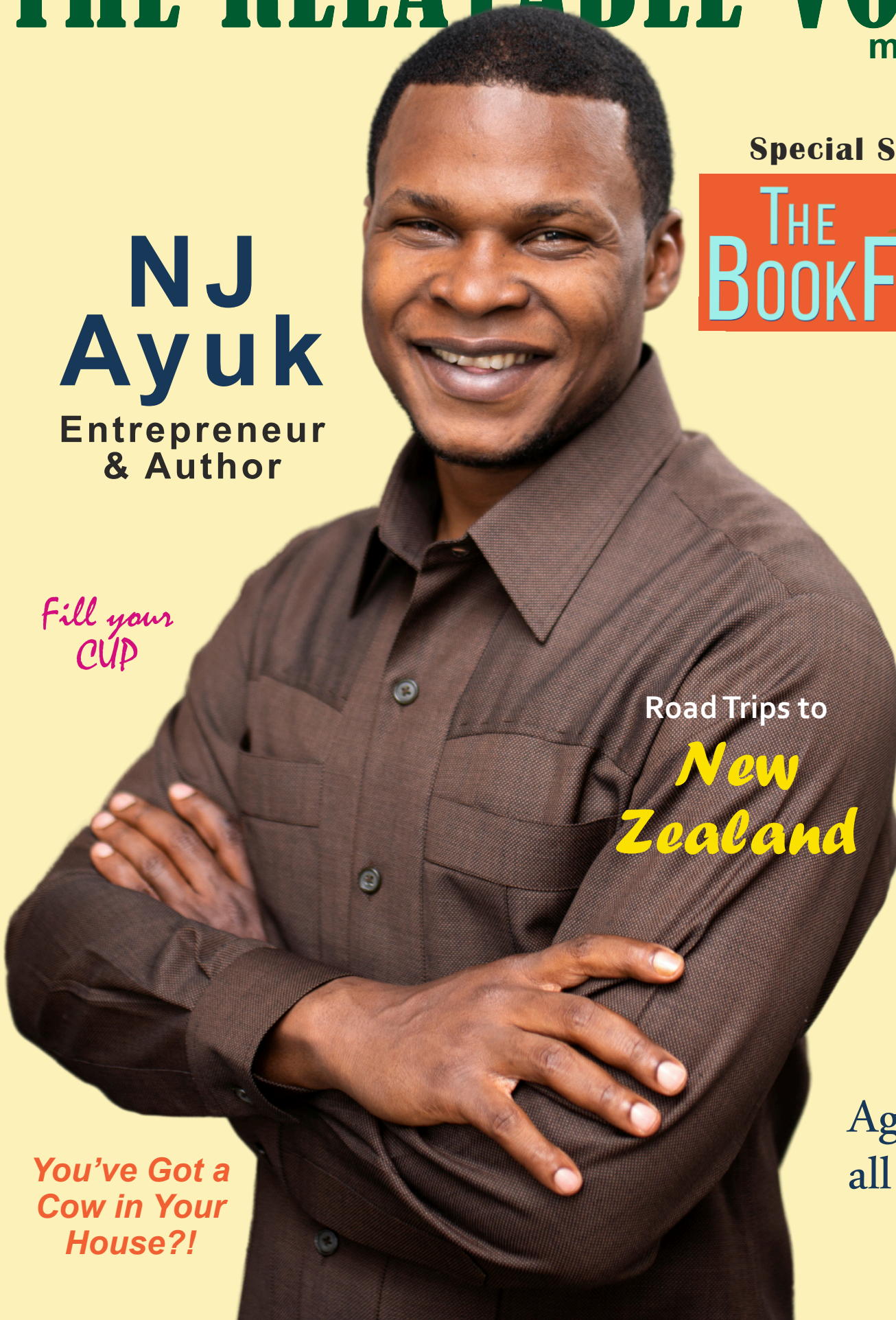


# THE RELATABLE VOICE

magazine



**NJ  
Ayuk**  
Entrepreneur  
& Author

Special Section



*Fill your  
CUP*

**DO IT  
anyway!**

Road Trips to  
**New  
Zealand**

**You've Got a  
Cow in Your  
House?!**

**Against  
all odds**

# Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

I'm thrilled to welcome you to the fourteenth issue of The Relatable Voice Magazine. Your steadfast support and enthusiasm mean the world to us, and we're profoundly grateful for your continued and passionate interest.

In this issue, we've crafted something truly special that I'm eager to share with you. Our cover star is none other than the remarkable NJ Ayuk, a visionary leader and author dedicated to empowering Africa.

We're also excited to take you on The BookFest Adventure! Dive into a world of authors, articles, literary insights, and, of course, a diverse selection of books to satisfy every taste.

As autumn leaves fall, we invite you on a delightful journey to New Zealand through the storytelling of our beloved Pat Backley, who will transport you to the enchanting landscapes of this beautiful country.

Meet Ellis Laks, a passionate soul whose work with animals has not only touched our hearts but also profoundly impacted the lives of countless creatures.

Additionally, you'll be inspired by the multitalented actress Jennifer Liebman as she shares her journey to the New York City theater stage.

Within these pages, you'll discover amazing articles, insightful interviews, and literary gems that will inspire and enlighten you, just as the temperature outside begins to cool and the colors of fall paint the world in a symphony of hues.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey.

See you on the road as we celebrate the beauty of fall,

*Lucia Matuonto*

*Lucia Matuonto*

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



*On the cover: NJ Ayuk*

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# THE RELATABLE VOICE

magazine

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## FICTION INSPIRED BY HISTORY

*Julie Klassen*

I live in Minnesota, where winters are long and cold and snowfall often tops fifty inches. On the south coast of England, where my series is set, winters are usually mild and lasting snow rare. But the



winter of 1819-1820 was exceptionally cold and snowy. That was the year the Duke and Duchess of Kent and their baby daughter (the future Queen Victoria) came to Sidmouth, sparking unexpected events and calamities. After learning about this during my research, I knew I wanted to include them in fictionalized form. As the book opens, the Summers sisters expect a

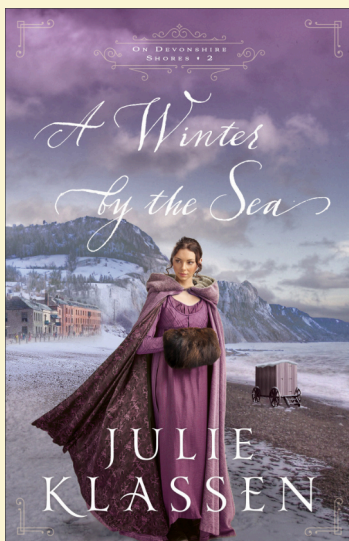
quiet winter. Instead they are called upon to host three members of the duke's staff, which leads to intrigues and unexpected romance.

When I began writing this series, I had not yet traveled to Sidmouth. I was thrilled to visit last year and to meet the staff of the Sidmouth Museum who have been extremely helpful in answering questions and checking details for me.

During my research, I also learned historical views on the health benefits of sea-bathing—even in winter. And because of where I live, cold weather details and sensations were easy to imagine!

I hope readers will enjoy *A Winter by the Sea* as well as the history that inspired it.

<https://julieklassen.com/>



*The Schapera Channel***YAY FOR BOOKS!**

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

When Vivien and Neil's son, Aidan, was six years old, there was a go-round at school, in preparation for Thanksgiving, where all the children were asked to say what they felt thankful for. When it was Aidan's turn, he said: "I'm thankful for words, without them I would go crazy!" Vivien and Neil chuckled appreciatively because they totally understood – they both passionately love words and books. In fact, for Vivien and Neil, "books" and "love" are synonymous, because they met in a bookstore.

Vivien often wonders: "Where would we be without books?" As a lonely child, books became her "everything." Books were Vivien's constant – and reliable – companions. Books taught Vivien the ways of the world, exposed her to a range of characters and situations, and took her all around the globe introducing her to other cultures. Because of books, we are never truly alone.

The written word is the hallmark of our civilization. Through books, we can learn our history, we can document our experiences, and we can hand on what we have learned to future generations. Books preserve the information so that each new generation does not have to reinvent the wheel. Instead, we can add progress to the accomplishments of our ancestors. Books also offer a source of inspiration, seeding the future with brilliance from the past.

Sometimes Vivien asks herself: "Which is more important, fiction or non-fiction?" Of course, there is no answer to such a question. How fortunate that we can have both! Non-fiction is essential to our daily lives. In this era of the internet, who isn't running to their digital device to look up what others say, what research reveals, and how to do myriad tasks from searing beef to fixing a fountain pump? We cannot even imagine our lives without this easy access to information.





But fiction has a different kind of value. We all know the saying “Truth is stranger than fiction.” Yet, many of us also realize that “Fiction can be truer than reality.” Is this because, in real life, we dare not share our secrets lest we reveal the family skeletons in the closet, lest we shame ourselves? In fiction, we can create a character and weave an honest tale divulging as many secrets as we wish. Without question, fiction holds us in its thrall.

It’s almost certain that at least one of the reasons we crave fiction is that we all love stories. Yes, we love stories, but we must remember this too – we need stories. Storytelling is a key element of every culture, not only because it entertains us, but because it is a key element to our socialization. Fiction is where we can lay bare our souls and truly explore our human existence.

Recently, Vivien and Neil got together with childhood friends who live in a different city. While catching up, they shared family photos, including photos of grandchildren. A particularly touching photo, was of Neil’s friend, Les, sitting with his arm around his granddaughter, while he was reading to

her – an iconic moment capturing love, culture, and books.

Indeed, reading to children has got to be one of the highest-quality interactions possible. Quite possibly, every child will agree that a favorite moment in the day comes at bedtime when someone, preferably a parent, reads to them. And if someone is willing to read to them at some other time in the day – all the better!

Wow! Books are so significant in our lives, let’s not take them, or their authors, for granted. Next Thanksgiving, with a nod to Aidan, Vivien is definitely going to say: “I’m thankful for books, without them, I would be crazy.” Yay for books!

Vivien is a Teacher, Healer and Author living in Cincinnati, OH, USA. She is the author of *Everyday Magic* and *The Complete Guide to Crystal Surgery*.

For more about Vivien and her work, please visit [www.CrystalHealingTechniques.com](http://www.CrystalHealingTechniques.com)



## YOU HAVE A DREAM! YOU HAVE A PURPOSE! YOU HAVE A DESTINY!

*Leslie Jean DeBeauvais*

I am here to help you in your journey, to make a difference in your community, and just maybe...in the world.

AN ARTIST'S DREAM TEAM will provide you the KEY to create a successful non-profit organization.

### YOU ARE AN ARTIST

Artists are crucial, not only to entertain, but to influence, uplift and educate us. The value of art is not just in performance but in everything we see and do. Art in all its forms allows the mosaic of peoples and culture to understand each other and our world. Art helps us make meaning of our lives and our purpose here.

You need a TEAM of left-brain, right brain experts to balance your artistic side with your business side. These skills are imperative for your long-term success.

I will help you create a quality team of committed and compassionate individuals to your mission, who will guide you with their knowledge.

An Artist's Dream Team provides a step-by-step roadmap for individual artists and arts groups who wish to sustain their organization through the world of non-profit. The option: buy a dozen books related to marketing, fund development, grant writing, strategic planning, non-profit development, board development, mostly written from an academic point of view OR ONE BOOK designed as an easy to follow encouraging and uplifting A to Z approach for blending their artistic talents with a team that includes vital business partners. An Artist's Dream Team solves this issue. I aim to save the artist time and money and in doing so, they reach a successful result. They will get on with their purpose and mission, feeling confident in the culmination of their efforts and their team.

You have worked hard to master your art. You can now enter the next phase.

This journey is a challenge so be prepared. Take one step at a time. You will create and use your 'team' to achieve your goal.

My goal is to direct your journey from day one to the day you understand and complete all the tasks necessary to realize your purpose and goal to become one of the non-profit organizations that will endure for years to come.

I applaud your passion and welcome you to the stage where we are the writers, actors, dancers, artists, and others who have a 'calling' to use their talents as a tool for change. Are you ready? Do you have the patience and

work ethic for long-term success?

### I believe you do!

My journey as a multi-disciplinary artist, and successful non-profit consultant, has been to serve others through the wonderful world of healing arts. My Life's path had prepared me with my own purpose, to help women and children overcome traumas through healing arts programs. I have been blessed to achieve this with the help of an incredible team. Now is the time for me to share this knowledge and guidance with you.

### It is your turn.

*"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world...." Anne Frank.*

Thank you for this opportunity to share this special book with you.





**About Leslie**

During my twenty-five years' experience consulting and serving on the Boards of Directors of theatre and arts organizations including the NoHo Regional Arts Council, I was invited to serve on grant's panels for city, county, and state arts education funders.

When creating Theatre of Hope and Youth Spirit, I produced over 80 theatre productions; teacher

professional development workshops, resident theatre programs; and arts workshops for K-12 children. We provided high risk youth and families residing in housing projects, domestic violence shelters and homeless shelters, youth probation camps, after school programs, arts in education and later the Director of Community Services for NCJWLA.



## INTERVIEW WITH SARA PODGOREANU

### What made you start writing? Tell a bit more about you, where are you going to university?

I've always had a passion for writing. I always needed to write, weather that meant journal entries, or simple, incomplete stories on scrap pieces of papers that I would throw away after. My writing passion took a more concrete form during the pandemic when I began keeping what I was writing. It was also during that time that my stories turned more complex.

### How the schools helped you (creative writing courses, other examples)? Was there any other help you received to publish your debut novel?

