

Issue #18 - February 2024

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THE RELATABLE VOICE

magazine

A
Caregiving
Journey

AI
is here
to STAY

LOVE
is all we need

Exploring
Nuremberg

AUTHOR, PODCASTER, SPEAKER

**KATHERINE
HAYES**

Mind & Body
Healing

Editor's Letter



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the eighteenth edition of The Relatable Voice Magazine! This February, we invite you to immerse yourself in our articles, interviews, travels, and recipes.

Join us on a captivating journey to Nuremberg, Germany, a city of medieval charm and beauty. Meet Dr. Katherine Hayes, our esteemed cover star, a renowned author and speaker. Additionally, dive into engaging interviews with other talented authors and actors.

As Valentine's Day approaches, we are delighted to present articles on love from passionate collaborators like Gabriella Tirado, who explores the significance of being born on February 14th, Vivien Shapera, and Douglas Weissman. Author Deborah Greenhut offers invaluable insights into caregiving, and Lisa Heiss shares her expertise on IA.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude for your continued support and readership. We hope you enjoy the content, connect with the stories that resonate with you, and continue to be part of our vibrant community.

See you on the road.

Cheers,

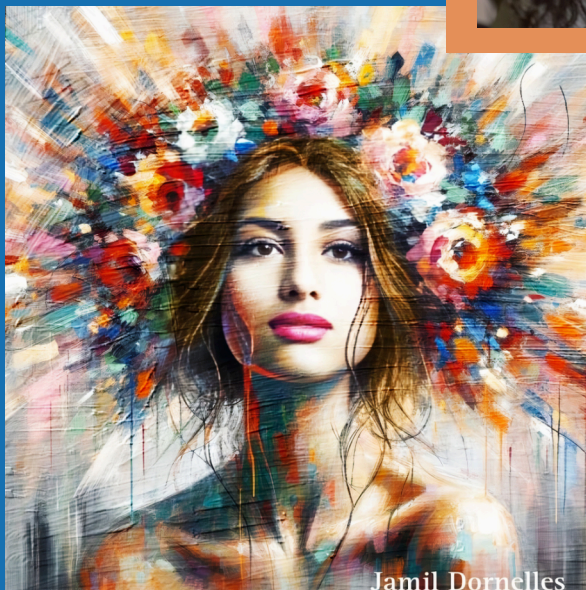
Lucia Matuonto

Lucia Matuonto

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

On the cover: Dr. Katherine Hutchinson Hayes

Highlights



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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.

LOVE IS IN THE AIR

Messages from 5 Love Crystals

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

For most of the Northern Hemisphere, the month of February is grey and cold, so it is excellent that we have Valentine's Day in the middle of the month to lift our spirits and please our hearts. The big question is: What if you don't have a sweetheart? Or you have lost your loved one? Does this mean that Valentine's Day is a sad nuisance, there to remind you of your pain? Vivien decided to ask her "love" crystals for February messages for everyone, so that no matter the circumstances, we can all join in with the loving energy of February.

The first crystal that Vivien asked is Rose Quartz. Rose Quartz is famous to everyone for its loving, pink vibration, but it is not a frothy lightweight – Rose Quartz imparts some profound benefits, especially for the health of the heart. Rose Quartz says: Love is an essential ingredient to the development of the soul. The universe operates on the energy of love. Love is not reserved for people to people interactions, but for *all* interactions. We love inter-dimensionally. In addition to people, we love, and receive love from, angels, fairies, mythical creatures, spirits and ancestors. We love animals, crystals, flowers, trees, the ocean. We love our hobbies, our interests and our work. We love the morning, we love the evenings, we love the moon and we love the sun. For some, the sum of all these dynamics equals God, for others God is a more distinct entity. No matter what our spiritual beliefs are, Rose Quartz wants to remind us that everything and everyone that we love, loves us back. Rose Quartz also wants to remind us to remember to *feel* this love.

The second crystal that Vivien asked is Rhodochrosite. Rhodochrosite comes in many



Rose Quartz

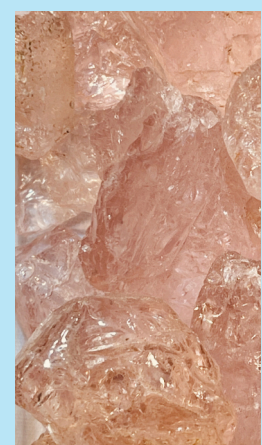
colors, but mostly pink and reddish-pink. Rhodochrosite says: Love is joy, and joy is love. When you think about it, you will realize that when you are giving love to someone else, you will be feeling joy. When you are feeling joy, you will be receiving love. Joy is the love vibration with an added bounce – the bounce of good times. People who don't have love in their lives, will have no joy either. These two dynamics are inextricably bound to each other. Rhodochrosite continues with these words: Think about how one feels when one loses a loved one to the other side. Joy is gone, replaced by grief. This is because we think the love is gone

too, and in a way, it is true – the joy has gone from the physical plane because the loved one has gone from the physical plane. Yet, once the loss is accepted and the grieving cycle has completed itself, the physical plane is transcended, the sense of connection is restored, and both the love and the joy do return. Rhodochrosite says: No love is ever lost.

The third crystal that Vivien asked is Pink Danburite. Vivien thinks of Danburite as the crystal



Danburite



Morganite





Kunzite

of the “self” because it assists in all self-related dynamics, such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-confidence and even self-love. Pink Danburite immediately asserts: Everyone should affirm their self-love on a daily basis. Self-love is not an indulgence, nor an egotistical whim. Self-love is a basic component of self-respect and offers the correct foundation for self-empowerment. If you want to make a contribution to your community, if you want to do good works on Earth, if you want to be effective, you need this foundation to hold you up so that your light can shine, and be seen, by those who need you. Danburite continues: You are the one who needs you most. Without *you*, there is no you. You are the slice of the universe that you have been given to take care of, to develop, to nurture. The better you do this, the better the universe becomes. The concept of self-care has gained tremendous traction in modern times. Kick it up a notch, and remember to add “self-love.”

The fourth crystal that Vivien asked is Morganite. Morganite is a Beryl, the pink version of Aquamarine. Morganite knows how to soothe pain with its loving energy. At the end of almost every Crystal Healing session where physical or emotional pain is present, Vivien coats the nerve endings with Morganite to bring relief and alleviate suffering. Morganite says: When you feel alone or unloved, seek comfort by *giving* love. This principle

is 100% clear to pet lovers – they understand exactly how this works. Love exists in a feedback loop. When you give love, you will receive love. Receiving love is not a passive state, it begins with an action. Even more specifically, love begins with *your* action of giving love to someone or something else.

The fifth and final crystal that Vivien asked is Kunzite. Kunzite has a special place in Vivien’s heart as an enduring favorite. Kunzite comes in many different colors and is an especially strong stone, giving Kunzite its unique character. Kunzite says: Everything comes in a wave form, including love. Sometimes, we are riding high on a wave of love, and sometimes we are in the trough, feeling low and definitely not “feeling the love.” Trust the wave. And allow the wave to carry you up high again. This is the rhythm of the universe, and it can be seen in the rhythm of the ocean, the rhythm of our hearts and the rhythm of life itself. How wonderful that in your world, you have a month dedicated to outwardly expressing your love. Enjoy your month of February, enjoy the love!

Vivien is a teacher, practitioner and author living in Cincinnati, OH. For more about Vivien, please visit www.CrystalHealingTechniques.com



Rhodochrosite



VALENTINE'S DAY

Pat Backley

February 14th. St. Valentine's Day.

What exactly is Valentine's Day anyway?

Is it just another excuse for greeting card manufacturers and red rose growers to make a big profit? For chocolate manufacturers to make huge chocolate hearts?

Or is it really just a wonderful day for lovers to celebrate, for admirers to admire, and for fledgling lovers to reveal their feelings. For Cupid to fire his arrows ?

How did it all begin?



Well, if history is to be believed, it seems to have originated in Ancient Rome, when a priest named Valentine was executed on February 14th, his crime apparently being either officiating secret weddings for Roman soldiers against the emperors wishes, or for writing love letters to a young girl he had tutored and fallen in love with. Whatever the truth, the Catholic Church in later years made him a saint.

Another theory is that St. Valentine's Day replaced the old pagan holiday of Lupercalia, a rather debauched feast involving sacrificial rituals.

It is said that it only started to become the romantic holiday we know today in the Middle Ages, when the poet Geoffrey Chaucer linked love with St Valentine in some of his writing. Shakespeare also wrote about love and soon people began exchanging love letters on that day.

By the mid 1800's it had become a more commercialized affair.

Victorian men wooed women with flowers, heart shaped boxes of chocolates became popular and early versions of the Valentine card started to be produced. By the early 1900's an American company that was later to become Hallmark, started to manufacture these cards in bulk and the rest is history!

In Roman mythology, Cupid, who was the son of Venus (goddess of love and beauty) was known for shooting arrows at both gods and humans, causing them to fall instantly in love, so it is easy to see why he is often included on Valentines greetings.

I still remember the first Valentine card I received.

It was 1965, I was 14 years old and rather shy.

I had never had a boyfriend, I wasn't even allowed to attend a dance until after my 15th birthday. So although I admired boys from afar, I was certainly not expecting any tokens of love.

The postman delivered a big red envelope on February 14th and my younger siblings crowded around, desperate to see what was inside.

The envelope contained a shiny card, with a huge red padded heart on the front. Inside was written, in blue ink: *"To Pat, my sweetheart, from an admirer."*



Mum was worried. Had I got myself into a romantic situation without her knowledge?

I was confused. Who would send me such a thing. It must have cost quite a lot?

A few weeks later I discovered the truth. The brother of a school-friend of mine had apparently developed a bit of a crush on me and decided to spend a whole weeks pocket money on a card.

Of course it went no further. I was too shy to thank him and anyway his sister had sworn me to secrecy. In the following months and years I did see him occasionally at a distance, but we never spoke, just smiled shyly. I wonder where he is now?

I have never forgotten him, or that card, so perhaps that is the magic of Valentine's Day. It makes people feel loved and valued, if only for a little while.

Now, in the 21st century it is a little different of course. People keep in touch via the internet, online dating is a huge thing. Has the romance of Valentine's Day faded?

Not according to the reports.

Valentine's Day is still celebrated by many people, worldwide.



Although in this age of fast food, fast cars, and fast internet, there is still a desire for romance, for the opportunity to show people how much you care.

It is also one of the most popular days for people to propose marriage to their partners.

According to the U.S. National Retail Federation, these days people also buy Valentines gifts for their friends, workmates and even their pets!

I wonder what St. Valentine would have made of it all?

www.patbackley.com



THE CORONA PROTOCOL

Dr. Paul D. Corona

Dr. Paul D. Corona, a notable medical doctor known for his commitment to finding new ways to treat mental health issues, releases his groundbreaking book, "The Corona Protocol: A Scientifically Proven Medical Solution to Stop Addiction, Bullying, Homelessness, School Shootings, and Suicide 30 Years in the Making." This transformative guide marks an evolution of healthcare, providing a blueprint for a holistic approach to well-being that transcends traditional medical boundaries, pioneering an approach he calls, "Mind and Body Healing."

"Holistic doesn't mean abandoning medication. It means understanding how the mind and body work together and treating both while achieving a natural balance," says Dr. Corona.

In "The Corona Protocol," Dr. Corona shares his intense journey, driven by a deep-seated compassion for those enduring needless pain and misery. Dedicated to eradicating unnecessary suffering, he introduces a new methodology that bridges the gap between modern medicine and the intricate interplay of the mind and body.

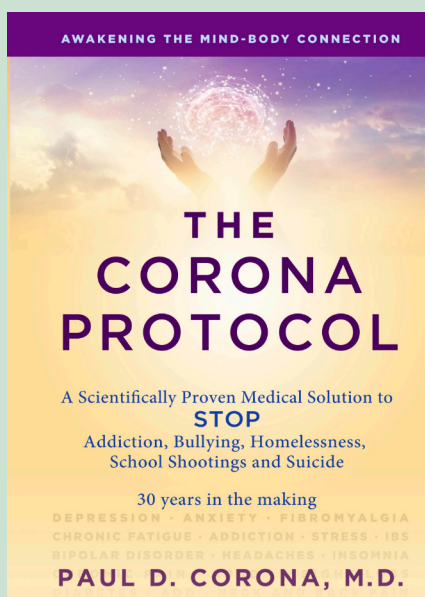


Drawing on his extensive experience as a family physician, Dr. Corona explores the impact of emotional factors on physical health. He concludes that unnecessary suffering should not be a burden anyone bears and, through his work and experience, shows how both patients and healthcare practitioners can confront mood disorders and their related afflictions head-on.

Dr. Corona challenges the stigma associated with mental health, presenting a comprehensive protocol that goes beyond conventional therapies. His protocol spans neuroscience, psychology, and medical practice, offering a new approach that's been implemented over many years.

At the core of "The Corona Protocol" is Dr. Corona's meticulous diagnostic process. Focusing on personal and family history, he navigates the intricate landscape of each patient's neurochemistry, offering a personalized approach rooted in evidence-based practice. This approach minimizes the often-frustrating trial-and-error process, providing effective solutions for improved well-being.

"The Corona Protocol" isn't just a medical guide; it's a guide aimed at comprehensive well-being. Dr. Corona's perseverance, compassion, and scientific rigor invites readers to join him in his quest to redefine an important section of modern medicine.



