

ISSUE 17 | AUG 23

her story

AUDREY
TANG

KALEE
BOISVERT

ALEXANDRA
STEED

ASHLEY
EARLEY

DR. BADEWA
ADEJUGBE-
WILLIAMS

DR. SHARRON
HINCHLIFF

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HINCHLIFF

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PROVIDING MULTIPLE WAYS FOR WOMEN TO
CONNECT, SUPPORT, ENCOURAGE, & TO GROW - AS
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PUBLICATION@HERSTORYMATTERS.COM



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Editor's Note

Self-belief means having confidence in your abilities. It means being able to trust yourself to do what you say you'll do and knowing that those efforts will result in the desired outcomes.

One of the challenges I had to overcome in my life was trusting that I can achieve what I wanted, it was a journey of procrastination and giving up before trying until one day I thought, what's the worst that could happen if I chose to believe in my ability to do what I

what I envisioned? I took a chance on myself and never looked back.

Over the years of editing the women's stories, I noticed the element of self-belief interwoven in the stories, whether mentioned or not I saw this thread intertwined within the ingredients that brought them success. What I saw was women taking a bet on themselves, achieving the impossible and winning in life.

In this edition, we have outliers, women who have defied the odds and chartered their paths. Women who have faced fear and overcame personal battles to become who they are. Women who choose to believe in themselves and attained their endeavors.

I hope this edition inspires you to believe in yourself and go for what you want. We are rooting for your greatness!

As always looking forward to the feedback, Please email us at publication@herstorymatters.com

Editor in Chief

Harriet Khataba

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harriet Khataba".

What's
Your
Story!





KALEE BOISVERT

KALEE BOISVERT

Kalee Boisvert has been in the financial industry for over 15 years, but her love of money started very young. Growing up in a single-parent household, she watched her mom struggle with finances and wished there was something she could do to help. Around this time, she realized she needed to find a way to save and earn if she wasn't going to allow her circumstances to define her. And so, her journey to financial literacy began.

Today, as a single mom and financially independent woman, Kalee is called to support women in their financial lives. She felt the pull toward a career that would allow her to pursue this deeply personal goal to advocate for women and their money, which led her on the path to becoming a financial advisor. Being an advisor allows her to work directly with women to empower and support them and help put an end to any money-related stress and doubts.

To further her efforts supporting financial literacy, Kalee has two books being released in 2023 – a children's picture book called MoneyWise Mabel's Bursting Bank, and a non-fiction book called Make Money Your Thing! Which aims to build confidence and empower people in their financial lives.

Please share your early life experiences and how they contributed to your career choice

I didn't grow up with money. Being poor was a pervasive theme in my childhood. I also recognized early on that not everyone seemed to be plagued by the same lack and money scarcity that my Mom, sister, and I endured. These glimpses of wealth brought me hope. And with that, from a very early age, I set out on my mission to make my own money to achieve my goals.

Each target I hit built up my confidence and belief in myself that anything was possible. It started at age eight with a Super Nintendo and a pet dog, and then as I got older the financial goals progressively got bigger, including a post-secondary degree, my first condo, an MBA, my first starter home, then a bigger home for my two kiddos and me, and now accumulating wealth for my financial freedom.



It turned out the circumstances that characterized my childhood didn't define who I was at my core or what I could have or achieve.

As someone who started from scratch, I knew that if I was able to succeed with money, then it was possible for everyone. And that fueled my drive to share the money confidence I developed with other women. If I could support other women to believe in themselves and what they were capable of in their financial lives then perhaps no more women would have to go through the stress and struggles that my Mom endured. And that is when I chose to become a wealth advisor, to empower women to build money confidence, too. From there I knew I wanted to reach an even larger audience of women to support them in their relationship with money and that's what inspired me to write my new book Make Money your Thing! This book is all about giving women a confidence boost in their financial lives so they feel ready to take action with their money.

Please share your money story

Growing up, my money story revolved around never having "enough" and money being a constant source of stress. As a child, whenever I mustered the courage to ask for something, my mom's response was always one of the following: "That's too expensive," "We have no money," or "I can't afford that." Money was never discussed in a positive light in my household. We were always struggling to stay financially afloat, and that became the recurring theme in our money conversations.

The messages about money that I internalized back then were that we never had enough, we couldn't afford nice things, and money didn't grow on trees. These beliefs played on repeat in my mind, making me feel like I was surrounded by scarcity. I started associating having less than others with a personal deficiency, thinking that being "not enough" was a defining characteristic of mine. It felt like an inseparable part of my identity, tied to my family's perpetual financial struggles.

On my path to becoming a financial advisor, I realized that I needed to heal the deep wounds of unworthiness that stemmed from growing up in poverty. To achieve this, I embarked on a journey of introspection, delving into my earliest money memories to understand how they shaped my present beliefs about money. The process of journaling allowed me to gain insight and brought about healing. I came to appreciate the immense impact that words have on our perception of money and its role in our lives.

Recognizing the power of awareness, I knew it was time to let go of the limiting beliefs I had carried from my childhood. Holding on to them only served to hold me back from financial growth and well-being. This newfound awareness empowered me to choose which money beliefs I wanted to retain and which needed to be discarded. It was liberating to realize that these beliefs were not only inaccurate but might not even be truly mine, originating from the messages I absorbed from family or friends during my formative years.

What is the biggest misconception about building wealth

The most significant misconception I often encounter is the belief that building wealth requires making a substantial income. However, from my experience working with clients, I can attest that many individuals who never earned six-figure salaries throughout their careers have still managed to retire as millionaires. The journey to wealth is primarily about being diligent with your finances and making wise decisions along the way.

True wealth is generated from the surplus that results when your income surpasses your expenses. It's not about how much money you make, but rather how effectively you manage and allocate your resources. Some individuals may have impressive high salaries, but if they have expensive tastes and end up spending most of their income, they will never be able to accumulate wealth, no matter how much they earn.

In contrast, those who focus on living within their means, saving diligently, and investing wisely can steadily grow their wealth over time, regardless of their initial income level. It's about maintaining a healthy balance between earning and spending, with a strong emphasis on saving and making sound financial choices.

From your experience and work why do some struggle with making money?

Making money can feel like an uphill battle at times. There are all sorts of reasons why some struggle with it. Not having the right skills or enough education can make it hard to find good-paying jobs or get a successful business going. And let's not forget about the way we think about money – negative beliefs and self-doubt can hold us back like what happened at the start of my career from holding on to an outdated money story. Debt and unexpected expenses can also hit hard, making it tough to get ahead. And sometimes, it's the economy that's just not on our side. Recessions and bad job markets can make it tough to find good opportunities.

But it's not all hopeless. Possibilities are still within our reach and switching the focus to what is in your control can help shift your energy towards what you can do to achieve financial success!

What was the greatest challenge in writing your first book?

The most significant challenge for me was figuring out how to write a book about money and finances that would be enjoyable and fun for the reader! My goal was to create a sense of having a friendly chat with the reader about money matters. To achieve this, I knew the book had to exude a welcoming, casual, and relatable vibe. Despite having a business school background, I didn't have any formal education in creative writing, which made the task even more daunting.

