



the impossible dream of

A LIFE LESS FRANTIC

and how i made it happen

KELLY EXETER

THIS BOOK IS FOR ...

- All the over-achievers and over-committers.
- All the people who hold themselves to standards they'd never expect from anyone else.
- Those who feel like they're always striving but never arriving.
- Those who feel like a hamster on a wheel, running their guts out but never getting anywhere. Who don't realise there is an alternative.
- And of course, there are always the voyeurs ...

This book follows Kelly's journey along the road to oblivion and back. It is a fascinating insight into how certain patterns of behaviour can develop from a very young age and stick with you for a lifetime – often to your detriment!

Kelly's story is that of every person out there who can't help but do 'too much'. While she's had to learn everything the hard way, she hopes her words can be a shortcut for others to the life less frantic that deep down we all crave.

Intro ~ How did I get here?

I remember the exact moment with frightening clarity.

Ant and Jaden, my husband and child, had left for the day and I was dragging myself around the house. Aimlessly tidying here and there, I contemplated my day and found little joy in what lay ahead.

I was about to enter the kitchen when suddenly I pulled up short.

A little devil had appeared on my shoulder and without pre-amble, whispered to me in a venomous tone:

Ant deserves better, you know. He deserves better than a sad-sack wife who is just existing her way through each day. Maybe it's time you took yourself out of the picture. He'd be better off if you were dead.

I reeled with shock. I knew I was in a bad way, but I didn't realise I was that bad. How on earth had I gotten to this level of hopelessness? To the point where *suicide* was presenting as an option?

I knew the answer, of course.

I'd spent my entire life following the well-trodden path of a type A personality:

Highly driven? Tick

Compulsive multi-tasker? Tick

Constant need to over-achieve? Tick

When I started running my own business six years earlier, the need to over-achieve became a killer. I couldn't deliver *anything* at the expected level. I *had* to surprise people. I *needed* to hear them say, "Wow, no one's ever done this as well/ fast/awesomely as you have". Naturally I couldn't keep up such a high level of delivery so I started to fail.

And I wasn't just failing my clients. I was failing at being a mother, wife, friend, daughter, sister, boss, homemaker and person too.

And it completely did my head in.

Ironically, the more I failed and the unhappier I got, the more I took on. It's always been my standard coping mechanism for any problem: *do more*. Try to be awesomeness personified for even more people.

The more I took on, the more life got out of control. The less control I had, the more anxious I got. Anxiety led to stress, stress led to depression, and before I knew it I'd spent the better part of two years firmly in the grip of this unholy trifecta, plunging steadily towards oblivion.

So how did I reach this point in my life where death seemed a viable alternative? And what steps did I take to bring myself back from the brink?

Well, it's a long story ...

Chapter 1

School – the perfect breeding ground for compulsive over-achievers

My first steps on the path to anxiety, stress and depression were taken very early in the piece. This was a road paved over years of compulsive over-achieving and holding myself to standards that were attainable but utterly unsustainable.

For many, it is demanding parents who lay the foundations for this kind of behaviour but for me, the opposite was true. Sure, the better I performed in life, the more mum and dad expected from me. But everything I aspired to was largely driven from within, and no-one expected more from me than I expected from myself.

For someone prone to high expectations and an addiction to achieving, school was the ultimate gateway drug. It wasn't long before I experienced my first little kick of accomplishment and once I got a taste for it, I had to keep going back for more.

I was born in the Caribbean nation of Trinidad and Tobago, on the larger island of Trinidad. Being born there wasn't as random as it sounds given both my parents are Trinidad nationals. Dad's very large family still lives there, but Mum's family has since scattered to all corners of the globe.

We lived there for nine years, and I can still remember all the houses we lived in and the weekend trips to my grandmother's house.

But what I remember most clearly was my time at school.

School in Trinidad was highly competitive. The standard of education is actually quite high there, probably because everyone sits exams in Grade 6 (called 11+ exams) to determine what high school they'll go to. These exams are highly-pressured and pretty cut-throat – not the best experience for the average 11-year-old, but that's just how the system works.

So unlike primary schools in Australia, which take a “gently, gently” approach, in Trinidad you were tested and graded right from the start. And at St Joseph Terrace

Private School (where I entered Grade 1) you were streamed immediately into 1A and 1B.

One of my clearest memories is being promoted from 1B to 1A midway through my first year. I'm still not sure why. My school mark was 86% at that point—not bad, but hardly stellar stuff.

I was devastated. I was a shy little thing but had made lots of friends in 1B and now I'd have to start over again.

Luckily when I took my place in 1A my teacher and fellow students made a huge fuss of the 'new girl' and this made settling in easier. I also clearly decided I needed to justify this promotion, because by year's end I was top of the class with 97%. And I was never outside the top two in my class for the rest of my time in Trinidad.

I absolutely loved school. The frequent testing gave me constant motivation to achieve, and fuelled my desire to be the best.

This desire would ultimately lead to some of the highest and lowest points in my life. But from ages five through nine I remember only high points.

Then Mum and Dad decided to move us all to Australia, and everything changed.

It's safe to say my Australian primary school years weren't my happiest.

We moved to Perth in 1986, and I slotted into Year 4 at St Judes Primary School pretty easily.

Too easily, in fact.

I didn't learn anything at school (apart from stuff about my new country) until Year 7. My Trinidad maths, science and English were years ahead of what we were learning in Australia. And grammar, which was a really big part of the English curriculum in Trinidad, didn't seem to be taught at all.

But the worst shock was yet to come.

In Trinidad, being smart was really cool but of course in Australia it wasn't very cool at all. Mum urged me to tone things down a little, but I just couldn't censor myself. My hand was always the first one up in class, and I soaked up whatever new stuff I could learn like a sponge. (I can still

remember my Year 4 teacher asking an Australian geography question and saying with exasperation, “Kelly wasn’t even born here. Why is she the only one who knows the answer to this question?”)

Needless to say I really struggled to make friends. I survived school recesses and lunches by playing cricket or football with the boys (yes I was also a massive tomboy – bad combination), playing with kids in the class above me or spending quality time with myself. Fortunately I’m quite the introvert, so spending time by myself wasn’t as intolerable as it could have been.

I distinctly remember an occasion when a girl from school was supposed to come over for a play date but for some reason never showed up. I was quite unperturbed—it meant I could do whatever I wanted and not have to entertain or accommodate anyone else that day. But my Dad (who’s a massive introvert himself) was quite upset for me. That night he beseeched me to be less like him and more like Mum, who was friendly and outgoing.

I realised then how concerned they were about my lack of friends at school. But while it would have been nice to have people to hang out with at recess and lunch, I

honestly didn't care if they didn't want to come to my house. I loved just being able to do my own thing.

And in the end, I felt it was more important to be the best than to have friends. Given this approach also took a lot less effort, I went with the path of least resistance.

By the time Year 7 rolled around and high school was looming, being smart became minutely cooler. So that final year was slightly more pleasant than the rest. I was chosen as Head Girl, became Dux of the School, and even had some friends to hang out with during school hours. Quite the perfect year as far as I was concerned.

But I was still excited to be moving on to high school.

Starting high school at Corpus Christi College was an exciting prospect for two reasons:

1. With 180 people in the year group, surely I would make at least one friend.
2. It presented a whole new range of possible avenues for achievement. (By now I was a total

addict, and nothing put a sparkle in my eye like having many things to strive for.)

I was right about the first one. I made friends right away, and while Year 8 friendship groups formed and dispersed at the speed of your average science experiment, I always had someone to hang out with outside of class time. Mum and Dad could finally relax.

I was right about the second one too, but not in the way I expected. I was still highly motivated to excel academically, but I also added success in sport to my repertoire.

Year 8 really set the tone for the rest of my high school years. I won a slew of subject awards, and just missed out on getting dux by 0.1%. I got straight A's on my reports, but cancelled out this un-coolness by excelling at cross-country and athletics, and making the interschool team for both.

The rest of my time at high school followed the same pattern. It was rare not to see a long row of A's on my reports, but as long as I kept performing well on the athletic field I got to occupy a neat little space in the social

pecking order. Not popular, but not a geek either. I could now pursue my goal of being the best at everything I set my mind to and still have friends.

Life was pretty perfect and I really thrived at 'Corpus'. No matter where your talents lay, be they in academics, sport, drama, music or life; you were encouraged and supported to ensure you got the very best out of yourself.

My final year of high school was great as far as achievements went, just as it was in primary school. On the sporting front I was named House Captain, Cross Country Captain and Athletics Captain, and also represented the school in Volleyball and Hockey.

Academically, Year 12 was TEE (Tertiary Entrance Examination) year, where your marks determined what university course you could get into. Most found it stressful, but between the constant testing and mock exams I felt ridiculously over-prepared and was confident I'd achieve my goals. The university course I wanted to do didn't require a particularly high mark (around 335), but there was a '400 club' for people who got 400 or higher in the TEE. Naturally I needed to be part of that club.

In December the TEE results were mailed to homes all over WA. I opened my envelope with quivering hands, taking a good minute to absorb the results before letting out a giant “whoop”. I scored 418, and was on my way to the University of WA to study Human Movement (Sports Science).

If my university years were notable for one thing, it was lack of academic achievement. We were only examined twice a year, there were no tests, and assignments were few and far between. What’s more, it soon became apparent that it mattered little whether we aced every unit with High Distinctions or simply passed. At the end of our three year degree we’d all have the same thing written on our Graduation Certificate: BSc.

For me this was highly de-motivating, and I responded by doing just enough work to pass. I sauntered through uni with the equivalent of a B-minus average. Not like me at all.

Fortunately I had something else to strive for in that first year. In the very romantic setting of a Human Biology

Anatomy Lab, surrounded by cadavers, I met the love of my life—Anthony (Ant). He caught my eye in the first class when he asked to borrow my pencil. This was apparently code for something as the whole table (all male except yours truly) promptly collapsed in laughter around me. I never found out what *that* was all about.

Further to this most inauspicious of beginnings, it soon became apparent my new crush was not a fast mover. Despite a lot of flirting and hanging out together, it still took half the university year (plus the intervention of a friend) before we finally became an item. But from that point we were inseparable, and I was blissfully in love.

(In the years to come, when things got tough and I started exhibiting the over-committed, stressed out behaviour that featured prominently throughout my 20s and early 30s, Ant often lamented that he wished he could have his ‘first year cutie’ back. In fact I can confidently say that 1995 was the only one of all my adult years {till now} that I wasn’t constantly vaged out thinking about twenty million things at any given time.)

As great as love was, by the time second year rolled around my ‘achievement meter’ was hovering on empty

and definitely needed a top up. I'd just started dipping my toes into the world of triathlon, but certainly wasn't kicking any goals at that point.

So I applied for a job at the uni Rec Centre. These were usually given to third year Human Movement students, but I wanted to try anyway. I landed a spot as a leader in the Sport for Kids program—a foot in the door. From there I wangled my way into a front desk position. Finally, when some Fitness Centre spots came up, I snagged one of those too.

Life was great. I had a wonderful boyfriend, I was earning money, and while uni wasn't stimulating me academically I was having a great time socially. And my various positions at the Rec Centre helped me distinguish myself enough to feel like I was at least succeeding at *something*.

For some reason Ant and I ended up doing our three year degree over four years, which worked out perfectly for me when it came to securing a job. (One of the less wonderful features of doing Human Movement is there's generally no clear job pathway once you finish your degree).

Towards the end of our fourth year a full-time role came up at the Rec Centre. Having been such a ubiquitous presence there for the past three years, it wasn't a huge stretch for them to give the job to me.

Up to this point I'd only dabbled half-heartedly in triathlons—doing the odd race here and there, but not much in the way of training. That all changed once I started working. And if school was a gateway drug for satisfying my need to over-achieve, triathlons were my crack cocaine.

Chapter 2

A sport tailor made for Type A Personalities

If you're looking for a sport created specifically for over-achievers, triathlon is it.

With three disciplines (swimming, cycling and running) you're pretty much guaranteed to be improving in at least one at any given time. Improving is akin to 'achieving', so you're consistently getting the dopamine 'hit' that comes with that reward. This makes the sport highly addictive.

Further, triathlon results are split into times for each discipline. So after each race you can track exactly how much you are improving, not just in relation to yourself, but against your fellow athletes too.

Still not hooked? Well how about this awards structure? It's not just the top three athletes across the line who get the accolades. Everyone competes in their five-year age category (e.g. 25-29) and the top three placings in each category are recognised in the same way as the overall winners.

Despite all this, it took a while for the seductive side of triathlon to get hold of me.

I did my first race in the middle of high school leavers celebrations. I'd wanted to compete since finishing Little Athletics at 15, but back then the only club that catered for juniors was too far from where I lived. So I did that first triathlon on the (little) training I prescribed for myself.