Dr. Paul D. Corona, MD, is a Southern California-based physician who is reshaping the future of psychiatry and family medicine with a pioneering approach he calls "Mind and Body Healing." His latest book is titled "The Corona Protocol: A Scientifically Proven Medical Solution to STOP Addiction, Bullying, Homelessness, School Shootings and Suicide 30 years in the making." In it, he unlocks revolutionary insights into the treatment of mental health and challenges conventional methods that have made progress stagnant.

With a career spanning over three decades, Dr. Corona's initial focus was family medicine, but his passion for understanding the human mind led him to psychiatry. This transition gave birth to "Mind and Body Healing." Dr. Corona believes in a holistic approach to mental health, one that transcends traditional boundaries and seeks to balance emotional and physical well-being. His latest book addresses how his treatments can revolutionize psychiatry, address societal issues, and be useful for patients, their families, and other healthcare professionals.

Born and raised in Southern California, Dr. Corona's journey in medicine began at the University of Southern California, where he earned his BS degree in Biology/Premed. He further honed his expertise at New York Medical College and completed a rigorous three-year residency in family practice at California Hospital in Los Angeles. Today, his practice is located in Laguna Niguel, California.





INTERVIEW WITH FRANCO VEGA

Hello Franco, welcome to The Relatable Voice Magazine. Tell us about your childhood.

My childhood was fun for the most part. My parents did the best they could given their circumstances. We moved around a lot, so we were pretty much always on the go. My parents always encouraged us to dream big and supported any kind of creative actions that we chose to do. For example, they would come home from work to see our backyard transformed into a stage where I had all the local kids in the neighborhood come together and make costumes from everything in our house to recreate and play out Star Wars scenes for all the local parents.

They didn't seem to mind that we destroyed all the curtains and blankets in our house to make this happen. lol. It wasn't until my teens years that things began to take a turn making it difficult to deal with my mother.

At what age did you decide to become an actor?

I decided at a very young age, I would say 5 years old, that I wanted to become an actor because I was

raised in The Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute as my mother was a full time student there and worked there as well, I imagine helping with her tuition. I spent a lot of time at the Strasberg's home growing up with their two sons. It was the best time of my life. They were so generous to me. Being that my mother an actress and I was always in that environment watching all the actors doing performances on stage, I naturally decided that was what I wanted to do with my life.

Which was your first appearance on the screen?

My first appearance on the screen was for a film called "RAVE." It was about the underground party scene and the trials and tribulations that came with it. That was probably the most fun set I was ever on, we were a family.

Which was the role you liked the most?

I do not have any one particular role that I like the most because I love all my roles. They each have something special for me to discover and bring to life. They all have their own journey. But if I had to narrow it down I would say SWAT, The Social



Network, RAVE, Roman J Israel Esq., and Destroy All Neighbors.

What do you think led you to fame?

What I think has led me to get the roles and opportunities to work with such great talent is my persistence and drive. I don't give up and I always bring my best to any project that I get the honor to be a part of.

What kinds of characters would you like to interpret?

I would love to interpret a variety of characters. That opens the door for opportunity to explore and go deep, to learn and to grow. In life we are continuously growing and it is great when you have the opportunity to see things from a different perspective looking through a new set of glasses.

What actresses and actors do you feel comfortable working with?

I'm most comfortable working with experienced actors who do their homework and bring their best to whichever project we are working on.

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0891825/>

Franco Vega was born in Long Island, New York, and moved to Los Angeles, California with his family at a young age.

Franco was raised in the theater as his mother was a stage actress and he has since studied with teachers at the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute and the Larry Moss Studio. He has also studied under Arlene Golanka, Lisa Robertson and Jason Buyer.

He enjoys doing plays on his down time and has worked on "Lost Causes & Impossible Loyalties", "The Only Song I Know", "You Shall Give Me Grandsons", and "True West" to name a few. Franco has worked on a variety film and television shows and appeared in the film The Social Network (2010).

In what other genres would you like to act?

I still love to do theater because this how I started. There's no other feeling like going live in an ensemble where there's no room for error. lol

What has been your greatest achievement?

My greatest achievement was bringing my son Lucian Franco Vega into this world 10 months ago. My greatest acting achievement was probably The Social Network.

Do you have any project coming up?

I am open to any future project coming my way and I am eager to see what I will get done in 2024.

Would you like to make a movie in Spain?

I would love to make a movie in Spain. It is so beautiful there and the people are very charming. I am a fan of Spanish cinema and any cinema that tells a great story.



Interview by renowned Spanish interviewer Carlos Miguel (@CarlosMiguel_87).





Huntly Plantz

Ep.411

On February 1st The RV headed to San Petersburg, Florida, to chat with the rising star Huntly Plantz.

Huntly is 14 years old and an actor who has been participating in many productions.

Don't miss his interview at:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/49a2owEsNMd3BLzM030zdy?si=551ebfd0e7bb4536>

Also, check out our December 2023 issue to read more about Huntly, who is featured on the cover.



A VALENTINE'S BIRTHDAY

Gabriella Tirado

I was born on Valentine's Day. It's a day filled with love - red, pink, and the sweet scent of roses. As a child, it was enchanting. Heart-shaped balloons and ribbons transformed our home into a haven of affection. My mother, Lucia Matuonto, a true romantic, made it a magical celebration. Growing up, I cherished the uniqueness of my birthday. Heart-shaped chocolates, romantic melodies, and affectionate cards made it sweet. It felt like a secret enchantment, known only to me. But when I moved abroad at 10, things changed.

My school friends couldn't come to my party because of their parents' plans, and unfortunately, I only had a few attendees. As I got older, my peers were busy with their Valentines. I either spent time with my parents or had a quiet cake at home. Sometimes, I wished I was born on a different day or that my friends prioritized our friendship over romance. Dinner with my parents and grandparents became a comforting tradition. It bridged the gap between my yearning for connection and the reality of the day. I learned that love takes different forms beyond romance. Valentine's Day became a celebration of all relationships in my life. Reflecting on my birth on this day, I appreciate the spectrum of love surrounding me. From my parents' romantic gestures to enduring friendships, my birthday celebrates love in all its beautiful shapes and sizes. Things may have changed, but the essence



remains - a reminder that love shouldn't be celebrated on just one day. This realization has given my birthday a deeper meaning. I am grateful for the love that enriches my life every day.





Jamil Dornelles

Gabriella Tirado as seen through the eyes and artwork of Jamil Dornelles.

Jamil Dornelles is a talented illustrator and can be reached at [@jamildornelles](https://www.instagram.com/jamildornelles).

THE HEART'S CALL: CRAFTING FICTION TO INSPIRE HOPE

Patricia Bradley

I stared at the email, willing the words to change. It seemed the only thing my editor liked about the manuscript I turned in a week ago was the dog. Somehow, I wasn't surprised.

I knew it was far from perfect when I turned the book in, but since the death of my daughter eighteen months earlier, I'd had a difficult time writing. Maybe it was time to quit. I stood and walked away from the computer, my thoughts darting in all directions.

I couldn't quit. The book already had a release date. As did the one after it. Besides, my daughter wouldn't want me to quit. *Then maybe you shouldn't have*—I let the thought die. I was still in the anger stage.

Faith has long been my go-to. God knew this day was coming. He'd called me to this writing gig, and he would see me through this crisis. I had to believe that. With a deep breath, I grabbed my jacket for the cool April day and hit the walking trail, letting my brain clear. When I returned, I read the edits again.

Well, maybe she didn't hate the whole thing. Just the beginning. I could rewrite the beginning and tie it in somewhere around the middle of the story. I set up a meeting with my editor, and started brainstorming the rewrite. My brain kicked in

(thanks, prayers!), and when the meeting time rolled around, I had a new opening and an outline. My wonderful editor agreed with the changes and added a couple of weeks to the edit deadline.

That's how Dani-the-potter was reborn.

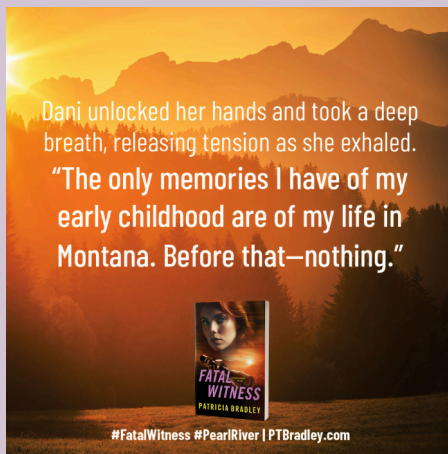
I'd like to say it was easy, but easy has never been in my vocabulary. It took four weeks of ten-hour days to make the changes I'd proposed. It seems once a change is made at the beginning of a story, it creates a ripple effect—kind of like falling dominoes, but I liked the story so much better. When I finished, the first chapter of *Fatal Witness* detailed nine-year-old Dani witnessing the murder of her parents, something so traumatic she blocked it from her memory. The rest of the novel details her journey to discover herself...and who killed her parents.

In some ways, writing *Fatal Witness* helped me find myself again. I learned when you don't know what to do, you dig deep and do the next thing. And when that doesn't work, you do it again. My hope is that even though *Fatal Witness* is a fictional story, others will find hope in its pages.

When it comes down to it, hope is an integral part of all of my stories even though I wrap it in fast-paced romantic suspense novels. I believe fiction has the capacity to change lives as much as nonfiction. Readers immerse themselves in a character and see their own life in the hero/heroine; they see how that character works out the problem in the book and think: *I can do that*.

I've actually had a reader to tell me that. After reading my second book, *A Promise to Protect*, a reader emailed me telling me how much the book had helped her. In that book, my heroine, as a nine-year-old, had overheard her mother tell her father they should never have had their second child. The heroine was that second child, and she never believed her mother loved her. In the book she overcame her crippling hurt and learned how to forgive her mother.





The reader had the same problem, and it had made her bitter. But seeing how the heroine worked that out made her believe she could do the same thing, and *she* started with forgiveness. In the email, the reader wrote that the book had changed her life.

And that's why I write—to offer hope to others. For a while I had lost that, but I'm happy to say, like my heroines, I've found it again.

<https://ptbradley.com/>

Patricia Bradley is the author of fifteen Inspirational Romantic Suspense and two sweet romance books, all set in the South. The winner of a Selah award, and an Inspirational Readers' Choice Award, she's been the keynote speaker at several conferences where she also teaches workshops on writing fiction.

She and her two rescue kitties call Corinth, Mississippi home, and when she's not writing, she likes to throw mud on a wheel to see what comes out.

Back copy for Fatal Witness:

Dani Collins sets out on a journey to uncover the secrets of her past and reclaim her true identity. But someone close to her is determined to keep the truth of what happened all those years ago hidden.





INTERVIEW WITH BJORN BACKMAN

"My name is Bjorn Backman and I'm an actor originally from Norway. I performed and graduated from the University of Central Florida with a BFA in Acting, where I got my Stage Combat Certification. I've got a black belt in Taekwon-Do and am bilingual. I'm a Ryan Reynolds/Rob McElhenney type. I am complex/sarcastic/edgy/sweet and can play anyone from a condescending asshole, criminal/lawyer to a boyfriend/dad/love interest. Most recently, I had a speaking role for the TV series Spilled Paint on Tubi."

Hello Bjorn, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine. Can you share a bit about your journey into acting and what inspired you to pursue it as a career?

Hi, and thanks for having me! I took my first acting class back in 2017 after my best friend found a Group On for a local acting class. It's to this day the scariest, yet most liberating thing I've ever done. Take the leap!

How did your time at the University of Central Florida, including earning a BFA in Acting and obtaining a Stage Combat Certification, shape your approach to acting?

I remember feeling crippled by imposter syndrome after getting accepted. I felt there were so many other people who deserved the spot more than I did, and were so close to dropping out. A professor who I held near and dear convinced me otherwise by telling me two simple words: "Not yet". So I pushed through. Being a high school dropout, it helped me realize that we are capable of so much more than we think.

Having a black belt in Taekwon-Do is impressive! How does your martial arts background influence your acting, especially in roles that may involve physicality or combat scenes?

The discipline from a military-based martial art has helped me maintain self-control in so many aspects of my life and has opened many doors in the acting world. It has made me more marketable as an actor. Never stop learning! The more skills you have the more you can sell yourself in this competitive business.

Being bilingual is a unique skill. How has your ability to speak multiple languages enhanced your versatility as an actor?

In my case, speaking Norwegian, it hasn't helped me directly, per se, but having an accent has helped me stand out in some bookings now that diversity is encouraged! I'm also working on perfecting an American accent as we speak. I've learned to use my differences as a strength.

You mentioned being a "Ryan Reynolds/Rob McElhenney type." What qualities or aspects of their performances do you find most inspiring or resonant in your work?

Yes, I've been told by many that I resemble them in both appearance and in how they carry themselves. I've found that it's important to stand out, but at the same time "know your type".

Your self-description includes being complex, sarcastic, edgy, and sweet. How do you balance these contrasting traits in portraying different characters?

This is what's so fun about acting. It challenges you to delve deeper into various aspects of yourself that you might not even have been aware of existed. I love having the ability to explore new aspects of myself to bring characters to life.

From playing roles like a condescending asshole or a lawyer to a boyfriend or dad, you seem versatile. Is there a specific type of role you find most challenging or rewarding?

Playing troubled characters with a haunting past is usually my go-to. I've always been fascinated by the human psyche and how such characters force you to dig into your past to find those little pieces that eventually, and hopefully, lead to a more believable performance.

Can you share any memorable experiences or challenges you faced during your recent speaking role in the TV series "Spilled Paint" on Tubi?

