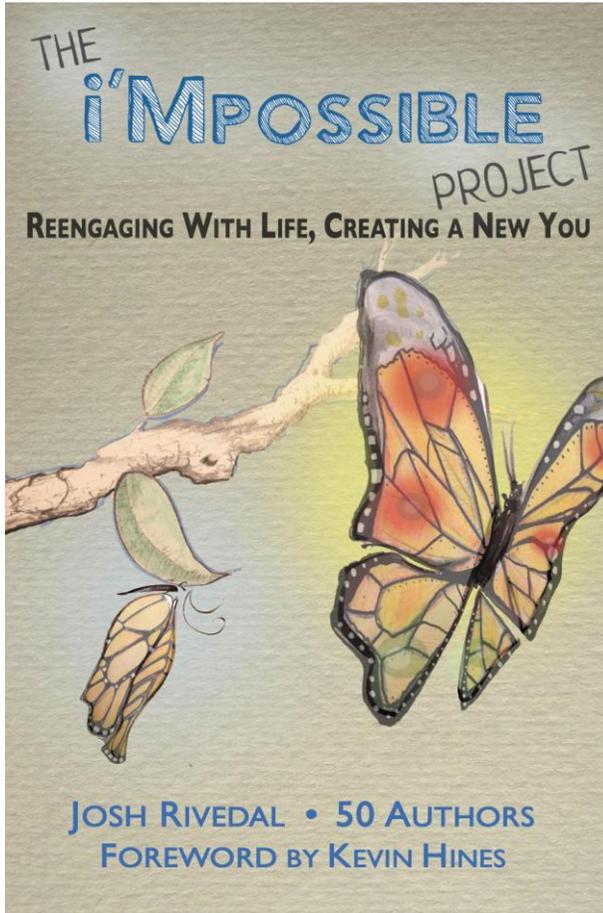


The i'MpossibleProject:Vol. 1—*Reengaging With Life, Creating a New You*

Sample Chapters

Survivors of Suicide Loss



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Skookum Hill
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Pre-Order: www.iampossibleproject.com/one

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My Inspiration for The i'Mpossible Project

FOR YEARS I'VE BEEN TELLING my personal story via an autobiographical thirty-character, one-man play *The Gospel According to Josh* (yes, I get along with the rest of the cast just fine). I've toured internationally with my *Gospel...* in theaters, high schools, universities, juvenile detention centers, and one unfortunate college biology lab. In my story, following my father's suicide in my early twenties, a lawsuit from my mother over my father's inheritance, and a break-up with my long-term girlfriend; all in the span of twenty months—I fell into isolation, silence, and melancholy that eventually had me hanging out of my fourth floor bedroom window contemplating taking my life.

But I pulled myself back inside and got help—first from my mom and then through trusted friends and professional counseling, all because I took a risk and shared my pain.

Now, after each presentation of my *Gospel...* I talk about my recovery process and how I found a way to reengage with life.

After nearly every show, incredible people, complete strangers who may feel voiceless or worthless or simply unheard confide in me powerful, personal stories on how they've overcome tremendous odds in their lives. These stories not only changed my life for the better, but also the life of the storyteller.

Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

At one point or another in our lives, I, along with millions of other storytellers took a chance on themselves and said “I am possible.” But why do a book about people’s stories?

STORIES PROVIDE A TEMPLATE FOR SUCCESS

Whenever I’m feeling particularly uninspired or low, one of my favorite activities is to read the biography of someone famous and look for the part of their life story where they had struggled. I find that I learn a lot more from a person’s low points—mine own included—rather than a highlight reel of their greatest achievements.

I’m deeply curious how people reengage with life after a difficult, traumatic, or tragic event. How did they get back on the horse? In what ways did they succeed? What did they do that was “unsuccessful?” Quick tangent: the word “fail” should be replaced in the English language with “lesson I learned on my way to success.” Boo-yah.

“If that woman can overcome her paraplegia to become a famous painter by using her teeth, then holy cow, I can do just about anything.”

