

"CAPTIVATING, HEARTBREAKING, AND FILLED WITH  
THE STRUGGLES OF LIFE..." ADMIRAL BILL MCRAVEN



# AND GOLIATH

THE LITTLEST NAVY SEAL'S INSPIRATIONAL STORY  
ABOUT LIVING YOUR BIGGEST LIFE



DAVID BROWN WITH ROBERT GETTLIN

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## AND GOLIATH

*“You’re wasting your time,” the Navy recruiter said.  
“SEALs are all muscled up strong guys. You’re way too little. I mean, be realistic; you’ll never make it. Forget about the SEAL program. Pick something you can do.”*

In the Bible story of David and Goliath—a lesson of courage, faith, and overcoming impossible odds—a small shepherd boy bravely volunteers to fight a giant Philistine. The king’s entire army fears the giant and warns the boy not to fight. Despite the warning, David arms himself with a sling and smooth stones from the brook. With a fearless heart, he approaches his rival. The Philistine, mocking David, attacks the boy with a spear and shield. David instinctively dashes toward the battle line; clutching his simple weapon, he arms it with a stone, slinging the rock deep into the giant’s forehead—killing him.

*And Goliath* is a story of determination and persistence, and finally, a triumph over impossible odds. It has endured for millennia because it reveals the seed for success.

This is my epic struggle to slay Goliath.

# 1

## FROM THE ASHES

*Stars are phoenixes, rising from their own ashes.*

Carl Sagan

Speeding south on California Highway 49 in the early dawn four days after Dina's death, my trembling hands gripped the steering wheel as I unconsciously navigated through old mining country. The gas gauge's incessant glowing "E" nagged, causing me to swerve into the first station and creep up to the pump.

Fumbling for my government credit card in the glove box, its contents spilled. Frustrated, I spun to exit my seat, only to be roundly returned, tearing a hole in my freshly tailored trousers. "*Shit, what the hell?*" Grabbing my hip, I discovered the seatbelt caught the pistol grip of my Glock 9mm...as a lefty, my safeguard was always strapped there. After extracting myself from the tangled mess, I stumbled out and began filling the tank.

Returning to the car's confines, I sat as still as a corpse, staring blankly through the windshield at the lighted "ICE" sign above the convenience store freezer.

"Pop!"

The nozzle handle signaled for my attention. However, lost in my thoughts, I remained oblivious to this cue and mechanically shifted into drive before accelerating without a second thought.

“Bam!”

The noise echoed from behind the car. Shoving the transmission into park and bolting from my seat, I encountered a crowd gathering, their eyes wide and their mouths agape at the sight of the jettisoned hose and nozzle lying on the concrete.

“My God! Did I do that?” I stood silent and embarrassed in my unsightly wrinkled business shirt, a hole in my trousers and tie askew. How could some idiot—not someone like me—forget to return the nozzle? In my low, I became that guy.

A kind man perhaps in his mid-sixties, wearing bib overalls and a sweat-stained John Deere hat, walked up and put his hand on my shoulder.

“Are you all right, son?”

No, I wasn’t. But words were impossible. I was too ashamed.

How did this happen to me, a former Navy SEAL and now the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of a federal law enforcement program? I was so pensive I couldn’t pump gas.

I wasn’t a screw-up. I swear. I was always on time, never made mistakes, and, for God’s sake, never failed or quit.

Two years earlier and on top of the world, after being promoted to SAC before my fortieth birthday, the price for my achievement was now coming due. After zig-zagging my wife and daughter across the U.S., the Pacific and back in my determination to achieve “success,” everything I’d worked tirelessly for evaporated.



Sheer willpower enabled me to graduate from Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training (BUD/S) class 115, joining the tiny handful who served as a Navy SEAL. Operating in the military for years, testing my body and mind on missions worldwide, my experiences hardened me to stay focused, unwavering in the goal—pushing forward in the never-ending evolution to complete each mission every day.



And then came a moment in the military when my compulsion to strive for undefined success wasn't enough. Leaving the Navy for a career in law enforcement led me to the top of the organization as the SAC in Sacramento, CA. There, I intended to build my dream retirement home on twenty-eight acres in the Sierras and live happily ever after.

