

Stan. ChooChoo John. Suzy Hot-Bod. There was good-natured ribbing, and impromptu barbecues, and endless talk about the wind: where it is, where it will be, what it will be doing.

That July turned out to be one of the windiest months on record. The hot, gusty days blurred into one another. The sheer physical effort of the act was addictive. And out in the middle of the mighty Columbia, I remained captivated by its beauty. The snowy hat of Mount Hood looked down from the distance. Egrets and bald eagles dive-bombed for salmon. I marveled: What I was doing accomplished nothing for anyone. It did nothing for my standing in the world. It won me no friends. No admirers. There were only endless reaches of back and forth, the wind and the water, the sky and me beneath it.

Then again, a lot of the time I was terrified. When the winds went wild, I was too frightened to hook into my harness because in powerful gusts I'd be thrown into the air, tethered to my sail, and trapped underwater. The whole system depended on a series of connections: mast to board, harness to person. So when strong winds blew, I'd bounce on the board, holding on for dear life, or get mowed down by the swell. Other sailors were dumbfounded: Why fight the wind?

"Gotta hook in," they'd say. "Gotta go faster."

I also couldn't jibe, which is to turn around, swinging the rig over the front of the board. You have to sail fast, commit wholly, and lean forward into nothingness to drive the board through the turn before flipping the sail in front of you. It's a masterful move that combines speed, power, grace, and timing, and separates the casual sailor from the expert. It seemed impossible to nail. But it was also an apt metaphor for what I needed to do in my life.

So again and again, I did the thing I dreaded: I went fast. Committed wholly. Leaned into nothingness. I sailed until I was exhausted. And I kept going. That summer I broke two toes. My arms ached.

My legs, covered in bruises, spasmed at night. And I was happier than I ever remembered being.

I sailed by day, and my psyche went to work at night. I dreamed about bridges crumbling beneath my feet, being tied up with rope, cars unable to accelerate up hills. But every morning I'd awake to the possibility of the jibe, imagining my feet steering the board, my hands pulling up the sail, flipping, catching. *Turn around! Turn around!* After two hot, glorious months, I still couldn't jibe—but I learned something just as crucial.

One day a friend and her 15-year-old son came out to the Gorge with me, and after I explained my trials, my long and fruitless journey toward the jibe, he said the simplest, most profound thing: "It's all in the attitude." This kid had been windsurfing exactly three times, yet he knew the secret. "If you go out there knowing you're going to rock it, you will," he continued. "But if you go out there afraid you'll get hurt, you will."

I smiled at him. Wasn't that precisely the same problem I'd encountered in life? I'd always been terrified I wouldn't reach the goal, make the grade, land the job or the contract or the deal—and sure enough, I'd watched my worst professional fear come true.

I knew I had to let that fear go. And slowly I did. Even after a particularly bad day of flailing, when I vowed I would never, ever windsurf again, if the wind went up the next day I'd be back at it, driven by the insane memories of the spectacular days when everything clicked perfectly and pure magic took over. Powered by the wind, fully locked and loaded, you push your legs out and hang out over the water, steer with your toes and heels, flying weightless, carried by the elements. There is no other feeling like it in the world.

The wind wanted nothing from me. It cared not at all about my ambition, my accomplishments. It reminded me that the beauty of life is in the trying, day after day. And that's where I am: still trying for the turnaround, in life and in the wind.



## INSTANT RESILIENCE REFRESHER



**PAULA DAVIS-LAACK**  
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"When you're reeling during a big change, get your worst- and best-case scenarios down on paper. Doing so helps you see the situation more clearly and develop a plan. Also, do all you can to preserve hope. What does that mean?"

Well, hopeful people share four core beliefs: First, they believe their future will be better than their present. Second, they believe they have the power to direct how their life unfolds. Third, they realize there are many paths to their goals. And fourth, hopeful people know there will be obstacles—but they believe in their ability to overcome them."