

Eleve

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JUNE 2025



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June 2025

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Never miss an issue of Elevé

Because you're not just part of this industry, you're shaping it.

The stories. The people. The culture.

If this first issue of Elevé made you feel something, seen, inspired, maybe even a little rebellious, don't let it be your last.

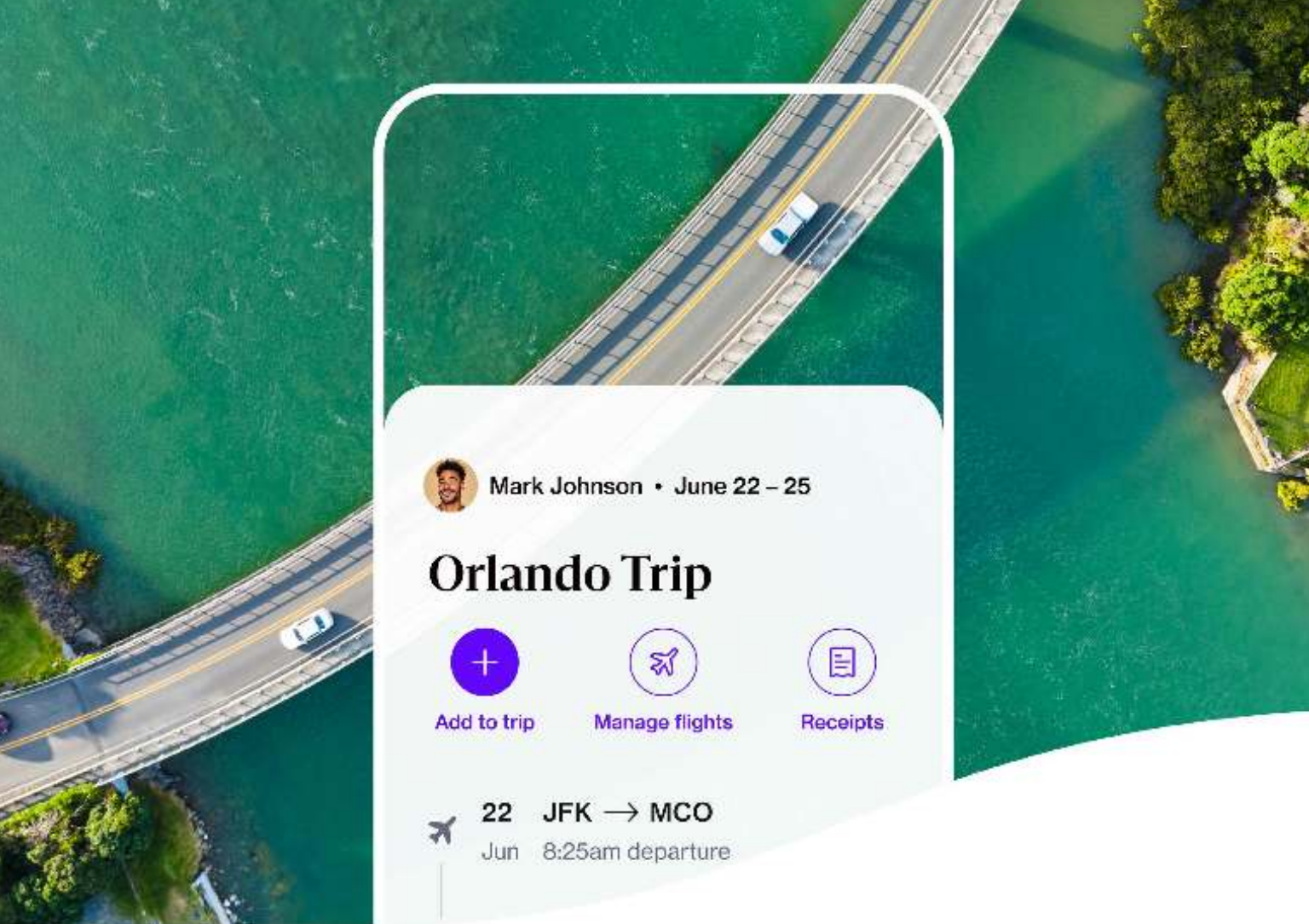
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Want to be featured in the next edition?

We're always looking for voices, rituals, side passions, and full-on reinventions to spotlight. Reach out directly to Haley Kershner at haley@sayanchor.com. We'd love to hear your story.

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Elevé

WHAT IS ELEVÉ?

In French, élevé means elevated. Uplifted. Raised up.

That's the spirit behind this magazine, a celebration of the humans behind the spreadsheets. Produced by Anchor, the same team building technology to simplify B2B payments, Elevé is our way of honoring the stories, passions, and full lives of the people who power this industry.

Because yes, we believe in great software (and you can visit our booth at Scaling New Heights or website to learn more).

But more than that, we believe in people.

So in these pages, we're not talking tech. We're talking about the music you dance to, the trails you hike, the cookies you bake, and the rituals that ground you. We're here to elevate all the ways you show up, for your work, your families, your communities, and most importantly, for yourself.

This is Elevé. You're exactly where you're meant to be.

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Erin Pohan		Sam Hallburn	



Letter From the Editor

You are more than your job.

That's where this began, not with a pitch deck or an editorial calendar, but with a question that kept surfacing in conversation. What lives behind the title? What drives you when no one's watching? What remains when the emails stop and the office quiets down?

This magazine is a first. A debut. A bold, joyful invitation to remember that behind every person in this industry is someone living a full, rich, wildly human life.

Here, you'll meet people who rescue animals, launch jewelry lines, ride motorcycles, and go-go dance under neon lights. You'll read about grief and reinvention, weight loss and woodwork, motherhood and military life. Some stories will make you laugh. Others might catch you off guard. All of them will make you feel something. That's the point.

Because each of these lives tells a deeper story. Not just about work, but about love. Loss. Cu-

riosity. Courage. They're not defined by their professions; they're expanded by their passions. We live in a world that asks What do you do? Before it asks Who are you? This issue celebrates the people who answer both with creativity, curiosity, and lives that stretch far beyond a job title. This issue is proof.

At Anchor, we see our customers the same way, not just as firm owners, bookkeepers, or CPAs, but as whole people with layered, beautiful lives behind their titles. This magazine is our love letter to that truth.

We made this to honor all of it, the unfiltered, the unexpected, the fully human. Because your profession is only part of the picture. The rest? That's where the real magic lives.

Thank you for turning the page.

*With heart,
Haley Kershner,
Customer Marketing Manager, Anchor*



One Step Then the Next

By Rom Lakritz

Spill your first coffee. Lose the client you counted on. Freeze on a slide you practiced a hundred times. I had one of those wobble-heavy mornings in May, just before logging into Anchor's virtual Together Summit, when Alex Smith appeared on my screen, calm as sunrise, ready to talk about comebacks.

For anyone new to his journey, Alex was selected first overall in the 2005 NFL draft and guided both the San Francisco 49ers and the Kansas City Chiefs to playoff runs. Two years and seventeen surgeries after a tackle shattered his right leg, he not only walked but played again. That

return earned him the **NFL Comeback Player of the Year in 2020** and reminded millions that resurrection is possible.

"I became a spectator in my own life," he told me, recalling months in a wheelchair while his three kids thundered through hallways he could not enter. The line landed like a turning key. We are all benched at some point, whether by a sudden crisis, a client who walks away, or a panic attack that shrinks the world to a single heartbeat.

What his pivot means to the rest of us

Alex found his turning point inside a military rehab hall where scars were as visible as de-

termination.
Most of us
will never
step into that
room, yet the
lesson travels
well. We do
not need
crutches or

metal cages to know what it feels like to stand exposed with our failures in plain view. In work chat threads, video meetings, and living rooms we carry setbacks that feel just as public. So how do we move?

Face the break

Acknowledge the missed forecast, the lost file, the hard diagnosis. Naming the bruise stops it from festering.

Shrink the horizon

Choose the next visible task. Send the apology email. Reboot the router. Take a walk around the block before opening the laptop again. Small victories stack into traction.

Flip the coin

Let gratitude shift the mind from fear to curios-

ity. Thank the stumble for the hint it offers, then pocket any lingering doubt as quiet motivation for tomorrow.

Why that matters to our community

Our profession is built on precision, yet real life is anything but precise. The spreadsheets do not list anxiety, grief, or surprise expenses, but they show up anyway. When a late payment strains payroll, when a parent's health declines, when confidence dips after a rough review, we practice the same muscle Alex used on his first step back to the field.

If you wake early after an anxious night, breathe, and press send on a fresh proposal, you

share ground
with an NFL
quarterback
who once celebrated shift-
ing weight
from one foot
to the other.

If you open a

blank sheet after losing a key client, you echo the courage of saying, I want to play again.

Alex still repeats a motto borrowed from a fearless teammate who once sprinted down kickoff lanes asking, Are you going to live today. He trimmed it to two words. Just live. The phrase returns him to the present where effort, never perfection, is all that counts.

So the next time a toddler upends breakfast, a crucial link breaks five minutes before launch, or the phone flashes news that twists your stomach, remember the man who celebrated standing. Speak the wish that scares you. Move one inch toward it, then another. Your comeback may never trend online. It does not need to. Every step from setback to motion is proof that broken places can grow strong.

Spill the coffee. Wipe the shirt. Restart the slide. Step again. Just live.

***"Every step from
setback to motion is
proof that broken places
can grow strong."***

Head in

A life-changing hobby in the skies over Buenos Aires

It started with a YouTube video. No dramatic epiphany, no childhood dream, just an algorithm with impeccable timing.

"I think I'm nothing else than a victim of the YouTube algorithm," says Matias Midosky, laughing. "I saw this guy in the U.S. flying this little machine he kept in his truck... and I couldn't stop watching."

From one late-night scroll came a full-blown lifestyle shift. Within weeks, Matias had found a paramotoring school near his home in Buenos Aires. "I just thought I'd try one flight," he says. "But that first flight, it got me."

It was winter. Freezing. He had to be there at 5:30 a.m. But then came the view. "The sunrise from up there... it was unreal," he says. "That moment changed everything."

A few weeks later, he enrolled in the full training course. Two months after that, he flew solo.



the Clouds



From the sidewalk to the sky

Matias isn't your typical thrill-seeker. He's calm. Measured. Curious more than daring. Still, something about paramotoring pulled him in.

"I don't get much from roller coasters," he shrugs. "It's not about adrenaline for me. Flying just gives me a totally different perspective."

He's been flying for a little over a year now, usually once or twice a week, weather permitting. "It's a very weather-dependent sport," he says. "Too windy, too rainy, too cold... we don't fly."

But when the conditions are right? He's in the air before most people are on their second cup of coffee.

"My friends think I'm a little crazy"

The reactions from loved ones have been mixed, but mostly amused. "My friends definitely think I'm a little crazy," Matias says. "And I don't blame them. I mean, I'm strapped to a wing a thousand feet up in the air. It's a little strange."

Still, they're curious. "Every time I bring it up, they ask tons of questions," he says. "They want to know what it feels like, how it works, if it's scary. I like that, it's their way of being supportive."

His grandfather, in particular, has been endlessly fascinated. "He's too old to come up with me, but he's always asking questions, watching my videos. If I could take anyone flying, it'd be him."

Landing softly, flying smart

Despite the wild imagery, paramotoring is relatively safe, at least when done right.

"People hear that your engine cut off midair and they panic," Matias says.

"But that's something we train for. It happens. You just glide down and land wherever it makes sense."

He's had a few of those moments, but never anything he'd call dangerous.

"It's all about preparation. You only fly in areas where you can land safely." He also makes it sound... surprisingly chill. "Flying now is really relaxing," he says. "I'm just up there, watching the sunrise. Thinking. It's calm."



Gear, costs, and that first awkward run

Let's break it down: the gear involves a wing, an engine, a helmet, and a radio. That's it.

"You can pack it all in your car," Matias says. "It's one of the things I love about it, you can just drive to a spot and fly."

But takeoff? It's not glamorous.

"You're running with about 50 pounds on your back," he laughs. "Of course you're going to look funny."

As for cost: "It's cheaper than buying a motorcycle," he says. "So if you

think that's expensive, then sure. But it's definitely more affordable than people expect."

Flying changed how I see everything

Before paramotoring, Matias never thought much about the wind. Now it's something he notices constantly. "I look at trees. Flags. Clouds. Even if I'm not flying that day, I'm checking the wind," he says. "You start paying attention to the details you used to miss."

Flying, he says, makes you present. "It's hard to think about anything else when you're in the air," he says. "There's nothing up there but the sky, and the sound of your engine."

A sport for anyone curious enough to try

There's a misconception that paramotoring is an elite or extreme sport, but Matias insists otherwise.

"You don't need a special license or an airport," he says. "You can train locally, fly from public spaces, and use your own gear. It's way more accessible than people think."

Training timelines vary. Matias trained once or twice a week, so it took a few months. But in ideal weather, you can be flying in just a few days.

His advice to curious newcomers? "If you've ever wanted to fly, this is the most real and personal way to do it."

From Buenos Aires, with lift

He doesn't do it for the rush. He does it for the stillness. The ritual. The hush that happens when the motor cuts and the world quiets.

"I didn't plan to become a person who flies," he says. "But I did. And I like who I am up there."

Cocktails AND Ca\$hflows

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Sip this summer cocktails



1. Rosé Paloma

Light, floral, and unexpected.

- 2 oz grapefruit juice
- 1 oz silver tequila
- 1 oz chilled dry rosé
- 0.5 oz lime juice
- Grapefruit wedge + pinch of sea salt

Shake and strain over ice. Garnish with the wedge. It's a poolside favorite, refined.



2. Cucumber Basil Gimlet

Botanical, crisp, impossibly chic.

- 2 oz gin
- 0.75 oz lime juice
- 0.5 oz simple syrup
- 3 slices cucumber
- 2 basil leaves

Muddle, shake, and double strain. Garden party approved.



3. Coconut Chili Margarita

Tropical with heat. For the bold.

- 2 oz blanco tequila
- 1 oz coconut cream
- 1 oz lime juice
- Chili-salt rim

Shake hard, serve over a large cube. Add a thin slice of red chili to float.



4. Peach Bourbon Smash

Southern charm, reimagined.

- 2 oz bourbon
- 1 oz peach purée
- 0.5 oz lemon juice
- Mint sprig

Muddle mint, shake, strain. Serve in a rocks glass with crushed ice.



5. Sparkling Elderflower Spritz

Elegant and just sweet enough.

- 1.5 oz St-Germain
- 3 oz prosecco
- 1 oz soda water
- Lemon twist

Build in a wine glass over ice. Stir gently.



Ice, Wine, and the Occasional Spreadsheet

Why hockey is my happy place

If you only know me as the CEO, the strategist, the person giving talks about scaling and selling companies, then let me reintroduce myself. Preferably with a cocktail in one hand and a Golden Knights jersey in the other.

Because here's the truth: I love what I do. I've built multiple businesses. I've sold one for millions. I've created a life where I don't work on Mondays or Fridays. I love the puzzle of operations, the thrill of the close, the clarity that comes with solving problems others run from. But if I had to give up everything outside of work and keep just one thing, it wouldn't be yoga, or meditation, or a mastermind group. It'd be hockey. Not playing it, but watching it. Yelling at it. Living for it.

Where the noise becomes quiet

There's something about the smell of ice. The sound of skates carv-

ing into the rink. The thud of a body check against the glass. The sudden, wild eruption of a goal. It's chaos... and yet it calms me.

I live in Las Vegas, and I'm a regular at Golden Knights games. And when I say regular, I mean I've got season tickets. I judge every penalty call like I'm on the NHL rules committee. I sing along to every cover band during intermission.

It's not just a game, it's a full-blown show. It's sports. It's music. It's community.

And it's the one place where I don't have to be "on."

I'm not mentoring six women in tech.

I'm not coaching someone through their first offshore hire. I'm not optimizing anything. I'm just a fan. Loud, a little sarcastic, a little inappropriate... and deeply happy.

The other half of me

I'm a serial entrepreneur. And that's not a buzzword, it's my actual reality. If I'm not actively running a company, I'm building one. If I'm not building one, I'm planning one. Even my downtime involves property development. So if I'm going to take time off, it has to be worth it.



And hockey? It's absolutely worth it. That's probably why I'm so obsessed. I get to channel all my energy without having to turn it into a business. (Although... if you've ever watched a game with me, I'm still analyzing everything. I can't help it. Team dynamics, momentum shifts, line changes, I see it all.)

The messy middle

When I started out, I was all hustle. I didn't delegate. I overworked. I thought working harder was the only way to win.

I burned out. Then I built smarter. Now I teach other entrepreneurs how

to build businesses that don't rely on them to survive. Systems, automation, delegation, it's all about getting your life back.

Because what's the point of building a business if you're too tired to enjoy the life it's supposed to support?

For me, joy looks like a stadium full of strangers and a puck flying across the ice.

