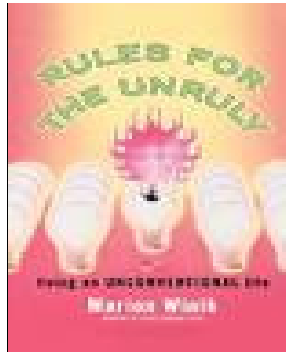


# Rules for The Unruly

Living an Unconventional Life



**Author:** Marion Winik  
**Publisher:** Fireside Books, 2001  
**ISBN:** 0 7432 1603 2  
**186 pages**

## ■ The Big Idea

Rules for the Unruly is a distillation of surprising life wisdom from National Public Radio commentator and writer Marion Winik – a woman who has seen it all, done it all, and would never exchange her experiences for the security of a traditional life.

Winik's amusing tales of outrageous mistakes, haunting uncertainty, and the never-ending struggle to stay true to her heart strike a powerful with creative, impassioned, independent-minded free spirits who know they're different – and want to stay that way.

Winik's seven rules for the unruly are:

- The path is not straight.
- Mistakes need not be fatal.
- People are more important than achievements or possessions.
- Be gentle with your parents.
- Never stop doing what you care about most.
- Learn to use a semicolon.
- You will find love.

## **Why You Need This Book**

This book shows you how to take risks, live creatively, and cherish your inner weirdness as to becoming the secret of your happiness and success, not your downfall.

## **THE PATH IS NOT STRAIGHT**

Let's say there's a well-lit, limited-access, four-lane high-way stretching straight and clear ahead of you, but the slow, funky back road with the doughnut shop and the cheap motels is calling your name. You call it curiosity and adventure, your parents call it stupidity and rebellion, but something in you can't resist taking the next exit.

On the other hand, let's say you have your destination firmly in mind and every intention of taking the interstate to get there – but the sawhorses are out, the orange Detour sign is up, and there's nothing you can do about it. You've taken a different road and maybe even ended up in a different place. Sometimes life rear-ends you, freezes your transmission, sticks a nail in your tire, or roars up behind you with sirens blaring and blue lights whirling – and you ain't going nowhere, honey, at least not for a while. Unwanted deviations from the plan are also a fact of life, and they are not always as disastrous as they first seem.

When you're young, it can seem like the routes are laid out, the itineraries assigned, and the outcome of the whole stupid rat race already decided. Everybody already knows who is pretty, who is rich, who is smart, who is a nerd with no luck at all. Well, wait twenty years and go to your high school reunion and see how wrong this is.

In the end, there's no rat race at all because there are neither rats nor a race: just people, becoming who they are.

## **MISTAKES NEED NOT BE FATAL**

One thing that is certain as you move ahead in life is that you will make mistakes – little teeny mistakes; somewhat bigger, messier mistakes; and huge, horrific, hellish mistakes that take years to deal with.

Cautionary tales just don't work. While it is comforting, fascinating, and often hilarious to hear about other people's screw-up's and the consequences that happened as a result, it does not seem and will not stop us from doing them anyway, especially if we are the unruly type.

We learn from our own lived experiences, not some anecdotes we read on self-help books and the experiences of others. So the focus here will not be on trying to get you to eschew mistakes but on what to do once you've made them. Stops along the way include:

- The seven deadly sins and you
- Mistakes can be teachers
- How to deal with shame
- Okay, one little mistake story
- Drugs and alcohol – the actual reason why they suck
- Secrets of bouncing back
- A little story about my first winter in Pennsylvania
- The Ph.D. who was expelled from high school

## **PEOPLE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ACHIEVEMENTS OR POSSESSIONS**

This is actually something you already know perfectly well, but you risk forgetting it as you grow up. Not to say that you won't continue to parrot it earnestly; most everyone does, even if their behavior says, "Bye honey, let's talk later. I'll be driving off to work in the Jaguar now. "

It can be gradually drummed out of you by our culture's emphasis on doing and getting or by the incredible risks and pain sometimes involved in connecting.

Your possessions won't love you back and your achievements turn to dust without the red blood of human relationships coursing through them. Hence, take care of the people in your life. When you have to make a choice, always put them first. This is the simplest way to be both a more ethical person and a happier person, both better and better loved. It even works for decisions of less moral weight, like choosing a college.

While you're out there loving people, you better be sweet to yourself, too. Because you too are more important than achievements or possessions, and you are what you'll be left with when all else fails.

Too much unselfishness tends to backfire too. If you don't believe this, ask your mom.

## **BE GENTLE WITH YOUR PARENTS**

The job of growing up entails breaking away from Mom and Dad, and it isn't pretty. Starting in adolescence, all but a few of us keep secrets from our parents, disobey them, hurt them, and disown them in our heads. Eventually we may decide that one or both of them are screwed up and the whole family is dysfunctional. We may be right.

This process of separation – which can feel painful and destructive on both sides – starts in adolescence. But there's a reconstructive process, too, that goes on and on in parallel, though it may take a bit longer to get under way. It involves forgiving our parents, lightening up on them, and even possibly falling in love with them all over again, but as independent adults this time instead of helpless babies.

Like the crueler part of growing up, reconciliation with your parents can begin without your being quite aware of it. Finally you get it: They're parents. They can't help being the way they are. It's annoying, but it's also irreplaceable.

## **NEVER STOP DOING WHAT YOU CARE ABOUT MOST**

If you can make money doing the thing you care about most, so much the better. But even if you remain an amateur, you must not stop doing it.

If someone tries to tell you it is self-indulgent to devote time to this pursuit of yours (this someone could well be a little voice in your own head), please know they are wrong.

The things we love to do are as important to our lives as the things we do to pay the bills, and if we are so inclined, and lucky, and don't give up, we may be able to make them pay the bills after all.

## **LEARN TO USE A SEMICOLON**

This is meant metaphorically. Even the most creative endeavors require something more than inspiration and enthusiasm. They demand craft and skill. Even if you intend to break the rules, you first have to know what they are.

True freedom is not ignorant of structure; it absorbs and surpasses it.

In addition to a mastery of craft and knowledge of the rules, every creative endeavor also requires diligence and discipline.

But this is not to say you can't have any fun in life. As long as you don't let them get the better of you, those things have their place in a well-rounded biography.

## **YOU WILL FIND LOVE**

You can't make someone love you. You can't make someone stay. You can, unfortunately, make them feel sorry for you and want to leave you and stay far away as possible from you. And anyway, you don't want the love you have to chase down and hog-tie. One day, it will show up on your doorstep. All the love you can handle, waiting for you with a bouquet.

And that will just be the beginning of your story.

There are rules for every life. Go make yours.

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