

Issue #21 - May 2024

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THE RELATABLE VOICE

magazine

Safari in
Africa

From Auditions
to Adventures

Mother's Day
Special



An entire
story in one line

AUTHOR

**PATRICK
GREENWOOD**

Bringing smiles
across the miles

The eyes
behind the eyes

Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the May 2024 issue of The Relatable Voice Magazine! May is the month of mothers, making it particularly special. We have wonderful articles from mothers and their offspring to celebrate this bond.

Our cover star is the super-talented Patrick Greenwood. Patrick is an author and podcaster whose inspiration for writing came from his business travels to places like Vietnam, China,

Japan, Taiwan, and Portugal. He also partners with "Helmets for Kids" in Vietnam, showcasing his dedication to making a positive impact.

Explore Africa through the eyes of Chimnese Davids and enjoy the beauty of wild animals.

Doug Weissman provides us with some tips on writing a great first line.

In addition, we're thrilled to feature Rick Incorvia, spreading smiles across the lines, Greta Garland sharing her journey of how she started writing, and insightful interviews with Ahnnika Velazquez, Sebastian DeCastell, and many more creatives.

I extend my deepest gratitude for your unwavering support and for being an indispensable part of The Relatable Voice community. Your presence enriches our journey, making it truly extraordinary. Enjoy the stories in this issue, and let's continue to inspire and uplift one another.

Looking forward to embarking on new adventures together!

Warm regards,

Lucia Matuonto

Lucia Matuonto

Chief Editor and Creator of "The Relatable Voice" podcast & magazine

On the cover: Patrick Greenwood



My mom and I

Highlights



Happy Mother's day

"I am sure that if the mothers of various nations could meet, there would be no more wars."

— E.M. Forster



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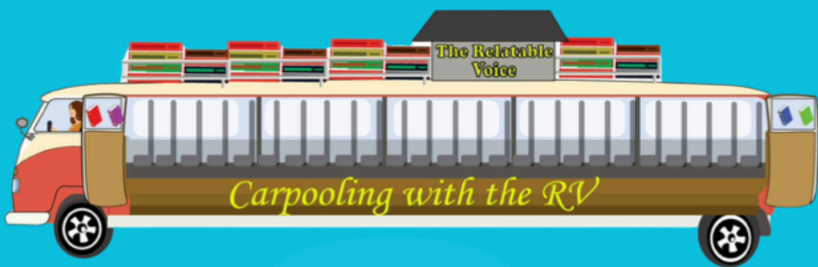
28



32

54

49



Contents

Mother's Day

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY	5
MOTHERHOOD, THE ETERNAL BOND	6
THE DIVINE MOTHER	8
BEING A MOTHER OF TRIPLETS MADE ME A BETTER PERSON AND WRITER	10
HOW TO BUILD REAL PROJECTS INVOLVING YOUR CHILD'S CREATIVITY	12
MY BUNKYFUL MOM	14
DECONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD	16
UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S TANTRUMS "I WANT THAT FIRE TRUCK!"	18
A JOYFUL LIFE AND RESTFUL DEATH.....	20
BEFRIENDING OLD GHOSTS.....	22
AN ENTIRE STORY IN ONE LINE	24
FINDING FLANNEL FRED	26
FROM AUDITIONS TO ADVENTURES.....	28
HOW THE INSPIRED BECOME THE INSPIRATION	30
COVER STORY - PATRICK GREENWOOD.....	32
THE REAL-LIFE HEROES WHO INSPIRED A TRILOGY OF NOVELS	38
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED	40
MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE: A PANDEMIC REFUGEE'S SEARCH FOR HOME	44
BRINGING SMILES ACROSS THE MILES	46
TOW THE LINE: BOUND BY REASON, UNRAVELED BY RAGE	48
INTERVIEW WITH SEBASTIAN DE CASTELL	50
CATCH THE STORY! PODCAST	53
CITY GIRLS INTO THE WILD EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME	54
HOW THREE CONTINENTS INFLUENCE MY WRITING	60
THE EYES BEHIND THE EYES	62
BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS.....	64



A bouquet of several pink roses of various sizes, some in full bloom and some as buds, set against a blue background. To the right, a light blue ceramic cup with a subtle floral pattern is partially visible, containing a dark liquid.

Happy Mother's day

“I am sure that if the mothers of various nations could meet, there would be no more wars.”

— E.M. Forster



MOTHERHOOD, THE ETERNAL BOND

Join Vivien and Neil Schapera of the *The Schapera Show* and *The Schapera Channel*
All Positive, Spiritual Talk Radio, Blogs, Vlogs and Podcasts.

For this year's Mother's Day, Vivien would like to share two very interesting stories from her work, stories about mothers who parent across the veil. Vivien works as a Healing practitioner, and in her work, Vivien receives much guidance from the spirit dimension.

The first story is about Bailey, and his mother, Noella. When Vivien first met Bailey, Noella, was still alive. In a way, this story begins during the pandemic at a time when Vivien was having very little contact with Bailey. Then, Vivien got a message from the spirit dimension to "stay alert" because soon Bailey would be contacting her about Noella, as her time to pass was approaching. This was helpful, because Bailey's method of communicating with Vivien was via a platform Vivien hardly ever checked. Sure enough, within two weeks, Bailey contacted Vivien to say that Noella had had an accident and please could she do some healing. The spirits advised Vivien not to tell Bailey about the inevitable, and foreordained outcome, but just to support Bailey step-by-step, as he accompanied Noella on the final leg of her journey here on earth. During this time, Bailey

would encourage Noella to speak to Vivien, and they would exchange "hello" on the phone, but otherwise, there wasn't much connection.

A couple of years later — actually this year — Bailey asked Vivien to choose a special stone, at the Tucson Gem Show, to connect him and Noella across the veil. By this time, Noella and Vivien had developed a different bond. Noella was an avid gardener and so is Vivien. As a consequence, Noella's spirit had taken to bossing Vivien around in the garden, criticizing some of her choices as too "ordinary," and encouraging her to plant even more annuals. When Noella discovered that she could now join in with crystal shopping, she was beyond delighted, and equally bossy. Noella certainly has an eye for the unique and valuable, and together, Vivien and Noella easily chose a very special Diopase crystal of the right rarity, size and formation to be exactly suitable for Bailey.

Bailey had asked Vivien not to show him the crystal, but just to choose it and send it, and to let it be a surprise. When Bailey opened the box and found the Diopase, he was blown away. Not only is Diopase the perfect heart stone to hold the bond



between mother and son, it is also Bailey's favorite color since childhood — green! There was absolutely no doubt for Bailey, that Noella had chosen the stone to connect them. What a success!

The second story is about Pat, and her mother, Charlotte. Pat has been Vivien's client for many, many years. A few months ago, Vivien noticed a spirit in attendance during Pat's sessions. The spirit claimed to be Pat's mother who had passed when Pat was three and a half months old.

Vivien looked carefully at the spirit's appearance, looking for keynote descriptors, and asked Pat: "Was your mother very short?"

"Oh yes," responded Pat, as the spirit also nodded "yes" at Vivien.

"And other than that, do you look like her, as far as you know?"

"Oh yes," said Pat, "apparently I do."

"Well then, I have your mother here and she wants to contribute to your session. She wants to express how sad she felt to leave you so young, and also to say how proud she is of you at how you have lived your life." Then Charlotte asked me to suffuse Pat



with Kunzite, a heart stone that projects a particularly sweet and loving energy. Of course, this was very touching for all three of us. Now, Charlotte comes at the end of every session, sometimes to say words of encouragement, but always to deliver a "Kunzite kiss" to Pat.

From Noella and Charlotte, and also from her own experience with her late son, Aidan, Vivien has learned that motherhood magnificently transcends the boundaries of life and death, becoming an eternal bond. The bond between mother and child — what a sacred connection!



Vivien is an award-winning teacher, practitioner and writer living in Cincinnati, OH USA. In private practice for over 40 years, she is also the founder of three schools, and the author of numerous blogs, vlogs, and books, including *Everyday Magic* and *The Complete Guide to Crystal Surgery*. For more information, please visit www.CrystalHealingTechniques.com



THE DIVINE MOTHER

Angie Maserati



I have heard people say that life doesn't come with an instruction manual. How could we have one set of instructions for billions of individuals? I believe there is a guide, more like a guiding light and it's example is all around us in nature. I also use the word light here as synonymous with the word love. I believe it flows through us and is our inner compass; making up our emotions and feelings. An intelligence that beats our hearts. A vibration that guides us as we take each step of our individual path. The same vibration that guides the birds

soaring in the sky. With an open and seeking spirit we can more easily tap into the endless flow of energies. When we tap into the power of being curious it will always meet us. When we seek guidance we will always find it. The ethereal all encompassing intelligence, that creates life on our planet holds each of us in love and is willing to provide our every need. I believe what we need and want doesn't even require an utterance to obtain. It only takes a desire based in gratitude. That is the big picture. Let's take it to the now...

I am sitting at my desk with a view of glorious redwood trees. These giants are home to so many creatures the birds the squirrels, insects. No one pays rent for this shelter or had to manufacture anything for it to exist. The nests that are held in its branches made from other freely provided materials. Every need is addressed with out even an ask. Provided without owing the tree or the earth, it is unquestionably a birth right. The energetic animals zip all around seemingly all about play and without a worry for tomorrow. The squirrels amaze me how they will jump between branches with complete confidence. A bird will perch on the



highest point of the highest limb; a perfect place to sing a chorus.

These examples of provisions with out indebtedness, and a trust in the process has been my great teacher as a mother of three. Each child a unique expression of intelligence and light. I love and practice autonomy; "having its own laws". Unconditional love supports the freedom to become who you are and holds your truth with you.

Like the trees bending in the wind, love is flexible and allowing of change. The exempling of flexibility and change comes to the mother before the child even enters the world. The body stretches and provides the perfect warmth. all whilst the rythm of heart beats creates a bond. , The mind is filled with wonder. The home is rearranged and prepared for safety, play, and imagination. There is an excitement in the anticipation like no other experience. Does the divine mother feel this as each of us is born? I like to believe so. If you were born you are meant to be.

Your views on welcoming new life is shaped by your learned perspectives and personal experiences.

This will significantly shape our children's perception of themselves. We are their mirror until they become their own. For example; I used to ponder if practicing the "golden rule" was the answer to world peace. So the saying is "love your neighbor as yourself", or "treat others as you would have them treat you". I found that it has this major loop hole; if you aren't holding your self as a precious being then you won't value others as precious beings; even your own children.

Be love and that will be what your children see in their own reflection and then ripple into the world. If you're not sure what love is, seek it and you will find the guiding light.

I am far from perfect and that has never been an expectation. I lead with love and grace. Like every day on earth I start new with the sunrise. I carry the wisdom from the lessons of yesterday, I hold the intention to create with love in the unfolding moments of today and a dream for tomorrow.

<https://www.angiemaserati.com>



BEING A MOTHER OF TRIPLETS MADE ME A BETTER PERSON AND WRITER

Margaret Izard

The greatest challenge I've faced in my life was raising the triplets. Three at once.

My response was, "God has a sense of humor." I'm no longer afraid of the number three. After the initial shock wore off, my husband and I quickly learned to approach this with the attitude of an adventure.

We had to approach things with creativity and humor.

Hobby Nights were our lifeline amidst the chaos of raising three babies. We both worked full-time jobs and cherished our creative outlets—I danced, and he played music. We scheduled Hobby Nights Monday-Thursday, taking turns caring for the kids while the other pursued their passion. Fridays were for date nights, a simple stroll at the mall followed by burgers and beer at a family-friendly restaurant. Sundays we dedicated to pure relaxation and fun. It was our recipe for sanity, and we still prioritize our hobby time to this day.

With school drop-offs becoming earlier, I aimed to send my kids off with a smile. Inspired by our first date at a comedy club, my husband and I adopted



laughter as a guiding principle. Every morning, I shared a quote from comedians—some rated G, some rated R—as the kids exited the car. One particular quote, despite its colorful language, always left them laughing. A teacher once inquired about the secret behind their daily amusement, prompting a raised eyebrow at my choice of words. Nevertheless, my children started each day with laughter echoing through the school halls.

I've always wanted to write.

I've told stories my whole life, be it dance or acting. It wasn't until I finished tutoring the kids through college that I finally put my foot down and said, "This is it!" Once my family overcame their shock, I wrote my first book, then another, and another. It's those great classics from ballet and theatre training that inspire me. Folk and fairy tales that I put a twist or a spin on creating innovative stories.

The first in my series premiered on March 4, 2024. *Stone of Love*, book 1, *Stones of Iona Series* is a swoon-worthy time-travel romance set in Scotland and an "add it now" for anyone's reading list. *Outlander* readers will clamor for more after reading this one! Discover how a simple magic Fae stone can save the realms as an American scholar starts a new life by renovating a Scottish chapel as a Fae's prophecy sends her through time into the



arms of the modern Scottish Laird, posing as his ancestor who must find a magic Fae stone to bring order to the realms.

What's ahead? I have four paranormal romance books based upon the magic Fae stones from Scotland coming out in 2024 in a series of seven books with three Christmas companion books. Then, another connected series of shapeshifting dragons will soon follow—all written in paranormal romance. Book 2 in the series, *Stone of Fear*, will be released June 12, 2024.

Having triplets taught me endurance and discipline.

Things weren't always picture perfect. Carrying triplets took a toll on my body, leading to a compound injury in my lower back. Post-birth, I faced immense difficulty in regaining abdominal strength, a challenge I continue to grapple with. The day before their birth at 32 weeks gestation, I sat on the edge of my bed, and my belly came out to the

end of my thigh where my knee joint started. I went from 210 to 170 pounds the day the kids were born.

Dancing has been my lifelong passion, encompassing various styles from ballet to tap and gymnastics. However, returning to dance after giving birth to my children and later purchasing a dance/gymnastics studio led to significant challenges. Teaching while battling back pain ultimately resulted in a herniated disc. Despite the initial diagnosis, I persisted in teaching until the disc nearly collapsed. To address the issue, I underwent a full fusion of L4&L5, involving the removal of vertebrae and its replacement with bone matter, reinforced with pins and screws. As a result, I have a four-inch restricted area that doesn't allow me to twist or I'll shout! Nonetheless, I can still engage in most ballet exercises and walk and run."

The laughter saw us through the good, bad, and ugly times. It wasn't always a piece of cake. But when we had cake, we ate our piece and laughed. I always say we celebrate the good. We cope with the bad. The ugly; we make fun of that!

What have my triplets taught me?

No matter what anyone says, no matter how anyone judges you or tries to tell you, you can't. *Ignore them.* Obstacles create sizable goals. Overcoming those goals creates character. Don't ever think you can't because, with a little initiative and humor, you can.

I have a positive outlook on life, but I think that comes with coping with a lot of adversity. How we manage and deal with challenges defines us as people. This is the primary message in my books. No matter how much evil might try to take the good from us, an honest heart, belief in yourself, and a little laughter along the way, you can overcome the greatest of odds and find a happily ever after.

www.margaretizardauthor.com

IG: [@mizardauthor](https://www.instagram.com/mizardauthor)



HOW TO BUILD REAL PROJECTS INVOLVING YOUR CHILD'S CREATIVITY

Claudia Marta

As a mother, I've experienced the profound joy of watching my daughter, Sonia Marta, blossom into a changemaker, award-winning author, podcaster, and leader. Our journey together has been a collage of shared experiences, where my role has been nurturing her dreams and actively supporting and collaborating with her on everything she wanted to do, even from the moment she started to talk. I was so happy when I discovered I would have a child, and I wanted to offer her my unconditional love and support from the first second. I am grateful I found the time to build our relationship and a career at the same time.

