

**Everything I Never
Wanted to Be**

Everything I Never Wanted to Be

*A memoir of
alcoholism and addiction,
faith and family,
hope and humor*

Dina Kucera

Dream of Things

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First Dream of Things Edition

*This book is for John and my girls.
In the end we may only have pieces of a great life.
But those pieces really kick ass.*

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Prelude

The doctor rolls the stethoscope over my stomach and then stops. He says, "See. Right there. Can you hear it?"

I listen. Then, as clear as day, I hear your heartbeat. It is confirmation that you are with me and I am with you.

As I listen, I try to picture you and what you will be like. And I know that whatever the future may bring, I will always be comforted by the sound of your heart.

I'm okay with the fact that I always give up.
I have a hard time believing I will ever have a good life.
I leave my family for people who don't care about me.
I don't have any real friends.
I'm attracted to the ugliest of people.
I've learned to like the violent fucked-up life style.
Shooting speed always comes first. It's not up to me anymore.
I share needles.
I'm a cutter.
I'd rather be in pain.
I'm okay knowing I will die. It won't take long.
I feel like I'm alive to show people what happens to those
who never stop.
In some sick way I enjoy not knowing if I'll make it through
this shot.
I have decided that when I get caught doing something by
the police I will kill myself right away.
I've destroyed my family.
I have become everything I never wanted to be.

Carly
sixteen years old

The Funniest Mom in America

I was doing the Funniest Mom in America TV show at the Laugh Factory in Los Angeles. They announced my name, so I got this burst of energy and ran up on the stage like I normally do.

I grab the microphone and...nothing. I stand there, staring at the audience. You could hear a pin drop. The longer I stare, the longer they stare.

Some young girl in the front row screams, "Boo! Get her off!"

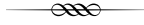
I've been doing this for eighteen years! What the hell is going on? I could tell them about my day job as a grocery store checker, or about the family that lives under my mother's bed, or about how my grandson's leg brace gives him super powers, or the time my husband attacked a drug dealer with a stick, or how a caseworker suggested Cosmic Bowling as a way to treat my teenage daughter's heroin addiction, or the time I got drunk and gave my car away, or my stay in a mental hospital, or anything about life in a family full of alcoholism, addiction

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and mental illness—all of which sounds tragic, but to a stand-up comic, it's a never-ending source of material. But no. I say nothing.

The young girl boos again. I see my daughter, Jennifer, in the back of the room, half standing, like she might jump on the horrible screaming woman.

It seems like seven hours later when a joke finally comes out of my mouth and I get rolling a little bit. But the damage is done. I am officially not the Funniest Mom in America.



My daughter, Carly, has been in and out of drug treatment facilities since she was thirteen. Every time she goes away, I have a routine: I go through her room and search for drugs she may have left behind. We have a laugh these days because Carly says, “So you were looking for drugs I might have left behind? I’m a drug addict, Mother. We don’t leave drugs behind, especially if we’re going into treatment. We do all the drugs. We don’t save drugs back for later. If I have drugs, I do them. All of them. If I had my way, we would stop for more drugs on the way to rehab, and I would do them in the parking lot of the treatment center.”

I’m fumbling around, going through Carly’s things piece by piece. I look in books, shoes, jacket pockets, DVD cases. I look in holes in stuffed animals. I see a box in the top corner of her closet. I open the box and see piles of papers.

I shuffle through them and see cute little cards, letters from friends, funny little notes from her old life. “Dear Justin. Do you like me? I like you. If you don’t like me it’s okay. But I will not be your friend.” Ribbons, stickers, and glitter line the bottom of the box.

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Then I find this... this list of what Carly feels about herself. I read and my heart begins to beat really fast. Toward the end of the list, I have to blink to allow the tears to roll down my face so I can see.

I am holding in my hand the truth. There are a million ways to get to the truth. The shittiest way to find the truth is to stumble upon it accidentally while sparkly glitter falls all over your lap.



The last few years, I thought Carly was just going through a stage. It was a nightmare that would end some day, and it wasn't as bad as I thought. But Carly simply could not stay clean. She would use meth to get off heroin, and then use heroin to get off meth. I have become so desensitized to drug use that I would feel much better if I thought Carly was high all day and having the time of her life. But that's not how it was.

Of the three times Carly was in intensive care, one of those times was a suicide attempt. The fact that her drug use made her so sad that she didn't want to be alive anymore broke me in half.