“That guy lost his wife and daughter in a car accident and fell into tremendous grief, but then rebounded, found love again, and became the Vice President of the United States. If he can keep fighting on then, oh snap, I can keep on fighting too.”

When people give of themselves through the telling of their stories it makes the seemingly impossible in our lives tangible and attainable.

STORIES BREAK DOWN STIGMA

The world becomes much smaller. “That black guy,” “that lesbian-chick,” “that snarky-writer-guy who talks about suicide;” they all now have a name. David. Jamie. Josh. Each of these people has wants and

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needs, to live, to love, to survive and thrive... just like every other human being.

But why include these particular stories in the book? Some of the topics inside this book are not ones typically found in an inspirational-style book: murder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a transgender recording artist. Each story displays its own beauty and with each the author uncovers a piece of themselves, showing us a moment in their lives where they've overcome a tremendous obstacle, transformed, or changed for the better—and by doing so they allow us to peel back and examine a layer of our own soul.

STORIES ARE A DEMAND FOR OUR CIVIL RIGHTS.

Slow down, Rivedal. Don't get so preachy. It's only the second page of the book.

I know. I just get really excited about this idea.

Once stigma is broken down because of the courage of the “ab-normal” person telling their story, they are now viewed as a human being—they now have a seat at the proverbial table of equality. Jim Crow is repealed. Women's suffrage is enacted. Mental health laws are passed that empower and aid people with illnesses rather than traumatizing or criminalizing them.

That's the kind of world that I want to live in. Bam.

A COUPLE OF THINGS TO NOTE

This book is not written entirely by polished authors—some are and some are not. (Some of the authors might want to kick me in the shins after reading that last sentence... but I'll take my chances) Each story is unique, powerful and inspirational; a love letter of sorts to you, the

Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

reader, on how they've dealt with a tremendous hardship and found a way to reengage with life in the aftermath.

I've edited each of the stories to a certain extent—not to fit my writing style, but rather to make sure the story arc of each is crystal clear. I hope I've done you a service with this.

Each story is no more than one thousand words. Sometimes we get bogged down in unnecessary details not imperative to the heart of what the story is actually about. The word limit is to give the story arc a laser-like focus and is for the reader with a short attention span (like me).

How should you read this book? Some of these stories are lighter and some are pretty heavy—take your time with it. Read it out of order. Focus on one story a week, and savor the deeper meaning, figuring out how it speaks to you... or not. Read it however you want. If one (or more) of the stories inspires you and you want to pass it along—go right ahead.

QUIT YOUR YAKKING, JOSH

I actually had ten more pages and a couple of haikus to share but fine... without further ado, I present to you forty fantastic authors and *The i'Mpossible Project: Volume 1—Reengaging With Life, Creating a New You*.

(Cue the thunderous applause)

Passing a Parent

Nikki MacCallum

IT'S NOT UNTIL I'M CLOSING IN ON him that I realize the man hobbling slowly in front of me along the path beside the Cape Cod Canal, is my father. Feeling more shocked than surprised, I stop running about fifteen feet behind him, begin jogging in place, and look at him. His legs look brittle, like he could be knocked over if a bike passed too close to him or if the wind blew too hard. He does not look like a man who has run thirty-two marathons, including Boston in two hours and forty-six minutes. He ran those thirty-two marathons when he was in his thirties and forties, before he embarked on a nearly-twenty-year-long battle with alcoholism.

When I arrived on the Cape last night, for a weekend visit, he was already in bed and my mom warned me that his walking has gotten worse. Years of alcohol abuse have given him permanent nerve damage. I got up early this morning and decided to go for a run, secretly hoping to avoid seeing him. Plus, I wanted to get in a training today because I've only got two months left until my first marathon. I have a love-hate relationship with running.

Actually, I hate it, but I'm oddly addicted to it. Really all it's gotten me are some free t-shirts, a lot of shin splints, and something to share with my dad. We used to run together on this very strip of land when I was a little girl. I was always frustrated that I couldn't keep

up and I'd fake assorted sports injuries, hoping to get his permission to slow down.

