

The Backstory of writing a book that will become a movie:

The Beginning of a Journey

It was in September of 2011 about a month after our mother's memorial service in Oakville Ontario. Mary Margaret Herstad, known as "Margie", passed at the early age of 73. I awoke in the middle of the night, got up, put on my housecoat and slippers, made my way down stairs to the dining room table. I opened my laptop to look at my mother's Facebook page. I perused the pictures and comments then I did something that started me on a fascinating journey which has blown my mind.

I typed and posted these words on Mom's page "A book will be published one day and a movie will be made of this very special and spiritual lady"

I am not sure why I wrote that statement. I never thought of myself as a writer. Sure, I have written some poetry at times but never thought I was capable of writing a book. I went back to bed and forgot about it.

As I wrote the above words I became aware of something I should share with you. I am someone who loves sleep. I love my rest. I am a proud mid-day napper and will debate its positive effect on my life with anyone. So, when I say that I awoke and got out of bed half way into the night, that is a big deal.

A couple of weeks before that night, I picked up my youngest sister Julianne in my company truck. We left her home in the tiny town of Belfountain, about an hour north, west of Toronto, Canada. It was a Sunday drive through the rolling country hills in this area of Caledon region. As we made our way along the meandering road overlooking river valleys, creeks, fields and trees, we discussed what happened at Mom's memorial service. A couple of people approached our family to thank us for having a mother who helped them. These individuals were two of many who spent some time in our house back in the 1970's, 80's, into the 90's. It was quite the reunion, seeing them again. Although our mother was a widow at thirty-seven with four children, she always had room for someone in need of attention, someone who came across her path or her children's path. Our spare bedroom was rarely empty. They came for a short stay, some stayed longer.

It was during this drive that Julianne and I made a list of eighteen names we could remember of those who had taken the spare bedroom. We wrote their names down on a piece of paper from the glove box. I said "Hey sister, let's go find them. Interview them on how the time they spent in our home and their relationship with Mom affected their life."

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It took us three years but through social media and word of mouth all interviews were conducted. Some of these people wrote us a letter as well. I have always had a deep respect for my mother but hearing these people respond to our questions took it to a whole other level. I knew this was a story that needed to be told. We discussed that Julianne was going to write the book and I, with my marketing experience, was going to help with sales.

Three months after the interviews were completed my sister was not responding to my phone calls. I decided to drive the thirty minutes to her home and see what was up.

When I knocked on the front door of her small cottage style bungalow, Julianne opened the door. I could see she was upset. We went in and sat in her living room. She said “I don’t know what it is but I cannot write a paragraph. I am letting you and Mom down. I don’t know what to do?” I replied after a long pause by saying “It’s ok. The three years of work is not going away. I will figure this out.”

On the half hour ride back to my house I thought, “What did I just get myself into? I have my own business as a lighting designer. Do I have time for this? How do I even start something like this?”

I pulled into my country home driveway and stopped the car. I took a couple of breathes, opened the driver door and made my way up the back steps into the house. I walked directly to the dining room table without taking off my shoes, sat down and Googled “How do I write a book?”. One of the listings that came up was a YouTube video of James Patterson. I clicked on the video and heard him speak these words and it was as if he was speaking into my soul. “Don’t worry about the words, the paragraph or the page; just tell the story!” I stopped the video and closed my laptop. I sat back and contemplated.

Thought, “I can tell stories. That’s what I have been doing in my sales career all these years . I share a concept or an idea with the intention of a positive outcome for them and for me.” I kicked off my shoes, carried them to the back door, placed them on the mud mat and went upstairs to bed.

A couple of nights later I awoke at 3am on the dot. Up I got and down I went to the ground floor of this 1922 farm house.

The story in my head woke me up. My brain actively grappled with it until I realized something; I have to purge it out of my head if I was going to get any sleep at all.

Other times I took the lap top up into the loft at the top of the house. It is almost a vertical climb to get up those stairs and you have to come down backwards holding the railing on both sides of the staircase. It was up in this 10’ x 20’ rectangular space that I posted and pinned the pages of the stories and the interviews on all

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four walls. This allowed me to change the order of the stories, stand back to see what stories needed more detail. I used pink paper, Mom's favourite colour.

Sometimes it took twenty minutes to get the story out, other times it took a couple hours. Once the particular story of that night was purged I was able to get back to bed.

The experience I had writing these stories was non emotional. It was as if it was coming to me to quickly to think about it. Directly from thought to my fingers and typed out. I was a conduit. The emotion came later during a reread for an early self edit and did it come. These were the times I purged the emotion. The worst of the emotion came when I reread the early family stories, specifically the ones about my father. Having to recall the event when I was six years old and jumped on his back to protect my mother. As I edited this story I saw myself, that six year old boy on the gravel driveway. I saw my mom. I saw my dad. I saw my two sisters standing in front of the main door to the house. The scene replayed in my mind over and over. The emotion was brutal. At one point I found myself on my knees.

Then I wondered what I would say to that little boy.

I would tell him that it is not ok for him to have to protect his mom at that age. I would tell him that it was good that he acted. That I understand that type of fear. But he pushed thru it because someone had to do something. I would tell him I was proud of him. I would say that I am here for him. I would take him by the hand and walk him back into the house. Help him change his pyjamas and wash the blood from the bottom of his feet with a damp face cloth. I would help him get back into bed. I would tell him that everything is going to be alright.

It was a blessing for me to write these stories out of my mind; Out of my subconscious. I was able to revisit so many events from my life and see myself as separate from who I was then and who I am today. I could now see those events without the fear and chaos. I felt lighter and more buoyant after the emotion from editing.

There was also an experiences of pride and joy in the emotion of rereading. The wonderful family stories we all shared. Trailering together, fishing together, having a father who coached me in a game that I loved. Having a mother that always helped me know I was loved. These were the happy tears.

Then I had an Oprah "AHHA moment".

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It was in the remembering of all those times, when I was young. Recalling how back then I said to myself “These are challenging times. We are in survival mode here”.

Looking back on it, it was not that at all. It was just our family journey. Those were wonderful, amazing times. Sure it was challenging but everything always worked out; Because we had each other. We weathered the storm as a team, all of us did our individual role with love and commitment to each other. I was so grateful for all the family history, every moment. It was like a gift of time and history I was recalling.

All and all, writing about my family, my childhood, then my mom and the experiences she shared with others was very cathartic. I recommend it for anyone wanting to know what thoughts and emotions may be trapped in their subconscious perhaps holding them back from a better life; Or maybe just for someone who would like to know how to be more appreciative regarding their own past and where they come from.

It all boils down to story telling. And everyone has a story.

As Frank McCourt, author of Angela’s Ashes expressed, “Sing your song. Dance your dance. Tell your tale.”

1.Publicity Summit

During the writing of the initial draft I decide to attend a publicity summit in New York City. I wanted to talk about this story with media contacts to see their reaction to it. This exercise was for me to find fuel to feed this dream.

The company is called Bradley Communications out of Philadelphia. This company helps people connect with various media to create exposure to the public. The media contacts included newspaper columnists, freelance writers, TV show producers, radio hosts, magazine editors, movie directors/producers. These are people who can change your life overnight if they like your idea, your pitch. It can lead to your story going “viral”.

I arrived in Manhattan, New York two days before the media contacts are introduced to the group. This event took place at the top of the Pennsylvania Hotel in the large meeting rooms. For the first two days all sixty participants are coached on how to express their idea, book, product or business to the media

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representatives. There are a series of exercises you do individually and in pairs to hone your story, your pitch.

The pitch is two and a half minutes maximum. It is how I verbally package the reason this book became an idea in the first place and why it should matter. I also had to confirm which media contacts I wanted to target. The list identified my top priority media people of the 115 total media contacts in attendance. I ranked my first pick with a #1 and continued until finished at #50.

It was day three at 9 a.m., “Pitch Day”. All media contacts entered the largest open meeting room on the penthouse floor and positioned themselves around the perimeter with their own station. Some of them remained standing, some sat, some leaned on a lounge chair. We participants lined up in front of each media member, behind a two foot by two foot masking taped outline of a square box on the carpet floor.

This is how it works; if you are standing in a five person lineup as third in line to pitch a particular media contact and that media person is #10 on your list, you remain in position three unless another participant shows up with that media contact as their #9, 9 is higher priority than 10, so you have to step back and allow them to butt in front of you in that line. Once you get to the front of this line and are standing in the square box, no-one can butt in front of you because you are next up to pitch that contact.

I made my way around that room working my priority list, hitting contact after contact with this pitch: “She was a widow at 37 with 4 children but always had room for someone who came across her path or her children’s path. Her spare bedroom was rarely empty. At my mother’s memorial service in 2011 our family was approached by individuals who did stay in that spare bedroom. Their gratitude was overwhelming. We decided to make a list of everyone we could remember who took that spare bedroom in the 1970’s, 80’s and into the 90’s. Our list totalled eighteen. It took me and my sister Julianne three years but through word of mouth and social media we found and interviewed all of them on how their time in our house and relationship with our mother impacted their life. Some of them wrote us a letter. My Mom’s message in this story reminds us of something we are born with and most everyone has forgotten. We have an inherent want, need and desire to connect and help one another. In so doing we find our own true joy and fulfillment. The book will be titled “Love, Care and Share”.

