

Aspire To



Jane



Sandamini

**This book is dedicated to our future leaders.
May you stride forward boldly and shine
bright like the unique stars that you are.**

- Jane Hearst & Sandamini Pallepitiya



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The Smart Gene

"What hero shall I be today" Jessica thought, as she walked past her local petrol station. She glanced at the workers as they cleaned a car. "I could do that!" she thought, rushing back to grab some bubbles and a sponge.

She was just 12 years old when she started her first business, the local car wash. It made her feel adventurous, like the heroes in her favourite movies. It was good to have a hobby that showed her how bold she was, because at school Jessica didn't feel the same. She found maths and science very difficult. She struggled to copy things from the board. "Jess, you're not passing" her teacher said, "Some people get it, and some people don't. It's in your genes".

Then, one day, Jessica was eating pizza with her brothers. "James and Jerelle have eaten most of the pizza" she complained to her mum. "There's only one pizza, 3/4ths of it is gone, there's only a quarter left for me!" She paused. She was suddenly filled with energy. "Wait, I'm not stupid, I do know fractions!" she delighted, "I am smart!"



From that day onward, Jessica began to teach herself. From calculating diameter using donuts, to considering the surface area of ridged potato chips. "I know how to make a good cup of tea" she thought, "I know just the right amount of sugar, the right amount of milk to make my mum smile. That's what makes me a scientist".



At university Jessica found out that she had a superpower called dyslexia. This means that, whilst she may struggle to read in the same way that other people do, she is great at thinking outside of the box and making inventive creations.

As Jessica's classmates were partying and enjoying free time at university, Jessica was designing family-friendly science for the community. She would turn shops into funky laboratories to help people enjoy different types of experiments in the local shopping centre and encourage them to channel their 'inner scientists' too. She took these lessons as far as Sierra Leone, where the Vice-President even came to participate!

Jessica is now a successful scientist but her journey there was tough. When she first became a scientist, people saw her doing amazing work during the day, but every night she went home to a freezing building and slept on the floor. She had to remain strong, so she fuelled herself with happy music every morning.

Jessica knows that being different at times can be scary. You may feel like you're alone, you may feel like the world is against you, however, embrace what makes you different. It's always better to stand out than stand in.

"The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all." - Mulan



A Traveller's Wisdom

There were two things that Janis dreamed about as a child. The first was to be a pianist. She loved classical music, so learning the piano brought her happiness. Her second dream was to travel the world. Her family travelled all the time. When they returned from their trips, they would bring back special chocolates and souvenirs for her.

Janis' father taught her to strive for excellence, so when she played the piano, she knew she had to be good enough to perform. As Janis got older, her teachers wanted her to focus on schoolwork. She worried she could no longer be excellent at playing the piano, so she stopped practising. Instead, Janis chose a new passion. This time she would become an expert at speaking English. She believed that this would help her when she travelled one day.



When Janis was 18, she moved away from her home city of Taipei, in the country of Taiwan, to live in Vancouver, Canada. The lifestyle in Canada was different. Her friends in Taipei were interested in fashion but not her new friends in Vancouver. The new friends preferred nature.

At first, Janis found this unusual, but she grew to love nature later. It brought a balance to her life and changed the way that she felt about her body.



Janis went on to live in lots of other places, like America, Australia, Czech Republic, China and England. Everywhere she travelled, she learned something new about herself.

When she was in Asia, it was very normal to be quiet, so Janis was very shy. But in America, she learnt to be confident and speak up to be a leader. She loved that other women had powerful handshakes, and she wanted to be like them.

Eventually, Janis realised that she could become whoever she wanted to be by travelling to the country with the right environment. Once she lived somewhere long enough, her body always felt different. Her behaviour would change to fit in, and she would learn new things about herself.

For her job, she began to teach others how they could learn from different cultures too. Sometimes she played a game where she could guess where somebody was from by how they behaved. Janis realised that her travel experiences had taught her some very unique talents. Now, she uses these talents to help people with their health.

Janis is successful because she welcomes change. She challenges the way she thinks so that she can continue to grow. Janis' top tip for others is to not be scared of what other people think. By communicating our thoughts and making the right judgements, we can become the best version of ourselves.



Personality and Perseverance



At 6-years old, Christopher was running with his friends. He tried hard to keep up, but he couldn't match their speed. Christopher's mum wondered if something was wrong. "There's nothing to worry about" said their doctor, but Christopher's teachers disagreed. They noticed that he fell over a lot and got tired really easily. "He's just lazy" said the doctor, but Christopher's mum knew he wasn't lazy and took him to see some specialist doctors instead.

It was at this point that Christopher was diagnosed with Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease. This meant that there was damage to some of his nerves, so he struggled to control his muscles. After that, Christopher was forced to go to a school for disabled children. Here there was a mixture of children with physical and mental needs. Even though the children

were different, everyone was treated the same. They treated Christopher like he was something to be hidden away. They didn't see how smart he could be.

Christopher began to act naughty and mischievous, so his mum decided to teach him at home instead. When he was 14, he got into a regular school. He finally felt free. But Christopher continued to misbehave. By being cheeky, people saw Christopher as more than his disability. He wanted his personality to shine.

