

KEVIN J COTTAM

# Aha

## *Mother's Pearl*

20TH PEARL: PRACTICE

**27 insightful personal stories of Aha Moments to help you perform at your best and lead a rich life**

“*Mother’s Pearls* is an enlightening read. It was a great opportunity to reflect on my own experiences and see Aha moments that I may have overlooked. Each new chapter brought to mind a simple life moment that needed to be reflected upon, helping to remind me to take each moment to heart. We may not always know an Aha moment at the time we’re in it, but patience is the key until the true meaning is revealed.”

—*Lana Bertsch, President, Birchwood Productions Inc.*

“With his insightful book Kevin Cottam presents 27 experiences that have the reader questioning her/his our life’s journey, looking for the kernel of wisdom in each visitation. The cross-cultural sweep alone makes for an interesting read. *Mother’s Pearls* is a treasure chest full of gems.”

—*J.Lafrentz, Engineer*

“Each pearl shimmers with wisdom, creativity, and everyday practicality, while inviting me to recognize and maximize the pearls in my life.”

—*Pauline O’Reilly, Teacher*

“The stories are so simple yet, they all have such powerful messages that really make you think about our conscious choices in every day life...”

—*Ira Kita, Montessori Teacher*

“To read a series of stories (the pearls), written from the heart, that shower you with truth and questions is but a unique and powerful experience. It is a guidebook and a support tool that can be picked up again and again, with some pearls read and re-read depending on your need or mood at that time. The Pearl’s are an insight to life, being both biographically educational and some more formally educational. It is a gift that sits by my bed, alongside the Dalai Lama’s Art of Happiness.”

—*Ailbhe Troubetzkoi, Communications Consultant*

‘We all have ‘Aha’ moments, times when the blur of our lives comes into clear focus, when the angles of the walls seem to bend, or the earth seems to shift under our feet with the new and powerful recognition of who we are and what our time on this planet is about.

In ‘*Mother’s Pearl*’, the author has selected 27 of such moments that have altered the course of his life.

Moving, honest and from the heart, ‘*Mother’s Pearls*’ is a true treasure – a beautiful necklace with its stones of wisdom, bright and timeless to treasure.’

—*Vivienne Vermes, Author*

# Aha

## *Mother's Pearl*



Kevin J Cottam



Singapore, Singapore

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Creative Performance Mastery International Pte Ltd.

Block 225

Lorong 8

Singapore, Singapore 310225

ISBN: 978-981-07-2244-9

Editor: Gordon Thomas • Designers: Julius Kiskis & Cory Wright

Proofreader: Bethanne Grabham • Cover photo: Bojan Tercon

[www.kevincottam.com](http://www.kevincottam.com) and [www.ahamoments.us](http://www.ahamoments.us)(blog)

Available from the National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

## CREDITS

The author and publisher would like to thank the following for granting permission to use material in this book: SYDA Foundation for material featuring Swami Chidvilasananda.

Order this book or an ebook online at [www.kevincottam.com](http://www.kevincottam.com) or email [info@kevincottam.com](mailto:info@kevincottam.com)

Printed in Singapore, Singapore

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12    2 3 4 5 6

# Dedication



To my mother, Lily, for everything.

My dear friends Bojan and Robin, who believed in me throughout the challenges of writing this book.

My friend Nikos, who unfortunately didn't live long enough to write his own book.

My Guru, who has taught and assisted my awakening to *Aha* moments.

All my friends, family, and unknown people, who all live inside these stories and have created the space for awareness to happen.

*“Be the change you want to see in the world.”*

MAHATMA GANDHI



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# Acknowledgements



Thank you very much to the most generous and supportive Executive Producers who have assisted in making a personal dream, *Aha, Mother's Pearls* come to life.