Now I'm afraid to pass him. I continue jogging in place, trying to stay with the beat of Lady Gaga's "The Edge of Glory," playing on my iPod. My dad stops moving forward completely and coughs, trying to catch his breath. He looks old and fragile and breakable. I watch him struggle, and for a second his condition feels like justice to me. After all, he did this to himself: wrecked his ability to walk, not to mention run; ruined his career as an attorney; completely self-destructed. My mother had to pay all the bills on her music-teacher salary: his medical bills, office bills, bills from car accidents and unnecessary parking tickets. I've watched him die so many deaths, yet he's still here, and suddenly I'm angry that I have to stop behind him and see him this way, that *I'm* the one who's running in place. My anger turns to annoyance that I'm losing valuable seconds on account of him; when you're training for a marathon every second counts. He taught me that. Can't he just go faster so I can go faster?

My anger turns to guilt. It must be difficult for him to barely be able to do something he once loved and did so successfully. I don't want to rub that in, to cause him shame, by passing him. How would it make him feel to have me—the daughter who used to fake shin splints to get out of running with him because she couldn't keep up—pass him, and not because she's fast now? Then again, I can't jog in place forever.

Guilt turns to compassion. This is the same man who took me running every Saturday as a little girl, on this very same seven-mile stretch of land. The man who coached my middle-school soccer team and even let me dress him up as a woman for Halloween one year. This is my friend and dad. Now here I am, training for my first marathon, following in his footsteps, and for that I'm proud.

Up until this moment, even with all his drinking and self-destructing, I've always thought of my father as immortal. His outfit today features

a pair of spandex neon yellow shorts that shouldn't be worn by anyone over the age of twenty. He's always tried to dress the way he thinks young people do. It wasn't until I was twelve that I realized my dad had turned twenty-seven for the past six consecutive birthdays.

I guess you always know that in the circle of life your parents will grow weaker and you'll grow stronger and a moment will come when you'll trade places with them, but I never imagined it happening quite like this. Maybe I'm afraid to pass him because I don't want it to be true. I'm no longer the child in this relationship. And I can't give him back his legs. He loses his balance for a moment and stumbles on the path and I'm surprised that my instinct isn't to run and help him; instead I feel paralyzed like my own legs don't work. It comes to me that I'm not supposed to help him. The greatest gift I can give him, as unnatural as it feels, is to pass him.

In this second, I realize, I totally accept him for who he is, with all the drinking and everything that went with it. Maybe not permanently, maybe not even an hour from now. But for just this moment I'm okay with it all, free of resentment, because I love my father. And I will do what he can no longer do himself.

I turn up Lady Gaga as loud as she can go, and I run. I don't look at him when I pass him. I don't know that it's ever easy to pass a parent. All I can do is the one thing he taught me. *Run.*

A wrong turn in life isn't always a bad thing. I wouldn't wish cancer on my worst enemy, but I wouldn't take it back for anything in the world.

Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

Adventures in Caregiving

Josh Rivedal

FEW THINGS INVOKE a more vehement denial than when your Significant-Other tells you they've just been diagnosed with cancer. Yes, denial—not just a river in Egypt.

“Bah humbug. You're definitely an Aquarius, not a Cancer, you silly goose.”

But when Significant-Other's tears didn't stop—I knew that life had just changed, shifted, and become both a bit more real and surreal all at the same time.

An entire spectrum of thoughts immediately came to the forefront. What is she going to do? What am I going to do? I'm happy to take care of her as best I can. But damn, it's gonna be a lot of work. Why her? Why me?

Significant-Other had an especially difficult roller coaster of emotions—her mother had died from cancer a few years back, her lovely but hairless cat died from cancer the year prior, and her best friend was in the process of dying from an especially nasty cancer, extinguishing a flame that should have shone bright for at least another thirty years.