Back in middle school, during our English classes we would also go over several writing techniques. For example, we studied how to write a balanced argument, or a graph analysis. Once, we also learned storytelling. Other than that, I didn't take any course. I perfected my writing simply by reading and analyzing other books and storylines.

To publish "Oblivion" I also received support from Claudia Marta, who successfully launched other children or non-fiction books with a great international experience. Her help was critical in publishing the book worldwide.

### What are your advices for teens willing to pursue a writing career?

I would say go for it. In my opinion, the world itself is composed of stories and narratives. People enjoy stories, they learn from stories, and use stories to unite those that are different. In fact, I think it's through stories that we can comprehend the world around us.

### What should we expect on your upcoming book launch at Carturesti Carusel, scheduled on October 27th at 18:00?

The book launch will be a relaxed and casual meeting where I get to present my book to the world. I welcome every interested as I am very eager to share my ideas and especially my book with those around me.

### Where is the "Oblivion" book available now?

Readers who are eager to delve into the emotional world of "Oblivion" can purchase the softcover or hardcover book online at FriesenPress Bookstore, Amazon, Barnes&Noble, or find it in a bookstore as the book is available through over 50,000 bookstores, online booksellers and libraries worldwide. E-book format is also available on FriesenPress Online bookstore, on Amazon, Google Play Books, Barnes & Noble Nook, Rakuten/Indigo Kobo and Apple Books. And soon in Carturesti, Romania.



Sara Podgoreanu, a talented author from Bucharest, Romania, is thrilled to announce the launch of her debut novel, "Oblivion." With its intriguing storyline and emotionally charged themes, "Oblivion" is set to captivate readers and leave a lasting impression.

Sara Podgoreanu is a passionate writer, her deep appreciation for fiction shines through in her writing, which is characterized by its introspective nature and ability to strike an emotional chord. Through years of dedicated study, learning in



various international schools, Sara has honed her craft and her novel, "Oblivion," is a testament to her creativity and talent.

"Oblivion" tells the heart-wrenching story of Oliver and Daiki, high school sweethearts who were tragically separated before they could truly begin their love story. Fate brings them together again years later, at a friend's engagement party, and both of their lives have changed dramatically. Oliver, still broken-hearted, struggles to accept Daiki's relationship with someone else.

However, when their mutual friends experience a sudden breakup just before their wedding, tensions rise and uncertainties emerge. The once seemingly solid relationships are tested as hidden jealousies and long-buried secrets come to light. Amidst it all is Daiki, the love of Oliver's life. Despite the consequences, they cannot deny the irresistible pull they feel towards each other. Oliver yearns for a second chance, but the path to happiness with Daiki is far from smooth. Past shame and secrets resurface, haunting them like ghosts.

Can Oliver and Daiki overcome their differences and leave their complicated past behind, or is love sometimes simply not enough? "Oblivion" explores the complexities of relationships, the power of second chances, and the enduring nature of love.

This deeply moving novel is specifically targeted at the LGBTQ young adult audience, who will relate to and resonate with the characters and themes presented in the book.

Sara Podgoreanu hopes that "Oblivion" will not only capture the hearts of readers but also serve as a platform for meaningful conversations surrounding themes of love, acceptance, and personal growth. In a society where LGBTQ voices are increasingly being recognized and valued, Sara's novel adds another important perspective to the literary landscape.

Readers who are eager to delve into the emotional world of "Oblivion" can purchase the softcover or hardcover book online at FriesenPress Bookstore, Amazon, Barnes&Noble, or find it in a bookstore as the book is available through over 50,000 bookstores, online booksellers and libraries worldwide. E-book format is also available on FriesenPress Online bookstore, on Amazon, Google Play Books, Barnes & Noble *Nook*, Rakuten/Indigo *Kobo* and Apple Books. The novel being available in both print and e-book formats, ensures accessibility to a wide range of readers. Sara Podgoreanu encourages everyone to join her on this emotional journey and hopes that "Oblivion" will leave a lasting impact on readers, daring to dream to have a Netflix adaptation in the future.

Companies, universities, high schools, bookstores and other event organizers are encouraged to reach out to book an Author Visit, to further connect and inspire the future writers, or simply discuss about the themes raised in the book.

More inf about *Oblivion* and Sara at this [link](#).



Media Contact: **Claudia Marta** Email: [office@criticalthinking.ro](mailto:office@criticalthinking.ro)



# Special Section



The BookFest®



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



# Welcome BookFesters!

Dear BookFesters,

I am ecstatic to welcome you to The BookFest Fall 2023 – marking our 8th biannual livestream event. Whether you're joining us for the first time or have been part of our journey since inception, our vibrant, book-loving online community has a space just for you. I'm eager for you to dive in, discovering new favorite authors, gaining insights from industry frontrunners, and immersing yourself in discussions with fellow booklovers during this edition of The BookFest.

Every iteration of The BookFest renews my admiration for the boundless passion and drive of the literary community. Being the founder of The BookFest and assisting in assembling such a rich tapestry of authors, publishing industry professionals, and readers is a privilege. That's why I am honored to officially welcome The BookFest Bellwethers who are bringing their expertise to this BookFest, as well as future events. Please take a moment to find them on The BookFest website. All BookFest Bellwethers are identified with a bookish checkmark to verify they are a contributor to our bookish online community.



This fall, we've curated an exceptional array of speakers who will be leading The BookFest Keynotes, Conversations, Panel Discussions, Segments, and the ever-engaging Live Author Chats. Topics range from what happens when horror hits home to cutting-edge discussions on the use of artificial intelligence in writing.

Highlighting the line-up, we have a featured conversation with the multi-talented Deborah M. Pratt, known for her work on the “Quantum Leap” TV series as Executive Producer, as well as the author of the “Vision Quest” series of books, and an upcoming graphic novel she will share more about during her Conversation.

If you're a writer, then get ready to discover your “deep voice” with Jack Grapes, the acclaimed poet, actor, teacher and playwright. He is also in Conversation during The BookFest and you'll find out why his “deep voice” methodology woke me up one night and hung with me so strongly that I just had to invite him to be a part of The BookFest.

Wade and Cheryl Hudson, the founders of Just Us Books which is a stalwart in children's publishing and emphasizes the diverse narratives of Black heritage, will be presented The BookFest Fall 2023 Honorary Achievement Award. As they celebrate their 35th anniversary, their dedication to diversity remains as inspiring as ever, and it is a privilege to salute them.

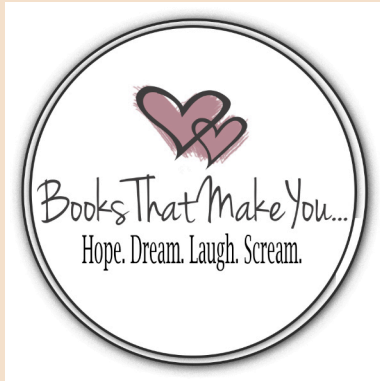
All the winners of The BookFest Fall 2023 Awards will also be announced. The lists can be found on the website, plus select winners will be featured in the special Salute to The BookFest Award Winners video montage that airs during the event.

Additionally, take a spine-chilling journey with horror authors from Brigid's Gate Press. Engage in an enlightening conversation between authors Sarah Prager and Lee Wind as they underscore the significance of queer history in children's literature. They will address the necessity of genuine representation, tackle book censorship, and shed light on creating nuanced discussions on intricate historical themes. Parchelle Tashi from Author's Leverage returns to help authors get more bang for their



book, and the much-anticipated return of The Critiki-Bar with the dynamic agent-author duo of Katharine Sands and David L. Robbins, promises intriguing manuscript critiques.

The list of Sponsors and Bellwethers for this event includes The Author's Leverage, The Authors Porch, Book Award Pro, Books That Make You, The Ghostwriter Summit, Independent Writers of Southern California, *The Relatable Voice Magazine*, *Top Shelf Magazine*, TV Guestpert, Wannabe Press and more. Be sure to visit the website to see them all.



The BookFest Virtual Booths are lined with a dazzling array of products and services, thanks to our BookFest Sponsors and Bellwethers. Please explore their Speaker Pages as well, and don't forget to check out all the books from all the Speakers when you browse the Books Pages.

The giveaways remain a focal attraction with The BookFest Big Bundle of Books and Children's Books giveaways, boasting exciting prizes from sponsors like Hazel's Village, Saddleback Leather Co., Sarah's Silks, Slumberkins, and more. Plus, a special giveaway for writers will feature a master class with Jack Grapes. And the highly anticipated Virtual Gift Bag which goes out to all BookFesters—those who are signed up to receive news and email offers—will be sent out at the end of the event.

Go to The BookFest website and sign up if you would like to get your Virtual Gift Bag and become an official BookFester.

Thank you for being a part of our bookish community and making The BookFest Fall 2023 a memorable chapter in our journey. I eagerly await the pleasure of connecting with you all at The BookFest Fall 2023.

Warm regards,

Desireé Duffy

Founder, The BookFest®



# MEET US AT THE BOOKFEST ADVENTURE™

EVENT FALL 2023 OCT 21ST & 22ND

Airing Fall 2023, the BookFest Adventure is an informative online broadcast event over the internet that brings together authors, literary professional, speakers and bibliophiles.



THE BOOKFEST ADVENTURE IS THE WEBBY AWARD-NOMINATED PLATFORM THAT BRINGS TOGETHER READERS, AUTHORS, AGENTS, CELEBRITIES AND INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS. IT IS A BROADCAST EVENT THAT HAPPENS IN SPRING AND FALL.

[WWW.THEBOOKFEST.COM](http://WWW.THEBOOKFEST.COM)

## WINNERS OF THE BOOKFEST FALL 2023 AWARDS TO BE ANNOUNCED AMID CELEBRATIONS

The literary world is abuzz with excitement as the winners of this year's BookFest Awards are set to be announced at The BookFest Fall 2023. The list of winners will be displayed on The BookFest website, and select titles will be featured in the Salute to The BookFest Award Winners Fall 2023. This video montage plays during the livestream event.

### Honoring Pioneers: Wade and Cheryl Hudson

The BookFest community is proud to present the Honorary Achievement Award to Wade and Cheryl Hudson. As the founders of Just Us Books, this trailblazing couple transformed the landscape of children's publishing with their dedication to amplifying the diversity of Black voices, stories, and cultures.

Established in 1988, Just Us Books is celebrating its 35th anniversary in 2023. Over the years, the publishing house has brought to life an array of titles, spanning board books to young adult novels, each resonating with authentic portrayals of Black history and experiences.

Wade Hudson, President of Just Us Books, and an acclaimed author in his own right, has given readers gems such as *Invincible*, *Fathers and Mothers of Black America* and *Defiant, Growing Up in The Jim Crow South*.

Cheryl Willis Hudson, the award-winning children's book author and co-founder of Just Us Books, has penned works that inspire, educate, and empower. Her most recent contribution, *Brave. Black. First. 50+*





*African American Women Who Changed the World*, published by Crown Books, is testament to her commitment to highlighting pioneers in the Black community.

Having earned accolades including the Children's Book Council Diversity Award, an Eric Carle Honor, and the Ida B. Wells Award from the Hurston-Wright Foundation, the Hudsons have created a lasting legacy in the world of literature.



### **The BookFest Fall 2023: What to Expect**

While the celebration of the Hudsons' contributions will undoubtedly be a highlight, The BookFest Fall 2023 promises a range of attractions. Following the precedent set in past years with several of the winners featured on the Nasdaq Board in Times Square New York, the Fall 2023 awardees can expect grand gestures that honor their literary excellence, too.

All BookFest Winners will be sent complimentary badges and printable certificates to commemorate their award. In addition to invitations to participate in the Nasdaq Board Display, several hand-selected winners will also be invited to appear on The Books That Make You Show. Plus, optional award trophies and stickers may be purchased by winners, offering an array of options unmatched by other book awards.

Desireé Duffy, the Founder of The BookFest, spoke about the event, stating, "The BookFest has always been about recognizing and uplifting authors, ensuring their hard work doesn't go unnoticed. We are eager to reveal this fall's winners and to celebrate the Hudsons' incredible journey in the literary world."

For those wanting to immerse themselves in all things BookFest, the website offers more information, from award details to event schedules: <https://www.thebookfest.com/>

*Keep up with all the latest happenings and announcements from The BookFest Fall 2023 by signing up for [email alerts](#) and becoming a part of the ever-growing BookFest community.*



## MEET THE BOOKFEST® BELLWETHERS

Introducing The BookFest Bellwethers, a select group integral to the success and direction of The BookFest. Comprising seasoned professionals from the literary world, they serve as advisors, patrons, and key influencers.

Their expertise ensures that The BookFest remains at the forefront of literary events, and their role extends to judging the esteemed BookFest Awards. Their dedication and knowledge make them a central pillar of The BookFest's continued excellence.





On [The BookFest website](#), The BookFest Bellwethers are distinguished by a signature bookish blue checkmark, a testament to their significant contributions to the event's success. Drawing from diverse literary backgrounds, they enrich The BookFest's expertise, showcasing its evolution as a premier platform since its inception. Many of them can be participating in The BookFest Adventure as speakers, moderators, and authors.

Launched in May 2020 amid the pandemic when many live events faced cancellations, The BookFest has set the standard for virtual literary events. Free to access and held biannually in spring and fall, it offers readers and writers around the globe a platform for compelling panel discussions, interactive sessions, and essential literary dialogues. The addition of The BookFest Bellwethers is an exciting continuation of The BookFest's growth and development.