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This summit gets you real feedback and you get it quickly. In the middle of your pitch you may be interrupted with a “This is just not for me. Next!” or “Not interested” or “Not at all a fit here”. However, I did get the full pitch out many times and got a “Sounds like a great story”, and “I like it, keep me posted”, “Here’s my card, let me know when it’s published”, and “I can book you right now on a radio show. Step over to my assistant and they will take your information”.

"One lady in particular said "Sweetie, this sounds like a great story. When you finish the book, please send me a copy. Here is my card."

This woman was Bonnie Kogos, an author and newspaper columnist, writing for The Sudbury Star in Northern Ontario for over thirty years. She is a firecracker, who loves to help authors.

Her nickname is the “Energizer Bonnie”.

In aggregate, the support for this story was obvious and the experience filled my motivation tank to the top.

At the end of the last day during this Summit I signed up for something called Quantum Leap. It is the next step forward that Bradley Communications Group offers.

2. Quantum Leap

The Quantum Leap commitment is just that. It is a leap of faith which moved me towards the dream. This is another investment in commitment level and in money to find out if the dream was more possible. It is a monthly fee to have access to all the professionals I needed counsel from to get things done. I needed marketing knowledge of the publishing industry. I needed help with the book marketing messages. I needed website content input. I needed to think about all these things while I was finishing the writing. They all relate to the writing content and messaging.

These decision moments that made me put money down, that is what made it more real for me. Every penny I spent on this journey is money I invest in myself. It is money to find the help to make it happen. It is money to get to and spend time with the right people. Having said that it was a challenge at times to sign the cheque. I realized one thing for sure, that if I did not send the cheque; I might not ever know

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if the dream could happen. I might be that one step away from it happening and never know it.

Steve Harrison is VP of Bradley Communications. He has helped people like Rich Dad, Poor Dad co-authors Robert Kiyosaki and Sharon Lechter. Their book has sold 32 million copies. Steve helped Jack Canfield, author Chicken Soup for the soul. That “Chicken Soup” series of books has now sold over 500 million copies world wide. More sales means more people get exposure to the message and this is what I was working towards. Finding the way to get Mom’s message to as many people as possible.

Part of the Quantum Leap encounter is a series of group marketing get togethers with Steve. Multiple Quantum Leap members attend the “think-tank” get togethers. They are held in a very nice hotel backing onto a golf course close to their main office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These round table meetings are for up to eight Quantum Leapers; authors, business owners, inventors. People like myself perusing a dream. I took my son with me to the first one. I wanted him witness this caliber of people and share in the experience. We met a local lady from Philadelphia who has a horse farm where she offers workshops. The workshops connect people and horses for some extraordinary results; In one case a lady realized for the first time that she has always had a fear of men. A lawyer from Little Rock, Arkansa had just published a book about an ancient poem that has always moved him. He breaks down every line of the poem to divulge its true meaning. We met a middle aged actress from New York who was reinventing her career with a come-back. Another participant was a gentleman who has hosted numerous TEDx events.

The way this works is we go around the room with standard marketing messages to see if they are a fit with your own story. You respond or you can brain storm alone or with others on derivatives of that standard marketing message. So it is highly interactive as a group. This process also helped with establishing who these marketing messages can be directed to and how to get to those contacts. (Example how does a book author with a new memoire pursue the USA library community to promote the book and which marketing messages will work best for this target market?).

At the end of the weekend you make a verbal declaration then move around the room re-introducing ourself to other participants with that title. Mine was “Hi I am Tom Herstad Author of a Best Selling Book and Public Speaker. Reagan’s declaration choice was that he was a movie producer. I enjoyed watching him

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respond to that question, finding his answer, then witnessing his declaration. It was a great exercise for us both.

Once the weekend was over and we said our good byes to the group, Reigan and I decided to make another night of it. He and I went out to dinner. Just the two of us. During the dinner we got into a discussion about his early childhood. He got emotional telling me that he was hurt by the way I dealt with a specific event. I asked him to tell me. He went on to express how ashamed I made him feel as a result of him exposing himself to a little girl when he was five. Revisiting this event together I realized I would change the way I dealt with it. I apologized to him for not knowing better. I asked him if I could respond now to what I said to him back then. I continued by saying “I should have told you that it is natural to be curious. That it is not bad to do that. It is just not appropriate. I asked him to forgive me for making him feel ashamed of himself and his own sexuality at that very young age. We got thru this difficult conversation then went back to the hotel to sit on the patio out back before bedtime.

Sometimes going away together, to a new place, away from life’s daily routine, can allow us the chance to find those topics we need to discuss.

Coming back home thru the Pennsylvania and New York State Adirondack Mountains was a peaceful, beautiful, spectacular drive we enjoyed. We even saw a couple bald eagles.

3. Cuba

When I got back to Toronto after the Quantum Leap get together I continued to write but found myself “flat-lining”. This word refers to my writing process. This is when the writing doesn’t come naturally and I start to wonder why and or push it until I realize it has to come on it’s own. Part of my response to the “flat-lining” included moving a bed up into that loft where the stories were pinned on four walls. I figured if I could sleep in the stories maybe that would help.

Then something happened.

My mother used to say “You have all your own answers. Relax and get quiet, listen to your inner voice.” Something inside me was telling me, “You have to go away. Somewhere remote, sit on a beach, stare at the stars. You also have to contemplate how to get a book edited and published”. I scheduled a vacation to Cayo Coco in Cuba, and asked my sister to join me. The trip was my treat. Julianne is great fun and she can also weigh in with deep thinking on any subject matter.

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We arrived at Toronto Pearson airport on that February Monday morning at 8 a.m. in 2016. I found my isle seat and was happy to notice I was seated beside a quiet husband and wife couple. I rested and read my book, “Autobiography of a Yogi” by Yoganunda, who introduced Yoga to North America in the early 1900’s. I was inspired to read this book after reading Steve Jobs’ book. He carried this book with him all the time and made arrangements to be sure that everyone who attended his memorial service received a copy of this book as a posthumous gift from Steve. I also became aware that George Harrison of the Beatles said the book was the most important book he ever read and used to buy them to give to his friends.

Half way into the flight I looked up from my book and connected with the lady beside me. Tanya introduced herself and her husband Austin. Tanya went on to discuss her interior design business, I shared with her my lighting experience. Austin weighed in with his life coaching counselling. It was a great engaging chat, then Tanya asked me this question “What else do you do?” I told her that I’ve started writing a book about my mother’s life. She said “I am a Best Selling Author, an editor and someone who has experience in self-publishing”.

“What!?” I was shocked and amazed at the serendipity. For the rest of the flight we went on to have an amazing chat about writing. When the plane landed, as usual, people flooded the isle and poured out into the airport. Tanya and I got separated and forgot to exchange business cards. Off she went with Austin and off went Julianne and I.

The resort was right on the ocean and perfect. Sandy shores as far as the eye could see in both directions, and the water knee deep at least one hundred yards out. It was a huge wind surfer destination. Wind sails and mini parachutes were all over this beach and fascinating to watch.

My sister and I shared the first couple days together walking and adventuring around the resort. Then I knew I had to spend some time alone to understand something. There were emotions I was experiencing that I could not put my finger on. Something gnawing at me; I had to find out what it was. My sister connected with a lady close to her age and they hit it off. This allowed me the time I needed to investigate my thoughts and feelings.

I sat on the beach for hours, swam. I walked the beach, fed the wild birds fresh bread, swam with dolphins, rode a scooter everywhere, to the end of the peninsula at sunrise. Then it dawned on me. I realized the decision I needed to make. It was a decision that was separate from the decision to start the writing. I realized I had to make a decision to finish the writing. A decision to finish the book.

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This decision was one of the most difficult decisions I have made in my life. To make a decision to finish writing, editing and publishing a book was a self declaration to complete something I did not know how to do. The only solace in this decision was that I knew I could trust myself to know what each next step would be. To offer everything else up to a faith I had in this process, in my mothers guidance.

A week later we made our way back to the airport, I sat awaiting the flight. Here came Tanya walking towards me and then I saw Austin. Tanya said “What flight are you on?” I said the flight number. Tanya said “Us too. Where are you sitting?” I said “not sure”. We exchanged business cards in the terminal and agreed to keep in touch.

About thirty minutes later we boarded the plane, made my way to my isle seat and what do you know? I was seated directly beside Tanya Freedman again.

What are the odds of this?

Once we were airborne we dove back into the books story. She wanted to know everything. Why I am writing? Why I believe it is a story that needs to be told? “Are you committed to finishing?” she asked? At the end of the conversation she agreed to receive the draft and promised to give me her professional opinion about if this story is just for our family or does it have a bigger purpose. I assured her she will not offend me with any of her feedback as I was already in over my head. Then it got even more interesting.

As we all moved down the isle and out of the plane Julianne asked Tanya when her birthday was. Tanya replied saying “My birthday is May 14th”. What!?

That is our mother’s birthday.

