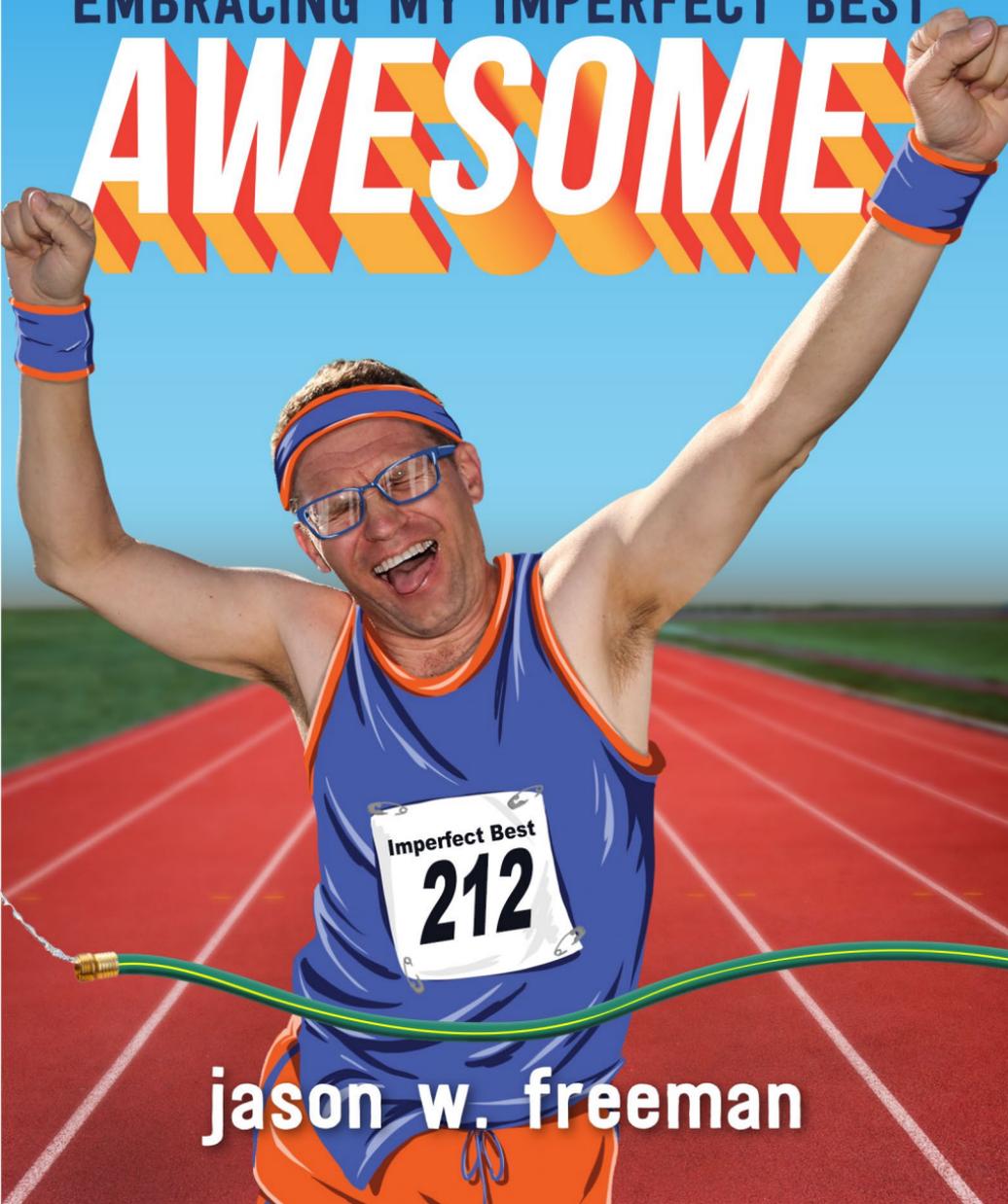


AWKWARDLY

EMBRACING MY IMPERFECT BEST

AWESOME



jason w. freeman

AWKWARDLY AWESOME ENDORSEMENTS

“A book is written once every decade that changes lives more than any other book... Jason Freeman’s book *Awkwardly Awesome* is that book of this decade and beyond. Jason literally took what most would consider his greatest liabilities, a speech impediment and coordination problem and turned them on their heads to become his greatest assets!

Jason tamed his coordination awkwardness with yoga and accentuated his speech impediment by becoming a rock-solid motivational speaker... and may I add, one of my favorites! Get ready to ignite your life in a positive direction as you read this amazing book!”

~ DENIS NURMELA
TheYESman.org

“With a winning combination of practical inspiration and heart-felt autobiography, Jason reminds us not only of the importance but the necessity of bravely going for our dreams.”

~ FRANK SHANKWITZ
Creator and a Founder of the Make-A-Wish Foundation and
Motivational Speaker, wishman1.com

“Jason enlightens us with the transformation process that most of us experience in stunning silence. I love this story. I love that we all have our Awkward Awesomeness and I love that after reading this book, many, many will discover, celebrate and share theirs.”

~ DAVID M. CORBIN
Author of *Preventing BrandSlaughter*, and *Illuminate*
Mentor to Mentors

“I’ve been honored to have Jason speak at several of my Evolving Out Loud events—his open heart and sense of humor is a gift to us all.”

~ KYLE CEASE

Author of *I Hope I Screw This Up: How Falling In Love with Your Fears Can Change the World*

“Courageous, humble, inspiring--and perfectly imperfect. Jason’s authenticity is contagious, and can help you grow your own seed of greatness.”

~ TAL BEN-SHAHAR

Best-selling author of *Choose the Life You Want*

“I first saw Jason speak on Kyle Cease’s Evolving Out Loud stage 2 years ago in Venice, California and it stopped me in my tracks. I burst into tears right in the front row! His story broke my heart wide open. I gained a deep respect for his brilliance and bravery. His storytelling showed me that I too, was holding myself back because of “a war within”. Each of us have personal battles that are largely fought or lost alone. Jason’s talk illuminated that for me. I was inspired to work with him in his Talk Swap process. We’ve been working together weekly ever since and it’s no lie to admit that our Skype sessions have freed me to reach dreams and go deep to places I had not imagined possible. Here is his story. I highly recommend his first book and, if you need a breakthrough from a limited mindset or a closed up heart, Jason is the coach for you.

~ TRACI ROBINSON

Storyteller, performer, coach and multi-million dollar real estate broker in the Hamptons.

“*Awkwardly Awesome* is chock full of the imperfect and the wonderful.”

~ BEN GAY III

The Closers, BFG3.com

“Jason Freeman is a man that not only has an authentic and true heart and the compassion of 1000 men, but also the courage of a warrior!

Joining Jason on his perfect journey of imperfection will be one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself.

To say you’ll be inspired is a huge understatement. You’ll be transformed!”

~MIKE KEMSKI

#1 Bestselling author *Change Your Energy, Change Your Life!*,
MikeKemski.com

“With a refreshing mix of humble autobiography and practical insight, Jason brings joy to the often painfully serious business of self-improvement.