I enjoyed and cherished every moment, from singing lullabies to playing with sand, running, dressing, and undressing dolls. I am very childish and playful; she loved that, and her friends too, and usually, her colleagues would come to us to spend super fun weekends. Travelling often for my job, I would bring back picture books and toys from each trip, sparking conversations about the places I visited and igniting a desire to read, discover, and expand her horizons. These moments laid the foundation for her creative journey and instilled a

passion for storytelling. A fond memory is when she took a book and, for the first time, said, "Now it is the time for me to read the story, and you listen!" even though she was not at the age of reading. But she memorised the story as we read it so many times and followed the images, reading out loud very seriously.

My support for Sonia's dreams didn't stop at bedtime stories; it extended to actively listening to her aspirations and working alongside her to turn them into reality. From when Sonia was very young, I fostered her curiosity and love for learning, testing with different games, toys, and sports, playing with various musical instruments, or attending theatre, ballet, or concerts. As any child, she loved exploring multiple extracurricular activities, from science labs, to painting, drama, dancing, playing piano, creative writing, sports and many others. When Sonia expressed her desire to become a published author and share her stories with children, I immediately embraced the opportunity to learn about publishing, writing, and marketing. Our collaboration wasn't just about launching books but nurturing her creativity in an environment where her ideas could flourish



organically. I worked with her as I worked with my clients, listening attentively to what she wanted to achieve. I was taking notes and brainstorming, so I checked with her what are the next steps we would focus on. Of course, as these were her projects!

We were thrilled about every single message, email, and feedback she received on the way, as Sonia's literary projects, from "The Rapping Astronaut" to "Women Leading the Way," gained acclaim and inspired readers worldwide. I remember reading every review on Amazon out loud or every comment on Instagram; we were so happy to see the story's impact on a family in a faraway country. Our journey together has shaped Sonia's path and brought us closer, creating cherished memories and moments of growth we couldn't have foreseen six years ago when the first book was released.

I work for Alcott Global, and the "From Source to Sold" book launch, a project I coordinated, became a #1 Amazon Bestseller. I had the opportunity to acquire new skills to navigate the dynamic landscapes of publishing, PR, and marketing at a global level. Interestingly, I landed this role based on my passion for books, my editorial projects with Sonia, my love for reading, and my mindset for growth and personal development.

That is why encouraging Sonia to explore diverse genres and themes came naturally. Our house is full of books, which has enriched her perspective and sparked creativity and critical thinking. I encourage every parent to foster a love for reading and discussion, as it enriches our lives and strengthens family bonds. I remember that every weekend before going to the park or a restaurant, we used to buy a book on the way, to avoid being trapped, to give my phone and play until the food arrived, and we had a nice chat about it. We still do it. I read books she recommends, and she reads something I suggest, and we talk about them and love the conversations we have. Sonia now quips, "When I move to university, I won't take much with me, except for my beloved books! It is not just about the books, but also about the memories they unfold".

One of the most rewarding aspects has been witnessing Sonia's love for trying things out. Besides writing, she experimented with podcasting, loves drama and has a few leading roles in school

plays. She also did a series of videos for school projects for her YouTube channel, she was having a blast in London last year, where she was recognised for her educational efforts with Silver for the Young Women Changing the World Award and had the opportunity to participate to the launch of Women Leading the Way Book at the London Book Fair. She needed to play with various programs for all projects, so we supported her and encouraged her to use Filmora, Adobe Suite, or Canva to create layouts and videos. She also needed some devices. But she studied what was available and had particular requests. Considering the required features and costs, she had to do the work and see what suited her. This helped us first have a conversation about projects and budget management, as well as understand and clarify the expected result to see what we need.

As we celebrate Mother's Day and honour the resilience and tenderness of mothers worldwide, I'm reminded of the immeasurable impact of a mother's love on a child's journey to success. It's a celebration of achievements, shared dreams, and the unwavering belief in our children's limitless potential.

Our story is a testament to the transformative power of nurturing creativity and fostering resilience in our children. It's a journey of collaboration, inspiration, and mutual growth, where each milestone is a testament to the bond between a mother and her child.

I invite you to join us on our continued journey of exploration and collaboration at the upcoming Pen to Paper Writing and Personal Branding Retreat, scheduled for July 8-12 in Mallorca. This retreat promises to be a transformative experience, offering insights, connections, and tools to unlock your creative potential and shape your brand. For more details and registration, visit www.soniamarta.com and embark with us on a journey of discovery and collaboration.

Here's to mothers everywhere: Thank you for your enduring love, unwavering belief, and the inspiration you provide to nurture dreams and empower future generations.

<https://www.soniamarta.com/>



MY BUNKYFUL MOM

Aleksandra Tryniecka



believe that my interest in creating and sewing plush literary characters and their clothes stems from my Mum's passion. Talking about literary characters, it's vital to state that my Mum is constantly rooting for Bunky who is very present in her life. Just like the Bunky Princess, she adores flowers and gardening. The Bunkyland scene from the trailer dedicated to "Bunky and Walms" was actually recorded in the garden among my Mum's flowers – they perfectly represented the idea of the Bunky Princess's fairyland. In her daily life, my Mum is a music teacher. She always highlights the joy and importance of working with other people, pointing out that seeing her students in the classroom makes her feel happy and young at heart. Her positive attitude taught me that work becomes a hobby and pure joy when performed with genuine love and involvement. She is an avid reader too, especially delighting in biographies, but also sharing my interest in Wilkie Collins' and Anthony Trollope's novels. Our favourite books are "The Chronicles of Narnia" series, and we also share

One of my Mum's favourite childhood heroines is Cat Ballou from the 1965 movie with the same title. Cat Ballou is brave, independent, noble, intrepid, assertive and beautiful. Even though in the movie she often rides a horse through a prairie and courageously challenges the most fearsome individuals in the West, she also possesses an exquisite taste in fashion, a deep sense of refinement and fondness for books and art. My Mum Anna is like Cat Ballou. Just like Cat, she would also design and sew her own dresses and, later on, she would sew plush toys for me as well. Each of the plush toys my Mum created would have their own sets of clothes for different occasions and celebrations – also made by my Mum. Thus, I

the same favourite movie: "Midnight in Paris". My Mum also possesses a great imagination, and a passion for travelling and discovering new places in Cat Ballou's spirit. Before each travel, my Mum would carefully study guidebooks and memoirs connected with a particular place, what later during a trip would turn her into a tour guide and a historian. While travelling, my Mum always knows where to locate the north, south, east and west without resorting to the internet or any additional clues. She instilled in me a deep sense of independence and the conviction that, through hard work, persistence and honesty, I will be able to reach for my goals and dreams and share them with others. We would be reading and writing together



since I was three, what undoubtedly helped me to make a conscious choice at the age of five to become a writer. Moreover, my Mum loves animals, and we are both huge fans of our beloved dog Yogi. She is to me like aunt Walm is to Bunky in “Bunky

and the Walms”, and the readers who read my novel know exactly what I mean.

<https://www.aleksandratriyniecka.com/>



DECONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD

Richard P. Hsung

After my mother passed away, I spent the next ten years completing the memoir she had been working on, *Spring Flower*, which Earnshaw Books published in three volumes. This arduous writing journey took such a toll on me that I decided to retire from my teaching career to complete it. Because of this, people assume my mother and I were close. But sadly, we weren't. Our primary connection, a fragile one, was that we were immigrants from China in a new world. My mother never showed me much warmth. She was a perfectionist, and the few times she did lighten up, I felt more anxious than loved.

My mother held me to the loftiest and, to me, unreasonable standards. I respected her, as she had a brilliant and disciplined mind. But I also feared her. Researching old letters, family stories, and my own and others' memories to complete the memoir, I learned that she was often the opposite toward others from the way she treated me. She could be warm and generous with her medical patients, colleagues, neighbors, and friends. To others, she was a devoted Christian and a beautiful human being. Reflecting on this while immersed in her life story, I realized she, too, was afraid of many things, having lived through floods, famines, and persecutions. She simply longed for love, as we all do.

The most poignant insight I had was that my life has mirrored hers. She was born in 1931 during the Yangtze River flood, one of the deadliest natural disasters of the twentieth century, killing more than four million people from drowning and later from infectious diseases and starvation. I was born at the onset of Chairman Mao's Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a catastrophic human-made disaster that destroyed generations of Chinese people. My mother escaped poverty when the kindest American medical missionary couple adopted her, and decades later my sister and I were raised mostly by our rough-and-tumble though loving neighbors, while my mother worked long hours as an eye doctor at hospitals in Shanghai and Hangzhou.

When my mother was 14, Japan occupied China, and as the daughter of Americans, the family fled to



the U.S. and lived in Yonkers, New York. Then at the end of World War II, my mother was whisked from Nathaniel Hawthorne Junior High, where she'd learned American ways, and taken back to China, taking a year en route to attend school in India. When I was 14, I was yanked out of a junior high classroom in Hangzhou on a spring day and put on a flight to Tokyo and then New York. Neither of our classmates knew what had happened to us. My mother did not want to leave America after the war, and leaving China was not my choice either.

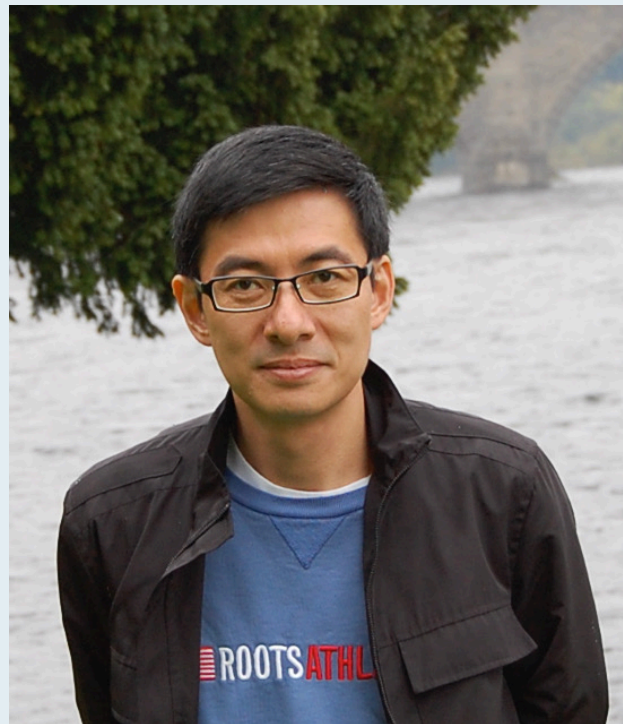
My mother taught me about baseball. She loved the Yankees and had gone to a few games at Yankee Stadium with her father in the 1940s. Baseball became my passion, too, and after we settled in Boston, I chose to root for the Red Sox, a perennial loser, probably to spite her. In 2004, my mother's first year living in a nursing home, we watched the



Red Sox play the Yankees together. It was the last time she was sound-minded enough to cheer at fitting moments. That fall, Boston beat her beloved team and lifted the “Curse of the Bambino.”

Ten years later, I promised her I’d work on her memoir. While that promise was from my heart, I never felt confident I could see it through. But over time, I’ve come to realize that, in fact, my life’s purpose has always been to get to know my mother through completing her memoir. She had created a manuscript of over a thousand pages, and I took the writing she’d done, read correspondence, interviewed people from her era, and used my imagination and memories to create the mortar to connect the bricks. Working on her life story, although an immense burden, became a transformational journey to help me know her humanness and rediscover myself. I understood that the wounds I carry are intergenerational, and only by knowing hers could I accept mine. And I discovered my strength and resilience in seeing this enormous task through. I still occasionally hear her scolding me for my imperfections, but I know in my heart that I did my best. In fact, this has been the most significant accomplishment of my life.

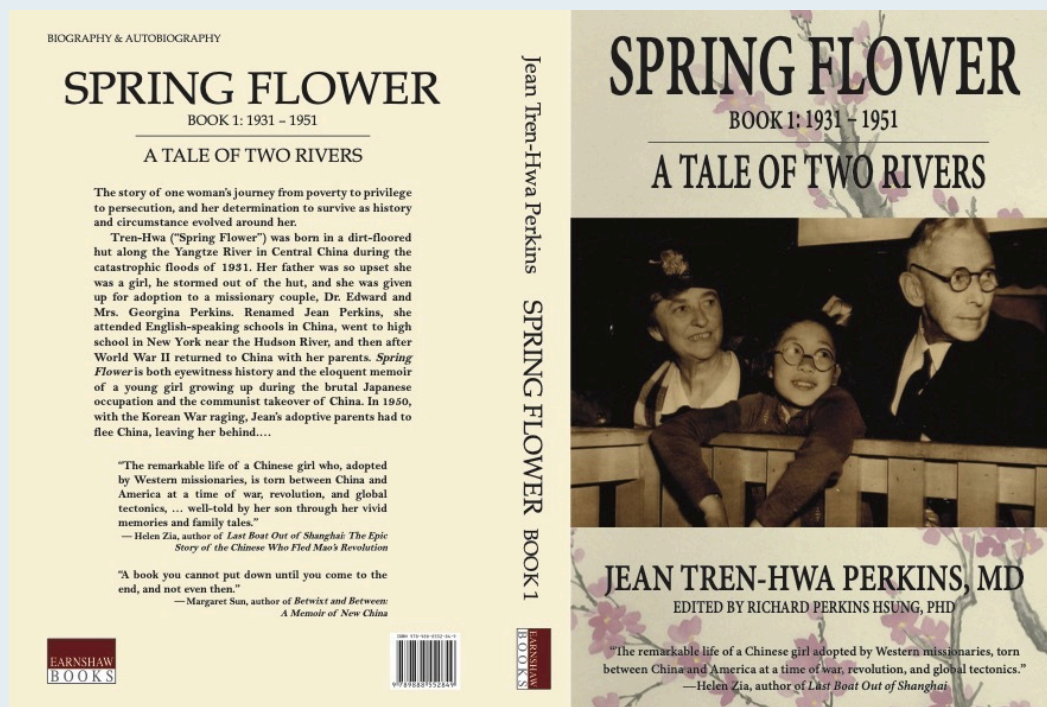
Seeing our connection on a soul level this way helped me realize who we both are. And getting a larger picture of her life and not just as her



son, I can say we are, at last, close. I hope she will finally be proud of me.

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/richard-perkins-hsung-2378752ab

Website: <https://www.yangtzeriverbythehudsonbay.site/home-page.html>



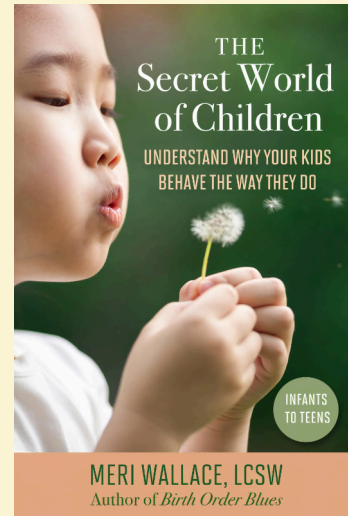
UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S TANTRUMS "I WANT THAT FIRE TRUCK!"

Merri Wallace

You are walking through a toy store with your three-year-old little boy. Within only a short time, he spots a shiny new fire engine, falls in love with it and pleads for you to buy it for him. The minute you say no, your child begins to spiral out of control. When children want something really badly and you won't give it to them, they begin to tantrum and will hit, kick and even throw themselves on the ground. In essence, they are expressing their anger with their body. This happens because young children do not have the language skills to express their wishes and needs in words.

