SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Mike Risola

Born Anyway

ABORTION SURVIVOR · ADOPTED SON · U.S. MARINE · PUBLIC SERVANT



Mike Risola was never supposed to be here.

He was born in Moscow in October 1996, after a saline abortion at twenty-seven weeks failed to end his life. His birth mother was seventeen. He spent three months in intensive care, then three years in an orphanage outside Moscow.

In April 2000 a couple from Tarpon Springs, Florida, flew to Moscow, adopted him, and gave him their name. He was three years old. Growing up in Tarpon Springs, he learned English, excelled in school, and set out to give back to the community that had taken him in—logging more than 1,000 volunteer hours with the Boys & Girls Club, Civil Air Patrol, and Key Club, and as a tutor and mentor. He was named Pinellas County's Young Hero of the Year.

At seventeen—the age his birth mother was when he was born—he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. He stood guard at Marine Barracks Washington, then served on the presidential security detail at Camp David, earning the Presidential Service Badge. As a sergeant with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines in Hawaii, he led an infantry platoon of more than thirty Marines and deployed to the Philippines. He earned his bachelor's degree from Excelsior University while in uniform and, afterward, a master's in organizational leadership from National Louis University.

His service continued at home. A congressional fellow to Congressman Gus Bilirakis while still on active duty, he went on to manage two of the Congressman's winning re-election campaigns. As Director of Government Affairs at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, he secured $675 million in federal disaster relief and oversaw divisions of more than 400 personnel, including Agricultural Law Enforcement. In 2026 he managed Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Wilton Simpson's winning statewide re-election campaign. He chairs the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council.

As an adult, Mike found the woman who gave birth to him. They met in Istanbul, Turkey—a reunion he calls powerful, humbling, and healing—and they remain in touch. He holds no ill will. He tells his story, one of compassion and forgiveness, so that more mothers in crisis will see what adoption can make possible.

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He was born anyway. He intends to make every day of it count.

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