In the initial version, the book probably read more like a dry financial textbook than the engaging read I had envisioned. However, through numerous revisions and the inclusion of relatable stories, I managed to transform it into exactly what I had intended – a light and breezy book on money!

I'm excited to share this light-hearted and accessible money book with readers, hoping it will make the sometimes intimidating world of finances feel like a friendly conversation with a trusted friend.

What have been your proudest moments and why?

Writing my book, *Make Money your Thing!*, is one of my proudest moments, and it holds a special place in my heart for several reasons. Firstly, it fulfilled a lifelong dream of mine to become a published author. I poured my heart into crafting a proposal and writing a few chapters for the book, which I then courageously sent to agents and publishers in the hopes of securing an offer. Despite facing numerous rejections, I remained resilient and determined to see my dream come to fruition.

Refusing to give up, I decided to enter the book into a Canada-wide writing contest.

The effort paid off, as my book earned a position as a finalist and caught the attention of a new publisher in Canada, one that turned out to be the perfect fit for my work! This achievement filled me with immense pride, knowing that my perseverance and hard work had paid off. The journey of writing the book was not without its challenges. I am especially proud that I managed to write a significant portion of it while being pregnant. Even after my son was born, I continued to push forward, dedicating myself to completing the necessary edits.

And recently, I experienced a truly touching moment when I took my nine-year-old daughter to a bookstore and proudly showed her my book displayed on the shelves. It was a reminder of my own past and the challenging relationship I had with money while witnessing the stress it caused my mother. Now, standing in that bookstore with my daughter, I felt an overwhelming sense of achievement and joy as I presented her with the very book I had written about money, turning my journey into a positive and empowering one for her and for others who may read it.

What's next for you?

I have another book coming out in September, which is a children's picture book about a little girl learning the value of money. It's titled "MoneyWise Mabel's Bursting Bank," and I wrote it in response to the most common regret I hear from people about their financial lives – that they wish they had started sooner. This led me to ponder: how soon can we begin teaching kids about money? The answer is really, really early! That's why I wrote this book – to encourage parents to initiate conversations about money with their kids as young as 4 to 5 years old. My hope is that MoneyWise Mabel will inspire children to pursue their biggest money goals and realize that anything is possible for them.

"One of the best books on personal finance for women I have read in years!"
—SARAH BROWN, *New York Times* bestselling author of
Smart Women Spend Smart & *Smart Women Pay Less*

MAKE MONEY YOUR *thing!*

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Design Your Money Will

KALEE VOISVERT



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Dr. Badewa T.
Adejugbe-Williams

DR. BADEWA ADEJUGBE- WILLIAMS

Princess Dr. Badewa T. Adejugbe-Williams, is an accomplished Educational Specialist, Educational Therapist, Director, Producer, Stage Manager, Actress and Model. She earned her Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) degree with a double major in English and Drama, and minor in Journalism. While earning her B.A. She became the first Black Stage Manager of theatrical productions at her university and stage-manage the university's stage productions for three years in a row. she was recruited by the Anniston Playhouse to stage-manage productions such as the opera, Gianni Schicci, and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. She had the opportunity to

co-star with the Tony Award winning actress Virginia Capers in Omalingwo, an original play written by the Nigerian playwright, Dr. Nkeoye Nwankwo. She later joined Virginia Caper's Lafayette players where she acted in numerous plays and left to take on the role of Shirley on the TV show Amen. She did voice over for the movie Ace Ventura starring Jim Carrey. Believing in propagating our culture abroad, with the goal to lead to better understanding of whom we are, Ms. Adejugbe-Williams went on to act in, direct and produce Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman which was reviewed by the Los Angeles Times, Drama-Logue, and LA Weekly. She was sought after by Shelley Jensen to stage-manage the original play Beauty Shop which she edited at the world-famous Wilshire Ebell Theater. As a Stage Manager and Director/Producer, Ms. Adejugbe-Williams worked on plays at the Beverly Hills Theater 40, Apollo Theater in Los Angeles, and the Old Globe Shakespearean Theater in Hollywood. With the success of her production of Death and the King's Horseman, she formed her own film production company, La Da Ma Pictures Incorporated, which developed and sourced for funding for the movie scripts, Dolemite, Toothfairy, Dub Man, Black Crane, and A Gentleman's Game.



Due to unforeseen family circumstances, Ms. Adejugbe-Willialms embarked on another career in Special Education. She is an Educational Therapist (E.T.) in private practice and a Member of the Association of Education Therapists (AET) based in the United States of America.

Dr. Adejugbe-Williams is currently the General Manager of the Abuja Film Village International Ltd, the Chair and Executive Director of the Nigeria Diaspora Summit Initiative (NDIS), founder of the Royal School of Educational Therapy Foundation. Dr. Adejugbe-Williams is passionate about volunteerism and national development. She has chaired and served on many technical and voluntary committees professionally as well as voluntarily.

Please share your early life experience

My background and early life experience shaped my existence and informed my purpose in life. I was lucky to be the last of seven children, spoiled rotten especially by my siblings and dotted upon by so many when growing up. As a precocious child of the Adejugbe Royal family of Ado-Ekiti,



When I was growing up, I was recognized everywhere. I was always on the move, always on the streets meeting and interacting with everyone within and beyond my community. I was a young socialite! My siblings, at gatherings, would regale us with stories of how I would daily visit all the market women in our hometown, from dawn till dusk and would arrive home with bags of goodies from these women, and each time my parents bought me new toys or clothes, I would then turn around and take all my old and some new toys and clothes to these women to give to their children.

My parents were staunch members of our society, well respected by almost everyone. My father had a magisterial and distinguished presence that personified aristocracy, royalty and respect. Everywhere he went, people respected and listened to him. He was the voice of reasoning and I grew up watching him effectively settling disputes. This is one characteristic that I believe rubbed off on me as evident with my ability to settle disputes even amongst the most cantankerous personalities.

People were and are usually baffled by my patience and listening skills. I learned compassion, generosity and persistence from my mother. I don't think there was anything my mother wanted to accomplish that she didn't accomplish. I cannot recall anyone ever saying no to her for anything. She was generous to a fault. She was the first of many and was considered one of the wealthiest women of her time in our state when I was growing up. These two imposing personalities shaped the trajectory of my life. My family taught me to be proud of who I am, to be compassionate, patient, generous, and to accept the responsibility that "if you can, you do! If you have, you give!". These lessons, I have been able to mold my life and career choices. My initial career path was the Entertainment industry.

What have been your proudest moments in your career

I have a few proud moments in my various careers. As a thespian, the fact that those of us in the late 80s and early 90s broke down walls in Hollywood became a defining moment for our various careers. I am very proud to see so many Africans on screen now. Next step? We need to define who we are by telling, directing and producing our stories as well.