This was a great one. It was my first time acting in a big, professional production with some amazing actors. It was eye-opening and inspiring to see someone so tuned into their craft that it made me



want to work even harder to reach their level. Although I only had one line, it was a big win in my book. I can't wait to see the finished product!

**How do you approach character preparation?
Are there specific rituals or methods you follow to get into the mindset of a particular character?**

Ah, there are so many techniques, variations, and ways to prepare! I've learned a lot through trial and error. No specific rituals or methods, per se. I will say that as far as memorization is concerned, trying to purely memorize has never worked for me. It all starts with a solid foundation of connecting to the character and material. Once you know why the

character is doing and saying what they do, memorization comes naturally. At least for me!

As an actor, what goals or projects do you aspire to undertake in the future?

I am constantly searching, submitting, and auditioning for new roles and opportunities and see every day and interaction as an opportunity to grow. I hope to keep booking more commercials, TV, and film in the future. I also have a big dream of doing stand-up comedy, so that's something I will actively work towards!

<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm9952011/>



GENRE-JUGGLER

Janet Kravetz

Sometimes I feel like an acrobatic “genre-juggler” of some sorts,
But instead of juggling colorful balls, I juggle words.
I grab letters and throw them up in the air, then I catch myself
With red, blue and green juggling balls on my bookshelf.

You see, I juggle many forms of writing,
Each one is different but still exciting,
Each can be described as a ball of color,
You can call me a “Genre Juggling Scholar.”

A pot of gold at the end of the rainbow awaits,
I just have to open those golden gates,
I just have to answer that inner-call
to choose each colorful and shiny ball.

Highlighting, writing, editing – it’s all so fun and inviting,
Each ball stands for poetry, novel and screenwriting!
Each toss in the air brings to life a story,
Each catch brings-home an allegory.

So, I am inviting you to juggle writing styles too,
To find the balls and colours that are right for you.
I myself started juggling a red ball ten years ago,
When Nova Scotia saw my first poetry show.

From my heart to your open ears,
I tossed into the air my fears.
My words went flying up and down,
Landing on my golden crown.

The red ball was heavy at first,
It’s actually pretty heavy for most,
Poetic honesty could be torn to shreds,
Balls are tricky, but especially the reds.



When I felt I mastered the red ball,
It seems to me fun, but small.
I now wanted to juggle other balls
With higher tosses and much lower falls.

Now I wanted to juggle a ball that was blue,
It was a bigger ball, that's true,
But so different to juggle, so slow to throw,
If I blinked, it could disappear in the snow.

Blue like Planet Earth on my hand,
Blue like water around land,
Blue like the skies above our heads,
All is linked by common threads.

All is linked by the stories we tell,
About a magic pot and a magic well,
About friendship, love and struggles,
About silly me who always juggles.

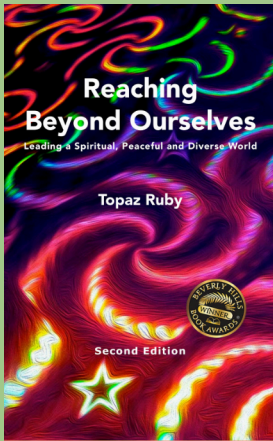
Character arcs and flowery words,
Am I a magician of some sorts?
Some balls come and some balls disappear,
So, I juggle ahead without any fear.

Yes, I decided to pick up novel writing,
It was so new to me and so exciting,
And when I mastered the blue ball too,
I found another ball on my shoe.

This opportunity laid at my feet,
To move around to a typing beat,
To write the last scene, delete a bunch,
To kick-off a script with a final touch.

It was a green ball that screamed to me,
"Pick me up, you would feel free,
You could throw colorful words faster in the air,
Come on, have balls, just go ahead and dare!"





Shift characters with the speed of light,
Let them laugh and even make them fight,
Drama, comedy – juggle it all,
Do not be afraid that I might fall.”

So yes, I dared to pick up the green ball,
It seemed to be the heaviest of them all,
Green like a soccer ball on wet grass,
I had to toss and catch it – then to pass.

From FADE IN to FADE OUT I slaved away,
From early morning to the next day.
I tossed it up high, but it fell crashing down,
Am I nothing but a clumsy juggling clown?

At nights I kept dreaming of “THE END,”
Last page to write was, for sure, godsend,
I picked up screenwriting and it is fun,
Indeed, my juggling work is never done!

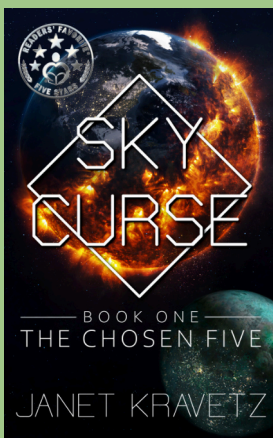
Sometimes in darkness it’s tough to embrace, then let go,
To toss a ball and hope it would go ahead and glow,
To catch a ball and hope it’s the right one,
But the secret to all is just to have fun.

When I decided to simply enjoy the toss,
Without thinking about some distant loss,
All the balls started glowing in the dark for me,
Their golden colors shine, as I set them free.

I now enjoy tossing colorful genre-balls up in the air,
But limit myself to one at a time, to be fair,
I catch and toss them slowly - then toss them very fast,
Try genre-juggling yourself - you’ll have a blast!

[STILL NOT] THE END

<https://www.authorjanetkravetz.com/about>



FROM PAPER TO PIXEL: THE CANVAS OF TOMORROW

Elissa Hess

What drives progress further? Curiosity, of course! It always has and always will fuel creativity. This is especially valid for the creative literary and arts industries. Decorated artists like Pablo Picasso revolutionized visual art through Cubism. Authors like Virginia Woolf changed the narrative structure with her stream-of-consciousness technique. Creators veering out of the ordinary as they explore new techniques and styles have made names for themselves despite the initial backlash. It is bold to be different.

Could a machine beat human creativity?

Are robots better than humans? The emergence of AI in the creative industry has sparked a vibrant debate that doesn't seem to end. As AI has brushed against the canvas of human expression, questions about the role of technology in art, design, and literature are echoing in the room louder than ever.

Early digital tools were simple extensions of the human hand and mind, transforming the way artists created and shared their work. But the story didn't stop there. Internet opened up global stages for artists. Yet, these were mere tools - the true essence of creativity remained **a human endeavour**. Unlike its digital predecessors, AI does something else; it tries to mimic art in a written or visual form. This has understandably caused a stir.

There are reasons to be wary

The concern doesn't involve the authenticity of AI-created art only, we're talking about the scale of impact it has caused on the very canvas of human creativity. Creative works should always stand on their own merit.

We, artists and creators, are at the heart of the debate. Our audience enjoys aesthetics and good storytelling. But for many, art is a livelihood. And as AI ventures into creative territories, the fear of displacement looms large for the creators. If we look beyond economics, there's a deeper, more philosophical aspect of what makes art, art. Is art the mere act of creation, or is it the emotional, often chaotic, human experience behind it?



Many argue that while AI can replicate patterns and styles, it lacks the intrinsic, often undefinable, aspect of human creativity. The posed questions refer to what individuals create, how they create it, and why they create it. We're debating about the human touch, the story, the context, and the vortex of emotions which a piece of art, music or a book can evoke in the audience.

Where does this new technology fit?

The consumption of arts and literature has never been a passive act. In fact, it's an interaction, a dialogue between the creator and the observers. We're asking, could AI truly understand the cultural nuances and the depth of human emotions in order to partake in this dialogue meaningfully? I think this is a concern that lays in the layered background of public rebuttal.

Amid the digital craze, ethical concerns have also rightfully surfaced. AI, after all, learns from existing data. But whose data is it using, and do the developers know? Consent in using artworks to train AI models is a muddy area that sparks debates about the moral grounds of AI-generated content.

"Because copyright today covers virtually every sort of human expression—including blog posts, photographs, forum posts, scraps of software code, and government documents—it would be impossible to train today's leading AI models without using



copyrighted materials,” stated OpenAI in a [submission](#) to a UK institution.

We already see many new tools emerge in line with art copyright usage, such as the image-generation platforms of Adobe Firefly, iStock and Getty. Today, we stand at crossroads of creative evolution and ethics. But the path forward doesn't embrace the blunt selection between human creativity and AI. We don't need to divide the society with such rhetoric.

Instead, what we need to understand and respect is the unique value each brings to the table. Despite the public concerns, we need to acknowledge that AI also opens creative doors. It democratizes art, offering tools for those who might not have the

means or the training to create, but see to share. In this aspect, we can even say that AI pushes the boundaries, challenges the perceptions, and, in some ways, can even inspire human artists to explore new horizons.

AI is here to stay, but it requires ethical use. As users and creators, we need to make sure that as we endorse new technologies, we have a duty to preserve the irreplaceable human essence that breathes life into art. After all, every brushstroke, every note, and every inscribed word contains an inherently human story - one that no AI can fully tell.

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INTERVIEW WITH DEBORAH GREENHUT

Hello Deborah, can you share a bit about your personal caregiving journey and what inspired you to write "The Rational Caregiver?"

Yes, that's a good question. I noticed a pattern in my early life experiences that inspired me to write *The Rational Caregiver*. On the positive side, I was always motivated to help people. My parents were medical professionals, and while I became a teacher, I shared their goals of healing and helping. I accomplished these goals by focusing on various forms of communication. What I didn't realize was how I always let my feelings overwhelm my good judgment about what was possible for me to accomplish as a caregiver. The ideal of being a no-limit person appealed to me, and that often led me to try to do too much—to "be all things" to others while forgetting about my own needs. In talking with other caregivers, I realized that many shared that bond with me. We dove into caregiving without considering the consequences for ourselves and often found ourselves burdened with stress and health effects that were challenging to overcome. There's a phenomenon known as "caregiver burden," and it can creep up on you to the point that you're not functioning very well. And that's not helpful to you or your loved one. I wrote the book to help myself and others remember that quality of life is critical to good caregiving.

How did your background in counseling and advising university students and corporate professionals influence your approach to family caregiving?

While I had often taught time management, I neglected my own rational practices when a loved one's life and health were at stake. You pay a price for that, and many people do. I've also learned from research that the cost can be a shortened life, particularly for caregivers over 70. We need to spotlight that! Older people also need to think about what makes life worth living for us apart from caregiving, which tends to steal time from activities such as exercise, hobbies, and spiritual growth. I started thinking a lot about all the times I had spoken with students about coordinating their long-term goals with their short-term activities when they structured their time. It occurred to me that as we

age, we may choose to be absorbed in caregiving because it does provide a feeling of meaning and purpose. But if we stop developing ourselves, caregiving can also leave us feeling empty and exhausted. Family caregiving is work, after all, and we should not ignore the need for work-life balance even if we love the work.

In your book, you mention the challenges of being responsible for the 24/7/365 needs of an aging individual. What were some of the most unexpected challenges you faced during this time?

The average age of first-time caregivers is 42. When I cared for my father in my mid-40s, I didn't know anyone else who was handling that responsibility. So, the isolation was one issue. At the time, I had my own business, which I had to abandon because Dad's needs for help and attention were so great. I didn't realize then how many doctors older people needed to see to remain healthy! At 72, I get it now! I began to care for my 80-year-old father the day my 71-year-old mother died. They were both living with major health issues, and I had been helping my mother remotely by handling some of the numerous phone conversations she needed to have and had lost energy for, but it turned out that was only the tip of the iceberg! For me, the biggest issue was my father's inconsolable and understandable grief for my mother, whom he loved so much and had depended on for everything, including the management of his medical practice. Some of the issues we faced were unique to him and the wind-down of his practice, but his cardiac condition and depression, which he had not managed very well were the headlines in that story. There was also my mother's estate, which had its own complications. My father died about two months later, and the work seemed endless. My kids were in high school, and while my husband held the fort valiantly, they had to live with my absence and lack of focus on them. Caregiving can become a multifaceted distraction from your own life!

Resilience and persistence are emphasized in your caregiving journey. Can you elaborate on





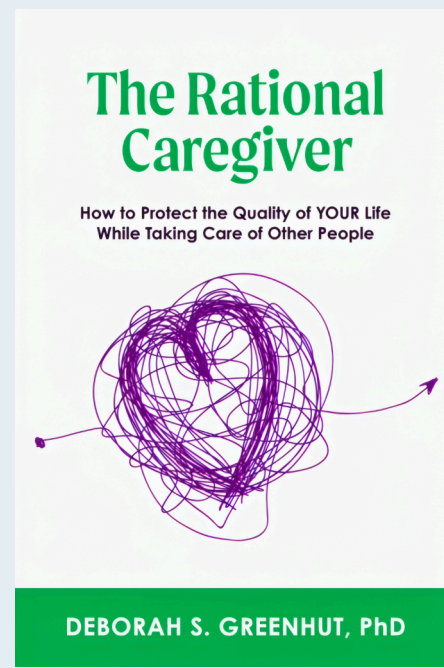
how these qualities played a crucial role in navigating the complexities of caregiving?

An early caregiving experience I had—becoming a Mom—differed from taking care of terminally ill people later in my life. I had learned about maintaining optimism and listening even when you're exhausted during those early years. If you want your children to thrive, it helps to show them how you do it! As a parent, you learn that you must keep asking questions, and if the answers aren't helpful, you must ask again! How handy that is again when you are caring for elders. Sometimes busy professionals don't have time for seniors. Learning this model helped me sustain myself in later years when caring for people whose outlook was poor. But there are times when you need to recognize that your own resilience has been weakened by unrealistic demands that exceed even your most persistent desire to meet them. When no one will help you—and often other family members can't, won't, or don't step up—you may have to realize that others may not share your commitment and enthusiasm so some things won't get done or may be financially difficult to achieve. You can have mad creative skills, but you can't do it all by yourself. Worst of all, you can't clone yourself when you need a break! Caregiving shouldn't make you sick, but it can.

