

# fearless



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survives by any means necessary

“You have to fight for the cause, fight the big fight.”

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Tools to work through fear

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Be safe where you are

FOR All Who  
CAN'T!

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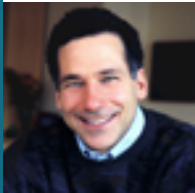
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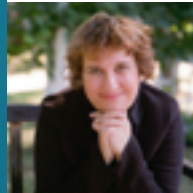
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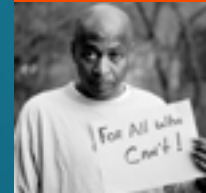
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# FEAR.LESS

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## DEDICATION

This issue of Fear.less Magazine is dedicated to John Thompson, founder of Resurrection After Exoneration, an organization that helps individuals formerly incarcerated rebuild their lives. Thompson, an exoneree, was wrongly incarcerated for 18 years, 14 of them on death row. He was finally acquitted in 2013 on evidence that was found hidden by corrupt officials in the court system. John passed in 2017. His life, spirit, legacy and commitment to bringing awareness to the corrupt prison and justice system will live on.

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Worry gives a small thing a  
**BIG** shadow.

Swedish Proverb



# Negotiating with Fear

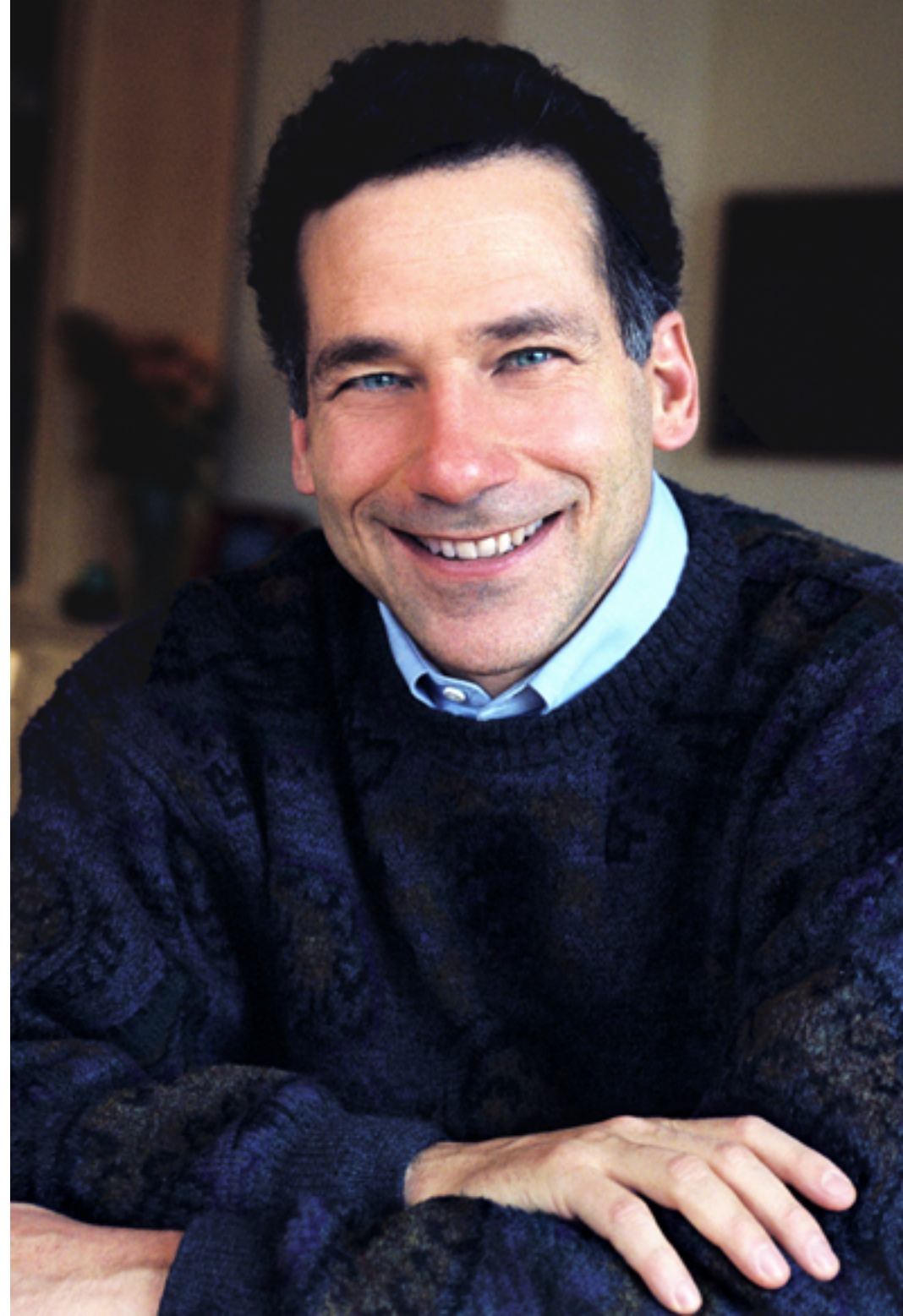
*“Many people think fear is the most effective tool for getting results.”*

*William Ury*

## HUGO, THE BOSS

**I**n my negotiation work, fear is a daily companion in my life. I remember feeling trepidation when I first met President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela for a meeting, wondering, “Is he going to take me seriously? Is this is going to last only ten minutes?” Before

the meeting, I insisted on going back to my hotel to spend an hour by myself in the garden. I sat quietly and thought, “Okay, what is this opportunity I’ve been given to meet the President of Venezuela really about?” I needed solitude to think before we met - that kind of quiet is essential for me in dealing with fear. I like to seek nature and allow myself to listen to an inner voice that you don’t normally hear in the business of life.



I ask, “What’s my intuition saying here?”

My initial inclination was to go in and talk to him about how I felt, because I had a lot I wanted to say about things that I learned, but at that particular moment, my intuition said, “Don’t just go in and offer him advice.” I only got ten minutes, and I feared that with time so scarce I wouldn’t be able to say what I wanted to. What came to me was to simply let go and allow him to speak, draw him out, listen and not worry about the time we had left. I didn’t want to worry about if I would have the chance to say what I thought because it distracted me from actually listening to him.

**“The more fearful you get, the more you hold on. To break free of that you need to begin to let go”**

That way, I was in a much more relaxed state when we began because I didn’t need to get something done. I let go of all my expectations and had a clear intention without an attachment to any particular outcome. We ended up talking for over two hours - we got into a long



conversation because I listened to him, and he told me the story of his life. Only after a full hour of conversation did he ask me how I thought he ought to handle the conflict with his opposition, and only then was I able to advance some ideas. He liked those ideas because he said, “Can you come back tomorrow?”