Then, Christopher's condition got worse. As an adult, he struggled to walk, and his voice began to change. Some of his friends started to disappear. This made him very lonely.



Christopher had to spend more time in hospital. Here the people made him feel loved. They saw him for everything that he was. He started to look within himself for his value and he accepted his disability.

After he left the hospital, Christopher joined a college to study art. He was surrounded by other disabled students who were all excellent at what they did. They were well supported and encouraged to be amazing. One day, Christopher was asked to draw a picture of himself. He didn't think he could do it, but after some encouragement, he decided to try. Christopher supported his drawing arm on top of his

other and created a fantastic picture. In that moment, he knew he had a beautiful future ahead of him.

Christopher went to university and became an artist. Now he uses his art to explore the human experience. His work teaches others about how different choices affect vulnerable people. He challenges what support is given to those who are poor or living with disabilities. He helps people to experience what it's like to be disabled.

Now, Christopher loves his life. He has his own house and leads a successful business. He is surrounded by brilliant friends, a fantastic team and amazing carers. His art is powerful. It helps to create a better world. If his younger self could see him now, he would think "wow, you're actually quite cool".



The Goal of Friendship

When Chloe was young, she was very jealous of the other girls. They always got to wear dresses to school, whereas she was made to dress like a boy. When she was 7 years old, she sat around her grandma's house colouring in her nails with a pink felt-tip pen. She thought they looked amazing, but when she went to school the next day she got bullied for them. From that day onwards, Chloe hid a part of herself away and tried to be a boy like people told her to.



It wasn't until Chloe was 30-years old that she started to express herself again. One day, she was watching a TV programme about a girl like her. A girl that was born with a different body. In the show, the woman was able to change her body to match her soul, through a process called transitioning. "This is me" thought Chloe, "this is what I need to do".

After some support from her doctor, it was time to tell her family. At first they were worried that life would be difficult for Chloe. The only stories they had heard about women like her were through the media, which made their lives sound scary and unfair. But with the family's support, Chloe knew that she could get through anything.

A few years later, Chloe's friends invited her to take part in a girls football game. She had loved playing football at school, so she thought this was a great idea!



Chloe enjoyed playing with them so much that she decided to join a professional club call Oadby and Wigston Ladies. They invited her to come and play with them, but as Chloe arrived she was filled with nerves.

"What if they don't accept me?" she thought, as she waited in the car-park. Chloe had checked with the Football Association that she was allowed to play in a girls team. They were the people that made the rules for football clubs. But sometimes people make up their own rules and she didn't want to play with anyone that would be mean to her.

She slowly built up the courage to go and say hello. "You're tall!" said the manager, "you can go in goal". At first, Chloe worried that being tall was a bad thing, but the more she played, the more she realised that this could be her superpower! In fact, she was a great goalie. She even progressed to play in the national league!

But for Chloe, football will always be more than just a game. It is a place to make friendships, to share experiences with your teammates and grow together throughout life's journeys.



Drive and Destiny

Raghu was raised in the state of Kerala, in South India. Education was very important to his family and they expected Raghu to get a good job like them.

Raghu was sent to a catholic boarding school where strict discipline was the norm. Anybody who broke the rules were punished, and caning was the most widely used

method of punishment. Raghu hated this very much. But this experience helped Raghu to build his drive.

Drive is a power that you can feel in your body. Something that pushes you forward when things get hard. Something that inspires you to achieve. From a young age, Raghu had a drive to help others.

There were many ways that Raghu could help others. When he was 16, Raghu trained in Yoga, and he gave classes alongside yoga instructors. Yoga helps people to

find strength in their body and mind. Raghu was interested in yoga, meditation, and the Indian spiritual writings from an early age. These interests inspired Raghu to study psychology for his first degree. He hoped to become a psychologist.

A psychologist is somebody that studies emotions and behaviours.

Raghu wanted to be a psychologist so that he could learn about people's inner worlds. He wanted to understand how our community changes the way we think and feel. Other people told Raghu that he should focus on fixing people with broken minds. But Raghu didn't believe in broken minds. He believed that the world shapes us. That to have a healthy mind, we need a healthy life.



In Raghu's first job, he looked after people with learning disabilities. These are people who learn in unique ways and experience the world differently to others. Sometimes when they got frustrated, these people would show highly disruptive

behaviours. Raghu's job was to support them to learn adaptive behaviours.



At first, the job was scary. But after a while, Raghu realised that simple activities like drawing a picture or building a puzzle helped people to feel peaceful. He was good at making people feel safe, so they didn't need to scream or hit people anymore. "I can't believe how calm they are" said Raghu's boss. He was very impressed.

From that point on, Raghu slowly became an expert. Now, he is a successful Professor of Mental

Health. This means that he creates research into culture and wellbeing and leads other researchers too. Along his journey, Raghu faced great difficulties. When he was 30 years old he went deaf in his right ear. He experienced dizziness and struggled to understand what people were saying. But he was determined to be heard.

