



# the phoenix cups™

**a cup filling story**

Discover your personal needs for fulfilment,  
because you can't pour from an empty cup

**Sandi & Christopher Phoenix**

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For Dionne,  
Atreyu, Grace,  
Lucy, and Koby



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

# CHRISTOPHER PHOENIX

On November 18, 1988, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas released an animated film about an orphaned dinosaur called *The Land Before Time*. Prior to its release, the hype in the school playground, and among my fellow grade two peers, was immense. Children met under monkey bars and at the bottom of metal slides to discuss the film's cover image of a menacing T-Rex, and the lovable junior dinosaurs. My pals Brian, with his fiery red hair and freckles, and Damian, with his buck teeth and bowl cut, invited me to go to the weekend screening with them. I declined the invite, saying, in an off-hand way, that my older brother was going to take me.

The buzz paid off for Spielberg and Lucas, as the film grossed over eighty four million dollars in the box office; a considerable achievement for an animated film in 1988. When my pals returned after the weekend, they were ecstatic. The excitement they felt, however, belonged to them alone. My brother didn't take me to the movie that weekend – it never really was an option. At that time my family was financially unstable. I just didn't want my friends to know.

Since I couldn't afford to go see the movie, I took what information I could from the conversations of the other children and began picturing the film in my mind. I then wrote my own version. Once I finished writing that story, I plagiarised the characters, and created more stories. After a time, I grew excited about my newfound ability to use words to conjure up images, create

sensations, develop worlds, and began creating my own characters and narratives. Not only did my family's financial setback help me to discover my love for writing, it was also writing that helped me fill my extremely large Freedom Cup. I could now transport myself anywhere I wanted to be. The written word had freed me. I have been an avid writer ever since.

A strange and curious thing then happened in June 2014 during one of my writing sessions. I penned a character named Sandy, who had a tangled mess of wavy amber hair, and whose gypsy jewellery danced musically from her wrists. Sandy had a fondness for red sangria and would pick out the fruit with her delicate fingers. In November of that same year, I met and fell madly in love with Sandi Phoenix, who was every bit, and more, of the Aphrodite I'd conceived. When we met, she introduced me to the foundations of her Cup's theory. Since then, we've developed the Phoenix Cups to how it currently stands, and continue to present the theoretical framework in workshops, conferences, and through written resources all around the globe.

I want to thank the entire Phoenix Support team, as well as anyone who has been a part of the journey getting this book and framework to where it is today. Kit Carstairs, you are a Rockstar editor! Your feedback has been invaluable and has made this book so much greater. Jodi Duncan, you saw our vision, helped us sharpen it, and bought it to life beautifully. I also want to provide a special thank you to Natalie, not only did she help me with my craft, she also helped me overcome the toughest period of my life, and I am forever thankful to her. I must also thank every philosopher who has ever calmed, excited, expanded, and confused my brain. And of course, my biggest thank you goes to Sandi, who is my love, my inspiration, my wife, and my hero.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

### SANDI PHOENIX

I am writing this introduction because I need to tell you a secret before you read this book. Hidden in this story is another story. My story. To date, it is a secret only known by those close to me. It is the tale of the origin of the name Phoenix, and the calamity that sparked it. I personally wrote Chapter 20 (The Presentation), through a stream of hot tears, tapping away at my laptop, on the beautiful island of Bali. My husband, Chris, was working beside me, not speaking, but every now and then would put his hand on my shoulder, or gently wipe my tears. Chapter 20 is the keynote I've always wanted to deliver on one of the many stages I've presented on, but I couldn't quite bring myself to be that vulnerable. Or, risk bursting into big ugly crying in front of hundreds of people. So, before I find the courage to do that, I've told it within the pages of this book, in the hope that it inspires you, or validates you and your story.

Chris came into my world in 2014. He not only changed my life, but also the lives of so many others who he has delivered the Phoenix Cups framework to, through either fascinating keynotes, interactive workshops, or online content. At the end of 2018, Chris pleaded with me to write a book about the Phoenix Cups. I told him I had no idea where to start, and asked him to use his creative writing talent to give it a go. As it turns out, he nailed it. Not only did he give the Phoenix Cups framework justice, but he gave it life through a tangible story, filled with eccentric – yet

endearing – characters. This book is a collection of our thoughts, told skilfully by my husband, woven together with dashes of psychology, and a great deal of the philosophies that make his eyes sparkle when he speaks of them.

