

Smile Again

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Smile Again

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Smile Again is an enlightening, motivational book about anecdotes and manifestations to live our best life. Whether we are going through a challenging time, or are seeking some positive enhancements in our life, it will provide inspiration and thought-provoking revival.

The first few chapters contain a recap of my first book in order to explain what enabled me to provide people with ideas and support to live our best life.

The following chapters talk in detail about great life lessons learnt through my experience, and interesting insights for general personal growth.

Whether we are going through great adversity, or simply enjoy helpful encouragement and inspiration, *Smile Again* will provide an easy, inspiring and entertaining read.

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Forward

FINALLY!

Well I figured this is as good time as any to write my second book. Being in self-isolation because of our current pandemic with Covid-19 gives many of us the opportunity to get some things crossed off our list. And that's all what this book is about... finding the positives in challenging times of great adversity.

You'll find that is pretty much the common denominator in all my chapters. Mostly various anecdotes to break through barriers, tools to step outside of the box and reach a sustainable continuity of happiness, fulfillment and joy; even following dark days.

Keep the Faith, Hope and Love. April 7, 2020

We are enduring a catastrophic time... people are sick and many dying all over the world. We are fighting an invisible enemy and parts of the world are getting bombarded. It's a very surreal and unpredictable time. We don't know when it will end or how many will be in the wake of its toll. We are all affected and cope in different ways. Some will go into depression or high anxiety; some will step up to help their

vulnerable neighbor and friends, or keep busy doing things - like spring cleaning and getting in better shape. The number of couch potatoes will likely multiply. There are countless effects, but there is one common denominator that we all share. How we decide to proceed during bad times is a very important choice which will determine our outcome, and likely affect those who we live with or have relationships with.

People will pass blame for their actions and behaviors, but when you point a finger at someone else, you have three pointing back at you. Take accountability for your actions. I see people on social media ranting and raving, complaining, hating and shaming. What good does that do? It just spreads more doom and negativity.

I also see people finding some positivity and helping others. People making masks and donating them, people checking in on those who are alone, or vulnerable. Cheering on and praising all our frontline workers and heroes. We all can help and serve in some way, even if it is following the rules by safe distancing, or just staying home, we all can make a difference.

My daughter Jesse, who is autistic, is not going to her daily program because it is closed. Yet she is stepping up to help me every day with house and yard work, doing crafts and making necklaces and selling by donation, so she can give to

the charities she works for. She has been a huge support providing encouragement to her other special needs friends who are feeling scared. Although she has struggled with anxiety in the past, she is making the best of it and is being as productive as she can.

We hold the power to win over evil. We have a choice with what we do and say. We must lift people up, come together, and think before we judge. We are the illustrators to our children who set the example, and we all want to be great role models for our children. Let's take the lead, not just during this pandemic, but whenever we are faced with adversity. This is our wake-up call.

I've started gathering some feedback from people to find out what positive things have come from living through this crisis so far and will share some of them once they've been collected.

I am enlightened and emotionally moved from various perspectives. I'm not sure where the world will be when my book is finished. And I don't know when I will have the book finished, but we will continue to find the silver linings.

For those who lose loved ones from this dreadful virus, I give my sincerest condolences. Losing loved ones are the worst

times for us to bear, and so much more heart-wrenching in the wake of this pandemic. I pray for healing and strength for you all.

For the frontline workers risking their life every day to save others, you are truly our heroes. Your selflessness is noble, and once this dreadful virus is behind us, we will celebrate and honor you in the way you deserve. For now, we will follow the rules, keep practicing the safety measures, and do all we can to help lessen the burden for you.

Sometimes powerful lessons come from great peril. When tragedy struck my own life, I couldn't see a light at the end of the tunnel, and I didn't think I ever would. But sometimes adversity leaves a gift. An opportunity to live a more flourished life and engineer a change of destiny.

When my son Avery was born, he spent his first five months living in the hospital with a critical heart defect and many days where he was not expected to live. I experienced one of the most devastating experiences a human can be faced with. I would give up my own life for my children. We all would. However, this experience gave me a purpose to give back, and support all I can who will experience their own crisis or be affected with the challenging times like we are currently experiencing. Through my plight I was able to discover a

purpose and turn my 'wounds into wisdom'. Having the time now, as well as knowing our nation will find fortitude from its perspective, I felt the need to get started now.