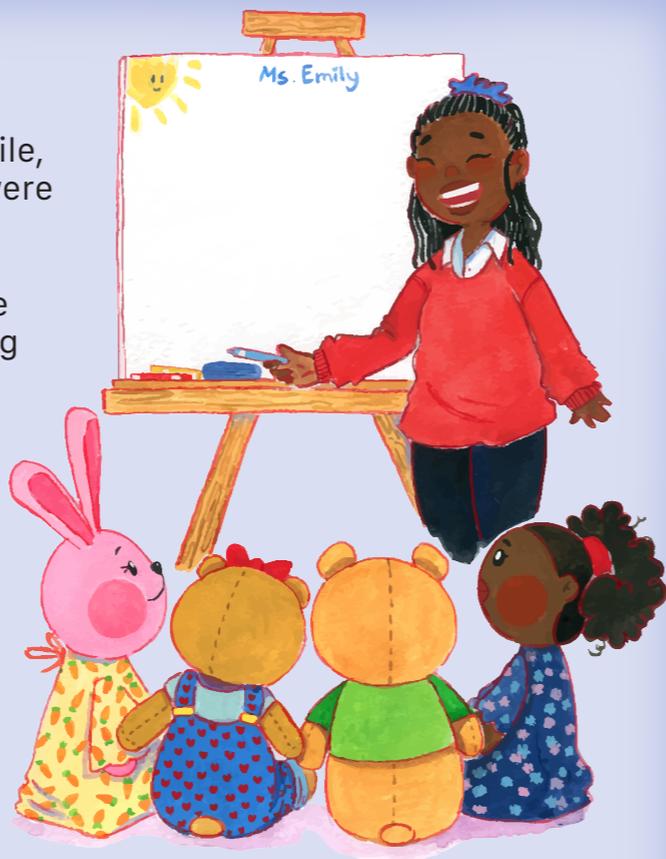
No matter what, Raghu's drive pushed him forward. He trusted in his destiny and this allowed him to help many people. He believes that we are not able to change the whole world and make everybody happy. But we can change a few people's lives, and if we can do this, then we have achieved great success!



The History of Me

Emily had an unusual upbringing. For a while, she was fostered by a white family. They were very loving and treated her as an equal. Sometimes they would struggle to do her hair, but that didn't bother Emily. Then one day, Emily learned about Martin Luther King at school. She realised the significance of her black identity. This was more than just a skin colour. This skin carried a rich history of stories about power.

Eventually, Emily moved back home with her birth-mum. As part of an immigrant family, her mum had a lot of drive. She didn't want Emily to experience the same difficulties that she had. This meant that Emily needed to work hard. She wasn't allowed to watch TV between Monday and Thursday, because this was study time.



Emily didn't always get the best grades at school. Especially since she moved primary school a lot. But in secondary school she worked really hard to do better.

For as long as she can remember, Emily wanted to be a teacher. When she was young, she would line up her dolls like they were in a classroom. Or she would play with her sister and create worksheets for them to complete. Emily's favourite teacher was her history teacher at college, Miss Brunskill. She always made her lessons really accessible. She taught with passion and positivity. This inspired Emily to teach history.



Emily knows the importance of a good learning environment. It's like a plant. You need light for the plant to grow, and it needs to be in the right soil. De Montfort University felt like her perfect soil. As part of her university experience, Emily got to practice teaching at lots of different schools around Leicester. She loved how diverse the students were and this shaped the type of teacher she wanted to become.

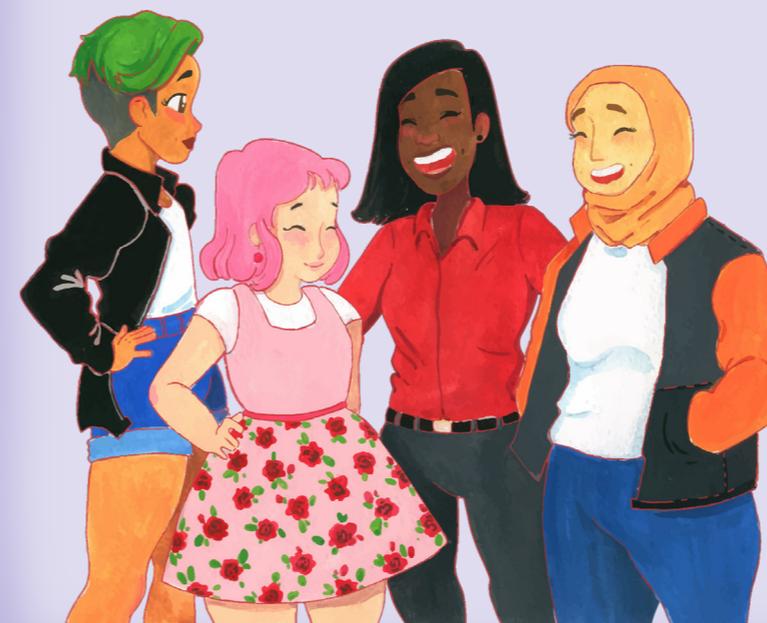
By experiencing life with both a black and white family,

Emily had become very adaptable. Some of her friends struggled to be around people who didn't look, or act like them. But Emily's upbringing taught her how to be flexible. To not put people into boxes. To belong anywhere. She wants others to feel the same.