Jason is Smart, Daring and Different. That makes him the very special person he is!”

~ RON KLEIN

The Grandfather of Possibilities, Inventor of the Magnetic Strip on the credit card, validity checking system and more.

“Brilliant” does not just describe Jason’s unique perspective (it is) Brilliant is the intensity of the light with which Jason Freeman illuminates the darkness of self-doubt that engulfs each of us from time to time. If you find yourself dealing with the fear of being less than perfect - and who doesn’t? - this book is for you. Jason’s words have helped me experience everyone - including myself - with more compassion. *Awkwardly Awesome* is an ‘awesomely’ inspiring guidebook to a more joy-filled life in this magnificently perfect imperfect world!”

~ JEFF SALZ, PH.D., CPAE

Author of *The Way of Adventure*

“It’s every man and woman’s desire to strive to go from imperfect to perfect in their lives, only to gain the realization that imperfect is indeed perfect! Jason Freeman instills this in you, as the reader, and takes you through the journey from shoe strings to all-important acorn principles! Allow Jason to “WOW” you as he did me. This is why he has an open invitation for life to speak on any of my Habitude Warrior Conference stages which typically boasts a 2 year waiting list. Way to go Jason! Keep changing lives one day at a time.”

~ ERIK “MR. AWESOME” SWANSON
Speaker, coach, CEO Habitude Warrior Int.
www.HabitudeWarrior.com

“When I met Jason Freeman, before he became the speaker, yoga instructor, writer and coach he is today, he barely spoke a word. Jason was worried about being understood (or misunderstood), about saying something wrong, about how he stood and walked, and it showed. As we became friends, I discovered his huge heart and passionate commitment to connect, love and serve others even if it was uncomfortable for him. Jason began posting on Facebook every day, even those days when he didn’t think he had anything to say. First text, then photographs, then video, then speaking on podcasts, radio shows, to groups and on stages and now this timely and wonderful book, *Awkwardly Awesome*. Jason leads by example, teaching that we are the only ones who can get in our own way of really living full out. It’s our imperfections that make us human, loved and loving. His courage in going first makes it possible for the rest of us to believe in him and ourselves. Thank you for being my friend and one of the most inspiring human beings I have ever known!”

~ ALISON BW PENA
International speaker and Life-to-Legacy consultant
BadWidow.com, AffluenceCode.com

*More praise about Awkwardly Awesome
and Jason Freeman at the end of this book.*

AWKWARDLY AWESOME

EMBRACING MY IMPERFECT BEST

by

jason w. freeman

Imperfect Best Book Series



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DEDICATION

To our ancestors who did their imperfect best
to create this abundant world we live in today.

May we do our imperfect best
to steward their gift and pass it on
to our grandchildren's great-grandchildren.

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My parents who've cherished me as a gift since the day I was born. My Mom also did one of the final edits on the book. Thanks Mom!

All my English teachers from grade school through grad school. I dearly love writing. Thanks for nurturing this love.

Rachel Labarre: I came to Rachel, one of my beloved yoga teachers and said, "I want to write a book. I have a thousand page tangle of random ideas and twice that many in my head." She said, "Take a deep breath," and proceeded to give me writing assignments that would become the initial rough draft of my book. Thanks Rachel for getting me past the point of overwhelm to the point of enjoying the process.

Tonie Harrington: I posted on Facebook that I was writing a book. She sent me a Facebook message that she would love to edit it. Little did she know that editing it would turn into a huge project. This book is so many times better than it might have been because I answered her message with a YES! Thanks from the bottom of my heart Tonie. You are brilliant!

Mark Lamaster: I hadn't seen Mark since college. He found me on Facebook and said, "I've written a book. I have practical knowledge that could help you." Mark did not disappoint. He gave that practical knowledge very generously.

Chris Taylor: The guru of all things technical in my business from my sizzle reel, to my website, to the layout of this book, its cover and even the author photograph. Everybody needs a few gurus. Chris is definitely one of mine.

Lamont Hunt: Lamont is a dear friend who has become an artistic genius. Chris and I asked him to illustrate some clothing on me . . . track clothing, people! Something that fit the running theme with extra points if he made me look good. With his help, I look better than ever!

It's taken me a lifetime filled with loving family and friendships to have the courage to write this book. I would love to thank each beloved person individually, but that would be a book in and of itself. So I will simply take this occasion to say Thank You!

FORWARD

This book exists because a fresh path to living has become available to me. I had heard tell of its existence, but didn't believe it was accessible to people like me. For most of my life, I chose the path of being ashamed of, and trying to cover up what I thought was most imperfect about me. I possess both extremely visible and not-so-noticeable imperfections that seem all but invisible to the outside world.

However, unlike many people, my noticeable imperfections are defined as a disability. When I was born, my umbilical cord got kinked like a garden hose, resulting in a loss of oxygen that left me with a pronounced speech impediment and coordination differences. Cerebral palsy is the general term used to describe the disorders caused by that loss of oxygen.

For example, if we were sitting in a cafe talking right now, you would notice that I talk slower than 99% of people and that sometimes it sounds like I'm hammered. But I'm neither slow nor drunk. It's just my normal everyday speech pattern. As for my lack of coordination, during a track meet in seventh grade, I actually threw a shot put backwards. True story!

As a result of those imperfections, I fought myself for years. **Do you know what it's like to be at war with yourself?** I declared war on my imperfections and tried to battle my way beyond them. I spent twenty-five years on the warpath with myself. I wish I could tell you that, as I traveled further along this path, I started to win more and more battles. But the truth is that the warpath consumed

AWKWARDLY AWESOME

me. I hustled for perfection, but all I gained was a high level of stress and self-loathing that threw me into frequent periods of sadness and frustration. This wasn't the life that I knew in my heart I was capable of living and wanted to live in my heart. I wanted more, but didn't know where to find it.

I've written this book because I've finally found a fresh path—a path that takes great courage, because the first step requires that we acknowledge what we perceive as wrong with ourselves. This can be a frightening path, and many people never walk down it for any number of reasons.

When an individual acknowledges their perceived imperfections, they arrive at a fork in the road. One branch of that fork continues down the path of reliving the same story and expressing the same pain over and over and over again.

The second branch is a journey into the unknown. It involves asking ourselves questions about what those imperfections could possibly mean besides the stories we've kept reciting to ourselves over the years. **That second branch also provides different options to meet our perceived imperfections head on and possibly move forward rather than stagnating.**

This is a **frightening path**, because it changes who we think we are and how we understand and interact with the world. It **changes our core assumptions about our self-worth.**

A basic part of human nature is to fight change, because change will likely bring all manner of emotions to the surface, emotions we have been afraid to experience. It's tempting, therefore, to turn back to the same actions,

FORWARD

feelings, and outcomes—the same denial, the same false smiles of contentment, and the familiar pretense that everything is all right, even though deep down we know that everything is not all right.