Life beyond the rink

Outside of hockey, I love live music. Dive bars. Caveman Keno (don't judge me, Vegas is weird and wonderful).

I have two dogs. I have a husband who doesn't blink when I casually start outlining business #5 over brunch. And I've got a 10-year-old's sense of humor.

If I had to describe myself, I'd say I'm 45 years old, stuck in a 25-year-old body, with a 60-year-old businessman's brain. It's an odd combo, but it works.

And it works because

I've stopped trying to fit my passions around my work. I've built a life where work supports my passions.

What matters most

So yeah, when you see me at a conference, I'll probably be talking about scaling your firm or automating your back office. But if you really want to see me light up?

Ask me who's going to win the Cup this year. Or better yet, come to a game with me.

I'll bring the sarcasm, the snacks, and maybe even a flask. You just bring yourself.

Numbers By Day, Neon By Night

He brings the light... literally

Numbers By Day, Neon By Night

He brings the light... literally

There are two versions of Nick Boscia. The first wears a blazer and crunches numbers. Sharp lines. Clean reports. The second? He's somewhere in Belgium, sweat-slick and smiling, arms raised toward a technicolor sky. Finger lights flashing. Trance pulsing through his chest. The second version is the one that makes him feel alive. "I just had such a fun time," he says of his first festival. "I

got absolutely hooked."

That was EDC New York, 2013. Concrete jungle. Electric sky. A moment that cracked something open.

"I was nervous," Nick admits. "I didn't know what to expect. You're partying all day with thousands of strangers... It sounded kind of overwhelming."

Still, he went. And something shifted. The world, once organized by spreadsheets and schedules, stretched open into something softer. Looser. Luminous.



Where the noise disappears

As a business owner, Nick's mind is always humming. "How could I improve this? What do I need to do next?" It never stops.

Except at music festivals.

"It's the only place where my brain completely shuts off. I'm just fully present. Not thinking ahead. Not solving anything. Just... being there."

Even on vacation, there's structure.

"Flights, meals, reservations. It's work, really. But at a festival, it's instinct. Like, 'That tent has something wild going on, I'm going.'"

He's not chasing headliners. He's chasing moments. A melody over a hill. A stranger's smile. A heartbeat synced to a bassline. It's not escape, it's return.

The tattoo says it all

Tomorrowland changed everything. It was his first time in Europe. "If it wasn't for this festival, I would've never gone."

He rolls up his sleeve. There it is. A clean, black tattoo on his tricep. "It's the logo for Tomorrowland," he says. "It really is life-changing."

There's a moment he remembers, standing in a crowd of 60,000, the stage exploding with light, the sound washing over him like a wave. "I actually cried," he says, eyes soft. "Not because I was sad. Because I felt so overwhelmed by beauty."

Finger lights and found families

Nick doesn't just show up. He brings things. Finger lights, specifically.

"I used to give them out when the sun went down. Everyone loved them,

easy to spot your friends in a crowd."

In Brazil, it caused a scene. "People were hugging me. Like, 'This is the best gift ever!' Just finger lights, you know? But it made people feel seen." That's the throughline. The glow in the dark. Nick isn't escaping something at these festivals, he's returning to something. Connection. Curiosity. Joy that doesn't need permission.

Accountant by day, rave veteran by heart

Most people in the accounting world don't know this version of Nick. "Everyone knows my business profile. But this side? Only my close friends really know." He laughs. "It's not that I'm embarrassed. It's just... not relatable to most people in my industry." But for Nick, this isn't a phase. This is a rhythm he's been following for over a decade. A lifestyle.

"We're veterans," he says. "We know the meetup spots. We've got hydration routines, eating windows. A newcomer loves coming with us because we make sure they have a good experience."

His advice? "Go with someone you trust. Stay flexible. Hydrate. Eat. Don't overthink it."



What if this is the thing that saves you?

At the core of it, Nick's story isn't really about music festivals. It's about giving yourself permission. To be weird. To feel joy. To try something unexpected.

"People might judge you," he says. "But they don't know how you feel when you're there. It's not about partying. It's about presence."

So what would he tell someone standing at the edge of something new? Nervous. Curious. "I would just say... give it a try. You might uncover something you love."

The Quiet Glamor of Starting Over

*Inside the ever-evolving
world of Erin Pohan*



The morning light in Yuma is slow and golden. It spreads across the desert like honey, warm and silent. But for Erin Pohan, that silence felt like isolation.

"I remember baking cookies and drinking mimosas at 9 a.m. just to pass the time," she says. "I didn't have a job or kids. I didn't even know who to call for coffee."

There's a certain quiet drama to the way Erin tells her story, not loud, not performative. Just honest. The kind of woman who makes reinvention look elegant, even when it feels anything but.

Her story begins years earlier, in a Marine Corps

uniform shop in Virginia. That's where she met the man who would change everything.

"All the girls knew who he was the second he walked in," she says, a smile rising like muscle memory.

One year later, they were married. Then came Texas.

"I felt like a question mark in a world full of periods."

Reinvention as a way of life

There's a version of femininity that doesn't need to shout. It's found in resilience, in adaptability, in the art of starting over again and again without losing yourself. Erin embodies that.

From the sticky humidity of Florida to the dry expanse of Arizona, each move was a new chapter. A different version of herself, military spouse, young wife, solo woman in a new city, took center stage.

At 24, she landed in Yuma. The town felt sun-bleached and still. Everyone around her seemed settled. She felt like a question mark in a world full of periods.

"I went to a baby shower and cried afterward," she says. "I felt so out of place."

But slowly, things shifted. She took a job at a local CPA firm, her first step toward anchoring herself professionally. When her husband deployed for a year, they brought her back without hesitation.

"They didn't have to do that. But they did. And



that job kept my whole career going.”

Arrival with a passport and a pregnancy test

Then came Japan.

“We told our parents we were pregnant, and then basically said, oh also, we’re moving to Japan next week.”

It should have been chaos. And in some ways, it was. But it was also magic.

They lived off-base, in a quiet Japanese neighborhood tucked between cedar trees and winding streets. Christmas lights strung across their balcony lit up the street. Their neighbors watched curiously as the young American couple hosted backyard barbecues.

“They were amazed we made burgers from scratch,” Erin laughs. “They went out and bought their own teppanyaki grill to do it themselves.”

She gave birth to both of her children there. Learned to navigate motherhood in a country where everything felt unfamiliar, and yet, somehow, freeing. Their Husky made frequent escape attempts. The days were long and messy and full of wonder.

Her favorite memory?

“We had a two-year-old and a baby at home, and one night we just said let’s do it. Let’s stay out until sunrise. We wandered Tokyo, watched salarymen get tossed out of karaoke bars, and just lived a little.”

It wasn’t a vacation. It was a moment reclaimed.

The detour that became home

After Japan, the plan was North Carolina. But the orders changed... again. “It was just this email that said: Welcome to Philadelphia.”

No warning. No discussion. Just a new direction.

“It turned out to be my favorite place we lived. Besides Japan, of course.

We made real friends there, not just military friends. And we still talk to all of them.”

Philadelphia was a surprise. A good one.

Now in Seattle, with her husband in the Marine Reserves and her children settled into their own routines, Erin feels the stillness, and she’s not entirely sure she likes it.

“We’re both itching for a new place. The military used to tell us where and when. Now we have to figure that out ourselves.”

Letting the story be hers

For years, Erin believed her story had to wait.

“I used to think being a military spouse meant my story had to wait,” she says. “But looking back, I see that every place, every season, built something in me.”

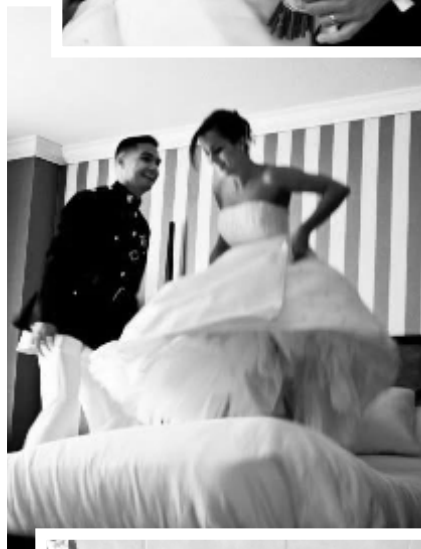
What she’s built isn’t a perfect narrative. It’s better. It’s real. She’s the kind of woman who can

pack up a house with a baby on her hip and a spreadsheet in her hand. Who can wander Tokyo until sunrise, then make it home in time for breakfast. Who can walk into a room full of strangers and find something familiar.

Her advice?

“Say yes to coffee invites. Make the first move. Find people you connect with, even if they’re not living the same life. And when you find someone who gets it, hang on tight.”

The orders may have stopped, but Erin’s life is still in motion. Only now, she’s the one giving the directions.





Tech Flashback, With a Twist

Clicks keyboard brings the tactile joy of typing to your iPhone

What if your smartphone could feel a little less... smart? And a little more satisfying?

That's the idea behind Clicks, a new keyboard case that's bringing physical buttons back in style, and not just for nostalgia's sake. Designed to snap onto your iPhone (and now, some Androids too), Clicks lets you actually feel every letter as you type. No more autocorrect fails. No more glass-screen typos. Just that glorious click-click-click you didn't realize you missed.

And yes... it's giving BlackBerry energy.

But this isn't your dad's old business phone. Clicks comes in bright, playful colors, lights up in the dark, and leaves your whole screen visible by shifting the keyboard below it. Think texting, tweeting, or typing long notes with fewer "oops" and more control. It's especially handy for people who write a lot on their phones, whether you're drafting captions, journaling, or keeping up with your group chats. Plus, there's a cool bonus: customizable shortcut keys that let you open

apps or perform actions with a single tap. It's part retro, part futuristic.

Clicks launched with iPhone compatibility (14, 15, and now 16), but Android users can join the fun too, versions are now available for Google Pixel, Motorola Razr, and Samsung Galaxy models.

So, is it a little extra? Maybe. But isn't that the point?

For those who miss the feeling of real buttons, or just want to text with flair, Clicks is the throwback you didn't know you needed.

Look Sharp, Stay Connected

Yes, your glasses can now take calls, and no, they don't look like something out of a sci-fi movie

It used to be that wearing glasses meant one thing: better vision. Now? It means you can take a call while walking your dog, stream your favorite playlist on a grocery run, and still look totally normal doing it.

Meet the Krypton 1 Smartglasses by Solos, sleek, stylish, and surprisingly smart. These aren't bulky VR headsets or clunky tech frames. They're lightweight, classic-looking glasses that happen to have tiny speakers and mics built right in. Think of them as your new everyday accessory... that also just happens to talk back. You can answer calls hands-free, get directions whispered to you during a walk, or listen to your

go-to podcast while folding laundry. And no, no one around you will even notice. The open-ear audio design means you hear everything clearly, without blocking out the world around you. They pair effortlessly with your phone via Bluetooth, and with just a quick tap on the frame, you're in control of calls, music, or voice assistants. Bonus: they come in a few stylish options, so you don't have to sacrifice fashion for function. For multitaskers, commuters, or anyone who's ever dreamed of being a little more hands-free, these glasses are a game changer.





When Voice Becomes Vision

Meet the recorder reimagined: Plaud Note

It looks like a compact mirror. Or a designer phone charm. But don't be fooled, this whisper-thin accessory is quietly redefining how we work, create, and remember.

Enter the **Plaud Note**: a voice recorder so chic, you might mistake it for jewelry. It snaps onto the back of your phone with MagSafe ease and captures everything, meetings, musings, poetry drafts, lecture rambles, late-night voice memos... before your mind forgets.

But here's where it gets good: Plaud doesn't just record. It listens and understands. Powered by the same generative AI behind ChatGPT, it transcribes your recordings in real time and distills them into crisp summaries, to-do lists, even mind maps. It's like having a personal assistant, minus the NDA.

Yes, it's smart. But it's also quietly elegant. Featherlight.

Ultrathin. A subtle shimmer of hardware designed for people who move fast and speak often, founders, writers, stylists, artists, anyone who lives in voice notes and needs to translate chaos into clarity.

With 64GB of storage, 30 hours of continuous recording, and a 60-day standby time, Plaud isn't just tech, it's survival. For the over-scheduled, the overheard, and the overlooked.

In an era of performative productivity, this is the opposite. It doesn't ask for attention. It gives you yours back.

Plaud is for the ones who think aloud. Who need to remember things they haven't even thought of yet.

The Road to Zeke

Grief, gratitude, and the long way home

Each winter since 2021, Kathy and I have escaped the flat, frozen stretch of the Midwest for something softer. Warmer. Earthier. Sedona's red dust. Sonoma's late afternoon stillness. Mornings that begin with slow coffee and end with firelight. These weren't vacations, they were rituals. Markers of time. Our annual reset.



And always, Roxie

She wasn't a dog who faded into the background. She was part of the picture. The sound of paws on hotel floors. The sight of her curled beside the fire. The way she'd plant herself in the backseat, as if to say, Let's go. She knew what those trips meant. To her, they were joy in motion. She made those places feel like ours.

And then, this spring, we lost her

April 15. No signs. No decline. Just... gone. She was eleven, yes, but vibrant. Strong. Still sprinting after birds she'd never catch. That kind of loss, immediate, untethering, doesn't land cleanly. It unspools you. One minute you're whole. Next, you're orbiting around a shape that no longer exists.

The silence in our house had weight. Her absence wasn't still, it was roaring. No wagging tail at the door. No warm shape curled beside our feet. She was everywhere, even in her not-being-there.

I've spoken before about vulnerability. The art of naming what hurts. But grief like this isn't poetic. It's jagged. It's raw. You don't write about it, you sit with it. Sometimes all you can do is breathe through it and hope your chest doesn't cave in.

And yet, in that ache... so much gratitude

For those drives west. For every trail she trudged, every puddle she splashed through. For the nights she fell asleep against my knee while the desert cooled outside. We didn't know that final trip would be her last. But we were present. We were together. And that's what matters. That's always what mattered.

Then, Zeke

Just seven days later, Zeke entered the story. We didn't plan to adopt. We were still unraveling. But there was something about him, quiet eyes, steady gaze. A knowing. We said yes to a foster placement. We ended up with a new chapter.

On May 5, Zeke-o de Mayo, as we like to call it, we adopted him. Exactly eleven years to the day after Roxie joined our family.

He isn't a replacement. He's a presence. He's clumsy and curious and wildly reactive to other dogs. But he's trying. So are we. The quiet is different now. Not gone, but filled with motion. With life again.

Grief doesn't go away. It evolves. And it makes room.

Roxie is still with us. In every red rock. Every winding road. Every ritual we still keep.

And now, so is Zeke.



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How to Become a Go-Go Girl

The unexpectedly fabulous second act of Nancy McClelland

Let's start with a vision: white go-go boots, a cassette tape blasting ABBA, and a little girl climbing onto the back of a sofa to perform for no one but herself. That girl? Nancy McClelland. And while she didn't officially become a dancer until she was 40, she's been ready for the stage

since childhood.

"I would climb on top of the sofa and do gymnastics and dancing," she says. "I was pretty sure I was fabulous."

Spoiler: she was. She still is.

A midlife confession... and a dare

It happened in a cafe. One of those unremarkable tables where remarkable things get said. Nancy, turning 40, was chatting with a friend when the question came up: Is there anything you thought you'd do by now that you haven't? She paused. Then it came out.

"I thought I would've studied go-go dancing by now."

The reply? Immediate and unapologetic. "Then why haven't you?"

Nancy offered the usual: Where would I go? Is that even a thing? It's probably silly.

"Just Google it," her friend said. So she did.

The result? A go-go dance class in Chicago. Ten minutes from her house. Run by a local troupe called The Janes. Monday and Tuesday nights. She showed up that week. Then the next. "A couple months later, they asked me to join the performance troupe," she says. "It really was meant to be."

"My husband bought me go-go boots. And I danced around the house like the first scene in Austin Powers."

A woman with long brown hair is smiling and posing on the roof of a dark blue classic car. She is wearing a short, sleeveless dress covered in blue and silver sequins, a matching choker, and long white boots. Her hands are on her hips. The background features a brick building and a clear blue sky.

at 40

The diagnosis that changed everything

Nancy's dancing life almost didn't happen. At 27, she was in excruciating pain, hunched over, unsure if she'd ever walk properly again.

"I was born with an extra vertebra. It's wedge-shaped. One fused to the vertebra above, and two below fused together. There's spinal stenosis. Multiple scoliosis curves. Herniated discs. It's a mess in there."

Some doctors told her she'd never walk normally. Others said surgery might leave her paralyzed. She chose neither. Instead, she went to physical therapy and made a quiet, radical request:

"I just want to dance again."

She wasn't talking about the stage. At that point, it was just about being able to move, at a party, in a club, surrounded by friends and music. "That was the goal. That's what kept me going."

