

Sample Chapters



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Joshua Rivedal & 20 authors

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Introduction

LEMONADE | ,LEMƏ'NĀD | : Webster's Dictionary defines lemonade as... yeah, actually we're not going to do that "traditional" definition here. We're going to do a l'il something different with lemons and lemonade and this book.

I'm going to assume you're familiar with the analogy, "life got difficult at some point," and "I took that difficult experience, a lemon, and turned it into lemonade." The point being you took something sour and turned it into something (bitter)sweet.

Life is hard. And if you're fortunate, you'll only have to learn or create one recipe for lemonade.

A lot has happened in my life since our last volume of *Lemonade Stand* was released. The abridged version: there was the tragic homicide of someone close to me. Multiple crisis situations. And the loss of several relationships that I loved and valued.

After losing a parent to suicide, being in crisis myself after losing that parent, taking care of a loved one with cancer (who thankfully survived); I thought my lemonade-making days were over. But over these past two years I've had to learn multiple new recipes, and I had to figure out a way to make it all—and fast.

Unfortunately (or perhaps, fortunately, depending on how you look at it), that's the way life is sometimes. And as a result of learning these new recipes, I've found the capacity to create deeper and more meaningful relationships, cultivate self-love and

acceptance, and discovered the ability to find beauty in even the tiniest of crevices.

“But, Josh,” you say, “Don’t you see: everything happens for a reason.”

And to that I say, “shut yer face, yo.” I have a strong dislike for this phrase. Tell that to the parent who just lost their two-year-old to lymphoma. Everything does happen for a reason—but only if we choose it.

Back in late 2017, I got to be a co-author on a journal research paper based on some of the stories in the first three *i’Mpossible* books. The subject matter dealt with the trajectory of the survivor of suicide loss, and my co-author (who also did the heavy lifting on this paper) was and is my dear friend, colleague, and homie-extraordinaire, Regina Praetorius, Ph.D. who also happens to be the head of the Bachelor of Social Work department at the University of Texas at Arlington (#namedrop). In our research we found that those who lost someone to suicide who had the healthiest trajectory were the ones who decided to make meaning of their loss (by starting a support group to help others, by creating a non-profit foundation, by using their experience to make sure no one in their community every felt worthless and alone). Essentially, we found that everything happens for a reason if we CHOOSE it.

Quick tangent: one of my biggest pet peeves is hearing about someone going through a difficult time and then learning that a well-meaning loved one qualifies the difficult experience with, “everything happens for a reason.” That statement marginalizes that person’s pain.

“Everything happens for a reason,” doesn’t give enough context to the experience and is either a statement of faith or a statement of choice. If you have faith then you can either rest in that faith and be comforted or rest in that faith, be comforted, and move forward with some kind of action. If it’s a choice, then one can move forward with action to help themselves heal, to make meaning of the experience by helping others, or both.

In my field (suicide prevention, mental health, social justice, diversity) we talk a lot about encouraging help-seeking behavior. I’m cool with that and I believe in that, but we also need to help people cultivate healthier “help-offering” behavior. Circling back to “everything happens for a reason,” if we encourage someone to reach out for help and they take a risk and do so; and then the helper offers them “everything happens for a reason,” with no context or follow up—guess who might not ask for help ever again?

So, as I stumble down from my soap box, you might be wondering... just where in the heck are you going with all this, Josh? Can’t we just get to the stories for Pete’s sake? And to that I have two responses, 1) who is Pete? and 2) yes, we can get to the stories.

Like in our last *Lemonade Stand* book, these are twenty powerful authors with true stories from: historically marginalized communities, a refugee, abuse survivors, ... and more; and in each the storyteller chose themselves. At some point they found themselves in a seemingly impossible situation and said, “I’m possible.” Each gathered the lemons life threw at them, concocted their own recipe for lemonade, and they share that with us within these pages.

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These stories are no more than 1000 words, but unlike the main I'Mpossible book series, *Lemonade Stand* has no specific theme (our first main series I'Mpossible book had a diversity theme and our second had a mental illness theme).

Read *Lemonade Stand: Volume II* in order, out of order, backward, forward, or upside down (I dare you)—and feel free to pass it along. #sharingiscaring

Without further ado, I present to you the three of the twenty marvelous, fantastic, splendiferous authors in The I'Mpossible Project's *Lemonade Stand: Volume II*.

