Douglas
County
Libraries

HUMAN LIBRARY®

*un*judge someone.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2020 1-4PM
CASTLE ROCK, PHILIP S. MILLER BRANCH

HUMAN LIBRARY READER AGREEMENT

The purpose of Douglas County Libraries' Human Library is to encourage dialogue that helps people understand perspectives and life experiences that may differ from their own. Just like borrowing a book from the library, you can "check out" a human book for a 20-minute conversation.

GUIDELINES FOR HUMAN LIBRARY READERS

The Reader must be respectful in their questions and conversations with the Human Book.

The Reader accepts that the Human Book may end the conversation if they feel that the Reader is treating him or her inappropriately or disrespectfully.

The loan period is for 20 minutes. The Reader may not record, videotape or photograph the Human Book.

The Reader may not ask the Human Book for personal contact information. All requests for further contact should be made through the Human Library organizers.

GROUND RULES FOR DIALOGUE

Personal stories are confidential, unless the owners of the stories agree that they may be shared.

Listen and treat others with respect.

If you are offended or uncomfortable, say so, and explain.

Speak for yourself, not others.

Be willing to be open and honest.

Do not cut people off.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS/ CONVERSATION STARTERS

Tell me about yourself.

What experience was the most influential in making you the person you are today?

What is a typical day like for you?

Why did you want to be a Human Book?

What do you hope to accomplish?

Do you wish you could go back in time to change a decision you made?

What's a good thing happening in your life right now? What makes it good?

What were some of the more difficult aspects of your life? What made it difficult?

Are you part of a community or support system?

Tell me three things about you that make you unique.

How do you deal with adversity?

1

FORMER TIGER MOM

As a self-described "tiger mom" of four, I challenged, stretched and often pushed my children to excel in school, sports and music. With only one child left at home and living in a new and unfamiliar town, I took a leap into education and began working with at-risk students at our local high school. With a student body of over 2,100, I was tasked with creating a program for students at the bottom 10% of the academic standards. With my "tiger mom" tendencies, I set goals and created matrices to "help" students reach the potential I thought they could achieve. What I quickly learned was that these students needed more than goals and spreadsheets. These students needed someone who would meet them where they were. And where they were ranged from homeless, adopted, addicted, anxious, depressed, misunderstood, paroled and hundreds of other labels that allowed other people to judge them or simply overlook them. Soon my goals for them went out the window and were replaced with an intense need to know them and love them no matter where they were. My goal was to meet them where they were.

2

SERVICE DOG

Overnight, life as I knew it changed. A few days before Christmas, 2016, I suffered a massive ischemic stroke in the right side of my brain. Instead of spending the holidays at home with my family, I spent them in the ICU at a local hospital. My left side was affected; I lost the use of my left arm and hand and have weakness in my left leg. I spent two months at a rehab center, learning to talk, walk and take care of myself. My goal was to return to work and live independently. Learning to function one-handed in a two-handed world was difficult and challenging. Enter Ollie, my service dog! Ollie is trained to assist me at home, work, and in public settings. He picks things up, carries them for me, retrieves the mail, and even helps me with the laundry. Ollie goes to work with me every day and is loved by everyone he meets. I don't know how I'd manage without him. Come visit Ollie and me and learn what life with a service dog is like, and how he allows me to remain independent as a stroke survivor.

3

EARLY MARRIAGE

I was born in Vietnam during the period of what Americans call The Vietnam War. When I was 16, I was married to an American GI. This man was a stranger to me. We didn't even speak each other's language. My mother must have thought this arrangement would protect me from war and poverty. She must have thought the marriage would provide me with opportunities for a good life in America. But after my husband brought me to the United States, it was apparent that he suffered from PTSD. He became abusive. We divorced. I had to learn English and become self-reliant for myself and my children. I did a variety of jobs to get by and eventually started my own business, from which I have now retired. I am now married to a man who respects me. My faith has helped me persevere through the many hardships in my life. I continue to learn and grow, appreciative of the new opportunities each day brings.

4

CANCER SURVIVOR

My Aunt Ruthie died during my freshman year of college. It was 1985, and this was my introduction to cancer, a disease that would profoundly change my life. Her heart-wrenching battle was long and ugly. The following year, my Aunt Jackie fought her own battle and lost. During the four years I was in college I lost four aunts to cancer. We didn't know it at the time, but my dad's nine siblings and my mom's five siblings would all die from cancer before the summer of 2012. For roughly twenty-seven years we went through the spiral of detection, seemingly torturous treatment and then defeat. Just one month after we said goodbye to my Aunt Diana, cancer moved into my generation. I was diagnosed with cancer.

