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## Kassandra Rempel & SimplySoles *Turning a Road Block into a Stepping Stone*

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I started SimplySoles under auspicious beginnings. My original idea was simple – open a shoe boutique in my neighborhood, Georgetown, in Washington DC. Back in 2003, DC was in desperate need for niche labels as refreshing alternatives to big box brands. What happened though was that in my excitement, I shared my plans with a few too many “friends” and one of those people thought the idea was so great that she decided to claim it as her own. I shared the name of my store, its location, the brands I was going to carry and lo and behold, a few weeks later the wave of disappointment crushed my heart and pounded my plans into sand. I essentially handed these women my business plan, which they proceeded to fully implement as their own – in the same space, with the same designers, with practically the same name. When I confronted one of the responsible parties, thinking at the time it was a freak coincidence, her best response was “You just must be shocked.” She actually had the shameless, prideful audacity to admit that she had stolen the idea.

The next three months were my darkest days in 37 years. However, what came out of that painful experience was an idea much larger than any single store. Because of it, my existing business was born: SimplySoles - a print catalog and online boutique which offers a carefully edited collection of shoes and bags, many of which are exclusive styles found only at SimplySoles.

After reinventing my business, (and probably also part of myself) I needed to educate myself on how to design/print/mail a catalog. I wrote a letter to the owner of my favorite catalog at the time, Wisteria. To my astonishment and extreme good fortune, Andrew Newsome (the owner) wrote back a 4 page letter that became the blueprint for my business. Without his generosity, and that of my experienced and energetic mentor in the catalog industry, Terri Alpert, I may never have discovered the required tools and developed the necessary skills to operate a successful web and catalog business.

My story is a testament to two things: 1. the power of perseverance; and, 2. the generosity of strangers. One of my favorite quotes is that of Winston Churchill who said that "Success is going from failure to failure without the loss of enthusiasm." To me, this means that success is not measured by the time it takes to achieve it. Nor is it a direct path. My first business idea was a heart-wrenching disaster. But it was also a learning experience that eventually led to my current business, one I've had for over 7 years which has brought many accolades, but more importantly, it has given me great personal joy. And it was because of strangers, strangers who became mentors, that I was able to start, operate, and ultimately navigate to profitability.

My motto? Embrace every experience, and with determination, dedication and the good grace of others, I may just fail frequently enough to find success.

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