If you think about it, this behavior actually begins in infancy. A baby who wakes up hungry will show his frustration by thrashing his arms and legs around and screaming and crying. To the baby it's truly life and death for him to be fed, so his need is urgent. As children grow, this sense of urgency is transferred to anything children want.

We even see this behavior even with older children. An eight-year-old may cry and punch his brother when his sibling won't give him a turn to play a computer game, and a teen may slam the door and shout, "I hate you," when you refuse to let her go to the mall.



It takes time for children to learn to express themselves positively. Parents need to teach their children to use words to express their feelings. They also need to help their children to control their angry impulses. This takes a long time because for the child it's like stopping a runaway train.

Here are some steps you can take if your child is having a tantrum.

-- Acknowledge your child's wish. It is extremely helpful to repeat your child's wish aloud. You might say, "I can see that you really want that fire truck." When you do, your child feels that he is heard and you understand him. Once his wish is duly noted he may find less of a need to keep protesting.

-- Set a limit. It's important to accept a child's anger while teaching him how to express himself in a positive way. For instance, tell him, "It's okay to feel angry, but we don't hit, kick or hurt anybody in the family. You need to use words." Children often don't have the words to express themselves, so it's helpful to teach them phrases to use, for instance, "I feel very angry," or "I really wanted that new tennis racket."

-- Explain your reason for saying no. If he's asking for ice cream and it's near dinner time, you can say, "You can't have any ice cream right now. We're going to have dinner, and you will have no room in your tummy for the healthy meal I prepared." The



more logical the reason is the more easily your child will accept it.

-- Encourage your child to communicate. If your child starts screaming, it's best to intervene quickly. Say, "I can see you're upset, and I want to help you. If you use words, I'll understand you better." If he's lying on the floor in the supermarket, take his hand gently and suggest that he sit on your lap and you will talk about it.

-- Keep a wish list on your phone. Many parents find that adding your child's desire to your phone, calms a child down and gives him hope that he may indeed have his wish come true. You can add, "Maybe we'll get this for you on your birthday or on the holiday."

-- Slow down your response. It's very helpful not to immediately say no when your child asks for something. For instance, if he asks whether he can

go to a party, you might say, "Let's see. You want to go to Sam's party on the weekend. I have to think about it."

-- Set some expectations. Before you leave for a shopping trip, you might set the rules in an effort to prevent any tantrums. For instance, you can say, "We are going out today to buy your friend a birthday gift. I am not going to buy you any new toys today because I bought you a new baseball mitt yesterday." When you're out, if your child asks for something you can refer to the rule you made. Planning ahead in advance can cut down on tantrums.

-- Be patient. As you repeat your limits and provide your child with support, he will ultimately internalize your words and begin to negotiate with you through positive communication.

www.MeriWallace.com



A JOYFUL LIFE AND RESTFUL DEATH

Frank Wayne Mottl

'Mother's Keep' was inspired by my Granny who lived in the forest in Gibson's Landing during the depression years. Granny and Grandad settled on ten acres of land—Regina Ranch. They had a cow, a vegetable garden, and lots of chickens, as well as a bull. I titled the book, 'Mother's Keep' because Granny never wanted to live anywhere else. She loved her forest. It was her keep.

"If you have a bit of land you can always make ends meet," she told me.

But there is much more to the story. You see, Granny was set in her ways, and wondered if the



world was headed in the right direction. I remember she told me a story, an article she read in the newspaper, about an educated man who turned his back on the university to live a simple life in a teepee in the forest. She understood this man's need to escape academia and society. This story became part of the book.

Granny continued to live in her beloved forest by herself after all her daughters (one of which was my mom) had left home, married, and Grandad had passed on. I remember visiting Granny as a little boy. The lane down to Granny's home was difficult to find because of the encroaching bramble that scraped the side of our 58 Ford.

Her little home, styled with a babbling brook that ran heavier in winter, vacant in summer, with a

rickety footbridge over, was small and humble, but she loved it. A big wood cook stove in the kitchen (where the whole family would gather for roast beef-yorkshire pudding dinners, and porridge breakfasts), a parlor with a little black and white TV, and three bedrooms off the back of the house. She refused to leave her little home until she was in her 80s. She had no running water, and no electricity until Uncle Chuck (who was an electrician) brought down a scrawny wire from the telephone pole on the highway!

As a child, I remember hauling water from the spring fed well further in the bush behind her home (two galvanized pails full, one in each hand), and remembering to only draw water from the left well because the other, further down to the right, was polluted when the cow fell into it!

They were magical places, full of crystal clear water, long wet dewy cow grass lined the trail, and a large trout which my mother had, with her sister's help, put in the well. That trout lived many years in the well, and became part of this wonderful story.

Granny made lye soap, clothing for her daughters made of flour sacks which were soft and comfortable. I recall, when Uncle Chuck and Uncle Ron put in a little electric pump for water from outside the pantry. Uncle Ron showed Granny that she now had running water in the pantry!

Granny said, "What do I need that thing for!"

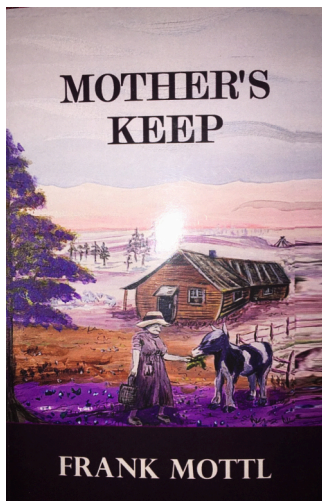
She told Uncle Ron to remove the pump.

She used to knit socks for everyone for Christmas, and was a Christian woman, like my mom, and had a great appetite for giving things to needy people.

My mother, Mary Mottl, instilled this same generosity in her life, starting the food bank in Cumberland, keeping the United Church running when people thought ministers couldn't be gay.

The minister told me, "Your mom took this whole church, congregation and all on her back, and





carried us all through the bad times when many were leaving the church.”

‘Mother’s Keep’ is fictionalized. Instead of four daughters, three daughters and one son, as well, it is a ‘combo’ book of prose and poetry with a poem preceding each chapter. Each poem gives a subtle hint about what may be coming up in the chapter. I believe poetry gives readers another doorway with which to access the story.

‘Mother’s Keep’ is narrated by the ghost of the lone brother whose mission is to save her sister from purgatory. Within this general theme of forgiveness, we find, by the end of the story, that life is worth living in shared commonality with others.

The story has many conflicts, between characters, between belief systems, between rich and poor environments, and the natural world of the forest, for the whole story takes place in and around the Granny’s small, humble home. It is a wonderful spell of story, truth fictionalized, with a heavy dose of ‘magic realism’.

The story pulls the reader along as they encounter dream worlds, life, death, animals, people, the young, and the old. It is a beautiful story presenting the solemn truth of what the world offers, and, like mothers everywhere, filled with the love of family; moreover, love for mankind.

‘Mother’s Keep’ was a story I had to write. It is a gift to all who read it, and is one author’s portrait of a good life.

<https://www.frankwayne.net>

Frank enjoys writing prose and poetry. He believes that a good base in poetry significantly improves the writing of prose. His debut novel, “The Cumberland Tales”, and his second, “Mother’s Keep”, are ‘combos’ of prose and poetry. “The Cumberland Tales” was inspired by a fellow named Sam Yik. He was an elderly Chinese gentleman, mystic, gardener who my mother bought vegetables from. “Mother’s Keep”, on the other hand, was inspired by my Granny who lived in Gibsons during the depression years. Both have strong elements of ‘magic realism’. “Cumberland Gold” is a murder/thriller/puzzler filled with sub-plots:

Not a regular reader of fiction I hesitated on reading ‘Cumberland Gold’. But the story set in this small Vancouver Island community intrigued me enough to take a closer look. I found a story of an earlier time when coal and gold were king and Chinese labour was imported to do the dangerous dirty mining work. Homeland Chinese history, politics, greed, gold, and death dance across the page to a final crescendo. With spaced lines and larger than normal print it is easy to read. Thank-you Mr. Mottl, Bob Wilson.

Frank has been published by the Poetry Institute of Canada numerous times for his poetry and prose. He was awarded ‘Excellence in Poetry’ from the same institute in 2017. His work has also been included in anthologies in the U.S., Australia, Canada, U.K., and China.



BEFRIENDING OLD GHOSTS

Samantha Atzeni

What's it like to be haunted by a story for twenty years? In theory it should be a story that was so life-changing or so traumatic that it would be a challenge to forget. Does a short story about customer service fit any of these categories? I guess that remains to be seen.

The original version of *The Legend of Dave Bradley* was born in a dorm room for a college fiction workshop. The assignment was standard fare for emerging writers: write what you know. That's easy, I said to myself. So easy, in fact, that I didn't get started right away and had to write the story twelve hours before it was due. Luckily, I finished the twenty page story with two hours to spare, learning nothing about the importance of time management and its benefits for writers.

Since I figured what I wrote was brilliant the first time, youthful arrogance prevented me from revising. In the original version, *The Legend of Dave Bradley* focused more on a main character very similar to myself ("write what you know!") and included many witty quips that I would never say in real life, but the fictional version of myself had at the ready. I also took a lot of cheap shots at Dave Bradley, a fictional customer with attributes I feared the most: never making it out of my small Jersey shore town, stuck in a loop of the same bad habits, and, naturally, being considered super annoying by the people who knew me well. I also sprinkled in a lot of weird popular culture references because I thought it made me sound worldly.

Since we all wrote similar types of stories, my short story was well received by my peers. At this time, we feared constructive criticism because 1) we didn't want it used on us and 2) we

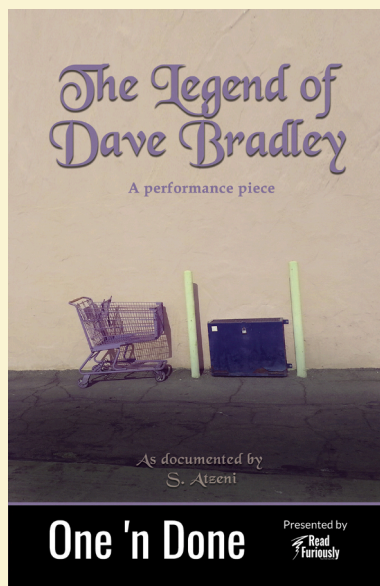
didn't want to hurt each other's feelings. As a result, my story received the usual "It's really good!" and, my personal favorite, "I can't wait to read more!" My writing professor was less accommodating. "This could be something," he said to me. "You just have to figure out what it is."

I got an A on the assignment; of course, I interpreted this to mean revision definitely wasn't needed. Also, if I was being honest with myself (and I wasn't), revising a story terrified me. To combat this fear, I kept filling notebooks and Word docs with stories that were complete, but could be something.

I never forgot *The Legend of Dave Bradley*. It was a story that became my own cinematic universe. I referenced it in other short stories. It was my go-to read for open mic nights. When we launched our "read in one sitting" One 'n Done series, *The Legend of Dave Bradley* reappeared. Since the series was considered "short and sweet," I chose to keep the story as is - why ruin a good thing? Why ruin the dialogue that received "great work!" notes from my fiction workshop peers and an A from my instructor? Why ruin jokes born in the early aughts that made people laugh uproariously?

When we evolved our One 'n Done series there I was, yet again, rereading *The Legend of Dave Bradley*. Only now every part of the story felt like a glaring red flag. Twenty years ago, I was a student who wanted to be a writer. Twenty years later, I'm a writer, publisher, writing professor, and semi-adult. Looking through this lens was jarring. Those early aught jokes felt contrite, the story wasn't so clever, and the standard short narrative form didn't support the real story. I had a hard time admitting that Dave Bradley and his fictional cohorts felt dated and immature. Just like the landscape around the local grocery store where I once worked had evolved, it was time for the story to make those changes too.

So I wrote. I took out the jokes that are only funny to obnoxious twenty-year-olds. I filled in the gaps that felt subtle and clever at the time, but are now just glaring plot holes. I decided the narrator didn't need to be a version of me. Instead, I played around with form, style, and point of view to create funny moments that stood out because they felt genuine - not because I needed peer validation in the form of laughter at a fiction workshop. I pulled out the pieces that were based on fact and gave myself permission to have fun with the gorgeous mess that comes with writing fiction. It took me an entire year, but I finally got *The Legend of Dave Bradley* where it needed to be.



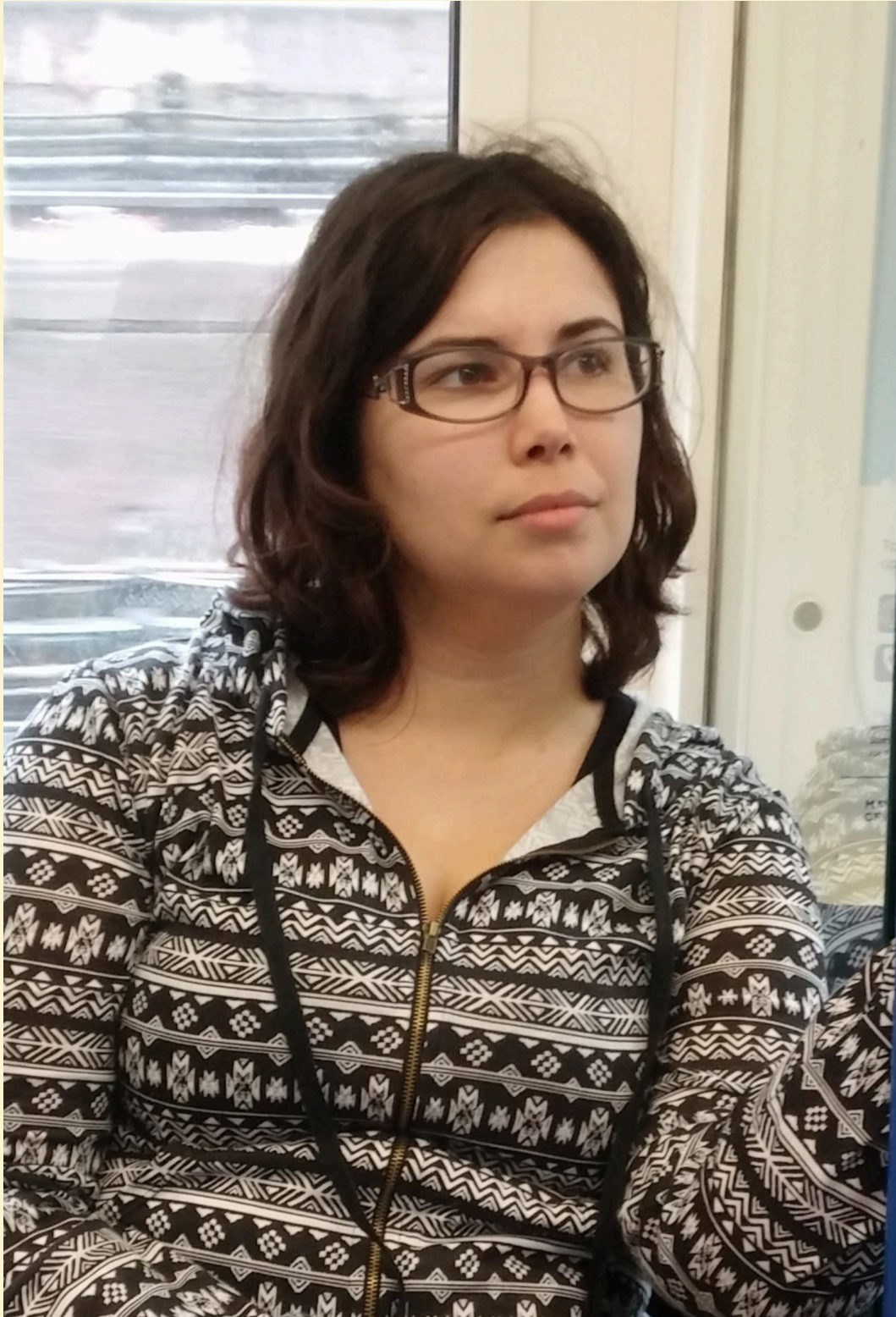
Unlike other revising sessions, this one felt personal rather than methodical. I took the time to celebrate the college student who really wanted to write and to share stories with an audience. I also took the time to honor my college writing professors who encouraged me so that I kept writing and then inspired me to teach students how to write. Now, this story is something. I just needed to do what no one in the first version of my story ever did: take Dave Bradley seriously.