5

COCAINE ADDICTION

Raised in a family that moved every couple of years, and the eldest of six children who were his charge because both parents worked full time, our book decided to leave home before graduating high school (but stayed in town long enough to graduate). A fierce desire to "have a life" of his own and shed responsibilities dictated a life based on self-will. There was no sense of community, so options were many indeed. Opening a book store, driving a cab, working a survey crew in the Colorado Rockies, and a stint in the library of the University of California, Santa Cruz, were a few of his attempts at life. The late 1960s and time in Topanga Canyon led to the world of drug experimentation and the downward spiral to the darkness of cocaine addiction in a basement. Walking South Broadway at night, the judgmental stares and sneers from passersby were frequent. Slowly, there was full retreat to the basement. Come see how a life was resurrected from this miasma. A thirty-year journey to the heart, and meaning in life followed, a new community and purpose in life finally achieved; home is found.

6

HOMELESS

I had worked all my adult life, paid my bills and had a car. Then my roommate decided to sell her house and I had to find a new home. Because by then I was retired and living on a fixed income, my options were very limited. Rents were more than I could afford. Even subsidized senior housing rents would have been a challenge for me to pay. No matter: none of those apartments was available and the complexes had wait lists of 3-10 years. There I was: homeless! People never expect something like homelessness to become a part of their life. I know I didn't. Being homeless is itself enough of a challenge, but I also had to deal with the judgement of people, strangers and friends alike, who thought I had brought this on myself, or that I hadn't tried hard enough to find a new place. My only options seemed to be to live out of my car or to relocate to a state where the cost of living was lower. Fortunately, I learned about the Winter Shelter Network, a service for women and children organized by area churches. The Network gave me hot dinners, a warm place to sleep, and led to new friendships, new connections, a new chance at an independent life, and a new empathy for others who found themselves without a permanent home.

7

HOMESCHOOLER

Being homeschooled elicits interesting questions and comments from people. Mainly, "Are you allowed to go to school in your pajamas?" or "Huh, you're nothing like what I thought a homeschooler would be." Hi, I'm a homeschooler. I laugh and talk like a human; I look like a human, and I have come out of my hole to tell you about homeschooling. I know, shocking. What is a homeschooler? By definition, homeschooling is doing school at home. From personal experience, I can tell you the difference between public school and homeschool. A few main differences from traditional school include schedule management and the ability to choose my own curriculum. Decisions I have had to make as a homeschooler possess differences from other parts of life. Applying to college has some interesting challenges as well, but also benefits. Educating about education at home prevails to be the topic of conversation.

8

CAREGIVER

It's 2012, and after waiting 54 years, my newly-retired husband and I are finally moving to Colorado. Our retirement involves enjoying the beautiful mountains and spending more time with my family. Forty-eight hours after we arrive, I get the phone call. My father, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's a decade prior, is now in medical crisis. My mom's cancer diagnosis follows shortly thereafter. Although I always imagined that I would care for my parents as they got older, it's now glaringly clear that retirement is not going to be what I thought it was going to be. In this moment, I have a choice to make: I can let the situation overwhelm me and hope that I barely survive, or I can commit to figuring out how to thrive throughout the caregiving journey. The choice is obvious, but the path is unclear. Over the course of two and a half years, my singular focus was on providing the best possible full-time care and protecting the dignity and quality of life of my parents. Seemingly overnight, I found myself unexpectedly immersed in the medical system and the world of care. I was unfamiliar with the complexities of hiring caregivers, selecting facilities, patient advocacy, as well as the medical, legal, financial and insurance aspects of care. I learned everything the hard way. I advocated for the compassionate and dignified care of my parents, and managed the treatment of their physical diagnoses, fighting the associated stigmas. I continued to connect deeply with my parents until the day they each passed away at home as they wished. The day my father passed away at 92, he said something meaningful to me, and expressed love for my mom, his wife of nearly 70 years. My mother followed peacefully eight months later. It was not easy, but with a clear philosophy, goal and strategy, I created a roadmap to navigate the unknown process of caregiving. In honor of my parents and as their legacy, it is now my mission to share what I learned while caring for my parents, so that others may more easily ensure their parents can live a "most meaningful life" through their final days.

9

IMMIGRANT

I was born in El Salvador, but I grew up in the USA. My family immigrated to the US in the 1980s during the civil war in El Salvador. We were a relatively wealthy family, and we were able to qualify for asylum. As an adult, I am aware of how coming from a wealthy family and having a fair complexion has afforded me privileges different from many other immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. As a result, I have spent my career supporting people in poverty and supporting children and families. I now use my privilege, connection to my heritage and experience growing up as an immigrant to be “a voice for the extreme poor.”

10

CHILDHOOD ILLNESS

Some of my first memories as a child were being in a children’s hospital ward due to a mysterious illness that caused pain, immune responses like inflammation, fever and fatigue. It was a scary place, with children crying and dying in beds around me. Was I going to die? After additional hospital admittance, I was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. As a young teen, I endured symptoms that held me back both physically and emotionally. Then in my middle teens, I decided not to give in to the pain and symptoms, and to get physically active. Later, in college, I had an epiphany that instead of pursuing a job for money, power or even fun, I wanted to pursue a position of purpose to help others. Join me to hear and discuss how what appears to be negative life experience and suffering, can be turned into something positive for a meaningful life by helping others improve or maintain health and wellbeing. Can we be grateful for negative life events?

