

# My Way



*By Rick Weinberg*

*Ridiculed and abused as a child, Russian-born Faye Kitariev transformed herself into a world-class figure skating coach and then an inspirational life coach. Now, she's written a book about her captivating journey.*



*Sasha Cohen*

**W**hen Faye Kitariev was six years old, she thought her name was “stupid, lazy pig.”

“I knew it was true,” she says sadly, “because my figure skating coach told me so ... *Every. Single. Day.*”

“*STUPID, LAZY, PIG,*” the skating coach screamed at Faye. “*Straighten your leg.*” Faye did just as she was told. But it wasn’t good enough for the coach. “*Straighten your back -- you look like an old crippled lady,*” she screamed at her shy, nervous student.

Faye knew exactly why this was happening: she wasn’t the tall, skinny, long-legged, blond-haired, blue-eyed girl that the coach preferred. Faye was short and stocky with dark hair and dark eyes.

Moreover, the coach was only doing Faye’s

mother a favor – teaching the six-year-old Faye to become the next Olympic caliber Soviet figure skater.

But it clearly wasn’t working out.

One day, Faye saw her mother slip inside the coach’s office.

“Oh no,” Faye thought to herself. “Nothing good is going to come out of this.”

She was right.

The coach informed Mrs. Kovler that she was through coaching Faye. Finished. Done.

When Faye’s mother emerged from the office, she had tears in her eyes. Faye reached for her mother’s hand, but her mother pulled it away quickly, enraged at her little girl, who only wanted two things in life – to please her mother and her coach.

*“How many times have I told you to work harder – you’re so lazy,”* her mother screamed so everyone could hear, embarrassing Faye. *“And now, your coach kicked you out. She won’t coach you anymore. You won’t be a championship-caliber skater! It’s over.”*

And then she walked away, leaving Faye alone, by herself. *“I was so sad,”* Faye remembers, *“because I had broken my mother’s heart. I had shattered her dream.”*

When Faye’s mother was a little girl, she dreamed of becoming an Olympic skater, but her parents were ill and unable to regularly take her to practice. But Mrs. Kovler was not going to allow that to happen to her daughter. She would do everything in power to turn little Faye into the Soviet Unions’ next champion skater.

*“But I had shattered her dream,”* Faye says, sadly.

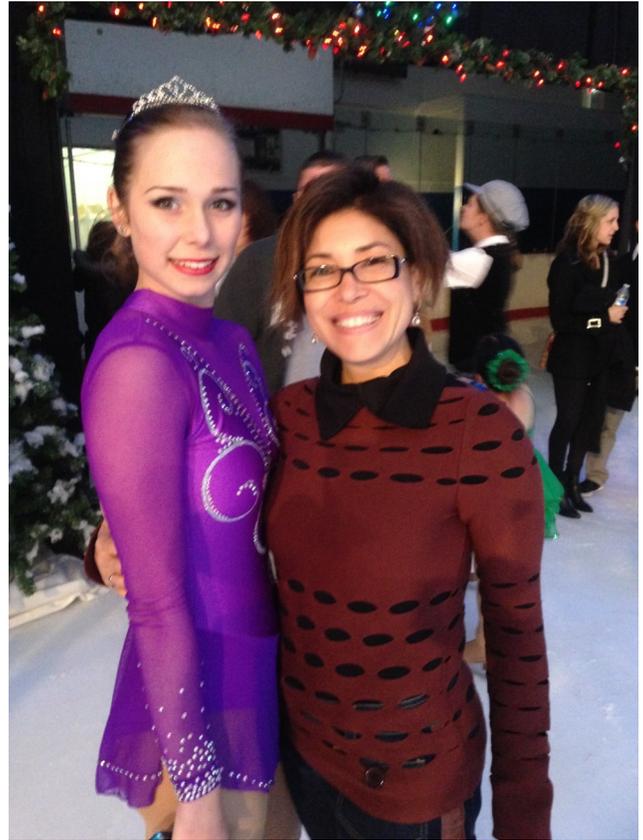
A few days passed and Faye’s mother dragged her back to the rink. *“She decided she was going to teach me herself.”*

One day, while Faye was twisting and twirling through the air and on the ice, she noticed a woman staring at her from a distance.