Years later, she still lives with pain and flare-ups. One brutal stretch in 2017–18 left her unable to sit or lie down for 107 days. Sleep came after seizures. But even then, her answer to What do you want most? remained the same.

"I want to dance."

"Sometimes when I dance, I forget I'm in pain. It's that powerful."

400 dancers and one unforgettable night

There's one performance Nancy still talks about with misty-eyed joy. Grant Park. Downtown Chicago. Summer

Dance Festival. Her group, the cheekily named Fabulous Ladies of Fitness, was invited to lead a crowd in silly, retro-inspired dance routines.

"We usually do these goofy jazzercise moves at bars."

she laughs. "But this time... 400 people danced with us. It was huge."

They danced to Michael McDonald's Sweet Freedom, Laura Branigan's Gloria, and Easy Lover by Phil Collins and Philip Bailey. "The crowd smiled the whole time. It was magic. I told my husband it might've been better than our wedding day."

Her words. Not ours. "We were on stage, under the lights, leading 400 people. It was euphoric."

*"Put it on.
Start dancing.
The rest will follow."*



No pre-show ritual, just rhythm

Unlike public speaking (which she also does), Nancy doesn't need a pre-performance ritual for dance.

"I just throw myself into it," she says. "Dancing feels natural. Effortless. It's not conscious. I'm just in it."

She's currently rehearsing with the Chicago Chorus Girl Project for Motoblot, a high-energy motorcycle and music festival. One moment she's rehearsing in sequins... the next, she's on a plane to speak at Scaling New Heights, an accounting conference. She contains multitudes.

David Lee Roth, but make it glam

Does dance bring out a different version of Nancy? Not exactly. "I'm not a reserved person to begin with," she says. "But inside me, I feel like David Lee Roth. I'm spastic and funny and no-holds-barred. That version of me comes out when I dance."

And the song that makes her dance, no matter what?

"September by Earth, Wind & Fire. It's the happiest song in the world. I challenge anyone to top it."

She even choreographed a routine to it for her

troupe's disco night. When another dancer said, "We don't do disco," Nancy's response was iconic: "Shut up. I'll choreograph it." And she did.

Yes, her husband dances too

"He's very introverted. If he's not in the mood, don't push him. But when he is? He's a great dancer. We've taken swing classes. He loves 80s new wave."

She pauses, softens. "I didn't know it mattered to me to marry someone who dances. But I'd be so sad if I didn't have that in my life."

"Dance isn't about being good. It's about being yours."

If there's one thing Nancy wants people to know, it's this:

"You don't have to be good. You don't need to get the moves right. You just need to let yourself respond to music in a way that's yours."

She once laughed at her high school prom

date's dancing, and regrets it to this day.

"I think he never danced again. That breaks my heart."

Now? She cheers for everyone on the dance floor. The brave ones. The goofy ones. The quiet ones who dance anyway.

So if you've got a favorite song and a little room to move?

Put it on. Start dancing. The rest will follow.





Made with Love

A dad, a son, and the hobby that became a family tradition

If you peek into Dan Luthi's garage on any given weekend, you're likely to find sawdust in the air, maple stacked against the walls, and a teenage boy quietly sanding a piece of wood beside his dad.

This is where the Luthis do their best work. Where cabinets become coasters. Where shelves come to life. Where a father and son turn quiet moments into something lasting.

"We've always had tools around," Dan says. "It just became something we did together."

It started as a high school class. Dan followed his brother into woodworking and fell for it hard. His passion turned into two-hour classes, real cabinet-building, and even selling furniture to teachers.

"For three years, it was all I wanted to do."

He worked in a cabinet shop. He got good. Then accounting found him. Woodworking didn't go away, it just became a hobby that never quit. Now? It's something much more personal. His son, 16, followed the same path. Same shop class. Same spark.

"He took it and just fell in love," Dan says. "Now we're building a side business."

A business born from scraps

It started small. Leftover walnut, bits of cherry, and maple ends that weren't quite right for bigger builds. His son made a set of drink coasters and gave them to Dan's parents as a gift.

"Then a neighbor saw them," Dan says. "He got

an order for over 100 to use as holiday gifts.” Since then, it’s been a blur of cutting boards, coasters, and big ideas. Salt and pepper shakers are next. There’s no fancy studio. Just a garage filled with creativity, and yes, a little chaos. “My wife parks outside,” Dan laughs. “She’s not thrilled. But my son’s in builder mode.”

When calm lives in your hands

There’s something meditative about it, Dan says. “My kids tell me they can see the calm in me when I’m working with my hands.” That calm doesn’t come from emails or spreadsheets. It comes from the hum of a sander. The smell of freshly cut maple. “It lets me reset,” he says. “It’s the one place where I don’t have to perform or deliver anything for anyone. It’s just fun.” That joy is contagious. His son’s latest school project? A three-piece walnut bookshelf set for Dan’s home office. One is already finished. The rest are coming this fall. “He’s proud of it,” Dan says. “And so am I.”

More than just furniture

Dan’s built his fair share of pieces, some practical, some intricate. A china hutch for his mom. Shiplap remodels. End tables. Picture frames. But the most meaningful builds have been the ones done side-by-side. “My wife usually has a list,” he smiles. “We’ve got faux beams coming, some nightstands... the list keeps growing.” His dream is simple: a real workshop. A 30x30 space, proper ventilation, and tools that don’t need to be wheeled in and out. “Right now, we’ve got everything packed into the garage and just blow the sawdust out when it gets too crazy.”

What his son taught him

Dan’s son isn’t just following in his footsteps, he’s showing him something new. “He’s reminded me you don’t need to start big,” Dan says. “A few scraps, a simple design, that’s enough. And you can still keep your joy while making money.” His son plans to become a finish carpenter after high school. Trade school is next. Maybe even working with his uncle, who’s already in the business. “He’s a builder,” Dan says. “He likes working alone. He’s

focused. He’s found something that fits him.”

Starting small, dreaming big

Dan’s advice for new woodworkers? Don’t overthink it. “Start with a project you care about,” he says. “You don’t need high-end tools. Ryobi’s great. Harbor Freight works fine. You can build beautiful things without breaking the bank.” “Let it grow with you,” he adds. “And let it be fun.” Because sometimes, the best things we build aren’t made for show. They’re made for the people we love, in garages filled with laughter, dust, and the quiet rhythm of something being made with care.

“It lets me reset. The hum of a sander, the smell of freshly cut maple.”



Under the Lid

*There's a choreography to speed,
and Tony Proctor knows every step*



he morning light is soft, almost silver. Charlotte hasn't fully woken up yet, but Tony Proctor has. He's already laced his boots, zipped up his jacket, and fastened his helmet. He doesn't need caffeine. He needs motion.

There's a rhythm to speed, and Tony knows every beat. As the owner of an accounting firm, he moves through life with precision. But it's on his sport bike that he lets go, not of control, but of constraint. There's elegance in that. In the tension. In the balance between safety and surrender. "I don't care how old I am. I'm going to get one," he told himself. "And it must be a crotch rocket. Because if you're going to get a motorcycle, you might as well have fun with it."

He didn't grow up riding. But the fantasy lingered. Childhood afternoons spent rigging his bicycle with a playing card just to mimic the sound of an engine. The thrill lived in his imagination... until it didn't.

All speed, no soft landing

When Tony decided to ride, he didn't ease in... he dove headfirst. Fifteen years later, he still hasn't "graduated" to a cruiser. He prefers the lean. The pulse. The road curling beneath him like a question mark.

"I still like to go one to three miles per hour over the speed limit," he says, half-smiling. There's no swagger in it, just truth. "It's the way it hugs the road."

That road has taken him everywhere. Through Charlotte's city veins. Down the Tail of the Dragon, a legendary stretch of winding asphalt between North Carolina and Tennessee.

"Curves for days," he says. "I stayed upright the entire

time. That was fun." But there are rides that burn into memory for less romantic reasons. One began in the chill of dawn. The sky still dark. The air biting. "It was right around 36 or 37 degrees. And on a bike, it feels ten degrees colder." At one point, he pulled his hand toward the engine, desperate for warmth.

"It was freezing. I started questioning a lot of my life decisions." By Atlanta, it was 70 degrees. But those first hours? Pure steel.

The elegance of alertness

"There's obviously a level of chaos... because you are uncaged around a bunch of other cages," he says. "But I'm calm. I'm at ease. I'm chilling."

That paradox lives at the heart of Tony's rides. High alert, low pulse. A storm inside stillness.

He likens it to a duck gliding across water. Serene on the surface. Paddling like mad beneath.

Same thing on a bike.

The trust that makes you sleep

One ride still catches in his throat when he tells it.

It was raining. He had his daughter on the back of the bike. She was ten or eleven, small enough to still melt into his frame when she leaned against him.

"We were just cruising and I felt her body. I won't say go limp but she fell asleep."

He laughs, but there's something tender beneath it.

"She was in such a great state of comfort and trust that she was like, I'm just going to doze off here."

What does it take to fall asleep mid-ride? Not just exhaus-



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tion, but faith. And love.

Protection is the ritual

Tony never rides unarmored. No matter the heat. No matter the destination.

"It can be 90 degrees, 95 degrees outside, and I am still going to have helmet, jacket, boots... the whole nine."

South Carolina doesn't require helmets. Tony still wears his. Always.

One morning, dew on the grass caught his tires and sent him sliding 30 feet.

"If I'd had some khaki pants on," he says, "I would've had road rash all the way down my leg and maybe even on my torso."

But he didn't. He walked away without a scratch.

Destination as memory

For Tony, dream routes are more than fantasy, they're biography.

"DC is home. New Orleans is where I spent a good amount of my formative years," he says. "I'd love to ride my bike there. Maybe even from Charlotte to DC. Charlotte to New

York."

New York City? Just for an hour. "Then I'm out. I do not need to collide with a taxi cab or a DoorDash biker."

Upstate New York is a different story. "There are some pretty cool routes. It's like riding through a painting."

Redefining the rider

Tony knows what people assume when they see a motorcycle. Black leather. Rebellion. Risk.

But his truth is quieter. Softer. And somehow more powerful.

"Everybody who has a motorcycle or has a helmet on is not a rebel. I literally have an accounting firm,"

*"High alert, low pulse.
A storm inside stillness."*

he says. "There are doctors. Lawyers. All types of professionals that ride motorcycles. Men and women. I've got plenty of ladies that can ride the heck out of their bikes." He's even dreaming up a project called Under the Lid, a photo series celebrating the people behind the helmets. The calm behind the roar.

"We want to get home just like the rest of y'all," he says. "We're just like you."

Baking As Ritual, Rebellion, and Reinvention

*How Candy Bellau Found Herself
Again, One Cookie at a Time*



The scent hits you first. Butter, sugar, maybe something citrusy. Sunlight drips through gauzy curtains. On the counter: bowls dusted with flour, a battered hand mixer, a plate of half-finished cookies cooling on a wire rack.

At the center of it all stands Candy Bellau, measuring joy by the spoonful, elbow-deep in melted chocolate. She's not here for the aesthetic. She's here for the alchemy. The way batter transforms under heat. The way laughter rises with the dough. "I begged my mom to marry a man named Bob Valentine so I could be Candy Valentine," she tells me, straight-faced. And just like that, you understand who she is: self-aware, mischievous, magnetic.

Flour, fun, and family

Her kitchen hums with motion. Her daughter sketches cake ideas in the corner. A tiny food processor spins. The dog circles. Her husband waits for the bowl.

"He comes around like, 'Done yet?'" Candy says. "He's better than a dog cleaning that stuff up." Baking here isn't precious. It's playful. A little chaotic. Always full of heart.

The showstopper

Her pièce de résistance? A gravity-defying explosion cake, cut it open and a waterfall of candy spills out. "It was inspired by the Neurotic Mom on Instagram," she says. "We did a test run a month before the party. When the candy fell, we were like... oh my gosh." Since the \$300 Hello Kitty cake, she's done it all herself. This year's theme?

Squishmallows. She'll bake the cake. Draw the characters. Host the bingo. Magic, made by hand.

A creative revival

"I used to sew," she says. "I'd alter every outfit to fit exactly how I wanted it." Then life intervened. The sewing machine got boxed away. "It was maybe two or three decades before I got that side of myself back." Now she creates again, in flour and frosting. "And I'm doing it with my daughter. That's what I love most."

Couture from a box

"There's no shame in using a mix," she says, unapologetic. "You can still make it your own." She adds almond or Key lime extract. Fresh whipped cream. A drizzle of ganache. She makes her own brown sugar. Keeps frozen logs of cookie dough wrapped in parchment. Her tools? Humble. Worn. Perfect.

Not for sale

She could go pro. People have suggested it. But she won't. "I know someone who did. She loved it, until it became a job." Candy knows where the magic lives: in the asking. What are you making? Can I help? Will there be cookies? And always, the answer is yes. Because in her kitchen, the oven is an altar. The ritual is joy. And the offering is sweet, simple, unforgettable.

"The ritual is joy. And the offering is sweet, simple, unforgettable."



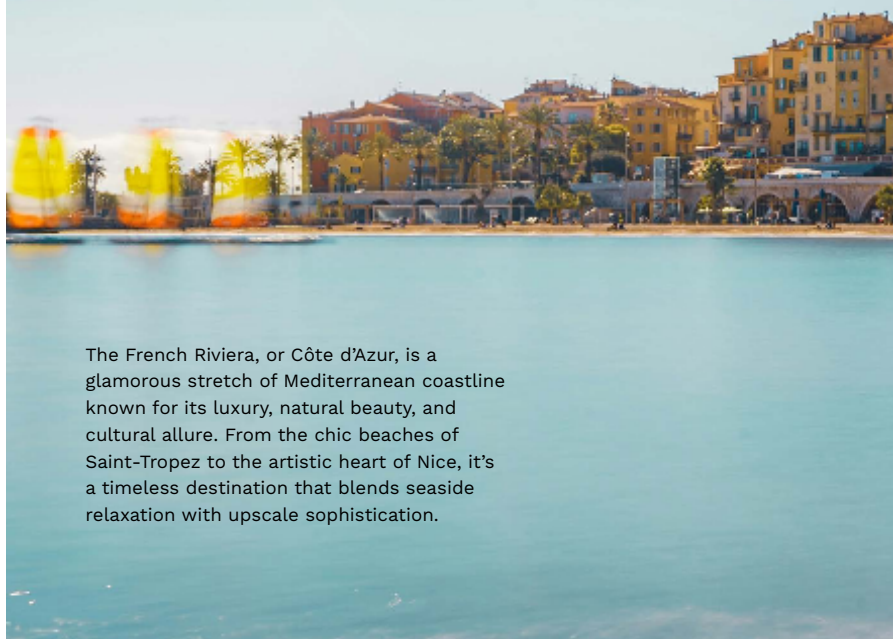
Where the Business Class is Going this Summer

Flight upgrades, hotel splurges, and the unlikely rise of St. Louis

By the time June rolls around, most of us are dreaming of European rooftops and white-sand beaches. But for a certain set, executives, founders, fast-moving consultants, summer still means business. Only now, business looks a little different. Think boardroom briefings in Nice, expense reports in Lisbon, and post-meeting spritzes in Miami. According to new insights from the all-in-one travel platform Navan, 2025's summer business travel season is anything but boring.

Business travel is booming (again)

The numbers are in: business travelers are back, and booking more than ever. Navan re-



The French Riviera, or Côte d'Azur, is a glamorous stretch of Mediterranean coastline known for its luxury, natural beauty, and cultural allure. From the chic beaches of Saint-Tropez to the artistic heart of Nice, it's a timeless destination that blends seaside relaxation with upscale sophistication.

ports a 10% increase in summer flight bookings compared to last year, with hotel bookings up a dramatic 25%.

Turns out, even in a world obsessed with virtual meetings, nothing quite beats a handshake.

“Executives have businesses to run,” says Rich Liu, CEO of Travel at Navan. “They clearly recognize the value of travel, connection, and face-to-face interactions.”

Translation: your next deal might not close over Zoom.

From Toronto to Tel Aviv, it's a global summer

The most jet-setting travelers to the US this summer? Canadians, who top the charts once again. Brits follow close behind, with London holding strong as the go-to destination for American travelers crossing the pond. And then there's Nice. The French Riviera city jumped into the #2 spot for both American and UK-based business travelers, though travelers should be ready for sticker shock:

hotel prices there are up 60% year-over-year.

Other unexpected moves? Israel, India, and Mexico all climbed the charts as top business travel markets to the US, while Spain fell five slots, landing at #12.

Hello St. Louis, goodbye spreadsheets

Domestically, the usual suspects, San Francisco and New York, still dominate. But 2023 is also giving love to



St. Louis is a dynamic Midwestern city known for its iconic Gateway Arch, rich music scene, and growing business ecosystem. Once an industrial powerhouse, it's now gaining traction as an emerging hub for startups, culture, and affordable city living.





