. I was sitting in my truck in the driveway of our rental house, waiting on Coker, with the truck cranked and ready to go. I answered her call on the first ring, something my family would tell you is rare.

“Clay!” she exclaimed, her voice cracking. “There’s a kid drowning! It’s 1411 Beach Boulevard. Go now!” she screamed.

I didn’t need to hear anything more. I frantically punched the address into my Garmin GPS and hit the gas. Less than a minute later, as I turned down Beach Boulevard, I could see that a crowd had gathered outside one of the beach homes in the neighborhood. There was a young volunteer firefighter kneeling beside a child. I could see that the child was limp.

I slammed the truck into park and sprinted through the crowd.

When I reached the child, I rolled him over onto his back. (The firefighter should have done this, but I think he was in a state of panic or shock.) There were no signs of life. His cheeks were turning a dark purple. I knew what to do, but I was sick inside: this was bad.

I glanced around and saw a big man pacing about ten yards away. He was wearing a red bathing suit with two white stripes down the sides and no shirt. He was soaking wet too, and fervently sobbing. I suspected the home was having a pool party (some of the larger homes in this area had big pools out back), and something had gone wrong.

My training took over, and I began to perform CPR on the child. He had no pulse. I started chest compressions and leaned over to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Then I saw something: it was a frothy drool.

“What is that?!” I yelled. “Something is in there!”

I tried to pry his mouth open, but his jaw was clenched. I had just completed PALS (Pediatric Advanced Life Support) training, and recalled that it advises not to perform a blind finger sweep of the mouth. I felt like something was guiding my hand as I did it anyway. I stuck my finger in the boy’s mouth and pried out a large orange peel that was almost as big as my palm! I inserted my finger a second time and extracted a second piece of the peel from his throat.

And then it happened: he grunted and coughed; then he breathed! I watched life return as his cheeks gained color and his pulse resumed.

“Son, are you OK?!” I screamed.

“What’s his name? What’s his name?” I then yelled into the crowd.

The big man buckled to his knees.

“His name is Sam!”

“Sam, Sam, come on, man! Come on! Hang on! Hang with me! Can you hear me?” I pleaded.

There was no response.

I took my fist and rubbed my knuckles on his sternum. He stirred this time.

“Sam, can you hear me?”

He weakly nodded his head.

I looked at the big man, whom I now took to be his dad. His blue eyes locked with mine, and I reassured him, “He’s gonna be all right. He’s gonna be fine; I just know it!”

As we say in the South, Sam’s dad “fell out” as hope appeared in our midst. He buckled to his knees and then lay face down in the hot grass, just crying. The crowd, which

had grown to over a hundred people, surged and cheered as we all cried with joy. The ambulance arrived close to fifteen minutes later.

As I later learned, there were five families staying together in one beach house. The moms had all taken a spa day and the dads had been responsible for watching the kids. Sam, who reminded me of my boys with his blond hair and blue eyes, had fallen into the pool, and it had taken several minutes for anyone to notice. To this day, no one knows how that orange peel got stuck in his throat!

The owners of the house heard about Sam's story, and called to offer my family a free weeklong vacation at their beach house the next year. We were so moved. We visit DeBordieu every year, and each time, we ride by that house and reflect on that unforgettable day. I stare at that spot, and I can still see Sam lying on that green grass by the palmetto tree. Was it all a coincidence? I don't think so. There were way too many events that led me to be in that truck and by the side of that boy in less than a minute. What if the car Coker was driving had been working properly and we had gone straight to the golf course? What if I had gone to the grocery store with Kelliagh? What if we hadn't paid the boat fee? I believe the hand of God was present in those moments. It gives me chills to think about it. I believe *everything happens for a reason*.

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I'm Clay Lowder, and I'm a family doctor. I love medicine. These types of events seem to happen to me often, and I love to recount the stories.

Over the years, I have used stories such as Sam's to relate to my patients. I tell them my definition of true health. It's

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**My definition  
of true health  
is not just  
a patient's  
medical history  
but is a blend of  
their physical,  
mental, and  
spiritual health.**

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not just their medical history, but, instead, it's a blend of their physical, mental, and spiritual health. I even put that philosophy on the back of my first brochure when I started Lowder Family Practice twenty-two years ago in my hometown of Sumter, South Carolina. I love to help "guide" people to this life philosophy. My opinion is that life is short, and you only get one shot, so do it right!

I wrote this book as a vehicle to share these stories and my life philosophies with you. Jesus told stories. He used parables and let people draw their own conclusions. I hope you will read mine and reflect on each one. I want you to change. I want to energize you to take action to improve your health and your life. I want you to gain a positive outlook on life and see all that it has to offer. Lastly, I hope my book inspires you to see the "signs" that are all around us—the ones that guide us toward making certain choices.

