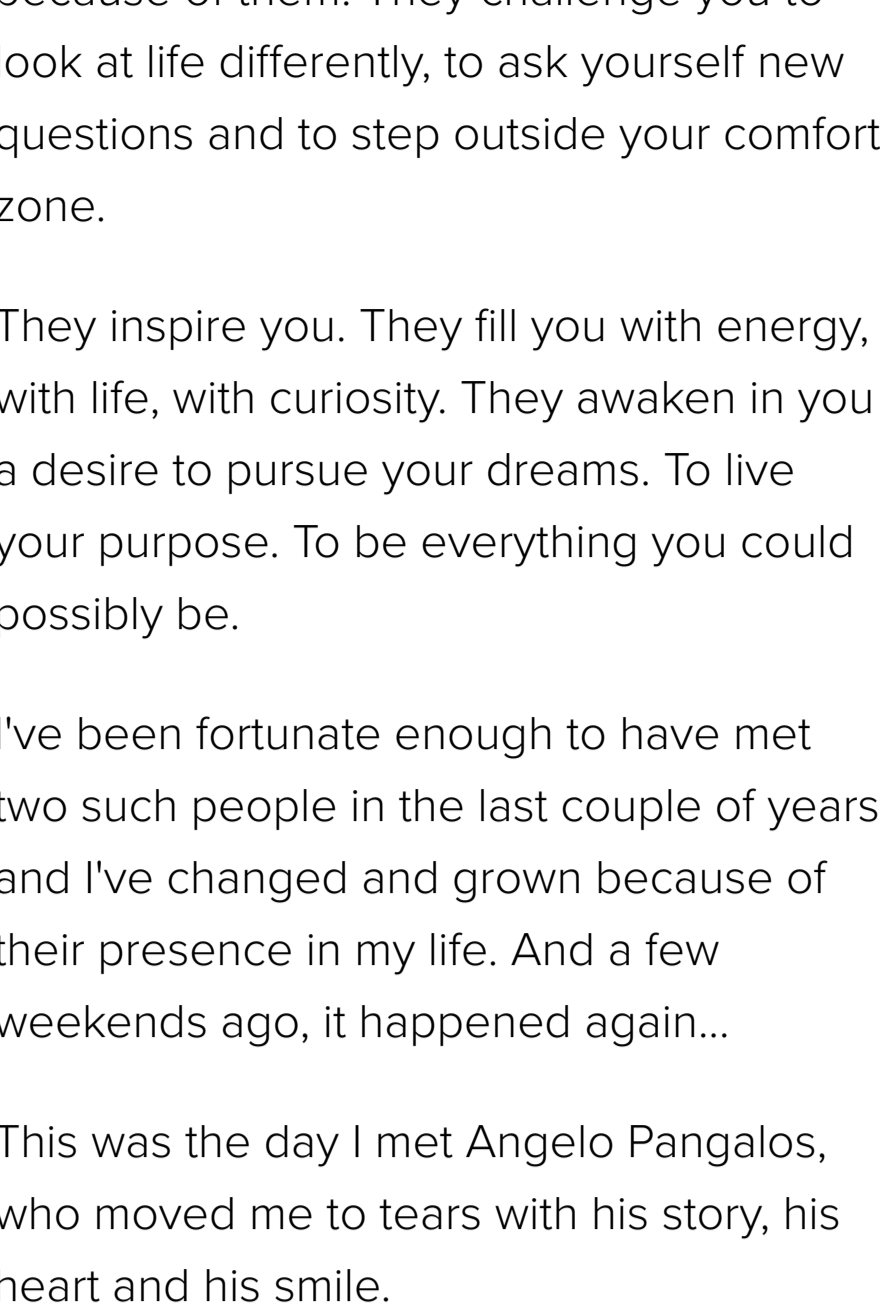


24 June 2013

PURPOSE, FEAR & FAITH: THE STORY OF ANGELO PANGALOS - MUSICIAN & MAGICIAN (FORWARDTHESMILE.COM)

Purpose & Calling



Sometimes, entirely unexpectedly, someone new turns up in your life and you know during that first encounter that something important just shifted; that nothing is ever going to be quite the same. The way you view the world just changed because of them. They challenge you to look at life differently, to ask yourself new questions and to step outside your comfort zone.

They inspire you. They fill you with energy, with life, with curiosity. They awaken in you a desire to pursue your dreams. To live your purpose. To be everything you could possibly be.

I've been fortunate enough to have met two such people in the last couple of years and I've changed and grown because of their presence in my life. And a few weekends ago, it happened again...

This was the day I met Angelo Pangalos, who moved me to tears with his story, his heart and his smile.

His story is one worth sharing, and I hope that it will move and inspire you in the way it did me. That it will encourage you to look at your life with new eyes, to open yourself up to the incredible people and possibilities that surround you every day and to remember that our lives are precious and that even when we've hit rock bottom, there's always a choice to be made.

Do we give in? Give up? Or do we gather our strength and turn our darkest moments into our greatest force?

From the moment Angelo told me his story, I knew I wanted to share it with you. And yet, it isn't an easy one for me to tell.

Angelo's story is inextricably linked with his faith in God. When we first met, he talked a lot about the role of faith in his life. It was hugely uncomfortable for me and I spent the days after we met in a state of confusion, asking myself questions that I'd never asked before. Religion was way, way outside my comfort zone.

