

Swinging Back to Life

By Geneva Kelly

Five years after my son's diagnosis with Type 1 Diabetes, I accepted the fact that a full night's sleep was a thing of the past. Still, the lack of sleep was getting to me. When I woke up to check on him, the quiet of the night was like a tornado sucking me in. With one month until my 40th birthday, I wondered if I could be having an early midlife crisis. "This is your life," said the voice in my head.

To say time flies is an understatement.

After moving a few times, breaking up with my child's father, having a less than satisfying job, and no sleep; it took years to finally be content. Content and bored that is. Sure I had written some good stories, finally got my articles published online and tried dating again; which was interesting. But something was still missing.

My past was full of adventurous things. I had been parasailing, snorkeling, horseback riding, and had flown a small plane. I had even been skydiving! But now that I felt like *an adult*, it was different. Being a mom was great. Finding balance however, was hard. That carefree girl I used to be was gone. The thought of doing the same thing day after day, for one more year was painful. I started thinking. What were some things I hadn't tried yet? I'd never been waterskiing. Never learned a new language. Never eaten Sushi or a Corndog. None of those seemed significant enough to change my life though. I remembered always wanting to do a back handspring, or join the circus. Then it hit me: The Trapeze!

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If at 40-years-old I could fly through the sky and *live*, things would have to feel different. My body was in decent shape. But how would I hold myself up? How does anyone hold themselves up? I decided to worry about it in the morning and let myself dream of possibilities for the rest of the night.

With the sound of the alarm, came a nudge of excitement. Instead of feeling tired, I was eager to start the day. I made my son's breakfast and sat down to watch some trapeze videos on YouTube. To my surprise, there were kids doing it. Granted, their bodies bounce back faster, but if a seven-year-old could climb a huge ladder and swing from their hands, what was I afraid of? (Besides broken bones or death?) After the first few snippets, it was official. For my 40th birthday, I would fly the trapeze!

As luck would have it, I'd be in New Jersey for my brother's wedding that weekend. There was a school in New York that was only a half hour away. But who would go with me? Anyone? Would I be comfortable enough to do it alone? I decided to call some friends and ask them to join me on my new adventure. Each one told me I was crazy.

Not to my surprise, they each had a reason they couldn't come. One was dealing with back pain, the other had shoulder issues and the next complained of not having extra finances. The last one pretended she never got my message. I checked the year to make sure we were all turning forty and not eighty.

Again my inner voice spoke to me. This time it was more of a confirmation that *change* was necessary.

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Part of me agreed I may very well be crazy. But the part that longed to be free couldn't wait for the day to come. My birthday was one day before the wedding, so to avoid visible bruises, I scheduled the class with a week to recover just in case.

Never would I have guessed what happened next. Two days before going, I convinced my friend who's terrified of heights, to let go of her worry and go with me. Lord knows miracles happen because that same night, when I told the story at my brother's house, his fiancé said she would go too! My brother joked, with seriousness; that if anything happened to her he was not marrying a vegetable, and it was her choice to act like a child.

That is exactly what she did. The three of us made a day of it. We found exotic stores with trinkets and funny things that put us at ease before going.

Finally, with our hearts pounding, we showed up at the rooftop building where the trapeze stood about thirty feet in the air. A huge net spread out on the bottom of this long rectangular looking contraption. Still, we agreed it didn't look as scary as we thought. Then the ground training started. They secured a belt around each of our waists tightly. It was thick and felt strange. Like most warmups, we started by stretching. We practiced how it would feel to balance our bodies in a completely unusual way. This was no regular swing we were about to get on. After our brief introduction, it was time to fly.

They called my friend first and by the time she made it up the ladder she was crying. The other people in the class cheered her on with encouragement. With tears in her eyes, she reached out for the bar swinging toward her. She grabbed on and swung forward, back, and forward again. And with a big swing she tucked her knees into her body to flip backwards and grab the bar with her legs. It was so close. Her left leg slipped off the bar and she hung upside down like a

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monkey, screaming. We couldn't help but laugh hysterically! Nervous laughter, I guess. But it was one of those heart felt belly laughs.

My brothers' fiancé, being about ten years younger than my friend and I, was next in line. You would have thought she'd done it before because she made it look easy. Her body went the right way and she listened to the cues perfectly. She dropped down with the biggest smile, and flipped out of the net almost like a dancer, taking her bow.

Then it was my turn. Adrenaline rushed through me with each step I took closer to the ladder. My fear was clouded by curiosity, and I was high on excitement. Until half way up, my body had its own reaction. My hands, my legs; even my mouth started shaking. After making it to the top, I was surrounded by a view of New York City. Everything looked small except the net in front of me. I felt numb standing at the edge of the open space. Now I understood why my friend started crying. It was scary! I prayed I'd remember to arch my body while holding on, jumping, and listening for cues to make the right moves... all while diving in to the intensity of the moment. Somehow I did it! Though there may have been some accidental words coming out of my mouth, on the way.

Instead of falling onto my back when dropping down from the bar, my momentum flew me forward. I dove superman style. My hands and knees slid for a brief moment on the net. Exactly what they said not to do. Fortunately, the exhilaration made it painless (at the moment). It gave everyone another good laugh. Especially us.

Forty was looking better already. And it was just the beginning of a new me.