Naturally, I finished nowhere. But my enthusiasm was undented.

Come Orientation Day at the University of WA, the first thing I did was join up with the UWA Triathlon Club (UWATC). There weren't too many girls in the club back then, so I think the guys at the UWATC stand could hardly believe their luck.

And those guys quickly proved to be lovely and eager to share their advice and knowledge. Unfortunately they were also all amazing athletes so other than one run session a week I couldn't really train with them.

They also tended to focus more on the longer events, so I'd often turn up to shorter races not knowing a soul. Fortunately that changed at the start of the 1995/96 season when I did a women's training course. From that

point on I had friends at every race, and triathlon became a lot more fun.

What wasn't fun was my swimming ability, or rather the lack of it. Coupled with a total aversion to swimming training, it meant I regularly came out of the water in last place. It wasn't all bad—a natural talent for cycling and having been a runner my whole life had me passing people continually for the rest of the race. Unfortunately I never passed enough people to affect the pointy end of the results.

The UWATC experienced a renaissance in 1996/97 when I dragged friends and workmates from the Rec Centre into the mix. Suddenly the club had a lot of girls and a lot of beginners, and it became both fun and highly social. Many of those I dragged along are still my closest friends today.

One of those people was quickly becoming my new BFF. Unlike me, Nat was an amazing swimmer. She was also my equal on a bike, and a much better runner. Having her in the club should have been the best thing that ever happened to me as nothing motivates me more than putting someone fast in front of me and saying *try and get to their level*. But between studying and working I always

found it easy to talk myself out of going to training and continued to perform accordingly.

In 1997 Perth hosted the World Triathlon Championships. The beauty of these championships is they're not just for the elites. You can represent your country in your age-group as well, and a lot of locals were doing just that. Nat and I were in awe of them all, especially our coach Robyn who won a medal in her category. We dreamed of being good enough to represent Australia when we were 40.

About six months later I finished Uni and started working full-time at the Rec Centre. Ironically, it was at this point that I also started taking training more seriously. One reason was that I could now only train before or after work, so there was no more thinking 'I can do this session later' (and never doing it).

Then there was the traffic. I have a pathological hatred of traffic, and if I didn't get up for training every morning, I'd only get an extra 40 minutes sleep before spending an hour sitting in a car park on the freeway. To this day I can thank traffic for being the single greatest motivator for getting me to morning training sessions.

Naturally, once I started training regularly (especially swimming), I started improving. I can still remember the first time I came out of the water at a race with people actually around me. It was a huge thrill, and I was on a massive high afterwards. This led to some much-deserved eye rolling from Nat who'd spent the past two years spruiking the benefits of regular training to me.

I improved rapidly, and by the start of the 1998-99 season I was consistently placing in the top three in my age-group in local races. Being me, I immediately set my sights on the next big thing: representing Australia at the 1999 World Champs in Montreal. It was a ridiculous goal. But I loved ridiculous goals, and I completely threw myself into training and racing—heart, mind and soul.

This was not terribly wonderful for my relationship with Ant as triathlon began to dominate my every waking thought. (Mind you, according to him it started dominating my thoughts long before this.) I found myself obsessively studying race results, comparing my times with my competitors' and figuring out where I could improve the most for the next race.

I was also figuring out how little training I could get away with and still achieve my goals. While I loved the actual races, I couldn't say the same about training. The only thing that really motivated me to train (other than avoiding morning traffic) was having a bad race. If I had a good race, it was pretty easy to justify skipping the next day's sessions.

For this reason I couldn't quite understand Ant's antipathy towards my commitment to triathlon. In my mind, I was doing a lot less training than anyone else I knew and figured he should have been grateful.

The 1998-1999 season finally ended, and having completed the qualifying races for the Worlds I waited for the team to be announced. Australia took 12 males and 12 females in each five-year age category so the odds of getting a spot were good given I'd hovered around 10th spot in all my qualifying races.

But when the team was announced I was named first reserve. I was completely gutted, but those in the know told me not to lose hope. *Someone will get injured they said and you'll end up going.*

And that's exactly what happened.

I was thrilled beyond belief to get called up to the team. And a little bemused that less than two years earlier Nat and I were watching the World Champs in Perth thinking, *maybe this is something we could do in 20 years' time.*

So there was no off season for me in 1999. I travelled to Montreal with some other competitors from Perth, including my friend Nathalie who was a Montreal native. It was fun being in a new city with someone who once lived there, and we had a wonderful time hanging out with some very talented athletes.

And not just Australian athletes. Incredibly, a male triathlete named Jason was there representing Trinidad and Tobago. I couldn't believe the tiny country I was born in had a national triathlon association. Little did I realise the opportunities that chance meeting would open up down the track.

On the actual race day in Montreal I finished kind of nowhere in my age group. Instead of being discouraged I came back from the Worlds hugely motivated and ready to take things to another level.

When I got back to Perth I changed squads, and for the first time I had a coach (Rick Turner) who demanded a *very* good excuse if I didn't turn up for training. It was just the accountability I needed, and while I still didn't love training, I loved training with Rick. His squad had some of WA's best triathletes, swimmers and surf club athletes, and it was a privilege to be around them. Needless to say I was improving out of sight, and greatly looking forward to the start of the 1999-2000 season.

My hard work was quickly rewarded. In the first race of the season I competed in the WA Elite category for the first time and finished third. I was over the moon.

Unfortunately the rest of my life wasn't so flash.

Ant and I were still struggling with our relationship, and I was desperately unhappy at work. Huge workloads and challenging budgets made the job quite stressful. And because I had to leave on time each day to get to training, I was considered a clock-watcher according to the office culture.

As well as being stressed and unhappy, I was resentful. I was efficient, worked extremely hard and would never

leave a job unfinished before heading off to training. Yet I still had to fight for every concession that let me pursue my goal of being an elite athlete—ironic given I worked for a sports association.

But things were about to get worse. A lot worse.

The 9th of December was a Thursday, and I'd been training that afternoon. As I was getting in the car to leave I heard about an accident at a set of lights I'd normally pass through on the way home. I lived with my grandmother and cousin at the time and on Thursday nights I always did the grocery shopping after training. So I deliberately avoided that intersection and as normal, did the shopping.

As I pulled into our driveway my cousin Chris came out to help me with the bags, which was unusual. I could hear Granny talking on the phone inside and heard someone had died. I asked Chris who it was, and he looked at me strangely before saying one word.

Adam.

My brother. My 18 year old brother.

I remember staring at Chris thinking *that's just not even funny* before it hit me like a Mack truck.

He's not joking.

He's. Not. Joking.

Everything from there was a blur but here's what I remember.

I remember Ant appeared at some stage. We went to my parent's house and heard Adam was the passenger in a car accident and died pretty much instantly. I went home soon after because I didn't want to be around anyone but Ant.

I remember seeing Adam at the hospital, and he looked like he was just sleeping. Ant fell apart at this point, and I remember thinking *No, you're not allowed to fall apart, I need you to be strong so I can fall apart.*

I remember that I didn't want to be near anyone who might be talking about him, especially other family members. I raced that weekend just to get out of Perth and away from everyone who knew Adam.

I remember returning to work the next week because I couldn't stand being alone with my thoughts. I specifically

told Nat not to come to the funeral, but felt comforted by Tess, another friend, being there. And then I felt stupid for telling Nat not to come.

I remember starting to resent work even more. Adam died in December, and come January it seemed everyone expected me to be 'over it'. I clung to triathlon—the one good thing in my life.

And it really *was* the only good thing in my life, because in February Ant and I broke up.

The sad thing was we still loved each other. But we'd reached a point where my devotion to my sport had become a huge barrier and love was now all we had in common. Ant was competing at an elite level himself in basketball, and I felt he should have understood my single-mindedness with my sporting goals.

But unlike most athletes at that level, he could switch off. Once training was done, it was done. Any frustrations he felt during a game were left in the change room. Sometimes he had to spend a long time in there, but once he emerged his mind was in the now, and not mulling over the past.

Not me. By this stage triathlon was *all* I was thinking about, and I had a new big goal to focus on. Despite hosting it only three years before, Perth was again hosting the Triathlon World Championships, and I was keen to represent Australia again. I'd started doing the qualifying races when Jason got in touch and asked if I wanted to represent Trinidad and Tobago.

While being in the Australian team may have been more prestigious, I thought it would be unbelievably cool representing the country of my birth at an event in my home city. So I fired back a big 'yes' to Jason. The Trinidad and Tobago Triathlon Association set me a qualifying time, which I achieved in February, ironically, not long after Ant and I broke up. It was nice to seal my spot that early—most of the Aussie team had to wait until well into March.

I had a really good World Champs and finished 12th in my age category—a huge improvement on my Montreal effort. After consistently placing in the top three in the WA Elite category for the entire 1999-2000 season, I finished with a win at a short course race at Rottneest. It was my first win in a biggish race, and I was excited at finding even better form in the next season.

But first I had to do some serious soul searching.

I was so unhappy at work I briefly considered turning professional with triathlon. The only problem was I'd spent some time with friends living that life on the Gold Coast. At the time there wasn't much sponsorship, funding or big prize money, so the athletes relied heavily on government handouts (i.e. the dole) for their income. (They jokingly considered themselves part of 'The Prime Minister's triathlon team'.) They followed the same pattern each day: eat, train, eat, sleep, eat, train, eat, watch tv, sleep; all the while worrying about how they'd pay for their groceries, let alone training and racing fees.

I wanted to achieve as much as I could in triathlon. But I wanted to enjoy my life too, and living on the breadline didn't appeal.

More importantly, I knew turning professional would mean never getting back together with Ant. While I never really thought our break-up would be forever, I *did* think we'd benefit from the time apart. I was his first real girlfriend, and I didn't want him 'settling' for me when there might be someone better out there for him. I also wondered whether I should really be going out with a

fellow triathlete. In my mind only another triathlete would 'understand' my single-mindedness when it came to achieving everything I could.

Five months apart made it pretty clear that neither was the case and we got back together in June (much to the relief of our respective parents). I made a commitment to be more 'present' when Ant was around, instead of always thinking about my next session or race and vagueing out on him constantly.

Shortly after this I had a salary review at work. I knew I hadn't exactly been a picnic to be around in the previous six months (the hardest six months of my life). But I'd still hit or exceeded the budgetary targets for all my cost centres and, in my mind, done my job really well. So I was devastated when they withheld my 3% pay rise (which basically covers inflation) because I "hadn't been a great person to work with for the previous six months". And it wasn't implied, either. That's what they actually told me verbally.

I was upset beyond belief, and immediately started looking for other jobs but quickly figured I'd have to get out of sports administration. It wasn't exactly a 9-5

industry and I was sick of the constant battle to leave work in time for training every afternoon.

Around this time I came across an advertisement for a nine-month intensive multimedia course. I'd always loved design, and had taught myself many of the industry standard programs. Nat (bless her) was the graphic designer at the Rec Centre, and she'd often let me watch over her shoulder as she worked. I showed Nat the course details, and she thought it covered all the key programs I'd need to know to become a designer.

The next stop was Mum and Dad to get their thoughts.

I was sure they'd be horrified at me throwing away a university degree to pursue a completely disparate career. But Mum just said, "Oh Kelly, I always thought you'd be well suited to a career in design". They really got behind me, and in August I resigned from the Rec Centre and went back to being a poor student.

Ironically, this put my triathlon career on hold for an entire season. Not only could I not afford training and races, I also didn't have time. (When the ad said the course

was intensive it wasn't kidding.) I still trained, but went back to doing the bare minimum and raced very sparingly.

One race I did do was the final event of the season, the Half Ironman in Margaret River. The season ending Half Ironman is the most prestigious race in WA and I was in no shape to be doing the event given it goes for more than five hours. But I had been on the organising committee so felt the best way to support the event was to toe the start line. Naturally I did not distinguish myself during the race but the after-party was notable for two things.

The first was a lot of a nudity (when triathletes get drunk there is always nudity) including a guest appearance streak by Ant and his mate Lanks. The second was my friend Morag introducing me to the unique combination that is vodka and Red Bull. This gave me the courage to approach and have a very drunken conversation with one Jon Kappler (JK). JK was and still is one of WA's best running coaches and I was keen for him to start coaching me.

It's safe to say neither JK nor I would have predicted where that drunken conversation would take us over the next five years!

Chapter 3

Everything's brand new

The winter of 2001 was a real season of change for me.

A month after finishing my design training I found a new job with The Marketing Mix (TMM). TMM was a marketing agency owned and run by Kath and Chris (a husband and wife team), and it was a lovely company to work for. Not only did they support my sporting goals, they didn't believe in overtime. With two young kids, Kath and Chris were seldom in the office after five and didn't expect anyone else to be either. This was a total dream after UWA Sports.