Mary, my wife of twenty-one years and high school sweetheart, had other plans. She'd grown tired of my work schedule, relentless travel, and now me. After our daughter graduated from high school, Mary made her move.

In the kitchen of our rented house, I demanded, "We're missing six thousand dollars from our checking account; what the hell happened to it?"

"I withdrew it to buy a Harley Davidson motorcycle," said Mary.

"What the hell? You can't take six grand out of the bank to buy a motorcycle without telling me!"

Angry, I stormed out and walked two miles into town to cool off. After an hour, I called her on my cell phone and left a message, "Come pick me up, I'm in front of the Nevada City Library." A short time passed when a man in a battered red Toyota pulled to the curb and rolled down the passenger window.

"Are you David Brown?" he asked.

Stepping back, I brushed my left side, feeling for my Glock. *Shit, I forgot it back at the house.* Twenty-five years of jailing people gets you many enemies, and this guy appeared fresh out of prison. Searching for cover, I said, "Yeah, why?"

He parked and approached me. As he began to extend his hand, I cautiously did the same. But instead of a handshake, he produced a legal document.

"Your wife has filed for divorce," he said. "I'm Mary's attorney. She's been planning this for months. You've been served, David. And by the way, the money she took from the bank was to pay me, not to buy a motorcycle."

*What the hell do I do now?* I had few options as he got into his car; I leaned into the open passenger window. “This sounds odd, but can you give me a ride home?” I asked.

He smiled and laughed: “Sure, get in. I’m a lawyer, not a jerk.”

Saddled with her demons, Mary wanted out. A retirement chalet in the foothills was my dream, not hers. So, she booted me from the rental property and took nearly every dollar and possession I owned. It was a price I was willing to pay to end the failed marriage.

As a former Navy SEAL—some say a certified badass—I’d been through much worse. On those difficult days, I’d say to myself, “I don’t need anything or anyone. Give me a K-bar knife, and I’ll survive alone in the woods. I don’t need worldly possessions or people.”

I wasn’t born the smartest, tallest, strongest, or best-looking, but I possessed something priceless—unbounded persistence and determination. My traits took me from certain obscurity and a life of mediocrity to achieving the improbable—some say the impossible.



With money running low and nowhere to turn, I had little choice but to sleep in my truck. Arriving early to work, I’d freshen up at the restroom sink and put on my stoic demeanor as the omnipotent boss in command in a demanding and precise occupation. The façade I presented wasn’t fooling anyone.

Before long, problems at the office began to snowball. My frequent absences led to a bungled multi-agency search warrant, and I was responsible. Within days, I became the subject of two internal investigations, and my job was on the line.

Still, I’d been through worse and recalled the pain and torture of Hell Week and enduring the twenty-three weeks of SEAL training. I was “Brownie” to my former SEAL brothers; I never failed and never gave up. But even a badass needs an escape plan.

Then I met Dina on a dating website and was sure my luck had changed. On our second date, she asked, “So, where do you live?”



In a panic, I couldn't say in my truck, so I said, "Nevada City," which was partly true.

"Oh, we should go there sometime," she said. "It's nice in the foothills."

Now what?

I couldn't lie, so I said, "Honestly, I don't stay in the house I rented in Nevada City; my soon-to-be ex-wife lives there. I'm sleeping in my truck until I find a place." Her eyes and mouth opened wide, and she grabbed my hand.

"Not anymore; you can stay at my house. I have plenty of room," she said, smiling. Like an angel, she took me in, and over two months, I envisioned my future as bright again.

In July, I went with Dina to see her oncologist. Sure, she had told me about her breast cancer when we met, but we both thought it was in remission. That day in the doctor's office, I learned a lot about cancer, chemotherapy, and hospice. Still, nothing—not my SEAL training, my lifetime of overcoming physical and social barriers, or my challenging missions around the globe—could prepare me for what was to come.

