

EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Finding the Faith and Courage
to Follow Your Dreams

JEN BRICKER

with Sheryl Berk



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This book is dedicated
to the glory of God.
May this book touch the lives
of millions around the world.

And to my parents,
Gerald and Sharon Bricker:
this wouldn't have been possible
without you guys!

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Foreword

I first met Jen in September 2014 at an event in Beverly Hills. I introduced her to the audience and watched their reaction. They were instantly and completely blown away by her, just as I had been.

It was clear from that very first meeting that Jen and I had a connection. It isn't often I meet someone who shares so many of the same truths and goals: dream big; embrace what God has given you; bring light where there are shadows; spread hope, faith, love, and peace.

I love her relationship with God and how she inspires others to find Him. She does it not just through her words but through her actions. When she is face-to-face with adversity, she never lets it stand in the way of her joy and purpose. Her faith is unflappable. She is grateful not only for God's gifts but also for the opportunities to try and fail and grow. Jen and I have talked about how we both see our "disabilities" as advantages. God doesn't make mistakes; neither of us is

a mistake. God knew exactly what He was doing when He created both of us.

A story like hers is so rare, and I'm proud of the fact that she is one of the few speakers I trust to take speaking invitations that I unfortunately cannot accept through Attitude is Altitude's speaking bureau. I'm proud of her for having the courage to truly put herself out there and share her story. But I also believe this is just the beginning. God has a lot more in store for Jen Bricker. Whether she's performing her aerial act or speaking before crowds of thousands, I can't wait to see her soar.

—Nick Vujicic

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, thank you, God. None of this, my life included, would have been possible without Him—my number one guiding force in all things!

My parents for being total rock stars and supporting every crazy thing I've ever wanted to try or do! My brothers—Greg, Bubba, and Brad—for loving on me since day one (and for not giving me a crazy name!) and teaching me how to “hang” with the boys and not to be afraid of getting dirty!

To my sisters Christina and Dominique, I cannot believe it's been ten years since we met. Time really does fly! I look forward to seeing what God has in store for the next ten years.

A *huge* thank-you to my entire community in Crawford County (teachers, coaches, and peers) for supporting me my entire life. I am beyond grateful to have the roots I have and a strong value of community from being raised by such a strong community!

Krine, you are the most amazing best friend anyone could ever ask for or dream of. I honestly can't imagine my life without you. I am so grateful God put us together!

Acknowledgments

Grant—you have always been on team J Bug from the literal second we met. Thanks for pushing me, loving me, and *always* believing in me!

I want to give a big thanks to everyone who took a chance on me when others were afraid. To all of you “angels” in my life who I come across in all my travels—thank you. You know who you are. You have let me stay in your homes. You have fed me, wined and dined me, and gone completely out of your way to show me love when you didn’t have to. I will never forget who all of you are and what you have done for me. I only hope to return the favor to you one day—and more!

I need to give a big shout-out to my writer, Sheryl Berk. I honestly couldn’t have done this without you—you are one amazing human being. I am extremely thankful to have spent so much time with you. Thank you for fiercely being on team Jen from day one!

Many thanks to Frank Weimann at Folio Literary for helping make this book happen.

To Joshua Schreff, my partner in crime, for always fighting for me.

Nick Vujicic for joining alongside me in such joyous and solid friendship.

Thank you to everyone at Reality LA. That church (all of you) has literally changed my life and is such an answer to prayer!

All my acrobats and aerialists, all of you who believed in me from day one. To Max, an amazing aerial choreographer, friend, and aerialist for helping me put acts together and have a place to stay and train!

Thank you to the *amazing* Jeremy Cowart, who made this beautiful cover an absolute slam dunk. You are fantastic, my friend!

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the entire team at Baker for being so excited and supportive of me! Brian, it has been an absolute joy working with you to make this book come to life! Amy, thank you for your enthusiasm along the way. Mark, you have been an absolute blessing. I seriously cannot imagine doing this book with any other company. I am beyond humbled and thankful for each and every one of you! You have made this process a totally beautiful one. Thanks for believing so strongly and passionately in this book and in me!

Introduction

Though she be but little, she is fierce!

