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Week 43: Rescue LIFE

Randy Robison and Sheila Walsh

Johnny and Becki Agar

SHEILA: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison, and we are excited about today's show. If you've got your phone beside you, go text a friend and say tune in! Because you're really going to love this program. I remember the first time I saw this guest. I was watching TV, it was on a sports channel, but suddenly this race came on and here was this amazing guy, Johnny, and his dad doing this race, in a way that I'd never seen before. I literally sat there with tears rolling down my face.

So today, we have Johnny Agar and his mom, Becki, because they've got a brand-new book called *The Impossible Mile*. Welcome to both of you.

JOHNNY: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to be here.

SHEILA: I love the subtitle: "The power in living life one step at a time." That's powerful!

Becki, would you take us back to when you were pregnant, and like every mom, you think things are going to go according to a certain schedule. But things didn't quite happen that way.

BECKI: Right. So at about 29 weeks, I ended up having Johnny. He wanted to come into the world a little bit sooner than we were ready for him to. So he was about 11 weeks early. For a premature baby, he was pretty big; he was three pounds, seven ounces. He was doing really well. However, they do a diagnostic test for almost all preemie babies where they do a scan, a CAT scan on their heads to make sure there is no internal bleeding or anything going on. That's when we found out that Johnny had some bleeding on the brain.

About a week after that, we were called into the doctor's office. The neonatologist told us at that time that Johnny had cerebral palsy. So as first-time parents, it was a little bit unnerving for us. We knew we had heard of cerebral palsy, but we didn't really know what it was; what that meant for a diagnosis. We knew it wasn't good. So we asked the doctor at the time, "Well, fill us in. We need to know what this is." At the time, the internet wasn't a big thing; I'm dating myself, I know.

But he said, "I can give you all the books you want to read. You can do as much research as you want about cerebral palsy." But he said, "In my years of doing this as a neonatologist, I found that a lot of times parents will read, and they'll anticipate things happening for their child that may not happen." And so he said, "I have the books; you can read them." He said, "I would suggest you love your child as your child and take it day by day."

So Jeff and I had decided at that point that that's what we were going to do. We were going to just love him and take it day by day. Go from there.

JOHNNY: Changed my life.

SHEILA: That's amazing. For parents to be like, we'll just love you. I wondered, too, Johnny, was there a point in your life where you thought, okay, I'm different than other people around me?

JOHNNY: I did to some extent, but my mom and dad and my friends that I had around me, they really made me feel like it was just something that I had to deal with and something that I was going to have to ask God to get me through. So I just was really, really thankful for the fact that they didn't really make an excuse for my disability, that that was just the way God created me. He has a plan for everything, and we don't really know what that plan is, to some extent. But his plan is a lot greater than ours, so we just need to trust in that.

RANDY: I think a lot of people, when faced with the situation you are in, strive for some level

of normalcy, what we think of as normalcy. You guys went for the extraordinary. What in the world made you decide I'm not just going to do what every other kid does, I'm going to do what most kids don't do. I'm going to become an athlete.

JOHNNY: Well, I looked at athletes as somebody that I could look up to because I watched how hard athletes trained to participate in games. And I looked at that as a visual representation of what I needed to do. I need to get stronger and better, and that would help me become more independent in life, just like athletes do to become successful and do what they're trained to do. And so it was really a representation, a visual representation for me, of I need to have these people around me. And the triathlon really gave me an opportunity to really express what I could do and really have the right people around me to show me what I could do.

SHEILA: Let me ask you about the title of the book, *The Impossible Mile*. When I read that part, considering how many steps you had walked up 'til that point in your life, this part blew me. Now you're the mom, how are you dealing with this, when suddenly your son wants to go way beyond what -- I mean, Randy and I couldn't run around the block.

BECKI: I know. He had only walked 23 steps. And Johnny does a lot of thinking, and you have to realize that throughout his whole growing up, we'd always wanted him to be typical. We never wanted to say "normal" because what is normal? But we always wanted to call him "typical." So we'd always encouraged him to do things that were what everybody else would do his age. And he would do a lot of thinking, and he would constantly come up to us and say, "I'm going to try this." "It's okay, let's do that."

