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The Life List: A Novel

By Lori Nelson Spielman



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INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

In this utterly charming debut—perfect for fans of Cecelia Ahern’s *P.S., I Love You* and Allison Winn Scotch’s *Time of My Life*—one woman sets out to complete her old list of childhood goals, and finds that her lifelong dreams lead her down a path she never expects.

1. *Go to Paris*
2. *Have a baby, maybe two*
3. *Fall in love*

Brett Bohlinger seems to have it all: a plum job, a spacious loft, an irresistibly handsome boyfriend. All in all, a charmed life. That is, until her beloved mother passes away, leaving behind a will with one big stipulation: In order to receive her inheritance, Brett must first complete the life list of goals she’d written when she was a naïve girl of fourteen. Grief-stricken, Brett can barely make sense of her mother’s decision—her childhood dreams don’t resemble her ambitions at age thirty-four in the slightest. Some seem impossible. How can she possibly have a relationship with a father who died seven years ago? Other goals (Be an awesome teacher!) would require her to reinvent her entire future. As Brett reluctantly embarks on a perplexing journey in search of her adolescent dreams, one thing becomes clear. Sometimes life’s sweetest gifts can be found in the most unexpected places.

Praise for *The Life List*

“A wonderful, touching story that reminds us to live life to its fullest.”—**Cecelia Ahern**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *P.S., I Love You*

“Spielman’s debut charms.”—**Kirkus Reviews**

“You won’t want to miss Lori Nelson Spielman’s remarkable debut, an intensely emotional novel of transformation and trust. It’s about how we let go, and how we never let go. *The Life List* has great heart, and even greater soul.”?**Sarah Addison Allen**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Peach Keeper*

“Irresistible! Everything I love and look for in women’s fiction. A clever, funny, moving page-turner.”?**Susan Elizabeth Phillips**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Great Escape*

Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader's Circle for author chats and more.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Inspiration for *The Life List*, by Lori Nelson Spielman

Like any author, I'm often asked how I came up with the idea for my novel. My answer comes easily. The seed for *The Life List* was found in an old cedar box.

It had been years since I'd last opened my miniature hope chest, a high school graduation gift. The scent of cedar greeted me, along with my first bankbook, my grandmother's rosary, a couple of silver dollars, and a single sheet of notebook paper, folded into a neat little square.

Curious, I unfolded the yellowed paper. In flowery cursive, *Lori's List* was penciled across the top. My abandoned life list.

I was wise enough to include the day and month, March 13th, but foolishly I'd omitted the year. Maybe I hadn't planned to keep it. Maybe I didn't realize how quickly memories fade, how years later, I'd barely remember the day that young girl sat on her blue flowered bedspread, contemplating her future. But judging from the goals, what had and hadn't been accomplished, I was somewhere between 12 and 14 years old.

The crumpled piece of paper revealed a list of 29 things my adolescent mind imagined would make for a good life. I'd also added a sidebar called *Ways to Be*, which included such pearls as, *Don't talk about ANYONE. Laugh. Say "hi" to everyone.*

I'd love to say that all my goals were altruistic and contemplative. In truth, many were embarrassingly self-indulgent and trivial. *Have lots of clothes* was actually on my life list. Seriously! *Be a cheerleader* was another lofty goal. (Did I actually think shaking pompoms would be a life changer?) Ah, but I did have *Help people* on my list. And *Give my body to science* was thoughtful, right? Never mind that I qualified it with a "maybe".

Relationships were important to me. A scrawny girl with teeth too big and breasts too small, I was pretty much ignored by the opposite sex. So naturally, *Be popular* and *Have boyfriends* were at the top of my list, followed by longer-term goals of *Have a good marriage*, *Have babies*, *Have a close family*.

Even as a young girl, I loved to write and tell stories, yet being an author was not on my life list. In my middleclass neighborhood, in my middleclass town, I'd never met a single author. Authors lived in New York City, or in glass-walled houses overlooking the Pacific. Instead, I hoped to be a teacher, a profession that seemed accessible. And if not glamorous, then at least comfortable.

As I stood reading the list some thirty years later, it pleased me that I did, indeed, accomplish many of my goals. I had made the cheerleading squad (pew, right?). I had my share of boyfriends, though they arrived much later than that young girl once hoped, thank God. I'd graduated from college and learned to ski and traveled to Europe. I was a teacher, a profession I loved. I had a good marriage. I even had a cat. But I didn't live on a lake. I hadn't designed my own home. I didn't have two kids, or a horse, or a dog.

As I read the list, I thought about how different my life would be if I'd fulfilled every goal my youthful heart

longed for. In no time, my mind was racing. A story was taking shape. What if someone were forced to finish their life list—a list they thought they’d outgrown?

In the course of several days, my story evolved. First, I came up with riddles from a dying mother, offering her daughter cryptic clues to find her true self. But that was silly. Why the riddles? Why wouldn’t her mother just tell her daughter what she wanted her to accomplish? And it was crucial that the mother didn’t appear heavy-handed or controlling. The story could only work if it was clear that the mother’s intentions came from a loving heart. I also knew the story risked being predictable. I imagined readers rolling their eyes, sure that in the end, Brett would be married to the love of her life and have a baby and a dog and a horse. Her dreams couldn’t be accomplished easily, or in conventional ways the reader might expect. I wanted some goals to lead to others, in circuitous, serendipitous ways. Soon, pages for *Another Sky* were piling up, becoming the manuscript that would later be re-titled, *The Life List*.

So there you have it: the kernel for *The Life List* was my old life list—Lori’s List. Though I fell short of some goals, I believe my list served me well. It’s true, I won’t be waving my children off to college. But I will get to watch my novel set off for parts of the world I may never visit. My book will be introduced to new people, and hopefully entertain, and possibly provoke discussion. And maybe, just maybe, my story will inspire some other little girl, in some other small town, to set her own goals, to aspire to something that’s hers alone. And whether her ambitions are humble or grandiose, silly or pensive, it doesn’t matter. The important thing is, she dreams.

Review

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About the Author

Lori Nelson Spielman, a former speech pathologist and guidance counselor, currently works as a homebound teacher for inner-city students. She enjoys sailing, running, and reading, though writing is her passion. She lives in Michigan with her husband and a very spoiled cat.

Users Review

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