Chris' contribution, as well as that of the awesome team members (past and present) at Phoenix Support, especially Tara Hill and Bronwyn Ball, and that of my colleague and mentor, Dr Louise Porter, have made the Phoenix Cup's framework deeper, richer, and oh-so inspiring. I have a much longer list of thank yous and acknowledgements that I've posted on our website. I am forever grateful to everyone who has come along for the ride. And I want to thank you, too, for coming along. So, buckle up, and let's get started.

## DISCLAIMER

The main characters and events that take place in this story are all fictional. With the exception of Chapter 20, names, characters, businesses, places, events, locales, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. This book is not intended as a substitute for medical or psychological advice. The reader should regularly consult a professional in matters relating to their health.

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JACK

# 1. THE BEGINNING IS THE END IS THE BEGINNING

Beep.

Beep.

Beep.

‘How long does it take for the heart to stop beating?’ I ask, standing over my father.

Beep.

‘It depends how strong it is,’ the nurse’s replies.

Outside in the night sky the rain falls sideways, while I look down at the old man in the bed with the dark sunken eyes and open mouth.

Beep.

‘Can he still hear me now?’ I ask.

‘I like to think he can.’

Beep.

‘I suppose it doesn’t matter,’ I sigh.

‘Sorry?’ the nurse asks, and I shake my head.

In the next bed over, behind the blue plastic curtain, comes a man’s gravelly voice, ‘If it means anything my father didn’t love me much

either.’

Beep.

‘Please excuse Frank,’ the nurse smiles. ‘He often chats with himself... or to his daughter.’

The skin on my father’s face has turned from olive to grey. His lips are dry and cracked, and he looks all nose and earlobes.

‘Can I get you anything?’ the nurse asks. I shake my head. She smiles politely and leaves the room.

I take a seat beside my father’s bed; how different he looks. I remember as a child how strong I thought he was. He’d hold a coin in his fist with the challenge that if I could pry it open I could have it. Not even with two hands could I get that fist to open. Even today I don’t know if I feel as strong as he was back then. When I look at him now, all atrophied, it looks as though someone has embalmed his skeleton. The last time we spoke was nearly a decade ago. How plump his cheeks were then. How sallow they are now.

Beep.

‘I’m dying too,’ the man behind the curtain says, ‘but it’s fine.’

*Should I have come up and seen him while he was still conscious? Should I even be here now?* Apart from my brother, I doubt he’s had any other visitors.

‘The damndest thing is, by the time I had found peace, it was too late. But it’s okay. In the end it’s all okay,’ the man continues.

Everything about this room is uninviting. The grey vinyl armchair I’m sitting in and the beige plastic bed table can all be sanitised in moments, letting you know your stay will not be too long. Even the untouched watered-down green jelly says: ‘don’t get too comfortable’.

‘Do you want to know the secret to making everything okay?’ the man asks.

*Would my father even want me here?*

Beep.

‘Well do you?’

‘Who are you talking to?’ I explode, and for some reason point to my chest even though he can’t see me through the curtain.

‘Who the hell else do you think I am talking to?’

For a moment all that can be heard is the rain tapping on the window and the dull howling of the wind.

‘Well, do you want to know the secret to fulfilment?’

I don’t want to deal with this old man right now, or even the crazy man behind the curtain.

‘I’m not saying it’s something you’ll achieve, but it’s something I’d like to tell you about. It’s not this cup half-full, half-empty kinda thing... Not exactly.’ His voice suddenly sharpens, ‘What? What did you say? No Darlene, I am not boring this young man.’

I go to peer around the curtain to see if there is someone else in the room with him. As I move in my seat, out of the corner of my eye it looks as though my father’s top lip quivers, and it pulls my attention. Silence befalls us, this time it lasts from the time the long hand of the clock moves from the seven to the nine.

Beep.

I remember once when I was six and was watching my father sleeping on the couch. I remember the way his eyelids seemed to protrude as if his eyeballs were too large. This was the second time I had come to visit him since my mother moved us to the other side of the country. Looking at his face now, those eyelids don’t seem as big. If anything, they have sunken further into his skull.

‘Okay, we’ve discussed it and since neither of us are going anywhere soon, we’ve decided to tell you about the Cups,’ the old man says. ‘You’ve

heard the saying “you can’t pour from an empty cup”? We connect with this phrase, don’t we? Sometimes we feel like we’ve got nothing left and need to refill. But what is it, this cup that we seem to notice most when it’s bone dry?

I stay quiet and hope that he stops talking soon.

‘Are you ready for a great big light-bulb moment, son?’ he says. ‘Are you ready to see your own behaviours and those of the people around you in a whole new light?’

Beep.

‘Are you ready to have your world changed forever?’

