

ABILITY

Katherine Beattie
WRITING WHAT SHE KNOWS

Garo Armen
SMART PROJECT ARMENIA

Leo Fender
MUSIC LEGEND

Poetic China
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+

My son, Mack
Autism, IEP & Happiness

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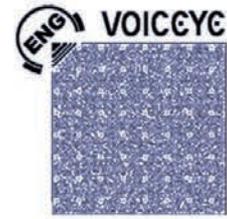
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- For High Contrast modes, press the button with four colored squares.
- To access the 58 Language Translator, move to the next bar by pressing the button with three dots. Select the first box, with the letter "A". To translate into another language, select the language button to the right, choose your language of preference, press done, then hit the "Translate" button on the bottom left of the screen.



Android

- To hear the text, press your phone's "Option" button, then select "Start TTS"
- To get text in large font, under the "Setting" selection, press the "+" button, and to decrease font press the "-" button.
- For High Contrast modes, under the "Setting" selection, press the button with four colored squares.
- To access the 58 Language Translator, press your phone's "Option" button, and select "Translate". To translate into another language, select the language button to the right, choose your language of preference, then hit the "Translate" button to the right of the selected language.





just got back home to Florida from California. I was doing a “top secret” project with Shift Colab and women’s motorcycle gear and apparel outlet ATWYLD, and I can’t wait for all of you to see the video when it is released!

I flew out on Monday and arrived in Los Angeles late. Someone picked me up from the airport and dropped me off at a hotel for the night, then came and picked me and a group of others up, and we headed out to the desert. It was a two-day shoot and it was in the middle of nowhere. I wasn’t exactly sure where we were, but it was absolutely gorgeous!



We had a really big crew who worked on the photoshoot and the filming. Everyone in the group was super nice, and I can’t wait for you all to check out ATWYLD’s gear. They have something for all female riders; not only motocross, but offroad too! Every female rider is going to love their selection of new gear.

So I was out there for two days, working hard, and then I flew back home. Of course my flight was delayed—ugh—flying makes things easier, but sometimes it can be a pain when things are delayed and luggage is lost. I had packed a couple of box wines and one exploded in my luggage on the way home. *Oops!*

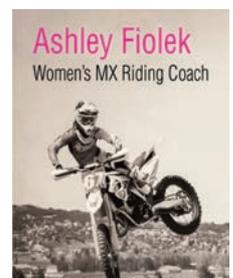
My mom and I did a private lesson at a track near my house a couple of weeks ago. It was with a little girl I started working with from Alabama; her family drove here for a mini-vacation, and I had a couple of days to

work with her. She is a quick learner and has a great personality. I can’t wait to continue to work with her more.

When I met up with her in Alabama she loved these peanut butter ball things, and they brought some with them from a gas station. They were huge! We kept talking about them to my mom when she was here in Florida, and my mom told her to make some for us but dipped in dark chocolate. She brought them the next day. They were so good, and my mom snuck one home for my brother, too. I am really blessed that I get to meet some really amazing people who love motocross as much as I do.



Back at home my brother is on his Spring Break for school. I plan on joining him by laying out at our pool for the whole Easter week. I am happy to be together with my family for Easter. I bought an old Nintendo 64 and we have all been playing Mario Party at night time... remember that game? My brother and I are so competitive, and my mom decided she hates the “A” button. It’s hilarious!



Happy riding everyone. ■ ABILITY

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The Stages of Money Lending



There are generally two types of people: those who lend money, and those who borrow money. “Borrow” is a sneaky word with several meanings. Webster’s Dictionary defines it as “To receive with the implied or expressed intention of returning the same or an equivalent.” I, on the other hand, define it as getting something you need from some sucker with the intention of returning it if you were to somehow win the lottery.

Money is very important to all of us. We need it to buy necessities in life like a place to live, food, transportation, shoes, cell phones, Netflix and lattes. So, to part with it for any other purpose than for our own needs is very difficult.

I encounter this resistance when I donate to a charitable organization. Yes, I know I’m called on to be a cheerful giver, but I just haven’t gotten there yet. I wonder if my money is really going to what it is purported to. Instead of digging a water well in Tibet, some shyster is sitting in first class on his way to Greece on my dime.

I don’t trust people with my money, especially when they think it’s theirs. Most of us work hard for our money, so to let it go toward something that’s not for us or our family is hard, especially when the average American has less than four hundred dollars in their savings account. We’re at the point where it’s every man

(or gal) for themselves.

At some point in our lives, someone has approached us to borrow money. It’s usually a relative or some close friend. Most of the time they’re coming to you because they know that you have been responsible with your funds, saving them for a rainy day, while they have not been responsible with their own funds. And now, they are having a rainy day. And guess who they’re looking at to be their umbrella?

Now you’re left wondering if they really need that car repaired, or if they’re hoping to score a bag of heroin, or if they’re looking to take Hopalong in the sixth to win.

The art of borrowing money has many stages to it. The first stage is **The Request**. This begins with the person expressing some sort of predicament they’re in. They’re short on rent this month. They’re waiting for a check that should be in the mail. Or they have a chance of getting in on the ground floor of the greatest business deal ever, like edible kittens. They usually start with a sob story hoping to provoke a response from you like, “Hey, if you need to borrow some money, let me know if I can help you out.”

You’ve just now opened the door to what is known as **The Money Beatdown**. This has just saved them the groveling they were prepared to do and, on top of that,

they feel like they didn't ask you for anything. After all, you offered.

As a mark, I try and always be in on my toes when I sense The Request coming my way. One of my favorite maneuvers — **The Slick Cut Off** — is one I learned from Muddy Banks in Tupelo, Mississippi in the early seventies. Right after someone has spilled their hardluck circumstances, before they have a chance to ask me for anything, I say something like, "You too? I've had some bad luck lately myself. I was just about to ask you if I could borrow a few bucks."

Boom. I just turned the tables in the blink of an eye. Now I'm on offense and they're back on defense.

I began to develop the method with precision on the Baltimore streets when I encountered panhandlers. I can usually catch these sidewalk beggars out of the corner of my eye approaching me for some coinage, so I quickly move towards them and, before they open their mouth, I hold out my hand and say, "Hey bro, you wouldn't happen to have any spare change like a quarter, a nickel, anything?" *Boom*. I just flipped the script. I've disarmed them, and they've got nothing to come back with.

Now, I'm a little more lenient if one of them has a pet that does tricks, like a guy in New York who has Guinea pigs that can sit so still you believe they're dolls, until they blink (incidentally, that guy makes \$40-\$50 an hour. No lie). I have no problem doling out spare change for that. That's entertainment.

When someone asks you if they can borrow some money, you may tell them something like, "I need to check my finances," or maybe "Yeah, give me a couple days and let me see what I can do." This is known as **The Time Tactic**. The key being that you're just buying time, hoping they'll forget or find another source. At this juncture, as the borrower waits for your decision, they are at your beckon call. They will go out of their way to do you favors, stop by with little gifts, go out to lunch and answer the phone when you call them any time of the day. They will act excited to talk to you because you are the nicest, greatest, best friend in the world.

Unfortunately, there are times when you are left with no choice but to lend the money. I refer to this as The Box-In. This is where no dodging ploy is possible. It's your best friend and you're not willing to lose the friendship. It's a co-worker and you know work will be a living hell if you don't fork anything over, even though you're certain he has a severe gambling problem. It's your wife's brother and you know it's a favor to her, even though you know it's a losing proposition.

When I have a bad feeling about a relative or a friend not paying me back, I use what I call **The Teaser**. I give them a taste of the apple — a nibble if you will — if I'm trying to preserve a relationship.

Say they hit you up for a thousand bucks. I tell them I don't have it but, if it'll help, I could lend them a hundred. They usually jump at this. After all, they were expecting some lame excuse, like that you're tapped. This serves several purposes. First, it lets them know that you care about them. And maybe you didn't give them the full amount, but it was something. They have no reason now to get pissed at you (most get pissed because they think what's yours is also theirs).

Second, you tested their trustworthiness with a small amount. If they don't pay you back, it hasn't crippled you and you're left with only a little resentment. You can live with the loss. If they do pay you back, you know next time you can lend them a hundred and three dollars.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it gets them off your back. It's like a note that tells them to move on to the next pigeon. Yes, ultimately, it could cost you a hundred smackers up front, but in the long run, you most likely saved yourself nine hundred bucks.

And, when you do lend someone the money, they rave about what a good friend you are and reiterate how quickly they're going to pay you back. You feel good for helping someone in need and you truly believe they will pay you back as soon as they can. This is known as **The Fool's Illusion**.

At this point in the money lending process, it's important to note that the borrower is still a friend of yours. They are pleasant toward you. You talk, you do things together... nothing has really changed, except for one small, itchy-bitsy detail: they now owe you money. You're not too concerned about it, though. After all, they've been super nice to you and appear very sincere in re-paying you.

Some people lend money with an open-ended repayment period, meaning they've told their lendee something like "Oh, just pay me back when you can." This usually occurs for those small loans, like a ten-dollar lunch. It's no big deal if they don't repay you or if they simply forget. You're not going to lose your house over it.

However, if it becomes a recurring theme, it can add up. This is **The Nickel-Dime Effect**. In their minds, they've beat you before out of ten or twenty bucks and you never asked them for it back, so they see you as a dupe who forgets things or just doesn't care.

Sometimes taking your lumps can be a good thing, because it's a red flag to loan this person a higher amount. If they can't handle paying you back twenty bucks, what do you think your chances are for two hundred? I'd say two hundred to one.

When most people borrow money, they give you a time period that they'll repay you within. Why? Well, this

increases their chances of getting the loan. “I’ll pay you back when I get my next paycheck,” is an old favorite, along with “I should be getting my tax refund check in the next week or two.”

Now, this is important. I truly believe that most people who borrow money have the sincere intention of paying you back when they say they will. They believe it and you believe it. We call this **The For-Sure Promise**. You’ve looked into their eyes and been guaranteed you will get your money back.

The drawback with this belief system is that there is a variable that looms in every future. It is known as “life”. This intangible thing is a relentless, sneaky S.O.B. It hides in the shadows and makes its move when all seems to be going well. One day you’re taking the family out for a dinner treat at Applebees, and the next, you’re all cuddled up around a candle to keep warm while dividing a box of macaroni and cheese. Why? Because life had just bitch-slapped you with some unintended expenses. A tax bill, a doctor visit, bald tires, fixing the cat, etc. Choose your poison. *Damn you to hell, life. Forgive me for having a moment of hope of someday having a savings account.*

Because of these unintended consequences we all encounter, we are left no choice but to prioritize our limited funds to our unlimited expenses.

We’ve now reached the point that psychologist’s label **The Slide**. This is when your loan is demoted and is slid down the priority list of payments. So the money — your money — that you were expecting back at a certain time — say, the borrower’s next paycheck — well, that has lost its significance. Life has attacked the borrower. The choice of them getting a brake job that the mechanic tells them they desperately need, or you getting your loan back... well, for most people, this is no choice. It now becomes “every man for himself”. This stage, **The Cold Slap**, means you have now been put on ice until they can get their life back in order.

When “the slide” occurs, once in a blue moon, you’re informed about it. A few noble borrowers will explain their predicament, and then set another re-payment date. However, if we wish to deal in reality, it is a rare occurrence.

We now typically find ourselves stepping into **The Avoidance Period**. This is when the borrower begins to avoid you at all costs. Phone calls aren’t returned, they don’t stop by to visit you anymore, and if you do see them, it isn’t for long. You see them for one brief second and then *poof*, they disappear.

We have now reached the stage commonly known as **The Ducking Mode**. Before you lent them money, whenever you saw them, you always had a nice, lovely conversation. But now they’ve become oddly busy, like

a little bee, always on the move.

You have now ventured into **The Chase Down**. You have no choice but to seek your borrower out. Eventually, you can track them down and you are brought into the big-story excuse, commonly known as **The BS Explanation**.

You’re now given the reasons why they have been avoiding you. These may include trouble with the cell phone, the death of an aunt or an uncle, the flu, something with the family pet, and the old “life’s been crazy” standby. This is code for “I don’t have your money.”

After they inform you that they haven’t forgotten about you, they set another date, usually next week, to repay the loan. That, or they start **The Piece Out Program**. This is when they give you some of your loan back. Although it’s a small amount of the original loan, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. They are at least showing good faith. However, the problem with *The Piece Out* is that it typically doesn’t last long, and you then return to *The Chase Down*.

Perhaps the most ironic leg of the whole borrowing progression is **The WTF Experience**. You’ve had no luck getting your money back. You’ve heard all the excuses and you’ve been given all the repayment promises. You’ve convinced yourself that this person must be going through some hard times. But you then hear stories of awesome weekends they’ve recently had at the beach, nights of clubbing, a family vacation, the new lawnmower... hell, they’re living better than you, and it’s *thanks* to you. If you ask them, “How could you go to Hawaii after you still owe me money?” They would respond with something like, “Oh, we planned that trip before I ever borrowed the money.” Oh, okay, my bad.

At some point you will move into **The Bad Guy Stage**. It is inevitable. This is the part where asking them when you will get your money back is responded to with hostile, irate, rude responses to your inquiry. You have now become a pain-in-the-ass to them. You’re the problem. You’re the bad guy. This was *your* fault. “Well, you shouldn’t have lent me money” is their defense.

Now, this is the important part. Nothing has changed since you first lent them money out of the kindness of your heart. You didn’t ransack their house, vandalize their car, kick their dog... but somewhere in the process you went from being the best person in the world to the bad guy. You’d most likely still have their friendship had you not lent the money. Crazy world, isn’t it?

They say when you lend money you should never expect it back. It’s a good rule of thumb. When I heard this golden advice years ago, I loved it. I loved it so much it made me switch sides. Instead of being a lender, I became a borrower. Since then, I’ve slept like a baby and everybody likes me. Well, except for those pesky lenders. ■ **ABILITY**



by Jeff Charlebois

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Accidental Samaritans

A Crash Course in Southern Hospitality



The odds of crushing my motorcycle's exhaust header into a pancake, destroying the engine sump guard, ripping off the oil filter, having four quarts of oil spew onto both wheels at high speed and *living to tell about it* are fairly slim, so someone was looking out for me on a cold and wet afternoon this past February.

I was heading south on I-95 to speak at my first talk of the year, a luncheon for MS patients in North Carolina. Because of an eight-inch snowstorm that was rolling into New Hampshire, I needed to leave two days earlier than I normally would have. I warmed up the home generator, filled all the five-gallon jugs with gas, and made sure the snow blower was all set to go. It was the least I could do for Elin, my wife, as once again I would be 1000 miles away and somewhere sunny when the winter cleanup was being tackled. I did feel a twinge of guilt for about a second, or at least until I rounded the first corner our block.

It was cold. I was riding with all my heated clothing plugged in, head to toe, drawing large amounts of amperage from my alternator as the temperature stayed below freezing for the first 8 hours. I spent the first night at my brother's house in Virginia, hoping the weather would get a bit warmer the next day. I decided to spend the first extra day I had riding to Florida, as there was a harsh and heavy rain forecasted

for the Blue Ridge Mountain area.

It was in the low thirties when I left the next day, and it rained through most of my ride south. I chose to continue wearing the heated gear. It rained on and off a bit; the temperatures rose to a respectable 45 degrees and I made good time using the Florida state line as my goal for dinner.

Driving through Florence, South Carolina, I sped up to pass a tractor-trailer whose spray momentarily blinded me. The crunching collision with a large object in the road was instant, and the bike went airborne. I never really saw what catapulted me into the stratosphere, but for a rare instant, a truck driver and a motorcyclist saw eye to eye. Neither of us blinked.

When the bike and I landed back on earth, I realized I had run over something large and hard. Both ends of my bike were misbehaving as if I had two loose wheels. I'm still not sure how I stayed upright. I assumed I had damaged both rims, or that I was riding on two flat tires. The bike's engine was also not responding to the throttle well, and I thought I might have knocked some connectors loose.

Taking care not to make any sudden movements that would upset the gyroscopic forces, I let the bike slow itself down enough to get to the side of the highway.



The realization of trying to patch two tires or waiting hours for a flatbed in the rain on the edge of freeway traffic compelled me to continue rolling as far as I could, hopefully making an exit, which was in sight. The bike was wiggling at both ends and I held on for dear life. I was relieved to see a hotel entrance just across from the off ramp. My feet were unable to stay planted on the foot pegs, which told me I also had an oil leak. The Yamaha stalled as I pulled in the clutch but we were able to roll into a parking spot. We marked our location with a beautiful pastel of oil and water.

As I looked over the damage, I was shocked but grateful, realizing I probably just had my closest call with a bad accident in decades. The front of the engine had been smashed in. The oil filter was torn right off the motor, squirting pressurized oil over both wheels. The belly pan protector under the bike was destroyed and hanging, the front fender was cracked, and the exhaust header was crushed and twisted. My driving light and one of the crash bars were also damaged.

I called a friend who works for Yamaha and lives near Atlanta for help. If I were to make my speaking gig, I needed parts, a dealer who could help, or a loaner bike. Within ten minutes of hanging up with Steve, he called me back letting me know a nearby dealer would be by to pick me up with a trailer within the hour. He also asked me what parts I needed. From what I could see,

the oil filter and a header pipe were all that were crucial to getting me back on the road.

I used some of my hotel rewards points and booked myself a room for the night. After apologizing for the oil slick surrounding my bike, I got to my room and began removing my wet layers when my cell rang.

“Hello Paul, this is Don from Generation 3 Powersports. I’m out here in the parking lot to collect your bike.”

Wow. Barely ten minutes had passed since hanging up with my friend Steve.

I never know what to expect in these sorts of situations. I am completely at the mercy of people I do not know to help me and I have no other options available. I am vulnerable and stuck agreeing to and paying for whatever they choose to charge me. This incident could very well cost me thousands of dollars, money I certainly did not have, just to get back on the road. It’s a scary place to be in, consoled only by the fact that I was, well, alive. The world was whispering in my ear that I was about to get a ride directly to the cleaners.

Don was the owner of the dealership, representing the second of the “Generation 3” name. He was very interested in my story and my goal of a million miles. Thirty seconds of conversation and I realized my fears were

GENERATION 3 POWERSPORTS



unjustified and flat out wrong. When he said they would do everything they could to get me patched up and back on the road, he meant it.