The next thing to change was my living arrangements.

For the previous six years I had been living with my grandmother. I moved into her place when I was in first year uni. My grandfather had passed away and Granny didn't want to live alone in her big 4x2. Given I was 17 and living a tiny 3x1 with four siblings and two parents at the time (and sharing a room with my 10-year-old sister), I jumped at the chance to move in with Granny.

And it was great. I revelled in finally having some much-needed privacy and space, but there were also a few drawbacks. To stay overnight at Ant's place I had to arrange for someone to stay the night at Granny's. Also, getting from Granny's house to everything I did – uni, work, training, friends and boyfriend – involved spending at least 25 minutes in the car each way.

So when Ant's sister moved out of the granny flat at his parents' place, Ant and I didn't waste any time moving in. My very busy life was suddenly a lot less pressured. I was now only 10-15 minutes away from work, training and friends, and got to see Ant all the time. This was very good for our relationship.

I also started training with JK that winter. I'd love to say this quickly sent my triathlon performance into the stratosphere, but in reality it was more of a slow build.

Despite that, my results for season 2001-02 were pretty solid. I won my first ever State Series Race, and ended up third Elite Female in the WA Triathlete of the Year standings.

This gave us a good base to build on during the off-season as I had a new 'big thing' to prepare for.

Early in 2002 I received an email from Jason's dad, who was President of the Trinidad and Tobago Triathlon Association. Would I be interested in representing Trinidad at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester?

Now you'd think answering this would have been a no-brainer ("Yes!") But at the time I felt a bit conflicted.

If I was living in Trinidad there wouldn't have been an issue—I knew I was the best female triathlete the country had to offer. But in Australia I wasn't even the best in my home state, and certainly not of a professional standard. Worse still, I had friends who *were* competing professionally and could only dream of representing their country at the Commonwealth Games. I was really uncomfortable having an opportunity like this offered to me on a platter rather than having to earn it.

I can't actually remember what got me past those conflicted feelings. Maybe it was knowing how chuffed my family back in Trinidad would be if I competed in

Manchester. Or maybe I thought it would be churlish to turn it down. Whatever the reason, I said yes and then trained my butt off all winter, hoping it would be enough to avoid disgracing myself on the world stage.

And things were actually going pretty well until I managed to have a bike accident three weeks out from the Games.

Fortunately I didn't break any bones. But instead of putting the proverbial icing on my training cake, I instead spent those precious weeks resting to heal my broken skin and sore body. I didn't have much time to feel sorry for myself though because I was soon on the plane to Manchester.

My Commonwealth Games experience was a mixed affair because I still hadn't gotten over the whole "You don't really deserve to be going!" thing by the time I arrived. I also get homesick really easily, so being in another country where I didn't know anyone was a bit hard.

Still, there's a lot to love about being an athlete at a major Games and I tried my best not to let negative thoughts get

in the way of having great experiences. And the first of those experiences was the Opening Ceremony.

What many people don't realise about the Opening Ceremony is that it's a long, drawn-out affair for the athletes. First you're bussed en masse from the Village to a holding area near the stadium. Then you spend the next three hours sitting around until it's your team's turn to head into the arena.

For me, the wait was torture. I didn't know any of the other Trinidadian athletes (Jason wasn't there yet), and my pathological shyness meant I couldn't start a conversation with anyone. I have no idea what I did in those three hours. (Remember, these were the days before iPhones and iPads.)

Finally though it was time to assemble outside the stadium. And honestly, I would have waited ten hours for what I felt when I entered the City of Manchester Stadium. The roar of the crowd was amazing, overwhelming and hugely inspiring in a Chariots of Fire kind of way. The only thing that could have made it better was having someone close to me to share it with.

After the Opening Ceremony I had ten days to kill because Triathlon wasn't held until the last day of the Games. Jason and his dad Ian weren't due to arrive for a few days so I spent many hours wandering aimlessly around the village by myself. While I often saw my Trinidadian teammates, I didn't want to impose on them by making them talk to me. I did manage to befriend some guys in the cycling team though and they ended up providing one of my absolute Games highlights.

One of the Trinidadian cyclists (Michael) was friends with some Aussie cyclists, and they were going for a training ride together the next day. He invited me to come along, and while my brain was going "OMG, OMG", I managed to say quite calmly, "Yes, I'd love to".

At that stage I wasn't the huge cycling fan I am now, so when I showed up to meet Michael I knew only two of the Aussie cyclists by sight - Peter Dawson and Graeme Brown. All I knew about the other cyclists were that they were world class and awesome. Peter and Graeme had Perth connections so when they heard my accent and found out I was from Perth, both made time to chat with me.

I greatly appreciated their kindness as well as the opportunity to ride with a group of such amazing athletes (some had just finished the Tour de France). But I also spent a lot of that two hour ride paranoid I might cause a crash and bring the whole pack down with me.

And it turned out my vigilance was well justified.

The following night I tagged along with the Trinidadian cyclists to check out the track cycling events. And nearly fainted as I watched the Australian men—the same men I'd ridden with the previous day—win a gold medal and smash the world record in the team pursuit event. Another giant OMG moment.

Not long after this Jason and Ian finally arrived in the Village. We hooked up with the Bermudan triathletes for training, and between them and my new cycling friends I no longer felt alone.

My friend Kylie Wheeler was also in the Village, competing for Australia in the Heptathlon. Once she'd finished competing (ending up with a silver medal—go Kylie!) she was another familiar face to look out for, and I got to

watch one particularly memorable night of athletics with her.

Finally, at a point where it seemed the entire Village was in party mode except us triathletes, the day of the triathlon event finally arrived. Thoughts of “Girl, you don’t belong here” were still on high rotation in my head, but I was happy to see there were other non-professional triathletes representing their countries. I had no idea what calibre they were, so the only ‘goal’ I could set myself for race day was to not come last.

Oh, and to have fun. Right?

Actually, having fun on the day was easy. Despite the wet conditions (which I guess is pretty normal for Manchester) the crowds turned out in force. They lined the streets near transition, and even hung over the sides of a multi-storey car park next to the course.

The swim went as expected, and I was second last out of the water. But once on the bike I swept through, picked up four girls in front of me and we formed a little pack together. Triathlon at Commonwealth Games level is draft legal on the bike. This means it’s not much fun if you’re

riding solo when everyone else is in a pack. So I enjoyed being able to roll around the bike course with a few friends. Sadly though, shortly after we rolled into transition together, all but one of the girls quickly ran away from me.

Given I started the run in the same position I would finish in, and didn't have anyone to chase, I just tried to enjoy the energy of the crowd over the next 10km. The nice thing was they didn't really care whether you were first or 20th. Being out there was good enough for them, and they were just as enthusiastic for me as they were for the girls in front.

In the end I finished 18th out of 21 athletes. While I loved being in Manchester and doing the race, it was also a bit of an empty experience for me. I guess it is because I am a compulsive striver. It's what motivates me in life and makes me 'buzzy'. The Commonwealth Games experience didn't feature any striving (unless trying not to come last counts as striving) so I think that's why it messed with my head a bit.

After sticking around to watch the men's race there wasn't much time to relax and reflect as the Closing Ceremony was that night. Afterwards I hooked up with Kylie and some of the Australian athletics crew for a night of laughs and revelry. Athletes who've been in heavy training suddenly indulging in their first taste of alcohol in months is always a recipe for hilarity.

The next day it was all over and I was winging my way back to Perth. There was little time to rest and de-brief as the local season started not long after I got home.

Heading into season 2002-03, I didn't quite know what to expect from myself. I'd been training hard for a few years, and despite continuing improvements, each season there seemed to be at least one nemesis I just couldn't beat. I was starting to feel like the perennial bridesmaid.

All that finally changed in December 2002. I broke through for my second ever State Series win and it was a cool win too. I came off the bike with another girl and we battled it out on the run before I managed to pull away in the latter stages of the race. That race boosted my confidence no end and from that point on I was rarely out of the top two in

any race I did. The following April I got to achieve my big goal for the season – a medal at National Champs.

Suffice to say I was on a massive high after returning to Perth after Nationals.

I certainly wouldn't have believed it if you told me that an even bigger high was sitting just around the corner.

Chapter 4

The highest high

The WA triathlon season always ends with its biggest and most prestigious race—the Busselton Half Ironman.

The event has a long and colourful history and also doubles as the State Long Course championships. The list of winners on the trophy reads like a Who's Who of WA triathlon.

For the whole of the 2002-03 season getting a medal at the National Championships was the number one priority for me. Having achieved that goal, I turned my attention to 'Busso' (as we call it) almost perfunctorily. At best I'd be racing for second because defending champion Angela Milne had entered. (As WA's sole professional athlete at the time she was a class above the rest of us.) Given I hadn't prepared for the race specifically, Busso just wasn't high on my radar.

Then, about ten days before the event, Angela pulled out. I can't remember if it was because she was pregnant or sick, but when I found out I nearly had a heart attack.

This is the race every WA athlete dreams of winning and I couldn't believe the possibility was now within my reach. I also knew chances like this don't come up very often in life. For the next ten days I walked a fine line between supreme excitement and a complete meltdown.

Fortunately I've always thrived on the excitement and nervousness of big races, so the threatened meltdown didn't happen. I toed the start line with a plan, and hoped it would be good enough for me to come out on top.

Then one of my competitors demonstrated why you don't go into races with plans involving anyone but your own self!

I'd been racing against Ebony Malone all season and knew she was going to be one of the main threats on the day. I also knew she was going to get out of the water about four minutes in front of me and I figured I could then safely give up another six minutes to her on the bike. Ten minutes seems a ridiculous amount of time to pull back in a run, but from the races we'd done that season I knew ten minutes was utterly feasible over a 21km Half Ironman run leg.

Sure enough Ebony had four minutes on me after the swim. Then it seems she lost my memo. The 90km bike leg had four laps, and you got seven chances to see how far people were in front of you. I was shocked when Ebony put a full minute into me by the first turnaround and a further minute at each turnaround after that. My mental maths is usually pretty ordinary but Ebony was making it pretty simple —if she kept this up I'd be going into the run 12 minutes down. And in the end, that's exactly what happened.

Judging by their muted reaction as I got off the bike in eighth place, the crowd thought my day was done. Not me. In my head I was thinking, *Oh man, 12 minutes. It's probably going to be a sprint finish now.*

Was that arrogance or confidence? No idea. But if I started the run feeling any differently then my day really *was* done.

By the time I finished the first lap of three things weren't looking great. I'd run my way into second place, but had only pulled back three minutes on Ebony. If we both kept running at the same speed then the dream was over.

All I could do was just keep running.

At the end of the second lap I saw JK and my training partners Matt and Gina. They excitedly reported that Ebony had slowed significantly, and was now literally just around the corner.

I couldn't believe it.

The crowd was starting to get fired up now, and their cheers carried me around the bend to start the final lap. Up ahead I could see the little flag of the lead bike riding with Ebony.

And it was getting closer with every step.

Given I expected the race to go down to the wire, it was almost an anti-climax when I passed Ebony just before the final turnaround. I had no idea what to say as I went past, so I went with a tap on the bum before carrying on through. When you've led a race from the start it is heartbreaking to lose your lead so close to the finish.

I didn't have too much time to spend feeling sorry for Ebony though as I was about to embark on the longest

3.5km run of my life. I was sure Jo Scheer, one of the best WA triathlon runners at the time, would be tearing through the field coming for me.

Riding the lead bike was my friend Scott from UWA days. I wasn't sure if he was allowed to tell me if anyone was running me down, but when I asked he did a brief scan behind us before assuring me no-one was in sight.

Those final few kilometres seemed to take *forever* but finally I reached the point where my friends Daz and Johnnie were standing, about 800m from the finish. They completely lost it when they saw me in the lead, and that's when I realised I was going to win. I floated through those final 800m, and as I entered the finish chute tears began rolling down my face. I was completely overcome—it was probably my only chance to do this, and I'd actually done it.

What made it even more special was I got to share the moment with my coach and training partners who'd not only worked so hard with me all season, but also put up with me. JK, Matt and Gina were waiting for me at the finish line, and about two seconds after I broke the tape

they enveloped me in the most excited group hug known to man. It was absolutely crazy.

Needless to say we did a lot of celebrating that night. I also ended the season on top of the State Series points table, and was named WA Female Triathlete of the Year.

Not a bad season all round.

The funny thing about sport is you never realise you've just had the best moment of your career till long after the fact. While I was beyond thrilled about winning Busso, my head kept reminding me I hadn't trained specifically for the event. Imagine what I could do when I did!

In theory, the season that followed that win (2003-04) was my most successful. I won six State Series races, and came second in another three. I say 'in theory' because while I was winning consistently, I didn't think I was improving all that much. A large part of the thrill of the Busso win was that I had taken a staggering 15 minutes off my previous best time over that distance. I think I

expected to see more improvements of that ilk in 03-04 but they were not forthcoming.