Upon returning to Toronto, I emailed Tanya the draft. Sixteen days later she to got back to me; I remember that night well. It was a Thursday at 9pm. I picked up my phone and said “Hello”. Tanya said “You and I are going to do something wonderful together. This is a much bigger story than just for your family Tom”. Her response confirmed that I would take the next 4 months off from my lighting business to focus on the publishing of the first edition of Love, Care and Share.

4. Mrs. P

It was late spring in 2016, my son Reigan and I were finishing a lighting service call in the western suburbs of Toronto on the shores of Lake Ontario. This customer has been with us for many years, as a result we have a close relationship. Once we gathered up our tools and loaded the truck I rang the bell at the front door

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to deliver the service call worksheet and get paid. Reagan waited in the truck for me. After a long pause Mrs. P opened the door, came out with her cheque book. It was easy to see she was upset as she made her way to the open porch front chair. She sat down and asked me for the sales sheet. I handed it to her. She confirmed the amount verbally as she started writing the cheque. Halfway through writing she stopped, slumped over forward, hugged her chest with the cheque book.

“Are you ok?” I asked.

She said, “No. I just don’t fit in here”.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

She went on to describe in detail how she had attended her daughter’s high school pre-graduation assembly that morning. Sidebar here; This is a rich neighbourhood littered with mansions and Porsche cars. Almost all women are stay-at-home wives with the most recent designer clothing. She continued to express how while at this function she shared with some of the other moms, in attendance, that she had a couple of kids staying with her in their home. One was her daughter’s best girlfriend who is struggling with cocaine abuse. The other was her son’s friend. This boy was thrown out of his family home because he expressed to his parents that he wanted to attend a different university rather than the one they had chosen for him. When she finished sharing this with the women they responded by cautioning her on helping “those” kinds of kids. They went on to suggest Mrs. P is being taken advantage of and being used.

Mrs. P held back her tears and finished writing the cheque. As she handed it to me I said “You are doing what we are all supposed to do. We’re supposed to react to others who need help in this way. You’re not being weak or being used. You remind me of my mother. I’m writing a book about her life right now. Could I send you the draft? Can you help me know that this is a story worth telling, sharing?”

She said, “Yes, please send it to me”. Later that night I emailed her the draft.

A couple days later I got a phone call from her. She spoke in a very soft voice “I cried through the entire read. I needed to read this. It has legitimized my life and what I do. I now have a relationship with your mother and I know that I do not have to justify what I do to anyone, anymore. Thank you, Tom, thank you. Your mother sent you here that day. I needed this.”

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5. Keep Writing:

Mrs. P's response to the initial draft allowed me to fill my motivation tank and to keep going. I opened the wooden door to the upper loft, grabbed the hand railing on both sides of the stairs and returned back up into the top of our home to continue writing. But now I had additional inspiration, a 1960 Remington typewriter. One of my closest friends and his wonderful girlfriend offered it to me as a gift when they heard I was writing a book. As it turns out Lori's father had just passed away and they had to deal with the contents of his house. Her father, Kerry Lambie, was a newspaper column writer for thirty some years. He'd climbed the ranks to considerable heights in the print media industry. I welcomed his silver work-of-art piece of machinery into my writing space, placing in the middle of the room on a fold-out table. When I shared with John and Lori my intent to include their gift in this writing I asked if they could offer me more details on Lori's father. This was their response:

"Kerry was born in Kirkland Lake, Ontario. He started his lengthy career in newspapers as a sports reporter at the Northern Daily News in the community. Stops would be made at several other newspapers as he eventually climbed the ranks to executive Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer (North America) of Thomson Newspapers Corp. A long-time passion of Kerry's was painting and after being sidetracked by the newspaper business for thirty-five years, he retired and started his own studio, largely focusing on landscapes from Ontario's Northland. While the newspaper business had brought Kerry to the Toronto area, his heart had remained firmly tied to the North. He visited the Temagami area annually and called the region "almost never pretty but always beautiful." He painted at his Mississauga-based art studio for 20 years and his work is hanging in homes and businesses in Canada and other countries, including the U.S. and Australia.

The presence of Kerry's typewriter will continue to remind me that I am not alone in that loft, writing in the middle of the night. RIP Kerry.

The stories kept coming but now not just halfway through the night. They were now coming to me during the day as well.

I started meeting with Tanya twice a week on the phone or in person to review the writing, engage in coaching, out loud editing. She was firm but kind with her enthusiastic guidance. Tanya challenged me on many aspects of each story and asked for more detail in places or offered some changes in paragraph order. I was hungry for her feedback and soaked it all in. It was during this phase of the project that she said something to me that I had to contemplate. She said, "Your story telling is very good but you need to go deeper. You need to take the reader into

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your thoughts and help them trust you and get to know you. This allows them to believe your perspective. I also want you to realize that putting your heart on the page means you need to take complete ownership of this writing. You need to put your name on this book.”

I hadn't even thought about the book cover or any of this until Tanya's words. My sister and I had started this project together completing interviews. Julianne had transcribed the audio interviews to print. To this point we collaborated on the content of the book often together.

As a result of Tanya's statement I knew I needed to call my sister. After catching up with her, I said, “Julianne, I realized that I need to ask you a question. Are you ok with me putting my name on this book?” I shared with her what Tanya had told me. I was expecting a longer pause. But she said, “Yes, I am ok with that, go ahead.”

It was during this time when I picked out some of my mother's closest friends and sent them some stories to get their feedback. I believed that their replies to me would in some way be close to what my Mom might say to me. I also knew they would have fresh eyes on this writing, so perhaps offer something I did not see. You know the saying “too close to the forest to see the trees”? Well, they did. One of Mom's dearest friends said I was rushing through on some of the details. Another said, “You have to give the reader a physical description of your mother early in the book. The reader needs to be able to see her”. Then I heard this during a phone conversation with her closest friend Chris, “Tommy, you need humour in this book. Your mother loved to laugh.”

6. Where's my Laptop?

Jules and I went away for a weekend trip with the trailer. Upon returning to the house I became aware that my 21 year old son had hosted a party the night before. While the house was cleaned, something happened that could have drastically affected the Love, Care and Share first Edition book ever being completed.

My lap top was missing from my office. During the impromptu party one of the “invitees” stole it.

This laptop had my book manuscript and all the interviews for the book on it. Everything I'd been doing for the past four years on this project. It also contained my lighting business information for the past eleven years. I was livid, freaking out. I grilled Reigan endlessly as to who might this disgusting thief be. Scared

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himself, he started connecting with his friends who attended the party. He narrowed it down to a girl he went to high school with.

Could she have stolen it?

We drove to her house and confronted her. After much questioning she identified a guy who came with her to the party. She recalled watching him during the party leave the back door running to his car with something under his arm. Unfortunately, the guy was someone this girl had not seen in quite a while. He was passing thru the area and was now gone again. She gave us his cell phone. But it was disconnected.

Exhausted, I met with local police and filed a report, but they promised nothing. Expressing that the computer black market is a quick moving machine. They said that the computer within twenty four hours is memory deleted and sold as an “out of the box” back into the sellers market. The buyers think these products are returned computers from a first time purchaser. More searching in my office for written notes turned up little evidence that a book was even in the works. I was desolate.

Once I settled down I began to think how I might be able to retrieve the book transcript and my business information. Then something occurred to me, I had sent the updated book manuscript with editing notes back to Tanya via e-mail four days before leaving on that weekend trip. With bated breath, I dialled her number. Tanya confirmed that the manuscript was on her computer, in her possession, I could breath again.

I then called my book keeper to confirm that the business information did have a backup with her. Deep breathing, again. How lucky was I?

I connected with my insurance agent to discuss the replacement of the computer under our house content insurance. Rob filed the necessary paper work for the insurance claim, the computer would be replaced. During my meeting with him he asked what was on the computer. I expressed that I was writing a book about my mother’s life . He asked about the book. I described the interview process we went thru and shared a couple of the stories from the book with him. I express to him that when I was making a decision to finish this book I heard a Commencement speech Jim Carrey completed at MUM University in 2014. Hearing Jim’s speech had a huge impact on me.

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“The affect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is” Jim’s statement during that speech triggered a realization inside me; My mothers positive affect on other people had to be acknowledged and shared with the world. My mom was doing what Jim said is so very important and I agreed with him.

Rob said “I am best friends with Jim Carrey’s brother, John”. Rob went on to discuss his relationship with him and how they met in the car racing circuit. I asked Rob if I could connect with John. I wanted to see if I could send him a copy of the book so he might forward it on to Jim. I wanted to acknowledge Jim for helping me make the completion decision for the book.

Rob agreed to connect me with John and his wife. After we connected, John agreed to forward the book to Jim with my hand written thank you note. I included another copy for John and his wife in the package. A few weeks later I followed up with John and he confirmed that the package was received. He assured me that he would forward the book and note on to his brother.

I was so pleased that I was able to thank Jim for helping me make that completion commitment. I did not heard from Jim. But I do trust that he received my book.

What did I learned from this?

Sometimes positive things can happen thru a harrowing incident.

7. First Edition

We arranged another Sunday drive with my sister. I picked up Julianne from her Belfountain home. She wanted to show me a new place. It is an old mill that has been converted into a shared space art gallery in the little village of Alton, Ontario. We pulled into the property after driving over a small bridge. The three story white stone building is situated on a big pond with a large water fall and creek that runs directly beside the mill. I could hear the sound of rushing water as I exited my truck.

