

**Dying to Be Young**  
**A Cosmetic Nightmare, A Spiritual Awakening**

**Dr. Eric Kaplan**

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## ENDORSEMENTS FOR *DYING TO BE YOUNG*

*An inspiring story of how people can find faith and strength in even the worst circumstances. A book to strengthen the soul of anyone who reads it.*

**Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, author of #1 international best-seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People***

*The Kaplans' story will provide chicken soup for anyone's spirit or soul. Their book **Dying to be Young** shows Miracles can take place with hard work and the right attitude. Their story demonstrates that you can transform your life into exactly what you want it to be, regardless of your situation, by simply shifting your mindset and creating a renewed reality.*

**Jack Canfield, co-author, *Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul***

*Dr. Kaplan's gripping story about coming back from the brink of death after a botched [cosmetic] treatment proves once and for all that beauty is an inside job. As Kaplan shows, there isn't a scalpel, pill, lotion or injection that can make us as radiant as an open, loving heart.*

**Ken Blanchard, co-author of best-sellers, *The One Minute Manager* and *Leading at a Higher Level***

*This book inspires you to confront your problems and draw on your inner resources to overcome even the greatest of life's obstacles.*

**Brian Tracy, Best-selling author of more than 40 books, including *Crunch Point***

*This book is destined to save lives, changes lives, and inspire anyone because of its impact, inspiration and insight.*

**Les Brown, best selling author of *Live Life to the Fullest***

*Your story will motivate and inspire others. I wish you and your wife every success.*

**Wally "Famous" Amos**

*I have known Dr. Kaplan as a friend, the family chiropractor, and an incredible motivator and now as an author who has lived to share his purposeful message. Imagine making one choice that could send you to a place of unimaginable suffering. That's what happened to my friend Eric and his dear wife, Bonnie. They could have given up, but chose to turn inward and found a power and insight so far beyond the physical self. Their courageous story teaches us to be grateful in all that God has given and to draw wisdom from all of our challenges. Anyone who reads this book will be blessed and know that yes, we are responsible for our choices but there is so much love and guidance available to us if we just ask, and listen. Living, Loving, 'be'ing, accepting the moment and ourselves is the greatest gift!! Thank you Eric, for stepping so deeply into the divine space and bringing back such wisdom to share. If anyone would live to uplift others I knew it would be you!*

**Marla Maples**

*The Kaplans' story is an inspiring read and a clarion call to America about the dangers of [botulism] and the horrible consequences if ever used as a weapon of terrorism.*

**Thomas McMillen, Rhodes Scholar, Former Congressman, Former Chairman  
President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 11 year NBA veteran**

*Dr. Kaplan's book clearly represents the strength it takes to survive and succeed. He is living proof that it starts with a Dream. His story and message show that if you visualize your Dream and make a commitment anything is possible. Their comeback story is what makes life exciting. This book will teach anyone to never underestimate the power of a Dream. It will change your life as the Kaplans changed theirs.*

**Rudy Ruettiger, whose life story was the basis of the 1993 TRISTAR blockbuster film,  
Rudy**

*Two is better than one if two can act as one. Obviously, the Kaplans acted as one in their courageous fight to overcome obstacles which seemed impossible. I am so excited that they are sharing this story with us. It is inspiring.*

**Mike Krzyzewski, Head Coach, Basketball, Duke University**

*As a cosmetic dentist and Mrs. America 2005, I have seen first hand the measures some take in trying to achieve what they consider beauty. In this amazing true life story, the Kaplans' message helps exemplify true beauty, inner beauty. Their courage should never be forgotten.*

**Dr. Chiann Fan Gibson DMD**

*I have always been against cosmetic procedures and have considered them malpractice since I became an M.D. Good luck on your crusade to change the way the world thinks about cosmetic procedures... Please give your life to peace, justice and care.*

