

ON THE
BRIGHT
SIDE

STORIES ABOUT FRIENDSHIP, LOVE,
AND BEING TRUE TO YOURSELF

Melanie Shankle

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On the Bright Side

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FOREWORD



I was born to a man who is delighted to RISE AND SHINE every single day of his living life. His enthusiasm knows no bounds. And not just for his four kids, whom he overloved and overvalued our whole childhood, but for anyone. I am telling you right now, he would be equally as excited about your new pair of Nikes as he was about the first grandkid I produced. It's all great. All the things are great. Our careers, your new baby stroller, the weather—great. He is still stumped that none of us ended up in the Olympics or the White House or as Rhodes scholars (his theory: “Whoever interviewed/hired/decided on the award is a jackwagon”). If you need a cheerleader, my dad is your guy. We go to our mom when we need someone to tell it to us straight; we go to our dad when we need a clearly biased hype man.

Here is my point: my dad basically invented the bright side.

I found it difficult to escape my dad's vortex of positivity. Thus, I entered adulthood pretty excited about almost everything. I inherited his big feelings and have been known to over-emote in ways both embarrassing and cringey, like the time I threw my arms around Constantine Maroulis's waist without permission after seeing his performance in *School of Rock* on Broadway; look, it's not every day you see the sixth-place finalist from season four of *American Idol* just walking down a New York City street.

I like my dad's approach to life. Is it naïve? Too earnest? Too simplified? Probably. I still like it. I've yet to regret jumping feet first into a big, juicy experience or giving the benefit of the doubt

or letting my enthusiasm edge north of respectable. The majority of my greatest memories are located somewhere near the bright side, even when all light appears to be dimmed, for even there, hope lurks.

It is just a weird time to be alive, isn't it? I have never been so tempted to give in to the beast of despair. I find myself searching the history books for comfort—as one does—asking, “Is this the worst it has ever been or no?” Turns out life has always been hard and people have always disagreed and injustice has always snuffed out human flourishing. This is, of course, not to say we throw in the towel and let the tide of human misery just rush along; we must fight for goodness in a world gone mad. But there is solace in knowing we are simply the current generation searching for the bright side. Our parents did it. Our grandparents did it. Their parents did it. And lo and behold, it could always be found.

A quick word about Melanie. I wanted to bear a meaningful witness of her integrity, so I searched my mental Rolodex and found dozens of stories. We've been friends for a decade. But I have no more significant example to hold out than this: I am a Texas Longhorns fan, and Melanie is a dyed-in-the-wool Texas A&M Aggie, and every single fall, she sends me adorable fashion options in what is arguably the grossest shade in the history of the color wheel (burnt orange) so I will look cute on game day. Now, for some of you, that entire sentence was gibberish, but for those who know, please find me a better example of Christian character. I'll wait. People, she clothes her enemy in strength and dignity, and she can laugh at the days to come. I don't know if Perry and Caroline are rising up and calling her blessed, but I am sure rising up and calling her for Anthropologie links. This is my sister in arms, and I love her.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

As the daughter of a Bright Side Dad, I have a high standard for hope-bearers. I'm looking for a brand of joy that can celebrate the bejeebers out of life but can also cut through loss and pain and suffering. It's a tall order. It seems few are up for the task right now. But Melanie sure is. This book will delight you, encourage you, relieve you, and nourish you. Don't read it in public because #laughter and also #tears. Close the last page, then give it to the people you love most. Melanie is a gift to us right now. Play your cards right, and you might also get a grainy picture of her in a burnt-orange plaid duster over yoga pants in the Target mirror because come what may on game day, she has your back.

WITH GREAT LOVE,
JEN HATMAKER