—William Shakespeare,
A Midsummer Night's Dream

So this just happened: I flew into the IPC Athletics World Championships in Qatar, suspended from a giant hot-air balloon. Not the kind with the pretty wicker basket underneath, mind you. I was actually *attached* to the balloon with my fabric. I took one look at the setup and gasped. *This is amazing! I've never performed on a hot-air balloon before!* When the organizers asked me to come to Qatar and outlined their ideas for my performance, I had no clue how magical and epic it would be. The number I was a part of had been choreographed around my entrance—and they'd gone to a whole lot of trouble to blow up a ginormous balloon and have a three-man crew walk out holding it high above them. It was done with utmost precision. So, like anything else that scares me, I knew I had to go for it. In

retrospect, it ranks as one of my all-time favorite “pinch me” moments—a perfect combination of cool and crazy, artistry and insanity. I mean, who *does* this? Me, apparently! The entire time I was floating up there, reveling in the cheers of the crowd below, a single thought kept repeating over and over in my mind: *God is so good!*

I have no doubt in my mind that I am blessed, though at first glance, maybe you’d think otherwise. It’s kind of hard to miss: I don’t have legs. But for the longest time, it never dawned on me that I was any different from anyone else. If there was something I wanted to do, then I did it. If I wanted to be a champion tumbler or an aerial artist, missing a couple of limbs was not going to hold me back. My approach was simple: no hesitation, no fear, no worrying “what if?” If an obstacle presented itself, I got creative and figured out how to get around it. It’s an attitude that I feel people aren’t taught, which is probably why I get asked for advice all the time. Life is an amazing journey if you’re not afraid to live it.

That said, I have never felt like I have anything to prove. I am who I am, and I own it. People often ask me, “If you could have been born with legs, would you have wanted that?” Not a chance. God gave me this gift for a reason. And yes, I said *gift*. I don’t see myself as “disabled” or “handicapped” or lacking in any way, shape, or form. I am grateful for my body every day. I wouldn’t have been presented with such special opportunities to affect people in a positive way if I had been born with legs. That’s how God works through me—through my “uniqueness.”

Maybe from the outside looking in, it seems like I was dealt a bad hand. After all, my biological parents abandoned me the day I was born. But the way I see it, that was God

protecting me. He had bigger plans. He knew He had to get me to the right place with the right people who could nurture my talents and gifts and teach me to embrace them. He knew what He was doing—He always does!

So yes, I am blessed. And my adoptive parents are my heroes because they taught me to see strength and beauty in places where others might not. They told me to keep going whenever a challenge presented itself. There were plenty of those and will continue to be many more. I took a Zumba class the other day and some lady asked me, “How do you do that?” Well, how do I *not*? How do I not kayak, skydive, roller-skate, play basketball—the list is endless. Ironically, I hate sitting still (and with no legs, it looks like I’m always sitting). I’ve been in constant motion from the moment I started crawling. It didn’t matter that the first doctors my parents took me to told them I’d spend my life being carried around and propped up in a “bucket.” The Brickers didn’t see or want that life for their little girl. They never let anyone or anything hold me back.

Have I had moments where I’ve felt discouraged, insecure, frustrated, *crappy*? You betcha. It’s called being human. I went through a long period of time as a kid when I had serious body issues. I didn’t like what I saw in the mirror. I wanted to be tall and delicate with ballerina arms. Instead, I was short with body-builder biceps. I had to do a lot of soul-searching, and I arrived at the decision that God gave me this body for a reason. Then He gave me these talents and abilities to go with this body so I would catch people’s attention, which is also my chance to educate, inform, and inspire.

That’s part of what this book is about, but I also want to share with you all the intricacies of what makes me who

I am. Maybe you've read about me or even heard me speak. That's just scratching the surface. I am adventurous, artistic, intense, flawed, passionate, broken, silly, athletic, goofy, flirty, and playful. I am a sister, a daughter, a best friend, an auntie, an aerialist, a lover. I experience feelings of insecurity, doubt, fear, and weakness, and moments of absolute bliss, extreme adventure, intense passion, and heart-racing love. Sometimes I want to explode with joy, excitement, and happiness; other times I feel overwhelmed, underqualified, and lonely. I have never before shared so many aspects of who I am as a person. To be totally honest, I wasn't ready. I thought that strong people never reveal their weaknesses. But I know now that the opposite is true: it takes a lot of guts to be vulnerable and to put your whole true self out there. I'm not the least bit scared of twirling thirty feet in the air from a piece of fabric, but opening myself up . . . pretty terrifying.

