

My first book review!!!! (Originally published on www.johnnyatomicstudios.com)

Chris Carswell is Better Than You

By johnny On October 1, 2011

It's True; Chris Carswell is Better Than You...

...and a lot better than me. This is not some kind but self effacing, feel-good statement, however. It is a profound and life changing epiphany. Stick with me for a little while and I will try to explain how Chris' being better than me helped shape a new and dire paradigm from which everyone can benefit.

In the beginning there was...

...a little boy named Chris, who just recently did most of the things I have tried to do in the last three years. Chris accomplished them in about six months.

Specifically, he wrote a small autobiographical story that he illustrated himself and for which he is now taking pre-orders. I don't want you to gloss over this, so let's recap: He is a professional writer, illustrator, and successful publisher.

And he is 13 years old.

Is he making a living at it? Not yet, but he is profitable. And, truth be known, I know a lot of multi-award-winning authors and illustrators who are struggling to meet that esteemed condition.

"But Johnny..." you say. "That's cool and inspirational right? Nothing to let bother you?"

And of course, you're right. I feel great that young Chris has done all he has done. My problem stems from my experience in trying to explain how great Chris is. You see, it's normal in this kind of situation to say something like...

If he can do THAT at 13, just think what YOU can accomplish with all your experience!

And that is exactly the kind of uplifting blather I originally wanted to impart to you —the idea that if someone has fewer resources than you, and still manages to do more with what they have, then you should be able to fast track your ass to Awesomeville. And that is where my mind began to crack under the strain.

There are a couple of points of Chris' greatness that I haven't shared with you yet.

Chris has Scoliosis as well as severe damage to his Left Occipital Lobe. Because of that, he can't see out of his right eye, needs the assistance of his mighty service dog Bronx (about whom enough good can't be said either), and suffers from frequent and severe seizures. He is, I believe, in the hospital right now, because Chris is always in and out of hospitals. This is not surprising at all considering I've listed perhaps one-fifth of his dire medical problems.

"Wow, I get it. He really is an overcomer. But doesn't that still mean that someone with fewer —or less Herculean — challenges can do even more?"

No. It doesn't.

You see the problem with the "if he...then you" line is that it compares an unequivocal, proven success that has occurred right now to some nebulous, future, potential accomplishment that you are emotionally not capable of performing even with all your perceived benefits and gifts.

Chris isn't cool for overcoming his obstacles; he is cool for simply selecting and achieving his goals. While he was out winning, how many of us were actually complaining about our circumstances? Our failures aren't suddenly turned into untapped potential by invoking the overcoming power of someone like Chris... and it's insulting to insinuate they are.

- Would-be writers: How's that book coming along? How many excuses have you made for not finishing it this week, this month, or this year?
- Would-be illustrators: How's that new art job? Or are you still stung by that less-than-stellar portfolio review?
- Students: Are you making the grades you want? Wait, don't tell me..."life" is getting in the way. Nobody understands how hard it is these days...

Sound negative? Here is a simple observation: In life there is only Did and Did Not. If you didn't do it, you may as well have been unable. The "if he...then you" paradigm doesn't take into account the only thing that matters: human will. The physical capability will always take a back seat to the mental fortitude needed to complete a complex task. In the final analysis, "I didn't" and "I couldn't" provide exactly the same net result:

Nothing.

"You sound kind of angry, Johnny. We're used to snark, but there is usually an upside. What's the deal?"

Yes, I'm angry. But I'm not angry at you, certainly. I'm angry at me.

You see, there is one last point about Chris I want to share. And perhaps you will be a little more angry too. His book is about dying. Literally. He has died on the operating table and returned with a brief, innocent, and wonderful story about what he saw there. And I believe that he knows on some level that he only has so much time to tell that story. It is a story of his unshakable belief that he is loved by God

and that you are too. He isn't afraid of what comes next, because, unlike many of us, he has even come to grips with mortality.

No, he is not afraid. And he wrote his little book to make sure that you are not afraid either. Because, through all of his suffering, Chris cares about you, even though he has never met you.

Because Chris Carswell is better than me.

My life is a poor example of how to live, when compared to Chris, and the only way I can think of to thank him for showing me what a superior man looks like, how a truly great man behaves, is to do better in every conceivable way. Give myself no excuses. Move constantly forward, with a concern for others as my guiding principle.

Chris Carswell is better than us, and that's good, because he is a brilliant light that can only make what it shines on better. But there is even more good news. If we work really hard, we just might be able to catch up. If we can manage to love more than judge. To give more than take. To listen more than talk. To be all we ever wanted to be without excuses. Then we are worthy to occupy the planet with the truly great men and women of the world. Chris is not the only one; there are many. But do we really pay attention? Are we receiving the gifts they are giving?

God, I want to.

Good Luck.

If you wish to order Chris's book (I suggest \$10) or just donate to his unimaginable medical bills, you can send anything you like to his family at:

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