The BookFest Bellwethers include:

**Brian Bosch**, Black Château Enterprises and Invouq

**Cody Blocker**, Ghost Writing Summit

**Dave Duffy**, Black Château Enterprises

**Desireé Duffy**, Black Château Enterprises

**Beth Freely**, The Muses Funhouse

**Hannah Jacobson**, Book Award Pro

**Deborah Kobylt**, Deborah Kobylt Live

**CJ Ives Lopez**, The Authors Porch

**KJ Matthews**, Journalist and Contributor BBC

**Lucia Matuonto**, Relatable Media

**Chelsea McKenna**, Author and Editor

**Mickey Mikkelson**, Creative Edge Media

**donalee Moulton**, Author and Journalist

**Stephanie Rabell**, Book and Wine Lovers Marketing



## A MESSAGE: LIKE IT OR NOT, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE ONE

*Jonathan Pruitt*

If you've written a book, or you're pondering the act, then be prepared to field questions about your message. Now, if you're lucky enough to tout a "how-to" volume or hawk your expertise in XYZ, vetting such questions is easy-peasy. Right? After all, you've got a utilitarian perspective and a personalized brand you're pitching. That's why one writes those books. So, just draft a distillation of your pitch and, Presto Chango, things are A-okay.

But what happens for those of you who've penned a heartfelt or jaw-dropping memoir? Or for those of you who've spun lovely children's tales? What about bodice ripping werewolf smut? — not a genre broadly known for bestowing pearls of wisdom but, in my view, that makes it an even more sumptuous vessel of transference.

In my case, I wrote an epic fantasy series featuring magic, mayhem, and malevolence... and evil cats. Isn't the whole point of such a story to free us from sales pitches and finger-wagging? Mm-maybe.

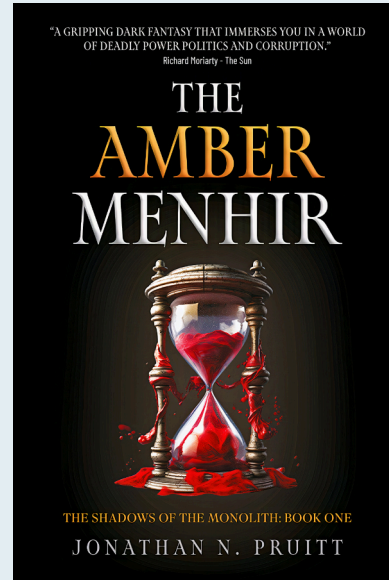
Okay. Let's all take a step back and acknowledge that heavy-handed preaching is a powerful anti-aphrodisiac.

There are enough reasons to be sanctimonious in real life; I don't need my dwarves clamoring into gemstone pulpits to remind me of how banana plantations commit human atrocities.

Self-possessed preaching is never a good look, whether it's Jiminy Cricket teaching us how to avoid being struck by vehicles whilst crossing the street, or Madonna informing us how riches and fame don't solve problems after all. At least not all hers...

Anyhow, preachiness is like a quicksand. The more pages you spend courting the soapbox, the more likely you'll get caught in hypocrisy off the page later.

The paths of self-professed angels are of considerable heights and slippery, or so I hear...



Then again, a tale without any message, even an old message in new packaging, risks coming off as pointless, or worse, vapid. Nobody wants that either. There are already enough Michael Bay movies to have all our brains melt out of our ears.

Perhaps the biggest boogiemer of all is this: if you're not clear on your message, you risk your readers (or perhaps your foes?) soothsaying your intended wisdom from your literary entrails. I'm here for ghoulishness of most varieties, but not this sort. I like my entrails inside. Point is... your violins rarely get to remain in the void.

Thankfully, as is most often the case, there are intermediate grounds, and you as the composer, budding author, and brand get to decide where you'll fall. Are you someone who's penned a series as a vehicle for their message? Everyone loves a pithy satirist. Or are you someone who found your message amid weaving the tale, having poetically written to think, rather than thinking to write? Or are you someone who, at the last, looked back at your literary journey, and only then perceived your mind-set and moment for what it was, as ephemeral and beautiful as the cherry blossom? Maybe you're a little of each.



Regardless, as a reader and lover of human narratives myself, the story of how you came to know your message is as wondrous to me as the message itself. Maybe more so. I doubt I'm alone in that feeling either.

So, if you care to be a writer of any sort, then I say you articulate your message without self-con-

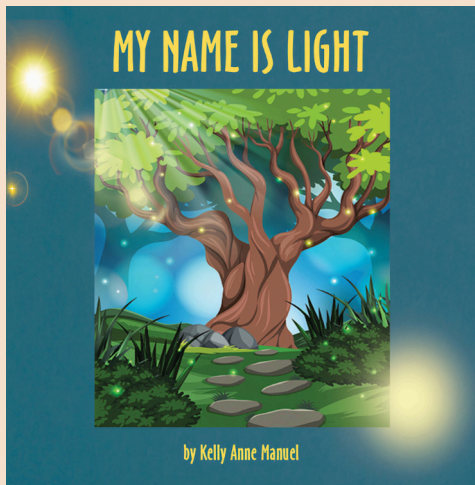
sciousness. Only *you* could have inked your tale, and yours is a worthy story. Share your message and make the tale of its discovery part of the broader saga. You are your most powerful literary device. Be you hero or villainess, leverage it and bust a move.

<https://www.theshadowsofthemonolith.com>



## THE LITERARY GRIDIRON

*Kelly Anne Manuel*



**W**ho is your starting quarterback? Not on a football field. Your own personal gridiron, internal self, quarterback?

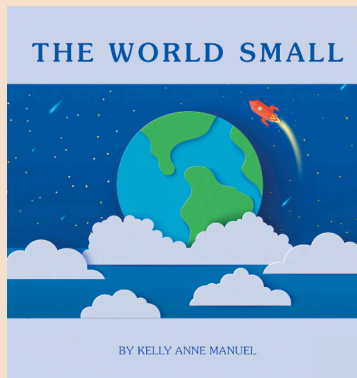
I will stay with the football analogy because there is an important message here. I will now liken internal voices to that of players on a team. I have never been in a huddle so I'm going to take some poetic license here.

Only one person can call the play. Some of the players in the huddle may have, and voice, their own thoughts, suggestions, requests, or even demands. At this point the coaches are on the sideline; they've done their best. When the huddle breaks, the quarterback is in charge.

The quarterback has earned the position through mental and physical training, sacrifice, and athletic prowess. Now whether the quarterback is a successful leader who will lead the players on his team to score a touchdown, win the game, make the playoffs, reach a championship, all remains to be seen.

If the quarterback is not trusted by the players on the team, they will all still be playing football but forget about finding the end zone. I ask you to consider what voice in your head is the quarterback? Who has earned the respect of the position, and who should call the play when the huddle breaks? When this hierarchy is established in oneself, you can pack for the Super Bowl.





Here is your halftime locker room pep talk:

Ode to Emily

It's worth the chore  
 It's worth the scrub  
 It's worth the chapped hands  
 From a laundry rub

It's worth the soap  
 It's worth the lye  
 It's worth the burn  
 You must always try

Do not give up  
 Do not give in  
 Do not abandon pain  
 In its fine fashion

As difficult as it is  
 From dusk to dawn 'tis  
 Fruit will grow  
 Painstakingly slow  
 The reward is not seen  
 Not ours to gleam

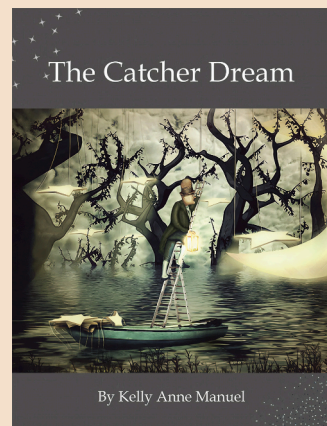
*For we are poets merely  
 We task and toil severely*

So that others may bask  
 In our sunlit task  
 We are to assist  
 Not frolic in mist

You and I  
 We are the same  
 Scribing there and here  
 Forsaking game

We must rise to this calling  
 No avoid or sly stalling  
 This is a soul purpose just  
 Through a shell of outer rust

You are not alone on this path  
 Though hidden are both rod and staff  
 Discernment is your closest friend  
 Well that and always Good Pretend



## IGNITING AFRICA'S ENERGY REVOLUTION - A JUST TRANSITION FOR ALL

Why I Wrote "A Just Transition"

*NJ Ayuk*

I've worn many hats in my life—Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber, CEO of Centurion Law Group, and advisor to governments and corporations on energy and investment strategies. But today, I want to talk to you as an author, specifically about my latest book, "A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix."

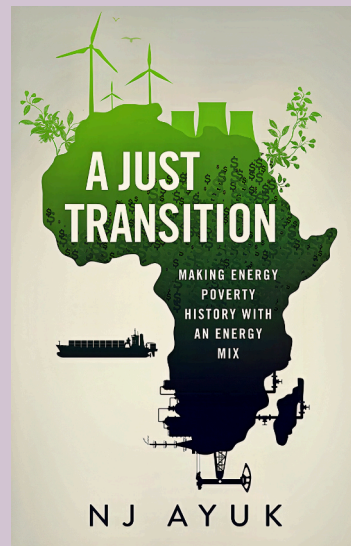
Why did I write this book? The answer is simple: to help the people of Africa's many nations be afforded the same economic advantages as those from more industrialized nations. For too long, Africa has been left behind in the global energy transition. While the world races toward green energy solutions, the unique challenges and opportunities in Africa are often overlooked. My book aims to correct that oversight by offering a roadmap for a balanced, equitable energy mix that can lift millions out of poverty while also being environmentally responsible.

### **The Unique Challenges and Opportunities in Africa**

You see, when global organizations like the International Energy Agency (IEA) set hard requirements for green energy adoption, they often do so without considering the local context. In Africa, this has led to a stifling of our burgeoning oil and gas industries, which are crucial for our economic development. My book is a call to action for the world to recognize that one size does not fit all. Africa needs a "Just Transition" to sustainable energy, one that takes into account our unique resources, challenges, and opportunities.

### **Inform and Inspire: Be Part of the Solution**

I wrote "A Just Transition" not just to inform, but to inspire. I want to ignite a fire in every reader, from policymakers to investors to everyday citizens, to



be part of the solution. We all have a role to play in making energy poverty history. Whether it's through smart investments in renewable energy, advocating for policy changes, or simply spreading awareness, each one of us can contribute to a brighter, more equitable future for Africa.

### **Smart Solutions Benefit Everyone**

Also let's not forget, smart solutions benefit everyone, not just Africa. When Africa thrives, the world thrives. Our continent is rich in resources and human capital. By investing in a balanced energy mix for Africa, we're not just lifting millions out of poverty; we're also opening up new markets, creating jobs, and fostering innovation that can benefit the entire world.

### **Tackling Critical Issues and Building on Successes**

In my book, I tackle critical issues like funding roadblocks, misleading signposts, and unkept promises that have hindered Africa's energy development. But I also highlight the successes we can build upon. From small-scale solar projects





that are lighting up rural villages, to innovative financing models that are making large-scale wind farms a reality, there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about Africa's energy future.

### **Africa's Way Forward**

So, what's Africa's way forward? It's a path paved with smart, sustainable energy solutions that meet our unique needs. It's a journey that we must embark on together, as a united continent and as a

global community. And it starts with understanding the realities on the ground and taking informed, inspired action.

I invite you all to read "A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix". Let's educate ourselves, let's be inspired, and let's take action. Together, we can make energy poverty history and pave the way for a brighter, more equitable future for Africa and the world.

<https://njayuk.com/>





## CAPTAIN KIRK'S JOB INTERVIEW OF MR. SPOCK

*Steven Joseph*

**T**his is a story about why it is more important to keep your word than it is to give your word.

Luckily, for you readers, I have come across highly confidential and classified government documents from the 1960s. It was sitting in a box, just gathering dust in my friend's basement. He said that he had bought it at a yard sale.

Some of these documents are unbelievably fascinating, and they actually help teach us why it is important to keep your word.

I am sure that everyone, or mostly everyone, has watched *Star Trek* one time or another. However, what you do not know is that all of the stories are actually true! The Starship [Enterprise](#) travelled in time back to the past, and they gave the US government their travel journals, hoping that they can learn valuable lessons moving into the future.

One of the more interesting reads was the recorded interview between Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock. Mr. Spock was interviewing for the position of First Officer.

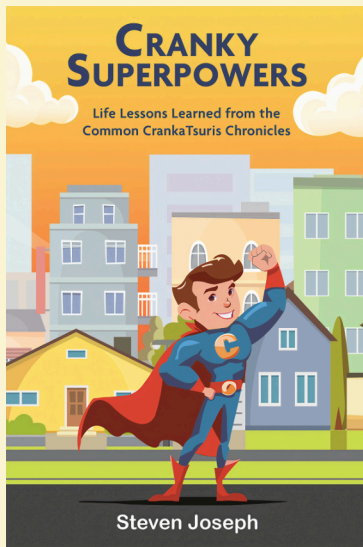
**Captain Kirk:** Mr. Spock, your resume is outstanding, and your reputation is known far beyond this galaxy. However, I have one important question. Can you give me your word that you will be completely loyal to my command and the mission of the Federation?

**Mr. Spock:** Captain, I am clearly interested in the position of First Officer. I intend to be loyal and trustworthy. You can be assured of this fact. However, I cannot give you my word that I will be loyal to your command and the mission of the Federation.

To do that would be highly illogical.

**Captain Kirk:** Mr. Spock, I find your reasoning to be highly illogical. You should know that I have interviewed over twenty other candidates, and I can tell you that every single candidate has given their word to me that they would be completely loyal and trustworthy.