That's how I found myself, twenty years later, saying goodbye to my old writing ghosts. It's time for me, and them, to move on.

Author Instagram: @smatzeni

Publisher Instagram: @readfuriously

Website: <https://readfuriously.com>



AN ENTIRE STORY IN ONE LINE

Douglas Weissman

The first line tells your entire story.

The first paragraph offers a glimpse into story structure. The first chapter acts as echo of the story's ending.

This is probably me overthinking how to write a novel but it's the process I go through. I line up the first line and the last line; I line up the first paragraph and the last paragraph. I line up the first chapter and the last chapter. If they don't work together, something has to change. But it all starts with making sure it's the right first line.

Every writer knows the weight carried by the first line of a novel. It's practically gospel that the first line needs to be perfect. I paraphrase Jhumpa Lahiri who said, along the lines of, "writing is agonizing over the sentence."

Will the first line break make or break my story? In reality, no. But it can send subconscious messages to the reader about the story's meaning, its texture, its voice, and how the story will unfold. A well-crafted first line possesses an undeniable power – the power to hook audiences and set the stage for the entire reading experience to come.

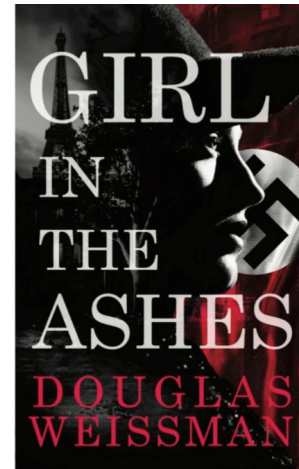
Here is the first line of my latest novel *Girl in the Ashes*:

"Mr. Maraud was naked and strapped to the table."

At its core, the first line serves one critical purpose: I make a promise and establish the reader's trust I will deliver on that promise. It must forge an instant emotional connection, planting the seeds of intrigue, mystery, or curiosity that compel the audience to continue reading. Simultaneously, an effective first line introduces vital story elements like character, setting, and tone, grounding the reader in the narrative world from that very first breath.

The most gripping examples of a first line demonstrate how to artfully blend several key ingredients:

Atmosphere - careful word choice that transports audiences to another time and place through mood and tone alone



Character - whether hero or antihero, character must be introduced early to anchor the audience's journey.

Intrigue - the first line can raise tantalizing questions that beg to be answered.

Language – word choice be alluring if you use evocative phrasing to invoke the reader's imagination.

Grounding - settle us in the space and time of the story's world without giving too much away, providing just a taste of what's to come.

Sex sells but intimacy creates devotion. The hook of the first line is not a cheap trick that doesn't deliver on its promise. It's showing skin on a first date but each following line creates the needed connection to character and story that deliver on the initial promise. If your first line betrays that trust by failing to captivate your audience, you may lose the reader before your story has a chance to unfold.

The first line casts a long shadow over any piece of great story. I was once told that if you take a person on an adventurous or creative first date, they will forever associate you with adventure or creativity. That is the same for a first line. It shapes the reader's perception of the story to come, knowingly or not, and can encourage them to continue into unexplored territory. You have read the first line of *Girl in the Ashes* but you can see if the first paragraph—and the first chapter—continue living up to the promises I make as you read beyond Mr. Maraud naked and strapped to the table.





FINDING FLANNEL FRED

Marcy Marine Back

“How did you come up with this story?” This is the question I always get when people hear about my book. I am a retired 2nd grade elementary school teacher of 28 years and writing a children’s picture book was never on my bucket list. I estimated that I’ve taught over 500 students in my career, and out of those 500, I always think back to those few who always stick out in my memory: the ones who seemed a little different from their peers; the ones who had experienced situations their peers had not; the ones who were sometimes sad or distracted; the ones who needed more from me than just a good education; the ones who I “wish I had a book for that” kind of kid.

So, to answer the question, I wanted to write a book that I wish I would’ve had while I was teaching. I always wished for a book for comfort and support, a book kids could identify with, a book that encouraged kids to accept differences, and a book about a tough topic, grief.

The idea for my book, which I named *Flannel Fred*, began to take shape rather quickly. My main character Fred was not based on one student from the past but more of a combination of them. Even though Fred was going to be dealing with grief, I also wanted him to have a character trait of resilience as well. He would still get up every day and try his best. I wanted to show kids that even though you might experience something hard that it doesn’t have to devour you. I wanted them to see that Fred isn’t throwing fits, bawled up in a corner, or taking out his sadness on others. I also wanted a character that would show empathy and kindness to Fred. My character Jack was also a combination of kids who embodied these traits.

After a lot of research, I came across Palmetto Publishing Company to help self-publish my book. Palmetto partnered me with a talented illustrator, Deb Johnson, who brought my Fred to life. I’ll never forget the moment I received the sketches and after seeing him for the first time saying, “Well hello Fred.”



My book was finally published in November 2022. In a brief description, *Flannel Fred* is about a young boy dealing with the grief of losing his father. He carries a red flannel shirt to school to keep his father’s memory close to him. Fred is looked at differently by his peers and often plays alone. He is finally asked by another classmate, Jack, about the flannel shirt. After learning the truth about Fred, Jack hatches a plan to let others know why he carries the flannel and let Fred know he is cared about. My hope for this book is not only that it would help children deal with grief, but also encourage children to show empathy and kindness to others.

I am also often asked, “How is the selling of your book going?” I knew going into this, it was never about making money. I have sold some books and donated many books too. I have given some books to be used at our local Hospice House, and my book has been given at funeral homes to those who have lost a loved one. What I didn’t expect was the comfort Fred’s story has brought to adults as well. I also love being invited into classrooms to share Fred with students. I am always amazed at the great conversations about dealing with grief, having empathy, and showing kindness the book produces. Before I leave the classroom, I always tell them what I hope they do after hearing the story; if you see someone sad or playing alone talk to them,



always try to imagine what someone else is feeling, and look for ways to be kind throughout your day. My book is a tiny fish in an ocean of children's books, but I hope it finds its way into any hands that need it.

I am so proud to say I am an author. The moment I held my book in my hands was in a word, epic! I am

so honored to tell Fred's story. It is an accomplishment that can never be taken away from me. I know there are scoffers when it comes to self-publishing - that anyone can do it; but, if you love your story and feel it can be a benefit to someone, that is all that matters. Write it!

Instagram [@flannelfredbook](https://www.instagram.com/flannelfredbook)



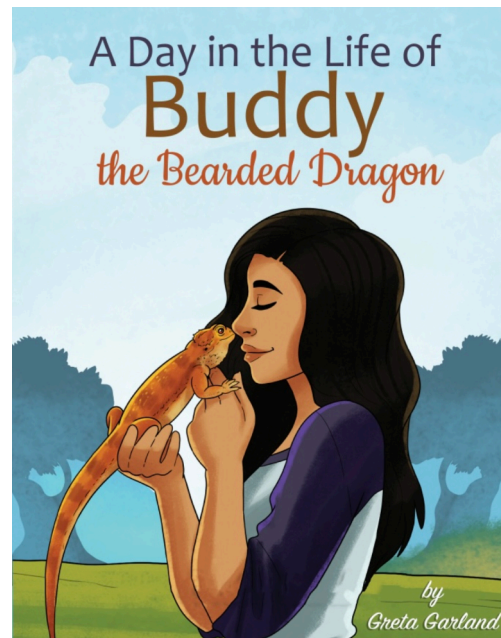
FROM AUDITIONS TO ADVENTURES

How a struggling actress & bartender became a children's book author

Greta Garland

I bet you have some questions about the actress and bartender part since this is supposed to be about a children's book author! Well, I am here to answer them for you. But firstly I'd like to preface this story by letting you know I had no clue I would EVER write children's books, or even be around children. I thought it wasn't for me. But here we are, 5 in a half years later into my early childhood education career and about to publish my second children's book.

Now for the fun stuff! Yes, I was a bartender for 6 years, at that Hooters Restaurant! Maybe you've heard of it? Truthfully speaking it was the greatest 6 years of my life. But, suffice to say, I was nearing my 30s and felt like my cup was very empty. Wearing those little orange shorts and constantly being rejected from parts I was auditioning for was starting to take its toll. Lets take it back really quickly to 2002 when I started my acting career being classically trained in Shakespeare. My



mother was a costumer for the theater and growing up I was ALWAYS in theaters. Running a muck with all my parents thespian friends was something I did on the reg. It was an incredibly fun childhood. Fast forward to 2015, I am graduating with my BA Degree in Performing Arts (yes while still bartending at Hooters) and I feel as if I am on top of the world!

Being creative is something that has been permanently etched into my DNA and I feel like I have been clawing like a cat trying scratch that creative "itch" that I haven't been able fulfill. I feel as though every single fiber of my body was telling me that I needed to stick to acting and bartending because that is what I thought I should do, even though years of both of those left me feeling empty. In 2018 Hooters shut down without notice and we all lost our jobs. It was a devastating loss but the BIGGEST blessing I could have ever asked for. Why? Because the place I ended up working at right afterwards was where I met my now fiancé. See? Everything happens for a reason!

Another year later in 2019, my best friend called me asked if I wanted to take a job as a preschool aid. I remembered how much fun I had working for this foreign exchange program for a couple summers,



and knew deep down how badly I wanted to stop bartending and acting. I needed something steady and I wanted to feel like I was making a difference in the world. So I accepted the position and sent myself back to college. 2 years later I obtained a double degree in Early childhood education and development. Its been an incredible journey thus far and feel like everything in my life has led me to now.

Now for the children's book part. Thanks for being patient with me! For years I had a bearded dragon named Buddy and he was my soul animal. We had an understanding about each other's existence and we lived a short, but beautiful life together. I shared him with an old boyfriend and when we broke up he decided it was best to keep Buddy. I was naturally heartbroken over losing Buddy, but that's life. You keep going. A couple years into my early childhood career, I received news that Buddy had died in his sleep. I was shattered to say the least. I knew I needed to tell our story. One day when I was driving home I thought "Buddy the Bearded Dragon. OH MY GOSH. I need to write a children's book about our life together." No seriously, I said that out loud in the car. I mean, as a preschool teacher half my day was reading children's books.

I thought to myself "how hard is it to write and publish a children's book?". HA! Little did I know the entire process would take an entire year. I researched for MONTHS on how to do it and even held a crowd funding campaign on that website Indiegogo to help with costs. I raised the money within a week with the help of friends and family. Truth be told, I have never been happier in my entire life. These books

have given me purpose. Talking to people about it also made me realize how many people aspire to write children's books. I always hear "Oh my, I've always wanted to write one I have so many good ideas." Well let me tell you something: write that children's book. I beg of you. It has changed my life for the better. Remember that creative "itch" I was talking about earlier that I couldn't quite scratch? Well, this book series has taken care of that permanently.

<https://www.instagram.com/buddythebeardeddragonbook/>



HOW THE INSPIRED BECOME THE INSPIRATION

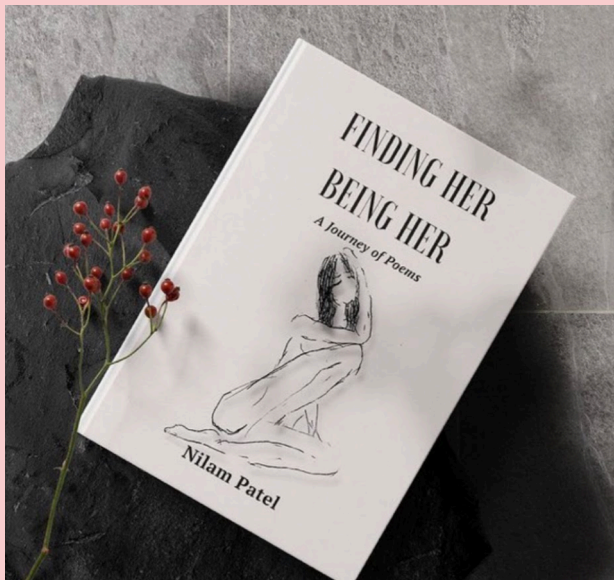
Nilam Patel

Growing up, expressing feelings and facing emotions head on was never something that I was taught to do. We never said I love you or it is okay to cry. Instead, we were expected to know that we were loved and know how to get over it. It was all that had always been practiced, taught and seen by previous generations of my family.

When my strongest form of grief, loss and heartache washed over me, I felt nothing but

confusion, loneliness and guilt. I could not understand why I was unable to get over my feelings and be who I had always been taught to be. I fell into a form of depression that most do not realize they are even in until they learn what living really is. I had a job, I was a mom and wife, I had a home and was responsible. I cared for my family and did my duties only to forget myself along the way. Only to ignore grief and put it away in a locked box thinking that was enough.





5 years later, I was a mom of 2 and had secured my dream job and dream house. I was the happiest that I thought I could ever be but I still felt like I would fall into a dark place unexpectedly. Still, I thought that was normal for me and it was just something I had to deal with and again, get over.

It was during that time a trigger brought me into a state of darkness that I chose not to ignore any longer. I felt for the first time I needed to look grief in its eye and befriend it. It was then my transformation started, it was then I allowed myself to start from a blank state of everything I ever knew about emotions and mental health itself. It was then I started writing.

I wrote my first journal entry about my loss and immediately began moving into the next stage of grief after having been stuck in the depression stage for 5 years. Once I went through an exercise of carving my journal entry into a poem, I read it aloud and it was there, in that moment, I realized I had written my first poem and further that I was a poet. I remember asking myself, could it be true that this girl who had always loved art but drowned her emotions, this girl that had been nudged to become a pharmacist by everyone she knew, this girl who had never written anything professionally before was all of a sudden a poet? Well yes, yes she was.

I began sharing my poems online and was overwhelmed with the amount of people who resonated with my work. I had readers all over the world messaging me every day about how much my work inspired them, moved them, shook them and

spoke to them. There were so many out there who finally felt seen, heard and understood. So many out there that made me realize I was not that unique after all. I finally found my community, writers and readers that were supporting, uplifting and encouraging. It motivated me to continue writing and I went on to write my book in 2-3 months and before I knew it I was dreaming of being a published author.

I still remember the day one of my closest friends asked me to recite poetry at her wedding and it was the ice breaker that started yet another journey. I went on to do open mics, more weddings and events and spoken word all over Austin and the world. I have never felt more powerful than when I am on stage reciting my words to poetry lovers. I have never felt more at home than when I am with others that are able to express themselves and feel their emotions because it is only with sadness comes true joy. I have never felt more proud than when I hear from others that they have chosen to finally be vulnerable after being inspired by my work.