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Surviving Myself

Landon Dickeson, MS, NCC

THERE IS NO LIMIT TO MY SKEPTICISM, and that includes my own life. In my late teens and early twenties, I began questioning my worth. Although beliefs of worthlessness had always been there, I began to dig at and tear into them with relentless analysis. By the age of twenty-one, I honestly believed the world, not just friends and family, but the entire planet, would be better off without me. The culmination of these years of self-loathing was the night of my aborted suicide attempt, which exists now as clipped sections of vivid film. The images that linger in my mind are too striking to share without offering a “trigger warning.” However, one aspect I believe is important to share is that the emotional pain of my death on those who loved me did not even register.

After that night, I took the time and made it a priority to think through my experiences. Investment in intentionality is one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, choices I have made in my journey to be the best of myself. I engaged with counseling, education, and medication to find the best combination of treatments for me. The whole of a person cannot be treated with medication or talk-therapy alone. One of the most profound

interventions for me has been to construct a metaphor in which the “daily me” stood atop a high wall and looked down upon the “critical me” and the “child me.” For some time, it completely escaped me that these two “unacceptable” parts could be built up to the level of the daily me. I came to realize that I had sectioned off and shunned parts of myself because the environment I grew up in forced me to act as an adult, and thus I had continued to punish myself in the same way that I was punished as a child. Recognizing that these parts needed to be built up and valued would prove a turning point, and one that ultimately led to the “daily me” and the “child me” embracing one another. In essence, I learned to comfort and soothe myself.

The way one remembers an experience tends to speak to the way one views the world and oneself in it. Changing and or accepting this can make all the difference in terms of surviving oneself. Therefore, the only way to liberate myself was to accept all parts of myself as they are and let them be. “Let it be” might qualify as one of the most difficult notions for Landon to engage with. I’m an analyzer, processor, and doer. Letting it be does not compute as productive. But that is EXACTLY what I needed. There comes a point where processing ends and letting it be begins. Both processes require intention and courage. Be it your last day, your first day, or any of those in between, face your day with bravery and intention.

Perspective aside, being with myself is still a struggle. Not daily, but some days it is an all-day struggle. Not against suicidal thoughts, but against the depressive and anxious symptoms. When we experience abuse, or trauma of any kind, we begin to process that experience in a way that allows us to make sense of

it. We need to find a way for it to fit within our view of how the world works; which, in turn, affects the way we view ourselves. What is the meaning of this? Why me? What is my place in all of this? What does this event and my behavior in it mean about who I am? If for example, a child is abused or neglected by their parent, they may internalize the message that they are worthless and unlovable. Such messages are interpretations of the value of self and place in the world, all of which are understandable given such circumstances. As a result, we begin to define our self-image and our value (or lack thereof) through that lens. This is not a conscious effort as we move through the business of surviving, but rather, these definitions become beliefs that drive our behaviors. Essentially, we end up treating ourselves the way we were treated by our abuser, or by how the experience made us feel. As a result, caring for and about self goes out the window.

For me, self-care was always about refilling my cup. It has been wonderful to find that caring for myself has resulted in not only refilling, but growing, my cup! How I did this might be the most important part of how I have learned to survive myself. Over time, I began to recognize the importance of alone time to simply recharge and decompress. There is nothing more exhausting than being surrounded by people. There is nothing more enjoyable than sitting quietly and alone in a safe space (maybe with one, trusted other). Accepting these truths about what feels good for me has allowed me to invest in them, which in turn recharges my batteries faster and prepares me to do the work of being with others. Moreover, there has also been a process of comforting that young boy inside me when things get overwhelming or when I become triggered. It surprises me still that conjuring an image of myself as a child and comforting him

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results in a calmer presence in the moment. I visualize myself hugging the younger me and telling him that everything is okay and that I will take care of him no matter what happens. Such a strange concept to picture and imagine. Nonetheless, it undoubtedly comforts me to attend to him, to myself. Over time, I am working towards enjoying and appreciating myself more. It has been my hope that this process increases my capacity to empathize with others, and I believe that it has. Wonderfully, it has also resulted in my desire to not die. I find that I not only have value in this life that I live, but I also enjoy it.

Viet-Aus-American Girl: World Citizen

Celestie Nguyen

HEREDITARY TRAUMA. It's an interesting term used to describe the delicate relationship between first generation children and their immigrant parents. My parents were refugees who fled from Vietnam in the height of the war. First coming to Australia, settling down and raising my brother and I, and then ultimately relocating to the United States nearly eight years ago.