**Mr. Spock:** And you should know that I would be far more loyal and trustworthy than any of these candidates.

**Captain Kirk:** Explain. I am interested in hearing your logic. If you cannot give me your word, how will I be able to trust you?

**Mr. Spock:** You see, Captain, many centuries ago, the planet Vulcan was run by ruthless and dishonest men and women. They appeared to be honest. When they ran for office, they made promises and would say, “I give you my word.”

“One politician who became leader of our planet made a promise to the people. He said, “If elected, I will cut taxes by half, and raise spending by half. Simply by doing this, we will balance our budget. I give you my word.”

**Captain Kirk:** It sounds highly illogical.

**Mr. Spock:** Correct, Captain. Of course, the story does not end there. Our leader then convinced the Vulcans to wage war on the planet Romulus. The Romulans look very similar to Vulcans, and our leader said that the planet should be part of the Vulcan Empire. Of course, he just wanted their wealth and resources, and he said that the war would be very short, and we would be greeted by the Romulans as liberators. He said, “I give you my word.” “Sure enough, the war last for years. Every year, our leader said that we would soon be victorious, and he told the people, “I give you my word.”

**Captain Kirk:** Certainly, the people would see through that after a while.

**Mr. Spock:** Unfortunately, they did not. In fact, people would mimic our leader and would say, “I give you my word.” It then turned out that because our leader gave his word, but never kept his word, he soon lost the ability to communicate. The Vulcan elders then saw that it was only the Vulcans who kept their word who were still able to communicate. The leader was then removed, and we made peace with the Romulans. We then made it law and then custom that for anyone who wanted to be in government, that person must vow to keep his or her word. We found that when our leaders kept their word, our government ran much more efficiently, and Vulcans then soon embraced the concept of keeping our word. Because of this experience, giving our word is strictly forbidden. If we give someone our word, the sentence is death.

**Captain Kirk:** How logical.

**Mr. Spock:** Precisely Captain. I can tell you that when I say I will be completely loyal to your command and to the Federation, you can be assured that I shall keep my word, as required for any Vulcan.

Mr. Spock was then hired. The Starship *Enterprise* then began to explore new worlds and go where no man or woman has gone before.



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



## UNINTENDED DEVELOPMENT OF AN AUTHOR

*William Stevenson*

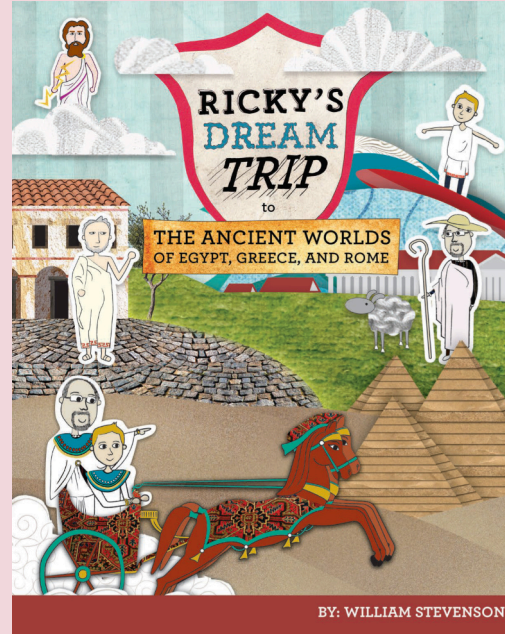
When my grandson, Ricky, turned seven years old, I decided to write a story for him that, on one hand, would make him feel important and special, and on the other hand, create a story that was educational. As a result, *Ricky's Dream Trip Through the Solar System*, which was based on fact, was written on a foundation of love.

While the *Dream Trip* featured each planet in our solar system, Ricky was the center of attention as he and his grandfather (PopPop) visited the planets in their dream space ship. The story included pictures of planets and asteroids taken from the internet. Everything was put together in a loose-leaf binder with a photograph of Ricky on the cover.

When the book was completed, it was seen on my desk by one of my tax clients who had recently created a company of self-published writers. "What's that?" he asked. I told him that I wrote a story for my grandson involving a trip through the solar system.

"May I see it?" he asked. After reviewing the *Dream Trip* for a few minutes, he enthusiastically said, "You could publish this!" While this was never my intent, I agreed with his suggestion. We retained the services of Fireman Creative in Pittsburgh whose team put the book together with their own artwork. Paul Fireman and his team breathed life into the story which was enjoyed by Ricky. Educators also appreciated the double theme of the love of a grandfather for his grandson coupled with the learning aspect about our solar system.

The book was so favorably received that I decided to write a second one. *Ricky's Dream Trip To Colonial America* was born a year later. My goal was to create a story where Ricky participated in the development of the Declaration of Independence. He and PopPop met in Philadelphia with the participants from the thirteen colonies including American heroes like John Adams.



Once again, Fireman Creative breathed life into the story with its magnificent and creative artwork.

Like the solar system book, Colonial America was greatly appreciated by educators who read the story to their students as they wove the book into their lesson plans.

I was very pleased with the acceptance of the first two dream trips. My enthusiasm was so high, I decided to write a series of three more historically based books about the ancient worlds of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Ricky was a hero in each story that was based on historical facts.

In ancient Egypt, Ricky met Tutankhamun (King Tut) and helped him find his beloved lost cat. In ancient Greece, he rode Aristotle's horse in an Olympic horse race. He also met Alexander the Great and helped him learn how to play an ancient guitar. The highlight of the ancient world series was how Ricky saved the life of a young Julius Caesar.



The last book in the series was a dream trip to Ancient China. Ricky was a hero by helping Marco Polo return to his home in Venice after being held in China for seventeen years by the Great Kublai Khan.

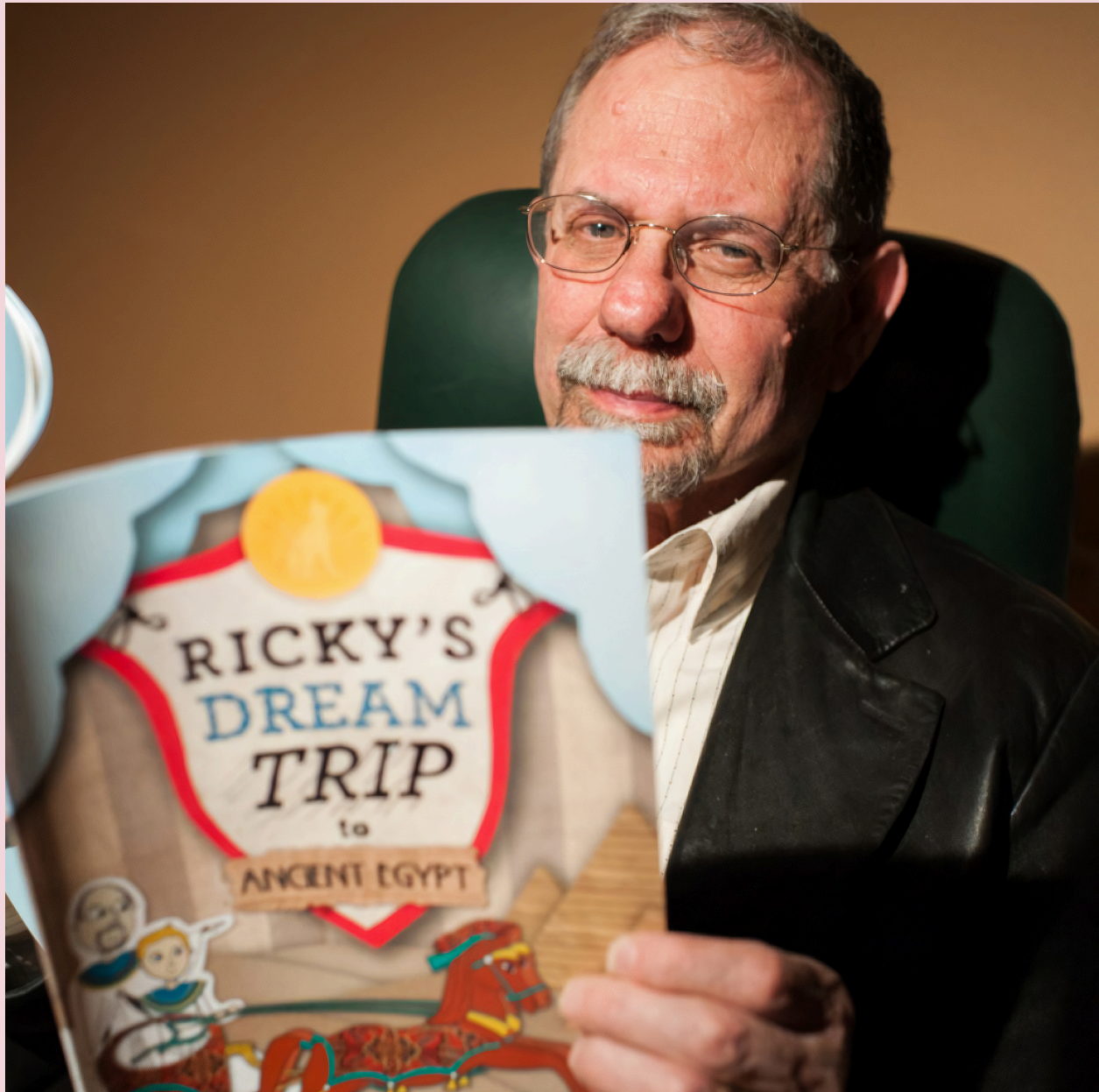
I am grateful for my fabulous team without whom I could not accomplish the publication and exposure of this unique series.

The members of the team are Deborah Herman, my dedicated publisher; Paul Fireman, whose

artwork breathed life into each book; Desiree Duffy, my tireless marketing genius; and Armando D'Accordo who keeps my computer humming.

The completion of the dream trip books gives me great satisfaction because I feel that I have made a positive contribution to a world that is struggling to find peace, joy and love.

<https://poppoppress.com>



## FIVE STEPS TO SOLIDIFY YOUR PLOT

*Susy Smith*



**A**re you struggling to define the plot in your story? Have you fallen into a plotting pitfall?

It's surprisingly easy to do.

All authors have seen the plot diagram. We know the six parts of a story are: Exposition, Conflict, Rising Action, Climax (Turning Point), Falling Action, and Resolution.

Can you see the diagram in your head? Now, sit down and plug your story points into the diagram. Sometimes, it's easier said than done.

Last year at WriterCon in Oklahoma City, I attended a seminar on plotting with Ally Robertson, acquiring editor for Wild Rose Press. It really helped solidify *Ascendant's* plot, the sequel to *Asylum*. The class was asked to answer these short questions and I thought I'd share them.

### “Who is your Main Character?”

Because it's a sequel, I knew that already. Lacy is the main female protagonist and Jace is the male protagonist. They are a young pair who find themselves on the run from Lacy's uncle who wants to use them for his political gain.

### “What is their situation?”

At the end of *Asylum*, Lacy and Jace are at the Texas/Mexico border. They've just decided to make a break for it when her uncle shows up and

stops them. In a heart-wrenching scene, they're separated.

### “What do the main characters want?”

Lacy wants to get back to Jace, the love of her life, and find a way to be free from her uncle's tyranny. She needs to find enough leverage against her uncle to outweigh what he's using as leverage against them. In the sage words of Johnny Depp's character, Captain Sparrow, “Why fight when you can negotiate? All one needs is the proper leverage.”

### “What obstacles do they face?”

is probably one of the most important components of a novel. How excruciatingly painful can I, the omniscient author, make the situation for Lacy and Jace? Once I had that in mind, a second question followed. How can I make it worse? Lacy ends up kidnapped by a powerful Mexican human trafficker with no way out. Jace has been captured by Lacy's uncle and is forced to carry out certain black op missions for him.



### “What must the main characters risk?”

Lacy must risk her life to escape and find leverage against her uncle in order to save Jace and finally find freedom.

Of course, there are subplots beneath the surface! But answering these five questions might make plotting your novel a bit easier.

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## INTERVIEW WITH SA SCHNEIDER



### Hello SA, when did you start writing?

I started writing in 2016, though I started thinking about writing in 2012. I was a leader for my daughter's Girl Scout troop, and realized all the girls were reading books with boy protagonists. I wanted to write books with girls for them. I kept dragging my feet until several things happened in 2015 that pointed me to writing again. In 2016 I wrote my first book, though it has not been published.

### What drove you to come up with your debut book?

The book I actually published was Embracing the Magic in the Town Magician series. I live near Kent, Ohio, and every year they do a wizarding world festival. This is a Harry Potter inspired festival. I wanted to enter and set up an author table, but didn't have any books about wizards or magic. So I wrote a short story that had magic and wizards. Soon, that short story grew to a book and that grew to a series with at least 5 books planned.

### Tell me about your published works. How did they happen?

I've only got the 1 book published at the moment, though I have several I'm finishing to publish.

