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# Everyday Ordinary

(MOSTLY) TRUE CONFESSIONS OF MARRIAGE, SHOE SHOPPING  
AND HOW I KEEP LOSING THE MOTHER OF THE YEAR AWARD

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*Playing ping pong with a 4-year-old is exactly like standing at a table holding a paddle watching said 4-year-old crawl around the floor chasing a little white ball.*

# Cartwheeling

Inspired by the Summer Olympic gymnastics a couple years ago, Ash said she wanted to learn to do a cartwheel, which surprised me a little that she didn't know how to do one. It shouldn't have surprised me. I am her mom, and I hadn't seen her or her friends doing cartwheels in the backyard. They occasionally tried flips on the trampoline. Mostly they just bounced on the trampoline or lay in the sun telling stories.

I don't remember how old I was when I started doing flips and handstands in my front yard with the other neighborhood girls. I just remember always doing them. It seemed that whenever I was outside on the grass, anywhere, I was doing flips and tumbles. When I was 3 years old, we—my family and I—were at my dad's company picnic, and I was attempting a handstand. Somehow I talked my dad into helping me. He held my legs straight up for a few moments, and then with me having completed the handstand, he let go. I tumbled to the ground and broke my left arm. I don't blame my dad, but he still blames himself. As my mom tells it, my dad felt such strong pangs of guilt whenever he saw my little arm in the little cast that he just quit looking at me until the cast was off, which took all of three weeks.

After the cast came off, my mom, both protective and encouraging at the same time, enrolled me in a tumbling class. It didn't last long. Apparently, I didn't have the grace for gymnastics, so my mom enrolled me in a marching and baton twirling class where I stomped around in white boots with tassels. My career as a majorette didn't

last long either. That teacher didn't think I had the grace for baton twirling, especially since I lacked the coordination to wrap the baton around my waist and march at the same time.

My mom then enrolled me in Wendy Ward's Charm School at the local Montgomery Ward's department store in Southern California. I was taught how to walk and sit with good posture and how to conduct myself gracefully like a lady. I was the youngest ever to be enrolled in and complete the class, where for graduation I got to be in a fashion show. After weeks of class, I was confident that I was a proper young lady and could take on the catwalk with dignity and style. So when it was my turn—and just like a proper young lady—I glided onto the catwalk in the lovely, knee-length blue velvet dress with a huge back bow that my mom purchased from Montgomery Wards especially for the graduation ceremony. Apparently charm and conducting myself like a lady really didn't take either. My catwalk was more akin to those dogs wearing snow booties for the first time, high stepping and wildly kicking their feet at odd angles.

After I completed the class, I quickly returned to doing backbends and handstands and cartwheels and flying somersaults whenever and wherever there was enough space to do so. By the time I started school, my mother gave in to my natural propensity for calisthenics and made me wear shorts under all my dresses so that I wasn't showing off my underpants to the entire school. It was a great move on her part. I lived on the twirling bars and monkey bars on the playground.

When I was 13, I had a few girlfriends who were bona fide gymnasts and could justly do the handsprings, layouts, and flips—frontways, backways, and sideways. I watched them keenly and thought to myself, "I can do that." After a lot of practice in my front yard in full view of the entire neighborhood—with shorts under my skirts—I learned to do a round-off, a one-handed cartwheel, and a front handspring, none of which were all that graceful. But I did them. I managed to hurl my body through the air and land on my feet. Ta-da.

The one thing I always wanted to do was an aerial—a cartwheel with no hands. I went over and over the move in my head, envisioning the move and my subsequent perfect Olympic score. But, when it came time to make the actual flip without placing my hands on the ground, I would chicken out and either place a hand on the ground to complete a cartwheel or stop midstream and in doing so allow gravity to take

over where it was being defied. That same year, I tried a similar trick on my skateboard on the asphalt in the middle of our cul-de-sac in Colorado Springs. I should have known that if I couldn't do it on the stationary, soft and forgiving grass, then surely I couldn't do it on a moving skateboard on the hard, less forgiving surface with much more severe consequences. (You can also ask Ash about the consequences of doing tricks on a skateboard on the asphalt. She understands all too well. She lost her two front baby teeth the summer she was 6 years old. She gets her grace from her momma.)

