



# GRIT WITH GRACE

## Pop Goes The Knee

By Randy Kaufman

with research assistance from Dustin Lowman

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*There's always gonna be another mountain  
I'm always gonna wanna make it move  
Always gonna be an uphill battle  
Sometimes I'm gonna have to lose  
Ain't about how fast I get there  
Ain't about what's waiting on the other side  
It's the climb*

Miley Cyrus, "The Climb"

## Cloud Nine

If you'd seen me at six, in tears at the base of the rope-tow line, my parents ski-footed and taking the slow ride up to the top of Butternut Basin, you'd never think that protestful, bratty little girl would turn into a passionate skier: tackling powder in Snowbird, fog in Alta, heli-skiing in British Columbia, Steep and Deep camps in Jackson Hole, and moguls whenever available.

Especially when you don't develop the skills early, skiing can be dangerous. Rushing down a mountain, the surface slick under your boots, the slope crowded with other skiers of varying skill — a lot can go wrong, and a lot does. But, for the longest time, it didn't go wrong for me.

Last February, my husband, my brother, and I were in Colorado, on a ski/work trip. After eight days, I was at 10,000 feet physically and on cloud nine mentally. As I stopped on top of a mogul, ready to contemplate the run below, pop went my knee.

"Life changes in a second," wrote Joan Didion.



Down I went on the hill, and when the ski patrol arrived, down I went on a sled. Wind whistled, snow blew into my face, and the sled caromed from mogul to mogul. I — in retrospect, naively — assumed that the sled trip would be the hardest part.

## The Marvelous Ms. Kaufman

At the outset of anything challenging, I always tell myself it's all going to be fine. That mindset enables me to take on challenges others think are petrifying.

At the outset of this particular personal challenge, I thought similarly. The pain wasn't bad — my ego was bruised, but in my typically optimistic attitude, I believed that all would soon be over and I'd be back to the Peloton, and back to the boat in time for our usual summer sailing. I was going to need surgery if I wanted to ski and sail again, but I foresaw a quick, direct recovery process. One that would include a little (okay, a lot) more Netflix than usual. Incidentally, I can enthusiastically recommend "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" to all who enjoy reminiscing on 1960s attitudes, outfits, and (Jewish) family life as much as I do.

For the five weeks before my surgery, I was pain-free. I worked easily from home, I saw "Hamilton" for my fourth time to fete my niece's 30th, and I saw the Neil Diamond musical "A Beautiful Noise" with my talented marketing coordinator. I walked gingerly and with a crutch (mostly to push pushy New Yorkers out of my way as they came precariously close to knocking me over time and time again, their heads in their phones). I couldn't exercise, but life wasn't so bad. I could. Not. Wait. For the surgery, for the healing, for the return of my normal life to begin. And yet...

## The Climb

My road to recovery was anything but a straight path. In reality, it was a [climb](#) — a laborious process full of pitfalls and setbacks, and one that led me into darkness and frustration.

There were physical pains. I was religiously committed to my PT, but it was incredibly painful. Progress was slow, leading me to plenty of moments of doubt as to whether I was, in fact, getting better.

There were professional pains. As I prioritized my recovery, I found it increasingly difficult to focus on work. For one of the only times in my many-decade career, I, who love my job and have always derived deep meaning from my client work, was finding it difficult to rise to the professional occasion.



And then there was the personal pain — logistical, mental, emotional. I couldn't take the trips I'd planned to take; I couldn't do the most simple tasks that I'd long learned to take for granted; I couldn't *be myself* in the most fundamental sense. I had to adjust to a 2023 that looked very different from how I thought it would, and to a set of personal capabilities that had narrowed considerably.

At the beginning of this unanticipated journey, I anticipated a six-week recovery. It's now been six months. My recovery continues. My life still hasn't gone all the way back to normal — particularly to the point that I feel safe hiking or skiing — and my timeline to normalcy has stretched to sometime in 2024.