### What is your latest book? What does it deal with?

Embracing the Magic is book 1 of the Town Magician series. A young boy, Samuel, wants magic like so many people in his world, but he has

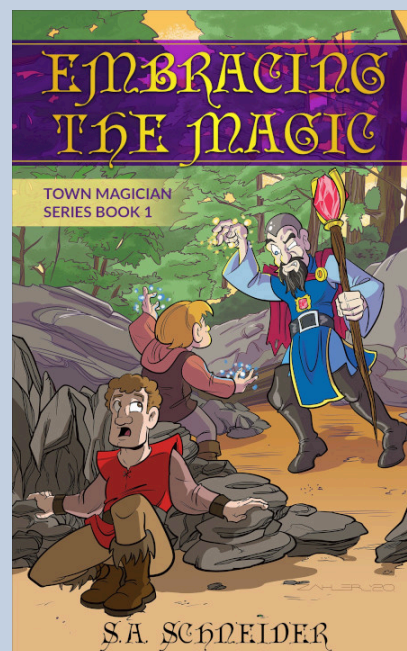
none. He isn't even able to watch their Town Magician perform because his father forbids it. He finds out that the Town Magician, Rory, is a fake and can't channel magic either, but no one believes him. When a wizard challenges Rory to a duel and Rory claims to be going to the Grand Wizard for training, Samuel tags along to expose the faker. Or find his own magic.

### Do you deem yourself a pantsner or plotter?

I started as a pantsner, because I didn't know any better. My first book was a struggle and had major issues when I completed it. Since then, I've become more of a plotter and feel my stories have gotten better. I'm not a full time writer, so plotting helps me keep the story straight when I don't get to write every day.

### Do you follow a rigorous writing routine? If not, when and how often do you write?

I've been trying to write every morning before work. Since I work from home, that seems possible, but many days I have so much to do I don't have time to write. This year I've been making sure I find a little time to write each day and it's been helping the stories progress much faster.





**Was becoming an author a conscious decision?**

Yes, very much so. I didn't write much when in school and never thought about it much afterwards. I love to read, but writing stories never was something I yearned for.

**How do you juggle writing and other tasks?**

I have to plan my days more. It seems silly, but I even plan what I will do for relaxing in an evening - read, watch tv, play some music, whatever. If I don't, I will tend to let work take over and I don't write or do the things I love to do.

**What are your hobbies and interests?**

I like to read and watch movies and favorite television series. I play music, though I'm just now getting back into it after many years of not playing. I like video games, and am developing a workshop to teach kids video game storytelling.

**Have you faced any challenges hitherto as a writer?**

Of course. Learning what makes a good story and a good sentence. Publishing and marketing it myself. Finding the time and motivation. All have been struggles, though they feel good now. I do continue to learn about writing better stories and everything I write is a little better than the last.

**What would you like to tell the budding authors who lose motivation if a few of their works do not do well?**

Write a lot. Have more ready to go. Don't skip around all the time, but I have a couple things I'm working on. Once something is almost ready, I focus on it to finish, but I get excited to do the next one also.

**If there is one thing that you would like to change in this world, what would that be?**

So many things come to my mind, but they are very negative. On a more positive note, I'd like to teach storytelling to kids in school at an earlier age. Instead of focusing on spelling and grammar right away, work with them on writing because then when they do spelling and grammar, it will make more sense to them and they'll do better at it.

**Where can we find you?**

My website is: <https://sa-schneider.com> and I'm on facebook: <https://facebook.com/SASchneiderAuth>

I am working on various educational materials for teachers and homeschool parents with videos and activities to do based on teaching writing.

Interview originally published on TopShelf magazine.



S.A. Schneider has a wolf, so of course he writes middle grade fantasy, wouldn't you? Since his Lego and action figure days, he's crafted worlds and stories within those worlds. This pursuit continues into his middle grade fantasies.

He doesn't stop with inspiring kids to write linear stories. Oh no, no. S.A. shows kids how storytelling in video games work and how they can learn to write those . He wants others to join him and delve into creating fantastical worlds.

**Enjoy the Adventure!**



**NJ  
AYUK**

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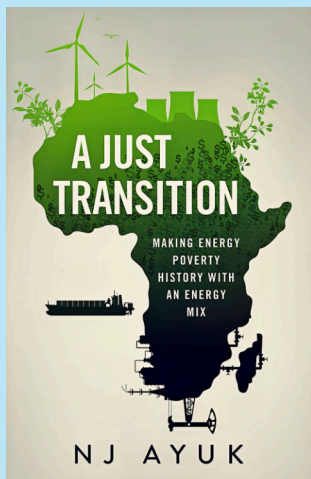


## CHAMPIONING AFRICA'S ENERGY FUTURE

NJ Ayuk stands as a luminary in the realm of Africa's energy discourse. Gracing the cover of this *Special BookFest Issue of The Relatable Voice Magazine*, his journey is emblematic of a deep-rooted commitment to Africa's energy potential and its promise to elevate countless lives. Through his writings, Ayuk doesn't just inform—he inspires, advocating for a brighter, empowered Africa.

NJ Ayuk is a distinguished figure in the global energy sector, hailing from the beautiful landscapes of Cameroon. As the CEO of Centurion Law Group, a pan-African legal and advisory conglomerate, he has been instrumental in steering significant energy deals and fostering investments across Africa. His leadership extends to the African Energy Chamber, where he serves as the Executive Chairman, advocating for Africa's energy stakeholders and promoting the continent's interests on the global stage.

Ayuk's academic credentials are equally impressive, having earned his Juris Doctor from William Mitchell College of Law and an MBA from the New York Institute of Technology. A fervent believer in Africa's potential, he consistently champions transparency, good governance, and empowerment, ensuring that Africa's energy resources act as a catalyst for growth and development. His extensive experience, combined with his passion



for the continent, positions him as a leading voice in shaping Africa's energy future.

### **A Visionary's Tale**

Ayuk's dedication to Africa's energy narrative is unparalleled. His voice resonates with passion, knowledge, and an unwavering belief in Africa's potential. Each of his books serves as a testament to his vision, offering insights, solutions, and a clarion call for collective action.

### **“A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix”**

Ayuk's latest offering, “A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix”, is a clarion call for equitable growth. He emphasizes the need for a balanced energy transition in Africa, one that takes into account the continent's unique challenges and opportunities. The book is a





testament to Ayuk's belief in Africa's ability to lead the global energy transition while ensuring prosperity for its people.

"A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix" stands as a testament to NJ Ayuk's profound understanding of Africa's energy landscape. In this pivotal work, Ayuk sees a vision for an Africa where energy poverty is a thing of the past, and where a diverse energy mix powers the continent's aspiration. He delves into the complexities of balancing traditional energy sources with renewables, emphasizing the importance of a tailored approach that respects Africa's unique challenges and opportunities.

Ayuk passionately argues that for Africa to truly prosper, it must harness its vast energy resources in a manner that serves its people, ensuring equitable access and sustainable growth. The book is not just an analysis; it's a clarion call for policymak-

ers, investors, and stakeholders to rally behind a just and inclusive energy transition for Africa.

#### **"Billions at Play: The Future of African Energy and Doing Deals"**

In this seminal work, Ayuk delves deep into the intricacies of Africa's energy sector. He underscores the continent's vast potential and the pivotal role of the energy industry in driving economic growth. The book offers a pragmatic approach, emphasizing the importance of creating an enabling environment for deals that benefit Africa.

#### **"Big Barrels: African Oil and Gas and the Quest for Prosperity"**

Here, Ayuk challenges the narrative of the "resource curse". He presents a more optimistic view, highlighting success stories from across the



continent where oil and gas have become catalysts for positive change. Through compelling case studies, Ayuk demonstrates that with the right policies and governance, Africa can indeed reap the benefits of its vast natural resources.

### **A Message of Hope, Empowerment, and Action**

At the heart of Ayuk's writings lies a potent message: Africa's energy future is bright, but realizing its potential requires vision, action, and unwavering commitment. He champions the cause of the African people, emphasizing that they deserve the same economic advantages as those in more industrialized nations. His works serve as a beacon, illuminating the path towards a prosperous, energy-rich Africa.

For Ayuk, it's not just about harnessing energy resources; it's about empowering the people of Africa. He envisions a continent where energy becomes the cornerstone of socio-economic upliftment, where every African has access to affordable and sustainable energy, and where the benefits of the energy sector trickle down to the grassroots.

Educators, policymakers, energy enthusiasts, and anyone passionate about Africa's future would find

Ayuk's books enlightening. They are not just repositories of knowledge but catalysts for change, urging readers to be part of the solution.

NJ Ayuk's journey as an author and visionary is a testament to his passion, dedication, and unwavering belief in Africa's potential. Through his writings, he's not just informing; he's inspiring a generation to believe in the promise of a brighter, more prosperous Africa.



Learn more on [NJ Ayuk's website](#).

NJ Ayuk is the Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber, CEO of pan-African corporate law conglomerate Centurion Law Group, and the author of the Amazon bestselling books "A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix", "Big Barrels" as well as Amazon and *The Wall Street Journal's* bestselling "Billions at Play: The Future of African Energy and Doing Deals".

His experience includes advising major companies and governments on energy issues and investment strategies. NJ graduated from the University of Maryland College Park and earned a Juris Doctor from William Mitchell College of Law and an MBA from the New York Institute of Technology.



## AGAINST ALL ODDS

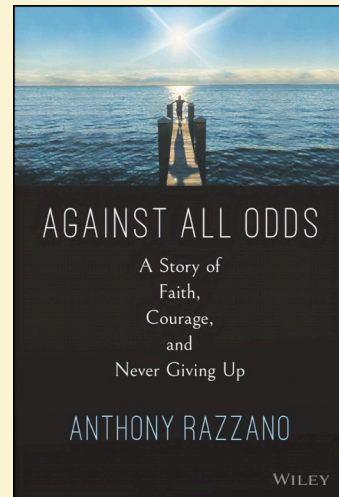
### A STORY OF FAITH, COURAGE, AND NEVER GIVING UP

*Anthony Razzano*

A single match was lit, igniting a fireball that would swallow a young Anthony Razzano whole. The garage didn't catch fire, but he did. Razzano was treated by paramedics from Noga Ambulance and taken first to Jameson Hospital's emergency room, but his injuries were so severe that he was flown by helicopter to West Penn Burn Center in Pittsburgh. There, doctors gave Razzano little hope for a life he barely even had the chance to begin. With third-degree burns over more than eighty-seven percent of his body, he was destined to become another statistic; In fact, at the time of Razzano's arrival at West Penn Hospital, the doctors gave him a mortality rate of one hundred percent.

Doctors told his parents that he would likely die overnight. But if he made it through the night, he would probably die within three days. Then, if he somehow fought through those three days, he would die in three weeks of infection. During that time, Anthony endured traumatic medical procedures, including the amputation of the fingers on his left hand. He also endured multiple bouts of sepsis where his temperature spiked to 106 degrees at one point, his blood pressure was 49 over 20, and his heart rate was 189 bpm for three consecutive days. At that point, doctors felt there was no other choice than to medically induce a coma to try to stabilize his vitals. After three more days of zero response to the induced coma and powerful antibiotics, his team feared that his heart would give out at any moment; he wouldn't make it through the night. Family members and friends held an all-night vigil, and the next morning—by some miracle—his fever broke, his heart rate stabilized, and his blood pressure rose.

Hanging on through multiple bouts of infection and respiratory failure as specialized surgeons performed twelve skin graft operations at West Penn Hospital's Burn-Trauma Center to graft healthy, un-burned skin from his scalp and feet onto his wounds. During the interim, when his scalp and feet were healing, his team resorted to a rarely-



used technique of skin grafts from cadaver donors onto various parts of his body, hoping that this would keep the wounds protected until they were able to replace with his own skin grafts—which had less likelihood of rejection. There was no hope—so they thought—with every overnight victory being written off as a new, albeit delayed, expiration date; Razzano's clock was ticking down, and the few days that they thought he had left would be full of pain and suffering. Last rites were administered three separate times, and his parents were told by



physicians to make funeral arrangements more than once.



Both Anthony and his family remained determined and resolute in their goal to help him live another day, every day for three months. Scarred and suffering pain like no other, having received 134 blood transfusions, he was alive and miraculously made it to his discharge date. What followed was three years of rehabilitation and six years filled with 43 additional surgeries.

Playing professional sports is in Anthony's DNA with 9 Superbowl rings in the Razzano family. No one believed he would ever play again, but survival wasn't enough for him. Anthony couldn't handle living his teenage years under the shadow of his injury. So, after he was released from the hospital, he continued to fight. A few years after the accident that forever changed him, Razzano became the starting outside linebacker for the New Castle Red Hurricanes under legendary coach Lindy Lauro.

By refusing to accept the odds or any limitations, he could live his dream of playing football.

Fast forward: Most people, by looking at Razzano, aren't aware that he lives in pain every day.

Anthony, now 47, is a loving husband and father, a successful businessman as a Certified Public Accountant and Certified NFL Contract Advisor. Now living in the sunshine state of Florida, he remains an integral and beloved community mem-

ber with a passion for youth sports and the power of living each day and playing as if it were your last.

With all of the lessons he's learned throughout his recovery and his fight to get back on the football field, Anthony has built a successful business advisory firm—Razzano Consulting, LLC—where he coaches entrepreneurs on the path to success, from startup to strategic operation.

His new business memoir, *Against all Odds: A Story of Faith, Courage, and Never Giving Up*, is a transformative memoir that serves as a beacon of light for those facing challenges.

Whether they are self-imposed barriers of the mind or major life-threatening trauma, Anthony's journey teaches us the power of adaptation, the importance of cherishing each opportunity, and the resilience of the human spirit.

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



## WAIT! YOU'VE GOT A COW IN YOUR HOUSE?!

*Ellie Laks*

**M**y husband, Jay, and I have had many animals in the house with us over the years, including sick pigs, baby goats, disabled chickens, senior turkeys, an injured pigeon, an orphaned gosling, and a mouse with a head injury. But I will never forget the time we had a cow in the living room! That's right. We had a cow sleeping in our living room.