We made our way inside the building, Julianne said, “Let’s go see if Paul Morin is here today”. I nodded and followed her up the main stairs and through a meandering, creaking, wooden floor hallway; Paul is the artist with the largest room in this shared art gallery building. We were in luck, his gallery door was open. Classical music was playing and I could smell a hint of something burning. Paul introduced himself to Julianne and I, then expressed that the smoke smell is

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the sap of pine trees far up in the Andes mountains in the Chile area of South America. It is said that the smoke can inspire creativity, open the mind.

Continuing the discussion he walked us towards the art work covering all four walls. Paul described his art as a high-end car salesman might describe a luxury car. The dialogue married a description of what we were looking at with his artistic process and how it may make us feel when looking at it. He is a true artist in every sense of the word. When he speaks you just want to stay quiet and hear more. He continued by describing how the layering of colour works. I continued looking at his paintings as well as at the lighting that is illuminating each piece of art. Paul noticed I had a couple detailed, long pausing looks at the type of lighting he had and said “The lighting in here is wrong, I wish I could get it right”. To which I responded, “I am a lighting designer. I agree you could have much better lighting on your art.”

Paul shared with us that he has just bought a building two minutes away on Main Street. He would be moving his art into his own gallery. He asked me if we could drive over to look at the building, to give him some ideas on lighting. I agreed to go with Paul while Julianne decided to stay behind and visit with other artists.

As we pulled into the parking area directly behind the newly purchased building Paul shared with me it’s history. It was originally built as a church in the late 1800’s. The building was utilized for many other reasons. It later became a fire hall, then during WWII it was used as a warehouse for army uniforms and condoms. After that it was a community hall/dance hall. What a beautiful building for Paul’s own gallery.

As we continued walking through the interior and into the basement, Paul listened intently to my lighting ideas and suggestions. When we had finished the lighting consultation

Paul asked “What else do you do other than lighting?”

I said, “I am in the throws of writing a book about my mother’s life”.

“Who’s doing the book cover for you, Tom?” he asked.

“I have not thought about that yet.” I replied

“I will do the cover for you and you can give me some lighting for the new art gallery?” Paul retorted

I said, “Thank you Paul, that would be great!”

I completed an exterior and interior lighting design which offered many different styles of lighting including colour changing lights for his stage area. I specified very high colour rendering index lighting to illuminate his art pieces as this type of light allows the true colour of the paint to show. I suggested launching the light

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close enough from the top of each piece as this will help show the texture of the paint. In return I received an amazing piece of art that was used for the book cover, 1st Edition of “Love, Care and Share”.

This painting resides today in the centre of the wall above our bed in our master bedroom.

Once all the stories and interviews were organized in the best order, formatted and now that the cover was finalized I self-published with Tanya’s company, Creative Hummingbird Results. She also helped with the website development and a video book trailer. “Love, Care and Share” was published in June of 2016 and downloaded to Amazon and was available on all available ebook platforms.

The website is: www.lovecareandsharebook.com

8. She Knows Him

I emailed Julianne the published e-book for her to see the finished product. This was an exciting time and I wanted to share it with her.

A couple days later I heard from her. It was a weekday after a lighting installation was completed. We had just finished loading the truck, heading home, when my cell phone rang. It was my sister. The phone was connected to my truck speaker system.

I said “Hello there”

She said “Something extraordinary happened today”.

I asked “What?”

Julianne said “I am half way thru the reading of the book”. She paused for a few seconds.

Her pause reached the amount of time for me to maybe say “Are you still there?”

When she said “Tom, I now know my father.”

She was seven when our father died. Other than the many stories we all shared with her about dad and her vague memories, she did not really know who the man was. However, reading the book, the family stories, my description of my father

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and my feelings towards him helped Julianne find her own definition of her father. This was an amazing conversation we shared. I was so happy for her and proud of myself for being able to contribute to this realization for my sister.

This was another time when I was more aware of my Mom and could feel her presence in this work. It was as if I could see my Mother looking at me with her gentle smile and subtle nod of approval.

9. Published/First Edition

Now that the book was published I engaged with Stellar Printing for a volume print run. I wanted to do book store signings and needed physical books to accompany me into the stores. The way this works is the printing company prints and gives you one copy of the book called a ‘galley proof’, you proof read it to ensure there are no mistakes. If everything looks good, you pull the trigger on the volume run. In this case it was 150 copies of the book.

I drove the one hour to pickup the “Love, Care and Share” proof copy at the Stellar Printers and made my way back home. It was a great feeling to now be holding the book in my hand. I hooked up my thirty-foot trailer to my company pickup truck and drove down to the Oakville Yacht Club on the shores of Lake Ontario. There is a small park right beside all the boats. I backed the Airstream into a corner spot with the trailer screen door facing the water. I wanted to read with the lake as my backdrop.

About ninety minutes into my read there was a knock at my trailer door. I ear-marked the page, placed the book on the kitchen table. This distraction confirmed that I needed a reading break and I wanted to stretch my legs. I opened the screen door and saw a man standing in front of the trailer.

Before I could say “Hi”, this man said “Oh, I am sorry, you’re not Mike. Same silver Airstream trailer, same spot, two weeks ago a guy named Mike was right here. Sorry to bother you”.

I stepped out of the trailer, down the side stairs and introduced myself with a handshake. He introduced himself as Doug Gill.

During our subsequent conversation Doug asked, “What are you doing here?” I explained that I was proof reading a book that was just published. Doug interrupted me and said “I am an author too. I write Sci-Fi.” He continued to describe in detail his most recent transcript. Doug also told me about his hobbies which included writing musical score. He is a piano player. During this conversation I told him that my book is about how our mom lived her life. Doug asked me why I wrote the book. I explained about how we interviewed people regarding their relationship

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with her. Doug asked me to tell him a couple stories from the book. After sharing the stories, Doug said, “This has got to be a movie. I know a movie director. His name is Paul Saltzman. The man is far too busy to get to. Maybe if I can get a copy of your book to his wife Anne, she might read it and then give it to Paul?”. My mind raced with ideas about how a movie contract might happen. Could this be possible? Why not, I thought.

Two weeks later I picked up the volume run of books. I gave Doug a signed book for himself and I signed one for Anne Peace.

A month later when my cell phone rang, I did not recognize the number. I answered the phone, as usual, “Tom here”. Then I heard “Hi Tom, this is Paul Saltzman of Sunrise Films. My wife handed me your book the other day and I have just completed reading it. It is a great story Tom and I was hoping you could come meet with me at my home in Oakville to have a discussion?”

“When would you like to meet?”, I replied.

He said “How is next Tuesday” I interrupted him before he finished the sentence with a “Yes, what time?”

He said “How is four?”.

He gave me his home address.

“See you then” I replied.

I got off the phone, I sat down. My heart was pounding. My brain raced with those ideas about a possible movie contract. Again, I thought, Why not?

The following Tuesday I invited Julianne down to my house and at four o’clock that afternoon we were outside Paul’s house on Lakeshore road. His property backs onto Lake Ontario. My sister and I made our way to the front door and could not stop looking at each other and smiling.

Paul greeted us at the front door then we made our way to his kitchen table. After Julianne and I sat at opposite sides of the table Paul asked us if he could make us a Chia Tea. We agreed and he moved to the stove and placed a pot on the front burner. We exchanged pleasantries then Paul delivered us warm coffee mugs full to the top with his special tea drink, foaming over. He sat with us at the head of the table and said, “I know your mother has come here with you today. I loved the book and it represents the following:

- It’s a beautiful story
- Its a female lead
- Your mother represents the courage and bravery to love

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- It also represents bright stories in these challenging times
- This is a story that needs to be told and shared.

He paused and then said, “It should be made into a movie.”

I could not believe my ears. My mind started to race with excitement. Julianne and I were grinning at each other. From the heat of my face, I knew both our faces were flushed red. Then our grins morphed into two full blown perm-a-smiles. Paul went on to explain to us about his career and how he always consciously searches for stories about loving bravely. He then listed many TV series and movies he has participated in.

As the conversation continued Paul said “I am far too busy with other projects to get involved, but if you can find financing for a screen play come back and see me. I will counsel you through this industry. I could introduce you to my entertainment lawyer”.

Julianne and I looked at each other with a puzzled expression. I said “Paul, how do you find financing?”

“Just put it out there, Tom and keep going.” He said. “There’s something special about this story.” He walked us to his front door, we left.

Our ride home together was mixed with excitement and reassurance but also confusion about the “finding financing” part. I thought to myself “Who do I know that has the kind of money to make a movie? How do I ‘put this out there?’ What does that even mean?”

10. Movie Contract

Four months after that meeting with Paul Saltzman, my son Reigan and I had just finished a lighting service call on Laura and Michael’s house. Their family was headed to Jamaica for vacation. I expressed to them that I had written a book which was just published, gave them a copy to read if they had some down time on the beach.

They thanked me for the gift and off they went to the airport.

Five days later I got an email from Michael during their vacation. He expressed that they wanted to meet with me when they returned from Jamaica.