Now Emily works

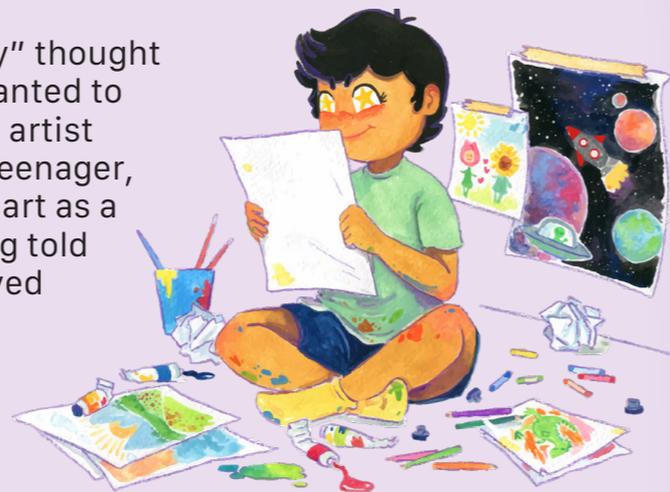
hard to help her students to feel seen and heard. Not just in the way that she teaches, but in the stories they learn. She teaches about things like the Mali Empire. This was the biggest Medieval Empire in West Africa. When her black students hear these stories, they see themselves in History as part of a rich and beautiful community. Not just as slaves. Stories like these make our History complete. They are like a pinch of salt on your food ... they bring out all the flavour.



The Art of Communication

“An artist is somebody who draws all day” thought young Kartik, as he explained what he wanted to be. Kartik loved colouring in, so being an artist sounded awesome! But, when he was a teenager, Kartik wasn’t so sure anymore. Creating art as a job often meant following rules or getting told what to make. That wasn’t what he enjoyed at all.

Kartik realised there were lots of other ways for him to be creative. He loved subjects like English and Media. They taught him how to design and write to connect with different people. That’s why, when Kartik was 16, he decided to do



an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship is a type of education that you learn within a job. This meant that Kartik could combine all his favourite creative skills every day!

Kartik’s job was with the National Health Service. This is a place where doctors and nurses help people to get well. He has designed ways for doctors and nurses to feel happy and looked after at work. He’s helped patients to find recipes for delicious, healthy food. He even helped to create an anti-racism campaign so that people can feel safe and loved. Kartik’s role now is to help people in Leicester find ways to stay healthy and learn more about what the National Health Service does.



One of Kartik’s favourite projects is the Rainbow Badge Campaign. This project helps doctors, nurses and other staff members to learn about the LGBT community. This is a group of people who celebrate our ability to love different people and be accepted for who we are. By wearing the rainbow badge, doctors and nurses can show their patients that LGBT people are welcome and safe. So, for those who don’t feel safe at home, the hospital is a great place for them to find support.

When Kartik told his family and friends that he was gay, he got a lot of support. But he knows that other people are not so lucky. That’s why he cares so much about this project. He helps to answer questions about LGBT people, so that people at the hospital can care for their unique needs. When they get the badge, doctors and nurses make a promise to help LGBT people as much as they can. Sometimes this means listening to their stories when other people don’t want to. Or thinking about ways to make them feel extra safe when they are poorly.

So far, 2500 people have claimed a badge, which makes Kartik very proud. His work has inspired lots of different people to share their own stories about love and acceptance. Kartik wants children to know that, just like love, creativity comes in all shapes and sizes. When we think creatively, we have great power to help those around us.



A Home Full of Heart



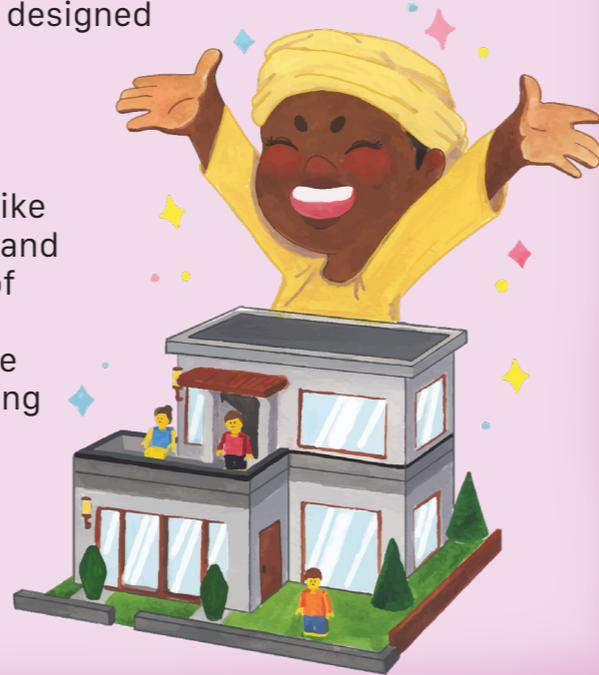
Maryam had always been a very observant child. She wanted to know why things were the way they were, so she asked lots of questions. Maryam grew up in a city called Maiduguri in Nigeria. The houses in the city were very different to the houses in the villages where her grandparents lived. Maryam wanted to know why.