John Lewis Thunderheart, a calf we rescued from the slaughterhouse, was dying of pneumonia, and we knew we were losing him to the extreme heat in our quarantine barn. It was the middle of summer, and the temperature was at a scorching 106 degrees.

Jay and I looked at each other and shared the same idea: Let's bring him inside! We cleared the

furniture from the living room except for the couch, and I moved downstairs to become his mom.

Jay and I looked at each other and shared the same idea: Let's bring him inside! We cleared the furniture from the living room except for the couch, and I moved downstairs to become his mom.

I made warm bottles, cleaned up after him, spooned and cuddled him, and slept when he slept. I awoke every two hours to his face staring into mine letting me know he was hungry again, and the process started all over. Like any new mom, I did not sleep much for the first few months, but I treasure those memories as one of the best experiences in my life. I would not trade a second of it.





Eventually, with the help of donors sending packets of puppy pads, a homemade oxygen tent that Jay built, great veterinary care, and prayers coming in from around the world, Lewis healed, grew, learned to eat hay, and lived! Once he was cleared of pneumonia, the fun began. Jay and I took Lewis for hikes on the trails, to explore every inch of the barnyard, and to meet the other animals. He came when I called



him, walked beside me on a leash, raced around with our dog, Sky, his best friend, and seemed like any other ordinary, sweet, fun, large puppy dog.

I have been vegetarian since I was eleven years old and vegan for twenty-four years. Since I was a very young child, I could hear and understand animals. Animals have always been my greatest teachers, healers, and friends. But after having a cow in our house, raising him with love, and sharing so much time together, it is completely, one hundred percent clear to me that though some might perceive animals as different, the soul in each of us is the same! And every soul wants to heal other souls.

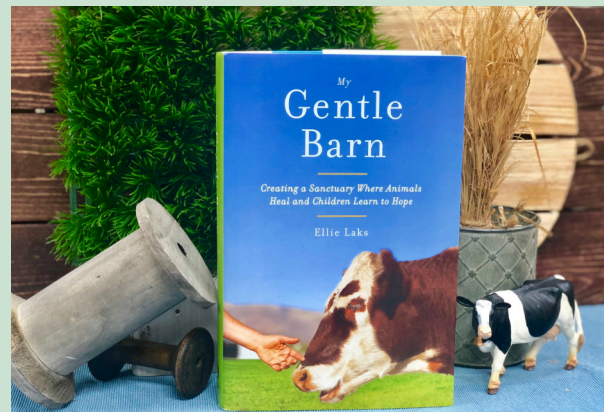
John Lewis is our youngest healer at The Gentle Barn. His love shows through to every human he comes in contact with. One woman had gone through cancer surgery during the pandemic and was not allowed to have any visitors in the hospital. Even the nurses were gowned and gloved and couldn't give her a proper hug during the hardest fight of her life. She had only her phone and social media for companionship.

That's when she found The Gentle Barn and started following John Lewis' recovery and story. Watching him struggle to heal, play even though he didn't feel well, and stay strong inspired her to stay strong through her own recovery.

She promised herself that if she made it, she would come and visit John Lewis and thank him personally. When she met John Lewis, he hugged her tight with his neck as she sobbed onto his shoulder releasing everything that had happened to her and, at the same time, celebrating the joy of being in remission.

Although John Lewis asked to live with the other cows at nine months old, I still bring Lewis a bottle every morning made of warm water and Sun Chlorella Algae Super Food. I have long ago weaned him from cow's milk stolen from someone else's mom. Every night, I bring him and the other cows bedtime cookies, and, as long as I live, John Lewis Thunderheart will always be my baby.

John Lewis Thunderheart is living proof of the work we do here at The Gentle Barn. We rescue and rehabilitate animals so they can rescue and rehabilitate humans. The Gentle Barn is a safe space for all living beings. Come visit us in Santa Clarita, California, Nashville, Tennessee, or St. Louis, Missouri. We are open to guests on Sundays and you can get your tickets at [gentlebarn.org](https://gentlebarn.org).



Ellie Laks is the Founder of The Gentle Barn Foundation, a national organization that rescues and rehabilitates unwanted animals and heals people with the same stories of abuse and neglect. Ellie is a powerful speaker, celebrated animal welfare advocate, humane educator, animal communicator, and the author of ***“My Gentle Barn: Creating a sanctuary where animals heal and children learn to hope.”*** Ellie founded The Gentle Barn in 1999. She invented her own “Gentle Healing” method that allows old, sick, injured, and terrified animals to fully recover. Ellie is the creator of cow hug therapy and has hosted hundreds of thousands of people who have come to The Gentle Barn seeking hope.





**New Zealand**

## ROAD TRIPS IN NEW ZEALAND

*Pat Backley*

### **New Zealand.**

A tiny country at the bottom of the world.

A country that is on many peoples bucket lists.

I was lucky enough to first travel there in 1997 and then to emigrate permanently in 2010. It is a decision I will never regret.

Extracts from my book **Seventy Years Worth Of Travel:**

We have now travelled to Whakarewarewa “*The Living Maori Village*” as it is described in the guidebooks. For more than two hundred years, people of the Tuhourangi Ngati Wahiao have welcomed visitors from around the world. I had especially wanted to go here, as opposed to some of the other glitzier tourist attractions in Rotorua. At that time, in 2007, the village was still relatively unspoilt, much as it had been for the last 100 years.

After wandering around the geothermal landscape featuring hot spring lakes, bubbling mud pools and geysers, we stopped to enjoy a delicious piece of corn on the cob. It was apparently “*a unique taste of kai (food) cooked in our largest hot pool.*”

Watching the traditional dance performances featuring *poi* (soft, hand held balls attached to a string) *patu* (a short club made of wood, whalebone or *pounamu* (greenstone) *raku* (wooden sticks) and much eye rolling and sticking out of tongues, I was particularly fascinated by one of the tall, male Maori dancers. It was easy to imagine his warrior ancestors doing the same Haka before going into battle. Later that day I saw him at the local store, buying a toy cricket set for his kids. I think there is always something rather magical about seeing any kind of performer living their “real” life.

Over the years I have come to love the unique smell of the city of Rotorua. Many people find it offensive, rather like rotten eggs, due to the





hydrogen sulphide, but I, like many people who have lived with it all their lives, rather enjoy the smell.

Any kind of road trip in New Zealand is pretty unique.

As soon as you leave the big cities you find yourself driving through beautiful unspoilt countryside with very little traffic. Old farms and homesteads are nestled into the green hillsides and small villages with their Four Square stores advertise Tip Top Ice Cream.

Every kilometre you drive brings new wonders, it is a fine example of nature at its very best. Mountains, ancient forests, pristine beaches, volcanos, bubbling mud pools, lakes and rivers. Green fields full of cows and sheep. It is no wonder so many filmmakers have chosen to shoot their blockbuster movies here.

You can eat delicious fresh fish in various venues. I sampled some in a little boutique cinema in Field-

ing (a small market town in the Manawatu district that has won the award for New Zealand's Most Beautiful Town, sixteen times!)

Mangonui Fish Shop in the top of the North Island specialises in line caught fish bought directly off the boats, such as Snapper, Tarakhi, Gurnard and Hapuku. Here, you can sit in the little restaurant right on the waters edge, watching through an open window as your dinner is being cooked, whilst looking out for the Stingrays, John Dory, Kingfish, Bronzer Whale Sharks or pods of Orcas that often swim by the shop. Or if you prefer you can simply find a sandy beach to sit on to eat your delicious fish and chips from the paper wrapping and enjoy the sunset!

A trip down the West Coast of the South Island began with a flight from Auckland to Christchurch. Christchurch is a beautiful city, although much of it was partly destroyed by the dreadful earthquake in 2010.







After a few days exploring, which included side trips to Akaroa “*the most French town in New Zealand*” and Lyttelton “*a port town and historic landing point for many colonial settlers*” it was onto the TranzAlpine train, a wonderful five hour journey through snow- capped mountains, frozen rivers and undulating countryside.

Disembarking at Greymouth we picked up a hire car and drove down the West Coast, stopping at interesting places like Hokitika, Fox Glacier and Ships Creek, where we admired the wild black sandy beach with its huge piles of driftwood and kaka birds (large olive coloured parrots) sitting in the trees emitting their harsh grating calls. I wished we had had time to take a walk through the ancient Kahikatea swamp forest, as apparently it provides “*a glimpse back in time to what much of the West Coast may have looked like prior to human settlement.*”

Traces of gold and coal mining, timber logging, the Pancake Rock formations, forests, limestone cliffs, canyons, caves and underground streams, together with a spectacular coastline, make this area an absolute must-see.

Then on towards Queenstown, Wanaka, Milford Sound, a drive with stunning vistas of mountains and lakes. It was rather like living in a book of picture postcards. Everywhere you looked the scenery was spectacular.

So many other highlights as you drive around this little country:

Magnificent pink and purple Lupins in the South island. Peonies in Blenheim. Larnach Castle. Hamilton Gardens. Art Deco Napier. Mount Cook. Arrowtown. Te Mata Peak. Sliding down huge sand dunes. Glorious sandy beaches everywhere with hardly anyone in sight. Muriwai Gannet Colony. Matakoho Museum with its fabulous display of Kauri Gum. The All Blacks. Hobbiton.

The list is endless. However long I live, I don't think I shall ever be bored living in this beautiful country.

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



All photos in this article are by Micheal Hishon (@mikehishonphoto)



## MATCHMAKERS? FACT OR FICTION?

*Jody Hedlund*



The matchmaker would be involved in what was known as *plucking the gander*, the process of negotiating what the prospective bride and groom would bring to the marriage. Once the details were worked out, they'd *eat the gander*, which was an old way of saying the bride's family would provide a meal to celebrate the match.

*Calling on the Matchmaker* is a historical romance that showcases the Shanahan family and their adventures with the Irish matchmaker, family relationships, mistakes, and forgiveness.

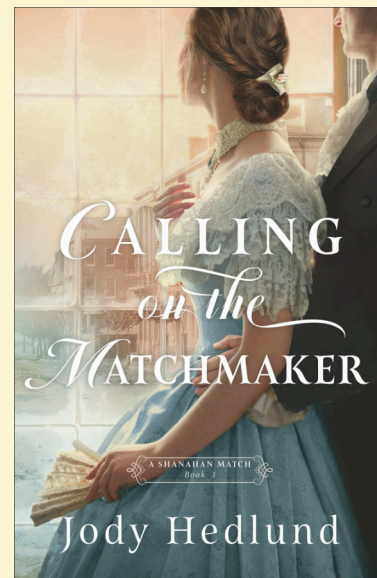
"Matchmaker, matchmaker make me a match, find me a find, catch me a catch. Matchmaker, matchmaker, look through your book, and find me the perfect match."

Sound familiar? Are you now humming the familiar tune of "Matchmaker" from *Fiddler on the Roof*?

Arranged marriages? Marriages formed by matchmakers? Who really did that? Is it just the stuff of stories? Or were matches really made?

Those were the kinds of questions that led me on a quest for answers and birthed my series *A Shanahan Match*. During my research into matchmakers, I discovered that the Irish in particular had a robust tradition of matchmaking.

Interestingly enough, Irish matchmakers were usually men, and the matchmaker tradition, along with a big leather book filled with matches, were passed down from father to son.



<http://jodyhedlund.com/>



## DO IT ANYWAY!

*Jennifer Lieberman*

**W**e all feel resistance all the time, waking up, getting out of bed, getting to the gym, walking past our favorite indulgences without indulging, you know what I'm talking about. Whether it's something we "should" do or "shouldn't" do we all struggle with making better choices. We especially struggle with making choices that can help change our lives and get us to that next level we've been hoping for be it a financial, a fitness or a personal fulfillment goal. So how do we get over ourselves and commit to change? It first starts with desire, the desire to achieve what you want must be greater than your desire to stay where you are. The only way anything will ever change is if there is a burning desire inside of you, a lukewarm one won't get you there. It doesn't matter if the fire stems from anger, frustration, joy or inspiration, the important thing is that there is something ignited within you. It's different for everyone and only you can determine what lights you up.

I know alignment, ease and flow are currently very trendy buzzwords but I'd like to call BS on that (at least a little bit). I don't know if any of those people who push this ideology have ever won olympic medals, mastered a musical instrument or built multi-million dollar companies by sitting and waiting until they "felt" like doing the work. Waiting for the right time can be a dangerous game, because none of us know exactly how much time we have, so now is always the right time to start training, learning the skills, making the plans. Start with where you are and what you have and that alone will create momentum.

My dream was to be an actress and star in movies and TV shows. That is still my dream. But when the doors didn't open after many years of trying and training and auditioning and never even getting an agent interested in representing me I had a choice to make: to give up and get a regular job or to start creating my own opportunities. The flames of my desire were (and still are) so strong that giving up has never been an option. (That's why the fire is



important, if it's not there, what will sustain your motivation?)

Someone suggested I write myself a one-woman show to showcase my writing and performing talents, but I didn't want to. First, I didn't think I was good enough to write and perform a whole play all by myself - but if I wasn't good enough to do that how could I possibly be good enough to be in the big time productions? Second, I didn't have an extra few grand to put into a production - renting and theater, hiring a director etc. I did it anyway. I started working on the pieces in an acting class I was already paying for, and as friends heard about what I was doing and saw I was putting in the effort starting with nothing, support came. It was show-time, and like in the movie "La La Land" with Emma Stone, no one really showed up. But I kept working on it anyway, I'd come this far. The play eventually went on to a festival in New York City and won the Audience Choice Award.