Two weeks later at their home they shared with me that Laura read the book in one sitting and then handed it to Michael. He shared how emotional the read was for him. Then they said, “This is a story that needs to be shared with the world”.

Michael added that he has experience making books into movies with his family business. He suggested that he and his wife finance the movie screenplay. I called

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Julianne from the car on the way home and she cried as I told her what had just happened. I expressed that I would set up a meeting with Paul Saltzman and let her know.

Two days later my sister and I went back to Paul's for a second meeting with him. He said "Remember when you were here four months ago and I was too busy on other projects? Well, I just dumped a project two weeks ago and I have time to work on this with you. "I want to sign a book option with you Tom and a want to produce and direct this movie. I also took it upon myself to mail your book to a screenplay writer. His name is Tom Schlesinger. He read the book and is interested to join us on this project. When can I meet the Paletta's?"

A couple weeks later I took everyone to Buca Di Bacco in Oakville. During the fine dining, Paul, Michael, Laura, Julianne and I discussed the book and our mother's effect on others. It was a fantastic get together. There was obvious synergy at this table between us all, it felt so right. Paul had to leave right after dinner for another meeting and excused himself. At the end of the evening Julianne and I walked Michael and Laura to their car. We split up into two and two. Michael and I walked ahead discussing a possible movie contract between Paul, me and Michael.

Julianne and Laura were walking behind us and had their own conversation.

I had already been predisposed to this negotiation, talking at length with Paul the days before. As a result of our "sidewalk chat" Michael and I came to a percentage share agreement in the parking lot and shook hands on it.

Our ride home was fantastic. My sister and I were so excited. We even spoke out loud to our mother.

The following morning I called Paul sharing all the details of my conversation with Michael. Paul said, "This is perfect. I will draw up the legal contract with my entertainment lawyer. Great work Tom!" Paul added how impressed he was with Michael and Laura. He said how this type of project needs the right people to make it magic, and he believed we were right on track with that.

The movie contract came a week later. The percentages share was all there but as I read through it I thought about my sister. She and I started this project together years ago doing interviews. She helped transcribe the interviews to print. I decided I would split my percentage with her 50/50. I emailed Paul on this change and the adjustment was made to the final contract.

Another thing happened during this time that is quite unique. The group agreed that Julianne would get the chance to write the original screenplay while being coached by Tom Schlesinger. This was another mind blower. Tom Schlesinger, a seasoned veteran writer agreed to coach my sister on her first screen play.

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Paul, said “It would be great to get the daughter’s energy into this movie”. We all agreed.

The contract signing meeting was at Paul’s. I could smell the Chia Tea as I entered the front door to his house, making my way to that kitchen table. This was the first face to face meeting with Tom Schlesinger. After pleasantries were exchanged and we caught up with each other Paul placed a contract in front each of us. We were asked to sign on the last page and initial the others. Then pass to our right until all the copies of the contracts made their way around the table once. All was now official as Julianne and I were confirmed as Executive Producer on the movie named “2nd Line West”. The energy was fantastic, we were all smiling and giggling as we signed, initialled and passing to the right. Once that part was finished Paul said, “Could we all hold hands? I would like to say a few words”. The table was elbow to elbow so holding hands was easy. We all bowed our heads, Paul said “Margie, we are here to collaborate and tell your story. Give us your words. Give us your truth”.

With Paul’s words this journey went to a whole new level.

We met as a group and had telephone conference calls many times over the next three months. My sister and I responded to multiple questions about our mother’s effect on others. We shared even more detail about our family life and other stories that were not included in the book; This is the brain storming phase when you put it all out on the table, stand back and pick what definitely needs to be in the movie for sure.

Many times during this stage it was expressed that perhaps this should be a mini series or a TV show, because there are far too many stories to pare down to a ninety minute movie.

We continued exchanging stories and ideas on the content. Then something wonderful happened. While our group was discussing the view point of the movie it was suggested that Julianne write from her childhood perspective. This was a big swing for her. She was no longer trying to find her way telling the stories I wrote for the book to creating her own story. This was a great moment Julianne and I shared at the round table with our group. I said to her, “Remember when I called you way back when to discuss with you that I needed to put my name on the book? This is when you make the decision to put your name on the screenplay and own it as yours.” From here forward I backed away from the continued collaboration and the screenplay was now Julianne’s with Tom Schlesinger by her side.

The screenplay was finished. Julianne arrived at my home the morning of the meeting day for her to share it with the group. I could see she was anxious. When she arrived we jumped into my ride and headed to Paul’s. All were in attendance

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except for Laura as she had some family stuff to address. My sister and I took our seats at the kitchen table as she handed out her screenplay. We read through the screen play and when it was over both Paul Saltzman and Tom Schlesinger said it was the best screenplay they have ever read by someone who has never written one before.

Julie's eyes filled up with tears. All the doubt and second guessing she had experienced and all that pressure she put on herself was purged from her being. It was special to watch and witness her reaction to their words. I was proud of her.

Then Paul said, "Tom Schlesinger will take the screenplay and make some changes, adjustments and polish it." We broke from the meeting.

11. Bonnie Kogos - 2nd Edition L,C&S

During the screen play collaboration, I got a call from Bonnie Kogos. This was the newspaper columnist lady I mentioned earlier from the Publicity Summit in New York City.

Bonnie said "Sweetie, Where is that book about your Mom? Did you complete it?"

"Yes, I published it and I mailed you out a copy. Did you receive it? She said "No, can you send me another one?"

I mailed out another copy, she read it and we spoke on the phone.

"Tommy," she said, reminding me of my mother. I could feel that Bonnie cared.

"The book idea is wonderful, but in certain spots where it is written, please forgive me, as if you are in kindergarten. You need editing help."

"What can I do?" I said.

"Since I believe in you, I am willing to cut the crap out of it, edit it and give it back to you. There is great promise here!"

"Do you want me to pay you?"

"Not at all. This is a gift I wish to give you, and on one condition!"

I paused, Waiting.

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"When I send you the new edited copy, to make it run like the wind, will you promise to print it exactly as it is edited?"

"You Bet!" I said.

For the next six weeks or so we went back and forth on emails, with stories and changes she made and with her suggestions. I added a few new stories. As she coached me on, I loved how direct she was.

"Axe this! Give me more detail here, what did you feel when that happened? You're writing 'my mom' too much. Let's use her name, 'Margie',' Bonnie also said "Stop using 'and' so much!" and "just".

Through this process with Auntie Bonnie, I realized that the read was becoming faster. Bonnie's newspaper columnist experience was obvious; I was learning new stuff.

Now that Bonnie was finished, I connected back with Tanya to re-publish and download the 2nd Edition of Love, Care and Share to Amazon but this time with a new tag line. I changed the tag line to "A Message for Us All" from the previous tag line, "An inspirational message". I knew the new tag line was stronger and had more intrigue. Too many books say "Inspirational" which is a word way over used in published book covers. We also updated the www.lovecareandshare.com website with the over 100 book reviews I had received.

Shortly after the update to Amazon was completed, Bonnie asked me to come to New York City. She wanted to interview me on my book for her 1,000th newspaper column. What an absolute pleasure it was to spend the day with her walking around Manhattan discussing all the steps that happened to get the book published, as well as all the serendipity along the way that helped it along to the movie contract. I took her to the best seafood restaurant, Docks in Murray Hill for lunch. On the way back to her apartment building we passed through a street sale of rugs and clothing. There was a carpet runner that she eyed for her home. Full of colourful butterflies. This was just right for her. As I paid for it I expressed to Bonnie "This is a gift from my mother to you for helping her son. The butterflies represent mom".

Bonnie laughed and accepted it with pleasure. She'd think of Margie every time she walked that hallway. Accepting this gift, the long runner carpet filled with

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butterflies and flowers, she smiled. Then said "So many people believe in you, Tommy, and it's been a pleasure to be on your team. Go get 'em!"

Also, later in these pages, you will read how Auntie Bonnie wrote about me and the progress of the book in her column published in The Sudbury Star. It was such a good story about me planning how to get through to Meryl Streep, one evening, when she was in Toronto at the fancy hotel getting a lifetime achievement award.

“Could I pretend to be a waiter, and simply put the book in her lap”. Bonnie wrote this like a detective story; could I, indeed, get through all the protection surrounding her? It made a great newspaper column. Even had a photograph of Meryl Streep.

“I will keep writing more columns about you, Tommy. Keep going!” Bonnie said.

Now that the book was better, I was confident to mail it out. I asked Dawn Yates, one of the ladies who stayed with us in the 1970's, help me to find correct addresses for Oprah, Ellen, Michael Beckwith, Joel Osteen, Heather Reisman I wanted to find a celebrity, someone who will embrace the story. Help find a bigger audience for it to land on. No one replied or responded to the mailings; Ok, that's alright.

This was another time I reminded myself this that was a journey I agreed to take. I must focus on each step and let the destination take care of itself.

“Embrace the wonderful, amazing journey you are on, Tom,” I kept saying to myself

12. Never too Late

Now that the second Edition of “Love, Care and Share” was published. I had an idea to solve something that was unfinished business in my life since 1987.