In the village, houses were made of mud because mud adjusts to the temperature. This meant that in the summertime you can stay cool inside, and in the winter you can stay warm. The side of the houses were

shaded by carefully arranged sticks and there were lots of trees to protect you from the heat of the sun. The houses were perfectly designed for the hot and dry climate of West Africa.

“So why are the houses in the city so bad at protecting us from the heat” Maryam thought. In the city people wanted their houses to look like western homes. They were built with concrete and used electricity to fuel air conditioners. Most of the time there wasn’t enough electricity available, so the air conditioning would fail. The roofs were made of metal, so when the scorching sun beamed down on them, they would overheat.

In Maryam’s community, houses were where women belonged. Their role was to look after their husbands and children and care for the home.



Maryam has 23 brothers and sisters. Their father believed in a good education for every one of them, not just the boys. He supported Maryam to go to university to become an architect.

An architect is somebody who designs buildings. Maryam wanted to learn about how to create houses that were beautiful and clever, so that people could live comfortably. She loved drawing and she always built with Lego, so she had the skills to do this job well.



Maryam got married shortly after getting her first degree and moved to the UK. When she had her first child, Maryam paused her education to look after her baby. Over the years Maryam had more children and she began to wonder if she would ever become an architect. When she had her 4th child, she felt it was time for her to follow her dreams.



Maryam achieved her goals. At last, she can help more people to live comfortably.

With support from her siblings, Maryam achieved her second degree. With all her children in full time education, Maryam felt it was the perfect time for her to continue her studies. Now, she is studying a PhD, where she designs sustainable houses for the poor. By never giving up,

From Rebel to Role Model



Ben's father moved to the UK from the Caribbean. He came from a humble background and worked hard to become extraordinary. He became a well-respected, black leader. People would tell Ben how important his Dad was to the community and what a big job his Dad had. This was one of the reasons why he was Ben's biggest role model.

As Ben's family became successful, they moved to a richer area. The people were not so respectful here and Ben didn't feel like he fitted in. He started to rebel at

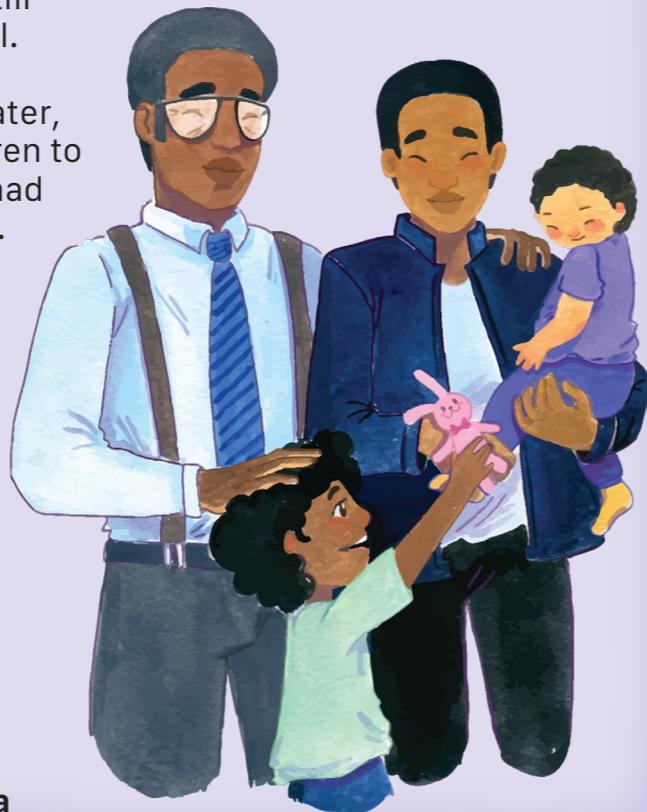
school and his grades began to drop. Ben still regrets not achieving his potential at school.

When Ben was 21, his son was born. Years later, his daughter was too. Ben wanted his children to feel proud of him, in the same way that he had for his father. It was time to make a change.

Ben was now determined to be a success. He was very lucky that some kind people helped to guide him and give him confidence. They encouraged him to study and apply for promotions. Ben listened to their guidance and went to university and progressed at work.

Education is not a name of any degree or certificate that can be shown to others as a proof. Education is the name of our attitude, actions, language & behaviour with others in real life.

- Barack Obama



The hard work paid off and eventually Ben became the Chief Operating Officer (COO) at De Montfort University. A COO is a very good job. It means that he leads lots of different people and teams.

For Ben, it is important for people to not only see him as a COO, but as a black COO. Ben notices that when he is dressed in his suit and tie, he is treated with respect. But when he dresses in his casual clothes, many people treat him differently. So, he knows how significant his role is.



He understands that it is important to have role-models that look like us. Sometimes it can be scary being a leader when there are not many people like you around.



When Ben feels pressure, he thinks about his family. He remembers his family are proud of his achievements and that they love him.

As Ben thinks about how he feels when he is discriminated against, it reminds him of why he chose to rebel at school. But as a COO he gets to fight back in a better and more powerful way.