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Chapter One

Bravery

"I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection."

~ Leonardo da Vinci

My first book, *Bravery; Our Journey of Faith, Hope & Love*, was about our family's journey following Avery's heart defect. I was inspired to write this memoir because the experience became a catalyst for a change of fate. Sometimes when we look back on life, we can see the steps on the path that lead us to where we are, and all the fortitude and wisdom we learned along the way. The people, the mentors, the chance encounters that became our guides.

I was very fortunate to grow up with wonderful loving parents. Along with my younger brother, Steven, we lived on a little hobby farm. I had my own horse at five years old. I couldn't ride it by myself so my dad would lead me around the farm for the first six months. My friends thought I was spoiled, but I appreciated every little thing my parents gave me, and never took anything for granted.

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My dad did not have a good family life and grew up very poor. His dad left at an early age and his mom was not at all loving or supportive. He left home at 15 years old and worked very hard to have all he achieved. Perhaps that's why he was so generous with us kids. In his late teens and early adulthood, he became a professional boxer, and later became a gravel truck driver and purchased his own business. He worked a lot but would always have time for my brother and me. He was an Irishman with a feisty temper, but the most loving father, husband and friend. He was a very kind, generous man who literally gave the shirt off his back and his lunches away to the hungry.

My mom was a beauty queen, and just as beautiful on the inside with a sincere kind and positive demeanor. She was a dedicated mom that came on all our field trips and always putting ourselves before her own. Almost every weekend was taken up either at soccer tournaments or horse shows. Back then I never realized her sacrifice of time for me. She was a softy, which was a good balance to my dad. But I had strict rules which instilled very good values, manners and respect.

I still remember my first day of Kindergarten, and the enormous fear to go inside the school.

I said, "I can't do it Mom." She said, "Honey, there is no such word as can't. I'm not going anywhere and will stay for however long you want me to." I don't know why that memory stuck with me so well over all these years. Maybe it was because it was my first lesson on how to face my fears, and what a wonderful mom I had.

Not only did I have the most supportive parents who filled my life with unconditional love, I also had my grandma next door. Growing up, I spent most weekends on her farm and unbeknownst to us, she blessed me with the outlook on life that would determine a mighty strength I would need in my adulthood. Grandma had only one leg because in her thirties, two cars drag racing smashed into each other and her. They couldn't even find her until the police spotted a tiny piece of her colorful dress. After she was pulled from the wreckage she called out for my mom, who was 14 and had witnessed it all from their car. She said, "Barbie, I'm not going to leave you," then slipped into unconsciousness as the ambulance took her away.

Later that day, the family was called in to say their good-byes because her right leg was crushed, and she was bleeding out. But a miracle happened when a blood clot formed to stop the bleeding. Unfortunately, though, her leg was crushed beyond repair and needed to be amputated.

This never slowed Grandma down and, in fact, she would go on to live the most self-serving life I know. She would visit anyone in Chilliwack who had a serious accident to help them by cooking for them and running errands. She'd take them to the best prosthetic places if they lost a limb. She was always baking bread to bring, along with other groceries, to those who were in need. I remember her baking birthday cakes and bringing presents for people who had no money.

She even took in a homeless man who couldn't take care of himself anymore and only spoke Swedish. He was her neighbor and lived in a tiny little run-down shack next door. When his health began to fail, she moved him into the spare room and took care of him for over 4 years until his passing.

When I was young, I remember thinking, 'why is Grandma so happy all the time, and always singing cheerful songs?' I'd wake up on most weekends to the smell of homemade waffles, or bacon and eggs. She would always sing, "Good morning Kimmy... It's another wonderful day!" Sometimes it would be raining, and I would think, what's so great about it. But when I was older, I got what she meant. She meant it was another day to spend alive and with the ones we loved.

