

Issue #19 - March 2024

www.relatable-media.com

# THE RELATABLE VOICE

magazine

**Celebrating  
Diversity &  
Inclusion**

**Are we  
kind?**

Discovering  
***New Zealand***

**ACTOR**  
**LELAND  
MERGILLANO**

## Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the ninetieth issue of The Relatable Voice Magazine!

March is a month of transition and transformation, marking the end of winter and the beginning of a new season filled with the promise of growth and renewal.

There are several awareness celebrations in March — including Disability Awareness Month, National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, Women's History Month, and National Reading Month.

We are very pleased to feature Leland Mergillano on the cover. Leland is a talented and dedicated actor who has appeared in over 15 film projects in the last two-and-a-half years!

We hope you enjoy exploring the beautiful landscapes of New Zealand through the eyes of Pat Backley, a British author and our frequent contributor who calls New Zealand home.

As we raise awareness about important themes, we have great articles from Jason Burke, Heather Hancock, and Vivien Schapera, as well as exclusive interviews with the strong girl Ashlynn Van Wyk and the film director Dr. Kamran Qureshi.

Additionally, you'll find many other articles and interviews from talented creatives.

Thank you for supporting our community!

Happy spring and safe travels!

*Lucia Matuonto*

*Lucia Matuonto*

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

*On the cover: Leland Mergillano*



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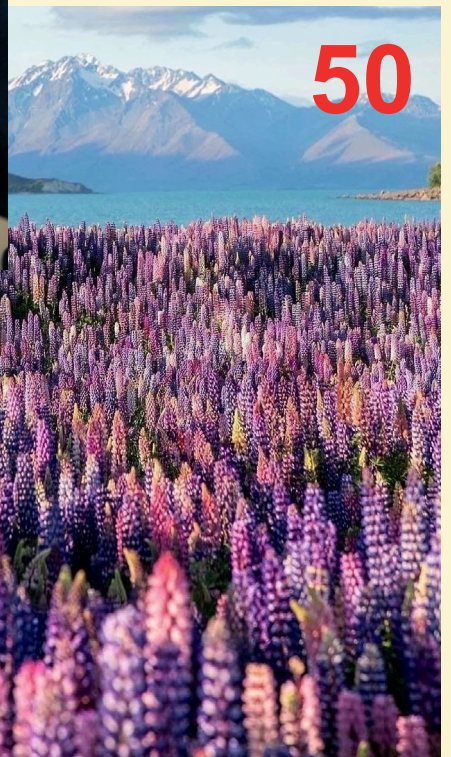
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# Catch the Story!



**Don't miss the podcast that everybody is listening to!**

**"Catch the story! podcast" celebrates storytelling, and each episode contains great stories, encompassing different genres and topics.**

**Your story deserves to be heard by a wider audience, and we can't wait to bring it to the world's attention. Share your narrative with us, and let's embark on this storytelling journey together!**

**If you have a compelling story that you'd like us to feature, don't hesitate to reach out at:**

**[catchthestory.podcast@gmail.com](mailto:catchthestory.podcast@gmail.com).**

## ARE WE CRUEL OR ARE WE KIND?

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

For a long time, Vivien puzzled over the fact that we can exhibit both the very worst and the very best traits of what it is to be human. Back in 1975, in a Social Psychology class, there was a poignant presentation of two news stories. In the first story, people stood by, as they watched someone get murdered. In the second story, a similar scenario, the people rushed in and saved the victim. In that same class, the psychology behind the behavior of concentration camp and prison guards, was explored. While Psychology could describe the situation, it didn't really explain it and Vivien was left with the question: What makes humans so cruel ... and what makes humans so kind?

It's important to say that Vivien's Psychology studies were all happening in the context of growing up in Apartheid South Africa. The institutionalized "them vs us" thinking led to the most appalling inhumanity imaginable. The irony was severe: these injustices were being perpetrated by the descendants of settlers who had left Europe to escape the injustices that *they* were experiencing. Although the oppressed clearly suffered the most, the experience weighed heavily on every member of the population. This was an unhappy country, with simmering conflicts, and it was a hard way to grow up.

Figuring out how to think about "other" people became a project. It was clear to Vivien that there is no such thing as "freedom of thought." We are given the words, the concepts, the labels, the categories with which to think, via our socialization, and it all flows from there. Fortunately, the following year, also in Psychology class, Vivien learned about the Humanistic Psychologist, Carl Rogers, and the concept of *Unconditional Positive Regard*. This hit the spot. Whereas Vivien could not meaningfully relate to the loftiness of *Unconditional Love*, Vivien could definitely apprehend *Unconditional Positive Regard*, and this gave her a path to travel both personally and professionally. The great thing about

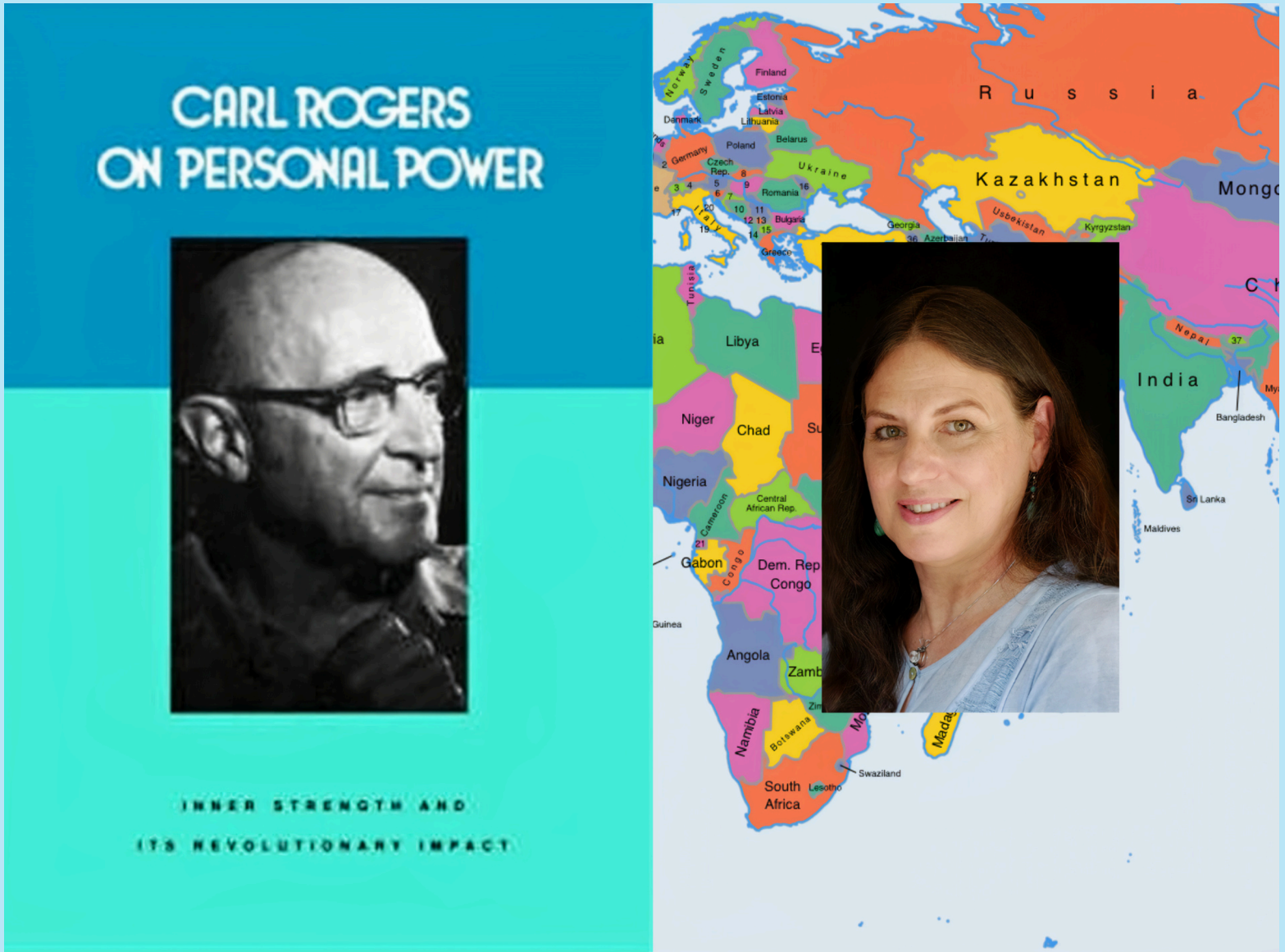


*Unconditional Positive Regard* is that it successfully embraces three dynamics: Attitude, Direction and Behavior. In other words, it provides: a way to think, a moral compass *and* an action.

That was all before Vivien reached the age of 21. *Unconditional Positive Regard* became a cornerstone of Vivien's life, but it took another 30 years before Vivien could explain the cruel/kind paradox to herself.

By traveling, by living in different countries and by immigrating, Vivien came to understand more about the similarities and differences between people. Although we tend to divide ourselves along notions of race, we are actually divided by culture – the culture of "sameness," unless we work consciously to address this. This desire for "sameness" generates subcultures with deep divisions *within* a society, along lines such as politics, religion, and





gender; as well as sexual orientation, health and even neurological status.

Why? Because it is human nature. We are programmed by instinct.

Look at the world today! We see culture wars all over the planet, not only between countries but also *inside* countries. We can shrug and say: “Oh well, that’s just how people are” or we can say: “I don’t want to be like that. I don’t want to be party to ‘them vs us’ thinking. I want to rise above biology, above my instinctual human nature. I want to live and let live. I want to see myself as a citizen of the world. I want to honor my *spiritual* birthright and express *Unconditional Positive Regard* to all the other citizens of *our* world.”

After all, isn’t that why we are here – to learn how to consciously transcend our human nature, by expressing our human spirits?

About Vivien: 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](http://www.CrystalHealingTechniques.com)



## LET THE PAIN INSPIRE YOU

*Jason Burke*

From the moment I was born, I was put on a deadline. Doctors told my parents I had no chance to even enter the world, much less last longer than a few weeks in it. A few weeks turned into a few months, which turned into a few years. I'm thirty-seven years old now, and I'm still waiting for the doctors to be right. I don't begrudge them though, they were giving their educated guesses based on their normal cases, and I was never a normal case.

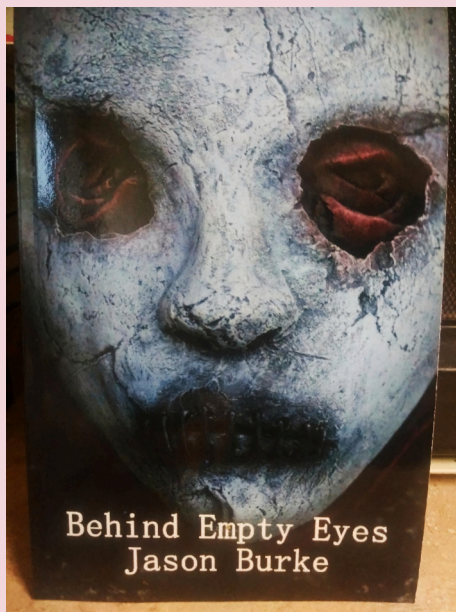
When philosophers say "Every long journey begins with a single step", I can empathize with their meaning. Specialists said I'd never be able to walk,

that my cerebral palsy and spinal stenosis were too strong to overcome. So I began walking on my knees everywhere, until I was eventually able to stand and walk on my feet. I can remember it being painful at first, but I found my way. I think the creativity in finding a way to walk has aided my creativity in finding a unique way to tell stories.

If I was born to do any one thing, it's telling stories. From my journey as a college theater actor in 2006, through (sports, music, law, and movie) journalism in 2010, all the way to my career as a director and screenwriter in the film-making community in







present day, I want my legacy to be engaging, original stories. As a person as well as a creator, I want to make people think, laugh, and feel. While those jobs sound glamorous and fun, they're a lot harder than they seem. They come with long hours, tons of research, preparing every little detail, and standing on a partially broken spine. I've had at least ten surgeries (I'm losing count) including three spinal fusions.

Though I "beat" my cerebral palsy as a kid, it's come back a lot stronger after the fusions. I walk very tightly and slowly now, with lots of pain and nerve-wrecking balance. I hold onto friends as I walk down curved streets, and my hand-prints stain the walls around my house from room to room. I have a degenerative condition that's an everyday struggle. But what also exists every day, is my need to leave a legacy that far outlives my body. My stories are my children, and they define me a lot more than a degenerative condition ever could.

I've published six books so far, ranging from Twilight Zone style slashers to introspective poetry compilations. I've got two more in production currently, including a coming-of-age children's Christmas story. Under my brand "Nostalgic Nightmare Productions", I've written, directed, and produced seven films, and I've assistant directed or acted in close to another seventy films and plays. "People change people, and events change people" is the motto I go by when I'm writing my character driven psychological thrillers, or earnest poetic portrayals of the ups and downs of life. I can't lie

and say that it's easy. I can't say that I don't want to give up sometimes. I can't say that there aren't days that I fall short. But what I can say is, let the pain inspire you. We're all going through something, whether it's a disability, finances, family, relationships, or whatever daily hardships the world throws into your already overflowing cup. But your story, every individual story, contains something important that somebody needs to hear right now. Time is fleeting and pain is temporary, so whatever hill you're climbing right now, keep climbing it. Don't just settle on being what's expected of you, be more. You're not just one more case in a medical file, you're the only you that's ever existed, exactly at this time, precisely in this place. Make it count.

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<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9QefhdjRfAnLDOZvkTZNWQ>



## CELEBRATING INCLUSION

*Lucia Matuonto*

A few years ago, while working abroad as a physical therapist, I had a profound realization that has stayed with me ever since: embracing inclusion means reaching out and offering support to others, regardless of our differences.

In 2008, I was living in Bahrain, a small Middle Eastern country with distinct customs, traditions, and religious practices that differed from those of my home country. The reason for my presence there was being hired by an American clinic to supervise and administer a groundbreaking treatment aimed at aiding patients with neurological conditions such as cerebral palsy, post-stroke complications, Parkinson's disease, and many others. The special treatment method used astronaut-like suits, elastic bands, and therapy sessions lasting up to 4 hours.



Initially, I faced some challenges because I didn't know anyone in the country and felt as if I would struggle to fit in there.. As I spent several months working at the clinic, I began to pick up a few friendly Arabic phrases to communicate with the children I was treating. Despite my efforts to connect, I still felt like an outsider. However, the most meaningful moments were those I shared with the children, many of whom faced motor and sensory difficulties.

Those little children did not understand English, however, after a few days, they were already greeting me with a big smile and trusting me to treat them. During the treatment, some children got tired, considering that the treatment was very intense, and the only thing they wanted was to go back home and sleep.

Noticing a lack of motivation in some children, I began sharing stories with them to enhance our interaction while their parents were translating. The interaction was amazing, prompting me to make a monthly tradition of crafting illustrations as gifts for the children.

I started telling the story of Zoe, a little crab who had lost her claw in a mishap at the beach. The following day, my patients returned with a plethora of questions, their curiosity piqued about what would unfold next. Unbeknownst to them, as I narrated the tales, their bodies were undergoing training, completely oblivious to the fact.





While trying to find her way back home, I continued. Zoe came across various animals who were dealing with their own struggles. One of them was a snake who complained about having to spend four hours every day just to cross the street, and there was also a rabbit who had been searching for his parents since the day he was born.