But like every other challenge in my life, I knew I had to do it. I think what finally made it a surmountable task was finding my motivation. I want everyone who reads this book to realize one simple, amazing truth: you *are* significant. We all have special gifts and talents that make us not only unique but also great. Everyone has the power to change someone's life. Everyone has a voice and a stage and the ability to impact the world in a positive way. This isn't just about turning lemons into lemonade or seeing the glass as half full. It's taking action. It's pushing yourself to do what you were meant to do (let's call that *purpose*)—not necessarily what you are doing right at this moment. It's seeing beyond what's in front of you and imagining the endless possibilities.

Everything is possible. That's my favorite Bible quote from Mark 9:23: "Everything is possible for the person who

believes” (GW). See it, believe it, make it happen. Who ever would have thought it was that simple? Yet my life is proof. The funny thing is I’m only twenty-eight, and I’m just getting started! I consider this the first leg of my journey (pun intended!). The path is clear—and I can’t wait to see where it takes me. So ask yourself: Where will your path take you if you decide to push yourself to do what you were meant to do? Where might you find yourself that you never dreamed possible? It doesn’t have to be soaring through the air on a hot-air balloon . . . but then again, why not? Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it! Be brave. Dream big. Have faith. And don’t be scared to look down. The view is pretty spectacular.

—Jen

CHAPTER ONE

The Baby Born without Legs

The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

—1 Samuel 16:7

I came into this world with no name—literally, a “nobody.” My Romanian birth parents essentially abandoned me, leaving me behind at the hospital. And yet, I don’t hate them. As hard as that is for people to understand, I have no anger toward them. Instead, I’m thankful. Thankful that because of what they did, I wound up in a loving home with my parents, the Brickers, who supported me and taught me that my life—every life—has a purpose.

Sure, it was a strange way to start a life. In a tiny hospital room in Salem, Illinois, my biological mother, Camelia, delivered me by cesarean section. I was born with big dark brown eyes, a head of thick black hair, dark brows and lashes, and very tan skin. I was also born with my heart on the right side of my chest instead of the left (many nurses got a scare when they tried to find my heartbeat with a stethoscope!). I measured a whopping thirteen inches, one inch longer than a ruler. Ironically, the hospital closed shortly after I was born. My family teases that after I was born, no one could top me, so they had to close up shop!

Camelia never actually laid eyes on me. That’s because my birth father, Dmitry, didn’t allow it—not even for a split second. A relative says the doctor who delivered me (also Romanian) told him I would die. Maybe he thought it would be too painful. Maybe he was trying to spare her pain or grief or regret. Maybe he just hit the panic button or felt ill-equipped

emotionally and financially to care for a child who had special needs. Maybe he thought he was doing me a favor?

I don't know, and I don't pretend to know what was going through his head at that time. All I know is that he took one look at this tiny infant with two appendages where her legs were supposed to be and decided she'd be better off with someone else.

So no, I'm not angry, as crazy as that sounds. I don't blame my birth parents or judge them or hold any grudges. How could I when they gave me the greatest gift of all—a family that needed me as much as I needed them? My parents were honest with me from the start about my adoption. They didn't want me to feel hurt or abandoned or to hate my birth parents. They told me, “Jennifer, you have to understand, your biological parents were from a different country with a different mind-set. You didn't walk in their shoes, and you don't know the real reason why they gave you up. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter. This was exactly how God planned for it to be. You were an answered prayer, a miracle, for us. They gave us a gift; they gave us you.”

It took a while for my adoptive parents to find their little gift though. A social worker first placed me with a foster family—a kind, loving couple whom I called Nana and Papa (I was with them for three months, but we stayed in touch for several years until they passed away). They named me Holly Ann. Papa worked on the railroad and always wore overalls, so I fit neatly in his bib in front, like a little baby kangaroo in a pouch. We would watch *ALF* (a weird little “alien life form” puppet for those of you who were not around in the late '80s!) on TV, and I had a little *ALF* figurine I carried around everywhere with me. They made sure I was secure and

content, and months after I became a Bricker, my parents still took me back to visit them. They were the first people who loved me, and they truly had the biggest hearts. They fostered kids who were “hard to place” and saw a lot of sad, unfortunate children over the years. I wasn’t one of those, despite my obvious “health” issues. Given my “specialness,” you’d have thought that placing me in a permanent home would have been tough. But it wasn’t—more than three hundred couples wanted me. I think about that sometimes: I could have been three hundred other Jens. It’s almost like a math probability equation: If Jen went with x and y , what would she equal? The way I was raised helped make me the person I am today. I am grateful, so grateful, that God had this plan.