Lisbon is a sun-soaked capital blending historic charm with modern energy, set against the backdrop of Portugal's scenic coastline. With its growing tech scene, vibrant culture, and relaxed pace, it's become a top spot for business travelers and remote workers alike.

less expected cities. St. Louis saw the most dramatic rise (+49 spots!), followed by Los Angeles and Orlando. These up-and-coming hubs are a reminder that business travel is no longer confined to coastal towers or finance capitals. It's going where the energy is. And sometimes, that means barbecue and blues before your morning pitch.

Lower fares, higher style

Here's the best part: you might not even need to cash in your points. Navan's data shows that economy flight prices for business travelers have

dropped 23% compared to summer 2024, averaging just \$414. Looking to save big? Try Miami. Flights there are down 45%, from \$1,022 to just \$556. Lisbon, Dublin, Bangalore, and Toronto also offer major discounts for the savvy traveler. In the US, low-key cities like Boston, Washington, and Seattle are showing steep airfare savings, which means more room in your budget for rooftop dinners or an extra night at the Four Seasons.

Airport roulette: choose wisely
Not all takeoffs are created equal. If your summer itinerary is tight, avoid

these trouble spots: LAX (Los Angeles), DCA (Washington, D.C.), and BNA (Nashville) currently top the list for cancellations. Book accordingly.

Pack the linen blazer

If 2024 was about testing hybrid work-life balance, 2025 is about mastering it. Whether you're hosting a company offsite in a converted chateau or closing deals between Michelin lunches, the travel forecast says go for it. And while you're at it, pack well, stay late, and maybe book that extra night. After all, the Wi-Fi's just as good on a rooftop in Lisbon.



Claiming Their Place

Inside the bold sisterhood of the Accounting Cornerstone Foundation

There's a certain magic that happens when women gather, not to compete, but to lift each other. That magic is exactly what I felt the moment I met Vanessa Vasquez and Mariette Martinez. Among the team behind the Accounting Cornerstone Foundation, two women in particular carry them-

selves with the kind of conviction that doesn't need to be loud to be powerful. You just feel it. In the way they speak. In the way they honor their work. And most of all, in the way they talk about legacy.

For Vanessa and Mariette, accounting isn't just a career. It's a calling. A community. A commitment to make sure no one does it alone.

"We're not competition. We're a complement to each other," Vanessa tells me early in our conversation. "We make sure everything happens for the best for each and every one of us."

More than numbers

Ask either of them why the Accounting Cornerstone Foundation exists, and you'll get an answer that goes far

deeper than spreadsheets and tax season.

“We’re more than just the people that put together numbers,” Vanessa says. “We’re the psychologists. We bring future and legacy to companies, families, and people.”

Mariette jumps in to share her personal why. Years ago, she had a transformational experience, not at a yoga retreat or on a mountaintop, but at a conference for accountants.

“It almost sounds like an oxymoron,” she laughs. “How can you be transformed at an accounting conference? But I was. Because I found my people. Not just technicians, but people working on themselves in a mindful way.”

That conference was Scaling New Heights, and it gave Mariette something she didn’t know she needed: proof that she wasn’t alone. That there was a different way to work and a deeper way to serve.

The golden ticket

That’s where the idea for the Foundation was born. A chance to give others the same transformation they had found, without all the excuses that usually get in the way.

“What if you had a golden ticket to go?” Mariette asks.

“Would you still find a reason not to go? The Foundation removes that barrier. We’re building the yellow brick road.”

Vanessa calls it a living legacy. Something not written after you’re gone, but built while you’re here.

“It’s not only when you die and someone writes something beautiful about you,” she says. “It’s creating a living legacy while you’re alive. And the people you touch are creating a difference in the world.”

The ripple effect

Legacy, for these women, isn’t just a word. It’s a ripple effect. One person transformed becomes a better business owner, a more present parent, and a more confident leader. And that energy spreads. “Before this interview,” Mariette says, “I was in a meeting for another organization. One of the members was someone who got a golden ticket from the Foundation. And

I thought, look at that. She’s here. In a space she may not have walked into otherwise.”

These moments, she says, are the real evidence of change. It’s not about polished outcomes. It’s about showing up and letting the magic happen.

No one left behind

Ask Mariette what kind of legacy she wants to leave behind, and the answer comes instantly.

“That no one is left behind,” she says, her voice catching for a moment. “That’s what I want on my tombstone. I try to bring everybody in as much as possible. Because it’s a lonely place when you’re left behind.”

Vanessa smiles, remembering when she first met Mariette back in 2016.

“She said that to me from the beginning, no one is left behind. And I’ve seen her live that, in everything she does.” They talk about community like some people talk about oxygen. It’s not a nice-to-have. It’s what keeps you breathing.



“You can’t go far if you don’t have a community surrounding you,” Vanessa says. “And being there doesn’t mean when you’re at your peak. It means being there when you’re in the valley, too.”

When someone believes in you

When I ask who first believed in them, the conversation shifts into a kind of soft reverence.

For Mariette, it was people like Alison Ball, who once pointed to a keynote stage and said, “I see you up there.” At the time, Mariette was still in her practice, speaking on

technical topics, nowhere near imagining herself as a keynote speaker.

“It was a mentorship moment,”

she says. “I didn’t see that for myself. But when someone else sees it in you, it sparks something. You start to wonder, maybe they’re right.”

Vanessa recalls a similar moment with Joe Woodard, who saw her potential before she did. He saw me at a conference and he said, I want you teaching next year. And I was

*“When someone believes in you,
you start to wonder...maybe
they’re right.”*

like, I teach virtually. I don't think I can do this. And he's like, well, you don't think so, but I do."

That was the beginning of something that would change her life and many others.

The balancing act

Of course, legacy doesn't build itself. It takes work. Calendars. Color-coded plans. Choosing where to show up and when to step back.

"We're a work in progress," Mariette says. "Sometimes I come home and I missed something and I have to ask myself, how do I feel about that? Do I want to feel like that again?"

Vanessa agrees. Her daughters are homeschooled, and they come first. Always. Even if that means structuring her business around ballet recitals and homeschool schedules.

"My main business is my daughters," she says. "The rest I plan around them. Every recital, every field trip, it goes on the calendar in pink. That day is sacred."

They speak about intentionality like a mantra. One day at a time. One calendar block at a time.

"Sometimes it's 2 a.m. and I'm still working. Sometimes it's a Hallmark movie and tea," Vanessa says. "Either way, I'm being intentional."

What they're unlearning

When I ask what they're unlearning right now, Vanessa doesn't miss a beat.

"How to communicate. We think we're supposed to respond right away to control the conversation. But it's more powerful to pause. To ask the right questions and really listen."

Mariette has a different take.

"I actually don't want to unlearn anything. Everything I've been through



is part of who I am. I just need to reframe it. And sometimes, I can choose to release it."

The onion metaphor

By the end of our conversation, Mariette compares herself to an onion. It sounds silly at first, until it doesn't.

"There are still so many layers I haven't shown the world. But I'm excited. Because every time I peel one off, I get closer to the woman I'm meant to be." Vanessa smiles and adds,

"Most people don't like onions. But this one, I think they'll like."

And just like that, two accountants, who are also mothers, wives, founders, friends, leave me thinking not about numbers or business models, but about bravery. About showing up. About what it means to build something that outlives you.

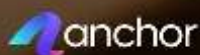
Because that's what Vanessa and Mariette are really doing. One golden ticket at a time.

"There are still so many layers I haven't shown the world. But I'm excited. Because every time I peel one off, I get closer to the woman I'm meant to be."

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Back To The Trail

Why Sam turned to hiking to find peace, purpose, and herself

S

am didn't set out to be a hiker. She just wanted to find wildflowers. "I used to love what we called wildflower hunting," she says. "It became a photography adventure, a decorating adventure. But in the process of doing that, I was hiking to get to these places... and I just fell in love with hiking."

Now, it's become her thing. Her ritual. Her reset.





Finding her footing

The path wasn't planned. She started walking. Then she kept going.

"It became the thing I wanted to do more than the flower hunting."

Her dog Rip is always by her side, and Captain, her late companion, is never far in spirit.

"The joy on their faces when they get to be dogs in nature, it brings me so much joy to give that to them," she says. "I know Captain's still with us, in his own way."

Books. Snacks. Water. Maybe a sketchpad. She's learned what to bring and what to leave behind.

"It's exercise, yes, but it's really my escape from reality, from the day-to-day grind."

A mountain of her own

In 2021, Sam took on Mount Whitney, the tallest peak in the contiguous U.S.

"I did the six-pack of peaks challenge. I did the 52 hike challenge, which is one hike a week for a year."

It took two years of training. And then... she didn't summit.

"My knee told me to stop. I didn't want to be the girl getting flight-lifted off the mountain."

Still, she solo-camped. Hiked most of the 20-mile trail. Climbed higher than she ever had.

"That experience changed me."

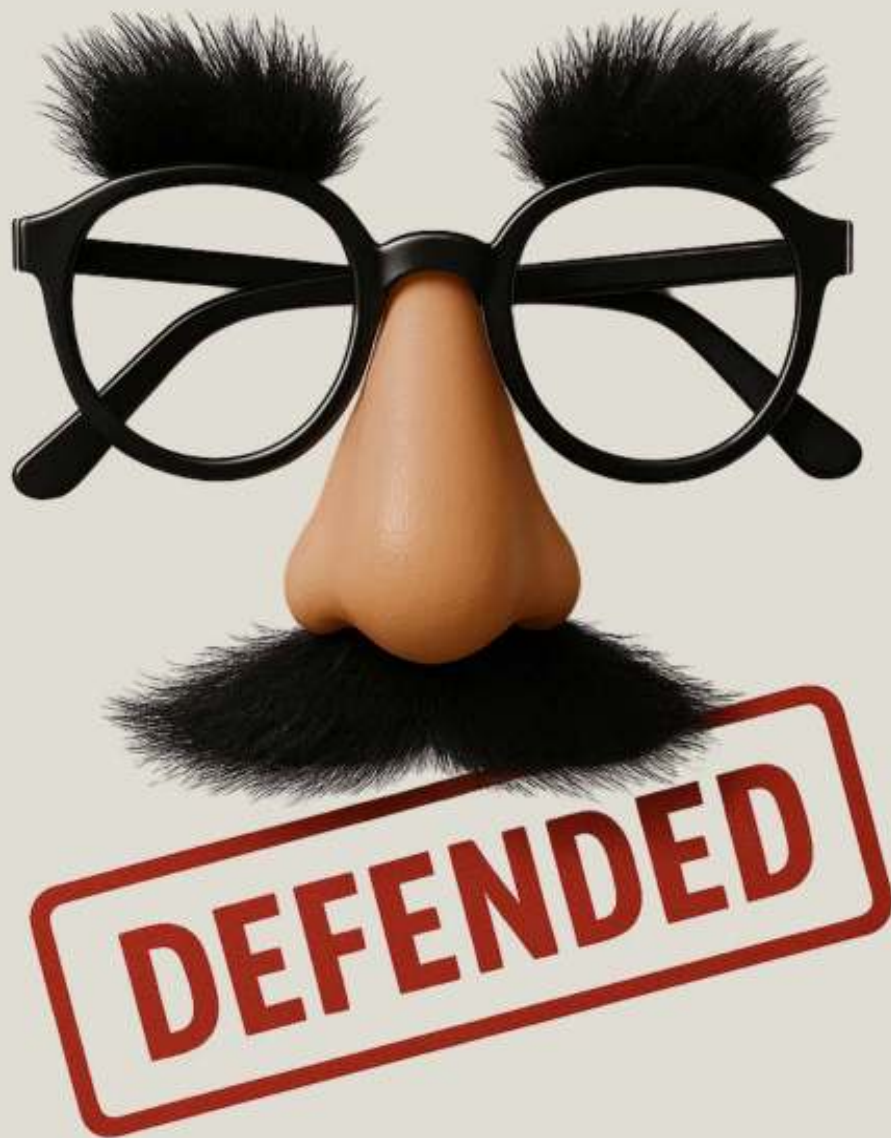
Gear up

If there's one thing she's serious about, it's prep.

"Good footwear is everything," she says. "Don't wear tennis shoes. Don't wear sandals. You're asking for trouble."

She likes REI. Athleta. Columbia. Sitka. "It really does make a big difference. Not just comfort, but your body's ability to do what you want it to do."

Her go-tos: protein powder from Truani, plenty of water, and clean ingredients. "No dyes. No crap."



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"It's probably saved my life at some points in time."

Mental space

What hiking really gives her? A pause button.

"I can actually turn my brain off," she says. "I'm not thinking about a deadline or a problem. I'm just... there."

She compares it to a conference.

"You come back inspired and renewed. But instead of sitting in a ballroom, you're on a mountaintop."

And for Sam, that's the closest thing to a spiritual experience.

The Montana factor

Sam lives part-time in Montana. The perfect place to get lost.

"I'm actually pissed I haven't discovered more," she says with a grin.

Even in winter, she heads out.

"As long as you're dressed right, you're fine. It's just like skiing."

Her next trip? Mammoth, in May.

"You really can see some amazing, amazing things you wouldn't see otherwise."

Parting advice

Start early. Wear the right shoes. Bring more water than you think you need. And don't overthink it.

"Find a lake with zero people on it at the top of a mountain and draw it. I promise, it'll be a beautiful experience."

"It's exercise, yes, but it's really my escape from reality, from the day-to-day grind."





The Fight

From TRX to TKO

It wasn't some gritty gym with rusted weights and sweat-stained leather that pulled Shana into the ring. It was a sleek cardio-boxing class in San Francisco, where TRX ropes hung from the ceiling and the vibe leaned more boutique than brutal. "It wasn't a real boxing gym," she laughs. "It was more for burning calories. But I instantly became hooked... and wanted to do nothing else."

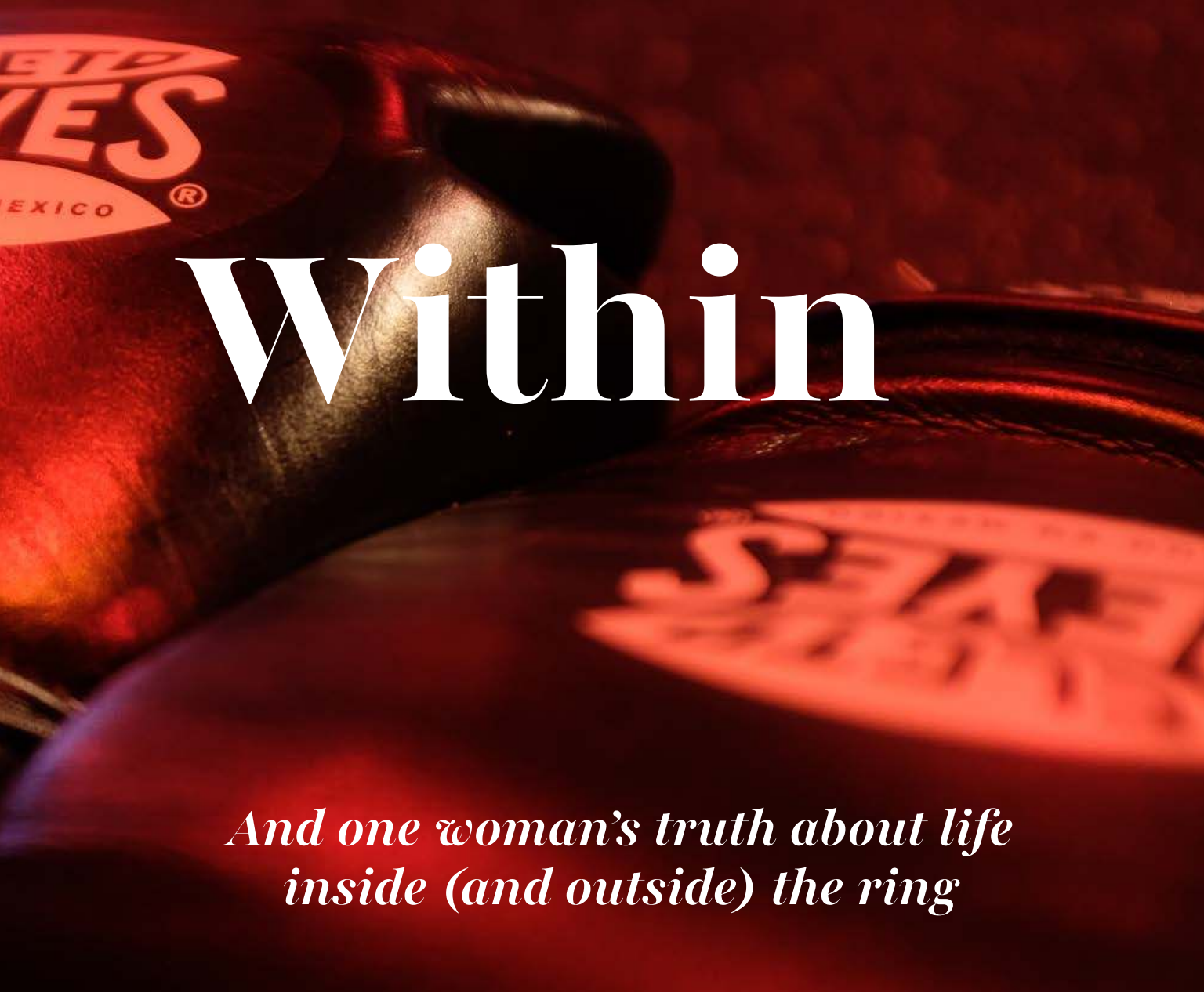
She didn't care for the ropes. Her friend stuck-with those. Shana? She found her rhythm with gloves on. Punch by punch, she felt something shift. Her obsession had begun.