However, Significant-Other made a smart decision at the very beginning. She reached out to her friends and her especially Brave-Sister

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on my behalf, to help me help her. I couldn't do it all alone, and she knew that prospect of doing so would break me in two.

The coming weeks were filled with doctors appointments, second opinions, paperwork, and scheduling surgery. Finally the doctors found a small tumor at the base of her tongue.

After a wee bairn of a Scottish doctor resected (fancy word for “sliced out”) a three centimeter piece of the back of her tongue, she was on pain drugs galore—many of which made her an irritable nauseous mess, which then brought on a terrible and persistent anxiety, the likes of which I had never before seen.

I knew how to deal with *my* anxiety. I speak about it in front of hundreds at a time, after which people will pull me aside to discuss their own anxiety. I get to hug them and be with them one-on-one for a few minutes. But how was I supposed to deal with the anxiety of Significant-Other for an undetermined period of time?

Significant-Other's anxiety was a true test of my patience, not to mention my mental health. Self-coaching, a call to a therapist friend, and honest conversations with Significant-Other were all what the doctor ordered to make my life and caregiving a bit more manageable.

Never once did I think Significant-Other would die from the diagnosis or the treatment. But the emotional baggage that one accumulates in the interim is heavy enough to make some sink for good.

Why do these things happen? Who the hell knows? Spending your life trying to gauge whether God is fair or unjust, or wondering whether the government is out to get you with cancerous crop pesticides is about as useful as chasing your own tail.

Hindsight does provide a luxury—the ability to wax poetic on any set of circumstances. With the benefit of clearer vision, and with Significant-Other's successful cancer treatment in the rear-view mirror; it's a bit easier to see that the whole ordeal was not and still is not easy to see in the slightest. I have to squint my eyes and focus on the bits I

Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

want to see, the ones that help me move forward, to heal and to help others. I get to choose my own viewpoint and my own adventure.

The purpose I take away from things like Significant-Other's cancer and my own brush with suicide in the past—it's all about refinement, at least for me (I already won the "white guy born in the United States of America" lottery, so that skews things a bit). I get to learn something from this—or at least I get to try.

I learned how to ask for help—something I still struggle with at times. Significant-Other asked for help from Brave-Sister and her friends, which in turn helped me find a way to ask my own friends and even Significant-Other for help while I played the role of caregiver.

I learned about grace and dignity. Three of my grandparents died from cancer before I was born. I don't worry about it, but there's a good chance I'll probably get it too (sweet b'jesus let it be something confined to my pinky toenail, if anything at all). I now have a better idea on how to ask for help for myself and how to navigate the health-care system.

I learned how to find my funny, even in the face of a s&*+ storm.

I learned how to better love myself, my friends, and my lover.

I learned.

Making it Big

James Lecesne

YOU WILL NEVER MAKE IT,” the man says.
“Not big, not in this business.”
Though what business it was of his I can’t recall.

His name?

His name was...

His name is gone.

But his words burned tattoo like into my brain.

“No, you will not make it big.

And do you know how I know this?” he asks me.

And I say, “no, no, I don’t know.” Noting that I say *no* twice in the same breath.

And that can’t be good. No, no. As though something deep down in me doesn’t really want to know. But never mind, here he goes, he’s on a roll, the man.

“Because,” he says, “you are too gay.”

And that gay word slices clean through me like a bullet through butter.

But hey, I grew up with people saying worse than gay to me.

They raised fists, sticks and once a boot to make their point.

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Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

They called me faggot, sissy, girly boy—and that was just to get my attention.

“I hate to say it,” the man says in that way that some people just love to say, “but

Gay will get you nowhere.

Gay is your Achilles heel.

Gay is not the universal formula for success.”

And just like that, I’m done for, discarded, plucked from the running and transformed into a common loser without my say-so.

So I say, “fine,

But let me get this straight.

Are you suggesting that in order to succeed I will have to be less gay?”

“No, he says, that’s my point. You? You couldn’t be less gay if you tried.”