Praying for a Miracle

At the time of my birth, Sharon and Gerald Bricker—my soon-to-be parents—were living in Hardinville, Illinois, a tiny town in the middle of nowhere on the eastern side of the state. They already had three boys: Greg, Brian (aka Bubba), and Brad, who were fourteen, twelve, and ten years old. Nonetheless, they desperately wanted a baby girl. My mother had to have a hysterectomy because she had cysts on her ovaries, and she knew she would never be able to give birth to any more children. So she asked God for a miracle. She kept her faith, believing all along, *There must be one little girl in the world who needs this family*. The woman seriously has the patience of a saint!

One day a friend who was adopting called her to say she’d heard about me. My mom knew at that moment her prayers had been answered. She told my dad, and he was as excited

as she was. Then they both ran it by my brothers. My parents asked Greg, my oldest brother, “How will you feel about bringing your date to the house and introducing her to your sister who has no legs?” Greg didn’t even have to think about it. He said, “If someone can’t accept her, I wouldn’t want to date her.” They went through every scenario with my brothers to make sure they were okay with it. Then, when the whole family was on board, they put the plans in motion.

My mom said she was 100 percent honest. She told the social worker all the reasons why our family didn’t need more children and all the reasons why, in her heart, she knew she *had* to have me. It took two and a half months before my parents could actually meet me. During that whole time of waiting, they never saw a single picture of me, which was on purpose. The adoption agency and social workers wanted to be sure how the prospective new parents would react after meeting me and how they’d handle changing and feeding me.

My mom says she was a nervous wreck the night before, tossing and turning in bed and worrying about how I’d take to them. All those worries melted away as soon as they walked in the door of my foster family’s home. My face lit up in a huge grin. My mom says that at that moment, she knew it was meant to be. It felt like she’d found the missing piece to her soul, and the smile on my face said, *You’re finally here*. It was an instant connection, and taking care of me came to my parents instinctually. While my foster parents had struggled to change my diapers (I was a slippery little thing!), my mom was a pro. “It’s so easy!” she exclaimed. “There are no little legs in my way!”

From that day on, I was Jennifer Bricker. My brothers were allowed to name me, but there was a catch: they had to agree

on a name. They argued over it for hours until one of them said, “Jennifer,” and they all kind of nodded in agreement. My mom tells me I went through a bit of an adjustment period while getting to know my new family. For two weeks I refused to crack a smile. Then one day one of my brothers sneezed and I burst into hysterical laughter. So he kept sneezing over and over so they could get their first picture of me smiling! That was it; I was a jolly little baby from that day forward. My brothers each had their own thing that they would do with me. Greg liked to rest me on his chest when he was doing homework; Bubba would stick me in the front of his bib overalls and carry me around; and Brad always fed me my bottle. They were so excited to have a little sister—I was like a shiny new toy!

The social workers made an appointment at the Cardinal Clinic in St. Louis, Missouri, for my parents to take me for a comprehensive medical evaluation. The prognosis was bleak: the doctors wanted to make me a “bucket” to sit in. In their opinions, I would never be able to sit up, crawl around, or move from place to place at all without being carried. My mom sat in the doctors’ office and cried her heart out. But my dad did not agree with their prognosis. “No,” he insisted. “That’s not what she’s about. We don’t accept that.”

So they took me to a new set of doctors, this time at Shriners Hospitals for Children in St. Louis. “I want to know,” my dad asked them. “Will she be able to sit up? What does her future look like?”

This time, the news was encouraging. The doctor smiled and said, “Mr. and Mrs. Bricker, this little girl is going to do things you never even imagined would be possible.”