**Patch Adams, M.D., Author**

*I know first hand Dr. Eric Kaplan as a Public Speaker and an Author. Eric walks the walk and talks the talk. His story told in his book "Dying To Be Young" is a spellbinding story that will make you laugh, make you cry, and teach you the empirical laws for health, success and inner healing. If you are looking for an inspirational story, this is the book.*

**Dottie Walters, Walters Speakers Bureau, Founding member of the National  
Association of Speakers, Editor and Publisher of *Sharing Ideas Magazine*, best-selling  
Author of *Speak and Grow Rich*.**

*Being in the NFL as a defensive end for 10 years, I understand a good fight. The Kaplans' story is an amazing story of amazing people. Their ability to overcome adversity makes them champions in my book. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to be the best they can be."*

**Duane Clemens, Cincinnati Bengals Defensive End**

*Dr. Kaplan's story depicts how the power of love, faith and family can triumph in the face of adversity. Faced with what many considered certain expiration of life as we know it, Dr. Kaplan and his family banded together and used the power of love and faith to turn an almost certain tragedy into success. I am inspired by their story.*

**Barry Larkin, Cincinnati Reds, President/CEO Champions Sports Complex**

*...[It's] an honor to endorse your book. Thanks for all you do while making the world a*

healthier place.

**Lee Haney, Eight time Mr. Olympia, Author, Former Chairman President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports**

*Your book is a homerun!*

**Johnny Damon, Two-time All Star Centerfielder, New York Yankees**

*Dr. Kaplan's new book reminds us that experiencing pain and adversity can arm us with incredible resiliency. Dr. Eric and Bonnie Kaplan's extraordinary journey teaches us lasting lessons which will help us overcome the daunting obstacles of the challenging gift we call life.*

**Rabbi Joel Levine, Temple Judea, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida**

***Dying to be Young** is a moving and spiritual book. Eric's and Bonnie's journey to renewed faith and healing is made possible by using, in Eric's words, "the power of the I AM" When Moses asked God who He was, God answered, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). And just as that name and power led Moses through the Wilderness, "the power of the I AM" led Eric and Bonnie Kaplan through their Wilderness to a place of healing. Their book will guide anyone to the reality of God and to the joy of Oneness with the Creator.*

**Lamar Helms, Associate Chaplain, Big Canoe Chapel, Big Canoe, Georgia**

*Bonnie and Eric Kaplan's story is a true story of hope?and faith? and true unconditional love. Dr. Kaplan is an inspiration to everyone. He is my inspiration.*

**Jaki Baskow, CEO Baskow & Associates**

***Dying to be Young** is a book you will not be able to put down. Bonnie and Eric Kaplan have always been leaders in our community. For months our community both struggled with the tragedy of their experience and prayed that again they would be back with us assuming their important roles. Dr. Kaplan's book will make you cry and understand that life is far more precious and important than many of us understand.*

**Mayor Joe Russo, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida**

*Dr. Kaplan's book makes you stop and think about life and the pressures that society places upon us to look beautiful, no matter the price. We need to focus inward and teach our children that beauty comes from "who" we are, and not "what" we look like. The tragedy certainly became a triumph for the Kaplans. The greatest gift a person can obtain is the gift to understand what your purpose in life is. This gift was bestowed upon the Kaplans as they fought for their lives. They are blessed to know their mission and this book is an excellent tool for their teachings. Dr. Kaplan's book opens your eyes and helps you see what really matters in life.*

*Compelling book, excellent dialogue, very inspirational.*

**Jodi A. Pliszka, M.S. ABC'S AMERICAN INVENTOR TOP 12 FINALIST, Award Winning Author, Clinical Therapist, Motivational Speaker, Entrepreneur, Mommy**

*If you've ever thought about having [cosmetic procedures to remove wrinkles], you will change your mind after reading this book. It's not only a compelling love story, it is a moving narrative about survival and the miraculous proof that angels are all around us.*