In Education, my proud moments are too numerous. I am proud to state that most of the students I ever worked with made significant improvements which could be attested to with their improved standardized assessment scores, better socio-emotional well-being and transitions into either an inclusive General Education learning environment or assimilation into a working environment. A lot of my past students still communicate with me to this day. That is a joy, to know that I impacted their lives so much that they of their own volition reach out periodically to either check on me or to update me on their lives accomplishments. This is huge considering I primarily worked with learners with developmental disorders and learning differences. Another proud and defining moment for me personally, not really careerwise, is from my



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what challenges did you face &
your greatest lesson

is from my volunteer work with the diaspora community. First, with the Nigerians in Diaspora and Alumni Network (NiDAN). We are a group of Nigerians from the diaspora who are changing lives by contributing our quota to national development and youth engagement. Also, my work with the Nigeria Diaspora Summit Initiative (NDSI) and our partnership with the Nigerians in the Diaspora Commission (NiDCOM). Since 2018, we have been organizing the Nigeria Diaspora Investment Summit (NDIS). With this partnership, our Team has contributed significantly to the socio-economic development of Nigeria and we continue to improve the lives of so many Nigerians, especially the youth and entrepreneurs. WIth the summit, we have been able to change lives by connecting entrepreneurs and the public sector with investors and/or technical partners. We have even attracted funding in the form of grants for some sociopreneurs. I cannot be prouder of our work and what we have accomplished these past few years.

From your experience what challenges do upcoming actors and actresses face ?

With diversity on the screens, half the battle is won. A challenge I see is the push back from some African Americans who feel that Africans should not play roles meant for African Americans. What they are not considering or wilfully neglect is the fact that Americans portrayed Africans for decades. We need to even the playing field and be deliberate and persistent; beyond this, we have to be judicious and better than most in our crafts.

what challenges did you face & what has been your greatest lesson as an outlier

While at the universities for my Bachelors and Master's, I was always working in theater as a Stage Manager with the hope of transitioning to directing plays and eventually movies. While at the universities for my Bachelors and Master's, I was always working in theater as a Stage Manager with the hope of challenges because Hollywood

was not ready for Africans. When auditioning for roles in movies and television productions in Hollywood, the feedback I most often got were, "You don't look or sound African! "You cannot play an American because you are not an American". After hearing these a couple of times, some of us Africans banded together and started producing and performing in our own productions. A close Nigerian friend at UCLA who was getting her Doctorate degree in Theater Arts started writing, directing and producing her own plays based on Nigerian culture and she staged the plays at the UCLA International Student Center. I acted in a couple of her plays and it was during this time that I met my mentor then, Ms. Virginia Capers, a Tony Award winning Actress. We were both cast members in one of the plays at UCLA. Ms. Capers believed in my talent and encouraged me to keep auditioning for roles. She introduced me to some Hollywood casting directors and executives and this was how I got my first break as a professional stage manager. With the recognition of being a professional stage manager, I started my Stage and Film Production Company, La Da Ma Pictures Inc., in the early 90s. We produced a couple of plays and bought the option to produce four major film projects. The intrigue with our cultural plays and the publicity mileage from the reviews of our plays in the local newspapers and industry magazines I believe were I believe were major contributors to the rise of Africans as consultants for African related productions in Hollywood. It was exhilarating for me, even after years of deferring my film production career, to sit at tables with production executives to discuss African and nonAfrican related projects. The lesson for me was and still is that we have the power to shape our destinies, we just have to be deliberate, tenacious and resilient.

What do you think of the "Metoo" movement and does its voice speak for what is considered the minority groups in the Entertainment industry?

The MeToo movement should have started decades ago. In those days, the common saying was, if you are desperate for the part, your back may have to be on the couch.

On the couch. Minorities cut across race and gender. If its voice speaks for minority groups, this could be subjective. As a woman, women are considered to be minorities, I would say yes, it does. As an African or African American, I am not so sure. Be that as it may, for us to be heard and seen, we have to step up and show up. We should not relegate our pains for others to tell. We have to be our own voices and advocate for ourselves. We should be mindful of our dignity and our self-esteem. No one should have the power to alter these two prizes. Some may be afraid to speak their truths and/or speak up against abuse because Hollywood can be unforgiving and they may be blacklisted from getting roles and offers; but being in the entertainment industry should not be someone's only career choice. I am optimistic though that with the MeToo movement, some privileged oppressors would think twice before propositioning others.

You work with people with special needs, what inspired you to this path?

The credit for this are two of my greatest joys in life, my twins who were diagnosed with special needs. I saw the signs by the time they were two years old. As a parent, your child's challenges and battles become yours. So, I took it upon myself to do all my possible best to help alleviate their struggles, and in so doing, I embarked upon a pertinacious journey of research and the quest for intervention and/or cure if attainable of neurodevelopmental (neuro=brain, developmental=body) disabilities, the impairment that affects either one or the combination of cognitive, perceptual, language and physical characteristics of a person.

I have accepted that serving the population with special needs has to be my purpose in life. This journey led to the establishment of my nonprofit foundation, the Royal School of Educational Therapy Foundation in Abuja, FCT. We are committed to researching and proffering interventions to remediate learning and socio-emotional challenges.

We amplify the voices of persons with special needs, that though they may have some areas of weaknesses, they should also be celebrated for their strengths and be recognized and included as members of their societies. We were able to do this successfully with the support from Voice in Nigeria and the Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy Abuja. Our students were able to come up with a story that the great Nollywood film director/producer Ambassador Lanecelot Imasuen helped us in turning to a docudrama that shows the plights and the abilities of persons with special needs.

My commitment to the population with special needs is one that will not stop till we can dispel the diagnosis and eradicate neurodevelopmental.

What is the greatest misconception towards people with special needs?

The misnomer that persons with special needs have no abilities, that they are different or unworthy or maybe even cursed!! What absurdities!!! We need to dispel these and we need to do so now!!!! EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US has strengths as well as weaknesses, ours just may not be neurodevelopmental in nature.

What are the greatest lessons in your life?

Be able to look in the mirror and feel good about who you are. The only way to do this is by showing piety towards God. You have to have that belief in a higher power in order to be pious. Likewise, be true to yourself. Do not live your life to please others, but to appease your conscience.

What's next for you?

To be able to leave a legacy of goodwill. God has been faithful and has blessed me in partnership opportunities for many projects, from film and entertainment to education and agriculture. I have a strong network of like-minded people who I collaborate with on many projects. We are relentless in our aim to continue to impact as many lives as we ultimately can.



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A young woman with dark curly hair tied back, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and orange pants, is sitting on a couch. She is holding a white mug in her hands and looking upwards and to the right with a content expression. The background shows a lamp and some flowers.

WELLBEING

BY AUDREY TANG



WHY VOLUNTEER?

We're all seeking ways to improve our sense of happiness, and volunteering is a great way to reap physical as well as psychological and social benefits. Some of our key "feel good" hormones/neurotransmitters can be stimulated through volunteer projects including "Oxytocin" – the bonding hormone, "Dopamine" – our "reward chemical", and "Serotonin" – which activates our "rest-digest" system improving our bodily functions.