## GO TO THE BALCONY

Fear generates a circular holding on to your apprehensions. The more you hold on, the more fearful you get. The more fearful you get, the more you hold on. To break free of that you need to begin to let go. Personally, it’s much easier to let go if I “go to the balcony,” which is my term for steadying myself and breathing deeply in order to gain a larger perspective around the fear. To realize that there’s a larger world, a larger presence, it allows you to see what you’re going through at that particular moment, and shows you that no matter what you’re going through, it’s a small thing in the grand scheme of things.

When I was in college I did a lot of rock climbing and mountain climbing, always testing my own fear. It was really helpful training because when you’re alone on a mountain or on a rope, you’re dealing with very real fear all the time, and you have to learn to stay balanced, centered, and to let go of the fear. It was a valuable asset later in my negotiation training.

## INTUITION & PERSPECTIVE

Fear can be an ally, a fine voice for you to listen to, and can sometimes play an evolutionary





role. The problem occurs when you allow it to control you. Fear has a particular wisdom to share if you let it feed into the mix naturally. But if you allow it to be the driver of the car, it's not a very intelligent driver. It needs to be properly appreciated in its own place, heeded, and then let go. Developing your intuition can be a very helpful means of releasing your fear because intuition and fear are in dialogue with each other. I've found that if I listen to my gut, my fear tends to diminish because I'm connecting with something that transcends my feeling of fear.

Perspective is also important. Everybody has a different way of getting it; my favorite method is nature – being in the woods or near mountains. For someone else it might be taking a shower, going for a run, talking to a close friend or deep breathing. You need something that breaks the cycle of fear and allows you to come back with a fresh viewpoint. If I can be in a garden or take a walk, my fear dissipates as I calm down, start breathing, and start appreciating the world around me. I've had a strong affinity for the mountains ever since I was a little boy, and

that presence helps me remove myself, slow down, and observe my fear from the outside.

## EMBRACING INTENSITY

One of the hardest and most fearful times of my life was when my daughter was run over as a child and went through multiple surgeries. Prior to the accident, my mother had just passed away and shortly thereafter my brother died. It was so intense and there was so much going on - I was afraid for my daughter, for

**“It needs to be properly appreciated in its own place, heeded, and then let go.”**

her life, and for what was happening to my family at the same time. There was so much fear in my life that I just could not understand how things around me were falling apart. Now, when I look back, although it was a terribly trying time, I realize it was also enormous gift because it played the role of waking me up and caused me to enter into a kind of inner

reflection, an inner awakening. I had to work around the fear and work around the meaning in my life, and doing that has sprouted some wonderful flowers in my life. As hard as it was, that time actually enriched my life, and it's given me resilience and strength and insight into what really makes me happy in life.

## LISTEN TO THE SIGNAL

The wisest advice I ever heard from someone is to always do what you're afraid to do, and to realize that if you're afraid to do something, it's probably a signal you should go in that direction. That's the opposite of how we normally construct fear. But there's a certain kind of fear that's a signal in cautionary moments that shows you a particular zone of discomfort that you'll benefit from entering. It might be something you need to learn. I remember as a boy I used to do high jumping, and in high jumping, when you jump over the bar, what happens? As soon as you succeed, they raise the bar - it only ends when you've knocked the bar down. It's such a metaphor for life - that failure is inevitable, it's a part of life, and in fact from failure comes great learning. The founder of Johnson & Johnson said, "Failure is our most important product." If you put it in that perspective, it calms your fear of failing. An example from negotiation is George Mitchell, once the special envoy to the Northern





Ireland peace process under Bill Clinton. He spent almost two and a half years listening to people on all sides of the conflict in Belfast, and remarked that it took him 753 days of failure and one day of success to solve the conflict.

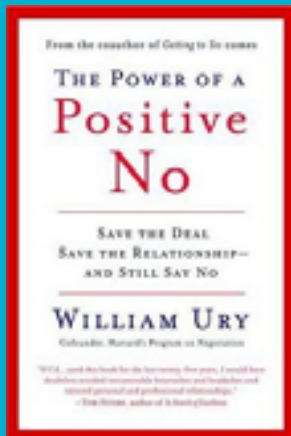
**“I never underestimate trusting the deeper parts of myself...”**

## SELF-TRUST

Over the years, I’ve gained more self-trust and faith. Even in high school, I didn’t just do what others expected of me, I always tried to listen to my intuition and reach a decision within myself that I could follow, and I’ve confirmed that that’s the right way of making decisions for myself. Each time I haven’t done that, and I’ve doubted or deviated from my inner guide, I’ve made mistakes and regretted it. I’ve learned serious lessons from those mistakes. When I’ve followed it, even when it didn’t seem like the right thing to do, it turned out to be the best path for me.

I never underestimate trusting the deeper parts of myself, and listening to that inner voice, however quiet it may be. I follow it even if everyone else has a different view or logic dictates I should do something else, and it’s always steered me right. Whether it’s steered me to success or failure is not the point, but it has always guided me in the right direction, like following the flow of my personal destiny. That’s how I’ve learned to trust myself, which I didn’t understand at first. It’s something that comes from within, from the heart more than the head. The mind is a very powerful tool that shouldn’t be disregarded; it’s a good advisor, but not the best decider.

## BIO:



**William Ury** is co-founder of Harvard’s Negotiation Program where he directs the Global Negotiation Initiative. In the last 30 years, Ury has mediated conflicts ranging from corporate mergers to ethnic wars in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. With former president Jimmy Carter, he co-founded the **International Negotiation Network**, a non-governmental body seeking to end civil wars. Ury has taught negotiation to thousands of corporate executives, diplomats and military officers worldwide. He is author of the best-selling books, **The Power of a Positive No**, **Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In**, and many others.

# Tell a Different Story

*“The trick is to realize you’re trapped in a story line.”*

*Roz Zander*

I remember when writing *The Art of Possibility*, the Harvard Business School sent out an early draft to readers before I felt it was ready to go. The comments we received back from the readers were pretty negative, and it surprised me that I was very interested in those negative comments and in what others had to say. I didn’t quite understand it at the time, but I thought, “If they haven’t

understood what I’m trying to say, then perhaps I haven’t conveyed it as well enough as I could have. So I saw it as their comments actually gave me clues on how to communicate my ideas better.” With that perspective, even the most negative reader appeared to me to be on my team. I was surprised at how little the “criticism” hurt, that it didn’t go too deep, and realized that I wasn’t knocked over by it, but that it was useful for me.





Reframing the criticism as an asset strengthened my ability to tell the story I really wanted to tell in the book. I ended up thinking, “These people have taken the time to offer me a gift,” which was much better than, “They don’t like my writing.” It served me better to think like that.

## THE TOOLBOX

Telling the right story to myself—creating a narrative based on possibility rather than survival—is one of my major tools for working through fear.