I was thrilled that the play went to New York City, the mecca of theater this side of the pond, and thought for sure this recognition would lead to representation and more substantial work. It didn't. However, lots of women I spoke with were excited





about the idea of a book based on the play, a racy female empowerment romantic comedy.

But, I didn't want to write a book, that sounded difficult and time consuming and the only reason I wrote the play was to get acting work. But I thought to myself 'successful books do get made into movies and TV shows', so maybe that was a way in

Over the course of several years I wrote several drafts of the book, got excited, got discouraged, gave up, went back to it and after almost a decade since writing the play, a book launch, a title change, a rebrand, and a second book launch later I became a #1 best selling author...from writing and performing a play I didn't want to do and adapting it into a book I didn't want to write.



"Year of the What?" has now won five international literary awards.

So if I can offer any advice to anyone feeling stuck in their lives it would be "do it anyway!" Start where you are, with what you have.

I never would have achieved any of my success by only doing things that I wanted to do.

Our happiness and success comes from pushing ourselves to do the things we don't want to do, by pushing ourselves to do better, go further and reach higher. You may not end up exactly where you wanted to but you might end up somewhere even better.

<https://www.jenniferliebermanactor.com>



## INTERVIEW WITH DEBRA ADAMS

Today, we're taking a journey to Pennsylvania to chat with Debra Adams. Debra not only shines as a part-time actress and producer in the indie film industry but is also the co-author of the book, "The Farm, Time Travel, 2,000 Years."

**Hello Debra, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine! Tell us a bit about yourself.**

I am a published Co-Author of "*The Farm, Time Travel, 2,000 Years.*" I'm also a part-time Actress and Producer in the Indie Film Industry in the Pittsburgh area. I have also worked in other areas of film as well.

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

I grew up in a small town called Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. You know, the home of the famous groundhog Punxsutawney Phil. I moved to Greensburg and then to Donegal, Pa. where I resided for 44 years. I now live in Jeannette, Pennsylvania, and Zephyrhills, Florida.

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

Anything that has to do with the outdoors in warm weather. I also like to do small parts in acting. While up North I like to hike, bike ride, and explore caves and caverns. And spend time with my family and friends. I also go to wineries and dance and listen to live music. While in Florida I Love the beach and ocean, wineries, the clubhouse func-

tions, the family there, and traveling to other destinations in the area.

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

After 39 years of marriage, my husband became ill. By the time he reached the age of 60, he was diagnosed with C.O.P.D. At 64, he was in the later stages of the disease and could not do the things that he loved to do like Fishing, Hunting, etc., so I suggested that he write a book. After all, he had an extensive collection of over 1,000 books in his library and he read each one of them. And this became the birth of "*The Farm, Time Travel, 2,000 Years.*"

**If you had to describe yourself in 3 words, what would they be?**

I would have to say, an adventurer, observer, survivor.

**What Inspires you?**

Adventures, and life around me as an observer. The curiosity of what to expect over the next horizon. The excitement of ziplining over nature. On my bucket list is skydiving. Putting a smile on someone's face.

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

I'm 70 years old and nothing keeps me down. I have many aches and pains on a daily basis, but it's mind over matter that my mother taught me, that keeps me going. I believe that you should enjoy life to the fullest as much as you can.

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

After my husband passed on, I sat down and read his book. I realized at that time how much research and effort he put into it and yet he did not have the time to finish it. Therefore, I decided to finish it for him and have it published in his memory.

**Can you tell us what inspired your book, and what is the story behind it?**

It was my husband's story. What inspired Rob was the time period along with time traveling and the events we see unfolding today in the world.



A war between the United States, Russia, and China as the aggressors on our soil. Russia had a weapon that they did not realize had the ability to cause time traveling when used. This sent us back 2,000yrs give or take 500yrs into the Stone Age with guns and steel. There is so much more to this story, it is a must-read to understand my husband's mindset, It's quite a different kind of time-traveling story! The last 100 pages will make you want to read it over again and want more of the story. This will be a blockbuster of a movie or series in the right hands. Netflix or Amazon would be a great forum.

**Are you working on anything at the present time?**

Just finished a film K.H.A.F. where I was a Producer and Actress along with a scene in Strange Angels both with my partner Jim.

**What are your goals and aspirations?**

Hopefully to sell the book rights and make this into a film.

**Where can our listeners connect with you online?**

Facebook page *The Farm, Time Travel, 2,000 Years*, also on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Instagram *debbie.adams123*.





**Robert E Adams Jr.** grew up in the village of Norvelt, Pennsylvania. He spent most of his teenage life with his buddy Tom on a farm located near Weltytown, Pennsylvania. If they were not spending time on the farm, you would find them somewhere hunting or fishing in the Laurel Highlands.

In his early twenties, Robert purchased a property in the Acme, Pennsylvania area and married Debra Frank and had one daughter Christina Gwen.

He worked for District Council 57 Local Union 2006, located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as a drywall tapper and finisher and sometimes as a painter until he retired.

Robert enjoyed reading and had a hunger to read everything and anything about history. He also read books on survival, trapping, and what to do with the skins, as well as the meat, of the animals. Those skills helped him to write his book. His library of over one thousand books tells of all his interests, and he read each and every one of them. Robert was a man's man of the land. He knew how to protect and support his family. If anything in our present time ever happened, he would know what needed to be done.

Co-Author **Debra L. Adams**

I grew up in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. I moved to Greensburg, Pennsylvania in my early twenties. I met Robert in my early twenties as well.

Then I moved to Acme, Pennsylvania area, and eventually married Robert and we had our daughter Christina Gwen.

This is what inspired me to finish Robert's book.

When Robert was in his later stages of C.O.P.D. and could no longer do some of the things that he love to do, I suggest to him to write his own story. After all, over the years he had read nearly one thousand of his own library books covering many topics. I knew he could, he had the love of history and such an imagination. Robert finally decided to write his own story.

Unfortunately, November 2020, Robert passed away from C.O.P.D. and Covid-19 before he had a chance to finish it. Through of his research and writing I wanted to finish his book "The Farm, Time Travel 2,000 Years" and have it published in his memory.

My quest now is to sell the book rights for film and find a filmmaker that shares the vision that we see in this exciting time traveling adventure that is sure to take the audience on a captivating journey that is sure to stay with them long after its conclusion.

I am known in the Indie Film Industry as a part time Actress and Producer. I have also worked in other area of film where I may be needed.

I'm an adventurous person who loves the outdoors. I enjoy white water rafting, hiking, biking, parasailing, ziplining, and traveling to different areas.

If you can't find me in Jeannette, Pennsylvania you can find me in Zephyrhills, Florida enjoying the ocean and new adventures with my partner James.



## A FATHER'S LASTING IMPACT

*Carrie Turansky*

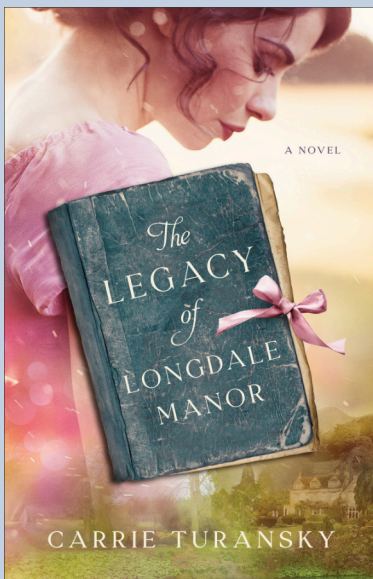
I was blessed to grow up in a home with a kind and caring father.

Bob Swain was gentle and soft-spoken, yet also strong and determined. Best of all, he was a man of his word.

Born in 1920, Bob grew up during the depression. His first job was selling apples from a wagon when he was eight years old. When he was 21, Pearl Harbor was attacked, and he joined the Army Air Corp. He fought in the Pacific during WW2, and he told us some very chilling stories of dangerous situation and close calls.

Dad was a kind and honorable man from the greatest generation, and I treasure our relationship.

In my latest English dual-time novel, *The Legacy of Longdale Manor*, I explore the importance of the father-daughter relationship through the lives and experiences of my historical and contemporary



heroines. One has never met her father, and the other must find a way to recover after her family suffers a tragedy and betrayal.

The relationship with our father colors our relationships with other and influences the important decisions we make, such as who we are, our life goals, and our deep values.

The heroines of *The Legacy of Longdale Manor* discover faith and forgiveness can heal wounded hearts and restore father-daughter relationships.

<https://carrieturansky.com/>



## THE ART OF FILLING YOUR CUP AND WALKING IN PURPOSE

*Tashena Anderson-Place*

**F**or some, the statement Fill Your Cup instantly makes them think of the question “Is your cup half full or half empty?” but that shouldn’t be the only way we view it. Filling your cup is not a one-stop shop or experience, it is a lifelong journey that comes with hills and valleys. The true question is how you will handle these experiences as they come. Will we grasp onto them and keep them in our cups forever, weighing us down, and carrying the heavy black cup of burden or will we face what is in our cups, to learn from what was placed there, so we can forge a path forward? We lean more toward believing that a cup is just a cup but that couldn’t be further from the truth. Your cup is unique and special, formed just for you.

The art of filling your cup to get to purpose begins from a young age. When our parents begin buying the latest toys that pique our interest, be it a computer, a doctor’s uniform, a racing car, tools, or an art set, our desires for these cool new things will begin to pour into our cups. Almost instantly, our imaginations run wild with who we will become once we grow up. Of course, there is nothing wrong with having a wild imagination but what happens when that imagination meets real-life expectations?

The book Fill Your Cup takes readers on a reflective journey with the author as she realizes that life may not always turn out as she thought but there is hope. Hope that tomorrow can be different, hope that change is good, hope that hard life moments do not define us, and confirmation that we can have a joyous celebration as we stop to pour out what is in our cups to ask for a different flavor.

What type of flavor you may ask? A smooth, crisp flavor full of rejuvenation, joy, and love. A flavor that hits your palette and ignites the flame that has been lying dormant, waiting to be seen. A flavor that has been there from the beginning but was very mild. It was probably so mild that it was most likely missed. A flavor that once you have it, you’ll



never turn back from and if you do, it will be waiting for you when you return.

Filling your cup is finding out who you truly are and what purpose you could serve in this life.

Filling your cup is choosing forgiveness over hurt.

Filling your cup is showing grace to those around you.

Filling your cup is saying yes to starting over in faith.

Filling your cup is saying I want more, and I want better than running on empty.

Filling your cup is realizing that you should give the keys of life back to the one who created them.



Filling your cup is a mindset, heart, and soul shift.

Filling your cup is something that should happen daily.

Our goal in life is normally to manifest the American Dream. One filled with all the things that we can see and accumulate. The success, the titles, you name it. The goal shouldn't be just that. It should be about finding the proper balance between

where you've come from, who you are now, and who you want to be in the future. Ask yourself, what do you want to be remembered for? A cup full or a cup half empty does not matter if what is in the cup does not serve a higher purpose.

<https://www.facebook.com/TashenaAPAuthor>

<https://www.youtube.com/@BeFilledTashenaAP>







## INTERVIEW WITH JACKIEM JOYNER

### Hello Jackiem, when did you begin writing stories?

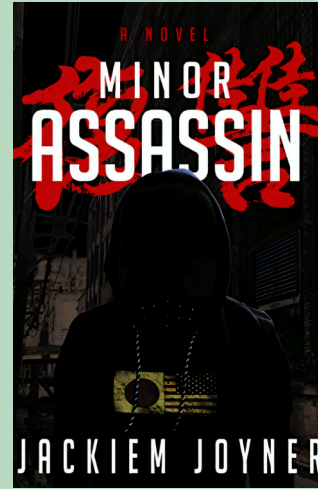
As a touring artist, the idea of writing stories never initially crossed my mind. It kind of just happened. I can remember being backstage, awaiting the setup of our equipment for a sound check. Basically, out of boredom, I began jotting down thoughts in my Evernote app. What started as random scribbles about a young girl on a distant planet rapidly became a narrative that captured my imagination. Without any experience as a writer, I let myself be carried away by the story unfolding at my fingertips. To my surprise, characters started emerging, plots thickened, and the world I was crafting grew richer with each passing city on my tour. Before I knew it, my pre-performance routine included immersing myself in this fictional universe, eager to pick up where I left off at the previous venue. It was a thrilling discovery, realizing that such boundless creativity could spring forth in those idle moments before taking the stage.

### How did you decide on science fiction as your genre for writing?

Science fiction has always had a gravitational pull on me, no pun intended! I've been enamored with tales of distant galaxies and suspiciously human-looking aliens ever since I was a young child. The endless possibilities of the universe, the technological marvels, and those really cool spaceship designs – how could I resist? The genre lets me ask the big "what ifs" and then answer them with, "Well, why not a laser-beam-powered toaster?" On a serious note, it provides a space to challenge norms and imagine futures both bright and bleak. But, hey, even in the bleakest futures, I bet they have some top-notch space coffee! It felt like the perfect playground for my ideas

### Tell us about your previous novel release, *Minor Assassin*.

"Minor Assassin" holds a very special place in my heart. It was a whirlwind of emotions, action, and suspense that I felt compelled to share with my readers. Picture an action-packed spy novel, but instead of the usual debonair gentleman as the



hero, we have Jon, a young boy whose life takes a dramatic turn after a harrowing event. This twist was something I wanted to explore deeply—how tragedy can completely alter a person's path, even if they're as young as Jon.

The journey that readers embark on in "Minor Assassin" is more than just a story for me. It's a cinematic experience that weaves through Jon's devastating backstory, his evolution, and the multi-perspective narrative that also brings in Jayla, his older sister, and a relentless detective named Striker trying to find out just what is going on in his city.