It can be absolutely agonizing to step beyond what we know. We come up with endless excuses as to why this first step won't work, is a waste of time, is dangerous and will end in failure. The relieving news is that it only takes a brief trek down this courageous path to get started. That first step brings us further along than we've ever been before. **The process of turning our limitations into our jet fuel is the process of taking that first step followed by another.**

Be aware that there may not always be that big “A-Ha!” moment that suddenly turns your imperfections into a life of bliss. I've found it's more of a gradual process of stepping up to the bright mountaintop and beholding the view. Occasionally we may slip into a dark valley where we flounder in search of the light. It's a challenging journey, but I've learned that the **rewarding epiphanies come from the daily effort to find the light.**

There's no way I could have aligned with my best life until I aligned with the perfection of my speech impediment and lack of coordination. They are perfect because they express the wholeness of who I am. This discovery simply wasn't available to me when I was on the warpath against myself.

In this book, I talk about my trek down that warpath and how my war almost consumed me; however, through many difficult twists and turns I discovered a fresh path.

It's utterly important to understand that the more

fully we learn to express ourselves as we really are, the more we can enhance our quality of life and the quality of life of those around us.

I hope my journey and the things I've accomplished so far will serve as encouragement for you as you embark on your journey to turn your limitations into jet fuel. Most of all, I want to impart to you that **this journey is within your capabilities. The human capacity to grow and adapt is unlimited. You deserve to be happy and live out your dreams.**

The following pages contain autobiographical reminiscences, and a few questions sprinkled in for self-introspection and inspiration. I know I have turned my imperfections into jet fuel, and I believe I can help you do the same. Hopefully, someday soon I will write a book filled with stories of clients who have successfully found their way from their personal warpath to a fresh path using my methods.

I've come to believe that **doing our “imperfect best” is one of the most powerful things we can do for ourselves and the world.** I use the phrase “imperfect best” to describe a liberating attitude towards life. **Doing our imperfect best means accepting that there will often be mistakes, flaws, and rough edges. These mistakes, flaws, and rough edges add to the beauty of who we are and provide us with the power to connect with others.**

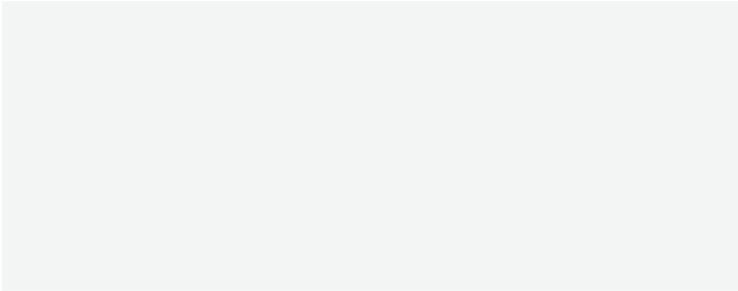
I am inviting you to travel this path of self-acceptance and enhanced self-worth with me. It's a difficult, but wonderful journey, and I know that it works. I believe you, too, will find your personal path of self-acceptance and self-worth.

IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

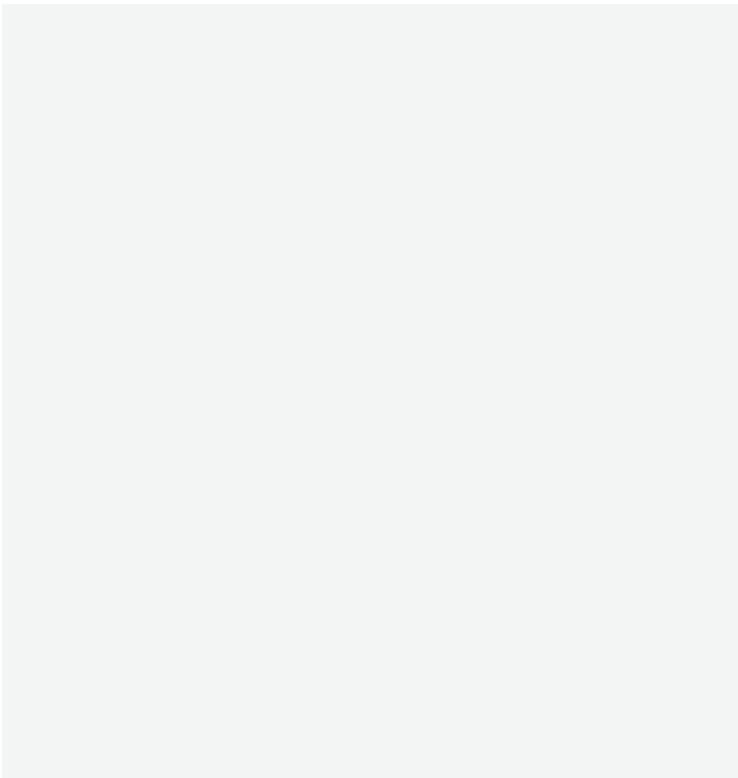
A Section Just For You

IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

What has been a change that you have made in your life that has felt really good?

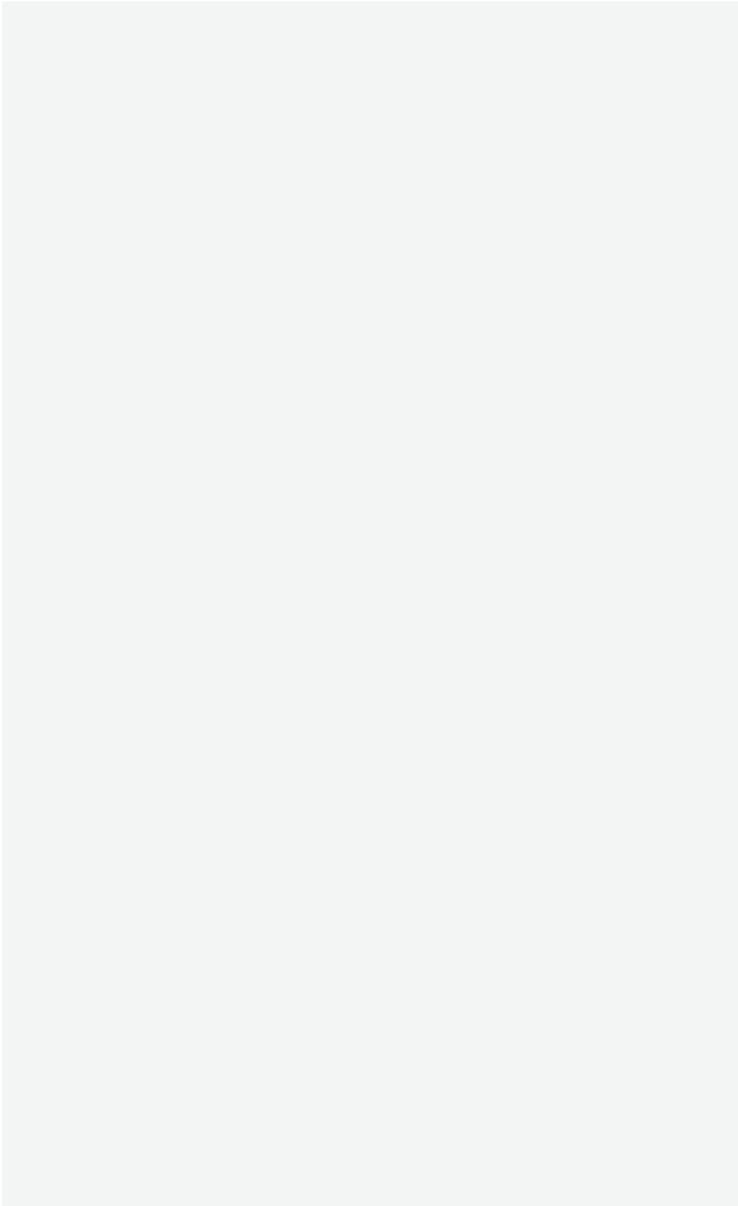


What has been the significance of this change for you?



IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

What's the importance of making peace with ourselves?



INTRODUCTION



A Letter To My Seven-Year-Old Self

Hey Kiddo,

You are so cute! You love to run around with your shoestrings untied and imagine the world just the way you want it. You love making plans for what you will be when you grow up, and you love changing those plans every other day. You do this because you can. You do this because life delights you and there's just so much to do. It

AWKWARDLY AWESOME

seems so easy to succeed in life.

You love your Mom. You love your Papa. You declare yourself the President of the Land on which you and your Mom and Papa live. Mom gets out poster board and writes “The Rules of the Land” as you dictate. You are always thinking about making the world a better place Little Man, and it’s good to see that you are starting close to home.

As Mom and Dad tuck you in, they tell you, “I love you. Sleep tight.” They also frequently say, “You are the best.” Yes, you are the answer to their prayers. They see you so clearly as the miracle you are.

As of yet, you haven’t begun your long and brutal campaign of focusing on what your body can’t do. Your voice is still perfect to you. You fit into your body like a comfortable pair of tennis shoes, just right for your exploration of your world. Aglow with happiness, you have no sense that you could ever feel any differently about yourself.

You look at grown-ups in awe, but at the same time wonder why they aren’t as free and as fun as kids are. When you are grown up, you are determined to be different.

But “grown-up” will come all too quickly for you. Too soon your voice will begin to sound to you like nails on a chalkboard. Too soon, gym class will become less and less fun as you begin to keep score and compare yourself to the other kids. Too soon, you will find that, at least in your mind, you are constantly losing. And you’re gonna hate to lose.

Practice, Kiddo! Remember to practice and

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practice. Remember that by practicing over and over again you already have learned to walk and talk.

You are going to become very tempted to substitute the words, “I can’t,” and “It’s so unfair,” for your winning attitude of “I’ll practice until I get it.”

Sure, some people will seem to pick up things twice as fast as you. They are running their race. You are running yours, simple as that. But you are going to be sorely tempted to make things infinitely more complex for yourself. You are going to try to diminish other people’s accomplishments so you feel better. You are going to try to convince yourself that if something requires too much practice, it’s probably not that much fun to achieve anyway.

You are going to try to talk yourself out of striving for your dreams. However, Kiddo, an attempt to make your life easier by not going for your dreams actually works in reverse. Life becomes infinitely more complex when you’re bored, because you have systematically removed challenging activities from your life. To put it simply, when you are bored you will start to worry, obsess, stress out, create drama, engage in vicious hypochondria, and generally feel miserable in your awkwardness. When you’re bored, you will make the sound of your voice and your unique coordination into a major, epic disability. When you are bored, you will become morbidly afraid of one day dying.

Let me give you the Cliff Notes version on this one: If you are bored and not challenging yourself by practicing the things you truly want to do, you are going to feel like you are withering and dying.

Living fully is about breathing deeply, showing up, laughing, and playing. So, find more and more and more

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things in life that fascinate you and that you love. Then practice them everyday with all your heart.

If you give something a try and it's still making you miserable after you've given it a fair shake, by all means stop doing it and move on to something else. There are plenty of other options. There is absolutely no reason to make long-term plans to do something that only makes you feel miserable.

For example, fear of there not being enough money can become a tough addiction. So, to make money you will be tempted to do things that you feel like crud doing. There are countless "another day, another dollar" jobs out there. Fear could keep you in a job like this for twenty-five or thirty years. Remember that if you cloud that precious smile of yours by doing work that you despise, there simply won't be enough time to do the things you love.

When you love the work you do you are much more likely to practice and practice until you develop a talent for it. So search constantly until you find work to which you can give your heart. Let the world pay you abundantly for your talent and your heart. Understand, though, that it may take quite a while to get paid "abundantly" for your talent and your heart. But, it is truly worth the journey. The money you make from doing what you love will feel infinitely more valuable than money you would make from doing things that weigh you down with fear. Let your career be your teacher, guiding you to become the person you most want to be.

Get rich quick schemes won't teach you this, so don't waste energy pining after them and chasing them. But, if a million dollars falls into your lap without much

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effort, thank your lucky stars and take it.

Use all money that comes into your life to enhance your experience. Be generous. Don't get lazy or too comfortable. Laziness creates boredom. If you need a refresher on what boredom does, please re-read the above.

Here's an important word to never forget—**TRUST!** Kiddo, notice how naturally you trust yourself right now. At your age you don't even think twice about it. You go with your ideas, instincts and intuition. Soon, however, you will start convincing yourself that others know better than you. You will convince yourself that you ought to defer to others because you have a speech impediment and coordination problems. You will quiet yourself because you feel your voice is less important than other voices. This tactic may make sense in your pre-teenage brain as a way to cope.

But, Little Brilliant One, realize that quieting the best in you won't help you grow into the person you want to be, and definitely won't help the world evolve into what it wants to be.

In about thirty years you might discover this Marianne Williamson quote, but I'm going to give it to you a bit earlier and hope you understand:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other

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people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles, Harper Collins, 1992. Pg. 190-191)

Yes, Jason Freeman, even as a boy you are a Free Man. But as you quiet yourself out of fear that what you really think and feel is not good enough to be said, your freedom will be diminished and the world will be less free because of your silence. So speak up and speak proud when you convey the truth within you.

At the same time, always be conscious that you are a healer. Use your words for healing. Always speak your truth as kindly as possible. (Note: You might develop a habit of being sarcastic and coarse at certain points in your life. Cut them both out. Neither represents who you truly are.)

Life becomes so much easier when you speak your truth and follow your intuition.

While we are on this subject you might try on many masks in life. As soon as you notice that you are putting one on, it's time to take it off. Remember, wearing a mask quickly becomes hot and claustrophobic. Furthermore, masks don't fool people who are comfortable in their own skin for long. They spot trickery and move

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away.

Kiddo, you want to attract people to you who are comfortable in their own skin. They can help you heal and call you on the things you are trying to hide.

(Note: Speaking of comfortable in your own skin, when you read this, the word “yoga” will look to you like a misspelling of the word yogurt. After all, right now you live in South Dakota in the 80’s. Nevertheless, find out what this word means as soon as you possibly can. Find books on it, and take a class at the soonest opportunity. Otherwise you might wait till you’re thirty-two to stumble into a yoga class. You are meant to move. But fear of looking awkward as you move will most likely keep you from playing contact sports. Don’t sweat it. Chronic stress and worry find safe harbor in a body that doesn’t move. The stagnant waters become a murky breeding ground for the multitude of sea monsters the mind can create. Try to find yoga. Learn to breathe. Consistently stretch your body in all ways possible.)