His success is his payback. Now he has the opportunity to help so many more people like him. He wants to inspire them. Just like his dad did.

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

- Nelson Mandela

A Gift from God

Parimala has the most welcoming smile. The type of smile that makes other people happy. She believes that children are full of joy and energy, and that the key to being a happy adult is to hold onto that joy.

This is why Parimala has the sweetest personality. She is lucky enough to have a wonderful and caring family. They are very important to her. One of Parimala's favourite things is when she makes her parents proud. But life has not always been easy for Parimala and her family.



Parimala was born with a disability. This means that she needs a wheelchair to help her get around. In India, where Parimala was born, there aren't many ways to help people who use wheelchairs. Buses don't have ramps to help people to roll their wheelchairs on. There aren't many lifts to help them get upstairs either. Because things were not designed to help people like Parimala, she needed to get in and out of her wheelchair to move around. Even the streets could be difficult to move along sometimes. This made living by herself very difficult.



Growing up, people would call Parimala a challenging child. Sometimes they would stare at her as she passed by or ask her dad why he bothered to support her. Parimala's dad quickly reminded her that she was a gift from God. He was her super-dad, looking after her whenever she needed him. But for Parimala, it felt like even when she tried her best, people were not ready to accept her the way she was.

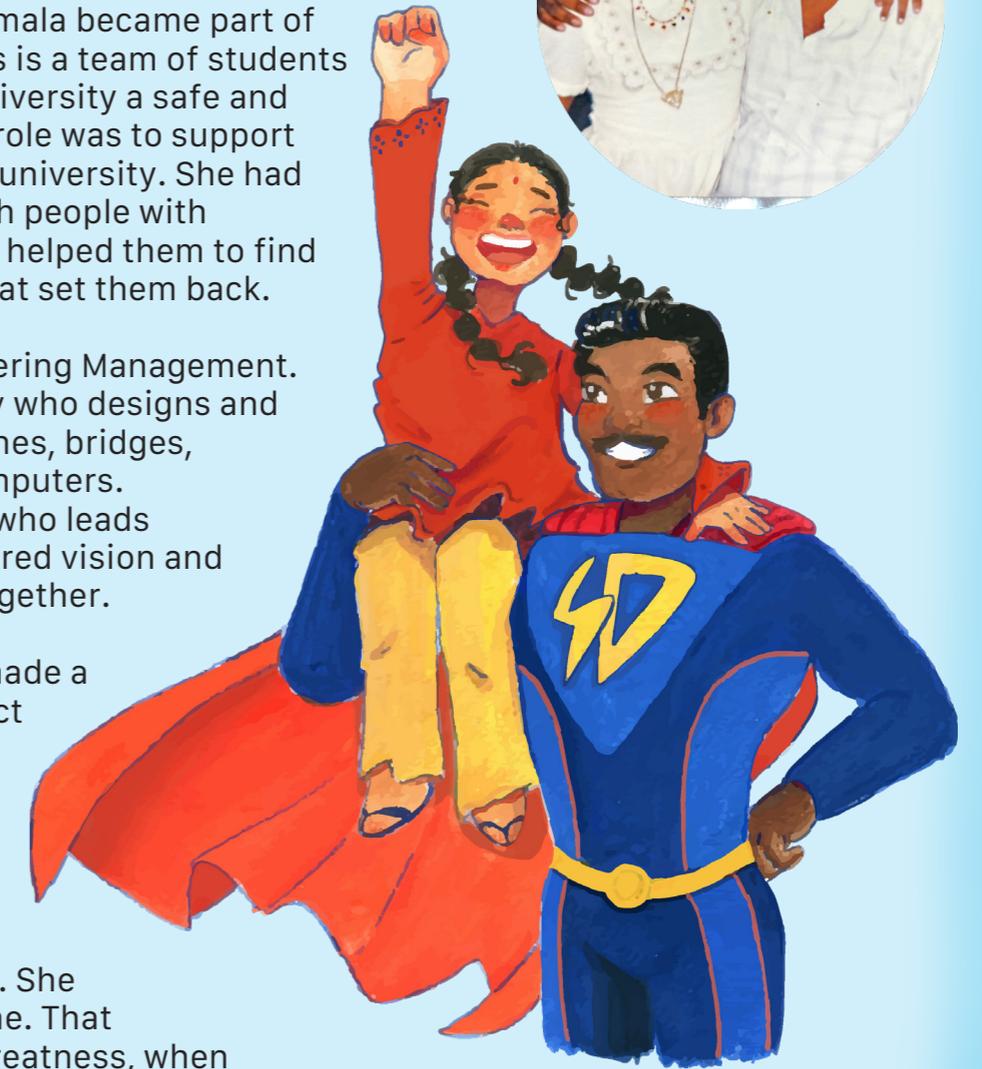
When Parimala was old enough, she decided to study in the UK. Here, the university asked her about her goals. They wanted to know what they could do to help her reach them. With this new power, Parimala decided to help other people who have struggled with disability.



Whilst at university, Parimala became part of the Student's Union. This is a team of students who work to make the university a safe and happy place. Parimala's role was to support disabled students at the university. She had lots of conversations with people with different disabilities and helped them to find solutions for anything that set them back.