The book talks about navigating appointments with dozens of doctors. What advice would you give to caregivers who find themselves in a similar situation, managing various medical aspects for their loved ones?

This is a place where it helps to have a “village”—a support team, if you will, because there are so many actions required to make and fulfill appointments—everything from scheduling to making sure the person is ready to go with whoever is driving. A colleague, Denise Brown, has identified 17 systems we need to interface with to handle family caregiving. [Here's a link to an interview with Denise: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbD4tW83-g>].

Which tasks can be delegated to your team? Can someone else be the appointment scheduler? The driver? Are there any medical transportation services for chronically ill people in your town? It's also important to forgive yourself when you miss one because your loved one won't get dressed in



the morning or you just plain forget one. Seek out understanding medical professionals who won't add to your stress. Getting rest and a good night's sleep may require assistance from other people. Get to know the insurance company rules so you don't miss out on benefits because you didn't have time to check.

Assessing financial resources before committing to caregiving is highlighted. What financial considerations should caregivers keep in mind, both for themselves and their loved ones?

This is a painful one for many people. Many married couples drain their savings paying for one spouse's care needs, and then the other spouse is left hoping they won't need anything. These needs will likely strike when we are past our major earning years. Fearing for your survival in your 70s is a terrible predicament. It's not wise to prevent your pride in your independence from taking advantage of community service and insurance benefits. My Dad, for example, flat out refused to travel on the senior bus because of how it would look. This deprived him of social interaction that might have benefited him, and it compelled me to keep him company while I was juggling all the other actions I mentioned above. If you can, it's wise to talk to a financial planner about solutions like assisted living and memory care earlier in your life so you understand those choices before the need arises and can make



proactive choices about saving for them. In some cases, medical services may not be covered—certain diseases have only expensive experimental treatments available. How would you handle that situation? There are often emotional considerations complicating the financial decisions we must make, and there's often no rational formula for that. People don't like to talk about these decisions, and they may reach their sickbed with other people deciding for them.

Sometimes, it's a quality of life + financial issue. I mentioned having to abandon my business when my parents passed away. That affected my retirement planning. A couple of years ago, cataracts in my eyes became enough of an impediment that Medicare would cover the surgery. I learned that I could also have several vision issues repaired with the same new lens, and I was thrilled. But Medicare doesn't pay for glasses or vision corrections in most cases. So that meant choosing between laying out a lot of money then or paying for new glasses at least once a year. There wasn't a huge difference, but, if I lived a long time, the surgery could produce a definite financial benefit. I weighed a variety of factors, including cost. Because I'm a writer and speaker, I felt that full restoration of my vision was preferable to depending on eyeglasses, so I decided it was a "now" expense rather than a "later" one. When my father had his final heart attack at 80, the system decided that he could not have a heart transplant at that age, so the decision would have been a financial one that didn't make sense. His doctors took it out of my hands, saying that octogenarians don't merit heart transplants. Even if we're basically healthy, we experience more crossroads like these as we age.

Simply put: how will you or your spouse live if you commit to an expensive medical treatment? This becomes complicated by our individual feelings about prolonging or saving lives, so it's not just money. Understanding your financial and ethical values is a critical life skill for adults. If you're depending on the Medicare programs you've paid into throughout your adult life, you should know that the administrators can decide to pay only for the least expensive treatment for everyday issues—for example, a cane rather than custom orthotics to improve your walking. You'd think the long-term

cardio and other health benefits of aerobic walking would count more than the short-term savings in terms of long-term health costs, but, apparently, they don't see it that way.

Your book outlines a framework to move from Rational Awareness to Competent Grace. Could you explain why progressing through these steps in order is essential for caregivers?

Deciding to care for a loved one's well-being often springs from the best parts of ourselves—compassion and love. These feelings compel us to make big changes, often on short notice. Those adjustments often lock us into an emotional frame of reference, which can lead to guilt when things don't go smoothly or well. The fact is that these emotions don't always help us to make good decisions or choices about how we'll cope while devoting ourselves to others. These unfortunate behaviors are a fertile breeding ground for "caregiver burden"—the stress that leads to or worsens conditions like heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes. Those are the leading causes of premature death among caregivers. Most people aren't aware of the context they're stepping into. We don't realize that help and money may not be available when we need them, for example. So, while we might be aware of the disabling condition of our loved one, we aren't aware of the consequences for ourselves. That's why I advocate moving from Rational Awareness to Rational Acceptance, and then to Rational Responsibility, and finally Competent Grace. People may compliment you generously and tell you, for example, that "you're doing God's work"—and that may feel good for a moment, but those emotions may evaporate along with your energy when you haven't slept for 3 days. It takes a lot of planning to handle those stressful emergencies. If you reach Grace, it means you're able to move comfortably and confidently in the world. I don't know about you, but sleeplessness and eating junk food (because I couldn't plan a meal) do not leave me in a gracious state! It's my belief and contention that you can't do what social scientists call a "Tarzan swing" to an immediate, positive adjustment when you take on a large life change like caregiving. And I do not mean to suggest that there won't be difficult times even if you reach the top of the framework. Grace implies a high level of morale, and if you've ignored all the



danger signals and skipped steps, you are not like to have it or keep it for very long.

For individuals considering becoming caregivers, what key insights or lessons would you want them to take away from your book before embarking on this journey?

The most important insight I hope readers will have from my book is that as a caregiver, you need to plan for your own self-care and make it equally important to caring for your loved one to emerge with your own quality of life intact. It is not effective to assume the emotional reward of caring will be enough if it puts your health and finances at risk. If you believe you don't have to take care of yourself, I need to ask you these questions: Who will take care of your loved one if you get sick? How do you feel about that?

How did your role as a confidant for others' caregiving challenges differ from experiencing it firsthand, and how did this shift impact your perspective?

As in many coaching situations, I realized that it's easier to tell someone else what to do than to do it yourself. I've become candid about my own mistakes as "teachable moments" because people want to be *shown*, not *told*, what to do. At the same time, coaching and listening to stories gave me a 360-degree perspective that I did not have when I was caregiving myself. I often resisted suggestions that would have helped because I couldn't think straight. As a life coach, I understand how important it is to clear a space for caregivers to be able to think. My suggestions to people are less important than helping them find a process that empowers them to be rational about emotional challenges. As a Certified Listening Artist, I have learned to take in heartbreaking stories without jumping in to fix problems when people simply want

to be listened to with compassion. This kind of listening is life-preserving! As a confidant, I can identify certain common threads we need to work with to maintain quality of life.

Self-care is emphasized as crucial for caregivers. What are some practical self-care tips that you found effective during your caregiving journey?

Recognize that you need help. It's hard to keep your morale up if you cannot do self-care things that non-caregivers take for granted without someone else helping in the story. Here are some everyday

things that caregivers often sacrifice: taking a shower (if your person cannot be alone), calling a friend, reading, healthy eating, spiritual and mindful practices, spending a whole day doing just what you want to do, nap, exercise, hobbies, vacation, a good night's sleep without listening for a cry for help or sputtering equipment...the list is endless. If you're a working professional, you may be trying to balance two challenging commitments without a lot of help. Professionals often tell you to take a bubble bath or journal—nice things, but temporary fixes. The important, quality of life-sustaining activities often get lost because there are only 24 hours in a day.

In your book, you mention the importance of thought and rationality in caregiving. Could you share examples of situations where rational decision-making was pivotal for effective caregiving?

For me, ignoring my own health became pivotal. Superwoman is a mythological creature, but I thought I could be one for a long time. I grew up with the idea I learned from my parents that life was like an emergency room, so I became skilled at triage and managing urgency instead of planning



ahead. When you do that, you must ignore important but seemingly less urgent concerns, and that's where you hurt yourself in the long-term.

My Dad was a physician, a professional caregiver, and for over 40 years, he worked 24/7/365, house calls and all! When he had his first heart attack, he gave up delivering babies, but it wasn't enough. His commitment to patients was nearly irrational sometimes, unlike his incredible diagnostic abilities, which suggested he could think well. In his career, he experienced a quadruple bypass and his life ended with massive heart failure. He was an excellent caregiver for others, but ironically would not heal himself with rest or even regular visits to a cardiologist. I realized when I thought about it after caring for him, that I wasn't following a very good model. It didn't take much thought to realize he was exhausting himself, but he didn't want to think about it. After that, when I caught myself trying to be all things to someone else, I learned to compel myself to put my own needs first. We hear that message on airplanes all the time, don't we? "Put on your own mask first before trying to help someone else." That's what I mean about being rational. Think through the outcome you want—in that case, it's two people living and breathing!

For readers who have already started their caregiving journey, what actionable steps or insights from your book do you believe would be most beneficial for them to implement immediately?

When I coach people, the first thing we do is an assessment of the major areas of life satisfaction that can impact a person's quality of life. It's good to evaluate where you are starting from in matters of health, finances, personal and professional goals, relationships, and so on before you undertake the responsibility of someone else's health and well-being. If you skip that step, your emotions are likely to continue to drive your decisions and your quality of life becomes an "after-thought" while you preserve someone else's. While we cannot usually predict how long we'll live, we can do something about how well we do. It starts with quality of thought—being rational, so you can learn to live with your feelings instead of in fear of your life.

Deborah S. Greenhut is a travel and cultural writer and photographer who is trying to live as many lives as she can enjoy in "retirement." Her first novel, *The Hoarder's Wife*, debuted in April 2022 from Woodhall Press and has already received to First Place awards from Speak Up Talk Radio, and a Finalist Award from Reader's Choice Awards.

During her working life, Deborah visited all U.S. states and worked in each of the Lower 48 as a corporate trainer in addition to offering programs across Canada and Western Europe.

During 2000-2012, Deborah became a playwright and filmmaker whose works focus on the drama of women's lives. Her plays, *Difficult Subjects*, *A Good Constellation*, *Fooling the Eye*, *Jimmies*, *The Funny Face Pancake Place*, and *How I Live. With Terror* have been festival selections produced in New York. Additional works have been read in Alaska, New Jersey, and New Mexico festivals, and *Difficult Subjects* was published in Volume 2 of *The Best Plays of the Strawberry Festival*, compiled by Van Dirk Fisher. Her film-in-progress, "Across the Ages Dance," chronicles the first year of an intergenerational dance project in Cambridge, MA. See: www.definingthecapture.wordpress.com

Now that the travel bug has struck, Deborah enjoys being on the road with her camera and a notebook. Chiang Mai, Paris, Havana, Banff, Montana, and Barcelona have lured her eye in the last few years. She is a member of the International Travel Writers and Photographers Alliance (ITWPA) and the author and illustrator of a series of picture travel books for children: *Granny On the Road Books*.

www.deborahgreenhut.com
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LOVE IS ALL WE NEED

Angie Maserati

Imagine life a garden, and each of us the farmer sowing what we know. What we know is what we have been taught along the way. Exemplified to us by people who “love us” and who also have lots of weeds in their own garden. Thankfully most weeds come out of the ground easily with just a gentle pull when you understand the root. Grateful that life is a journey. We naturally grow, desire, and seek a greater understanding of purpose and autonomy in our being.

The foundation of every garden is love. Even if the garden has been neglected, love remains.

Love is the sun, the rich diverse biome of soil, and the rain. Love is always in abundance, willing and able to nourish every precious life. Love provides the gifts we crave; empowering knowledge and life sustaining growth. Love provides the reflection and the coming to the understanding of oneness. We just have to believe for our hearts to beat with the purpose of love and light!

Love also holds the power to grow thorny things at times. Love uses these thorns to poke at us, until we are so uncomfortable we must change. Choosing to move into the flow and ease that life can provide, can be literally life saving. To stay in the discomfort will bring disease. The dis-ease will provide a way to jump the body and retreat into the spirit of love, with no more need for the body. There is no wrong way. Love only seeks truth and expansion. Patience is love and love is grace. These are naturally granted, for the soul is always in a beautiful experience of growth. Gentle and kind, with awareness of the temporary physical and the eternal path of the spirit. The energy of love will do whatever it takes to get us to honor the love we were made for. We must not settle for less than the purest and most ambient love our heart and soul desires.

Why is it so hard to go towards our joy and our hearts bliss? Wouldn't you think it would come naturally? It did come easily when we were kiddos! The tendency to go towards joy gets programmed out of us and replaced with FEAR! The worst of the



four lettered “F” words, FEAR! The fear of not being “good” and then not being loved. We are shown this by those that we are to believe have our “best interest” in mind and love us “the most”. We have to understand and recognize the damage fear brings into our life! We need to attune to our soul in a way that we hear our own voice and truth the loudest. Believe in that voice as the life it is saving is our own. Break up with fear and the uncomfortable comfort zone.

Allow the greatest moments of life to flow in! Philosopher Alan Watts calls it living “in the way of the water”, effortlessly in flow. Our beliefs and experiences shape how we view and experience love. Sadly, we're often told it's something to be earned and not for everyone or there are a rigid set of rules to follow to be lovable.

We need to wake up “get woke” to the truth of love! Social programming has us celebrating years of a relationship rather than the self honoring joy in a relationship. To truly connect with ourselves and others, we need to let go of the noise and programming that keeps us from feeling the love that's already inside us. Love requires no sacrifice and no compromise.