Hereditary trauma refers to trauma that first generation children subtly inherit from their parents' struggles. It's a complicated feeling of guilt and frustration; caught between feeling indebted to fulfilling your parents' ideals placed on you because of their immense sacrifice and feeling as if you owe it to yourself to pursue your own happiness *due* to their sacrifice. It's a constant battle of wondering if the path to making your parents' sacrifice significant is one that is worth their potential disappointment. There is a large amount of cognitive dissonance at play, leaving you never quite satisfied with the decisions you've made.

For many Asian cultures, the family is a unit and it is uncommon to venture away from the safety of the nest. Westernized families emphasize the importance of an individual

identity and the pursuit of individual happiness. However, in Asian cultures, your identity is centered around the family unit. We are taught to provide and care for the family unit as a whole, and to sway from that path to venture on your own may quickly appear selfish. This applies to something as seemingly trivial as my education. I feel a crippling amount of guilt for choosing to pursue a university almost a thousand miles away from my family, being one of the few who has ever left the immediate proximity of home. I justify these choices to myself by saying that I owe it to myself to choose what is best for me. This is quickly followed by a wave of guilt and knowing that I willingly stepped away from the quality time that I'd be able to spend with them.

I was raised in an extremely Westernized society, growing up in suburban Australia and attending a mostly Caucasian private Christian all-girls school, in which I was one of two Vietnamese girls. My friends always seemed to have more freedom than I, being able to gain independence at an age that seemed unfathomable to me. This was heightened after my move to the United States and going through puberty in a society that I had only ever seen idealized in the movies. I had a difficult time socially and emotionally adjusting to the world around me. I was thirteen in a country where I knew no one, and two years younger than all my peers at school. I have miraculously built a life for myself, in both states I call home. I have been fortunate enough to grow through my formative years with people who I now consider family.

Being shifted from the only world I knew to a foreign land at a young age has allowed me to be extremely adaptable. Looking back, it will never strike me as anything less of a triumph that I

survived those first few years. That version of myself and the life I led seems like a blur. As the years went by, my Australian accent has faded—a revelation heartbreaking to me, as it was my only tie to the country I claimed as my own.

I feel guilt to have turned my back on my Asian culture for so long, and now am afraid to face that truth. Walking into an Asian grocery store, and only being able to make out half the product labels but understanding enough to float by. As a child, I was ashamed and embarrassed of my heritage, something that made me so distinctly different from others. As an adult, I am unlearning those mechanisms against myself and healing from those self-inflicted wounds. I was taught to speak Vietnamese at a young age and it is how I communicate with my family. The older I've become, I've realized the importance of being able to talk to my parents in their first language and how much that means to them. Everything that I used to reject as a child—the language, the food, the traditions—means a great deal to me as an adult, with the heavy understanding that my parents are also growing older.

I feel as if I am constantly living in the threshold of “in-betweenness.” I will never fully belong in a Westernized culture, carrying my family's traditions and values with me. I am not as in touch with my Asian culture as I should be and can be quickly outed to others as white-washed. Adding onto these complicated feelings are those of ‘otherness’ due to my move to the United States as a child. Foreign enough to still hold an accent, I will never be accepted as someone who belongs in the United States. Yet, without fail, returning to Australia after many years, I am reminded of who I no longer am; the accent is faded, the food I

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only come across on occasional visits, and the friends I lost touch with years ago.

In 2016, after almost six years of living in the United States, I finally received my citizenship. I will always consider Australia my home, but I hold a soft spot for my places of growth in the United States, having gone through puberty in Texas and college in Florida. Many ask, “where do you prefer, Australia or the United States”—Australian is who I am, Vietnamese is what I am, and the United States is where I grew into myself. I don’t know where I belong, or what culture I can claim as my own. That is scary, but it allows me the full freedom of movement and change. The idea of identity is fluid and subjective. I am still creating my own, with all the countries, cultures, and people who have shaped me.

Starving for Self-Love

Nicole Hmatkowsky

GIVE ME A PLAY, GAME PLAN, way to win and the deal is done. Tell me I cannot do something, and I will make it a point to do it better than expected. Pressure has been something I've never really disliked, more of an obligation to succeed. From a young age, I've been a perfectionist. From athletics, to grades, looks, body fat percentage, and guys. The list continued to grow as I grew older.