**Yvonne Perry, Author of *More than Meets the Eye: True Stories about Death, Dying,***

***and Afterlife and Right to Recover: Winning the Political and Religious Wars over Stem Cell Research in America***

*Dr. Eric Kaplan's, **Dying to be Young** is so much more than a chronicle of his journey [surviving] botulism; it is a remarkable guide to aging with grace and dignity.*

**Reader Views**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this book to Bonnie Kaplan, my wife, my life partner, and my best friend for 26 years. Bonnie survived as a youth abandoned by her parents and raised by the state. She went on to educate herself as she worked her way through school. In 1997, Bonnie was diagnosed with colon cancer and was originally given six months to live. She is now eight years cancer-free. She went on to conquer botulism and its crippling effects. She has done all this while enduring me! Our story is more than a story of botulism; it is a love story of two people fighting for the love they held dear. Bonnie has always led by example and provided strength, wisdom and insight. She is the person I respect and love the most. It was from her strength that I found the power to write this book.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to give special thanks to my brother, Steven, and his wife,

Gloria, who put their lives on hold to tend to our needs. They truly held our family and our lives together. Thank you for being at the hospital with us every day. You helped us physically, emotionally, and spiritually more than I could say with words.

To my neice's and nephew Richard, Tracey and Beth Kaplan for their ongoing visits, presents, calls, e-mails and gifts. I am proud to call you family.

I would also like to thank everyone who visited us, wrote us, e-mailed us, called our family, rooted for us or prayed for us. We are thankful to all of our friends for being true friends, and to all our family for standing behind us.

To the law firm of Grossman & Roth, especially Stuart Grossman and his assistants, Rodney Bryson, Esq. and Donna Burroughs, not only for representing us, but also for caring about us as human beings and for making a stand with the government about their policies in regard to these horrific toxins. Mr. Grossman is a man among men, a true gladiator, he has remained focused on eliminating this terrible toxin from the public. Only a "man of steel" would stand up and challenge the Federal Government for its ineptness. We are grateful to him and his team for assisting us in preventing this from happening to anyone else.

I would like to offer special thanks to Bear Lakes Country Club, to the Board of Directors and membership for there humane understanding. I would like to pay tribute to my Saturday-morning golf group for keeping me in the loop and for their patience for playing golf with me as I re-learned the game. I thank Andy Brock, Harvey Golden, Keith Hammond, Rich Kaufman, Rich Palladino, Sandy Meyers, Rich Lubin, Bob Shalhoub, Warren Zwecker and Bill Meyer. Special thanks go to Bear Lakes staff, especially David McClymont and Steve Pembroke, and Professionals Kevin Murphy, Matt

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Thanks to all my friends and neighbors at Big Canoe for their kind hearts and endless meals. Our appreciation to the developer Bill Byrne and his marketing guru Ann Young, for their ongoing support. The womens guild at Big Canoe for there constant letters and prayer. We would especially like to thank Minister Lamar Helms of the Big Canoe Chapel for visiting us at the Shepherd Center weekly for prayer and helping us feel welcome in our new community. To Carolyn & Sonny Miracle and Tom, TJ and BobbieMeany for making our Georgia house a home and a comfortable place to recover. To the Beechlers, Fox's and Alfonso's for their visits and ice cream. To David O'Connor, Linda, Trish and all the golf staff. Finally, to all the staff at the Fitness center for aiding us in our rehabilitation, thanks to Tina, Steve and staff for their support and Alannah for nursing us back to health.

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A special thanks to the following people for being there 24/7: the Axelrods, Balas's, Bards, Bernsteins, Beers, Beiges, Birnbaums, Brailes, Brocks, Burkes, Buschs, Chapnicks, Daniels, Dickens, Doughertys, DiMayos, Egittos, Fischers, Garfunkels, Gotkins, Greggs, Griswalds, Gutsteins, Harmons, Harveys, Hicks, Hoxies, Juergans, Kaufmans, Kerners, Kings, Larussos, Levines, Littenbergs, Marcus's, Mandels, McMillens, Meyers, Newmans, Osbornes, Prestons, Prices, Punyons, Rosens, Russos, Scherbaks, Siegelmans, Smiths, Yeckes, Zucks, and Zweckers. Also, special thanks to Uncle Jack Segall, Uncle Buddy Adler, my cousin Steven Daniels and my Aunt Gloria Punyon for coming to the hospital every day, rain or shine.