Like a horrific car crash, it happened so unexpectedly. On a sunny, blue-sky morning in late August 2003, I stood helpless as my beautiful Dina passed away. She lay in her bed on white linen sheets, surrounded by her family in the home she loved. She was gone, and I was again... alone, homeless, and broke, but mostly brokenhearted.

Defeated, I was metaphorically cast into the woods with nothing but my K-Bar. I always thought I was prepared for this situation but never expected to be in it.



Dina died on a Thursday, and on Monday, I was on my way to work because that is what SEALs do; they complete the mission.

Whenever a SEAL was killed, teammates met at the Casino, a dirt floor bar in Virginia Beach, and had a beer keg in his name.

Afterward, we'd go on to the next mission the following day because that is how we were trained and bred; it's in our very being, our DNA.

There were no raised glasses and brave shout-outs to a fallen hero that morning in the gas station as I stood pathetic and helpless while a group of customers gawked at my vulnerability. Lifting the nozzle off the ground, I returned it to the pump. After thanking the man who put his hand on my shoulder, I got in my government car and continued my drive.

On the ramp to Interstate 80 from Auburn, the fog in my mind and in the valley began to clear. My thoughts flew back to BUD/S and the Teams.

Thousands of miles away on the other side of the globe, we parachuted out of aircraft at night and into the black ocean. Racing our rubber boats onto foreign beaches, we carried out classified missions without the thought of injury or failure, always knowing that no matter what, we would survive. I understood that my options in the most challenging days of being a SEAL were no different from now, decades later.

White knuckled, I gripped the steering wheel. As the sun in the rearview mirror breached the mountain peaks, I stood on the battlefield, ready to confront the ferocious foe feared by all.

Goliath.

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## BEYOND IMPOSSIBLE

*The only way to discover the limits of the possible  
is to go beyond them into the impossible.*

Arthur C. Clarke

In 1997, Tim Noakes, an emeritus professor in the Division of Exercise Science and Sports Medicine at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, proposed the “central governor” theory. Noakes suggested that “fatigue is a protective emotion rather than a physiological state.” He deduced that the central governor limits exercise by reducing the neural recruitment of muscle fibers. The brain requires a steady flow of nutrients and oxygen and demands a reliable mechanism for transport (your body). Anything that might jeopardize these things will be tightly regulated. Otherwise, athletes could run themselves to death by destroying skeletal or cardiac muscle or starving the nerve tissue of nutrients and oxygen. This reduced neural recruitment of muscle fibers causes the sensation of fatigue.

Some people are born runners. Others learn to love running and experience a short-lasting euphoria or bliss known as a “runner’s high.” Fatigue is what I experienced when running. I needed to overcome my central governor and become faster.

Running over fifty miles per week—to chow, on the beach, and during conditioning runs—chances were I’d become faster or

eventually break... again. Narrowly, I could pass the mandatory four-mile timed run on the hard-packed beach, but I paid the goon squad price for falling behind on the soft sand conditioning runs.

Joining me in the demeaning and demoralizing goon squad were other losers who, like me, had a mental or physical running challenge. Running was our albatross, an unbearable burden sure to do us in. We were not quitting, but we weren't succeeding, and daily moving closer to being a statistic.

Schibler and Tony Gumataotao usually joined me. I shuttered at the thought of throwing either man over my shoulders (fireman's carry) and transporting them a great distance in the sand.

One fateful day in our second week, we set out on a conditioning run, heading south on the Silver Strand past the demo pit and up and over the dunes. The circumstance was unfortunately familiar, with most of the class sprinting ahead, leaving me and the slowest runners to catch up only to have them dash away. Tagged again as the first person in the goon squad, those behind me were also condemned to its ranks.

Concerned about our ability to keep up, instructors warned us that our days were numbered unless we figured out how to run as if our life depended on it. But now it was time to pay the price for our failure. The upcoming severe lesson was supposed to help us with our attention to detail, sharpen our focus, and strengthen our resolve. Designed to be worse than any condition we experienced in a successful evolution, the goon squad was intentionally made unbearable. Near exhaustion, I struggled to regain my breath as I hunched over with my hands on my knees.