Parimala studied Engineering Management. An Engineer is somebody who designs and builds things, like machines, bridges, railways, motors and computers. A manager is somebody who leads people, by creating a shared vision and helping teams to work together.

Even in class, Parimala made a difference. For her project she looked into the differences in disability help between India and the UK. She found that many people shared the same experiences as her. She realised she was not alone. That everyone is capable of greatness, when they are in a place that sees how great they are.



Eloquence and Experiments

When Maitreyi was young she always did experiments with her parents. Like the time when her dad taught her how a pendulum works by hanging forks from a curtain rail. Or the times when her mum would take Maitreyi to her science lab and let her watch as she mixed chemicals. At first, she wanted to be a doctor when she was older. She liked the idea of giving people injections. Then, Maitreyi fell in love with biology.



Maitreyi enjoys seeing how bodies use beautiful and simple solutions to support life. Her favourite is the way that a fish's gills exchange oxygen and CO₂.



Another passion of Maitreyi's has always been reading. If she could go back in time and give herself advice as a child, she would tell herself to be more confident about this hobby. She believes that self-confidence is a great way to change people's opinions about the things they think are cool or not.

Throughout her life, Maitreyi has been lucky to have amazing role-models. When she was at university, she worried that she couldn't be a scientist and still spend time with her family. Her tutor showed her that this was possible and inspired her to keep pursuing her goals.

Maitreyi also worried that she might not be good enough to be a scientist. But her tutor knew that she really enjoyed working in the lab. She helped Maitreyi see that even if she wasn't the best in her class she was good at experiments and that's what a scientist does.



In the summer holidays she used to take part in summer labs. Here, her mentor and her would conduct experiments. In between experiments, when they had a lot of waiting time, her mentor taught her how to hula hoop as well!

Today, Maitreyi works as a virologist. This means that she studies viruses and designs medicines to protect us. Her biggest goal is to find a medicine that will help to cure many viruses at the same time so that we can be safe from future pandemics. To do this, Maitreyi looks at different viruses and finds things that they have in common. Viruses are made up of

different types of proteins. By finding the common proteins that many viruses use to grow, Maitreyi can design ways for our bodies to protect against them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Maitreyi became a leader in her community. She helped them to understand different things about the coronavirus and made them feel safe. She loves to teach others and hear them go "wow".

Maitreyi learns best by being curious of new discoveries. She loves to see her students asking questions because it shows her that they are excited too. She reminds us that real life is not like an exam. In real life we have easy access to information. It is how we use this information that makes us special.



No Such Thing as Normal

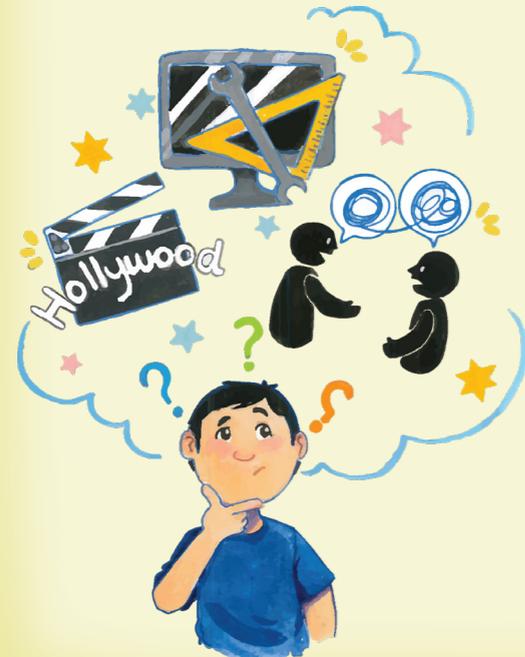
When people meet Charles, they see a chatty man with a warm and bubbly personality. They delight to meet him and his beautiful dog, Carlo. But what some of them do not realise, is that Charles is also blind.

There are 4 conditions that affect Charles' sight. His eyes are sensitive to light, so he wears sunglasses even on a cloudy day. His eyes like to dance around, which makes his vision go in and out of focus like a camera. Parts of his eyes have cloudy patches, and he also has pressure around his eyes. Charles has been blind since birth, and his dad has eye conditions too, so he knew from a young age what barriers he would face.



In his first school, Charles' teachers noticed that he was hyperactive and blamed him for struggling to learn how to write. They didn't understand how to support him enough. Then, in year 5, Charles' parents sent him to a special school for disabled children. The headmaster at this school was blind and someone in his class had the same condition as him. Charles thought this was amazing.

Thanks to this special community, Charles had a happy childhood. His friends understood his challenges and could have a laugh together. They shared information about products and services that could help. Most importantly, they knew that being different was fine. They challenged the idea of 'normal' because they all knew that there was no such thing!



At other times, Charles had to fight hard to get support. Like the time he had to create a book of evidence for the council to get funding for his specialist college. Or the time he prepared hundreds of applications and went to 15 interviews before he could get a job. Charles thinks that this is sometimes because support costs money. When Charles was younger, he often wondered if he was important enough to deserve this support, but now he knows that everyone deserves a fair chance at life.