## **Freedom Pearl**

Robin and Bojan  
Meg Mann and Mark Brown

## **Expansion Pearl**

Randy Rae and Gary Lewis  
Jay P. G. Wolfe  
Jelle Boelen  
Mirjam Pennings

## **Presence Pearl**

Laura Alexandrou  
Simone and Mark Alexander  
Cristina Alvarez and Koen Suidgeest  
Kathy Campbell  
Carole, Marylou, and Seb  
Anne H. Jensen Chatroux  
Cathy Denny and David Anderson  
Harm van der Endt  
“Erika in Zurich”  
Bruce Wallace Charles Grant  
Ian, “a friend who believes in Kevin”  
Sumaira Isaacs  
David Kliman  
Vincent Labeeuw  
Janet Logan  
Leslie Larch  
Larry Peloso  
Andrew A. W. Schuster and  
Steven Tod Sparling  
Judy Thomas  
Martti Wichmann



# Introduction



*Live your pearls now, and use them to powerfully transform your life.*

For a number of years, I lived in Europe and would routinely return to Canada each summer to visit my mother. Even at the advanced age of eighty-eight, she took great care to dress stylishly at all hours of the day, including breakfast. One hot summer morning, she appeared at the kitchen table wearing a double strand of pearls. My niece Launa exclaimed, “Oh Gran, you always look so good with your pearls!” We all smiled and laughed at this lovely moment, but for me it represented a profound realization. *Aha*, I thought, “‘Mother’s Pearls,’ what a great name for my book.”

That simple *Aha* moment triggered my desire to write this book. *Mother’s Pearls* is a collection of twenty-seven short autobiographical chapters of *Aha* moments of realization. These moments in life often appear like a flash of light coming out of nowhere, from a voice or an image I may have seen, a sentence or phrase I may have heard, or voice deep from within. They can sometimes also appear completely contrary to what is happening at the time. They are a mystery really. Or are they? They may appear during a truly challenging and negative experience, which is just a face, or a “façade,” if you like, as the beautiful pearl is sitting there behind the curtain waiting for us to discover it.

These moments are offered as gifts of messages, lessons, or knowledge. They are freely given to us and yet we often let them pass by, not acting upon them and letting them return into the ether. In *Mother’s Pearls*, I invite you to discover your own pearls and what they mean and can do for you. It is here you can discover your truth, explore your journey, and fully celebrate your essence.

Through the art of storytelling, I have chosen to explore my *Aha*

moments, my pearls. Storytelling is definitely not a new concept; it has existed since the beginning of time. As human beings, we discover our lives, our inner light, our worth, and more through the stories we hear and in turn relate to each other. All of this can lead to the development of our greatest human potential.

In telling my own stories, I have chosen pearls and oysters as metaphors for my journey. The pearls are the *Aha* moments of wisdom that have appeared to me throughout my life. The oysters are the locations where the pearls have occurred—they hold the pearls. I've had the rare opportunity and privilege to live in many different places and among numerous cultures, each of which has offered moments of revelation, learning, and inspiration—providing the pearls that, strung together, have so lovingly helped guide my way.

For me, discovering the bigger picture behind the story is what life is about. I hope you will also find the wisdom of each story by getting inside, behind, and on top of it. In turn, this new awareness will assist you to make more powerful decisions in your life. With these pearls, you will begin to see and experience how your life can transform with more self-confidence and self-worth.

Accepting and honouring my past, realizing what is present, and actively moving toward the future is a valuable truth. *Mother's Pearls* reflects some of the lessons on my journey that have led me to find the truth, my truth, and my reality. Through these pearls, I am now discovering how to perform more vibrantly and authentically from my heart. My hope is that, through this book, you can also find this awareness, comfort, and knowledge in your pearls.

Life today often feels comparable to a hurricane. When you are in the storm, it is extremely challenging to be objective. But if you simply stop for a minute, listen to the *Aha* moments, reflect on their teachings, and move toward the calm, interior eye of the storm (or simply step outside of it), you will begin to see the picture of your life in a much bigger way.