**“It’s the attitude of inquiry that’s important.”**

If you find yourself in a situation that is at once familiar and difficult, like missing out on a promotion or something else, you can broaden the frame by looking for patterns running through your life and perhaps your parents’ lives. It’s the attitude of inquiry that’s important. I worked with a man who just couldn’t seem to advance in the company he worked for. The comments were always the same—he couldn’t take the risks necessary for a leadership role, he didn’t take much initiative. It turned out that when he was three his father had punished him harshly for picking flowers for his mother from the garden. He decided at that moment that he would never ever be able to tell what was the right thing to do, so avoiding risk became his modus operandi, a reflexive way of walking in the world. When he thought about it, he saw how the pattern had

been an excellent way of keeping a three-year-old safe, but that now he was now exposing himself to repeated failure and rejection.

So he did two things. First he changed the story. He decided that the flower picking wasn’t what had upset his father. He thought that perhaps his parents were in an argument in which he was a pawn, and in retrospect it seemed a perfectly plausible story. It was never about him. Second, he started to change the pattern on a physical level, encouraging himself to take small risks every day. In those two ways he broke the fear barrier over time.

**“Most of our fears can be boiled down to a few things we all get anxious about: loss of belonging, control, safety, or recognition.”**

Most of our fears can be boiled down to a few things we all get anxious about: loss of belonging, control, safety, or recognition. When I am beset by some ancient anxiety or am really taken to my limit, I meditate, retell



the story in my head, and give myself time to look back to the patterns that got me here in the first place. The trick is to recognize that you're being trapped in one of those story lines that have to do with survival—the survival of yourself as a child, or the memory of danger throughout human existence. The next thing to do after you realize that the story is what's getting you is to let go and accept and say, “Life is actually different now, I can give up trying to be in control here,” or “I can live without seeking approval.”

## THE RISE OF ANXIETY

Fear is something that comes up immediately in a situation where you feel that your life is being threatened. Anxiety, on the other hand, arises as a reflection of the story you're living in. If you've learned from your parents that the world is a dangerous place, you are likely to take on that story as truth and feel anxious a good deal of the time. In addition, anxiety has become increasingly prevalent in our modern world, partly because there are

**“The amusing thing is that we're never in control.”**



so many stimuli coming at us and so many ways we can go out of control - we talk on cell phones while we drive, we hear about the stock-market crash on the news. When you can't stem the flow of information, then every little thing, from your messy papers on your desk to not being on top of your schedule, threatens a primitive need to be in control. The amusing thing is that we're never in

control. We don't know what's going to happen from one moment to the next.

## FILLING IN BOXES

I gave a talk at the TED Conference this year, and a few weeks before the event, the organizers asked me to rewrite my speech



because they felt the first draft was too personal. It turned out that I had to rewrite it while I was at another conference, and I didn't have nearly enough time to refine it. In fact, I was still rewriting even as I arrived in Long Beach, CA. My anxiety was riding pretty high, and one of its least helpful symptoms was that I found myself doing everything I could to avoid looking at, or practicing, the speech.

Then I remembered I was once told that if you didn't have time to memorize something, at least read it through 20 times and you'll know it well enough to be able to deliver it with your eyes on the audience. It was a great

lesson to me because my fear was driving me away from grappling with the task before me, but this technique gave me a specific task, a clear practice to utilize in spite of my fear.

I made a grid of 20 checkboxes and set out to read my speech straight through 20 times

**“...focus on the completion of the task instead of how difficult it is.”**

over three days. It wasn't easy because I'd get a quarter of the way through and find something I wanted to change or edit, and it really took an enormous effort to read it through without stopping multiple times. But whenever I failed to do so, the empty boxes were staring at me! I focused on meeting the goal of filling the boxes instead of the agony of trudging through the speech, and this carried me over my fear in order to actually be able to continuously read it through.

The morning before I gave the speech, I checked off the 20th box. I'd done the best I could, met my goal and was glad that I had been able to progress step by step toward my larger goal instead of letting anxiety consume me. I learned that it is helpful if you are worried about some imagined failure, to focus on the completion of the task instead of how difficult it is - it gives you more of a sense of mastery. Ruminating on your anxiety amplifies it. That's why the treatment for OCD is to keep letting go—to interrupt the obsessive thought, and to move your attention away from the source of anxiety.

## **THE ENERGY OF ANXIETY**

Once, when I was coaching musicians on the subject of stage nerves, one of the students in the class said that he found it helpful to him

to help other people before his auditions. He told us about a time when he coached the other players who were in competition with him and how he won the audition. Truly, the energy of anxiety is very different than the energy of possibility and creativity. Very good things happen out of the latter. Becoming aware of the quality of the energy that is manifesting within you will make a difference in your life.

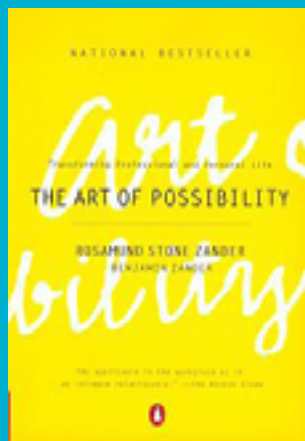
There is an intuitive self within all of us that draws real wisdom from the unconscious. The part of the brain that tries to “figure things out,” is often not the part to use when you’re re-sculpting your perspective to alleviate your

“... the energy of anxiety is very different than the energy of possibility and creativity.”

anxiety. Sometimes it’s better to ask your deep wisdom for advice and let it tell you what to do. Sometimes the solution is to step back and say “OK, what’s up with that story

in my head?” You may want to create a more positive narrative than the one that has been giving you so much trouble, the one that has been telling you that when things go wrong, it’s all about you. How about creating a story where you, thankfully, are not the center of the universe? You’re likely to feel very relieved.

## BIO:



As a family therapist and executive coach, **Rosamund Zander** is a pioneer in leadership models and creating meaningful pathways to live. She coaches personal and professional relationships and has designed programs for Hilton Inns, IBM, Whirlpool, The Bureau of Public Debt, Boston Medical Center and Genentech. She’s author of the best-selling book, **The Art of Possibility**, with Boston Philharmonic conductor Benjamin Zander.



# “River View, Fear Optional”

by Sharon Salzberg

**L**AST YEAR I MANAGED TO PROCURE A PRECIOUS COMMODITY: A SUBLET IN NEW YORK CITY THAT WAS BOTH MAGNIFICENT AND AFFORDABLE. THIS BEAUTIFUL LOFT WAS OWNED BY FRED, A FRIEND WHO HAD GONE TO ENGLAND FOR A MEDITATION RETREAT. LOCATED ON THE WEST SIDE, THE LOFT'S LIVING ROOM WINDOWS OPENED ONTO A PANORAMIC SWEEP OF THE HUDSON RIVER. I WAS CAPTIVATED...





...by the view. To be able to look out at the river last thing at night and first thing in the morning, I slept on the living room couch. I wrote my landlord's instructor, a colleague of mine, to suggest half-jokingly that Fred might benefit from an even longer stay in England. Watching that river flow by, I sensed mystery, voyage, delight.