So we were at breakfast one day, one morning, and he said, "You know, I've been thinking, I want to walk a mile, the last mile in one of the races dad pushes me in."

JOHNNY: I wanted to give dad a break, is what I like to say.

BECKI: And our immediate thought was, Jeff and I looked at each other, and we knew because we weren't going to say, how are you going to do that? You've only walked 23 steps. So we just

said, "Okay, let's start training. Let's figure out how we can get that done." What kind of parents would we have been had we put a limitation on him at this point? Because we had been saying all along that he could do all these things if he wanted to and tried.

JOHNNY: That's what -- gave me too. I knew even though I had only walked 23 steps, I knew that there was a process to things. And I knew watching my dad train, how hard he works, I knew that I could accomplish things if I did the same thing, and just have faith in God and have the right tools with me that I could accomplish anything.

RANDY: Which, to me, is amazing because your body doesn't obey what your mind always tells it to do. That is a huge challenge from the mental to the physical. How were you able to get through that? How do you even train for that?

JOHNNY: I think if you have the right support system, then people will start telling you stuff. I always like to think of racing as going to church every day, every week, you're there to have the positive reinforcement, and I think racing does the same for me. Not that racing will ever have the same impact that church does, but I think it's the same scenario in that if you have those people around you, those messages with you every day, every week, then you come to believe it, and it becomes a part of you. I think that encouraged me and helped me to do a lot more than you think.

SHEILA: One of the things in your story that I found really moving was so you're committed to doing the last mile, and you have the special thing that will help you walk, but you're not seeing initially what's happening because it's kind of over the hill. Tell me about that moment because some people said, "Hey, you need to come see this."

BECKI: Yeah, my job was to stay at the finish line because I wanted to get pictures; that's what I love to do. So at the finish line, there is a little bit of a hill, so when I'm standing there, I can't really see what's happening. It was taking -- it took him an hour and 45 minutes to walk that mile. So I was there for quite a long time, and people kept coming up, and they were crying. I was starting to get nervous because I thought, what is happening? And finally, a friend of mine

came up. He had biked up, and he said, "Becki, you've got to go see what's happening."

I said, "Why? Is everything okay?"

He said, "Just get down to where they are, and you'll see what I mean."

So when I started walking down there, I saw Johnny walking, and he was surrounded by hundreds of people behind him. His dad was beside him, my two daughters were there, and just everybody who had either run the race or had come to watch was standing behind him. And every step he took, they would just encourage him every step of the way. It was like love was just surrounding him. It was just the most beautiful moment. It just filled my heart because I know how much he wanted to do that, and I know how much he struggled to do it. And just to have that encouragement, I wish everybody could kind of feel that same thing when they're challenged with something because it was just --

RANDY: This wasn't just a fulfillment of a race. This has got to be a fulfillment of a lifetime of your whole family working together to do the impossible.

BECKI: It was beautiful.

JOHNNY: And you know what my favorite part about it was? It was our church's 5K and over the hill was my church. So it was like God was telling me -- I have a hard time too when I walk; if I keep my head down, then my whole body gets out of whack. So if I can keep my head up, that will help me stay focused and keep my posture going. It's like God is telling me, "I'm here for you. You don't have to worry about a thing; I will show you where to go and help you along the way." So it was a beautiful thing for me and really an eye-opening kind of -- eye-opening in my faith life too.

SHEILA: Let me ask you about your faith life, though, because so often we're still coming through a pandemic, people are facing impossible situations, different situations. How do your challenges impact your faith? Do you question God?

JOHNNY: I think like I said before, God's plan is a lot different than what we think our plan is. And so, I think, if anything, it strengthened my faith. It is all about people can look at it in different ways for sure, but I think for me, and mom's been strong in her faith her whole life, I think there's been a wonderful thing for me to understand that no matter what happens God has my back. He's not doing this because he wants me to struggle. He's doing this to maybe help others. And that's what I really want from the book is to really help others.

RANDY: I noticed on the cover, and we can show a close-up of the cover, it says "*The Impossible Mile*." But the "I" and the "M" at the beginning of that word fade away to make the impossible possible. What things have you learned that you want other people to learn, to take that impossible and make it possible?