Beep.

‘Here it is. The big news. Your life-changing moment...’

Beep.

‘You don’t have one Cup.’

Beep.

‘You have five Cups.’

Beep.

‘Each Cup represents different basic human life needs that we all have. Fulfilment is the active potential to fill those five Cups.’

Beep.

‘But before I tell you what each Cup is, what it represents in terms of your life needs, or how this all relates to taking ownership of your life. Let me tell you first how I came to know about the Phoenix Cups.’

FRANK

## 2. THUS, SPOKE THE PHOENIX

Reaching into my coat jacket I take out a hip flask, and throw some down my throat. The liquid wets my tongue, but I can't tell if it's whiskey or bourbon. I look up at a great building in front of me, marvelling at its construction of tinted windows rather than solid walls. I walk up the stairs towards the doors, stopping now and then to catch my breath as I cling to the cold metal railing. I glance down at my wristwatch – 9:37am – before opening the heavy glass doors. A current of warm air hits me in the face as I enter the foyer. Looking left and right, the vastness of the halls quickens my heart. How many lecture rooms can one convention centre hold? How far would I have to walk? A passing usher must have sensed my disorientation, he looks at my ticket and points me to an escalator.

At the top, hundreds of people are gathered. Some chatter with those they arrived with, while others, like myself, stand awkwardly alone. Ten minutes pass before the doors are opened. After I find my seat I take another swig from my flask and then watch as the room fills around me. The house lights are dimmed and a hush falls over the auditorium. A woman with long hazel curls strolls onto the lit stage in front of us.

‘Hi, I’m Sandi Phoenix,’ she says through a wide smile.

Even from my seat toward the back of the room, I can see that she emanates power and elegance. She moves around the stage like a solo actor might during a Shakespearean soliloquy, telling a heart-wrenching tale of a child labelled the ‘naughty kid’. A child whose weekend was wrought with visions of domestic violence, fear, and despair. She speaks in great detail of the tragedy this boy experiences that will never be seen by those who judge him the most for his behaviours.

I’m enamoured by her confident voice that holds the complete attention over every one of the thousand people in her audience. Every pause, pitch, and hand gesture moves us so that at times we laugh, while other times we weep. Most importantly, by the time she stops speaking, we’re transformed.

I found my way into her conference on children’s behaviour not at all expecting my life to change. I’d gone seeking different answers. Not for myself, but for my grandchild – even though my daughter hadn’t spoken to me in years I’d heard she was having issues with her son. Some part of me believed that if I could just help her with his behaviour, then perhaps she’d have me back in her life.

On stage, as the light shimmers on Sandi’s hair, she falls silent. She scans her audience almost like a bird of prey, patiently preparing for the best moment to change tone and pace. You could hear a pin drop in the room – I am sure I am not the only one with my mouth gaping.

Sandi takes a few steps closer to the front of the stage. ‘Imagine human behaviour is motivated by five basic human life needs. These include the need for safety, the need for connection, the need for freedom, the need for mastery, and the need for fun. The difference between us is that we all have different sized needs. Where one person may have a big need for connection, another person may have a smaller need for connection. Because of these dif-

ferent sized needs, differing amounts of these needs being met, and differing behavioural choices, their behaviours to meet their needs would be different.’

Using an analogy about Cups, Sandi paints a picture of how humans have five metaphorical Cups that represent these basic human life needs. The size of their individual Cups represents how much of each need they have. While the fullness or emptiness of their Cups represents how much each need is met or not met.

This analogy gives me a moment of clarity about human behaviour that I'd never before had. I could visualise different people's Phoenix Cup's Profiles and suddenly I understand why individuals are motivated to behave the way they do. It's to fill their Cups. Never had the world of psychology held much interest for me, I was captivated. It was as though some imaginary veil had fallen from my eyes, and I was looking at the world around me for the first time. I was excited. A million questions were swimming about in my brain. I needed to know more.

When Sandi finishes her presentation, she leaves the stage to a deafening applause. I watch as she embraces a man in the wings, and then ducks out of sight. I leave the auditorium and walk into the great hall where there's a banner stand that reads Phoenix Cups. Behind the stand are two women; a petite blonde with a warm smile and a brunette lady. They both emanate warmth as they greet the delegates flocking to the stand to buy resources and ask questions. The stand is busy and I don't feel like battling the crowds to get to the women. Like some kind of magic, the man who embraced Sandi on the edge of the stage walks toward me. I grab him by the arm as he walks by, I am surprised by my own abruptness.