You are enough, you are worth it, you are love, you gorgeous soul! Honor that! No need for guilt or shame, just being our audaciously authentic selves, scars and all is enough! Life is a journey, and we're bound to get a little roughed up along the way and when we do, love will always be there supporting us and guiding us through it all. Trust love, if we feel we can't then it is not love, it's something less.

Let's face it; there's no one size fits all manual for life. Thank goodness for that! We're all unique, like snowflakes, but with a common thread that weaves us together: love. It's the most powerful force in the universe, and it's already inside us. All we need to do is believe it.

Choosing the high road of love means treating everyone with respect and valuing each person's unique spirit and journey of light and expansion. There is individual in the "one" and no ownership or contract to decide where we journey. We've got some work to do, but together, we'll make it happen! I love and I believe!

Nature easily gets us back to our roots and fills us with a sense of belonging. A few minutes tuning in to the beauty around us and remembering that we are also nature is aligning. We are one with the love that holds the planet in space every day. Surely we can feel empowered enough to love ourselves and one another.

Love is the ultimate superpower that's always waiting for us to play and dance with joy!

Love will bathe the soul in serenity and peace. It's a never-ending provider of nourishing and healing vibes that we can tap into at any moment.

To truly bask in love's glow, we've got to cut loose the negative vibes and self-doubts that don't serve our joy. Once we've got that covered, surrender to the power of love, my loves!

When we live in this space of positivity, we magnetize love like bees to honey. Trust love, that's when the magic happens! Go ahead, live your life to the max and create a love story that'll leave you breathless. Now that we know let's sow a garden full of bees and honey that bears the nourishment of love. If at anytime you need a reminder my song "Let Me Show You Love" is now streaming everywhere, from my heart to yours.

ONLY LOVE because I love you- XOXO.

P.S. At the beginning, during and end of it all, fearlessly live a life that serves and expresses all that you are. When re-entering the stream of love, let it be with every truth said and desire met. Also may you be in the arms of the ones that fueled your brightest light and LOVED you...LOVED every essence and expression of you

<https://open.spotify.com/album/1G4NkxXWpLTGPwVWHq8ltb>

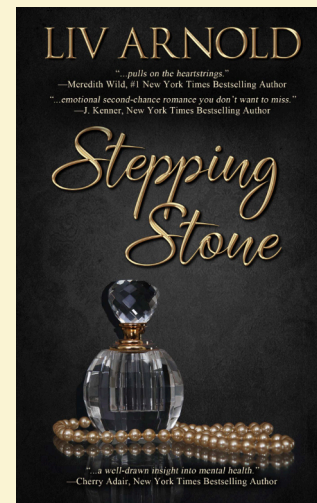


ROMANCE, RESILIENCE, AND MENTAL WELLNESS

Liv Arnold

In the changing landscape of romance literature, my journey has been marked not only by the stories I tell but also by a commitment to mental wellness. As someone that's had anxiety since I remember, I write relatable characters with real life challenges. Since I was a kid, I would stay up all hours of the night until the alarm went off and I had to go to school. I worried about small occurrences like if someone hated me or getting into trouble by a teacher. Rarely, my concerns happened. Because of anxiety, I was reclused and often read books during break times. I loved being taken away into a fictional world and the characters' adventures were a great comfort.

My novel, "Stepping Stone" is a romantic suspense that explores second chances, sexual awakening, and the process of healing. The project is more meaningful because 10% of profits is going toward Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA). The inspiration for the main male

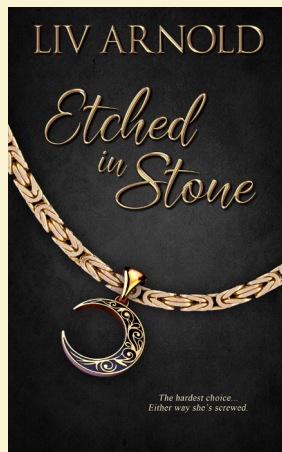


character, grappling with PTSD, came from an acquaintance who served in Afghanistan. He gave me insight on the signs and symptoms to look out for, including being strict on safety or startled by a loud noise. Most people who served in the military return home with a form of PTSD. Although I don't know their ordeal, I use my physical symptoms like a clenching chest or shortened breath to bring into my characters.

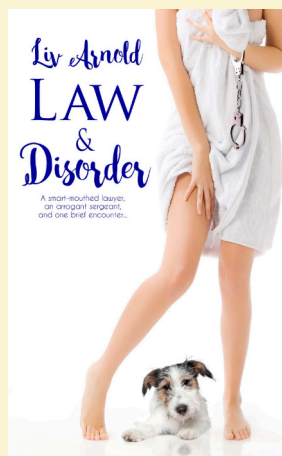
My favorite reviews were from readers who said they recognized themselves or someone they knew in my characters. Or that my story made them feel like they weren't the only person going through mental health challenges. I was delighted when renowned authors praised "Stepping Stone" for its emotional depth and ability to address complex social issues. Meredith Wild, a #1 New York Times bestselling author, captured the essence of the novel, describing it as, "a journey of love, suspense, sexual awakening, and healing that pulls on the heartstrings." J. Kenner, another New York Times bestselling author, commended the incorporation of forgiveness and self-discovery into my emotional second-chance romance. And Cherry Adairs said the story compassionately addressed the tough subject of mental health.

My goal toward mental wellness improved when my brother recommended the Wim Hof Method. Wim Hof is a man from Iceland who practices breathing into pressure points and cold therapy. His 10-week





program started with 30 second cold showers on the first week and ended at 10 minutes toward the end. I had tried therapy and medication before. Neither worked, but I detested the cold and love my showers scalding hot. That first cold shower was a massive shock to the system. But the cold worked. While I was in the shower, the small worries flew out the window. I only wanted the shower to end. The body links up to the mind. A cold shower wouldn't harm me. The program was about mental resilience.



I looked for other physical methods to manage anxiety like fasting for 20 hours. Many studies showed fasting provided mental clarity and cleared toxins. Again, I struggled at first. By the time the day got to hour 19, I was so cranky. But I grew used to fasting and my food habits became a lifestyle change. I found solace in physical challenges and added martial arts like jiu-jitsu and Muay Thai. Despite my lack of sports background and the inability to swim, these activities helped build confidence. When I'm in class, the movements provided a mental reset. As I've often said, I don't

believe in therapy. Talking is overrated. Sitting around discussing your problems will only heighten the issue. If traditional methods of managing anxiety doesn't work for you, there are other options.

As a sex advice expert for Cosmopolitan and various media outlets, I engage in open discussions about mental health and sexual wellness. My openness has led to cover features on prestigious magazines such as Harper's BAZAAR, Playboy, InStyle, Grazia, and FHM. Never in my wildest dreams I thought I'll ever be on the cover of a magazine.

My dedication to addressing mental health challenges, personally and through my creative work, showcases there are many ways to reach success. My hope is to inspire others to find their own unique paths to wellness and peace.



<https://www.livarnold.com>



COVER STORY

KATHERINE HAYES

Editor

Speaker

Podcaster

Author

Educational
Consultant



Hello Katherine, welcome to The Relatable Voice. Can you please share the inspiration behind your latest book, and what motivated you to write it?

A Fifth of the Story is a book that I was inspired to write based on the experiences of my husband throughout his extensive military and civilian intelligence career. Through his work, I gained a unique and valuable behind-the-scenes look into the world of intelligence and the various challenges that the intelligence community faces on a day-to-day basis. I came to realize just how endangered the intelligence community really is, and how absolutely vital it is for us to preserve and support what they do and why they do it. The book delves deep into the complexities of intelligence work, and offers fascinating insights into the critical role that intelligence agencies play in keeping us safe and secure.

How do you approach the process of creating and developing your characters? Are they inspired by real people, purely fictional, or a combination of both?

I start by storyboarding my character. I flesh out how they look, their entire background, and their personality. Through this process, I create characters who are a combination of fictional and real people. By the time I'm finished with a well-developed character, they have become their own person—to the point where they're talking back to me.

Every writer has a unique writing routine. Can you describe your daily or weekly writing habits and rituals?

Each day, I create a list of things I need to accomplish. This is based on my annual and monthly goals. If I'm working on a novel, I usually also have clients I work with and several freelance jobs with publishers, magazines, and companies. Therefore, I have a strict goal of writing at least 1,500 words daily for my novels. When I can write more, I write in sprints to get chunks of writing done. I usually light candles in my writing space, turn on a diffuser, and play inspirational music.

Is there a specific genre or theme you prefer to explore in your writing, and if so, what draws you to it?

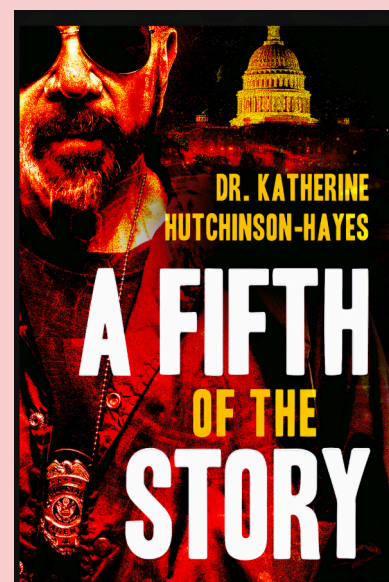
I am deeply committed to upholding justice, particularly for those who are often overlooked and underrepresented in society. My passion for advocacy stems from a deep-seated empathy for marginalized women and children, whose struggles and hardships have left an indelible mark on my heart. I am constantly mindful of their experiences when I am writing, and I strive to use my words to amplify their voices and bring attention to their needs.

This cause is especially important to me because I come from a family of people who have faced persecution and discrimination throughout their lives. Additionally, my mother was a descendant of Portuguese immigrants who were persecuted and marginalized, and their experiences have shaped my own perspective on the world. I believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, regardless of their background or circumstances, and I will continue to work tirelessly to make this vision a reality.

How do you handle writer's block or moments when inspiration seems elusive?

For me, nature and exercise are two of the most powerful sources of inspiration. I find that spending time outdoors, surrounded by the beauty of the natural world, helps to clear my mind and invigorate my soul. Whether it's a hike on a trail, a walk along the beach, or sitting in a park, being in nature always fills me with a sense of wonder and peace.

I also make it a point to exercise regularly. Whether it's hitting the gym or going for a bike ride, I find that





physical activity helps to keep my body and mind in top shape. It gives me a burst of energy, helps me to clear my thoughts, and sets me up for a productive day ahead.

But it's not just about physical fitness for me—I also prioritize my spiritual health. To start my day right, I always begin with prayer and daily devotionals. This helps me to stay grounded, focused and inspired throughout the day.

All these things—nature, exercise, and spirituality—are an essential part of my daily routine. They help me to stay centered, energized, and motivated to tackle whatever challenges come my way.

What role does research play in your writing process, especially when dealing with specific topics or settings?

Research takes up just as much time as writing a novel. I spend hours reading and collecting data on my topics and settings. Although it's painstaking and time-consuming, I believe it's vital for me to do as much research as possible so that my writing is informed, unbiased, and accurate as possible.

Can you share a memorable experience or challenge you encountered while working on one of your books?

I can recall breaking down when I researched the explosion of violent hate groups in the United States. I was appalled by the heinous agendas of many of these organizations to discredit democracy and take away the freedoms many have fought so hard to gain.

Many authors have a favorite among their own works. Do you have a particular book that holds a special place in your heart, and if so, why?

A Fifth of the Story will be my third book, but it's my debut thriller. This book will always have a special place in my heart because my beloved brother and mother died suddenly while I was writing this novel. I learned a lot about stretching myself. I also developed a renewed respect for my husband's years of service and the powerful work of the intelligence community. This community does a lot to keep our country safe and our constitution thriving.

Collaboration in the literary world can take various forms. Have you ever collaborated with other authors, and what was that experience like?

By nature, I enjoy collaborating with others. I often get a chance to do this through the various writing organizations I'm engaged with, such as the 540 Writer's Community, Word Weaver's International, Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers, the PEN, and EFA. I also have a blog where I've written alongside a team of writers for a few years. We recently collaborated on a book of devotionals based on the blogs we've written called Focus: 45 Devotionals to Keep Jesus in the Picture.

How do you navigate the evolving landscape of publishing, especially with the rise of self-publishing and digital platforms?

As an author who has both traditionally published and self-published works, I find myself constantly navigating between these two distinct worlds. With the advent of digital platforms and the rise of self-publishing, the publishing industry has undergone a major transformation in recent years. As a result, I have had to stay ahead of the learning curve and constantly improve my craft to remain competitive in this ever-changing landscape. Despite the challenges, I have found that this shift has pushed me to be a better writer and has given me greater control over my creative output.





Are there specific authors or literary influences that have shaped your writing style or approach to storytelling?

Throughout my journey as a writer, there have been two mentors who have played an instrumental role in shaping my writing and my approach to the publishing industry - Cecil Murphey and Edwina Perkins. Their guidance, generosity, talent, and wisdom have been invaluable to me, and I feel indebted to them for everything they have done for me. Cecil Murphey, with his vast experience in writing, has taught me the nuances of storytelling and has helped me refine my craft to a great extent. Edwina Perkins, on the other hand, has been an excellent guide in navigating the publishing industry, and her insights have been immensely helpful in making informed decisions about my work. I owe a great deal of my success to these two wonderful mentors and their unwavering support.

For aspiring writers, what advice would you give them about the writing and publishing process?