Despite all that, I headed into Busso 2004 knowing I was much better prepared for the event than the year before. After all, this time it had been my sole focus for the entire season. I knew I wouldn't be defending my title (several professionals had entered), but I still wanted to be the first WA female across the line and smash my 2003 time out of the park.

Unfortunately, for the first time ever my hard training did not translate to a wonderful race. I had one of those days where my legs didn't fire, and I had to battle through the entire day.

By the time I got to the second lap of the run I could see I wasn't even going to equal my time from the previous year so decided I was going to pull out. I ran towards where JK was standing to tell him I was done for the day and it was quite funny that I didn't even open my mouth. He took one look at me and said "One more lap to go, Kel. Let's go".

I don't know if all the coke I'd been drinking to that point suddenly kicked in or whether JK's words just gave me a

mental boost, but suddenly I felt the best I'd felt all bloody day. I bolted through that final 7km, confusing everyone who'd passed me I'm sure, and crossed the line only 20 seconds shy of the time I'd done the year before. Obviously this was a long way off my expectations, but to this day I'm grateful I finished that race.

(Tips for young players: It's always easier to say, "I had a bad race but I still finished" than to say, "I had a bad race so I chucked it in.")

Obviously the season didn't end the way I wanted it to and I sulked about my performance at Busso for a good two weeks—disgraceful. But I still finished up as Female Triathlete of the Year for 2003-04 so I was kind of forced to get over myself.

By the end of the 03-04 season I was feeling a little burnt out. I'd been combining full-time work with 15 hours of training a week for three years without much of an off-season break. In addition to this I was volunteering a lot of time to Triathlon WA as their webmaster and graphic

designer, not to mention trying to be a good girlfriend to Ant.

I hoped a good rest and recharge in the off-season would see a return to the level of improvements I expected for the hard work I was pouring into training.

Unfortunately this was not the case.

When you hit a significant performance plateau, the solution is usually to either change things up or find more hours in the week to train. But there wasn't really anything I *could* change up, and I didn't have the capacity (or the desire) to train any more than I already was.

Maybe the Busso win in 2003 was partly to blame. Up till that point my triathlon career had been a nice, motivating cycle of striving then arriving, followed by more striving and arriving. After I won Busso it's possible that the goalposts for 'arriving' had shifted somewhere well out of my reach.

In retrospect, with no more arriving to be done, I probably should have retired at the end of the 2004-05 season. Unfortunately I'd already committed to going to the 2006

Commonwealth Games. These were being held in Melbourne the following March. Given my experience in Manchester I am not sure why I was so determined to go to Melbourne. Maybe I just wanted a do-over – another chance to make the most of a pretty unique life experience.

The 2005-06 season ended up being a real mental battle. Despite being leaner and fitter than ever before, for the third season in a row, only marginal improvements were achieved.

Swimming was the worst culprit. After years of plowing my way up and down a swimming pool three to five times a week, my swim had only reached the higher end of mediocre. Swimming fast relies heavily on having the right body position in the water, and after nine years of swimming training I still hadn't nailed the whole body position thing.

This was a major main barrier to the “half decent” race in Melbourne I desperately wanted to have. Things had changed since Manchester. Draft-legal triathlon had evolved to the point where the swim and run were now

hyper-critical. You had to be able to swim *fast*, and run even faster.

So I spent that whole season praying for and working towards a major swimming breakthrough that never eventuated. By the time I was on the plane to Melbourne, that feeling of, “Really, Kelly. You don’t belong there, you know” was back. Thankfully I was able to shut it down pretty quickly and focus instead on just enjoying the experience.

A few things helped my cause. The Games were in my home country, so I wouldn’t be getting homesick. And JK would also be in the Village as part of the team.

When the T&T Triathlon Association asked JK if he’d like to go to the Games as the team’s Triathlon Official, his reaction fell somewhere between dying and going to heaven and being a bit dubious that it was the real deal. I don’t think he actually believed it *was* for real until he arrived in the Village and was greeted by the other T&T officials.

And what a funny moment that was. Despite every country at the Commonwealth Games speaking English (in theory),

the myriad of accents makes English sound like multiple languages. Initially I had to act as translator between JK and the T&T officials because neither could understand the other. Fortunately they managed to tune their ears in after a while. The last thing I wanted was to play translator for the entire Games!

The Opening Ceremony was on the same night JK arrived, and it was so awesome having such a close friend there to share the experience with. It sure made the three hour wait in our holding pen – Rod Laver Arena – go a lot quicker.

Finally it was time to march, and it was even better than I remembered in Manchester. As I entered the wonderful cauldron that is the MCG I got a text from my sister Robyn saying, “I am so proud of you.”

What a lovely moment. I wasn't a professional triathlete, I wasn't world class and I wasn't the same calibre as the athletes I'd be racing. But I *was* the best triathlete Trinidad had to offer, and I'd trained very, very hard for the race I was going to be doing. Robyn's text brought all that up to

the surface, and I felt immensely proud and happy to be there.

I was also happy that JK could experience it as well. He's one of those people who coaches purely for the love of it, and for the love of seeing his athletes improve and do well. Watching him soak in the atmosphere, the excitement and the *roar* of the crowd as we walked into the MCG was one of the highlights of my life.

If that wasn't enough, my dear friend Morag (whose Red Bull and Vodka combo all those years ago gave me the courage to approach JK in the first place) was in the crowd. She'd told me roughly where she was sitting and to look out for her. The MCG seats 90,000 people, so I figured the chances of seeing Mogs were pretty slim. But if you look at the video I took as we walked around the stadium you'll see the camera suddenly start jumping up and down and you'll hear a high-pitched squeal from someone—me. Yes, I managed to pick one of my closest friends out of a crowd of 90,000 people. Another major highlight, and the Games had only just started.

The days between the Opening Ceremony and the triathlon event were great fun. JK was in his element in the Village, and loved having other coaches and athletes around to talk shop with. Mum, Dad, my brother Shane, Ant and his parents were all in Melbourne too, and I got to spend lots of time with them in between training runs at the St Kilda race venue. I even got to bring Mum, Dad and Ant into the Village as guests and show them around. Dad played international hockey for Trinidad back in the day, and I think he saw a few familiar faces amongst the T&T team officials.

What made the whole experience even nicer was the T&T Team seemed much better organised and funded than they were in Manchester. It was a little heartbreaking for JK and myself when the team officials asked what kind of funding and assistance they could provide to us for future events. I wish we'd had the same conversation four years earlier.

Race day finally arrived (thankfully not the last day of the Games this time), and as I stood on the St Kilda Pier before the start I tried to enjoy the moment knowing it would be one of my last triathlons.

Once the race started I was thrilled to have one other girl as company in the swim. Unfortunately covering 1500m in 23 minutes put us five minutes behind the bulk of the field from the outset. Still the swim managed to provide my race highlight as I got out of the water to find a bunch of my Perth friends there cheering for me. I had no idea they were coming, and I nearly forgot myself and stopped to have a chat with them.

The rest of the race was pretty lonely. No picking up fellow stragglers on the bike this time—there weren't any to pick up. The girl I came out of the water with took forever to get on her bike, and I wasn't going to wait for her. So I rode the whole 40km and ran the whole 10km solo.

Still, just like in Manchester the crowd was absolutely insane, and once again they didn't care whether you were winning or coming last. So I just made sure I enjoyed myself and soaked it all up. At the finish line I had the honour of doing my first and only drug test, which was... fun. And then I got to relax and watch the men's race in the company of my family and friends.

After the race, JK and I had a couple more days in the Village before heading home. I was quite proud of how I'd turned my head around from Manchester and enjoyed the Games experience this time. Opportunities like these should always be embraced as fully as possible, even if they are handed to you on a silver platter. I am so glad I decided to go to the Melbourne Games in the end.

Melbourne highlighted one other significant thing — it's hard to enjoy an experience if you don't have anyone to share it with. Being able to share that Commonwealth Games with my closest friends and family made the whole thing utterly priceless.

A month later we realised just how priceless those life experiences could be when one of our close friends was taken from us.

Chapter 5

Sometimes life is a whole lot of bullshit

It's funny what you remember when someone close to you loses their life.

I can still remember the odd call from Nat that morning saying she wouldn't be meeting Tess and me for breakfast.

Then our friend Lou called during breakfast, asking if we knew anything about our friend Chris (Curly) being taken to hospital after collapsing on his regular morning run.

As Lou spoke, my mind started racing at a million miles an hour, connecting Nat's phone call to the fact that Karen (Nat's sister) was engaged to Chris.

I remember looking at Tess, wondering what to do. Should we call Nat? Should we call Karen?

In the end I decided to call Moose. He would have been running with Chris that morning, and would put our minds at ease.

Moose answered in a haunted voice, and my own voice suddenly became frantic.

“Moose, it’s Kel. I just got a call from Lou saying something had happened to Curly. Is he okay?”

“Kel, he’s gone.”

He’s gone.

My entire brain collapsed in on itself.

I don’t remember the rest of the conversation.

A month earlier we were all in Melbourne together at the Commonwealth Games.

Two *days* earlier we were at JK’s house. Curly was holding court (as always), teasing Karen about their impending wedding, giving Ant business advice and making weather predictions for the upcoming Busso Half.

My mind flashed to Karen, who was like a sister to me as well as a friend. She and Chris were supposed to be getting married *the following week*. And just six months earlier they brought their beautiful daughter Emily into the world—ten days before Ant and I got married.

(One of my favourite photos of Chris is from our wedding, holding Emily in her capsule with a big, proud, cheesy grin on his face.)

In the ten years I'd been friends with Karen this was the happiest I'd ever seen her. I just couldn't believe this was happening. To her. To all of us.

Life, you really are a whole lot of bullshit sometimes.

I questioned life a lot over the next few months.

Adam's death cut deep because he was my brother. To this day I feel ripped off I never got to see him come into his own, and I keenly feel the lack of his presence at family gatherings.

But Chris' death seemed to hit me even harder. Maybe it was because I saw him several times a week, and not just on training rides and runs. We both did a lot of work for Triathlon WA and Triathlon Australia—me as a volunteer designer, him at board level. He emailed me almost every day: “Kel, I've got an idea.”

Chris was one of those inspiring, visionary, big picture people. He didn't just come up with ideas. He'd find the right people to execute those ideas, and then empower and motivate them to do it.

Losing him made me wonder, *What's the point?*

What's the point of having passions, working hard and doing anything except spending every second with people you love when it can all be taken away in a millisecond?

What's the point of life if it can be so ephemeral and fleeting?

Less than a month after Chris died I closed the book on my triathlon career when I competed in my last Busselton Half Ironman event. Like the rest of my friends, I raced with a heavy heart and a brain that still hadn't processed the loss. I felt empty, stupid, and almost ashamed I'd given triathlon such importance over the past ten years. I couldn't believe I'd wasted all that time pouring my heart and soul into a *sport*. Shouldn't I have been spending my time doing something more worthwhile?

Chris poured a lot of *his* heart and soul into triathlon in WA. He was hugely instrumental in bringing the Half Ironman event to Busselton and making it such a success. And now he was gone. I just couldn't get my head around it.

But life goes on, and I coped the only way I knew how: I got busy. I created a book of all our memories of Chris. I tried to be there for Karen and Emily as much as I could.

And I entered a marathon.

Running was still my number one sporting love, and I'd been wanting to run a marathon for years. Unfortunately the triathlon "off-season" only lasted a month, so I couldn't really start training for a marathon till I was done with triathlon.

Ironically, while I was doing it to keep myself occupied it actually took up less of my time. Marathon training is much easier than triathlon training, and because running is so time efficient my training hours suddenly dropped from 15-20 a week to 8-9.

Which probably had a lot to do with what happened next.

As well as working full-time at TMM I was doing some freelancing on the side (as do most graphic designers). Admittedly I was emphasising the ‘free’ part pretty heavily, working voluntarily for Triathlon WA on their website and other design needs. (In all the time I worked at TMM I spent nearly every lunch break doing stuff for TWA.)

I also did a lot of stuff for friends and family. Graphic design wasn’t just a job, but also something I genuinely loved doing. And being a compulsive helper meant I could help my friends and do something I loved at the same time—an unbeatable combination.

Starting a design business had always been on my radar, but probably not until Ant and I had kids. In fact, on a recent trip south with Wade (one of my TMM bosses) I told him specifically (and truthfully) I much preferred being an employee. I didn’t want to deal with all the stresses of running a business.