Take the time to really receive the *Aha* moments. Their gifts are there

for you to move forward in your life with elegance and strength.

Imagine a closed tap. The water is being held back so tightly it cannot get through. Now when you open the tap, you allow the water to flow through. Allow yourself the fluidity and flexibility so you can loosen your grip on life a bit. Then, the messages or *Aha* moments will come, flowing through to you at the exact moment when you are ready to receive the pearls. Loosen up so you can hear, see, and feel the pearls that come with the *Aha* moments, which can appear at anytime in your life without any warnings at all. Be like a pirate and discover the treasure; but go farther to discover the treasure beneath the treasure.

As I have mentioned, my mother and her pearls gave me the title and metaphor for this book. Her love gave me the freedom to explore. My mother and my father gave me life, and I thank them for this. And now, I have also come to realize in a more profound way the meaning behind the saying, "We choose our parents and the life we come into." I am grateful and honoured to consider my own role in my creation.

I also want to thank all the people from around the world, from different cultural and professional backgrounds, who contributed to the creation of this book. They offered important perspectives and insights. Thanks specifically to Pauline O'Reilly, a fellow seeker in life, John LeFrenz, Jenny Tarrant, Kate, Lana, Sandy, Danny S., and Peter M. for providing valuable feedback.

*Honour the Pearls that you are.  
Honour the Oysters you have had.  
Honour what you have created along the way.  
Honour you and just be.  
Be aware of that Aha moment as  
You never know when it will appear.*

Kevin J Cottam





20<sup>TH</sup> PEARL

Pearl • Practice



Oyster • Edmonton, Canada

*“Practice  
means to perform,  
over and over again in  
the face of all obstacles, some  
act of vision, of faith, of desire.  
Practice is a means of inviting the  
perfection desired.”*

MARTHA GRAHAM



**I** was standing on the ice rink one chilly fall morning at the Royal Glenora Club in Edmonton working on some figure skating choreography with a top nationally ranked Canadian skater. We were running through his program doing some last minute touch-ups before we headed off to an international competition in Germany. He was having a few problems with his jumps, his attitude was fairly positive, but I could see that he was not fully trained or practiced for this point in the season.

Normally, I wouldn't get to attend one of these competitions, as his technical coach would accompany him. This time, however, his coach asked me to go in his place. I was delighted to accompany my skater because this would be my last opportunity to do so with him, as he was retiring after the competitive season.

A month before, he had had a most disastrous competition in the US, where he ended up second to last. Consequently, his morale and confidence were very low. It was a challenge to get him motivated for the competition in Germany. His coach and I worked as a team, so we did our best to motivate him.

When you are a honed athlete of this calibre, a poor result in a competition can throw you off and put you out of focus, disorienting you until you can get in the "groove" again. I sensed that the skater was not completely in his "groove" yet, but hoped that he would be able to put his mental power to work in Germany.

On the first day of practice in Germany, I could see that he was having trouble with his jumps. I thought it was due to the jet lag. It was as if all his training and knowledge of his athletic, tuned body was out of balance.

I had to dig deep inside my knowledge, as I had a lot of responsibility to assist him. I had to keep him focused, but his body language and results of practice showed he was just not yet there. We spoke about it, and as the competition day approached, he improved but was still not in

top form.

The short program arrived and almost exactly the same thing happened as in the US competition one month earlier. He fell three times on important elements and the performance lacked elegance and focus. Each time he fell, my heart sank and felt the pain going on inside of him as he continued on with courage. I thought, What am I going to say to him to boost his confidence and at the same time be realistic about what he's capable of?

When he came off the ice, he was in disbelief and shock. He couldn't understand what had happened. After a few moments, we chatted about it and devised a plan for moving forward to the long program.

On the day of the long program, his practice was mediocre, but he was digging deep inside himself, as a good competitor would do.

