

Three Strikes, but Not Out

Not Letting Tragedies Define You

Preface/Introduction

We've all had hardships in our lives. Many of us, possibly even most of us, have suffered tragedies—actions that have directly, or indirectly, impacted us greatly. How we've chosen to react or respond to these tragedies might even have been a turning point in our lives. But one thing is for sure, tragedies do befall us all.

In the mid- to late-1900s, the Kennedy family was deemed to be the “Royalty of the United States.” Joseph Patrick Kennedy (1888-1969) was a multi-millionaire who built his fortune on whiskey, real estate and other commodity investments. The family had it “made,” right? It would sure look that way. With his political and business connections, Kennedy had grand designs for his family, including the U.S. presidency for his eldest son. Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., died in 1969 at the age of 81, having outlived four of his children.

His first-born, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., was well-educated, leaving Harvard Law School in his final year to join the U.S. Navy in World War II. He became a pilot and volunteered to join an elite overseas air corps even though he was eligible to return home to the United States. A tragic explosion aboard his aircraft killed him and his co-pilot on August 12, 1944. He was twenty-nine years old.

Kathleen Kennedy was the second daughter and fourth child in the Kennedy family, having been born in 1920 just seventeen months after her sister Rosemary. While her Dad was serving as U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom, she married William Cavendish, the Marquess of Hartington in 1944; he was killed in World War II action four months later. Kathleen died in a civilian plane crash almost four years later.

Following the death of his eldest son, Kennedy, Sr., then moved the presidential ambitions for his children to the second son, now the eldest male child, John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK), who was twenty-seven at the time of his brother's death. JFK and his wife ‘Jackie’ endured tragedies as she suffered both a miscarriage and then a still birth while JFK was a U.S. Senator. JFK was elected the 35th U.S. President in 1960, and in August of 1963, the couple gave birth to a premature baby named Patrick, who died within two days of his birth. Three and a half months later, the Kennedy family and the entire nation was hit with another tragedy as President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963.

Robert Francis Kennedy (RFK) was the third son and seventh (of nine) children in the Kennedy family. His time in the U.S. Naval Reserves was as an enlisted man because he had not yet graduated from college. He subsequently graduated from Harvard College and the

University of Virginia Law School. He served as the U.S. Attorney General under his brother JFK, and after the latter's assassination, until 1964. He then was a U.S. Senator from New York, who ran for the Democratic nomination for President in 1968, when he was assassinated after winning the California primary election.

Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., had money, position, influence, and yet tragedy struck the family. Not just in the deaths of four of his children who died before he did, but he had a prefrontal lobotomy performed on his eldest daughter, twenty-three year-old Rose Marie whom he said was mentally retarded.

Wealth and power and status do not preclude you from being a victim of tragedy.

Neither does being an “ordinary person” of any level of means—a poor person; a middle-class blue-color worker; a single parent; a married couple who are both college graduates; corporate executives; racially mixed families; someone struggling just to buy food and pay rent.

No; tragedy can hit anyone of us, every one of us. And while the effects of that tragedy, or perhaps even the accumulation of tragedies, can be harmful, hurtful, or even devastating, we don't have to let it be in control.

How you respond to tragedy, however, is within YOUR control. And that is what this book is about. It's somewhat auto-biographical in that I'm telling you about the three major tragedies (the “Three Strikes”) that happened to me, and what ensued so that those tragedies didn't become the definition of who I was or who I am.

Tragic? Yes, they were. But perhaps no more tragic than what happened within the Kennedy family, or the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., family. Or the families of those killed on September 11, 2001. Or those of the families of victims of car crashes (not all of them are “accidents”), senseless murders, tsunamis, pandemics, and hurricanes. If it hasn't personally affected you, someone else's tragedy might not seem like such a terrible thing. But if it happens to you, then it IS the most important thing to have occurred.

With my undergraduate degree in Mathematics, combined with years of teaching mathematics at the college level, it is easy for me to look at “numbers” and make almost anything out of them. There is a line, whose accuracy is somewhat in doubt, that has been attributed to Mark Twain: “Statistics don't lie, but liars use statistics.”

An example of this might be when you read an article from a trusted source that says, “Only one in 5,000 people suffer major, or fatal, damage from *blah-blah-blah* ...” One in five thousand. That's not bad—only two-one hundredths of one percent, two percent of one percent! Microscopic, some might say. Most of us don't even know five thousand people all that well, so whatever it is that is harming that one person in five thousand might not impact anyone we know.

Not a big deal, right? Maybe not in the abstract sense. But what if that ONE person was a good neighbor who's watched your house while you were away on vacation? Or what if it

was your child's favorite school teacher? Or the mom you shared child-sitting activities with? Or what if it was your significant other? What if it was YOU?!?

Now, all of a sudden, that small percentage of a percent seems rather large. Its importance and relevance have increased dramatically. That tragedy now has real meaning and impact. Now that it's touched home, it has real meaning, doesn't it?

And while that tragedy has impact and significant meaning, it doesn't have to have control over you; it doesn't have to define who you are. You can have three strikes called on you, but that doesn't mean you have to be "Out."

So, why the [obvious] baseball analogy?

First of all, the game of baseball has been called "America's national pastime"; some have called it "America's game." People who know the game of baseball, and many who don't or who could care less about the game, know that a batter is called "Out" when he or she has three strikes called. The batter's time at bat is over; he or she is sent back to the dugout. That strike out has defined that player for that inning (unless the team does really well and he or she comes back up to bat later in that same inning; that's a bit of rarity, though.).

If you've watched any baseball games, you've probably seen a batter take a pitch and it's called a strike. Or perhaps the batter has swung and missed or fouled it off; that's a strike (unless it would be the third strike, but now we're getting into the weeds). The batter has a strike; is that going to define him or her? Of course not, the batter is still at the plate. Perhaps he'll (okay, let's just use one gender; since most baseball players are male, let's just stick with the male pronouns from now on) he'll get a base hit on the next pitch; maybe even a home run to win the game. So did that one strike define him for the game? Not at all, that base hit might be what's written about him. Certainly the game-winning home run would be in the write-up; not the strike. Even if he'd struck out in his previous at bat, a game-winning home run will certainly get more press than the strike out.

So what's going to be what defines you and your life? Is it that tragedy, or is it going to be how you responded and rebounded from it, and then went on to better things? The latter is probably how most of us want life to be.

It's not always simple; it's not always pleasant; many times it doesn't even seem possible. But it IS possible. You CAN rise above the tragedy. You can DO it!

I'm going to reveal many details in this book that I've never made public before. While it's a difficult and slightly nervous process for me, I feel it's important that you know everything behind the "three strikes" in my life. Only by putting it all out there, can you fully understand what happened and what I've done since then.

And then there's Marie Hernandez whose bitter divorce left her with absolutely NOTHING. Nothing except her will to succeed. And to survive. Marie has gone on to become a self-sufficient world-traveler, mentor, and coach. Her independent life lets her enjoy her lifestyle wherever she wants; with family in the U.S.; conducting a retreat in Italy, or maybe even in Bali. She certainly hasn't let that one "Strike" define who she is.

[NOTE: there will be more stories; the process of gathering them has just begun.]

Read these stories and more, and then think...

Is your next-day baseball summary going to be about your strike out or your base hit? It's your choice. Let's get to bat!!!

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