And then in a manner that astounds me to remember even now, the words tumbling from my twenty-something year old mouth, I tell the man, “Well then I guess I’ll have to change my definition of success.”

This will not be the last time that it happens.

Others will come along offering sidelong glances and outright statements;

they will be there at every turn, reminding me

to tone it down,

butch it up,

watch my back,

don’t dance so much,

gesture less,

lose the lisp,

straighten up,

buckle down,
wear a tie,
don't be such a girl.

In short, they will want me to be less myself –
as if such a thing were possible.

A New York agent will kindly agree to represent me as an actor, but not before he offers this: “Are you aware that you come off a little gay?”

A little?

Yes, I will tell him and then I walk out of that office head held high, but his word will bang in my ear for years, “A little gay.”

It's faggot, sissy, girly-boy all over again.

A woman with a big desk will caution me about the dangers of declaring my self.

She will list the casualties, recount the missteps of others in the business of show who showed too much, dared to say, went that way, were themselves.

Then she'll end her speech by saying: “In this town, if you want to live by the sword, you must die by the sword.”

I will get the point.

It's the raised fist, the big stick, the boot—all over again.

Others will be subtler.

But it won't just be the show biz folks who flick an eye or quick clear their throat to keep me close in check. Everyone will try to rein me in, shut me down; signal me to just get over it already—as if such a thing were possible.

It will go on like this for years.

Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

And yet despite how hard they try,
Despite the many warnings, threats, prizes, perks
They offer me to be something other than my Self,
I will never stop.
It just won't happen.
Turns out, people come and go.
Self sticks true.

Now that I am so much more my Self, I know that making it big
Means making more and more myself.
Making it big means expanding self to include everything skin-out,
the whole damn world in fact. Can I make it mine?
You too. Yes, even you.
Whether you are lesbian, gay, bi, transgender, cisgendered, two spirit,
androgynous, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, hetero or
just some undeclared freelance super hero on the fly, can I make you
mine?
Is there room enough in me for you?
Is there love enough?

Can I convince each and every one of you that though I am standing
here, right here, and you are there, right there, together WE are the
universal formula for success.
And that—
That togetherness is what works and is
What allows us all to stand and in one voice say to the Man,
Please, step it back a bit so you can see what's what and what.
It looks like to, yes, yes, truly make it big.

Author Biographies

In Order of Appearance

Nikki MacCallum holds a B.M. from New York University. In 2011 MacCallum won the MAC nomination for her writing and performance of her New York City cabaret debut show, *Matchmaker Matchmaker I'm Willing to Settle!*, which has since had full productions at ArsNova, MGR Playhouse and N.Y.U. She recently finished *26.2*, a coming of age memoir that parallels running a marathon with the struggles of an alcoholic parent.

James Lecesne has been telling stories for over 25 years. His short film, *TREVOR*, won the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short and went on to inspire the founding of The Trevor Project, the only nationwide 24-hour suicide prevention helpline for LGBT and, Questioning youth. James is also the founder of The After The Storm Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to offering support to community centers in New Orleans that are working with youth and the arts. www.jameslecesne.com

Josh Rivedal is an author, actor, playwright, and international public speaker. He has spoken about suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and diversity in more than ninety locations across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia.



He has served on the board of directors for the New York City chapter of The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. He wrote and developed the one-man play, *Kicking My Blue Genes in The Butt*

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(KMBB), which has toured extensively throughout the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. His memoir *The Gospel According to Josh: A 28-Year Gentile Bar Mitzvah*, based on KMBB and published by Skookum Hill in 2013, is on The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's recommended reading list. He writes for the Huffington Post. He is the founder and executive director of The i'Mpossible Project—a non-profit media company designed to entertain, educate, and engage on suicide prevention, mental health, diversity and social change. Coming soon in conjunction with The i'Mpossible Project: *Living Mentally Well and Crushing it While in College*, and *Winning the War on Depression and Living Mentally Well*.