New city, new fight

Not long after, she moved to New York. A city built for reinvention. She knew one person. Making friends? Daunting. "So I just started gym-hopping," she says. "Until I found a place that felt like home."

Eventually, she landed at Overthrow, a now-closed downtown gym known for its punk-rock aesthetic, loud energy, and politically charged edge. It was less Equinox, more East Village grit. "Boxers are intense," she says. "Everyone I've met who boxes... we're not normal people. We've all got a screw loose, but in the best way."

Her schedule became ritual: four days a week training, the other three spent hanging with



Within

And one woman's truth about life inside (and outside) the ring

her gym crew. "It was my whole life outside of work," she says. "That period, 2018, 2019, it was everything."

The thrill of the ring

Shana never went pro, but she trained like someone who could. Fight nights, sparring camps, two-a-days. "Even just practice sparring... there's nothing like it. It's the most insane challenge, mentally, physically, even spiritually." The adrenaline hits hard. The vulnerability is real. "It's not about getting hurt. I was more afraid of embarrassing myself. Of not doing well. But every time I got in the ring, I left feeling like I could do anything."

She pauses. "It genuinely changed how I carry myself."

A body shot to remember

One moment still lives in her muscles. During the pandemic, with gyms shuttered and the city quiet, Shana and her crew trained on rooftops and in parks. "We couldn't stop," she says. "We just found places to move."

Her trainer had a connection. Amanda Serrano, one of the greatest female boxers alive. And somehow, Shana ended up sparring her. "She doesn't even spar women. Not because she's snobby, she just doesn't want anyone learning her style."

Shana had no business being there. But Serrano let her in the ring anyway. “She hit me right in the solar plexus. I went down. Couldn’t breathe. I was mortified.” But she got up. “You only get 30 seconds between rounds. I caught my breath and went back in. Even Amanda looked at me like “are you sure?”

Afterward, her coach came up. “That was insane,” he said. “We’ve seen her do that to pros who refuse to ever spar her again. But you got up.” Shana smiles. “It’s the coolest thing I’ve ever done.”

More than muscle

People assume boxing is about self-defense. “That’s the biggest misconception,” she says. “People think I’m invincible now, like I could take down someone in the street. I live in New York. I’m not delusional.” For her, boxing is about mental strength, not street-fighting. “It’s not about hurting people, and it’s not about getting hurt. It’s a sport. And honestly... it’s a little like dancing.”

Her best friend started boxing after getting mugged. “She didn’t know how to process it. She wasn’t in therapy. Boxing became the thing that made her feel strong again.”

An antidote to stress... and sitting

When life feels like too much, her mom has one solution: “She’ll say, ‘Can you just go to the gym?’” Shana laughs. “I’ll come back a different person.”

Boxing clears her head. “Even in a cardio class, your brain’s fully engaged. It’s not like running, where you can zone out. You’re thinking about combinations, movement, and defense. You can’t think about work or stress while you’re boxing.” It’s regulation. Rewiring. Something close to freedom.



How she eats (and lives)

Shana eats clean, but not rigid. “I’m from California, so I love healthy food. I eat a lot of chicken, salads, and coconut water. I was a pseudo-vegetarian for years. Not much dairy or gluten.” But she lives in New York. “I eat everything when I go out. You don’t live here to skip the food.” Her golden rule? Earn the balance. “Last night I trained for an hour and a half, sweat like crazy, then went to a bar and had wine and chicken wings. It all evens out.”

Why she never went amateur

There was a window, just before she started her current job, when she considered going full amateur. “But that lifestyle... it’s intense. You need to be training constantly. Cutting weight. Focused 24/7.” She has friends who’ve done it. “They have USA Boxing books. Sanctioned fights. And it’s cool. But I love my job. I love my life. Boxing is a huge part of that, but it’s not all of it.” She smiles. “That ship has probably sailed. And I’m okay with that.”

Just go

Thinking of trying boxing? Her advice is simple. "Just go. Don't overthink it. No one's watching you. And if they are? They don't care. We all started somewhere."

She went to almost every gym in New York before finding the right one. "It's like dating. You need to find your people. The place where they recognize you. Where you want to show up."

The obsession that became home

Boxing isn't a phase for Shana. It's a lifeline. "It's

the thing that gets me off the couch. The thing that resets me. I'm kind of a homebody, so without it, I'd probably just sit and binge reality TV. But once I train, I want to do more. Go out. Live." It's also the way she connects with people everywhere. "When someone finds out I box, and they do Muay Thai or jiu-jitsu... suddenly we're talking for 30 minutes." Boxers recognize each other. It's a silent nod. An unspoken knowing. "Everyone I've met through boxing is a little bit-crazy. In the best way. But we get each other. We carry something, and we show up for it."



A 90-Pound Pivot

The routine that rebuilt Fady Hawatmeh

The number wasn't just high. It was humbling. Fady Hawatmeh, founder and CEO of the fintech company Clockwork, stood on the scale in silence as it blinked: 308 pounds. He wasn't shocked, exactly, but it still knocked the wind out of him.

"I stepped on and just froze," he says. "I thought, there's no way I'm 300-something. That was it. I was done making excuses."

Clockwork had taken up his sleep, his time,

his body. He was working 18 to 20 hours a day, sleeping four. "I kept telling myself I was too busy to be healthy," he says. "But the truth is... I just stopped taking care of myself."

He didn't move. He barely ate until late at night. Then he'd binge on pizza, pasta, chips, anything that felt like comfort after the chaos. "I wasn't just unhealthy.

I was hiding from it."



A promise between siblings

The push didn't come from a fitness influencer or a New Year's resolution. It came from his sister.

"She told me she was starting her own journey," he says. "Seeing a weight loss doctor, getting serious about her mental and physical health. I told her, 'If you do it, I'll do it too.'"

It was meant to be supportive. But the scale moment made it real.

Together, they held each other accountable. Texts, check-ins, shared progress. "She ended up losing almost 90 pounds, too," Fady says. "We did it side by side."

"Even when I was fat, I was confident. But I was in pain. And I was hiding." He doesn't downplay the truth. "I've always been a confident guy. But I wasn't okay. I was in physical pain. My joints hurt. My clothes didn't fit. And the depression... it was bad."

That was the thing most people didn't see. The quiet mental fog that settled in alongside the extra weight. "You can't feel good when your body is constantly inflamed. It's like your brain is underwater."

Walk first, then everything else

Fady's transformation didn't start with a personal trainer. It started with a treadmill.

"I started walking," he says. "Incline at 15%, three miles per hour, 30 minutes a day. Five days a week. That's what started the change."

No excuses. No missed days. Even now, he walks 12,000 steps every day, rain or shine. "Vacation? I'm still walking. It's who I am now."

He added in pushups and squats, 100 of each, every day, and kept things simple. "Nothing fancy. Just discipline."

And then he overhauled his meals.

"I ate the same thing every day for six months," he says. "Egg whites, low-carb tortillas, turkey tacos. It was robotic. But it worked."

The alcohol exit

He also gave up drinking.

"I wasn't a big drinker, but when I drank, I drank to get drunk," he says. "Then I'd eat like crap. Then I'd feel like crap. It was a whole cycle."

Cutting out alcohol helped him cut ties with temptation. "If you can say no to drinks in Vegas at 6 a.m., you can say no to anything."

But the side effect? He lost friends. "You stop drinking, you stop going out. You stop being the fun guy. And people fade away."

He's okay with it. "I've always had a small circle. The people who stayed, those are the ones who matter."

"I used to feel guilty after eating a burger. Now I just move on."

It took time to unlearn the guilt.

"At first, I had cheat meals. Then I'd fast for two days to punish myself. It wasn't healthy," he says. "Now I eat because I enjoy it. If I want a burger on a Tuesday, I'll have it."

That shift didn't happen overnight. "It took me almost two years to find balance. To realize I don't have to be shredded year-round. I just have to be consistent."

The routine that rebuilt him

His current rhythm is tight and intentional.

Up at 6 a.m. Walk to work, 1.6 miles. No breakfast. At 2 p.m., lunch: eggs, cheese, low-carb wrap. Afternoon walk. Home. Lift weights. Dinner around 7. Popcorn. Greek yogurt. Bed. "It sounds boring. But it gives me

structure. It frees up brain space."

What most people get wrong

"They think it's complicated," Fady says. "They want some perfect macro plan. But really? It's about being honest with yourself."

Move more. Eat less. Stop overthinking. Start walking.

"You're not going to die from being a little hungry," he says with a grin.

"You'll survive. And you'll get stronger."

"I lost 90 pounds. But what I gained was clarity."

This isn't just a weight loss story. It's a clarity story. A story about deciding you're worth the time. The early mornings. The awkward goodbyes. The moments when no one's clapping but you show up anyway.

"You don't have to suffer," Fady says.

"You just have to start."



"I lost 90 pounds. But what I gained was clarity."

There's an Art



to Shitposting

Inside Tom Zehentner's delightfully chaotic world of internet satire

Tom Zehentner is not a comedian. He'd want that clarified, right up top. "I just kinda like to f*** around," he tells me with a shrug. "But I'm not a comedian. I just have too much respect for real ones."

Still, his LinkedIn reads like a cross between an existential meme page and *The Office* meets *BoJack Horseman*. It's dry, chaotic, sometimes absurd, and, weirdly, very effective.

Tom is leading Product & Growth functions at FinOptimal, a software platform for accountants. But online? He's more digital trickster than tech exec. If thought leadership had a court jester, it might look like this.

"Being funny on LinkedIn is like cracking a joke in class and hoping the teacher laughs too."

Every post is satire. Not just funny. Satire. A carefully calibrated roast of startup culture dressed up in corporate clichés.

There was the election-day bait post about "how divided we all are"... that ended with a punchline about Excel vs. Google Sheets. A month-long tribute to *I Think You Should Leave*. A face-swap series featuring Got Milk ads. (One with Britney Spears was... upsetting.)

Tom isn't trolling. He's creating.

"I've got rules. No punching down. No politics, no

religion. If it's not something I'd want someone to screenshot and share out of context, I don't post it."

But even the clean stuff gives him the 4 a.m. shivers.

"I wake up wondering, did I post that? I check my phone in a panic."

Most of the time, it's fine. Sometimes, he deletes. Rewrites. Or tosses the whole thing. "If I can't say it the way it's meant to be said, I'll just scrap it."

The legs are covered in ink. The vibe is covered in chaos

Zoom might not show it, but Tom is heavily tattooed, sticker-style, black-and-gray designs from toes to thighs.

"I'm Type A about when I get them. Only when I'm a month or more from swimming. No sun, no sweat. Gotta heal."

He batches ink in the fall and spring. Then hides them, or not, depending on the room.

"Pants for the showroom floor. Shorts at the hotel bar."

"People don't care as much anymore. Especially in startup land. Tattoos aren't shocking. The memes, maybe."

Not here to be liked. Here to be remembered

Tom's humor isn't for everyone. And that's the point. "I once got DMed a shocked emoji from a guy I used to work with. I panicked. Thought I crossed a line. But he followed up and said, 'I love it. People take this stuff too seriously:'"

It's become a pattern. "Plenty of people react publicly. But the DMs always roll in, from the lurkers who never like or comment, but still see everything."

And if it ever backfires?

"I can delete it all. Throw up an AI headshot. Go back to being boring. No one will remember."

"I cosplay as a dumb idiot online... but I'm actually very good at what I do."

Tom knows his stuff. He responds fast. Sells well. Leads with clarity. But if someone assumes he's just a goofy meme guy?

"Good. Let them. I'm writing for myself first. The people who know me, know me, and I'll take a few folks thinking I'm dumb if it means I get to make myself laugh."

Charge for value. Unless you're formatting spreadsheets no one reads

When asked what industry clichés deserve roasting, Tom lights up.

"'Charge for value, not time.' And then they spend eight hours on a file no one opens."

He rolls his eyes.

It's satire with edge. But never cruelty.

Why it matters

He didn't want to post at all. "You're supposed to have a voice. So I did the only thing I know how to do: joke."

It worked. People laugh. Leads come in. Customers feel connected. The weird energy sticks.

"If you make it personal, it will work. You just have to be brave enough to do it."

His advice? Step away from the AI. Skip the content checklist. Make something only you could make.

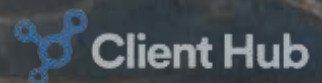
"That's what makes it good. That's what makes it real."



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Diamond

What baseball taught her about family, legacy, and joy

Deborah Defer isn't your typical grandma. For one, no one calls her that. Around the ballpark, she's Mia, a name born from backyard Mamma Mia dance parties with nieces and grandkids, and it stuck. She's got a cooler of Cajun peanuts in the backseat, a lawn chair in the trunk, and a soft spot for triple plays and walk-up songs.

Her Saturdays? They belong to baseball.

"They'll get on my daughter's phone like, 'Are you coming today?'"

Four boys, one ballfield, and a whole lot of heart

Her daughter had a plan. All the boys, Clayton (9), Maverick (7), Theodore (4), and KJ (2), would start baseball at age four. No excuses. "They do this peewee thing first," Deborah explains, "where they learn to bat, throw, and just kind of get used to the field."

It clicked fast. "Clayton's been throwing since he could walk. My daughter and son-in-law are both athletes, so it's just in their blood."

By the time he was seven, Clayton was doing things that made the stands go wild.

"He made a triple play all by himself. The parents went nuts."

A front row seat to greatness

She's not just in the bleachers. She's part of the team, in her own way.

"I'd throw with them, help them bat, hold the babies if my daughter was coaching. Whatever was needed," she says. "I loved every second of it."

Her voice lights up describing Clayton's championship games, ten strikeouts, three double plays, and the kind of energy that makes baseball electric. "He switch hits too," she adds, casually, like she's talking about a cup of coffee. "Left and right."

"I try to live vicariously through him. I wasn't that good of an athlete."

Baseball and the art of being a team

What she's most proud of isn't the stats, it's the growth. "Baseball's taught them how to be team players," she says. Clayton takes it seriously. If he misses a fly ball or strikes out, he gets hard on himself. But he's learning how to support the team." She smiles, then adds, "I even look for that when I hire people. I love when someone's played on a team. It says a lot."

From the bleachers to bonding time

These games have become more than just a sport. They've become a ritual. A way to bring

Days



the whole family together. Her husband, newly retired, now plays a starring role of his own: chauffeur, sideline cheerleader, and truck-heater king when it's too cold. "He's at every practice. And if it's freezing, he's in the car with the heater on. But he's there."

As for Deborah, she has her own ballpark essentials. "Cajun peanuts for the big kids. Fruit snacks for the littles. And always a hot dog at the stadium."

Sun, snacks, and travel ball life

Travel ball isn't for the faint of heart. It means long weekends, early mornings, and triple-header Sundays. "They'll play at nine, win, play again at noon, win again... and if they make it, they play under the lights at 5 p.m. It's a full day."

But she wouldn't trade it. "I love the heat. Sitting out there in a tank top, getting some sun, watching them do what they love."

Clayton's team is currently 25-4. They've won multiple tournaments and show

no signs of slowing down. The younger boys are already showing signs of future greatness in their own way. "Maverick's the politician," she laughs. "He waves to his friends in the outfield. Theodore just wants to see how far

he can throw the ball."

And KJ? The baby? "Oh, he'll play. No question. It's inevitable."

Legacy, love, and a little dancing toddler named KJ

The athletic roots run deep. Her son-in-law played baseball. Her daughter played softball and basketball and placed fifth in the state for high jumping as a sophomore.

"It's just who they are," Deborah says.

But beyond the medals and home runs, there's a quieter kind of legacy happening here.

The kind that looks like early mornings, chilly bleachers, a familiar shout from the stands. The kind where a little boy checks his mom's phone to see if Mia is on her way.

"I don't need to be called grandma. I'm Mia. I'm 29 forever."

It's the kind of story that doesn't always make

headlines. But it's the kind we all hold close. A reminder that sometimes the most glamorous thing isn't a red carpet, it's a dirt field under the lights, a stadium snack in hand, and a woman who shows up, every time.



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Sacred Rhythm

How Christian Jones built a life on purpose

Christian Jones doesn't compartmentalize. Faith. Business. Family. Church. They're not separate tracks, they're woven into the same life.

