



Carry On: A Story of Resilience, Redemption, and an Unlikely Family

Lisa Fenn

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In the spirit of *The Blind Side* and *Friday Night Lights* comes a tender and profoundly moving memoir about an ESPN producer's unexpected relationship with two disabled wrestlers from inner city Cleveland, and how these bonds—blossoming, ultimately, into a most unorthodox family—would transform their lives.

When award-winning ESPN producer Lisa Fenn returned to her hometown for a story about two wrestlers at one of Cleveland's toughest public high schools, she had no idea that the trip would change her life. Both young men were disadvantaged students with significant physical disabilities. Dartanyon Crockett was legally blind as a result of Leber's disease; Leroy Sutton lost both his legs at eleven, when he was run over by a train. Brought together by wrestling, they had developed a brother-like bond as they worked to overcome their disabilities.

After forming a profound connection with Dartanyon and Leroy, Fenn realized she couldn't just walk away when filming ended; these boys had had to overcome the odds too many times. Instead, Fenn dedicated herself to ensuring their success long after the reporting was finished and the story aired—and an unlikely family of three was formed.

The years ahead would be fraught with complex challenges, but Fenn stayed with the boys every step of the way—teaching them essential life skills, helping them heal old wounds and traumatic pasts, and providing the first steady and consistent support system they'd ever had.

This powerful memoir is one of love, hope, faith, and strength—a story about an unusual family and the courage to carry on, even in the most extraordinary circumstances.

Carry On: A Story of Resilience, Redemption, and an Unlikely Family Details

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Reagan Mcneil says

Wonderful story in an enjoyable, well-written book. I enjoyed every page of this one!

Sarah Greywitt says

Great book. I am disappointed that I have finished it.

Hope Huddleston says

This book and story are simply excellent. It's well-written, engaging and thought-provoking. It will challenge your thoughts on redemption, race and poverty. I'd recommend it to teens, adults, men and women. I'd find it hard to believe that anyone could read this book and not be challenged to truly see the people around them.

Nathan Albright says

This book is a companion volume to two ESPN movies I have not seen about disabled wrestlers from a struggling public school in a particularly unfortunate part of Cleveland. This is a book that combines a fair amount of tearjerking stories about harrowing childhoods spent in immensely dysfunctional families as well as an unsparingly honest approach to the difficulties of escaping from such a trap. It also features, unfortunately, a very Nathanish examination of the horrors of PTSD for one of the young people involved [1]. The result is a book that hits rather close to home in surprising and often unpleasant ways but also shows a great deal of resilience and hope for the people involved. It is a book about friendship and family and loyalty and the grit and determination it takes to make a better life out of the grim materials of one's ordinary existence, and it also demonstrates a great deal of the educational and other deficits that often keep people down generation after generation after generation. There is indeed something worth appreciating in this excellent book.

In terms of its contents, the book is about 300 pages long and is told in a mostly chronological fashion. At its core are three people. Two of them, Leroy and Dartanyon, are black wrestlers at an inner-city school in Cleveland who happen to be disabled. Leroy had lost his legs in a childhood train accident, and Dartanyon is a motherless young man who struggles with natural near-blindness. Predictably, as they are both engaging young people, they are passed along despite having massive learning deficits and a shortage of skills in how to gain knowledge and demonstrate it that are important in higher education. The third person is Lisa Fenn, the author, a former producer with ESPN who has a strong streak of social justice and a problem with carrying children to full term. The book looks at what happens when a chance encounter with a story leads to two ESPN films and charity donations and to plans and actions taken for a better future through grit and a lot of stress and difficulty. The author, in the process, lays bare a look at the dynamics that keep people trapped in poverty and despair generation after generation, from educational shortfalls of several kinds to the

plague of unstable families and a common resort to crime and drugs and alcohol as a way of escaping intolerable realities, and a flinty pride that prevents one from asking for help or being candid about how difficult things are really going.

Overall, this is a pretty painful book to read. It is a book that struggles with the problem of evil as well as the related problem of good, and shows both compassion and a surprising degree of toughness. The author leaves the reader with no easy answers, which is the honest thing to do, and puts a spotlight on the fact that so many problems are deeply connected. The dysfunctionality of family life among the poor is perpetuated by a lack of hope and opportunity, of the expectations that help breed success as well as fragile families and addictive patterns of self-medication. This book shows how this happens over and over and over again. It serves as a poignant reminder of life's difficulty and the ways that people overcome them without hardening themselves to the good in the world and in the people in it. There are triumphs and struggles aplenty in these pages, and a call for compassion as well as for a sort of tough love that seeks both to understand and improve. It is, in the end, a surprisingly complicated and nuanced look at life and family and what it takes to succeed and to overcome adversity without self-pity.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

Lamandra says

Phenomenal, incredible, inspiring, hope-affirming story that gave me goosebumps and made me cry.

