



(MORE) (EXTRA) ORDINARY
INSPIRATIONAL STORIES OF EVERYDAY PEOPLE

KEITH MAGINN





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Cover and book design by Mark Sullivan

ISBN 978-0-9985216-1-9 (paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9985216-2-6 (e-book)

Printed in the United States of America

Published by KiCam Projects

www.KiCamProjects.com





This book is dedicated to those who serve others
and try to make the world a better place,
that they have strength and wisdom;
and to all who are suffering,
that they may find relief.







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Preface

With apologies to Mr. Dickens, the best of times and the worst of times might be right now. The world is a scary place today. We are a divided and frustrated human race, in many respects. Yet despite what you see in the news, there are still good people doing good things all over the world.

The late actor and activist Christopher Reeve said, “A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming odds.” To me, the real heroes today aren’t celebrities or athletes or politicians. They are “ordinary” people like the ones in this book. They are making a difference, often with little or no fanfare. And they give me hope.

(Extra)Ordinary: More Inspirational Stories of Everyday People is a collection of stories about ten amazing people. These tales aren’t rainbows and unicorns from start to end, however. Many of these people went through extremely trying circumstances to get where they are now. But as Booker T. Washington said, “Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.”

I believe that people who have dealt with and overcome adversity are more relatable. Though some of the accounts





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depicted here are uncommon on the surface, each individual's struggles are universal and encouraging. The world needs more stories like these.

Being able to learn more about these people and to write about them has been an awesome and humbling experience. I learned from every one of them, and I am grateful they trusted me with their unique stories.

In many cases, these are people you would walk past on the street and never know they were what we might think of as “special.” A few might stand out physically, but their stories go far deeper than simply what we see with our eyes.

Each of these people reminds us to see with our hearts and encourages us to ask questions, defy assumptions, and make real connections in a world increasingly characterized by virtual relationships. At a time when division runs rampant for various political, cultural, and social reasons, these stories can unite us all in the belief in the power of the individual to do more—and to be more—than we might initially believe or expect.

Faced with seemingly insurmountable problems, some people simply give up. Others do what they have to do to survive. Still others—a remarkable few—turn their experiences into a purpose to uplift others. As you will see, life's tests build depth and character. When we decide to keep fighting, we learn the human spirit is incredibly powerful.

The purpose of this book is to inspire you and also to challenge you, because it is becoming more and more apparent





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that we need more people like the ones you are about to meet.

What is your gift? What can you do to make the world a better place?

Thank you for reading.

All the best,
Keith Maginn
Winter 2017
Cincinnati, Ohio, USA





Sara Beth



Sara Beth Vaughn might be one of the most upbeat people in America. Despite being diagnosed with spastic cerebral palsy as an infant, she sees this “disability” as a blessing and has dedicated her life to helping others.

“I tend to stand out among a crowd, go against the grain,” Sara Beth says. “Whichever way you choose to word it, I’m just a plain ‘outside of the box’ woman.”

Spastic cerebral palsy is a developmental disorder caused by damage to the brain before or during birth or within the first few years of life. Spastic CP is the most common type of cerebral palsy, frequently characterized by muscle and joint stiffness and erratic movements. “However,” Sara Beth says, “living with CP has served as the largest blessing in my life to date!”

In her manuscript *Perspective: Does CP Stand for Cerebral Palsy or...Compassion?*, which she hopes to turn into a book, she explains:

You see, I am what most folks would often describe as “disabled.” I was diagnosed with having spastic cerebral palsy at the ripe old age of eighteen months. I believe we are what we think. With this in mind, I often refer to myself as “experiencing living life with CP” or “experiencing a physical handicap.”





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At thirty years old, Sara Beth says her life has had both challenges and empowering triumphs. She focuses more on the latter and believes pain and suffering can be used for the greater good.

Sara Beth puts forth a challenge in *Perspective*:

Life is hard, but it tends to be much more of a challenge when we feel that no one is in our corner. Each day, let's set a goal to serve as that support for at least one individual, if they will have us. Supporting one another is the key. I often find that I serve myself by serving others! Try boosting someone's spirits tomorrow and see if your own spirits aren't boosted by the process as well!

Her motivation for writing her story is to inspire others. Our tests give us wisdom, she says, "so we would be remiss to keep silent regarding the valuable insights we have learned through enduring and triumphing over our unique struggles along the way."

Sara Beth believes that when we start seeing our differences as attributes that make us extraordinary, real growth can occur. When we learn to accept ourselves as we truly are, we can positively affect others as well.

Everything happens for a reason, a valuable purpose, she says. Opening up to others in turn helps us offer compassion. "Showing compassion is often the first step in restoring hope," Sara Beth writes, "and without hope, it can become





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a bit more challenging to put our feet on the ground with purpose upon waking.”