The mere act of seeing someone do a "good deed" boosts oxytocin levels, and taking part in one can give you that same sense of bonding as you might feel when spending time with loved ones. Further, if you had to achieve something in the process, you're getting a dopamine hit as well. My favourite however, is lifting our serotonin levels – because if we sleep and eat better, we feel better generally, and this can be done by simply being out in the sun, say helping to tend an allotment, or time keeping at parkrun!

Volunteering is also an excellent antidote to loneliness. Not only are you socialising with others – but it is very likely you will have a meeting of minds as well...you already have your cause in common. It is incredibly important to address feelings of loneliness because the research in this area is not positive. Reported feelings of loneliness increase the likelihood of mortality by 26% (Holt-Lunstad, 2015), and it has also been associated with other physical illnesses such as heart attacks and strokes. Volunteering can sometimes be a comforting channel for processing grief if you get involved with a cause related to the lost loved one's illness, or one that was close to their heart – although it is notable that volunteer co-ordinators are trained to be mindful when a volunteer may still need more time to come to terms with what has happened and perhaps not "rush in" to what can become a distraction from an important passage of emotions.

Through volunteering you are also able to give back to your community – and see and experience the benefits or changes first hand, and it may even be that it's not just a case of learning new skills, but offering your time and talents to teach others playing an inspirational part in their journey.

There are also many roles available to volunteers – you do not need to commit long term – perhaps instead help out at an event, or fundraise in your own way, but if you do want to “go the distance” – then you might even want to consider becoming a charity trustee with the responsibility and opportunity of shaping a cause.

Here are 5 other key benefits of getting involved in giving back:

You create healthy habits in a manageable way

Many charity challenges ask you to achieve a certain target over a specific length of time...they are specifically set up to stretch you a little, but to be achievable - for example, a 1 million steps target can be set at 500k instead. But nonetheless, you may be putting the additional walks in to hit a daily target, and finding you really enjoy them.

You inspire others

You may be part of a team bringing a sense of camaraderie, and even form connections with a new and different group of people who "get what's going on". This team inclusion offers you a whole new source of support, encouragement and ideas, which is not only a little positivity boost, but really great for stimulating a new sense of curiosity through learning from different people.

And, when others see what you are doing, they too may feel able to join in, or set up a challenge themselves!

You raise awareness

While you may think the "donation post" on social media is just about the money, I have found it gets people talking, especially if you've shared your reason for being involved. And, in talking to them about how they have managed their situation, you learn so much more about them, their grit, their resilience...and you've created a space to share.

That sense of purpose

With the issues in the world, we can often feel as if we aren't doing enough. While you might not be able to tackle homelessness by sleeping rough for one night, you can at least draw attention to important community issues.

You might achieve more than you thought possible

Whether it's topping the fundraising leaderboard, or smashing your target, or even developing a new skill, you might find that you have been able to gift *yourself* something of even greater value than money raised!

So, it's not too late - rather than think about getting fitter, sign up for a challenge; or instead of becoming anxious about issues - see if you can contribute to solving the ones you are passionate about by either joining the cause or supporting it in other ways. It's not actually just about financial support - every little second of your time really does help...and probably far more than you realise!



Audrey Tang

Is a Chartered Psychologist (CPsychol), and award-winning author - "The Leader's Guide to Resilience" 2021 (prev. "The Leader's Guide to Mindfulness" (Pearson & FT, 2018) and "Be A Great Manager - Now" (Pearson, 2016)) with a focus on practical self improvement.



Share
Your
Story!



DR. SHARRON HINCHLIFFE



DR.SHARRON HINCHLIFF

Dr. Sharron Hinchliff is Reader in Psychology and Health at the Division of Nursing and Midwifery, Sheffield University, leads the ageing, gender, and sexual health/sexual well-being programme of research at the University. She has worked in this area for over 20 years and uses insights from psychology to address inequalities and the problem of discrimination in healthcare and wider society. Key to Sharron's work is innovation and resource development, including the Age of Love project which uses art and light humour to raise awareness of the intimate relationships of older adults, and the public health website agesexandyou.com which provides information for people aged 50 and older about the sexual changes they might face, for use by health professionals and older adults themselves. Dr Hinchliff co-edited the book 'Addressing the sexual rights of older people: Theory, policy and practice', and in 2022 launched the UK's first Sexual Rights Charter for Older adults in partnership with Age-friendly Sheffield.

Congratulations on the UK's first Sexual Rights Charter for older adults; how is it going, and how was it received?

Thank you! It's going really well. We launched the Sexual Rights Charter in 2022 with the aim to support open and honest conversations about sexuality as we age. We know from our research that people in midlife and older face barriers to seeking help for sexual issues, and that health and social care staff experience obstacles to providing that support, so we decided to do something about it. The Charter not only raises awareness of the key issues, but it also provides guidance for services to be age-friendly and sexual rights savvy. Sexuality includes our sexual thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and identity, and is important to many people as they get older. But this is not always recognised and one of the main reasons is because as a society we tend to associate sexual expression and activity with younger people which has a huge impact on the services we provide. So the Charter helps to tackle social stereotypes associated with older age, such as the sexlessness stereotype and the assumption of heterosexuality. The Charter is currently being used by community groups (e.g. for wellbeing cafes and book clubs), and it forms the basis of training that has been commissioned by health and social care providers. It was important to us that the Charter was inclusive, so when we were developing it we consulted with diverse communities. We worked in partnership with Age-friendly Sheffield, with the main objective to make a difference in the lives of people as they age by recognising sexual agency, respecting diversity, and tackling ageism.

Please share with us your early life experiences and how this impacted your career journey

I grew up in South Yorkshire in a working-class family. My mum had a few jobs that fitted around raising a family: school dinner lady, barmaid (as they were called back then), and she also worked at my aunt's sewing factory. My dad was a joiner. We're from a coal mining family but Dad didn't go to work down the pit mainly because he had a skill for carpentry, and because family members

first-hand what a dangerous job coal mining was so they steered him away from that.

Our family was small but I did grow up surrounded by strong women. I left school at age 16 and went to work on a Youth Training Scheme and then in a sewing factory, again surrounded by strong working-class women. This cemented my interest in women's health and wellbeing, and my determination to tackle gender inequalities and make things better for women. I went to University in my 20s after taking an Access to Higher Education course to get the qualifications needed because I left school with only one O'level and that was in woodwork!

My mum and dad instilled a strong work ethic in me and a fierce determination, both of which were an advantage when I was studying for my PhD. The values that I learned from the people I grew up with have been a guiding light, personally and professionally, enabling me to establish a career as an academic. As a first-generation academic I didn't have any academic role models when I was growing up, but I did have role models who inspired me to work hard, persevere, and keep my feet on the ground.

What are your proudest moments?

I was proud to be awarded my PhD because that was the culmination of my journey, from leaving work, going to night school, then to college, then to university. I never thought I would get that far. But with the support of people who gave me a chance (such as the guy who interviewed me for college, the team who awarded me a PhD study scholarship, my doctoral supervisors) and those who helped me emotionally (friends and family), I did.

I'm also very proud to be a mum. My kids are young adults now, forging their own journeys, so they need me less. They are good people and that makes me happy. Plus, it's such a pleasure to spend time with them.