Thanks to the LPG Company for their love and support and for not giving up on my partner or me. Also, a special thanks to Thierry & Natalie Phillippe and family.

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To the Shepherd family and the Shepherd Center, this is truly a place of miracles. To all the doctors, nurses, therapists and staff for caring so much about us. With special thanks to Drs. Bowman, Gutay, Leslie and Karen Kline. Their help restored our lives when we faced an insurmountable health trauma.

To the American Chiropractic Magazine for standing behind me during my recovery with special thanks to the Busch Family and blessings to their editor and my friend, Jacklyn Busch Touzard.

My special thanks to the Chiropractic Profession and specifically, New York Chiropractic College for providing me the training, philosophy, insight and peers, which allowed me to heal myself and my wife to a higher level of health than anyone ever expected to be possible after botulism poisoning.

I would like to honor my cousin and adopted aunt Ruth Zuck, who has battled lung cancer for over four years. Her desire to live and beat all odds inspired us on our journey. She is our hero.

And lastly, but most importantly, thanks to my two sons, Michael and Jason, who became men overnight, for putting their lives on hold and showing us that our own lives were worthy of two great young men. No children should ever see what our sons have seen. Their love for us was our best medicine.

A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Shepherd Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

## Prologue

My goal is to pour out my heart and try to develop a book that deals with a real situation. Botulism poisoning is fatal in most cases, yet my wife and I beat the odds and are living today to tell our story. What we went through emotionally, physically and mentally during our recovery could qualify for no less than hell on earth. What we learned spiritually could be no less than heaven.

This book is not a tragedy, a comedy, a saga, or a soap opera. If it were a soap opera, it would be entitled "One Life to Give." This is a book about survival and conquering all odds. It is a book about the love and support offered to us by family, friends, doctors, nurses and even strangers. It's about the lessons I learned while fighting for my life.

There is one thing we all know about life on earth, that we do not get out of here alive! However, some of us die and come back, as I did. It was through my encounter with death that life itself developed a greater meaning. The experience opened my inner eye, to see what so few can see: that life is for living, loving, laughing and learning, not for whining, worrying, and working. I want this book to be a guide to your inner eye, to open your mind to the gift of life and to understand that your spirit is eternal. I want you to realize that no matter what you are going through, you are not alone in this universe. Although God is abundant in my thoughts and actions, this is not a religious book. Through it, you will learn to believe in life, love and the power of the human spirit. Belief is a sign of faith, and faith has nothing to do with religion.

There are only two types of people on earth. There are those who believe there is no order in the universe, and that whatever happens occurs randomly and for no apparent reason. These people are usually angry or lonely. Then, there are those who believe that everything happens for a purpose and that nature makes no mistakes. They understand the perfection of life and see every circumstance as part of a larger picture. They see balance in the universe. I am of the latter category. I understand that darkness follows light, summer follows winter, and I believe that as surely as the sun rises and sets each day, there is order to the universe.

Prior to November 23, 2004, no one in the world had ever been poisoned by fake Botox or injections of raw botulinum toxin. The dosage we received should have been fatal. Thankfully, it was not fatal and good has triumphed over a bad situation. My body has been altered physically and may never be the same, but mentally and spiritually, I am stronger than ever. I have learned that our mental attitude dominates our physical condition. Yes, brains are superior to brawn! The power of our mind, spirit and soul is stronger than any muscle in our body; and the stronger our spirit becomes, the more we empower our body to heal.

It is my heartfelt desire that this book inspires you to see beyond the mundane and become thankful for the little things in life, the ability to blink, to breathe, to move, to laugh, to cry, and to love and be loved.