The torture began with an instructor's command.

"Eight-count bodybuilders, gents. Mr. Schibler lead the count. Go! If you had put out the effort like your classmates, you'd be taking a shower now." The instructor lamented, "I don't want to do this, gentleman, but you forced me to. You are all making me be the bad guy, and I don't like it!"

Each remedial activity was more brutal than the last. We paired for our races as the order came in: “Brown and Gumataotao pair up for the fireman’s carry.”

Weighing in at 114 pounds and five foot three inches tall, I stood next to the 230-pound, five foot ten inches tall Gumataotao. The other goons stared, and some mouthed, “Oh shit, Brownie.”

Schibler walked up to me and with sweat pouring down his sand-covered beet-red face, said, “It’s okay, Brownie, you got this.”

I didn’t have time to be afraid or consider whether I could haul him to the ocean; I only thought, “*We had to win this race.*” Every trainee faced overwhelming odds, and at one time, a decision to continue or quit. Most chose to ring out, while others narrowly hung on.

“Up and over the berm, hit the surf, and back,” the instructor bellowed. The whistle blew, and the race was on. Throwing me over his back like a rag doll, Tony sprinted up and over the massive sand hill, leaving the other pairs far behind. Flying down the other side, we made it to the shoreline, and I jumped off as we dove into the Pacific.

“Move, move, move. Let’s go!” I said. Soaked, we ran to the berm’s base and stopped. Leaning over, I prepared myself.

Covering me like a giant spider over its prey, Tony begged for forgiveness, “I’m so sorry, Brownie, I’m so sorry.” As if someone had put a Volkswagen on my back, I sank into the sand, forcing the water to jet from my boots.

Holding my breath, I bore down to stop from collapsing.

*Go, go, go!*

Slow, methodical steps up, I began my ascent. Grunting, grinding my teeth, and spitting,

*Go, go, go!*

Tony’s arms and legs hung motionless, dragging along as he encouraged me, “Come on, Brownie, you can do it. You’re almost there!”

Shaking under his weight, my shoulders and back cramped, and my heart readied to explode when we reached the peak. After sucking air and with a loud groan, I started down the other side. In the distance, instructors stood in amazement as I opened my stride,

taking longer steps and letting gravity pull us down. Tony's weight was more than I could control, and I tumbled face first, with his 230 pounds burying me in the sand.

Cresting the berm, the other teams closed in as the instructors called out, "Get up; you're going to lose!" Jumping up with sand blurring my eyes, caked up my nose, and crunching in my mouth, Tony halfheartedly fell across my back. We collapsed over the finish line, moving more like a three-legged race than a fireman's carry.

"You did it, Brownie! We won!" yelled a happy Gumataotao.

Spitting the crystals lining my tongue, I glanced up at the laughing instructors.

"Good job. That was one of the funniest goddamn things I've ever seen," one said. "It pays to be a winner, gents. It pays to be a winner! Brown and Gumataotao, you're secured."

How did I make the impossible possible?

According to Jeff Wise, writer for *Scientific American*: "Hysterical strength, also known as adrenaline rushes, are displays of extreme strength by humans beyond what is believed to be normal, usually occurring when people are in life-and-death situations. When our hypothalamus senses danger, it sends signals to the adrenal glands to release adrenaline and noradrenaline. These chemicals together cause a rise in heart rate and blood pressure, an increase in respiration, dilated pupils, slowing of digestion, and contraction of muscles. A reserve of power is triggered and used in a high-stress situation. You get an adrenaline rush when you do something frightening or in a fight-or-flight situation as the chemicals flood the body. You have extreme reactions and superhuman abilities."



In this second week, we had three runs. On Monday and Wednesday, I fell victim to the goon squad. Now Friday, as we prepared for the week's last conditioning run, terror set in. I hit the running wall. My journey, my dream, was in jeopardy.



Beginning our first sprint soon after leaving the training area on our way past the O-course, my mind pleaded with my body to keep up. Why can't I run faster? We headed south down the Silver Strand, zigzagging for miles up and over the berms, with the group circling back to pick up the usual stragglers and me.