What's the biggest challenge you faced in your career?

This is a great question. It takes time and a lot of work to establish yourself as an academic, and we know that can be doubly hard for women and those from non-traditional academic backgrounds

academic backgrounds. Academia has a culture of overwork, so trying to balance that has been a challenge. Having young kids helped because you simply cannot work all the hours when you're raising a family. And I wanted to watch them grow-up because I knew I would never get that time back. I made a conscious decision early on to maintain a work-life balance so that I could be with my kids in the morning and at night, take them to school, bathe them, and read a bedtime story. It wasn't easy but I was fortunate to have the support of my partner and our parents, so it was a team effort.

I've also been fortunate to meet and work with some colleagues who have given me opportunities and pushed me to learn and develop in ways that I may never have. And I try to pay that back. My work in supporting women to achieve their goals was recognised in 2022 when I won the She Inspires 'Girl Up' (national) Award. It was such a privilege. You know, the relationships we have with others, within and outside of academia, can help you to overcome work-related challenges.

What is the inspiration behind the Age of Love project?

Love is such a powerful force. Our Age of Love exhibition consists of 12 images, each with a short narrative, that tell the story of an older couple who are dealing with a sexual difficulty. The couple, Frank and Joy, are very much in love and sex is important to them. The idea was based on findings from our research that shows that the older we get the more difficult it is to get help for a sexual issue. I worked with artist Pete McKee who brought my research findings to life with artwork that used light humour so people could engage with this sensitive topic without the embarrassment. His artistic style is one that people identify with. Pete's work has a theme of strong women and he made sure that Joy was in the driving seat for the Age of Love narrative.

We've exhibited twice in Sheffield and received thousands of visitors, some travelling from afar. Watching them as they laughed, cried, and hugged their partner was a joy and I saw first-hand the value of taking my research to people who may not otherwise hear about it.

The aim of the exhibition was to start a conversation that matters, on a topic we don't often hear about, and we certainly achieved that.

What are some of the complexities in the sexual rights of older people?

There are two key areas here. First, when older age intersects with other categories of identity such as gender, race, disability, social class, it can mean that people experience multiple layers of inequality. So for me, the complexities come to light when we think about the Equality Act and its protected characteristics.

Second, not everyone recognises that sexual rights apply to older adults. Sexual rights are human rights as applied to sexuality, so we all have them. But traditionally sexual rights have been considered in relation to younger people to protect them from HIV and sexually transmitted infections, abuse and violence, and unintended pregnancies. It's important to continue advocating for sexual rights as a life-course issue so that awareness and action extends further than the health and social care contexts and into wider society.

How do sexual rights or lack thereof impact our overall well-being?

Any form of discrimination can affect our health and well-being. And I would argue that when our sexual rights are not being met, that is a form of discrimination. We know that sexual activity can have benefits for our health and well-being, such as the boost to self-esteem from feeling desired, lower levels of depression, better tolerance to pain, better sleep quality and so on. Being able to be our true selves, so our sexual identity has benefits for health as well. Denying people their sexual agency, expression, and freedom to be themselves is damaging to our health, well-being, and society overall.

What is the biggest challenge surrounding women's reproductive health, and how can we collectively work towards eliminating it?



There are a few challenges to choose from here, unfortunately. But as we're talking about midlife and beyond, I will pick the menopausal transition. There is a lot going on about menopause at the moment in the UK so women are learning more about the symptoms and how to manage them, and practitioners are receiving training to support patients. But we need to make sure that the progress we make is inclusive. Women are a diverse bunch, and there are communities that are under-represented in the menopause world. And we need to ensure that trans men and non-binary individuals are not left behind. Gender inequality infiltrates all aspects of health care. There is no one-size-fits-all here.

What's next for you?

I'm currently working with a fantastic team at the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health to develop specialist menopause and sexual well-being training for health professionals. On the community side of things, I am working with a superb local organisation, Heeley Trust, to deliver Age of Love cafes; these are menopause cafes with a twist. The twist is that we focus on sexuality and reproductive health, with the aim to support well-being.

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GASLIGHTING AT WORK

by Audrey Tang



What exactly is gaslighting at work

The term gaslighting, and its characteristics are derived from the 1938 play “Gaslight”, where one man's obsession with an old crime leads him to systematically manipulate his wife into thinking she is going mad. It is seen as emotionally coercive or controlling, and the perpetrator is often doing it to suit their own ends – whether psychologically (It is common behaviour for narcissists who “need” to control, or practically – someone is trying to achieve their agenda). While the original story is one of an intimate relationship, it can also happen in the workplace.

Behaviours particular to gaslighting include:

- Emotional manipulation eg. “Love bombing” through words and actions, interchanged with esteem damaging comments eg. “you’re oversensitive” or “I knew you’d mess that up”
- Defensively projecting behaviours if anyone dares to question anything eg “You’re always accusing me of...” or “You obviously have trust issues.”
- Blatant lying eg. taking credit for work in an open forum and then dismissing any complaint with more negativity eg “That’s hardly being a team player”
- Isolating someone from others who might bring perspective (sometimes with extra lies eg “All I’m doing is looking out for you - you don’t need people like that around you.”)
- Subtle control eg. “You and me, we’re a team, we don’t need anyone else” encouraging dependency.

As well as the above examples, in the workplace one might experience situations such as:

Covert bullying and cliques: Excluding someone from meetings, or deliberately making decisions when they are absent. It may also include playground behaviours such as forming cliques, silos or alliances who all go to lunch together, or all socialise outside work together deliberately not inviting others.

Asking you to be complicit: This might involve asking someone to sign off something they didn't witness, or "tweak" a grade, or turn a blind eye. If it is a senior employee asking this of a junior, they may even say "I'll take full responsibility" to encourage compliance.

Dismissing ideas/Talking over: While this may not be as explicit as someone saying "your degree is worth nothing" (although it can happen), what is more common is being given the chance to speak, but then not being acknowledged; or being cut off before finishing.

The problem with any form of gaslighting is that it takes a while for it to register that it is happening and it can be hard to address for fear of repercussions.

BUT, there are some things you can do.

5 Tips if you think you are being gaslighted

Keep a diary: Record events with dates and times. This can help reaffirm memory and ensures that any discussion is rooted in facts and evidence. Keeping copies of any written correspondence, and make sure conversations with the potential gaslighter, are followed up with an email summary – even if it takes a couple of minutes extra to be written can offer further protection.

A template summary may be:

- 1.Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.
- 2.We discussed...
- 3.My understanding of the next steps is that...

Be aware of options for escalation: Find out who the senior chain of leadership/reporting is – however, approach where possible, approach the immediate manager first unless it is about them, in which case speak to HR for advice on making a report.

- If meeting with HR or a manager, write an agenda for the meeting to remain on track
- Seek the support of the relevant union. This can include having them join meetings to take notes and have an extra pair of eyes and ears. Brief them on the desired outcome and what they are being required to do.
- Have the evidence to present the case
- Access the whistleblowing policy (if there is one, this will often be highlighted as part of the induction process) and follow procedure, otherwise, seek advice from the union.