JOHNNY: I think that in order for me to walk, I need to take small steps, not big steps. If you take your challenges and put them into smaller -- break them down into smaller pieces, they are easier for me and others to accomplish. But I think if you're like, for example, if you want to say, dad's going to go out and do 140.6 miles, you look at that and say, that's really daunting. But in reality, if you have a training plan you put together, and you trust your coaches that are with you, you can accomplish things. I think that's really been a huge, huge benefit for me to see that and to know that there is a process to things. And you may not get it on the first try, but it's always there for you if you want it badly enough.

SHEILA: That's a great point.

BECKI: I think the big thing with Johnny is, he experiences failure every day. So just getting out of bed, it takes him a few tries -- anything; failure is just part of his life. So he never was afraid to fail. I think a lot of times, people are held back because they're going to be embarrassed that they fail.

JOHNNY: They look at it like a definite thing.

BECKI: As a bad thing. Whereas Johnny just sees it as just part of his every day.

RANDY: It's not the end; it's just a part of the process.

BECKI: So his challenge is yes, as he was growing up, there were times he'd look at the kids playing, and he would think, why couldn't I do that? But he didn't really lament on it. He would use it, turn it into a positive. We always wanted to include him in everything. So if he couldn't play baseball, he can't really throw a baseball too well, it would go backward, but he would ump during a game. He would do something; he would be a part of the game in a way that he could. We'd just adapt it for him.

So I think he just always was raised that way and had that mentality. And then, when he got old enough to make the decisions, those challenges became opportunities for him, and he went from there.

SHEILA: May I ask you one thing, Johnny? On the front cover, "Johnny Agar is a True Inspiration -- Michael Phelps." The most decorated Olympian of all time!

JOHNNY: Yeah, it really meant a lot for me to have him be a part of the book. Because it is not just about the gold medals, it is how hard he works. It's so much more than wins and losses for me; it's what do you learn from things? And so, I look at how hard he trains and how hard he works to accomplish things. So I say, I can work that way too. And I really, I really don't need that for wins and losses, necessarily, I need it so I can be more independent in life. And so it's just a wonderful thing for him to be a part of the book, and I'm really thankful for it.

RANDY: All that you've been through with the races and the TV commercials and athletes endorsing you that has given you a platform. And you've chosen to use that not just to inspire people, sort of in whatever they're struggling with, but you used it to proclaim Christ. Why is that such an important message?

JOHNNY: Well, I try. We try. But I think God's plan is a lot bigger than ours. And so I just

really want people to understand. My favorite Bible verse is: "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." I really know that. And so I tell people that all the time. But I'm really thankful that he's given me this opportunity to -- bring glory to him as well.

SHEILA: Amazing! We're going to tell you how you can get a hold of this phenomenal book, *The Impossible Mile*, the story of Johnny Agar with his mom, Becki Agar. Because maybe you can't throw a ball forward, but I don't think some of those people who can will have written a best-selling book. So we're just very proud, proud to know you.

I want to let you see something now. It's another battle that we're very much part of. So watch this, and then I'm going to tell you how you can get a hold of Johnny's book.

On the mission field:

Producer: So, first, can you introduce yourself and tell us your name and what you do?

>> My name is Bella. And I work as a social worker in Siem Reap.

Producer: And what does it mean to be a social worker in Siem Reap?

>> It means that I go to KTV to find the girl and help them find a new job.

SHEILA: There is a popular form of recreation in Asia called karaoke television or KTV. These KTVs are advertised as places to sing with friends. But as I've seen with my own eyes, in many areas, the KTV is a front for human trafficking.

>> And a guy goes to sing. And then, if they want to have sex, they ask the girl, will they go with them? And they go. I know this feeling, you know.

Producer: How do you know that feeling?

>> Because I've been through... I used to... I used to do that too. So, I really know it, and clearly, it's not what they want.

SHEILA: Although she was trafficked herself at the age of 12, Bella was rescued and has since chosen to put her faith in Christ. Today, Bella fights to reach, rescue, and restore girls from sexual slavery.

>> You know, sometimes I tell them about my story. I said, "Before, I used to do that, too, and I know how it feels." I think if I'm without God, I'm nothing. So every day, I always thank God for this life.

SHEILA: Tonight, there is a girl about to endure another round of exhausting torment. Bella's life was changed when somebody chose to help her. That same opportunity is yours right now.