*Dr. Eric Scott Kaplan*

## Introduction

Thinking about wrinkle reducing injections? Think twice!

If someone came to you with a syringe filled with anthrax and told you it would make you look younger, would you let them inject you? Of course not. Now suppose someone comes to you with a syringe of botulism toxin and told you it would make you look younger and remove wrinkles, would you let them inject your face? Last year over seven million Americans said yes.

How have so many people been persuaded to receive injections of this deadly toxin? Because we naively trust pharmaceutical marketing, our government and the health care delivery system to protect us. We don't ask questions about the materials doctors use to make us look younger.

Since the FDA approved it for cosmetic use in 2002, Botox has become a household word and many people have been injected with the drug at the site of a facial line to paralyze the nerve and make the skin appear wrinkle free. This FDA-approved and licensed Botulinum Toxin Type A is derived from the waste of the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*, the same toxic byproduct that causes botulism food poisoning. Botulinum toxin is the most poisonous substance known to man. Because of its extreme potency and lethality, the ease of production, transport, and misuse, Botulinum toxin is considered a bioweapon. A single gram of crystalline toxin, evenly dispersed as an aerosol and inhaled, would kill more than one million people. The name Botox is cute, but remember it is short for botulism toxin.

The media, pharmaceutical companies and doctors have made it seem so safe that many people receive this plastic surgery procedure at a social event known as a Botox party. What happened to my wife and me was no party. We voluntarily took what we were told and thought were legal Botox treatments, actually paid for them, and ended up with botulism because the doctor had used an illegally obtained raw botulinum toxin A substance instead of the FDA approved Botox serum. Within seventy-two hours we were hospitalized, on life support, and unable to move a single muscle in our bodies. We almost died! On a misguided journey looking for youth, seeking heaven on earth, we found ourselves in hell.

Cosmetic procedures gone wrong are the quiet epidemic sweeping America that no one in the drug industry wants you to know about. Few of us realize we could be risking death when we ask doctors to help us preserve our youth. Bonnie and I learned from our mistake and we want to share our insight with you. For those who are thinking of cosmetically altering your appearance, do your research and ask questions about what is going into your body. If you have already been damaged by drugs and medical procedures gone awry, perhaps this book will help you find encouragement in the midst of your suffering and injustice.

While I was facing death, unable to communicate and in a paralyzed state, I wanted to die. Bonnie and I were in terrible pain as we faced a long uphill battle, a battle that offered no assurance that we would recover and live normal lives. I was deeply depressed and even prayed for God to take me out of my suffering. Ironically, I also bargained with God and prayed to live, but only if Bonnie and I could both recover and be healthy again. My prayers were answered in an unusual way and that is part of my story. I had three angelic visitations, each one giving me a message and encouraging me to use my will power and mental authority to live and recover.

For those reading this book who feel you are alone in life and want to die, I want you to know that angels are everywhere, even in your personal hell. I pray this book will help you find your inner power and give you confidence to recover from illness.

Although our experience was a nightmare, I know that something good will come of it. I believe that I am divinely inspired to write this book to encourage others. Perhaps you are facing the death of your physical body and have doubts or worries about what comes next. In reading my story, you will be presented with compelling evidence that there is life after death and that the afterlife is a wonderful place to learn, love, plan and continue spiritual growth. I now believe that our soul or spirit is our true identity with an eternal consciousness that will continue in other realms and dimensions. Death is merely a portal or tunnel to another realm of consciousness, spiritually akin to the physical one we pass through as an infant when coming into this life through our mother's womb. After my experience, I feel there is truly nothing to be afraid of regarding this transition.

By sharing our knowledge and our story with you, it is our hope and prayer that you are helped and encouraged to be the best you can be.