But yes, they *could* imagine it. And from then on, we all had the attitude of *Let's go for it*. Nothing would stand in my way. My parents never held the reins too tight, but they also didn't let me fly in the wind with no rules. What went for my brothers went for me. Just because I had no legs didn't mean I received special privileges or treatment. I was going to grow up a normal little girl, and my parents would never accept anything less. They didn't coddle me or speak to me in baby talk. I was a talker—and very vocal about what I wanted—from the moment I opened my mouth. It started with me pulling myself up in the crib. “Hold you, Mommy!” I would call, meaning, “Hold me!” Not only could I sit up, but also I could move—fast! Faster than my poor parents could keep up with me. My mom called me “mouse” because I would scoot about with lightning speed. I used to pull myself along with my little arms and leave a trail of pink Pampers shredded on the ground behind me. My brothers had me practically jumping off the couch from the moment I could crawl around. They put pillows down to break my fall, but they'd egg me on. I never could turn down a dare. I was fearless.

Before I was five, I needed two surgeries: one to remove a growth plate, a partial bone growing down from my hip, the other to remove the two appendages so I could better tolerate my prosthetics. My family nicknamed the appendages my “flippers.” One had the cutest big toe and a little arch and a heel, and the other was a little more unformed. As a baby, I loved music and would use them to keep time with the beat. Because I was so young, I don't remember much about those times going into the hospital. But my parents tell me I was never afraid, never sad to spend time there. The nurses all loved me, and I assured them, “Don't worry, I fine!” I was a tough one.

— *My VIPs* —

In these boxes, you'll meet the most important people in my life as they share their memories of yours truly. I'm humbled and a little mortified, but mostly humbled.

My Mom: Sharon Bricker

When I told my father, Noble Waldrop, we were adopting a baby girl, he hesitated. Not because of the way she was born, but because he wasn't sure he could love her the same as his other grandkids. She wasn't his blood. Well, that changed in a heartbeat. I took her over to my parents' house, and he fell head over heels for her. They had a very tight, special bond, especially during his last days. Jennifer brought him joy and comfort. He would get depressed being on an oxygen tank, and my mom would call and ask that we bring her by. Whenever we did, he'd immediately perk up. I remember she would sing to him to lift his spirits—she was the best kind of medicine for whatever ailed him. I remember watching her and thinking how she had a natural ability to connect with people. Today, whenever she speaks in front of a crowd, it's as if she's talking personally to each and every person in that room. She has more friends than anyone I know, and it's because anyone who meets her instantly loves her. I think of her with my father and how I knew way back then that she had a God-given gift for inspiring people.

I Can Do That

As I got a little bigger, my personality really started to shine through. I was trouble with a capital T! Growing up with three older brothers certainly contributed to this. Greg taught me to rock out to Garth Brooks. He also took me on many of his dates, probably because I was such an up-front little squirt—I'd give him my honest opinion! All my brothers would brag to their friends about how strong I was, and as a result, few would ever take on the challenge of arm wrestling me. They didn't want to get whipped by a little girl. As an adult, I can see that growing up with brothers helped me understand guys a lot better. To be totally honest, they're easier to get along with than most girls—less drama. Most of the friends in my life now are guys, and almost all of my roommates have been as well. I guess I miss living in a house filled with men!

I also have a sister, Jodi, my dad's daughter from a previous relationship before he married my mom. She's about fifteen years older than I am. I didn't get to see her very much growing up because she lived a few states away. But she would always try and remember my birthday. She would also come to see us for Christmas, which was always awesome. As I've gotten older, I've been able to see her a bit more because of my travel, and I try to let her know whenever I'm in Colorado so we can meet up.

As a kid, anything physically challenging—a sport, a game, a tree to climb—had my name on it. My parents tell this funny story about how, when I was a baby, I loved water and they wanted me to swim. They put little pool floaties on my arms, and when they lowered me into the water and let go, my butt floated straight up and my head went underwater. It

scared my parents to death! Clearly, regular floaties weren't going to work, so they got me a one-piece suit with a little inner tube attached to it. That managed to keep my booty underwater. But when I was about six, I decided I'd rather dive down deep than float up top. I jumped in, sans floaties, and my parents let me go. It turns out I was a natural swimmer! In fourth grade, my school held swimming classes at the local college, Lincoln Trail College, in Robinson, where I placed into advanced swimming. I loved holding my breath underwater, and one day while I was swimming at the city pool in Robinson, I decided to challenge myself: How long could I stay at the bottom and not bob up for air? Reggie, the lifeguard, thought I was drowning and dove in to rescue me. I remember he dove in, lifted me up, and then held me above the water.

“What are you doing?” I asked, laughing.