There were three major turning points in my life; Junior year of high school, sophomore year of college, and the summer I graduated with a BS in education.

High school was the best yet traumatic years of my life. I struggled with body image, however I was “popular” and couldn't let people see I had insecurities. I succeeded at nearly everything I did. Yet I was still drinking until I couldn't remember anything I did, and the worst part was, I didn't know why. I just felt empty. I tried to validate myself with dating the coolest jock or surrounding myself with party girls. My body image altered my senior year and with prom around the corner I ran myself into the ground—literally for hours on end—creating a vicious eating disorder. This eventually merged into an emotional binge eating disorder. I would consume massive amounts of food that I typically didn't enjoy, stuffing myself until I

physically passed out or threw up. Rather than feel emotions, I would eat—anything, everything. It didn't matter, it felt better than feeling happy or sad. It was so uncontrollable, it almost felt like a high no drug would ever give.

As I cycled back and forth with weight throughout my first couple years of college, my weight became noticeable. I would go months of being over 200 pounds, finding myself under 150 the next. People talked. I was an athlete. Everyone noticed...and judged. The drinking got worse. Basketball was the only thing where time stopped, and my thoughts didn't eat me alive. Basketball saved my life—sports were the only way I knew how to cope.

Speaking of coping, I sucked at it. I had terrible taste in men, searched frantically for validation from guys in the absolute worst way and woke up every day feeling like I lived two separate lives. I would cry myself to sleep and have terrible night terrors.

During my sophomore year in college, I thought dieting and looking my skinniest would do the trick and all my insecurities would vanish. I began experimenting with diets again, but this time I added in a college sport and heavy weight lifting. Soon, I stumbled upon diet supplements and that's where I crashed. I was at the lowest point of my life; frail and always angry due to being hungry. Adding alcohol into the mix and then the pressure of being a leader on a team made things even messier. Ironically, I was sitting in a special education class at school and felt uncomfortable. I never felt like I did before, and I had a feeling something wasn't right. I was right. I stormed out of class into the bathroom and projectile vomited everywhere, I wound up

passing out and hitting my head on a toilet, where another classmate found me time after.

That day was the first day of my recovery. I was hospitalized immediately by my school and my parents were notified. Embarrassment didn't even cross my mind, because I wanted help. I needed it.

School wouldn't let me go back to being a resident until I agreed to get counseling. This was something I never understood because it was "stupid." I was the epitome of a young child throwing a temper tantrum in the counseling department because I refused to "talk to someone about my feelings." I realized soon after that wasn't my fear. The fear was accepting the idea of being imperfect.

After about a year and a half of on and off counseling I had conquered this disorder. Or this imperfection I liked to call it. I beat it, just like a game in over time, or a classmates' test score, I overcame it and would never have to waste my time going over the disorder again.

Anyone who thinks they totally wash away their imperfections, you don't. You just learn to love them. Or deal with them.

It was nearly graduation time and I never felt more accomplished. Winning a championship at the collegiate level, graduating in the top, and beating an eating disorder, who could beat that resumé?

But I was still broken. I was empty and did not like myself. I wound up attempting suicide several months after graduation. I didn't want to die, but I didn't want to live this way either. My brain wouldn't shut off—I was my own monster.

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I did not die, obviously. However, I did get admitted into a treatment facility. I went to treatment EVERY DAY for months. Being a perfectionist, I guess did help me in the end.

I was determined to never feel so terrible again to not want to live. I worked. I still work. I still binge sometimes, and I have my breakdowns. But they are fewer and far between. They get easier to come down from. God put new people and things into my life for me to change my mindset and my life.

I find the value in small things like smiles, nature, and children rather than medals, honor rolls, and trophies.

Life is full-circling. I am now a capable and functioning person. I work as a teacher and basketball coach. I have seen the work of my own treatment help others that surround me every day. I am physically in the best and healthiest shape of my life, and I am learning how to truly love myself.

My suicide attempt was not and is not who I am. However, it has shaped me into the strongest version of myself possible.