End of video

In the studio:

SHEILA: I love Bella! And I love her story! What we now know, Bella is now married, and she has children. She has this beautiful life that God has put back together. And the reason that it's been put back together is because of people like you. You have stood with us in these campaigns for years. Honestly, it's been one of the most harrowing campaigns to be part of.

I remember my first trip to Southeast Asia when I saw the age of these girls. I mean, they're just little girls. They're like your daughter, like your granddaughter, like your little sister. They put all sorts of makeup on them and dress them up as if they're older, but I saw them during the day when they had no makeup on, and they're just -- they're just little babies who should be loved.

But because of the partners at *LIFE Outreach*, we've been able to go into places like that, and Bella works with us and tells the girls there is hope. Remember those nights you lay in the dark, crying out, if there is a God, send someone to help me. Well, God heard that prayer, but now we

need to do it even more. The evil is getting even darker as the days get darker. But we are the body of Christ on the planet at this time, and we're coming as a mighty force, in Jesus' name. And Randy, we can all do something.

RANDY: Absolutely! I don't know if you know this, but recently we received a report from one of our mission partners in the field where we had rescued a couple of girls. It's heartbreaking, Sheila, because they were five and seven. So that's what we're up against. But you know what? We don't stop. We reach into these areas with the sole purpose of rescuing these children and restoring them.

It's interesting because Bella got to see the goodness of God, and we've talked about showing people the goodness of God. How do we do that? Well, we do that with you. Normally, it costs, on average, \$128 to reach into one of these areas and rescue one of these children or put them through a program that would restore them.

But we have a matching gift right now. We have people who have already stepped up into this campaign and said we will match up to \$320,000. What is that? To me, that means, Sheila, here we go. I get excited. I'm like, we're going to really blow the -- we're going to storm the gates of hell on this one, right? But we need you. We want you to make up the rest of that. That means to reach one child, instead of \$128, it is \$64. It doubles your impact. It is just the math on it. But here's the bottom line. We together are going to storm the gates of hell, is the way I think of it.

I don't want to see any more children, much less the youngest, the most innocent, robbed. I want to show them the goodness of God. And I'm asking you to do that today. Join us in Rescue LIFE. Let's reach out to these. Let's show them God is good. There is hope. He has a plan for you; He has a future. He has it for you, and he has it for these, and it's tied together. So will you go online? Will you go to the phones and give the best gift you can? You can help us rescue lives today. Do it now!

Begin video clip:

ANNOUNCER: Innocent children and young people, longing to be loved and cared for, are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, forced into the evil industry of human trafficking.

Through Mission: Rescue *LIFE*, you can reach out to educate children at risk of being trafficked, rescue those already enslaved, and restore young lives giving them a future.

With a generous \$320,000 matching gift, now your gift of \$128 to help reach, rescue, or restore one child can be doubled to help two children. Your \$64 gift will be matched to help save one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a \$32 mission rescue gift will be doubled to \$64.

With your gift today, we'll send you Sheila Walsh's brand-new book, *Holding on When You Want to Let Go*; "A lifeline of hope for those who feel their life is falling apart."

With your gift of \$128 or more, you'll receive the *Beauty Out of Ashes* puzzle set featuring an image taken by our team while on a trip to the mission field. This 500-piece puzzle forms a beautiful portrait of hope in the midst of despair. Included is a 24-piece puzzle for your children and grandchildren.

Finally, please consider a gift of \$1280, which will now help rescue 20 children. And you may request our inspiring bronze sculpture, "Divine Servant." Please call, write, or make your gift online.

End of video**In the studio:**

SHEILA: Thank you so much! And if the lines are busy, keep calling. We're determined to shine the brightest light into the darkest corners of the earth.

RANDY: When you do, if today you request *The Impossible Mile*, we would love to send it to you because we just appreciate Johnny and Becki, all that you have brought. Thank you so much for getting out and sharing the inspiration that you guys do. It is just amazing. Thank you.

BECKI: Thank you! Thank you so much for having us.

JOHNNY: Thank you very much for having us!

SHEILA: Awesome!

RANDY: Yes. Thank you, guys, for watching. Don't miss the next episode of *LIFE Today* and share this one with your friends. We'll see you again next time.