After releasing my collection, I realized I had found the legacy I would leave this world with even after I am gone. One that my daughter, son and future generations will be able to read and continue to be inspired by. Writing is my joy, my outlet, my passion. It is what I come back to each time I, myself waver from my path or someone else tries to knock me off. There is something so euphoric about the moment you are writing a poem, about having that for myself and knowing there is no one that can take it away. That is true happiness, that is life and that is love.

*Calm your mind,
find her.
Honor your body,
be her.
Take your journey,
love her.
-read it again*

*Finding Her Being Her, A
Journey of Poems
Nilam Patel*

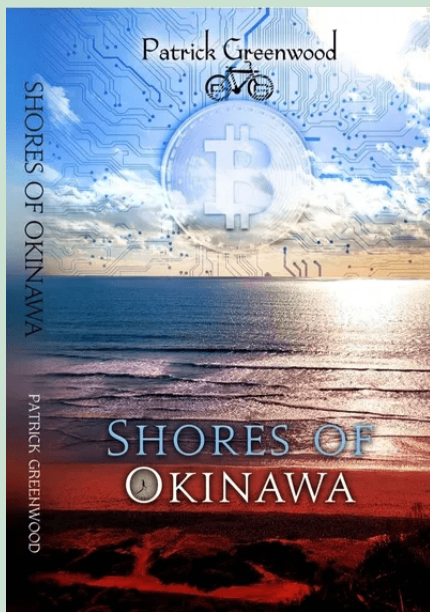
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COVER STORY



Hello Patrick, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine! Can you tell us where are you from and what you like to do in your spare time?

Home is Lake Forest California! I am a few minutes away from the beautiful beaches of southern California! In my spare time when I am not writing novels, blogs for clients, promoting my coffee to help support global causes, I love cycling! My company name and logo come from my love for writing and cycling, cyclewriterllc.com!

What inspired you to write, particularly based on your experiences traveling to countries like Vietnam, China, and Japan?

Being dyslexic my whole life, writing was something that wasn't high my the list of things to do. Overcoming my shortcomings in life to fulfill my dream of becoming a professional writer is what inspired me everyday. I travel the world often and I love to write about what I see, smell, taste, and experience.

Vietnam, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Taiwan, and Japan are some of the most beautiful places in the world. Why not share these places through writing! The food, the people, the cycling, and of course, the coffee in these countries is incredible!

Your debut novel, "Forever Our Sunrise in Saigon," delves into significant historical events such as the Vietnam War and the fall of Saigon. What drew you to explore these events in your writing?

Yes, the book started with fall of Saigon and led into main character's life goal to travel to Vietnam to discover what happened to the country years later including trying to find the nuns that helped save the orphans at the end of the war. The book is a balance between non-fiction life experiences with a blend of fiction! For people who love a beautiful yet challenging romantic story with suspense, they will love this incredible novel!



Could you share the process of researching and incorporating real-life events into your fiction writing with us?

Adding personal life experiences into fiction is a soul searching experience. In "Forever Our Sunrise in Saigon," I included a healthy balance of my personal life including traveling to Vietnam in 2012, 2013, and 2014. Many of the events including cycling the country, investing in a water company, and finding the Catholic nuns all were true.

The fictional part extended more into the relationship between Jack and Linh, the introduction of the CIA agent; Forest Adams, and the meeting with Jack's nemesis, Travis Jones.

I was deeply inspired by Tom Clancy's novels including the "Hunt for the Red October" because the story leaves the reading to contemplate what part is real and what part is pure fiction!

"The Shores of Okinawa" is the follow-up to your award-winning debut novel. What can



readers expect from this next installment in the Jack Kendall series?

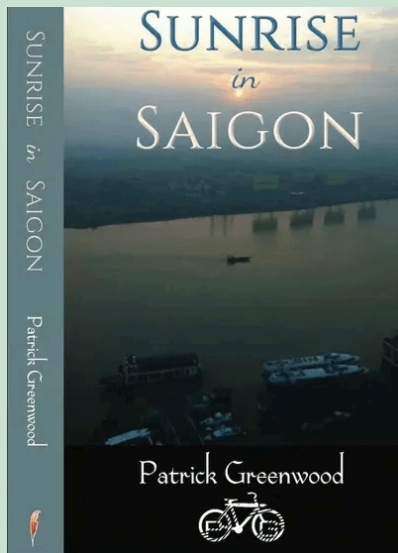
Well, for starter the Shores Of Okinawa is a wonderful fiction novel drawn from many actual events happening today including; China hacking Taiwan, global hackers joining forces against other hackers, and how organized crime uses cyber terrorism to steal data and cyber currency.

In this sequel, Jack is off to Portugal with Nella to meet her family, while his nemesis; Travis Jones develops a plan to help China hack into Taiwan by using cyber assets from the Chinese Triads and hackers from Laos and Vietnam. Jack realizing that Travis is up to something creates unspeakable alliance between the CIA, the Japanese Yakuza hackers, and Taiwanese government to help stop Travis and the Chinese cyber forces from stealing Bitcoin from Taiwan!

Can Jack and Forest stop the hack of the century? I hope everyone enjoys this wonderful sequel! The book will be launching around Memorial day 2024!

How do you balance the intricacies of writing fiction with your work in ghostwriting for cybersecurity companies and blogging?





Yes, writing full time takes a good amount of balance and patience. I ghost write under my real name of John Gormally for global technology companies. This is how I support myself. Writing for clients provides me the ability to create fictional novels, help me master my craft better, and help build an audience for my works!

Can you tell us about your podcast, "Writers on Writers over a triple espresso"? What topics do you discuss, and what inspired you to start this podcast?

Oh yes, I love being a podcaster! Writers on writers started in 2022 as a way to help writers have a voice to help promote their material. I have been deeply honored to have writers from all over the world come on the show. I have had award winning musicians, editors, publishers, and voice-over actors and actresses spending 30 minutes with me to discuss their beautiful works!

What do you hope listeners gain from tuning into your podcast episodes?

I want all writers to know they are not alone in their writing journey. Writers want to help other writers become successful. We are a beautiful community! I hope the podcasts help other writers overcome their challenges to create their best work and be very proud!

As someone who has experienced various cultures through travel, how do you incorporate cultural authenticity into your writing?

Cultural authenticity is very important when writing. Traveling the world does give you a window into

how others live everyday. Portraying them in a positive yet authentic manner demonstrates a deep respect for others and their way of life. Yet, when I have traveled and witnessed poverty, despair, and corruption, I also want to write about these moments with the upmost authenticity so the readers also see both sides of every issue.

What advice would you give aspiring writers looking to draw inspiration from their own experiences and travels?

When traveling or experiencing life, keep your mental camera on auto-record. There is so much we miss in life because we are distracted. Seeing your homelife, your city, your state, and your country with eyes and your heart open, you will discover something someday you may want to write about!

Capture, process, and write! Repeat!

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your writing journey so far?

Having people I do not know pick up my books and listen to my podcast is an absolute joy! Having a writer come on the podcast and come with the very best experience is another wonderful feeling!





Looking ahead, do you have any upcoming projects or future writing plans that you can share with us?

Yes ! The next novel in the Jack Kendall series is "Scent of the Lotus" due out April 30th, 2025. This story picks the days before the fall of Saigon in April 1975 and how Forest Adams and Bui found each

other, only to be torn apart by the Vietnam War. The story follows Forest's 30 year journey trying to get back to Vietnam to find Bui, the only woman he ever loved.

<https://cyclewriterllc.com>



Patrick Greenwood, after military service, embarked on a 25-year career in the information technology field, working in various roles in sales, engineering, support, and design. His inspiration for writing came from his business travels to places like Vietnam, China, Japan, Taiwan, and Portugal. A true believer in listening to one's passion, Patrick began writing in early 2020 based on several trips he made while cycling in various countries. In his debut award-winning novel, "Sunrise in Saigon(2022 Amazon.com)," Patrick draws upon several non-fictional events in Vietnam, including the war with the US, the last days of Saigon falling, and the chaos at the US embassy. Patrick's follow-up novel, "The Shores of Okinawa (Quill Hawk Publishing)," due out in May 2024, continues the Jack Kendall series with even more intrigue and suspense! When Patrick isn't writing his next novel, ghostwriting for cybersecurity companies, or writing blogs, he hosts the award-winning podcast, "Writers on Writers over a triple espresso." The podcast broadcasts live on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 10:00 am PST.



Author Patrick Greenwood partners with "Helmets for Kids" in Vietnam.



THE REAL-LIFE HEROES WHO INSPIRED A TRILOGY OF NOVELS INSIGHTS FROM PURPLE HEART DECORATED VETERANS WHO INSPIRED THE GOODBYE, ORCHID SERIES

Carol Van Den Hende

Have you ever wondered how people adapt when life changes in an instant? That forms the premise for my *Goodbye Orchid* series, when an entrepreneur saves a man from jumping in front of a train and ends up on the tracks himself.

To research main character Phoenix's disabling accident and recovery, I had the honor of interviewing combat-wounded veterans, surgeons, psychologists, physical therapists, and sensitivity readers like Dr. Linda Olson whose memoir *Gone* tells the story of how a train accident took both her legs and an arm, yet she lives a fulfilled and happy life.

I learned so much about disability inclusion and accessibility during my research. Here are my top insights from working on the trilogy.

SHIPPING OUT ON 9/11

First, we are resilient and can adapt to enormous changes. Sgt. Bryan Anderson had shipped out to Iraq on 9/11/2001 and then, on his last tour of duty, had been "blown up" by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED).

In an instant, the force of the IED's explosion amputated both of Bryan's legs and his left hand. Fellow soldiers stemmed the bleeding with tourniquets, evacuated him, and saved his life.

When he woke at Walter Reed Medical Center, his mom asked if he knew what had happened. Then she said, "You know you have basically two options here, right?"

"Yup—move on, or roll over, and die," he responded.

He was surprised his mom even needed to ask which option he was going to choose.

"I'm moving on," he said.

A NEW LIFE

In the ensuing months, with emotional ups and downs, he learned adaptations for everyday tasks and achieved his goals, like greeting his Army

buddies for the first time since the blast standing upright, and learning to live independently.

Since that time, he's built a full and rich life. He's a spokesperson for Quantum Rehab, Gary Sinise Foundation and USA Cares, a motivational speaker, author, an actor who's been featured in movies like *American Sniper*, and an athlete in a full-contact wheelchair sport appropriately called 'murderball.'

I asked Bryan what he wishes he could change. He says, "Even if I could, I wouldn't change what happened to me, because it's made me stronger."

EMPATHY, NOT JUDGMENT

However, what he does wish is that others wouldn't judge his life based on his visible disabilities. His daily adaptations don't pain him as much as the things people say.

I helped shine a light on this in *Goodbye, Orchid*. During the culminating scene, an acquaintance thoughtlessly makes main character Phoenix's accident sound impossibly dire, "You are so amazing, to go through all that. I can't even imagine. *I would've just died.*" His love, Orchid, stands up to the acquaintance, stating "I guess some people are just stronger than others."

Sensitivity reader Linda Olson told me how much Orchid's protectiveness touched her. She affirms, "It is comforting to have that protection."

REALITY INSPIRING FICTION

Bryan's story and those of other people with disabilities inspired me with their can-do attitude.

I imagined a character, Phoenix, who would face life-changing injuries like those that Bryan had sustained. His story would be crafted to inspire hope and optimism for people facing challenges. However, I didn't make him a military character. Instead, I placed him into the world of business that I know well from my years working in marketing, strategy and innovation.

He's named Phoenix since he must rise from ashes. In the story, he meets Orchid Paige who is still



dealing with her childhood tragedy that killed her parents and her resulting PTSD (which is another challenge veterans can face). When the train accident changes Phoenix forever, he's become the very image of trauma that will trigger Orchid. He believes that he's faced with the hardest decision of his life – to protect her, must he leave her without explaining why?

In his memoir, *No Turning Back*, Bryan confirms that this is a real-life dilemma. When he was recovering at Walter Reed, he didn't want to see his girlfriend, but rather wished she would remember him the way he was.

DANCING WITH THE STARS

During the time that my agent was submitting my debut manuscript to publishing houses, I remember watching Sgt. Noah Galloway compete in Season 20 of Dancing with the Stars. When he served in Iraq, the Humvee he was driving hit an IED, and as a result, he lost his left arm and left leg. Yet in the show, he and his dance partner Sharna Burgess moved in unison with grace. His prosthesis seemed to be a natural extension of him. His movements were a joy to witness. I imagined my protagonist Phoenix likewise finding his inner strength. I infused that sense of optimism into the storyline.

So it was the best gift to receive words of praise for my trilogy finale from Noah. Fittingly, they arrived on Independence Day, during Disability Pride Month.

"Always Orchid by Carol Van Den Hende is a heartwarming tale of love and resilience that reminds us of the power of forgiveness, the strength of the human spirit, and the unbreakable bond that can withstand any obstacle."

— Noah Galloway, Purple Heart decorated veteran, author *Living with No Excuses: The Remarkable Rebirth of an American Soldier*

I'm grateful to Noah for these words, and to Bryan and wounded veterans for teaching us lessons of empathy and resilience. Please think of them whenever we might need to adapt to life changing in an instant.

carolvandenhende.com/contact.

CAROL VAN DEN HENDE is an award-winning author who pens stories of resilience and hope. Her novels *Orchid Blooming* and *Goodbye, Orchid* draw from her Chinese American heritage, and have won 40+ literary and design awards, including the American Fiction Award, IAN Outstanding Fiction First Novel Award, and Royal Dragonfly Awards for Cultural Diversity and Disability Awareness.

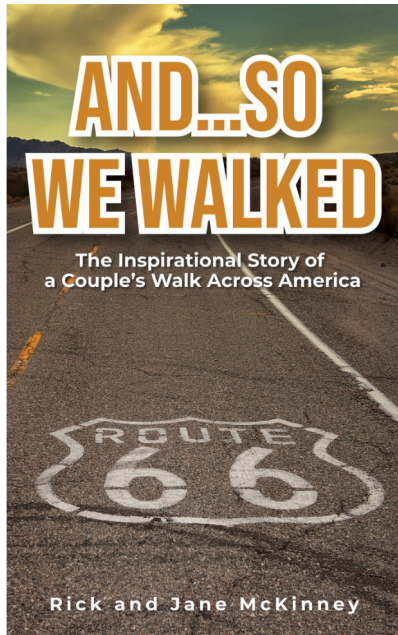
Buzzfeed, Parade, and Travel+Leisure named Carol's books a most anticipated read. Glamour Magazine recommended her "modern, important take on the power of love." The International Pulpwood Queens selected *Orchid Blooming*, *Goodbye, Orchid* and *Always Orchid* as Books-of-the-Month.

Carol's mission is unlocking optimism as a writer, speaker, strategist, Board member and Climate Reality Leader. One secret to her good fortune? Her humorous hubby and twins, who prove that love really does conquer all.



THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Rick and Jane McKinney



In a world where the extraordinary often seems reserved for the rich and famous, I'd like you to meet my wife Jane and me, your run-of-the-mill, ordinary couple who stumbled into a life more thrilling than a bungee cord free fall off the Golden Gate bridge.

We're not talking about living in a "Downton Abbey" mansion or hobnobbing with celebrities. No, our bank account is pretty modest and our portfolio, oh yeah, we don't have one. Our family tree doesn't boast any Ivy League scholars or silver-spoon-fed royalty. We're just your average Jack and Jill, truckin' through life with a little bit of faith and a hearty appetite for adventure.



THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED
MINISTRIES

So, how did we end up living a life that could rival a Hollywood script? It all started with a simple "yes" to whatever door swung open. Our marriage has been a fifty-year non-stop marathon of choosing the road less traveled, and let me tell you, it's been a crazy, wild ride.

Picture this: a ragtag group of friends and us, armed with nothing but determination and a few power tools, building a house in Juarez, Mexico, faster than you can say, "Bob's your uncle." The look on that family's faces when we handed them the keys to their new home with a Spanish Bible? Priceless. Tears flowed like Niagara Falls.

Then, there was the time we packed our bags and took our puppet show on the road to Mexican orphanages. Let's just say the border patrol officers were more than a little surprised when they unzipped our suitcases and discovered a troupe of googly-eyed boys and girls looking back at them. Talk about a puppet show they will never forget!

But our adventures didn't stop at the border. Oh no, we crisscrossed continents like bold explorers on a mission to spread love and joy. From feeding children in Indian orphanages to singing and speaking in remote, primitive villages in Andhra Pradesh, we brought smiles wherever we went. And then, at 12,000 feet above sea level in Lhasa, Tibet, we met those little beggar children who stole our hearts. Even now, the memory of their rosy cheeks still brings a smile to our faces.

So what do we consider the pièce de résistance of our escapades? A 2770-mile walking tour across America, from the boardwalk of Santa Monica Pier to the hallowed steps of the Supreme Court in D.C. Yep, you heard that right. We hiked every step of the way through blistered feet, missing toenails, sun poisoning, and the Santa Anna winds, encountering more characters than a 700-page novel along the route.

We met folks from all walks of life, from the streets of inner cities to the dusty roads of Native American reservations. In West Memphis, we got a warmer reception than grandma's homemade biscuits from



the locals. And don't even get me started on the divine interventions and angelic encounters that peppered our journey. Let's just say we had more "scratching our head" moments than a confused first-year student in a senior-level philosophy class.

So, here we are, fifty years and countless adventures later, still driving our trusty old vehicles with lots of miles. We punch the time clock like we did half a century ago, even though we are well past retirement age. But you know what? We wouldn't trade our rich tapestry of experiences for all the gold in Fort Knox (which happens to be just a few miles from where we live).

Because when it comes right down to it, we may not drive fancy cars or have movie stars' phone numbers stored in our cell phones, but we've got something far more precious: a lifetime of memories, a heart full of gratitude, and the unwavering belief that saying "yes" to the unknown is the most incredible adventure of all. So, here's to living life off the beaten path and never looking back. Cheers to saying "yes" to the road less traveled!

rickandjanemckinney.com

<https://www.instagram.com/rickdavidmckinney>



INTERVIEW WITH AHNNIKA VELASQUEZ

Hello Ahnnika, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine! What initially drew you to pursue careers in both acting and modeling?

I have always wanted to pursue acting and modeling ever since I was a little girl, but what drew me to acting was whenever I'd watch TV I would imagine myself on the screen on some of my favorite shows like Bunk'd, Jessie, and Bizaardvark. I was about 7 or 8 years old and I'd say to my mom, "I can do that..." or "I want to be on TV like her..." Sometimes, I watched reruns and I memorized some of the lines so that I could mouth it off and act that part as though it was me in that role.

With modeling, I played a lot of dress-up with my cousins and pretended that we were in a fashion show. I was about 5 or 6 years old at the time when I told my cousins that I was going to be a model when I grew up. In 2021, I started modeling for an influencer with clothes from Justice, Target, and Walmart, and from there it's history. I now walk runways at different showcases and at fashion weeks, such as the New York Fashion Week, and most recently at the LA Fashion Week. It's a lot of fun wearing all sorts of styles, but what you don't see is the chaos that happens behind the scenes with so many models getting their hair and makeup done. It's chaotic but exciting at the same time. I hope to be the main face modeling for some luxury and popular teen brands.

My acting and modeling journeys would not be possible without my mom. She has been super supportive of my passions and is always there to help me whenever I need it. I love her for the strong person that she is and I am so grateful for all that she does for me.

Can you share your journey from starting in live musical theater to landing roles in streaming series and movies?

I started musical theater in 2019 and I loved it. I think that I've always been a performer since the age of 2 when I started dancing on stage during recitals. Although I'm pretty shy, I've gained a lot of



confidence throughout the years in acting, singing, and dancing. My mom says I'm like a lightswitch when I'm in front of an audience or in front of the



camera. I'm always ready to perform and when I do it's with lots of energy and excitement. Going from live musical theater in 2019 to landing roles in streaming series and movies was like a roller coaster; it had its ups and downs. I remember when my mom saw an open casting happening locally for a kids' series and she asked if I wanted to audition. Of course I said Yes! That's when it all began. We drove to the open casting and I experienced my first ever audition so I was super nervous. I didn't book any of the roles during the first couple of open castings which took place over the course of one year, but I finally did on my third audition for one of their episodes. After filming the episode and it was released, the Director was really impressed with my acting and reached out to me asking if I wanted to return and continue my role in one of their movie sequels. I loved filming and had so much fun and wanted to experience it again.

How have your experiences in ballet, jazz, martial arts, and cheerleading influenced your approach to acting and modeling?

I believe that my experiences in ballet and jazz dance, martial arts, and cheerleading have impacted my acting career a lot, only in a positive manner. It has taught me that I can be flexible and disciplined when it comes to acting – flexible in that the skills I gained in dance, cheer, and martial arts open up more opportunities in various acting genres, such as in musicals like *Zombies* and *Matilda*, or in action genres like *Avatar* or *Kung Fu*. Martial arts and cheerleading have taught me disciplines and skills that I can apply on my journey as an actress. There are so many action types of films that I hope to use these skills in someday.

What prompted your move to Los Angeles to further your career in the entertainment industry, and what has that transition been like for you?

My family and I moved to Los Angeles solely for me and my desire to be more involved in the entertainment industry. This is where it all happens and I wanted to be closer to where dreams are made. Being closer to the opportunities allows me to be where I need to be almost on demand.

The transition to Los Angeles was pretty difficult because the rest of my family and my closest friends are up in the Bay Area. It was hard to leave

them all and to “start over” here in LA, but we now have everything under control and I've met so many amazing people and made great new friends since moving. I was ready to make the move to LA years ago, but it took a couple of years for my mom to think about it. It was a big move! When she felt it was time, she asked me, “Are you sure this is a move you want to make? It means a new home, new area, making new friends, and being plugged into the industry much more.” I jumped at my response and said, “YES!!! I'm ready.” It would only be a short flight up to the Bay Area or 4.5 hours on Highway 5 whenever we want to visit family and friends. So that's when our moving journey began... Summer of 2023. When we moved into our new home, it was pretty chaotic. I had auditions to do and my mom could not find any of the backdrops to videotape against. They were in boxes somewhere so we started video taping against a plain white wall. Now we're almost settled in completely and it has been very busy since our move with modeling and acting.

As a young performer, what are your long-term goals in both acting and modeling and how do you plan to achieve them?

My long term goals in acting and modeling is to grow and to continue to hone my acting and modeling skills so that I'm prepared no matter what type of film or modeling role comes up. I'd like to work on my emotions and be able to cry on-demand and, eventually, be “the Star” in a major movie or TV show. I'd also like to model for some of my favorite clothing brands like Lululemon, Urban Outfitters, and Charlotte Rouse, as well as big brand jewelry and accessories brands like Tiffany & Co. and Pandora. I plan to achieve my goals by continuing to work with my acting coach on various types of scenes and practicing at home in front of the mirror. I plan to achieve my modeling goals by working on poses that are suitable to what I am modeling and to be more open with the types of clothes and accessories that I am modeling. I am also working on my model walk so that I am more poised and know which modeling skills to apply based on what I am wearing and what set mood is.

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm12902913/>

<https://www.instagram.com/theofficial.ahnnikamv>



MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE: A PANDEMIC REFUGEE'S SEARCH FOR HOME

Joel David Bond

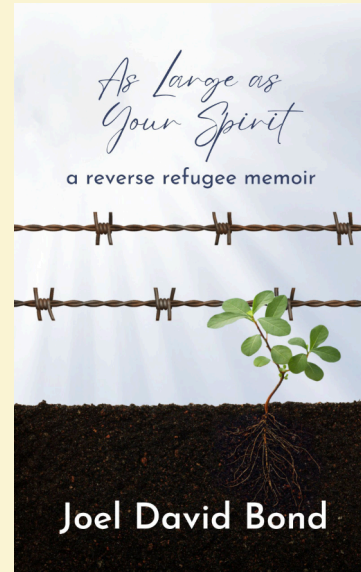
I shook open a black plastic bag and began combing the beach, starting with the near end. Driftwood was the main culprit: long branches in a giant tangled game of pick-up sticks. As I walked, I began heaving the wood into a giant pile towards the base of the cliff. Large patches of thick, black rubber — the kind used as inner tubes — snagged on the sharp, broken ends of the timber. I shoved what I could into the trash bags and carried on, uncovering plenty of plastic food packaging and bottle caps. I recognized Turkish words in faded print across most of the labels, and I peered through the shimmering heat waves to the distant slip of land on the horizon. Was some beachcomber there picking up Greek trash, or did the current only flow one way?

The lip of the beach was short — half a football field, at best — and only a dozen paces deep. Towards the far end, the driftwood became longer, more regular, and plank-like. I began to uncover plastic buckles, fist-sized chunks of white styrofoam, and tattered swatches of brittle and faded orange nylon. I flipped over a pile of planks and jumped back as a tiny white crab scuttled out of a waterlogged pair of tattered shoes, one rubber sole a dog's tongue lapping at the edge of the surf.

I scanned the rest of the cove to verify I was alone. The only sound was the constant applause of rocks tumbling in the surf. I grabbed a stick and poked at the shoes. They dislodged, spilling a slurry of pebbles and mud from their empty cavity.

I sat down on the rocks, thankful that the shoes were not connected to a pair of feet. I slipped my own shoes off and let the surf lick between my toes. Reaching into my bag, I withdrew a bottle of beer, sweaty with condensation. I pried the top off and tossed back its contents in a burst of successive, thirsty gulps.

For four weeks, I'd been away from home. The world had changed in a heartbeat, and here I was, marooned on a Greek island, collecting beach trash and slinging back an amber ale. It wasn't a bad existence, I told myself, but it wasn't where I was



meant to be. In some other universe, I was back home in Iraq, inspiring young minds in the well-ordered routine of my classroom. After work, I would head for dinner with friends, strolling down the main avenue lined with food carts and drink vendors. We would weave among the crowds, sharing a laugh over crispy falafel sandwiches, the sweet tahini sauce dribbling down our chins and into the butcher paper wrapping. Then, when we'd had our fill, and our legs had given out from wandering aimlessly through the bazaar, we would press into the bustling blue haze of a shisha bar, order steaming *chai* and gooey-sweet *baklava*, and talk late into the evening.

But this universe, this alternate plane, had crashed into my previous world and skewered it like a kebab. This life was a backlog of work, events, and relationships which were now slowly roasting in the burning sunlight of an isolated Greek cove.

Across the water, the Turkish coastline shimmered in the haze, a mirage passageway back to my real life. I stared at the now-empty bottle in my hand, wondering what message for help I might seal inside it and hurl into the waves. The label read *Mythos*, a local Greek brew. What Homeric myth was I now on, lost at sea away from everyone I knew and loved? Would I ever find my way home again?



Or perhaps the myth was that anyone even cared. Why should they? Compared to the rest of the world's problems, isolation on a Greek island sounded ideal. No, I was going to spend this pandemic alone, baked in the heat of a foreign shoreline, surrounded by only the tattered wreckage of a life that wasn't meant to be mine.

I picked up the filthy pair of shoes and dropped them in the trash bag, tying the top closed. I was done with the beach. I hefted the now-full bag in one hand and gripped the empty beer bottle in the other. I had no pen on me nor paper to leave a message. And the romantic notion of a message in a bottle seemed highly unlikely to amount to

anything anyway. I looked over at the towering cliff walls enclosing the now pristine beach, the waves making a gentle advance with the incoming tide.

With a single overhanded arc, I launched the bottle against the cliff face. The green glass shattered, raining down on the cobbles and slipping under the advancing waves. If I was going to leave here, I'd have to do it alone. No message in a bottle was going to save me now.

(Excerpt from the book, "As Large as Your Spirit: a reverse refugee memoir" by Joel David Bond).

<https://www.joeldavidbond.com>



BRINGING SMILES ACROSS THE MILES

MY JOURNEY WITH AN INTERNATIONAL ANTHOLOGY

Rick Incorvia

When Lucia first interviewed me about one of my recent publications, I didn't anticipate the delightful journey ahead. Our rapport was immediate; her enthusiasm infectious, and by the end of our chat, it had transcended the typical author-interviewer dynamic. She revealed an ambitious plan: an anthology of inspiring short stories from writers worldwide, aimed at uplifting spirits. "Would you join us?" she asked. Her invitation wasn't just a query; it was a call to adventure.

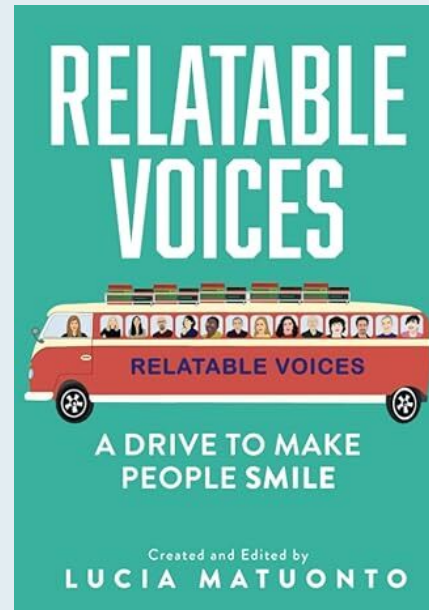
After the interview, my curiosity about Lucia grew. I dived into one of her children's books, *Lost On The Beach*. Its message about unlikely friendships and looking beyond appearances resonated deeply with me. I was sold. I replied to her invitation with a resounding yes, hoping to add my voice to a chorus of storytellers.

Our first collective meeting was a Zoom call with a dozen diverse authors, buzzing with excitement and curiosity about each other's lives and literary crafts. Lucia outlined our mission: stories of triumph with cheerful resolutions. We aimed to craft narratives that would leave readers feeling brighter and more hopeful.

However, collaboration across different time zones and backgrounds is never without its challenges. Our primary mode of communication was email, a breeding ground for misunderstandings. Simple exchanges sometimes spiraled into confusion, compounded by contractual obligations that brought tensions to a head. Amid these trials, we nearly lost sight of our core purpose—to make people smile.

A subsequent Zoom call helped realign our focus. We hashed out misunderstandings and reaffirmed our commitment to the anthology's goals. It was a poignant reminder of why we had come together: to spread joy and empowerment through our stories.

As I contributed to the anthology, weaving narratives of hope and resilience, I felt a profound connection with my fellow authors. Each story was a testament to the human spirit's tenacity, and the



collection grew into a tapestry of encouragement that stretched across continents.

When the anthology was finally published, holding the book in my hands was a surreal experience. Each page was imbued with the essence of its creator, offering readers a glimpse into diverse worlds unified by a common theme of courage and joy.

The reception to our anthology exceeded our expectations. Readers reached out with stories of how our words had brightened their days or given them strength during tough times. It was incredibly gratifying to know that our collaborative effort had sparked such positive reactions.