But in that winter of 2006 I started getting enquiries from people I didn’t know, wanting to pay me the going rate for my design services. (I have no idea where the influx came

from. Maybe it was because I'd just re-designed my website after Ant told me it was pretty crap for a designer.) Soon I had so much paid work it was taking all weekend to get through it. And I didn't really want to be working all weekend, no matter how enjoyable it was.

So I probably surprised Kath, Chris and Wade that August when I asked if I could work a four-day week in order to have a day to do my freelance work. Happily they agreed, and we were figuring out how it would all work when I realised I had far more work than I could do on that one day off.

If I was going to start my own business, now was probably the time to do it.

Being done with triathlon had significantly reduced the time pressures in my life. Ant's teaching wage could still cover all the bills. (We had a mortgage, but it wasn't massive.) And while we *could* survive if I didn't make any money to begin with, I doubted we'd have to because I was getting a *lot* of enquiries!

So less than a month after requesting a four-day week, I resigned from TMM. Kath and Chris were understandably

shocked and a bit upset, but I think Wade was quite excited for me.

I knew I wouldn't have the discipline to work from home, so I was thrilled they let me sub-let a little 4x3m room in the TMM building. It was a win-win situation: I got to be around people each day that I liked, and they had access to all the client information in my head.

It was a really odd period in my life. In the space of five months I'd lost a close friend, retired from a sport I thought I'd be doing forever, signed up for a marathon and went from happy employee to budding entrepreneur.

On September 17 2006, six months after retiring from triathlon (and on our first wedding anniversary), I ran my first marathon in Sydney. I had a wonderful time and finished 9th overall so I was pretty stoked. Then a month later, on October 16, Swish Design officially opened its doors.

I was now a business owner.

I threw a launch party to kick things off, and it was the smartest thing I could have done. I invited a large group of friends and acquaintances from the triathlon world, not to mention all of my enormous family. Not only was it awesomely fun, it also created a highly motivated team of sales people for me. Everyone was excited about my new venture and really keen for me to succeed.

The first few months of business were surprisingly stress-free. Work came in straight away, and it wasn't long before my income was tracking on par with my TMM wage. This kind of blew Ant's and my minds, and really took the pressure off me. I'd always contributed equally to the household budget, and I was happy we weren't relying on Ant's wage alone.

So my workload was consistent (but not heavy), and life was good.

Obviously life was too good because I started getting that "What's my next challenge?" itch again. My mind naturally turned towards another marathon because I felt I had a lot of untapped potential to explore with running. It was one

of the things that made walking away from triathlon so easy.

I saw an advertising package from the Heart Foundation that said if you raised \$10,000 for them they'd send you to do the New York Marathon. Hmmm. Could I cope with running a new business, fundraising \$10,000 *and* training for a marathon?

I signed up. Of course I could!

And so began what turned out to be the high-pressure year of 2007. Swish was getting busier by the month, and all my fundraising exercises seemed to be pretty labour intensive but low on return. (Having never fundraised before, I had no idea how hard I was making it for myself!)

To top it all off I was training *really* hard for New York. After running 3hrs 18 mins in Sydney on training I felt was quite pedestrian, I was sure I could get close to the three-hour mark in New York with some "proper" training under my belt.

The training program JK devised for me looked insane on paper. But he knew exactly what I was capable of because

my body rose to every challenge he set. By July I was running 100km every week and working long hours for Swish.

It soon became apparent I'd need some help, especially if I intended on leaving the business unattended for two weeks in November. So I took on a trainee—Connor.

Taking on Connor *did* help reduce my load a little. But to be honest it also created a lot of extra stress. Not only did I have to manage him, I also had to ensure I made enough income to pay him.

Thankfully I had running to keep me happy and keep the work stress at bay. By September I was flying, and felt right on track to achieve my ambitions in New York.

Then an old nemesis - allergies - struck hard.

First I had an asthma attack in a 10km race, which was devastating because I was in shape to run a best time. Then I struggled through the next few months of training because I couldn't get on top of a bunch of hay fever and sinus problems. I was still going okay, but it felt like the Manchester Games where I missed out on "icing the cake".

The final nail in the coffin came while in transit to New York. I was struck by full-blown sinusitis and needed to go on antibiotics. Boo. I've never raced well on antibiotics, and could only hope it would be different this time.

By the time I reached New York the antibiotics had kicked in nicely to take care of the sinus pain. I did a couple of training runs in Central Park and felt quite good, so I was feeling very confident about race day.

Sunday November 4 rolled around, and after sitting for hours in the Staten Island cold it was time to start the race.

From the first few kilometres I knew I was in trouble.

With a long triathlon, you can work your way into the race. So even if you start out feeling average you can feel pretty magic by the end of the race. But when you're running, if you start off feeling average, by the end you'll feel *extraordinarily* average!

That said, I was still running pretty well. And there was nothing I could do but keep running. I got through the first 15km or so reasonably well, and then my legs started to tighten up.

Around the 32km mark of a marathon your legs begin to feel a certain way—let's just say they really, *really* hurt. Well, in New York I developed 32km legs around the 18km mark.

I was *so* pissed off.

In typical self-absorbed athlete fashion I felt really aggrieved it was happening to me. What made it worse is I still had another long 24km to go. That's a long way to run when you're feeling average!

I sulked for a good few kilometres and considered just plonking myself down on the kerb and howling at the injustice of it all. Then I gave myself a virtual slap and remembered how lucky I was to be there (in New York!) running a marathon (some people don't even have legs!) in pretty much perfect health. I had my "Curly hat" on in memory of Chris, and I distinctly remember him saying "Really Kel. You need to snap out of this!" in my ear.

Another thing that kept me going was knowing my dear friend (and New York resident) Tracey would be waiting for me on a corner about 10km away. I hadn't seen her in six years and getting a look at her smiling face with 6km to

go was just the tonic I needed. I actually perked up in those final kilometres and eventually crossed the line in 3.15.15. Incredibly I'd run a PB (personal best), but it wasn't *quite* the 3 hours flat I'd come to New York to run.

Once it was all over and I was safely back in my hotel room (after a fainting episode in a nearby bagel shop –fun!) I started feeling pretty sorry for myself. I found it impossible to celebrate the fact I'd managed a PB despite everything that happened. Instead I felt disappointed and upset that despite all my hard work I still hadn't achieved my lofty goal.

So I started looking for my next marathon.

By now Ant was getting agitated about when we might have kids, so I cut a deal with him. We'd go to Europe the following year and do the European trip we wouldn't be able to do once children came on the scene. I'd run the Paris Marathon in April, and then we could start trying for babies.

The next few months were crazy. Not only had I committed to another marathon, I also had to plan the overseas trip to go with it. My business was growing at a

crazy rate, and Ant and I were about to start a three town-house building project, even though we'd never built a house before in our lives.

(Writing about it now makes me wonder what the heck I was thinking. But at the time it all seemed perfectly reasonable.)

By the end of 2007 things were so busy at Swish I needed to take on a permanent part-timer. I offered Connor the position, but he turned it down saying I wasn't offering enough money.

Shit.

I told Wade. He said TMM could probably do with another half a designer, and that maybe between the two of us we could come up with enough money to offer Connor a full-time job. I thought if I was going to be offering a full-time position to someone, I wanted to bring someone like my brother Rory into the mix.

Rory was running a printing business for my uncle, and I knew he wasn't making the kind of money TMM and I would offer. I also knew he was desperate to get away

from running a business and back to his first love—being a designer.

It was a bit of a process making it all happen, but it was a happy day when Rory came to work for me and TMM. I knew exactly what I was getting—a very talented designer, a very hard worker and a very loyal person. And we both shared the same penchant for over-delivering to clients, so I knew my business would be in good hands when I went to Europe.

Rory's arrival relieved enough pressure for me to not lose my mind with everything I had on my plate. My training for Paris wasn't going well (I had a bit of an injury), and things at Swish were so busy I just didn't have the same time or mental energy to devote to training that I did for New York. On top of that were all the things that needed sorting out before the building project could start.

As far as I was concerned, our trip to Europe couldn't come fast enough.

In the end I was shocked at how fast it *did* arrive! It felt like I'd barely hopped off the plane from New York, and here I was jumping on another one to Paris. This trip

would be an emotional one for a lot of reasons, the main one being about starting a family.

For years Ant waited patiently as I ticked off the things I wanted to do before we had kids. And now I was about to tick the final box.

The problem was I'd never experienced that real craving for children most women had. I really loved my life, and couldn't see where children would fit into the mix. And I worried that by becoming a mum I'd lose my identity.

Still, I always knew I wanted to become a mum *one day*. And I figured Ant had waited long enough.

But first there was a marathon to run. And while calling it a total disaster might seem a bit melodramatic, that's exactly what it was for me. I'm still not sure what the problem was—all I could think was I must have got a little hypothermic from wearing shorts and a t-shirt when it was only five degrees. Whatever the reason, I found myself walking for a large chunk of the marathon somewhere after the 25km mark and feeling quite delirious.

Not very fun.

Paris ended up being my slowest marathon by a long way. But as someone said to me after, if you're going to find yourself walking in a big city marathon somewhere, it may as well be Paris! C'est la vie indeed!

My first impulse was to have my signature sulk about yet another sporting disappointment. But given I was in Europe with Ant and my parents, and about to embark on a whistle-stop tour of eight countries in ten days, there really wasn't time.

Two nights after the marathon we headed to London. There we started a grand tour that took in England, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland before delivering us back to Paris. It was an awesome time, and being one of five kids I enjoyed having my parents to myself for ten days.

When we arrived back in Perth there was no rest for the wicked. Rory had done a wonderful job holding the fort, but there was a backlog of work that had to be tackled. And Ant and I had to vacate our little fibro house so it could be levelled for the block to be developed.

Mixed in with all of these stresses was the whole baby-making thing. I always assumed I'd just need to come off the pill and I'd fall pregnant, but of course this wasn't the case. It took six months (which I am aware is actually not a long time), and ironically happened in a month where I suddenly lost two kilos because my stress levels were so off the charts.

Poor Ant. I immediately went into shock when I saw the two lines on the pregnancy test. Instead of delivering the news with delight and unbridled happiness, I told him in a quavering voice before promptly bursting into tears.

He was over the moon, but I was completely freaked out.

Life was out of control and now I was going to add a baby into the mix.

Every coping mechanism I possessed was about to be seriously tested.

Chapter 6

Business + Baby

Throughout my pregnancy, people kept asking me the same question: “Do you love being pregnant?”

Did I love being pregnant?

The truth is I didn't have time to think about it. Things were incredibly busy in Swish world, and I was working really long hours to get everything done.

By October 2008 Rory was my full-time employee, and I was about to hire my sister Robyn to take some of the admin stuff off my plate. But even with their help I still had to deal with client work, financials, new enquiries, marketing and the never ending minutiae of running a business. And now I had two extra people to manage.

They also created another dilemma. Now that Swish Design had three staff members we couldn't fit into that 4x3m space in the TMM building any more.

It was time to move.

We ended up taking over the lease of an office in West Perth and shifted during the Christmas/New Year break. So we started 2009 at a fresh new location - one that was considerably more expensive!

But it seems 'more expensive' equals extra legitimacy because we started attracting bigger clients almost immediately. This was nice and unexpected.

Then, a few months after we moved, Wade (one of the TMM part-owners) decided to strike out on his own. We had a spare space in our office so Wade moved in. This was an amazing deal for Swish; Wade contracted us to do all his graphic design work and guaranteed us a certain income every month. This was pretty handy given the increased overheads of two staff and a new office.

Unfortunately, taking on the big new clients (with their higher expectations) along with all of Wade's work meant that our workload was quickly outstripping what Rory and I could handle.

Not only that, it was April by now and my baby was due in July.

This was a constant source of worry for me because being only three years young at the time, the business still relied heavily on me for... well, everything.

Thankfully, a touch of serendipity eased my mind a little. Early in June I heard TMM had let one of their designers (Adrian) go. Rory had worked with Adrian at TMM, and I knew him by virtue of working in the same building. He was a nice person (high priority!), and Rory and I agreed he'd be a great fit as both designer and workmate. I really couldn't afford another full-time staff member, but even if I had to borrow money to pay him initially I knew it would be a good investment. Adrian could pick up my design load while I was away, and when I came back to the office I would be able to spend more time running the business than working in the business.

So Adrian came to work for Swish, rounding out the fantastic team who are all still with us today. He started at the beginning of July, and a fortnight later I started 'maternity leave'.

I gave myself two weeks at home before the baby was due and naturally, they didn't involve much actual leave. I was

just working from home instead of the office, frantically tying up loose ends and finishing the little jobs no-one else at Swish could do.

Ironically, my first truly relaxing day was the day the baby was due.

I'd made Ant stay at home because I'd been having mild contractions the previous two nights. The school he taught at was 45 minutes away, and I couldn't bear the thought of going into labour and him being nearly an hour away.