He was embarrassed, but I didn't mind one bit. I had a huge crush on Reggie, and anytime he wanted to “save” me, I was fine with it!

My parents trusted that I always knew what I could and couldn't handle. They let me leap into the pool—and leap into my life. They treated me like a person instead of a child, even at an early age. I think that's why I learned to talk and spell and read so quickly. Everyone in my family did, so it was expected of me as well. I loved Dr. Seuss books and could recite *Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now* and *Green Eggs and Ham* by heart. When my kindergarten teacher asked if I could read them to her, I declared, “Absolutely!” But really I had just committed them to memory from my family reading them to me over and over. I've kept this secret until now—my teacher thought I was a genius!

My parents also never worried about what people would think of me. Initially, my mom said this little prayer: “God, please let her face be pretty so people don’t notice that she has no legs!” For the record, she says God came through on that as well—but she’s a little biased! And I guess I hadn’t learned humility yet. When people would stop and tell me, “Oh, aren’t you so cute!” I’d answer back, “I know it!”

My mom would turn twenty shades of red.

“Jennifer!” she would tell me. “We don’t say that! We say thank you.”

So then I would reply, “Thank you. I know it!”

People simply forgot—literally—that I was missing my lower limbs. In fact, my mom’s best friend since high school has a daughter three and a half months younger than I am, and she was always sending clothes that her child had outgrown. One day my mom received a box of these hand-me-downs and opened them up to find an entire pile of socks and shoes. She called her friend, laughing, and asked, “And what am I supposed to do with these?” Her friend was shocked and embarrassed; she’d completely forgotten I didn’t need them. But that’s how it always was. People in my small town were so comfortable with me that they quickly forgot I was different. And because they forgot, I did as well.

I got my first set of prosthetic legs when I was a toddler—sometime around two years old. At first I screamed and hated how they pinched and poked and weighed me down. They were so foreign, so heavy and bulky, and I was too little to understand why my parents were pinning them on. As I got older and became used to them, I loved them. I could wear fancy socks and shoes, and I wore them to kindergarten. One day I went to the bathroom and left them there by accident.

A classmate went in after me and returned to the classroom white as a ghost. “There are legs in the bathroom!” he cried to the teacher, who promptly took me aside and reminded me not to leave them lying around. As I got older, I became more active and didn’t want to wear the prosthetics much at all. Eventually, I wore them solely for dress-up.

The first sport I participated in was softball, which I played in first through third grade. I had so much hair that the helmets barely fit my head because of my giant ponytail. My brothers and coaches taught me to hit to the third baseline to give myself more time to reach the bases. But we all soon realized I was lightning fast—all you really saw was a trail of dust in my wake. I remember one time I hit the ball right to the first baseman. No one thought I would make it to the base in time, but I kept running. I didn’t take my eyes off that base, and as the first baseman was trying to pick up the ball, I dove and touched the bag. *Safe!* It was a great lesson and a reminder for me: I should never take my eyes off my goals or God’s promises for my life. Even when something looks absolutely impossible—game over—in that very last second, things can change.

While softball was about being close to the ground, the trampoline was about soaring to the sky. I played this game called Popcorn, in which I challenged people to see who could bounce the highest (I always won). I decided I could play basketball too, and my forte was stealing the ball. It was definitely harder to make a basket because I was so low to the ground, but I just had to throw that much harder.

I also decided to try volleyball in sixth grade because Mr. Corn was the coach, and he was effortlessly cool. He taught art as well, and I’ve always been drawn to artists, although

my own “artistic soul” hadn’t quite emerged yet. Because he saw I needed to build my confidence on the volleyball court, he definitely did not take it easy on me. I was extremely self-conscious and nervous about serving. Since I was so low to the ground, it was difficult to serve from all the way in the back of the court. Time after time, my ball wound up in the net. So he taught me to stand sideways and hit the ball that way. Of course, I wasn’t the star spiker of the team, but I was great as middle back. Right where the ball dropped low, guess who was already low and didn’t have to fall to her knees? This girl.

I think everyone who knew me was just waiting to see what I would do next. I kept doing things I wasn’t “supposed” to be able to do. My parents were the only ones not surprised by my physical shenanigans. When I wanted to try something new and said in frustration, “I can’t do it!” they would scold me. “*Can’t* is a bad word in our home, and you shouldn’t use it, Jennifer,” they would say. So I grew up embracing the idea that I could do anything if I set my mind to it, just like the train in one of my favorite stories, *The Little Engine That Could. I think I can, I think I can.* To this day, I love the lessons that story teaches: be courageous, persevere, believe. As we try new things, we discover how strong we are and realize the only limits are the ones we impose on ourselves.