My cell rang again. It was my Yamaha friend, who had located the only exhaust header available in the country. Steve had made arrangements to have it shipped overnight to the dealer, and even better, that Yamaha would donate the part and shipping costs.

“The oil filter,” He said, “Well, you will have to get one of those on your own.”

Again, my fears were squashed and replaced with a little guilt over not trusting the goodness of others. The call probably saved me a grand. The remaining repairs and trailer ride would be less, and I knew I had a low interest credit card I could use and pay off over a few months. Having two extra days on this trip was something that never happens, and it looked like I might even be able to make my talk.

We unloaded the bike and rolled it into the shop. A couple of the mechanics showed interest in the bike, and we chatted about how many miles I had ridden it last year. One of the guys took a good look and agreed the header pipe and oil filter were crucial, and we decided to patch the fender for the time being.

The owner gave me a ride back to the hotel after work, and even invited me to attend church with his family. I declined, as I needed a shower and some

moments to absorb all that had happened. And maybe a shot of whisky.

We didn't know what time the part from Yamaha would arrive, so I decided to take a lazy morning and Uber over to the dealer around noon the next day. The young lady who picked me up started to talk about her life and challenges she was facing, and I briefly told her about my journey and things that had really helped me. Something seemed to click. She thanked me over and over for inspiring her to make a change in her life. I was humbled beyond words leaving the car, considering it was only a three mile drive.

Getting out of the car, I saw the mechanic riding my bike around the lot. The exhaust system had arrived and had been installed, and the bike was rolling! Wow. All in less than 22 hours! They refused to let me leave without giving it a good wash first, and Don asked me to join him and his wife for lunch. I hardly ate, as listening to their story of 40 years in the motorcycle business and their involvement in the community was amazing. They listened to my story and about MS, and we discussed the current issues facing the motorcycle industry.

They refused to let me pay for lunch, and when I returned to say goodbye and collect my motorcycle, they refused to let me pay a single dime for any of the parts, service or the trailer ride. None of it. I had the guys who worked on the bike sign my fender, slapped a Generations 3 Motorsports decal on the bike, and we all shook hands. The staff took a photo of me and the bike in front



of the store and then returned to their daily business activities as if it were just another day for them.

I was a bit overcome and embarrassed by my initial fears of being exploited, financially burned or taken to the cleaners. Purely by accident, I was able to meet some incredibly decent people who just wanted to help me out when I needed it the most. I rode away, choked up, grateful my near miss with death had turned out to be another amazing lesson about the kindness and compassion of strangers.

I was able to pay it forward in a small way the very next day, as traffic slowly inched past a fresh accident in Durham, North Carolina. The van was smoking, smashed up in the front, facing the wrong direction halfway in the passing lane and pressed against the jersey barriers. As I passed, I saw a woman propped against the barrier just behind the wrecked van. The police were not on the scene yet, and surprisingly for the amount of afternoon commuter traffic, not a single driver had stopped to help her.

Pulling over was mechanical for me. I never gave it a second thought. I'm not trained in medical response, but I could tell she was a bit shaken and scared. She kept repeating where she was to the 911 operator and that another vehicle had hit her. The traffic made it loud, and because English was not her first language, she was having difficulty. I understood her answers but the operator did not. I motioned for her to give me the phone and I took over the call. After hanging up, I just tried to show

compassion. She had a bump on the head and sore legs and arms from the airbag. She kept trying to get up and look over the van but I encouraged her stay put. I calmed her down a bit and kept telling her it was going to be ok.

It was another ten minutes before rescue arrived, and when they began to assess her condition, I spoke with a trooper and then quietly departed the scene. It wasn't anything more than doing the right thing, but boy did it make me feel good to show a little compassion to a stranger when they needed it. It also made me sad to realize how often I'm too busy to do so.

The keyboard brandishing evils of this world are trying to turn us against each other with fear, distrust, hate and bullying, hoping to destroy our country. It's not real. Stop watching the media feeds, and you can lower your cholesterol and blood pressure while losing the fear and distrust of others.

I started this million mile journey because I felt I had a limited time and a progressive disabling disease, but I am experiencing so much more about the true goodness of people around the world, and it has been an incredibly positive adventure. I challenge you, no matter what obstacles you face in your life, to unplug and take a trip, take chances, learn the truth about the people of our world and mostly, #DARE to CARE! ■ ABILITY

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Raising the Human Vibration

For some reason, so many of us are going through horrific challenges. It feels as though the universe is throwing curve balls at an unbelievable speed, and just when we think we can come up for air, we are hit again. From what is happening globally, nationally or personally, none of us are spared in what we have to process on a daily basis. And yes, on top of everything else, Mercury is in that awful retrograde.

My heart is holding so many friends in a cloak of love, light, and spiritual strength. I am personally so grateful for all that I have been given in life.....*especially* for the challenges and pain. Why? Because it has allowed me to feel compassion and love for others. The gift of all pain is in the “present” of feeling it so that we can heal and help others to do the same.

For those who do not care or feel genuine love for others, they’re equivalent to a new car, running on empty. It may look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside it is an empty vehicle going nowhere. Sometimes the best thing we can do for ourselves when we are struggling with our own pain, is to help others with their pain. In other words, getting out of “ourselves” and being able to help someone else actually is helping ourselves as well.

Unfortunately, we are living in a world that is screaming “ME! ME! ME!” And that is a part of the problem that we experience in finding solace for anyone. As soon as we are able to shift that “me” energy, then we will find our own pain being alleviated as well. For example, if we are overwhelmed by financial hardship, we can lend someone our time and listen to their concerns and pain (no \$\$ involved). This allows our heart and mind to be in a “giving” way, rather than “taking” and feeling broke and worthless.

When we take the time to help others, we lessen our sense of hopelessness. I’ve noticed on social media that a lot of people are sick of hearing “you are in our thoughts and prayers”. And it is not necessarily because they do

not believe in God or the power of prayer, but rather that it excludes ourselves from doing anything further to solve the problems or alleviate the pain. So, if we are going to pray for someone, lets also pray that each of us are given the awareness of what we personally can do to help others as well.

Praying for others is a way of asking God, or the universe, or the higher power to care for the person or situation we are praying for. However, if we are not willing to do our own part to truly care (and sometimes taking formidable action), then our prayers do not really carry the belief that anything can actually be done.

In the process of raising the human vibration, we must daily seek awareness in what each of us can do in raising the “human” condition. We may not be able to cure the cancer that a friend has, but we CAN call them, bring comfort to their journey. We may not be able to save someone’s home from going into foreclosure, but we CAN help them to look into options and give them emotional support.

Also, we cannot turn the clock back and bring back all the lives that we lost in the senseless shooting, but we CAN seriously look at our gun laws and make a real effort to lessen the violence that we face on a daily basis. In shaming the students for the marches, we are truly in denial of the pain and suffering, and all we care about is ME ME ME.

For me personally, I was raised to believe that God helps those who help themselves. So if I really expect God to help me in life, I must help others in life in any way that I can. Being there for someone else opens doors and pathways. Being there for only ourselves and our own needs will not open any doors, pathways or even windows. Let’s all contribute to raising the human vibration – do something, *anything*, in helping someone today! ■ ABILITY

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by Geri Jewell

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Garro H. Armen, PhD

The Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) first came into my realm of awareness when I saw Tom Hanks in a video on Facebook talking about COAF in support of its upcoming gala. Within months, a myriad of celebrities were cheerfully joining in videos on social media to give a shout-out to COAF. From Nicole Richie, Ariana Grande, John Stamos, Lori Loughlin, to Martin Short and Conan O’Brian who recently broadcast his humorous trip to Armenia exploring the culture, language, and cuisine. Name dropping aside, the campaigning and gala were successful and a wonderful amount of funds were raised for COAF.



Garo hanging out and dancing with his growing COAF community.

A quick read produced the following: COAF is a non-profit focusing on reducing rural poverty, through “education, healthcare, community and economic development”. What began in one village in the country of Armenia has expanded into 45 villages. Its method has been to use a “cluster village model” approach. This sparked my curiosity. Who was behind this operation? What was actually going on in bringing access to a country with such history and birth of globally influential minds, yet so much of its population isolated from information? This may be the right time to mention I was born in Armenia, along with many others, my family and I emigrated to the States fleeing the Soviet Union and seeking opportunity. A new trend has been settling in, a trend in which those with Armenia in their blood have been finding ways to contribute or permanently settle back where their roots were planted. I was pleased to have the opportunity to get to know the individual whose brainchild this is, Dr. Garo H. Armen.

Garos emanates efficiency. The first few minutes of conversation was spent on him gathering the blueprint of our chat. This was so he could provide thorough information in the most effective and easily digestible manner. He is the Chairman and Founder of COAF as well as the Chairman and CEO of Agenus. The company has spent

20 years committed to immuno-oncology, targeting the immune system to fight disease; we’ll dive into more of this in a bit.

BACKGROUND

Garos came to the United States when he was 17, he studied chemistry and went on to get his PhD in physical chemistry. With no prior background, chance and exposure led him to the financial market. He found himself leaving research to go to Wall Street, became a specialist in pharmaceutical technologies and subsequently, biotechnology. His career on Wall Street varied from banking to managing money. He then came across technology he felt seemed to address the problem of cancer fundamentally as a complicated disease. When Garos mentions technology he is referring to “individualized cancer vaccine technology because cancers are individually distinct from person to person”. This got him interested enough to start Antigenics, now known as Agenus.

The idea of COAF came about on Garos’s visit to Armenia where he recognized a need. In rural Armenia, access to information or technology has been quite difficult to say the least. He explains, “At this time the objective of COAF is to empower children, the youth, and the overall



Agenus is curing previously incurable cancer patients.

population so that they can take charge of their own future. That’s the primary objective. We do this by a wide range of programs, from education to healthcare to social structure.”

ADDRESSING NEEDS

At a time when intervention was limited, and chemotherapy was nonexistent, Garo’s mother had lived through and died of cancer at the age of 47. He feels even when chemotherapy was introduced it “was not really a fundamental way of addressing cancer”. When he came across this technology in 1993, a technology he felt strongly enough could turn out to be a solution, he pursued it. After 24 years he thinks we are on the path to solving cancer, “I’m not referring to inadequate treatments, but cures”.

THE FIRST VILLAGE

During Garo’s first visit to a local school in a village, he was shown how treatment would work. He felt the situation was painful and unsafe to continue this way. “At that time I thought that if we simply addressed the school issue we would solve it, bit by bit we discovered that things weren’t that simple.” After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of Armenia, there was a palpable deterioration in the education system. Garo saw a dire need for repair “not just

physical construction but also reteaching teachers how to teach, administrators how to run a proper school, empowering young children and students, how to learn. Because they were going down the wrong path.” He felt COAF’s approach was holistic and addressed issues fundamentally.

Garo and his team quickly discovered major problems with the healthcare system. “We had to do the same all over in healthcare, first the physical infrastructure and then training nurses and doctors how to treat patients, to teach parents and children how to conduct healthy lifestyles”. Garo stresses importance of not going into these villages dictating how things should be done rather, collaboratively learning what the community feels its issues are and actively participating in the process.

Soon, trust between the villagers and COAF began to grow. The organization then began experiencing other issues in need of addressing: social, psychological, discrimination against children with disabilities. This is when they began developing customized programs, including specialists. Word spread to other villages, Garo explains, “We’re now at about 45 villages. It became clear to us that the rest of the Armenian landscape, some 900 villages in total, needed help. The



question then was, we spent 14 years to reach 45 villages, are we going to spend a hundred years to reach the rest of Armenia? That wasn't really practical. So we developed this concept of SMART".

SMART

COAF's first SMART center has been built in northern Armenia, a 20-acre campus in Lori. "SMART is an experimental model to see if we can have a multiplying effect much faster than doing village by village" explains Garo. Strategically located in a major through-way, the objective is to use modern communications technology and high-speed Internet to access the larger part of the global population and make connections otherwise impossible. This is also an opportunity for locals to exchange their knowledge, including unbiased free-thinking ideas. For instance, Garo expresses, that "There is a growing drive to promote innovation. Some of the more progressive companies, not just technology companies, biopharmaceutical companies and others, are setting up innovation centers. One of the objectives of setting up an innovation center is to populate them with groups of individuals who are not biased with corporate culture, because even though some of the corporations do wonderful things, they erect or transmit biases that prevent people from thinking freely". Garo sees the

value of the exchange of information, knowledge, and skills thinks that's why, "SMART would be a fantastic experiment to see what can be created away from the urban environments and the corporate environments that we are so obsessed with today".

With a staff of over 190 professionals working with COAF in a number of villages and 20 newly on board just for SMART, their numbers in various fields are growing. Garo emphasizes the organization being highly integrated with centers of excellence in education, healthcare, psychosocial and economic development.

OVERCOMING PREJUDICE

How do you overcome biases and prejudices associated with disabilities? Garo feels education is critical. "When you educate young people about these issues, the outcomes are fantastic, because what we see is initiatives by them that maybe even Western programs haven't thought about on how to overcome these biases and issues and help these children who have disabilities. Some of them are physical handicaps; others are non-physical. What you see is an ecosystem developing where they become a part of a family." Garo notices a more harmonious society when these prejudices are dealt with. He does not claim to be able to deal with this in every single house-



The beautifully designed SMART Center in Lori, Armenia.

hold but does think the equilibrium is tilting in our favor. When good outcomes are seen, others emulate them, and he sees this behavior occurring.

IMMUNOTHERAPY & AGENUS

I was curious to know about the types of cancer showing most reaction to the immunotherapy. Garo explains cancer is an individualized disease, every person's cancer is unique, down to its DNA: the mutations driving each person's cancer are specific generally to that person. This is what led him to the decision he made in 1993, "The only way you could successfully battle cancer, the only way, was through the immune system, because the immune system has a phenomenal ability of being able to direct the armies of the individual's immune cells to specific cancers, specific infections, and so on". He admits to being a bit naïve when they began this journey, and the science wasn't as developed at the time. "Twenty-four years later, we know a lot about the science, the biology of the disease and the immune system. We know today, for example, the most effective immunological means of targeting and destroying cancer is with the right combinations of agents. Those combinations will vary from cancer to cancer, from individual to individual. They'll vary." Garo mentions the focus of differentiating treatments

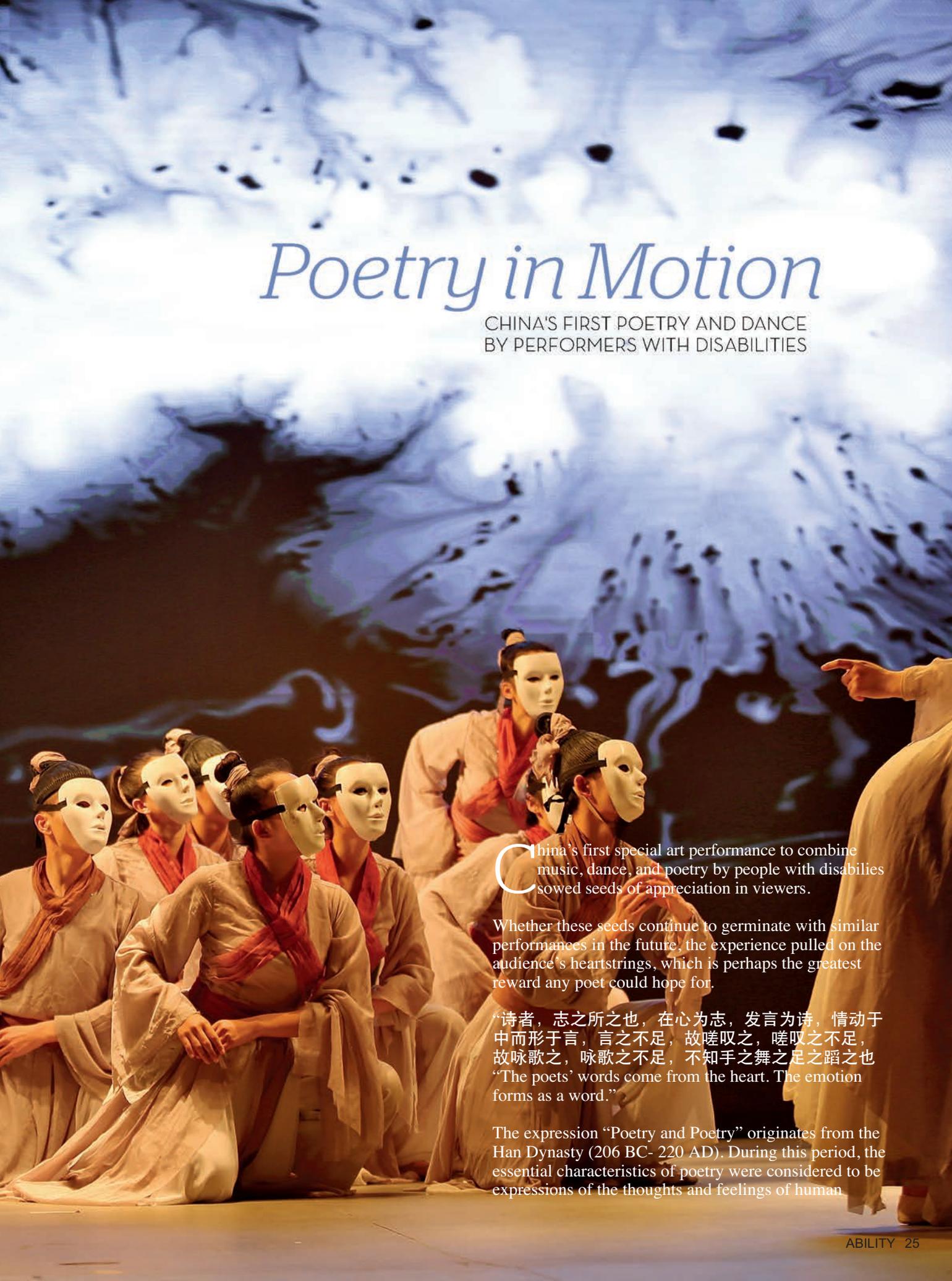
from cures. "A lot of treatments were approved in the U.S. as treatments on the basis of slowing down the progression of cancer, sometimes by as little as a 14-day survival benefit. And nobody bothered to ask about the quality of life of the patient in those last 14 days." He says because of immunological treatments, cures are possible. For example, Stage IV metastatic melanoma, "50% of melanoma is essentially cured today". Garo expects tremendous progress being made every year at Agenus in curing previously incurable cancer patients.