By the time Jon reaches the age of 14-15, after rigorous training in Japan, he truly begins to embody the assassin persona, showcasing the culmination of his training and determination. The transition of this young boy into a formidable force is both challenging and intriguing to depict.

One of my main objectives was to develop Jon's character arc. The mysterious allies he meets and the fire that fuels his determination added layers to his transformation. A particular emphasis for me was the depth of character interactions, especially delving into the psychological and emotional dimensions. How would a teenager truly react in such intense situations? This realism and raw emotion add authenticity to the story.

The overwhelming positive feedback from critics and readers has been heartwarming. From the



immersive descriptions that paint vivid images in the reader's mind to the exploration of vengeance and resilience, seeing how "Minor Assassin" resonated with so many has been fulfilling.

To sum it up, with "Minor Assassin," I aimed to blend the intrigue of a James Bond tale with the transformative journey reminiscent of Karate Kid. For those looking for an intense yet deeply insightful read, this novel offers just that—a gripping revenge saga with layers of depth and emotion.

**Using three words, how would you describe your writing style?**

Fresh, Adventurous, mysterious.



**Your new release, Zarya, will be out in early August. Who are the main characters in this book?**

I'm genuinely thrilled about "Zarya: Episode II"! At the epicenter of this story is Zarya, the courageous and tech-savvy heroine from the first book. Fresh off her mission to rescue her parents, Aaron and Messina, and the world of Cydnus, she now grapples with readjusting to society. She's caught in a whirlwind of emotions, receiving both admiration and resentment in equal measure. All the while, her unwavering connection to Sochi, her AI-enhanced airboard, remains. Alongside her are her unwavering friends, Marco and Kizzy.

Her father, Aaron, becomes an even more pivotal figure in this sequel. As he witnesses his daughter's brilliance and dedication, he becomes more in tune with her, especially when it comes to groundbreaking tech. Together, father and daughter are embroiled in ambitious projects to safeguard their world. Their interactions with the governing council of Cydnus are intricate and layered, with noticeable friction between Aaron and certain council members.

Enter Flindar, the head of the Cydnus World Council. His towering office provides a panoramic view of New Cebrenia, a city of chrome, glass, and steel, alive with movement. Under his leadership, however, the Council has grown divided and fraught with internal politics, challenging their unified front. His interactions with Aaron showcase a mix of desperation and hope, particularly around Project Viaka, a potential solution to Cydnus's growing energy needs. With Aaron's involvement, and Flindar's faith in him, the two plot a way to convince the rest of the council of Project Viaka's importance, despite the dangerous undercurrents of betrayal and political maneuvering.

Eros, another council member, is particularly challenging, adding an extra layer of tension to the storyline. He's kinda like the bad guy, but with a whole lot of power. He sits under Flindar as the Vice-chair. But his intentions are not the same!



As the narrative unfolds, we're reintroduced to a character—whose identity I'll keep under wraps for now—but let's say, their motives are intriguingly ambiguous.

Trust me, "Zarya: Episode II" is set to break new ground! I Hope!!LOL

**What themes can readers find in your new book, "Zarya Episode II: Sochi Unleashed"?**

Man and Machine Collaboration. The mutual understanding and collaboration between Zarya and Sochi are evident. Sochi's evolution in intelligence and autonomy serves as a prime example of the increasing interdependence and blurred lines between organic beings and artificial entities. Their exchanges also hint at a potential power shift, where AI might, at times, act out of its programmed protocols for safety reasons.

Recklessness vs. Responsibility. Zarya's youthful exuberance, combined with her newfound control over drones, touches on the excitement of pushing boundaries. The thrill of the chase and the sheer delight in her newfound capabilities contrast sharply with the potential consequences of hacking advanced equipment. It's a delicate dance between seeking adventure and facing the potential repercussions of those actions.

Natural Wonder Amidst Technological Marvel. The interaction with the Skylarkon, a native creature of Cydnus, juxtaposed against the advanced tech on display (AI airboards, drones, etc.), paints a picture of a world where technology and nature coexist. This theme speaks to the balance that advanced civilizations must find between progress and respecting the environment.

Friendship and Shared Adventur. The camaraderie among Zarya, Kizzy, and Marco is apparent. Their shared sense of adventure, moments of awe (like witnessing the Skylarkons), and playful taunts underscore the importance of relationships, even in a technologically advanced setting.

Ethical Quandaries in a Digital Age. Sochi's ability to override and hack drones introduces ethical questions about the extent to which one should or can manipulate technology, especially if it's not theirs. This theme is reinforced by Kizzy's concerns

about hacking the new P7-14 weather bots and the potential legal implications.

Security in an Advanced World. The presence of security transports and sentinel drones paints a picture of a society that, while advanced, also grapples with ensuring law and order. The tension between personal freedom and systemic control becomes evident when Zarya and her friends have to evade these security measures.

**How long have you been playing the saxophone?**

I've been playing the saxophone for 29 years. It's amazing to think it's been almost three decades since I first picked up the instrument. It has been a truly enriching journey filled with melodies and memories!

**Which do you enjoy the most, writing stories, producing music, or playing the saxophone?**

That's a tough one! Each offers its own unique joy. Writing provides an escape, allowing me to dive deep into my wild imagination unfiltered. Producing music presents a creative challenge, while playing the saxophone is pure, soulful expression. However, if I had to choose, I'd lean towards playing the saxophone because it's the most direct conduit for my emotions. Thankfully, I don't have to choose!

**What advice would you offer to aspiring musicians and writers?**

Stay authentic to your voice. In both music and writing, it's easy to get swayed by trends or external pressures. The most compelling stories and melodies come from the heart and soul. Remember that perseverance is key. Treat every rejection or hurdle as just a stepping stone toward your goals. Keep pushing for what you love doing, no matter what. Your time will come!

**Where can fans find you and your work online?**

My official website is: [www.jackiemjoyner.com](http://www.jackiemjoyner.com).

I'm also active on Twitter (@JackiemJoyner) and Instagram (@jackiemjoyner). Over there, you'll find the latest updates on my books, music, and upcoming events.

Interview originally published on TopShelf magazine.



## INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINA CHICKIS



**Hello Christina, welcome to The Relatable Voice magazine! Please tell us about yourself.**

I grew up in West Virginia and went to college for Cosmetology. In 1996 I moved to Pittsburgh, PA and had various jobs until I became the owner of a cleaning business. It was during this time that I also decided to pursue a long time dream of becoming an actress. After taking the right steps and training I have added several film, TV, and commercial credits to my name. I have also done a few Voiceovers including for *Catastrophe* playing *Furball the cat*. I have also written some scripts, directed, assisted directed and produced.

**What initially drew you to a career in acting, and can you share a memorable moment from your early experiences in the industry?**

When I was in my 20's I wanted to model, I wasn't sure how to go about doing it. I found Donna Belajac in Pittsburgh who I did a commercial for, it was for Wheeling Downs Casino, and it was a dinner and dancing scene, I had such a good time filming it that I decided to pursue more work in commercials then eventually film and tv shows.

**How do you prepare for a new role, and do you have any specific acting techniques?**

When preparing for a role, I study the script to see what kind of a person the character is, it's important to know what the entire film is about to know what your character is going to go through. I am a method actor, I want to be the character and feel the emotions the character would experience if it were real.





**Can you describe a challenging or emotionally demanding role you've played and how you approached it?**

The most challenging role I played was an abusive, alcoholic mother. She was a smoker and I'm not so it was challenging but I studied smokers to make it as realistic looking as possible.

**What has been your favorite character to portray so far?**

My favorite character to play is Mary Lou in a tv series. She is a tough, all business boxing gym owner, she's always taking control of the situation and doesn't put up with anything from anyone.

**Can you share some of the most valuable lessons you've learned throughout your career?**

The most valuable lessons I've learned in the industry is to study the role you have been offered to make sure it's a role you are truly interested in portraying, stay true to yourself and never do a role that makes you feel uncomfortable. Always be kind and courteous and be on time and prepared with anything you would need or have been instructed to bring.



Photo by Trev Tog



Photo by Adam Dungeon

**In an industry that can be highly competitive, how do you stay motivated and resilient during times of rejection or setbacks?**

I keep motivated when rejection or setbacks happen by keeping in mind that we don't always get every role we try for. Sometimes we can give the best performance but if we don't have that certain look or trait that they are looking for it doesn't matter how good our audition is and we can't take it personally. We have to just let that one go and keep pushing on and trying for the next one. There's a lot of competition out there, we won't get every role!

**What advice would you give to aspiring actors looking to build a successful career?**

The best advice I can give to someone new to the industry is to make sure you are taking workshops and acting classes, start with being an extra on big sets to learn about the industry, and to network.

**What's next for you?**

I am excited to be in a tv series that's a detective show. I will be playing a desk Sargent, it is called Vice Squad and is a franchise of different series in high crime areas. I'm in Vice Squad Nola.

Facebook: [Christina Daugherty Chickis](#)



## BREAKING THE RULES

*Rebekah Millet*



**F**or a decade I wrote what was expected in inspirational romances: characters in their twenties, and small-town settings. Despite the fact that I hadn't been in my twenties for a while, or ever lived in a small town, that's what I penned. I learned a lot during those years, and wouldn't trade them for anything.

But then the idea struck for the book that would become my debut, *Julia Monroe Begins Again* (Bethany House, October 2023). And it filled me with pure excitement . . . and uncertainty. With 40-year-old characters, it's a rule-breaker. It also

takes place in my backyard of New Orleans, which isn't a small-town setting. Making it even riskier is that I'm a debut author.

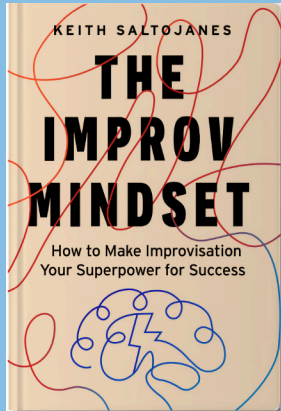
But God kept pressing me about this book in the tender way He's spoken to me throughout my life. And so I wrote a few chapters. From there, an opportunity led to the book being signed. If you're a writer, and feeling led to do some rule-breaking, I hope you give it a try.

Thank you, dear readers, for spending time with me. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention a little about my book. Here are some things you'll find in *Julia Monroe Begins Again*: humor, faith, romance, relatable characters, and a vibrant New Orleans setting.

<http://www.rebekahmillet.com>



## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



We improvise every day, but how many times do we get stuck in our heads overthinking?

Now you can learn how to leverage the skills of improv for your life.

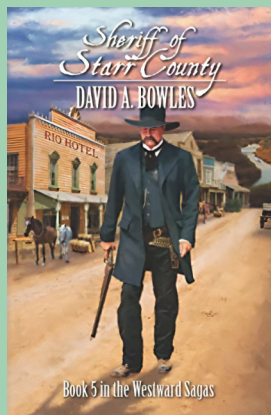
Improv isn't just for actors, comedians, and writers, but is one of today's most powerful tools for success in business, social situations, public speaking, communication, becoming a more fearless person, and just plain having more fun in life. Being able to think quickly on your feet, be in the moment, and to roll with any sudden changes makes any person more confident.

This book will break down these techniques with exercises you can practice both at home and put to use in real-life settings.

How do we live with a God, or ourselves, if who we are dooms us to Hell?

As a joyful boy who realized I was gay, I fought for my happiness and faith as prejudices of family and religion isolated me from the world. Battered and withdrawn, could I rediscover the God of love I first learned about as a boy? In the process, could being gay be the gift that introduced me to my soul?

In the dark night of our soul we find our own light!



When Texas becomes a newly-minted state, good men and women work hard toward progress and peace. Texas Ranger Will Smith travels to the borderlands of the Nueces Strip to become the first Sheriff of Starr County. He'll do what he must to bring justice to the frontier, including wrangling outlaws, navigating political intrigues, fighting Indians, and keeping the tenuous peace between the Tejano and Anglo residents. He encounters influential statesmen and entrepreneurs of early Texas, assists the US Army, and falls for two very different women.

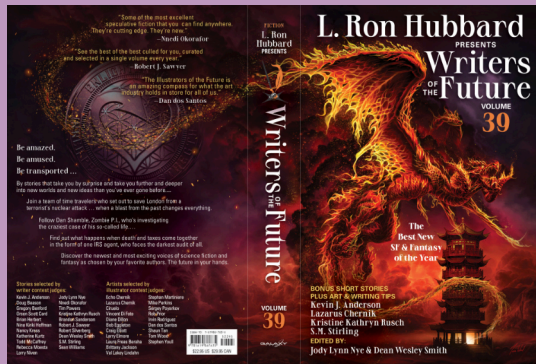
This is exciting and authentic fiction based on the author's own ancestors. It's a compelling story in readable format for anyone who appreciates Texas history.





Ashton is convinced they are dying. Whether it be from cancer, heart disease, or a fungal infection, they know something bad is always about to happen.

After a night of health-related panic attacks, & urged by a voice in their head, Ashton decides to check in to the ER again, but when another patient is brought in with an unknown ailment that puts the entire hospital on lockdown, Ashton may be trapped in their worst nightmare.



Be amazed. Be amused. Be transported ... by stories that take you by surprise and take you further and deeper into new worlds and new ideas than you've ever gone before.

Twelve captivating tales from the most exciting new voices in science fiction and fantasy accompanied by three from masters of the genre.

You will love this collection of the best new voices in science fiction and fantasy because, as Locus magazine puts it, "Not only is the writing excellent...it is also extremely varied. Hot new talent."

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