*“My heart sunk into my stomach,”* Faye recalls. *“Anytime anyone looked at me, I got scared.”*

The woman went to talk to Mrs. Kovler. A few moments later, Mrs. Kovler motioned for her daughter to skate over to her to the coaching box.

*“Faye, this is Janna, a new coach at the academy and she wants to coach you,”* her mother said softly, with a smile.



*Faye with one of her national champion performers, Katarina Kulgeyko.*

*“Me? She wants to teach me?”* the petite six-year-old nervously thought to herself.

Coach Janna leaned over and stared straight into Faye’s deep brown eyes. *“Janna had the most beautiful sparkling eyes I had ever seen,”* Faye recalls. *“She had so much love and kindness in her eyes. No one had ever looked at me like that before.”*

Coach Janna told Faye: *“You are the most beautiful talented girl I have ever seen. Would you like me to be your coach?”*

Faye was overjoyed. *“I fell in love with her immediately,”* Faye says.

They became so close so quickly that Janna wound up staying in a spare room at the Kovler’s home in Riga, Latvia, a small

## Inspiration

republic in the Soviet Union. Faye and Janna worked together every day at the ice rink and at home.

And, lo and behold, Faye emerged as a state champion.

When she received her medal, who happened to be standing on the same podium ... below her in second and third place?

Two tall, skinny, long-legged, blond-haired, blue-eyed girls.

Several years later, when Faye's family moved to New York City and Faye had to choose a profession, she decided she wanted to be a coach -- like Janna.

"Not because I loved skating but because I wanted to coach those girls who no one believed in and tell them they were beautiful and talented and that they had the potential within them to become champion skaters," Faye says.

Family and friends laughed at her. "They said I'd never make it," she recalls.

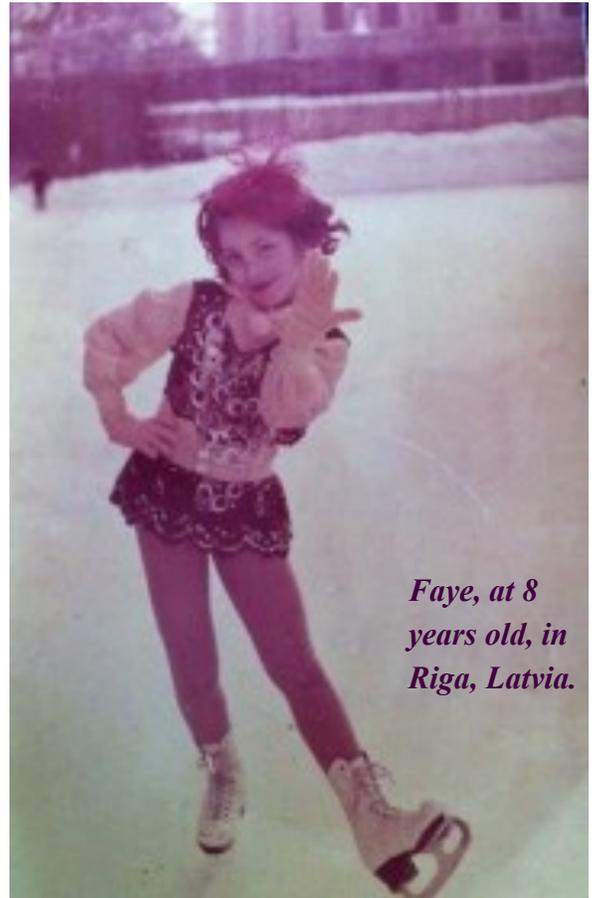
Without being able to speak fluent English, the 19-year-old Russian went to the University of Delaware and later graduated with her coaching skating degree.

She went on to coach -- and choreograph acclaimed programs -- for several champion skaters, including Olympian Sasha Cohen.

"I had a knack for choreography, a seventh sense so to speak," Faye says, shyly.

However, during her celebrated career, Faye got caught up in winning. Victory had become the only thing. The next city, the next competition, the new program, the next championship, the next student.

She was also trapped in a world of glamour and meaningless, materialistic items.



*Faye, at 8 years old, in Riga, Latvia.*

Soon, her world caved in and swallowed her.

Her marriage was on the rocks and so was her relationship with her own daughter.