**I BELIEVE THAT THE POWER OF INCLUSION IS LIMITLESS.**

After spending time with her new friends, Zoe realizes that despite having only one claw, she can achieve many things just like the other animals who don't have disabilities.

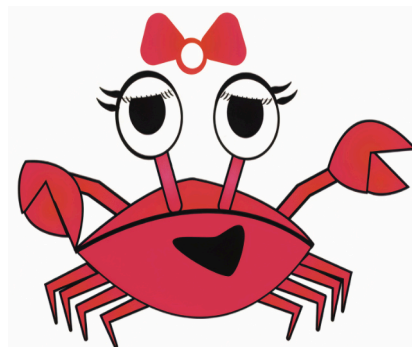
The children thoroughly enjoyed the stories and drawings I shared with them, and their parents were delighted with the positive outcomes. For me, it was an incredible feeling to discover their immense excitement about going to the clinic. Their parents were grateful for this, which led to me receiving invitations to their special celebrations. As a result, I had the opportunity to learn more about their stories, and they learned more about mine as well.

Experiencing the embrace and acceptance of being treated like family at their houses was an incredible sensation. My patient's families didn't judge me based on my appearance, beliefs, or anything else. They saw me as one of their own, and I truly felt at home.

In the end, I spent three years in that beautiful country. Stunning landscapes and warm people surrounded me. I wrote those stories, and in 2021, my lifelong dream of becoming a published author came true. Finally, I published my trilogy called "Zoe the Crab."

After a couple of years working in different countries and educational institutions, I realized that to achieve inclusion; it is necessary to provide the necessary resources to ensure that every individual feels welcome. For example, in educational settings, it is crucial not only to eliminate the separation of children with disabilities from neurotypical classes but also to ensure they feel like they belong. Allowing them to form relationships with their classmates and instructors is crucial.

My personal experience of being included has truly emphasized the importance of inclusivity and has become a significant source of inspiration for my books. The main goal of my books is to encourage acceptance and facilitate understanding.



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## INCLUSION: DISABLED CHARACTERS IN FICTION

*Heather Hancock*

Inclusion is a universal human right. It's for all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical, or other need, which gives equal access and opportunities. The focus is on eliminating all forms of discrimination: bullying, removal of barriers (to employment, social interactions, venues, transportation, voting, etc). In doing so, intrinsic worth of the individual is upheld, acknowledged, and valued. For the purpose of this article, I will be addressing the inclusion of a specific population: the disabled.

The arts are a very important part of a society, and literature has always been integral in expressing ideas, values, dreams, and stories with whom we identify with one or more characters. The reader gets to explore worlds and possibilities through these characters' eyes.

Consider this: what if you could never identify with a main character or any character, because they are all able-bodied? What if some authors' attempts at creating characters with disabilities fell short, shallow, and unrealistic?

That has been the case for the disabled for centuries and I want to draw attention to the need for this community to see characters in fiction that look, feel, and behave as they do. Characters who face the same challenges, obstacles, and restrictions that they do, and find ways to deal with them or overcome them.

I know, I have lived with Cerebral Palsy for close to 56 years. Growing up, one of the first characters I met in fiction was Beth, the youngest sister in *Little Women*. Yes, she was frail and passed away early in the story, but her life had an impact on her family and her sisters as they grew up and made choices. It was the first time I saw the ripple effect of a life intersecting with others. It was fascinating, and cemented the idea into my head that each life, regardless of length, has intrinsic value and purpose.

As an author who writes contemporary and speculative Christian fiction, I want to include characters with my disability and other disabilities into some of my books. My intention in writing is to

educate, bring hope, and allow the words and ideas shared to bring healing to wounded hearts and souls.

Will all of my stories have a character or characters with disabilities? No. I won't force a story to have what it may not need, depending on the plot lines and purpose for writing that story. That being said, the books that I do write with disabled characters are written for very specific purposes.

The first is education. A reader who experiences certain traumatic events and situations through the eyes of a disabled character will be along for the journey to survive, heal and thrive. It doesn't have to be as severe as that scenario, in fact, in my contemporary Christian fiction novel, *Sister Lost*, I address discrimination in a mall setting and educate the reader on the challenges people in wheelchairs face doing the most simple tasks the able-bodied world takes for granted. My intention is not to blame or shame, but simply shine a spotlight on barriers that still need to be removed so that I can enter a store and shop with assistance that holds no bias or judgment towards me. There are many things store owners could do to make their businesses inclusive. Conversely it also shows the disabled shopper the things they can do to get the service everyone else receives and the specific help that they need.

The second is identification. Every disabled person needs to know that they aren't the only ones on the planet dealing with certain situations and challenges. Having a disability is very isolating socially, emotionally, and physically. Most of us are scattered in around our countries and the globe with little access to others dealing with the same or similar situations. Seeing a disabled character and looking at the world through that character's eyes can be both inspiring and thought-provoking. Bottom line: you are not alone.

***"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12 New International Version)***

The final and most important reason for writing the stories that I do, is to bring hope to the hopeless. I



know what it is to be in a hopeless place; a pit of despair with voices taunting and tormenting you to end it all. I was in that exact place at the age of fourteen. The incessant bullying at school, and the beatings and narcissistic abuse at home took its toll over the years. I became suicidal. Before I could execute my plan, Jesus ran to me and saved me. My faith is my foundation and the source of all healing and hope in my life.

Inclusion is a multi-faceted topic that spans many aspects of society. Basic access to schools, stores, restaurants, theatres, stadiums, recreation centres, hair dressers, etc. is the main thing people think about. That is only the first facet. Access to education without barriers and with accommodations to make it easy for the disabled to learn in an environment of acceptance by students, teachers, and professors is necessary.

Inclusiveness in options for employment from recruitment to accommodating a held position with acceptance from recruiters, supervisors, bosses, and co-workers is lacking and needs work. The list

goes on, but I will stop there for the purposes of this article and shift back to my world of fiction.

It's not my intention to preach in my books, but I do deal with faith, the unseen realms, and how the two intersect from time to time in the lives of my main characters. Yes, it's based in truth, but I write fiction so there is some artistic license in the way that I present it. In *Sister Lost*, it is glimpsed and a minor thread, but the new novel I am working on takes it to another level. A small hint for those readers who may be wondering what's coming next.

March is the month set aside for many disabled groups to shine a light on the needs of those with Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, Multiple Sclerosis, Epilepsy, and Autism. It's the perfect month to explore the topic of inclusion. It's the elephant in the room most of the time, but I hope this article has revealed its presence and the need to begin to address it once facet at a time.

<https://heather-hancock.com>



## INTERVIEW WITH ASHLYNNE VAN WYK

### Hello Ashlynn, where are you from?

I am from Uitsig, a small place near Ravensmead, in South Africa, and was raised by my grandmother from the age of 2, after my mother passed away.

### What do you like doing in your spare time?

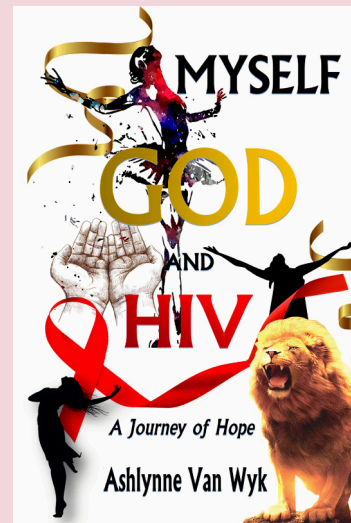
I enjoy spiritual dancing, photography, and writing. I'm also considering modeling but still praying about it.

### What inspired you to write "Myself, God & HIV" and share your experiences with the world?

I wrote this book to stop carrying the burden of my HIV status alone and to challenge the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. It was a way for me to assert that my HIV status is not my fault and to provide encouragement to others facing similar challenges.

### Can you describe the process of writing your book and how it helped you express your inner emotions?

Writing the book was a cathartic experience, though it involved reliving painful memories. It was only after completing it that I felt a sense of relief, as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. It reminded me of God's faithfulness and gave me hope that my story could help others.



### How has your faith played a role in your journey living with HIV?

My faith in Jesus has been my greatest source of strength and joy. It has helped me find peace and contentment despite my circumstances.

### How did you cope with the news of being HIV positive at the age of 12?

Initially, I struggled with feelings of failure and defeat, but I eventually decided to take control of my HIV status rather than letting it control me. I refused to let the stigma define me and leaned on my faith for strength.





**Can you share some of the challenges you faced while growing up with HIV?**

I faced bullying and discrimination from peers and family members, which was devastating. However, I believe that God protected me from fully understanding the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS at the time.

**How do you think your book will help break the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS?**

I hope that my book will show people that being HIV positive does not define a person and encourage others to share their own stories. By raising awareness and promoting openness, we can reduce the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

**What support systems or resources have been most helpful to you in dealing with your diagnosis**

My family, especially my aunt Charmaine, has been my biggest support system. The doctors at the HIV clinic at Tygerberg Hospital have also been invaluable in providing care and support.

**Can you tell us about your relationship with your aunt, Pastor Charmaine Daniels, and how she has supported you?**

My aunt Charmaine has been like a mother to me, always encouraging and supporting me. She ignited

my love for writing and has been by my side through every struggle.

**What role has medication played in managing your HIV, and how do you stay disciplined with your treatment?**

Medication has been crucial in managing my HIV, and I take it every morning at the same time. Establishing a routine has helped me stay disciplined.

**How do you stay positive and maintain hope despite the hardships you've faced?**

I remind myself that God is sovereign and find comfort in knowing that my suffering has a purpose. Accepting my flaws and imperfections has also helped me stay positive.

**What are your aspirations for the future, both personally and as an advocate for HIV awareness?**

I hope to become a social worker and advocate for HIV awareness, particularly among youth. I want to encourage openness and reflection to reduce new HIV infections and lessen the impact of HIV on individuals and communities.

**What advice would you give to other young people living with HIV or facing similar challenges?**

I would encourage them to embrace openness and self-acceptance. Education and awareness are key, and by sharing their stories, they can help break the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS.



## AND THERE WE GO

*Sheyla Dutra*

And there we go, coming soon, World Down Syndrome Day (note the word "syndrome" at a size it deserves to be, showing that people are greater than their diagnosis), on the 21st of March. Yes, because we are referring to the trisomy of our 21st chromosome within a total of 23.

Did you know that the official day on the United Nations calendar originated from a Brazilian project? This awareness month aims to bring consciousness about people with disabilities (I promise you, they are very capable and challenge the notion that the environment is the villain). It's a day when we take the opportunity to talk and listen,

teach and learn, increase visibility, and provide a platform for this population to be heard.

Some people wonder why we celebrate. I like to explain that it's not about cake and candles; it's a time for reflection on whether we are being truly humane or merely passing judgments. This year, the theme at the UN is "Stop the Stereotypes." Let's consider what we are teaching our typical children and what kind of humans we are raising to make the world a little better.

I have a daughter with Down syndrome, and she is the most incredible human being I've ever met: polite, gentle, and generous. She started working





and dating at the age of 19. Do you know why? Because my family believed in her from the very beginning. Rain or shine, she attended school, church, and birthday parties (although they stopped inviting her around the age of 11), and she never missed her therapies.

That's why it's everyone's responsibility to include all kinds of people, with or without disabilities. That's why we should celebrate and take to the streets with flags reading "I love someone with Down syndrome." Because I believe that no matter the question, love is always the answer!

❤️ *Love and fight!*

As citizens of anywhere, it's our responsibility to prevent exclusion, prejudice, ableism, and bullying.



Wherever you are, bring the values of respect, empathy, and humanity. At any time, ensure that we are advocates for diversity, supporters of inclusivity, and partners in brotherhood.

I invite you to meet someone with a disability. You'll find more similarities than differences between us.

Inclusive hugs!

@sheyladutra



## INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL HINGSON

### What gave you the inspiration for the Running with Roselle?

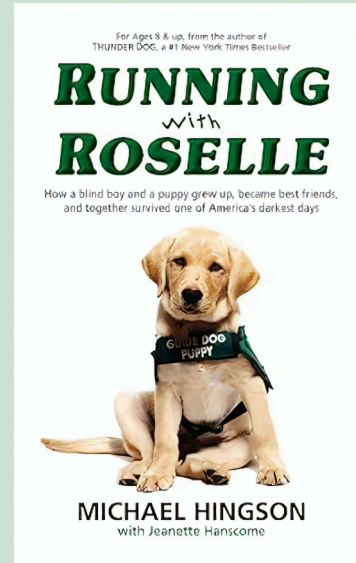
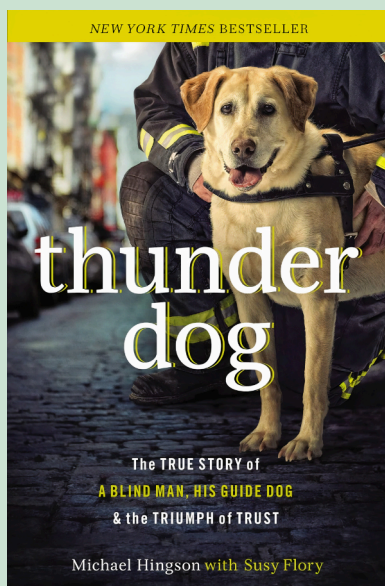
After writing and seeing published my #1 NY Times Bestselling book, “Thunder Dog: the story of a blind man, his guide dog and the power of Trust”, I wanted to create something that would inspire children and youth. Thunder Dog told adults my story and discussed many aspects of the true nature and realities of blindness, not what people think. I wanted to find a way to also approach younger with the same kind of information. I teamed with a children’s book author, Jeanette Hanscome, to create “Running with Roselle”. The book tells my story and Roselle’s story. Roselle was my guide dog in the World Trade Center.

### When did you start writing this book?

We began writing Running with Roselle early in 2013. I believe it does portray guide dogs and blind people in an accurate and appropriate way. Blindness, for example, is not what people think. A guide dog doesn’t “lead a blind person”. The dog guides and keeps me safe as we travel. I have to be the one to give the dog commands and I am the one who knows where to go and how to get there. We work as a team.

### What themes will readers find in this new book?

Readers will learn the value of Trust and Teamwork. They will learn that “disability” does NOT mean a



lack of ability. They will discover that blind people are real people too and can work, live and love in society just like everyone else.

### Who are the main characters in this book? Is this book based on true events?

The main characters are Michael Hingson, me, and my guide dog from 1999 to 2007. Yes we are real characters. I was hired by Quantum Corporation in 1999 to open, staff and run a sales and support office for the company. We opened the permanent office on the 78th floor of Tower One of the World Trade Center on August 1, 2000. Roselle and I were there preparing to run sales seminars on September 11, 2001. We escaped and have been telling our story in speeches and workshops ever since.

### How would you describe your writing style?

Conversational and informative. Also, I love to teach.

### Are you a panster or plotter?

Some of both. I like to plot the generalities and some essentials of what I write. However, I do like to let the characters help shape the story as I go along.

### Where can readers find you and your work online?

[www.michaelhingson.com](http://www.michaelhingson.com)





Michael Hingson is a New York Times best-selling author and international lecturer. Michael, blind since birth, survived the 9/11 attacks with the help of his guide dog Roselle. This story is the subject of his best-selling book, *Thunder Dog*.