He's the CEO of a national marketing firm, a father of four, and the kind of small group leader who knows every family's birthday and prayer

request by heart.

And at the center of it all: his faith and church. "We're known there. That's rare in this season of life."

A village of seven families and fifteen kids

What began as a church small group has become a full-blown ecosystem. "We raise our kids





together, eat together, carry each other through.” Christian says. They’ve been meeting for nearly a decade. “Our small group is our anchor in a season that tends to pull you in every direction, all at once.”

“For us, it’s not just about Sunday. It’s how we live Monday through Saturday.”

A moment that still haunts him... in the best way

After college, Christian joined a year-long faith program in Branson, Missouri. It was a season for reflection, introspection and asking big questions, trying to figure out what came next.

One night, walking alone through the empty fields of the campus he lived on, something clicked.

“It was quiet. I had my headphones in. And I felt this... stillness. Peace. Holiness. It was clear that God was near to me in that moment in a way I had never experienced before.”

It wasn’t glamorous. But it was defining.

“On paper, you could say that point of my life was a low point because I wasn’t sure what the next steps in my life were going to look like. There was some uncertainty. But, it was a very sweet and impactful season because I knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be.”

Marking the season

Christian was born with a heart defect and underwent surgery as an infant. A scar still wraps around his chest. Years later, during that formative year in Branson, he tattooed a verse from

Song of Songs 8:6 on his arm to match.

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm...

One scar. One seal. A physical reminder that faith leaves a mark.

“Religion should never feel distant. It should change how you lead, love, and live.”

Faith in the workplace

For Christian, scripture isn’t just ethereal or disconnected, it’s strategic and orienting for all parts of his life. He leads his company like he leads his family, with purpose, presence, and an open hand. Psalm 27:13 grounds him: I believe I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the Living.

“Having faith in Jesus is not just about Heaven, or the afterlife. It’s about stewarding the here and now. How I show up as CEO of TaxProMarketer, as a husband, father, and friend is rooted in the vision of the Kingdom of God found in scripture” “Business isn’t secondhand. It’s sacred when it’s done well.”

Legacy in motion

He doesn’t preach at work. But he doesn’t hide either.

“There’s a version of work that’s deeply spiritual. I want to see more leaders live that out.”

He’s 34. But his voice carries the kind of conviction that makes you sit up straighter. Not because he has all the answers, but because he’s learned to ask the right questions.

And through it all, he’s just trying to be faithful.

Changing the Narrative, One Scholar at a Time

Meet the four recipients of the Accounting Cornerstone Foundation scholarship, and the dreams, values, and rituals shaping their lives beyond the numbers.

Every once in a while, you meet people who remind you that accounting isn't just about ledgers and spreadsheets, it's about people. About community. About heart.

The Accounting Cornerstone Foundation recently awarded scholarships to four remarkable individuals who are not only building careers, but also building lives full of purpose, balance, and quiet joy. From quiet mornings with coffee and Scripture, to coal-heated homes in Pennsylvania, to lake paddles in the Texas sun, these recipients share what grounds them, what drives them, and how they plan to make their mark far beyond the books.

Here's what they had to say:



Barb Skinner
Portland

Let's start with where you come from. What's one fun or unexpected thing people wouldn't guess about you?

I grew up in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon with my parents and three sisters. I've always loved this area and only left briefly for college and to study abroad in Costa Rica. My husband, Colin, and I have lived in North Portland for 14 years. We have three kids, ages 3, 5, and 7, so most of our time is spent playing, reading, and exploring with them. Starting a "lifestyle" bookkeeping business has allowed me to work part-time doing something I enjoy, while still being present at home. It's been an incredible gift. We try to visit the Oregon coast monthly, and love biking, hiking, and reading together. Before kids, Colin and I used to do marathons and triathlons together, and I hope to get back to marathoning soon!

What's something you're passionate about outside of accounting?

Sustainable agriculture. Colin and I spent a summer in

college working on a small, family-run organic farm in Colorado through the WWOOF organization. Ever since, we've made it a priority to support local farming through community-supported agriculture programs. Most of our produce, fish, and sometimes meat comes from those sources.

Is there a hobby or ritual that helps you re-charge?

Every morning, I start my day in the backyard with coffee, my Bible, and my journal. I spend time in prayer, reflection, and just listening to the birds. Especially when everything's in bloom, it feels sacred. Colin and I alternate

mornings to work out, and I love my early runs through our quiet neighborhood.

How do you hope to make a difference, accounting aside?

Our church community plays a huge role in our lives. We meet weekly in a small group for dinner, discussion, and prayer. We support each other, financially, with childcare, and in service projects. We've served meals in shelters and partnered with foster families. I also volunteer regularly at my daughter's school and love hosting neighborhood play-dates and dinners. It's about fostering real-life connection in a world that's increasingly online.



Samantha Roshannon
Pennsylvania

Let's start with where you come from. What's one fun or unexpected thing people wouldn't guess about you?

I'm from the coal region of Pennsylvania, specifically Minersville. Something people don't expect is that many homes here still heat with coal! Families scoop coal into buckets and pour it into a big bin that feeds into the furnace. It sounds wild, but it's part of the charm of where I'm from.

What's something you're passionate about outside of accounting?

Financial literacy and budgeting. Before I started my bookkeeping business, I ran a personal finance coaching business. That started after I graduated college and realized how little I knew about managing money. I dove into books and podcasts, paid off \$90,000 in debt, built an emergency fund, saved for two unpaid maternity leaves, and bought my first home. That experience shaped everything I do today.

Is there a hobby or ritual that helps you re-charge?

I've always been active, gymnastics growing up, CrossFit as an adult. Since having kids, consistency's been tough, but I recently hired a trainer and feel that spark again! Movement helps me feel strong and centered. When I prioritize my physical health, everything else benefits.

How do you hope to make a difference, accounting aside?

I want to create a mentorship program that pairs aspiring bookkeepers with early-stage startups. New bookkeepers would gain experience under mentorship, and startups would get the support they need. Breaking into the industry is hard without experience, and small businesses often can't afford quality help. I want to bridge that gap so both sides can grow together.

Clean puor summer mocktails



1. Lavender Lemonade Fizz

- 1 oz lavender syrup
- 0.75 oz lemon juice
- Soda water to top

Build in a Collins glass. Stir gently.



2. Blackberry Sage Cooler

- 4 blackberries
- 2 sage leaves
- 0.75 oz lime juice
- 0.5 oz honey syrup

Sparkling water
Muddle, shake, strain, top with bubbles.



3. Watermelon Cucumber Tonic

- 2 oz watermelon juice
- 1 oz cucumber juice
- 0.5 oz lime
- Fever-Tree cucumber tonic

Serve tall over ice. Garnish with a cucumber ribbon.



4. Pineapple Coconut Mule

- 2 oz pineapple juice
- 1 oz coconut water
- 0.5 oz lime juice
- Ginger beer to top

Build in a copper mug. Add crushed ice and mint.



5. Hibiscus & Rose Iced Tea

- Brewed hibiscus tea
- 0.5 oz rose syrup
- Lemon slice

Serve chilled with edible flowers. Gorgeous and caffeine-free.



Cindi Hansen
Montana

Let's start with where you come from. What's one fun or unexpected thing people wouldn't guess about you?

I grew up and went to college in Central Florida, lived in Utah for a decade, and now live in Northwest Montana. I taught elementary school for 16 years before making a career change. Family is incredibly important to me. I'm lucky to live close to most of my immediate family. Fun fact: I used to be adventurous. I rode a motorcycle, went scuba diving, and even skydived twice. I've got the photos to prove it!

What's something you're passionate about outside of accounting?

Family, both the one I was born into and the one I've built. Having a family of my own took longer than expected, but they're the most important part of my life. I also have close friends who feel more like family.

Is there a hobby or ritual that helps you recharge?

Hiking and being out in nature. That's a big reason why I love living where I do. I'm not an early riser, so I'm more of a sunset person than a sunrise one. But being in nature reminds me to slow down and stay present.

How do you hope to make a difference, accounting aside?

By helping people feel loved and valued. That's something I believe the world really needs. I want to raise children who do the same, and by being my authentic self, I hope others are encouraged to let their true selves shine too.



Jennifer Adams
Texas

Let's start with where you come from. What's one fun or unexpected thing people wouldn't guess about you?

I live in a small town between Austin and San Antonio. I was born and raised in Texas, but spent four years in Oregon for college. That was a bit of a culture shock for a Texas girl, but I grew to love the Pacific Northwest! I have a Bachelor of Theology, I'm an ordained minister, and now I run a bookkeeping firm. It's been a wild, twisty path, but people have always been my passion.

What's something you're passionate about outside of accounting?

Teaching Bible studies, preaching, and walking alongside others through life's highs and lows. I spent 13 years on a church staff, part of that time in a pastoral role. My heart is to point people to Jesus through how I live and how I teach.

Is there a hobby or ritual that helps you recharge?

I live next to a lake, so I kayak or paddleboard whenever I can. Being on the water is my happy place. And in Texas, the weather usually cooperates!

How do you hope to make a difference, accounting aside?

I want to leave a legacy of loving God and loving people well. So many people long to be seen and known. If I can help people feel that, even in small ways, I'll consider that a life well lived.



More than a Rescue

*A love story with many endings
(and new beginnings)*

Let's start with a scene: a twelve-year-old girl, an orange kitten, and a piece of string tied loosely around his neck like a tattered ribbon. The kitten was thin, threadbare. The girl was curious, gentle. She scooped him up, combed out the fleas, fed him, and gave him a name fit for a tiny warrior, Tuffy Tiger.

That girl was Judie McCarthy. And that was her first rescue. She didn't know it yet, but it would become a lifelong practice. A personal religion. The way she would connect to the world.

"Pets need a voice," she says now, decades later. "They can't speak for themselves."

Rescue isn't a hobby, it's a heartbeat.

Judie didn't grow up imagining a life spent at adoption events or coaxing scared puppies out of crates. But love doesn't usually ask for permission. It just shows up and stays.

The first official rescue came when her daughter was four and grieving the loss of her grandmother. Judie thought a pet might help ease the ache. At the shelter, just as they were about to leave, they spotted an orange tabby kitten, Tuffy 2.0, in a way, and he became family for over fifteen years.

"There's something about rescued animals," she says. "They just love you

differently. Like they know."

From fosters to soulmates

Judie has fostered everything; new-born litters, senior dogs, sick puppies, traumatized survivors. She's cleaned up more messes than she can count. She's lost animals she only just met. And she still keeps doing it.

One dog changed everything. His name was Rufio, a shy Siberian Husky mix from an abusive home.

Judie worked with him until he was adoptable. Then she brought him to an event... on Valentine's Day.

"I sat next to his crate the whole time," she says. "I just couldn't leave."

A couple showed interest but couldn't

“Love doesn’t usually ask for permission. It just shows up and stays.”

get Rufio to come out. So Judie found them outside, told them she was his foster mom, and brought them back in. She coaxed him out. The couple adopted him.

That was eight years ago. They still text. They still visit. Judie flies from Florida to Texas just to see him.

Letting go with style

People ask her all the time: How can you give them up?

“I don’t miss them,” she shrugs.

“Because I know I did right by them. That’s the point. Rescue’s not about collecting pets. It’s about giving them the life they deserve.”

And sure, she’s had the tough ones. One foster mom was “a handful,” as Judie puts it, high energy, didn’t gel with her own dogs, required more patience than expected.

“But we made it work,” she says. “We always make it work.”

“You can’t go looking for them. The right animals just find you.”

Judie doesn’t believe in shopping for dogs. Or planning it too much. She believes in timing. Magic. Something that feels like destiny with fur.

“My dog Luna just appeared in my life,” she says. “All my pets did. They show up when they’re meant to.”

She talks about rescue the way some people talk about soulmates or Parisian vintage finds, accidental but perfect.

What the system gets wrong

Despite the romance of rescue, Judie’s clear-eyed about the system’s flaws.

“There are too many breeders pretending to be rescues,” she says. “They’re just rehoming and charging insane fees.”

She wants better regulation. More funding. More transparency.

“I’ve walked into shelters and cried,” she says. “The animals deserve so much more than they’re getting.”

What no one sees

Behind every Instagram-ready adoption story, there’s hours of labor. Paperwork. Medical care. Behavior assessments. Judie’s made the hard calls too, the ones no one wants to talk about.

“Sometimes an animal isn’t safe,” she says. “You do everything you can... but some decisions are just heartbreaking.”

Still, she keeps going.

The love that lingers

Her final message isn’t flashy. It’s intimate, practical, and wildly inspiring.

“Donate towels. Walk a dog. Sit and pet a cat,” she says. “Show up for a few hours. That’s all it takes to start.”

Because what she’s really learned is this: You don’t just rescue animals. You rescue people, too. Yourself included.





High Road On Two Wheels

How Scott Zarret found movement, meaning, and his version of meditation

Let's get one thing straight: Scott Zarret didn't become a cyclist for the Lycra.

This isn't a story about watts or cadence or shaving your legs for speed. It's a story about distance. About quiet. About finding out who you are when there's nothing to do but keep pedaling.

"I think I was maybe 13," Scott says, his voice soft, remembering. "It was a three-week trip through Canada. That was my first real touring experience."

The long haul

In the summer of 1999, Scott Zarret embarked on the most epic journey of his cycling career. It was a 2,470-mile self-supported mountain bike journey along the Continental Divide, stretching from the Canadian border in Montana to the Mexican border in New Mexico.

Motivated by a desire to step away from the corporate grind and rediscover himself, Scott joined a group of twelve riders from across the globe for a two-and-a-half-month adventure through some of the most remote and breathtaking landscapes in North America. The expedition tested his physical and mental limits as he hauled a 70-pound trailer through snow, mud, rain, and searing heat, climbing over rugged mountain passes and navigating desolate fire roads.

Along the way, he encountered bears, moose, mountain lions, and storms, but also shared powerful moments of camaraderie, laughter, and solitude with his fellow riders.

WHY THE BIKE?

“You get the adrenaline rush... and it’s like meditation.”

When asked what cycling gives him that nothing else does, Scott doesn’t rattle off stats or goals. He thinks. Then:

“Friends. Exercise. Nature. Adrenaline. Cycling gives me all of them. I come back and I feel great. It’s like all those boxes get checked.”

But there’s a different kind of peace he talks about too. “It’s also meditation,” he says. “You just get into a rhythm. You lose time. Everything else fades.”

That rhythm? It’s where he feels most like himself.

Back then, and maybe again

Scott used to race. Before the kids. Before CPAcademy.org. Before life got full and fast in other ways.

“These days it’s all Peloton,” he says. “Three or four times a week. But I think I’ll be back next year.”

Does he miss it?

“Yes,” he says, without even thinking. “It’s the thing that fills my bucket. Brings me energy and joy. And I can’t do it right now.”

Then, a pause.

“There’s this moment when I’m on the bike,” he says quietly, “and I feel like I remember who I was, before everything else got added.”

REINVENTING THE RIDE

“My goal is to reinvent ways to be on two wheels.”

He’s not chasing old finish lines. He’s chasing simplicity. Freedom in motion. “I was talked out of the motorcycle form when I met my wife,” he laughs. “But pretty much anything with two wheels, I’m happy with.”

These days it’s about moments. The e-bike for errands.

The fat bike in the snow. School drop-offs on the bike that feel like tiny escapes. “It’s more convenient,” he says. “Less buildup time.”

The motion is still there. The sweat. The clarity. It just looks different now.

Let it ride

An ideal day?

“A Sprinter van. Parked somewhere remote. Mountains, maybe. Quiet breakfast. A ride. Lunch. A soak. A nap.”

No WiFi. No meetings. Just a trail, some gravel or dirt, and space to breathe.

Some people count their days in dollars or deadlines. But Scott? He measures his in miles. In quiet climbs. In the way the wind slips past your ears when there’s no noise left in your head.

And that’s what cycling has given him. Not just movement, but stillness. Not just sweat, but clarity. The kind that stays with you, long after you step off the bike.



*“Cycling gives me all of them.
Family and friends. Exercise.
Nature. Adrenaline.”*



Salvadoran pupusas, rooted in the Indigenous Pipil tradition, are a national dish blending pre-Columbian heritage with modern street food. Today, they're a global symbol of Salvadoran identity.

Pupusas, Purpose, and the Pacific

The Journey Back to Herself

“You have to eat them with your hands,” Astrid says, smiling. “It’s messy. It’s perfect. It’s life.”

Astrid Galvez says with a laugh, her voice as warm and rich as the Pacific waters she loves to surf. “It just doesn’t work that way.”

In one sentence, she captures the essence of her life where she’s grounded in tradition, full of joy, and never far from family, community, and a good meal.

Astrid, a quietly magnetic force in the accounting world, was born in El Salvador, spent two decades in Los Angeles, and now calls Washington home. But no matter where she lives, her heart always carries the colors, flavors, and spirit of El Salvador.