Seven-year-old Jason Freeman, “organization” isn’t your middle name. William is. Your Mom will get a wee bit frustrated with you for losing the red uniform sweater in that adorable picture of you, and many more like it. Your room is often a mess. This all seems fun now, but I tell you, your life will expand as you find ways to organize yourself and do so on a consistent basis. A human drives more cars and lives in more houses than an ant because a human has organized his or her world much more intricately than an ant has.

You can apply the same idea to your own life. You can either vigorously resist organization, which you are doing quite an impressive job at so far I must say, or you

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can figure out how to organize your life and then watch as you create the things you want to create and feel far more relaxed doing it.

The wisdom I'm imparting to you now is based on years of personal experience, but it might not be meant for you yet. Maybe you are meant to go down all the roads I'm trying to dissuade you from traveling. Maybe all those roads have made me into a man capable of writing this letter to you now. Just remember, my Brilliant Young Self, that life is such a mystery. Delight in it. Accept its challenges.

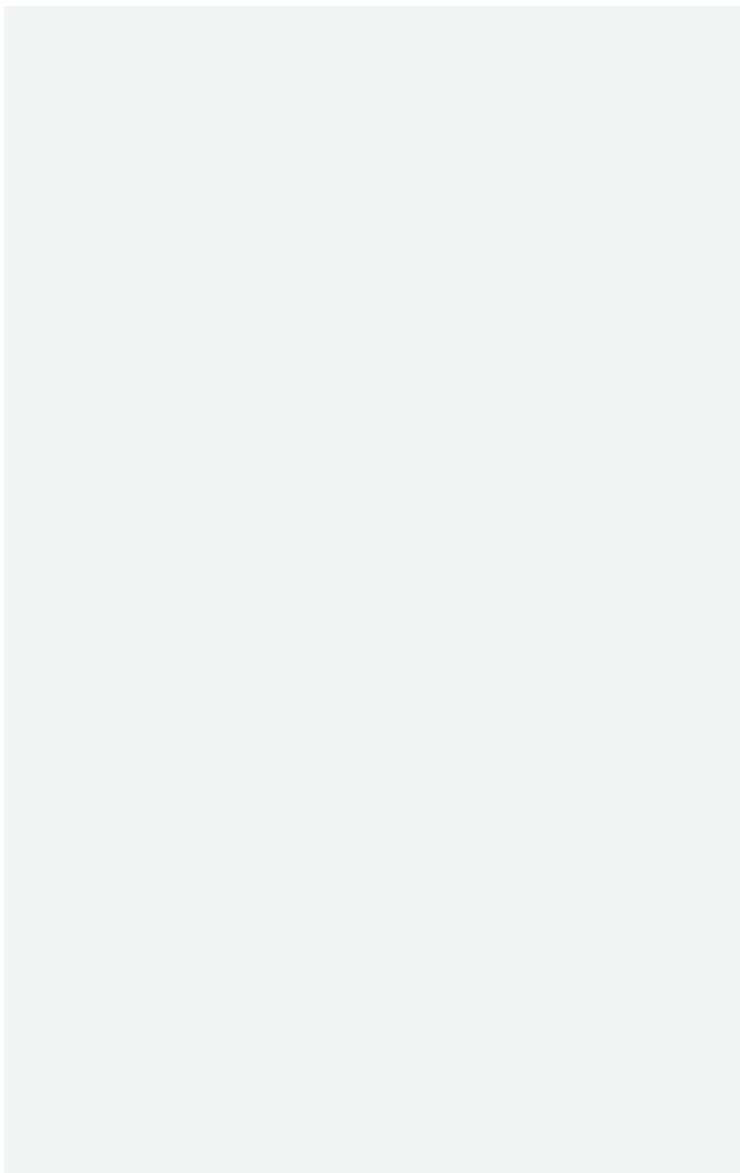
I look forward to seeing you in 34 years.

IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

A Section Just For You

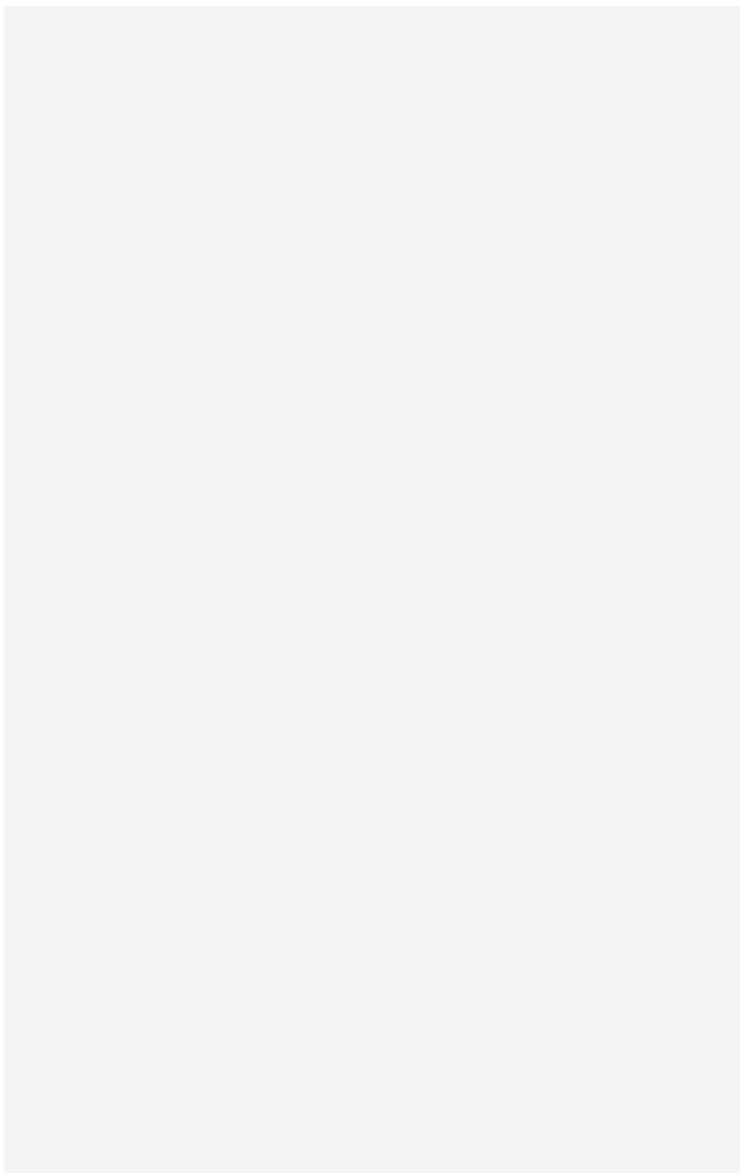
IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

What are the top three nuggets of wisdom you would offer your seven-year-old self?



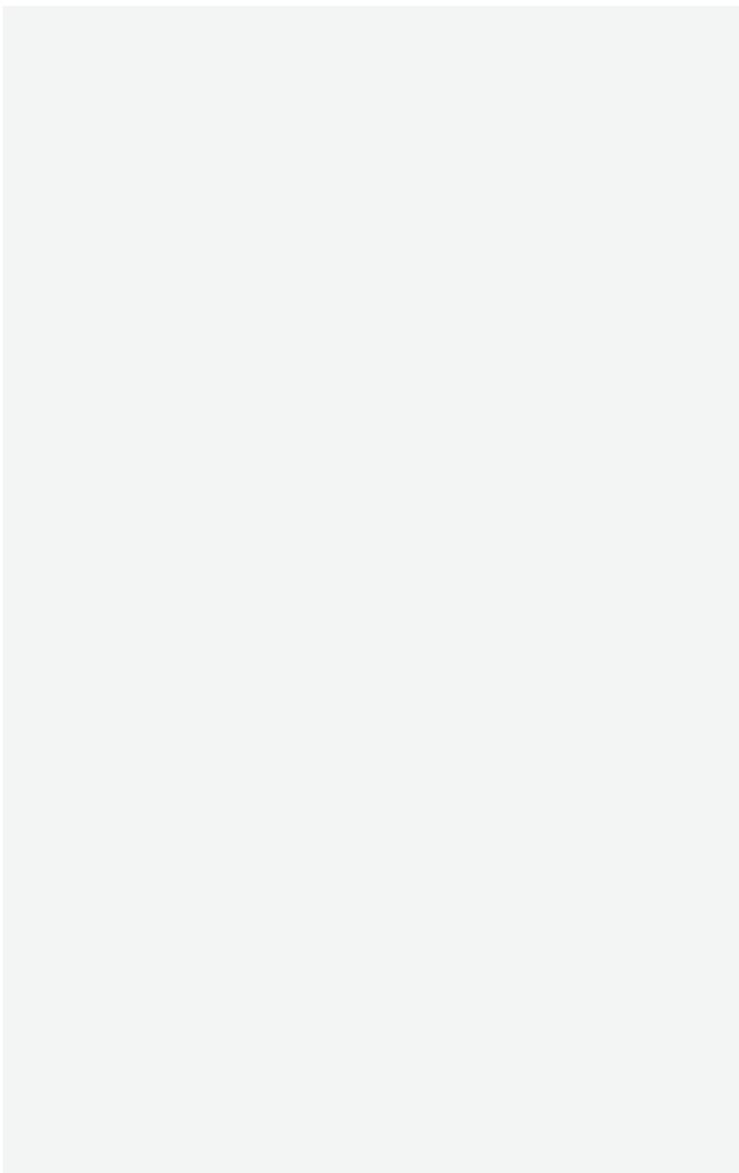
IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

What's the funniest thing you would tell your seven-year-old self?



IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

What's the thing you would tell your seven-year-old self that most surprises you?



Chapter 1

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

I've been trying to write the perfect book since high school. The results are in a large Rubbermaid tub in my closet. I don't know what all is in there, but I do know that the tub makes a great stepping stool when I want to organize my socks on the top shelf of my closet.

This book isn't going to be perfect. Even after forty-one years on this earth, that's almost enough to drive me crazy and throw me back into The-Planning-To-Write-The-Perfect-Book-Phase, the endless brainstorming, the boundless free writing that creates a library of notebooks. Part of my life's purpose is to write lots of books. Yet, at the moment, I use the majority of my writing as a stepping stool. Yes! That joke's definitely on me.

Are there any green Rubbermaid tubs full of brilliance stashed away in your life?

My plan for this “perfectly imperfect” book is to create a conversational autobiography. Hopefully, it will become a **two-way conversation**, so that when I ask **questions** like whether you have a Rubbermaid tub hidden somewhere in your life, **you'll take a moment to think about it and respond**, just as though we were conversing in a coffee shop.

AWKWARDLY AWESOME

As you read this, you can't hear my unique "Jason-from-Sioux-Falls-South-Dakota-Midwestern-accent," because I don't have one. Rather my unique accent stems from a speech impediment. I'm also able to hide my lack of coordination from you that causes me to move somewhat awkwardly. These are the advantages of writing a book instead of meeting you in person. I can hide those imperfections.

Today, however, I'm not writing to hide myself from you. **I'm writing because our individual uniquenesses have the power to draw us into community, the power to bring us out of hiding and into the fullness of what our lives can be.**

If I didn't have a speech impediment and coordination differences, would I be so inspired to connect with large numbers of people through public speaking? I don't know. Part of me is highly introverted and loves to go on long walks by myself for hours on end. That part of me has about as much interest in speaking to large groups as I have in going to the dentist every week.

But there's another part of me that's definitely inspired to communicate with as many people as I can with love and clarity. If everything had been just fine and dandy with my speech and coordination would this inspiration still be there? Who knows?

For much of my life I despised my speech impediment and coordination differences. You'll note I use the past tense—despised. Now I'm growing to deeply love my speech impediment and lack of coordination. Why? My attitude didn't change because my body magically became "normal." **I learned to love myself because I finally noticed that my body was magic and perfect just**

PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

as is. I REPEAT—I learned to love myself because I finally noticed that my body was magic and perfect just as is.

“As is” is always changing anyway. How we view our lives or ourselves is never fixed. There’s nothing huge you need to do at any moment other than to take a few deep breaths and be open to viewing yourself in new ways. This all takes time, but why not?

The fear and desire to be perfect wasn’t in me as a little kid, as near as I can remember. I was so lucky. I was born to two loving parents who believed in me and gave me a very strong foundation.

I’m seven years old and it’s the height of July. Outside is My Territory. This territory seems unbelievably vast because we live in the country on a large piece of land. There are giant oaks as ominous as mean giants, dandelions as yellow as the sun, butterflies as unexplainable as magic. I dash around in flip flops with a knotted bunch of shoe strings in my hands all the while living out every dream a seven year old boy can imagine in his head.

This habit that seemed utterly normal to me at the time seems mighty peculiar as I look back on it. **When was the time in your life when you dreamed the biggest?**

I’ve always been a dreamer. I may talk a bit slowly, but I dream huge and amazingly. This poem that my father wrote about me captures perfectly who I was as a child.

Daydreams

by Jerome William Freeman

*A child can carry on,
Where we leave off,
With plans and dreams
For yet another generation.*

*My eight year old son
Captures the spirit properly
As he answers
(In response to an adult's query
about the future)
"I want to be everything."
Me too.
Even Now*

Jerome Freeman, *SOMETHING AT LAST: Dakota Poetry and Sketches*, Penstemon Publishing, 1993. Pg. 12

As a young kid, my parents told me I was the best and who was I to disagree? I lived in happy agreement with them until the fourth grade. However, I'm sure things had been simmering somewhere in my awareness for years. These things reached a boiling point when I transferred from a private school in Sioux Falls to Valley Springs Elementary. Sioux Falls is the biggest city in South Dakota. Valley Springs has a tiny blue water tower and if you walk out from the center of town to the edge you will hit a corn or soybean field within 10 minutes.