I attended Rochester Institute of Technology from 1983-1987. My major was Marketing with a minor in Human Communication. I finished the four years at this wonderful institution but was one credit short of my BSc and it was an English course. Yep, a first year English course I kept putting off because of my dislike of English courses. It was always my worst subject in school.

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To add insult to injury when I did not get into that English 101 class to begin my last trimester at RIT, because the class was full, my education counsellor got me permission to write a 1500 word essay. If I received a 75% or better they would give me the English credit in full. Professor Ventura marked it with a 72% and did not budge from this mark after my two failed attempts to meet with him. So, coming home, driving west on the New York state I-90 for the last time, I was one credit shy of the Bachelor of Science, “Grand Shalada”.

I wrapped and packaged a copy of the newly published 2nd edition, carefully addressed and mailed it to the VP of Alumni affairs at RIT. Lisa Cauda called me when she received the book, we had a long conversation. She assured me that something might be possible here on the first year English course. Two weeks later Lisa called me and said, “I would like you to come down to Rochester and meet with me.”

Three days later I sat in her beautiful, spacious office on the sixth floor overlooking the Union Hall. Lisa expressed that the book was accepted as a credit by experience submission towards the outstanding 101 English course then presented me with my Bachelor of Science, Marketing Diploma with a mini RIT Alumni flag. I was now official as a fully qualified Alumni.

During this trip to my alma mater I met with John Moore, the facilities manager. After a lengthy discussion on the old ice skating arena I played in needing a lighting upgrade to LED, I got a purchase order to supply state of the art LED lighting for Frank Ritter arena.

Another meeting I completed was with Kelly Redder of the Alumni office. Kelly was in charge of a new construction build on campus. The meeting with Kelly confirmed me throwing my hat into the ring to supply a new custom lighting design and LED lighting products as a donation towards the new Alumni building, which was in it’s design stage.

Once home, I tucked my BSc Diploma under my arm and went to a local picture framing store. The Diploma and hand size Alumni flag was fitted into a wooden frame with glass facing. Thirty years and four months since leaving RIT the Diploma now hangs on my bedroom wall.

I guess it is never too late to finish something we have started.

13. Brenda/Meryl Streep

It was late summer of 2018, Bonnie Kogos had just completed her own book “The Boat That Brings You Home”. The book took her nine years to complete. It is a

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memoir about her time living on a sailboat in the Caribbean with her boyfriend for some four years. I got an email from Auntie Bonnie advising me that her new book launch was to be held on the island of Manitoulin, five hours north of my home near Toronto. My lady Jules and I agreed to go and support Bonnie at her event.

After the long drive we pulled into the little town of Kagawong on the island. The small community centre parking lot was packed, we found a spot and headed into the building. Although Bonnie is an American, she was introduced to the Canadian landscape by a long past boyfriend and fell in love with it. She has been writing for the local to Manitoulin island, Sudbury Star Newspaper for over 20 years. This is why she wanted to launch the book here. She is the “Bell of the Ball” in this close-knit community; everyone knows “Energizer Bonnie”.

As she finished greeting everyone and explaining why her book had to be written she did something that was so wonderfully gracious.

She pointed to me and said “While you’re all here, go get Tom’s book he wrote about his Mom. It’s being made into a movie”.

She then added, “Tom, go get some copies from the trunk of your car.”

I was so surprised. This was her day, not mine, but she took the time to help my book get exposure to her crowd. I went outside, came back in with 10 copies. People approached me and asked about the book. I signed and sold six or seven copies then something extremely interesting happened.

A lady was looking at me through the crowd. She looked around seventy years of age. A younger lady was with her. When the small crowd around me dispersed the older lady walked towards me, her companion followed.

She introduced herself as Brenda. She asked if she could touch my book.

I said, “Sure”, and handed her the book. She took it and held it between both hands in the praying position below her chin, closed her eyes and bowed her head over it. After about a three second count she stared at me and said “Meryl Streep. She’s the one you need to get to help with this story.”

Then she asked me who is the skater in the book? This was bazaar. I’m the skater in the book, with many stories of my hockey career. I was shocked because she never opened the book. She then said “I have to leave now. There’s too much energy in this room”.

As Brenda walked through the crowd away from me, Brenda’s companion leaned in to me and said softly, “I cannot believe Brenda did that. She is not a physic for hire. She rarely shares her gift with anyone”. Offering me a gentle smile she then followed Brenda out of the building.

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When Jules and I returned from Bonnie's book signing I shared what happened with our movie group during our next conference call. Tom Schlesinger said, "Meryl Streep will be in Toronto in a few weeks to accept a Lifetime Achievement Award at TIFF. Maybe you could go to the festival, Tom?" ; This movie festival happens in Toronto every fall.

After the call I sat in my dining room chair wondering how I could connect with Ms. Streep in such a crowd of TIFF fans. And if I did, what might happen?

The morning of the TIFF dinner gala for Meryl I called Julianne. As it happened, I caught her while she was about to do a promotional YouTube video for the movie. She was looking to raise awareness to people who may be able to help us finance the movie production budget. Although the screen play had been paid for, we as a group, still needed to find the bigger money required to shoot the film.

Julianne put me on speaker phone, "Say hello to Bob. He's here helping me with the video".

I've known Bob for many years. Julianne and he went to high school together. He manages live entertainment events with his family business. He must have leaned in closer to the speaker phone, as I heard his voice get much louder, and he said "I've done lots of work in that Royal York building. She's a beauty! What room is the event in?"

I put my phone on speaker, laid it down beside my laptop and Googled 'TIFF dinner gala event for Meryl Streep'. "The Canadian room" I said.

Bob replied "Hang up and let me call you back but don't answer. I am going to leave you a voice message".

His phone message was as follows:

"When you get to the front of the Royal York Hotel go left to the end of the building, that is York street. Turn right and go to the back of the building, this is Piper street. Turn right and go along the back of the building about halfway until you see a single man-door with a vertical pull handle. Go inside that door and go two flights of stairs down. When you come out into that basement hallway, turn right. Go until you see your first hallway on your left. You will be able to see the service elevators. Wait for the right side elevator to open and take it up to the third floor. When the elevator doors opens go right and take your first left. That is the kitchen. Don't go into the kitchen, make a hard right once entering the kitchen door and follow that right side wall all the way to the end, that is where the Canadian room is. One last thing, make no eye contact with anyone." I listened to the message another two times and walked outside. It was a clear blue-sky day and I asked myself, "Can I do this? Should I even try?"

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About twenty minutes later I called my sister's phone again and asked her to put me back on speaker. I said "Bob, if I went, what would I be wearing?"

"Black pants and jacket with the best white shirt you own, and comfortable shoes. They will think you are wait staff or a high ranking security guy."

I thanked Bob for his help, but I was nowhere close to deciding if I was going. The call ended.

At three o'clock that afternoon I got dressed in the proper attire, grabbed a leather file folder, put my book "Love, Care and Share" inside the folder then took a selfie of myself from the front waist down. It showed me in black pants and comfortable shoes. I texted Julie the picture with a statement, "Project 'Comfortable Shoes' is a go".

I then drove to the train station near my home and boarded the GoTrain heading to Union Station in the heart of Toronto. The Royal York Hotel is within walking distance from there. Let's be crystal clear here, I had only made an agreement with myself to go down and see how I felt about this. I gave myself permission to bail on 'Project Comfortable Shoes' at any time without any other reason but that it just did not feel right. I was also clear that if I did go to the gala dinner with these directions, I could not be a surprise at 8pm, start time for the event. I best make an earlier appearance.

I got off the train at Union, in the heart of the city, and made my way to the Royal York Hotel. I felt fine all the way over. I looked at the front of the building and said to myself, "It's Go Time". Walking down to York street I made a right turn, feeling OK. Down Piper street, feel OK. I see the single man door with vertical handle to basement. There was a guy there. I stopped and pretended to get on my phone, to buy some time. I realize he is not a security guard, he is a janitor taking a smoke break. I pass him with my phone on my ear, no eye contact, open that door, down into the basement I went. I followed Bob's directions listening to his message all the way in with my phone stuck to my ear. I got to that long right side of the kitchen wall I am to follow. There are four people in front of me blocking this, open on the left side to the kitchen hallway which leads to the Canadian room. I saw a group of what looked like a manager, two lead cooks and a new hire. I had to make a decision. Do I bail, do I divert my path through the open kitchen and around, or do I walk through them. I decide to be bold and walk towards this group. Do you know that they got out of my way, parted to let me by. They even apologized for being in my way as I passed.

Once in the Canadian room I keep my phone on my right ear and continue with no eye contact. I walk the perimeter of this huge room. People were putting up decorations, preparing table, hanging balloons. I notice some security with the side

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of the face talking bar and ear piece. There were at least two groups of three as I made my way around the room. I glanced at my watch many times with no eye contact with anyone.

After one lap I continued without pause, out the same way I came in. But before I left the room I took a picture of the room with a wide angle shot and texted it to my sisters phone with the caption “The Eagle has landed. I repeat, the Eagle has landed”. On my way back out I still felt Ok and no nerves.

Outside onto Piper street I walked back to the front of the building and inside to the main lobby.