‘I'm sorry sir,’ I say, ‘I didn't mean to take hold of you like that. I'm just so intrigued and my head is swimming. I have so many questions to ask. I need to know so much more.’

The man smiles at me, reaches down, grabs a small booklet and holds

it out to me. ‘Use this as well as the quiz on our website to determine your own Phoenix Cup’s Profile and work out what size your individual Cups are. You can then design a Cup-filling plan. Try and find ways to fill your cups without affecting the rights and needs of others. And where possible, try and understand other people’s needs. Their behaviour is driven by their own Cups.’

His words sound so matter of fact. It’s clear he’s used to delivering this information, and in the shortest time possible. Looking around me at the hordes of people, I can see why. But something changes suddenly in his demeanour. He looks me over and gives me an almost all-knowing smile. Taking a pen from the table, he turns over a Cups leaflet and scribbles something on the back.

‘Find these authors, theorists, and ideas,’ he says, handing me the flyer. ‘But when you do, keep the Cups in mind. The Phoenix Cups are life affirming. It’s about finding fulfilment in this life and in this moment. Only you can fill your Cups. Only you can create your own meanings.’

FRANK

### 3. ABOUT A GIRL

On the train ride home I devour the information in the booklet, which summarises the Phoenix Cups, and includes an exercise to help determine my own Phoenix Cup's Profile. I turn my attention to the note the man scribbled on the flyer. It's half an A4 page, and the handwriting is barely legible. On it are names like Aurelius, Frankl, and Sisyphus. There are statements I barely understand, like: 'Condemned to be Free', and 'Amor Fati'.

The man's last sentence plays over in my mind: Only you can fill your Cups. Only you can create your own meanings.

I'd have to do some research.

Taking my phone from my pocket, I dial my daughter's phone number. I was excited to think I finally had some guidance for her son's behaviour. The sound on the other end of the line suggests that the phone is disconnected – Darlene had probably forgotten to pay her phone bill again.

The train carriage sways gently, and the lights flicker as we pass through a tunnel. Its rhythm, as it glides along the tracks, lulls me into a daydream. I remember a time when I was in Uluwatu, on the west coast of southern Bali. Darlene must've been six or seven years old. As we strolled

through the markets a pink ukulele, which hung from a wall, caught her eye. The Indonesian man in the stall followed her gaze, took the instrument down, and strummed some soothing chords.

‘Daddy, look,’ she said.

I bartered with the man, but he wouldn’t take my highest price.

‘I’m sorry baby,’ I said to Darlene, ‘it’s too expensive.’

‘Okay Daddy,’ she said, and lowered her head.

Even though Darlene accepted the disappointment, heavy hands seemed to push down upon my shoulders. As she walked into another stall with her mother, I turned around and went back to the man and paid him what he asked. When Darlene came back out of the shop and saw the ukulele in my hands, her face turned as bright as the Bali sun.

The daydream is broken when the train conductor calls out ‘Central Station. End of the line.’ I realise that I caught the wrong train and was now in the city. I don’t know what propelled me, but instead of changing platforms and catching another train home, I decide to get out and wander through the streets and laneways of the city of Brisbane.

It was by walking around with this new-found philosophical framework that it was as if something had cleared the air. I felt like I was seeing the world for the first time in my sixty-seven years. Not only did I people-watch, contemplating their Cups, I marvelled at the great cathedrals, was awed by the engineering of those towering bridges, and was enthralled by all the modern street art I had once dismissed as graffiti vandalism. I became alive by my senses, and what came to mind was Oscar Wilde’s account of his protagonist curing his soul by means of his senses. But there was no debauchery here; my senses were filling my Cups. I was drinking in my world as though it were an elixir. I must’ve looked like a fool with my neck craned skywards and a dumb look on my face, but I didn’t care. I don’t know if I’d ever been so in the moment as I was during that walk. Even though I’d walked for nearly an

hour, my frailty had only allowed me to travel four blocks.

So, it was with my neck craned that I first saw the signage of the book store. On black hooks, protruding from the stone wall, was a wooden sign with the words Dan's Books scorched into the cedar.

Stepping over the stone footing, I enter the shop, which no longer has walls but rows of book spines. The worn carpet guides the labyrinth of nooks and crannies. The store has a musty scent that I instantly associate with knowledge and comfort. At the counter stands a petite woman with silver hair in a bun, she's wearing a cotton dress with faded sunflowers on it. The dress must've been so old that the yellow of the petals look like butter-oil drops. Her hands are thin and delicate as she places a customer's leather-bound book inside a cotton shoulder bag and hands it over.

Continue the story...

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