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It's January. Outside, snow smothers the ground. The sky is an unrelenting gray and it's 20 degrees below zero. Inside my grade school, I fidget in an uncomfortable child's desk in Mrs. Olson's class. The old-building heat is claustrophobic. Above our heads a swarm of fluorescent lights buzz noisily. And then, for some reason the realization happens. Something here is not like the others. As I look around the room, I'm puzzled. What could it be? What is different? Slowly it dawns on me. Oh no! What a catastrophe! It's me!

It's me! And life goes on—kind of. I'm beginning to realize that I'm not like the other kids. In gym class, the other boys throw balls and catch them with ease. Often as not, these same balls fly right through my hands or hit my forehead, glasses, chin, or stomach. It's painful and humiliating.

Then, it gets worse. To cope, I decide not to let on that my voice and coordination not only bother me, but mortify me. I repeat to myself, "I hate this! I hate this! I hate this!" I become skilled at putting on the "Happy Face"—you know, the one that makes everyone believe things are peachy, but really you're dying inside.

Do you ever put on the “Happy Face?”

Fifth grade: I have only one friend here. I can't think of what to say to the other kids. I'm a dork. I imagine the other kids hate me. I figure I'm disgusting.

I develop a crush on a girl in my class. I also chew on my shirt because I'm awkward and nervous. The girl won't give me the time of day.

Sixth grade, I go out for the basketball team. I catch lots of basketballs with my glasses. Miserably, I don't score a point all season; but it's a winning season for the eyeglass shop in town.

Looking back, the teachers at Valley Springs Elementary are heroes in my book, but I didn't appreciate them as heroic at the time. I was just trying to survive.

Do past wounds ever come back to you, when you finally decide to make an effort to express the authentic you?

Right now, I feel it—the concern that I'm not getting this first chapter right. The concern appears as pain in my forehead.

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I'm three years old when I decide to dive off some playground equipment. Fortunately, I catch myself with my forehead. Unfortunately, I am so banged up it calls for an emergency room visit, but the nurses won't let my Mother into the treatment room while they work on me. I'm an only child accustomed to being by my Mom's side day and night. This is how I know safety and comfort in the world. Suddenly, my head is throbbing, blood is coming out of me and my Mom is ripped away from me.

Funny that that experience which is so ancient to my life, is coming back to me while I try to type my way through this chapter. Could it be that the same sense of loss of safety and comfort that was ripped away from me is returning in my efforts to share who I am with my readers? As I write, I'm plagued by thoughts of self-doubt that what I'm writing now isn't important enough to be in a first chapter. What if no one reads this? What if this is no good? I was an English major and have a Master of Fine Arts In Poetry. I should know how to write better for heavens sakes!

Generally, the more important the communication, the more we struggle with trying to make it perfect. I notice that I don't experience much self-doubt when I'm talking about the weather. (You could argue that I live in San Diego now and there's no weather to talk about. And that is a fair argument). **Why is this discussion even important? Because, "stuffing" our truth down by not communicating what we need and what we**

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want out of life can hurt us!

The following fictional scenarios give an idea of what can happen when we refuse to communicate our innermost needs and wants:

The book that is loved in dreams slowly dies when the author abruptly quits after chapter 3 because he doesn't think it's any good. He has every intention of picking it up again, but one excuse leads to another, one year slips into another, and the words the author might have blessed the world with collect dust and might as well be pushing up daisies.

There's been a misunderstanding between two friends. There is hurt. There is pain. They take sometime away from each other to cool off. A few days drag into months and the misunderstanding grows in their minds as they don't talk. Each of them wants to reconcile but can't come up with the perfect words to set things right. A friendship that could have so enriched both of their lives dies a slow death.

A woman is passionate that children living in poverty should have all the benefits other children enjoy. She has a brilliant plan to end childhood hunger in California. She has a long list of groups she wants to speak to in an effort to gain support for her plan. She starts to write her speech, only to pull her hair out as she agonizes

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over every word. Eventually she quits, convinced that she is not good enough to deliver this message and that somebody much more qualified and more intelligent will come along and deliver the message much better than she could. No one comes along. She dies. Kids go hungry.

Sad, imaginary scenarios. In our fear, we demand perfection in how we express ourselves. Then we can't live up to this standard, because something can always be a little more perfect. Since it's not perfect, we don't express it. When we don't express what is important, we suppress, and that suppression has a tendency to come out sideways in the form of stress, unhappiness, boredom, numbness, anger, rage, pain, or all of the above. Isn't that fun?

Seeking perfection before we communicate or take action is like running a never-ending marathon.

Imagine training hard for a marathon. In fact, you have trained for four months, following your training regimen to a T, getting up at 5 AM so many mornings when you feel like sleeping in. You're proud of what you've accomplished. Now it's race day and everything is going great. Your running partner is the perfect person to pace you and inspire you. The day is just right, sunny and fifty-five and you are feeling strong—the strongest and most powerful you have ever felt in your life.

You and your running buddy pass people left and right. You can't believe your ears when a person at mile twenty-four screams your time. It's so good, and there are just a few more quick miles to go. The finish line is in sight. You are running your final sprint and pulling far ahead of even your running partner. You see the two women holding either side of the finish line sitting in their cars on either side of the road, and you wonder why

they're in their cars on such a perfect day.

Then, just as you are within two yards of the finish line, the two women speed off in tandem and the finish line disappears over the hill. You are exhausted so you stop about where the finish line would have been, utterly out of breath. Even though the finish line bizarrely disappeared, and you are exhausted after running a full marathon, you are utterly elated because you finished in record time. In fact, you are on top of the world and feel that you definitely have hit a high-water mark in your life. Then, about a minute later you notice everyone racing past you. How can this be? A volunteer rushes up to you and asks you, "Is anything wrong?" You smile and gasp, "I did so good! I finished the marathon in great time. **I really accomplished my personal best.**"

The volunteer says, "I'm so happy you are all right but I need to tell you that you didn't finish yet. **They decided to move the finish line to mile thirty-one.** If you still are interested in finishing with a good time, you best get going right this minute."

You laugh. "What a funny joke to play on someone who has just run their best marathon. You planned that out so well with the finish holders driving off. This will make a great story to tell all my friends."

The volunteer replies, "I hate to break it to you but it's no joke. The finish line is now at mile thirty-one. **The Judge decided to move the finish line to mile thirty-one. So now the old finish line MEANS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.** If you stop here, I'm afraid we can't even give you a t-shirt for a finish, because **you didn't finish.**

Out of control and irate, you scream, "But I ran 26.2 miles! That's the length of a complete marathon." The

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volunteer says in a very calm voice, “I understand that you **THOUGHT it was the length of the marathon. And it was until about ten minutes ago.** But the Judge changed his mind. Now a marathon is defined as 31.3 miles. A marathon is now 31.3 miles because the judge says it is.”