Hingson gives over 100 presentations around the world each year speaking to influential groups such as Exxon Mobile, AT&T, Federal Express, Scripps College, Rutgers University, Children's Hospital, and the American Red Cross just to name a few. Hingson is Ambassador for the National Braille Literacy Campaign for the National Federation of the Blind and also serves as Ambassador for the American Humane Association's 2012 Hero Dog Awards.

*Interview by Danielle Urban.*



## DATING FOR JOURNALISTS?

*Itto Outini*

When I tell people that my husband and I founded an international media platform called The DateKeepers, the response usually goes something like this:

“Oh, wow! That’s so important! I mean, how else are journalists supposed to meet each other these days? It’s really good that you’ve started a dating site for them!”

Unfortunately for all the lonely journalists out there, I always have to burst their bubbles: “No, no, not that kind of date.”

My last name, Outini, comes from the indigenous Moroccan language of Tamazight, my mother tongue. In Tamazight, “ou” means “the one who owns” or “the one who keeps,” and “tini” means “the fruit of the date palm tree.” Hence, “Outini” means “the keeper of the dates,” or “the date keeper.”

My husband, Mekiya, took my name when we got married, and we became “the date keepers,” plural.

When we launched our media platform, we decided it should also take our name. We’re not the first to make such a decision, but ever since making it, I’ve been left with newfound sympathy for other media moguls. Sometimes, while drifting off to sleep at night, I find myself wondering how Michael Bloomberg deals with getting asked why he wanted to start a flower nursery on a floating glacier.

I’ve also been bemused by the fact that English-speakers seem to instinctively associate the word “date” with “dating sites,” and not with making history. Journalists, after all, make history. Literally. Even if our names do not appear in history books, we’re the ones who take stock of current events, choose the appropriate narrative frameworks, and determine which stories shall go down as history.

At The DateKeepers, we’re making history in multiple ways. Instead of constantly fixating on the latest crises, as most media outlets do, we’ve decided to challenge the longstanding journalistic paradigm, “It bleeds, it leads.” We deliberately turn the narrative spotlight away from the apocalyptic



narratives of the day and onto individuals who’ve made meaningful contributions to their fields, usually after overcoming hardship and adversity. Each month, we profile at least one extraordinary person—an artist, scientist, policymaker, inventor, or entrepreneur—so that their names and work will find the place in history that they deserve.

We’re also creating unprecedented opportunities for journalists and nonfiction writers. Instead of reading to reject, as most editors do, we look for the potential in every piece submitted and work with our writers to help them make their best work even better. We provide our contributing writers with constructive feedback, regular publication opportunities, and long-term professional mentorship because we believe that the only way to build a better world is by telling better stories, and the only way to tell better stories is by taking better care of our storytellers.

In modern societies, we have professional storytellers: journalist, writers, podcasters, filmmakers, musicians, videogame designers, etc. In the rural Atlas Mountains of Morocco, where I was born and raised, we had no professional storytellers, at least not when I was growing up. Modernization may have led to more division of



labor in recent years, but when I was a kid, we had no journalists or entertainers. Nor did we need them. Everybody got the chance to tell their stories themselves.

In modern societies, we rely on professional storytellers for many reasons. One of these reasons is that many people never get the chance to tell their stories. Some don't know how. Some don't have platforms. Some fear that something bad will happen to them if they do.

I understand this fear. However, if you ask me, the worst thing that can happen to anyone is not being able to tell their own story. I've experienced every sort of hardship you can imagine, from losing my parents, to facing neglect and abuse from my family, to spending six years homeless on the streets of Morocco, but because no one has managed to stop me from telling my story, I haven't just survived. I've learned to thrive.

Telling my own story, on my own terms, has empowered me to become the woman I am today: a successful journalist, businessowner, and international scholar, happily married to my best friend, doing what I love and pursuing my dreams. One of my longstanding dreams has been to build a

platform where people can tell their own stories, on their own terms, without having to worry that others will warp or distort them.

That's why I gave my name to The DateKeepers: to make history; to pioneer a new kind of journalism; and to share the gifts that changed my life with others so that, together, we can change the world.

I gave my name to The DateKeepers in order to make history because I'm committed to passing on these gifts to others, too.

That's why I gave my name to The DateKeepers: as a way of sharing these gifts with others, too.

These days, I give myself the love my family never gave me. I'm proud to have achieved academic and professional success despite all the barriers that stood in my way. I'm happily married to my best friend, who's also my business partner, and I continue to tell my story every day.

Through stories, people make sense of their lives and their roles in the world. That's why I created. That's why I gave The DateKeepers my name.

[www.thedatekeepers.com](http://www.thedatekeepers.com)



## PICK YOUR OWN ADDICTION

*Mekiya Outini*



I don't know how I'm not an alcoholic. Logically, I should've been.

My parents got clean—cleanish—long enough to raise me, but only after sampling every psychoactive substance they could get their hands on during college, then quitting their jobs, selling everything they owned, and roaming the country for months in a van. My mother's father died of liver failure—preventable, the doctors said—when she was eight years old, and my father would later disown his own father, a violent misogynist as well as a drunkard, on the eve of my parents' wedding. These factors may help to explain why my parents settled in North Carolina, far from all the other relatives who'd managed to survive, but they don't help to explain my sobriety.

My earliest memories take place Asheville, where my parents knew no one, and where we moved when I was two years old. For the next fourteen years, I was homeschooled. No friends. No community. Only my parents, for whom “clean” meant three or four glasses of beer every day, sometimes wine, no hard liquor, a few packs of cigarettes for my father, and smoking weed only in secret, on special occasions.

I like weed, but not secrets. I like those old videos of writers—Anne Sexton, James Baldwin—poised behind podiums, wielding their cigarettes like tiny batons, reading or perhaps orating as if every word had surface tension. It's not the cigarettes that appeal to me so much as the idea of cigarettes: the ethos that they conjure. I've never tried tobacco,

though, because either it would leave me sick and sleepless, just as alcohol leaves me sick and sleepless, or it wouldn't. Either way, I'd have a problem on my hands.

I didn't drink until a few months shy of twenty-one, and then only at the behest of alcoholic friends, whose company took the edge off my depression even as the blueberry beer put it back on. Booze has never once lifted my spirits, though drinking socially occasionally has. The operative word here is "socially," not "drinking." At home, I'll use half a bottle of red for bolognese sauce, and by the time I notice the other half sitting on the counter, I've got red wine vinegar. I'm not talking about kicking addiction. Kicking addiction is a major achievement, one that I applaud in others, but cannot claim for myself. No. I'm talking about an anomaly.

The cigarettes are just the side dish. Baldwin, Sexton—*they're* the entrée.

They're the reason I made it through childhood. Not them, precisely, but their ilk: Diane Duane and Philip Pullman, Brian Jacques and Bruce Coville; the distillers of something far stronger than alcohol, a psychoactive substance capable of stretching minds, filling heads with others' voices, and making someone feel that he is not alone.

To say that I do not have an addictive personality is incorrect. I just got lucky. I got addicted at an early age to something else, something unorthodox, a non-toxic substance—though there are toxic strains of story, too.

Since the arrival of COVID-19, I've watched my parents' addictions resurge. They go through more booze and cigarettes and weed than ever now, and they also binge on something new: the news. If the media's the opiate of the masses, then clickbait can only be the methamphetamines. For over a year, whenever we spoke on the phone, they had only one story to tell. The virus. Virus! The climate. The floods. The tornadoes! The elections. The virus! The tornadoes. The fires. The pollution! The fires. The fires! The elections! The wars!

Today, as for the 1,460 days before, give or take, they believe that the world is

ending. Perhaps it is. Their world is certainly ending, and it's not the first to end. Plenty of worlds have ended already. As Ben Ehrenreich wryly observes in *The Desert Notebooks*, "Worlds end all the time."

Without ends, there can be no beginnings. Without cataclysms, there can be no conflicts, and without conflicts, there can be no resolutions. No tensions. No stories at all. Every story demands a sacrifice, the end of someone's world, but the good ones also offer paths to transformation. We must choose our stories wisely. They're no less capable than drugs and alcohol of reconfiguring our neural circuitry and permanently altering our minds.

I got lucky. I got hooked on stories from a young age—good ones. Later, for a while, I got hooked on not-so-good ones, but that's another story.

I can't take credit for ending a cycle or for kicking addiction. I can only take credit for the stories I tell. I believe that if we are to wean ourselves off world-ending narratives, not to mention all the other substances that help us end our worlds, then we'll need more stories, better stories, different ones—a wider sampling from which to choose.

That's why I'm telling this one.

[www.thedatekeepers.com](http://www.thedatekeepers.com)



## WHY I WROTE “LIFE FLASHES: A MEMOIR AND WRITING PROCESSES”

*Merrie Reagan*

I do not fully know why I wrote *Life Flashes: A Memoir*. I did not intend to do so. I do not know why I began writing a journal in diary form that three years later became *Life Flashes: A Memoir* book manuscript. I do remember beginning to write the manuscript for the book right after undergoing a profound spiritual awakening in early 2007.

As a result of internal conversion, I began to truly live again, through having re-established connection with God, accepting uncertainty, realizing that conflict happens in all relationships and that division is essentially an opportunity for growth, not an obstacle, and that goodwill—kindness, respect, and cooperation—is what holds relationships together in delightful, devastating, and everything in between times.

I remember the first short story I wrote in elementary school. It was entitled the Deer Hill Fire. Sitting at one of the desks in the fifth-grade class homeroom, I wrote about the fire—as it was happening—at a farm located on Deer Hill, which was situated directly behind Deer Hill School. To this day, I can recall the excitement I experienced while writing the story, I can also remember being thrilled when receiving the completed story back from homeroom teacher Mrs. Bancroft, who marked the paper in red pen with an A or an A minus grade.

Shortly after I left the education field in the mid-1970s, I began writing freelance news and — feature articles for two local newspapers. Writing



feature articles about people, places, and things especially interested me. I do not know why I loved writing from the start. I remember the internal freedom and peace I felt after finishing the first freelance article I wrote.

I had done something that I was not expected to do and did not expect self to do. Writing or playing with ideas, including observing behavior of people, places, and things with words was personally fascinating and rewarding, for reasons that I did not fully understand. I was discovering —in a new way—that it is just as normal to work in a profession that is different from what family members or friends have chosen as it is to choose the same profession in which family members or friends are employed. I was rediscovering that life is essentially about passion, not proving self-worth.

When I began writing a journal again in 2007, I decided I was not going to do so in the same manner as I had in the past. This time, I vowed not to sugarcoat challenging matters. At the same time, I pledged not to wallow in self-pity. I was not interested in writing a tell-all memoir; I chose to write *Life Flashes: A Memoir* in diary form because





doing so helped me to discern what was genuinely going on within me—mind, heart, and soul.

Writing, editing, and proofreading of *Life Flashes* found me remembering words someone, whose name I cannot remember, uttered. “Do not ever write anything that you would not want to read on the front page of a newspaper.” This is sage advice. A writer who seeks excellence consistently re-examines written material. Why? On a regular basis writers find material that they wrote that they initially believed to be relevant is immaterial, inaccurate, or inappropriate. Published or not, writing which does not demonstrate literary limits damages author credibility and relationship between the author and readers.

Writing is not an essentially solitary process. While writing, an author is continually interacting with people, places, animals, and things that he or she is examining. After writing for several hours, writers generally experience considerable physical as well as emotional fatigue. Writing enables authors to

privately engage with people, places, and things in a manner equivalent with engaging with people in person. During the past fourteen years, I have consistently discovered that social life that I errantly believed that I have missed while I have been living alone and writing, rewriting, or editing for much of the day—mostly at home or in libraries or coffee shops—has been active within me. Solitary and social interactions are remarkably similar; the two communication methods are not mutually exclusive.

No endeavor, including writing, is conflict-free. As a rookie laptop computer user, I lost sections of the manuscript on several occasions, without warning. The manuscript text could not be rewritten; passing time can render a writer unable to recreate experience, mood, and atmosphere. Authors continually learn how to grieve and move beyond literary losses.

<https://merriehreagan.com/>

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Former educational tutor, small business owner, and part-time freelance news and feature article writer, Merrie H. Reagan resides in America, in the state of Massachusetts.

She savors reading, writing, ballroom dancing, singing, homemaking, and yard work. Merrie watches varied public and network television programs, including *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *Call the Midwife*, *American Idol*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *CBS Sunday Morning*, and *Funny You Should Ask*.

Her new book is *Life Flashes: A Memoir*.

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## THE BERMAN MURDERS

*Doug Kari*

Immersive Investigative Journalist Doug Kari Turns True Crime Author with Release of *“The Berman Murders”*

How did the heir to the Kahlua fortune go from Beverly Hills to a tragic end in a shallow grave? Explore the Mojave Desert's most mysterious unsolved crime.

During his investigation of the Berman case, Doug laid in a shallow grave to imagine the carnage that occurred there. When a Vietnam veteran went missing, he scoured a remote corner of Death Valley to discover a key clue. And while covering the migrant crisis in Mexico, he walked through squalid encampments to interview refugees.

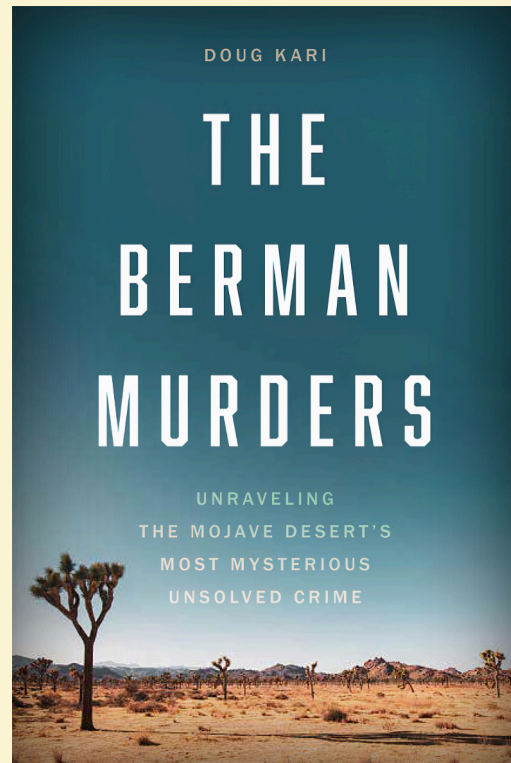
Doug's immersive approach allows him to discover the facts without resorting to the “What ifs?” and exaggerations that plague the true crime genre.

In his debut true crime exposé, Kari uncovers the story of Barry Berman, heir to the Kahlua fortune, and his wife Louise — who went missing in 1986 in Saline Valley, a popular Mojave Desert draw for nudists and eccentrics.

“After years of investigation and interviews, I uncovered information no one expected,” says Kari. “The chief suspect's history of dominance and deviancy in his intimate relations. Jailhouse informants who said they'd heard talk of the murders. The observations and suspicions of a retired Marine Corps general who knew the suspect well.”

The story of *“The Berman Murders”* begins at daybreak on January 6, 1986, as a couple on a camping trip in the Mojave Desert set out for a stroll, only to never return. Eventually, the local sheriff's office discovered that Barry and Louise Berman had been murdered.

As years passed and the double homicide went unsolved, speculation and conjecture grew around the Berman case. Despite extensive investigation by local and federal authorities, there has never been, to this day, an arrest made in the case, let



alone a conviction. But to Kari, this doesn't mean there's no plausible theory.