But this summer—the summer of the Olympics—Ash was determined to do a cartwheel.

“I am going to do a cartwheel today,” she announced and readied herself in the middle of the living room.

B was on his way to the church, but he paused in the doorway to watch.

Ash stopped, looked at her father and said, “What?”

“If you're going to do this, I want to see.”

She smiled shyly and ended up doing a somersault on the floor. Then Ren did a somersault on the floor.

“Momma, did you used to do cartwheels?”

“All the time,” I said.

“Can you show me?”

B grinned and asked, “Do I need to call the doctor to meet us at the emergency room?”

“No,” I said looking at him and then looking at Ash, “and no.”

“Chicken,” B said, and then he left.

Then Ash and I googled, “How to Do a Cartwheel.” We watched a lot of videos of girls doing cartwheels.

Later that day when the kids and I went to the backyard—me to hang the laundry and them to play—where there is long, lush grass and lots of open space, Ash was even more determined to do a cartwheel. She poised herself with arms stretched high above her head, and said out loud, “Ready, set, go!” She bent over, placed her hands on the ground, kicked her feet wildly, and fell on her bottom. “Did I do it, Mom?”

I watched her from beneath the clothesline. I hung another T-shirt and carefully chose my words, “You have the concept, but I think you should keep practicing.”

She straightened her arms out to one side, bent her knees and then pushed herself over backward in an awkward I'm-falling-kinda-of-way. "Did I do it that time?"

"I think you should change your approach," I said. Ren had also been watching her. To him his big sister was amazing, and he wanted to do everything that his big sister did. From what he could make out, all he had to do was to stand parallel to her, hold his arms outstretched just like her and then fall backward on his bottom. "Hey Momma, see!"

There was no way this method was going to work.

"Can you show me?" she pleaded.

I sighed. I put the laundry down and walked to an open space. I wanted to show the Girl how to do a cartwheel. I loved doing cartwheels, but the last time I did one, I think it was the summer before I got married, I pulled a muscle in my leg. The time before that, I broke my glasses. And the time before that, my shirt and skirt flew up, and I flashed everyone in the neighborhood. And I was in my 20s.

"Start with straight arms and legs," I said, holding my arms out. And then, out of pure instinct as if I were 13 again with no inhibitions or back injuries or pulled muscles or sprained ankles, I hopped twice and pushed myself over. I felt my feet lift from the ground and begin to cartwheel over my body. My glasses slid from my nose to the ground and in that split second I thought to myself, "Oh no, what did I just do?" I looked to the sky to see pointed toes and straight legs and lots of white fluffy clouds, and then my shirt fell down across my face. All I could see was the inside of my T-shirt and the grass beneath my hands. I was still tumbling.

But then just as quickly as it started, it ended. I was standing on my feet! I was standing tall with my arms outstretched overhead. I smiled, and I flung my hands back gymnast-style to signal I was done. I heard the roar of a crowd and saw a perfect 10 flash on the scoreboard in front of me. I turned to see my audience.

"Oh, so that's how you do it!" Ash said clapping and then adding, "Did you hurt yourself, Momma?"

"Only a little. I think. But no need to call Daddy."



## Dance, Dance, Revelations

A lot of people call Ash a *Kat Mini-Me*. I don't see my face in hers, but there are some things she definitely got from me, like her coordination and rhythm. I like to think I have rhythm, but the truth is, if it weren't for the drummer in church and the fact that he pops the snare on "one", I wouldn't know where to clap, a condition that plagues B, the human metronome. Now, Ash is a lovely musician and plays several instruments—that part she got from B. That's not the problem. It's the Girl's overall coordination that plagues her, not just the cartwheel stuff. For example, she will occasionally just fall down, a combination of said coordination and big feet.

Once, while we were on vacation in Orlando, Ash wanted to take a hip hop class at the resort where we were staying. And she wanted me to take it with her. "Sure," I said scrunching up my nose, "If that's what you want to do...on vacation."

