

# Leaving *Your* Light On

---

*Inspirational Stories of Unforgettable Lives*

**KELLY A. MELOCHE**

Copyright 2023 © Kelly A. Meloche

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

Kelly A. Meloche asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book and on its cover are trade names, service marks, trademarks and registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publishers and the book are not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. None of the companies referenced within the book have endorsed the book.

For more information or to book an event contact:

*kelly@kellymeloche.com*

or visit: *www.kellymeloche.com*

**ISBN: 978-1-959555-77-3 (Print)**



*The Platypus Team  
Platypus Publishing  
support@mattrud.com*

## DEDICATION

---

I dedicate this book to Jaime & Kara. Without both of you, I would never have known the pure joy of a Momma Bear's love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

---

This book is the gift of the beautiful people that championed me to its completion. Thank you for your immeasurable love.

I, also, can never adequately express my gratitude to the families that have welcomed me into their sacred circle of trust, while at their most depleted moments. It is a true honour to be able to share the beautiful stories of lives well-lived.

I am a better human for having the privilege to share in the experience of celebrating lives in such a deserving way.

## REFLECTIONS

---

A funeral is not for the dead, it is for the living. Kelly has a unique ability to craft the life of your loved one into an awesome celebration of a life uniquely lived. People leave Kelly's services saying that was a "good funeral." As a funeral director, those are the best words to hear. You know the family is leaving a very sad event with a full heart.

*~Kevin Reid, President, Reid Funeral home*

In more than 3 decades of working in hospitals and hospices with the dying and their families, I can attest to the immeasurable value of the profound healing that happens when families create memorable farewells. "Leaving your Light On" is a must read for everyone, especially those who work with the dying and their families or those who are currently living the reality.

*~Maria Giannotti MA, MSc,  
Specialist in End of Life Care and Spirituality*

Kelly is the best and most versatile celebrant I know. It takes a lot of energy to obtain life stories from family members. Then,

in a short period of time, Kelly articulates those memories into a meaningful celebration of life. This is a true talent. Kelly goes above and beyond with every family she serves; sharing these stories is a gift.

*~Brian Parent,  
Managing Director/Founder, Families First*

Kelly is a magical storyteller. Her gift is being able to bring a persons life back to their family in a way that is truly inspirational. Everyone leaving a funeral that was led by Kelly always says, "I want my funeral to feel just like that."

*~Lorna Baker, Managing Funeral Director*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

DEDICATION .....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	4
REFLECTIONS .....	5
FORWARD .....	9
PRELUDE .....	11
<b>CHAPTER 1: JOHN AND KATHARINA GRUNDNER</b> .....	18
Because Love Never Dies .....	18
<b>CHAPTER 2: LEONARDO SANTAMARIA</b> .....	23
The Ten Year Old Barber .....	23
<b>CHAPTER 3: MAX MCMULLIN</b> .....	32
The Guitar Sang Him to the Stars.....	32
<b>CHAPTER 4: ISABELLE GAUDETTE</b> .....	36
Saving the Day in a Cardigan.....	36
<b>CHAPTER 5: THE LIFE OF RILEY</b> .....	40
A Tail of Love.....	40
<b>CHAPTER 6: DON BISSON</b> .....	44
A Poet & A Warrior .....	44
<b>CHAPTER 7: SARAH EDEN</b> .....	49
Invisible Scars .....	49
<b>CHAPTER 8: EVERYONE’S STORY</b> .....	52
When Someone You Loved, But Didn’t Like, Dies.....	52
<b>CHAPTER 9: DEBBIE CLARKE</b> .....	55
The Clear Bead.....	55
<b>CHAPTER 10: JASON FINDLEY</b> .....	60
A Shadow Between the Cracks .....	60

<b>CHAPTER 11: ROSE MARIE TENNANT</b> .....	62
The Wealth of a Mother’s Love .....	62
<b>CHAPTER 12: DAN RAHM</b> .....	68
Rules to Live By, Or Have Fun Breaking .....	68
<b>CHAPTER 13: CEDAR RIVERS</b> .....	74
A Heart Filled with Hope.....	74
<b>CHAPTER 14: ALICIA BUISST</b> .....	81
Roaring On & Finishing Strong .....	81
<b>CHAPTER 15: COLIN HARPER</b> .....	91
Always Ready!.....	91
<b>CHAPTER 16: CONNOR O’MALLEY</b> .....	96
Last Day Regrets.....	96
<b>CHAPTER 17: DEMERISE VASELENIUCK</b> .....	101
Together Again .....	101
<b>CHAPTER 18: DOUG ANGLIN</b> .....	106
\$2.00 Budget Bliss.....	106
<b>CHAPTER 19: DANIELLA DEMERS</b> .....	112
Never Miss the Chance .....	112
<b>CHAPTER 20: JIM RUSTON</b> .....	115
Proudest Girl Dad .....	115
<b>CHAPTER 21: ROSA STRANO</b> .....	121
Don’t be a Karen ~ be a Rosa! .....	121
<b>CHAPTER 22: A KELLY MELOCHE MOMENT</b> .....	126
My Flame.....	126
<b>CHAPTER 23: CONSIDER THIS</b> .....	130



## FORWARD

---

I am the storyteller of lives well-lived; lives that were epic in love, and lives muddled by darkness. Lives that inspired either through brilliance or brokenness. Every life is important, and every life ends with a story rich in lessons and rewards to ripple us into safety and sanity if we listen.