A slow and beautiful transition

Astrid's American story began in 1997, when she arrived as a teenager. Her sisters followed years later, each step a slow layering of their shared journey.

"It was a slow transition," she says, remembering those early days with a reflective grace. "We faced barriers we didn't even know existed, the language, the system, the culture. Everything was new."

Landing in Los Angeles cracked her world wide open. "Back home, we all looked the same. In LA, every face, every street corner was different. It was overwhelming, but it was a beautiful shock."

In a city filled with contrasts, Astrid found expansion instead of erasure. She learned how to hold her heritage and her future in the same hand. Over time, that balancing act became a rhythm.

A return to where it all began

Every spring, after tax season winds down, Astrid and her sisters head home to El Salvador, where coconut trees lean lazily in the sun and where the soul breathes differently.

"We made it a tradition," she says. "It's not just a vacation. It's a reset."

Days start with fresh coconut water. Afternoons hum with the scent of grilled pupusas, hand-pressed and filled with pork, beans, and cheese, topped with bright pickled cabbage and ladles of tomato salsa.

"You have to eat them with your hands," Astrid says, smiling. "It's messy. It's perfect. It's life."

There's no rush, no fork, no need to explain. Each bite tastes like home, like memory, like restoration.

Surf lessons, volcano hikes, and a full heart

Adventure is woven into every trip home. Some years, it is surfing lessons, Astrid's sacred ritual. Other years, it is hiking volcano peaks, ziplining through lush forests, or wandering the misty highlands.

"El Salvador may be small," she says, "but it is packed with magic. One morning, you're hiking a volcano. That afternoon, you're surfing world-class waves."

Her favorite kind of day begins barefoot on the sand and ends with fresh seafood eaten as the sunset melts into the Pacific. There's salt in the air and nothing on the agenda but joy.

And no matter the plan, one tradition never changes.

"The first thing I do when I land? I book a surf lesson," she says, grinning.

The ocean is not just a playground. For Astrid, it's a place to release, to reconnect, and to remember who she is outside the pressures of work and expectation.



Family, business, and the art of trust

Running a business with your sisters sounds dreamy, and most days, it is.

“There are challenges,” Astrid says. “Especially when we are exhausted at the end of the season. But we trust each other. We communicate. We are honest.”

The firm they run is more than an accounting practice, but it embodies a bridge for Hispanic entrepreneurs. A place where stories are understood, and dreams are translated without explanation.

“Our work is deeply personal,” Astrid says. “We know the barriers because we lived them.”

Clients do not just drop off forms. They share stories.

They find comfort. They find community. And sometimes, they find strength in hearing that the woman behind the spreadsheet has walked a path that looks like their own.

A homeland stitched into the soul

Ask Astrid what she wishes people knew about El Salvador, and she answers without hesitation.

“The warmth you feel when you land, it’s not just the tropical air. It’s the people. They welcome you like family.”

Her top five musts for first-time visitors? Eat a pupusa with your hands. Surf the Pacific. Hike a volcano. Drink coconut water straight from the source. Leave room for surprise.

“El Salvador fills you up,” she says. “It reminds you who you are and why you started.”

For Astrid, every trip home is a full circle, a reconnection to purpose, a renewal of spirit, and a reminder that sometimes, the truest version of yourself is waiting right where you began.

And sometimes, it is folded into the soft, sizzling warmth of a pupusa, eaten by the sea with salt in your hair and gratitude in your hands.

“Sometimes, the truest version of yourself is waiting right where you began.”



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24,901 miles of clarity

76 years old and cycling the circumference of the earth

“I’m on a mission now to get to 24,901. That’s my mission.”

There’s a beautiful absurdity to it. Jeff Prager, cycling enthusiast, black belt, CFO, is riding the distance of the Earth’s circumference. One trail loop, one Colorado morning, one padded-short-clad ride at a time.

It started with a glance at his odometer: 17,000 miles. Then curiosity struck.

“I wondered what the circumference of the Earth was,” he told me. “24,901 miles. And as of yesterday, I had 4,023 to go.”

The goal is simple. Elegant, even. Ride the globe without leaving the state. And do it before turning 80.

From stickball to Strava

Jeff’s earliest rides weren’t tracked on an app. They were sweaty, sun-drenched excursions through Connecticut neighborhoods where pizza cost thirty-five cents and no one wore a helmet.

“Our parents opened the door and said, ‘Get lost,’” he laughed. “That was freedom.”

There were no water bottles, no sunscreen. Just a group of kids, their bikes, and whatever the day became.



"We'd ride to my grandparents' house, after school, to get pizza. There was only one car in the family, and my dad took it to work. Bikes were our transportation."

He earned his Boy Scout cycling merit badge with a 50-mile loop around New Haven. "We rode by the train tracks, found weird little places. We didn't even know the value of drinking water back then."

The pause (and the inevitable return)

Like any good love story, cycling faded into the background when life got loud. Jeff and his wife raised three kids. Between soccer games, swim meets, and building his businesses, the bike gathered dust. "I stopped for many, many years," he said. "And then one day, my youngest son came home from college and said, 'Hey Dad, let's go bike riding.' And just like that, I remembered how much I loved it." He didn't ease back in. He jumped into charity rides—75 miles from Denver to Fort Collins and back again the next day for the MS 150. "It was fun... until the last 20 or 30 miles when everything just hurts like heck."

Motion, as meditation

Cycling, for Jeff, isn't just about movement. It's about mind. "I still work. And when I hit a wall, whether I'm programming, writing, or stuck on something, I jump on my bike." And just like that, he disappears into motion. "Some of my best ideas come when I'm not thinking about them. I've had to stop riding just to talk into

my phone: don't forget this. Do this at two o'clock. Write this down." The rhythm of the pedals becomes a rhythm of thought. Riding becomes



writing. "Sometimes I look up and think... where am I? I'm so deep in thought, I don't even notice where I'm going."

Elegant endurance

He rides two to three hours on average. He's biked in 100-degree heat. In 32 degrees. Once, while training for a charity ride, the weather dropped mid-ride and he wasn't prepared. "I thought I'd die before we got back," he said, shaking his head. "Now I pay close attention to the forecast." When the weather's bad, he rides on a trainer. It's harder than real roads, he says. But it gave him his power and speed back. "My must-have? Padded shorts. That's for damn sure."

Cycling as discipline

There's a cerebral energy to Jeff. He's methodical but never rigid. He still practices martial arts. He recently started piano. He likes being bad at

new things.

"It's infuriating," he admitted. "But that's how you grow."

He sees cycling the same way.

"You can learn a basic move in karate in 20 seconds. But as a second-degree black belt, I still get corrected. The difference is the nuance."

He's never taken a professional cycling lesson, but lately, he's been thinking about it. "My bike shop guy is an Olympic cyclist. I've been going there for years. I thought... I wonder what I could still learn."

Close calls and disappearing civility

Not all rides are Zen. Jeff's seen his share of close calls: flooded trails, pileups, near-misses. He avoids roads when he can, sticking to Colorado's expansive trail system. But even then, he says, courtesy is rare. "People walk dogs off-leash, they wear earbuds, they don't hear you yell, 'on your left!' It's just... rude." He sighs. "It's not just biking. I think we've lost our sense of civility. Everyone's so fast to flip the bird now. We're less patient. Less kind."

Still riding

Despite all of it, he keeps going. His younger brother rides too. They compare miles. Push each other to go further. He wants to ride 24,901 miles by the time he turns 80. And he's close. But even when he hits it? "I'll probably just keep riding."

Her Own Kind of Balance

Lindsay Wheeler is redefining motherhood, with heart, hustle, and a little help from Instacart

Lindsay Wheeler's day started at 6:15 a.m.

Her son, fully dressed, was standing beside the bed. "That's nice," she laughs. Then came a workout. Two packed lunches. One revised Google doc. A hairdo. A school drop-off. And now, this interview.

She has two kids. One startup to scale. And about five hours of focus time before the next round begins.

Small wins and sticky fingers

Motherhood, she says, wasn't what she expected. Not in the best parts.

"You feel this wild joy when they succeed," she says. "It's not about you, but you're teary-eyed anyway." Her daughter, Lincoln, is in a school play. She's six. She can't read yet. But she's memorized every line. Her son, Christian, is seven. He plays football. He's short, but fast. "They both go for it. And when they get it, you feel so proud it's embarrassing."

"You're like, why am I crying at a second-grade poetry jam?"

How work changed when they arrived

Before kids, Lindsay worked nonstop. Travel.



Presentations. Accounts to close. “It wasn’t always the best work,” she admits. “Just a lot of it.” Now? “I’m intentional. I get two deep work windows, morning before school and between 8:30 and 4:30. That’s when I move the needle. After that, I’m mom again. And if you catch me on a Zoom after 8 p.m., it’s because they’re finally asleep.”

On guilt, grace, and applesauce at the window

Yes, she gets mom guilt. Like most parents. “Especially when you’re on a call and they’re at the door with applesauce asking for permission.”

But she’s learning

to let go.

“You just do your best. Yesterday, I made it to my son’s poetry event, 11 to 11:30 a.m., the worst time possible for a working parent. But we figured it out. And I worked around it.”

Rituals that hold it together

Mornings are surprisingly smooth. Her son wakes early, dresses himself, and makes breakfast for both kids. “It started with a school initiative called Let Grow, the idea is to give them more independence. Now he’s got a system. It’s actually pretty peaceful.”

Fridays are for pizza and movie night. “Sometimes we let them pick a movie and my husband and I go outside with wine. Everyone wins.”

And date night? Always a thing. Even if it’s just sitting at the kitchen bar. “We turn around and tell them, this is date night, don’t bother us. They’re into it.”

What self-care really looks like

It’s not spa days. It’s not silent retreats. “Honestly, it’s lunch with girlfriends. Pilates. Coffee. Things that check more than one box, socializing, moving, nourishing. Multitasking, but in a

good way.”

“You still go to bed thinking, do we have eggs? And end up ordering groceries at midnight.”

What her kids think she does all day

“They think I do nothing,” she says, laughing.

“Because I work from home and their dad leaves for an office. They’re like, he’s busy, mom’s available.”

Sometimes they mimic her. “My daughter used to hold a pretend phone and say, ‘Don’t come in, I’m on a call.’ She was two.”

Advice she gives and lives by

“Outsource the noise,” she says.

“Groceries, for example. Busy week, order them. Sure, the apples might be bruised, but the time you save is worth it. Order pizza. Call a friend. Ask for help.”

She’s not trying to

be a hero. She’s trying to be human.

“There’s a whole mom community waiting to pick up the slack when you can’t. That’s how it’s always been. We’re just finally naming it.”

Legacy in the little things

She doesn’t have family nearby, hers is back East. But she’s built a village in Los Angeles. Six families in the same school. A nanny-turned-neighbor down the street. “There’s always someone to call.”

And maybe that’s the secret: not doing it all. But doing what matters. Asking for help. Laughing at the chaos. Letting your kid win Prodigy time by making breakfast. Holding onto the rituals, pizza night, a glass of wine, date night at the kitchen bar.

“I think we’re all just doing our best with the time we’ve got,” she says. “Trying to show up for everyone, and hoping it’s enough.”

Spoiler: It is.

*“Sometimes they mimic her.
“My daughter used to hold
a pretend phone and say,
‘Don’t come in, I’m on
a call.’ She was two.”*



How Two Sisters Turned Vintage Buttons Into a Sold-Out Jewelry Brand

The story of LBV the Label

“Jewelry with a story. Style with soul.”

It started, quite literally, with a button. Not just any button, a vintage Dior one, discovered through a French dealer, elegant but imperfect. The kind of object you imagine buried inside a silk-lined drawer, forgotten. Until one day, Michaela's sister picked it up, turned it over, and casually said, “I could make that.” She wasn't wrong. That quiet kind of confidence, the scrappy elegance, would soon define their brand.

They called it LBV. Short for La Bon Vie. The good life.

“We posted four times. Sent one necklace. And sold out in seven minutes.”

A drop. A dinner table. A dream.

In 2020, with the world paused and lockdowns looming, the sisters launched their first drop. It was small. Ten necklaces. A modest idea. “We didn't know what would happen,” Michaela says. “We figured if it worked, great. If not, we lost a little money. That was it.”

But the design was intentional. Upcycled luxury. Buttons from vintage YSL jackets and forgotten Dior pieces. All reimagined as pendants, each strung onto new chains, polished and transformed. One influencer post, and it was gone. Seven minutes. Every piece sold out.

They watched it happen from their family kitchen. “We were eating dinner and refreshing the Shopify page. It felt surreal.”

“It wasn't hype for the sake of it. It was survival. We could only make so much.”

From les bijoux to la bon vie

LBV was originally Les Bijoux Vintage. But after a quick rebrand to avoid confusion with a similar name, they landed on La Bon Vie. The letters stayed. The mission sharpened.

“We wanted to give people that champagne-sipping, Rue Saint-Honoré feeling... without the price tag,” Michaela says. “You shouldn't have to spend \$5,000 to feel stylish and special.”

Her sister, fresh from a pre-pandemic Paris

trip, had just bought her first designer bag. The full ritual: boutique appointment, velvet gloves, flutes of Veuve. “She came home and said, ‘Why can’t more girls have this experience?’” So they built it in miniature. Jewelry with a story. Style with soul.

Community as the campaign

Models? Unnecessary. Their muses were already following them.

“We never hired models. It was always our customers. Our friends. Us.” They’d name pieces after their most loyal fans. Build themes around movies like *Pretty Woman*. Send out necklaces to regular customers and ask them to shoot a photo, however they wanted.

“It made it feel real. Fashion for people who don’t want to be told what fashion is.”

That human touch extended to every detail. Cart-saving hacks. Pre-drop previews. Hand-written thank-you notes. If someone ordered five times? They threw in a surprise bracelet.

“We built the brand around what people asked for. That’s why it worked.”

A pause, not a goodbye

LBV ran for almost three years. But as life shifted, careers, babies, and new ambitions, the pace slowed. “We were just talking about it last week. We miss it,” Michaela says. “The community. The creativity. It was special.”

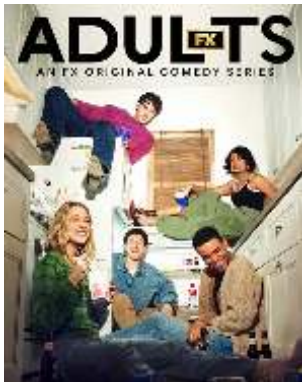
Today, Michaela works in marketing, yes, for accounting firms, and her sister is a PA in addiction medicine. But LBV lives on. In their closets. In their memories. In their inbox, where customers still write.

And in the quiet truth that something can be stylish, intimate, imperfect... and still unforgettable.

“We didn’t build a business. We built a feeling.”

“Something can be stylish, intimate, imperfect... and still unforgettable.”

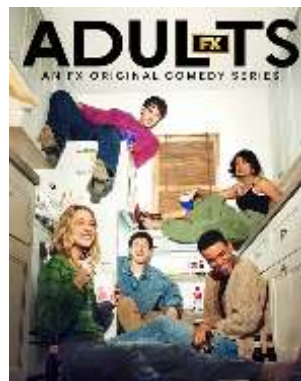




10 must-watch shows and movies for grown-ups

What to stream, binge, or catch in theaters right now

Whether you're in the mood to laugh, cry, escape, or lean into a little drama, this summer's lineup is serving it all. Here are ten fresh picks that grown-ups are raving about, with something for every vibe, every screen, and every streaming night in.



1. Adults

FX AND STREAMING ON HULU

Five roommates. One wildly chaotic New York apartment. This smart, offbeat comedy nails the trials of adulthood, think awkward Tinder dates, therapy overshares, and jobs that pay in pizza. Created by Nick Kroll, it's equal parts hilarious and weirdly touching.

2. Dept. Q

NETFLIX

From the team behind *The Queen's Gambit*, this crime thriller is moody, gripping, and totally binge-worthy. It follows a tormented detective tasked with cracking cold cases that have haunted his city, and himself, for years. If you're into dark mysteries with serious emotional punch, this one's for you.

3. The Phoenician Scheme

COMING TO U.S. THEATERS

Wes Anderson's latest is everything you'd expect and more, quirky, gorgeous, and full of oddball charm. It follows a dying billionaire and his estranged daughter through a final, outrageous plan. It's part heist, part family drama, and 100% Wes.

4. Motorheads

PRIME VIDEO

Street racing, small-town secrets, and a family torn apart by the past. This fast-paced drama follows a brother and sister as they dive into the legacy their father left behind, a world of custom engines, unfinished business, and unexpected loyalty. Fast, fun, and surprisingly emotional.

5. Captain America: Brave New World

DISNEY+ AND AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

Sam Wilson is officially carrying the shield, and the Marvel universe just got a whole lot more complicated. With political twists, new villains, and high-flying action, this isn't just another superhero flick, it's a bold new chapter.