Due to Sara Beth’s physical constraints as a toddler, the medical field placed limits on Sara Beth very early on—she’d never do this or be able to accomplish that. Because she was able to prove them wrong so many times, Sara Beth is compelled to help others shatter their perceived ceilings. She has devoted her life to giving hope to others, to assisting them in conquering unfair labels. Her definition of happiness is reaching “all who long for the weight of oppression to be lifted from their chests.”

Sara Beth was born three and a half months premature on August 13, 1987, at St. Mary’s Hospital in Evansville, Indiana. She weighed 1.7 pounds.

Tiny Sara Beth was put in an incubator, dependent upon a staggering number of machines to live. She writes:

Being as substantially premature as I was, my eyelids were translucent, and my fingernails and toenails had yet to form. The lungs of my tiny little body were so underdeveloped that they were unable to breathe without assistance. Within twenty-four hours of living, my heart had already ceased to beat three times. Doctors weren’t hopeful, as they explained to my parents that *if* their daughter survived another day, she would know nothing more than a life in a vegetative state—never know herself, nor her parents, and remain bed- or wheel-chair-bound for all of her days.





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Three blood clots were detected in the center of Sara Beth's brain within seventy-two hours of her birth. Doctors asked her parents whether blood transfusions, necessary for the baby's survival, should continue. Sara Beth's parents didn't hesitate; they wanted every measure possible taken to allow their daughter to live.

Their resolve paid off, Sara Beth writes:

A few weeks later, doctors were stunned when the three blood clots squatting in my brain diminished, as if by magic, without causing any further brain damage. We all knew it was not magic. It was the **BIG GUY UPSTAIRS!**

The miracle baby spent the first three months of her life in the newborn intensive care unit. When she was finally sent home, Sara Beth was tethered to a heart monitor.

Anyone who babysat Sara Beth had to be CPR-certified. Her "Papaw" was her most frequent babysitter. He, along with the rest of her family, taught Sara Beth that true happiness comes from working for a cause bigger than oneself.

Papaw, Sara Beth's kind and gentle grandpa Larry, was a special friend. When he was eight years old, a farming accident had severely damaged his legs. His own physical limitations led to a deep bond between him and his granddaughter.

"My grandpa's physical pains, challenges, and suffering led him to play the part of a leading advocate early on in my childhood," Sara Beth remembers. "He taught me that a broken lamp can be glued back together, and even with the





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scar of a fracture, that lamp still contributes an abundance of light to the world.”

When Sara Beth was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, she couldn't crawl or sit up on her own, let alone stand or walk. Despite her developmental hold-ups, Sara Beth writes that she had an early talent:

One of the things I learned to do right away... talking! You see, when you have a child who lacks the ability to physically get up and get what they need, they learn to verbally convey to their caregivers what it is they need in accommodation for physical barriers. And that is exactly what I did! I began speaking full sentences by the time I was one year old, and I haven't been able to close my mouth since!

Sara Beth walked exclusively on her tiptoes as a child. She was severely pigeon-toed, and her left leg was longer than her right. She also had scoliosis.

Fortunately for Sara Beth, a local group of Hadi Shriners stepped in to cover expenses for medical assessments, screenings, and procedures. They sent her to Shriners Hospitals for Children in St. Louis, Missouri, where Sara Beth had eight surgeries between the ages of three and eighteen, mostly before she was five. The Shriners' generosity is responsible for fixing most of Sara Beth's lower-body issues.

The staff at Shriners Hospital provided exceptional care, making the children feel special and in safe hands. After





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some of her surgeries, Sara Beth stayed at the hospital for a few days; after others, she remained for months. Most procedures were scheduled in the summer to prevent her from missing school. One of her parents stayed with Sara Beth each time.

During inpatient care, the kids at the hospital attended group physical therapy. “It was there that the real magic took place,” Sara Beth says. “I am talking about recovery and relearning how to walk in a sense, but more than that, the real lesson was that we all learned to see each other for who we actually were.”

Despite her frequent hospital stays and having to spend months in casts from her neck to her toes, Sara Beth says she wouldn’t trade her childhood for anything. Her experiences gave her “the capacity to look beyond the superficiality of human nature to see people for who they truly are. It is very important that we all try to refrain from making judgments about what a person can or cannot do until they actually start speaking to us. [That] is probably my most prized lesson I have learned throughout my life.

“Embracing our differences as attributes gives us our ‘edge,’ that which sets us apart from our peers and colleagues. Normalcy is ultimately just a figment of our imagination... The way I see it, we all fall on the ‘spectrum of crazy’ somewhere. Challenges are opportunities to personally grow and develop if we can find the insights to gain within each hard aspect.”





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By age five, Sara Beth learned to walk with a walker. But when six-year-old Sara Beth entered her first-grade classroom, she noticed none of the other kids used a walker. That idea was new to her; until then, she'd never felt there was anything wrong with her.

To fit in, Sara Beth decided she didn't need her walker anymore. Worried about her safety, the school called her parents. Sara Beth's mother responded: "Sara Beth is strong. Let her fall. She will learn."