So we had a lovely relaxing day together, and I felt silly that he'd be going to school the next day to announce the baby hadn't arrived yet. In fact, that day (a Thursday) was so relaxing I told the baby to hold off till Monday so I could have a few more!

Naturally I went into labour that night, and after giving me a rather rough time of it, Jaden Anthony Exeter was born the next day.

How would I describe those first few months of Jaden's life?

I wish I could say they passed in that gentle haze of Johnson & Johnson adverts—pyjama-filled days of soft focus and heavenly new baby smells. But while I had a wonderful team at Swish who could take care of design work and managing clients, there were some things only I could do.

Such as invoicing.

Jaden was born on the 31st of July, and so the next day I found myself sending invoices from hospital. And receiving irate emails from concerned clients asking what on earth I was doing.

I was making sure my business maintained some semblance of cash flow, that's what!

Not only was I stressing about having enough money to pay my staff, I also had to make sure I could pay myself. When you're building three houses you can't really afford to take a pay cut!

We got home from hospital on a Wednesday, and happily Ant took the rest of the week off work to spend with us. But I distinctly remember him going to school the next Monday, and freaking out about being on my own with a new little baby all day.

But I coped, and with a little help from Tizzie Hall and her book *Save our Sleep* I soon established a nice daily routine. Trying to get such a young baby on a routine may horrify some people, but I had little choice. With each passing day, the more client emails I answered the more I got. And I was okay with that. Given I was still drawing a full time wage from the business I felt obligated to pull my weight wherever possible.

By the time Jaden was eight weeks old I was working at least 3-4 hours every day. Whenever he was asleep during the day I'd be on the computer. Tizzie's routines also called for a 10pm dream feed each night, so Jaden would go down to sleep at seven and I'd be on the computer till 9.30pm. It seems like madness now, but at the time I was just doing what I needed to do.

When I had a heap to get done I'd go to my parents' house so my father (now retired) could help with Jaden. But that involved lots of travelling, and coordinating car trips so I missed the freeway traffic but didn't mess with Jaden's sleeps. It was obvious I needed more regular help, but I didn't want to send Jaden to day care at such an early age. So when he was three months old we got a nanny.

Naomi (happily a member of our extended family) had just finished her Early Childhood studies at university. When she started with us Jaden was in a lovely daily routine: awake for two hours, asleep for two hours, awake for two hours, asleep for two hours. So I spent two hours with him in the morning before he went down for that first sleep at nine. Nanny Naomi would arrive while he was sleeping, and look after him for the two hours he was awake. Then he'd go back down to sleep and wake up at three, at which point I'd finish working and start the afternoon routine.

It was the perfect arrangement. I could work for six hours straight during the day, but only miss out on two of Jaden's waking hours. And working from home meant I could give him a kiss and cuddle whenever I wanted.

Within three months Naomi's days had been increased to the point where I was pretty much working full-time – 6 hours during the day in addition to the 7-9.30pm shift

And it was at this point that I started to get a little resentful. I was stressed and overscheduled and barely able to enjoy my baby. This wasn't how I envisioned my early days as a new mum. But I couldn't see an alternative. The financial pressure from our building project meant it wasn't enough for the business to just tick along, it needed to be growing and making more money.

By March 2010 it was time to head back to the office. My team was doing ok without me, but it would take considerable pressure off them if I was there. It also solved another problem; Jaden, now eight months old, was starting to play up for Naomi if he knew I was still in the house.

Yet, on the first day I was supposed to go back to the office, I couldn't do it. In fact, I couldn't do it for the entire week.

In my pre-baby life I'd always joked to Ant that if he wanted to be a stay-at-home-dad I'd happily be the main

breadwinner and go off to work every day. And yet here I was, not wanting to be away from my child.

I couldn't believe it. I had been so determined not to lose my identity and 'just' be someone's mum. But it was now clear that I *loved* being Jaden's mum, and couldn't stand the thought of being away from him for a whole working day.

Oh, the irony.

Eventually though I had to tear myself away and get my butt to the office.

A month later I unexpectedly fell pregnant. Yep, the world's greatest control freak fell pregnant by accident. I couldn't believe it, and sobbed when the doctor confirmed it. He was really concerned, and asked why it was such a terrible thing. I just muttered something about it being a huge shock and that "it wasn't part of the plan".

And it *wasn't* part of the plan.

It finally felt like I was getting on top of things at Swish again. I didn't have time to be pregnant, let alone have

another baby in eight months' time. And I was devastated for Jaden. I wanted him to have his parents all to himself for more than 17 months.

I spent a week trying to get my head around being pregnant again. A run with my friend Danny helped convince me it was a wonderful thing - the two children would be great mates, and I'd be done with childbearing relatively quickly.

The very next day I started bleeding, and had my first miscarriage.

I'd be lying if I said losing the baby wasn't a relief. But feeling relieved put me on an emotional rollercoaster of guilt and shame. And this neatly exacerbated the rollercoaster of emotions from the week before.

Five months later, in September 2010, I fell pregnant by accident again.

What. The. Heck.

This pregnancy was beset by problems from the word go and it never looked viable. But it still took three mind-

numbing weeks of blood tests, scans and very uncomfortable probing before it 'resolved' itself into nothing.

By this stage I wasn't surprised my body wouldn't hold on to babies. The stress of running a business, managing a household, being a new mum *and* building three houses was playing havoc with my health. When my skin starts looking grey and translucent, I know things are pretty bad.

And from what I saw in the mirror, things were pretty bad.

The worst thing about the long hours and stress I was enduring was that Swish was just breaking even every month. Our cash flow was so tight mum had to show me how to manage it on a day-to-day basis. This helped, but it also added another layer to my already overwhelmed state of mind. I ended up getting a bookkeeper that October, and being able to hand over the accounts to someone else relieved a lot of pressure.

But every time I relieved one pressure, another seemed to crop up. It felt like I was on a giant hamster wheel—running my guts out but getting absolutely nowhere.

I responded to this pressure in the only way I knew how – by doing *more*.

I felt incredibly trapped by my business, and was sure I was missing out on some kind of secret sauce that would solve all my problems. So I signed up for every online course and downloaded every e-book I could get my hands on. I listened to small business podcasts on every run. I really didn't have the time to devote to all this learning but I was desperate to find the proverbial silver bullet.

It was a pretty frustrating time for Ant. Whenever he asked me pointed questions about Swish and the business financials, I would get defensive and fob him off. But given I was having to dip into our savings to bail out the business every so often, it was pretty clear that I was not running a tight ship.

To him, it was obvious what I needed to do—stop over-servicing clients and start charging properly for our time.

But while I agreed with him in principle, I couldn't see how to make the changes he was suggesting. I'd spent four and a bit years creating a certain level of expectation about pricing and delivery. I couldn't just turn around to

my clients and say “Sorry, can’t help you with that stuff anymore” or “I know I never used to charge for this kind of thing, but I am now”.

By December 2010 all I wanted to do was sell the business. Actually, I wanted to sell everything we owned and go live in a shack down south. By now our houses were finished building and we were living in one and renting out the other two. I’d zeroed in on them as the root of all evil and decided the only reason I was working so hard was to pay our mortgages. All I could think was, *Do we really need these houses? Wouldn’t we be better off living a simple life somewhere, free of all the financial stress?*

I was back on the constant striving/never arriving treadmill - working damn hard, but not getting the payoff (financial security) I wanted.

When this happened in my triathlon career, I quit. And to Ant’s frustration, I was trying to do the same thing here.

Instead of doing the things he suggested, I just wanted to run away. He pointed out that Swish really wasn’t in a position to be sold—its profit was tied up in me, so it was

worth nothing without me. He also pointed out I wasn't capable of living anything approaching a 'simple life in a shack', and urged me to make proper changes to the business before giving up.

I entered 2011 promising myself I'd fight the good fight. I'd make proper changes, and then re-assess mid-year. And if Swish wasn't in good shape by the end of 2011 I'd walk away—whether I could sell it or not.

The problem with making changes is their effects take a while to be seen. And not everything works. Although it wasn't apparent to Ant, I *did* come up with strategies and try new things in 2010. Some of them worked and some of them didn't, but the net effect seemed tiny compared to the effort I made.

And 2011 ended up being more of the same. I was putting new things in place all the time, but as soon as I solved one problem, another would crop up.

I'm sure Nat would agree. I often downloaded on her about my business woes, and I'm sure every conversation

we had that year was about a new thing I was doing to *make my life so much easier*. But nothing made my life easier because I was still looking for the ever-elusive silver bullet, taking on more and more stuff.

Stress had been my constant companion for the better part of four years now, and as my life slowly spiralled out of control it was joined by anxiety. There was just so much to do and I couldn't keep on top of it all.

But stress clearly had no effect on my fertility, as I fell pregnant again in April.

I missed my period at the same time as Kate, another dear friend of mine. I was *so* excited, and for the first few weeks we kept tabs on each other, charting mutual nausea and swollen boobs.

Then in May I started to bleed and three weeks later, I lost the baby.

In the end it wasn't unexpected. Once I started bleeding I had scans every week, and each time there were signs the foetus wasn't viable (despite a dogged little heartbeat appearing every time). Finally the day came when there

was no heartbeat, and I had my first D&C—on the Friday before Mother’s Day.

The timing was devastating. What made it worse was that I’d been so excited about being pregnant with one of my best friends, and now I wasn’t.

Later in May we travelled to Melbourne for Morag’s wedding. At the wedding she announced she was pregnant, and had I still been, she would have been only a couple of weeks behind me.

I thought I’d dealt with miscarriage number three pretty well. I was getting really good at being pragmatic and philosophical, believing the baby miscarried because it wasn’t a strong enough pregnancy and wasn’t meant to be.

But it turned out I hadn’t dealt with it at all.

About half an hour after Mogs’ announcement, a wave of emotion hit me. Suddenly I was in the midst of a panic attack and fleeing dramatically from the room. Proving why she’s my sister from another mother, Karen figured out what was up straight away and came after me.

Poor Mogs. The last thing you need at your wedding is one of your best friends sobbing uncontrollably on another friend's shoulder.

When we got home from Melbourne I was still rattled and struggling to get a handle on myself and life in general. Wade was acting a bit off-key too. He'd been a bit distant ever since I returned to the office after Jaden was born, but I put it down to the fact he was busy and I was busier.

But in the two weeks after returning from Melbourne, everyone in the office agreed he was acting *especially* strange.

The caring friend part of my brain told me to go into his office, shut the door, and get to the bottom of what was going on. But the emotionally-fried part of my brain—the part barely coping with my own problems—screamed "No! Don't go there. You can't cope with anything else right now".

I thought he and his wife Kate (who I adored) might be having marriage problems. And at that point, the thought that everything might not be right in their world was more than I could bear.

So I took the soft option and sent him a text asking if everything was okay. And he quickly fired one back saying yes, everything was fine. He was just really busy.

On Friday the 3rd of June, two days after I sent the text, Wade left the office with barely a goodbye. I don't know where I was, but I don't remember him leaving. Adrian and Rory said he left very quietly—unusual for Wade, who normally left with a flourish and a clatter of the office door.

The following Monday—a public holiday—I got a call from Lou.

Wade had committed suicide.

Chapter 7

And the walls all come tumbling down

Lou's words were not computing.

I couldn't reconcile my friend Wade with the act of suicide. Wade was 'that guy' who had it all going on. He ran a successful business. He had friends and lots of influence. He loved connecting people for their mutual benefit and was very good at this. He was the consummate family man, and adored his two boys beyond belief.

That's the main reason I couldn't process the word 'suicide'. There was no way he would do this to his family.

By the time I got off the phone I was in deep shock. But my mind was racing at a thousand miles a minute. Lou had only the barest of details, so I still didn't believe it was true. I was sure it was some kind of horrible mistake.

Reminiscent of when I heard the news about Curly, I sat there thinking *Who do I call? Who can truly confirm this for me?*

There was no way I was calling Kate, so I settled on another mutual friend, Darryl. He both confirmed what Lou said and filled in a few more blanks.

And that's when it finally sunk in: this really, truly happened.

I hung up from Darryl and looked at Ant who'd been listening in from the couch. I cope with this kind of thing by slamming up protective barriers in my mind and creating a blessed state of mental numbness. But Ant had fully processed everything, and was beside himself. He wouldn't get through the night without seeing Kate and finding out exactly what happened.

So we went to see Kate.

We found out that on Friday, while he was in the office, Wade had downloaded a book on euthanasia. The method he used ensured that even if someone found him before he died, he'd be brain-dead.

Ant and I were chilled and distraught at how determined he was to go through with it. He'd left the office on Friday

knowing what he'd be doing that weekend. And knowing he'd never see us again.