11

ROCKET SCIENTIST

You probably are familiar with the highlights of our country’s space programs, starting with the formation of the National Space Agency (NASA) in 1958. You may know that it was President Kennedy’s challenge, delivered in 1961, to send men to the moon’s surface and to bring them back—that really got things moving. You may have followed each mission by watching it broadcast on TV, but I was a part of it! I was an engineering manager in the Mission Evaluation Room (MER). My fellow NASA Subsystem Managers were at their consoles as Neil Armstrong piloted the Lunar Module to its historic touchdown – a descent filled with computer alarms, rapidly depleting engine fuel and a landing site filled with boulders, some of which were as big as cars. I will share the elation of the successful missions, as well as the agony of the tragic accidents of Apollo 13 and Space Shuttle Challenger. All of them affected my life and career.

12

SEARCH AND RESCUE

It could have been one of the worst days of your life. You may have fallen while rock climbing, driven your dirt bike into a tree, gotten lost or hurt miles out on a trail (and it’s now dark and cold), found that an aging parent walked away from home, or your child didn’t come home from school. These, and many other challenges, are where DCSAR (Douglas County Search and Rescue) gets called in to help make a “worst day” have a much better outcome. I am a multi-year fielded member of DCSAR and one of its Public Information Officers. Search and Rescue’s mantra is “So others may live,” going out any time of day or night, in any weather condition, driving from all over the county – to find and help folks in need. We’re an all-volunteer professional organization under the Sherriff’s Office, comprised of highly-trained members who’ve chosen to dedicate their time, energy and passion to serving – often leaving family and home or work to do this. We average over 140 searches and 45 rescues per year, spending over 2,600 hours on missions and driving roughly 30,000 miles, with another 8,000 hours in training each year – to be at our best when things are at their worst. In this “book,” you’ll hear and dig into what goes into being a Fielded Member of a SAR team, what to do to make your own wilderness journeys safer, and some examples of the searches and rescues our team has had the privilege to serve the community through.

13

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

My family and I believe that ordinary citizens can make extraordinary change happen with the choices that we make in our daily lives. Sustainable living has been a lifelong effort and learning process where finance, life circumstances and technology have molded our choices. Of course, we always had the principle of sustainability to guide us by the simple adage “waste not, want not.” I will describe two major upgrades that we believe were clearly sustainable choices for our bank account and the environment. A few years ago, when propane costs got pretty high, we began looking to replace our 80% (or possibly even less) efficient furnace that came with the house, with Geothermal. Because the system draws from fairly stable subsoil temperatures of around 55°F all through the year, we can also cool our house in the summer without the need for a separate air conditioning system. A solar panel was the natural next step, because we use IREA for electricity. My story of sustainable living has proven to me that ordinary citizens can make extraordinary change happen.

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9/11 SURVIVOR

The morning of September 11, 2001, I was emerging from the Canal Street Subway station in New York City when I noticed that the wind was strange. There were papers flying around. Cars, trucks and cabs had stopped in the middle of the Broadway and Howard Street intersection, and a cluster of dazed, befuddled drivers stood in front of their parked cars, right in the middle of the street. Everyone was looking in the same direction with a strange glow reflecting off their faces. “Is this an eclipse?” A moment later I was staring at a gaping fire wound. “A drunk pilot hit the tower,” a delivery truck driver told me. Everyone had a different theory on what was going on. When the second plane wound around the second tower and disappeared behind it, things were moving in slow motion. An explosion of heat and a shock wave. A sensation that felt like an enormous metal spring released as I was slammed by a wall of sound. It’s almost twenty years later now and life has moved on and forward for me. In Colorado, where 9/11 remains a somewhat abstract and distant tragedy. As the long-term impacts of this emotionally as well as environmentally traumatic event start to reveal themselves through long-term and sometimes costly health care needs I feel increasingly compelled to share my story. Readers are invited to check me out to learn more.

15

AUTISTIC GIRL

In 2014, my oldest daughter was diagnosed with ASD, or Autism Spectrum Disorder. She was 13 years old. How did we not see this sooner? Why did no one see this? It turned our world upside-down and momentarily crushed our hopes and dreams for her. For the past five years, we have been on an amazing journey together. It started with my having to unlearn everything I thought I knew about her, and then learning to understand how she actually sees the world around her. With her help, the guidance of therapists, and lots of books, I have tried to piece together how my daughter’s mind works in order to help her navigate school, social situations, and the future. In turn, my daughter has had to learn what it means to be autistic, how she differs from “normal” people, and how to function in a world that she often does not understand. It has sometimes been a frustrating and heartbreaking journey, yet it has also been enlightening and joyful. We have helped each other with the challenges and celebrated the gifts. My hope is to share those moments with you, the signs that led up to the diagnosis, and to offer up my perspective of her world.