Practice assertive phrases: Statements such as "I don't remember it happening that way", or "What I said was..." *especially with evidence* – can re-establish the balance of power without causing a confrontation.

Treat cliques with professional politeness: Remember, a clique is not essential for success. However, if the clique involves a direct senior – consider tips 1 and 2.

At worst, leave. No job is worth damage to mental and emotional health – however, consider using the exit interview to give an account of the experience to potentially help those who remain

About Audrey

She is a Chartered Psychologist (CPsychol), and award-winning author - "The Leader's Guide to Resilience" 2021 (prev. The Leader's Guide to Mindfulness" (Pearson & FT, 2018) and "Be A Great Manager - Now" (Pearson, 2016)) with a focus on practical self improvement. She hosts podcast 'Retrain Your Brain for Success', and The Wellbeing Lounge on NLiveRadio, is presenter for "Psych Back to Basics" on DisruptiveTV, and resident psychologist on Channel 4's "Don't Diet Lose Weight", and The Chrissy B Show (Sky).



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ASHLEY EARLEY





Ashley Earley

Ashley Earley grew up in Georgia, where she spent most of her time running wild in the woods of her backyard, building forts to create her own fantasy worlds, obsessing over books, and experimenting with her writing.

Today, she lives in Colorado with her dog and still spends her time devouring any book she can get her hands on, writing, and editing for her clients at Earley Editing, LLC. In May of 2021, she graduated with distinction from the University of Colorado Boulder, receiving a B.A. in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. She also enjoys snowboarding, exploring, annoying her dog, constantly eating chocolate, and sharing her writing adventures on Instagram.

Her Thriller/Suspense short story, *Chasing Hair of Gold*, won first place in the 2016 Writer's Digest Popular Fiction Awards.

As a writer, she leans into fantasy or horror due to her love of all things creepy. As an editor, she loves a little bit of everything when it comes to fiction. Give her that steamy, forbidden romance, give her

give her vampires, or even that young lovey-dovey stuff with all the twists and turns!

Describe the first time you discovered your love for writing

I started writing when I was 14 years old. The first book I ever finished writing was a horrid X-Men knockoff. It took me seven months to write, and by the time I'd finished the first draft, I felt such an intense sensation of accomplishment that I knew I wanted to do it forever.

Since then, I've never stopped. After graduating college, I completely immersed myself in the industry, starting my own book editing business under Earley Editing, LLC, and writing as much as I can on the side.

Favourite quote from a book

“Remember that you are a wolf, and you cannot be caged”—A Court of Wings & Ruin by Sarah J. Maas. The A Court of Thorns and Roses series helped me get through a very rough time in my life and will always have a special place in my heart.

The biggest challenge first-time writers/authors face writing their first book

Speaking as an editor for a moment, the most common thing I see writers/authors struggle with is the “show, don’t tell” technique. Knowing when to show and when to tell is such an important balance within writing, but it’s also have the most confusing technique for writers. An example of showing, writing out an angry action, such as “he clenched his jaw” or “his hands balled into fists,” is stronger than writing “he was angry.” However, when it comes to subtly telling readers about an emotion, “the guards cast wary glances her way” or “his gaze lingered on her in disbelief” are perfect examples of how telling can be useful within the writing.

How do you process writers block?

I have a few coping mechanisms for processing through writer's block. The first go-to is to make myself another cup of coffee and consume a bag of M&M's. Sweets and caffeine are necessary for my "process". If this does not work, I usually find an excuse to take my fur baby Nova on a walk to clear my head. However, if all else fails, I will deep dive into YouTube into true crime podcasts for inspiration. There is no explanation for my madness.

What has been your proudest moment and why?

My proudest moment has to be starting my own business right out of college. I graduated right at the end of the pandemic and getting hired for a job seemed impossible. I wanted to edit books and while working for a publishing house would have been a dream, moving to New York was not a possibility. Somehow, I ended up coming across freelance editing and that was how Earley Editing, LLC was born. I've learned a lot since starting my business and have helped many evolve from writer to published author.

What was the biggest transformation you had from writing?

My biggest transformation has a bit less to do with writing and more to do with networking around writing. I think it's safe to say that a good portion of the writing community considers themselves introverted. I am one of them. I've learned how to put myself out there for my business, Earley Editing, LLC, and market my services to writers. However, with marketing my book, I've realized it's a lot about marketing myself to readers and connecting with readers on an entirely different level. I've learned to put myself out there more and find ways to connect with readers via the BookTok and Bookstagram communities.

What greatest challenge you have faced and how you overcame it

This one also relates to my proudest moment, but my greatest challenge was graduating during the pandemic and starting my company right out of college. I believe the proudest moments come from great challenges and hard times. When I first started my company, I was pitching my services left and right to get writers to trust me enough with their work even though I was just starting as a baby editor. At the same time, I got a second job to help pay the bills, was in a bad living situation, and ended up being scammed out of a job by another editor because I didn't know any better.

My greatest challenge was overcoming those obstacles and coming out of each of them with a successful editing business. still work with many of those writers who first trusted me with their books and am forever grateful for them and their stories. Thanks to my perseverance, I get to start my writing journey now.

What word of advice to aspiring writers

Writers do not feel pressured to follow the writing schedule and "you must write this many words a day to become a bestselling author" pressures from the greats. Write in a way that feels natural to you. If writing 200 words a day is your vibe, you're still 200 words closer to finishing your book. Pushing yourself beyond your limits and comparing yourself to others will only result in burnout. Trust me, I'm speaking from experience.