The warm-up before the competition was good and he said he felt en forme. He began his program with gusto and energy. Then he fell, and fell again, again, and again. Each time he stumbled, I couldn't believe it. My heart was reaching out to him. I am sure at some point he felt like simply skating off the ice, as the program was not worth salvaging. After he finished his program, I could see a wounded being coming toward me. The best thing I could do was just be there for him in a quiet way.

We sat down, his head in his hands and my hand on his back. He was in a state of shock and began to cry, which was not like him. Words at this point would be wasted as they wouldn't be heard, but on the other hand the athlete was waiting for my words of wisdom.

I told him this was not the time to begin to analyze this situation, and I suggested we meet the next day to look at this with a broader perspective.

The next day, we went for a long walk before I was to leave Germany. He was still in disbelief and walked in a rather dazed state. We looked at what he had done that season, what he had not done, and what he could



do better. He had about eight weeks left to the national championships and to qualify for the Olympic team. He had time to regroup, refocus, and concentrate on his initial goals.

He decided to take a few days off to contemplate his intentions for the next training period. I suggested he sit down and create a training path for the forthcoming weeks. He was to set out mini objectives and goals. He was also to institute a visualization practice to envision what he needed to do, wanted, and how he would move toward that vision. I reassured him that his coach and I would assist and support him emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

During the next few weeks, I watched his training process and practices change. His confidence was growing and growing. He was committed from the heart to achieve a position on the Olympic team. He was committed to put this “bad” start to the year behind him and move toward the goal. He practiced and practiced, refining his technique, aerobic capacity, and choreography as well as his mental power. We even changed his competitive skating outfits so that he would not have memories of old performances.

One week prior to the Canadian national championships, an interesting turn of events happened to his closest training partner, the then current Canadian and world champion. Due to an injury, he had to drop out of the competition, which left the coveted championship open. The door was opened for my skater, despite the fact that another person was favoured to win.

Even with this fact in mind, he left for the Canadian championships in great shape and with confidence and excitement.

His short program was a success. He performed the best he had all season, which placed him in second position. Then the final long program came. The favoured skater, who was in the first position going into the long program, skated before him and made a couple of mistakes, which the marks reflected.

My skater entered the ice with confidence. His hard-earned training over the past weeks was behind him now; the moment of reckoning was here, and there didn't appear to be any remnants of the earlier season lingering in his mind. He was set to go. He was in the "groove."

He began the long program with confidence and landed one jump after the other like never before. His flow of the skating edge was like silk, his energy was even throughout. The television commentators were blown away about his every move and clean technique; and the crowd became more and more excited as he neared the end of his program. They were on their feet before he ended. The crowd roared and roared.

His performance was amazing to watch. He had the best skate of his whole career. It was an inspired performance that energized the audience and his entire being. No one had ever seen him perform so well.

As he sat in the "kiss and cry area" with his coach next to him awaiting the marks, I sensed the glow of his inner being. He had practiced and practiced and visualized this moment with focus and determination. The marks appeared for the long program, his eyes exploded with joy along with his coaches. This was one of those moments in life which would never ever be repeated again. Then the final results for the whole competition flashed up on the screen and he had won the coveted national championships. This performance and win was the culmination of his career in many ways. The many unexpected turn of events turned, literally, into gold for him.

He returned to Edmonton to a hero's welcome at the airport. Friends, family, TV, press, and his great friend and training partner were all there with lights flashing from their cameras to share this moment of glory. I had never seen him so happy. I was witnessing a changed, inspired, transformed person.

My mind went back to previous weeks when he was about to give everything up and we talked about a new training plan. We realized that

when things aren't necessarily going well, how important it is to review and sometimes change direction or strategies. New methods needed to be honestly recognized and implemented.