The next day we went to the office, broke the news to Rory and Adrian, sent them home and closed the Swish office for the day. Wade was a triathlete as well, and the whole WA triathlon community was in shock.

If Adam's and Curly's deaths rocked my world, Wade's death exploded it into a billion pieces. This was someone I saw every working day. Someone I thought I knew well. The determined way he went about his suicide told me no one could have prevented it. Still, I couldn't help but wonder if there were things I could have and should have done.

But there wasn't much time for that kind of reflection. Wade had a business his family relied on for their income, and someone needed to keep it running. I knew Kate could pick things up later down the track, but in the interim, we in the Swish office were the ones who did all his design work. We knew who his clients and suppliers were. If there was one useful thing we could do, it was to keep his business running.

I won't lie. All this came at a time when I was already at my mental limits. My coping mechanisms were non-existent. The combination of stress and anxiety I was suffering from meant I had already started to slip into the depths of depression. The additional load of keeping Wade's business running as well as managing my team and my own business—well it ended up being much more than I could handle.

The second Kate could take the reins I threw them at her.

And then I fell to pieces.

One morning in July I completely broke down in the car on the way to work. (Ant was driving—he was on long service leave from school and using the Swish office to work on a business he was developing.) My shoulders heaved as I sobbed out all the stress, emotion and pressure of the past two years. I wasn't just unhappy that my business was barely breaking even, and that every single day was a huge battle. I was unhappy because I flat out hated my job.

A job, ironically, I created for myself.

It was typical stuff for a small business owner. You start a business doing something you love (design in my case). Then the business grows, and you end up spending all your time on the minutiae of the business instead of doing the stuff you love.

I wasn't creating any more. My days were filled with managing people—staff, clients, suppliers—and putting out fires. Constant bloody fires. Any design work I *did* get was always pressured and rushed, and I never felt I was doing my best work. Worst of all, I was an introvert who spent her whole day interacting one-on-one with people, and working in an open-plan office surrounded by five others.

Not ideal. Not even close to ideal.

It was time to sell the business. Or just shut up shop—I didn't care anymore. I loathed the business, and loathed the person I'd become. I didn't want to be around myself anymore, so why would anyone else want to be around me?

At this point Ant said, “If you’re at the point where you want to sell Swish, why don’t you let me try running it for a while?” He was reluctant to just walk away from what he considered to be a good business—albeit one that could be managed better.

I looked at him as if he had six heads.

No Ant, you can’t run my business. You are not me. You don’t have my knowledge, or my rapport with clients, or my ability to read clients’ minds when they aren’t telling me something important. You don’t know how to manage the staff so they don’t burn out, or how to act as a buffer between the designers and the clients. I’ve been building these relationships for five years. I can’t bear the thought of my clients being unhappy about the service we’re providing, and you can’t possibly service them the way I do.

Then Ant pointed out if I sold the business that’s exactly what would happen—someone would run things differently and my clients would just have to get used to it. I had nothing to lose by letting him take the reins for a while.

In the end, I could see his point. And honestly, I didn't care anymore. I just wanted out.

So we drafted an email to everyone saying I was taking a month off, and that Ant would be taking over. Then I went home to rest, recharge and get my mental health back under control.

Although it had nothing to do with the decision, I happened to be pregnant again. And this time it felt like the real deal—no bleeding or funny business. Early scans revealed the foetus was the right size and in the right place. In the first week I was home morning sickness hit with a vengeance, and I started sleeping 2-3 hours in the afternoon just to escape it.

I also started seeing a psychologist.

When I saw my GP in July to confirm the pregnancy, I also mentioned I was struggling mentally and might need professional help. (By getting a GP referral, Medicare would cover a big chunk of the first six appointments.) As part of the referral process, my GP ran me through a quick

mental health test. She was shocked at how low my score was, given how calm and 'together' I seemed to her.

But I guess it's pretty much always the way. The people who seem the calmest and most in control can be hiding the lowest feelings behind that façade.

The first visit to the psychologist was unbelievably well-timed. It was my second day at home, and I already felt guilty.

Here's what was running through my brain.

A lot of people in this world are struggling, you know. Why should you get to rest and relax?

Oh, aren't you lucky having a husband who can just take over running your business for you?

Weak. You are just unbelievably weak.

Given this helpful internal dialogue, I thought it was lucky I would get to talk to a psych about it that day.

I've always been a big advocate of getting professional help. Relationship issues? "You should probably see a

counsellor.” Unhappy and depressed? “You need to speak to someone.” Struggling with something in your life? “Your friends can really only listen to you. A professional will help you create actual strategies for dealing with it.” All these words have come out of my mouth.

But the second I pulled into the psychologist’s car park I panicked and just wanted to back straight out and get the hell out of there. It took every ounce of mental strength I had to park the car, get out, and walk inside.

I don’t know why I felt this way. Maybe I was frightened of the Pandora’s box I was about to open. I can be *highly* emotional if I let my feelings run unfettered, and I don’t like that side of me because there’s no control. And feeling out of control makes me incredibly anxious.

But I managed to hold things together pretty well in that first session. It was always going to be a fact-finding session for Janet (the therapist) so I tried to give an overview. Three miscarriages, death of a close friend, becoming a new mum while running a rapidly-growing business, trying to be everything to everyone in my life,

constantly overextending myself, and feeling like an utter failure as a wife.

Curiously (or not so curiously), I felt the last one was the biggest problem. Over the previous 10 to 15 years Ant always seemed to come off second best. Most people in my situation say they put themselves as the lowest priority, which is why they run into trouble. But in our case, I think Ant came behind me. I couldn't understand why he was still married to me, and I wanted to be a better wife more than anything else in the world.

I also mentioned that even though we'd taken this step of sending me home to rest and get things under control, I already felt guilty about having that opportunity. And that's when she said the one thing that will stay with me forever.

"Kelly, you are exhausted."

You are exhausted.

Three simple words that gave a name to what I was feeling. And she was right – I was just completely and utterly spent.

I left that first session with one big take-away: “You’re doing the right thing. Keep going.”

So I kept going. I went down south and stayed with Tess for a few days. I read, slept, wrote and slept some more. I enrolled in a writing course I’d wanted to do for ages. I felt I was making good progress bringing back the version of me that I liked.

Then we lost the baby.

It was an odd time to be having a scan—ten weeks. But I was seeing my obstetrician the following week, and wanted to have a “Let’s just check that everything is okay” scan before I saw him. (When you’ve had three miscarriages obstetricians will do anything to ease your mind.)

I had a hint of a warning. The scan was on a Friday, and on the Tuesday of that week I was driving the car with the window down, revelling in the Spring warmth on my cheeks and feeling incredibly light and carefree. For the first time in weeks I felt ‘well’. It took me a couple of days to realise this was because the morning sickness had disappeared. I was a bit concerned, but my morning

sickness with Jaden also disappeared around the nine-week mark. So I went into the scan alert but not alarmed.

Within two seconds of the sonographer running the scanner over my belly I knew. Our eyes connected and she said sadly, “There’s no heartbeat”.

There’s no heartbeat.

I was getting really tired of hearing those three words.

I couldn’t look at Ant. I couldn’t think. Tears started rolling down my face as I slipped into that familiar state of numbness. I listened distantly as the sonographer took measurements and made apologetic noises before quietly ushering us into a little side room while they called my obstetrician.

He asked us to see him at the hospital straight away, and he arranged a D&C for that afternoon.

It was the Friday before Father’s Day.

Who the heck was writing this script?

Even before we lost the baby, I'd decided I wasn't going back to the Swish office, at least not in the role I had before. But the second I wasn't pregnant any more I slipped back to my normal method of coping—doing more stuff.

In less than a month I was completely over-extended and stressed out again. Not to mention mopey and depressed.

And that's pretty much when I hit rock bottom.

That's when I had my moment in the kitchen where I thought:

Ant deserves better you know. He deserves better than a sad-sack wife who is just existing her way through each day. Maybe it's time you took yourself out of the picture. He'd be better off if you were dead.

While I really did feel that life would be much better for Ant if I was dead, I knew I wasn't truly suicidal because when you are suicidal you're not thinking about other people. You're only thinking about yourself, your pain and the utter hopelessness you're feeling. I *was* feeling utterly

hopeless, but it was Ant who was completely dominating my thoughts.

The feeling of being a complete failure as a wife was back with a vengeance and I felt Ant could do a lot better than me.

I wasn't the same person he met and fell in love with in first year uni. And while I realise none of us are the people we were 17 years ago, I desperately wanted to be the person I was back then. I thought that person was closest to my true self—quietly driven, yet chilled and easy-going.

I felt that for as long as we'd been together Ant had to compete with whatever was fuelling my 'need to achieve' at the time. He spent 10 years competing with triathlon and the way it dominated my life. (Even after we broke up and got back together, and I wasn't thinking about it every minute of the day, it was still a pretty consuming sport.) When I quit triathlon I not only started my business, but also did three marathons in three years. When I got pregnant and couldn't run any more, I was consumed with running Swish. When Jaden was born I was consumed by motherhood *and* running Swish.

I didn't want to be consumed any more. I didn't want to be the person who was perpetually over-extended. I didn't want to be the person with a thousand things on her mind all the time. I didn't want to be stressed and riddled with anxiety and depression.

I wanted to be the wife Ant deserved and I wanted to be 'me' again.

But I just didn't know if I had the ability to change.

Chapter 8

Two steps forward, half a step back

It was October 2011 and the conversation between Ant and I went like this:

Me: I've got a psych appointment this morning.

Him: I don't think these appointments are helping at all. Nothing has really changed.

Me (irate): What the heck are you talking about? I've changed heaps of stuff. And I'm definitely not as stressed as I used to be.

Him: Kel, you may not *think* you're as stressed, but you're still vague and thinking about a million things at any given time. And you're on your laptop *every single night*. So the only thing that's *really* changed is you're doing it at home instead of the office.

I was incredibly upset. I honestly felt I'd worked really hard with Janet (my psychologist) to make some real changes after I had that 'moment in the kitchen'. I felt I

was finally getting back to being the person I wanted to be—a better wife to Ant, a more present mum for Jaden, and a more relaxed me.

And now I was being told I was kidding myself?

I challenged Ant to come to my next session with Janet and share his thoughts with her personally.

Isn't it funny how you are more likely to truly *hear* your partner when they talk about you to someone else? After listening to Ant state his case to Janet, I had to agree: nothing had changed.

After a short period of 'improvement' I was back to saying yes to every opportunity that crossed my desk because every opportunity was a potential "ticket to freedom". Freedom from what I wasn't exactly sure, although our household finances were definitely front of mind. Since there was no baby in my belly anymore I didn't feel like I could be swanning around the house doing whatever I felt like. I needed to be contributing to our bank balance.

So I was writing for anyone who would have me and taking on a lot of consulting work. And because my

workload was getting a little out of control (again), I was starting to suffer from anxiety (again).

Then two things happened that helped bring about some actual real change.

First, we had a meeting with our finance guys to run some numbers and see where we were at. And as it turned out, where we were at was 'fine'. I didn't need to panic about bringing in an income because our businesses were bringing in enough to cover us for the time being. This news provided some much-needed relief, and instantly removed my sense of desperation. (It appears I make quite bad decisions when I'm desperate.)

Then I had an epiphany.

I was out for a walk, listening to a podcast where a guy called Steve was getting drilled by US-based uber-blogger Penelope Trunk. Steve's story was a common one—he wanted to escape from cubicle nation, and was chasing the freedom dream. Penelope was irate because that's all he had—a dream. He didn't know what he actually wanted to *do* with his days and consequently had no plan for

achieving the life he wanted to lead. I cringed as Steve offered halting answers to Penelope's pointed questions...

... and realised with horror that I was Steve.

I had four blogs on the go and a vague plan of building their individual audiences and my profile to the point where I could monetise them and generate some passive income. Because that's everyone's nirvana, right? Generating income while doing nothing?

There were just two problems.

The first was that there is no such thing as passive income. No-one gets to spend their days on a beach in the Bahamas while some wonderful, maintenance-free money-making machine chugs away merrily in the background.

The second was I had no interest in doing the things necessary to make money from my blogs because I'd already done all that business-building stuff at Swish (and hated it).

To suddenly realise I didn't want to monetise my blogs was awkward. After all, I'd just spent the better part of 18

months laying out this path for myself. And I didn't want to follow the consulting path either because spending heavy one-on-one time with other people is just too exhausting for me.

Really, all I wanted to do was write and design at home from the quiet of my study.

Realising all of this was wonderfully freeing. I'd never actually considered just sticking to the things I loved doing. I've always felt that if I am good at something, or *could* do something, then I should do it.

I went home and told Ant about my epiphany. He was pleased to hear I wanted to reduce all the *stuff* I was doing, but I could see he didn't think it would really happen. This galvanised me, and I quickly started jettisoning stuff from my life.