Reflecting on this experience, I've learned that storytelling is not just an art form but a powerful means of connection and healing. Working with Lucia and the other talented authors was more than just an opportunity to write; it was a chance to be part of something larger than ourselves, a project that echoed around the world.

To those who have enjoyed our anthology, I encourage you to delve deeper into the lives of its authors. Who knows? You might be discovering the next literary giant sitting quietly behind the veil of



modesty, just as passionate about bringing smiles as they are about crafting stories. As for me, I'll continue to write, inspired by the memories of this

unique collaboration and driven by the endless quest to touch hearts through words.



TOW THE LINE: BOUND BY REASON, UNRAVELED BY RAGE

Rick Incorvia



"Tow the Line" was born from an urge to delve deeper into the human condition, exploring the resilience of the human spirit when faced with overwhelming odds. The inspiration struck me during a period of personal reflection on how we often find ourselves on the precipice of right and wrong, making choices that define us for years to come. This novel is not just a narrative; it's a journey through the darkest alleys of human motives and the spark of redemption that lives within each of us.

Why should you read "Tow the Line"? Because it's more than just a story—it's a mirror reflecting our own lives. In its pages, you'll find Gwin and Paxton, characters who are not only navigating the treacherous waters of a chaotic world but are also battling their internal demons and desires. Their tale is a compelling saga of courage, betrayal, and the relentless determination of humans to survive against all odds."

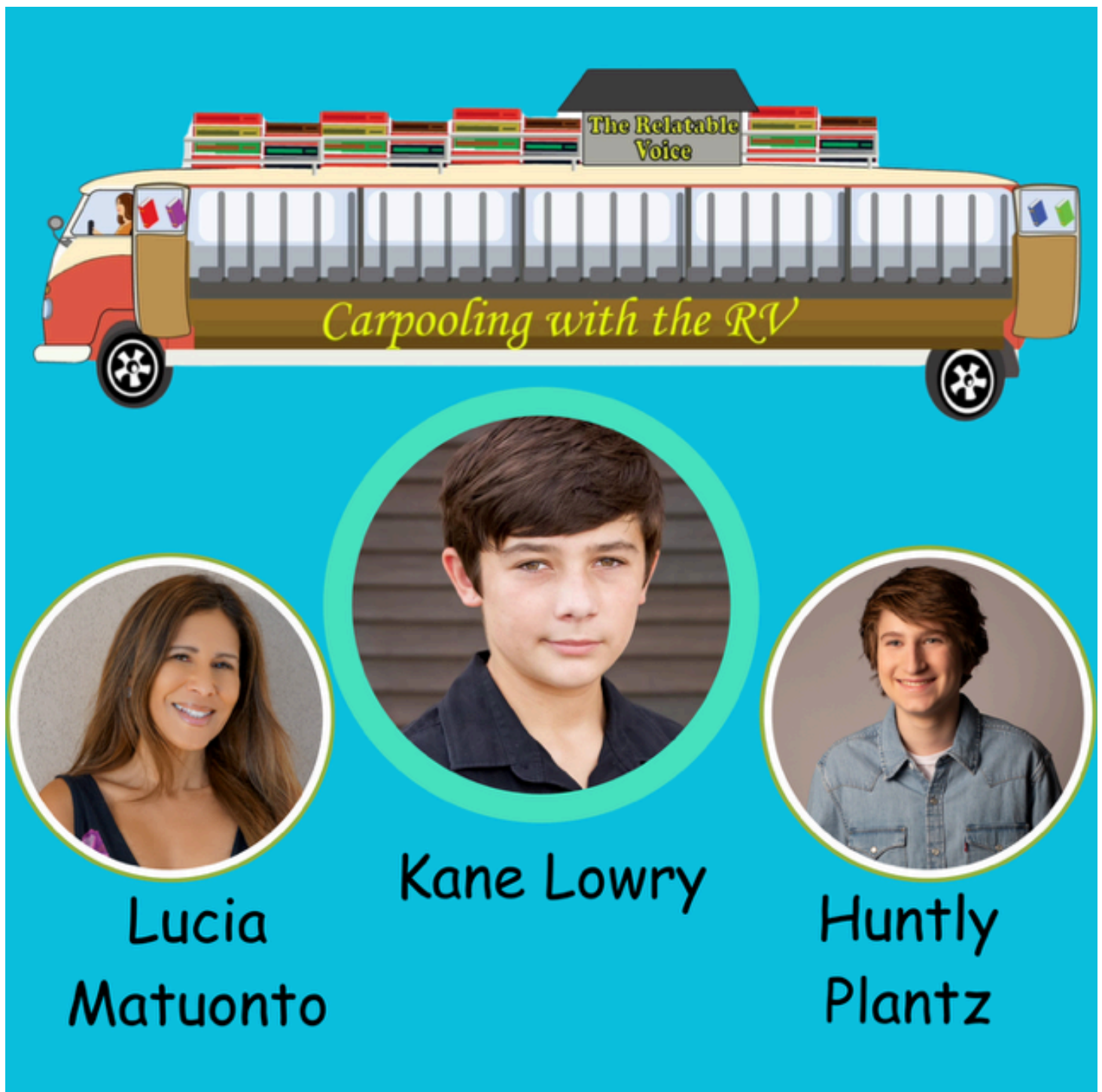
The world of "Tow the Line" is richly woven with themes that resonate deeply in today's society—justice, resilience, and the often-blurred line between right and wrong. Each chapter invites you

to question not only the characters' decisions but also what you would do in their shoes. It's this introspective questioning that makes the book not just a thrilling read but also a personal challenge to your own values and beliefs.

To all aspiring writers out there, let "Tow the Line" be a testament to the power of perseverance. Every idea that flickers into your mind has the potential to become a story that might touch the hearts and minds of readers around the world. Don't let your ideas wither in the shadows of hesitation. Write bravely, edit ruthlessly, and share your stories boldly. Remember, every great book was once nothing more than a fleeting thought. Grab your ideas by the reins and guide them from the ambiguous corners of your mind into the eager hands of hungry readers. Embrace the journey of writing, for in your narratives lies the power to inspire, transform, and entertain.

You can find all of my books, available in various formats, on Amazon. For detailed descriptions and reviews of my works, as well as thoughtful reviews of books by some of my favorite authors, visit my website at www.AuthorRickIncorvia.com.





Lucia
Matuonto

Kane Lowry

Huntly
Plantz

Get ready for the thrilling comeback of "Carpooling with The RV"! 🚗 This time, our cozy ride has transformed into a grand adventure, boasting special co-pilots and talented guests.

In our latest episode, I had the pleasure of cruising to Orlando with Huntly Plantz as my co-pilot, for a delightful interview with the teen actor Kane Lowry. Join us for a journey brimming with laughter and insightful conversations.

Tune in now to catch all the excitement: [CARPOOLING with the RV](#)



INTERVIEW WITH SEBASTIAN DE CASTELL

When did you begin writing the prelude for the *Court of Shadows* series?

In August of 2020, during the pandemic, I found myself in Mont St. Michel in France. Mont St. Michel is a tiny island with a Medieval monastery at the top, connected to the mainland by a causeway that used to be submerged during high tide, cutting island off entirely. It's one of those places that's full of beauty and mystery that fills one's imagination with visions of swordfights and scullduggery.

At this particular point in time, travel was permitted again and I'd gotten all my vaccine shots, but I still assumed the place would be mostly deserted. To the contrary, Mont St. Michel was absolutely packed with tourists. Everyone had to wear masks, but still, the sheer weight of numbers meant that ascending the roughly four blocks from the bottom of the island to my little hotel took almost half an hour. I was rather disheartened by the experience. Luckily for me, jetlag kicked in and at three o'clock in the

morning I was wide awake. I decided to go out and take a walk to clear my head, and suddenly found myself in what felt like an entirely different world.

Most tourists don't spend the night on Mont St. Michel, and those that do don't venture out into the night. So there I was, strolling through the winding streets of this Medieval town, utterly alone except for the hordes of cats who live on the island but only come out at night. I felt as if I'd travelled back through time, exploring alleys and graveyards all by myself. It was positively magical.

When I returned home, I began writing *Crucible of Chaos*: a fantasy mystery set on an island inspired by that strange, wonderful night on Mont St. Michel.

How many books do you plan to have for the *Court of Shadows* series?

Crucible of Chaos acts as a prelude to the series, which will have four more books, beginning with *Play of Shadows* coming out this March. However,





each book works as a standalone as well, and can be read in any order, so readers aren't forced to wait to get the end of the story.

What will readers find inside of your new novel, *Crucible of Chaos*?

There's swashbuckling adventure, of course, as that's one of my favourite aspects of writing the Greatcoats novels, but *Crucible of Chaos* is also very much a mystery novel. Estevar Borros is my "swashbuckling Hercule Poirot", and part of what I love writing about him is the way he investigates crimes, unconcerned whether the means by which those crimes are committed is a sword blade or a supernatural curse.

What themes are explored inside your new novel?

Theme is such an integral part of a novel, but one best discovered by the writer rather than planned. I begin with a sense of a mystery or question I want to pursue, and let the themes reveal themselves through the characters. In the case of *Crucible of Chaos*, the question of faith and devotion are central to how the characters deal with the strange events threatening the island. Many of the monks come to blows over which gods they should worship, whereas Estevar's allegiance is to the law – and specifically, to the entirely human notions of fairness and decency that underpin those laws. When he finally solves the mystery at the heart of the book, that question of faith becomes even more crucial to what happens next.

Who are the cast of characters inside of *Crucible of Chaos*?

Crucible of Chaos features a relatively small cast compared to most of my books. This is by design: I wanted Estevar to feel alone, always at the edge of failure, never quite knowing who to trust. That said, once I began writing the book, I found he needed *someone* he felt was truly on his side, which is how Imperious the mule became such a vital – if unexpected – sidekick.

The main characters we meet are:

- Estevar Velejan Duerisi Borros, also known as The King's Crucible due to his duty as the Greatcoat sent to investigate crimes of the supernatural. Estevar is my reimagining of a kind of swashbuckling Hercule Poirot with a dash of Fox Mulder from the X-Files. He's fascinated by the supernatural, but his passion is solving mysteries, whatever the cause.
- Imperious: Imperious is . . . well, he's a mule. Perhaps the most cantakerous mule in all of Tristia. But he's also loyal to a fault, and patient enough to listen to Estevar's musings while offering an occasionally helpful grunt or bray.
- Caeda: a high-spirited and enigmatic young woman who seems intent on assisting Estevar in his investigation and yet whose own motives are shrouded in secrecy.
- Brother Agneta: a religious inquisitor whose own methods of investigation are rather more extreme than Estevar would like.
- The Wolves, the Trumpeters and the Bone Rattlers: three factions of monks warring against each other over whose gods are the ones that should be worshipped in Tristia.

Will most of the cast of characters be found in the upcoming books?

No, each book in the Court of Shadows is set in a different part of Tristia, a troubled country reeling from the aftermath of a long interregnum and a war that nearly turned its citizens in to slaves of an enemy nation. I wanted readers to be able to enjoy the books in any order, and so each volume of the Court of Shadows works as a standalone even as it slowly builds the broader mystery of who or what is plotting against the people of Tristia.

Is it easy combining the historical and fantasy genres together?

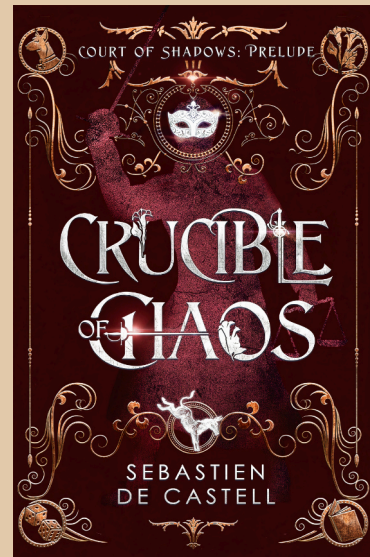


Every genre has its benefits and challenges. Fantasy affords you the means to create a world perfectly suited to your themes. However, any narrative world, whether adapted from our own or entirely invented, has to have internal cohesion. You can't introduce magic spells that can turn lead into gold without having that radically affect the economy. You can't have orders of travelling, sword-fighting magistrates without inventing a cultural context in which trial by combat is more widely accepted than it was in our own world. So, it's all a process of creating a world that's internally consistent, not merely in terms of physics or geography, but also of culture and sociology.

How would you describe your writing style?

I've always been influenced by noir (or hardboiled) writers like Raymond Chandler as well as by fantasy novelists who also borrowed from them stylistically like Roger Zelazny and Steven Brust. But I'm also a fan of William Goldman (the legendary screenwriter who gave us *The Princess Bride*) and Aaron Sorkin (whose lightning-fast dialogue was at the heart of *The West Wing*).

I try to bring those influences into my own style, aiming for something that's readily approachable to most readers, but where every word is intentional. Writing schools and books often skim over prose these days, treating it as if it were simply a varnish you paint over the more important structural elements of character, plot and theme. But if you think about it, the prose – the words on the page



– is the entirety of what makes up a book. The prose *is* the book. So, I try to craft my words so that there's a flow and rhythm to them that the reader never needs to notice or think about, but which pulls them along on the journey from the opening words until the final sentence.

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My books have been translated into fifteen languages and are in all the usual bookstores and online retailers around the world. The best way to reach me online is through my website at www.decastell.com, and if someone wants to write to me, they can do so at www.decastell.com/contact. I reply to every e-mail I receive.

Sebastien de Castell had just finished a degree in Archaeology when he started work on his first dig. Four hours later he realized how much he actually hated archaeology and left to pursue a very focused career as a musician, ombudsman, interaction designer, fight choreographer, teacher, project manager, actor, and product strategist. His only defence against the charge of unbridled dilettantism is that he genuinely likes doing these things and that, in one way or another, each of these fields plays a role in his writing. He sternly resists the accusation of being a Renaissance Man in the hopes that more people will label him that way.

Sebastien's acclaimed swashbuckling fantasy series, *The Greatcoats*, was shortlisted for both the 2014 Goodreads Choice Award for Best Fantasy, the Gemmell Morningstar Award for Best Debut, the Prix Imaginales for Best Foreign Work, and the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer. His YA fantasy series, *Spellslinger*, was nominated for the Carnegie Medal and is published in more than a dozen languages.

Sebastien lives in Vancouver, Canada with his lovely wife and two belligerent cats. You can reach him at www.decastell.com





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CITY GIRLS INTO THE WILD EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

Chimnese Davids

For two city girls, one a seasoned traveller and the other unfamiliar to traveling, an adventure in the South African wilderness proved to be the trip of a lifetime. Their journey began in Johannesburg, where they boarded a flight to Hoedspruit in the Limpopo province. Upon arrival, they were met by their guide, Harry, an expert on the flora and fauna of the region. He escorted them to Kapama River Lodge, one of several luxury camps operated by Kapama Game Reserve, nestled in the heart of the bushveld.

As they settled into their lavish accommodations, the girls could scarcely contain their excitement for the safari drives ahead. Early the next morning, they set out with Harry into the reserve, cameras in hand, eager to spot the famous "Big 5" - lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and buffalo. Luck was on their side that first drive, as they came upon a pride





of lions lounging beneath a shady tree after a big meal. The power and elegance of these apex predators left both girls in awe. Over the next few days, they continued exploring the reserve, checking off the rest of the Big 5, along with giraffes, zebras, impalas and more.