The first time I felt the kaleidoscope of bewildering emotions was at my neighbour's funeral. I was 12, and my favourite babysitter had been killed in a car accident. I was baffled how hard everyone tried to not act sad, angry, or confused. And nobody wanted to talk about Joanne, who was just about the coolest person I knew. After that day, it seemed wrong to talk about her. Death, I wondered, was maybe the time that you were supposed to erase the person from your being. Clear the cache of love, memories and lessons. At least that is how everyone acted.

Two weeks after my 20th birthday, my father died. Seven years later, my mom followed. I have zero recollection of their funerals, aside from feeling as if it were a survival mission to remain numb, say the right things, and to hover above the dark abyss as if it wasn't happening. Their funerals, just like Joanne's, had nothing to do with the lives that they lived. Hence, they mostly remain a mystery to me. I don't know their stories aside

from the fragments I remember. Their services were an assortment of rhetoric, canned language and bookmarked psalms delivered by someone who didn't give a shit about the person we loved and the untold story they lived to the best of their human ability.

No wonder everyone hates going to a funeral! When a baby is born, we gather to celebrate. We talk about their life, what we hope for them, the happiness they deserve and their birthright to give and receive great love. We validate their life. When the circle closes, and it will for every single one of us, shouldn't the story we lived then be shared as a final act to let our light settle into those who will be moving on as the torch carriers of our legacy?

Of course it should.

This book is a selection of the life stories I have had the privilege to write and deliver after these humble warriors, gentle misunderstood wanderers and a few pains in the asses earned their wings.

It is meant to remind you of your own story. It will one day be told. Maybe by me!

What would your title be?

## PRELUDE

---

If you are old enough to remember the 1960's CBS show, "The Munsters," then you'd understand when I tell you I grew up feeling as though I was the kindred spirit to Marilyn. I was the youngest of 2, until, of course, I found out there were more—all sisters, never the brother I desperately yearned for. That was just one more little kernel hidden in the tickle trunk of family secrets. Daily living was, from my observation, a poker game of illusions. I continually wondered who was the alien... them or me?

I was learning that I loved a good story, and was to discover that mine was to be found when I stepped out of unnecessary haze and into a labyrinth of unfolding clarity.

My memories circle back to the early years when independence was the key to peace. After selecting, literally, the most mismatched clothing ensemble and crunching back half a sugar-soaked grapefruit that had hardened overnight in the fridge, I was off to slay grade 2.

Once out the door, I was on a quest to make my way through my "Pleasantville" neighbourhood seeking healthy glimmers of family values, good sense, and snippets of stories in the making. I had two stops along the way. Both were olive branches of hope. The first stop was the Gilberts. Two parents and 5 kids whose

bellies were filled with warm oatmeal and family intention. Same with the next stop. Those friends met us at the park, a drop off from Dad every day. I loved how my friends, Amy and Samantha, would joke about all the things that mattered that morning. They knew and understood their roots.

I was the smiling actress along the way, hoping my straight A's and untamed curls would somehow mask how deeply unacquainted I was with myself.

This became a trend. While always trying to flesh out my truths and genuine purpose, I gained insight by witnessing the journeys of others. I cared. My Mom used to call me “Little Ann Landers” because it seemed my ears attracted stories and my shoulders were for tears. Other people made sense to me. I liked connecting their dots while learning immensely from their lives.

I didn't know it, but I was in a lifelong boot camp preparing for a career that I had no idea existed.

As a little girl, I'd sit on my bed and pretend to read stories to my invisible audience. I just loved that feeling of engagement. I adored dipping my essence into the story and embodying the journey as if it were my own. Whether it was a fairy tale or fiction, I was always a willing passenger, jumping aboard to be moved through the landscape of their lessons.

Once I became an adult, every career I excelled at meant that I was communicating with others more than effectively. In my early twenties I went into law enforcement. I have no idea why, really. If I am honest, I think my mother nudged me that way,

and I was too eager to please. We've all bought that t-shirt or a similar one, right? Had I not drunk too much of that people pleasing Kool-Aid, I very well might have taken my straight A's to medical school and achieved my dream of making house calls with my retro doctor's bag. Which, I guess, would have pleased people too, but I would have arrived by virtue of my own nudging.

Standing a mere five feet tall and wearing a smile that never dims seemed to totally contradict the handcuffs strapped to my duty belt. I wore a badge from age 20 until I couldn't silence my entrepreneurial spirit another second, throwing myself into the "if you can dream, you can be it" world. I opened up what would become a grassroots global healthcare company by age 40. It made absolutely zero sense, if I am to be realistic. I was a single mother by this time, with two kids in grade school who were enrolled in all the expensive sports. All I can say is that faith kicked my fear's ass every single day when I felt myself seeking sanity as I sorted socks.