6. The Four Seasons

NETFLIX

A beautifully written series that follows a tight-knit group of friends through life's biggest transitions, love, loss,

aging, and everything in between. It's heartfelt, funny, and quietly profound. For fans of *This Is Us* and *Parenthood*, consider this your next emotional rollercoaster.

7. Thunderbolts

IN THEATERS

Marvel goes a little darker with this edgy, ensemble movie about misfits and antiheroes. Featuring Yelena Belova, Bucky Barnes, and more fan favorites, it's got action, attitude, and just the right amount of chaos. The bad kids finally get their spotlight.

8. Murderbot

APPLE TV+

Imagine if your home security system had a personality, and existential dread. This wildly original sci-fi series follows an AI security unit that gains sentience, ditches its corporate overlords, and embarks on a reluctant journey of self-discovery. Funny, weird, and unexpectedly moving.

9. The Paper

PEACOCK

From the creative minds behind *The Office*, this mockumentary-style sitcom dives into the chaotic world of a struggling Midwestern newspaper. Set in Toledo, Ohio, *The Paper* follows the staff of *The Truth Teller* as they navigate the challenges of modern journalism, dwindling readership, and the eccentricities of their community. With sharp wit and a heartfelt look at the importance of local news, this series offers a fresh take on workplace comedy.

10. The Return

HBO AND MAX

This intense psychological drama centers on a man who reappears a decade after going missing, with no memory of where he's been. As his family tries to reconnect, dark secrets bubble to the surface. Twisty, eerie, and filled with gasp-worthy moments.

What are you watching first? From action and heartbreak to aliens and awkward roommates, there's a little something for everyone on this list. So queue it up, grab a snack, and settle in, your summer screen time just got a serious upgrade.

The Future Wears Akyn

Amy Powney's New Fashion Label Marries Chic Design with Genuine Sustainability



In a quiet studio tucked into the edges of the English countryside, a new kind of fashion story is unfolding, not with flashbulbs or fanfare, but with compostable tags, regenerative cotton, and the kind of design that whispers rather than shouts. Its name is Akyn. And if you haven't heard of it yet, you will.

Founded by Amy Powney, the former creative director of Mother of Pearl and a longtime force in ethical fashion, Akyn is more than a label. It's a philosophy. A reclamation of the word "responsible" in an industry that's spun it thin.

After nearly two decades immersed in the complexities of luxury fashion, Powney walked away from the runway and into something quieter, slower, and far more radical: a brand built from the ground up with sustainability woven into its DNA.

Even the name Akyn is intentional. A poetic blend of "atelier" and "kinfolk," it evokes craftsmanship and community in the same breath. And that's precisely what it offers. The debut collection, titled Run to the Rescue with Love, a nod to a quote by River Phoenix, leans minimalist but meaningful. Wide-legged

trousers in organic wool, pared-back shirting, perfectly weighty knits. Every piece is designed to transcend trends while holding its own in the sharpest of wardrobes.

There is nothing performative here. No overused green slogans. No marketing sleight of hand. Instead, Akyn invites you into a kind of gentle rigor. The garments are made using certified organic cotton, flax, and wool sourced from regenerative farms. Nothing fossil-fuel based. No synthetics pretending to be sustainable. Even the buttons are crafted from nuts.

"I didn't want people to have to do the homework," Powney stated. "I wanted to create a brand where the responsibility has been executed for them."

In a world that often asks consumers to make impossible choices, style or sustainability, ethics or elegance, Akyn simply offers both. Powney calls it "future-proof fashion." It's fashion for people who care. Fashion that cares back. But what makes Akyn especially striking is its restraint. There's no glossy sustainability manifesto splashed across its homepage. No TikTok-ready gimmicks. It doesn't need them. The pieces speak for themselves: sculptural, soft, unfussy. Designed not to dominate, but to live in. Still, it's not just about fabric and fit. Akyn is building something slower and more sacred—a



kinship among people who want their clothes to mean something. With every order, customers become part of the "Kynfolk," a community of like-minded individuals brought together by shared values rather than style codes.

In the end, Akyn's magic lies in its refusal to compromise. It's a brand that understands that sustainability isn't a checkbox, it's a practice. A promise. A way of showing up in the world. And in that way, Akyn isn't just what we wear next. It's what comes after.



Charred peach & burrata salad

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 2 ripe peaches, halved and pitted
- Olive oil, for brushing
- 1 ball burrata
- 2 cups arugula
- Handful fresh basil leaves
- 2 tsp honey
- 1 tbsp white balsamic vinegar
- Flaky sea salt & black pepper
- Sourdough, sliced and toasted

Instructions:

1. Heat a grill or grill pan until very hot. Brush peach halves with olive oil and grill, cut side down, for 3–4 minutes until charred.
2. In a shallow bowl or plate, layer arugula, torn basil, and grilled peaches. Tear burrata over the top.
3. Drizzle with honey and white balsamic. Finish with sea salt, pepper, and a side of toasted sourdough. Serve warm.

Miso grilled salmon with soba noodles

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 2 salmon fillets (skin-on, 4–6 oz each)
- 2 tbsp white miso paste
- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 4 oz soba noodles
- ½ cucumber, julienned
- 4 radishes, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp sesame seeds
- Optional: fresh cilantro

Instructions:

1. Whisk miso, soy sauce, rice vinegar, and sesame oil. Brush over salmon. Let marinate for 10–15 minutes.
2. Grill or pan-sear salmon, skin side down, for 4–5 minutes per side until flaky.
3. Cook soba noodles according to package. Rinse under cold water. Toss with cucumber, radish, and sesame seeds.
4. Serve salmon over soba. Garnish with cilantro if desired.





Lemon-herb chicken thighs with fennel slaw

Serves 2

Ingredients:

For chicken:

- 4 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary
- Salt & pepper

For slaw:

- 1 fennel bulb, thinly shaved
- ½ apple, julienned
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh dill
- 2 tbsp Greek yogurt
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- Salt, to taste

Instructions:

1. In a bowl, combine lemon juice, garlic, olive oil, rosemary, salt, and pepper. Marinate chicken for at least 30 minutes.
2. Preheat oven to 400°F. Sear chicken skin-side down in a hot skillet for 5 minutes. Flip, then transfer to oven and roast 20–25 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, mix slaw ingredients in a bowl. Let sit 10 minutes to absorb.
4. Serve chicken atop slaw with pan juices drizzled over.

Summer corn risotto with basil oil

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- ¾ cup Arborio rice
 - 1 tbsp butter
 - 1 shallot, finely chopped
 - ½ cup dry white wine
 - 3 cups warm vegetable broth
 - 1 cup fresh corn kernels (from 1–2 ears)
 - ¼ cup grated parmesan
 - Salt & pepper
- For basil oil:
- ½ cup fresh basil
 - ¼ cup olive oil
 - Pinch sea salt

Instructions:

1. Blend basil, oil, and salt until smooth. Set aside.
2. In a saucepan, melt butter. Sauté shallot until translucent. Add rice; toast 1–2 minutes.
3. Add wine, stir until absorbed. Add broth gradually, stirring constantly, until creamy (about 20 minutes).
4. Stir in corn, cook 2 more minutes. Add parmesan, season to taste.
5. Plate and swirl basil oil on top.



Bookmarked

Give to Grow by Mo Bunnell

In a culture obsessed with productivity hacks and conversion rates, Give to Grow offers something radically human: the idea that generosity, not hustle, is the real secret to success.

Mo Bunnell, a business strategist and creator of the GrowBIG® system, invites us to reimagine how we build careers, companies, and relationships. His thesis is simple, almost subversive: when you give freely, time, insight, connections, you don't just grow your network. You grow yourself.

This is not another book about closing deals. It's about opening doors. Bunnell shares stories and strategies, yes, but the heart of this book is emotional. It's about replacing transactional thinking with genuine care. It's about listening. Following up. Sending the article.

Making the introduction. Not because it "converts," but because it connects. He calls them "gifts." We'd call them everyday rituals of modern kindness. And in an age of inbox overload and burnout, that might be the most radical business advice of all.

At Anchor, our Head of Marketing, Elad, brought this book to the forefront, not as a sales manual, but as a philosophy we live by. It's something we talk about often and believe deeply, across every department. The kind of work we want to do, and the kind of company we want to be, starts here.

The language is accessible. The tone is earnest. And while you won't find pages of glossy quotes or bravado, what you will find is a quietly powerful guide to becoming the kind of person people want to work with, and stay with.

Read it for the frameworks. Stay for the perspective shift.

Success, it turns out, starts with giving a damn.

The Let Them Theory by Mel Robbins

Let them cancel.

Let them ghost.

Let them doubt, dismiss, walk away.

In her latest book, The Let Them Theory, Mel Robbins delivers the kind of modern mantra that doesn't just live on Instagram, it lives in your gut. It's deceptively simple: Let them. And for a generation exhausted by people-pleasing, over-explaining, and bending to fit expectations, it lands like a revelation.

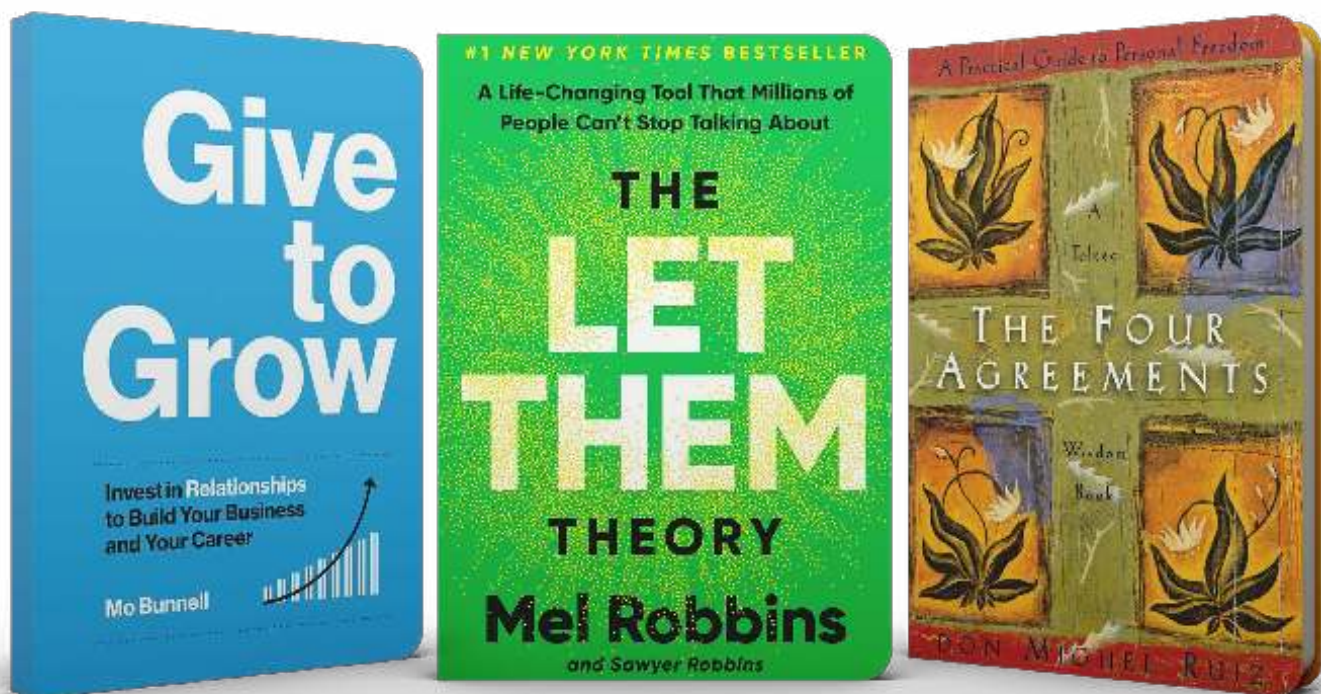
Robbins isn't asking you to detach in a cold, don't-care kind of way. She's inviting you to reclaim your energy. The book is part memoir, part manual, and completely centered on one radical idea: if you stop trying to control what other people do, you get your life back.

Through stories, research, and her signature you've-got-this tone, Robbins reminds us that boundaries are not walls, they're mirrors. That letting go doesn't mean giving up. It means giving yourself permission to stop performing.

It's not a "burn it all down" book. It's a choose yourself quietly and consistently kind of book. Which might be exactly what we need right now.

So let them talk. Let them misunderstand you. Let them scroll past.

And while they do? You grow.



The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz

Not every book finds you at the right time. This one did.

The Four Agreements isn't flashy. There's no marketing lingo or motivational hype. Just four principles, quiet, steady, and remarkably hard to forget. Be impeccable with your word. Don't take anything personally. Don't make assumptions. Always do your best.

Simple? Sure. But life-changing? Absolutely. There's a reason this book keeps surfacing on bedside tables and therapist shelves. It cuts through the noise. It challenges you to live with more clarity, more compassion, more responsibility, not just in your personal relationships, but in the way you lead, the way

you listen, and the way you show up for others. For me, this one's personal. I'm Haley, the Customer Marketing Manager at Anchor, and I sent The Four Agreements to over 1,300 of our customers. Not as a campaign. As a gesture. Because this book holds weight. It's shaped how I navigate conflict, how I build trust, how I speak to my team and talk to myself on hard days.

I don't think of it as a business book. I think of it as a human book.

In an industry full of strategies and scripts, The Four Agreements offers something rarer, a return to self. To intentionality. To truth. It's a gift I keep giving. Because it keeps giving back.

Be Like Josh

How one very fluffy dog, a fearless founder, and an accountant with a heart of gold are flipping the script on disability

It starts, as many good things do, with a scroll. Katie Helle was drifting through Instagram when she stumbled on Kimberly, a gym owner with a gift for storytelling and a golden doodle named Josh who looked like he stepped out of a Nancy Meyers film and into a better world.

Josh wasn't just adorable. He was different. A little wobbly on his feet. A little slower. But there was something about him. "I had two golden doodles of my own," Katie says.

"Josh was the same breed, but different. You could feel it. There was something... magical."

He's not a mascot. He's a movement

Meeting Josh was like being handed a key to a quieter kind of magic. "He has this energy," Katie says. "So peaceful. So kind. Nonjudgmental."

Josh has a neurological disability. He doesn't walk like other dogs. But he hikes in a backpack. He leans into hugs like it's his job. He shows up. And that energy? It's the thing people keep talking about.

"He just has this way of making people feel calm," she says. "You don't meet dogs like him. And when you do, you remember it."

"There's just something magical about this dog"

Josh isn't the only one. The Be Like Josh Foundation focuses on rescuing dogs with neurological differences, many of whom were once dismissed, discarded, or deemed "too much."

"I think people assume dogs like Josh can't live normal lives," Katie explains. "But they can. They just might need a wheelchair. Or a backpack. Or a little help. But that doesn't mean they're broken."

Josh isn't perfect. And that's the point. He's a living reminder that softness is strength and love doesn't need

symmetry.



From spreadsheets to soul work

Katie's role at the foundation started with an ask. Kimberly needed someone to manage the books. Katie said yes. Then she joined the board. Then she started fostering.

"I do all the financials," she says. "Volunteer. No pay. Just purpose."

When Josh fell sick earlier this year and racked up a \$20,000 vet bill, it wasn't a corporate donor who saved the day. It was the community. "I still get goosebumps thinking about it," Katie says. "People

showed up."

"if Josh could talk, I think he'd just keep wagging his tail"

Josh has no idea he's a star. That he's sparked a movement. That strangers across the country donate in his name. "He's just humble," Katie says. "You pick him up like a baby and he melts into you."

His body is small, hidden beneath a cloud of fluff. But his impact? Huge.

Small rescue. Big love.

Be Like Josh doesn't do volume. It does intention.

"These dogs require expensive medical care," Katie says. "Each one gets an MRI. Some become Forever Foundation dogs, adopted out, but we cover the care for life."

It's not flashy. It's not scalable. But it's deeply human.

"We don't need a facility. We just need people willing to give their time," she says. "The biggest challenge? Finding fosters."

"The most rewarding things we do aren't paid"

Katie's never taken a dime for her work. And she doesn't plan to. "This is my thing," she says. "Helping people build something meaningful."

That includes the foundation. And motherhood. And the other rescues who now call her for advice.

"You just have to find what you were brought here to do," she says. "And then give it. All of it."

Be like Josh...or at least try.

Josh doesn't care about followers. Or hashtags. Or your calendar. He's here. Fully. Tail wagging.

And maybe that's the whole message. Be like Josh. Not because he's perfect. But because he isn't, and that's what makes him unforgettable.



The collage features a variety of content related to the CPA profession. At the top, there are several tweets from users like @WILLIAM and @CandyBeller. A large central graphic has the text "What else can you do for me?" and a photo of a woman smiling. Below this, there are more tweets, including one from @NancyMcCalland and another from @CandyBeller. There are also images of a child at a computer, a group of people, and a woman in a red shirt. The bottom left corner features a graphic for "EPISODE #4" with a photo of a woman.

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