One day I told my parents I wanted to go roller skating, never even considering that I might need feet to put on roller skates. When you live in the middle of nowhere, you have limited activities, so the roller rink was the place to be! I asked my parents to take me to the store to buy a pair of skates, which they did, without any hesitation. The sales clerk must have thought we had lost our minds! *What is this girl going*

to do with roller skates? If I thought I could skate, then my parents believed not only that I could but also that I would. I put the skates on my hands and off I went. It took me a while to make it all the way around the rink—and even longer to learn how to skate backward. But I simply refused to quit trying. And when I did make it around, everyone applauded. I felt like such a star!

My favorite moment at the rink was when they called, “Limbo!” Because I was so small, I could limbo like nobody’s business. How low could I go? They’d never seen anything like it!

Seeing through God’s Eyes

I had the happiest, most normal childhood. I collected Beanie Babies, Polly Pockets, and fuzzy-haired troll dolls by the dozen. One day I was walking in town with one of my favorites—a troll with bright blue hair—and a lady on the street remarked, “What an ugly baby you have there!” I swear my mom wanted to smack her because she saw how upset her words had made me.

“Mama,” I wailed, “she called my baby ugly!”

My mother took me aside and gently explained that every creature is beautiful in God’s eyes. “Your baby isn’t ugly,” she told me. “That lady was just having a bad day.”

And that’s how I grew up—knowing I was beautiful and perfect in God’s eyes. Our physical presence is only part of who we are as human beings. What’s inside is just as important, and maybe more so. My parents took me into their home and their lives with the fullest of hearts and the biggest of faiths. They knew life wouldn’t always be easy for me. They

knew I would experience frustration and pain and people who saw me in the way that lady saw my troll doll. They also knew they couldn't always protect me. I had to learn to fend for myself. However, they believed God gave me to them for a reason, and they felt an enormous responsibility to prepare me as best they could to tackle whatever challenges came my way. *Can't* was never an option. Fear was never an option. I would rather fall flat on my face than regret not trying. And I'm blessed with parents who were courageous enough to let me try, let me fail, and let me find my way and my trust in God.

My parents were very open about where I came from and the fact that I was adopted. They never thought it should be a source of shame or embarrassment. Some kids are born to their parents. Others are chosen. My mom says that one day when I was little, I asked her, "Mommy, do you think my parents gave me up because I didn't have legs?" She thought long and hard before answering.

"Jennifer," she said softly, "Mommy's tummy was broken, and God found you a really nice lady with a nice tummy so she could hold you until I could get to you."

I never questioned it again. It made perfect sense to me, and honestly, it still does.

BELIEVE IT!

These are the things I've come to know and believe with all my heart and soul. Think about them. Consider how they might apply to your own life or situation, and use

them wherever and whenever you see fit. I'm not going to "school" you or tell you what to do. That's just not who I am (although my brothers might disagree since they think I can be pretty bossy). But I will tell you this: all the knowledge in the world won't do you any good if you sit on it. When you learn something, you need to put it into play. Otherwise, it's like holding the basketball and never taking that jump shot!

Everything Happens for a Reason

Trust that every experience—good, bad, or ugly—shapes the person you are for the better. Every mistake or misfortune is an opportunity to grow and learn. It's a matter of seeing the bigger picture, the purpose you are working toward, and how each thing you go through is part of the journey. I was born without legs. I could choose to have a woe-is-me attitude, and I don't think anyone would hold that against me. But I don't . . . ever. Instead, I see my body as a huge advantage because it provides me with the opportunity to have an extremely unique perspective on life. It also allows God to work through me to inspire and motivate others.

Sure, my life is more difficult in some aspects. I'd be lying if I said otherwise. But it would be too easy to go down that negative road. Instead, I prefer to focus on all the positives that having no legs has brought to my life: the opportunities, the people, the chance for my voice to be heard. And when I do think of all those things, the good overwhelmingly overshadows the bad. Bottom line: if I hadn't been born without legs, I wouldn't have the life I have now. And I certainly wouldn't be writing this book!