I sat and had a beer to relax in the lounge area. I waited until 6 pm, took that same route to make my second pass. This time while walking through the kitchen I was able to make some relaxed eye contact with a few people. One of those cooks who blocked my way on the first pass nodded at me as I passed his area. I nodded back and continued into the Canadian room for another perimeter walk. This time I got a nod of acknowledgment from a security guy. I nodded back and continued my confident walking pace through this room then reversed my path back out and down to the main lobby.

This time at the main lounge bar I got into a conversation with the guy beside me. Kevin was in his late twenties. A Hedge Fund guy from Boston in town for a meeting. During our talk I find out that his boss, who is a multi millionaire and has financed movies in the past. He most recently financed a documentary film that was nominated for an Academy award. Exchanging business cards Kevin agreed to read my book when I send him the electronic e-book version as a gift. You never know, right?

Now it is 8pm and I can feel the vibe in the building change. Black Escalades are pulling up to the east wing ground floor entrance and celebrities are making their way into the building, up the escalators and into the reception area for the gala event.

I shake Kevin’s hand, say good bye and head on my “GoTime” route. I get back into that Canadian room and start to be more assertive about my coverage of the room. I go to the main reception table where the Toronto elite register for their \$15,000 table. I find myself in the interview room with TIFF wall papered walls. I see an interview taking place about twenty feet from me but do not recognize who it is. I make my way into the big reception open area before the corridor to the Canadian room and here come the judges from the Dragons Den TV show, they pass me.

A waiter offers me a glass of wine which I decline and then a waitress offers me hors-d’oeuvres, which I decline. I make my way to a hallway. Everyone has to pass

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through here to get into the big room. I know I am certain to see Meryl from this position.

Five minutes later, here came Ms. Streep. It was obvious that something happened to the room. The vibe changed as she was noticed. She walked with purpose, confidence that is just a matter of fact, and a grace I have never witnessed before. It was like a river of energy that just washed by me and the wake was still lapping over me. When I heard someone yell “Hi Meryl!” The iconic actress made eye contact with that person and nodded in reply. Behind her were three men and a lady. I did some research on Google images earlier in the day and none of those fellas were her husband. It looked like a bodyguard and some family joining her if I had to guess. Her table was across the room directly in front me about thirty feet away. The main stage was about ten feet in front of that table.

I had decided earlier that I would wait for the end of the award ceremony until I would make my approach. I figured by then the room would relax into the shared spirits part of the evening and loosen up the crowd.

But after her award acceptance speech she went back to her table, her companions all rose to their feet, and they were escorted by a security guard out of a door on the opposite side of the room, out of my site.

Oh no! My heart in my throat I thought fast. I had to make my way over to that door but not in a rush, and follow those stairs. As I made my way towards the security staff guarding that door, standing in an ‘at ease’ pose, I decided to ask him, “Hey, does this staircase behind you lead to the ground floor?”

He replied, “Yes, it does,” and stepped to his left to allow me to pass. Once inside that staircase I rushed down two sets of stairs and saw a service elevator door close. I could see five pairs of legs two were women’s and three men’s.

I panicked. “Is she Gone?”. I ran down to the bottom of those stairs, through the door and out onto Piper street. I rushed to the east side of the building and noticed black Escalades parked bumper to bumper.

I thought to myself, “I have maybe one more shot at this”.

But as I got to that eastern exit and I ducked around a fence opening I heard “Hey, stay behind the taped area.”

I was busted, had to stop walking, turn around and walk back away from the idling black Escalades. From where I now stood in this sea of fans I could not see Ms. Streep but I heard some fans on the far side yelled “Good Night, Meryl!”

I walked all the way back to Union station train terminal and boarded the next train home. For the first thirty minutes I was beside myself. That little guy in my head,

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the one that says all the “doubting Thomas” stuff, well, he showed up in full force. I sat slumped over in that train seat, looking at my feet. My head hanging low.

Then I thought, ‘I made a decision to take a journey when this project started and that is why I was there tonight to enjoy a very extraordinary evening. Surely, I’m to enjoy the journey that I am on, not just the pursuit of a destination.’ I relaxed and allowed myself to feel proud of myself for starting down this path, writing a book and having the fortitude to try anything to help this dream happen. I enjoyed the last half of the train ride back out of the city into the country. I felt grateful.

The next day I read in a news release that the movie *Laundromat* was being premiered at TIFF that afternoon at Elgin Theatre.

I thought to myself “Meryl is lead character in the film. She is probably still in town, surely she will be at the movie showing as actors, director and producers generally take the stage and answer questions right after the movie from the audience.”

I went on the internet and got tickets to the movie. Jules and I arrived at the Elgin Theatre and took our seats. It was a last-minute purchase so we could not sit together. I waved to her across the room before the lights went out to start the show. I had with me the leather folder with my book in it. After the movie showing I was going to raise my hand to ask Meryl this question. “Hi Meryl. May I give you a copy of a book I wrote about my mother? I have signed it for you.”

After the movie concluded, the lights came on and the curtain parted at the right side of the stage as a young man delivered a podium to centre stage. I thought, “OK, this is when I ask her the question”. As I grappled with this thought the director of the movie came out, stood behind the podium.

I thought “What? Where are the actors? When do they come out?” Steven Soderbergh announced that all the actors had left Toronto and he would be taking all of the questions. I got Jules attention and motioned for her to meet me at the back of the theatre. We left the Elgin Theatre with me carrying that leather folder with my book in it.

When I got home I thought, ‘Hey, let’s Google where Meryl Streep lives?’ In so doing I was surprised to see an aerial map of her country home near the town of Salisbury, Connecticut. Could it be true? Is this her home? I decide to call the Salisbury postal office the next morning and ask them to confirm the postal code for that street her house is on. I also guessed the address based on the fact that the house is on the north side and is the only house on this short street. The post office confirmed the postal code but then I got into a conversation with the post office lady. I told her that I am a first time author and how I am mailing a book to Meryl Streep. We share more conversation then I asked Carol if I could mail her a book

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for her sister, Mary, an avid reader. I also went further to sign and mail a copy for AJ. AJ is the letter carrier who delivers to Meryl's street. A week later I called Carol. She confirmed the individual packages arrived for her sister's book as well as AJ's book. So, I was confident that the book for Meryl made its way to their office ready for delivery to Ms. Streep's home by AJ.

I got the book back in the mail two weeks later with black magic marker blanking out Meryl's name and address with big black letters expressing "RTS". Yep, Return To Sender. I mailed another book the next day. The same thing happened again three weeks later. That's ok, right, F- - - !

I realized that this actress's mail is being screened, especially now with her outspoken words regarding the political situation in America today. I sat contemplating what I could do next.

14. Book Signings

This journey has involved many new experiences for me as I have shared with you on these pages. One of the most notable is conducting book signings in local Chapters/Indigo bookstores. I have also had the opportunity to do a book signing at Barnes and Noble bookstore on my alma mater campus of RIT. It is greatly beneficial for authors to have these stores open to scheduling these book signing events.

It is organized through the store managers. They post your book signing date on their websites, and advertise it on their social media platforms. A fold-out table is setup at or near the front of the store and you stand or sit with your books on display from 10am to around 4pm. It is a great day to engage with people to discuss why the book was written, share some of the stories, connect with the bookstore customers.

I learned that for most all readers the bookstore experience is sacred. They enter the store and usually peruse the New Release section first. Then they make their way through the store to their favourite genre sections to see if anything new is there. I realized very early in these book signings that you do not approach a book customer when they have a book in their hand. This is very important; They pick up a book and engage in a detailed look at it's book cover, then the back cover, then the introduction part is read if their curiosity continues to motivate them. If you approach them at all you have to wait until they put a book down and are reloading on their next book interest. You also cannot hover around the book customer. Again, this is sacred time for them as they are about to make a purchase on something that will tie up their precious "my time" for a month to six months or

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more depending on their reading speed, and reading time they can fit into their days, nights.

My opening if and when I feel comfortable to approach is to ask a question in a soft voice, “Excuse me, what kinds of books interest you?”. If they responded with a positive reply and it included true stories, family books, memories, non-fiction, any reply that could fit with my book, I would then introduce myself, the book title, then express that it is a story about how my mother lived her life. I then say, “I will be in the store until 4pm if you would like more information.” If there was no other question or statement from them I would slowly back away.

I had some exceptional interactions with book buyers. A Hindu man after a long conversation with me, bought the book, took it to the in-store Starbucks, read the first four Chapters. Then wrote this on a small piece of paper and handed it to me as he left the store. It said “Your mother was someone who could see a butterfly in the caterpillar”.

A lady bought the book, went out to her car in the parking lot, read half the book in an hour, then bought me a Thank you greeting card with a pen written, “Thank you for writing this book.”

It was so exciting to connect with some people who would be so interested in Mom’s story after engaging with me that they bought multiple copies to give to others in their life.

During these local book signings I also met people from my past school years. People I had not seen in years as they happen-stance into these bookstores on my signing dates. Many of them bought the book out of support based on our shared history. This warmed my heart.

15. “Hurry up and Wait”

The making of a movie is a long process. There are so many moving pieces. If you created an algorithm representing a start to finish formula it would probably fill pages and pages.