Then one day a friend asked me if I'd heard the warning about possible terror attacks on subways and trains. I turned on the television and heard the newscaster say, "Warnings are issued about possible scuba-diving terrorists!" I froze. Scuba-diving terrorists! They would need a body of water, wouldn't they? I looked from the television screen to the river and sensed

devastation, menace. How can I manage to get Fred back here quickly? I desperately thought. Some people claim that danger exists simply in one's own mind, or contend that terror threats are merely the strategic tool of a political machine distracting its populace. But life is made up of uncertainty. Each time we breathe out, we don't know if we'll breathe in again.

Each time we risk stepping forward, we don't know what we'll encounter, but we can't just idle where we are. Despite all our efforts to picture the unfolding of events as managed and orderly, we don't know what will happen next

**“The space fear carves out for us to reside in is very small.”**

But it makes no sense to let our actions be determined by fear's blind rush, its choking certainty that everything is bad and will only get worse. The space fear carves out for us to reside in is very small. Last year I could have let my blast of worry about the river overwhelm everything else and moved inland. The year before, living in New York right after September 11, I was startled by how we tried to manage a world that was spinning outside our control: “If I don't cross that bridge, I'll be okay.” “As long as it's not rush hour when I take the subway, things will be fine.” Yet when what we fear can come in any form at any time, safety becomes a psychological or spiritual destination rather than a physical one. Finding our inner strength, our love for one another, our aspiration to make this a better world is the only sure way to survive with our hearts intact.

I've learned a new term from friends who work in federal agencies in Washington, D.C.—shelter in place. Shelter in place is the opposite of evacuation, and it's used in the event of a chemical, nuclear, or biological attack, when it's not safe to go outside. When a shelter-in-place drill is ordered, people go to some designated windowless space, with their supplies of water and food and clothing, and stay there until they are told it's safe to leave. Before I knew what the term meant, I found the sound of it uplifting—like make your home wherever you are. Let your deepest understanding be your sanctuary, even in bad circumstances. Safety is not where you are; it's what you do about where you are. That deeper sense of shelter in place is what I'd always longed for spiritually and had aimed for steadily.

I know that regardless of whatever outward measures any of us take, we're likely to still be afraid. We live in times of immense turmoil and anxiety. Whether the threat is scuba-diving terrorists, diseases, personal heartache, or what the news says we should be most afraid of, our lives are full of real, potential, and imagined hazards. Because of this omnipresent truth, I believe that what we need to do right now is work to retain our faith. We can do this no matter what our religious orientation, or lack of one, by remembering that everything is changing all the time. This is the positive face of uncertainty. Daily reflection or meditation will remind us that if we look closely at any painful emotion or difficult situation, it is



**“The fear we feel in the morning may not be present in the afternoon.”**

bound to change—it's not as solid and inert as it might have seemed. The fear we feel in the morning may not be present in the afternoon. Hopelessness may be replaced by calm, or even a little less hopelessness. Even while a challenging situation is unfolding,



it is shifting, varied, alive. Once we see the inherent change in our experience, we see that we're not trapped, we have options. Then, even if we're afraid, faith can arise.

Faith is the quality that allows us to find a way to go on, to feel empowered, to—no matter what—keep on trying. This is not a sentimental faith that everything will be okay, according to our wishes or our timetable. Rather, it is an awakened faith that gives us the courage to go into the unknown, the remembrance that nothing is fixed, and the understanding that as long as we are alive,

possibility is alive. It is the power of faith that inspires us to step forward into the center of our lives—to participate, to reach out to others and let others reach out to us. And it is the vitality of faith that tells us, however easy it is to forget or be overcome by fear, that the place for communicating, for loving, for sheltering, for trying, is right where we are.

Now I remind myself, while feeling afraid, to love life anyway, to retain the certain knowledge that I will die someday and use that to open to the preciousness of what I see and feel right in front of me. Now I might

feel afraid but am determined that my fear serve as a counterpoint to my tendency to procrastinate—if I have to apologize, tell someone “I love you,” try to make a difference, I need to do it right now. Now I want fear to liberate me instead of victimize me—to have it free me to go beyond embarrassment and habitual social stricture and hollow expectations to fully live my life, nothing held back. To venture to love. To enjoy every river and all friendships and each drop of air.

*Originally published in the June 2004 Issue of ‘O’ Magazine*

# BIO:



**Sharon Salzberg** is one of the leading meditation teachers in the U.S. and the author of several books, including **Loving Kindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness** and **The Kindness Handbook**. She co-founded the Insight Meditation Society, the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies and The Forest Refuge Retreat Center.

# Small Victories

*“All it takes is some patience.”*

*Leo Babauta*

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**A**ll my life, I was under the assumption that I had to work for somebody to make a living. I never considered breaking out on my own and going for my dreams of becoming a writer. I couldn't let go of the steady paycheck. More importantly, I feared I wasn't good enough, that I couldn't compare to the bigger world of talented writers out there. As a speechwriter for the Guam legislature and part-time freelance journalist for

many years, I always wanted to branch out into a bigger market, but it was intimidating to go to New York and try my luck as an author or journalist with the sea of successful people already doing it.

I played it safe for almost a decade, and it was only in 2007, after I realized how much I loved writing, I ventured out into the online world - not with any big goals, but just to try out blogging. It was a great way of putting myself out there without



having to risk everything, and it was a transition step to test out my writing on Guam, which has an audience of 150,000 people, not millions. After some time, to my surprise, the blog grew quickly, and readers encouraged me to continue writing, something that really pushed me to overcome my fears. I started to think that maybe I could do this full time. I decided to spend all my free time working in that direction. It was scary but exciting to think I could do work I loved and be my own boss, and I think my excitement overcame any fear I had about starting. Today, I know there are different ways to support myself doing what I enjoy, but this attitude developed over time; it was something I never even really considered before. With the economy like it is and people losing their jobs, it's a timely opportunity to try something on our own instead of looking for another job. I know it's not easy to do with a regular paycheck coming in, but the reward is priceless if you can discipline yourself and start small.

## I'M NOT SUPERMAN

Anyone can do the things I did, and it didn't require superhuman ability, just some patience. I wanted to show through Zen Habits that I was finally doing things I always wanted to do in my life, but which I lacked the discipline to do before. Once I actually started doing them, I realized they actually weren't that hard, and I wanted to share with people how



achievable they were. I felt like I had things other people wanted to know and could benefit from. A lot of times, our fear is what prevents us from taking action, so I just started by taking small actions that led to small victories. The positive transformations I made at the time – I started running, quit smoking, started eating healthy, got out of debt and became more productive – were things I wanted to hold myself accountable to. Keeping a blog and letting others know about my goals was a way to make sure I did those things.