"I realized my 'every day race' had no end. I knew I had to make a change in my life," Faye says.

She did.

And now she has written a captivating book about her incredible and courageous journey in *Choreography of Awakening*.

It is her first book.

And she insists her story is about "helping other people — other victims — relating to their own setbacks and flaws, overcoming adversity.

"You don't have to be a victim of your past forever," she says.

**T**he front door swings open and there is Faye, standing at the entrance of her home in Irvine, California. She is glowing. She had just received the first copy of her book. She holds it up high, like a trophy. Then she pulls it to her heart. Her dream fulfilled.

The book is her life's journey -- a voyage of making the impossible possible, an adventure of realizing dreams and overcoming fear, a captivating trek to self-growth -- including her own.

Her life began and evolved with everyone saying no. No, you won't become an Olympic skater. No, you won't coach figure skating. No, your skater will not even become a competitor, let alone a national competitor.

Well, Faye went on to achieve it all. She climbed every mountain. Then she fell -- fell hard -- in her own oasis of achievement and accomplishment. And that's when her transformation began, when she began helping herself, then helping others -- not in figure skating, but in life.

As Faye was writing the book, her life and the book began unfolding in a way that she could not have predicted or imagined. It began with the intention of "an inspiration guide" in personal development for skaters. But just as Faye's life was taking a U-turn, so did the book.

"I resolved to use my story as a figure skating coach to become a messenger and a guide to people, who, like me, were seeking meaning and purpose in their life," she says, sitting on the couch in her fresh, earthy, organic living room.

*Choreography of Awakening* is about "getting out of your own way to move toward where you're supposed to go," she

adds.

Faye opens up to her audience, exposing all of her flaws, admitting, "With each success, my ego was growing larger and more guarded. My motivation to learn shifted gears from 'I love learning' to 'I need to know more than my competitors, have better skills, more credentials.' It shifted from excitement of a curious youth to a fear-based, necessity-oriented learning of an adult."

Every so often, a book comes along that can't help but improve your life, author Ken Dickson says so deftly points out.

"This is one of those books," he quickly adds.

High praise.

Even higher praise comes from one of Faye's former students, 3-time U.S. National Skating Champion Johnny Weir, who says, "Faye helped me achieve so many of my dreams and overcome multiple struggles. Her strength and brilliance are an inspiration on and off the ice. Her book can help anyone believe in themselves and believe in the power within."

Yes, the power within. Faye continuously brought that to her students, helping them reach their highest potential and achieve their grandest championship dreams. And she helped them even further ... with *Choreography of Awakening*.

After reading the book, U.S. skating medalist Wesley Campbell says, "I feel inspired to continue on the path of growth and learning in all aspects of my life. Inspired to seek out change and knowledge, embrace the possibilities that can become realities when I reflect on past experiences, own my fears and find the 'whys' be-

hind my future ‘wants’.”

“This book,” Faye writes, “is for those who feel the yearning for something greater, who are waking up – or want to wake up; who are lost and confused; who feel there is more potential and ability lying dormant within.”

Each page carries a strong message that anyone can identify with, a message that makes you stronger, more positive, more of a believer in yourself and what you’re capable of.

Steve Chandler, who wrote *Time Warrior*, says Kitariev has “poetic energy as a storyteller,” and another author, Rory Cohen, says, “Faye has a gift for seeing the impossible as the possible, and for creating a picture of that possibility for all of us to experience. It’s easy to see how she so successfully coached young skaters to levels of excellence.”

Then, “using metaphor, intuition and humor, she shows her own courageous journey, both on the external from immigrant to coach of stars, but more importantly on the inner journey,” Cohen adds.

“Once I started [the book], I couldn’t put it down.”

It’s Faye’s ability to tell a story and weave it together with live skating experiences and metaphors that make the read so compelling. The book is a “choreographed program” that covers all the elements, aspects, feelings and emotions of life.

Faye’s transformation advanced quickly to the next level when one of her former students, Angelyn Nguyen, called her to have lunch.

Several years earlier, Angelyn had given up skating to study Biochemistry at UCLA.

Faye had always felt Angelyn had given up skating too soon, that she had a lot more to give, that she had not come close to her potential of competing regularly on a national level.