For aspiring authors, I would say, never give up. Write your vision of where you want to be. Make the vision plain, concrete, and doable. Run the vision each day. Take yourself seriously as a writer. Do all the *things*—create a business plan. Create a business card and dare to call yourself an author or writer. Put up a website. Write your blog. Do the podcast. Send out the newsletters. Go to as many conferences as you can and network. Then, network some more. Continue to hone your craft. Be nice. Your attitude is everything. That's my best advice.

How do you balance the creative aspects of writing with the business side of being an author, such as marketing and promotion?

As a writer, I find that I spend nearly as much time managing the business aspects of my work as I do writing itself. Regardless of how much I enjoy the creative process, I understand that writing is a

business that must be approached with a professional attitude and managed with care.

To help me handle the marketing side of things, I've brought on a part-time assistant who works with me to promote my work and engage my audience. I've found that this has been tremendously helpful in freeing up more time for me to focus on writing.

In addition to my assistant, I've also been fortunate enough to work with Mickey Mikkelson, a publicist who has been absolutely fantastic. Having a skilled publicist on my team has allowed me to reach a wider audience and gain more exposure to my work. I feel grateful to have such a strong support system in place to help me navigate the business side of my writing career.



In today's interconnected world, social media plays a significant role in an author's visibility. How do you use social platforms to connect with your readers?

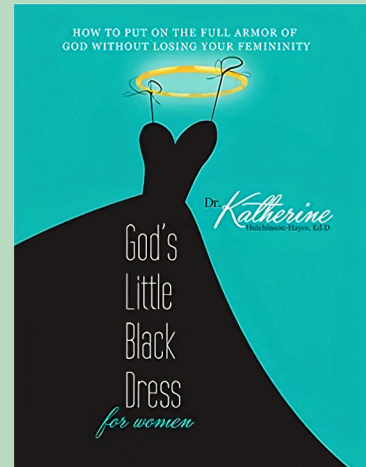
I use social media to connect with other authors, readers, and the author community in general. I primarily connect by posting inspirational messages, updates on my podcast guests, news about upcoming books, and other author-related activities. I'm most active on X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Looking ahead, are there new genres or themes you are eager to explore in your future works?

As I was writing my novel 'A Fifth of the Story', I stumbled upon an amazing idea that inspired me to create a romantic suspense thriller. The process of writing this book has been a journey of self-discovery and growth. Looking ahead, I am excited to explore this genre further and continue to incorporate themes of justice into my work.



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



Dr. Katherine Hutchinson-Hayes is an Editor, author, speaker, and educational consultant. She is a member of Word Weavers International and serves as an online chapter president and mentor.

She belongs to FWA (Florida Writers Association), ACFW (American Christian Fiction Writers), CWoC (Crime Writers of Color), AWSA (Advanced Writers and Speakers Association), and AASA (American Association of School Administrators). She serves on the nonprofit organization Submersion 14 board and the 540 Writer's Community board and is an art instructor for the nonprofit organization Light for the Future.

Katherine hosts the podcast Murder, Mystery & Mayhem Laced with Morality. She has authored a Christian Bible study for women and is currently working on the sequel to her first general market thriller novel. Her thriller A Fifth of the Story will debut in February 2024 through Endgame Press.



DICE GOBLINS AT PLAY: USING STORIES TO LIFT UP NEURO-DIVERSE VOICES

Thomas R. Wilson

Laughter echoes in the background; players jump from their seats, and dice roll against the canvas of a map highlighted by marker-drawn beasts and dungeons. Against the noise and the exaltations I watch, I sit humbly, waiting for those who plan and scheme and plot against the machinations that I had placed in their path. Some say I am the bad guy; from time to time, I am, and sometimes I am the wounded child seeking safety, others the king with grand knights waiting to save or slay the plans of those that have laughed.

Yet, in all of it, I am the planner, the facilitator, the maestro of the game. I run the story, I provide the safe space, and I work to watch the players move within the world I craft. I watch as they move as they plan, I adapt, I summon, I prevent the deaths of heroes, and sometimes I take them.

Though, when I sit in my moments of silence, when I craft my own machinations, my stories that are told over months, years, or even only hours, the worlds that I may craft and control, I never work to question serenity. I strive to build a space calm and quiet when it needs to be, never working to bring pain to my players, never working to move too swiftly. Never working to remove the laughter, the joy, the moments that need to be felt. I wait in the pauses, in the quiet surprise, and in the calm. As stories live there. They live in all the moments of what is and what could be. Stories live in the possibilities.

However, I honor the players so often, more importantly, more pivotal and more impossible than it may seem. I honor the moments when questions need to be heard; I honor the moments when ideas are formed, form the minds of a group so immersed in a world of fantasy and myth that they craft their own reality. I honor the misunderstandings, fears, triggers, and worries. I listen with intention, I hold my pride and acknowledge when I am wrong, and I hold my tongue when I should not speak. I always work to make it so that my voice is not the only one heard. I apologize when I know I am wrong.

Never in my intent when crafting these worlds do I intend to hurt. When I lead the game of D&D, I know my place, my role. When I stand on a stage telling a story, my story, I watch the faces of those who listen. For they give a true insight into what is not said. When I work to gather unheard voices, I will ask questions of value. As I know the pain of misery, mockery, or hatred. I see the hurt that comes with being silenced. I know the well of tears that flow when I have been hit. So, no matter how much I play the character of a villain, or the wise king, or the fool who shows a winding pathway, I honor those who listen. I hold strong the paths to more stories, futures, and voices. So that pain may heal, and our community may become a chorus of voices heard beyond our realm.



MORE THAN A WHO DONE IT, A MYSTERY

W.B.J. Williams

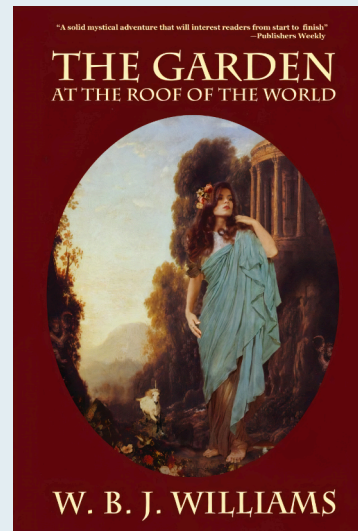
A mystery is not just about who done it. Neither is my forthcoming fusion of mystery and the otherworldly, Johnny Talon and the Goddess of Love and War.

The idea for the story started with my encounter of Paul Delvaux's painting, Proposition Diurne, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The painting is dreamlike, which is typical of surrealist work. In it, two naked people, a man and a woman, are wandering through a ruined landscape. She holds a mirror that reflects nothing, and a necklace and bracelet just hang in the air. His hands are open, one of which is reaching out, as if offering a solution. I wrote the story to explore the mysteries I saw in the painting. Who is she, who is he?

The best mysteries explore a deeper topic than the dark and sinister event we call murder. Possibly the most famous of the Sherlock Holmes stories, "The Scandal in Bohemia", is not even about a crime, but is about preventing a scandal. To do so, Sherlock must understand who Irene Adler is, and this brilliant detective who so readily gets to the root of so many mysteries finds that the truth about her eludes him. Understanding of one's true self is an essential mystery.

He is Johnny Talon, a surreal detective. He is a man who will search for truth in dreams and follow non-sequiturs wherever they may lead, even into hell itself. After all, what is a journey out of addiction to health but a journey through hell. What better weapon could you ask for than the sharp wit of a gumshoe who knows how to search for truth.

She is Johnny's client Eve, a prostitute on the run from a magician who wants to use her in a black mass to summon demons. She doesn't see herself in the mirror because she doesn't understand who she is within the world. Of course, Eve is not her real name. Johnny must solve the mystery of who she is, and get her to know and love herself, in order for her to overcome her addictions.



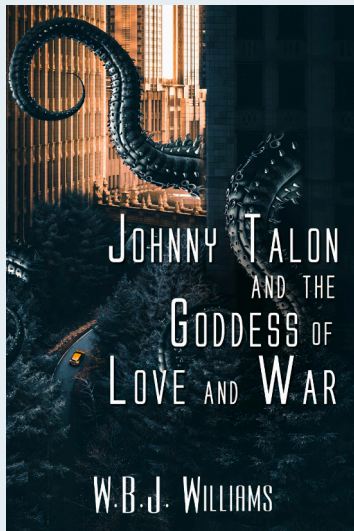
A different Sherlock Holmes story inspired the rest of my story. Sherlock Holmes was addicted to a seven percent solution of opium, and Nicholas Meyer's novel *The Seven Percent Solution* explores how Holmes, with Watson's help, over comes this addiction. Growing up I watched how people I loved fell prey to addictions to things others used without issue. Addiction is a mystery worth pursuing.

Why magic? Mythology is the best tool for helping us explore the deepest mysteries, and magic is a part of the best myths.

John Ford's *The Last Hot Time* gave me the thought that a paranormal mystery could be explored using noir themes. The noir mysteries of both Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammet heavily influenced my style. *The Maltese Falcon* is not just about who murdered Sam's partner. It is almost a subplot in this brilliant exploration of yet another kind of addiction.

I learned how to use surrealism to explore mysteries from Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*. Lewis Carroll's Alice stories taught me how to do surrealism with a twist of the comic and absurd. I wanted a light and playful tone; my readers should have fun. I ignored Lovecraft's bigotry in his *Dream of the Unknown Kadath* which is an excellent model of how an exploration of





dreams could be an exploration of hell. David Lynch was also a good teacher, especially his *Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Twin Peaks*. The detective in *Twin Peaks*, Dale Cooper is a transcendental detective, but like my Johnny Talon, he finds truth within dreams. *Twin Peaks* was also a great teacher

of how to write noir inspired fiction but with a light and humorous touch.

Other odd mysteries inspired me. Dustin Hoffman and Lily Tomlin play existential detectives in *I ♥ Huckabees*, which looks at the essential mystery of the interconnectedness of everything. Douglas Adam's *Dirk Gently* is a wholistic detective, looking at the whole problem. So why not a surreal detective?

This brings me to Johnny Talon. The spirits, sorcerers, and truly desperate in San Francisco's seedy neighborhoods know Johnny Talon, a private detective who can solve impenetrable cases in a way no one else can. His use of lucid dreams and subconscious insights lead him to the truth. He is a man who will go through hell for his client. After all, how else is a gumshoe going to pay the rent?

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AN EXISTENTIAL CRY, IF I MAY

Linda Drattell

My dog and I had passed a man in a rumpled business suit, his body slumped on a bench, when I realized he had died; a nearby police officer came to his side and stayed there, waiting for help to arrive. I could not help but circle back around to the same spot and observe with fascination the fraternal touch of the policeman's elbow against the dead man's unmoving arm, while my mixed Corgi-Chihuahua pulled at me with all the strength his little body could muster to continue our walk in the opposite direction.

On one of my long-distance runs, I passed two young girls begging for their mother's attention while she stared at her cellphone. It was a sunny day, the girls were happy, and they clearly wanted to share their happiness with their mother—who was, sadly, unavailable.

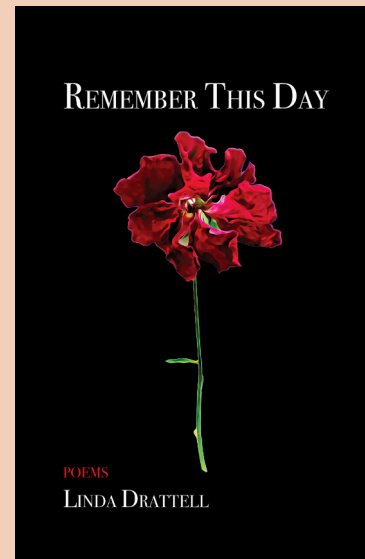
In Nice, France on Bastille Day in 2016, my husband and I found ourselves in the middle of a terror attack that killed over 80 people, including a teenager who had been riding his bicycle and an infant crushed in his stroller. Over 400 were injured. Slightly injured myself, I struggled with the guilt of surviving when so many others hadn't.

I lost my hearing when my children were young, a time when they needed my attention the most, losing the only way I knew to connect with my family and others. It was a rip in my existential being for which, to maintain my sanity, I needed find the significance of it.

The news today is another source of angst for me – the way in which we are quick to unmercifully condemn and attack each other.

So many crossroads to search for understanding. It's mind-boggling.

Recording my thoughts and emotions on paper has helped me achieve an inner peace; by jotting things down, I allow myself to forget the details of each event because, to remember, I know I will always be able to read what I've written. The musings I've committed to paper have turned into poems, short stories, and essays.



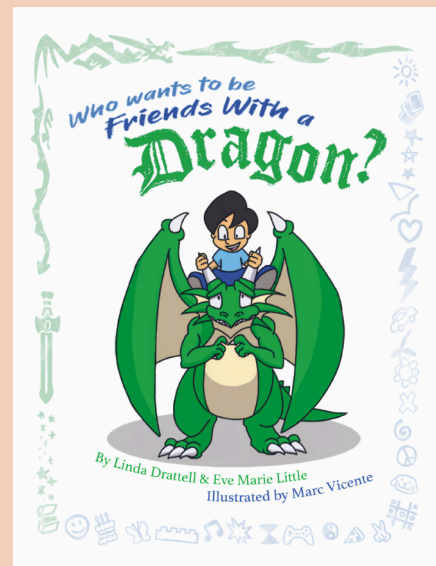
Working for several years in peer support services, community relations, and as an advocate for the deaf and hard of hearing, I've relearned how to navigate social, professional, and family relationships, and have chronicled this process through articles in newsletters, magazines, and in a poetry anthology. My poems have been published online and in print in various anthologies, podcasts and literary magazines. My poetry collection, *Remember This Day*, was published in 2023 by Finishing Line Press. A second poetry collection, *The Lighter Side of Horse Manure*, will be published in 2024, also by Finishing Line Press. A children's picture book I co-authored—*Who Wants to be Friends with a Dragon?*—was published in 2023 by Dorrance Publishing Company. An excerpt from my work-in-progress adult novel is now published in *Embark Literary Magazine*, and a flash fiction piece, "The Appointment," was short-listed for the Loft Books 2023 prize. My short story, "The Vote," originally published in the most recent California Writers Club Tri-Valley Writers Branch anthology, was featured on "Catch the Story!" – a podcast I am honored to be a part of.