## (Yet Another) Lesson In Stoicism



Marcus Aurelius, architect of stoicism

*"The good news is that when you are suffering, when you are in pain, that's a moment of truth. This is a moment when you're forced to embrace reality actually the way it is. Then you can make meaningful change and progress. You can only do that when you're starting with the truth."*

-Naval Ravikant, "The Knowledge Project Podcast," Episode #18

This experience with my knee has turned into another masterclass in stoicism. Here are a few of the things I've learned (and relearned) throughout this process. (Check out my [previous article reflecting on stoicism here](#).)

1. **Bad news bears.** I learned (again) that most people don't want to share bad news. I met many people who had ACL surgery, most of whom said some variation of, "You'll be fine, don't worry, it's easy."

Only one friend and colleague, a fellow athlete and senior investment professional at Cerity Partners, warned me that the road ahead would be hard. He cautioned that my recovery would go up and down — much like the markets — but that it would trend up.

This was the most wise and valuable voice I heard during this process. I think people are afraid to give reality checks because they don't want to hurt us, but the reality is, helping someone set realistic expectations does them much more of a favor than sugar-coating the truth.

2. **To boldly go where no man (or woman) has gone before.** As Trekkies and boaters know, the bridge on a ship is where the controls live. These controls don't control the weather, the enemy, or anything outside the confines of the ship. They control how the vessel in question *responds* to influences beyond the confines of the ship.

Reality dawned on me midway through my recovery. I remembered what I've known for decades — that all I could control are the inputs — my mental attitude, adherence to PT, nutrition, medicine, ice and heat applications, and wine indulgence (or non-indulgence) — but the time to

recovery would be what it would be. My impatience wouldn't move it along, so I decided to stop being impatient — to accept what I could and couldn't control.

- 3. Support from loved ones makes a world of difference.** For swollen feet, doctors recommend compression socks. My orange ombre socks eased the pain, but the doctors failed to remind me how important support from friends and family would be to my recovery.

Support came in many forms: the delicious meals left at our door by my uncle-in-law when I was on two crutches, in excruciating pain, and unable to walk, let alone microwave a plate; the regular calls and visits from my mother and close friends; or finally, a trip to Virginia, Georgia, and Florida with my husband and best friends that I was afraid to take lest it set me back.

On the advice of my surgeon and my husband (with his rose-colored glasses firmly intact), I went, crutches, brace, and all. Getting out of the four walls of our apartment after five weeks, zipping through airports on wheelchairs, bearing the pain to attend cocktail parties, seeing the ocean and wild horses on an island off the coast of Georgia, my recovery turned a corner. I came back from the trip healthier, more grateful, happier, and feeling almost normal.

- 4. With acceptance comes happiness.** I started out resenting the slow pace at which my body was recovering. And, I still do at times. But, mostly, I now accept that it's going to recover at whatever pace it has to — and that rushing it will only set me back.

I'm hoping to ski next year. Sadly, I concluded that sailing this year was a risk not worth taking. Yet in another masterful pivot, my husband and I embraced a summer radically different than the one we expected — with a slew of unexpected rewards.

In difficult moments, I remember wisdom from my aforementioned friend and colleague at Certy Partners, [Sal Russo](#): Like the stock market, the recovery process goes up and goes down when I least expect it to. And like the markets, the recovery is trending up over time. Of course, I also remember my father's oft-repeated wisdom: [This too shall pass](#).

With much growth from my injury, grit, sadly no grace while on crutches, but gratitude always.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Randy Kaufman, formerly a corporate tax attorney and investment banker, is now a wealth advisor who prides herself on focusing on what matters most: clients' peace of mind, family dynamics, and getting *enough*, not *more*. Randy is a passionate student of impact investing, strategic philanthropy, and behavioral psychology (while not a psychologist, she occasionally plays one in the boardroom). She is dedicated to helping the underprivileged, and is a proud member of global venture fund Acumen's advisory board. A thinker, learner, and pursuer of overarching truths, she is always eager to discuss big ideas about money, and its off-and-on associate, happiness.