The desire to punch the volunteer out is coursing through your body and with a rush of adrenaline you feel you have the strength, even after running those 26.2 miles. Instead you belt at the top of your lungs, “**But that is so completely UNFAIR.**”

The volunteer’s voice is rising and becoming assertive. “Now sir, if you don’t calm down I’ll have to use my walkie-talkie and call security over.” So you sit down completely dejected and start to cry. The volunteer softens, waits a few minutes and sits down with you. He tries to explain, “You see **the judge believes in going above and beyond.**”

Luckily marathon judges aren’t known for moving the finish line, but **how often do you function as your own judge and keep moving the finish line on your personal best?** We sometimes do this almost reflexively thinking, “Well I can do just a little better.” Or we cross the finish line and think, “**Well that is JUST NOT A GOOD ENOUGH RESULT** for me to be finished and congratulate myself. Or we see someone else running farther than the point we declared as our finish line, and think if they are running farther, “**I’d better run farther SO I DON’T GET LEFT BEHIND.**”

The concept of your personal best can become utterly lost because you never allow yourself a finish line, you never allow yourself a completion point. **Everything you are working on in your personal and professional**

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life becomes unfinished and you never achieve your best, because it is a point you constantly UNDERMINE by creating your NEW PERSONAL BEST.

Allowing ourselves to do our imperfect best is essential to discovering a fresh path of living. If we demand perfection, we either stuff our words, dreams, hopes and best ideas deep inside because they never are good enough to make the cut of the demands we place on ourselves, or we get things out very, very slowly because we keep second guessing, back tracking, revising, and generally shaking in our “running shoes.”

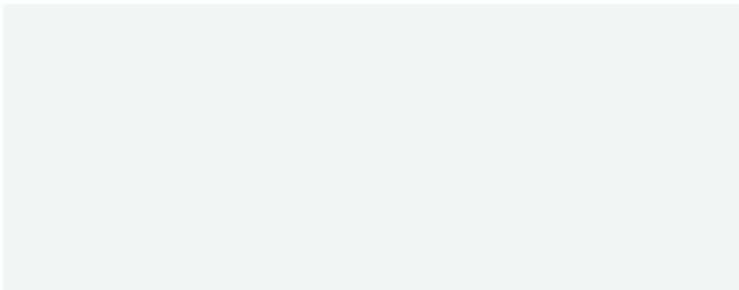
I say “we” as if your journey to becoming comfortable in your own ski will be the same as mine. This of course isn’t true unless you are a clone of me. If you are a clone of me, we really need to talk. Mercy me, I hope we can understand each other.

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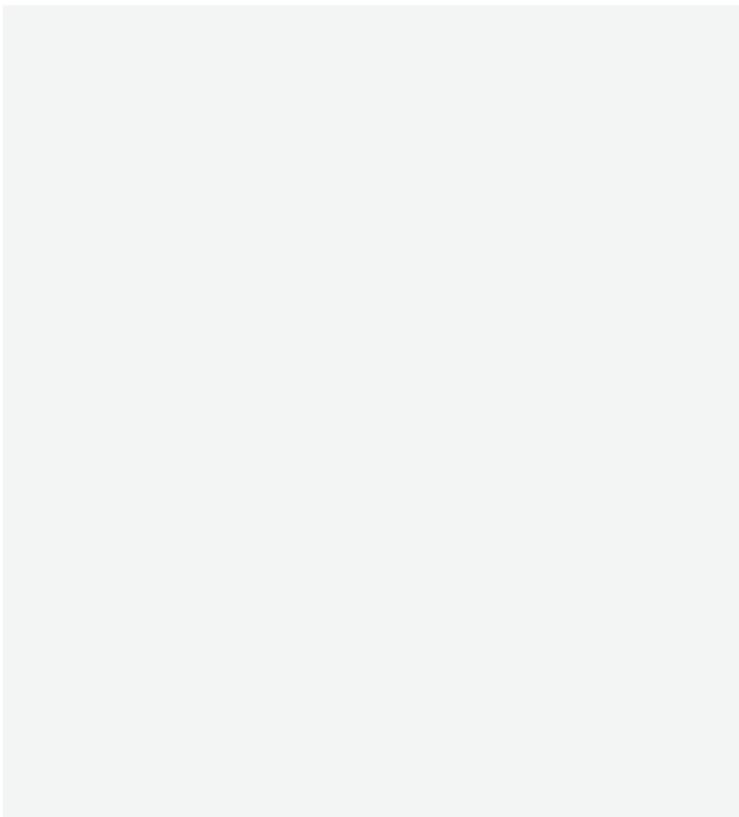
A Section Just For You

IMPERFECT BEST REFLECTIONS

When in your life did you dream the biggest?

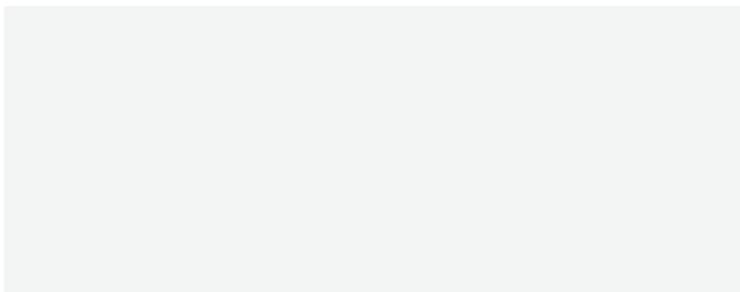


What are your fondest memories of this time?

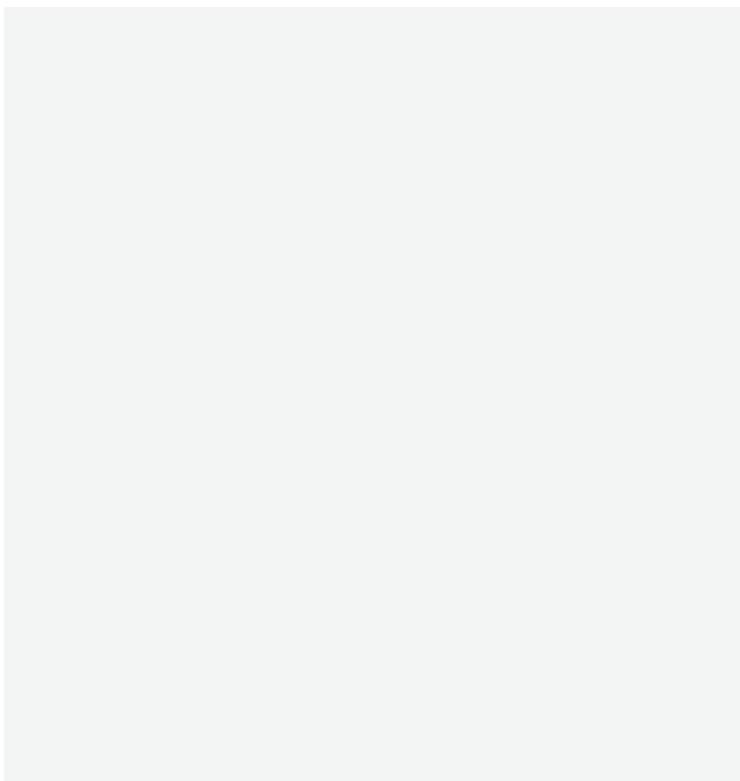


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What's a talent, big or small, that you often hide from the world?



What would it be like to offer this talent to the world?



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