I remember Grandma saying how she never thought to appreciate all the value and great things her legs did... like the

simple act of walking or riding a bike. I grew up with great respect for her, but I never really knew the magnitude of wisdom she gave me until I needed to find the strength to endure my own crisis. If we are fortunate enough, we can learn, adapt, and find ways to make peace with adversity.

When I was twenty-one, I moved to Vancouver to attend BCIT, and ended up living there for quite a few years. Not long after I moved there, I was fortunate to meet my future kind and loving husband, Cam. We bought a cute little house and a few years later had our beautiful daughter Jesse. Life was cruising along just as good as I could have ever wanted or planned, and we were excited about the arrival of our second baby, oblivious to the oncoming storm. When people are not expecting something, I see why it is equated to 'hitting a brick wall' because that's what it felt like.

Almost a month before my due date, excruciating pain sent me into the hospital. Within a minute of laying on the hospital bed I felt a huge gush of fluid. I thought my water must have broken but when I looked down, the white linens were soaked with blood. In seconds, I was whisked to the O.R. for an emergency C-section. When I became conscience, I was told I had delivered a baby boy, but the look on the nurse's face told me this wasn't the celebration it was supposed to be.

She said, "Hi honey, are you feeling okay?" I nodded. Then she said, "You have delivered a baby boy, and I am sorry dear, but he is very sick. He was born blue and not breathing. We resuscitated him and a team of specialists from Children's Hospital are on their way to get him. I'll go and get your husband now."

Just like that... in the blink of an eye, my life was forever changed. I didn't even hold Avery, and briefly saw him being taken away into the transfer ambulance. I couldn't see what he looked like because of all the machines hooked up to him, but I could tell he had a beautiful head of strawberry-auburn hair. I was too sick to be discharged and had lost a lot of blood. So, for two days, I laid in my hospital bed wondering if I'd ever get a chance to hold my baby alive. There is no other way to describe it - I was in a living hell.

What followed were many months of heart surgeries and setbacks, yet our little Avery wasn't giving up and continued to defy all the odds. Renal failure, respiratory arrests, and Code Blues were just a few of the obstacles Avery would have to overcome. So many times, the chances were against us, and one after the other, hopes to raise are only dashed with more and more setbacks.

I was Avery's mom, but I couldn't save him. Sitting beside him in the chair all day, watching the machine breathing for him, I felt invisible and helpless.

However, during our stay it was outstanding to see how all the surgeons, nurses and doctors rallied in desperation to save Avery, and fall in love with this tiny little guy who was determined to survive. Spending so many months in ICU became very taxing and I would try not to think about the stability of my mental health.

Not only were we facing the weight of everything Avery was going through, but all around us were very sick babies and children. Over time we became acquainted with many families, some of which babies did not survive. And some of who had the same defect as Avery — Transposition of the Great Arteries.

One of the families we got to know quite well spent many months beside us in ICU. Her name is Reena and her prognosis grave. I would look at her parents and see such broken faces, very sad eyes. I thought that is how Cam and I must look to others... kind of like we were only half alive.

Throughout our five months stay at the hospital we were bombarded with one hurdle after the other. Our beautiful

little Jesse would receive a diagnosis of Autism, and the worst of all, the untimely passing of my beloved Dad. It was a Saturday morning on July 18th, and my Dad was at home alone while my mom was out with her friends at garage sales. Sometime in the hour my mom was gone, Dad suffered a massive heart attack and died at only 59. My world was shattered, no words could describe the despair.

Prior to this, I could feel in my heart that his health was deteriorating. He had high blood pressure and I feared all this was too much for him, I could see it in his eyes.

Up until then, I never asked, 'God, why me?' I just didn't know how I would cope with all this happening at the same time. I remember feeling I wanted to be in a coma because waking up every morning was more painful each day. We didn't even have time to grieve the loss of Dad because our lives were consumed with Avery's survival. But somehow, I knew Dad had traded his life for Avery's, and this brought me some comfort.

We had to go on, but with our hearts completely broken. For months I carried the fear and reality I may lose Avery too, and prayed for just one more day. I tried the best I could to remain positive, but it was hard when there was no escape from the suffering, and all around us was despair.