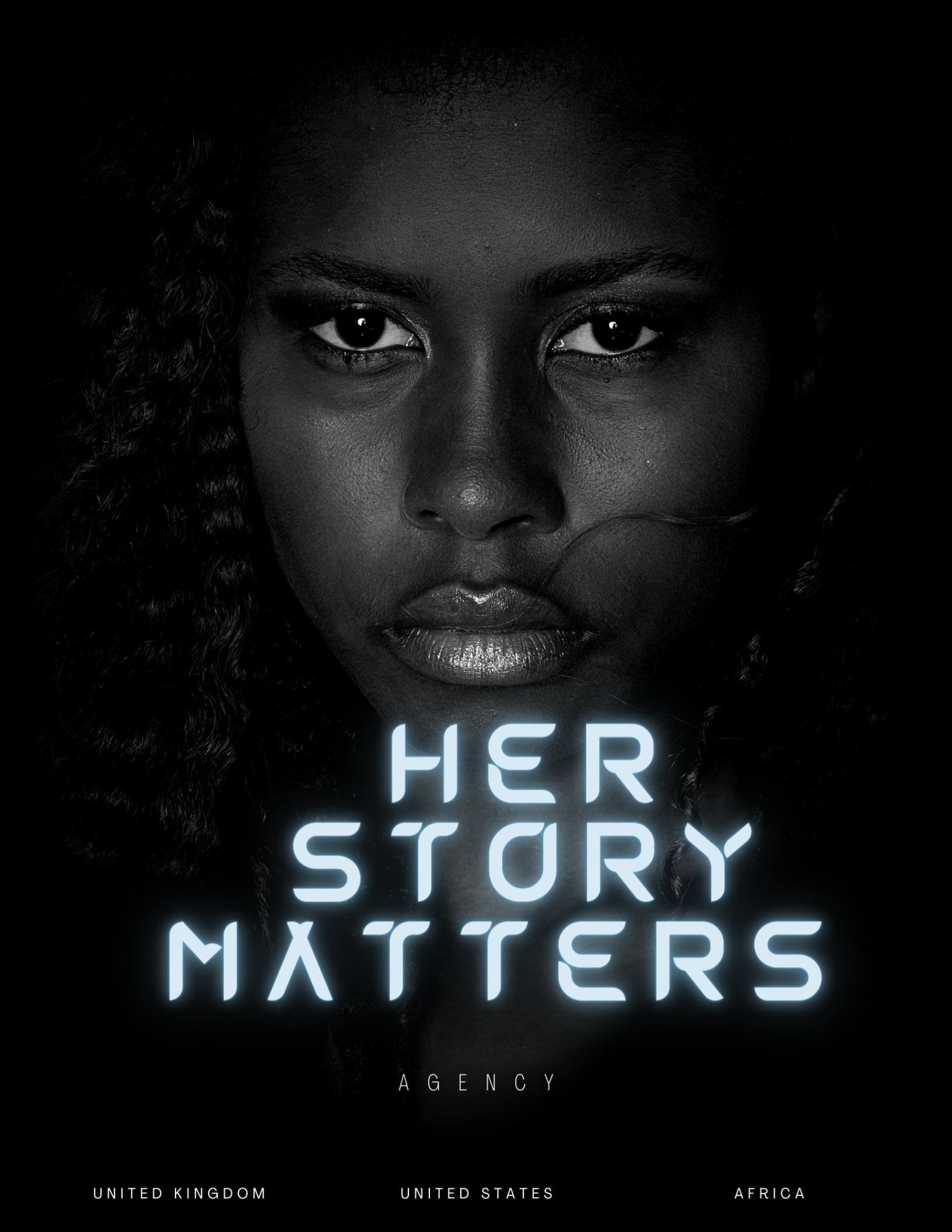
What's next for you

Next, I hope to continue to grow my editing business, but also dedicate more time to writing. I want to find some kind of balance between work and being creative. It's something I've been missing from my life for a while, and it's a goal I'm dedicated to. Working on my upcoming novel, Heart of Skulls, has rekindled this drive and I am motivated more than ever to continue writing in my day-to-day life

Heart of Skulls



ASHLEY EARLEY



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ALEXANDRA STEED



ALEXANDRA STEED

Alexandra has a major interest in landscape, art, and sustainability, and focusses on transforming external spaces that elevate our experience of, and connection to, the natural world. She started her career in Canada, implementing and testing innovative green and blue infrastructure solutions, before moving to London in 2003 and expanding her work to the international field.

In 2013, Alexandra founded URBAN, an urban design and landscape practice, with a vision to bring joy to people's everyday experience. Projects range from urban spaces, to masterplans, to regional landscape strategies. At every scale she brings a rigorous approach and a clear vision to achieve inspired outcomes. Notable projects include: AlUla Landscape Framework and Guidelines, Saudi Arabia, nominated for the Sir David Attenborough Award for Enhancing Biodiversity;

SKY TV London campus; and the South Essex Green and Blue Infrastructure Study, winning numerous national and international awards including Tackling Climate Change and Excellence in Landscape Planning, and the World Architecture Festival X Award.

Aside from her work at URBAN, Alexandra is a Fellow of the Landscape Institute, Fellow RSA, Design Council UK Associate, Highways England Design Reviewer, and lecturer at The Bartlett, UCL. Most importantly, she is mother to two beautiful sons.

How would you describe Alexandra?

Born and raised amidst the breathtaking landscapes of Vancouver, Canada, my love for nature took root deep within me. From a young age, I found solace and inspiration in the beauty surrounding me. Creativity and artistic expression have been constant companions throughout my life, fueling my passion for singing, painting, ceramics, printmaking, and acting. Aesthetics became the guiding force behind my endeavours.

After completing my fine arts studies at university, I yearned for a more profound connection between my creativity and the natural world. This longing led me to pursue a master's degree in landscape architecture, a perfect fusion of my greatest loves. I saw it as an opportunity to curate and shape the natural environment, infusing my artistic expression into transformative landscapes.

In 2003, I made a life-changing decision to move to London, England, my father's birthplace. This vibrant city became my new home, and it was there that my two sons, Angus and Johnny, were born—my greatest loves. Family and friends held immense importance to me, and I dedicated myself to nurturing the connections I had built in London and Vancouver.

Driven by an unyielding restlessness, genuine happiness for me lies in remaining productive and engaged. I strive to make a positive impact through my work and creative endeavours, constantly seeking to bring beauty and meaning to the world.

The appreciation for nature, the pursuit of beauty, and the desire to connect people with their environment

continue to define my life's journey—a quest for truth and beauty.

My passions have guided my professional path. As a Fellow of the Landscape Institute (FLI) and the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA), I have influenced urban environments worldwide throughout my career.

In 2013, I founded URBAN with a vision to create landscapes that bring joy and enhance well-being. My designs aim to foster meaningful connections with the natural environment, enriching people's lives.

Beyond my practice, I actively advise and serve on expert panels for organizations such as the Design Council UK and the Government's Office for Place. I share my knowledge as a lecturer at The Bartlett, UCL, and volunteer my time to empower communities and develop inclusive public spaces through neighbourhood plans and landscape visions.

My exceptional contributions to landscape architecture have garnered prestigious awards, including the WAFX Award for innovative solutions to global challenges. I have also received The LI Award for Excellence in Tackling Climate Change and won the Best Landscape Architecture Project in the UK. Additionally, I was shortlisted for the Sir David Attenborough Award, highlighting my dedication to preserving and enhancing biodiversity and ecosystems.

With valuable experience as Principal of Design for AECOM London and Director of Martha Schwartz Partners' London office, I am dedicated to integrating natural processes and systems into my designs. My work and advocacy strive to combat climate change, protect ecosystems, and inspire others to appreciate and engage with the natural world.

What is your design process?

My design process is driven by a passion for connecting people and their environment in fresh ways. I always start with an in-depth understanding of a landscape, its natural systems and processes, and overlay these with community knowledge and stories. I aim to merge the community and nature harmoniously, creating landscapes that are

Nurturing, sustainable, and productive.

My vision is to bring joy to people's everyday experiences by infusing an artistic approach into my designs. Each landscape is treated as a unique work of art, fostering new perspectives and expressions.

I engage actively with clients, the community, and stakeholders, exploring possibilities while understanding the physical site. Our designs evolve through collaboration and refinement, revealing the uniqueness of each place.

Collaboration and understanding are paramount to my process. I work closely with my team, clients, and community, exchanging ideas and expertise. This process balances strategic considerations and attention to detail, resulting in integrated designs. We create meaningful landscapes that enrich lives by connecting people and their environment in fresh ways.