Author Biographies

In Order of Appearance

Landon Dickeson, MS, NCC, graduated from the University of North Texas with a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and a focus on trauma and crisis intervention. Landon has been working and volunteering in the mental health field for eight years, and he has experience working with risk of harm assessment, suicidal ideation, grief, sexual assault trauma, veteran trauma, and DBT group work. Landon practices as a therapist at Ranch Hands Rescue in Argyle, TX, where he works with abused animals and traumatized people.

Celestie Nguyen is a graduated from Flagler College in December 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology, a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, and with a minor in Mathematics. She is a passionate advocate for human rights issues, the LGBTQ+ community, and mental health. She is a feminist. She is the proud daughter of Vietnamese immigrants and believes that diversity is beautiful. She seeks to do meaningful work helping to uplift others and to bridge the human connection within communities. She is hopeful for a near future that consists of equality on all fronts for all humans.

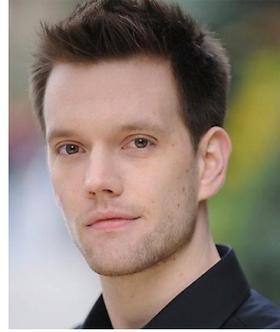
Nicole Hmatkowsky is an inner city, second year college graduate, and resides in Philadelphia. She has a passion for helping people, sports, nature, and traveling. Nicole currently teaches in an elementary school, is a nanny, and is a high school level basketball coach. Nicole is also involved in CrossFit and competes in local tournaments. Alongside athletics, Nicole loves to travel

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around the world on her summers off. Nicole also speaks to younger high school women about body image and eating disorders. Nicole still seeks counseling is involved with advocating for self-help.

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Joshua Rivedal is the creator and founder of Changing Minds: A Mental Health Based Curriculum and **The i'Mpossible Project**. He is trained in human capital management with an emphasis in coaching from NYU, and is also trained in QPR, ASIST, and the teacher's edition of emotional intelligence at Yale University's Center for Emotional Intelligence. He has spoken about suicide prevention, mental health, diversity, and storytelling across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia. He currently serves on the advisory board of Docz, a startup peer-to-peer mental health app. He wrote and developed the one-man play, *Kicking My Blue Genes in The Butt* (KMBB), which has toured extensively throughout the world. His memoir *The Gospel According to Josh: A 28-Year Gentile Bar Mitzvah*, based on KMBB, is on The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's recommended reading list. His second book, *The i'Mpossible Project: Volume 1—Reengaging with Life, Creating a New You*, debuted #1 in its category on Amazon in January 2016. He is a co-author on two journal papers, one on the trajectory of the survivor of suicide loss, the other on surviving trauma.



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The i'Mpossible Project is an organization designed to entertain, educate, and engage on suicide prevention, mental health, diversity, storytelling and social justice.

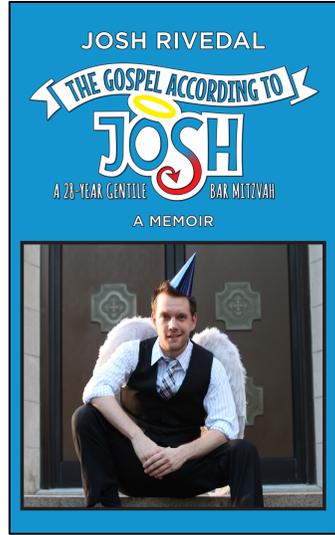
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The Gospel According to Josh: A 28-Year Gentile Bar Mitzvah

(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/the-gospel-according-to-josh

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

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A Toolkit for Your Mental Health

Changing Minds is curriculum that combines lecture, storytelling, group discussion, and improv theatre to enhance emotional development—providing hope, help, and saving lives. Changing Minds was first developed for The College of New Jersey in 2015. The Mental Health First Aid Kit™ component was then added and piloted at the Southeast Missouri Suicide Prevention Conference in 2016.

Our mission is to create supportive environments that promote healthy and empowered individuals, families, and communities. We aim to teach the tools people need to address their own mental health effectively by: providing an in depth and evidence based education on mental health; an understanding of brain and human development; teaching participants about coping tools; and showing the crucial steps to help oneself or a peer, colleague, or loved one in crisis.

Changing Minds curriculum is broken down into five modules.

- The Basics of Mental Health
- Developing Coping Skills
- Storytelling and Support Systems
- Living With a Mental Health Condition
- Helping Yourself or a Friend Thinking of Suicide

Each module has been adapted for: middle school, high school, college and university, and the workplace.

www.changingmindsstrong.com

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