The day Carly tried to commit suicide, she came to me and told me she couldn't live the rest of her life as a drug addict. She had just taken every drug she could get her hands on. Heroin, Xanax, OxyContin, Fentanyl. She had a variety of drugs in the house, and she had taken all of them.

I take Carly to the emergency room. She tries to tell them what she has taken, but she can hardly speak. They immediately admit her. They have a nurse sit by her bed twenty-four hours a day in case Carly goes into cardiac arrest.

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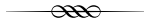
Three days into her stay, Carly begins having seizures. It is a horrible thing to watch. I ask when the seizures will stop. The doctor says they may stop, they may not. It depends on what level of damage she has done to her brain.

When a seizure starts, Carly's eyes flicker and her head falls all the way back, as if her neck will break. She can't talk. This happens every half hour or so.

I sleep in the hospital in a chair next to her bed. Late one night, Carly wakes up and looks at me. She looks like a little girl. A pretty, pretty little girl. The room is dark except for the light coming from the nurse's laptop computer, but I can still see Carly's face and striking green eyes.

She is slurring her words, but I'll never forget what she says: "I wish I was like other girls. The girls who go to the mall or to the movies. They're all bright shiny stars. And I'm like this. I don't have a best friend. I don't have any friends."

Carly rolls over facing away from me, begins to fall asleep, and mumbles, "They're all bright shiny stars." As she speaks, I can feel my heart crumbling.



The hospital stay happened to fall the week before I had to go be the Funniest Mom in America. I told my husband, John, I shouldn't go. He said I would hate myself if I didn't, and that I couldn't cancel on such short notice. So I decided to go. But I had slept on a chair for a week in the hospital and had to be in Los Angeles the following day. I didn't feel great, so Jennifer drove me.

We got a room in the ghetto because it didn't look like the ghetto in the picture on the Internet. The picture on the Internet had a beautiful family sitting poolside drinking exotic drinks.

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That family was not there, and the view from the only window in our room was of what we eventually figured out was a payday loan store—although we couldn't be sure because the sign was in Spanish. As a matter of fact, every business in that area had a sign that was in Spanish. That explained why when Jen and I walked into the motel lobby, the illegal immigrant desk clerk backed up against the wall with his hands up.

I said, "We have a reservation."

He put his arms down and breathed a sigh of relief. "They have reservation. Oh my Got. That scare the sheet out of me."

We were scared, too. The Internet also said you could "walk to shopping" from our motel. Any time you stay at a motel that advertises, "Walk to shopping," be afraid. If we were shopping for crack cocaine, they were right, we could walk. Probably down the hall.

Jen and I both wake up the morning of the big funny event with fevers. I am so dizzy I can't get out of the bed, so we both go back to sleep to the sound of gunshots and police sirens.

Jen gets me to the comedy club where the other funny moms are already waiting to go on. I still have a fever and am dizzy. All the moms are pacing back and forth, thinking about all the funny things they are going to say, but I am thinking about Carly. I have my cell phone in my hand the entire time, calling and checking on her every fifteen minutes. One time, I get her on the phone. Carly says, "Just be funny. You can do this, Mom."

I get off the phone, and I am pacing back and forth, completely blown away that only a week ago, such a beautiful, intelligent, amazing person tried to commit suicide. And I am that person's mother. The tears come and I sneak out the side door and walk

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around the corner of the club to shake it off. Then I put on a smile and walk back in. My hands are shaking from the image of Carly and the sound of her voice.

A few moms go on before me and it's almost my turn, and I suddenly realize I should have also been pacing and thinking of funny things like the other moms had been doing. But I didn't and now here I am. On stage. Unfunny. I think of something funny, but then I have a tiny flash of Carly having a seizure and my stomach rolls with anxiety. I have been a comic for eighteen years and I have never felt so unfunny in my life.

I do my silent set. I am like a mime that doesn't do any mime movements. I'll remember that the next time the joke doesn't come out. Just mime "Trapped in a Glass Box."

I look at the other moms afterwards. I'm sure they are funny all the time. I can see the women and their husbands and kids just laughing and laughing all day and night. I bet not one of them has a seventeen-year-old at home shooting up heroin. Not that they know of at least.

Jen and I are driving home the next day, and I can't stop ranting about what happened the night before.

Jen says, "It's okay, Mom. You're not the Funniest Mom in America. But you are the Funniest Mute in America."