The next 13 years were filled with extensive travel, meeting incredible thought leaders and embracing inspiration. I battled with feeling worthy and sometimes felt I didn't believe in myself to even a fraction of what it appeared others did. The "imposter syndrome" is what they call it, and I had a hefty dose.

One time I was at a luncheon for "Women Entrepreneurial World Leaders" at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. There, at one of the beautifully set tables for 8, was my name tag. Close as I

could tell, they did their research and concluded that I was worth the buffet. There was a panel of women that had paid oodles of money in order to commandeer the mic for a measured period of time. They all deserved every second, especially Miss Turkey, as I nicknamed her. While I don't remember the details of her presentation, which I have no doubt were riveting, it was the few moments in which she finessed from performer to mother that woke me up. During her presentation she not-so-apologetically took a phone call. Turns out it was her daughter's 5th birthday and, in that moment, Miss Turkey won the crown as far as I was concerned. When she returned back to the moment at hand, she remarked that all we have, every day, is really just ourselves. It is the person looking back in the mirror that counts and is accountable. Miss Turkey owned her authentic ground, stepped outside of the pinstriped business casual norm, staying true to the woman in her mirror and her tiny treasure halfway around the world.

A God-smacked moment, gifted to me from a stranger, that I have since adored.

The next day was my turn. I was the Keynote speaker! Kelly Meloche—lit up in lights. The woman in my mirror was a jittery mess! The room went from sparsely populated to standing room only. The power point presentation queued up belonged to a presenter from Afghanistan, so when the timer went off, all I had was me! What a gloriously, somewhat paralyzing, gifted mistake turned opportunity.

I was too short for the podium, and there was no deflecting attention to my presentation on the screen once it was properly loaded, so I stood in front of the crowd, a very humbled and grateful woman with something to share. I knew my research well enough that doing that “talk to the screen” defense mechanism would have been such a massive waste of the moment I was blessed with. I didn’t talk to, I engaged with, the strangers and their variety of eye colours and expressions. I believed in my craft, and that became the energy of the room.

Three more similar sessions followed, all of which went outrageously different than what I had practiced to my same life-long invisible groupies. My notes became relatively secondary. They were a means to guide but not lead. Subconsciously, I had stopped believing in the assumed divide between myself and the people offering me their time and attention. It was about being collectively receptive to the room, a gathering of good intentions and aspiring ambitions. They were a lovely lot of humans, some of which I am now privileged to call friend.

My life was unfolding much to the tune of John Lennon’s, “Life is what happens as you’re busy making plans.” While I thought I was becoming a rescue squad to the waitlists plaguing Canada’s socialized medical system, I was just being distracted. Evolution comes in many forms. This was part of my spiritual journey, leading me to cast deeper roots into a level of care that all this globe-trotting was preparing me for. Soon I realized...

Boot camp was over!

I sold my company, opened my mind as wide as my ambitions could see as I coaxed purpose, once again, to marry with my passion.

A proverbial blink occurred, then a refreshingly charismatic man from the funeral home business asked to meet with me. Let's be real, when have you ever heard 'charismatic' and 'funeral' being used in the same sentence? Initially, he was hopeful that I could help him in his quest to transform his funeral homes from gloomy to gracious. I held little hope. As I looked around while listening to his wishes, it felt paradoxical. There was no evidence of overt momentum to modernization.

We shared great synergy. I immediately gravitated to his crisp, creative intelligence, but I couldn't see the end game. It was evident we were supposed to meet but were unsure of the reason why. As our chats gained momentum, he finally exclaimed, "Kelly, you are a born Celebrant."

I had no idea what that meant.

It meant I would listen to people. It meant I would write the life stories of their loved ones. It meant I would tell these stories to people who aren't invisible... okay, yes, some are, but they are the guest of honour!

As they delve into the past and recount stories, families and friends uncover a wealth of discoveries. The conversations flow naturally, unveiling beautiful gems of cherished moments that signify the start of their path to healing.



All of their favourite things are included in this celebration. The Harley Davidson and a sea of biker colours with a ride at the end to roar farewell. A shot of whisky, nip of Merlot, perhaps the artwork that told its own stories, best friends who can barely squeak out a song from their past as love wells up in the back of their throats, favourite pets, awards and the music that feels like a B12 shot right to your soul.

Life is a magnificent trail of stories. Not one is perfect, but they are all filled with inspiration, and even in the tragedy, we find love.

Everyday people are extraordinary people! When I tell their story, whether it is at a funeral home, in a backyard, on a boat and yes, even near a goat, it is what peace and comfort are all about.

Celebrating a life after it is fully lived is essential, it is respectful, and it really does put the “fun” in funeral!

**Purchase Paperback** 

**Purchase eBook** 