Fast paced and meticulously researched, *“The Berman Murders - Unraveling the Mojave Desert's Most Mysterious Unsolved Crime”* is the first book to reveal the full story surrounding the Berman murders, making it a must-read for true crime lovers.

Doug Kari investigates true-crime stories firsthand and in depth. His true-crime stories have run on the front pages of *LA Weekly*, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, *San Francisco Daily Journal*, and other respected outlets. With an English major from U.C. Berkeley, Doug honed his writing skills under novelist and professor Leonard Michaels (*The Men's Club*). After receiving his law degree from U.C. Law San Francisco, Doug practiced IP law while doing pro-bono wilderness protection work for Desert Survivors, an outdoor group he co-founded.

Discover more on <https://www.dougekari.com>.





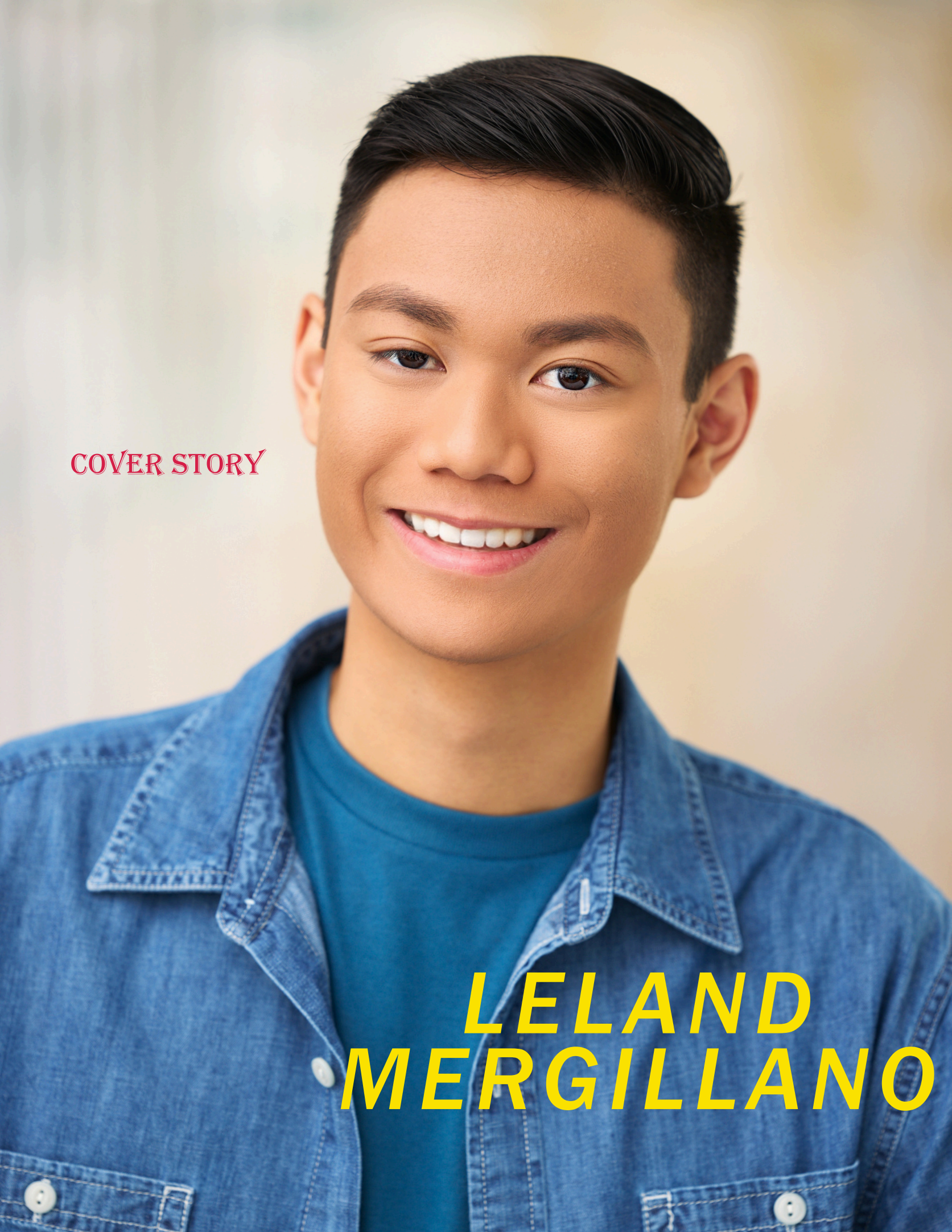
Lying in a shallow grave to imagine the carnage that occurred there. Scouring a remote corner of Death Valley to discover a key clue in a missing person case. Walking through squalid encampments in Mexico to interview migrant refugees.

Doug Kari investigates true-crime stories firsthand and in depth.

In his debut true crime novel, “The Berman Murders: Unraveling the Mojave Desert’s Most Mysterious Unsolved Crime” from Roman & Littlefield, Kari exposes the story of Barry Berman, heir to the Kahlua fortune, and his wife Louise — who went missing in 1986 in Saline Valley, a popular Mojave Desert draw for nudists and eccentrics.

Doug brings a blend of scholarly research and good old-fashioned storytelling to his writing. He believes in immersive investigation. His true-crime stories have run on the front pages of *LA Weekly*, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, *San Francisco Daily Journal*, and other respected outlets. With an English major from U.C. Berkeley, Doug honed his writing skills under novelist and professor Leonard Michaels (*The Men’s Club*). After receiving his law degree from U.C. Law San Francisco, Doug practiced IP law while doing pro bono wilderness protection work for Desert Survivors, an outdoor group that he co-founded.





COVER STORY

**LELAND  
MERGILLANO**

**Hello Leland, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine. How did you discover your passion for acting, and when did you decide to pursue it seriously?**

I am very thankful for the opportunity to be a part of this magazine! Thank you for having me. My acting journey started when I was seven years old. My mom asked my sister and I if we were interested in doing a theatre summer camp. For the summer musical, we performed Sound of Music, and I was casted as Kurt Von Trapp. The following summer, I played the White Rabbit in Alice In Wonderland Jr. at Caponi's Cannolis School of the Arts. It was then when I truly fell in love with acting. I continued on with musical theater through the years and still do today. Watching a lot of shows/movies, it inspired me to take acting to the next level. After being enrolled and graduating from advanced teen acting school in 2021, signed with an agent, and got my first taste of the on-screen acting experience. From then on, I was hooked and decided to pursue acting in films seriously.

**Balancing school and acting can be challenging. How do you manage your time effectively to handle both responsibilities?**

Being homeschooled makes my schedule more flexible, and I am also a dual enrollment college student. I balance my schedule by setting priorities and having a student planner to help manage my time. I find it beneficial to create a schedule, and to work around plans that may conflict with my school schedule.

**Are there any actors or actresses who inspire you, and if so, what aspects of their work do you find most compelling?**

I've looked up to many actors in my life, but if I could pick two, they would be Keanu Reeves and Dwayne Johnson. Keanu has always been one of my favorite actors because of how good he is at portraying different types of characters. I also really admire how he stays humble and kind despite his status. While I was in New York, I got to meet his girlfriend, Alexandra Grant. She was delightful throughout our conversation and is a very talented artist. Dwayne Johnson has always been my favorite comfort actor because of his family-oriented personality, which is something I can relate to. Growing up, my dad would watch WWE, so I kind of grew up with Dwayne Johnson's presence, in a way. I got to play Maui in a theatrical production of



Moana in 2022, so I would always study how he performed the character vocally.

**What has been your favorite role or project so far, and why did it resonate with you?**

Working as an on-screen actor is exciting, and I've enjoyed every experience I've had with it, so having a favorite is difficult. Two projects that I have in mind though are "She is 17 Again" and "Film Camp". I got to work with my sister and very close friends. It was great to meet new people who were amazing to work with. The part of the film took place in the 1960s, so having to do different style changes was enjoyable, and the atmosphere felt as if we were in that era. "Film Camp" was awesome to work on because of the unique environment. Staying at an awesome faith-based camp while shooting a movie is not something one can experience often, so I was blessed to have been given that opportunity. I also made some wonderful friends there.

**As a teen actor, how do you approach portraying characters that may be significantly different from your own experiences and background?**

I believe that playing a character that is different from my own background is a great experience! When you play another character, you are getting out of your element.

Playing a different role requires character breakdown and careful study of it.

**"Miracle at Manchester" is a notable project you've been a part of. Can you share any memorable experiences or challenges you faced while working on this film?**

Miracle at Manchester was a very memorable and enjoyable experience for me. It was an adventure to fly to California and be a part of the film. The production company is JCFilms they are so amazing, and consider them my film family. This film is based on actual events about a community that comes together to organize a miracle for a teen battling an aggressive form of brain cancer. Meeting this person on set had a profound effect on me. He is a role model today using his foundation—Miracle At Manchester Foundation—to help other children with cancer.



I met actor Eddie McClintock (Warehouse 13, Friends, S.H.I.E.L.D, etc.), who directed the movie and was one of my favorite directors. I believe that faith in God has shown through this movie and ultimately impacted the movie world.

**Being a part of the entertainment industry at a young age, how do you prioritize maintaining a healthy worklife balance?**

It can be very busy at times, but with time management, you allocate enough time for work responsibilities as well as personal pursuits, such as spending time with family, engaging in hobbies, or pursuing personal goals. That is how I can maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Staying busy doesn't mean that it's always work; I could be busy having fun with family & friends,





gaming, biking around the neighborhood, or simply reading a book.

**Are there particular genres or types of characters you are most interested in exploring as your acting career progresses?**

I've always wanted to play the main character of an action movie or the funny side character in a sitcom. Although, my dream is to be a part of the Star Wars franchise. I have been a lifelong Star Wars fan, and being a part of the franchise would be fantastic.

**With a diverse portfolio including "Baila Conmigo" and "Success Camp," how do you approach roles in different genres, and what attracts you to such varied projects?**

What attracts me the most to such projects is how diverse they are. To me, a good actor can portray all genres. That is a part of acting- getting out of your element. I was blessed to have been a small part of "Baila Conmigo." The crew was phenomenal, and the experience was something I will not forget.

"Success Camp" was intriguing yet exciting because as we were filming the movie, we felt as if we were real campers of the camp! I got to work with many familiar faces and new people, making the film an enjoyable experience.

**Are you more inclined towards on-screen performances or stage productions? If so, what factors contribute to your preference?**

I truly enjoy both. Being on stage is what began my acting journey. The thrill of seeing the live audiences smiles brings me joy! For on-screen, I always look forward to working on set. It is a different experience every time, learning, and growing as an actor.

**How do you stay grounded and focused on your craft amidst the attention and potential pressures that come with being a teen actor?**

Faith & Family is very important to me. Without the love and support from my parents I would not be where I am today. Finding a balance that leaves room for spending time with family & friends, church, volunteering, sports, gym etc. is key. Challenges are always going to be present in this industry. It is an excellent way to except it and turn it into motivation. As actors, we should always work on our craft, whether on set or off set.

**Can you share any advice for other teenagers interested in pursuing acting as a career?**

If you feel that the stage or the camera is calling your name, don't ignore that call. If anything, the best time to start is now. This career takes commitment, so if you feel ready, put in the work,



and see how rewarding it will be. An issue many people have faced is self-doubt, but if you get into that mindset of becoming the best you can be as an actor, it will work out. Keep going, keep learning, keep doing, even though some auditions don't go through, never give up!

**Auditioning is a crucial part of an actor's life. Can you share any tips or strategies you've learned for navigating auditions and handling both successes and rejections?**

Be prepared. It is best to study the character you're reading for beforehand. It would be much easier to step into the character's shoes during an audition. One thing that has helped me prepare for this industry is discipline. Don't worry about being nervous. Do your best, smile, and have a good time. There will be times where you will experience rejection in this industry. Accepting that rejection is very much a part of the journey. Welcome that fact, which gives you a chance to improve and use it as a motivation. Learn that everything happens for a reason and trust the rejection – you may not have got the part, but that allows you to have space for a different one.

**Looking ahead, are there any dream roles or collaborations that you aspire to in your acting career?**

I would love to co-star with Dwayne Johnson, Keanu Reeves, and Ralph Macchio. However, I'm just excited about going through the journey in this industry and looking forward to working with actors and will feel blessed with the opportunities and the many memories that will be made.

Find out more at:

IMDb: [IMDb.me/LelandMergillano](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1023884/)

IG: [Leland.Mergillano](https://www.instagram.com/Leland.Mergillano)

FB: [Leland Mergillano](https://www.facebook.com/Leland.Mergillano)



Leland Mergillano from Clermont, Florida, is driven, dedicated, intelligent and a compassionate individual. He finds joy in spending time with his family, serving at church, traveling, gaming, being with friends, playing with his dog (Duke), cat (Tommy) and bird/cockateil.

His desire for acting started when he began his theater journey at a young age. He later opened his YouTube Channel called Leland's Travels. He plays the piano, harmonica, ukulele, Tahitian drums, and continues to do musical theater today. Leland's passion for acting peaked ever since. He has played at Disney's Polynesian Village Resort and Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, and various community theatres.

Besides his fine arts talents, his distinctive voice—a deep baritone/bass unusual in someone his age—has people remembering him by. Leland attended acting classes, signed with an agent, and started acting in movies in 2021. He has been in over 15+ film projects in the last 2 1/2 years! Leland has worked alongside actors such as Dean Cain, Eddie McClintock, just to name a few.



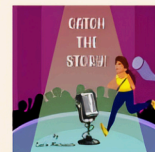




# The RV Book Fair



June 2024



**THE RELATABLE VOICE**  
magazine



Don't miss The RV Book Fair, in June 2024. This 10-day event promises to bring the magic of books to life, so be sure to check it out and celebrate great authors and their incredible work. For more information and to stay up-to-date about all things Relatable, please visit <https://www.relatable-media.com>.



## 5 UNUSUAL PRACTICES THAT'LL HELP YOU CRUSH 2024

*Franklin H Ezenwa*

**D**o you know what percentage of people stick to their New Year's Resolutions by year end? Is it 40%, 90%, 6% or 25% ?

It's actually 6%.

I know what you're thinking - that number is scarily low.

According to a report released by Forbes Health in October 2023, only about 6% of people stay consistent with pursuing goals set at early in the year by the time the year is ending. The vast majority of people (at least 80%) quit on their goals aka New Year's Resolutions around February and March of the same year.

In fact, a couple other studies from different sources have similar findings, revealing how only very few people stick to the commitments (aka New Year's Resolutions) they make to themselves in certain areas of their lives.

This leaves us with the question: "Are New Year's Resolutions on their own effective?"

As someone who used to rely squarely on New Year's Resolutions and was always left disappointed, I can say that the answer is a big 'NO'. After many years of studying and applying principles from top success experts, I discovered 5 promising, usual practices that continue to help me to not only stick to my goals but also make significant progress towards them.

For 2024, here they are:

1. **Reflect on 2023:** Doing the same thing and expecting a different result, they say, is the definition of insanity. If we're going to make 2024 better than 2023, then we need to assess 2023 to learn what we need to do differently otherwise we'll do the same thing and get same, if not, worse results in the new year. To do this, we want to ask ourselves these 3 questions as we take inventory of 2023:

*I. What worked well?* : We want to continue what we did well and add on top of it.

*II. What didn't work well?* : We want to get rid of what's not working since it's a distraction.

