

## **A Moment of Distinction for everyone .....**

My story may help someone.

Tough times shape us and make us stronger. But we can succeed – if we don't give up.

It is difficult to sit back and think of the exact moment where I pulled myself out of the little dark hole I had fallen into. It amazes me to sit and think of the toughest days of my life and know that at the time I just did what I had to do and got through. Looking back now I have no idea how I survived the days I did. I know that I wouldn't have made it through alive without my dear friends by my side and know it was their ears listening to me, and their shoulders for me to cry on, that kept me going, but I also know there are many out there that don't have that support structure in their friends that I did back then. I was a single mum, one year with two children under two, and pregnant, and then six tough months with three children under the age of three, initially unable to gain employment because I was pregnant and had no childcare and no local family support. Then, with three under three, in the vicious cycle of needing childcare to allow me to take a position, yet needing employment to afford to pay for childcare ...

I don't recall when everything turned the corner it did, I only know that I fought hard and just made it work. I found a family day carer in my local area who was fabulous and worked with me, giving me a flexible position for the children until I could get a job. I borrowed \$50 from a friend to purchase a pair of shoes. Yes, after two years as a single mum, I didn't even own a pair of shoes!

So, new shoes, babies in care, and within a week I had a new job. I went from a single parent pension to being on an income in excess of \$70k per annum as a Telco account manager. Within a couple of months my life was turning around. I used my entire first month's pay to take my two eldest boys to the Melbourne zoo for a day trip and had an absolute ball. I filed divorce papers and finally closed the door on my old life.

Then, six months later, I had a knock on my door. It was an old neighbour visiting. He was in the area visiting a friend and popped in to say hello. A friend and I were beautifully dressed up to go to a fancy dress party in 80's gear so, needless to say, I was looking pretty glamorous in a skivvy and pigtails!! Well that's where a new chapter started for my old neighbour and I. We fell totally in love, blended our family to make what was then five children under five (soon to be eight!!). Having so many children made childcare fees phenomenal and a logistical nightmare with children going in different directions while we both worked two separate full-time jobs.

What to do to make this little family work, and have a career that would work around us rather than having our children having to work around our careers? We went through another tough year filled with multiple family deaths, our divorces, a very ill child and an array of other things that make you wonder how this little world could be so cruel. In one year I think we both went through a lifetime of worry and stress. Without the fact that we did this together, as soul mates picking each other up as we fell time and time again, I doubt that we would have survived. But we had each other and again we did what we had to do and we got through. Then, again, a whole new chapter started....

On the sofa one night, my husband and I, with a bowl of ice cream and chocolate fudge sauce, had a little idea. With a passion for photography, I had an idea for a business that could work around family, photos on canvas, a product mums would want to buy, a product that mums would be able to sell, a product that would be affordable for mums to purchase, in a way that could work totally around family.... totally 100% family focused, in my local area. I could offer free photo shoots. It would only

cost me time but I could work around my children, and my husband could study to change his career and follow his dreams. Moments Of Distinction photo-to-canvas prints sprouted from that brainstorming session over ice cream that night on our little sofa.

I set up a business that mums can become a part of – becoming self-employed selling the product to other mums, working hours that suit them around their family commitments, allowing their ideas and dreams to come to fruition – all at no cost to them other than time and drive. I decided my business would be shared with those that wanted a chance to get their own businesses started, in their own territories, that would give them everything they needed to get started with no set-up cost or fees. There was now no reason why a single mum couldn't have a job if she wanted, no reason for any mums to miss those school concerts or first days at school or bobbies first step and smile. They could set their hours during times that suit them as a single mum or working around a husband's work hours or children's school hours. I would not charge for the samples or promo material that would be needed. I would hand it all to them and help to train and guide them to make the most of the opportunity.

Over the last two years we have seen Moments Of Distinction grow from the little idea over ice cream to a national business creating jobs in every state, with two retail outlets and a plan for a national roll-out of stores - a plan that creates in excess of 100 full time roles. With a beautiful team of staff, even their children become a part of Moments, with little uniforms to go in to work with mum, if needed, and little jobs for them to feel a part of it all. We have seen mums go from no income to getting paid photography work through the training and support of myself and the staff. We have seen a casual, working four hours a fortnight in a supermarket and struggling to survive, go to working full-time in her dream role as a photo editor, with all training and support handed to her, in a role that she believed was totally out of reach. Others have been unemployed and worked hard and put the effort in to watch and learn, to move into roles that they only dreamt of. Some take the opportunity and run with it. Some decide it isn't for them but, nevertheless, we have made our little dent in the world to help fix an otherwise hopeless situation and give those that are in the spot I was in many years ago an opportunity to pull themselves out of the hole that is all too easy to fall into and get stuck....

To all the mums out there who think there is no option, no way out: Look hard, and try hard enough, and I can promise you that there is no reason for you to be stuck. There is always a little rope hanging down to help pull you out. Just look!