By the time Charles went to university he had practiced how to ask for support many times. He was good at finding people who could answer his questions or help to check his work for mistakes. This made some of the other students jealous of him and he felt a little lonely. But when Charles got his guide dog, he found it easier to meet new people. Students would come to say "Hi" to Carlo which made starting conversations easy.



Charles left university with so many interesting stories that he began to get invited to write articles about his experience or appear on the radio and TV to talk. He's helped people to learn more about life with a disability so they can imagine new ways to help.

Now, Charles works in marketing and communications. This means he shares information and helps to sell things. He makes sure his team have shared goals and helps them to understand the needs of different customers.



Finding Freedom

Neee Nahhh Neee Nahhhh.

The sirens were ringing again. Ambulances. Police. Bijna often saw them around when she was young. So, when Bijna thought about what she wanted to be when she was older, she aspired to be kind and help people in difficult circumstances.

Bijna's mum had two jobs. She worked very hard to take care of Bijna and her younger brothers. Bijna saw this and wanted to do as much as she could to help. This meant that whilst Bijna's friends were out playing, she was focusing on helping with meals, chores such as cleaning or helping her brothers with their homework.

Together, they watched Disney movies and played a lot of board games. One of her favourite things about her childhood was celebrating the holidays from different cultures, like Diwali and Christmas. There was a lot to learn about different cultures and religions, and with all the different people who live in Leicester, this was a great place to learn about them.

Bijna liked to learn. For her, education was a way to explore the world and grow.



But getting there was hard. Often, she was the only Asian child in the classroom and people would treat her differently. She tried to fit into her community and follow their direction, but their rules were very strict for girls compared to boys. As a result, she became very introverted.

Bijna observed that the women in her community were kept busy with caring activities, leaving them no time for self-development. Bijna wanted to be different. She was determined to care and be a success, even when this was hard. When her mum got ill, Bijna wanted to do everything she could to help. She worked during the day with people much older and studied at night school. Her world looked different to other university students, so she didn't have many friends the same age as her.

Then, one day, Bijna got a summer job in banking. Here, she met some amazing people. They worked hard but had a lot of fun too! They all lived unique lives that they designed. They were ambitious and they weren't judgemental. They liked that Bijna was different and appreciated it. Around them she felt like she belonged. They gave her a glimpse of the type of life she wished for. Inspired by her dream life, Bijna carried on working hard and stayed in the finance industry. Finance describes different types of jobs that assist people with their money.

Now, she helps people from different backgrounds get into finance too. She believes that people need to be better supported in their ambitions, so that everyone is able to succeed. Bijna has helped so many people that she was given an award by the Queen. She has shown lots of kindness to the people she supports and now she is learning to love herself too.



"I would tell my younger self to be completely free. To not live up to expectations, judgements, or stereotypes, or worry about them. Just follow your heart and do what feels right"

The Misfit

When Kimberly was 11 years old, she wrote a story for her school work. "This is great" said her teacher, "You should be a writer one day". From that day onwards, Kimberly knew this was her dream career. Besides, she loved reading books; how awesome would it be to write one! Not long afterwards, Kimberly and her cousins created their very own book called 'Super-Star Super-Hero'. Her cousin did the illustrations whilst Kimberly did the writing.

Kimberly's parents thought that becoming a writer was a great idea. Her dad would always take her to the library or bring books back for her. It was a hobby that they shared together; a type of play that didn't rely on others. When other children were loud and energetic, Kimberly was shy and introverted. She liked to imagine things inside her head, rather than play them out in the world. So, writing became a great way for her to communicate about how she was feeling.

As a teenager, this made Kimberly feel like a misfit. She felt safest around her aunty because she was quiet too. But her friends didn't think that reading was very cool, and her community didn't want to read either. At times they would try to persuade Kimberly not to be a writer. They thought that they were protecting her from the pain of not succeeding. That if she conformed she could avoid getting hurt. But as an adult Kimberly recognises that her introverted mind is her superpower.



When you read, you gain access to other people's voices. You can imagine what it feels like to be them and you can start to think about what you want your voice to sound like too. When Kimberly was growing up she liked to imitate other people's voices. One of her favourite authors is Bali Rai, a children's



book author who writes about Asian culture. When reading Bali's work, she felt like it was describing her own culture. It was so vibrant and accessible. It inspired her to share her own world.

Eventually, she wrote her own book called 'Misfit'. A story which traced her journey of feeling like the weird and quirky person in every room. She wanted to write for people who felt like her. People who were equally weird. Those who felt a bit lost or weren't sure what to do with their lives.

Kimberly wants people to know the arts are for everyone. She knows that money can get in the way at times. But having access to other voices is super important. She encourages people to consider accessible forms, such as blogs, as a way to begin their creative journey.



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The Curious Observer



People are like the colours in the rainbow, each one is beautiful and unique. But it is only by seeing all the colours together that we truly appreciate just how special each of them are.

This book is a celebration of diverse and inspiring voices. A collection of 14 role models from De Montfort University and Leicester city, UK.

Linked simply by a location, they paint a picture of the wide variety of aspirations possible, as they share their journey from childhood to adult life.