She beamed with excitement.

That evening the temperature hovered around 90°F, naturally accompanied by Florida's wet-blanket humidity. Dressed in yoga shorts and tanks and sneakers and with water bottles in hand, Ash and I headed to the dance class, next to one of the resort's outdoor swimming pools and within full view of about 50 guest room balconies, all of which were filling up fast. I signed us in and took my place with the other moms toward the back. We stood there eyeing at each other, all wondering exactly what we just signed up for.

The instructor, a young, skinny, perpetually tanned Floridian, introduced himself to me and asked if I had ever done any hip hop.

I wanted to reply something sarcastic and smart but thought better of it, "No."

"Well, I am going to reach inside and pull the rhythm right out of you," he said with a toss of his head. With that, he moved to the front of the class and pushed the play button on his portable boombox.

Ash eagerly took a place at the front of the class while I took a spot in the second row with the other moms. I tried really hard not to think

about the 25 people in the pool clinging to the side wall or the 100 people lining their balconies overhead watching intently.

“This can’t end well,” I said out loud to myself. “This is for Ash.”

“What, Momma?”

“Nothing, girly girl,” I said forcing a smile. “It’s gonna be fun!”

Then it started. At first, it was innocent enough, bouncing back and forth alternating feet to the beat of the music, just feeling the rhythm. Then the instructor said, “Follow me.”

He popped and locked, did the Soulja Boy, the Spongebob, the Wop, the Roger Rabbit, the Running Man, the Kriss-Cross and several other dance moves that I couldn’t pronounce let alone execute, although I think I inadvertently twerked.

The people on the balconies started pointing and calling their friends out. I looked around the class, and there were some great dancers, and then there were the moms. That’s when I realized this dance class was not too dissimilar to the aerobics classes at the gym, and before kids, I had taken a lot of years of aerobics classes, starting with the Jazzercise class my mom and I took together when I was 15 and we wore 80s style leotards with leg warmers. Over the years since, I did it all: regular aerobics, dance aerobics, step aerobics, ski conditioning (not a skier), boot camp, Kenpo cardio, and core. I wasn’t as graceful as most of the people in my classes and occasionally lost my place and balance. But above all, I knew if I could do that—especially the Kenpo cardio—then I could do this and probably finish with some semblance of integrity.

I set my eyes squarely on the instructor and did what he did, in a much less artistic, more utilitarian kind of way. He took a step, I took a step. He turned, I turned. He kicked, I kicked. He lunged, I lunged. Moved this way, bounced that way, crossed my legs, slapped my knee, grapevine, and locked it. Sometimes it took me a few steps to catch on, but I did catch on. He did it with flair. I was just grateful I wore sneakers and a sports bra.

“It’s like aerobics! It’s cardio hip hop!” I said out loud.

Then Ash said. “This is so easy! I’m doing it, Momma, I’m doing it. Are you watching?”

For the first time, I looked at her and saw what she was doing, I mean really doing. And whatever it was, it was not cardio hip hop. Her arms flailed about wildly, and legs flew independently of her body. It

was mesmerizing. The instructor turned, Ash kicked. He popped, Ash did a weird robot jerk. He lunged, Ash fell to the ground. She popped right back up.

“Momma, I’m doing it.”

I muffled my laughter long enough to ask, “Are you having fun?”

“This is great,” she said, breathing hard. She added, “I want to audition to the arts middle school for dance, not violin.”

“Oh girl, you’re so good with the violin. I think you should audition where you’re strongest.”

## SPRING SLEDGING

Just because Ash can’t do a cartwheel or hip hop, doesn’t mean that she’s not a risk taker. Clearly, she’s not like Ren, who’s fearless and reckless and will rush into any situation as though someone just yelled, “Free cookies this way.” Free cookies or not, Ash tends to hang back a little, assess the situation before proceeding and taking the risk. So when Ash came in the kitchen where I was cooking dinner to ask if she and Ren could use her purple sled, I knew something was afoot.