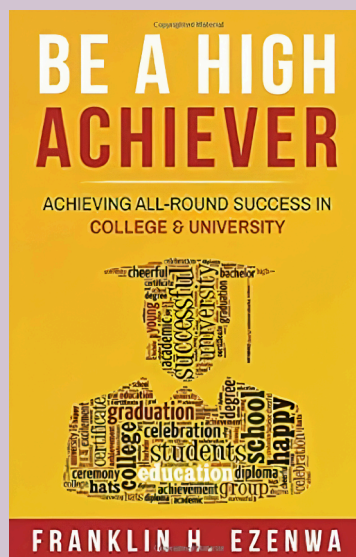
*III. What will I do differently?* : Based on the data we've gathered from I, II , we can now decide what we'll do differently in the new year

2. **Create a compelling vision of 2024:** I believe one of the main reasons many people lack motivation along the way is that they lack a compelling vision. Having a compelling vision is what pulls and drives us because it captures our 'why' which is our driving force in life. That's why we want to have a clear, compelling vision of 2024 where we identify what we want to be celebrating in the different areas of life by the end of the year - whether it's a level of income you want to make, specific body weight you want to attain, or relationship you want to have. This way we can align our actions and strategies with our vision.

3. **Set guaranteed growth goals:** With a clear compelling vision at hand, it becomes easy to set goals to bring the vision to life. Although, it's good to set destination goals (i.e. "I will do X by X"), I believe that we want to have growth goals. This kind of goals require us to place ourselves in an environment that guarantees that we'll stretch and grow. Obviously, this will feel uncomfortable at first,

but when we stay in the discomfort long enough, we'll get used to it plus we'll become a better version of ourselves. For example, if you're looking to improve your public speaking and leadership, you could consider joining Toastmasters. If you're looking to learn to swim, then you can sign up for swimming classes. (You can join me in doing both this year.)

4. **Get accountability:** We tend to do better when we have someone else holding us accountable especially to our own commitments. That's why we



definitely want to tap into the power of accountability. Whether it's a peer, a mentor or a coach, we want to connect with individuals who will not only support us on our journey when things gets tough, but people who will celebrate our wins with us.

**5. Track progress regularly:** Another major reason why people don't stick to their goals is that they don't keep a tab on it. They set the goal at the beginning of the year and guess the next time they revisit it? That's right! The end of the year is the next time they review their goals and by that time it's too late to make any adjustments. When we focus our attention on the progress we're making

towards achieving our goals, we'll get excited and motivated on the journey that we'll make even more progress.

If you liked these practices and found them useful then you will love my Ultimate Massive Success Guide 2024. You can download your FREE copy of the guide to go deeper in this topic.

By applying these practices, I can personally guarantee that not only will you achieve more in 2024 than you did in 2023, you'll also enjoy bliss and a good sense of purpose. Let's make 2024 our best year yet.

@franklinhezenwa



## INTERVIEW WITH SONIA MARTA

### **Hello Sonia, what can you tell me about yourself?**

I am a very intricate individual. I am intensely passionate about many things. I'm a leader, podcaster, student, writer, and more. I'm most likely the most captivated and creative person you've met. At the tender age of 10, I self-published my debut poetry collection, *Oracol*, which hit the shelves in 2018. This began my journey as a changemaker and an award-winning author. My story "The Rapping Astronaut" (2020) received high praise from teachers and the international community. I continued to enchant readers with "Bucharest City Tour, a Trip with Sonia", published in the same year (2020). In 2023, I had the honor of co-authoring "Women Leading the Way" (2023), a collection spotlighting successful women, proudly launched at the London Book Fair (LBF23').

My projects have propelled me to be the role model I aspire to be, enabling me to travel and address

more than 3,500 children, students, and parents. I emphasize the value of self-improvement and education, inspiring youth to chase their dreams. This dedication to my mission gained recognition at the Women Changing the World Awards Gala (2023). I was honored with the Silver award in the Young Women Changing the World category. It was a memorable trip as I had the chance to meet the Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, Dr Terrera Trent and Peace Mitchell at these events held in April 2023 in London.

### **Are you working on anything at present that you would like to share?**

I am eager to announce The Pen to Paper Writing and Personal Branding Retreat, an exclusive literary adventure for authors, aspiring writers, and thought leaders keen to shape their voices and kick-start their branding journey. Guided by me, other industry experts, and inspiring guest speakers, this retreat promises to ignite our participants' journey to





becoming published authors, elevating their branding, and becoming a voice in their respective industries.

### **Who are the Speakers at the Pen to Paper Mallorca Retreat?**

The Pen-to-Paper Writing and Personal Branding Retreat speakers are people close to me. I am happy to have you, Lucia Matuonto, an awarded book author, creative director at WorldAuthors.Org, founder, and top-rated host of The Relatable Voice Podcast and the new podcast 'Catch The Story!'. Claudia Marta, my mother, is a book coach and senior director of marketing, PR, and events, who, besides helping me with my editorial projects, had other bestselling projects she orchestrated from initial idea to bestseller and further engaging communities and leaders worldwide. Among the various personal branding and writing workshops the speakers will hold, I will be holding one on personal branding, as since my first book was published, I became my social media manager. Hence, I deeply comprehend our digital footprints' impact on the world and our careers. The retreat provides a unique opportunity to learn from skilled

mentors and gain valuable insights into the literary world or personal branding.

### **Can you give more details about the agenda?**

Since our retreat is in the summer, it will offer valuable content, relaxing moments, and opportunities to discover Mallorca. As I visited two years ago when my aunt used to live there, I can promise the location is tailored for all ages, is a great place to inspire both authors and offers stunning landscapes for creating an impactful personal branding kit.

The first event on the agenda the night after landing is a welcoming cocktail dinner to allow participants to get to know each other, dance, have fun, and make plans for the upcoming days. I would love to see participants who are also published authors to learn from their experiences.

On the second day, the comprehensive daily workshops, held in the morning, will cover everything from generating ideas for a fiction or non-fiction book to building a writing community, from understanding traditional vs. self-publishing to making critical publishing decisions, and straightforward tactics and strategies to elevate



participants' executive presence with personal branding tools.

The workshops are designed to cater to all genres and levels, ensuring that every participant has the opportunity to learn and grow.

After lunch, fun activities are booked, for instance, a sunset trip on the sea with the catamaran, a trip to the old town, and a relaxing afternoon.

Every day, our photographer will capture key moments and have 1 to 1 sessions with our participants to ensure they will have around 40 representative images of themselves to kick-start their branding and websites or launch a PR campaign with their services.

The last day will be dedicated to 1 to 1 sessions and goodbyes in the hopes that all participants will look forward to our next retreat and the next city it will be in.

It is essential to mention that all participants will have our support in the following months to help them achieve their objectives with their editorial or personal branding projects.

#### Who is it, for?

The Pen-to-Paper Writing and Personal Branding Retreat suits a diverse audience, as we want to offer a unique and enriching experience for individuals between the ages of 15 and 50 at various stages of their literary or professional journey:

- **Aspiring Writers:** If you dream of becoming a published author, our retreat provides guidance and tools to turn your writing aspirations into reality. Whether you're a teen, student, or passionate writer within the specified age range, our workshops cater to all genres and levels.
- **Published Authors:** If you already published your book, this retreat is an opportunity to enhance your presence and global reach. Learn strategies and tactics to elevate your brand, connect with your audience, and mark your presence with your project online or offline. Learn with us to be bold and different.
- **Thought Leaders and Professionals:** Leaders seeking to amplify their executive presence and personal brand will find valuable insights in our comprehensive workshops. They will have the



chance to refine their communication style, connect with like-minded professionals, and explore the intersection of storytelling and leadership.

- **Educators, Teachers, Parents:** If you're willing to work with your kids to create a children's book, or you dream of sharing your story. I am where I am today thanks to the support from my parents, teachers, and entrepreneurs, who listened to my ideas and saw the spark, passion, and determination in my eyes. I am willing to have more people who have the opportunity to empower teens joining my sessions.

**What are the key dates, and how can people register?**



The dates for the retreat are the 8th-12th of July 2024, aiming to book at the Meliá Calviá Beach 4-star hotel. For all details, interested participants can explore my website [www.soniamarta.com](http://www.soniamarta.com), the Retreat tab, and we encourage them to get in touch at [office@soniamarta.ro](mailto:office@soniamarta.ro)

I am so eager to have a holiday that will be dear to all of us and the turning point in our careers. I am looking forward to our first edition guests! Registrations are open until the end of March to ensure we plan for every detail for an unforgettable experience!

**Is there anything else you would like to add about your passions?**

As I mentioned above, I am captivated by many fields and tasks. My interests lie in literature, acting, podcast production, listening to music, taking long walks at sunset in the park, orchestrating interactive sessions with the youth, reading and traveling. Every trip I take captivates and invigorates me; each destination exudes its distinct essence, offering myriad unique experiences waiting to be penned into narratives. Engaging all senses is imperative to fully embrace the essence of a locale – from its architectural marvels and cultural heritage to the pulse of its streets, the laughter of children, and the myriad of flavors in its cuisine.

My recent trip to Vienna, amidst the wintry embrace of January, was a delightful surprise, unveiling a rich tapestry of cultural vibrancy, notably in the youthful effervescence infusing the city's concert halls. A highlight was a day spent amidst the splendor of Schönbrunn, a place of history and creativity, where imperial elegance intertwines with lush gardens and opulent architecture, sparking inspiration for storytelling as rich and layered as the city. Again, I take every opportunity to capture my spirit with a professional photo session that further builds on my personal brand, and, most importantly, on the message I want to send to the world, to other teens, and create long-lasting unforgettable memories.

I want to create this together in Mallorca for us as a group and for each individual.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this initiative with you, Lucia.



[www.soniamarta.com](http://www.soniamarta.com)



## A BRIEF REFLECTION ON MY MOTHER

*Richard Perkins Hsung*

**M**y mother grew up along the Hudson River Valley, moving from Hastings-on-Hudson to Irvington before finally settling in Yonkers.

She lived with her parents in Yonkers until she was well into her thirties. For women of her time, that was rather old not to be married, and she had accepted that she would live out her days with her parents, a quiet and non-adventurous life. They were all devout Christians, and while life was uneventful, they were happy, just the three of them and their dogs.

In 1916, that all changed. That was the year Mother married Father. A few years earlier, my father spotted her riding on a trolley in New York City. As the trolley made a turn, Mother glanced through the windowpane, and when their eyes met, my father was in love. He chased the trolley, hopped onto it, and proposed.

They were married in 1916, and shortly after the wedding, Mother left Yonkers for the first time in her adult life and became a missionary, traveling halfway around the world. Much praise should go to her parents, my grandparents, who were willing to part ways with their only daughter and sacrifice their happiness.

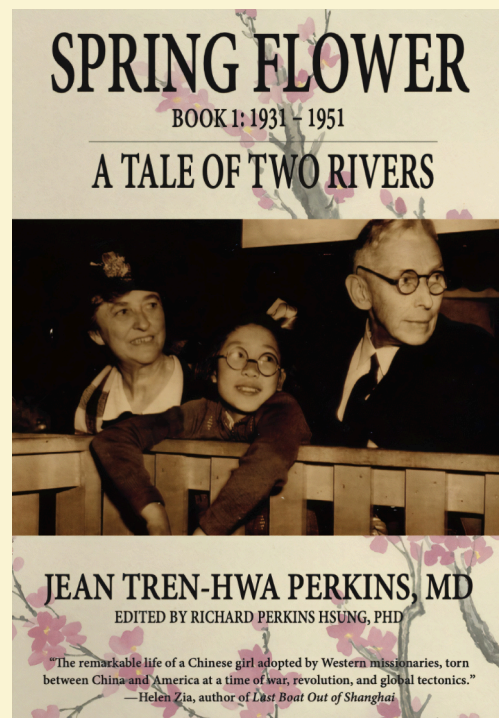
Together my parents boarded a Trans-Pacific steam liner at the San Francisco Ferry Terminal and bade farewell to America, where Georgina had lived since she was seven. After months at sea, with brief stops in Honolulu and Yokohama, they landed at the famed Shanghai Bund (上海外滩). Mother was already an avid photographer, and she began to document her lifelong journey into China through her lens. In the early twentieth century, carrying around a camera was most unusual.

I often think about what Mother's expression must have been when she arrived in old Shanghai and when she meandered by gondola through the narrow and congested Grand Canal before sailing up the Yangtze River for the first time. I imagine her being completely captivated when the Kiukiang Pagoda (锁江楼塔) slowly and majestically unveiled

itself. At the same time, she must have been awestruck by an alien world.

I wonder what she was thinking when she finally landed in the town of Kiukiang, after spending most of her life along the Hudson River in Yonkers, New York. I can only imagine the magnitude of her culture shock, particularly during her first years. She did speak of her shock when she learned that the centuries-old practice of "bound-feet" was still prevalent. Chinese women had their feet tightly wrapped with strips of cloth at a very young age so they could grow up with small feet, which was attractive (and marketable) to men. Despite creating a lifetime of pain and deformity, this antiquated practice was adopted by nearly all social classes, because having tiny feet was considered a thing of beauty. It would be impossible to find a woman with feet longer than three inches. To my mother, this was a desecration of women's bodies, which was consistent with historical disregard for women, including their health and education.

My mother was not new to Chinese faces, as her family had generously hosted numerous Chinese medical students and physician-interns in New York. Had she stayed in Shanghai, it would have been





less shocking, since Shanghai was already an international city in 1916. But Mother migrated from the US to a rural town in the Central Regions at a time when war and famine were ravaging China.

One might think she was merely following her husband, fulfilling the traditional duties of a loving wife supporting her man's dream. But this was much more than that. What must have sustained her? I believe she had a mission, a calling of her own, which was a life of compassion, an ideal in which women everywhere have an equal right to life, education, and medicine. She was following her hope that Chinese people could see the heart and feel the warmth of Western civilization. Georgina

Phillip Perkins was doing what she could to make a difference in this world.

Here is what my father wrote about her: *"It would be quite impossible to describe how great of a blessing the Lord conferred upon me in my life. He has given me someone who has always been ready with sympathy, with comfort, with patient understanding, with wise counsel, and all kinds of practical help, under extreme conditions and harrowing experiences throughout our active and ever-changing life. In short, she has been patient in trouble and fearless in danger."*

[Richard's LinkedIn](#)



**Richard Perkins Hsung** was born in China in 1966 and was one of the first teens to leave China legally after Mao's Cultural Revolution. He earned a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Chicago and became a professor at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, retiring in 2022. He spent ten years editing and completing *Spring Flower* (Earnshaw Books) by his mother, Jean Tren-Hwa Perkins, MD. The three-volume memoir chronicles her life as an adopted child of American medical missionaries, survivor of China's brutal communist regime, ophthalmologist, immigrant, and mother. Learn more at *Yangtze River* by the Hudson Bay.

## INTERVIEW WITH DR. KAMRAN QURESHI

**Hello Dr. Kamran, welcome to the Relatable Voice magazine! What inspired "Only Love Matters," and how did your past works influence the film's creation?**

Thank you, Lucia Matuonto, for giving me the opportunity to speak to your readers. As a director and a filmmaker, I have always picked up subjects which are usually hard for people to talk about. In the past, I worked a lot on sensitive topics around women's issues. Having been very close to my mother, I was very keen to bring the stories of great mothers to screen and I stumbled upon an intersex mother's story over 20 years ago while I was looking to submit a film in a festival. Later it was aired as part of a 13-part film series that I directed on mothers. This specific film, titled "Murad" went on to win Best film award in Indus Telefilm Festival and became a reason for me to go ahead and direct a 32-part TV series in 2004, "Moorat" in Asian language that was nominated for Lux style award. I learnt a lot of things about intersex and transgender issues in general and specifically about that region.