**“It didn't require superhuman ability, just some patience.”**

## SPIRAL OF SUCCESS

You have to start small no matter what your goal is. If you want to start a business, just take the first step to learn a little bit more about how to start a business or talk to someone else who's done it. Those tiny steps where you haven't risked that much will help you feel accomplished and want to continue taking action. Bill Gates talks about the spiral of success, on which you build upon your small successes, one on top of another, like he did with Microsoft. Soon, all those small victories add up into a spiral that continues to go up and up, like it did for me. I recommend the same strategy for anyone, entrepreneurs included.

## CELEBRATE YOUR MISTAKES

With any goal you set, you're usually enthusiastic at the beginning. But as time goes on and you make mistakes, that enthusiasm wanes, and inevitably, you quit. That fear of making mistakes stops a lot of people. I tell people to celebrate their mistakes. It's impossible to not make mistakes, and if you don't make them, you'd never get any better. We should analyze what we did wrong and what to do differently next time, and after that, not think about it so much. I make mistakes



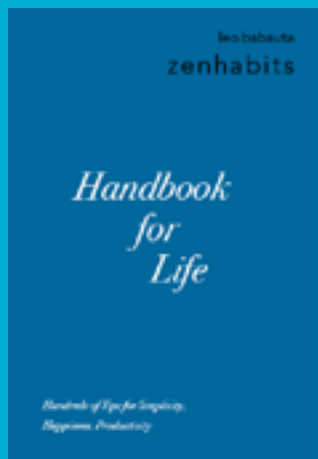
all the time with Zen Habits, and I just keep working at it, trying different things and doing more of what works and less of what doesn't. I used to write horrible posts in the beginning, and I still do today. When that happens and readers call me out on it, I see it as a good thing, because I know where to improve!

If you're humble about it and open to new

ideas from people, it's much easier to keep moving and not worry about failure or being perfect. No one is perfect. I'm certainly not perfect, and I've never claimed to be. That's a good thing, because every mistake I make, I get better at something. If you intentionally let people know that you're still learning along the way, it's sort of a safety valve for you to try new things without worrying about

failing. What we should all do is look at each failure as something useful, because it's the only way to get to the goal. Looking at it like that, quitting isn't an option. Every failure becomes a necessary stepping stone to success.

# BIO:



*Leo Babauta is the author of **The Power of Less** and the **Zen to Done Handbook** and the creator of **ZenHabits.net**, a popular blog on simplicity and productivity. He runs a successful e-book publishing company, and in the last two years he has made numerous positive transformations in his life and is on his way to living the life he's always dreamed of. Leo also started *Write to Done*, a blog about improving writing skills.*

# Electric Fences

*“I realized you don’t have to do anything.”*

*Colleen Wainwright*

**M**y career trajectory was unusual in that I quit my highly paid, “prestigious” job in advertising in 1992 and then foolishly came out to Hollywood to try to make it as a writer with absolutely no experience or training. When that went to hell in a handbasket, I did something even more insane and became an actor. Now I write as a marketing consultant. Thinking about it, it’s actually much more practical than anything

I’ve ever done to date! The whole idea of finding the perfect thing can just be paralyzing and I found it’s better to say, “What do you feel like doing?” and just try doing that. If you’re looking for the perfect place for it, you won’t find it. I didn’t even know that what I’m doing now, helping people with their marketing, existed while I was in advertising. And now there are tons of professions and services that didn’t exist when you first got into whatever job you were doing.



Making those transitions was strange, but the absolute hardest was leaving what seemed at the time a stable, secure position in advertising. There's an office you go to, they pay you every couple weeks, you make money and then if there's money left over, you get a bonus; all these expectations are set up for you there. All you have to do is hit specific benchmarks people have established. But as my friends who stayed in advertising are finding out, nothing is secure. The security was an illusion. If you want to extrapolate and get metaphysical, you can ask: What is secure, period? Nothing is. The only thing you can depend on is the truth of the moment. Where are

**“What is secure, period? Nothing is. The only thing you can depend on is the truth of the moment.”**

you right now? What's going on right now? Everything else is an illusion because you're either projecting something into the future that doesn't exist yet, or you're looking backwards at spotty memories. My ex-husband, who was then my husband, was



the one who compelled me to leave advertising. He had been walking the walk - had a few odd jobs to make money while he was transitioning to full-time stand up comedy, and he explored the world as much as he could. Every night I'd come

**“Society reinforces this notion that you need a secure, stable, expected route.”**

home and say, “I hate my job so much. I hate doing it - what a waste of time. It's stupid! I know it's not what I want to be doing with my life!” He said, “You know, why don't you quit?” And I thought, I could, couldn't I?

He was the only one who supported me in my decision. Society reinforces this notion that you need a secure, stable, expected route, but he just threw all that up in the air, and said no. He was right. At the time we had no one to answer to but ourselves, no real responsibilities to anyone else, and as long as we paid the mortgage, we were fine.

I'm a planner and I like security, so I had to prepare myself for the move to LA in some



way. I saved up as much money as I possibly could and immediately stopped spending. When I went in to quit my job, the company threw all these other options at me, but I said I wasn't interested in negotiating, "I'm done, I want to go and live my life now, and I don't care if you think it's nuts." Then they said, "Well, what if you could work three days a week and get paid the same salary?" I did the math in my head

**“we’re just imagining all kinds of electric fences we can’t cross.”**

and since I didn't have a hard plan to drive to LA until later, I said okay. For three months, I worked three days a week for my full salary and saved a ton of money. It was an amazing, crazy thing. Once you don't care anymore, once there's nothing they can offer you, you're in the most freeing position of power.

## MADE-UP RULES

It makes me laugh when I think back to all the rules I made up in my life about what I had to do. Now I realize you don't have to do

anything, and you never know what someone else is willing to do. We tell ourselves these stories about what's impossible, but if someone wants to hire you badly enough, they'll break rules. "We're not hiring" doesn't fly then. Exceptions get made all the time for people who really want something.

That's the way institutions or companies operate: they can't watch everybody all the time. They count on you being afraid enough to toe the line, agreeing to all these rules that don't exist, and that if you push their limits, they may push back with more rules and more surveillance. But for the most part we're just imagining there are all kinds of electric fences we can't cross. It's fear that's keeping us there.

When I moved to Hollywood, I got a job without doing much because a friend of mine had pitched an idea and needed someone to write it, and he brought me on as a co-writer. At that point, I had no idea what I wanted to do when I got out of the 9-to-5, and I arbitrarily picked writing for television, thinking, "Well, I'm used to writing 30-second commercials that go between the show, why can't I write a show



around a 30-second commercial?” The job wasn’t that hard to do and I thought, “This is easy, I’ll just go and get another one of these. I’ll just do that until the next thing presents itself.” Turns out I wasn’t good at writing for television at all.