In addition, I would like to give you some of what my wife calls “Lowderisms.” They are phrases and other one-liners I received from great parents and teachers; some just came out of nowhere. I’ve repeated them so often that I frequently hear my kids using them. That reaffirmation makes me feel very good. I hope you will use and pass them along as you continue forward.

Here’s an example: When I was in seventh grade at Wilson Hall in Sumter, my history teacher and football coach, Coach Faulkner, would grin and exclaim, “Never a dull moment, never a wasted second!” Forty years later, I’m still quoting Coach Faulkner and breathing life into others as he did for me. It became one of my first Lowderisms. In fact, I’m an assistant coach for my daughter’s softball team, and I enthusiastically shout it regularly at her and her teammates during practice.

Liza even chose to use that particular Lowderism for her senior quote in the Wilson Hall yearbook. Coach Faulkner would certainly flash his big signature smile if he were to see the quote she chose, knowing I’ve passed on a nugget from his teaching days almost four decades ago.

I have a new motto now though, and I can’t wait to tell you the story that inspired it.

I grew up a huge Clemson fan. My dad played baseball at Clemson University, and he began taking me to football games there when I was five years old. These days, I still go to almost every football game. Taking after my dad, I also

graduated from Clemson University, and I carried on the fun by taking my children to games when they were just toddlers. We have not missed a season since. Our family loves to travel with the Tigers! It's become a tradition.

There is one game I remember vividly. Clemson was playing Auburn in Atlanta. It was the Chick-fil-A Kickoff Game in 2012 in the Georgia Dome. The Lowders were there, and we were excited. One of my two brothers, Dr. Milt Lowder, happens to be Clemson's sport psychologist. He has been an integral part of Clemson's success over the past ten years; just ask Coach Dabo Swinney! The team and coaches there have told me often how much they love Milt, and he has even passed multiple Lowderisms on to them.

Milt was the one who told me this story that inspired my next Lowderism: The night before the game in Atlanta, Dabo had a speaker come in to talk with the team to share some words of inspiration. This particular year, it was the world heavyweight champion, Evander Holyfield. His message was powerful. Hearing about his speech that night changed my life.

As Milt told it, the champ said, among other things, "Boys, you are winners by just being here in Atlanta. Winners travel! Losers sit at home. You are winners. Make sure you remember this as you go through life. Use it to motivate you and your families to become successful, and always travel. Go see things. Now, let's start by taking care of Auburn."

That they did; Clemson won 26–19!

“Winners travel.” That was it. That was the motto I had been searching for. The minute I heard it, something went off in my brain. That phrase was my life, and more importantly, my life’s work. It would go on to become my most loved Lowderism.

How does it work? What grabbed me? Well, in this book, I hope to show you, and that’s why I chose it as the title to represent my thoughts. There are three parts to Winners Travel: mental, physical, and spiritual. All three parts must work together in order for you to experience a complete transformation.

Winners Travel is a way of life. It’s a way to view life as a never-ending journey, always wanting to see new things and open your mind. It will drive you to explore and to be great.

**Mental:** I hope and pray Winners Travel will open your mind, and once your mind is open, it can never go back to the old way of thinking. This is freeing, which is the mental part of it. One of the best tricks that I have learned is to control my thoughts. How? It’s called *displacement*. When you have a negative thought, you can learn to displace it by concentrating on a positive thought instead. Setting goals and planning trips is one of the ways I accomplish this. Your brain can be guided. It can be programmed to think of these things often, and doing so will relieve stress.

I'll show you how, and I'll provide stories of how Winners Travel to mental health.

**Physical:** Winners Travel to physical health as well. Of course, that's my specialty. I urge you to think about this. By the time most people come to see me (or any doctor), it's often too late.

Winners keep up with their physical health. I'll go over the latest technology and share with you how it will help you. Medicine has moved into the area of prevention, and I am a preventer. Many people visit doctors to try and reverse what's already been done rather than treating their problem before it becomes an even bigger one. The most important thing to remember (and something you can do right now, even if you don't read the rest of this book!) is to schedule a checkup! If you don't do it for yourself, do it for your family! Winners always think of others.

**Spiritual:** I believe this is the third aspect of Winners Travel. I witnessed Sam, the child who almost fatally drowned in the beginning of this book, come back to life. I saw him grin at me when we put him in that ambulance. I believe God has always guided my life, and that His guiding hand is the reason why memorable and inspirational moments happen to me.

We are on this earth for a deeper and more purposeful reason. I hope I can show you how to see the meaning of

your time here every day. I hope and pray it changes your perspective and teaches you why you are here. I have many more miracles to share that have shown me how Winners Travel to spiritual health.

So let's get started on our journey. I thank you for letting me be your guide. I am so humbled by this opportunity to lead you, which I feel compelled to do. I'm excited to show you a new potential path. I believe everything happens for a reason—even your reading this book. Remember: Winners Travel to mental, physical, and spiritual health. If you observe this motto, it can change every aspect of your life.

Let's roll!