## Chapter One

### The Genesis of Our Degeneration

The room was cold and I was drifting in and out of consciousness as I lay in an uncomfortable bed wondering what could have happened to me. I was surrounded by the clamour of chaos and unfamiliar sounds that offered only to confuse my senses. There were machines making noise around me, but I did not know where I was, how I had gotten there or how long I had been in this condition. Voices of strangers scurried around me as I kept trying to figure out what was going on. I recognized the voices of my loved ones; some were crying as if someone had died. Are they crying for me? Am I dead? Is this my funeral? No, I am alive.

God, what is happening to me?

I heard my brother's voice, "Eric, it's Steve. Can you hear me?"

I tried to speak, but my lips would not move and I could not utter a sound. This can't be real. I must be dreaming. If this is a dream, I can just open my eyes and wake up. Open your eyes? I can't! I can't open my eyes! Why can't I wake up? Am I alive? Oh God, I am helpless! I can't move! I must be dead! Wait? how can I think, if I'm dead? I can hear, so I can't be dead, right? Someone is touching me. I can feel, so I MUST be alive. Come on, Kaplan. Open your eyes! I screamed within my own head, but no one heard me. I cannot open my eyes. OH GOD, I CAN'T MOVE. Why can't I move? I'M ALIVE! I'M TRAPPED IN MY BODY! Help me! Somebody help me! I can think, but I cannot talk. I must have died. Oh my God, I am not in heaven. I am in hell!

My bewilderment changed to panic when I heard a stranger's voice say, "Your parents are in bad shape. They may be like this for a year to eighteen months. It could be six months before they are even able to open their eyes."

Who is this man and who is he talking to? He's talking about my wife and me! Eighteen months like this? No way! Where is Bonnie? Is she okay? How did this happen? I want answers! Oh, God, please let this be a dream. Help me wake up.

"Dad?" It was my oldest son, Michael.

Michael? I'm here. I'm trapped. Help me wake up! He couldn't hear me. My thoughts were racing and I was panicking. Why can't I speak to him?

"I love you, Dad. You can make it!" Jason, my 19-year old son, was there too. He was holding my hand and cheering me on. I could feel my sons' love and I knew I must be alive.

Alarms were beeping and some kind of machine was pumping air in and out of something, someone, ME! I must be in the hospital. I must be in bad shape. Snippets of recent events started coming to me in my brief moments of consciousness. I remembered riding to the hospital with Jason and I vaguely remembered seeing my friend, Dr. Dennis Egitto, after Bonnie and I arrived in the emergency room. Bonnie! Where is she? Is she alive? Is she paralyzed too? People were coming in and out of my space testing and probing me, but I still could not imagine what had caused Bonnie and me to become so sick and weak.

"Eric, this is Dennis. I don't know if you can hear me." Dr. Egitto tried desperately to communicate with me, but I could not answer him. "You need to fight this. You have a rough road ahead of you."

"How rough?" I wanted to ask.

"I am going to give you something for pain. It will also help you relax."

I was thankful to have something to relieve the terrible aches. My joints and muscles were

hurting all over my body. Soon a wild feeling came over me and I couldn't tell what was real from what was imagined. I did not know what was happening to me, but I knew I was loved as I drifted off to sleep.

I awoke again later. How much later? I don't know. Time was immeasurable. It could have been hours; it could have been days. Wanting to believe this was nothing more than a nightmare, I again tried to get out of bed. I was terrified when I realized I could not move my body, speak a word, swallow, or open my eyes. I could feel pain in my throat and I could hear machines around me. Suddenly the stark reality set in. I was in a hospital bed and I was paralyzed.

Am I in a coma? Why am I here? What happened?

Imagine a world of total darkness where you cannot see, touch, or move. You can hear, feel and think but you cannot communicate with the outside world in any way. Imagine being a prisoner, trapped in a cold, lifeless container that showed no signs of life. That was my plight for weeks as I struggled in a mental stupor with very little physical improvement. To some this may read like another Steven King novel. To me, it was worse. It was my life, it was real, and it was hell. Once I realized I was in Hell, my question was, "How do I get the hell out of here?"