I questioned whether I could write his story. I was so worried I might alienate you guys, reading this, which essentially means I was worried about myself and the impact on the blog. And so I decided in the end I would write his story, but bypass any reference to God or faith.

And it would have been possible. I could have shared his story without talking about those things. But there would have been something missing. It wouldn't have been the whole truth. And it wouldn't have been his story. And it wouldn't have been fair to you. Who am I to say which part of a story you do and don't want to hear?

So here it is. Angelo's story. The full version.

By way of introduction, four years ago, Angelo founded a project called Forward The Smile (www.forwardthesmile.com). A simple project with the purpose of encouraging and inspiring strangers to share a smile using his magic and his music on the streets of London.

The question is...why?

The story begins in Cyprus, 23 years ago, when Angelo is just 5 years old and is diagnosed with a rare allergy which causes his blood vessels to burst and bleed internally. The time he spent in hospital sows a seed of fear inside.

This is not a sob story.

Fast forward 6 years and Angelo moves to London with his parents and his older brother and sister. The move is prompted by his parents' desire to send his brother to University instead of the mandatory time in military service required of all Cypriot men.

Angelo's older brother attends King's College, his sister is enrolled at Southgate College and Angelo...well, he's enrolled at Saint David's and Saint Catherine's School, at the very, very bottom of the league table. Bullying becomes a normal part of Angelo's secondary school life.

This is not a sob story.

Fast forward another 7 years. Angelo is now 18 and finds himself in hospital again. This time with a collapsed lung. He undergoes major surgery.

This is not a sob story.

A few years later, a string of infections leads to Angelo having his tonsils removed. A nerve is damaged during the operation leaving him with permanent pain in his throat. At the same time, they also discover a problem with his breathing (related to an incident years earlier on the basketball court) and do a further operation on his nose.

This is not a sob story.

At 24 he's offered an incredible opportunity with Facebook and spends a week training for his new role in California. But when he returns, his health forces him to leave the job before it's even begun.

This is not a sob story.

A life in and out of hospital, a series of messed up operations, pain, bullying, problems at home between his parents. What would it be like, to end it all?

'I just want to die', he marks out across his bedroom wall.

He has a choice to make. Give up? Give in? Or something else entirely? And it's in that moment that he turns to his faith, to Jesus Christ, for help.

The project is born. **Forward The Smile.**

What happens when you decide to give, at a point in your life when you are deeply in need yourself? What happens when you engage with a stranger and share a smile despite the overwhelming problems you're facing? Just how much can the smallest actions you take, impact the people and world around you?

At the lowest point of his life, this is exactly what Angelo set out to do. To give. To share. To smile.

One of the reasons I was so moved by my meeting with Angelo is because of the role purpose, fear and faith play in his life. So central to my own story, meeting Angelo forced me to take a step back and look at these things in an entirely new light.

Angelo, on Purpose

The lack of it is why I could never settle in any of my previous jobs. That missing sense that I was doing what I was here to do. That I was making a difference. Changing things for the better in a way that was unique to me.

Angelo lives with absolute purpose. His belief is that we each have a purpose that is unique to us and that, when our hearts are open to it, we'll be guided by God to find and fulfil that purpose. We'll be protected on our journey and guided to the people we need at just the right time.

This, to me, is a truly beautiful and magical concept. Suddenly we need not worry about being 'better than the competition'. We need simply concentrate on being ourselves. For we all have something special. And that is what the world needs.

Angelo is not the most outstanding magician. Nor is he the most outstanding musician. His ability to connect with people and make a difference come simply from the fact that he does what he does with purpose and because it's something that to him, truly matters.

This sense of thinking that you need to be the best (or at least better) at something before you take action on doing the things you want with your life is a massive obstacle in ever starting anything.

You don't need to be the best. You simply need to discover your cause, your purpose, believe in it wholeheartedly and get started. The rest you'll learn along the way.

Angelo, on Fear

Fear and facing it is a part of my daily life now. But when I meet people like Angelo, who seemingly have all the confidence in the world, it's hard to imagine that fear also features in their lives. But it does.

Angelo has fear around things that seem illogical to me, but which stem from his own experience of the world. He recognises though, that the only way to move forward, to grow and to fulfil his purpose is to push past those fears.

We must each of us face our own fears if we are to find, follow and fulfil our purpose in life.

Angelo, on Faith

This is the big one.

Angelo has questioned, of course, what he did to deserve the things that have happened in his life. But he recognises too that today, he wouldn't be the person that he is if it weren't for all those experiences. All part of His plan to help him serve his purpose.

Since quitting my job I've had to take some massive leaps of faith and I would never have reached the place I have today if I hadn't just believed that somehow, things would work out ok.

Today, I wholeheartedly believe that it's faith, trust and an ability to step blindly forward into the vast unknown, that will lead you to the most special moments, the most special people and the most special experiences.

To go through life without any sort of faith (whatever form that faith may take), to have to intellectually understand something before you can conceive of its being possible, I think that's a life with limits. Faith gives us the strength to go further, to face fears and to tackle the impossible.

As Angelo so beautifully put it to me, with his faith, his life is limitless.

No, this is not a sob story.

It is a reminder that there is always a choice to be made.

A reminder that though suffering ourselves we can choose to bring joy to others.

A reminder that small acts have big impacts.

And a reminder that, if we connect with the strangers around us, the world can become an entirely different and far more beautiful place.

Let me leave you with Angelo, in this video about his project, Forward the Smile.

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 13:34 - Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

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