While planning for directing another English language feature film in 2016, my quick research brought back no results on a British film with intersex lead characters. I was very curious to find out how intersex characters have been portrayed in English language films. This led to the concept of *Only Love Matters*.

The film itself is a result of years of research where I studied the issues of intersex, watched and critically analysed all the existing English language intersex films. Taking up a subject that was never discussed in British cinema on a serious note, was a challenging task. I have tried to bring an authentic intersex perspective in a meaningful way. I, though, built on my previous work, by using the same concept, an intersex-mother and her relationship with her adopted child.

**How did you handle sensitive topics like discriminatory medical practices and adoption complexities in the film?**

It was something that I had in mind at the time of script writing. I had a lot of discussions with the screenwriter Iannis Aliferis and producer Dr Iram



Qureshi who understood exactly what intersex issues I wanted to convey. We tried to bring in some of the elements very subtly in the film and some very prominently. Especially when dealing with medical practices for example, we referred to an infamous phrase about childhood sex reassignment surgeries in the medical profession that says, "it's easier to dig a hole than it is to build a pole", (this means operating an intersex child to make them a girl is easier than making a boy). We used the phrase, keeping in mind the wider audience that we wanted to reach and addressing to those who are involved in carrying on these practices, to express the inner feelings of intersex people who have gone through these. During this research I volunteered myself and worked with Hillingdon Hospital as a public Governor and learned how difficult it is to discuss this issue even sitting within the medical establishment, as this is still considered a taboo in most of the western societies including the US and Britain.

With other issues like adoption, we did want to show the hope and the change in the society over the years which has allowed more inclusivity to gender diverse people in today's world, while the period that we are showing in the film is the 1990s. Some of the issues that we discussed conspicuously included discrimination in sports





which has many precedents that you can find in the past like South African athlete Caster Semenya's case, and Spanish athlete María José Martínez-Patiño's case.

**With over 30 awards, how does the film's success impact the conversation around intersex issues?**

During the world premiere in Spain and UK premieres in London, Southampton and Norwich, also screenings in Universities, very few audience members were fully aware of intersex or their issues. Even the film's team members including actors, crew members, contributors and facilitators were also the ones to whom I explained about intersex and their issues while recruiting. This way, it was an ongoing process of creating awareness to which the festivals and awards helped in getting more attention and being taken on serious notes. The BBC reporter, Mike Apps, when found out about the film, he asked people around him about intersex and no one knew anything. He did a report for BBC TV & Radio and the film was featured in a BBC article as well. Additionally, the film has got attention from media with articles at various international platforms such as the London Daily Post and NY Weekly.

**How did you capture the essence of the Great Indian Desert and modern Britain in cinematography?**

The Great Indian Desert part in the film had to show a 1970s era and it took quite intensive work to do the recce and find the places that actually had old constructions and those signature round shape huts. Being involved in much of the set design, I specifically emphasised on using dynamic colours, which is a trait of desert life. I had the floral designs painted on the huts that I saw during the recce at some of the places, had the local Indian cultural wardrobe made for the actors with all other small bits and bobs including the beautiful props like the manual wheat grinder, the pottery, trunks, furniture and toys. The peacocks and other animals such as camels, goats, cows were arranged for the scenes like it is shown in the area naturally. We also arranged a Holi event near an Oasis, also known as the festival of colours, where we invited the local village people, arranged a dance group and a local folk singer with her band and used drones to capture everything, which actually added a lot of colours to the footage.

To show different eras in Britain we selected some interesting locations such as Royal Standard Pub in Beaconsfield, which is the oldest pub in England and has a very interesting texture inside, with the contrasting modern London landscape such as



Walkie Talkie (20 Fenchurch Street) building, London Eye, River Thames, some parks and open spaces.

**How did you collaborate with the cast, especially Sara Faraj, to ensure authentic performances?**

When we had casting calls out for the lead roles, many actors and their agents contacted us. Initially we asked them to audition for some challenging scenes. All the lead actors won the roles purely on the basis of their acting skills and suitability. Sara Faraj auditioned for scenes from different ages of the character, especially those with intense emotions, which she did very skillfully and she was perfect for the role. There was one more condition kept for Sam's role, where we required the actress playing the character to agree and cut her hair. Sara agreed and had a boy-cut hairstyle that we needed for the role. It was a great experience to work with such a versatile actress.

**Balancing education and universal appeal, how did you approach creating a film with a 12 age rating?**

My research on the intersex characters in films, especially during the theoretical readings of extant English language intersex films, I explored that overt use of sex and nudity or revealing scenes led these films to a very limited audience, for example films like *Terror Firmer*, *Both*, *Open*, *Never Too Young to Die*, *Bruno & Earlene Go to Vegas* and even the Australian sci-fi film *Predestination*, either have nude or sex scenes or the photography of genitals, that we avoided. Some of these films also presented intersex as criminals or evil characters such as *Terror Firmer* and *Never Too Young to Die* and the subject was confused by the filmmakers with LGBT. While LGBT is by choice, intersex is a biological, or natural phenomena where children are born with different sex characteristics instead of choosing to transition from one gender to another or choosing a sexual orientation. They have no choice in how they are born, but in societies they are treated the way if it was their own choice to be born like that.

I aimed to target a wider audience since the beginning and purposely avoided anything that could have taken the age rating up including exposing scenes, sex or nudity. It was given a 12-

age rating by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) without any cuts.

However, if we had opted to go down to a PG rating, we might have had to cut some of the core information and elements, which we did not want.

**How did the collaboration with musicians contribute to the film's emotional resonance?**

It was a journey that took a few turns. Initially when we were looking for music composers and were in conversation with some, I explained to them what type of music I was looking for and with one musician to whom I provided all the reference music pieces, I was sent the music for the whole film without a sample for one or two scenes. I found that music to be arranged from a totally different perspective and I unfortunately could not use that music. I came to the conclusion that for the Indian portion of the film, someone who is better used to making that sort of local Indian music would be perfect for the task. We contacted Rishi Singh, a composer for Bollywood films, who composed a regional language song "Piya". The lyrics were written by a famous Pakistani lyricist Fatima Najeeb who writes OSTs for Asian TV series. It was sung by Manjeera Ganguly, a multi-language singer for Indian films and TV. The song expresses the inner feelings of the character not spoken through dialogue. We also had some background music by Rishi that we used on the same character later on in the film.

The English song, *Only Love Matters*, is a slow ballad that was composed and written by a British composer Phillip McHugh and sung by Ashley Solars and Josephine McHugh. Again, this was one where I wanted the song to have these specific romantic lyrics which we discussed with Phillip and he was very understanding and responsive to the requirements. For the music in the British part of the film, we had Jeffrey Harrison, an American composer, who provided the orchestral pieces which are beautiful and have been used to emphasise some key emotional moments in the movie. While most of the background music pieces were composed by David Edmonds who has been writing music for The Salvation Army and different bands. This way we created a whole team for music from three continents where each composer played a significant role in understanding the theme and



subject of the film, the type of touches needed in each scene and worked very patiently and in harmony.

### **How do you envision the film promoting change and understanding regarding intersex rights?**

When you talk about the previous representation of intersex, the demonic and freakish characters like Cassey in *Terror Firmer* and Ragnar in *Never Too Young to Die*, and even in the TV series *American Horror Story - Freak Show*, *X-Files*, *Passions*, *Nip Tuck*, all showed a trend and cultivated wrong information. In *Only Love Matters*, I portrayed intersex characters as ordinary human beings with emotions and feelings so that a viewer can connect and understand these characters.

I think this is a first step, where we are trying to send the message across globally to understand what intersex means and their equal rights as other members of any society, the film not only targets the English-speaking audience but we have also got it subtitled in other languages including French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese, to widen the horizon and reach for OLM. Having won over 30 awards and lots of recognition, I believe the film is

doing what it was aimed for, however, we as filmmakers still need to do a lot of work from our end to highlight and discuss such subjects to educate our audience.

### **How did you ensure the film resonates universally while staying true to the intersex community's experiences?**

After extensive research of three to four years on the experiences of intersex people in Asian and western countries including the US and UK, I carefully selected the issues that I highlighted so that the film can resonate universally. I have brought two intersex characters in the film, one from India and one from the UK. Because I have worked in different parts of the world on the same subject, I found similarities in some issues and studied the core factors that affect intersex communities across the continents. I brought those factors into the film such as forcedly raising the intersex children in either of the binary genders, discrimination in sports, sexual harassment and discrimination at work, hiding facts from the intersex children and even the infancy corrective surgeries have become common in Eastern countries after West.



**With the film showcased at academic institutions and film festivals, what discussions or impact do you hope "Only Love Matters" will have within educational environments?**

I think with the showcasing, the film has already started to make an impact in different institutions by having started discussion on the subject, not only screenings but institutions like Brunel University, Ravensbourne, University of East Anglia, Solent University, have published articles about the film and the issues that it discusses. Also, not only I presented my research on *Only Love Matters* in different universities but also my studies on the other intersex films in global cinema, and I am now invited on different forums for discussions, mentoring, reviews, interviews, participation in festivals and conferences, which is providing me further opportunities to meet and talk to more people about the subject. In the University of East Anglia, *Only Love Matters* was awarded the Engagement award and was the finalist in Impact and Innovation Awards.

We have created a first-ever substantial intersex narrative and screen works' open access database including all sorts of intersex verified media such as films, television, radio and theatre. This database includes 140 films with major or minor intersex characters, shorts and documentaries, starting from 1932 till 2023. Over 70 of these entries are feature films in 12 languages such as English, Chinese, Italian, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, Japanese, French, Swedish and Cantonese. The database is available at <https://intersexdatabase.com/>

**What are your expectations for the film's reception and how will you extend its reach through social media and the official website?**

After so many international festivals runs and screenings in educational institutions, we are in the process of releasing the movie soon on major streaming platforms. The film's team was engaged with the media by inviting them to the London BFI Southbank premiere, Southampton Film week, and Norwich premieres. Media coverage and interviews of experts and the general public is on its official website and social media channels.

Official website: <https://onlylovemattersmovie.com>

Website: <https://kamranqureshi.com/>

Dr Kamran Qureshi is an award-winning British Film and television Director and Media Academic. Kamran has directed several award-winning television drama series, TV shows and documentaries. His new feature film *Only Love Matters*, the first movie in cinema history on the intersex subject set in Britain, has won over 30 awards in international film festivals. His PhD (on English language films) was in Professional Practice Film, TV and Media from the University of East Anglia, England, UK. His research on film and television includes English language feature films, US television drama series, Indian cinema, and Australian film and TV. Press has been writing articles and reviews about Kamran's screen-based directorial work since 1998. He is a frequent guest on radio, podcast and TV shows, including BBC TV, to discuss a wide range of topics, including intersex representation, women's issues, film production, mothers, good parenting, and movies for children.



## A BRITISH WOMAN FILMMAKER MAKING HISTORY

*Dr. Iram Qureshi*

Dr. Iram Qureshi, an award-winning British film and Television producer, director, senior lecturer at Ravensbourne University London, as well as the founder of KQ Movies has recently produced a pioneering film, *Only Love Matters* (2023): which stands as the first British feature to prominently feature lead intersex characters. Through this cinematic endeavour, she challenges the prevailing stigma surrounding the individuals born with intersex variations, formerly referred to as hermaphrodites, within English-speaking contemporary societies including the US and UK. her film casts light on pertinent issues such as non-

consensual infant surgeries, discrimination in education, and sports.

The movie had enjoyed successful premieres including esteemed events at the prestigious BFI Southbank London, Southampton Film Week, and a World Premiere in Spain. Garnering critically acclaim, “Only Love Matters” has secured over 30 awards in international film festivals, with the participation of over 300 collaborators from across continents, spanning the US, Europe, and Asia. Dr Iram’s commitment to addressing intersex-related themes extends beyond the screen. She is the co-

founder of the world's first research database dedicated to Intersex related art forms, encompassing films, TV, theatre, radio, and literature, aiming to centralise information for filmmakers, researchers & general public. ([www.intersexdatabase.com](http://www.intersexdatabase.com))

In addition to her cinematic endeavours, Iram is currently commissioned by Manchester University Press to contribute to the ‘British Film Makers’ book series with her forthcoming book, ‘Wendy Toye’. This book offers a historical account of pioneering British woman director, Wendy Toye’s contributions to mainstream British cinema and TV from 1952 to 1982. Delving into the Post World War II British cinema landscape, the book particularly contextualises women’s roles in the

1950s British film industry and highlights the experiences of women filmmakers.

Iram’s advocacy extends to national and international media platforms, where she frequently



speaks on issues concerning women and intersex individuals, appearing on outlets such as BBC, New York Weekly, PTV, Canada One TV, HUM News, Express News, ARY Digital TV, BOL TV, SAMAA TV, Britic Magazine, and London Daily Post. Please see: <https://iramqureshi.com/category/news>

Her journey into combining media and academia commenced with her MSc dissertation, which examined the impact of family planning and contraceptives television advertisements on young women's perception of family size. This initial research laid the foundation for her subsequent work on women's issues throughout her professional and academic career. She was involved in many TV and film projects around the subject of women. During her early involvement in a weekly factual TV show *Ariel Mothers* (2000), which spotlighted mothers from diverse backgrounds interviewed in their own settings, revealing inspiring stories of their contribution towards their children and families, was an eye-opening experience for her. She travelled with the production and research teams to remote and difficult areas absorbing a lot more than what people saw on screen.

Continuing from there, a weekly show on good parenting, child nutrition and education, called Nido Young Stars and *Nestle Nesvita Women of Strength* that shared stories of strength from inspiring young women who achieved something extraordinary. After an extensive experience of TV & film productions and her PhD research, she presented her research paper on a contemporary British director Gurinder Chadha's work at SWCAS conference in Trinity University, US.

Dr Iram authored an article titled, "A Woman for Two Pennies: A Study of Changing Social Constructs of Gender and Portrayal of Women in Pakistani TV Dramas", which was published in the American journal *Jumpcut*. In this piece, she delved into the portrayal of female characters within modern Eastern societies. She critically examined how these female characters are crafted and discussed through the perspectives of male screenwriters raised important questions about the manner in which these female characters were reconstructed, often embedding biased patriarchal viewpoints under the guise of glamour and romance, all while claiming to portray modernity.

When she moved from providing education back to getting education in 1999, ultimately becoming the mentee of a TV director. She chose the TV & Film profession for her future, joining forces with her mentor, Dr Kamran Qureshi, a Film & TV Director, Producer and an academic, for a lifetime. It proved an added advantage for both of them to be from the same field, understanding the technicalities of the profession. They produced and directed a multitude of projects together. Her determination and right support in her career and marital life, helped her in dealing with challenges, while pursuing a full time PhD and job, financing her studies herself, bearing a child, nurturing two more children and accomplishing her goals. She states, "Life as a film producer, an academic as well as a mother is a demanding yet thrilling journey. All of these roles require a delicate balance between fostering creativity, imparting knowledge and nurturing", although all these tasks are equally applied across the board.