“I secretly hoped that she was going to tell me she was coming back to skate,” Faye whispers.

That was not the case. Angelyn simply wanted to thank Faye for all she had taught her and that she took those lessons of life and applied them into her studies.

“I realized at that moment that she never really stopped skating,” Faye says, her eyebrows raised. “She merely changed the ‘choreography’ of her ‘program.’ Biochemistry became her double Axel and biology her triple Salchow. Exams became her competitions and homework her practice.”

Later, Faye discovered that another one of her students, Deanna Inn, had become a coach -- thanks to Faye.

Just like Faye had become a coach -- because of Janna.

“Faye taught me that I could take on the world if I wanted to, and I believed her,” Deanna says. “She taught me how to reach for the stars and never settle for anything less while simultaneously teaching me how to defy gravity. She inspired me to start coaching, to implement in my students what she ingrained in me. I can only hope and wish that I can influence and inspire my students the same way she has for me.”

Tears well up in Faye’s eyes when she talks about the stories from her former students. Soon after Faye began her transformation, after she realized that chasing the next championship wasn’t what she want-

ed any longer and after she acknowledged her marriage and relationship with her daughter were spiraling out of control, she ran into a down-and-out friend.

Faye immediately went into action, instinctively, transforming herself from skating coach to life coach, without missing a beat. Sensing that her friend was not doing well, Faye sprinkled the therapeutic banter with such comments as:

“We are often afraid to make that first step ... It will give you clarity and energy to move in the new direction. ... How much are you willing to suffer?”

He listened intently. They kept talking.

“Inspiration,” Faye told him, “is the driving force behind human achievement. It allows us to move beyond what we deem possible. It transforms us, touching the deepest corners in our hearts. Inspiration doesn’t know ‘buts’, doesn’t know ‘doubts’, doesn’t know ‘fear’. It only knows joy and love. When it enters into one’s life, you have to grab it and follow it.”

She goes on to talk about the power of “want.”

“It’s magical,” she says. “Nothing ever happens without want. It’s staggering the power we hold in our hands. People are afraid to dream big and instead put themselves in a box. Then they work to grow into it when they really should be working towards growing out of it... We become so afraid of disappointments that we stop dreaming, imagining and going after our dreams.”

He became a believer and Faye realized even further that she had an ability to inspire others, not only in skating, but in life, the ability to empower and inspire an-

yone.

An ensuing conversation about life’s purpose led to this: assisting people in finding their life’s purpose, realizing their potential and empowering them to follow their dreams.

“There are no limits to human potential,” Faye says. “There *are* limits to human beliefs.”

Fear plays a major role in Faye’s transformational teachings and how she pushed her students to the limit to help them achieve, overcome and break through the barrier separating mediocrity from greatness.

“The untrained mind falls for the emotion of ‘fear’ and stumbles along the way, losing focus, direction, orientation, strength and balance,” she says. “Fear shows up as a thought or vision, calling for an immediate psychological response that creates contraction, tension, heaviness and discomfort.”

Faye possesses an adept ability to confront fear, control it *and* eliminate it.

“I realized I had a gift, an ability to see beyond the visible,” Faye writes.

“Unconsciously, I was using this ‘innate faculty’ to recognize and tap into my students’ ‘natural’ source, even when its existence was not evident to others. I discovered we all possess tremendous gifts, some of which we are aware of, and others we don’t. ... Our ‘talents’ are just small glimpses of what lies within us, like islands in the oceans of potentiality.”



he stories in this fascinating and captivating book will stagger you - - and tug at your heart.

For instance...

*It's a rainy day. The Kovlers are in Odesa, a large city in the Ukraine. The circus is in town. Seven-year-old Faye asks her mother to take her to see the clowns, the elephants and the acrobats. She agrees. Her mother tells her to grab her favorite new umbrella with a newly-created, automatic button on the side – the umbrella that came from a “faraway country” and “cost a fortune.”*

*They arrive at the circus and Faye places the umbrella on the seat next to her. She is having the time of her life, mesmerized by the array of dazzling performances. She laughs at the clowns and thinks to herself, “Maybe I can be a clown when I grow up and make people laugh.”*