With the class caught up, it was time to return to the compound. Running down the access road near the demo pit, I fell behind again. My breathing was labored, and my legs were fatigued as my class pulled away.

Overwhelmed, I slowed and started making excuses. The weight of my quagmire lay heavy across my shoulders as the sand gripped every step. I became the person everyone told me I was—an unimaginable fear set in that I wouldn't survive another goon squad.

I started crying, yelling, and cursing as my classmates pulled farther away. My sobbing was not from my physical pain but from the fear I was about to fail. Even with no intention of quitting, I was not good enough and didn't know how I would ever be. I swore off crying as useless, but crying was all I had left. Sweat and tears poured down my face; there was nothing more I could physically do.

Lurking close behind, the ambulance taunted me.

*Get in, get in.*

*You're not going to make it, Brownie.*

*You're not going to be a SEAL.*

It is a cliché, but my life flashed before me, all the barriers, hurdles, and mountains. Time compressed as I relived every traumatic event.

In that moment, my life changed forever.

My mind disconnected from what my pain sensors were screaming, and with an altered perspective, I watched hovering above as the situation unfolded. While that sounds crazy, neuroscientists are beginning to understand these Out-of-Body (OBE) experiences, which occur in up to 10% of the population. OBEs happen, according to science, when there is a transition between different states of consciousness and can be caused by disease, extreme stress, or near-death situations. These experiences occur when the brain

works in overdrive to integrate sensory information that places a person's sense of self somewhere in space.

Seeing the ambulance only paces behind me and the distance to the pack in front of me, my vision became clear. My body would race and catch up, or it wouldn't, and if I couldn't, I would die right there on the Silver Strand, trying.

This was not physical; my physical-self failed me. This revelation came from the core of my being.

I surged with improbable strength and speed as my stride stretched like never before, catching the class in seconds. As expected, the instructor sprinted, and as the accordion effect reached me, I also dashed. Staring at the man's boots in front of me, I ran in his footsteps. Almost as soon as the sprint started, it slowed, and cheering erupted from my classmates. "All right, Brownie!" they shouted. "Way to go. Keep up."

*"Run in the footsteps of the man in front of you."*

Crescini's words finally made sense.

My goon squad days were over. I unlocked my limitless potential by releasing my mind's central governor control of my physical ability, catapulting me forward to overcome my most difficult obstacle—myself—and destroy the slow progression to failure.

Everyone's path to success travels through soft sand, trying to catch up and staying with the pack. Overcoming obstacles like the dirty name and carrying Gumataotao reminded me that despite my shortcomings, I could be equal to those around me. Enabling my body to ignore its self-preservation protections was transformative.

BUD/S was the catalyst, not the reason. Without my developed inherent traits and my boyhood experiences, I would not have had the capacity to search inside myself to find the key.

Now, I could pursue my potential without any visual and conceptual perception constraints. I buried the stereotype. My odyssey wasn't over, but from then on, *I* set the bar to measure my progress, and only *I* judged my success.

Only some people who want to be a UDT/SEAL can be, but everyone can be successful. Being a Team guy goes far beyond the

title, the job description, and a gold pin. It's not a transformation; it's a revelation. Every person can achieve greatness; it's genetically programmed.

Potential and success are a journey defined by you. Some happily run with the pack, and some find their own direction. My revelation birthed a lifelong philosophy for overcoming obstacles and a never-ending quest to reach my potential.

My classmates either hardened themselves or unraveled. PT, swimming, and running led us to one unimaginable five-day endurance test—Hell Week, a mandatory evolution that sets the gold standard for special forces training worldwide.

The king and his warriors warned David not to fight Goliath, the same as I'd been warned I would never be a SEAL. I was sure my weapons of persistence and determination would bring me victory in this weeklong battle from hell.



ABOVE: David and his sister Bonnie, at Harvey's Lake cottage in the summer of 1968. (Leo Brown Sr.)

BELOW: Third Grade class photo, 1970. David is second from left in back row. Albert Kita is fifth from left in the back row.



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