Dr. Garo Armen travels to Armenia at least six times a year, and he has seen the outcome of being hands on, trusted, and the respect needed in order to use his information and resources to enhance the quality of life of a community. With COAF and Agenus, he continues to use his personal experiences, privileges, and acquired knowledge to share with those that may benefit. ■ **ABILITY**

by Lia Martirosyan
Co-Founder of ABILITY Corps: promoting inclusion & diversity

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Poetry in Motion

CHINA'S FIRST POETRY AND DANCE
BY PERFORMERS WITH DISABILITIES

China's first special art performance to combine music, dance, and poetry by people with disabilities sowed seeds of appreciation in viewers.

Whether these seeds continue to germinate with similar performances in the future, the experience pulled on the audience's heartstrings, which is perhaps the greatest reward any poet could hope for.

“诗者，志之所之也，在心为志，发言为诗，情动于中而形于言，言之不足，故嗟叹之，嗟叹之不足，故咏歌之，咏歌之不足，不知手之舞之足之蹈之也”
“The poets' words come from the heart. The emotion forms as a word.”

The expression “Poetry and Poetry” originates from the Han Dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD). During this period, the essential characteristics of poetry were considered to be expressions of the thoughts and feelings of human



beings and the spirit world. As the first special art performance by people with disabilities attempted to integrate music, dance, and poetry, it showcased an even more emotional side of poetry. The actresses who are deaf used their body movements to create a creative background and to showcase the cultural context of each poem. The performers who could not move used their language skills to convey the charms and subtleties of the poetic words. Together, they complimented and fit together well.

This drama, created by the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe, featured three different Chapters of poems acted out in special artistic performances. From the first Chapter called "Why do People Write Poems," to the second chapter, when it becomes clear why people today should learn about ancient literature. The last chapter focuses on the legacy of traditional culture and classical Chinese poetry. Since their first performance, the troupe has received invitations from numerous primary and secondary schools throughout Beijing. The students responded deeply to the charms of the poetry and gained a more in-depth understanding of their culture.

Why write poetry? The first act of the first chapter called "If the Poet had no Poetic Words," is represented by masked people who lived in ignorance. Although they were confused and exhausted, and the masks were restricting and made everyone frightened, this constraint also made them more eager to express themselves. Perhaps there are no better actors who can express the desire for expression than those who are deaf. It is even more effective when they move collectively as one, on stage, thus



making the dance appear more powerful and inspiring.

As society and culture developed, a rhythmic and emotionally linguistic form of poetry also emerged. It combined music and dance. As people began to recognize themselves in the poetry verses, they were inspired to express themselves. On stage, poets from different eras appeared in succession, which was challenging to portray for the actors who are deaf. In the past, they only needed to be dancers. But now they had to represent the words of the poems through dance in order to portray a deeper understanding of ancient poets Li Bai, Li Qingzhao and others.

Li Bai wrote,

"The lone sail sails away from the sky, the sky is empty, but we can see the flow of the Yangtze River."

In another passage, poet Su Shi's bitterness and frustration is evident when he writes,

"I hope people will live forever, a thousand miles away."

This also includes his thoughts on relatives and friends. Li Qingzhao, who is "miserable," is nostalgic over her late husband's death. She shows the desolation of her personal circumstances, but also speaks of concern over her country's destruction. The actor who played Li Qingzhao is deaf. Everyday he rehearses until midnight and then takes another two hours of his time to read and do research.



As fast-paced music plays, the actors who are deaf portray different poets on stage. As they do so, they must consider the rhythm instructions of the sign language teacher whilst also focusing on their performance. They cannot separate themselves from their roles. Works by famous poets such as Wang Wei, a Tang Dynasty Chinese poet and Ma Zhiyuan, a poet and playwright whose poetry “Senior Brothers in Shandong on September 9” to “Yue Jingling in Cold Rain,” and “Tian Jingsha Qiu Si,” sound even more emotional and poignant when performed by these actors.

Most of the themes are related to popular poems often seen in primary and secondary school textbooks, such as “Will Enter Wine,” “Difficulties in Roads,” “The House is Broken by the Autumn Wind,” and “Tenglu Bird House”. Students responded enthusiastically to the actors, to the music, and to the poetry readings, which captured these ancient poets’ anxieties, fears, and heroism. Also, in some cases, it helped showcase the poet’s journey while writing the poem, its back story, and even the historical context.

During each 80-minute performance, the actors assembled their own costumes, applied make-up, and set up props. Even imperfect makeup did not affect their emotional expressions. But because of the limited number of actors in the art troupe, those who are deaf needed to play numerous roles. In one of the scenes, an actor who is deaf played his part without any mistakes. But to do so, the effort required 100 times that of someone without a disability. Although actions can be imitated, the portrayal of emotions in each must be felt. The audience can

sense the challenges these actors face on stage, which makes their talent and abilities all the more appreciated.

As to why we study ancient poetry, the second Chapter vividly conveys the meaning of the subject. In this chapter, it was as if the ancient poets Li Bai and Li Qingzhao were both in wheelchairs and had time travelled to the modern world. Students like Liu Shijia, who previously had no interest in ancient poetry, became intrigued by the performances because they cleverly incorporated students’ hobbies and favorite games, which helped the students learn the poetry. Liu Sijia, who used lots of slang, suddenly understood the value of learning poetry for its concise language, meticulous composition and abundance of emotions.

Under the guidance of the actors, the students were given the opportunity to read the poems aloud, and they still cannot forget the euphoria they felt. The seemingly odd and unusual layout and set up of the stage underscored just how fast paced everyone in society is today.

When, as a society, we started devoting hours to the internet and internet novels, this changed our reading habits and fostered a kind of uncaring attitude towards traditional culture. Some say poetry is divorced from our modern times. But when the actors stood on stage, performing a poem from over 1600 years ago, they managed to link the old to the new. Even though times have changed, and life is different, peoples’ feelings and concerns remain the same. The third Chapter is about the theme of inheritance. When the actress who is deaf recited the poems in her unclear, yet somewhat clumsy voice, it was so shocking and poignant that it is almost impossible to describe.

As the first staged special art play to integrate music, dance, and poetry performed by people with disabilities, the performance was extremely moving, whether it was because the actors pushed beyond their physical limitations or because of the touching scene in front of them, or because of a certain poem that highlighted their love and sentiment for their home country or because the play talked about human fate and destiny. When the audience listened to the actors read the poems aloud, even without historical knowledge, a poetic seed was sown in their hearts. The future of that seed doesn’t matter. Whether it continues to germinate or not, hearts were touched in those moments, which may be exactly the response the poets were looking for all those years ago. ■ ABILITY

by Wang Yumeng

Photography by Zhang Heyong



This story is part of a series of articles published as an exclusive editorial exchange between China Press for People with Disabilities & Spring Breeze and ABILITY Magazine

STANDING OUT

I retired my son's file today. He is 17 years old and a junior in high school. Together we attended his annual review. After hearing the results of his educational and psychological evaluations, reviewing his progress report and hearing the news that he finally passed the math portion of the state mandated assessment (MCAS—a requirement for graduation), I told my son how proud I was of him and stated to the team that it was my feeling that he was no longer eligible for special education services. I noticed a few sideways glances between team members followed by an uncomfortable silence which I think was due to my long history with this public school system; I have a bit of a reputation of being one of those challenging parents. I had been fighting aggressively off and on for so many years on my son's behalf that moving out of services was not something they expected me to consider much less recommend. One by one team members agreed that my son's "disability" had all but disappeared and that simple accommodations would see him through his Junior and Senior year. I had anticipated this moment, I had stepped out of his academic life awhile back, he had really come so far and I was incredibly proud of him. He has become an independent learner; intelligent, creative, conscientious, quirky for sure, and not without his obstacles. However, he has learned what his obstacles are and can either avoid or accommodate, depending upon the situation. My son's name is Mack, and oddly, he is the one boy out of my four that I worry the least about now.

The file that I held on tightly to as I left the meeting, is old and thick. It used to be dark green with plastic hook inserts for hanging purposes. It is now a very pale pea green and feels fuzzy when touched. The inserts have long since disappeared and a half torn visitors pass is permanently stuck to the bottom of the file. I have carried this file with me to each team meeting since kindergarten, 13 years ago. My memories of those first meetings are still so vivid, vivid and real enough for that feeling of worry and heart ache to resurface. Kindergarten for Mack began benignly. He seemingly moved through the year without incident. However, later on in the year teacher concerns began to compile as it

appeared that my son was not developing his academic skills as expected. In the spring, I attended my son's first team meeting and listened carefully while the teachers rattled off a list of concerns that they felt were preventing him from keeping up academically with his peers. He can't pay attention, he doesn't know his letters, he can't sit still, he doesn't follow directions, he can't, he doesn't, he can't. Horrified, I remember wondering, is this how he is perceived at school; a failure, a problem, unteachable? Is this what my sweet and silly little boy faces when he walks into school each day? At home, Mack is busy, chatty, happy, and so so funny. I thought about a time when he was four years old. His brothers and I were in the car discussing what each wanted to be when he grew up. Mack chimed in, "I want to be a hobo". "Because I like trains," he said confidently. "You should be a conductor then", my oldest stated knowingly. "Nope, I want to be a hobo". I smiled, I get him, of course he would prefer the life of hobo versus conductor, he is my free spirit; if the window in the car was open, regardless of the weather, he would hang his head outside, hair blowing in the wind, eyes closed and a smile on his face. Later that day he told me that he really wanted a "stick and sack thing" that the hobo packs his clothes in. I told him that I was not sure if the stick and sack things were around anymore and explain the difference between the cartoon world and the real world; "Ok" he said, and toddled off happily.

I remember how alarmed I was at this meeting, not only because my child was struggling in school but because the teachers had waited all year to tell me that he was not making progress. When I asked if they had any recommendations, they said; "testing" (ok, but what and by whom), "medication" (yikes), possibly accommodations or an IEP (OK, perhaps). When it was my turn to speak, I first addressed the comment regarding medication. I explained to the team that medication could have a bandaid effect in that it does not teach the child anything useful to counteract the presenting problem. I considered medication a last resort and that if at some point it becomes apparent that medication is needed, my son's doctor would be the one to make that recommendation. I

wasn't sure but I think I saw a few team members roll their eyes in response to my lecture. I also inquired about class placement for the following year. Team members unanimously agreed that he should move onto 1st grade (seriously?). I disagreed. How could he progress through 1st grade if prerequisite skills had not been established? "We" decided to table the discussion until the next meeting when testing was complete and recommendations on the table. Our second meeting was held near the end of the school year. I listened to the results of the various evaluations and then to the school's recommendations, which included a bizarre rationale for progressing onto 1st grade. Afterwards I carefully shared my opinion, sighting reason and research as to why my son should repeat kindergarten, but to no avail. They finally backed down when I stated, in an emotional, unprofessional and immature manner "over my dead body is he going to first grade, he is not ready". This was the first of many battles to come.

I remember my sons first few team meetings well because of the abundance of questions that filled my head, and fear that seemed to gather up in my throat. I was awestruck at how large the communication gap was between school team members and me. It seemed we disagreed on almost everything. I left those early meetings feeling isolated, patronized, overly emotional, and speech impaired. It didn't take long for me to realize that this uncomfortable and at times hostile experience was primarily due to where I sat among team members. For the first time since beginning my teaching career, I understood, first hand, what it was like to sit on the parents side of the table, opposite the professionals. I had attended hundreds of IEP meetings and remember thinking, was this how parents felt at the meetings I attended? The thought horrified me, but ultimately led me to evaluate my own professional interactions. This, I am certain of further developed my skills as an active listener and respectful communicator.

Many years since kindergarten, frustration would bring me to tears. I worried, poured over progress reports and testing, argued with school personnel, and acted like a mother bear lunatic until I felt somewhat satisfied that his IEP was appropriate, teachers understood his needs and were able to work effectively with him, and, most importantly, were positive in their interactions with him. And I always worried if I was doing enough on his behalf.

Some horrifying moments stand out: The day I discovered that my son had been missing recess for months because he was not finishing his work in class. The day I caved to pressure and placed him on a stimulant for focus and activity level. The day I realized that the medication I placed him on was the cause of the oral-motor tics that were surfacing. The hoops I had to jump through to obtain a proper neuropsychological evaluation. The moment I fully understood that a "warning" in a math MCAS score could prevent him from receiving a



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high school diploma. The day the team recommended he be “placed” in a substantially separate classroom environment because of his high need for support. This educational model even had its own name; a name that appears inspiring but connotes “welcome to the educational path of segregation, administrative convenience, and toward a certificate of attendance, not a diploma”. The day I took a huge leap of faith by enrolling him in a charter school that had only been in existence for one year (rather than the educational model with a name).

Yet, as hard as I advocated on behalf of my son, he would not have come this far without the help of so many talented and informed professionals. Some really grateful memories stand out: For the school psychologist who evaluated him early on and portrayed him as a smart, funny, unique and very capable boy and who carefully communicated aspects of his learning profile in a way that teachers could use the information and modify accordingly. During those early years, this report helped maintain an objective “read” on my sons ability, intelligence and potential, for team members. For the all the teachers who let the quirky, annoying and wiggly side of him slide and, who were able to adjust their expectations and modify their teaching style in a way that kept him moving forward. For all the teachers who, not only developed his academic skills but also protected his self esteem through positive interactions and high expectations. For the neurologist who revealed (among other things) that anxiety, not only attention, was an obstacle to accessing the curriculum. This evaluation came at a particularly dark time when both his progress and his silly social side was waning. This evaluation identified both his needs as well as his strengths and clarified for the team the elements of his school experience that had to be prioritized; positive, successful and nurturing. For his charter school math teacher who worked diligently to fill in the gaps before he moved to high school. She was also the one who travelled quite a distance to see him act out four lines in his first town play. She is now the principal of that Charter school. For his high school math teacher who brought his skill level up to the point where he did indeed pass math MCAS!

Some proud, happy and very funny moments stand out: When my son became a fluent and avid reader and his love of comic books and graphic novels helped him transition to other more mainstreamed books and educational texts. I always said “if he could just read math”. When he learned to accommodate his word retrieval problems through beautiful, descriptive and quite funny language; “you know Mom, that green stuff that grows up from the ground” (grass?) and “I love what you’ve done with your teeth” (braces!). When a friend asked him to attend an AA meeting at the town church as his support person. When he acquired a job mentoring a boy with autism. When he somehow managed to take 2 girls to the junior prom. I know as his Mom he is a kind, gentle and safe person, apparently the girls at his high school do as well!

As the years passed, team meetings lessened in intensity. We all learned something about one another and grew as humans and professionals; I learned not lecture at the table and to give opinions and recommendations a chance (let the data speak for itself) and they learned to listen and accommodate. Over the course of many years, I had several significant “aha” moments that have led to my son’s success; Stimulants may negatively impact anxious children. Expectations need to be adjusted, not lowered; get rid of the bar. Activities involving learning to read and reading for fun should be experienced separately. Mack struggled with reading early on and I worried that frustration over trying to sound out would tarnish his love of books. For a half a year, I lied every time I signed that reading log claiming that my he had read to me for 20 minutes each night. Instead, I was the one who did the reading. I selected chapter books that had an important message, were interesting, exciting and appropriate for all members of our family. I knew he would learn to read, in fact, it seemed to happen almost over night and his love of books has never waned. The strategy I chose to follow, was a personal one, appropriate given my family, but one I cared not to share with his team that year. The neuropsychological evaluation (not to be confused with the psychological evaluation) is an extremely useful assessment, when a team is at odds with one another and the concerns related to the child’s academic progress and overall well being are increasing. Typical peer models, least restrictive environment, and inclusion are all a right of passage, not something that has to be earned. I believe that the substantially separate model is outdated and an obstacle to diversity in the classroom and learning opportunities for all. There is no evidence to support that an all day self-contained classroom setting is needed, just because the child learns best given specialized instruction.

Beyond my horrific and grateful moments, my funny and “ah ha” memories, I have three “take aways” that I believe are in part responsible for my sons success: First, kindness, politeness and persuasiveness are indeed compatible. Second, we, as professionals need to remind ourselves that parents are so vital to the team process. I commonly describe a child’s team as a pizza pie; everyone gets a slice of responsibility, except the parent, who gets 2 slices. For it is the parents job to make sure the child is developing intellectually and is healthy, happy and feels good about himself at the days end. I took the latter responsibility very seriously. I was the self-esteem police. I made sure that anyone who had a job called Mack, must know that for every single annoying or challenging behavior there are 10 fabulous, funny and sweet things to notice and share about him. That he is a whole boy no matter the setting, not just a receptacle of academic content. At the end of the day, it is the parent who must look hind site, own the mistakes and carry the guilt during times when their child is struggling and obstacles interfering. Third, our nation is full of intelligent, creative

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professionals who care deeply about children. Yet, children are complicated, opinions differ (even among those on the same side of the table) and no one has all the answers. I tapped into my skill set when necessary, sought the advise of others, held on tightly to my instinct and stood my ground. Eventually team meetings became collaborative and productive, and the little bumps in the road barely catastrophic.

So, this brings me back to the day's meeting. I flip through some of the documents and one in the back of his "file" stands out. It is a vision statement I wrote in early elementary in preparation for an IEP meeting. It reads as follows:

For Mack:

To feel capable, intelligent (because he is) and positive about his unique learning style.

To maintain his wonderful creativity and friendliness.

To be fully included (with some supports in place) in all academic, social, and special activities offered to typical learners.

To become an independent learner.

To read for fun.

To develop coping and behavioral strategies in

response to sensory overload, frustration, difficulty attending and not feeling well.

To become independent with routine / daily expectations.

For the gap in academic performance to lesson versus widen.

To want to come to school because he perceives it as an exciting learning environment.

It has been 11 years since I had written that vision statement. I now reflect on the fact that my son has achieved and maintained every one of the goals that I set for him back in second grade. The goals are lofty, appropriate and attainable, yet they must have seemed peculiar to others as the acquisition of academics is not the focal point. Perhaps goals such as these, could be included in our rubric for defining and measuring school success. Because it is these bench marks; pride, motivation, flexibility, curiosity, confidence, self advocacy and the ability to cope when times get tough, that will see a child through high school and beyond, something ABC's and 123's can only partially do.

My name is Dr. Ann Filer, I am Mack's mom, a Special Education teacher and Board Certified Behavior Analyst. I am so proud of the young man my son has grown to become. Today is a happy day. ■ ABILITY





JESS ORCSIK

Good things come from Down Under. One in particular—the Focus On Ability Short Film Festival—celebrates films examining the abilities of people with disabilities. Now in its 10th year, the festival is the brainchild of Martin Wren, CEO of Nova Employment. Wren’s inspiration for the festival was to end bullying in schools by educating youth through personal stories. To help spread the word, he teamed up with famous Aussie actor Paula Duncan, known for her work in film and television and her support of people with disabilities. The festival encourages people of all talent levels, including first-time filmmakers, to create films that inspire and educate. Last year, 210 films were submitted from 19 countries, and the winners screened across Australia as well as New York, New Zealand and Africa. Recently, *ABILITY*’s Nancy Villere caught up with Jessica (“Jess”) Orcsik, the festival’s international marketing and entertainment ambassador and the daughter of actors Paula Duncan and John Orcsik. Orcsik spoke openly about the festival’s mission, its inspirational message, and her own journey as an actress and educator who grew up in the limelight.

'I REALLY HOPE SHE DOESN'T BECOME AN ACTRESS'

Paula's daughter makes her TV debut, but Mum has other ideas about the future

ON the set of Richmond Hill, they're all making a fuss of the new, brown-eyed, brown-haired little bombshell called Jessica.

It doesn't matter that Jessica is just four years old and the daughter of famous parents — Paula Duncan and John Orcsik — because she's taking her job seriously, although the truth might be that acting is much more fun than kindergarten.

And if she's got any ambitions to be a star like her mum and dad and Aunt Carmen, she has to cool them, at least until school or perhaps university is behind her.

"I really hope she doesn't become an actress," says Paula. "It's just the most insecure business to be in. She'd be much better off in archeology!"

Jessica, who has her father's dark good looks, makes her acting debut in Richmond Hill next month as Georgie Perez, who has to be reunited with her estranged grandmother (played by Tess Malton) when her mother is killed.

And to play Georgie, the writers called for a cute kid with short, dark hair, as befits the child of a Spanish father (Stephen Amadio) who, against his mother's wishes, marries an English girl.

Jessica certainly qualified as cute and dark — but she had long hair. So Paula, as any mum would understand, had to undergo the agony of watching Jessica's locks come tumbling off.

It's all part of the plot. When Constable Susan Miller (Peliccy Soper) and her colleagues first set eyes on young Jessica they think she's a boy!

"That was the hardest part of the whole experience," says Paula.

At 35 ("I've no inhibitions about my age"), Paula is a veteran of 16 years in the business, starting out as a teenager in *Certain Women* and Number 96, *The Young Doctors* and, most famously, policewoman Danni Francis for a marathon 500-plus episodes of *Cop Shop*.

"I was frightened of being type-



Paula Duncan and daughter Jessica... TV debut in Richmond Hill.

cast, of not being able to make a film because I was typecast as a 'soap opera actress'," she says.

"I was frightened of being put into a slot where people say, 'That's all you do'. But in the past two or more years I've proved to myself it's not true!"

When the Seven Network put up the shutters on *Cop Shop*, it delivered a gift-wrapped main chance to Paula. She seized it with both hands and set about showing that she was more than just a soaps star.

In two years she played a brothel madam in the movie *Jenny Kissed*

Me, a social worker in the telemovie *Matthew And Son*, a comedy and "other small roles" for the ABC, a "zany, mad twist" in *Prisoner*, and the sophisticated Ruth opposite her sister Carmen in a smash theatrical season of *Bilhe Spirit*.

"It's been wonderful," she says. "I don't feel typecast now. If I am, I don't mind, because I'm working!"

Story: Christopher Day
Picture: Phil Blatch

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Nancy Villere: How long did it take to launch the festival?

Ocsik: It took a while to build. My mum Paula Duncan, came on board several years ago. She is a very, very renowned Australian actress and has spent most of her life dedicating her time to supporting disabilities and many different charitable organizations. She was working back in the '80s in Australia when people were still institutionalized with disabilities, so she spent a long time being an advocate and trying to shape change. So when she got involved in the festival, she felt like it was marrying her two loves, which was film and obviously supporting people with disabilities.

And then being her daughter, watching her and the people we met really inspired me to want to make a difference. So Martin Wren brought me on board. I'm in the film industry and work internationally. I live here in Los Angeles and have spent the better half of about 14 years traveling back and forth, I think he wanted my help in branching us out into that international market and to really use this incredible power we have with film to change thoughts and perceptions of people around the world when it comes to people with disabilities. And rather than focus on what people can't do, we focus on what they can do. We focus on ability and the strength and power behind that.

Villere: What's the format of the festival?

Ocsik: You can enter just a five-minute short film that can be shot on your iPhone or be professionally shot. We welcome all people from any experience. That's the beauty of the festival. Your film just has to showcase the achievement or ability of a person with a disability. It can be in a short film or a documentary, but other than that, the creativity is open. We just want to see inspirational real stories about incredible people.

Villere: So the team or individual producing the film doesn't necessarily have to have a disability?

Ocsik: As long as the film celebrates that. We're inclusive of all. We obviously would love filmmakers who have disabilities; we'd love writers and cinematographers with disabilities. We'd love you to get involved. But we're inclusive, because our message is bringing unity together and making sure we all have the same message of inclusion and diversity and using this to educate people around the world. So I think the beauty or the power within education is when we use the word "inclusive," all people are welcome.

Villere: How does the judging work?

Ocsik: We have a large number of judges both Australian and international. They range from various different fields from casting directors, to directors, to producers, and members of Screen Australia, which is our



Parents Paula Duncan & John Orcsik

big film commission in Australia. Essentially, they cast their votes. We watch a film in a specific category, say it's a documentary category, and the specialist judges would put in a vote for five, four or three points for their top three or five films. And then the most votes wins. We try to be as fair as possible. That's why we like to have a big array of judges, because obviously there are so many different things in a film we want to look at. We want to look at the story, the cinematography, maybe the writing, and the actor. Is there a young breakout actor with a disability who wants an opportunity to step onto the platform? Obviously that inspires us too.

Is it a true story about someone's survival or achievements? We've had many incredible films submitted from across the world, including Africa. We've had films from India, America and Australia that are culturally-driven and various different things. We have big school involvement across Australia, and we'd love to see that continue throughout the US and in other countries as well where schools get involved and tell a story. That's incredible because we're seeing more young voices speak up, which is the kind of change we want to see. We just vote on what we're drawn to or what the individual is drawn to.

Villere: You mentioned categories like documentaries. How many categories do you have?

Orcsik: We've an international section, which would be one category, and a local section, and then within that there are subcategories: the most online votes, best documentary, best short film. This year we've introduced into our short film category best short film screenplay, so basically if you're writing a short, and you've written this incredible story, we want to see the actual screenplay, and we're going to offer some developmental writing programs to help develop more writers. Because when it comes to inclusion, writing is so important because writers write the stories and the characters, so we really want to see that aspect grow and be a focus. Especially to include people with disabilities in their stories.

Villere: How do most of the votes come in?

Orcsik: We either have votes in through our judges or online votes, so if you've entered a film, you can get all your friends and family to support you and vote online. We have multiple subcategories. Obviously best actor is another one. We're very big on supporting actors with disabilities and getting them more opportunities in the industry. That's something we would love to see grow.

Villere: All the entries are based on a short format?

Orcsik: Yes, short films and five-minutes in length. This year we have a great new sponsor with Screen Producers Australia, and they're going to be mentoring a young



Jared Hargreaves (Winner FOA 2017) & Jess



Top and bottom FOA red carpet 2107



Paula Duncan & Martin Wren

producer of either a documentary or a short film. We want to see these shorts be developed into feature film content, and we want our prizes to encourage and develop future talent and build bigger projects. We'd like them also reinvest prize money to create feature-length projects or expand a short film story into a feature film. This is the kind of thing we want to promote more of so we can see a bigger progress in our film industry with inclusion for people with disabilities not just within Australia but around the world. We need to expand the types of stories we tell, not just the sad, the negative, and the struggles. As a festival, we believe the power in what people can do is inspirational, and I think it's nicer for us to focus on that aspect. I think in life we always focus on the negative. That's what we're drawn to. We have so many incredible positives in life, and if we can help each other to focus on that, I think we can inspire people around the world. That's what I know my team would want for us and certainly what I want for us in the festival.

Villere: Your mother & father were actors? What was that like growing up? In the States there are a lot of issues growing up in a public family. What was that like in Australia?

Orcsik: It's the same. *(laughs)* If you're in the public eye, you don't have a lot of privacy. In my case we traveled and moved a lot. My parents were very, very famous in Australia, not here, so when they met, they

met on a massive television show at the time and obviously became an on-screen and off-screen couple. When I was born it was big news, because they were married, like, three times, for example, once on-camera as characters, once off-camera for a public wedding, where all their fans got to go to, and then a private wedding. That's how famous they were. So I was photographed at one day old in the hospital with a big thing written about me. People ask, "How was that?" And I'm like, "Well, I didn't really know anything different, so I guess it was what it was." But it's certainly been interesting moving to the States.

Villere: So in the States, nobody knows your past.

Orcsik: Yes and that's fine. It doesn't bother me. I still don't act because of fame. I act because I love it, because I like to—haha!—inspire people. That's my view. I've seen and done a lot that not every person has. In this life where you turn on the TV and you see something dark and scary almost every day, people need to feel inspired. People want to be inspired and feel good about themselves. People want to see and hear stories they can identify with. They want to feel like they can achieve anything. That's why I'm an actor. That's why I'm a producer. That's why I work in the arts. That's why I teach. That's why I work for a film festival. I want people to feel like they can do and be anything they want to be, despite whatever holds them back on



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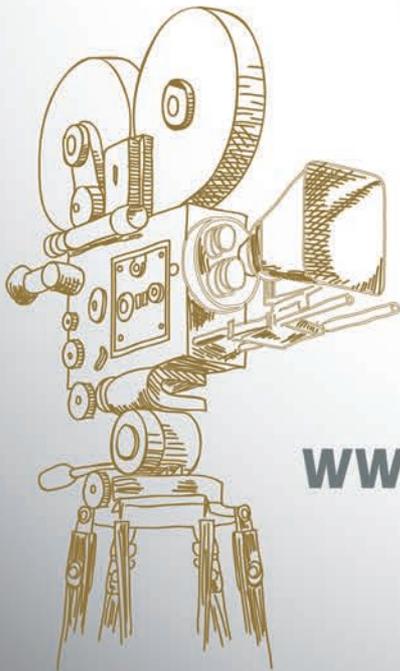
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Allen Rucker - Screen Writing Judge for FOA



John Lawson (International Winner FOA 2017) and Jason George



Paula & Jess on *The Daily Edition* TV Show promoting FOA

the inside. And that's got nothing to do with disabilities, that's just people. People are very tough on themselves. Everyone has something they struggle with. That's why I do what I do.

Villere: What do you think the number one fear of most people? This is something I just heard on a talk show, and the person said there was a survey done recently on the number one fear. What do you think it is?

Orcsik: Speaking in public? I don't know. I guess it would be the average of people saying they don't like to do things in public.

Villere: I think we've all heard it's speaking in public or fear of heights.

Orcsik: Oh, heights!

Villere: This person said it's a fear of birds attacking.

Orcsik: *(laughs)* No, I don't have that fear. I'm not afraid of heights either. I get a little nervous speaking in public, but I've had to speak in public since I was a kid, on talk shows, on TV. It doesn't scare me. In fact, I kind of like it, because it means people are listening to me, which means I can do something powerful. I was watching the Oscars last night and thinking, "That's why people get up and make certain speeches." Frances McDor-

mand didn't get up there and make her speech because she wanted people to skim over it. She wanted people to—again I'll use the word—be inspired. She wanted to inspire all those women in that room and in their homes, she wanted them listen to what she had to say. When you have the floor, it means people are going to take note of what you have to say. And if you have something valuable to say, something worth listening to, then it's a nice place to be heard. It's a hard thing for most people to want to be seen and heard. I worked really hard on it. *(laughs)*

Villere: Looking at your life in Australia as a public notable and at your life here, which do you think is a happier space in your psyche?

Orcsik: There isn't a happier place. It's just my journey. I have a home and birth country, and I'm building a bigger one here. This is only the start of my journey here. It's an easy thing to think you can compare them, but in essence, I was born there and lived 30-odd years of my life there, whereas here, I've just started. I've gone back and forth for 14 years. But I'm really starting the next journey, and who knows what the next 20 or 30 years will bring? We could have a very different conversation in 20 or 30 years. There's no happier place. It's just a different part of my life, a different stage, and a different journey.

Villere: I ask because there are many people who feel

they would be happier with fame or with money, and in a sense, you're able to live both lifestyles. I was wondering if you look back at yourself and ask, "Am I happier in that particular reality?"

Orcsik: (*sighs*) I think with more fame and money comes more complications. I think it's harder to live a regular life. In saying that, there is also a power that comes with fame and money. With great power comes great responsibility. I want to be heard, so I fight to have a platform where people will listen to what I have to say especially if I really want to create change in life. I want to be remembered for something bigger than myself. I don't know what that is. I just want to know that when people think of me, that's what they think of. Fame and money help to build that platform, where people know you lent a hand in changing the world in some way, in trying to make it a better place.

But personally, it's not everything. There's no golden ticket. The personal struggles can be very real, which is why a lot of people don't deal with it well and end up struggling with mental health and various other issues, because there's a lot of responsibility that comes with it. I think when it comes to me, I'm Jess. I'm an ordinary person. I've lived in an extraordinary world, and I'm OK with just being me, whether I have money or I don't have money or fame, but obviously, with my dreams and my aspirations, it would be great to know I do have that on my side, so I can reach more people. That is unfortunately the way the world works.

Villere: I find it very inspirational. (laughter) Tell me about your mom and dad—the actors Paula Duncan and John Orcsik?

Orcsik: My mum has won seven Logie awards, which is the equivalent of about seven Emmys. My dad has been acting for his whole life and he runs one of the largest film and television schools for actors in Australia called TAFTA. I also run a film and TV school here for international actors and teach them all about how to work, live, survive and grow here and not go home crying because it doesn't work out the way they thought it would. (*laughs*) Life in LA can do that. I've done that as well. It's interesting. My family shaped me. And they're very inspirational people. I'm grateful my mum opened me up to this world of hers, because I love it.

Villere: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Orcsik: I have a brother. He has nothing to do with the film industry whatsoever. I think he saw it and went, "No, that all looks like too much struggle for me. You guys can have it." So he went into IT, does computer forensics and works for the government. He has a stable income. (*laughs*) But yeah, it's an awesome thing. I always describe my family as dysfunctional-functional. Two actors in one household was a lot. They're divorced now, but they're the best of friends and have been for

many years. I'm also pretty lucky to have that, too.

Villere: Whom do you love more?

Orcsik: I love them both equally! (*laughter*) They're great people. You know, when I talk about my viewpoint, it comes from the experiences in my life. I think many people assume when they hear the word "disability," even the general public, they go straight for what they can see—the physical disability. But the reality is that a lot of us in the world struggle with mental health issues, and those things aren't always on the surface. For someone like myself, growing up I struggled with a lot of depression and anxiety. I still do, as I just started talking about it I felt it come on. (*laughs*)

When I was younger, I had issues with suicide. I became a youth spokesperson for youth suicide because I wanted to be a voice for other people who might not know how to speak about what they're feeling. That was the hardest thing for me, that I couldn't communicate my pain to other people. You couldn't see my struggle on the surface, but it was there.

I speak about people's struggles because we all have something in life that blocks us from living our life to the fullest potential. The reason I became so involved in being a voice for people is because I've gone through many different things in my life that I've been unable to communicate about. Either because people wouldn't understand it or wouldn't accept it. People sometimes don't understand feelings of suicide. People think your being selfish but it's because you feel you're so alone, that you've got no one to turn to. It's a very tough situation. We're living in a day and age where we should be able to talk about things that happen to us and be proud of all the wonderful things that we do and experience, good and bad, because that's who we are in our journeys and our stories. We need to communicate these things that are hardest for us and not feel fear of judgment because of it.

Villere: Did you find counseling, with a psychiatrist?

Orcsik: Yes. It was a dark time. I went to some family friends who started talking to me and through counseling I worked through it. I kept it hidden for a while.

Villere: How old were you?

Orcsik: Eleven. It's very hard to communicate that to adults. But you work through it. My mum suffered with episodic depression where it would flare up if something happened in her life that could bring her down. I think maybe that transpired to me in my life. But you just have to keep going. You have to keep going until you can feel whatever the next stage is of your life. I guess that's me with everything that I've done is getting myself to this point where I want to be a voice because I think people can make change. Look at Oprah, she inspires women all over the world. Ellen inspired gay women all over the



world. This is how we create change, by speaking our stories and letting people know they're not alone and inspiring other people to do great things and keep on fighting, no matter what.

Villere: I'm glad you shared that.

Orcsik: Having gone through what I went through, I wish someone had spoken to me and told me I wasn't alone. Do you know what I mean? I felt alone. So now I have a voice that can say, "You are a wonderful person. What you do is inspiring. Who you are is inspiring," I would say that to one of my actors. It doesn't matter to me your race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or if you have a disability or not. To me you're an inspiring person because of your story. And that's my message. We all have the ability to inspire. And if we can instill that into this world full of violence and world war, it might be a better place.

I think what helps people get to another stage in their life is again knowing there's someone else who's willing to stand up and talk about their story. It's not comparing my story to your story. It's just saying, "This is my story, and this is why I do what I do." If I can help make you feel stronger and help you achieve whatever you need to achieve in your life, regardless of whatever that is, then I've done my job. Then I've helped somebody. With my film and TV school, I would say that to one of my actors who's struggling, who doesn't think they're good enough or fearful they'll never achieve anything.

I'd remind them how incredible and talented they are. It's a nice feeling to have someone believe in you, and it only takes one person to believe in you in life for you to achieve anything. And it only takes one person to listen to you for you to know that you're not alone. And it only takes one person to say, "This is how I feel." It's amazing what that does for people.

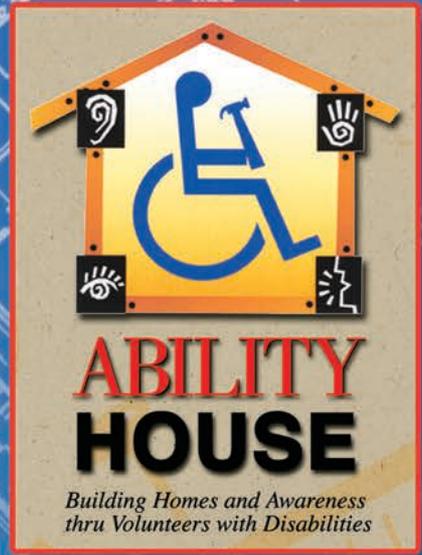
It is sad not everyone has that skill, but that's why those of us who do have a voice and aren't afraid to be seen and heard must to express ourselves. Especially to people who tell you "You shouldn't say this," "You shouldn't do this." "But that's exactly when I want to say it!" *(laughs)* There are enough people in the world being told they can't say something or can't do something. That's what we spend our lives focusing on. We spend a lot of time in life telling people what they can or can't do. For me, I like sitting on the other side and saying, "Why don't we try the opposite? Why don't we say 'You can' and see what kind of energy that gives someone?" If you can go home with a smile on your face and feel good, that's great. That's such an achievement.

Life experience goes a long way.

Villere: But it's good to get some input.

Orcsik: Yes, exactly. ■ ABILITY

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The ABILITY House program outreaches to volunteers with disabilities to help build accessible homes for low income families. We are currently seeking corporations, organizations and churches to sponsor more homes. This award-winning program builds homes and awareness, changing the lives of everyone involved.

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katherine BEATTIE

A few months ago, my friend Jan Hoag e-introduced me to Katherine Beattie. She said, “I can’t believe you two haven’t met! You have all the same life experience!” Now I’ve never met someone with my life experience in Hollywood, so I was looking forward to seeing what Jan meant. As soon as we connected, Katherine said she is vegan and suggested we meet at my favorite vegan Mexican restaurant. Needless to say, I liked her already. That night, I met an extraordinary, intelligent, fierce, ambitious, fun young woman, who literally did have almost all the same unusual life experiences. We connected in a way that I’ve never connected with someone before. We swapped stories, talked about our experiences, challenges, surgeries, obstacles, losses, hopes, dreams. I noticed we had the same drive, vitality, spunk, and even had many friends in common. Kindred spirits indeed, and both making our mark in Hollywood. I was so excited to know there is another warrior woman in entertainment, speaking up, showing up and making sure her voice is heard. Katherine worked her way up to the writers room of a major network franchise, and is already changing television. When Katherine and I get our way, disability will be an accepted and welcomed part of diversity in entertainment, and will be depicted in a way that is a lot closer to our reality.

Eileen Grubba: What drew you to the entertainment industry?

Katherine Beattie: Growing up in La Canada, I had a lot of friends whose parents were writers, actors or producers, so show business wasn’t this far off, mysterious thing for me. It was just another job people had. My dad used to work in the White House Office of Advance, and he would often run President Clinton or Vice President Gore’s trips to Los Angeles. Through his work he developed relationships with the people at *The Tonight Show*, and eventually I



got to hang out back stage when my dad would have a candidate on the show. I started seeing my favorite musicians and actors and thought, “wow, this is really cool! If I work here I can interact with all these creative people on a regular basis.”

Grubba: What was your first job in Entertainment?

Beattie: My first job in entertainment was Human Interest Production Associate at *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. I interned at the show between my Junior and Senior years of college and had such a great time, I couldn’t wait to go back as soon as I graduated. Human Interest was a great experience because we did all our own booking, research, and producing, so it was like diving into the deep end when I was 22 years old.

Grubba: Tell us about your journey to the writing room. How did you get your first writing assignment & how did you become a staff writer? Who gave you your first big break?

Beattie: My journey to the room was a long one. Though I’ve always enjoyed writing, it wasn’t until after I started working at *Ellen* that I realized my heart was in scripted TV. I was a tremendously lazy student in high school, so I never thought that something you did in school, like writing, could be a career. Once I realized it was an actual possibility, I quit *Ellen* – which was so scary since it was and still is one of the biggest talk/variety shows ever – to

go back to UCLA Extension to study TV Writing.

I’d actually consider my first “big break” to be getting a job as an office PA on *Californication*. Anyone out there who’s trying to become a writer knows those jobs are not easy to get! From there, I got promoted to Script Coordinator on the show, and did many different assistant jobs when that was on hiatus. I did several other shows as Script Coordinator until I landed at *NCIS: New Orleans*. I got another big break when our first Showrunner, Jeffrey Lieber, gave me a co-story credit with him on an episode in season 2. I continued on as the Script Coordinator when our current Showrunner, Brad Kern, took over, and got another co-story credit on the season 3 finale with Chris Silber.

Grubba: Tell everyone about your exciting current job.

Beattie: I’m currently a Staff Writer on season 4 of *NCIS: New Orleans*. For those readers who may not know, Staff Writer is the bottom of the ladder when it comes to TV writers, so there’s nowhere to go but up!

Grubba: What’s it like to be a staff writer on such a huge network show? Is it fun? Stressful? Fulfilling?

Beattie: I’m probably the luckiest Staff Writer on television. The Upper-Levels on our show are very supportive of young writers so I had a lot of experience “in the room” before I got staffed. The biggest difference for



me once I got staffed was that I got a regular chair at the table and didn't need to worry about running out to my assistant work every time the phone rang. Having said that, I think I find it a lot less stressful than a typical Staff Writer would. Being such a hit, the network has high expectations of us, so there always is that pressure to deliver... but lucky for me I thrive under pressure. And speaking of being a network hit, it's been so great to go from working on all these cable shows that I loved but no one watched, to a show I love that 14 million people also happen to watch!

Grubba: What qualities are most important when trying to land a staff writing job?

Beattie: The thing about TV rooms is the staff spends all day together sitting around a table. With that in mind, I think one of the most important qualities any writer can possess is being cool and easy to get along with. As a staff writer, I think you need to be a good listener, someone who is going to support the upper-level writers in their pitches, and not someone who is going to pitch problems without solutions or someone who is going to pitch an idea that's clearly not thought out just to have your voice heard. All that does is slow down a room. And of course, the biggest one is hustle. Hustle, hustle, hustle. No one should be outworking the staff writer (except maybe the showrunner, but staff writers better be trying to make their showrunners' jobs easier in any way they can)!

Grubba: You have exceptional life experience, how does it inform your work? Do you use your personal experiences in your writing?

Beattie: I use a lot of personal experiences in my work, but not the ones people would think. A mentor of mine once told me, when we were talking about "writing what you know" that I had to write something about using a wheelchair. My first thought was, "Why? Why is that interesting? It's really just a means to get around." So I went and wrote a father-daughter political comedy, because that's what I know. With more distance from that conversation I see what she meant. Being a disabled writer gives me a unique vantage point, and in a world where the representation of disabled people is usually just one trope after another, I've gotta be the one to shake things up.

Grubba: You mentioned you most love comedy, yet you are working on a network drama. Do you sneak comedy in wherever you can? Are you able to write other projects outside of your job?

Beattie: One of the best things about working on *NCIS: New Orleans* is we have great comedic actors! I think we all love writing jokes, especially for Chill Mitchell and Rob Kerkovich, but our show being a little more character based than most procedurals gives us opportunities for comedy or lighter moments with all our cast members.



I write as much as I can outside of work... everything from family drama to half-hour cable comedy. I don't feel the need to fit squarely into one box.

Grubba: Do you plan to become a showrunner? And if so, what kinds of shows?

Beattie: That's my ultimate goal. My favorite shows are the ones that blend genres like *Californication* or *Catastrophe*, or recently, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. But would I be mad if I ended up running a network procedural? Absolutely not. I love it all.

Grubba: How do you feel about performers with disabilities (PWD's) playing disabled roles in film & TV?

Beattie: My feelings on this issue have definitely evolved. I used to think "well, the part should go to the best actor for the role..." but that's such a cop out. If there is a disabled role on film or TV, it must go to a performer with a disability. End of story. Not only do PWD's bring so much more authenticity to the role, but Hollywood wouldn't (with a few glaring exceptions) cast someone outside of any other minority group to play a minority role anymore. And yet, when it happens with disabled roles, no one bats an eye. If you're going to exploit a character's disability for a story point, at least give a disabled performer a chance to work.

Grubba: How do you feel about PWD's playing other

roles, not scripted for disability?

Beattie: This!!! Sometimes I get dinged for not writing more disabled roles into my scripts, but that's because PWD's can and should be able to play a myriad of roles that have nothing to do with their disability. If I write a show about a lawyer and an actor who is Deaf or has short stature or limited mobility or whatever comes in and gives a killer audition, you'd better believe I'll fight for that person to get the role. But because I've seen that these performers so seldom get the chance to even audition, I'd like to start including more disability specific roles and story lines in my work from now on.

Grubba: Is the industry open to writer's with disabilities? Do you feel their voices are needed, and why?

Beattie: This is a tough question. I don't think the industry is openly against writers with disabilities, but unconscious bias even from well meaning people is difficult to get around. Many of the diversity programs out there look at a person's race, gender or sexual orientation without giving any consideration to disability status. This is crazy considering that disabled people are not only the largest minority group, but they have the most literal and figurative barriers to entry of any group out there.

A few years ago I did a pilot with a writer who has been writing TV since before I was born. This person also uses crutches. I found out that I—at the time simply the

writers' assistant—was the first other disabled person they had ever seen in a writers room. Now that I'm in the WGA, I've heard from more and more people that they've never worked with a writer with a disability of any kind. And yet, there are so many out there. Certainly makes you think.

And yes, their voices are needed. The same way women's voices and LGBTQ voices and POC voices are needed. We need people with different life experiences and viewpoints to bring authenticity to writing.

Grubba: How has being a woman with a visible disability affected the way people treat you?

Beattie: I think women and people with disabilities tend to get written off in general. That's why I think confidence is key. Confidence is hard to ignore.

Grubba: Have you ever tackled society's misconceptions of disabled people, even if in subtle ways, in a network show?

Beattie: I think the *NCIS: New Orleans* writers have done a fantastic job with this. We've had disabled veteran characters on our show dealing with the trauma of war and just living their lives, which is shocking to most people. My favorite thing to be a part of though—and this was while I was still an assistant—was our character Patton's backstory. Patton seems like your typical computer genius in a wheelchair at first glance. But in talking to the writers about my own story, I really wanted to make him anything other than that. So they made him a badass. He was a badass before he got injured, he got injured because he was a badass, and he is still a badass post injury. And he's great with computers. When writing "injury episode" they worked in a story where he was paragliding. Not in an "inspirational" (a word I despise) look at that guy go kind of way. He was paragliding because he liked to live fast, and because he was good at it.

Grubba: Do you notice people treat you differently depending on your current mode of mobility? Do you notice different behavior toward you when you are walking, on crutches or using a wheelchair?

Beattie: Oh yes. People treat you about 1,000 times better when you're in a wheelchair as opposed to stumbling all over the place. One of my favorite things about using a wheelchair or crutches, and the list is very long, is that it serves as a visual cue to others that I am disabled. People are much more understanding of something they can see. One year at the LA Auto Show my able bodied twin sister took my chair for a spin, came back after 10 minutes or so and couldn't believe how nice people were to her. Now, this is definitely not the norm, as I've certainly encountered my share of jerks, but there's a real lack of understanding and compassion when it comes to invisible disabilities.

Tell us about WCMX. What is it? And how did you get involved?

Beattie: WCMX is like freestyle BMX on a wheelchair, hence the name. Basically, it involves taking your wheelchair into skateparks and trying to adapt whatever the bikers or skaters are doing to what you've got. I've always loved extreme sports and was a little '90s skater kid growing up, so I knew as soon as I got a wheelchair of my own I'd be riding skateparks. I've been riding since 2012, and in 2015 I gained some notoriety for being the first woman to land a wheelchair backflip. I don't get to devote as much time to WCMX as I'd like, so while we have a few competitions a year, these days I mostly ride for fun.

Grubba: Have you always been a risk-taker?

Beattie: Yes. To use a clichéd saying, I truly believe life begins at the end of your comfort zone.

Grubba: Do you consider yourself mostly fearless? Or are there things you are afraid of? What scares you?

Beattie: In WCMX, in writing and in life in general, I think fear is what makes it worth it. Or rather, pushing past fear and doing it anyway. If something isn't at least a little bit scary, what's the fun in doing it? I'm not fearless. I'm just very practiced at being afraid of something and doing it anyway. As for the things I'm afraid of... I'm a writer, ask my therapist!

Grubba: Who has most influenced your career?

Beattie: I've worked with so many great writers and mentors over the years. It would be impossible to pick just one person!

Grubba: What do you love the most about your life?

Beattie: That's easy. My wheelchair! Seriously, sometimes when I'm not riding it I look at my wheelchair and my heart swells the way I assume a parent's does when they look at their kids or something. My only regret is not trying harder to get one when I was younger.

Are there any life goals you have yet to achieve? Anything special you are working towards now?

I want to go to the Paralympics... I think the first step in towards that goal should probably be picking up a sport soon, because I'm not getting any younger. I intended to try out for the Para-skeleton team when the sport was trying to get accepted into the winter games, but it didn't work out with my schedule on *NCIS: Nola*. It's just as well because I remembered that I hate cold weather. I'll probably be 40 or 50 before I have time to devote to that dream though, so look for me in LA 2028? ■ **ABILITY**

Face the
Music





Leo Fender was a man whose influence resonates around the world. In just about any public space—stage, restaurant, mall, you name it—the American inventor’s impact is spoken through the ambient acoustics of the electric guitar. In fact, you would be hard pressed to find an influential guitarist of rock ‘n roll or country western who hasn’t riffed on a “Fender” guitar, bass guitar or used his amps. Founder of Fender Electric Instrument Manufacturing Company in Fullerton, CA, he invented the Telecaster, one of the most popular electric guitars in history, and later the Stratocaster. After selling his company to CBS, he founded G&L Musical Instruments, where he continued to create and refine other inventions.

Today the Leo Fender Gallery in the Fullerton Museum Fender’s legacy and memorabilia are on display in the Fender Gallery at the Fullerton Museum. He was inducted posthumously into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1992—a rare distinction for someone who wasn’t a musician. Humble and modest, he remained a quiet pioneer in music history, an unknown outside the field. But that’s changing with the recent publication of *Leo Fender: The Quiet Giant Heard Around the World*, written by his wife, Phyllis Fender and Randall Bell, whose father worked for the inventor. *ABILITY*’s Chet Cooper and Lia Martirosyan joined Fender and Bell for a chat at Polly’s Pie Shop in Fullerton to learn more about the man behind the inventions.



Phyllis Fender & Randall Bell



Leo Fender

Lia Martirosyan: Do you have any specific roles being the honorary chair of G&L Guitars?

Phyllis Fender: *(laughs)* Yeah! I'm the one who organizes the potluck suppers we have there sometimes, and I always bring pie. Those are all my rules.

Martirosyan: From Polly's Pies? Or do you make your own?

Fender: Well, no, actually from Polly's. My family Dalton business is we make the big yellow oven that the pies are cooked in, both for Polly's Pies and for Marie Callender's. We owned two of the Marie Callender's shops, and we paid for four of the first ones they had. So we had a lot of business. My dad was in the bakery and restaurant equipment business, and my grandfather designed and built an oven in 1917. My father continued until he passed away about 10 years ago. We put in this Polly's Pies' oven, and we put most of the Marie Callender's in. That's why this pie shop sort of feels like home.

Martirosyan: So it is your office! (laughter)

Fender: Yeah. Randy met me in the museum, picked me up one night, and then—

Chet Cooper: He does that. (laughter)

Fender: Luckily, there were a lot of people around, so I wasn't afraid! *(laughter)*

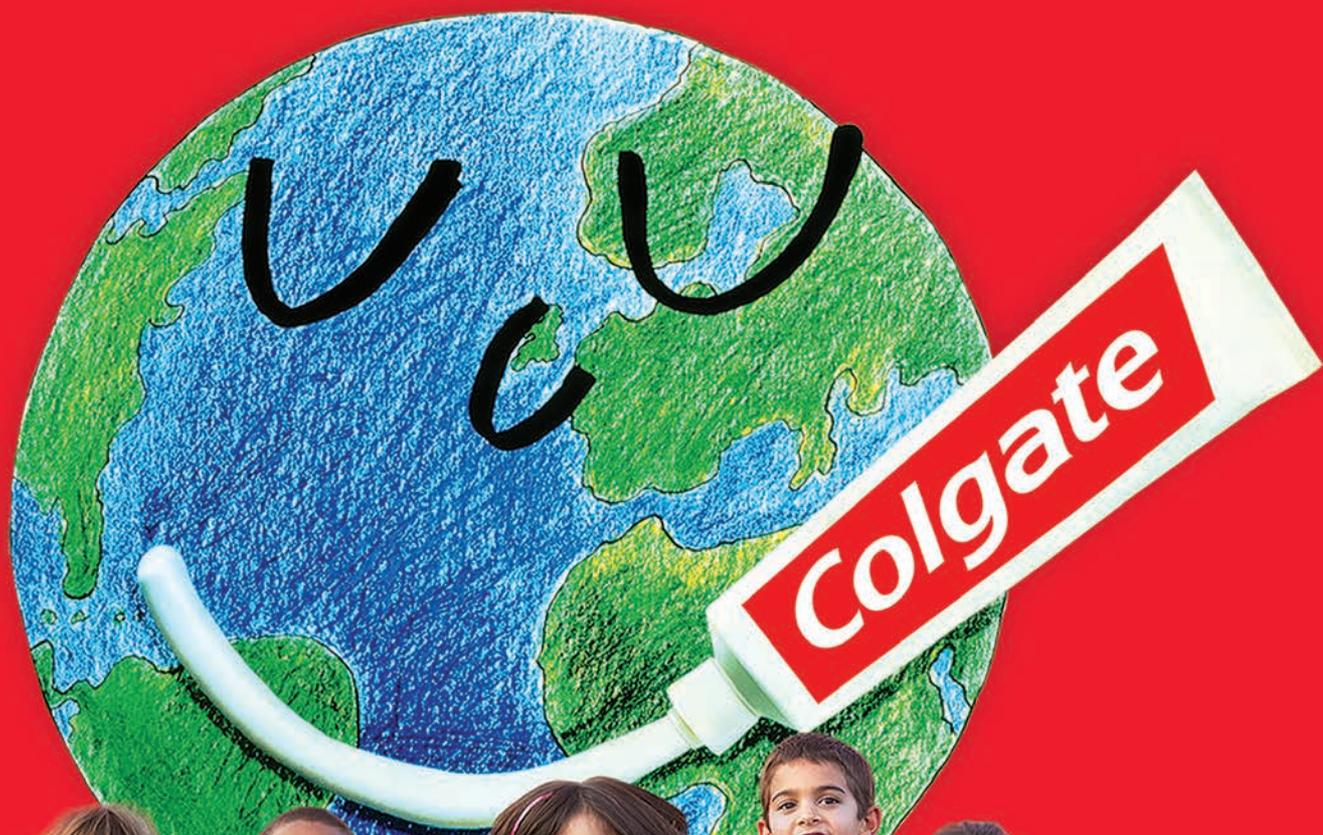
Cooper: Had you met before? You knew who she was?

Randell Bell: I certainly knew who she was. My mom is 95. She lives two or three streets away from the Fenders. My dad worked for Fender. So I was very familiar with Fender. And yet, we had not met until recently at the museum, although my dad worked there, and I knew a lot of the people who worked at Fender.

Cooper: And did you have the book in mind when you met, or was the idea just connecting?

Fender: No! I don't know how it started. He just—

Bell: I remember vividly. *(laughter)* Mrs. Fender was talking to a group of people at the museum, and during the course of speaking, she mentioned her son, who happened to be standing right next to me. And then later on she mentioned that she had written a book but no publishers had taken it. I leaned over to her son and said something like, "You've had a front-row seat to some interesting history." And he smiled and said, "Yeah." And then I said, "Does your mom need a publisher?" And he said, "Yeah." And I said, "I'm a publisher, although a small one." *(laughs)* And he said, "I'll introduce you afterwards." So afterwards he did, and we



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Phyllis and Leo Fender

exchanged email addresses, and I sent her an email, and then the next day—

Fender: The next day!

Bell: Just about the next day, we met here at Polly's, which is my mom's favorite restaurant. Phyllis showed me the book. It was more like a family photo album with captions.

Fender: Which is what it was. It was supposed to look that way.

Bell: So I said, "It's a great head start, but I think you need a real narrative." And that's how it started.

Fender: When I got home from the museum, he already had sent me an email, and he said, "We're starting on your book tomorrow at Polly's at 11:30 am. I'll see you there." *(laughter)*

Cooper: I like it! That's a good story, thanks for sharing it.

Fender: And I just thought he was fooling. I thought, "Well, this'll be fun, but it's not gonna go any place." Because I thought the book was pretty wonderful, and the publishers couldn't find any place in their catalog to put it, because it was like a coffee-table book.

Cooper: You mean your original design?

Fender: Yeah, the original one. It had mostly travel pictures, and I explained the pictures. It was as if you came to my home and I said, "Sit down and I'll make you a cup of tea, and I want to show you." That's how that book started.

Bell: It'll be a hardbound book.

Fender: I still, after the first few months, wasn't sure anything was going to happen, but I was having a lot of fun. He's so interesting to talk to, and it's amazing how much we have in common, with his relationship with Fender and of course mine with Leo. His family is absolutely adorable; his wife gives me permission to call him "Honey." *(laughter)*

Bell: She just doesn't care! *(laughter)*

Fender: I'm sort of like his grandmother. He's very kind to me. He treats me well. *(laughter)*

Martirosyan: That's very sweet!

Fender: It's been a really nice relationship. And if the book only sells one and a half, I'll be crying, but I'll be happy, too.

Martirosyan: How did you and Leo meet?

Fender: We met sort of on a blind date, but not really. Leo's vice president of G&L was George Fullerton, and he and his wife Lucille attended the same church that I did. George sang in the choir, as I did, and Lucille was my best friend. So they would once in a while talk about Leo. I had no idea who he was. Half my life I didn't realize he was famous. The first Mrs. Fender had died about a year or so before I ever met him. He was still in deep mourning. He felt he had not done enough for her. She had contracted lung cancer from working at the phone company here in Fullerton. At that time, the women were in one big room where they had to push the buttons to use the phones, and anybody could smoke. But she was not a smoker, and yet she's the one that got lung cancer.

Cooper: Second-hand smoke, yeah.

Fender: Leo had people taking her all over to find a cure. They had been married 45 years, so it was a long marriage, and it was not her time to stay.

Cooper: So he was well into his career when you two met?

Fender: Oh, yes. He was 26 years older than me. I basically lived with my mom and dad and my kids most of my life. I had three kids, and I had a lot of illnesses, so it was necessary for me to have someone around who would take care of my kids. So I was living with my family, and all of their friends used to come from church, and we'd have these big dinner parties and sing-alongs, so all my friends were seniors. So when Leo came along, it didn't mean anything. He was like my mom and dad. It bothered him a little bit. In fact, when he suggested at dinner one night that we should get married, he said, "But I'm not gonna be able to entertain you like you probably would want." And I said, "I'm entertained by seniors now! They're my best friends! I love seniors. I don't really associate with anybody my own age." And he said, "Oh, well, OK, I guess it's all right. We might as well get married." (*laughter*)

So the next day we went down and bought this ring and started planning the wedding.

Cooper: How long ago was that?

Fender: We were married in 1980, on the Love Boat—

Cooper: As in—?

Fender: Uh-huh.

Martirosyan: —the show?

Fender: It was not the show, but it was the boat. We went on a 17-day cruise for our honeymoon. But George and Lucille were the ones who introduced me

to Leo. I had been writing the "Parents Without Partners" articles on happiness and how we're responsible for our own happiness. And they had shown some to Leo to try to get him off his sadness, so they asked me to come and talk to him. They sat Leo in a big chair, and I sat at his feet on an ottoman, thinking that the four of us, George and Lucille, would visit. They left the room and said, "We'll see you later," and I didn't even really know his name. I sat on the stool and started talking, and we barely got into the conversation, and he started to weep.

Lucille had shown him an article I had written that we're responsible for our own happiness, that we can't expect our dog or our church or our neighbor to make us happy. We have to make ourselves happy. He kept saying, "But I can't do that. I can't do that." He was really weeping. And that went on and on, and then George and Lucille came in an hour and a half later. I did that three different times. Finally they said, "Well, you know, Leo's really comfortable with you now. Why don't you have dinner with us?" Esther and Leo had no family. I said, "OK." And they said, "But when Leo likes to eat, he just likes to eat. He doesn't like to talk." And I said, "That's OK, I'll talk to you guys, or I'll eat." So I sat down, and Leo started talking to me. He talked and talked and talked, and I looked across the table, and George and Lucille are laughing like crazy. And I went, "What are you guys laughing at?" And they said, "If we knew all we had to do was put a blonde next to him, we'd have done it a year ago!" (*laughter*)

So that was the beginning. Our first date was a Christmas program at the Palomino Club in Los Angeles. The Country Music Association had a party, and G&L had been invited to come.

Cooper: Do you have a background in music yourself?

Fender: I just sang in the choir. I played the piano. All my family play guitars or ukuleles or pianos, and we sing. Every holiday we sit on the floor and sing. Both my mom and dad were in the choir. It was a musical family but not professionally. Well, I had a baby sister in Santa Barbara who was in several all-girl groups. She played the country music part of it with guitars and stuff.

Cooper: Is your writing based on personal experience? Do you have a degree in psychology?

Fender: (*laughs*) I may need a psychologist, but no! I love to write. I love words. I do all the narration at church, all the Christmas program stories, and a lot of narration at the museum. I just like words. They're just so powerful. The writing of the book was simple. He would just ask me a question, and I'd tell him the answer. We had such a good time that it hasn't been work. It's just him sitting there and saying, "OK, what did Leo think about this?" or "When did you do this?" "Why did you decide to go on the Love Boat to get



Young Bell visiting Leo Fender in his office.

married?" It was a walk down memory lane for me, and it was a history lesson for him.

Bell: Speaking of disabilities, Leo had a glass eye. His eye was damaged when he was seven or eight years old. He was deaf because he had his head in an amplifier and someone turned it on while he was trying to fix it and blew out his hearing. So he had a glass eye and he was deaf. He was socially awkward—I don't know if that's the right way to put it, but he was shy. And yet he built an empire. He sold his company for, in today's dollars, \$300 million. It never went to his head. He lived in a mobile home and was quite content. He loved the simplicity. And he built this enormous iconic brand, and he was completely humble about it.

Phyllis's daughter Chris found Leo's wallet the other day. We were going through it bit by bit, his Sears card and driver's license. He had the Sizzler senior discount card in there signed by him, which is priceless. He was just down-to-earth, blended right into our neighborhood. Never showed off. I think that's a fascinating study in true iconic living.

We did an article that ran in *Forbes* about Leo on leadership. He was a brilliant leader. He could do anything. He invented the electric guitar, and to document that I think just had to be done. He was so quiet nobody knew what he was like personally. But now

we have Phyllis to tell us.

Fender: (*laughs*) I'm hoping I'm showing you his good side. He was a simple man. And when I say "simple," I don't mean "Duh" simple. I mean he was so content within himself that he didn't need a lot of stuff around him. He was driven to make the best instrument possible because he believed that the world needed it. The week before he died he took my hand one night after I had put him to bed, fed him through the tube in his tummy and gotten him in his jammies, and he said, "You know what, Phyllis? I know this has been hard for you, but thank you." He didn't say a lot of thank you's, and I didn't need a lot of thank you's, but I knew what he was thinking. He then said, "You know what? I finished what I was supposed to do."

How many of us can say that in our life, that we've finished what we were put here to do?

Martirosyan: That gave me goose bumps.

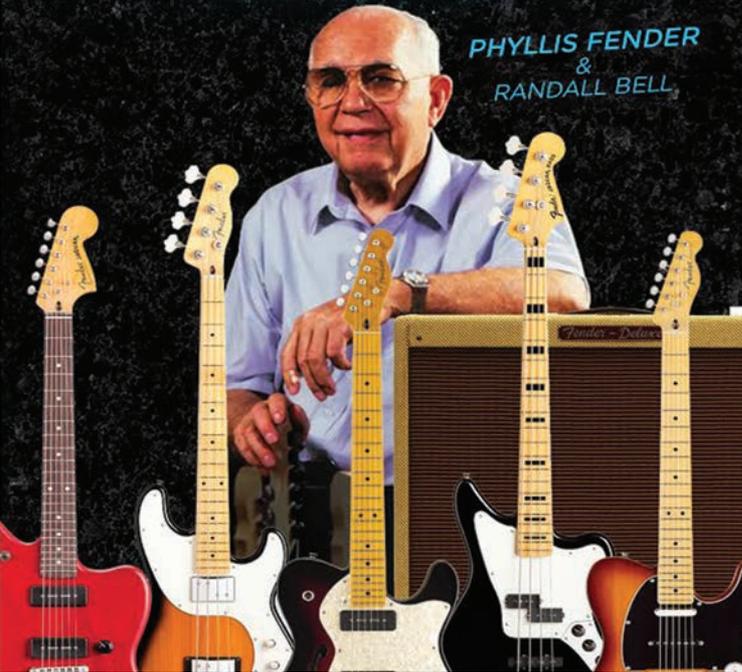
Fender: It was a goose bumps moment. And I hugged him and kissed him and cried. And then a week later he was gone.

Bell: And he passed away getting ready to go to work. He had Parkinson's disease. He was in a wheelchair, and he was slowly getting up to go to work. He worked right

Leo Fender

THE QUIET GIANT HEARD
AROUND THE WORLD

PHYLLIS FENDER
&
RANDALL BELL



up to the very end. Retirement was not a word he used.

Fender: No, it was not.

Martirosyan: Was there anything in the book that you were hesitant to write about, any experience you had?

Fender: Randy and I made a deal there would be nothing negative or nothing that would make fun of Leo or anyone else. It was to be like a love letter. I wanted it to be true. I wanted it to show the Leo that I married, not the Leo some of the world knew. I wanted it to be all about his love of children and those kinds of things.

I didn't even have to think about what to write about because of all these questions over the years that people have asked me. And that's what I did at the Fullerton museum in the Fender Gallery, where I work and tell stories about Leo. That's how I met Randy.

We made sure there was nothing hurtful in the book, because that's not what either one of us is about. And the book is not made to get even with anybody. It was written to share about a wonderful life and that most people know nothing about.

Bell: There are no skeletons in the closet. Leo never lost his temper, never got mad. He was very emotionally stable. And this is from both Phyllis and my dad. In the

book there's a story about a guy. Leo would work in his laboratory in his office, and he'd walk around the plant every day at least once and check on every single thing. He was proficient at every single job there. He saw a new guy on the job who wasn't doing it right, so Leo went up to him and said, "You might have an easier time if you do it this way," and the guy said, "Look, buddy, you do your job, and I'll do mine," and Leo said, "OK." And he just walked away. That was Leo's personality.

Cooper: That was your dad? (laughter)

Bell: *(laughs)* No, it was not my dad! But it is not a sugar-coated book. Of course, in any business empire, there are egos at play. We decided to focus more on what Leo was about as a person. He was a very pleasant, very even-keeled, very—

Phyllis Fender: —simple.

Bell: —good, civil human. He was just a good guy. And my dad and others had a very easy time working for him, because he was not a show-off. He wasn't a jerk. He wasn't a lot of the things that come to mind when you think of a CEO of a major empire. He was down-to-earth. If he invited you to lunch, it meant you were going to Carl's Jr., and you had half an hour. If he saw a car in the parking lot he liked, he'd probably get on the asphalt and climb underneath to look at it.

Cooper: Because he knew Carl Karcher? (laughter)

Bell: Actually, it's funny you say that, because Leo was born in a barn on the corner of Harbor and La Palma in Anaheim, right across the street from Carl Karcher's first Carl's Jr. The Fender farm was literally next door to Carl Karcher's first restaurant. I don't know if they knew each other or not. And then right down the street on Harbor was a guy named Walt Disney. And Leo invented the electric guitar at 107 S. Harbor, which is right over here. So there were some amazing things happening—

Cooper: And then there's this Knott guy—

Bell: Yeah, he's on Brookhurst. He's on the wrong street altogether. But if he had done it on Harbor—

Fender: —he'd have been famous! *(laughter)*

Martirosyan: That's cute! How interesting.

Cooper: Fullerton. When you talk about Fullerton—?

Fender: No connection. Just happened to be that way. That's what the G. in G&L is. G is George and L is Leo.

Cooper: I didn't know if it meant "guitar."

Fender: A lot of people have wondered why it wasn't



Fenders waiting to be assembled, Fullerton CA



L&G, but there again, it was Leo. He didn't put himself first, he put George first and then L for Leo.

Martirosyan: He had priorities.

Fender: He said, "I don't want 'em to think about me. I want 'em to think about my babies, all of these guitars and pianos and basses and amplifiers."

Cooper: He made pianos, too?

Fender: Fender Rhodes electric piano.

Bell: And Rogers drums. They made everything.

Cooper: Tell me the difference in a nutshell between selling the Fender Company to CBS and then to G&L.

Fender: One is the big brother and one's the little brother, and Leo was the daddy in between. Because Fender is everywhere. And Leo felt he had to sell Fender because the doctors told him he was dying. And then he didn't die. But he sold it, and I think he was sorry later.

Cooper: He still worked?

Fender: Yes, he worked for Fender for a long time after he sold it. But then after he sold it, he had 10 years that he couldn't compete. So he did other things. He invented

new things. He stayed in the business, making all kinds of nuts and bolts and things. I didn't know him then, but people told me stories about it. When the 10 years were up, they decided to do the G&L, and all of the things that are being done today at G&L and basically at Fender are all his ideas. They were fantastic way back then, and they're fantastic right now.

Cooper: Do you think he was more intrigued with the invention, using electricity, finding different ways of making something happen? Or was it the music?

Fender: Oh, it was the creating. He was such a tinkerer about every kind of thing. We'd go on these beautiful cruises, and I would wonder where he was and find out he was down in the engine room taking pictures of the engines or the gears. All the pictures that I took of our cruises, I got sunsets and children playing on the beach and all that, and he's got gears hanging from the ceiling or a light—"How did that light fixture stay in that wall?" Every once in a while he'd look at a sunset.

Cooper: And wonder how it was made? (laughter)

Fender: We were only married 11-and-a-half years before he passed away, but we went on 10 cruises, sat on the Great Wall of China and rode down the chocolate-brown Amazon River. Those were things he had wanted to do. He had one more he wanted to do, but he

didn't tell me about it until his Parkinson's was so severe. He wanted to sail around the tip of South America. But the sea is very, very rough there, and by that time his Parkinson's had taken over, and I was afraid he would be injured. He was a little disappointed. I said, "Honey, if you'd told me this 10 years ago, we could have done it."

He was very satisfied with life. He felt he had been given a family. He married into a very strong Christian family. The Lord became part of his life. He understood more of why we're here as our lives wound around each other, and that we're here for a reason. He realized what his reason was, and my reason was to take care of him. Most people say, "He was so quiet." But when it was just the two of us, we laughed and laughed at all kinds of stuff and did silly things on the ship, like getting Mai Tais and piña colodas. There's a funny story in the book about that.

It wasn't just this old man and this younger woman. It was never that. It was two people who enjoyed each other. And it was comfortable. We just had fun. And we both loved to eat.

Cooper: And drink Mai Tais.

Bell: Well, he didn't drink, but if she ordered it, it wasn't drink. *(laughs)* It's in the book.

Fender: I don't drink, either, but I might as well tell you the story about the Mai Tai. We were on the boat—and Leo always sat back in the corner overlooking the deck and the pool. I'd be in it 90 percent of the time getting skin cancer, and he'd be sitting back there wearing his black jacket, black slacks, black socks, black shoes, and sometimes a white hat. He's designing and designing. So I had been in the pool for a couple of hours. And he's going, "Phyllis! Phyllis! Come here!" He's waving at me. So I thought maybe he was ready for lunch. So I wiped off and walked over and he said, "You know, you really need a Mai Tai." And I went, "Leo, I don't drink!" And he said, "You really, really need a Mai Tai. It's so hot." And I said, "Leo, no." And he called the waiter over and said, "We'll have one Mai Tai." And I said, "Leo, I just want iced tea." And the waiter brought back the Mai Tai and set it there, and so Leo pushed it over in front of me and he said, "OK, have a drink." I took the straw and slurped a big slurp, and it actually did taste pretty good!

So I put it down, and he drank the rest of it! *(laughter)* And I said, "I thought you didn't drink." And he said, "Well, you said it was good!" *(laughter)* And he drank it the whole time. *(laughter)* But that was the way he was! He wanted to be able to say, "I am not a drinker." For some reason, that was very important for him. His wife had a Mai Tai. And I'm not a drinker at all, no way.

Cooper: So you had four Mai Tais?

Fender: *(laughs)* It actually tasted pretty good. Those were just fun things we teased about. Every time we were on a ship, I said, "Are we having Mai Tais on this ship?" "No more Mai Tais." "OK, I'll just go get some more skin cancer out in the pool."

Cooper: So he was wearing black socks—?

Fender: He wore black almost all the time. He wore black pants, black socks, black shoes, black jacket, and black sweats he wore to sleep in, with the black socks on. Then he did one of two things. He either wore a baby blue short-sleeve shirt or a white short-sleeve shirt. And then he wore that with his black pants and all the rest. He did that on the ships and he did that when—well, I did talk him out of it for our wedding. He did have a black suit on, but it wasn't his blazer.

Cooper: If he wore sandals, would there be black socks underneath?

Fender: *(laughs)* Probably! But he'd never be caught in sandals. Real men don't wear sandals. Mr. Farm Man.

Cooper: Would he wear flip-flops?

Fender: No. He wore regular men's black shoes. Not even tennis.

Cooper: But on a ship he wouldn't wear anything more tropical?

Phyllis Fender: In the book, we have a picture of him wearing a colored shirt. One of the ships we were on asked everybody to wear something bright and colorful. They were having a fiesta or Mardi Gras event. So we borrowed a shirt off of one of the waiters, because Leo had a blue shirt and a white shirt, and that was it. Of course, I had no trouble with color. So we have a picture of him with this bright-colored shirt on. I don't recall now whether we ever gave it back to the waiter.

Cooper: They called us earlier to ask you to return that shirt! (laughter)

How's your health?

Fender: Well, I have a variety of things going on.

Martirosyan: There was something about a diagnosis of just a few months to live?

Fender: Yes. I was snorkeling in Maui one year. My mom and dad and my sisters always went to Maui in February because my birthday is on the 20th of February, and my dad's birthday is the 11th of February. And the whales are there in February. So my two sisters and my dad and I were snorkeling over some beautiful reefs. It was just beautiful. And all of a sudden I couldn't breathe. I came up gasping, and I grabbed my dad's leg, and Dad thought



Leo Fender and Lionel Richie

I had swallowed some water. I finally got hold of my baby sister, and I pulled and pulled on her. They pulled me over to shore, and I lay there for a few minutes and crawled across the sand to where our blanket was and passed out. They got me back home, didn't take me to the doctor. It was my birthday. We were going out to dinner.

Cooper: How old were you?

Fender: Well, it was 28 years ago—somewhere in my forties.

Cooper: Somewhere in your 20s.

Fender: *(laughs)* I felt like I was 20! We were going home the next day. So they said, "You can see the doctor when you get home." When I got home, I felt a little weak, and then I had another seizure in my dad's office where I couldn't breathe, and he got me in the car and took me immediately to my doctor. I walked into the doctor's office, and the doctor looked at me, and he said, "Get her to the hospital right now!" So they took me to the hospital, and my heart was only working at 17 percent. They did all kinds of tests. They sent me to UCLA for more tests and maybe have a new heart put in. I was twice on their list for a heart transplant, and they decided to use other means. They finally said, "Let's try a pacemaker, a fibulator." I've had that ever

since, and it has kept me here today. But it was not during Leo's time. It was after I was a widow.

Cooper: If you had been on the Big Island, the person who invented the pacemaker lives there.

Fender: Oh, really? Well, the young girl who lives with me, who's sort of my adopted daughter from church, all of her family lives on the Big Island.

Cooper: So the pacemaker's working for you?

Fender: It's working. I'm due to have a transplant probably in January.

Cooper: Is the pacemaker a Medtronic product?

Fender: I don't know. I haven't looked at it lately.

Cooper: A person similar to Leo, an engineer tinkering around—

Fender: *(laughs)* Oh, I don't want any tinkering with my pacemaker!

Cooper: His story's similar in that he's a brilliant person tinkering around who created this thing.

Fender: Yeah, their minds run a different way. We're

thinking, “Look at those beautiful clouds, that sunset, that tree, this book, this iced tea in front of us!” That’s what we’re seeing—well, I’m not speaking for you guys, but most people. What Leo saw and the man who did the pacemaker, they’re thinking of things not see-able at the moment. They’re feeling what they can cre-ate. He was so proud of his babies, having such a good time with his work. He was so happy to be himself. But he wouldn’t let anybody else know that.

Cooper: While we’ve been talking, there’s a classic sta-tion playing in the background, and several times I’ve heard the guitar and I’m thinking—

Fender: It’s appropriate! *(laughs)*

Cooper: It’s just amazing—

Bell: Really, the chances are very good.

Cooper: That’s so strange. Lia just got this phone. She does other things than just being a great writer and author. She also sings classical music. We were in Italy, I had a speaking engagement at a conference on accessibility on the Web, and she was singing in Florence.

Fender: How wonderful!

Cooper: You talk about people looking at things differ-ently. Now with this new phone, she’s a little different. Where was this picture taken again?

Martirosyan: In Florence, at the Piazzale Michelangelo.

Cooper: Have you been there? Did you see the big statue of David?

Fender: Yes. Oh, he has a beautiful bottom! *(laughter)*

Cooper: Everybody’s in front taking pictures of him, and she goes to the back—

Martirosyan: (laughs) Selfies!

Cooper: —so this is her screensaver now. (laughter)

Bell: Nice!

Fender: But his bottom is beautiful! Leo said “They’re nasty,” and I went, “No, it’s beautiful!” It was. I didn’t particularly want to see the front, but the back was beautiful.

Cooper: Now every time I see her phone—

Fender: We’ll be best friends! *(laughter)*

Martirosyan: Absolutely!

Fender: Are you leaving?

Bell: It’s all over.

Fender: Us nasty girls, that’s OK! *(laughter)* That statue is magnificent, and so big! That was one of the places Leo and I stopped on one of our cruises.

Bell: I think one of the interesting things about Leo was that a lot of people invent something or build a company to bring themselves fame or fortune, but Leo wasn’t like that. He was very authentic and very pure. He really was on a mission to invent guitars to give to musicians. He didn’t play a guitar. He didn’t know how to tune a guitar. His mission was to get the instruments into the hands of musi-cians to create music. It was a very pure mission. There was no ulterior motive. It wasn’t about him, it wasn’t about fame, and it wasn’t about fortune. He got all that, but he couldn’t have cared less. And that’s what’s so intriguing about it. You see all the CEOs today who are just—

Fender: —in ivory palaces.

Bell: Yeah. But he was the real deal.

Cooper: Are there other books on the market about Leo?

Bell: There are lots of books about guitars, but not so much about Leo. This is the first. Miraculously, I got LeoFender.com.

Cooper: How’d that happen?

Bell: I don’t know how it happened.

Fender: Yes, you do. You know why.

Bell: We say it’s a God thing.

Fender: Yeah, we always say, when something like that happens, and you don’t think it can happen—

Bell: —that He’s up there pullin’ strings. I think Leo’s story needs to be told. It’s inspiring. This guy who had every excuse to—

Phyllis Fender: —hate the world.

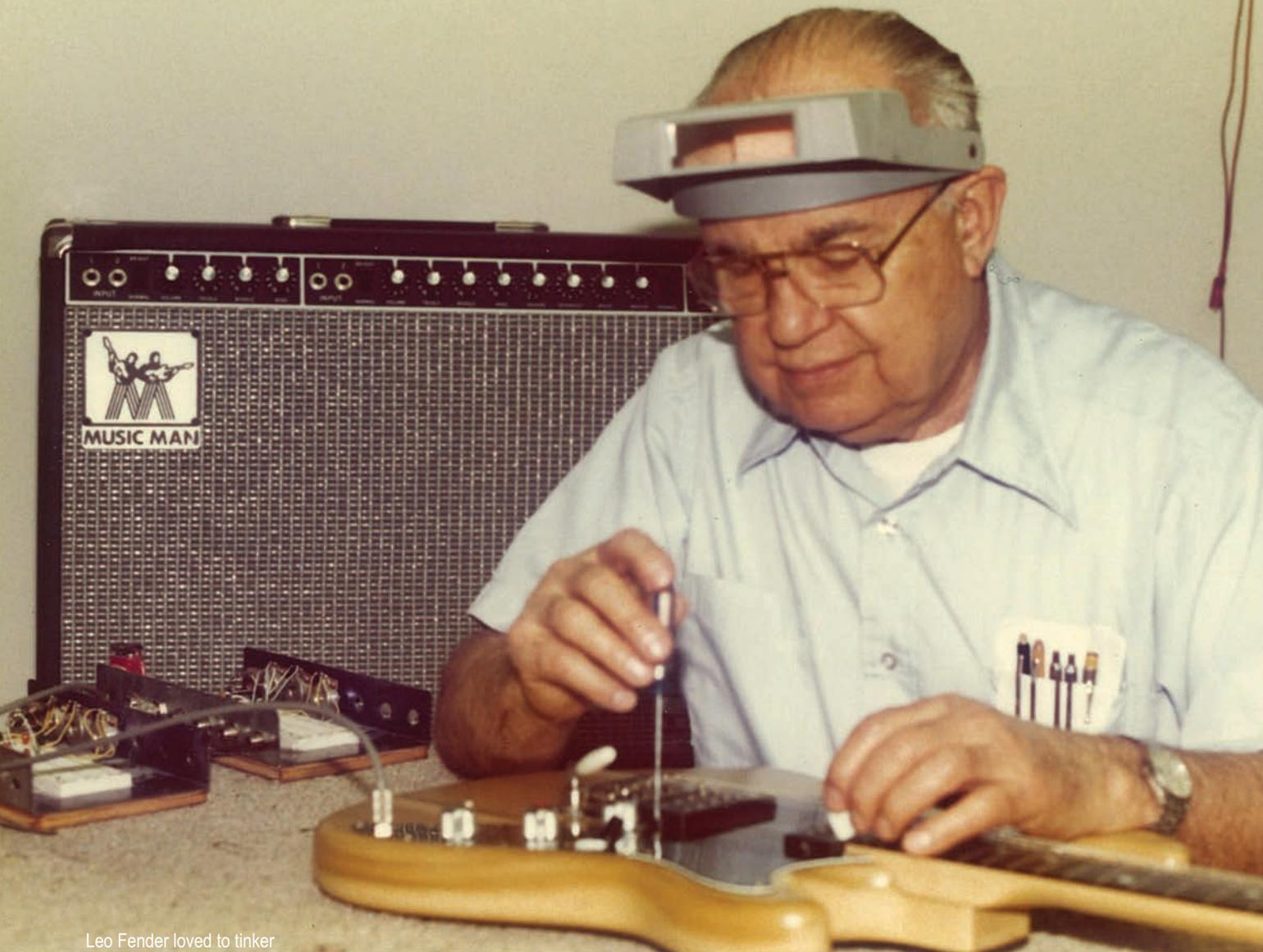
Bell: —be bitter, but he was positive and pleasant. He kept goin’, and he created an empire, and even then, that didn’t destroy him. A lot of people can handle adversity, but they can’t handle power. And he had both. He had adversity and disabilities, and he had power and money. None of that destroyed him. That’s an inspiring story.

Cooper: So your publishing company is doing the book?

Bell: Yeah.

Cooper: How long has it been around?

Bell: About 20 years. It’s been around a long time.



Leo Fender loved to tinker

Cooper: And you outsource the printing?

Bell: Yeah.

Cooper: Had you looked into what it would cost to create a book in the shape of a guitar? (laughter)

Bell: No, I have not! I went with the conventional thing there.

Cooper: The end of it would be difficult to figure out.

Fender: The sentences would be very short when you got to the neck. *(laughs)*

You'd have to write it sideways.

Cooper: And the chapter that would normally be there, and the rest would just be the strings coming in.

Fender: You do have an inventive mind, my dear! A

little weird, but inventive!

Martirosyan: I'm curious about yours and Leo's favorite genre of music.

Fender: Country is basically all Leo wanted to listen to. Of course, I love Christian music, and I love classical music. As long as it's not music with all of the naughty stuff. I don't want that. *(laughter)* I like pretty music. I like music that you can hum.

Martirosyan: Hmm.

Cooper: Hmm. (laughter)

Fender: A song that stays with you, that maybe you'll hear on the radio or in a production. It plays and plays, and three or four days later you can still remember it, or anything by Willy Nelson. I love Willy Nelson. In fact, his name is in the book. It was one of the arguments Leo and I had. I won 'cause I put it in the book. *(laughter)*

Leo basically liked Sons of the Pioneers, or music like that. But strangely, he had his whole big setup at the house with stereos, 78s records and the big ones, what are they called? In fact, I had loaned his whole case of them to the Leo Fender Gallery. He never had music on in the house.

Maritorsyan: Well, if he couldn't hear well, he probably wouldn't enjoy it.

Fender: But he had his hearing aids in most of the time, unless I was talking too much. *(laughter)* That's a story in the book, too.

Bell: You asked a really interesting question. Leo liked three kinds of music: country was number one, western was number two, and country western was number three.

Fender: That really was what he liked!

Bell: And he invented the electric guitar over here on Harbor Boulevard, and it took off with the country western crowd. Rock and roll had not been invented yet. A lot of people don't realize that. Leo invented the electric guitar in the 1940s, and it took off with the country western genre for years and years. Rock and roll didn't come along until the '60s, 20 years later. When we think of electric guitars, we think of rock and roll, but the genesis of the electric guitar was with country western.

Every single country western star in the world came to Leo right over here. And we're on Raymond Avenue. The building where the Stratocaster—the Strat—was invented just two blocks south of us. It was produced there for years. Then guys started getting this guitar and adding distortion, and that's where rock and roll came from. And they think they were first on the scene with the electric guitar. They were actually late to the game. This puts music into perspective in terms of musical history.

Martirosyan: Who named the Stratocaster? Do you know the history behind that?

Bell: I do. It started with the Telecaster.

Cooper: Why "Tele"?

Bell: Well, he originally named it the Broadcaster, and then he was threatened with a lawsuit from Gretsch Drums because they had a similar name on their drums. Leo was not into litigation and making lawyers rich, so he dropped the name, and he clipped the name off the decal and they became Nocasters. They're worth a fortune today. Those guitars are worth \$30,000, \$40,000. He produced them until they ran out of stickers, and then he thought, "Well, I liked Broadcaster." Television was a new thing, so he just took Tele and Caster (from broadcaster) and put it together, and then—this is in the book—Freddie Tavares was Leo's right-hand man. He

was a Hawaiian version of Leo.

Fender: And he played at our wedding.

Bell: And he played at my sister's wedding. *(laughter)* When Freddie met Leo for the first time, Freddie said, "You know, your amplifiers, they're a mess. They've got a lot of problems." Instead of being insulted, Leo said, "Tell me about it." Freddie flipped one around and pointed out design flaws. What did Leo do? He hired him on the spot. The very first day on the job, Freddie said, "I've got an idea for a guitar." And he sketched out, guess what? The Stratocaster, right in the building down the street. Leo loved it. They collaborated, and Freddie was very much like Leo. He gave all the credit to Leo, but it was actually a collaborative effort. Leo just kind of smiled and said, "Well, I have the patent." *(laughter)*

The Stratocaster was iconic, huge. And it all happened right here in little Fullerton. It's just funny.

Martirosyan: Sweet!

Bell: My dad took home Stratocaster wood from the plant.

Fender: That was being thrown out. He wasn't stealing it!

Bell: No, he wasn't stealing a Stratocaster. *(laughter)* I suggested he bring a couple of things home, but he never would. *(laughter)* And he made our kitchen table out of Stratocaster wood. It's a butcher block made out of Strat wood. My mom still has it today.

Cooper: I love the name in the subtitle, the "Quiet Giant."

Fender: That was him.

Bell: I'm on a mission, too, because there are two great lives here, Leo Fender and Phyllis Fender. Just the way they collaborated, and the way you supported Leo.

Fender: He was pretty nice to me.

Bell: I've felt passionate about writing this book because Leo's had a remarkable influence. If you've heard a song on the radio, Leo Fender has influenced you, because he invented the electric guitar. I got *Rolling Stone's* magazine article on the top 100 guitarists in the history of the world. I went through one by one and checked, and 91 out of 100 played a Fender onstage.

It's like discovering electricity. On a practical basis, Leo Fender has influenced more people than Einstein did with $E=mc^2$. Most people don't really even know what that means. He's famous. And yet ironically, this guy of enormous influence, enormous historical importance, is an enigma. I lived two streets from him, and he was invisible. Now we have this enormous valuable resource to tell us how this guy, how his mind clicked, how he ticked.