## TRICK YOURSELF

One night I went out with a friend to the Groundlings School, a comedy school in L.A. They were asking for volunteers for improv, and I had taken a couple classes in Chicago, so I went on stage and had a lot of fun. I asked about their classes. At this

**“I fooled myself into acting in this round-about way because I was terrified.”**

time I was still thinking I was going to be a writer, but it wasn’t really working out. When I started the classes, I told myself “Oh, I’m not doing this for any other reason than for fun!” but I saw the possibility of where it could lead if I was good enough at it. I realized that that was what I wanted - to be on stage

performing for people. I tricked myself into starting it by thinking, “Let’s just try going on stage tonight,” which is actually one of the things the Groundlings taught us about - how to overcome procrastination. You don’t say to yourself, “I’m going sit down and work for two hours on my book proposal.” You say, “I’m just going to open up that file.” Maybe not even that. “I’m just going turn on the computer.” Perhaps by that time you’ve overcome inertia, and actually start to work. I fooled myself into acting in this roundabout way because I was terrified. I didn’t start acting until I was 33, and though I had a little training when I went to Groundlings, I was with either younger people or those who had been at it consistently for a decade. I was horrible compared to them, and had to work really hard. It would have been ridiculous to think I could do it as well as they did initially, so I had to trick myself into starting until I saw some success - not as in a job or money, but realizing “Okay, I can be in the improv scene with these people” or “I wrote this sketch and it doesn’t totally suck, and even if it doesn’t work I can write another one.” I needed to reach those markers first because they were more appropriate for where I was.

Around this point someone told me about *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron, and I tried it and loved it because it gave me the structure I needed to make the transition to acting. It helped me see that acting was what I wanted at that point in my life, and then I beat the hell out of it for ten years.

If I actually looked at my odds of winning, I wouldn’t do anything. So I blur the future. I have hope in my heart, but I don’t deal with it all the time. I focus on the present. Recently I’ve had this dream of writing books and speaking to people on a level like Elizabeth Gilbert or Malcolm Gladwell. It’s completely unreasonable to think that at almost 50 years old, that’s going to happen for me. But it doesn’t matter, because that’s what I want, so I’m moving forward. If I am honest with myself, connecting with other people, pushing myself and continuing to learn, is what makes me happy - not external success. I’m not going to NOT do what I want because I’m not going to succeed. That’s crazy.

## CHECK OUT MY HEADSHAWT.

Musicians or artists or writers or actors are in a strange place where they have to take work incredibly seriously. If you’re just screwing around rolling into Hollywood and

**“If I actually looked at my odds of winning, I wouldn’t do anything.”**

dreaming yourself on stage, that's fine, you have to do that to some extent. But if you're only doing superficial things around your craft, and not actually working to be the best actor you can be, then you're delusional. I learned so much about that from being a working actor for so long, getting rejected and hired. Then as someone who hired people, seeing it from their standpoint I felt like I had to share this information with them.

I write a marketing column for actors every

**“If you're really pursuing what you're passionate about, you'll never think you're good enough at it..”**

month. I tell them I'll answer anything they want except, “How can I get an agent?” “How can I get a TV show?” Ask me about the marketing, I tell them! That's what I'm here to help you with. But people still ask, “How do I get an agent? Check out my head shot.” I don't know what to tell them. All else being equal, you just have to be so great that if you knew how good you needed to be when you started, you'd be completely paralyzed. If you're really

pursuing what you're passionate about, you'll never think you're good enough at it. It's sad to see so many actors who don't really want to be great actors, they just want to stand in front of people accepting an Oscar and be famous. If you're that way, you should just dress up for Halloween and hold an Oscar. It's going to be nothing but heartache if you say you have a passion for acting but what you really have is a passion for is getting on stage at the Kodak Theater holding a gold, naked man.

## KNOW THYSELF

I know myself much better now, and I've learned all these mundane things about myself that help me function better. If I don't eat well regularly, or drink too much coffee, or don't get enough sleep, I don't feel good - these boring things have been big revelations for me. I also have a tendency to think in binary, that I'm all that or a piece of crap, and neither is true.

I believe I am of above-average happiness. That's not to say I haven't suffered depression at points in my life, and it's shameful how gloomy my messed-up orientation was. Seven years ago I got sick, as close to death as you can get without dying, and I can say with certainty that it re-calibrated me forever. Now, if I even start to enter a dark place, I think, “Don't be an idiot. Other people are way worse off.” I now appreciate being alive and present as opposed to reflecting on all the

dumb things I did in my past or worrying about what's in the future. Those are over - and you can only prepare for the uncertainty so much. The only thing I can focus on now is being better in this moment. That brings me back to my natural happiness much more quickly than I used to be able to before I was sick.

## THE BEST POSSIBLE THING EVER

Fundamentally, what it's all about is love. I probably sound like the cheesiest person right now, but this is the reality that I learned from my own experience. When I was sick I saw that even though I was in a hospital, I had insurance, people who loved me, a safety net. I weighed 90 pounds, I had tubes coming into me, and I couldn't walk without help, but while I was at my physical nadir, I had my moments of purest happiness. This wasn't just me high on the intravenous medications. It was, “Okay, two things can be happening at the same time.

**“Things can be really bad and at the exact same time I don't have to be sad.”**



Things can be really bad and at the exact same time I don't have to be sad." I saw that at the core is just love, and the rest is distraction. Once you experience things being the absolute worst they've ever been for you, you have to pay attention and see things differently. You have to.

My very first breakup after I was sick devastated me. I thought I was going to have love the rest of my life and it turns out I misread it and I was an asshole. But in that moment I felt both every bit of the pain,

**"... you can only prepare for the uncertainty so much."**

and the feeling that things would be okay. That was a HUGE gift for me. The ultimate power, the ultimate way to negotiate life, is to say: I have no attachment to what's being offered now. I'm just a little bag of food and

water, I can't imagine The Best Possible Thing Ever, and I'm just focused on moving forward with purpose. This doesn't mean you can't have compassion or intent, but it does mean you stop bonding yourself to outcomes you can't control. That changes your life.

## BIO:



**Colleen Wainwright** is a writer-thinker-talker who started calling herself **"the communicatrix"** when she hit three hyphens. She spent 10 years as an award-winning TV copywriter, crafting television commercials and another 10 acting in them for cash money. Since 2002, when an epiphany brought on by a bout with Crohn's Disease rendered her unfit for the world of normal commerce, Colleen now speaks to groups like the Cornell Entrepreneur Network and the Seattle Design Center, consults one-on-one with solopreneurs about their online marketing presence, and creates content for a large number of online outlets.