What has been your most challenging work/design?

One of my most challenging work experiences was during a complex landscape project in the Middle East. Despite the project's intricate nature, the significance of landscape architecture was underestimated by those involved. It often feels like a constant battle to advocate for the proper recognition of the landscape. However, I have come to accept that such is the reality of our world.

During this project, I encountered a group of less than supportive individuals. Despite my team's exceptional work, I became the target of their animosity simply because I was a woman. Dealing with such blatant sexism proved to be both real and incredibly challenging to handle professionally. Nonetheless, I remained determined and persevered, completing the project to the highest standards. Our efforts eventually garnered prestigious awards, but this experience highlighted the importance of seeking clients who share similar values and treat consultants with respect. Working with clients who lack these qualities can be emotionally draining. Therefore, I have learned to be more discerning about the clients I choose to collaborate with, ensuring alignment not only in professional goals but also in mutual respect and integrity.



What inspires you

What truly lights up my spirit are those magical moments in life that leave an indelible mark of inspiration. It's the simple joys of connecting with loved ones, sharing laughter and stories, and building precious memories together. It's also the awe-inspiring sight of a breathtaking painting that stirs my imagination or the captivating melodies of a musical composition that transport me to another realm. Nature, too, never fails to leave me in awe. Whether it's the sunlight filtering through the leaves of a gorgeous tree, a field bursting into a riot of blossoms, the sweet melody of a bird's song, or even a butterfly deciding to land on my hand—those moments are pure magic! They inspire me like nothing else, igniting a desire to bring people closer to the sheer beauty of the world around us. There's so much to take in, and I'm passionate about sharing that beauty with everyone. There is abundant beauty to revel in, and my passion lies in bringing this beauty to the forefront and weaving it into the fabric of our lives.

What is Alexandras' proudest moment and why?

Among my proudest moments, two significant milestones stand out, and they are intricately intertwined. Firstly, summoning the courage to leave my employment and venture into the unknown by starting my own practice was a defining moment. It was undeniably risky, but deep down, I recognized that it would be even riskier for my health and well-being to remain stagnant. Embracing this leap of faith allowed me to prioritize my own growth and fulfilment.

Simultaneously, I decided to break free from a dysfunctional marriage that had consumed nearly a quarter of a century. This required immense bravery, and the journey was far from smooth. Yet, I have never once looked back, as the newfound freedom, peace, and joy I have in my life are invaluable. These two transformative changes were intimately linked. Both centred around leaving behind a life where the desires of others dictated my existence.

It was about finding my voice, living authentically, and charting my unique journey. While the road may have been challenging, the rewards of self-discovery and personal fulfilment have made it all worthwhile.

What influenced your career path and transition establishing your practice?

The decision to start my own practice stemmed from a deep-rooted desire for autonomy and the freedom to pursue my passions without limitations. Throughout my career, I found myself drawn to the bigger picture, fascinated by strategic issues, and motivated to understand what truly drives a company's success. The prospect of charting my path, free from the constraints of others' expectations, became increasingly appealing. However, the motivation to start my own practice extended beyond my professional aspirations. It was driven by a pressing need to better care for myself and find a sustainable work-life balance. Working tirelessly for a large corporation, constantly travelling, and being separated from my young children took a toll on my well-being and the harmony within my family. I recognized that the traditional corporate structure was not conducive to prioritizing the needs of my loved ones. By establishing my own practice, I could dictate when, how, and with whom I worked. This newfound flexibility allowed me to create an environment where I could excel professionally while nurturing my family. The journey of entrepreneurship has empowered me to do excellent work alongside remarkable individuals while placing my family at the forefront of my life.

How is URBAN reconnecting humans and the environment?

Our approach to connecting people with nature is rooted in the belief that the landscape is the bridge between people and the natural world, manifesting our relationship with nature. Through our landscape-led approach, we delve into comprehensive studies of the environment, mapping layers of ecological and social information

social information to understand the context and potential of the place thoroughly. By engaging in workshops with various stakeholders, community organizations, and experts, we gather valuable insights that enrich our understanding of the landscape.

Our designs are guided by the principles of healthy ecological functioning, ensuring harmony with the land, water, and air. Critical strategies for connecting people with nature include establishing regional parkland to provide an integrated landscape framework, building habitat connectivity to support ecosystems, integrating water management systems to enhance resilience, harmonizing agricultural practices for climate change and biodiversity, and revealing and celebrating unique landscape features. Additionally, we emphasize the importance of holistic planning for growth and development, guiding sustainable practices that respect and coexist with nature.

By shifting our focus to the land and engaging the whole community, we tap into the intelligence of nature, leading the way towards sustainable development. Through this approach, we foster a harmonious relationship with the natural environment and unlock countless benefits. By implementing living infrastructure and embracing a rehabilitated relationship with the land, we pave the way for greener, healthier, and more sustainable futures for all.

URBAN has a huge emphasis on collaboration, how has this impacted the organization?

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do at our company, and it has truly transformed our approach. We believe in working closely together within our team and with our clients, stakeholders, and community groups. This collaborative mindset helps us refine and shape the best ideas and solutions. We value the importance of listening and embracing feedback throughout the entire design process, from start to finish. Our success lies in our ability to establish, nurture, and sustain dialogue, cross-fertilization, and share experiences, knowledge, and expertise among all members of our integrated team. This collaborative and fresh approach is woven into every project we take on.

When creating beautiful landscapes, we fully engage ourselves in exploration. We team up with clients, communities, stakeholders, and other professionals while immersing ourselves in a deep understanding of the physical site. This allows us to envision many possibilities and ultimately craft the most elegant and meaningful designs that truly reflect the essence of a place. We approach our work with open eyes, bringing our ideas while remaining open to learning, adapting, and working harmoniously with the contributions of others. Our designs go through an iterative process, where we refine and fine-tune until we discover the perfect solution that showcases the unique character of each location. It's a sensitive and collaborative approach that brings out the best in our work, leaving a lasting impression on every project.

How do you spend your free time?

I hang out with my lovely sons, Angus and Johnny, along with our charming dog, Silvie. One thing that lights up my day is going on long walks in the most stunning landscapes, particularly on the coast. Whenever possible, I love swimming in the ocean. Connecting with friends is very important to me, and I often find myself at the pub after work for a quick drink to catch up with friends and have a few laughs. Oh, and I can't forget about my weekly Pilates sessions! It's not just about staying fit; it's about laughing, stretching, and being rejuvenated by my fabulous friends. I also adore reading. There's so much wisdom out there, and I can't resist diving into books to learn from the insight of others. For me, life's all about adventure, connection, and continual learning.

What's next for you?

I have a book coming out soon called *Portrait to Landscape*. It's all about shaking up our perspective of the world, shifting from a narrow focus on humans to a wide-angle view that embraces the beauty and importance of nature.

Alongside my book project, I'll be continuing my work at Urban and juggling my commitments to the Office for Place, Design Council, and teaching at the Bartlett. Whatever life brings, I'm ready to dive right in.



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ISSUE 17 | AUGUST 2023