Sarah says

When my principal told us that she purchased this book for our entire staff to read, I was a little disappointed. Even though my husband is a high school wrestling coach, I do not like sports at all...not even a little bit. The only sports I've ever willingly watched in my lifetime are those that my children were involved in. Needless to say, the prospect of reading a book written by a former ESPN producer about two disabled high school athletes was not something I relished. However, I'm always up for expanding my reading horizons, so I resolved to approach it with an open mind.

I'm so glad that I gave it a chance, because this was one of the most touching and inspirational books I've ever read! This book made me reconsider and reassess my role in my students' lives and my assumptions about their families and cultures. It encouraged me to see the broader picture, outside the lens of my own experience and biases. After reading this book, my faith in humanity has been restored and renewed, and my

purpose as an educator has broadened in spectrum. Everyone needs to read this amazing story!

Ronin says

Definitely a powerful and moving memoir. I must admit my bias having met the author and one of the two men featured in the book, Dartanyon. They spoke at a conference I attended and signed my copy for the book. However the story is inspiring and incredibly well written. Memoirs can be hit or miss and this one, though it shifts from telling Lisa Fenn's story to the stories of each of these guys she became so close with, she manages the balance exceptionally well. You see her producer chops shining through as well as she stages the story in a way that not everything is given up front or in a chronological order. It's truly amazing that she was able to collect the amount of background information that she did.

I definitely recommend this read.

Christina Stoimenova says

This book is a WONDERFUL true story that uplifts and inspires. I am so thankful for Lisa, and for others like her!

Cassandra says

I received a complimentary copy.

Sadness, hurt, pain, tragedy, and a light at the end. Struggle is real in so many ways but this this author they came in a life changing way. I found it to be a book that also includes hope, love and family bonding. I use the term street family which in some cases are far more stronger then a blood relative. The author pours her all into these pages so that the reader can feel her pain as well as blessings.

Meg says

Powerful, emotional. Lisa Fenn is a savior and an angel. Can't praise this book enough.

stella Lee says

Another amazing unbelievable true story that deals with social injustice, racial discrimination, human connection, and redemptive family story, not only touches my heart but motives me to make differences in other's lives. The friendship of Dartanyon and Leroy is remarkable and they are strong athletes and even better friends; their life hardship requires them to overcome so many obstacles. What I am impressed even more is Lisa's willingness to invest ALL in their lives, which is incredible! There are many good stories

inspiring us; but majority of times, we just move on to something else, once a project is done, camera is off, or book is read. Not Lisa: she decided to stick to these boys and became their guardian angel first, later, a mom.... WOW.... That requires resilience, persistence and commitment of time, money and sacrificial love... In her book she stated, "In many ways, growing up in poverty disabled the boys more than their physical challenges. Both were living out of the consequences of being raised with no accountability, no responsibility and few expectation. In order to truly help them, they needed missing life skills and reverse the destructive habits they absorbed throughout their youths." They needed someone to believe in them and to teach them and to guide them until the vicious cycle is broken, and Lisa was willing to be that person! Later, she wrote, "In 2 years timeframe, I essentially became a mother to 4 children of different races, ages, and abilities. It is a family that reframed my understanding of what it meant to be blessed. Blessing has less to do with what we have and everything to do with what we are able to give! Blessings come from the being a part of redemptive journey here on earth in allowing God to work out the injustices through us. Blessing come when we walk alongside another to pick up the broken pieces and together restore the beauty." Now the question is what can I do to be a blessing to others...

Melissa says

This book was fantastic! I'd give it 4.5 stars. It was a deep and troubling look at the cycle of poverty, about dysfunctional families, and about race. It was also very inspiring. It is an amazing look at what it takes (an amazingly giving and patient woman, a whole village, a bunch of money and resources, and a long time) to help pull people out of the poverty cycle. I always enjoy a story about an unlikely or unusual kind of family. I highly recommend this book.

Sara says

I enjoyed this book a lot. I think, perhaps it meant even more because it references places I know well as it mainly takes place in Cleveland. It was a bit heavy on some God/Christianity talk which would be my only concern using it as a required text for high school or college students.

Jordan Nicholas says

As a Lutheran West graduate (like the author), a Cleveland resident, someone who works with kids in poverty, and a sports fanatic, I was able to connect to this book on so many levels! By the end, I was literally in tears. What a cool story about the importance of and the power of never giving up on and believing in others. It's also so eye-opening about the struggles and the mindset and the reality of those living in poverty. SO GOOD.