There you have it. I'm a poet and a writer, dividing my time between Northern California and Barcelona, pouring my heart out in poems and fiction, conduits to share my most private journal



pages. My aging horse and goats (some have passed on to greener pastures) have been the muses for many of my poems, for they exhibit the same sense of angst we humans do. I tell myself it doesn't matter if anyone reads the things I write. But I greatly appreciate it when someone does, when they take the time out of their day to share my experiences. Some people have told me they identify with something I've written, and it thrills me that my writing has become a way for me to forge ties with others.

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ONCE UPON A LIGHT

Douglas Weissman

“Once upon a time there was a magic witch,” my four-year-old says.

“Did you know you are magical?” I ask. She smiled—eyes wide, shimmering with mischief. I wondered in that moment what spell would she cast on me, but I knew the spell she had already cast.

I don’t remember when I started hearing stories in everything, the moment stories became meaning, around the time I remember “once upon a time,” but I remember the moment I ached to give stories that same meaning to my daughter. In the NICU, minutes after being incubated, she sat there with black saucer eyes and a tube shoved down her throat, but the gears of a story churned inside me and before the long night was through, I read one of the stories available in the hospital, something about a duck and a bear and a pond. In that moment, so shortly after birth, without time to question what had happened, I covered my daughter in the comfort of a book, a blanket of happily-ever-after.

Once upon a time my wife and I would take turns reading one of the stories, more to give us something to do, to let our daughter hear our voices as she lay like a roly poly through a looking glass,

deceptively close but barely able to touch. We couldn’t leave the NICU in pieces and instead waited long days but blessed days until she came out of the NICU and we brought her home and told our pets the story of where we were, what had happened at the hospital, and how we returned whole.

Once upon a time my wife and I would gather our daughter in our arms, feed her, and read the stories we had collected, predictable accumulations of our childhood we wanted to share—monsters and witches and new worlds and talking animals, wild beasts and angry dragons and friendly robots. The dog would cuddle next to us on the couch, the cat would sit on the arm rest, one of us would read, the other would hold the baby and the bottle. But in that moment of sharing stories, we created a story of our own, allowing the light to flicker within us in our soft and gentle jumble of mismatched tails and tales—a story completely our own, yet also one so many others have had; its specificity making it incredibly relatable.

Once upon a time my great grandmother’s childhood resembled Cinderella with a wicked stepmother. And my grandfather sailed from the



East coast to the West coast as a boy, with his father staging a beauty pageant to keep the attendants in the lower bays occupied stitched together in a tapestry of shared experiences.

Once upon a time, my great grandparents were newlyweds in Russia—a soldier and a baker. In the morning, the husband went on patrol as part of the White Army. In the afternoon, he returned from patrol and was arrested as an enemy of the Red Army. The baker on her way to work saw her new husband standing in a line with other dissidents waiting to be shot. The baker grabbed the soldier, threw him over her shoulder like a sack of flour, and ran to her bakery, shoving him in a hidden closet with other sacks of flour—lost to the dark but safe. In the morning, the baker opened the door, the light shone in, and the newlyweds boarded a boat and traveled to Canada.

Once upon a time I heard a story about love—most of all—about light. I was told, when I share in general, it often means I get less of something. I share a pie, I get fewer pieces of pie. I share a car, I have less time with the car. I share a house, I have

less space. Except when I share light; I get more light. A candle doesn't steal light from another candle, it shares and grows the flame. And when stories are light, the more stories shared, the more I glow.

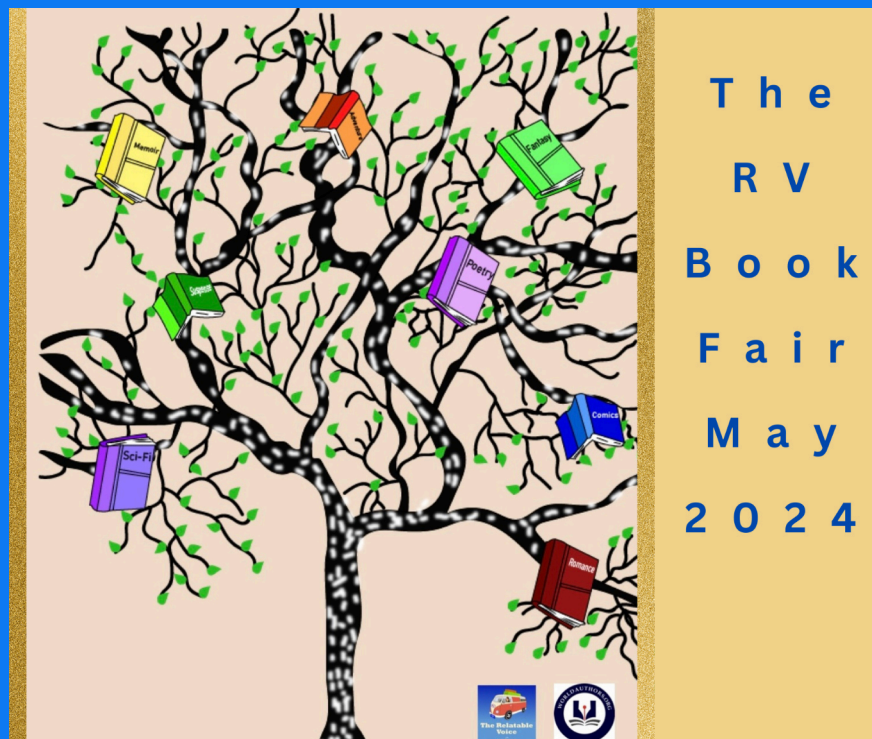
Once upon a time was only the beginning, a shorthand for the story to come, for the magic that awaits, for the light to flicker and grow. My wife and I still sit by our daughter and read bedtime stories. The messages have evolved, the monsters seem more real, and the darkness of the outside world spreads a little closer to our doorstep. But each night, we tuck our daughter into her bed, she cuddles close to a panda bear or a squirrel pillow or a Rapunzel doll, and I whisper to her the story of her life.

“You are magical,” I say.

And with each story, we whisper a little more light into existence.

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

[Catch the Story featuring Douglas Weissman.](#)



Don't miss The RV Book Fair, which will start in May 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 works. For more information and to stay up-to-date about all things Relatable, please visit <https://www.relatable-media.com/>.



EXPLORING NUREMBERG

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND CULTURE



House provides insight into the life and work of the famous Renaissance artist. Art enthusiasts will find joy in exploring the numerous museums and galleries that the city offers.

Nuremberg is not just known for its cultural offerings; it is also a thriving center of innovation and industry. The city houses leading companies in technology, automotive engineering, and healthcare, establishing its reputation as a hub of innovative research and development. The Nuremberg International Toy Fair, the world's largest event of its kind, showcases the latest advancements in the toy industry and attracts visitors from around the world.

Nuremberg offers an impressive culinary scene, featuring a variety of restaurants, cafes, and breweries that serve delicious Bavarian cuisine and international dishes. This gastronomic paradise offers a variety of options to please every palate, from hearty sausages to exquisite wines and beers.

Nuremberg is a beautiful city in Bavaria, Germany, known for its blend of history, culture, and innovation. The cobblestone streets, medieval architecture, and lively atmosphere make it a popular destination in Europe. Nuremberg holds great historical significance in the Holy Roman Empire, playing a crucial role in shaping Europe throughout the Middle Ages. The impressive Imperial Castle, along with the city walls, is one of Europe's most formidable medieval fortresses.

In addition to its historical importance, Nuremberg is a cultural hub with many attractions. The Old Town, with its half-timbered houses and bustling market squares, has a charming old-world feel. Landmarks like St. Lorenz Church and the Schöner Brunnen fountain are worth a visit. The Germanisches National Museum showcases artifacts from ancient times to the present, while the Albrecht Dürer





When evening arrives, Nuremberg transforms into a lively hub of nightlife. Nuremberg has something for everyone, whether you like cozy beer gardens, trendy cocktail bars, or lively nightclubs.

The city seamlessly blends its rich history with a modern outlook, providing visitors with an unforgettable experience.

And if you are visiting in December, the Christmas market is sensational. The Nuremberg Christkindlesmarkt, one of the oldest and most famous Christmas markets in Germany, transforms the city into a festive wonderland, with its charming wooden stalls, twinkling lights, and the aroma of mulled wine and roasted chestnuts filling the air. It's a magical experience that captures the spirit of the season and draws visitors from far and wide.





Photo: M. Matuonto



Photo: M. Matuonto

INTERVIEW WITH ANN CHARLES



Hello Ann, where do you find the inspiration for each one of your books including your latest, *TimeReaping in Deadwood*?

I've always found real life to be stranger than fiction, so I enjoy the everyday tales of life coming from friends, family, strangers in the grocery store checkout line, and posts on social media. I also love to watch movies and series for inspiration. Usually, something I see along the way will spark an idea for an entertaining plot thread within one of my on-going series.

For my latest book, *TimeReaping in Deadwood*, I had fun learning about tarot reading. I included elements of it as a humorous thread throughout the book that also added to the suspense for what was to come for Violet Parker, the main character in this series.

Is it difficult to combine more than one element when writing a book?

Mixing genres comes naturally for me. In my early days of writing, I tried to stick with mostly one element. First it was romance. Then it was mystery.

But I struggled to put it on the page. After I decided to let the story flow and see what came out, I realized that my struggles had been because I'd been trying too hard to fit into one genre. So, I let the story roll out and ended up with a tale that blended several elements and didn't fit easily into one genre. Then I had a new problem—how to sell this mixed-genre story in a world with pre-set, somewhat rigid categories in the publishing industry. Lucky for me, at this time the entertainment industry was changing, and mixed genre movies and stories were starting to become popular. It was then a matter of finding readers who enjoyed the type of elements in my mixed genre stories, which took some time, but that's another story.

Your books are well-known and loved for the humor, action, and adventure packed scenes. Were you always this talented or did you have to work to get to where your writing is today?

I had to work and work and work, and I'm still trying to improve with every book I write. Over the years, I've studied some of my favorite books, breaking



them down into scene and sequel, studying how the transitions were crafted, making notes on body language, analyzing dialogue and character growth. I worked to understand the purpose of themes and premises, figuring out how to better incorporate them into my stories. I experimented with various tropes and plotted out series arcs, keeping in mind how a binge reader would feel as they cruised through not just one story, but multiple books.

One of the struggles with writing a longer series is holding a reader's attention. This is something I study in other long-running series, considering different ways to keep the humor fresh as I move from one book to the next. In order to be successful, I think I have to keep studying and experimenting with new techniques. Not only will this benefit the reader, but it will keep me from growing bored with telling the story.

Who are the main characters in TimeReaping in Deadwood?

Violet Parker is the main and only point-of-view (POV) character in the Deadwood Mystery series, so we only ever see the story unfold through her eyes. This first person technique is nothing new in the publishing world, but for years I only wrote in third person. Violet's series is the first and only where I write from a single POV. There is a challenge in this style of storytelling that I enjoy, and while it can be limiting on some levels, it also can really raise the suspense in a scene. I think telling the story in this way also helps the readers feel like they know Violet better due to a deeper POV.

Other than Violet, there is a cast of secondary characters that includes her quirky friends, her aunt, her kids, and boyfriend. There are some great villains readers love to hate, and some really creepy supernatural characters that add some great scares, too. To help readers keep track of everyone, after the first few books I began including a cast of characters at the front of the books and list in which books the characters star.

What themes will readers find inside of TimeReaping in Deadwood?

There are a lot of tricky devils in this story who give Violet plenty of heartburn, and there is no such thing as coincidence for her and her friends. She's growing stronger mentally in this book, learning when to fight and when to run.

While the last book in the series (Book 12: Never Say Sever in Deadwood) had a lot of physical action, this book follows with more character growth blended with humor. I think it's important with a long series to keep track of how characters are changing in addition to moving the plot and subplots forward book after book.

How many books are in The Deadwood Mystery Series? How many do you plan for the whole series?

Currently, there are 13 books in the series. I'll be working on the 14th book next year, and there will be more books after that. I used to say that I'd write 12 books and see how things were going at that point. Well, 13 books later, the series is still going strong, so onward we go. At this time, I don't have a set number of books for how long this series will last. I'm traveling along a series arc, but I'm allowing the storyteller in my head to move at her own pace. As it is often said, it's all about the journey, not the final destination.

As an indie writer, do you set-up deadlines to complete each one of your books?

There are so many roles as an indie writer that have nothing to do with actually writing the books. For example, I have to spend a significant amount of time promoting each book and coming up with next ways of marketing my stories. I also have to spend time doing bookkeeping every month to stay on top of the financial parts of the business so that I can keep the tax folks happy. There is new software to learn to keep up with the publishing trends, and



don't forget all of the time it takes to keep up on social media creating new content. Each book requires energy to market, and continuing to keep my backlist of books selling takes even more brain power. So, if I don't set a deadline to complete a book and push hard to hit that deadline, it is really easy to not write day after day and not create any new content for readers. No new stories means an author is no longer relevant and makes it hard to stay up higher in the rankings because the algorithm on major retailers likes popular books. Whew!