Iram supports sustainability and talked about how filmmaking affects the environment and the efforts of Hollywood and British production companies in making film production greener, during conducting a workshop on green productions in the University of East Anglia as part of Green Film Festival, later pursuing the subject in her university teaching.

Currently, Dr Iram is working on her new World War I period drama 'My Good Lady' on the life of Elsie Inglis, a surgeon who founded Scottish Women Hospitals for Foreign Service and took 1500 women to Serbian and French fronts during the Great War (WWI) and served and set up the field hospitals. And a film series British Mother (working title) once again bringing inspiring mothers from the UK.

<https://twitter.com/DrlramkQureshi>

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







Welcome to The Relatable Voice Podcast! Today, we're delighted to drive to California to talk with Patrick Greenwood, Patrick is a writer, cybersecurity blogger, and his latest book, "Shores of Okinawa," has just been released.

[Listen to the episode!](#)





## A ROAD TRIP IN NEW ZEALAND

*Pat Backley*



New Zealand. My adopted country.

A place of glorious scenery, great people, fabulous beaches, and delicious mince and cheese pies!

Taking a road trip here is always an adventure, you never know what you will find.

It is a truly multi-cultural country, with the rich Mōori culture of its first inhabitants now supplemented by immigrants from all over the world. I am one such immigrant myself, having moved here from England some 14 years ago.

Late last year, I had some speaking engagements booked in the South Island, so decided to extend my stay into a road trip.

New Zealand consists of two main islands, aptly named The North and South Islands and they are somewhat different.

The North Island contains several big cities, including Auckland and the capital Wellington, and has a much larger population. Although once you leave the cities you are very soon driving through

quiet country roads, or past beautiful unspoilt beaches.

The South Island is altogether quieter, with some absolutely breathtaking scenery. Rolling countryside, lakes, mountains and beaches. The stuff of dreams and often used by filmmakers for big blockbuster movies.....think *Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit* and *Avatar*.

I flew to Christchurch in the South Island and picked up a hire car. Within half an hour I was driving on open country roads with barely another car in sight.

My first unplanned stop was at a little place called Rakaia. 57km south of Christchurch on State Highway One. A town I had never heard of, but was inspired to stop for a coffee because of the statue of a giant fish!. The Big Salmon rather dominates the main street.

The river from which the town takes its name is known for its salmon fishing and jetboating and according to the sign: *"Rakaia has developed a reputation as a little town with a big heart and its*





*community spirit and can-do attitude was sown by those early settlers who had to adjust to survive."*

Next stop was at Trott's Garden, a country estate that reminded me of an English country garden, with its sweeping expanse of lawn and well kept herbaceous borders. It even had it's own little chapel, a pristine white wooden building that had apparently been moved there from the nearest town some years previously. Moving buildings is quite common in New Zealand, something that intrigued me when I first arrived here. It is fascinating to see whole houses, often chopped in half, being transported through the night to their new destination in some remote paddock or new building site.

My destination was Oamaru, a town on the east coast, famous for its white stone Victorian buildings. I had been desperate to visit here since attending a stone carving course some years previously, where we had used Oamaru stone to carve our masterpieces!

I was not disappointed. The architecture was wonderful, grand white stone buildings glinting in the sunlight. But best of all, I had unsuspectingly arrived on the one day a year when there was a Victorian parade celebrating the founding of the town.

Local inhabitants dressed in colourful Victorian costumes, there were suffragettes, farmers, and urchins selling newspapers. Cyclists on old Penny Farthing bicycles, ladies in straw bonnets. Three magnificent Scots marching bands with bagpipes, drums and kilts, led the parade. It was fabulous, but absolutely not what I had expected to see on a quiet Saturday morning!

After all that excitement I headed inland towards Lake Ohau.

Driving on almost empty roads, through stunning countryside, bright blue skies and fluffy white clouds. Such glorious views that I stopped the car every half an hour or so to take yet more photographs. It felt like I was driving through a tourist brochure.

Rolling green hills full of sheep with lots of newborn lambs gambolling in the sunshine. Snow-capped





It is hard to adequately describe such beauty. Suffice to say, a road trip anywhere in New Zealand will often take your breath away.

[www.patbackley.com](http://www.patbackley.com)



mountains and massive lakes, the magnificence was never ending. I was thrilled to be in time to see the wild lupins: carpets of pink white and purple flowers lining the roadsides.



## INTERVIEW WITH KRISTNA SAIKIA

**Hello Kristna, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine! Tell us a bit about your childhood.**

My childhood was a mixture of pleasant experiences and versatility, as well as being very metaphysical. I never studied in one school but changed schools and cities due to various reasons. However, it was good as I got to see many places and meet international students. I took part in art, plays, and sports, so I was very active. My parents were very strict, so I focused on my studies and was very studious too.

**From what age did you decide to be an actress, and how did you know you had the skills to be on screen?**



I was in the hostel during my school days, which had strict discipline. The owners of the hostel encouraged us to study and get good marks, as well as take part in the hostel's annual cultural functions and sports. I used to take part in script-writing and play lead roles in plays from the 6th standard. One evening, all the guests, teachers, and students appreciated my performance, and I was playing the lead role. The play ended with applause for my performance. That night, just before I went to the girl's dormitory to sleep, the lady superintendent of the hostel stopped me, touched my left shoulder, and said, "I think you can act." At that moment, a big transformation came within me. I wanted to be an actress. My teacher played an important role in giving direction to my life as an actress. I got more involved in plays in school and managed to get the main lead. During my college days, I managed to get a diploma from a well-known acting academy after training for one year. I already knew I had the skill; I had to learn the technicalities more for stage acting and onscreen to be more polished and evolve. Well, practice makes perfect. Acting is an ongoing evolving process for a lifetime.

**Did your parents support you in the direction you wanted to be an actress?**

Yes, it was an easy process for them to support me. In the 11th standard, I told my mom about my interest in acting. My parents invested money in my portfolio fashion shoot and a short film, which got telecasted on national TV in my state in India. After that, there was no looking back. Along with my studies, when I was in college, I did films, TV series, documentaries, music videos, and fashion shows. After college, I was in radio for 10 months.

**What was your first appearance on the screen?**

I played a young newly married lady in a short film. I enjoyed the experience, and both my parents were present at the school.



**What has been your greatest achievement?**

My greatest achievement was to empower myself. That's the biggest challenge. I became fearless and more confident in expressing myself to achieve. I became a different species, I feel now. The energy within I feel is different. The realization was I could achieve big and small goals with a relaxed state of mind. It is a continuous evolutionary process from within, which reflects outside.

**Do you have any anecdotes that have marked you in your life and as a person?**

Life on earth is meant to experience peace and harmony but is also a space where we learn, evolve, and grow, as well as bring wisdom and magic to the world. The death of my dad, many relatives, and dear friends changed my perspective on life. I felt I lost a part of my soul energy and also

learned a lot from them, which impacted my life positively. I became more loving towards life. I want to leave behind my legacy of art and literary work I created in various forms. Now I can imagine big. I became a powerful giver and receiver.

**What projects will you start next?**

My new book, "Royal Paradise," is coming up soon on bullying and abuse. I have upcoming films, music videos, and wellness retreats in Dubai, Australia, and the UK. I am also collaborating with LA Documentary filmmaker Joseph F. Alexandre, Vegas-based musician Darrel Craig, and my friend Ashkan Tabibnia.



*Interview by Carlos Miguel Bernardo González*



## INTERVIEW WITH GLENN M. RATCLIFFE



**Hello Glenn, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine! Tell us about yourself.**

I was put in an orphanage at an early age and then taken out of the orphanage. I left school early, played professional soccer, and after about 60 jobs, I found my passion in acting and spirituality.

**Where are you from and where do you live?**

I was born in London and raised in Scotland. I now live in Los Angeles, California.

**What do you do in your spare time?**

In my spare time, I like to meditate, pray, read, and write. I enjoy hiking and long walks.

**Can you tell us a little bit about your journey?**

Yes, having originally come from an orphanage, I have two sisters I don't even know about. I lived a very tough life. There was one bathroom for about 30 people, and I received a bath once a week at my grandmother's house after the rest of my uncles had been in the bathtub first. Hot water was expensive and difficult to come by where I lived. So life was very tough. I failed at school and left at 15 years old. My one love was soccer, and I managed to play professionally before I ruptured my Achilles tendon three times and was told I couldn't play anymore. Then I got married and came over to California on a honeymoon, and I've been staying ever since. After about 60 jobs, I found my passion as an actor. One day, I was driving to do a play in Hollywood, "Arsenic and Old Lace," and I was hit by a truck. I had an out-of-body experience where I transcended time and space and went into the

quantum field of all-knowing. It was like a giant orgasm, and I was the length and breadth of the sun. I was at complete peace, and then I spiraled back into my body in centrifugal force, re-anchoring in my heart. When I came back to consciousness, there were flux threads of light from my heart to everyone's heart, and at that moment, I knew we were all connected, and that love was the key to life. My purpose was to serve humanity and make the world better before I go.

**Describe yourself in three words.**

"I AM LOVE."

**What inspires you?**

A deep connection to God, beauty, and truth.

**Can you share any insights or experiences from your work on "Ghost," particularly your collaboration with Diane Keaton and Justin Bieber?**

I was very blessed to work with Grammy winner Justin Bieber; he was wonderful. We talked about hockey and his background in Canada. Diane Keaton was wonderfully generous, and she talked about having been to Europe, so the experience was wonderful. These are super talented people, and I felt very blessed.





**Share something the audience wouldn't know about you.**

I love to do Tai Chi and Qi Gong.

**How did you get into writing or doing this work?**

After I had my out-of-body experience and woke up from a slumber where I could pierce the veil of the invisible universe, I was encouraged to share my findings through my writing and podcasts.

**What do you want to promote?**

Freedom for humanity and bringing happiness and joy to the world.

**Can you tell us what inspired your movie "Tested" and what was the inspiration behind it?**

I had gone to Taiwan to meditate, and after meditating for many hours, the movie "Tested" came to me. The purpose of "Tested" is to liberate mankind from spiritual bondage. The reason the movie is called "Tested" is that you can pass a test. The regulations and laws that are not in synchronicity with the law of God can be seen as tests on humanity. Once you restore your dignity and know that God resides in your heart and you're not an ego structure but a divine being, you can then be in this world but not of it, and watch the cosmic drama of time and space as a silent witness and not react toward the system that is trying to



manipulate you. This will give you a sense of freedom and peace.

**Are you working on anything at the moment that you'd like to share?**

Yes, I'm working on a TV series for development called "Macintosh," which is a cross between kung fu and Columbo. It's a sequel to the movie "Tested," and the purpose is to engage socially conscious change-makers who have their pulse on corruption, and who know what's going on. Through these episodes, we can short-circuit any wrongdoings. The first episode is about why old people are dying in the hospital when their insurance runs out. These episodes can engage all humanity and create a paradigm shift to bring heaven to earth.

**What are your goals and aspirations?**

My goal is simply to make the world a better place before I go and give as much love to as many people as I can.

**What advice would you give to someone who is just starting in acting and looking to make their mark in the industry?**

The first thing I'd recommend is to "know thyself," like Socrates says, because you're representing the human condition in time and space, holding the mirror up to nature. So the more you know yourself, the more you know your own soul, your own psychological makeup. You can contribute that to the character and breathe life into the person you're playing.

<https://glennratcliffe-thecompleteactor.com/>



## INTERVIEW WITH FERN BRADY



### **What gave you the inspiration for the Thyreins Galactic Wall Series?**

Thyrein's Galactic Wall was born in my 6th grade classroom. As part of the 6th grade curriculum, I taught world cultures along with my English Language Arts class. So as we learned about geography and its connection to human development, we also created our own planets with their geography and their humans. As we discovered new things about the cultures of our world, we mixed it in to our imaginary worlds. Thus through the year, we wrote many stories set in our worlds as we used the mentor texts and social studies topics for inspiration. And that's how the universe of Thyrein's Galactic Wall with its myriad of planets and peoples came to be.

### **When did you start writing the first book, United Vidden?**

I started United Vidden way back during my 15 year tenure as a teacher. It took on variations as I modeled writing strategies and skills for my students. It wasn't until after I left teaching and took

up writing in earnest that the story became what it is today. But its evolution has been the path of learning of my students in my classroom.

### **What themes will readers find in this space opera fantasy series?**

The overarching theme of the book is the hope of redemption. Verena makes the worst mistake possible -- she runs away, thereby effectively abdicating her rights to her throne. Yet, when she realizes this, she returns, determined to win back her people and prove herself worthy. Her path is not easy, but she navigates it with grace and poise and learns hard lessons along the way.

### **Who are the main characters in this first book?**

The primary protagonist is Princess Verena. She is the heir to the throne and will be the first female ruler for her house. Yet war is stirring with the natives so her father chooses not to abdicate as he was supposed to. Instead, he betrothed her to Prince Amiel ra Aulden which causes Verena to





reexamine her belief in her father's love for her and her own identity.

Amiel is the primary antagonist to Verena. While he is her love interest and they care deeply for each other, he believes he should rule. So when he gets the chance to take full control, he does.

Another, key character is Sir Andross. Knighted by Amiel, he owes his allegiance to him, yet discovers that Verena is the one seeking the best interest of the nation. Sent on a quest by her, he soon becomes a major factor in the success or failure of the kingdom.

#### How would you describe your writing style?

I write a blend of science fiction and fantasy steeped in political and societal drama with a strong thread of interpersonal relationships holding it all together. My writing is primarily scene work. I like to



put readers in the middle of the action and let them experience the story as though they were in a movie.

#### How many books do you have planned for this series?

Currently, the series is likely to have 4 books total, but the final installment might need to be divided into two parts and so the final total might end up at 5 books for the series.

#### Are you a panster or plotter?

I'm a little of both. I begin by pansting and then about mid way through I usually stop and begin forging out a plot line. During the revision phase, once I have a full draft, I actually create a timeline of the story chapter by chapter to find gaps and to ensure pacing. So I'm a blend of both styles. The book I'm currently working on I actually already completed a timeline before the first draft so it is interesting that for this new project my writing process is changing a bit.

#### Where can readers find you and your work online?

[www.fernbrady.com](http://www.fernbrady.com)

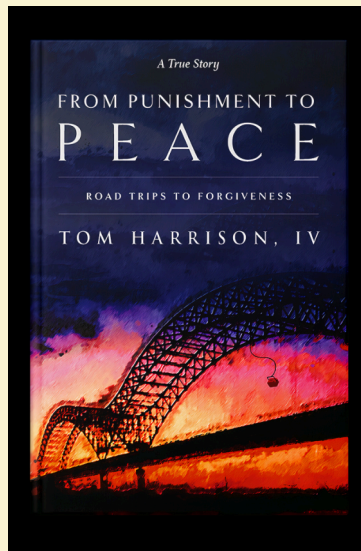
[www.inklingspublishing.com](http://www.inklingspublishing.com)

Fern Brady is the founder and CEO of Inklings Publishing. She began her professional life as a foreign correspondent, and taught for 15 years in Alief ISD. She has published numerous short stories, two children's picture books, and a couple of poems. Her debut novel, **United Vidden**, which is book one in her Thyrein's Galactic Wall Series, was given a glowing review by Dr. Who Online, the official site of the fandom. **Love's Call**, which is book one of The Dragon and His Kitten, released in 2023. She also has a graphic novel collaboration, **Mr. Landen's Library**, with the amazingly talented Rosa Maria Garza. She has returned to the leadership of the Houston Writers Guild, with whom she served as CEO for four years previously, and is a full time teacher again for Cy-Fair ISD.



