

# CHAPTER FOUR

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*Life's Not Fair—Drive On!*

*If you want to change the world . . .*

get over being a sugar cookie  
and keep moving forward.



I ran to the top of the sand dune and without hesitation sprinted down the other side, heading full speed toward the Pacific Ocean. Fully clothed in my green utilities, short-billed hat, and combat boots, I dove headfirst into the waves as they pounded the beach off Coronado, California.

Emerging soaking wet from the water, I saw the SEAL instructor standing on the dune. With his arms folded and a piercing glare that cut through the morning haze, I heard him yell, "You know what to do, Mr. Mac!"

Indeed I did.

With feigned enthusiasm, I screamed a hearty "hooyah" at the top of my lungs and fell facedown into the soft sand, rolling from side to side to ensure that no part of my uniform was left uncovered. Then, for good measure, I sat up, reached deep into

the ground, and tossed sand into the air to guarantee it found its way into every crevice in my body.

Somewhere during the morning's physical training I had "committed a violation of the SEAL training rules." My punishment was to jump into the surf zone, roll around in the sand, and make myself a "sugar cookie."

In all of SEAL training there was nothing more uncomfortable than being a sugar cookie. There were a lot of things more painful and more exhausting, but being a sugar cookie tested your patience and your determination. Not just because you spent the rest of the day with sand down your neck, under your arms, and between your legs, but because the act of becoming a sugar cookie was completely indiscriminate. There was no rhyme or reason. You became a sugar cookie at the whim of the instructor.

To many of the SEAL trainees this was hard to accept. Those that strived to be the very best expected that they would be rewarded for their stellar performance. Sometimes they were and, then

again, sometimes they were not. Sometimes the only thing they got for all their effort was wet and sandy.

Feeling like I was sufficiently coated with sand, I ran to the instructor, yelled "hooyah" again, and came to attention. Looking me over to see if I met his standard of excellence in sugar cookies was Lieutenant Phillip L. Martin, known to his friends as Moki. I, however, was not on a first-name basis with Lieutenant Martin.

Moki Martin was the quintessential frogman. Born and raised in Hawaii, he was everything I strived to be as a SEAL officer. An experienced Vietnam veteran, he was expert with every weapon in the SEAL inventory. He was one of the finest skydivers in the Teams, and being a native Hawaiian, he was so skilled in the water that there were few, if any, who could match him.

"Mr. Mac, do you have any idea why you are a sugar cookie this morning?" Martin said in a very calm but questioning manner.

"No, Instructor Martin," I dutifully responded.

"Because, Mr. Mac, life isn't fair and the sooner you learn that the better off you will be."

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A year later, Lieutenant Martin and I were on a first-name basis. I had completed basic SEAL training, and he had been reassigned from the training center to Underwater Demolition Team Eleven in Coronado.

The more I got to know Moki, the deeper my respect grew for him. In addition to being a superb SEAL operator, Moki was also a phenomenal athlete. In the early 1980s, he was on the leading edge of the triathlon craze. He had a beautiful freestyle stroke in the open ocean. His calves and thighs were strong and moved him effortlessly on the long runs, but his real advantage was the bicycle. He and the bike were made for each other.

Every morning he would mount the bike and go for a thirty-mile ride up and down the Coronado Silver Strand. There was a flat stretch of paved bike path that paralleled the Pacific Ocean. It ran from the city of Coronado to the city of Imperial Beach. With the ocean on one side and the bay on the

other, it was one of the most beautiful sections of beach in California.

Early one Saturday morning, Moki was out on a training ride along the Silver Strand. Head down, pedaling fast, he never saw the oncoming bicycle. At roughly twenty-five miles an hour the two bikes collided head-on. The bikes crumpled from the impact, slamming the riders together, leaving both men facedown on the asphalt path. The first rider rolled over, dusted himself off, and struggled to his feet. He was banged up but otherwise fine.

Moki remained facedown, unable to move. The paramedics arrived within minutes, stabilized Moki, and transported him to the hospital. Initially there was hope that the paralysis was temporary, but as the days, months, and years passed, Moki never regained the use of his legs. The crash left him paralyzed from the waist down with limited movement in his arms.

For the past thirty-five years, Moki has been in a wheelchair. In all those years I never once heard him complain about his misfortune in life. Never



once did I hear him ask, "Why me?" Never once did he display an ounce of pity for himself.

In fact, after his accident, Moki went on to be an accomplished painter. He fathered a beautiful young girl. He founded and continues to oversee the Super Frog Triathlon that is held every year in Coronado.

It is easy to blame your lot in life on some outside force, to stop trying because you believe fate is against you. It is easy to think that where you were raised, how your parents treated you, or what school you went to is all that determines your future. Nothing could be further from the truth. The common people and the great men and women are all defined by how they deal with life's unfairness: Helen Keller, Nelson Mandela, Stephen Hawking, Malala Yousafzai, and—Moki Martin.

Sometimes no matter how hard you try, no matter how good you are, you still end up as a sugar cookie. Don't complain. Don't blame it on your misfortune. Stand tall, look to the future, and drive on!