# Resurrect Yourself

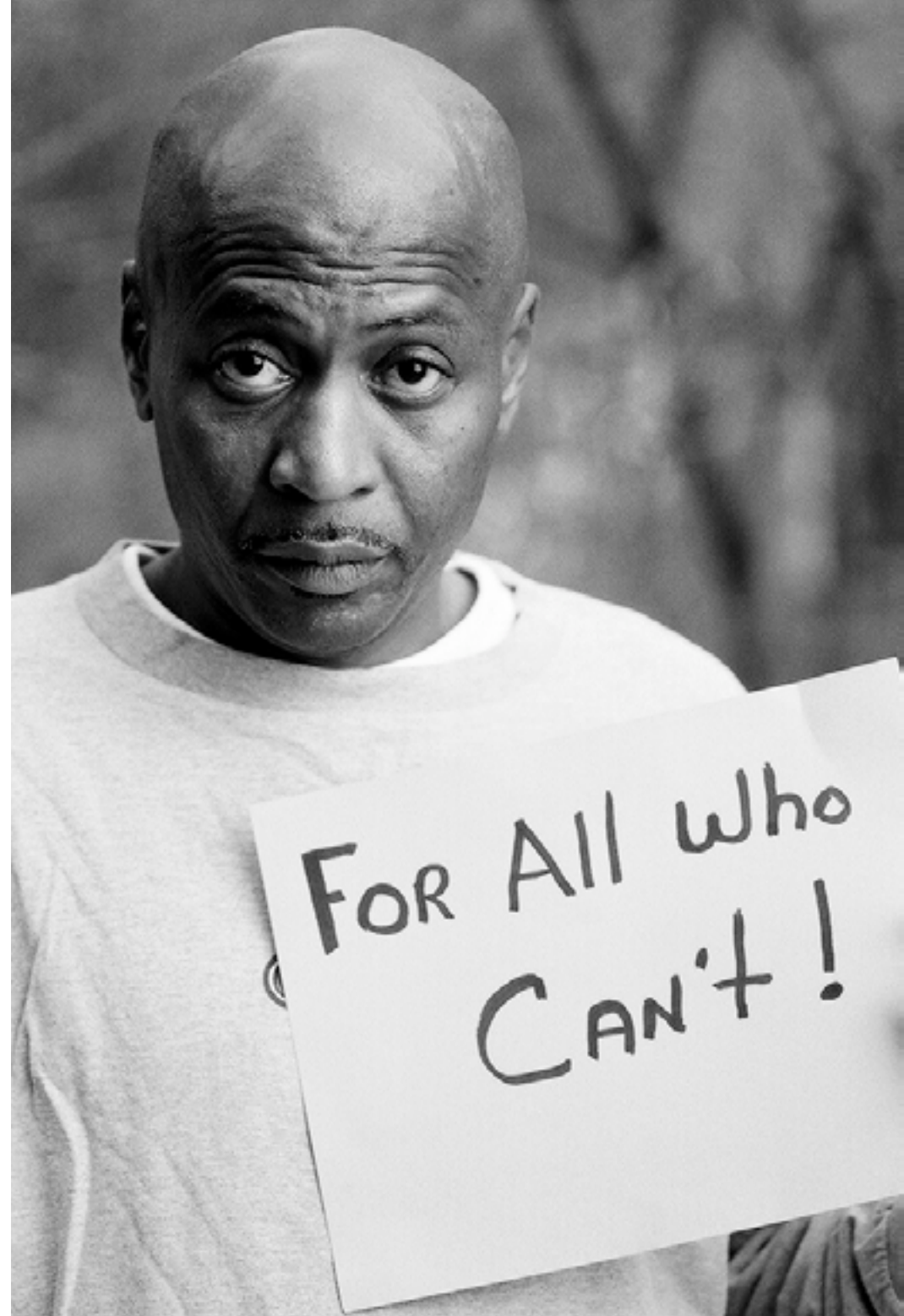
*“I had to create a purpose for myself.”*

*John Thompson*

**I** I had two convictions for two different charges, one for 49.5 years on a robbery and another one for murder, for which they gave me the death penalty. With two separate trials, even if I fought and won one, there was still the threat of another one looming over me. Mentally, fighting two cases that weren't likely to ever be won was exhausting. When I was put on death row, I initially didn't pay attention to what was going on, and nothing sunk in until I was moved up to a cell where the

guy before me was executed just before I had arrived. In fact, some of his things were still in the cell! Only then did I really start to pay attention and get really scared about the environment I was put into.

I now know that the criminal jail process is designed to inject fear into prisoners. My environment in a maximum-security prison was very harsh. People had sentences of 99 years or more, so when the reality sunk in that people came here and didn't go home, I felt an



immediate and intense fear that didn't leave me for the first few years of my prison life. Here I was, surrounded by people who didn't have anything to lose, and I had everything to lose, so I started living in tremendous fear. I was around all these people who didn't care about anything, who had nothing to live for anymore! But I still had something to live

**“The fear that you have to accept this life now, because this is where you were going to remain forever, is just immense.”**

for, because I knew I was innocent. But what do you do? A 99-year-to-life sentence means you're stuck, and people just watched their lives and freedom disappear before their eyes. The fear that you have to accept this life now, because this is where you were going to remain forever, is just immense. It takes all the meaning out of your life. What are you living for? Why are you even living? If you think about the concept of “We're going to hold you

I learned that you don't have too much time to focus on that though. As soon as you get in, you have to get with the program and survive.

## JUNGLE FULL OF PREDATORS

Once inside, I had to take a stand immediately, otherwise I would have been labeled weak, and I saw that weak people got seriously hurt in prison. I had to create a purpose for myself, put on my suit of armor and survive by any means necessary. It was an extremely dangerous place to be, and the violence I had to participate in just to survive or evade sexual abuse was unbelievable. I was in hand-to-hand combat, fighting with pens, fighting with knives – and I'm not that big or strong. I didn't want to fight, but I had to do everything in my power to be ready at any moment to fight - I was constantly living in fear.

Although I was innocent, it felt like I would have to kill someone out of self-defense just to stay alive in prison. I felt that my state and my government, the people who were supposed to protect me, put me here and forced me to fight like a gladiator. I saw it as a jungle, with predators and strategic games of hunting and surviving. The old lions in prison weren't thinking about going home; they enjoyed the prowl and terrorizing new prisoners, so I had no



JOHN HOLDING A PHOTO OF JIM WILLIAMS, ONE OF THE PROSECUTORS WHO WRONGLY CONVICTED HIM. WILLIAMS IS STANDING AT HIS OWN DESK WITH A MODEL OF AN ELECTRIC CHAIR. IN THE CHAIR ARE PHOTOS OF SEVERAL MEN WILLIAMS PROUDLY SENT TO DEATH ROW, INCLUDING JT.

that I had to do something in order to fight back the thoughts of daily executions, so I quickly started learning about the prison system and tried to understand exactly what was going on.





JOHN AND VOLUNTEERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.

a young kid, so I was able to concentrate on getting calm and learning about my options instead of focusing on the drama around me. I had to stay above everything, become immune to it all, and take the good from my present experience. I had to keep nothing but the good feelings and thoughts and stay with them

and be totally immune to the rest. And since I wasn't an angel before coming to prison, I had a lot of powerful friends – and when you go to jail, if somebody knows how you operate, they'll look out for you. They won't let anyone bother you and won't leave you hanging. So even in the most dire situations, a

support system can help you through. Luckily, I also had two lawyers fighting for me for 18 years. I was blessed when they finally proved my innocence through DNA evidence, but it still took two lawyers 18 years to prove that.