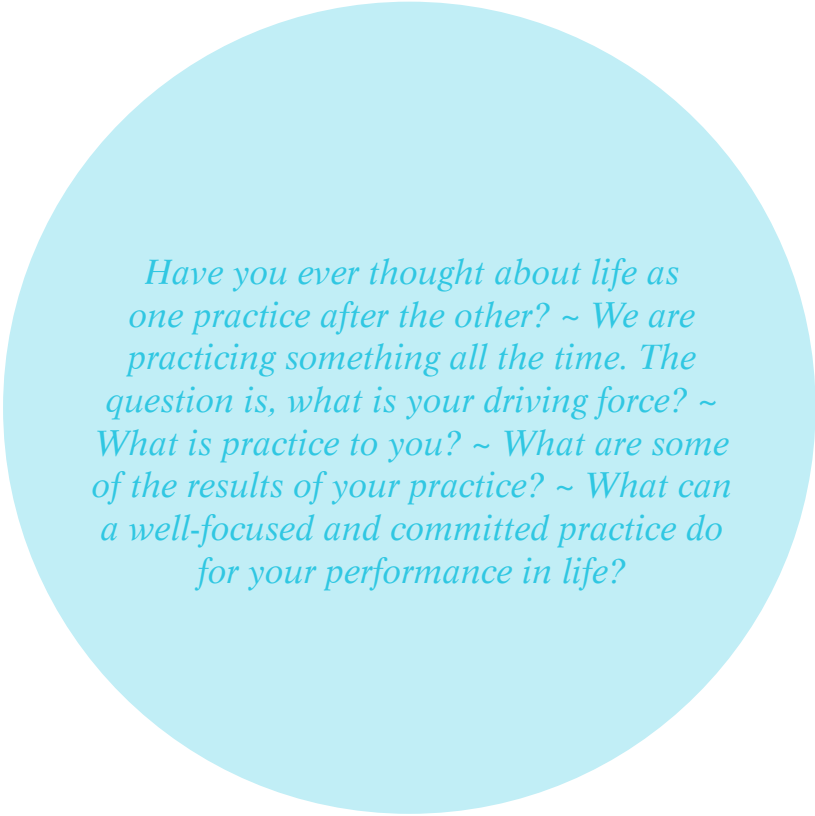
There was a combination of elements that led to this major turn around; one of them was reaching out for other professional help with a sports psychologist. Another was to review the balance of his mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual capacities. All of the changes were realized by his fierce commitment to focused practice. It goes to show that, with a conscious and committed practice from the heart, miracles can happen. This was his moment of glory, transforming his life from that moment in time.

For each of us, this commitment to practice is what we all can do in our everyday lives, whatever our walk of life, situations, and professions. We are constantly practicing. The question is, "Are we practicing with the right focus, intention, and from the heart?" When we want to change habits and behaviours in our life, it takes a conscious practice to create our desired results. It is truly a re-learning that can only be done through practice of new behaviours or procedures.

Commit to practicing with consciousness and awareness, it will add value to your life, and to others around you.



# DISCOVERY



*Have you ever thought about life as one practice after the other? ~ We are practicing something all the time. The question is, what is your driving force? ~ What is practice to you? ~ What are some of the results of your practice? ~ What can a well-focused and committed practice do for your performance in life?*

## EPILOGUE

To my mother and the mother within us all.

*I thank my mother for her biggest pearl of all, truth.  
Whether it was her intention or not,  
I accept this as her greatest gift and  
lesson for me in her life.  
It has taken me five decades to realize this and  
many of us will come to it  
at our own pace and time in life.  
Others may not,  
but here is your chance, now.  
Through sharing this with you  
my wish  
is that it won't take as long for you as it did me.  
But again, life plays tricks on us and  
when the student is ready  
the teacher will appear.  
Stand on guard,  
be alert, and  
keep that door open,  
your senses piqued, and  
be ready to move when awareness strikes,  
as it may be a fleeting moment.  
Grasp it,  
run with it,  
dance with joy, and  
forever be grateful that  
this is the bigger picture of life.  
The reason you are here,  
is to seek the truth,  
through your own stories.*

With all my love and respect, I welcome you to your Mother's Pearls.



NOTES: