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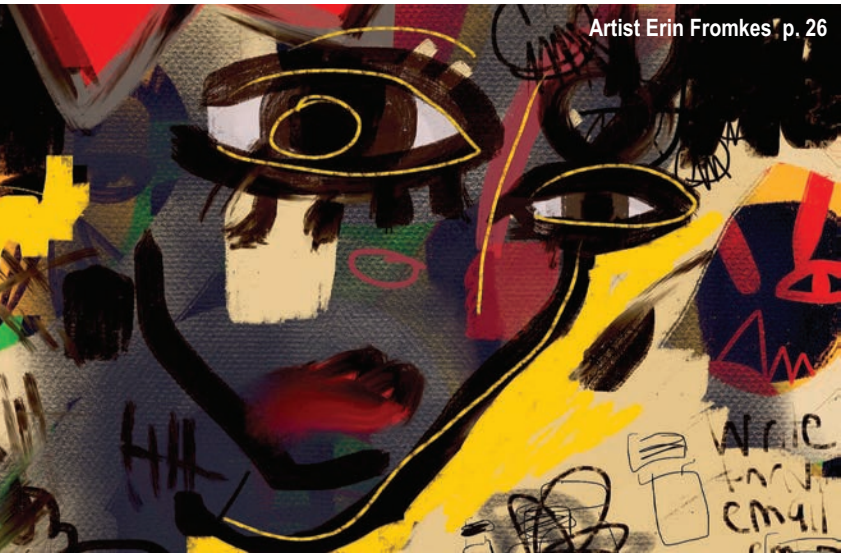


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- For High Contrast modes, under the "Setting" selection, press the button with four colored squares.
- To access the 58 Language Translator, press your phone's "Option" button, and select "Translate". To translate into another language, select the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





Since I've done riding, racing, acting and stunt work, a few of my friends from the recent Marvel show suggested that I go after even more acting and stunt gigs. So I signed up on a number of acting sites, some of them based on my friend's Sto advice. Isn't it nice when a plan comes together? I just got a call back, and it looks like I'll be doing a commercial riding my bike! I'm pretty excited as I start filming soon. When I have all the details, I'll let you know what to watch for.

I've decided that I'm happiest riding and racing, so I'm training for this year's Endurocross and X games. With the help of Husquvarna, I should have a great bike to ride.

It's good to gear up again after my Marvel adventure ended. When the show hit Florida a while back, I decided to spend time with family for the holidays before heading back to Cali.

I met up with my mom in Sunrise, FL, right before Thanksgiving. It was great to head home and, of course, have a home cooked holiday meal. We always hang out with another family, and get to enjoy both a smoked turkey and deep-fried one. There's so much food it's crazy. Kids are running everywhere and pumpkin pie is flying!

We were supposed to ride our vast assortment of ATVs during the trip, but of course the Florida weather had other plans: My parent's 10 acres were flooded out. That was a bummer, but we still managed to squeeze into the house and have a great time. We blasted the remote control cars around a little, but they kept flying into the water and frying out. Oops!

My brother always celebrates his birthday at Fort Wilderness campground in Disney World, so right before Christmas we packed up the motorhome and headed to Orlando. Even the crazy French bulldog got to tag along.

The campground always goes a little insane, and it's fun to drive around in golf carts and see all of the Christmas decorations. It's kind of like being in a small city! I could always find my way back to our motorhome because ours were the only one's without decorations.

My return flight to California was out of New Orleans, so my family and I drove out that way right after the holiday. Mom and Dad wanted my brother and me to check out the city's culture, because we'd never been there. We had a great time and got to stay on the river. It's a bizarre city, but the food and sights are amazing! If you're into oysters, they have some of the best around. You can eat them raw, but they also chargrill them, and they're delicious like that, too.

In New Orleans, Dad wanted me and my brother to experience this great chicken place called Willie Mae's. I guess it's been there forever, but he made us leave the hotel to get there before 10, when it opened, because the lines get so long. I thought he was being ridiculous, but the chicken *was* amazing and shortly after we got there, sure enough, the lines began to form, so I'm glad we got an early start.

I made it home in time to have a New Year's Eve party at my house with friends, and we all rang in 2015 together. This winter I've been snowboarding like a crazy because the snow at Big Bear has been amazing. If you see me on the slopes, come on up and ride with me!

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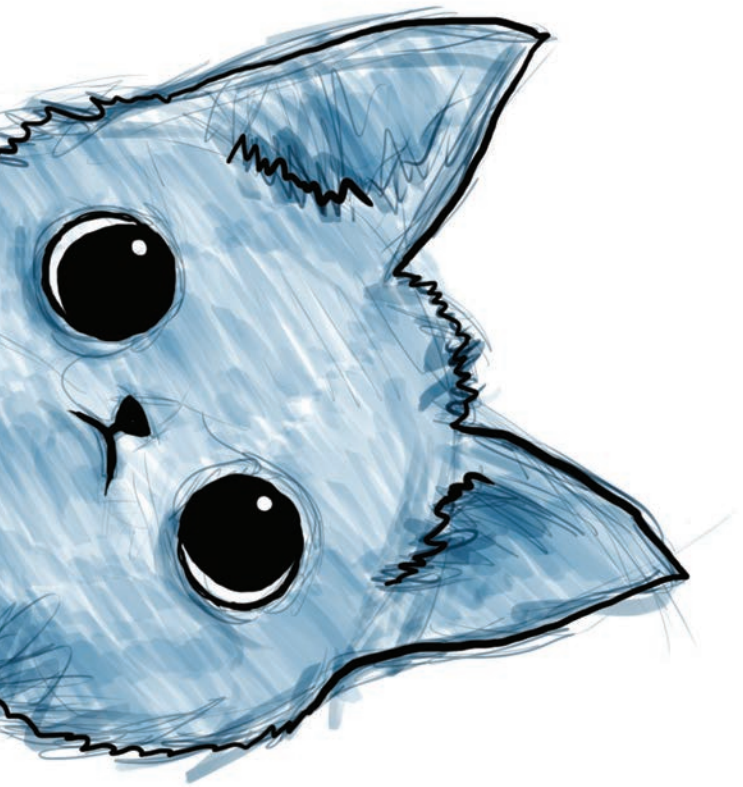
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CAT GOT YOUR LIFE?



I don't believe in reincarnation, but if I could come back as any animal after my death, it would be a kitty cat. As a writer, I'm at home throughout the day and able to observe my cat, Olaf, as he goes about his life. It's not much of a life but, damn, does he have it good. Too good. It's sickening looking at someone every day who has it better than you do.

When I get up in the morning I have a "to do" list. Most of the time it's stuff I don't want to "to do." Clean the kitchen, write something, pay some bills, make that phone call where I know I'll be on hold pushing buttons and screaming verbal prompts into the phone that are never heard correctly. C not P, you stupid lady! Okay, let's try this again… Cats have one thing on their "to do" list which is "whatever I feel like today." Even if my cat could use his little paws to make one of these dreadful phone calls for say, not paying his vet bill, he would get me to do the dirty work. Probably pull the old "circle and rub my leg" routine that has served him so well in the past.

The pesky kitty also has a "to do" list for me too. It is the same every day. Feed me is always number one. The non-stop meow whining makes that quite evident. This is one reason why being a cat is enticing. Could you imagine every time you were hungry all you had to do was go up to someone in your house and just keep annoyingly meowing until they fixed you a plate of something? Then have the audacity to not even leave a tip. Even employees at Starbucks who get paid to do their jobs set out a tip jar.

That's the thing that's intriguing about being cat. Their attitude stinks and, let's face it, who of us would not like to go around with a pissy attitude and no repercussions. As a matter-of-fact, the felines are rewarded for their lousy "the world revolves around me" demeanor. Humans wind up fired or divorced. A cat ends up with a full belly and a nap.

It makes sense that the word "me" is in the sound "meow." A cat has three things on his mind, "me, me, me." Their faces even look like royalty, which is perhaps why they demand to be treated as such. If my cat is in the mood for a petting he will just jump on my lap. Doesn't ask permission. Doesn't ask if I mind. Has no fear of a lawsuit. It's just "pet me" time. I always tell him I have things to do. I have a "to do" list, you pet leaching beast! The words mean nothing as they fall on deaf, furry ears. I know he understands me but he knows having his needs met is the most important thing to accomplish right this minute. It takes place over feeding starving children in third world countries or the fire on the stove.

My cat has only three jobs in life; eat; use the litter box; and sleep. Once in a while he'll catch a lost bug in the house, but even that's not a sure thing. I've seen him go up to crickets and smell them then walk away. I'm like, Is that all you got? Come on, I just petted you for an hour. Who knows what he would do with a mouse… probably get a card game going.

I'll look around my messy house with looming headaches and tedious tasks dancing in my brain trying to get myself in order and figure out a game plan for the day, then I look across the room at this balled-up lump of cat solemnly asleep. He's been like that all morning. He looks up at me, blinks a few times then goes back to sleep as envy and disdain rage within me. I want to do that, you lazy fleabag! How did you get that job? He just proudly sits there, grinning, believing he invented the catnap.

My kitty has an extra benefit. He is what I would consider an alarm clock cat. Every morning, at the same time, the habitual monster leaps on me and wakes me up, just like an alarm clock. I just have to make sure I wind up his tail at night. And when he jumps on my chest he's got three settings; meow, purr and scratch your eyes out.

I often wonder why I have a cat. They shed everywhere. They're always hungry. And litter box duty is meant for kids looking for an allowance. My furniture has become a scratching post used to sharpen their claws which are

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later used to draw blood on my hand when a playful belly rub turns ugly. When guests notice my ripped up fabric on the couch, I tell them it's the new style and rage Montgomery Ward is touting. I look at this fluffy creature and often ask myself, what are you bringing to the table? From my point of view, this appears to be a one-way street. Do something. Lick the dirt off the floor. Learn how to trade options. At least put your squeaky toys back where ya got 'em. The creature usually looks back at me, yawns, as if to say, what's it to ya? Then flops on his back, wanting a belly rub. Is it starting to make sense why I wouldn't mind coming back as a cat?

A dog will at least bark if a burglar is breaking into your house. A cat will lead the intruder to his food bowl and then, after it gets fed, probably point out where the jewelry is. All signs tell me they are worthless, but I just can't pull myself to open that front door and say, go! There's a whole world out there waiting for you. Go get a job, get married and sit on some couch and drink your troubles away like the rest of us. But I can't. I don't think he'd make it out there. Not with the terrorists, cat jugglers and the Jehovah Witnesses.

I once saw a cat in a commercial walking on their owner's back giving a sweet knead massage. Now that feline has a purpose in life. I looked at my cat, pointed to the TV and said, You see that!? That's what good kitties do! He snarled an irritated meow, and I went to the kitchen and fetched him a Salmon Whiskas treat to calm him down. The rest of the night I stewed in my guilt for making, what I thought, was a perfectly reasonable observation.

How did a kitty get so much power? It is mind-boggling. Maybe there's some PETA school out there that kittens attend and learn how to get whatever they want. My little bundle of fur has certainly mastered all the tricks. He sits there and stares at me with big cute eyes waiting for me to buckle under his demands… and I do! He has trained me well. I'll give him that. I least I draw the line at bathing him by licking his hairy back. I have some dignity left I tell myself as I scoop the litter box.

As he rolls on the floor without a care in the world, it becomes evident the beast has a hold on me. Maybe I just feel the love. Maybe I just need something to squeeze. Maybe he's subconsciously teaching me to care about someone other than me. No matter what it is, he's hit pay dirt. Free rent and board. No worries. Day naps and catnip. And, the infamous belly rubs. When do I get mine? I want my day in the sun. (Hold on, Olaf. Let me finish this article. I'll feed you in a minute.) A-yi-yi. (I said, hold on.) Arghhh.

Yes, if I come back, I want to be a cat. ■ ABILITY



by Jeff Charlebois



It's 2015, and we live in a world where it's easier than ever to stay connected to loved ones. However, because there are so many different ways to communicate, sometimes we actually communicate *less* than we did before we were bombarded with all this technology.

Think about it…

Flashback to the 70's and 80's. If you were alive then, you probably only had a landline, a typewriter and a box of stationery. We called friends on the landline, and returned calls if we had an answering machine that recorded voicemail messages. If someone lived at a distance, we wrote them a chatty note or a long letter. We made lunch dates, dinner dates, dates for Sunday brunch…and sometimes if we didn't have a date, we'd go hang out at the discos until we found one!

It's not that we don't do those same things today—although it's pretty rare to send (or receive) a handwritten letter. But with all the ways we have to keep in touch with people, our brains are sometimes operating on circuit overload. Should I Facetime, Skype, Facebook, instant message, tweet, text, call or email?

Also, the method of communication that you value as intimate, someone else may perceive as cold and impersonal. For example, let's say that you love to send text messages, but the person you're contacting hates to receive them—preferring a phone call. This can hurt the relationship.

The thing is, with seemingly infinite ways to stay connected, it's become easier to be in touch with more people than we ever thought possible. So now that we have a few hundred "personal" friends, whom do we really wish to be close to, and how do we create boundaries with those with whom we'd like a bit more distance?

If we do not create boundaries, then we don't have the time to focus on the relationships where there is genuine closeness and intimacy. We're close to everyone, at once, and everyone is close to us.

Some of us, through our texts, tweets, Facebooking, etc., juggle hundreds, possibly even thousands of relationships. So we need to ask ourselves this question: If it were the 70's or 80's and, given the opportunity, would I save a message from this person on my answering machine, or a note from them that I received in the mail?

In other words, allow the world of yesterday to be a barometer to the world of today, giving us a healthy perspective on all these relationships that we cultivate through social networking. There are a lot of wonderful things that can come out of the current era, but only if we understand honestly who we are, and what we want in our relationships with ourselves and with others.

Even in playing online games with others, we create a relationship. That's another area in which I run the retro test: Would I invite this person into my home to play Scrabble in 1977? If the answer is "yes," I start another game. If the answer is "no," it may be game over.

I know you might think I'm taking the spontaneity out of fun, instant connections, but I don't think so. I believe that having to wrangle so many "relationships," even connections to friends we were close to in kindergarten, can make us lose focus of interpersonal bonding. Try giving each relationship the "hallmark" of focus: caring enough to send the very best of ourselves. That, my friends, is a way for us to truly honor our connections. ■ ABILITY

by Geri Jewell

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MU MENGJIE

The Power of a Teacher's Love

On Mu Mengjie's 49th birthday last spring, people in the rural area where he lives threw him a birthday celebration for his coming 50th year. Mu was named one of China's 10 most inspiring people for his commitment to educating children who, too often, have been turned away from conventional schools.

Early on Mu's birthday day, his cell phone rang non-stop. Calls came from students wishing him good cheer. Later, when the party got under way in his front yard, more than 70 former students came back to fete their beloved teacher, who once invested all his savings to fund a private school for the blind.

The students brought Mu up to date about what they were doing and their personal successes. Liliang Zhou said, "My sister's family was relatively poor, so I helped pay for my nephew's college tuition with my income, which my Mom could never imagine I'd ever earn." Zhou owns a massage shop with a monthly net income of about $800.

By noon on the day of the bash, everyone was served noodle soup and a glass of bubbly to toast their cherished teacher and wish him long life. Then he raised his glass to toast his students, in return, also wishing them many fruitful years.

One of the guests was sighted and a friend of a former student, who said he'd often heard his friends talking about their teacher, and wanted to meet him.

"These students are doing great!" the sighted guest said of the students who are blind. "If they had not received any education from Mu's school, they may never have gotten out of their houses, earned enough to support themselves, or had the happy lives they have now."

After the party, when students went back to their work places, Mu reflected on his dream 14 years ago to open a school for kids who are blind, to ensure they got an education. Today he has taught hundreds of pupils on his village campus of 2.5 acres.

NO SCHOOL FOR MU

In 1973, at the age of eight, Mu did not have a chance to attend a school. Back then teachers didn't know how to educate him because he could not see the pages of books or the blackboard, even though he was a good listener.

He started learning at home by listening to his sister read her school work aloud; gradually he learned to recite the famous Chinese poem, *Jingyesi*. He also learned to count to 100. With those skills he thought the school would accept him, but it still refused him.

Mu was in tears, and his father had to drag him away, saying: "Stop crying. You have to accept your fate. Your Mom and I will take care of you forever." The memory of that day was more painful for Mu than losing his eyesight, he says.

Born in 1965, in Xingtai City, Hebei Province, a rural area east Xin Zhaicun, Mu was 4 years old when he got the eye disease, retinal atrophy. At 7, he became completely blind.

His father was afraid of him being lonely at home, so he let Mu take care of the family's sheep. One day, the sheep went into the barley field, and the village leader was upset and scolded his father, saying, "The blind kid cannot even take care of sheep; what can the blind do?" Mu's father apologized, but still had to pay a fine, which entailed selling his sheep. After the incident, Mu became determined to acquire the skills to earn his own living.

At that time, in rural areas, a person who became blind was considered unlucky to others. If a blind person went into someone's home, they were thought to bring bad energy. So Mu could only eat in the streets. He had to sleep in a bullpen. He had to overcome a great hardship to learn skills to become a street musician, an acupuncturist, a masseur, and the Yi Ching Braille fortune telling.

In 1979 he, along with the master storyteller musicians in Baoding, heard that there was a school that taught blind students. He rushed there. After a simple arithmetic exam, he was accepted by the school, but could not afford the tuition.

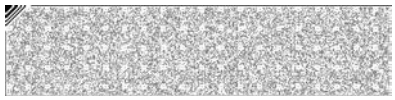
He remembered his masters who taught him various skills for free. It instilled a belief in him that people who are blind should help one other. After he walked out of the school that he could not afford, he vowed: "If I make enough income in the future, I will run a school for the blind free of charge. I want the blind children in rural areas go to school!"

At 15, he began to work as a singer and storyteller. His stage was streets corners; train and bus stations; and small hotels in villages. Two years later, he had saved enough money to help reconstruct his parent's home. A few years after that, he built his own home, and his family had become the wealthiest in the village. When he had saved $85,000, he pursued his dream to open a private school for people who are blind.

SCHOOL POLICY OF FOUR NO'S

In 2000, Meng Jie School for the Blind was formally established in the southern region of Hebei Province and is still the only private school for special education in that area. It fills the gaps in basic education in rural areas.

The school has an open-door policy for both the blind and kids with cognitive disabilities. There are no interviews, no tests, no age limit, and no charge for tuition. The school also accepts students who can pay full tuition





and fees, which helps subsidize those who don't pay. Students who are blind can stay and study as long as they need to. "No matter what, as long as a teacher teaches patiently, a student always progresses," says Mu.

In 2014, the school had 91 blind students. Children in lower grades loved to play hide-and-seek, Mu observes. They learned how to touch Braille books and proudly shouted: "We can read and feel smart." When they went out, one by one, teachers—most sighted—would help them. Everyone was happy to learn and enjoy the day.

Guozhong Shi was the first blind student who graduated in 2002. He goes back to the school at least three times a year, once for Mu's birthday, once for Qingxiang Cao, his wife's birthday and once for New Year's.

At one point, Jiahong Li, then a 4-year-old girl, was the youngest student and followed a first grade curriculum. She came from a distant village, and her mother, Liting Chen, having low vision with a disability in her hand, also took secondary school courses in massage.

Liting Chen had had rubella during her pregnancy, which caused her daughter to be become blind shortly after birth. No kindergarten would accept the girl, and she spent much of the day screaming at home. One day, her grandmother was watching a TV program called, *Inspired China*, where she saw something about Mu, and wrote down his name.

She asked neighbors to help her find him through the Internet. After she got his phone number, she called the school to make sure they could accept her young granddaughter. Then Liting's father took his daughter and granddaughter to the school—over a 370 mile journey. To facilitate her daughter's care, Liting lived with the child in one room at the school, and the girl was finally able to attend kindergarten.

One Family's Sacrifice

In 2008, the school faced challenges. Many teachers and students left as a result of implementation of governmental subsidies for rural public schools, which waived tuition and books, and reduced admission fees.

After that policy took effect, Mu's private school did not have a low-cost advantage over the public schools. So, many children who were paying full tuition and fees switched to public school, and Mu's school lost a source of income. Unable to pay his teachers; he lost many of them.

In 2009, Mu stepped up his own efforts to regain financial footing for the school, working overtime at acupuncture and massage, offering counseling, and taking bank loans. In the end, the school only recruited those who are blind. Mu remained optimistic saying, "As long as there is a patient, someone will find me doing acupuncture; as long as there is an unhappy person, someone will need me to do consulting; I can earn money and sustain our school's operations."

He recruited his son, daughter and niece to teach. His niece's wages were less than $14 per month, and his son


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and his daughter worked for free. Mu Huaxin, his daughter, graduated from high school and attended the Handan Special Education Teachers Normal School; his niece, Mu Lifei, majored in computer science and graduated from college in 2008.

Mu Mengjie said to them, "In the Mu family, my generation has three blind children, your father and I, and your Aunt. We all suffered a bitter blind life; we have to help the blind."

KIDS BEING HELD BACK

Mu Mengjie has run the school for 14 years with students from rural areas, the majority coming from poor families.

"These kids have never been to a school, and they were being held back at home," Mu finds. Data from a "Protection of Disabled Persons" law enforcement inspection report shows that until 2012, the proportion of children who are blind or deaf or who have an intellectual disability are the least likely to receive a compulsory education, at a rate of only about 20 percent, in some provinces. The data were not specific to the implementation of the rural areas, but the poorer they were, the less they could afford school.

Mu's school continues to get good coverage in the news media, but many rural people do not read newspapers or watch the news. In the process of searching for children to enroll, Mu learned that there were a lot of cases where many children who were blind were even less fortunate than he had been. Some parents tied the children to the bed or locked them in the cellar. Many parents never taught them such skills, as walking, eating, dressing, bathing, toilet skills, etc. "In fact, they are not even treated as human beings" Mu said.

Eighty percent of the parents who sent their children who are blind to school don't visit them. Those parents had simply given up on them and wanted to get rid of the burden. Many arrived with no language or interpersonal skills, which is harmful to children's self esteem. Lifei Mu found that the older the child, the less self esteem they have, and the more difficult it is to restore.

LESS MEAT IN MEALS

With tight funding, Mu had to cut down the number of teachers, reduce student meals and health-care costs. Teachers and students ate the same meals. At the beginning some teachers had a hard time adjusting, but eventually overcame it and accepted the simpler meal.

Schools did not have shower rooms. Even in the summer, each student took a shower once a week. Outside the second floor, Mu installed a solar water heater and six-shower heads for summer days. Throughout winter, students go into the town center to take baths. Huafei Mu picks students up and transports them the 3 miles in a small van of 10 seats, requiring nine round trips.

In 2009, the China State Council issued a decree that, in a city with a population of more than 300,000 children with disabilities, the government would increase financial support for special education. Since 2012, the government has subsidized the salaries of teachers who instruct students who are blind and poor. Huafei Mu worked for free for two years before he became a public teacher, receiving a regular monthly salary from the government.

A government subsidy of $50,000 a year has reduced some of the pressure on Mu. But the school's annual expenditure is north of $85,000, so he still needs to find a way to make up the shortage of $35,000 a year to maintain a balanced operating budget.

He hopes to get more government support for private special education. In a 2014 teleconference, Premier Li Keqiang spoke of innovative ideas and approaches to coordinate "various educational resources at all levels to support special education." Mu looks forward to the day the premier's reforms are implemented. ■ ABILITY

byYing Li

chinadp.net.cn

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.*

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数据库查询

China's Largest Disability Publisher and Website



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人物频道

the breast things in life...

After my uneventful annual mammogram in the summer of 2011, I received one of those all too familiar notices from the hospital saying that I needed to come back in for another look at my left breast. I was not upset in any way, but for some reason I made an appointment with a breast specialist in the city instead. I will never forget as I sat in the exam room waiting for the doctor to give me her impression of the films I brought, when the office experienced a power outage. The doctor ran in and asked if I was ok. Though I was not familiar with this doctor, I felt as if her concern were coming from another place. I said, "Did you see anything in my left breast?" She said, "No, but I did see "something" in your right one."

So started my journey of making good intuitive decisions. If I had gone back to the facility that sent me the notice, they would have checked the wrong side, given me the all clear, and put off detecting what turned out to be a small tumor in my right breast for at least another year.

A dear friend who was an executive at a leading hospital guided me to a fantastic surgeon who believed a lumpectomy suitable. With his talent and the fact that the tumor was as deep as it was small facilitated a remarkable cosmetic outcome. Lymph dissection, all the tests entailed, things only got dicey when it came to radiation. I had the option of choosing Brachytherapy, which would mean inserting a device into the incision site that would deliver the radiation continually for two weeks, then remove it and re-stitch. Or, per my surgeon's insistence, do full on, traditional radiation for seven weeks. Neither of these options made sense to me. Undo that finite scar? Blast the whole breast causing unavoidable shrinkage and exposing my nearby organs to damage? Both options seemed contradictory.

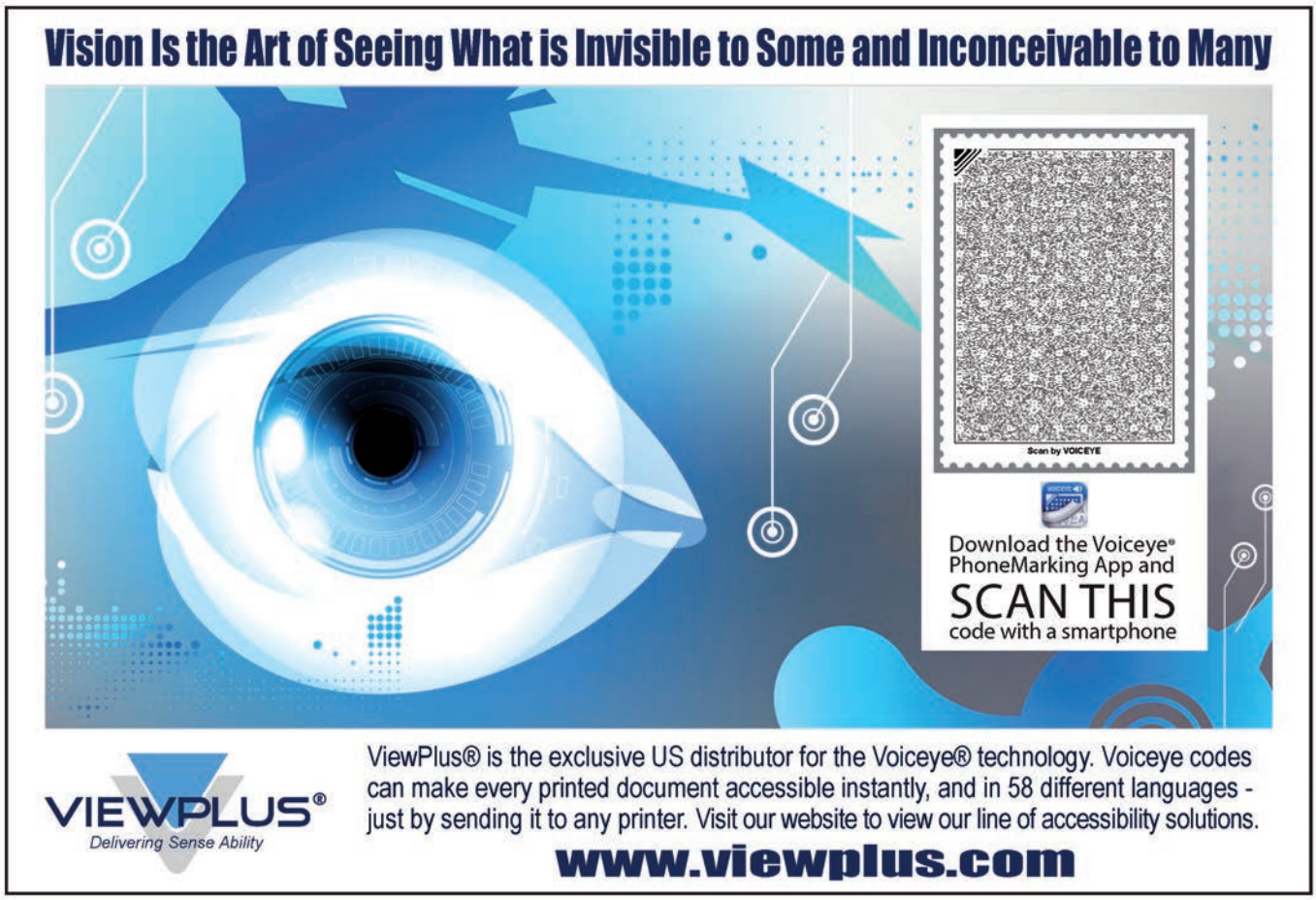
My brother in law was photographing the new state-of-the-art Perelman center in Philadelphia and mentioned proton therapy as a possible alternative. I called and they apologized that breasts were not yet on the radar for this type of therapy as this body part varies greatly in each individual and is difficult to target. Now that I knew this modality existed, I was determined to see if I could possibly find this targeted beam treatment somewhere. It turned out there was only one place in the entire world that was doing breasts at that time, and they were starting their second clinical trial. We would have to travel 3000 miles to California. With an angel on my shoulder I managed to qualify for that trial, and off we went.

At this amazing facility, they spent time building a cast for my breast so they could specifically pinpoint the radiation. I was the only woman there at that time, but met many men from all over the world who were receiving proton radiation for their prostate. It has been almost five years now and I am comfortable with my unconventional personal decisions, including not taking Tamoxifen.

The anxiety, however, comes on a yearly basis with the trip to the oncologist and my mammogram. This year, like the others, my doctor wrote the prescription on, or around, the anniversary of the previous year's test. As usual, the technician got annoyed at my request for the thyroid guard and had to untie it from the back of the door where it apparently resides without use. We got started, and then she stated she had to repeat some pictures... my heart began to pound. When she finished I went to sit in the waiting room with the other anxious women, perspiration running down the sides of my gown. I heard them call for a doctor... and just thought... oh god, please no.... A very long ten minutes later I was summoned to the office where the physician reviews the results. She immediately said everything looked good, prompting me to thank her as if she had spared me a prison sentence!

Weeks later, I was not expecting the next cause of stress to come in the form of a bill for this recent mammogram. Certainly a mistake, I thought. Any woman can climb in a mobile unit these days and receive a mammogram for free. I pay almost a thousand dollars per month for my premium individual plan and have never had to pay for my mammogram.

I called the hospital to let them know there had been a mistake. I was told no mistake. They said my insurance is not paying for this mammogram and it was my responsibility. Okay... so I called the insurance company, and indeed they said they were not obligated to pay. I called back when it hit me that this same insurance company had paid for my mammogram the year prior. To my disbelief, I was told that the prior year's payment had been a mistake. I could not get a clear answer as to why I was being denied other than that they did not cover "diagnostic" mammograms. They didn't seem to understand that this was my annual mammogram and



that I was not having a problem.

About the third phone call it was explained to me that my physician had entered a diagnostic "code" that rendered me not covered. How could that be? My doctor deals with women who need mammograms every day... impossible! I started to be unpleasant and grew angry with each new contact, knowing and hoping these phone calls were being recorded and monitored. I started using terms such as "discrimination" and "unfair practice" when it became clear that I was being denied only because of my prior breast cancer.

As things stood, I would never be covered again as long as I live. I don't think this was what Hillary and Barrack were trying to achieve, and in fact the total opposite. Finally, I got a supervisor who was willing to listen and hand me the golden ticket—the prescription code that would allow me to be recognized as an average woman receiving her annual mammogram. Armed with her validation, I asked if she could please do one more thing and stay on the line while we called the radiology department together. We put the call through to the individual in charge of that area, to whom the insurance rep clearly stated that she would be willing to support and witness changing the code, thus guaranteeing coverage for this service. We went back and forth, and I could not fathom the downside. I would be covered, and the hospital would be paid. Not so fast... the radiology employee refused any responsibility in the matter believing she would be breaking the law. She put it back on my physician to find a way to change the code after the fact.

I called my doctor directly and implored her to change that damming code, explaining the ramifications not only for myself, but also for every other patient she has with prior breast cancer. She informed me she could not change it because of its technological nature and because of the computer system she relied on. She promised to speak with the powers that be and I believed her.

A few days later I received a call from a woman named Roseanne... thanking me?

Yes, thanking me for shedding light on this issue and apologizing for any stress it had caused me (she definitely must have listened to the recordings). As it turns out, I would not be receiving any more bills as it was taken care of, and the radiology department was having a meeting to correct and clarify procedure moving forward. I felt good. Two weeks later the insurance company mailed an addendum to their plan regarding mammograms: they were eliminating the discriminatory factor of prior breast cancer as a reason to prevent coverage for annual screenings. ■ ABILITY

by CC Brown

proton-therapy.org





am often asked, why?
Why do I ride in the pouring rain?
Why do I ride in the black of night?
Why do I ride in the bitter cold of winter?

My motorcycle license plate reads NOCAR, and here is why I ride my motorcycle every day.

Forty years ago, I had the opportunity to have my palm read by one of the most famous fortunetellers in the world—at the midway of a county fair. After paying with three ride tickets, he hooked me by miraculously knowing that someone in my life was named Mom. For an additional three ride tickets, he was able to inform me that my future might involve living happily ever

after or end in a fiery automobile crash. I opted for the happily ever after, and I have tried to stay away from cars ever since.

Riding a motorcycle makes me feel alive and refreshes my spirit. After almost 30 years on two wheels, it still never gets old. We all need an activity in our busy lives that will do this for us. Skiing, running, surfing, painting sunsets or even knitting might do it for you. The trick is to find something you can be passionate about and make it an important regular activity in your life. You deserve it!

When I ride, I do not have multiple sclerosis (MS). Even the thought of my disease melts away almost instantly along with my symptoms and all the rest of my life's junk, freeing me, leaving me carefree and in the wind.

Take today, a dreary cold January morning for instance. I'd bet a million dollars I felt more alive and refreshed when I arrived to work today than all the other commuters in my state combined. With no hint of bad weather or road conditions from the TV, I grabbed my boots, heated jacket and gloves. With a kiss from my understanding wife and a smile under my helmet, I rode off. I have a handful of routes to work I can pick from, but today I took 40 miles of scenic hills and curves.

About 30 miles into my ride, I began to notice the roadway was no longer salt crusted or dry. The heavily treed state park road I was travelling on hadn't dried out from yesterday's rain shower like the rest. The asphalt was glistening, and the dry tracks where tires helped expose the pavement slowly got thinner and thinner until there were none. It would not have been any issue at all, if the temperature hadn't been 21 degrees. I was riding myself into the midst of another surprise adventure.

I concentrated on smooth moves, managing throttle and brakes with an ever so gentle touch. I tried not to lean the bike at all. I did not tense up or panic, but I was curious how the situation would pan out.

Road traffic had started to materialize, which was a big red flag, as I seldom encountered any cars on this road. We all slowed down to about 10 mph, just about the time flashing headlights were signaling from the opposite direction. The cars ahead of us were stopped, and some up ahead were actually turning around.

Cars had slid off the road ahead, and emergency lights from a tow truck and police car were visible through the leafless trees. As I came to a slow and calculated stop on the incline of a hill, I touched my tippy-toes down on each side of the bike, immediately confirming that it was indeed sheer ice I had been balancing on for the last few miles. I held my breath, trusting the brakes and my faithful Bridgestone tires would keep me from sliding about in impossible directions. I wasn't worried or scared, just not sure what I could do in this predicament.

It was a narrow country road with a high crown and no shoulder. The cars ahead were slowly making four or five point U-turns. There was no way I could reverse direction without surely dropping my 700 pound bike repeatedly on the ice. I could read, "Are you an Idiot?" on every set of lips shielded by safety glass as the cars ahead retreated.

In a brief rare moment, the smile left my face and I wished I'd owned a bike with a seat height that wasn't three inches taller than my leg length, so I could have at least dragged my feet like pontoons. (Notice, I didn't go so far as to wish I'd borrowed my wife's car this morning.)

I waited a few minutes on the edge of the road, and a few cars behind me did the same. A tow truck was pulling a car out of the brush and blocking the way ahead. We could not go forward, and I was not going to attempt to go back. Although I would be very late to work, I knew in a few hours the temperature would rise enough to melt the thin black ice. A man in a white Ford truck rolled down his window as he passed and gave me two big thumbs up. Obviously, he was a rider, albeit a smarter rider.

It was just a few minutes, but the solution to this morning's adventurous dilemma appeared like an Apache helicopter loudly rising over the horizon. A 10-wheel DOT sanding truck approached from the other direction. It was a joy to be saved, baptized if you will, with a wonderful splatter of rock salt, sand and brine. As my rescuer passed me, he rolled down his window and yelled down to me, "Be careful buddy, it's all ice ahead!"

Traffic began to move forward after the second car was towed away. My GPS confirmed it was only about a mile until the safety of the dry and treated main road, so I turned off the bike's traction control which allowed me to move on the ice, held my breath and continued slowly over the hill and around the bend.

There were no reporters, congratulatory crowds, cheers or clapping when I reached my office parking lot and dismounted my trusty steed this morning, but it did take me over an hour to stop giggling, and I am still unable to wipe the smirk off my face.

Not every day's commute is like this, but mornings like this make me feel excited to be alive and truly grateful I get to experience such an invigorating, life-lifting, skill-mastering achievement, just trying to get to work! No matter what else I do today, I can already declare this a most excellent and successful day.

Why on earth would I ever want to commute by car?

■ ABILITY

longhaulpaul.com





photo by Jacek Gancarz

Life and Art

BENEATH THE COVERS



After being chronically ill for the past two decades, the now frail artist has recently been diagnosed with the cause-positive Lyme band findings, coupled with Multi-Systemic Infectious Disease Syndrome (MSIDS). These invisible illnesses, as they're often referred, are debilitating in many ways. Erin Fromkes channels her talents through art making and is emerging onto the scene as an artistic voice for a global community experiencing similar afflictions. A worldwide project launched by the artist in 2012, "Hope Hands for a Cause" is going into its 3rd year of participation. This ambitious fighter and advocate aims to open a dialogue about the experiences of invisible illness through her art, providing interpretation and a better understanding for viewers with the ultimate goal of expanding global understanding and compassion for those suffering through it.





Erin Fromkes is a mixed media artist, grower of sprouts, glitter princess, and badass who paints everything. She fights EBV, CMV, HHV6, DDD, (ME/CFS) with a twist of Lyme disease & co-infections.

- Multi-Systemic Infectious Disease Syndrome - (MSIDS)
- Epstein–Barr virus (EBV)
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- Human Herpesvirus 6 (HHV-6)
- Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME) also called Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)
- Degenerative Disc Disease (DDD)
- Positive Lyme Bands & co-infections
- Co-infections include: Q-Fever (Coxiella Burnetii) & Babesia Microti

WHEN MY MYSTERY ILLNESS BEGAN EXACTLY, I CANNOT SAY

I can remember being in and out of our elementary school nurse's office frequently —Mrs. Yarn, the sweet elderly lady with pink vintage glasses and curly hair. I paid more visits to her than the average child. I was often unwell and sent home to rest. In between the bits of ill, a magical childhood filled with fireflies and illustrious imagination unfolded. Secret hideaways were revealed and seasons were spent coloring in my festively decorated art nook, as my mind, like any child's, danced with dreams of exploring the world and voyages of limitless possibility.

Fast forward to middle school. As the only player in the band with an oversized sparkling brass French Horn (that's half my size mind you), I stood out, as did this exotic horn. I was immersed in a sea of long haired flute players and clarinets. One day the horn was passed around the band class in jest, for others to toot. This innocuous and innocent event was really a germ-sharing party, which resulted in my first severe bout of mono. What later manifested were two battles with chicken pox, another bout in high school with mono and a time span that included severe flus, fevers, cold sweats and head pain piercing enough to cause hospitalization. All of these were likely to be caused by more than simple viruses.

College brought the typical cycle of parties, good times, friends, and intense studying. Everything was squeezed in between falling ill, often with viruses which sadly, I had become far too accustomed to fighting, including a third bout of mono and then a fourth. Despite all the adversity, future plans of a career in the arts brimming with fancy gallery openings, elite social engagements and the quest for true love hung in the foreground. I imagined all of these opportunities would lie ahead.

THE THING ABOUT LIFE IS THAT YOU JUST DON'T KNOW HOW THINGS ARE GOING TO TURN OUT

Who knew these early experiences with illness would evolve into months, and then years of time, eventually to the point of consuming my life? The countless doctors and office visits that would double - then triple? "Needles and blood tests and IV's—oh my!" MRI's and cat scans were soon to become a normal part of my routine. I spent so much time tossed within an endless system of networks and traveling across states to see a specialist… all the while with my body crawling with invisible meanies and strange puzzling symptoms and none of the doctors knowing why. There were herniations, degenerative discs, months of physical therapy,





Materials used to create these pieces were; pill powders, hair & feathers, honey, milk of magnesia

trips to the ER, acupuncture, excruciating immobilizing pain and spinal surgery! What a spiral! Good days became a thing of the past, leaving only distant memories of social outings, riding bikes and summers at the beach. I was left with the cold reality of strange, relentless exhaustion that would weight itself and cling to every fiber of my being—the unwelcomed visitors draining my life. Still, the search for answers remained.

Hopes and dreams are scaled back when life unfolds in such a way, so much so that now my time and focus consist of merely surviving the days and keeping positive. I am truly blessed to be surrounded by love and to have the help and support of my wonderful parents. Together we continue to try and make lemonade. My saint of a mother, unpredictably, has parted from her own house and marriage to become my live in nurse, housekeeper, caretaker, medical secretary, professional juicer, driver, salad maker and personal shopper. My sweet, patient father has become a tea maker, art assistant, wheelchair pusher, vegetable washer, grocery shopper and cook. This is a relationship that is skewed and has been adapted to help carry out the basic essentials that any young adult should be able to handle with ease on her own.

EXCERPT OF A DAILY "STRIVE FOR" LIST

… make wheatgrass, push to eat three healthy organic gluten free meals, take all of your proper medications at the right times, sort your pills for the week, soak vegetables for green juice, call your doctor's office (several times) to make sure they faxed results to your other specialist, find time for basic yoga and practice your Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) tapping, breathe, go outside—if you can today—and get some sunshine, feed the cats, respond to emails, make art, make tea, walk up the block...

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AN ARTIST, BUT NOW I MAKE ART THAT IS MORE PERSONAL

My creative voice comes from a combination of personal experiences mixed with imagination. I have figured out a way to exchange the physical to art-form and to give the malady a face. Internalized feelings that have manifested over time are unleashed into my works. This art therapy aids in my healing process.

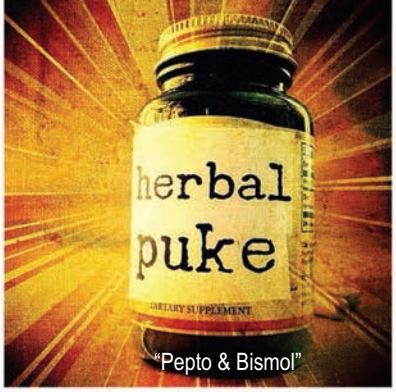
One style of my work is short-lived because I use my leftover supplements to create them. I call them Medicine portraits. They are a series of temporary pieces, captured through a sequence of photographs. Created using pills, pill powders, teas, liquids and tinctures, these familiar, far too often consumed substances serve as my mediums. Delicately poured out in small quantities, manipulated powders and liquids become strange figures and ghostly portrait… here one moment gone the next.

Other, more permanent works aim to capture moments of time and emotion. These pieces represent fragments of my life, and when placed concurrently together, tell my story. Paint is the substance I use to color myself out of this pained labyrinth. As such, everything gets

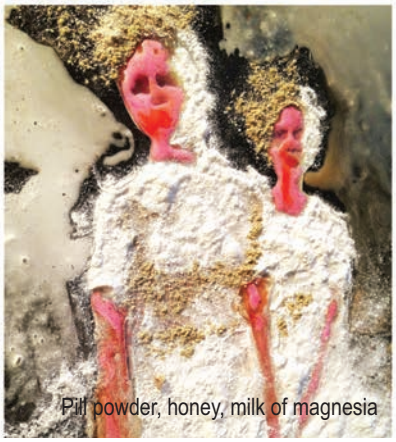


Why not paint your chair and travel in style?!





"Pepto & Bismol"


Pill powder, honey, milk of magnesia



enveloped in color and is smattered with collaged bits. Vibrant energetic works, wearable quirky head pieces and heavily splattered outfits illustrate my passion and love for art, and also depict two contrasting worlds… the one within which I am trapped and the healthy energetic physical realm in which I dream to return. I forgot to mention the digital Bed art that I have been making recently… UGH!

ART SHARING

I got into the Instagram craze in its infant stage, so there were not many of us out there at the time. As time marched on, several other young people, who did not look sick, were beginning to bravely post their daily battle pictures. I was instantly inspired and enamored with what I saw.

How can this be? I had never seen others in real time that were just like me! Unknowingly, I had stumbled across a small group of people that would eventually blossom into a tight-knit group of thousands and that this soon-to-be future world would allow me to communicate at any given hour of the day for support, with mirror images of myself.

The realization that I was no longer alone in this fight has helped me to become a more proactive artist as well. I feel a certain responsibility to use my creative voice to bring "invisible illness" to the forefront, because there is such urgency to this. Underfunded illness research and the lack thereof result in treatments that often impair human lives. Therefore I use art as my weapon of choice to express the frustrations with this.

Social media outlets such as Instagram and Facebook have been invaluable tools. What a rare gift it is to be an artist this day and age… the power that lies within this is such a blessing. I am bedridden and housebound most of the time, but through technology, I am able to create art from under the covers using a tablet. Now I can connect and share all of my creations by posting them in a matter of seconds. These posts are gateways to an outside world, giving me an instant audience! I have a mix of followers, many of whom are in the same boat as I. As such, it is very gratifying to have a compatriot look at my work and experience that "me too moment"—"the ah ha" I get in understanding where this piece is coming from and the response to it… totally priceless and comforting, too.

THE GOOD STUFF

It is easy to lose sight of the good stuff—the fun activities. Keeping busy with art projects really keeps me looking forward to the future. I plan to continue to sprinkle color, light, glitter, love and joy into this gaping, pained pit of exhaustion. I will not relent pushing forward into the light. My mission in process is to create a website of my artworks where Spoonies—people that live with chronic illness—can visit my online gallery of works that might speak to them, to share visible hope, as well as include future art challenges that will encourage art as therapy and give chronically ill "creatives" something to look forward to. With a present focus on healing and art making, future dreams to develop a chronically ill artist community and healing art center sparkle on my mind's horizon. ■ ABILITY

ErinFromkes.com
Follow me on Instagram:
@Cfs_Warrior_Princess



VICE PRESIDENT OF PARADISE

Ana Helena Chacón Echeverría

Bordering Nicaragua and Panama on the narrow isthmus of Central America, Costa Rica is a country known for its natural features—lush rainforests, exotic wildlife and stunning geographical diversity. Peaceful and democratic since it abolished its military in 1949, this tiny enclave of four million is considered one of the most progressive and stable countries in Central America, with a rapidly developing economy, progressive environmental policies, and a health care systems ranked higher than the US.

What is less well known is its progress on disability rights, and the players who persistently nudge their country forward on such issues. Among its individual champions is Ana Helena Chacón Echeverría, one of two vice presidents of Costa Rica, and her friend, director-screenwriter Laura Astorga Carrera. For both women, disability issues are deeply personal. VP Chacón's daughter has a developmental disability, and Laura, who uses a cane, has a father with a disability.

Long before entering the political arena in 2002, VP Chacón was a familiar face in Costa Rica's human rights movement. Disability-centric and reform-minded, she helped create the country's first non-governmental organization (NGO) for people with Down syndrome and later an inter-American NGO for people with disabilities. For years, she went into schools on a weekly basis and taught children how to respect individual differences using puppets with disabilities. She is a former cabinet minister and deputy who has pushed hard to shape public policy to benefit people with disabilities and the disadvantaged. In fact, early in her tenure as vice president, she's already signed a decree to improve work and technical training opportunities for people with disabilities.

Although she worked with Laura's father for many years on human rights, she met the director as a result of her most recent film, Red Princesses (Princesas Rojas), a story told from the perspective of the daughter of Sandinista rebels who flee Nicaragua for Costa Rica. The plot draws from the director's own childhood: her father is well-known journalist and human rights activist Luis Fernando Astorga. The film has won numerous awards and was considered one of the best at the Chicago Latino Film Festival in 2014.

Both women share with *ABILITY Magazine* their perspectives on the progress and status of disability rights in Costa Rica—its hard-won achievements, persistent challenges, and promising future.

INCREMENTAL STEPS

Among the subtler shifts in Costa Rica's disability rights movement has been a change in terminology, away from using disparaging or "less than" words, such

as “handicapped” in favor of “disabled.” VP Chacón explains: “We have been changing our nomenclature, because we have been changing our priority on how to approach disability. We now have a human rights approach, which we’ve had for many years. We are not begging for favors, we are begging for our rights.”

Unlike its neighbors Guatemala and Nicaragua, whose disability movements originated with activists who’d already cultivated a voice during their countries’ civil wars, Costa Rica’s grassroots movement began with the parents and especially mothers of children with disabilities. In fact, so close is the association between parents of children with disabilities and the movement, that it’s not uncommon for parents to identify themselves as disabled, just as VP Chacón does, saying, “I am the mother of a disabled woman; she’s a young woman of 25 who is mentally retarded, so I feel part of this group, you know?” Today, the country has various disability movements, of which most are run by NGOs and people with disabilities while a few are still parent-initiated.

When asked about her use of the term “mentally retarded,” acceptable in Costa Rican parlance but no longer in the US for its pejorative connotations, both VP Chacón and Laura concede that disability nomenclature is still evolving in Costa Rica. “It’s not in a bad way that we use it... although it can be used as slang in the streets to insult someone,” says the vice president. “Things are changing, but we still have a lot to do. We have to make a movie about this topic,” she says. “But nothing in the teach way, just using an emotional way to teach,” adds Laura.

Although Costa Rica passed “The Equal Opportunities Law for People with Disabilities” in 1996, a sweeping piece of legislation designed to provide equal opportunity for people with disabilities in the areas of health services, education, and employment as well as access to public buildings and spaces, its implementation has been slow and incremental at best.

Special education, for example, is one such area the vice president is working hard to overhaul, particularly curriculum reform and the need for more social inclusion. “We have a lot of challenges because teachers who teach special education don’t have to give information about how they’ve been developing their classes, so they’re not tested by a third party,” explains VP Chacón, adding, “They need to be tested by other teachers to prove that they have really taught the kids.”

Perhaps nowhere has the battleground been more fiercely fought for disability rights than with public transportation, which the vice president calls “a real fight.” With the passage of the Equal Opportunities Law, mass transit authorities were given 10 years to make every vehicle used for public transportation accessible to people with disabilities, including those in wheelchairs. But a decade passed with little change. A powerful group, mass transit demanded more time and a contentious battle ensued. They were then given an additional five years to bring their vehicles into compliance. Several sticking points was the cost required to retrofit vehicles and the time it takes to lower the lift platforms on buses, which drivers complained slowed down service.

To date, not all transportation units have been adapted, but a recent measure enacted by the government in will help enforce compliance: bus drivers will be required to have a new license in order to drive their buses, which must be retrofitted for accessibility. “But it’s almost 20 years too late,” laments the vice president. “Because they really don’t care.”

Though mass transit stalled compliance efforts for years, there’s been a noticeable shift in cultural attitudes and behaviors in the streets towards those who are disabled, which itself signals a victory. “Only now can I stop a bus and they will stop,” says Laura. “In the past when they saw that I used a cane, they didn’t want to stop. But now, they’ve learned that they have to stop and use the lift to help me if I need it. But this is recent. This is an important shift—it’s not just about the lift, but the attitude.”

She says even when she doesn’t need the platform lift or if the lift doesn’t work, passengers are willing to lend a helping hand. “And this is very important because the chauffeurs and other passengers have changed their minds. Twenty years ago, people weren’t educated about disability. Now, everybody helps; they have the attitude, ‘Okay, I have to do that—it’s part of my job.’”



The Martirosyan family hosts a traditional Armenian dinner for Vice President of Costa Rica, Chacón Echeverría & Laura Astorga Carrera (middle) - good times



VP Ana Helena Chacón Echeverría always smiling

CREATING A NEW PARADIGM

Costa Rica strives to reach a quota of five percent employment of people with disabilities in public sector jobs, whereas in the US, only federal contractors are required to meet a quota of seven percent. Unfortunately, rarely, if ever, are these quotas met in either country.

In Costa Rica, it's been difficult to accomplish, says the vice president, because of too many financial restrictions. "So what we have been doing over the last six months is working with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Labor on our protocol for educating and hiring people with disabilities to prepare them for technical careers," she says.

The quota doesn't pertain to privately held companies because it's considered unconstitutional, so Costa Rica, since 1973, has offered private companies double tax incentives to hire people with disabilities. But companies rarely use it because they typically hire only one or two people with disabilities, not groups, so the deductions are minimal.

Although Costa Rica enacted laws to help equalize opportunities for people with disabilities, they still struggle to transcend the discrimination and stigma so many face in the job search. "The worst thing is the perception that some people have about us," explains Laura. "For me, I am in a privileged situation because I made a movie and I am kind of famous for it, and people respect me. But if I wanted to work in advertising, for example, employers would feel uncomfortable that I use a cane. They feel like, 'This is not a good match.'"

"Because that's not the image of a very successful person," adds the vice president. "If you are disabled, you are not considered successful. And that's not true at all."

This is especially true for Costa Ricans with disabilities who have advanced degrees. It's easier to get low-skill service jobs, such as cleaning floors or washing windows, than be hired for professional or managerial positions, a bias the vice president and others are trying to reverse. "People are okay with that because they're people with mental disabilities, and that's considered okay," explains the vice president. "In other words, 'you can clean my office, but you can't be my lawyer if you are a blind or deaf person.'"

To help counteract such obstacles, the Ministry of Labor initiated several key measures aimed at increasing the successful placement of candidates with disabilities. To start, companies now have access to a depository of resumes to search for qualified applicants. And those at the ministry are mindful of how to present candidates to potential employers, something VP Chacón says she's been working on for the last four years.

"We are not focused on what they can't do," she asserts. "What we tell the employer is what they can do—'He's very good in public relations'—not what they can't do. It's a different way of seeing disability not to say, 'This person can't walk.' We don't put that. We change it."

In addition, once an applicant with disabilities is hired, he or she has the option to use a "companion," the equivalent of a job coach or mentor, who for one to three months helps the new employee navigate his or her environment and figure out how accessibility can be improved on the job site. This service helps companies figure out how best to accommodate their new employee and to help ensure a successful transition.

Intended to create a new paradigm for disability that is less about impairment and more about ability, these measures appear to be having some impact. More and more companies, says the vice president, including large national and international corporations, are beginning to take advantage of the database of resumes. December 3 is Costa Rica's annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities when the government recognizes companies who have hired employees with disabilities. Last year, five companies participated, and this year the number has more than doubled with 14 companies involved.

When staffing her own busy office, VP Chacón is resolute about walking the talk. She actively tries to find

people who are disabled to employ, and if she has two positions open for hiring, she makes sure one is reserved for a person with a disability. She currently employs nine people of which four have disabilities.

"I have one young woman, a human rights lawyer, who had cancer in her legs and they had to be amputated, so she's in a wheelchair. I have a man who is blind, a mother of a disabled person, and someone with Asperger syndrome." To accommodate employees with disabilities, the presidential house is currently renovating its bathrooms so they'll be accessible to all. The vice president says the human rights lawyer who works for her says the renovation is her fault. "I say, 'No, no, it's ok. It's great. They have to accommodate you.'"

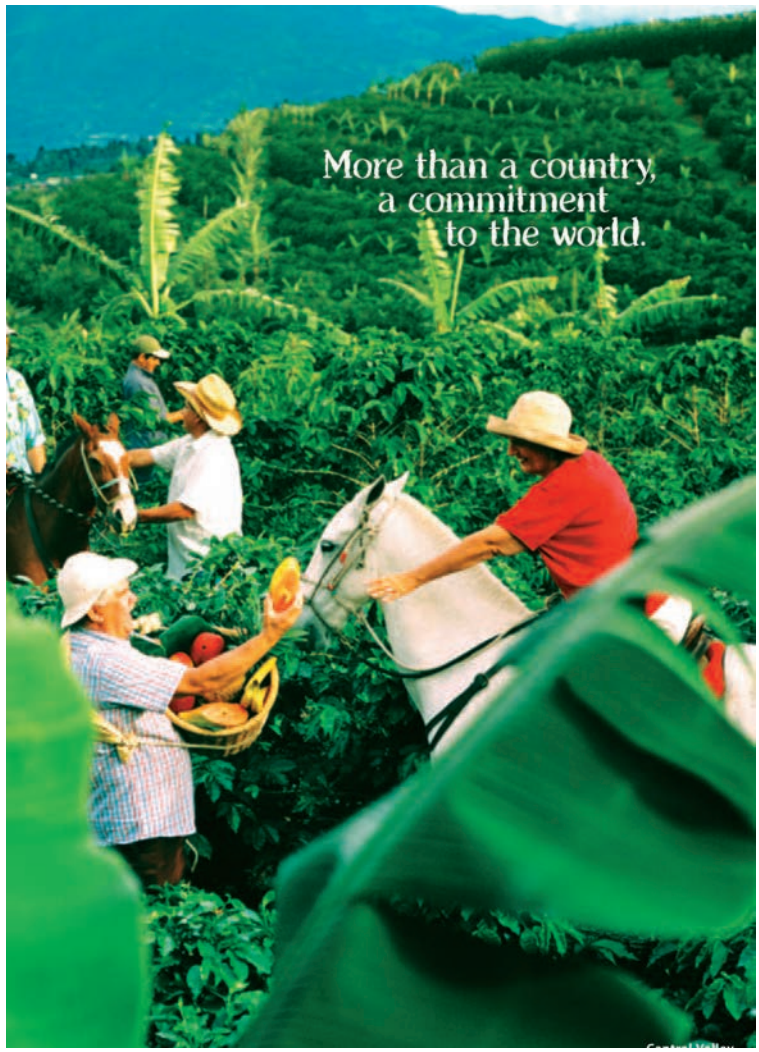
Though the vice president maintains she and her staff work well together, if anything should change, she says she'll hire another person with a disability. "Just because you have a disability doesn't mean you're not a good worker," she adds, while Laura counters, "They still have the right to do bad work."

A DISABILITY-CENTRIC GOVERNMENT

When VP Chacón joined President Luis Guillermo Solis' cabinet, which took over in May 2014, along with it came a promise to advance disability rights. "We signed a commitment to build a country that's much more inclusive and accessible for the disabled community," she says. "We have ongoing rounds of conversations in my office about how to build public policies with labor, education, and accessibility. We are always working on this, because it's a very important issue in human rights."

A recent manifestation of this commitment is the government's use of a sign language interpreter. "We always have this translator with us, so when we talk to the media, she's translating and interpreting for people who are deaf. This is very important for us," asserts the vice president, "especially because we want them to have accessibility to all of our actions." Government officials even have their own sign with a hashtag-like symbol attached in sign language to represent them. For example, VP Chacón is identified not only by her name but also with the sign for dimples, because she's always smiling.

Unfortunately, and unsurprisingly, not all politicians are on the same page about how to promote disability rights. Some, the vice president says, use disability as a means to advance their careers rather than make meaningful inroads, which she feels reveals a lack of true commitment. "We have a congressman who does that, and it's terrible. He is always asking for pity for disabled people, not for human rights, and because he's blind, he asks for pity and money... and he's corrupt," says the vice president. "He does a lot of damage," adds Laura.



When asked if she'd consider running for president, VP Chacón reflects for a moment while Laura laughs, replying quickly, "It's my fantasy. I've had that thought!"

But VP Chacón clarifies: "Because I want to be happy once in my life," she says laughing, then adding, "I've never been in a job where I'm doing that job because I want to move on to another job. I just do my job. I'm going to finish being the vice president, and that's all. I'm here to help President Solis; he asked that I be loyal, so I'll be with him once he finishes." To which Laura responds: "The thing is, for women in politics, it's really, really difficult because they're so exposed, so I can understand what you're saying... If my country becomes a little more feminist, maybe she can feel comfortable."

■ ABILITY





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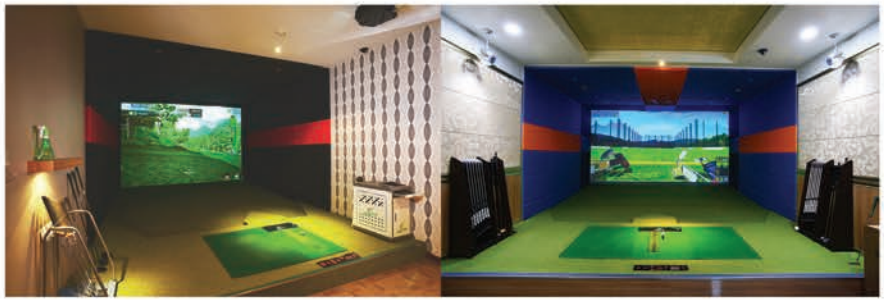
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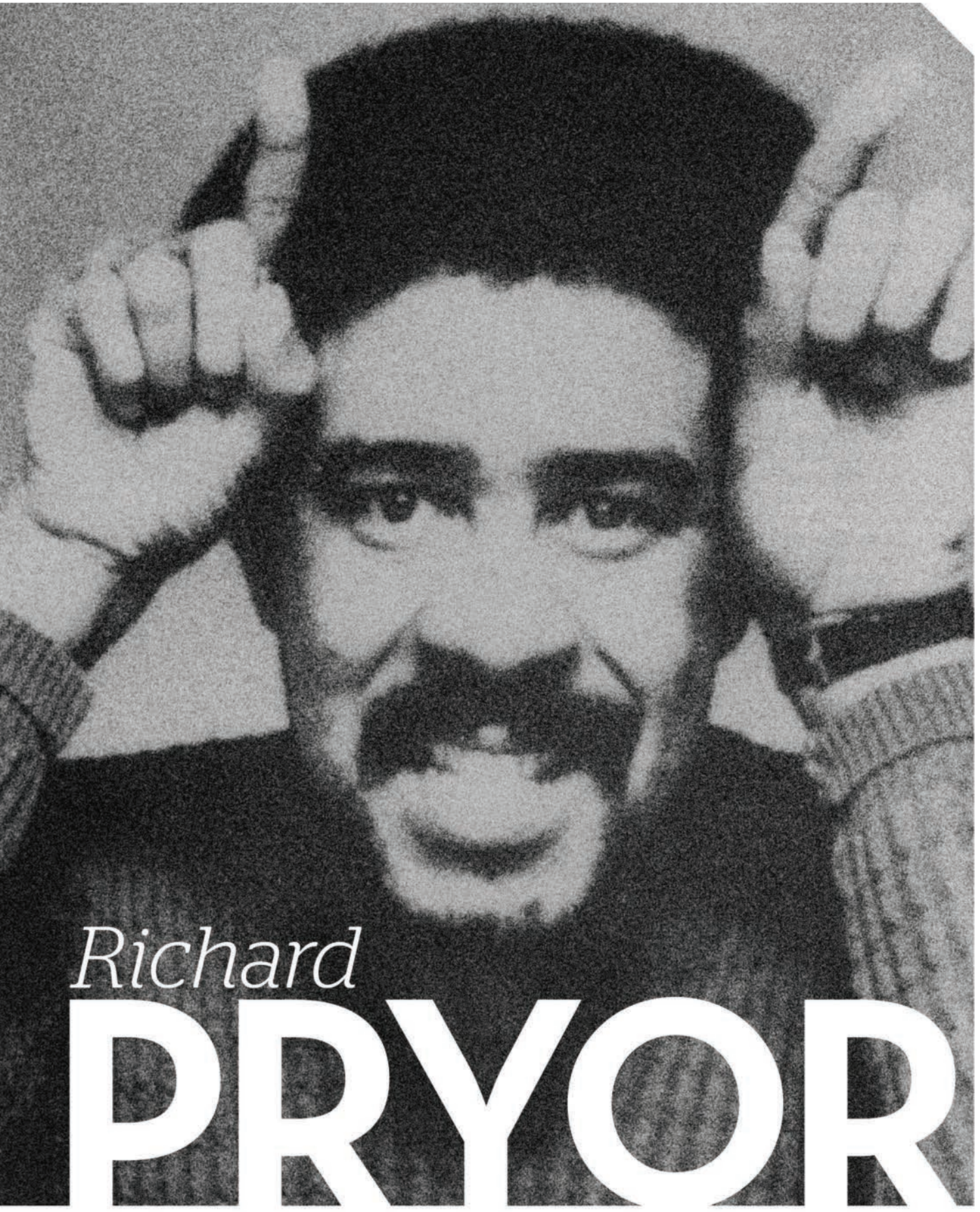












Richard PRYOR

Right away, it's obvious that press interviews aren't one of comedian Richard Pryor's favorite things. But he's hip to the drill; when you've got a new book on the market, hyping it goes with the territory.

Pryor Convictions and Other Life Sentences (published by Pantheon) is a memoir that takes readers from the revolutionary comic's childhood in Peoria, Illinois, to his battle with multiple sclerosis (MS), diagnosed nine years ago. The man may be down, but he's far from out. "This is my life," writes the guy many call the greatest stand-up in show biz. "I know the truth. If you aren't here you're nowhere. So I go on because it ain't over. Only stranger."

And while he may not love interviews, that doesn't stop him from being funny as he deftly fields a series of intimate questions. In his career, Pryor's made 25 comedy albums, about 40 films and logged in countless brilliant stand-up performances.

Now he is sitting in a battery-powered scooter at a small desk in his San Fernando Valley living room. At his left, a big bulletin board nails down his schedule for the week. Three of the days call for sessions with Maria, his physical therapist. Lately, he's been making major progress: he's able to get around with a walker and sometimes walks on his own with a little help.

Pryor, 54, mostly owes this improved state of health to his fourth ex-wife, Jennifer Lee, whom he hired a year ago to get his life in shape. Their marriage was a nightmare of violence in which a drugged-out Pryor routinely beat Lee. These days, she says all is forgiven, and Pryor depends on her to run things. Before coming on board this time around, Lee was in New York lecturing on dysfunctional relationships.

Pryor's home is tastefully decorated in light tones and accented by two enormous swordfish mounted in the living room and above Pryor's bed. But the comedian will soon be moving to a new house complete with Jacuzzi, allowing him to begin a program of water therapy. His treatment involves a low-fat diet with lots of vegetables, and he sips some twenty glasses of water daily to prevent atrophy of the throat muscles, thus making swallowing easier. For respiratory congestion, he drinks herbal tea.

All this heath care is in stark contrast to Pryor's previous lifestyle, which ran to extreme drug and alcohol use and ultimately, setting himself on fire one terrible day. Father of six and now a granddad, he calls his early years, "like walking on a minefield." His grandmother was "controlling," and his mother "scary." Now that they are gone, Pryor, once fueled by anger, says he's finally found peace.

ABILITY talked with the comedian one rainy afternoon. Lee was preparing to leave for a business meeting, but stopped first to chat for a while.

Jane Rusoff: What prompted you to write the book?

Richard Pryor: I needed money.

Jennifer Lee: He also wanted to set the record straight.

RP: Oh, yeah.

JL: Because there were like nine books out on Richard.

RP: And I talked to none of the people who wrote them.

JR: You wanted to set the record straight about your personal life?

RP: Yeah. About s--- in my life they said, which wasn't true.

JR: For example?

RP: Jenny can help here. Help! Jenny! For example?

JL: Some of the women stuff probably. Richard took responsibility for the physical abuse, which I think is important.

JR: Did you deny it in the past?

RP: Yes.

JL: And people still had the perception from Pryor's film *Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life is Calling*, that the fire was an accident.

JR: You consciously…

RP: Set myself on fire.

JR: And wanted to kill yourself?

RP: No.

JL: He wanted to roast marshmallows!

JR: Why did you set yourself on fire?

RP: Consciously I just wanted to f--- myself up.

JR: But not die?

RP: No. That was the furthest thing from my mind. My God, I didn't know that fire could f--- you up so. I could have died.

JL: You almost did, Honey. I remember Richard's telling me that he didn't know any other way out of the drug hell he was in.





RP: Oh, yeah. That part, too… I was scared of where I was and what was happening to me. The drugs and the whiskey… 'Cause I could drink a whole quart of cognac and not get f----- up. It scared me.

JR: Ever regret getting involved with drugs, that your life would not have been so tumultuous if you hadn't?

RP: If I regretted it, I wouldn't have done it. I don't want to look back.

JL: Richard's a difficult interview… Don't listen to his bull----. Go for the truth… I was married to this man. I know every part of him. (*to Richard*) Okay, Honey, Dear, Sweetheart, Puddin'nin' Pie? She just wants a good interview. (*Jenny leaves for an appointment*.)

JR: How long did it take to write this book?

RP: Jenny! A long time. I'd tell [co-author Todd Gold] something, he'd go away and write it and then come back and ask the same question again.

JR: What strength are you drawing on now?

RP: I don't have MS as bad as some people. It's like God just gave me a taste… oh it's bad, but it's not the end-all. It's the beginning.

JR: Of what?

RP: That, we'll find out.

JR: Are you feeling stronger?

RP: I think so. Maria comes three times a week to work with me. And I can walk. We go out by the pool and walk around the pool. She's a tough taskmaster, bless her heart.

JR: Do you think that your MS is related to the kind of life you led, particularly your drug use?

RP: That's what the doctor said. That some of the tissue around the muscle got eaten away.

JR: From drugs?

RP: Yeah. But they don't know. They are guessing—at

my expense. I might add.

JR: What was your reaction when they said it might have been drugs?

RP: I just looked at them like I'm looking at you. I said I don't know anything medical. It holds no interest for me, really.

JR: Still smoke?

RP: Yes.

JR: Still drink martinis?

RP: Yes. I drink a 'toony' now and then 'Cause I'm an alcoholic, a practicing alcoholic.

JR: But you have it under control?

RP: No. I don't know any of us that do.

JR: Do you get drunk?

RP: I try. I really do.

JR: And it doesn't work?

RP: Not yet.

JR: Do you feel you have a bit more peace of mind these days?

RP: Yes.

JR: Why?

RP: My family's gone. You laugh! But you don't know what that means. There's nobody here telling me what to do. And there's no fear. There's nobody asking for money.

JR: "Family" refers to—

RP: My mother, my father, my step-mother, aunts and uncles and grandmother. They're out of here. They shuffled off to Buffalo, as the guy said.

JR: You have peace of mind because you don't feel conflicted any longer?

RP: Right, and they don't get to harp on Jenny or [another ex-wife] Shelley. They are not choosing my life for me.

JR: They tried to?

RP: I think they did. I bought my grandmother a home in Peoria, but she really liked to live in that old house on Fourth Street. When I'd visit Peoria, she'd move back to the new house just to show off. I didn't know that then, but I do now.

JR: Are you more at peace with yourself now, like yourself more?

RP: Oh, I adore me sometimes. I really do. Like if I have some "moneys." I like me then most of all.

JR: In your book, you discuss going to the Betty Ford Center. What led you up to that?

RP: I was really in trouble with (*sniffs*) coke. It was something to do, so I went. I was home in Northridge and I said, I got these two weeks, I'm gonna go to Betty Ford.

JR: Seems like a calm decision considering the rest of your life.

RP: Well, Betty Ford is a different place… I like the "womens" there.

JR: Go out with any afterwards?

RP: Yes.

JR: In a relationship?

RP: Oh, we tried, but [another ex-wife] Flynn came back and caught me with one. She went berserk, ballistic, as they say, and she took my money and gave it to this lady. She said, "You've got to give her something, Richard." I said, "Yeah, but you don't give her no $200,000." She did.

JR: Like paying her off to get her out?

RP: Yeah, I think that's the way to put it.

JR: She never came back?

RP: No.

JR: How do you feel about that?

RP: Angry.

JR: You didn't like to be faithful to one woman?

RP: It seems not.

JR: Why?

RP: I don't know.

JR: In the book, you reveal you were raped at age six.

RP: Yeah, when the guy put his d--- in my mouth. It was embarrassing and I felt humiliated, afraid, lost and



coward "Cause in my dreams I bite it off."

JR: Still have those dreams?

RP: Not as much as I used to.

JR: How did you and Jenny get back together?

RP: I needed her help. I called her up in New York and I said, "Please… something's going on here; I don't know what it is." She came out here and straightened it all out for me. She's helping me.

JR: In a purely friendly way.

RP: Yeah, purely friendly.

JR: That's a much different relationship from the one you had before. Why do you think you can now get along well?

RP: She's smart and she's pretty. But Jenny doesn't like the movies I like. She won't let me see *Natural Born Killers*.

JR: It's very violent.

RP: Yeah, but it's good. I saw it one time, and then she got it for me on tape, but she never lets me see it.

JR: But Jenny is good for you, right?

RP: I think so.

JR: I once read that you experimented with homosexuality—

RP: Oh, God, yes.

JR: Did you like it?

RP: I liked it, but "she" scared me because she got an operation to become a woman. I haven't seen her since.

JR: That ended your experimentation?

RP: That ended it.

JR: Are you planning to go back to stand-up?

RP: I haven't made up my mind. Probably if I need some money and there's a place I can just go and woodshed a little bit…

JR: Like work out?

RP: Yeah.

JR: You must miss doing stand-up. It was such a big part of your life.



RP: That's the thing that's going to make it happen, that I miss it.

JR: I hear you're a grandfather now.

RP: Yeah, Richard Jr. made me a grandfather. It's a boy.

JR: You had your first child when you were 14?

RP: No. The said that it was my child but it wasn't.

JR: How many children do you have?

RP: Six—three tiny ones and three big ones.

JR: How tiny?

RP: I think one is about six.

JR: See him?

RP: No.

JR: Do you care?

RP: Yeah.

JR: How come you don't see the child?

RP: Because it's real hard to see the mothers since they are going to ask for some money that I don't have.

JR: You've been married six times. Would you do it again?

RP: Once more. I'm gonna go for the gusto!

JR: What's your goal right now, Richard?

RP: To get better. And then to run outside and go, "Wow!" and kick up my heels. I'd love to do that. ■ ABILITY


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My husband and I are preparing for the upcoming 2015 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Los Angeles. It's set to be the largest sports and humanitarian event anywhere in the world that year, and the single biggest event in LA since the 1984 Olympics.

There'll be 7,000 athletes from around the world who'll compete in different sporting events. Athletes with intellectual disabilities will participate, along their coaches, over the 9-day competition. The event will require 30,000 volunteers, and draw more than 500,000 spectators to cheer the athletes on.

My husband and I still remember the day that we learned that our daughter, Janelle, one of the athletes, had intellectual disabilities. That was one of the most shocking experiences of our lives. How could it be? We had such big dreams for our daughter, and with the diagnosis we feared they'd never come true.

Then we went into denial. She's was just a year or so behind in speech, and we were good parents. If we just provided her with all the therapy, education, and medication that she needed, maybe things would turn around.

That phase was followed by sadness, anger and fear. We grieved for the life we thought our daughter could no longer have. We got mad at her caregivers, fearing that they weren't doing enough to help. None of our friends had children with intellectual disabilities, and even some of our relatives didn't understand what we were going through. We worried that we wouldn't be able to provide for Janelle's complex, life-long needs.

Fortunately we moved into acceptance and determination, coming to understand how our daughter's uniqueness enriched us. We loved her, and were devoted to giving her the best life possible. We planned to build new dreams for her and our family. But we weren't sure how that could happen…

Then came SO!

Mothers and fathers of children with intellectual disabilities go through the same difficult feelings of adjustment. Raising a child with intellectual disabilities is a life-altering experience. As one of the estimated 4 million SO families worldwide, we parents find that having a child involved in the program helps make this uncharted journey a life-affirming, joyful experience.

SO helps our loved ones be healthier, stronger and physically fit. They grow in confidence, social skills and friendships, and enjoy a boost in self-image.

When I became a SO mom, our whole family became immersed in the lifestyle. We wouldn't dream of missing one of our daughter's competitions. We go to cheer her on, our hearts filled with pride. My husband, two sons, and I became involved as coaches, Unified Partners, and volunteers on various committees.

We live north of LA in the Santa Clarita community. Yet, when our Janelle started SO, at 14, there wasn't a local program in town. We had to drive an hour to the San Fernando Valley, so she could participate in Tri-Valley SO. We spent our Saturdays taking her to swimming and horseback riding practice.

Finally, in 1997, Don Zennie, a previous SO Coach, created a program close to home. Janelle was one of a handful of athletes who showed up at his first basketball practice. I was so thrilled that I told him I'd do anything to help him grow the program. We held car washes, rummage sales, sold Dodger game tickets, and more. Don served as a 'volunteer area director,' but owing to his business obligations, he didn't have the time to steer the program in the direction it needed to go. So, I stepped in as volunteer area director, sharing the responsibilities with another SO mom, Nancy Heath.

SO Santa Clarita quickly expanded to include over 100 athletes, and added the additional sports of track and field (athletics), swimming, floor hockey and softball. I co-wrote a grant with the Tri-Valley area director, Jan Maseda, to The California Endowment. We sought to further expand our sports programs and bring on a paid area director and administrative assistant to open a local SO business office. We were awarded a grant of approximately $350,000, which greatly fueled our momentum.

I was hired by SO Southern California to be the paid area director for Santa Clarita. Local SO coach and volunteer, Suzanne Vanvakaris, became our administrative assistant. Along with some amazing volunteers, we've accomplished a great deal. When I retired in 2004, SO Santa Clarita Valley had hundreds of volunteers, 450 athletes and 17 year-round sports. We also hosted countless local and regional competitions.

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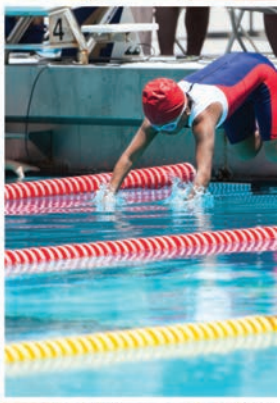
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Southern California Distinguished Outstanding Family Service Award. Gary and I were presented the 2003 SO Don Zennie Outstanding Service Award. Our son, Eric, is now in the Massachusetts SO Hall of Fame in recognition of his outstanding fundraising accomplishments. He's almost raised a million dollars for SO Massachusetts through his creation of an annual Bio-Ball Fundraiser, and his participation as a charity runner in the Boston Marathon.

The biggest accolades should be reserved for Janelle, who became an accomplished SO athlete, excelling at floor hockey, softball, basketball, swimming, equestrian, soccer, cycling, snow skiing, and tennis. Despite her petite, 4'10 stature, she is a tenacious competitor, and has earned many gold, silver and bronze medals. She's also a global messenger for SO, speaking at numerous events, and had the honor of meeting Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of SO, and Tim and Maria Shriver.

The highlight of our Special Olympics experience was Janelle's participation in two SO World Summer Games. She represented Team USA in the 1999 SO World Summer Games in North Carolina, when she was 17. CNN, ABC and Channel 9 News featured her, as did several newspapers and magazines. We were ecstatic that she did so well, given that the horseback riders competed using unfamiliar, donated horses, and had only a couple of practice sessions.

Janelle, who won a bronze medal in one of her events, was then selected to participate as a member of the USA women's basketball team in the 2003 SO World Summer Games in Ireland. She celebrated her 21st birthday there, where her team went on to win a 4th place ribbon.

Having our daughter participate in the last two SO World Games is an honor. Our family is so proud when she puts on her USA uniform; nobody in our family wants to miss it, so Janelle's two brothers, grandparents, and her aunt and uncle often come along.

The whole SO World Games experience is phenomenal, from the star-studded opening and closing ceremonies; to the harmonious camaraderie amongst athletes and family members from other countries; to the athletes' impressive courage.

We trade pins, thankful for the vast global impact that SO has worldwide, including the impressive outpouring of sponsors, donors and volunteers. We bask in the abundance of genuine smiles, hearty laughter, and enthusiastic high-fives. The wonderful memories last a lifetime!

SO has had such a profound influence on our family. Our close friends are other SO parents, who provide a strong circle of support. They help us handle the emotional pendulum that comes with parenting a child with intellectual disabilities. We don't know what we would do without each other. The advocacy tips, the shoulders to cry on, the abundance of hugs as we celebrate milestones that mean so much to us.

That's why Gary and I are on the committee to ensure that SO athletes' family members feel welcomed and satisfied with their World Games experience. We send out a newsletter so that they will know about the multitude of things to do and see in LA.

Gary and I also serve on the Santa Clarita Host Town Committee, and next summer will welcome 100-150 athletes and coaches from other countries for three days of recreation, entertainment, and community exchanges preceding the opening ceremonies. This will give delegation members a special reception, and time to rest and adjust to the local climate and time zone.

We're currently raising funds and handling the logistics of providing housing at our local Master's College, obtaining donations of bedding, meals, transportation services and more.

SO provides a wealth of benefits for athletes, parents, and family members, and it's completely free! So when I say, "Then came Special Olympics," I always reflect on how pivotal a time that was in our lives, helping us to unconditionally accept and cherish our Janelle.

■ ABILITY

by Maureen Spindt



specialolympics.org/los-angeles-2015

REACH UP LA™

Support Now LA2015.org

July 25 - August 2, 2015



Special Olympics
WORLD GAMES
LOS ANGELES 2015

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Sweet treats

Good health starts with good nutrition. Get started today with some of these healthy recipes.

No-Bake Cookies

In recent years, granola has gotten a bad rap for being a high-fat, high-calorie "health" food. Although granola and muesli are excellent sources of fiber, the main nutritional information to evaluate is sugar, calories, and fat grams. Most commercial granolas are toasted and sweetened, which means added fat, sugar, and calories. The healthiest products contain 5 grams of sugar and 150 calories per serving or less.

Makes approximately 32 cookies
Serves: 8

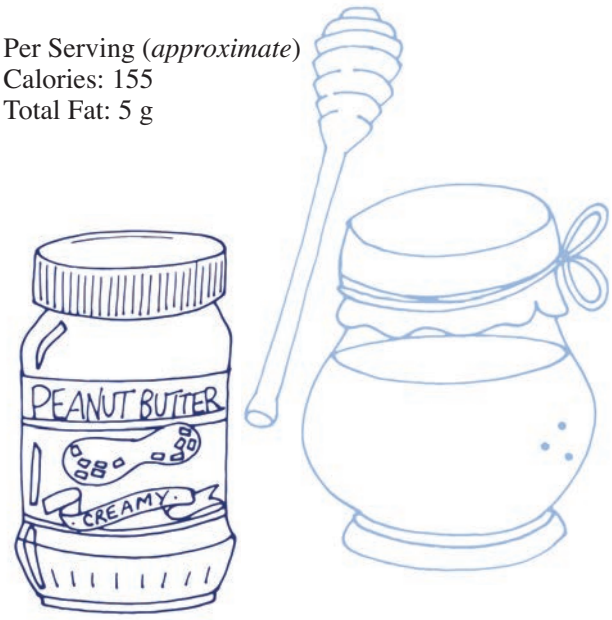
Per Serving (*approximate*)
Calories: 155
Total Fat: 5 g

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup reduced-fat smooth peanut butter
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/2 cup low-fat granola
- 1/2 cup crispy rice cereal
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup crushed graham crackers

Directions

1. Heat peanut butter and honey in a saucepan over low heat until creamy. Remove from heat and pour into a bowl to cool.
2. Add granola, cereal, raisins, and crushed graham crackers to the peanut butter mix and stir well.
3. Roll into tablespoon-sized balls and set on wax paper. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving.



Make-Your-Own Cereal and On-the-Trail Mix

Cereal grains are a source of protein and contain more carbohydrates than any other food. Their unprocessed forms are also inexpensive, so cereals are a staple food throughout the world.

Present the ingredients for this do-it-yourself recipe in different bowls or containers. For the cereal, give each

person a bowl and allow guests to choose the items for their cereal. Serve with skim or low-fat milk.

For trail mix, offer same items and brown paper bags or re-sealable plastic bags for guests to make trail mix. Shake gently to distribute ingredients.

Cereal Suggestions

- O-shaped cereal
- Bran, Rice, or Wheat Chex
- Granola
- Cracklin' Oat Bran

Fruit Suggestions

- Raisins or golden raisins
- Banana chips
- Dates
- Prunes
- Other dried fruit, such as cranberries, blueberries, apricots, pineapple, apples, and papaya

Other Suggestions

- Almonds
- Peanuts
- Walnuts
- M&M candy
- Coconut slices
- Chocolate chips
- Carob chips
- Bite-sized pretzels
- Marshmallows



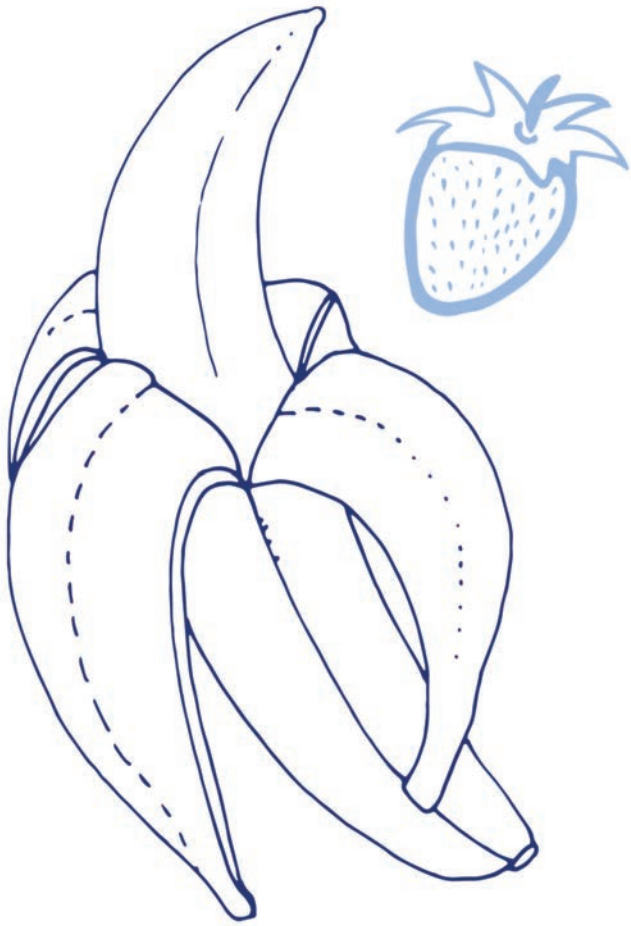




Calories and fat will vary depending on ingredients and serving size.

Energizing Smoothie

This tofu drink is packed with protein, calcium, vitamin C, potassium, and fiber, so it will boost your energy level



any time of the day. Tofu is also a great source of soy.

Isoflavones in soy may have protective effects against breast and prostate cancer. Studies on individual soy components are currently underway.

Serves: 8

Ingredients

- 1-1/2 cups sliced ripe banana (approximately 3 bananas)
- 1-1/2 cups frozen sweetened sliced strawberries, partially thawed
- 1-1/2 cups soft silken tofu, drained (about 3 ounces)
- 1-1/2 cups low-fat vanilla yogurt

Directions

Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor and process until smooth. Makes approximately 5 cups.

Isoflavones in soy may have protective effects against breast and prostate cancer. Studies on individual soy components are currently underway.

Per Serving (*approximate*)
Calories: 180
Total Fat: 2 g ■ ABILITY

American Cancer Society
cancer.org



Photo by Jack Guy

Laura DERN

screen gem

Her long-running career has included plum roles in such films as *Mask*, *Blue Velvet* and *Jurassic Park*. Along the way, Laura Dern's won two Golden Globe Awards: One was for her portrayal of Florida's secretary of state in the HBO film *Recount*, and the second for her role as Amy Jellicoe in that cable network's series, *Enlightened*. Dern also scored a best actress Academy Award nomination for her performance in the film, *Rambling Rose*. Just last year, she appeared in spate of films, including *The Fault in Our Stars* and *Wild*. *ABILITY*'s Chet Cooper recently caught up with Dern in Denver at the Global Down Syndrome Foundation's annual fashion show, and subsequently had a nice chat. She has this genuinely sweet energy about her and is incredibly well spoken.

Chet Cooper: How's the campaign for Wild *been going?*

Laura Dern: Good. Our job is done, thank goodness.







Reese Witherspoon and I have been promoting it since last August at the Telluride Film Festival, which was our first screening. It's amazing how big of a machine promoting movies has become. It used to be a weekend on the press junket, and then you were finished.

Cooper: Did the roll out of the film entail a lot of travel?

Dern: It did.

Cooper: So you're tired and you don't want to talk. We'll talk to you next month then.

(*laughter*)

Dern: I'm ready!

Cooper: Did you have a chance to reflect at all on the Global Down Syndrome Foundation (GDSF) gala, and your take away from that event?

Dern: I have continually. I had a lovely conversation afterwards with John C. McGinley. The beauty of the event is that it gives everyone an opportunity to connect with the children. You can hear statistics about Down syndrome at a fundraiser, but unless it's affecting your daily life, then you may walk away and go on to the next topic or the next illness that people are dealing with.

I'm sure that's a challenge for fundraisers. What was incredible about that event is that it paid tribute to amazing, light-filled people. Their smiles and humor stay with you, which helps drive support for funding. That's why I found it such a moving event.

Cooper: Did you get to talk with any of the models—the kids and young adults there with Down syndrome?

Dern: I spoke with several of them. One little girl was one of the models. She was so adorable and infectious that every time I saw her which, in a matter of two and a half hours was probably, like, 12 times, she would come charging at me and hurl a hug onto me that would throw both of us to the ground.

(*laughter*)

Cooper: That was me, actually.

Dern: Oh, that was you!

(*laughter*)

A couple of people gave me candy as a gift, and she would make sure that I understood that the candy was actually meant for her. She was very clever, warm and loving; meeting her stands out as one of my favorite experiences of the whole event.

Cooper: Did you get to speak to any of the young adults?

Dern: Briefly. The thing I remember about everyone I spoke to is that they were hilarious. They were so full of personality, so sweet, funny and sassy. Many of them loved to dance, and I noticed a lot of flirtation going between some of the young adult boys and the



The Global Down Syndrome Foundation's gala brought several familiar faces to the catwalk



cheerleaders who showed up.

(*laughter*)

Cooper: That was funny.

Dern: It was hilarious. Everyone had an incredible sense of humor, which made it a lot of fun. I spent less time with the children than I would have liked to, but look forward to other opportunities.

Cooper: I was wondering about the role that you played in I Am Sam*, and if you put that experience together with some of the people you met at the gala.*

Dern: I was very moved by not only how beautiful an actor Sean Penn is, but how committed he was to honoring the gift that comes along with the challenges that people may have. I think he did such a beautiful job with that in the film. And so did the actors who were in it with him.

Jessie Nelson, who wrote and directed that project, is one of my closest friends. She was fiercely committed to making sure everyone was honored. But I was working with an actor playing someone with a mental challenge, not someone living with it. Seeing John McGinley (who has a son with Down syndrome), and meeting some of the families the night of the event, deepened my understanding and longing to support the research and extraordinary work that's being done in Denver. That's the part that just blew my mind. The research in genetics was phenomenal and will serve so many areas of medicine where there's a lack of knowledge about aspects of the disease.

Cooper: What I noticed about your career is that you've been involved in different projects that have a connection to mental illness. Have you thought about that with regards to the different characters you've played? Has it increased your awareness within your own life?

Dern: I'm interested in human nature. That's why I chose to become an actor. Whatever people are struggling with, the struggle is often where the drama is. Whether it's dealing with cancer in the last couple of films I've done, or dealing with a breakdown in my show *Enlightened*, or the drug addiction in *Citizen Ruth*. I think it's about not just the crisis you're in, but how do you get to the other side? How do we heal? How do we survive this experience, while remaining hopeful instead of filled with despair? That's what interests me.

Cooper: The pilot of your series shows you having the breakdown and then going to Hawaii for recovery. Did they actually send you to Hawaii, or was that just sand on a back lot?

Dern: Oh I did go to Hawaii! That was the luckiest part!

(*laughter*)

Cooper: In the show, what were you diagnosed with? Anxiety, depression? What did the rehab reveal?

Dern: They didn't really go into it because our interest



Dern all saddled up for the movie *Wild* with Reese Witherspoon

was in questioning what madness really is. I was inspired by the political state of affairs at the time, and the fact that people didn't take to the streets. It was during the 2000 election that I started thinking about it. Faced with an apathetic culture, which is what it felt like to me, I started asking the question, and then I asked Mike White, my partner: What does it take to risk everything and stand up? What does it take to be a revolutionary? Could our greatest challenges or weaknesses also be our greatest gifts? That's a conversation that continues to interest me, and it's a line of thought that your magazine explores. What's the challenge and what's the gift inherent in each thing?

And for my character on *Enlightened*, the challenge is that she feels everything in an enormous way, so when people are unjust to her—starting with a guy who totally screwed her over; the company that fired her; people who treat her like trash—she gets in people's faces and goes insane. But in fact, it takes someone who will actually get in the face of a company like Monsanto or Pfizer or any drug company; someone who will say to big food, big oil, or big drugs: "You're poisoning Americans, and we want a change." We were interested in taking somebody who was considered impossible, insane, or an embarrassment, and making her a whistleblower. That was the arc of the story.

Cooper: How do you get an apathetic society to change?

Dern: With the technology, we've become more apathetic, because we don't look in each other's eyes any more as we attempt communication. But at the same time, with one iPhone, we can start a revolution. If there's injustice, you just film it and post it. And suddenly people are tapped into a current event they wouldn't otherwise see, and that's incredible. Again, with the challenge comes a gift, such as the Million Person March.

Cooper: We've been watching it ourselves, and it seems that action requires a fairly extreme tipping point before people do something. And it usually has to hit home in some way for people to move.

Dern: That's why 2000 was so extraordinary, because this is a country where we actually do have a voice, and the right to use it, and yet we still honor authority in a very odd way, as though the bosses don't need to be questioned. If they're making a decision, it must be okay.

So when the Supreme Court says: "I know you voted for this one guy, but we're going to let the other guy win," nobody took to the streets on that. We just allowed the decision to stand. Having played Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, who had a lot of responsibility in that decision, and learning what I learned about what happened in Florida, it really made me outraged, because Al Gore won the presidency of the United States. Whether we're Republicans or Democrats, that's what happened. People voted and said who they wanted, and it was Gore, and yet George Bush still became President. I don't understand why people weren't in the streets. That's just bad. That's where it really began for me.



Cooper: I didn't like it because they kept saying "hanging chads" and my name is Chet. There was some confusion going on, and it wasn't my fault.

(*laughter*)

Cooper: I'm curious about your involvement with awareness around heart disease.

Dern: I haven't been that involved. Barbra Streisand has been such an extraordinary spokesperson for the cause, bringing attention to heart disease in women in America and how shockingly common the problem is. The statistics are staggering. That opened my eyes to the issue. But my energy has been focused in the area of environmental health, particularly for children. That's been the thing I know more about, and there is so much to learn because there are so many problems.

Cooper: I was going to ask you about that. What's your feeling from the research on GMOs?

Dern: I'm very disturbed by the quality of food in America, in general. I mentioned Monsanto before. It's so devastating to consider how we've been impacted by big oil and now, particularly with fracking becoming such a huge health concern throughout our country, so many people are cropping up with various cancers who are living in and around areas where there's fracking, and where the water table is severely affected. That has a huge impact. Companies that deal with toxic chemicals, PVC, and plastics, which, you know, are used in the Mississippi River… There's unbelievable poisoning going on there.

We didn't think that they were going to necessarily add the poisons to our food, but they've been doing it for years. We thought we had control over it by making sure we supported local farmers and had organic, pesticide-free produce, and then they injected the feed with chemicals. Even when you think you're eating fairly healthy, corn really isn't corn. The chemicals are in everything. If our corn and our wheat are genetically modified, we're losing nutrients. And when we're asking people to raise healthy children, I don't know how we do that if we're eating and breathing chemicals constantly. It's a tragedy.

Cooper: And speaking about apathy, you're talking about big oil and all they're doing that's polluting the environment. If you have a sick environment, you're going to have sick people. It seems like the powers that be have more force and support behind continually regulating the allowance of these issues. Just today I think they pushed again for the pipeline—

Dern: In Alaska?

Cooper: Yeah. It's a constant struggle between big money, if you will, and civilians: people who are getting the brunt of it, especially the poor.

Dern: And where we're dumping has the biggest impact on the poorest areas, the lowest-income neighborhoods. They're building factories in those areas, and the people's voices are not being heard. No matter how many protests



On the set of HBO's *Enlightened*; photo by Lacey Terrell

a group of impoverished people has to protect their children, we need it picked up by the media on a national level, and we need celebrities to make it a mission, and then maybe the news will cover it.

Cooper: Let's end on an a positive note.

(*laughter*)

Dern: We care. We're using our voices. We're not apathetic. This is awesome. I get inspired. I hear you guys, and it makes me go, "Okay, see?" You're out there bringing the truth and that's awesome.

Cooper: We try. So, lastly, what do you do for fun?

Dern: I've learned to love the things my kids love to do, whether it's cycling or stand-up paddling or things in nature that I never did before, or was less inclined to do. I've always done yoga and exercise, which I love. I've always loved to travel, any opportunity I have to see the world through my children's eyes is an incredible experience.

Cooper: How old are they?

Dern: A 10-year-old girl and a 13-year-old's a boy.

Cooper: Have you surfed with John C. yet?

Dern: You know what? We never have. I've known him forever, but we never have.

Cooper: Maybe we'll all meet up and surf. We'll try to keep in touch with you about any travel opportunities. We do these things around the world, from Beijing to Dubai... If something comes up where there's an event, or if we could get someone to sponsor—

Dern: Please do! I hope to come back [to GDSF's event] next year. Any news that's coming out with their research or any way I can lend my time, my name, keep me posted, please.

Cooper: We will. I don't see why Michelle Sie Whitten wouldn't invite you back to the GDSF next year.

Dern: How awesome is she, and her whole family? She's just like the biggest rock star in history!

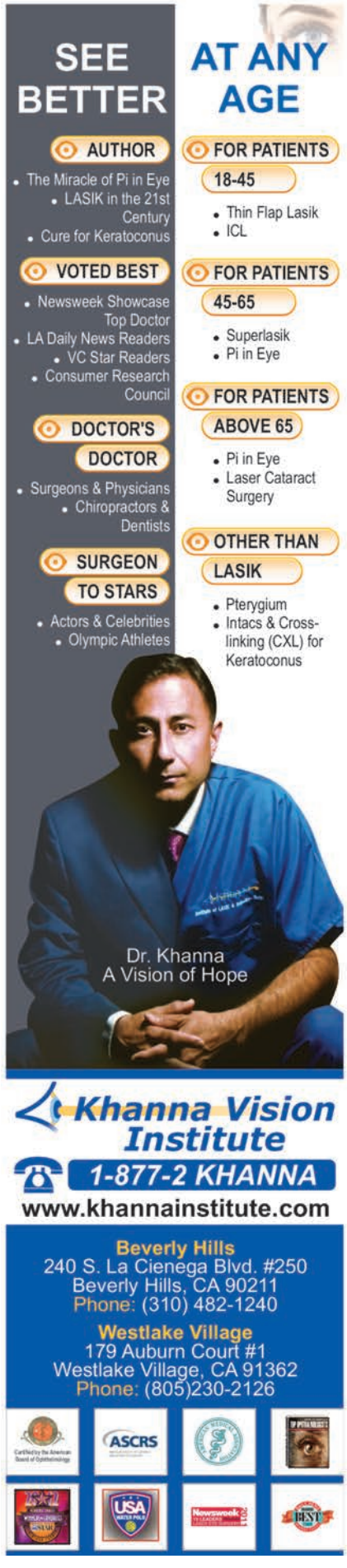
(*laughter*)

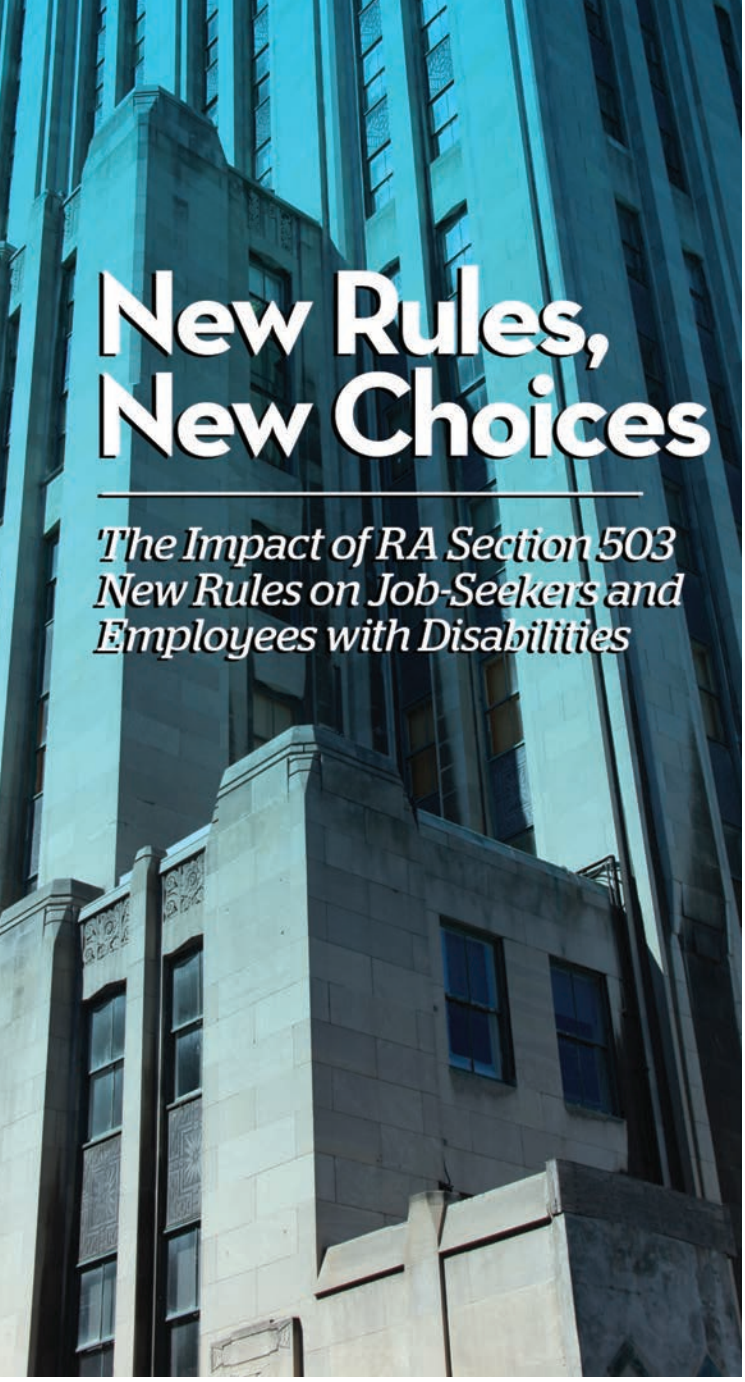
Cooper: Once she got involved in this, there was no stopping her.

Dern: With her level of drive, it's going to get done.

Cooper: Absolutely. You know, I just thought of something: There are at least two movies that you and your mother [Diane Ladd] have been in together. What's it like to work with your mother?

Dern: We've been in several movies together: *Rambling Rose*, *Wild at Heart*, she had a scene in *Citizen Ruth*. We did a movie for television together, and our series *Enlightened*, so, like, five times. It's amazing. It's a lot more amazing to work with your mother when you're 40 than when you're 20. I really enjoy her art and her friendship. I pray I get to work with my dad, but so far I haven't been given the opportunity. It's our big dream. I hope we get to do it. ■ ABILITY





New Rules, New Choices

The Impact of RA Section 503 New Rules on Job-Seekers and Employees with Disabilities

When Sally Jones (not her real name) applied for a nursing job, she worried about what she might be asked during the interview. During college, she was briefly hospitalized for severe depression. Though she has been fine since then, Sally feared she would not be hired if the employer found out. And she had reason to fear. Four months ago, this same employer fired a colleague of Sally's after taking leave for cancer treatments. Before the interview, the HR manager asked Sally to complete a form with a question about whether she was a person with a disability. When she saw this form was voluntary, she quickly folded it up and put it among her belongings to be thrown away later.

The form Sally was being asked to complete was probably the voluntary self-identification form that is now required by the Rehabilitation Act (RA) Section 503 new rules which took effect on March 24, 2014. Because Sally did not trust this employer, she chose to not identify as a person with a disability. Was this the right decision?

Covering over 200,000 workplaces across the U.S., these new rules could have a sweeping impact on the employment of people with disabilities (OFCCP, 2014a). Employers with at least $10,000 in federal contracts or subcontracts must comply with the new rules. Much of what has been written about the new rules is directed toward employers. This is understandable; the Section 503 new rules change what employers need to do. Yet, jobseekers and employees with disabilities will also be impacted in several key ways. What do people with disabilities most need to know about Section 503 as they make choices around getting and keeping a job? In what follows, we discuss seven key points about how the new rules for RA Section 503 could impact the choices of job-seekers and employees with disabilities.

1. Understand the basics of RA Section 503

Because the new rules could significantly impact the disability inclusiveness practices of many employers, it's important for anyone with a disability who has or seeks a job to understand the basics. For the most part, the Section 503 new rules do not grant new rights to people with disabilities in the workplace. Instead, the new rules require employers to implement strategies for improving disability inclusiveness and track progress toward having a workforce that consists of seven percent of people with disabilities. The Section 503 new rules also require employers to align with the existing ADA Amendments Act. The U.S. Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) enforces Section 503 new rules. More information on the Section 503 new rules can be found on the OFCCP website.

2. Know which employers in your community region are federal contractors

It is likely that several employers in your community are federal contractors covered under Section 503 new rules (have federal contracts/subcontracts of at least $10,000). Sometimes, however, employers themselves might not fully understand whether they are covered. Who is a covered federal contractor can be confusing and has been challenged in court. This is particularly the case for employers in a rapidly-growing segment of our labor market: healthcare providers. Healthcare providers often have arrangements with the federal government to provide care to certain populations, such as veterans. Do these arrangements "count" as federal subcontracts and, hence, do these employers need to comply with RA Section 503 new rules? Thus far, it seems the answer is yes. Courts have tended to uphold the federal contractor status of healthcare providers, but have in some cases allowed more time to comply (OFCCP 2014b). To find out which employers could be federal contractors/subcontractors in

your community, go to: abilityjobs.com/fed-contractors

3. Target covered employers in your job search

Having a disability could be an advantage when applying for jobs with employers covered under Section 503. Over the next few years, employers will be gearing up to meet the goal of a workforce with seven percent of people with disabilities. Start your job search by targeting these employers.

4. Connect with employment placement agencies partnering with employers covered by Section 503 new rules

Employers covered by Section 503 new rules are required to reach out to employment agencies who can provide qualified job applicants with disabilities. As a job-seeker, using the services of these agencies could give you an advantage in finding a job. Ask employment placement agencies in your community or region if they partner with employers who are covered under RA Section 503 new rules. Also, ask these agencies how they supply job applicants to these employers. How do they communicate with these employers? What can you expect as a job applicant with a disability?

5. Being asked to work for less than minimum wage? Think again…

Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act issues a certificate allowing employers, in some cases, to pay workers with disabilities less than the Federal minimum wage. OFCCP (who enforces RA Section 503 new rules) does not have jurisdiction over these policies and could not address this in the new rules. So it is still permissible under Section 503 new rules for employers with a 14c certificate to pay subminimum wages to workers with disabilities when these workers are in a work-training situation. Employers, however, are required to pay competitive wages and benefits to workers with disabilities who become qualified to do the job. Individuals with disabilities should ask some hard questions about entering into these sorts of arrangements. Is there a concrete description of what "qualified" means? Is there a clear path toward competitive employment? Is there any sort of accountability where employers must hire individuals who become qualified? What is the history of other individuals with disabilities who have been in this work training situation? Have they moved on to competitive jobs? How long has this taken?

6. About disability disclosure

RA Section 503 new rules require employers to track their progress in reaching a workplace that consists of seven percent of workers with disabilities. To do this, employers must find out how many individuals with disabilities have applied for jobs and are in their workforce. This is done by asking applicants and employees to voluntarily self-identify as a person with a disability both during hiring and after employment has started. It is important to understand that this invitation to self-identify does not conflict with the ADA. The invitation to self-identify required by Section 503 new rules is voluntary and confidential. There is no penalty for not completing the self-identification form and the disability information given on the form must be kept separate from other personnel records used for decisions such as hiring, firing, or promotion. So this voluntary self-identification form is *very different* from an in-person, face-to-face disability disclosure made, for example, during a job interview. As a job-seeker with a disability, you still have the ADA protections against an employer questions that force you to disclose your disability to, for example, a hiring manager during a job interview.

7. Make a disclosure decision that's right for you and right for each situation

The decision to provide disability information to an employer (either through the voluntary self-identification form or through a personal disclosure) really comes down to one thing: trust. Do you have reason to trust the employer? Remember Sally Jones? She had reason to believe that this employer may not use disability information in a way that's legally compliant, effective and responsible. But each employer is different. You need not make the same disclosure decision for all your job applications. Pose a few questions before making this decision. Does this employer have any sort of track record (either good or bad) around employing people with disabilities? Is there anything in the employer's culture that would suggest disability inclusiveness (e.g. an Employee Resource Group for people with disabilities, a well-designed and effective accommodation process, or a diversity plan that fully includes disability)? What tends to happen to employees in this company when a disability arises? What messages does this employer send about disability? Look for answers to these types of questions among members of the disability community, the internet, or an employment placement professional.

The final point that's most important to keep in mind is this: As a job-seeker with a disability, you have reason to hope. With the ADA Amendments Act, Section 503 new rules and other changes in disability law, positive change is now on our horizon. The skills and abilities you bring to the workplace matter, not just to you, but also to the employers who will soon discover them. ■ ABILITY

by Hannah Rudstam, Ellice Switzer, Judy Young, Kathleen Lee

OFCCP (2014b). District court judge rules in favor of OFCCP's New Section 503 Rule. OFCCP Blog Spot. Office of Federal Contractor Compliance Program. Washington, DC. Retrieved from ofccp.blogspot.com/2014/03/district-court-judge-rules-in-favor-of.html





EXCERPTS FROM Love Without Limits

Q&A WITH NICK AND KANAE VUJICIC

Nick, you were worried that you would never find a woman who could love you. How did those insecurities affect your relationship with Kanae? How did she help you overcome those doubts?

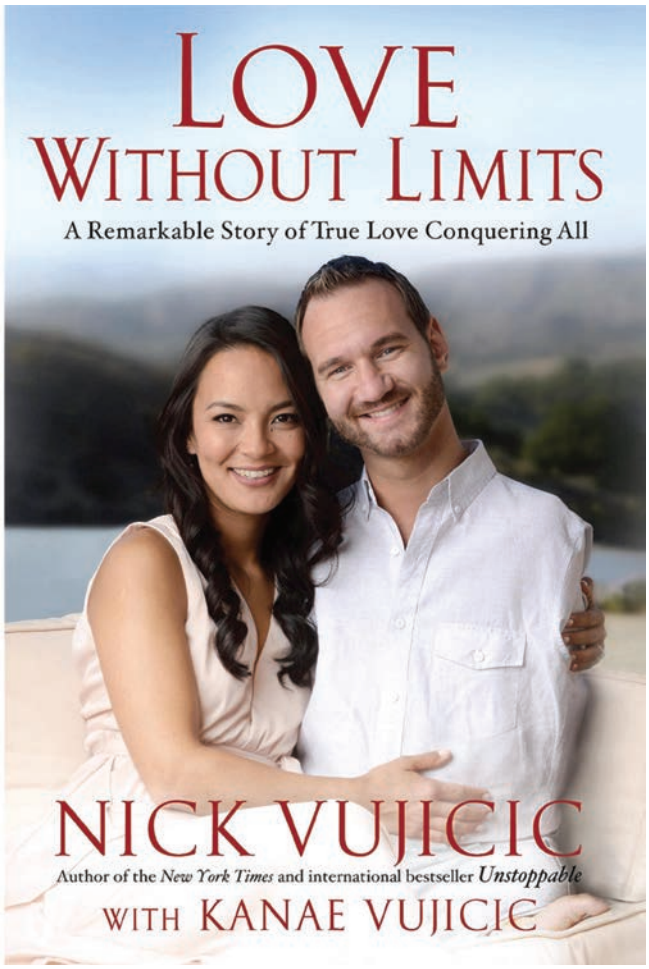
All my insecurities were gone out the window as I saw how Kanae looked at me, held me and how we both felt about each other. There is nothing better than a reciprocated love that's unconditional. After a relationship that did not move onward, I desired to have a bride whose family would welcome me into their family and hearts. The biggest test for us during our courting period was when I went through a personal financial crisis. Seeing Kanae's commitment to stand by my side no matter what was the most amazing discovery of how deep her love was for me. She looks at me, and I can tell she doesn't see limbless Nick. Shshsh :)

What was the biggest adjustment once you were married? Was there anything you dealt with that surprised you about being married?

There were several adjustments we handled once we were married. My caregivers never slept over anymore and there was the balance of me needing care sometimes but not always and then balancing the fact that I don't want my wife to assume the role as a caregiver either. I think the biggest surprise was actually seeing what our counselors said was true—that it's always more about giving than even sharing from a day-to-day basis and that goes for both sides. Also we learned that nothing the counselor could ever tell you can ever completely prepare you for marriage. Lastly, I am reminded daily of what I need to work on in my character as a man to be all that I want to be for her and our son Kiyoshi.

Your son Kiyoshi was born a day after your first wedding anniversary. How did having a baby change your marriage?

It changed everything in such a beautiful and chaotic way all at the same time. Our focus now is not just on each other, but him. I can say nothing ever can prepare you for parenthood. You just jump in with both feet and roll with the punches. It is quick to see what things I can't handle that Kanae seems to handle quite well. A lot of the responsibility was and is on her as I cannot do most things for him, but as he is getting older we are interacting, playing and reading books together. Kanae and I never thought that we as human beings had the capacity to love someone so much as we love our baby boy. It is a deeper and new dimension altogether that we love. We hope to have more children in the future so that Kiyoshi has a sibling or two.



NICK AND KANAE'S FIVE ROOKIE TIPS TO WORKING AT MARRIAGE

1. SORRY, BUT THERE IS NO COASTING

Whether you got married just months after a brief but intense courtship or you have been in love since sitting next to each other in first grade, there may be a strong temptation to take each other for granted in the first months and years of marriage. It's understandable. You put a lot of effort into proving your love and worthiness to each other, and you may just feel like putting it on cruise control for a while. The thing about cruise control is that it only works if traffic and road conditions never change, but change is inevitable on the interstate and in life. There is also the fact that when you marry someone, you don't lower the stakes of a relationship, you raise them. You become interdependent in every way, from your shared physical and emotional needs to your shared financial security. So you have to pay attention. If you don't, you can be sure your spouse—or life itself—will at some point deliver a wake-up call.

2. CONFLICTS WILL OCCUR

You and your spouse may be two peas in a pod, as compatible as peanut butter and jelly, but sooner or later your wedded bliss will be disrupted. The conflict might be triggered by in-law family members or outlaw friends. It may be circumstances beyond your control, or the fact that you refuse to hang up your wet bath towel. Prepare for it by keeping this in mind: Being right isn't nearly as important as being together. Sometimes you will be the windshield. Other times you will be the bug.

3. YOU MUST ADJUST

Marriage conflicts are inevitable. They only become crises when you don't make adjustments to resolve them. If you want your marriage to work, we suggest that you simply accept from the start that when conflicts occur—and they will—that the important thing isn't to win. Instead, you each should identify the problem from your perspective, find common ground, and then agree to make the necessary adjustments.

Sometimes this will mean simply accepting that "it is what it is" and letting go of resentments, anger, and the right to be right. The famous love passage in 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that along with being patient and kind, "love…thinks no evil." Some translations say that it keeps no record of wrongs. That's the Scripture version of "fuggedaboutit," as movie mobsters say. In other words, don't take conflicts personally; use them as opportunities to make your bonds stronger. Let go of hurtful feelings and focus on making the marriage better, not bitter.

4. REMEMBER WHY YOU MARRIED YOUR SPOUSE IN THE FIRST PLACE

I have a friend who, like me, married a younger woman who is also very smart, strong-willed, and not afraid to speak her mind. One day, their college-age son was present when my friend's wife let him have it for something he'd done that she did not like. After she vented, my friend turned to his son and calmly said with a smile, "Son, this is what comes with marrying a strong woman!" I love this story, because it goes to the core of a married relationship. We choose the people we marry. My friend married a strong woman, and he knew that she would be a strong wife. He was willing to accept that when she had a bone to pick with him, she would not mince her words. He loved her strength, and he accepted it for better and for worse.

When Kanae and I are at odds, I find it very helpful to look beyond the conflict at hand to the woman I fell in love with. Then I remind myself that I vowed to honor her and keep her in good times and bad. Our love is bigger than any disagreements we might have. Our relationship is more important to me than being right or winning an argument.

I also try to step back and think about the fact that I was a very lonely single guy, and this woman has brought



more joy into my life than I thought I'd ever know. That attitude, along with prayer, helps me get through the challenging times as a husband.

5. YOU AREN'T IN THIS ALONE

There may be times when you just can't figure out your spouse. You may not be able to understand why there is a conflict, what you did wrong, or how to get beyond an issue that has put you at odds. In these moments, you may feel that you are all alone. After all, the person you love the most is the same person who is angry with you, right?

These are the times when you reach out for help and support. You could go to your family and friends, but before you do that, ask yourself if you really want to share your conflicts and frustration with them. They may feel it necessary to pick sides, and that can become an issue down the road.

Instead, you might want to consider talking with your minister, a marriage counselor, a therapist, or some other impartial third party with experience in relationship

issues. And, most of all, talk to God and ask Him to give you wisdom and strength. In fact, my advice is to pray for His guidance and support each and every day—and maybe more often when you need help with this very important part of your life. Remember that if you can't change your spouse, God can. But also keep in mind that the person who may need to change could be you, and God will see that before you do!

5 POINT SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THE FIRST YEAR OF LIFE WITH A CHILD

1. SHARE YOUR FAITH

2. BE FULLY PRESENT WHEN YOU ARE WITH YOUR WIFE AND CHILD

By "being present" I mean focusing on your loved ones whenever you are around them. If I'm physically with my wife and son, I want to be mentally focused on them as well and not on my cell phone, checking e-mails, texting, or succumbing to all the other distractions of modern life.

Lately, I've been working on creating better boundaries between my work life and my family life. It's about being present-minded and engaged in every moment I am with my son and my wife. I turn off my smartphone to give my full attention to my wonderful family. I've discovered that my business actually benefits, because when I return to my office, I feel invigorated and more content due to my improved relationships.

3. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

The thing about gratitude is that when you feel it, you should express it, whether you are grateful for something a person has done for you or you are just feeling blessed because of someone in your life. This is especially true of your wife and children.

With reciprocated love, you accept each other as you are, knowing that neither of you is perfect. We all need grace, and we all need to give grace to our partners through understanding, forgiveness, and gratitude. Many couples have difficulty returning to a normal sex life after the birth of a child, particularly the first child. Spontaneity is no longer an option. The lack of sleep, financial pressures, the baby's erratic schedule, and last but not least, the woman's physical recovery from childbirth are all disruptive factors in this arena. As common as those issues are, it takes patience, kindness, and consideration to overcome them in the first few months after starting a family. The whole struggle is for the man and wife to join together, to become one as a married couple so that they are considerate and grateful for each other.

4. PUT YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

5. REFRAME THE SITUATION

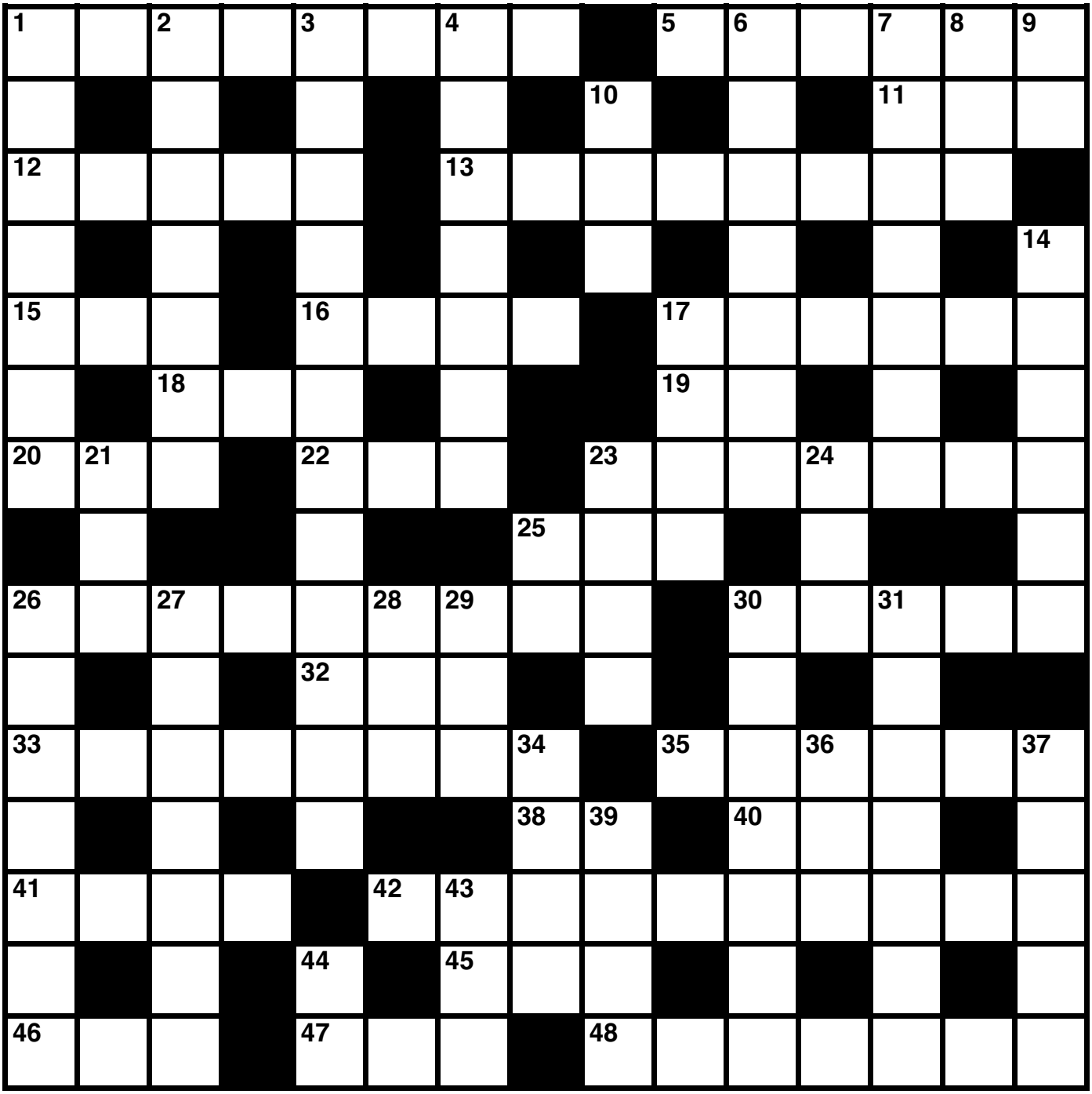
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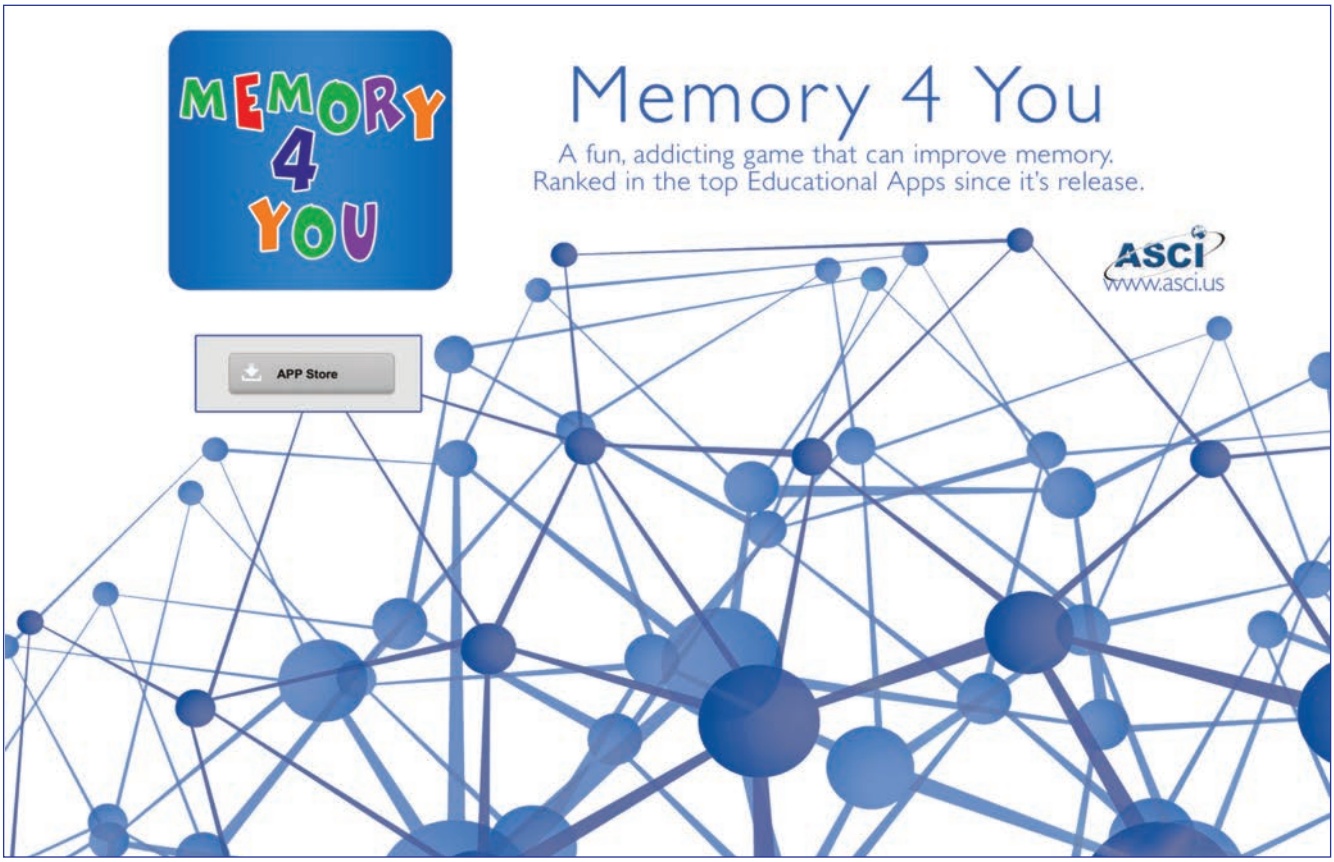




ABILITY's



Crossword Puzzle



ACROSS

1. Golf pro who plays successfully with a prosthetic hand (2 words)
5. "American Horror Story" star who plays a leadership role in the non-profit "Born to Act," Jamie _____
11. Omelet ingredient
12. The answer was "Blowin' in the Wind" for this protest singer
13. It's often called "the best medicine"
15. Place to surf without a board
16. Be optimistic
17. One who likes fishing
18. End _____ high note (2 words)
19. Humanitarian org.
20. "Rehab" singer Winehouse
22. Avail oneself of
23. How heroes act
25. Grp. with moles
26. It usually contains many sweet memories
30. Dietary rough stuff
32. Financial assistance
33. Comes back after a failure
35. First name of the Canadian singing star who is the celebrity patron for the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation
38. Topeka state
40. "Waking ___ Devine" (hilarious Irish 1998 comedy)
41. Jolly, to the British
42. He started the Prototype Arts Center in Nanjing (2 words)
45. "Harper Valley ___"
46. Cry from the stands
47. Gym round, briefly
48. Movie that's not to be missed (2 words)

DOWN

1. "Material Girl" singer who supports the Make-a-wish Foundation
2. "War and Peace" writer
3. Dedicated long distance motorcyclist who is a continuing inspiration for MS patients (3 words)
4. Bonnie Tyler's "Total ___ of the Heart"
6. Barbadian-born R&B star who created her Believe Foundation to help terminally ill children
7. Playful and a little scary motorcyclist stunt
8. Musician's gift
9. Room, abbr.
10. Sometimes you have to "go with your ___"
14. Sincere request
17. Atmosphere
21. G3 or G4 computer
23. Exercise device
24. Roman 7
25. Firm, briefly
26. Founder of the Special Olympics in 1968, Eunice _____
27. Renaissance, literally
28. Container
29. Strange
30. Actor who played Lord Voldemort in the Harry Potter series, Ralph _____
31. Marriott Hotels program which helps young people acquire skills and jobs
34. Spoof
36. Journey stage
37. Escape to get married
39. Monty Python obsession
43. Cell phone diversion
44. Either mate

answers on page 62

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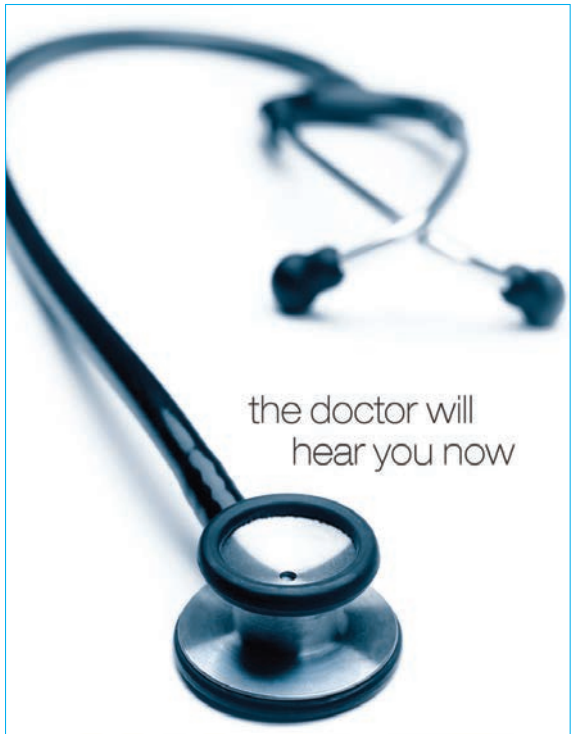
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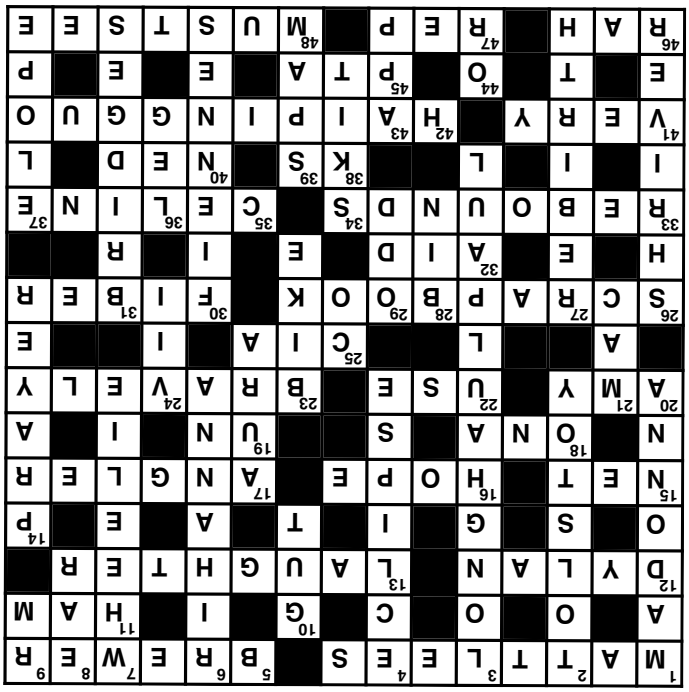
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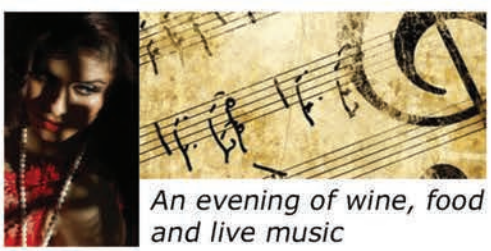












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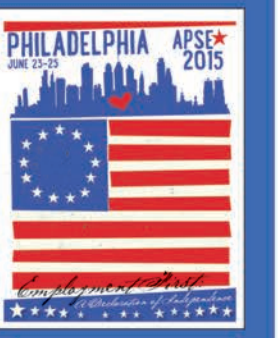
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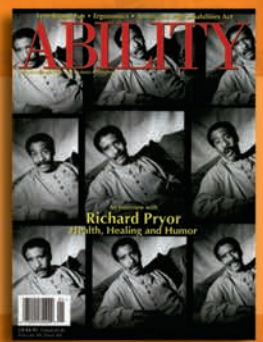
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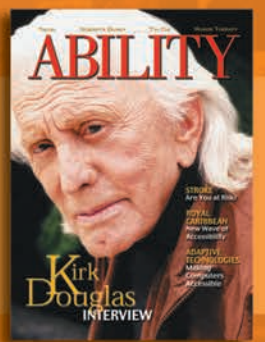
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