*It is getting late and Faye is sleepy. The curtain closes on the final act and mother and daughter depart for the bus. It is dark outside. It smells fresh and clean after the rain. “Hurry,” Faye’s mother says, yanking her daughter’s hand. “We need to catch the bus.”*

*The bus is crowded with circus goers. Suddenly, a frown appears on Mrs. Kovler’s face. “Faye, where is my umbrella?” Faye shutters. She remembers she left it at the circus. She senses the righteous anger of her mother is going to strike like a powerful tropical storm. She shrinks in her seat. She wishes she is a turtle so she can hide in the safety of her shield. Mrs. Kovler calls her daughter names. “Does she really love the umbrella more than she loves me?” a teary-eyed Faye thinks to herself.*

*“I wish we didn’t go to the circus,” Faye thinks. “I wish I didn’t make my mother angry. I wish she stopped humiliating me*

*in public. I wish she hugged me and told me ‘I love you.’*

It is this kind of gripping story that overwhelms you and encourages you to read further. You want to learn more about Faye, how she overcame her childhood nightmares and demanding mother, how it impacted her life when she was in New York and Delaware, and later when she got married and had her own daughter.

Years later, Faye learns much more about her mother – things that surprised her.

When the family moved from Riga, Latvia to New York City, Mrs. Kovler found work as an admission counselor at a trade school for Russian immigrants.

“It wasn’t just a job for her,” Faye writes. “She identified herself with the school.”

She passionately encouraged people to enroll, and they did, one after another. The school grew and Mrs. Kovler was promoted to admission director.

“Work was always on her mind and she talked about it all the time,” Faye recalls. “She regarded the school so highly that people thought she was talking about a major university like Columbia.”

When the holidays came, Mrs. Kovler’s office was filled with flowers, chocolates and small gifts of appreciation.

“People flocked to her for advice and inspiration and were grateful for her help,” Faye writes.

When Mrs. Kovler passed away, Faye received a call from one of her mother’s colleagues, Anya, who came to New York from a small, provincial town in Russia at the age of 19. The big city overwhelmed Anya, but Mrs. Kovler took her under her

***“Nothing ever happens without want. It’s staggering the power we hold in our hands. People are afraid to dream big and instead put themselves in a box. Then they work to grow into it when they really should be working towards growing out of it...We become so afraid of disappointments that we stop dreaming, imagining and going after our dreams.” — Faye Kitariev***

wings, gave her a job, trained her and gave her a place to live.

“Your mother was my lantern, my guide,” Anya told Faye. Her voice shook nervously as she fought back tears. “She helped me find myself. She was like a mother to me, closer than my own mom. I feel so lost. What will I do without her? Who will guide me? I can’t imagine being in the office without her being there. She held up the whole school with her exuberance. Everyone was going to her for help. Your mom was such an inspiration.”

Faye was speechless. It was then that she realized she did not know her mother nearly as much as she thought. She saw her mother in a way she had never had before, even though she grew up “terrified of awakening the impatient beast within her.”

Yet Faye makes it perfectly clear in the book and during this interview that even though her mother “was hard on me, she was the perfect mother for me,” she says. “I don’t want to give the impression that I think I was a victim. I see it as a gift.”

Now, Faye only wishes that she could have felt love for her mother like Anya did. Yet, she nevertheless realizes that without her mother, she would not be where she is today, she would not have become a coach to champion skaters and now a coach to individuals seeking to break through that wall that is separating them from living a full, spiritual, meaningful and purposeful life.

After her conversation with Anya, Faye looked through her office window at the beautiful palm trees swaying in the soft California breeze. Tears filled her eyes. She slowly twisted her chair around and she came face to face with herself in a mirror.

“I suddenly realized at that moment what my mother did in her life,” Faye says. “She was a life coach who had empowered and inspired thousands of feeling-lost immigrants to believe in themselves to build a new life in the U.S.”

Faye looked closer at herself in the mirror. She saw her mother’s eyes staring back at her.

“As her eyes looked back at me from the mirror, I knew with absolute certainty that I, too, possess the same gift and passion for inspiring people to discover their new lives filled with meaning, new identities, and their authentic selves.”

**To purchase *Choreography of Awakening*, go to [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).**

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**To read more about Faye, go to [ChoreographyofAwakening.com](http://ChoreographyofAwakening.com).**