## LESSONS IN HUMANITY

I learned so much about our humanity in prison. When I watched these so-called “bad men” on death row pray for the victim’s family knowing that it could’ve been them in the moment when an inmate went off to execution, I knew they were talking to God and asking for forgiveness for what they had done. These guys aren’t bad guys. Most of them just did stupid things when they were younger like everyone does. They fast on days of execution - no one eats anything at all – all they do is pray for the victim’s family, for the people who are waiting outside for the executions to happen, and for the prisoner. The hardest thing in the world is to watch a man who you became friends with and had known for years, get dragged away to be killed.

Everyone is human. We all make mistakes, and it’s not we who are supposed to judge. That’s God’s job. We’re supposed to love and get along with each other. Be grateful, enjoy life. Watching men die every day, I learned you can’t take life for granted. I love my family and my grandchildren. You have to really



appreciate them. I'm grateful to God, and I don't regret my experiences, but I'm going to continue to fight against the institution and the people who took away my life. That's why Resurrection After Exoneration gives me energy and drive, the ability to fight back – not just for me, but for all of us who were on death row. I tell them we can't just accept the system the way it is – we have to take initiative. You can't have someone fight for you. You have to fight for the cause, fight the big fight.

## THE RIGHT QUESTION

No man deserves to die. The death penalty is hypocritical and makes no sense. We put people in jail for killing someone and then punish them by killing them? Who then, goes to jail for executing someone? We shouldn't ask citizens, "Do you agree with the death penalty or don't you?" That's an irrelevant question. The right question is, "Do you want to give your government the right to kill you or don't you?" Many cases that have been turned over and much evidence tell us that innocent people do go to jail – innocent people are convicted wrongly all the time for serious crimes. Look at myself and the other exonerees. That's a fact everyone is aware of. So why, then, are we asking our citizens the wrong questions? We should understand that one day we could be in the exact same

JT AND CHRISTO RAINES, AN EXONEREE ADVOCATE WHO WORKS WITH RAE.



position. It doesn't really matter who committed the crime. That could be you on death row. People close their eyes to the evil in our world. We think we live in a safe environment with a government that will protect us, even if we do things they don't like. Our government is not our protector – anything that threatens them, they can destroy (or lock up, in our case.) We feel that just because we're just citizens, we can't do anything about it, that we have no power. We accept things until it's too late – until the damage is already done. They framed me, an innocent man, and they can do it again and again until we stand up and do something about it.

Fear still exists today in my heart. I fear that society doesn't understand or doesn't want to understand what is actually going on

**“ I fear that society doesn't understand or doesn't want to understand what is actually going on within the privatized prison system. ”**

within the privatized prison system. People don't realize the inner workings of a prison, and it's so easy to close our eyes to the real picture, the cold hard truth about what goes on inside, because we're not a part of it.

## **BREATHE AGAIN**

After prison, I came home with an understanding of what I wanted to do and where I was at in life. God gave me the opportunity to breathe again. I don't allow my prison life to consume my current life, and it's a blessing that I'm able to contain my anger and disappointment. I realize that it won't help my situation, but it does come back to haunt me, the mental disturbances and the things I had to go through. You have to work really hard to adjust and refocus and deal with the free world again. That's why it's so hard for the men that I work with through Resurrection After Exoneration. Everyone expects them to be free of the hardships they suffered in prison, but there are severe psychological effects that linger on beyond your release. Outside of prison, it's almost worse than it is inside because inside you had to defend yourself and focus on survival and once you come out, you react differently to things in this world. You also feel like you have to defend the way that you've become or the mentality that you've developed. The system is almost designed for prisoners to come out, make mistakes and return to the system. There's no support when they come

**“ The system is almost designed for prisoners to come out, make mistakes and return to the system. ”**

out, and the fear and angst that you live with in prison is manifested on the outside, and now they're left to deal with the psychological effects on their own. You can't talk to your family because they don't understand what you've been through, and you don't want to tell them about the horrible things you've experienced, so it's incredibly hard to handle psychologically, mentally, emotionally. That's a large reason why exonerated prisoners act out or take revenge.

## **SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER**

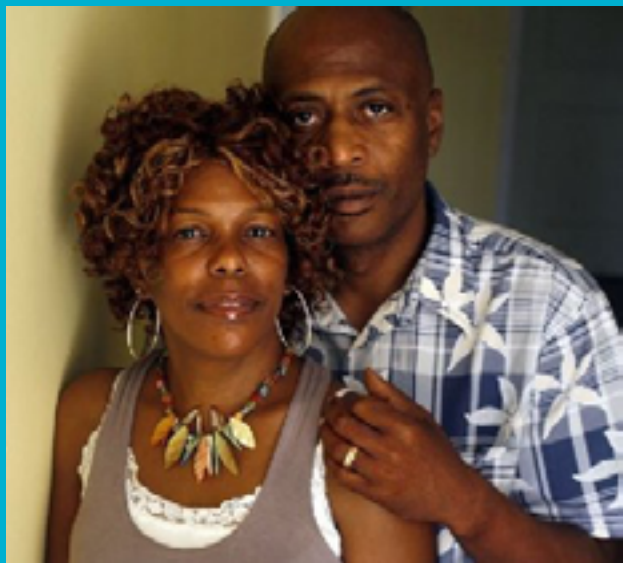
From my experience, love and forgiveness are the key. That's what's enabled me to rise to the occasion and do what I'm doing now. I love what I'm doing with RAE, taking all the exonerees' stories and putting them out in the



open for the public. We're trying to make a difference, not run away. We're not just going to allow the government to use us for target practice without any repercussions – to lock us up and throw away the key. We're trying to send a message out into the world, telling people about the injustice that happened to these men. I'm trying to hold people accountable and not

let them get away with anything and to use these stories in ways to bring about a change. RAE gives me the opportunity to put power in the hands of the exonerated and that's become my mission. God is showing me how to paint this picture, and even now, I feel that God is the one pushing me to do things with RAE, guiding my actions. I don't even feel like it's work.

# BIO:



JOHN WITH HIS WIFE LAVERNE

**John Thompson** was an individual formerly incarcerated who spent 18 years on Angola's death row after a wrongful sentencing for a crime he did not commit. After his release, John started Resurrection After Exoneration, a nonprofit organization that guides exonerees in an environment that nurtures self-sufficiency and empowerment to become leaders for social change. The mission of the organization is to reverse the rate of exonerees returning to prison by transforming their experiences of freedom. John passed in 2017. His life, spirit, and legacy will never be forgotten

**Courage is resistance to fear, mastery  
of fear - not absence of fear.**

Mark Twain