For the city girl well-travelled, this safari adventure offered a chance to experience nature's wonder in a breathtaking new environment. For her friend, it was a total immersion into the wild - a life-changing opportunity to gain an appreciation for these beautiful creatures and the fragile ecosystem they inhabit. From witnessing the daily struggle for survival on the savanna to observing predators caring for their young, this trip offered profound lessons on the circle of life. As their time at Kapama drew to a close, the girls left with memories to last a lifetime and a newfound reverence for the majestic beauty of the African bush.

This Safari tour curated by Point B Travel provides an unforgettable experience for two locals traveling through their homeland of South Africa. Point B



Travel, based in Cape Town and Atlanta, has specialized in crafting customized South African safari itineraries since 2019. Their expertise shines through in this multi-day tour tailored for residents, providing a fresh perspective on the beauty of the bush. The African wilderness can initially seem daunting to first-time safari-goers, with wildlife roaming freely across rugged landscapes and the looming threat of unpredictable weather. Yet as the tour progresses, the bush transforms into a sanctuary, a place of profound peace that deeply connects one to the natural world. Witnessing

animals in their untamed habitat provides an appreciation for the delicate balance of the ecosystem, where each living thing fills a vital role. Survival is not guaranteed from one day to the next. The raw, humbling lessons of the bush awaken a sense of awe and gratitude for the grace of God in creating and sustaining life. This is a tour that will open one's eyes to the magnificence of creation and be etched in the memory forever.

<https://www.instagram.com/chimneseauthordavids>







HOW THREE CONTINENTS INFLUENCE MY WRITING

Mandy Eve-Barnett

For me inspiration for my writing comes from multiple sources, as with many wordsmiths, but the essence of the three continents I have lived have really left their essence in my soul.

Firstly, there was Africa. It is a world of vast expanses, fierce wildlife, and stifling heat, towering mountains, dense rainforests, vast deserts and winding rivers and diverse and unique cultures. My core memories are deep seated in my mind as I was only a small child. The rocking of my pram as the gardener pushed me around the garden instead of working. The brightness of the sky, the scorch of the sun, the dusty wind, pungent aromas and language I could not understand. One thing I continue to respond to are the rhythmic drum beats that lulled me to sleep accompanied by the singing of evening insects and morning birdsong.

Secondly, there was England; I still refer to as 'home', even though I have been in Canada since



2007. It is the land of green lushness, old growth and eons of history. An island packed with accents, dialects, and slang, all of which are a great source for my work. I grew up on this island steeled in so much historical conflict, numerous invaders and a diversity of flora and fauna. This is where my knowledge and love of the natural world really began. Delving through forest floors, or beach combing, I discovered the magic of wildlife from the smallest of insects up to mammals. I found a fascination in fungi and lichen, then from there the realm of the fairy folk. This magical world, to this day, is one I believe in. Some may say it is a childish belief, but what is life without some magic? In my children's chapter book, *Ockleberries to the Rescue*, I drew from this knowledge and experience to create magical sprites helping their forest animal friends.

My school history lessons and many visits to ancient sites and historic houses allowed me to create a fantasy trilogy set in Medieval England - *The Rython* trilogy. I was lucky to live within a stone's throw from centuries old buildings. Being able to actually touch the stone facades, or wooden beams and panels, walk among the splendor of centuries old churches, or palatial mansions connects you with the



people who lived there. Several times, I actually felt a connection. One in particular was when I gazed at a ceramic and ironwork clock, an object my modern day personality would disregard. I was strongly drawn to it and felt relief that 'I'd found it and would not be punished', without my friend catching me, I would have fallen backwards to the floor. I was completely unaware of anyone or anything around me at that moment. Subsequently, I found out the clock belonged to Marie Antoinette. I am convinced I was a servant and 'lost' the clock. Maybe it is an English trait to feel such a connection to the spirit world, I'm not sure, but I have experienced it for myself so will accept it. I believe when we feel vibrations, and experience déjà vu it is core memories from our past lives. That is why I used reincarnation on my novel, *The Twesome Loop*.

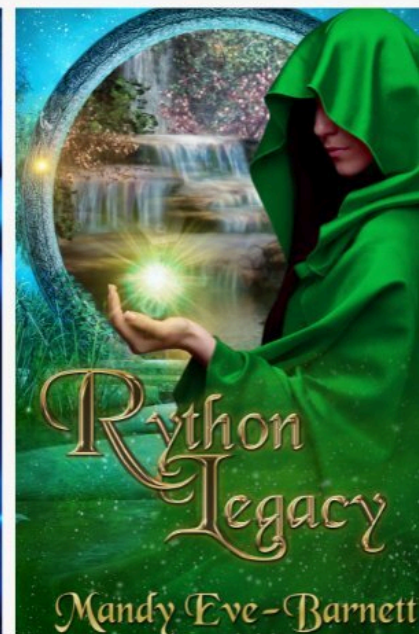
And lastly, but not least, here I am in Canada, my current home, whose vastness was initially difficult

for me to comprehend. A short time after arriving here, I found out that England can 'fit' into Alberta four times if turned horizontal on a map! My first impression was the amount of sunny days and the dryness of the air in Albert. I'd grown up with an inherent dampness in the air with overcast and cloudy skies, the result of an island surrounded by oceans. Canada has given me new perspectives, chances to view extraordinary wildlife and climatic zones, began my writing life and introduced me to a wealth of friends. With road trips to all points in Alberta and several hops over the nearest borders, I am cultivating new ideas for narratives and the characters within them.

I keep these continents and their essences within my soul. They are the perfect companion to my writing Muse.

www.mandyevebarnett.com

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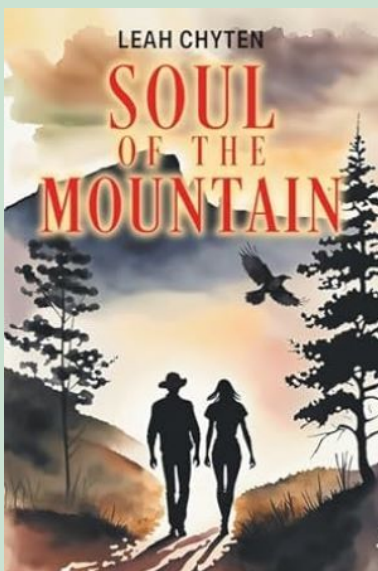
THE EYES BEHIND THE EYES

Leah Chyten

It all began with a vision; a young boy, bare chested, hair unbound, joyfully galloping across the prairie. He stops to deliver me a message, a wink, a smile and off he rides, back into history. I've been summoned to write his story.

Two weeks later a chance meeting with a musician traveling from a reservation in South Dakota, where he'd just finished recording an album. The name of the CD was Paha Sapa, the Native American name for the Black Hills. He offered me a brief history lesson. Paha Sapa is considered the home of the Great Mother, the birthing place of all creation. Vision quests, ceremonies and prayers have imbued the land with spiritual presence. These hills were initially included in the reservation treaties, until gold was discovered. Suddenly the US government rescinded the treaty. Gold diggers and settlers descended upon Paha Sapa, ravaging her body to make their fortunes. I knew now why this young boy had contacted me. This story needed to be told.

I'm not Native American, and I entered this story with trepidation. Dare I presume to speak for Native Americans, to know the suffering they endured as their land was stolen from them, as their tribes were decimated by cruel attempts at genocide? Dare I write the story transmitted to me by the young spirit boy? I took the risk because his story is also the story of our country. ***Soul of the Mountain*** is the



message he shared with me, so that I could share it with you. A message of sorrow, of laughter, of a most diverse collection of voices, of wisdom, and magic.

The story flowed through me, easeful and elegant, warm, lighthearted, and terrifying. How I love this book, and the multitude of characters who come to life! Luce, a young Manhattan lawyer is the main protagonist. She is visited by a Native American woman from South Dakota who leaves her a nugget of gold, that presumably belongs with Luce. Clearly this is no ordinary nugget. Now plagued by a relentless raven intruding on her dreams, Luce is determined to return the nugget. But what they encounter is far more than they ever could have imagined.

Suze, her bestie, a guilt-ridden Mayflower descendent whose family made their fortune





stealing land from the Indians, insists on outfitting a Mercedes Sprinter Van and together they head west to the reservation. What they both encounter is way more challenging and magical than they ever could have imagined.

Soon after arriving, Suze meets Kent Standing Bear, Red Morning Star, and a vision comes to all of them; a college built right on the rez, dedicated to teaching Indigenous wisdom to a world sorely in need. How does Suze find a way to convince the board of trustees, aka her racist relatives, to fund the project? Come find out!

Luce meets Roy, a charismatic and often elusive Native American, who introduces Luce to his friend, White Owl Hooter, an old woman shaman who teaches Luce how to master the power of the nugget, the power that lies dormant within, waiting for its destiny to be revealed.

White Owl must work hard to break through Luce's defenses, and her acquired view of how reality works, that she may open to her shamanic gifts. Luce is stubborn, but also courageous.

Now she is prepared for yet another journey, this one with Roy. They hike further and further into the wilderness, toward the Black Hills, encountering many interesting characters along the way, until they arrive at the sacred mountain. Roy asks Luce

to close her eyes and take his hand, as he guides her straight into the mountain.

They are greeted by the Sojan people, an advanced civilization residing within the belly of the sacred mountain, acting as her stewards. They called out to Roy and Luce for help with a devastating situation. The soul of the mountain has been stolen and she is being held in exile. Many have come to offer their help, but only Luce and Roy can rescue her. The stakes are high, for if they fail, the petty dictators and tyrants, interested only in power and wealth, will take her place. Will they prevail? Come find out.

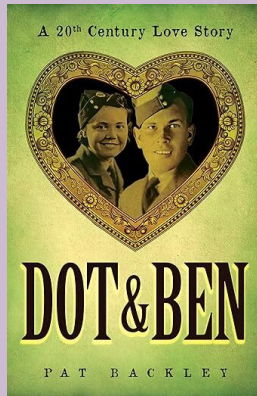
The story concludes with these words from Luce:

If it weren't for the pipe, I might have thought it all a dream. But whenever I hold the pipe it all comes back to me, and I know that everything we experienced was real. Who can truly understand until one has traveled to unseen worlds, so close, and yet invisible to those without sight.

Leah Chyten has written two previous novels. She is a psychologist, a spiritual teacher, and a grandmother. She resides close to the ocean in southern Maine. You can contact Leah Chyten at her website: www.Leahchytenauthor.com



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



What do you know about your ancestors?

This book, the third one in the ANCESTORS series is based on the lives of the authors parents.

Dot and Ben were born in the 1920's, lived and fought in WW2 and their story continues until 2014. What was their day to day life like? Did their love survive?

"Once Hitler is defeated, my proper life will begin. I will travel the world, have adventures, paint and write. My life will be glorious."

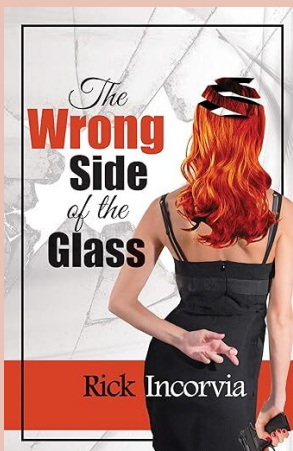
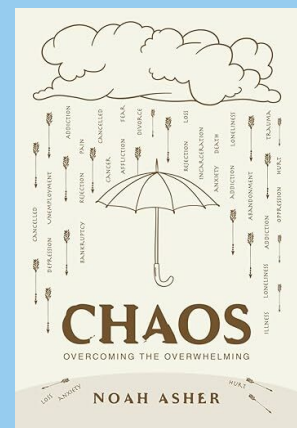
"It was all the rage to have enormous wedding bouquets, Dot guessed it was a reaction to the austere war years, as well as everyone trying to copy the magnificent bouquet Princess Elizabeth had carried on her wedding day."

How do we overcome these overwhelming times? Great question. I don't have all the right words, which probably isn't what you want to hear from an author.

But I know Who does. His Name is Jesus. And He is the only One Who can bring unexplainable peace in the midst of your Chaos. Whether you are reading this behind prison bars, in the hospital room, at the funeral home, or on the awesome World Wide Web, I hope you choose to read this book.

Chaos is inevitable. It comes like a thief in the night— stealing, killing, and destroying all we hold dear. But there is hope. Where the enemy comes to destroy, God comes to rebuild. He comes to restore. He comes to bring life and joy. This book isn't some self-help book. Nor is it an autobiography. It's a collaboration of real people experiencing real pain, learning how to overcome the overwhelming.

Jesus isn't just the center of this book. He's the beginning, middle, and end. And spoiler alert: He always wins.

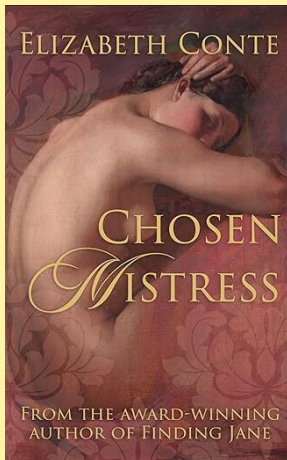


Smart, beautiful and irresistible, Gwin Apollo has the best of intentions. Her special gift is eavesdropping on conversations from troubled women who have been hurt by cheating lovers, and derives great pleasure in relentless quests to teach them a lesson. Unfortunately, her affliction with IED - Intermittent Explosive Disorder, also makes her unpredictable and dangerous.

Her pathological anger and rage manifests as chronic resentment, hostility, verbal and physical abuse, deceit and sometimes even murder. A spouse whose partner is plagued by this disorder is often the one who pays the biggest price. In this somewhat dark thriller, Gwin cleverly tricks her husband Eddie into taking the blame for offenses that she committed. He finds himself incarcerated on the wrong side of the glass, in an 8' x 10' jail cell, convicted of her sinister crimes.

Believing that Eddie has wronged her, she torments him with frequent visits that reveal chilling details about her horrific cold-blooded murders.





Charlotte Ashford will do anything for her cousin Lydia. They are practically sisters, growing up together in the heart of Victorian England. They dreamed they would share their lives forever and made girlish promises to always be there for each other. When Charlotte’s path veers to America and Lydia marries the enchanting Nathaniel Hammond, their dream of sharing a life together is fractured.

Years later, Charlotte is unexpectedly left penniless and alone. Learning of her cousin’s fate, Lydia doesn’t hesitate to invite Charlotte to return to England and live with her. But when Charlotte arrives, she discovers that not all is as idyllic as it seems for her cousin.

With promises from the past, to always be there for one another, Lydia is pushed to ask Charlotte to embrace a role that she never could have imagined—to become her husband’s mistress.

As secrets surface and truths unravel, Charlotte finds herself ensnared in a web of duty and deception.

Everyone wants to feel loved, wanted, and appreciated in our relationships...yet we continually feel hurt or misunderstood instead.

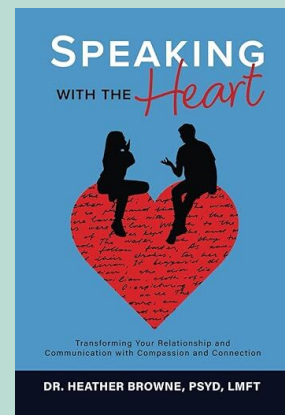
Are you frustrated with having the same argument week after week?

Do you act more like roommates than a couple who’s in love?

Are you stuck not knowing what to do to change your connection, communication, and intimacy with your partner?

We all want to have deeply connected relationships, but oftentimes, we become stuck in the same arguments and dynamics which keep us from experiencing the joy we wish to feel in our intimate relationships.

Speaking with the Heart explains how communication is a love letter. The best conversations start with connection and compassion before any word is uttered.



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