This need for instant action is fairly typical for me. Once I decide something needs to change I want it to happen straight away. Unfortunately lasting change doesn't happen by just snapping your fingers. And to my frustration, it would take a few months to tie off all the jobs and obligations I'd already committed myself to.

I felt deflated and nearly just tossed the whole idea on the scrap heap. But before I gave into that urge I decided to distract myself by changing other (non-work-related) areas of my life—slowly, and one at a time.

The first change was resurrecting my previously daily exercise habit that, after four miscarriages, had been eroded to three days a week at best. I knew how crucial daily exercise was to my mental health, so I spent four weeks getting back into that habit.

The next change was quitting sugar. This was something I'd wanted to do for a while, not only for the health benefits but also out of vanity. How I look affects how I feel about myself, and at the start of November I was looking pretty flabby and soft.

So I spent eight weeks quitting sugar.

And by the end of the program the new habit had stuck, and I was enjoying living in a body that felt better, worked better and looked better.

The final change was to get fit again. At the end of 2011 I felt the most unfit I'd been my whole life. And before Ant

and I tried for another baby I wanted to get back to what I considered a 'base' level of fitness.

When you're me, a 'base' level of fitness means being able to run 21km (a Half Marathon) very comfortably. So I picked a March half marathon and started training for it. It felt unbelievably good to be running with purpose again.

By the start of 2012 I was in a nice place.

I had cut back from four blogs to one and had discharged all obligations other than those related to the work I *really* wanted to be doing. I was also the fittest and healthiest I had been in nearly three years.

And I was on holiday.

We shut down the Swish office for two weeks during the Christmas/New Year break like we always do. But for the first time in years Ant, Jaden and I had a "staycation". Normally we'd spend the first week attending a billion family Christmas functions, and the second on a big family holiday with my parents, siblings and their kids. These

family holidays are always nice, but they're really exhausting and I always went back to work feeling knackered. Doing the "staycation" thing and just hanging out with Ant and Jaden for two weeks was magic.

And I tried to keep that magic going over the first three months of 2012 by forcing myself to say "No" to stuff.

I won't lie—it was really, *really* hard. I've never seen an opportunity I didn't like, and I've always considered any requests from the point of view of "Can I do this?" And if you're anything like me, you know the answer to *that* question is always "Yes".

So I started running requests through a different filter. "Should I do this? Does it fit with my desire to spend my days writing, designing and talking to people as little as possible?" And more often than not, the answer would be "No".

But there was one thing I didn't say "No" to, and it taught me a lot about myself and how my mind works.

In February I applied for a job.

At the time I was drawing an income from Swish, and Ant was subtly hinting that to be fair to our staff I should be earning it by doing some actual work for Swish. My solution was to return to the office and get involved in the operational side of things again. Not surprisingly, this caused the odd (okay, daily) power struggle. And that wasn't good for our relationship, our staff, or the business.

So when I saw the job for an online editor at a small business website, I just couldn't get it out of my head. It was a three-day a week position I could do from home, and best of all it meant I could stop drawing money from Swish. I really wasn't coping with Ant being my boss, and decided the best way forward was to withdraw from the business completely.

Deep down I had concerns about the job because I know what I'm like. If someone pays me to work 20 hours a week, I can pretty much guarantee I'll work 30 hours a week for them. I have a pathological need to hear my employer tell me how amazing I am so I identify their expectations and then ensure I go way above and beyond them.

These qualms were quickly overridden however by another pathological need of mine – the need to *achieve*. I decided getting this job would be a huge achievement, and once I got that in my head it was game on. I spent 30 hours on the application alone (I know – *how?*), and when I made the interview shortlist I instantly signed up for interview coaching with an HR expert. I also decided a Skype interview wasn't my idea of doing it "properly", so I spent nine hours flying to and from Sydney for the one-hour interview.

In the end I didn't get the job. And once I got over the hit to my ego ("But I'm amazing. How could anyone else be more amazing for the position than me?"), I felt an overwhelming sense of relief. I knew full well taking the job would have pushed me straight back into "stressed and over-committed" mode. And I suspect the interview panel knew it as well.

So I sat down with Ant and tried to figure out what role I could play in our business that wouldn't jeopardise our relationship, or stress me out. We finally decided that I would take on business development and marketing, as

well as any overflow design work. And I would stay out of the office as much as possible.

And for a few months things were really good. I loved walking into my study every morning, sitting down at my desk, and spending the next seven hours in blissful peace and quiet—the introvert’s dream. I also took care of the house during work hours so when Ant and Jaden came home in the afternoon we could just relax and hang out together. And for the first time in years I wasn’t jumping back on the laptop the moment Jaden went to bed.

But it’s hard to fight against type. And once I got comfortable in my role and with my workload, I started taking on more stuff again.

It happened so naturally. Someone would ask if I wanted to be involved with something, and as long as it involved writing or designing I’d think, “Well, this sounds fun. It involves something I love doing, and I have the time. Why not?”

Sure enough, by September I was feeling pretty frazzled again. I was angry with myself, not just for slipping back into my old ways, but also for letting my own personal

projects fall by the wayside in favour of helping other people with their projects. How can someone be such a slow learner?

But in the end it seemed I *had* learned something. Instead of thinking, “Too bad, Kel. You’ve committed yourself to these things, so now you have to follow through or you’ll really let these people down”, I told myself, “Suck it up Kelly. They’ll either understand or they won’t”. And of course, they did.

Ant and I are kind of resigned to the fact that this will be an ongoing battle for me. If I have any spare time on my hands it’s hard for me to resist filling it with *something*.

This is the major challenge I face in trying to live *a life less frantic*.

I love being busy because I get bored really easily. So living *a life less frantic* can’t hinge on “not being busy”. Rather it’s about not being stressed out, frazzled and vague. It’s also about being mentally present when I’m around Ant and Jaden, and enjoying being together as a family.

So how did I finally achieve this?

First I nailed down the things that really stress me out. And it turned out there were really only two things:

- Over-committing myself (because I start feeling out of control, which triggers anxiety)
- Being employed by someone and needing them to think I'm amazing (and if they don't think I am amazing, this triggers anxiety)

It's really not that hard to stop over-committing myself. I just need to be smart about what I say "Yes" to. But I'm pretty sure I'll have to stuff this up every so often to re-establish where the line in the sand is between "happily busy" and "oops, too much".

As for the second cause of stress, I've come to realise that in the interests of my mental health I'm basically unemployable. I seem to be okay working for other people on a project-by-project basis, but if someone employs me for a salaried job, I can't *just* do that job. I immediately slip into "must be super-awesome" mode, and feel I have to operate at 120% when even 100% would be amazing. If I

think I'm not delighting my employer beyond belief for even half a second, I go to pieces.

And that's it really. Two simple things I need to keep an eye on in order to stop slipping back into the vortex of stress, anxiety and depression.

So in September 2012 I eased back on my workload once again, stopped looking for employment opportunities outside of Swish, and filled my spare time writing the first chapter of this book.

At this point in time I also had some extra motivation for keeping a lid on the stress levels.

I was pregnant again.

It was hard to keep a lid on the heebie-jeebies for the first trimester. There were problems right up until the 10-week mark, and I spent the entire time waiting for (what I figured was) the inevitable miscarriage. Not a great headspace to be in, but hey, what can you do?

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, October arrived and we had reached the magical 12-week mark for the

first time in five pregnancies. I could barely believe we'd made it that far, and having a caveat-free scan at that point was just mind-blowing.

Things have progressed amazingly smoothly since then. As I write this I'm 30 weeks pregnant, and I can feel our little girl wriggling around inside me.

It's absolutely surreal.

Was it the extreme stress I was under during those two years of miscarriages that made my body too toxic to hold on to pregnancies? Or was it just bad luck? We'll probably never know.

What I *do* know is this little girl's mother won't be sending invoices from hospital or rushing to the computer at every available opportunity. She'll be spending her time just savouring all the wonders of her newborn baby.

For me, 2012 ended on a strange and unfamiliar note. In late December I was working with a mentor who was asking me some pointed questions about what I wanted to

achieve with writing, and with life. And my answers kept bringing me back to one conclusion.

I was exactly where I wanted to be.

As far as writing was concerned, I had all the recognition and respect from my peers my heart desired. I was writing a book people wanted to read. I was *enjoying* my writing, and even making the odd dollar from it here and there. I'd basically ticked off everything on that particular bucket list.

And things at home were... wonderful. Ant, Jaden and I were enjoying a very happy life filled with laughter and love, and I felt outrageously content.

Content? Right where I wanted to be?

My brain couldn't cope with these concepts, and seemed to equate them with "stagnant pool of fetid water teeming with the Ebola virus". Every fibre of my being was screaming, "Get out. *Get out of the stagnant pool!* You need a Big Hairy Audacious Goal. You need a Next Big Thing. My God, Kelly. If there's nothing left to strive for then you're completely stuffed."

Thankfully a few friends were on hand to talk me down from the ledge.

And once I was safely back on solid ground I realised this wasn't something to be feared. It wasn't something I needed to escape from. And it certainly wasn't cause for despair.

It was actually a beautiful gift.

A gift delivered to me once I finally learned to live a life less frantic.

Epilogue

He said. She said. A Love Story

He said: Can I borrow your pencil?

She thought: WTF? What kind of loser turns up to the first week of Uni without a freaking pencil?

He said: Wanna play table hockey?

She said: For sure. I will kick your ass.

He said: Wanna play table hockey?

She said: Love to.

He said: Wanna play table hockey?

She thought: This is the longest courtship in the history of man.

He said: Want to go see a movie?

She said: What took you so long to ask?

They said: Oh my god, that is a total wedding photo.

He and she said: Whatever. {But **she** secretly agreed}

He said: Kel, you love triathlon more than you love me.

She said: Don't be ridiculous.

He said: No really, your life is all about triathlon and there's no room for me.

She said: No really, you're just high maintenance.

He said: I think we should take a break.

She said: I think that's a good idea.

She said: I've done a lot of thinking and you're right, my life was all about triathlon. I want to have another shot at us.

He said: I've just started seeing someone.

She said: Oh fuck.

He said: I broke it off with that girl.

She cried with relief.

He said: Will you marry me?

She said: What took you so long to ask?

She said: I want to start my own business.

He said: Ok.

He thought: Oh my god.

She said: Business is great!

He thought: Thank god.

She said: I'm pregnant.

He said: Woo hoo! High five!

She said: His name is Jaden. You get to choose his second name.

He said: Anthony of course. Jaden Anthony.

He said: Kel, you are so stressed out, there must be a better way to run your business.

She said: I am running the business just fine thanks.

He said: Kel, it's been a year and nothing has changed. You're still so stressed out.

She said: You don't know anything – I've changed lots of things. *Of course* it's stressful being a mum and a wife and running a business. That's life.

She said: I hate the business. I want to sell the business. I want to sell everything we own and go live in a shack in the bush.

He said: Why don't you try running the business like a business first?

She said: I've *tried*. I've tried everything and nothing works. It's never going to get easier. It's never going to get better.

He said: You *haven't* tried everything because you haven't done any of the stuff I told you to do.

She said: Ok. I will keep trying.

She said: I hate the business. I want to sell the business. I want to sell everything we own and go live in a shack in the bush.

He said: Kel, go home. Rest. Get better. Let me run the business for you.

She said: You can't run my business

She said: Go ahead. Run the business. I just don't care anymore.

He said: What did the doctor say?

She said: There's no obvious reason for all the miscarriages. It could be stress. But it's more likely just really bad luck.

He said: That's a bit shit.

She said: Hmm, you're actually doing a really good job of running the business. I'll just continue to stay at home shall I?

He said: Yes. Good idea.

She said: I'm ready to try again for baby number two. One last shot.

He said: Woo hoo, I'll make it a good one.

She said: I'm pregnant.

He said: It was never in any doubt.

She said: I can't believe we made it to 12 weeks.

He said: It was never in any doubt.

She said: I can't believe we made it to 19 weeks.

He said: It was never in any doubt.

She said: I can't believe we made it to 27 weeks. Look, she has long legs just like you.

He said: Do you believe it now?

She said: No. I'll believe it when she's in my arms

She said: I can't believe we've been married for 7 years. Thank you for staying with me through all the shit.

He said: Where would I have gone?

She said: Oh my god, she is perfect.

He said: What's her name?

She said: Mia Marie. Miss Mia Marie Exeter.

He said: Do you believe it now?

She said: Yes. Oh yes.

Thank you for reading A Life Less Frantic – I hope you enjoyed it! I have just started to re-write this book so if you have any feedback for me (good OR bad!) please feel free to email kelly@kellyexeter.com.au

In the meantime, if you want to stay in touch, feel free to visit my blog at kellyexeter.com.au

THANK YOU!