There are roughly 50,000 screenplays registered with the Writer's Guild of America each year. All things being equal, an un-produced screenplay has a 0.3 percent chance of being made into a feature film by a studio. This industry has a catch phrase for most every stage of this process. It is referred to as “Hurry up and wait”.

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The movie making process is long and detailed and it teaches you patience. If you cannot find patience your self-doubt will devour you.

The biggest task in the process for me has been to stop focussing on the fact that it has not happened yet. When I find myself experiencing these thoughts I make a conscious decision to change my thoughts to what an amazing journey I am on with this group of wonderful people. I also walk through the forest or by the water. Those doubting thoughts are no challenge for Mother Nature.

Once the screenplay was finalized by Tom Schlesinger we discussed the potential path for distribution after the movie is completed. Would it be the motion picture path? Would it be the internet streaming companies path; The Netflix and Prime TV's of the world. There are pros and cons for both decisions but perhaps the answer lies in aggregate distribution. With the internet streaming companies, the first night a movie goes live on these platforms it can access up to 1.4 billion homes worldwide immediately. As a rule there is less money in this choice for the movie production team percentage share but imagine if every home clicked on our movie that first night?

The motion picture choice puts the movie in the water with movie industry "sharks". There is big money in the machine of Hollywood. A tight group that control this machine and relationships are everything. The big companies also have huge advertising and marketing money to support their films.

It is referred to as "The Turtle Path" for a small independent film such as ours to "swim it that water". What is the Turtle Path? A female turtle climbs up onto the shore of the ocean. It is a full moon night. She makes her way up onto the sand dunes. She digs down as far as she can with her massive front flippers and lays on average, 110 eggs. Mother turtle then covers the eggs and leaves forever. We are one of those eggs! in about thirty days and on the next full moon, we have to crack our shell and claw our way up to the surface of the sand. We then have to crawl past feeding birds as we make our way toward the light of the full moon and hopefully into the water. If we get to the ocean, we must swim quickly past feeding fish of all types. If we get to the deep water we may grow to be an adult turtle. But guess what? There is only one adult turtle photographed for the cover of National Geographic and we have to be that turtle. "Say Cheese!"

All in all this movie making industry is a fascinating one. Julianne and I being included in the project is very rare. Most movie people would consider us dead wood that might delay the flow. Most movie producers would buy the story for as little as possible and take it from there as you are instructed to skip down the street counting your pennies. We have the amazing privilege to be with a special group of

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people who believe we are an asset to the movies message being delivered to the screen.

It has been expressed to us that the right story, with the right people, delivered at the right time, can be magic. Remember the movie “Good Will Hunting” with Matt Damon and Ben Affleck? That is what we are doing. Our message is an example of the bravery to love without judgement, the conscious awareness of others around us, our forgotten desire, want and actual need to connect and help one another in order to find our own true joy and fulfillment.

Is that not what everyone wants?

We also believe that this is the perfect time to get this message out into the world.

Something happened along this part of the process is that affected Julianne’s initial screenplay. Many changes were made, so many that she was no longer getting Screenplay credit on the film. When I became aware of this I contacted both Tom Schlesinger and Paul Saltzman to find out why this happened. Paul expressed to me that Tom Schlesinger had done so much work on the screenplay since the first draft that in his professional opinion the screenplay credit lies solely with Tom Schlesinger now. I asked Paul if anything can be done to address all the work my sister had done to get us started on this path by completing the first screenplay. Paul and Tom discussed it and got back to me confirming that they both agreed to give Julianne sole Story Credit for the film. The following day Julie received an email from Paul Saltzman stating that she has Story Credit for the film. I was glad that I was able to address this for her.

I never told Julianne that I had lobbied on her behalf to get this done. Three months later, after a visit with my sister at a horse farm near her home, as she walked me to the exit she asked me, “Did you contact Paul and Tom to get me Story Credit on the movie?”. I said “Yes, I did, because it was the right thing to do”. She said, “Thank you, Tom”.

The movie is now in the casting stage with a Casting Director. Then we will confirm our production budget and shoot the movie “2nd Line West”.

16. 2nd Line West Book Published

In December of 2020 I realized something had to be done. I perused the Amazon sales for the book “Love, Care and Share” to confirm that seven books had been sold in the past year. The book was at a standstill and something had to change. The reality of selling books on Amazon is that you are competing with 48.5 million books. Yes, I said almost 50 million books!

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As I thought hard and heavy I stood back and asked myself this question, ‘Does this book have a competitive advantage over the other books?’

I came up with this:

“First time author signs a movie deal with two-time Emmy award winning director and owner of Sunrise Films”.

“A book is being made into a motion picture as a result of a movie director’s wife reading this book.”

“A son writes a book about his Mom. His sister writes the original screenplay for the movie.”

I thought, Why not republish the book with the movie title?

This idea I shared with the movie group with great response. This allows both audiences to find the other product easier. It allows for co-branding which speaks to a competitive advantage over the Amazon book competition. This idea also included, if executed the right way, with the right publisher could lend itself to a Best Seller. Making a movie based on a Best Selling book would make it easier to attract production budget financing. It would be viewed as less of a risk.

I wondered when to pull the trigger on this decision; thinking I should wait until the movie is in production to republish with the movie title “2nd Line West”. Until then the movie is still just an idea that has not happened yet.

Then this occurred to me. What can I do to help this process in a positive way? What energy can I put into this project to help it along? And it dawned on me, staying with me; by me initiating a 3rd Edition of “Love, Care and Share” with the movie title “2nd Line West” I will be

“Uplifting” this project. By doing this I am conducting myself as though the movie shooting has already happened. That positive energy is being put out into the universe. It will also start a “2nd Line West” community following with every book sale and this helps to start building the movie audience.

I became aware of Hasmark Publishing during a book signing event in Milton, Ontario. I met another author who knows Judy O’Beirn very well. Judy owns Hasmark Publishing. After a face-to-face meeting with Judy in her backyard I decided on Hasmark Publications to help me do this. They have a proven track record helping self-published authors achieve Best Seller status. Her company name broken down into it’s parts is - Heart and Soul Marketing. They were the perfect choice.

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The republishing process with all associated work took over five months. I added some more stories. The book was reformatted. I had to redo the book's introduction to explain to the reader why the title was "2nd Line West". I recreated a new book cover.

This is when I decided to make "Love, Care and Share" the tagline for the book. When I received the final changes on the selected book cover something entirely new occurred to me. The title now being "2nd Line West" cannot be associated with a "self-help" title or a "for females only" target market. I remembered that these were comments shared with me at past book signings by prospective book buyers. It was also clear to me that "2nd Line West" has more intrigue in it. Maybe someone hearing or reading the title would think to themselves "I wonder what happened there for it to be the title?"

I also realized that "Based on a True Story" had to be printed on the book cover. During this republishing stage I shared each task as it was completed with our movie group. The new introduction, new book cover, a new website and a brand new book video trailer which can be used for the upcoming movie as well. I got some great positive feedback from the group.

The book "2nd Line West" was launched on Mom's birthday, May 14th, 2021. Our Margie would have been eighty-three years old. That day I did several live Facebook videos with the Hasmark Publishing's community network. The first live video was done from the little village of Meadowvale under that 2nd Line West street sign. It is still there. Our house used to be one mile north from that spot. All the roads are changed now and rerouted around this area as a new highway now comes straight through one hundred yards south of our old property.

The other live videos I conducted were from the new named road in front of our old homestead. The house has been removed but the full two-acre property remains. On this sunny Thursday afternoon with the help of the buying savvy of the Hasmark Publishing group the book did achieve "International Best Seller" status.

The new "2nd Line West" book website is: www.tomherstadofficial.com

My experience with Hasmark Publishing is represented with a simple metaphor which I sent to Judy O'Beirn the end of the that 2nd Line West book launch day.

"In a Publishing industry full of sharks, Judy and team are a school of dolphins."

17. Almost There

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When I think about this entire journey, all the steps which commenced from my mother's memorial service to where we are today, I have so many wonderful thoughts. I know my mother is helping this message happen to the world from the "other side". I call on her often to find my patience and understanding.

I know she is saying "Tom, gently, gently".

18. What I have learned on this journey

I will not share with you any advice because I do not regard myself as a teacher of any of the steps along this path. However, I can share with you what I found out about myself while following this dream:

1. I had to believe that my dream could come true and this started with a declaration to myself.
2. I had to write down my declaration as an intention, this happened on my mother's Facebook page in September of 2011.
3. I became more aware of my energy. I had to protect it and avoid conversations where people talk negatively about others.
4. I created a Vision Board and continue to update it along the way with every note to myself, new business cards, pictures of people etc. Anything that feels inspiring or "right" is pinned up.
5. I realized that I had to relax into the journey because it is a commitment to a journey. The destination must take care of itself.
6. I realized that I had to let go of how the dream should happen.
7. When inspiration is a challenge or self-doubt creeps in, I go to nature. A walk in the woods or by the water.
8. I had to stop myself from focusing on the fact that the dream had not happening yet.
9. I stoped watching TV news as I realized it was negatively affecting me. I now get my news from YouTube or internet when I decide.
10. I know I have to share this story with others as I have just done with you. In so doing my hope is that you too may realize that perhaps all dreams are possible.

God Bless,

Tom