## OUTGROWING OUR SWEATERS

*Tom Harrison IV*



I've always wondered whose idea it was to take this picture. Clearly the moment was staged. One of two possible photographers that day, holding her Kodak Brownie camera, must have said, "Let's put Tommy and John in their college sweaters and take a picture of them together."

I look back, wondering which of the two clicked the camera's shutter. There was never a closer mother-daughter relationship than that of my grandmother

and mother. Though often proven during their later years, I had always wondered if the challenges they both had faced a few short years before this picture was taken had created an unnatural bond. It must have. A drunk driver ended the life of a thirty-three-year-old husband and father, leaving behind a devastated widow and four young children. The widow would remarry, but the years would later show the terrible damage of her decision. None of those scars would be more prominent than on the little boy in orange.

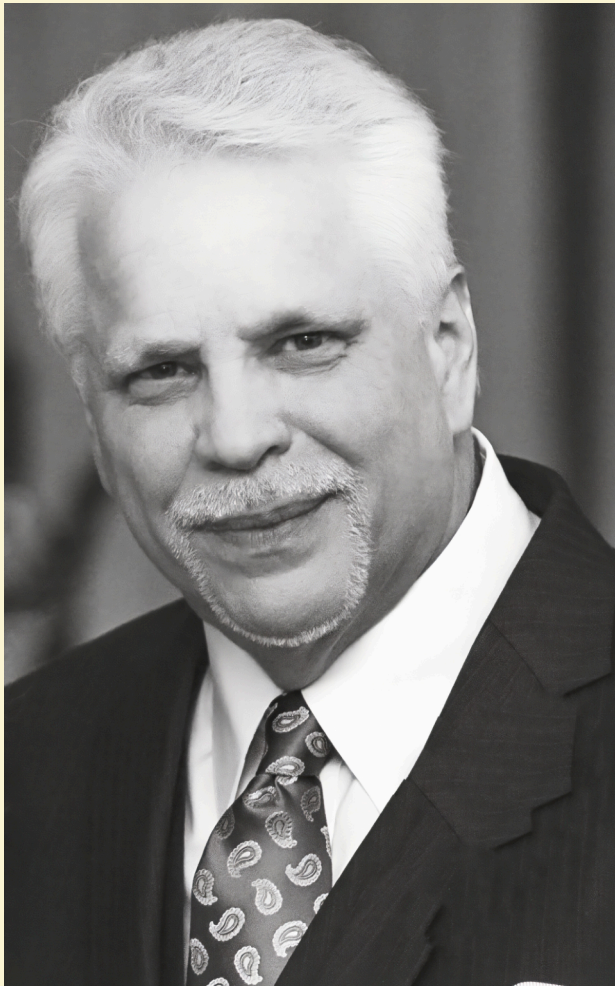
Her oldest child--fourteen when she lost her father--would be the first of her new stepfather's victims. Did his advances motivate her to fall into my father's arms during a moment of sixteen-year-old passion in the backseat of '54 sedan? No matter the motivation, mother and daughter became pregnant within months of one another.

The pain that they both somehow overcame, if only for a few brief moments, was forgotten within a fleeting, precious few seconds of joint motherhood and the desire to memorialize the promise and hope of their five-year-old sons' lives.



John was the oldest, looking comfortable in his skin even at such a young age. I wonder today, as I look at this picture, if the numerous physical and emotional beatings inflicted by his father during his childhood, had already begun. The sweater he wore, a remnant of each mother's tragic past in Knoxville, Tennessee would never translate to the hope that he would grow up, attend college, and forge a successful, happy life. The opposite happened. His father's chaotic household would challenge John's thinking and motivate his need to escape. Drugs and alcohol would be what he reached for to sooth. John would never finish junior high school, settling for a weak foundation to his life-long challenges of addiction, homelessness, and incarceration. In looking back at the years through the view of the camera's lens, John's destiny seemed to be showing its early thorns.

I was a few months younger than my uncle in this picture--noticeably smaller and less confident at that age. Wearing the college colors of the local university of the family's new home, Memphis, I



seemed to be wanting to please the photographer. "Now smile you two. John, come on, smile. That's it, Tommy, hold it for a bit longer while I figure out how to make this damn Kodak work." I would grow up to be a pleaser, as if I sensed at this early age that pain and struggle would land on all of us, and it would be my job to fix it. Challenges with my own father--intense emotional abuse throughout my first twenty years--was not yet showing through the innocence of my face. The universities of the sweaters that we wore that day would both be in my future, along with the pain of chasing my father's acceptance. Despite many attempts in my adult years to seek his acceptance, he would never say the most important words a son would want to hear, "I'm proud of you son."

The hope our mothers must have had--the hope that all mothers surely have as they scramble to memorialize a moment--must have been wide and deep at our young ages. And why not? Life hadn't had the chance to lay heavy its destructive hands. Our mothers wouldn't let us out of their sight long enough to let that happen. But time passed. Our mothers could no longer hold their protective cloaks over us, as if once we outgrew our sweaters, the world's damaging influence would begin to tear into the fabric of our innocence.

But what about the photographer? I had always wondered if my grandmother ever knew of the horror her new husband had inflicted on John and her other children over the years since this photo. The molestations of my aunts, the physical beatings, especially to my uncles. And what about my mother, the oldest? Was she simply reckless with her boyfriend and the soon-to-be father of her child, my dad, or was she subconsciously looking for a way to escape her version of the unimaginable?

No matter the tragic past or challenging future, during a few fleeting moments on a crisp, sunny fall afternoon, mother and daughter dressed up their hopes and young boys and posed them in an effort to create a cherished memory. Time would ultimately reveal their futures, leaving only one question that would never be answered: Who's the girl in the onesie?

<https://frompunishmenttopeace.com>



## AN UPLIFTING NEW LENS OF SELF-PERCEPTION THROUGH A SPACE STATION VIEW

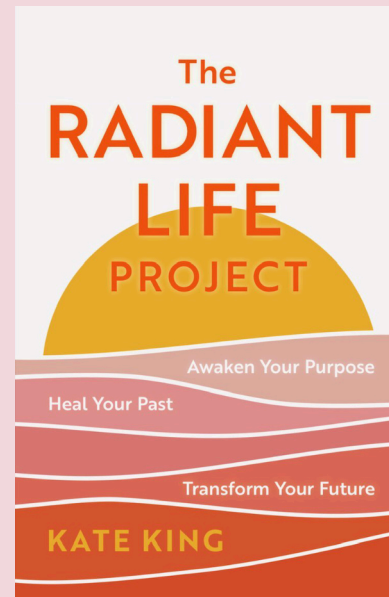
*Kate King*

Most humans on the planet have seen photos or videos of the International Space Station (ISS). This habitable floating structure resides in low Earth orbit, performing various astrophysics experiments and observing our delicate blue-green gem of a planet. From the vantage point above and beyond the gravitational reality that keeps the rest of us earthlings pinned to the ground, astronauts on the ISS can see life on our planet through a different, largely more objective perspective.

I recall a video of astronaut activity on the ISS at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. The strikingly peaceful video of Earth from space provided a stark contrast to the chaos and fear unfolding on the planet's surface. From their 248-mile distance, reality appeared quite different — serene, even, as our planet floated along against the starry backdrop of the Milky Way galaxy. There was no sign of Covid-19 from outer space.

I often think of what I now refer to as *the space station view* of everyday life to re-orient the swell of fear, panic, and urgency that can so easily become a consuming part of daily human life. From space, no matter how big a person's individual problem, no matter how terrified they may be of an economic crisis, relationship issue, career disaster, or global pandemic, it's inconsequential from the perspective of the ISS.

This perspective isn't meant to minimize the significance of the trauma and drama in our lives, but instead stands as an offering to compliment it for the purpose of counter-balancing the depth of our suffering. It's a reminder that we're each small drops in the massive ocean that is existence, and encourages us not to sweat the small stuff — or even the big stuff. Though our individual realities feel of the utmost importance to each of us, we're each the main character in the saga of our lives. Nothing is really that important in the greater scheme of the universe. After all, stars are being born and dying every day while we stress about our lifestyle choices and social media content.



When you reflect on your life from the perspective of the space station view, you can re-enter the flow and surrender that's required to exist within a reality where large amounts of your experience are beyond your control. And those aspects that are in your control? They may not be as earth-shatteringly crucial and delicate as you fear.

This perspective allows room for mistakes. It opens space for grace and the release of rigidity. It fosters an invitation for you to marvel at the reality that, regardless of supernovae exploding mere galaxies away, we were granted the luck that Earth maintains the sweet-spot distance from our sun that allows warmth without incineration while providing rare availability of liquid water and breathable oxygen necessary for us to exist at all.

You are here. Right now. Alive as a conscious speck in the midst of the sands of time and space, living your daily life and microwaving your leftover mac-n-cheese lunch at the office.

Far from being a nihilistic impulse to minimize the grudges and worries of daily life, this perspective of the space station view invites sacredness back to your experience through awe and wonder — two qualities many have lost touch with in the hustle and bustle of modern-day living. We get so inundated



and obsessed with our daily tribulations, building mountains of drama for ourselves that wreck our nervous systems and our relationships alike, that we overlook all there is to marvel about. We forget to wonder at the miracle that any of us exist at all.

I, myself, often fail to remember that, along with the high unlikelihood that life would form and evolve on Earth at all, the fact that my great-grandparents met each other during a random social moment and came together to create my parents, who, out of all the genetic variations possible, created me, it's just



Kate King is a licensed professional counselor, board-certified art therapist, radiant life coach, published author, professional artist, and creative entrepreneur. She expertly teaches a unique transformational healing strategy that integrates science, psychology, creativity, and spirituality.

Learn more at [theradiantlifeproject.com](https://theradiantlifeproject.com).

so humbling and re-orienting. Also, it's profoundly relieving to surrender to the reality that there's more I don't know than what I do. It removes pressure.

I can't remember any of this if I'm stuck in the perception of life that sees my daily commute, strained relationships, and sensitivity to dairy as being all that's real. I must step back — way back — in order to recognize my life for what it truly is: a mystery that plays out daily for my own experiential learning. I'm on a ride I somehow got a ticket for that takes me through existence on planet Earth

where I get to consciously navigate the balance of daily minutia in relationship with existential enigma.

To support the space station view, I recommend that you play with orienting yourself larger and smaller than your current reality by learning about facets of existence that divert the focus from regular human experience alone. Zoom out to astrophysics, zoom in to microbiology. Consider science-fiction and fantasy stories to open your mind, or read about the tiny Tardigrades, which are micro-animals living all over the world in mossy water-based environments (they're cool — look them up!).

There are podcasts and books galore that will catapult you beyond your limited 21st century human perspective and directly into mindsets of wonder and awe. Below are three such resources I've enjoyed for this very purpose:

Podcast: "Through The Looking Glass" on the TED Radio Hour Podcast

Books: *Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How it Can Transform Your Life*, by Dacher Keltner; and *The Power of Wonder: The Extraordinary Emotion That Will Change The Way You Live, Learn, and Lead*, by Monica C. Parker



## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



*A 1500-year-old mystery. A warrior's lost saga. A businesswoman's fight to survive.*

455 AD, Central India

The marauding Svetahunas take prisoner Harshavardhan, a fearless warrior and a devoted son. In captivity he fashions a combat strategy with black and white pebbles, waiting for the day when the Svetahunas and his people face-off in battle—a war that will determine the future of ancient India.

Present Day, New Delhi

When her estranged father Rajinder Joshi dies suddenly, Vinita is called in from New York to take charge of his now floundering forty-year-old company AveoGen. As she sorts through his papers and effects, Vinita discovers tantalizing clues to Rajinder's long-standing obsession—the origins of chess and the identity of its creator. Shuttling between boardrooms and unknown historical sites, Vinita must battle her emotions and her father's many enemies to arrive at the violent story of how chess was born.

Is there a calling within you to step into your power?

This book provides you with the inspiration, motivation and practical advice to show up as a leader and take your place in the world.

So often ambitious women are held back from greater success because of limiting beliefs, fear and self doubt. Our dream is to shine the light on the path for these women. To inspire more women to overcome their doubts and truly step into their power as leaders by providing real-life role models and the inspiration and motivation to find their inner strength and take their place in the world as heart-centred leaders.



### THE ABANDONED WIVES HANDBOOK

A gentle guide to one of life's great traumas.



PAT BACKLEY

The pain of abandonment is huge.

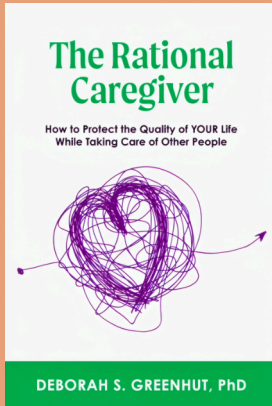
The partner you loved and cherished for so many years has decided you are no longer required. Past your sell by date. Of no use to them anymore, so tossed out like a piece of garbage. Abandoned with barely a backward glance.

In an attempt to keep this a gentle, light-hearted read, each chapter is divided into letters of the alphabet, rather like a dictionary of distress, something you can dip into at any time.

I am not an expert, merely someone who has survived one of life's great traumas and has come through it as a stronger, more resilient person.







Deborah S. Greenhut's family caregiving odyssey for her parents, her spouse, and, later, a partner began around 30 years ago, just as her children were leaving the nest. Throughout her career, she had counseled and advised university students and corporate professionals in the art of managing their own multiple priorities, and she believed she could do it all.

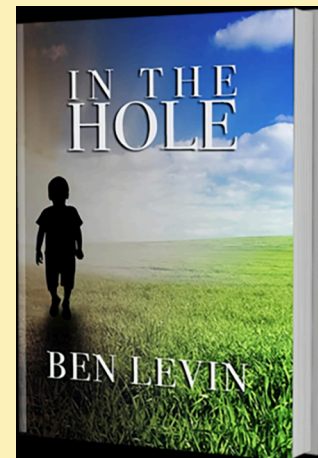
While she had long been a confidant for the surprising challenges of others' family caregiving experiences, joining the ranks herself was a shocking experience. Navigating the disorientation of being responsible for the 24/7/365 needs of an aging, elder who was not well was frustrating and occasionally frightening.

Most of all, she learned she would have to assert herself to be recognized as playing an important role and to find alternative solutions when people declined to help.

Life goes from great to worst for nine-year-old David Kimball when his father loses the family restaurant.

Then, David loses his prized possessions. Finally, after a basketball victory, the Kimball's house goes too. Forced to live in a borrowed car until it, too, is taken, David, Mom, Dad, and sister, Julia, seek shelter. A derelict inn with other homeless folks drives home the reality that David is in the hole. Poverty is more than David can take! Bullied by peers, David deals with his father's alcoholism. As a young athlete clinging to hope, David works harder than ever. Soon stronger, he finds ways to support his family. Through thick and thin, teammates stand by him as his best friend Justin O'Malley leads the charge.

David and his family face the biggest challenge of all when Julia slips into a coma from lack of nourishment. Terrified he may lose his beloved little sister, how does David help his family out of the hole of homelessness?



<u>Publisher</u>	<b>Relatable Media LLC</b>
<u>Editor in Chief</u>	<b>Lucia Matuonto</b>
<u>Art Director</u>	<b>Lucia Matuonto</b>
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# MARCH

## DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AWARENESS MONTH