And I'm glad you outlived those two doctors who told you you were going to die.

Fender: Yeah, I had three to six months to live. Those doctors are all dead, though. That's in the book, too.

Bell: Leo Fender's story is inspiring. In spite of the disabilities, in spite of the hardship, in spite of being born in a barn, literally, and growing up in a tough situation where his birthdays were not celebrated, Christmases were very minimal, he just ploughed ahead with the slight smile, never got angry, never threw a temper tantrum, never told anybody, "Look, do you know who I am?" None of that stuff. He was just the real McCoy.

Cooper: He was the real Fender.

Fender: He wouldn't even wear a nametag when we went to the NAMM show that said "Fender" on it. He didn't want people to think he was showing off.

Bell: In his office he had a Styrofoam cup and a piece of masking tape that said "Leo," and he stuck it to that cup. He used that cup over and over. And he wouldn't throw away any cans from the kitchen; he'd used them to keep nuts and bolts in. He was very frugal, very practical. Never tried to show off. That's an interesting guy. When you read about the Michael Eisners out there, this is a refreshing view of what a real CEO behaves like.

Fender: He had given this reporter this much time because he didn't give it to anybody.

Bell: Greg and Duff were over at my house, and they said, "Your dad works for Fender?" And I said yeah. They said, "Really?" Like I was lyin'. And I said, "Yeah, he really does." And they said, "Can you get us in there?" I said, "I think so. Let me see." We had the rotary phones, so I dialed my dad up at the plant. He answered the phone. My dad ran research and development, which was the job Freddie Tavares had. When Freddie retired, my dad got that job. I said, "Dad, Greg and Duff are here. They want to see the Fender plant, is that OK?" He said, "Sure." I said, "OK, we're goin'." And so from the moment they asked to the moment we were in the Fender plant must have been six minutes. *(laughter)* It was, like, instant.

Fender: Whoopee!

Bell: They were in awe. My dad took us to every single stop on the production line and introduced us to every single person. They knew my dad. They shook hands. Not only did we get to see what they did, we learned about their families. Some of them had kids who went to high school with us. Every single stop, without exception, and we sat and chatted with the people who put the keys on the necks of the guitars.

The paint was very vivid in my mind, because the guy

was doing starbursts. And then I saw my dad's office, which was a lot like Leo's office—kind of a mad scientist thing, with the green workbench.

Fender: Which is now in the museum.

Bell: The workbench that the Stratocaster was invented on and probably the Telecaster, when CBS was moving to Corona, they took all that stuff and threw it out in the yard to be disposed of, and my dad saw the green workbench, and he said, "I like that bench," and he took it home. And now it's in the museum. It was the bench that the Strat definitely and the Telecaster probably were invented on. That's in the museum, right next to Leo's desk. And then we spent maybe two or three hours in there until we had absorbed everything we could. Greg and Duff were like, "I can't believe that just happened! Can we go again tomorrow?" *(laughter)*

Cooper: How long did the painter work there?

Bell: He was there years. They had a retirement age of 65, but my dad kept turning 65 for a good 10 or 15 years. *(laughter)* He retired when he was at least 75. They loved workin' there. The vibe was cool. You weren't poundin' out widgets that you didn't care about, you were crafting something really cool, and you knew it.

Cooper: You had said something earlier that I hadn't recorded, you mentioned you were thinking that this person painting, Jimi Hendrix was—

Bell: Oh, yeah. We had seen the painter, and we were goin' up to where the lady was pounding frets into the necks. Leo had invented a brilliant thing. You didn't see the groove in for every fret. He had a saw with whatever it is, 27 blades on it, and they would mount the neck, and they'd roll the neck along this thing, and it would put all the cuts into the neck all at once. So we saw all of that, and we talked about how Leo had invented that machine—

Fender: —among many other things.

Bell: He had a patent on it, of course. And from there, it went to a lady who pounded in the frets. I sat there just lookin' at it, and I said to her, "You know what? Jimi Hendrix's neck must have been on this table."

So I started talking out loud to this lady, and she's poundin' in the frets and doin' her thing, and I said, "You know, Jimi Hendrix's and the Beatles' and Jimmy Page's Telecaster that recorded Led Zeppelin..." I start rattling off every single guitarist I knew who played a Telecaster or a Stratocaster, and I said, "Their necks were on this table." And she looks up and smiles at me and says, "Everybody's necks have been on this table." And they knew it. They didn't say anything about it, but they knew they were workin' on somethin' that tomorrow would be in an arena in front of 10,000 fans. ■ ABILITY

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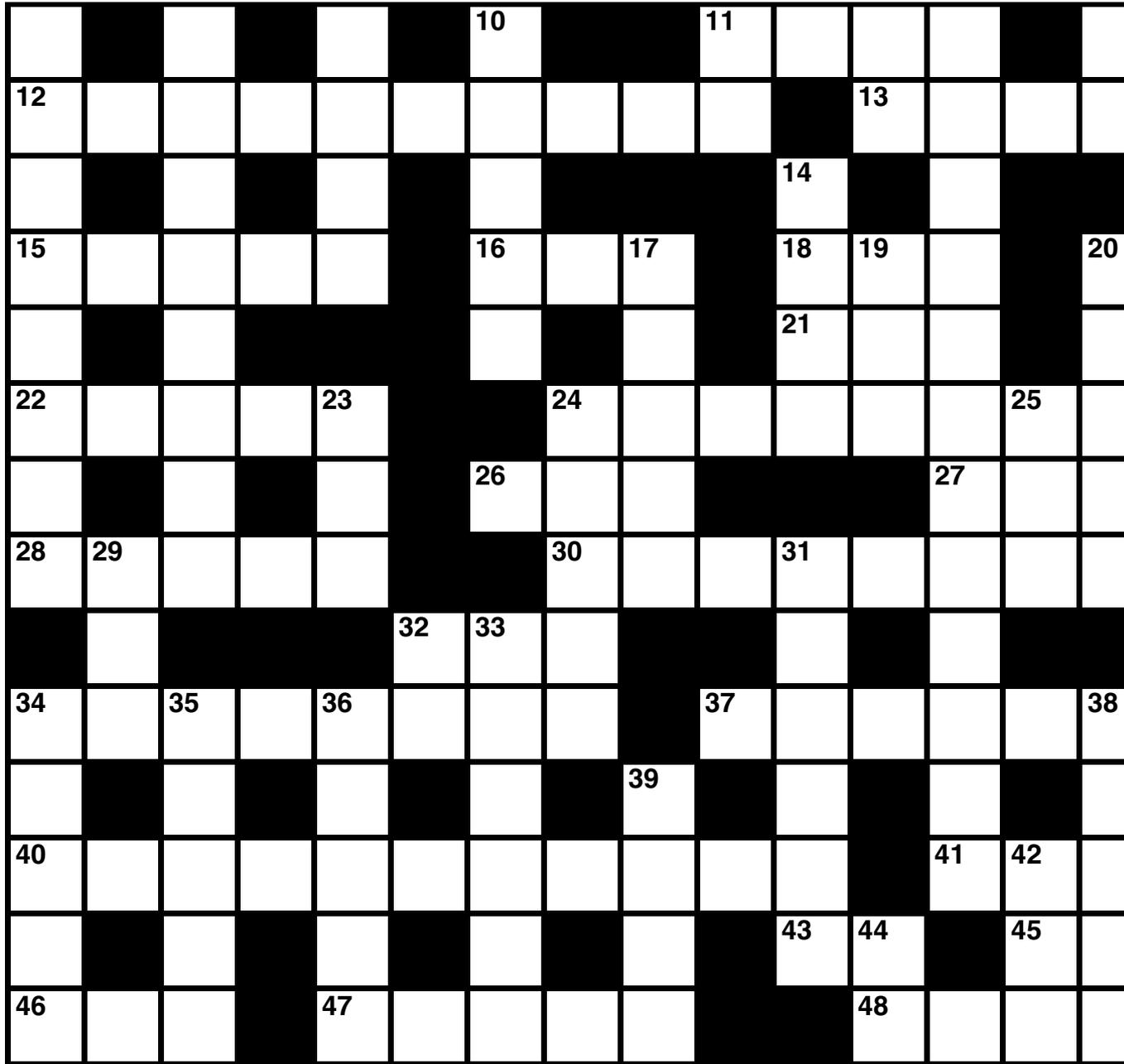
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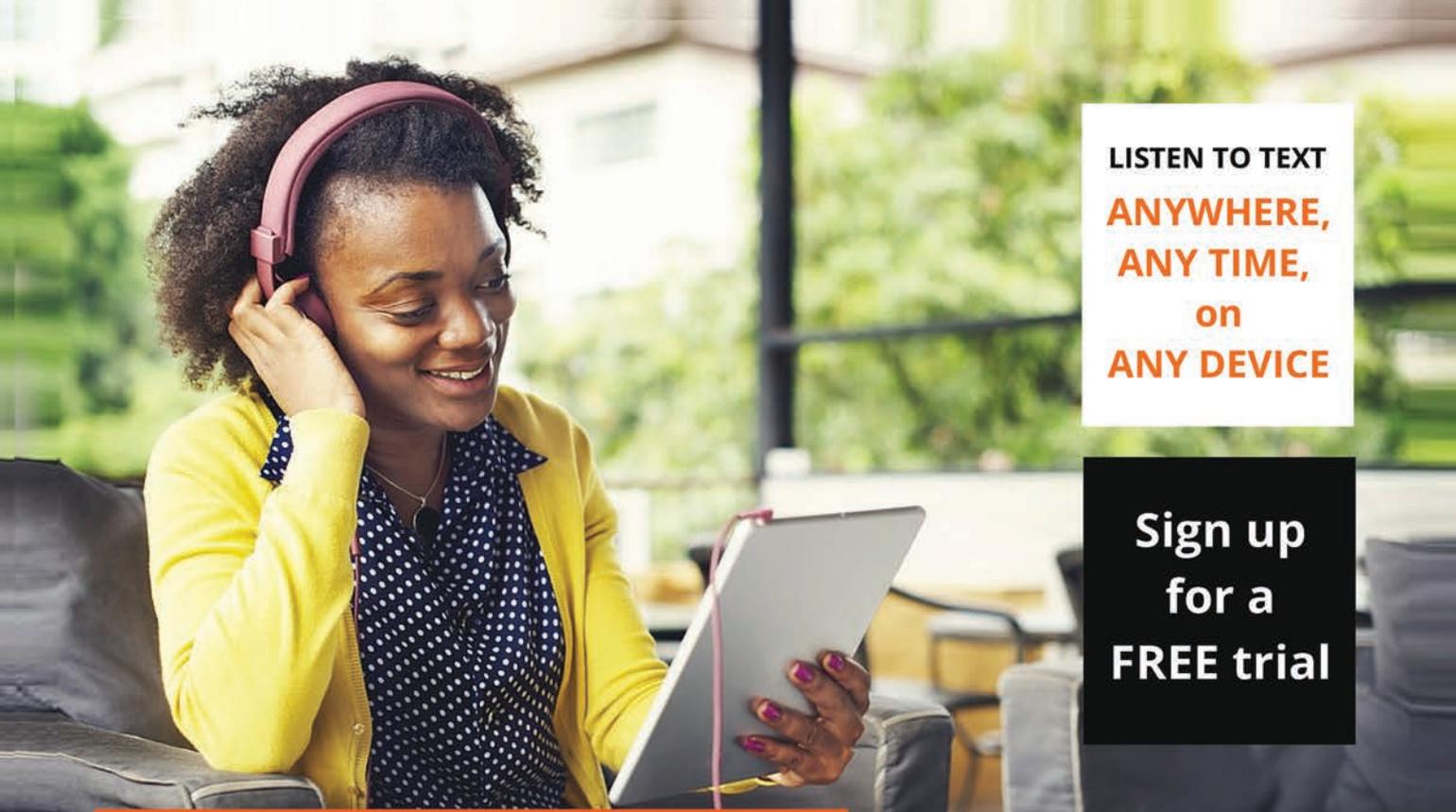


A C R O S S

1. Recently discovered adaptive immune technology that may be significant in countering diseases
4. "The Nanny" star who started the "Cancer Schmancer" movement, Fran ____
11. Actress Miles, who played Lila in "Psycho"
12. Easy enter, a keyword in legislation for people with disabilities
13. Versed in, 2 words
15. Praises
16. Movie where Sean Penn stars as a father with an intellectual disability, goes with 21 across
18. Campus climber
21. See 16 across
22. Unsophisticated
24. Landmark 1999 Supreme Court decision regarding people with disabilities
26. Outfielder Mel
27. Russian fighter plane
28. World weariness
30. Actor who plays a surgeon with autism on "The Good Doctor," Freddie ____
32. Dedicated lines
34. It's "the best medicine"
37. Strike caller
40. The opposite of segregation
41. Visit
43. Smallest continent, abbr.
45. Top soccer team: __ Milan
46. Credit card percentage
47. British megastar pop-rock singer who supports the Aids Life charity
48. __ Yaeger, former BMX biker star who lost a leg and now campaigns for people with disabilities

D O W N

1. Stimulating task or problem
2. Action of allowing participation
3. Puts up in Facebook, e.g.
5. Big day lead-in
6. Compass point
7. French vineyard
8. It's nice to look back on them, 2 words
9. "A Beautiful Mind" director, Howard
10. ____ duty
14. Loving action
17. ____ media
19. Wine barrel
20. Lemon slice or salad
23. Record label inits.
24. Word with wise and wordly
25. Broadcast
29. Basketball association
31. Caring
32. Over 8 hours work in a day, abbr.
33. Pour, as wine
34. Camera brand
35. Express
36. Global legal venue, with "The"
38. Vote in
39. "My Heart Will Go On" singer Celine
42. Big feature of an elephant
44. It's most of the British Isles, abbr.
39. Zodiac sign
41. Keats' composition



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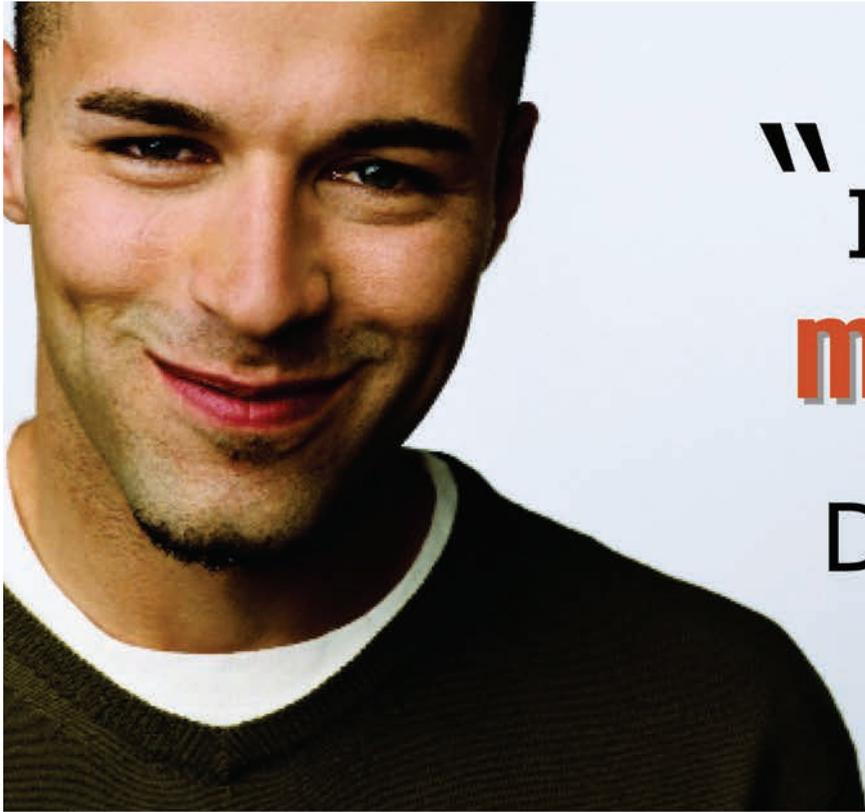


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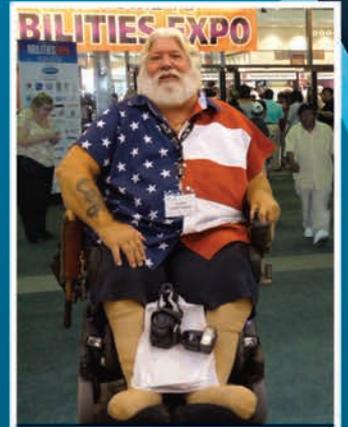


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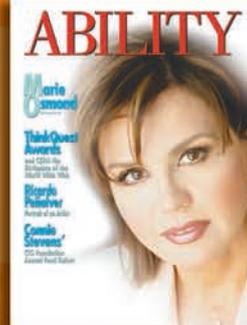
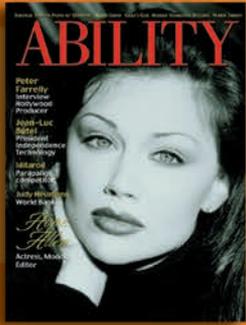
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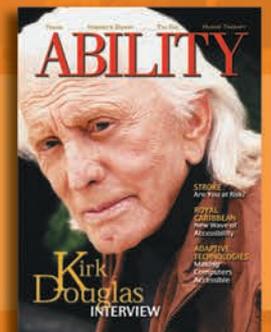
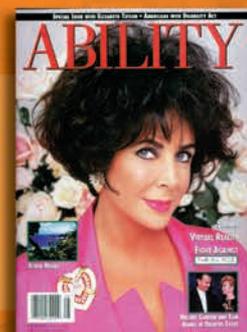
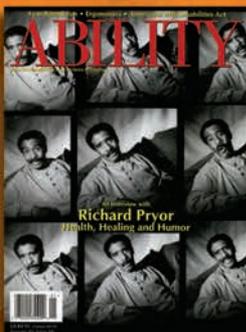
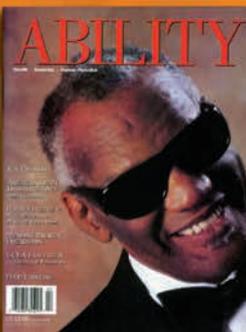
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