That tough-love approach and Sara Beth's stubborn determination forced Sara Beth's body to learn to walk without support. Her family and the Shriners trained Sara Beth there was no such thing as "you can't do this." She gives them credit for making her into the woman she is today. "The English language does not even have appropriate verbiage to convey how full my heart is due to all the blessings I have had in my life," she says.

But Sara Beth knows firsthand how easy it can be to spiral into "Why me?" thinking.

In 2012, Sara Beth had just completed a master's degree in social work at the University of Southern Indiana. She got a full-time nonprofit job, leased a new vehicle, and moved into her first apartment. But when she came home one day, everything of value she owned had been stolen by an untrustworthy partner.

She admits to throwing herself a pity party: *I've already been through so much. Why, God, would you let me be*





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subjected to something as horrendous as this? But she soon picked herself back up, realizing she didn't want to wallow in a victim mindset any longer. She explains:

Quite honestly, being burglarized was the best possible thing that could have happened to me—for two reasons.

1. It served as the catapult I needed to get myself out of a bad relationship, which has further provided me with insights on how to better support and guide those who are currently experiencing a similar situation.

2. God and I both know I am a stubborn lady. Thus, He knew that was the only way I would learn the hard lesson that nothing that is actually tangible to our touch holds any real value whatsoever. I didn't even replace half of what was stolen from me once I regained my footing from that traumatic experience. It seems to me now that the less you have, the less you have to worry about. I am going to have to thank God with a bear hug when I see Him for teaching me this lesson so early in life.

After the theft, Sara Beth threw herself into her work. She followed her own advice, putting the focus on serving others. Helping and inspiring others accelerated her transformation from victim to survivor.

For the past four years, the five-foot-tall ball of energy has been an assessment specialist at a nonprofit, working to





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prevent and end homelessness in the Evansville area. Sara Beth is an advocate for at-risk individuals, directing people to services, programs, and housing options to get those in need back on their feet. She is ecstatic to get paid for doing her dream job.

Sara Beth has many roles, but the most important to her is restoring people's hope. She says her ability to express herself early in life has led to her serving on the board of directors for a local family shelter. Sara Beth says she is skilled in making people laugh, often because of her lack of a filter. "For the last thirty years, I've just gotten louder," she says.

She is committed to raising awareness for Shriners, whose organization supports children and their families. Wanting to give back, Sara Beth has been a guest speaker at Shriners Hospitals events, sharing how the Shriners' generosity and compassion changed her life. She also has volunteered for the local Hadi Shrine center's fundraisers.

Sara Beth shares the power of positive thinking with corporations, universities, prisons, shelters, and groups as a motivational speaker. She loves talking to groups, noting that when you've stood out in life since day one, any fear of speaking in front of others goes away quickly. Sara Beth has made something of a name for herself in southwest Indiana. "Every life event I have been honored to experience from birth up to this very present moment has culminated in this beautiful, destined reality that I currently find myself within," she says.





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Sara Beth is an example of what can happen when negative thinking is surmounted. Despite being labeled abnormal and disabled, Sara Beth sees her distinctions as a miracle:

If people remember you, most often they also remember the causes you stand for. I enjoy that people can pick me out of a crowd, because hopefully it reminds them of what I hold as value in my affiliations: everyone is connected, we all deserve support and compassion, and we are what we think—meaning that if you believe in yourself, you can manifest in your life whatever you can dream up!

Every day I am humbled to meet new people, hear their stories, and learn vicariously through them the lessons that it may have taken them years of hardship to master. The truth is, from the moment we are born, we have within us everything we need in order to become who we were always meant to be.

Sara Beth loves to show people their own abilities:

The extraordinary moment of transcendence takes place when the words “you can” transform into the empowering statement of “I can.” This particular moment of pure inspiration I have been fortunate enough to witness. It is so completely life-altering to witness the uncanny change from heartbreaking despair into something of pure empowerment,





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strength, and self-advocacy. That is my reason for being.

Sara Beth believes we can all find happiness in who we are. We have an inherent ability to grow, to change. She tries to see the best in people and to better herself every day.

From first receiving hope from the Shriners to now passing it on to others, Sara Beth says she is humbled to realize her life has come full circle:

I am proud of myself. Be proud of yourself. Let's be proud together.

Don't forget that you are the only you. You have something unique to contribute! My experience of living with a physical handicap has revealed to me that I can contribute compassion in my own unique way.

I encourage you to see that in the end, we are all very much connected! Once someone has inspired the restoration of hope in your life or assisted you in overcoming any variety of adversity, you then are qualified to do the same for another. This concept is the motivation behind who I am and what I stand for today, which in essence is helping others to believe and know that they are whoever they want to be. We are not obligated to become who society says we are. It brings me joy to share my story with one person or 10,000 people. I will speak to anyone who is willing to lend me their ear. Remember, you do not have to have initials behind your name to





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make a positive impact on someone's life. All you need in order to manifest such an act of kindness is compassion.



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If you would like to make a donation in honor of Sara Beth,
please do so at ozanamfamilyshelter.org.