“It’s spring. It’s 82° outside. Why do you need the sled?”

“To pull stuff.”

“Use the blue plastic seat sled,” I said. Over the last winter, a molded plastic, single-rider disk sled appeared in our backyard. We think it came from one of our neighbors, but so far, no one has laid claim to it.

“I tried. It’s not big enough, and it doesn’t have a rope.”

“What sort of stuff do you want to pull?”

“Just stuff, Mom,” she said. “And the blue one doesn’t slide good.”

“On the grass?”

She didn’t answer, but persisted, “So can we?”

I didn’t answer, but deferred, “Ask your dad.”

She turned and skipped off to find B. A few minutes later, she darted out the back door, and B followed detouring to the basement to retrieve the barely-used, purple plastic toboggan sled...with a rope.

“Are you sure you want to let them play with that?” I asked as he walked through the kitchen. B looked at me and shrugged, and then he walked outside to give it to the kids.

When there were just a few minutes left for the dinner to cook, B



and I ran upstairs to check a file on the computer in my office, where we happened to have the perfect view of our backyard, the swing, and the fort with a long wavy slide. And there, perched atop the slide, was Ren sitting in the purple plastic toboggan sled. Ash stood at the bottom of the slide, rope in hand, counting down to blast off.

As B and I stared out the window at the daredevils, I said, “That’s what I thought she was going to do.”

“I had no idea,” B said. He smiled big.

Just then Ash jerked the rope, and the sled and Ren bumped haltingly down the slide. When the sled reached the bottom, it stopped short and launched Ren three feet head-over-heels into the air and then to the grass. He stood up and ran back to the slide.

“I would never have done that when I was a kid,” I said out loud, thinking it did sound like a lot of fun but the potential for getting hurt would have stopped me and my brother from trying it. I could hear my father’s voice inside my head, the voice of reason and warning, although that voice was somewhat vacant when I tried that skateboarding trick on the asphalt. Another time I dared something vaguely similar was when my brother and I made up a game in which we would jump from our eight-foot-tall backyard jungle gym to toys we had placed at varying distances on the ground surrounding us. We awarded points to each other for height, distance, and style. For the grand prize and eternal bragging rights, I decided to jump from the highest point of the jungle gym to my brother’s inflatable Bozo the Clown punching bag approximately 10 feet away. I sailed through the air and landed squarely on top of Bozo’s head, which in that instant flew out from underneath me like a greased pig. I plummeted the extra three feet straight to the ground and knocked the wind out of myself. As I lay there attempting to catch my breath, Bozo bobbed back up and bounced about my head mocking me with his bright red painted-on clown smile. I didn’t win the grand prize.

“Oh, I would have,” said B, “but we clearly had different upbringings.”

“Clearly,” I said, “for example, my dad never would have towed us behind his truck on a sled in the snow. Nor would he have put me on top of his car to hold down a mattress as he drove along the highway.”

“What? That’s not normal.”



Kat Groshong always wanted to be a writer and spent hours writing anything, everything longhand—before the digital age—as evidenced by the permanent flat spot and cracked nail on her right ring finger fingernail. She got her first computer in college and started her first blog in the late 1990s after she read a story on a someone’s personal weblog page entitled, “Operation Hang it Up,” about two online diarists who took a nine-hour road trip to hang up a payphone on a deserted road in the Mojave Desert. Any evidence of her early blogs are long gone, *thankgoodness*, but she continued to write amusing email updates to her close friends and family until she started her Confessions blog in 2008, just about the same time she abandoned her MySpace page and joined Facebook. Just like this first book, her blogs center around everyday life and were often sporadic during the toddler years when she worked from home and Monkey Boy was her assistant. It wasn’t easy, she says, because Monkey Boy was not a good administrative assistant: he wrote illegibly, crowded the workspace with action figures, took too many breaks, and downloaded random games on her cell phone. On the upside, he could be paid in Cheerios. As a result, she still has a backlog of blogs to post. Connect with Kat at [www.katgroshong.com](http://www.katgroshong.com).



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