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About the Book

It's finally ready.

I am excited to share that the first [i'Mpossible Project book *Reengaging With Life, Creating a New You*](#) (January 13, 2016) is available for pre-order... today. Like, right now (#word). At all the major outlets where books are sold (click the links):

Go to www.iampossibleproject.com/one to order an autographed paperback or an e-book at Barnes & Noble, iBooks (Apple), and Kindle (as of October 15).

I'll be honest: This is pretty big. I've been curating this book for more than two years—fiddling with the right combination of stories, authors, and concepts. If you've followed along on the [blog](#) then you know the truth already: I put my everything into this book. Absolutely everything. And you're getting a little of me and fifty incredible authors and stories when you get this book. It was exhausting and wonderful and a once-in-a-lifetime process to produce this book and I am just now getting the confirmation I hoped for: *It was all so incredibly worth it. Thank you for that.*

So Here's the NittyMcGritty

Pre-order sales matter a ton. They show booksellers and publishers that there is interest in what I and these 50 authors have written. It would mean the world to me and to these authors if you would [preorder a copy](#)

As a thank-you for pre-ordering, the first 200 people to pre-order will get a "thank you" in the book—forever, in the front where everyone can see.

Josh Rivedal & 50 authors

Not satisfied with a “thank you” in the book? I’ll also send you a free download of my first book *The Gospel According to Josh: A 28-Year Gentle Bar Mitzvah*—also on The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention’s recommended reading list.

#holylguacamole ... that’s some good readin’

All you have to do is send in a proof of purchase—a scanned receipt, a screenshot, a selfie with your receipt—to tony@skookumhill.com. You have no idea how much the fifty authors and I have been encouraged by your comments, your tweets, your emails, and letters. Thank you for inspiring me, and us, to keep pushing forward with this book. I’m so grateful to have you in this community and I don’t know if I say it nearly enough. Thank you... and thank you for helping make this “i’Mpossible” book, possible.

[Click here to preorder an autographed paperback copy or an ebook copy](#)

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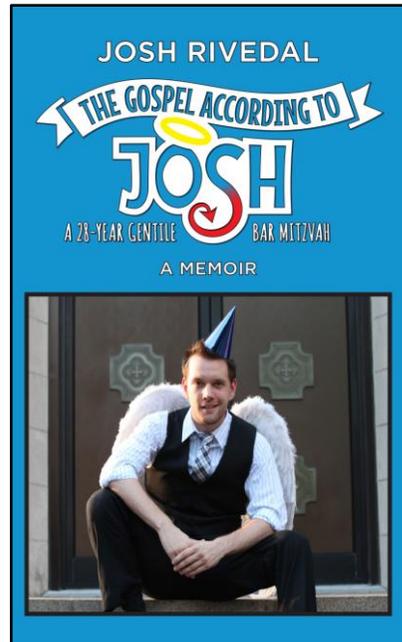
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ALSO BY JOSH RIVEDAL

The Gospel According to Josh: A 28-Year Gentile Bar Mitzvah
(Based on the one-man show *Kicking My Blue Genes in the Butt*)

By the time Josh Rivedal turned twenty-five, he thought he'd have the perfect life—a few years singing on Broadway, followed by a starring role in his own television show. After which, his getaway home in the Hamptons would be featured in *Better Homes & Gardens*, and his face would grace the cover of the *National Enquirer* as Bigfoot's not-so-secret lover.

Instead, his resume is filled with an assortment of minor league theatre and an appearance on *The Maury Povich Show*—a career sidetracked by his father's suicide, a lawsuit from his mother over his inheritance, and a break-up with his long-term girlfriend. Tortured by his thoughts, he finds himself on the ledge of a fourth floor window, contemplating jumping out to inherit his familial legacy. In turn he must reach out to the only person who can help before it's too late.



Available on Amazon, Kindle, at B&N.com and at

www.iampossibleproject.com/GATJ

On the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's
Recommended Reading List for survivors of suicide loss

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