



## LOOKING AHEAD, LOOKING BACK

# Planning for the best, accepting the worst

**W**hen things out of the ordinary happen, one usually stops, reflects and wonders what to do next. We may not want to accept the hand life has dealt us. We may want to scream "Why is this happening to me?"

Things happen, no matter how "good" we are, no matter how much planning we do, how much we give to our family, community or faith, how well we look after ourselves.

Why do challenging things happen to good people? Why does it seem that only the good die young?

For some personalities, not being in control of all variables can be difficult to accept, but I have learned to do so.

At the beginning of each year, I like to think of the many blessings in my life. I like to think of all the good I have tried to create, to inspire people who are sad or sick by making them laugh, reminding them of all they have.

I think balance is key. When you make plans, but understand not everything is in your power, it allows for acceptance, contentedness and peace.

All who have been blessed with children know the feeling when first looking into the newborn's eyes. It's an amazing experience.

For me, it inspired hope, love, joy and faith. Hope in the next generation we are creating, love so pure it almost breaks your heart, joy that fills us with such happiness, and faith in humanity and my babies' future.

It is different when parents realize their baby is not typical. Mostly because we don't know what to expect. What goals and plans should we think about? Will they walk, talk, have friends, go to school, ride a bike?

I realized 24 years ago, after our baby with Down syndrome was born, that neither her father nor I did anything "wrong." It just happened.

Having a child with some differences changed our lives for the better. It helped us get back to what the true basics.

We were very lucky that Emma would go on to graduate from high school, go to college, is an amazing artist, works in the community and receives real pay for real work. She has won provincial athletic awards and is responsible for many of the household chores, just like the rest of the family.

She is equal to everyone; she votes and understands why she is doing so. In short, she has taught us what life is really about at the core. Having her was definitely a good thing, not bad.

At the time, it felt like our lives were being ripped apart. Everything was different and uncertain from what we knew in previous child rearing.

We were thrown into a world of specialists for quite some time. Even though she was and is very healthy, she had to be taught to roll, sit, walk and talk with more patience than our typical children.

When her father died suddenly three years ago, all our lives stopped. Emma's reaction was to run to get me and her siblings to help him. We responded by calling 911 and administering CPR. None of us did anything "wrong" to have this happen to us. However, all our lives would change forever that day.

The feelings were similar to those when our non-typical child

was born - out of control.

We didn't want to accept her father's death. We were angry, sad, confused. We went through the stages of grief - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance.

It was interesting to all of us that Emma accepted her father's passing the quickest.

That is not to say that she doesn't have moments of sadness, reflection and missing him. She just accepted he was gone quicker than any of us.

It occurred to me as the kind comments from those who love us came forward over the Christmas season that everyone has happiness and sadness in their lives.

Things out of our control will continue to happen. A car crash, illness, separation, a loved one lost.

When tragedy happens, one choice is to be sad, reclusive or feel a victimized. Another is to work at getting healthy again. I believe we can all help others by looking after ourselves first. Once we feel strength come back into our own soul, bring some joy and hope to those who may not have the strength. Be part of a welcoming community.

Once again this December, we held what used to be a gals' Christmas lunch (of four lonely housewives) and has grown to become a get together with more than 60 guests. The purpose was to give to those who truly would not have a Christmas.

Friends, family, colleagues, politicians and the original group of 30 years ago attended.

For the last many years, we have adopted families who have diverse abilities and are in low-income situations, identified anonymously through Community Living B.C. This year, we included a donation to the food bank. Several thousand dollars were collected.

It was a perfect of example of the amazing reward for both recipient and giver.

Following on this good deed, I have been thinking of all the good things I hope for family and community in 2013.

Perhaps we couldn't control everything that happened in 2012, but we can be in charge of our attitude, looking ahead.

I can try to move a negative into a positive by embracing change and acceptance.

Here is my plan for 2013: I am going to continue to help as many people in our community as I can through inspiring them to be the best they can be. That starts with me and my family and fans out in a positive circle. I am going to ensure that my attitude continues to be the healthiest it can be.

I am going to finish my book on grieving now that I know how to complete it. I was waiting for something fantastic to happen to be a happy ending and provide hope. I just realized the other day that the end to my book (or anyone's journey in grieving), is really up to each of us.

By continuing to heal and spread our joy, by believing in hope, by having faith in ourselves and others, we may find a very pleasant place in our journey toward peace, with love and happiness.

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*Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?*