Deadlines are motivating and challenging, especially after I announce when a book will be released to readers. I don't like letting them down.

For those who do not know about the book publishing world, how does one become a USA Today bestselling author?

An author has to actually sell a lot of books to readers in a short time in order to make the list. With all of the books being released every week by so many authors, it's not easy to hit any list these days, especially as an indie author with a limited marketing budget. It is really the readers who have

the power to help authors make it onto bestselling lists, and I'm grateful to the fans of my stories and characters who have helped me not only land on this list and other bestselling lists, but also win so many writing awards.

What other books are you currently working on at the moment?

I'm working with my husband, Sam Lucky, on the 5th book in the Deadwood Undertaker series, which is a blend of historical fiction, humor, supernatural, and mystery. We hope to have this book out in early 2024.

Where can fans find you and your books online?

You can go to my website (www.AnnCharles.com) to find links for all my ebooks, print books, and audiobooks on various retailers. You can also find links there to my pages/groups on social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.). If you check out the blog section of my website, I have posts that share my past interviews and podcasts, as well as my previous newsletters.

Ann Charles is a USA Today Best-Selling author who writes spicy, award-winning mysteries full of mayhem, adventure, comedy, and suspense. She writes the Deadwood Mystery Series, Jackrabbit Junction Mystery Series, Dig Site Mystery Series, Deadwood Undertaker Series (with her husband, Sam Lucky), and AC Silly Circus Mystery Series.

Her Deadwood Mystery Series has won multiple national awards, including the Daphne du Maurier for Excellence in Mystery/Suspense. Ann has a B.A. in English with an emphasis on creative writing from the University of Washington and is a member of Sisters in Crime and Western Writers of America.

She is currently toiling away on her next book, wishing she was on a Mexican beach with an ice-cold Corona in one hand and a book in the other. When she is not dabbling in fiction, she is arm wrestling with her two kids, attempting to seduce her husband, and arguing with her sassy cats.



INTERVIEW WITH D.C. GOMEZ

Hello D.C., when did you begin writing your novel, *A Desperate Cat Lady*?

This book has been in the makings for over three years. I knew after the released of *The Cat Lady Special* (book 1 in this series) that I wanted another book for Angela and the ladies. It just took me a while to let the idea plot developed and the characters to find their flow.

Will there be a lot of books in this series, or no?

That is a fantastic question. This series is so different from everything else I write, that is hard to say when the ideas for another book would come. At first I wanted this to be a trilogy. Now I'm leaving myself open enough to go with the flow. I'm hoping at least one more book will come for this group.

What themes will readers find inside *A Desperate Cat Lady*?

A Desperate Cat Lady deals with the idea of those *dark secrets* many of us keep. Regardless of how people may come across, appearances can be deceiving. Angela is an illegal arms-dealer. Others in the story have a scandalous past. As you find in the book, some of those secrets can be deadly. Unlike book 1, this book has a murder at the very beginning. This book is a mash-up of cozy mystery and dark-humor, with Angela still fighting for her family and building her tribe.

How many other book series do you have published?

I want to say roughly 5 series. One is a completed urban fantasy series, *The Intern Diaries*. Two active series in the same magical universe of the *Reapers*, *The Order's Assassin* and the *Chronicles of Elisha and Elijah*. *The Order's Assassin* is an urban fantasy taken place right after the last book in the *Intern Diaries* (*Judgement Day*). So a very fun transition to that world. *Elisha*, on the other hand, takes place roughly 60 years in the future and is a dark-humor dystopia. This one also has magic and just tons of fun quirky characters.

I also have a children's series called *Charlie's Fables*. I focus especially this one on helping little ones, finding out what they are good and learning life lessons. For adults that enjoy devotionals and

inspirational books, my series *The Dare Collection*, is also available.

Which characters from your current novel, *A Desperate Cat Lady*, did you have the most fun of creating?

Without a doubt, Minnie is the most fun to write. She is in her 70s, the oldest in the group and just wild. She does what she likes, and in this book, she is channeling her inner Red from the *Blacklist*. It's fun to see her just enjoy life.

What is your main protagonist, Angela like?

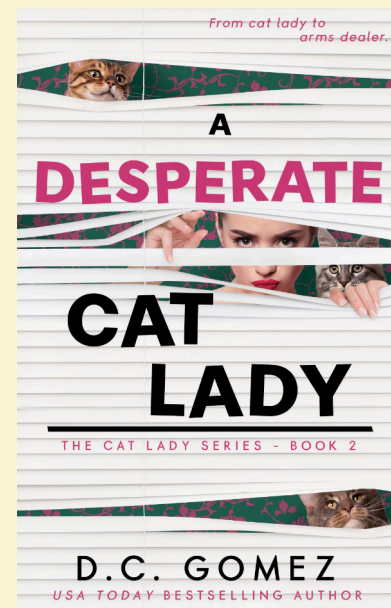
My dear Angela is a good Southern lady. She doesn't curse, works hard to dress impeccably, but above all, she cares about people. Her goal is to make sure how family is protected, and she will do anything to keep it that way.

Describe your writing style using three words.

Witty, Fast-paced

Where can readers find you and your books online?

My website at www.dcgomez-author.com.





D.C. Gomez is an award winning USA Today Bestselling Author, podcaster, motivational speaker, and coach. Born in the Dominican Republic, she grew up in Salem, Massachusetts. D.C. studied film and television at New York University. After college she joined the US Army, and proudly served for four years.

D.C. has a Master's Degree in Science Administration from the Central Michigan University, as well as a Master in Adult Education from Texas A&M-Texarkana University. She is a certified John Maxwell Team speaker and coach, and a certified meditation instructor from the Chopra Center.

One of D.C. passions is helping those around her overcome their self-limiting beliefs. She writes both non-fiction as well fiction books, ranging from Urban Fantasy to Children's Books.



Article originally published in our partner magazine:

TOP Shelf



BUN CHA RECIPE

Bun Cha is a delicious Vietnamese dish consisting of grilled pork served with rice noodles, fresh herbs, and a flavorful dipping sauce.



Ingredients

For the grilled pork

500g pork belly or pork shoulder, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons minced shallots
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon honey or sugar
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
Salt and pepper to taste

For the dipping sauce

3 tablespoons fish sauce
3 tablespoons rice vinegar
3 tablespoons sugar
1/2 cup water
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Thai chili, finely chopped (optional)
Juice of 1 lime

For serving

Rice vermicelli noodles, cooked according to package instructions
Fresh herbs such as mint, cilantro, and Thai basil
Lettuce leaves
Sliced cucumber
Bean sprouts
Thinly sliced carrots (optional)
Crushed peanuts (optional)

Instructions

In a bowl, combine the thinly sliced pork with minced shallots, minced garlic, fish sauce, soy sauce, honey or sugar, vegetable oil, salt, and pepper. Mix well to ensure the pork is evenly coated. Marinate for at least 30 minutes, or ideally, overnight in the refrigerator.

While the pork is marinating, prepare the dipping sauce. In a small saucepan, combine fish sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, water, minced garlic, and chopped Thai chili (if using). Heat over medium heat until the sugar has dissolved, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat and stir in the lime juice. Allow the dipping sauce to cool before serving.

Preheat a grill or grill pan over medium-high heat. Grill the marinated pork slices for 2-3 minutes on each side, or until cooked through and slightly charred. Remove from the grill and set aside.

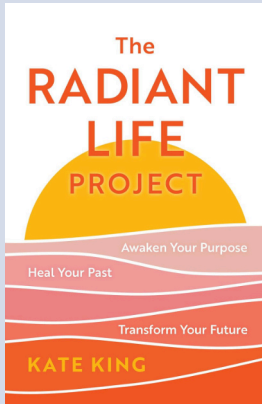
To serve, divide the cooked rice vermicelli noodles among serving bowls. Top with the grilled pork slices, fresh herbs, lettuce leaves, sliced cucumber, bean sprouts, and thinly sliced carrots (if using). Sprinkle with crushed peanuts for added texture, if desired.

Serve the Bún Cha with the prepared dipping sauce on the side. To enjoy, dip the grilled pork and noodles into the sauce and enjoy the vibrant flavors of this Vietnamese dish.

Bún Cha is best enjoyed fresh and warm, making it a perfect meal for sharing with family and friends. Enjoy!



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



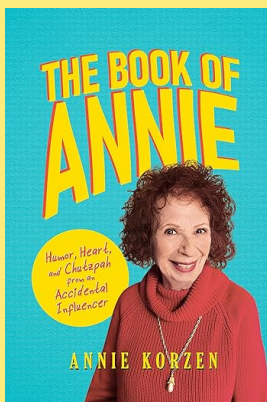
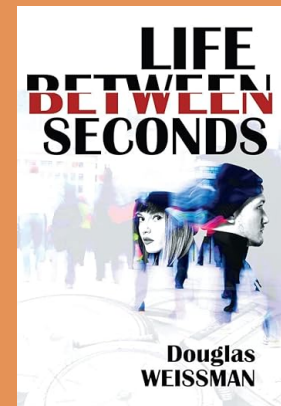
A groundbreaking guide for self-healing enthusiasts that teaches a fresh therapeutic approach for a meaningful life by combining science, creativity, psychology, and insightful personal growth tools.

The common problem in our society is precisely this: We are not as alright as we seem. Trauma, physical and mental illness, and disembodied value systems are at an all-time high across our communities. Additionally, issues of pervasive social justice imbalances, inequality for marginalized communities, and painfully charged political dynamics clearly demonstrate a large-scale desire for collective change and transformation. Society is waking up to a new reality without the shackles and numbness that have previously limited our potential. This book is the timely resource to support the expansive elevation humanity demands.

The Radiant Life Project answers the yearning for large-scale repair with the intention of mending the world by first cultivating radical wellbeing within each individual. This book teaches a fresh and accessible approach to self-healing with deep compassion, skillful expertise, and exquisite strategies for intentional progression toward improved mind-body-soul wellness.

For fans of Karen Russell's *Swamplandia!* comes a new tale of found family and magic. Unfolding over three decades, *Life Between Seconds* sets Peter and Sophia on a collision course with their respective pasts propelling them toward either redemption or damnation.

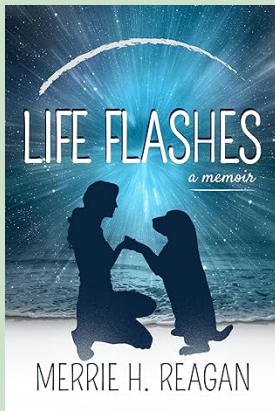
Engrossing, heartbreaking, and surreal Douglas Weissman's first adult novel is a meditation on trauma, family, and how to heal after a great loss.



Wildly funny musings from an eighty-three-year-old TikTok sensation.

“Understated” and “tasteful” could never be applied to Annie, and that’s just fine with her. A colorful actress with a decades-long career in TV, film, and theater—including a recurring role on *Seinfeld* and a center-stage spot touring with *The Moth*—Annie offers her trademark unabashed takes on both everyday and typically taboo topics. Whether she’s sharing her thoughts on the miracle of childbirth (“It’s a miracle that anyone who’s been through it is willing to do it again”), religion (“William Shakespeare was not Jewish; no Jew could write a play called *All’s Well That Ends Well*”), motherhood, or any other topic, Annie will have you laughing out loud.





What if you could read a memoir that not only captivates you with its heartfelt prose but also functions as a contemporary guide and time capsule for future readers?

Look no further than "Life Flashes: A Memoir" by Merrie H. Reagan. This genre-bending book is a stunning combination of diary, memoir, biography, and spiritual commentary, all woven together over a fourteen-year period. Based in Cohasset, Massachusetts, Merrie invites readers to join her on an unforgettable journey that folds snapshots of history, pop culture, and current events of the period into her private reflections, family moments, and personal philosophies.

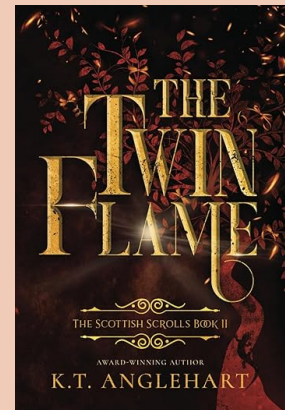
Merrie skillfully weaves together key moments of historical record that happen throughout her lifetime. From Hurricane Sandy to the shootings at Newtown, the historic Obama and Trump presidencies, and the COVID-19 outbreak, Merrie uses these events to contextualize her personal recollections and musings. While also peppering in tasteful humor and heartwarming anecdotes that will leave you feeling uplifted and inspired.

Mckenna O'Dwyer knows she's impulsive. Sometimes reckless. She also knows she's a witch and keeps reincarnating as one, for reasons only her mother, Abby, can help her fully understand.

After weeks of searching, mother and daughter finally reunite—just as Elizabeth Dunlop's prophecy states—and Abby is keen on helping Mckenna get a firm grasp on her abilities. She teaches her the proper way to channel elemental magic...but Mckenna soon discovers there's a shortcut, something Cillian fully supports if it means getting quicker, more powerful results.

At first, Mckenna will do anything to thwart the High Priestess once and for all, before her powers are used to wipe out billions of souls. But the white horse Eachna's devastating vision of Mother Nature continues to haunt her. Is that the future awaiting them if the Scottish Scrolls aren't fulfilled?

Which is the lesser evil?



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