

S.H.I.N.E.

Life Lessons Revealed

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S.H.I.N.E.

Life Lessons Revealed

From the Voices of 14 Inspirational People

J O N M A G N U S



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Foreword

The challenges that impact the health and well-being of children and adults in today's world are colossal. As a lifelong child advocate, I am dedicated to directly addressing these issues and empowering young people to lead intentional and fulfilling lives. It has been my good fortune and honor to serve at the helm of Children's Home Society of Washington, whose sole purpose is to create a world where all children thrive! In order for children to thrive & realize their potential they must be loved, nurtured by parents and community who are strong, resilient and able to navigate the trials, as well as the good times, of life's journey. We all need and benefit from those who provide inspiration and meaning to our lives.

In April, 2009, I attended the annual Sweetheart's Benefit Luncheon for Children's Home Society of Wenatchee and met one of those inspirational leaders. The keynote speaker for this event, Jon Magnus, had recently survived a medical ordeal that nearly claimed his life. His message, which included words of wisdom from a survivor and information from a book that he was writing about positive role models, was powerful and touching. Following Jon's presentation we agreed to remain in touch as he completed his book.

In February, 2014, Jon sent me the completed manuscript for S.H.I.N.E.—Life Lessons Revealed. It is both substantive and thought-provoking.

S.H.I.N.E.—Life Lessons Revealed challenges readers to look within by looking without. It highlights the value of listening and learning from others, of seeking inspiration from those who live authentically and of transitioning from simple observer to positive role model. Readers learn to embark upon a journey of self-discovery, to celebrate solidarity, to live with purpose, to face adversity with resilience and to experience the joy of positive thinking. S.H.I.N.E.—Life Lessons Revealed offers clear and poignant illustration that resilience and perseverance can result in amazing triumph and success despite all odds to the contrary. Jon's keen intuition and insight have allowed him to grasp the challenge that each of us must come to grips with as we strive to be our best. His understanding and perception of one's opportunity and challenge is captured beautifully in these fascinating and engaging biographical vignettes of very different yet, similarly courageous, outstanding individuals.

A visionary, leader and dedicated educator, Jon clearly has brought his heart and compassion to the pages of his book. For fourteen years he has invested his time and effort to help students as they prepare, together, for the future. His genuine interest in people, his love of learning and narrow brush with death give him the unique life perspective voiced in this book. I know that you will enjoy S.H.I.N.E.—Life Lessons Revealed, find practical application and be inspired to be the best that you can be—as I have.

Enjoy!

Dr. Sharon Osborne, President/CEO
Children's Home Society of Washington
Chair, Children's Home Society of America

To my loving family...

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PART I

Who's in Your Mirror?

Prologue

Shortly after midnight, the shrill beeping of a heart monitor pierced the silence of my hospital room. Nurses and doctors scurried around the bed, barking orders and moving in equipment. “What’s happening to me?” I wondered. “I am only forty-five. Why does my mind feel so disconnected from my body?”

And then I saw it: *Wenatchee High School French teacher Jon Eric Magnus died at age 45. A resident of Cashmere, Washington, for the past 10 years Mr. Magnus has been teaching French and working on a book of interviews with fourteen exceptional...*

My obituary scrolled through my mind like a document on a computer screen.



Seven weeks earlier, on September 6, 2009, classes had begun at Wenatchee High School in Eastern Washington State. During the first weeks of school, I focused on getting to know new faces and making everyone’s learning experience memorable and entertaining.

a background of whirring and beeping machines. But, despite the controlled chaos, I experienced the comfort of total peace. My heart began to beat out of control. I was dying and my thoughts were filled with prayer and the acceptance of what was about to happen.

Gone were thoughts of finances, professional responsibilities, house and home. The two things that mattered now were my relationship with God and my relationship with other people. That was when I saw my obituary as it would appear in the local newspaper, and that was when a question came to mind: “Did I do enough when I was here to reach out to others? Did I do enough?”

In nothing short of a miracle, doctors and nurses worked through the night and saved my life again. In the morning, I learned that a *permanent* colostomy—in which part of the colon and the entire rectum is removed—was the only way to preserve my life. And there was little time to spare. I wanted to live, yet I also realized that my body would never be the same. Resigning myself to that stark reality, I opted for the procedure.

After surgery, I experienced immediate relief. Despite post-operative pain, the recovery process began with gusto. Within two days I rediscovered an appetite and dined on the most delicious meal of my life: Saltine crackers. Specialized nurses taught me how to care for my new “stoma,” and though I was terrified to see the end of my colon protruding like a small radish to the left of my belly button, I was thankful to be alive.



For as long as I can remember, people have opened their hearts to me with compelling honesty. I listen in the classroom. I listen on busses, trains, planes, and everywhere else. People I don't know seem to want to share their tests, trials and successes with me. Through the years, I have come to understand a simple yet powerful concept:

Every person is worthy of my attention. Everyone I meet teaches me something. The key is to listen and to observe.

I listen and observe daily in my role as high school French teacher. Every day students pepper me with questions or reveal hidden feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. They struggle to identify who they are and what they will become. At times, they discover that finding their place in life is an elusive goal. Yet, as students share the ups and downs of teenage life with me, I often find our roles reversed. Their insights and unadulterated wisdom, refreshingly sincere, make me stop, reflect and learn.

Over time, my interactions with people of all ages, from vastly different countries and cultures, revealed two startling truths:

1. *The search for direction and a meaningful life does not end in adolescence.*

Many of us have become spectators of our own existence. We wander aimlessly, burdened by a sense of helplessness and bound by others' expectations. We invest precious time and energy into simply existing and never experience the satisfaction of finding true happiness and self-fulfillment.

2. *Many adults never engage in the introspection that allows them to discover who they truly are. Consequently, they never experience the joy of leading an intentional and fulfilling life.*

In 2002, seven years before my brush with death, I set off on a journey to find out why. For twelve years I traveled the world to speak with and observe fourteen exceptional people who shared their secrets to successful living. Their unique experiences illuminated patterns in thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving that led them to achieve their goals. Over the years, I began to see patterns emerge—five attitudes and lessons that this diverse group shared in common.

Little did I know that the five steps they taught me would become an integral part of my own journey, the fundamental elements that helped me to reconstruct my own life.



I left the hospital with a new zest for life. Everything looked different. The remaining leaves on the trees—golden and red as they defiantly clung to the branches—were the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. Most significantly, I now understood others who had stared death in the face and lived to share these gems:

- Life is infinitely fragile.
- Become the person that you want to be *now*. There are no guarantees for tomorrow.
- Live intentionally.
- Do not waste a single moment.

For months following my operation I commandeered a comfortable armchair next to the wood stove in my parent's home. I spent countless hours reflecting on my life and what I'd learned from these fourteen individuals. And I decided to finish my book.

Come along as I travel from my advanced French class in rural Wenatchee, Washington, to Paris, France; Lake Geneva, Switzerland; Budapest, Hungary, to the banks of the Mississippi River and beyond. Join in conversation as I sit in Nancy Brinker's kitchen (Founder of Susan G. Komen for the Cure), Cheryl Brown Henderson's historical office (*Brown v. Board of Education*), LPGA golfer Betsy King's country club and CBS Broadcaster Mark McEwen's living room—among others.

Taken together, the lives of these mentors taught me the five principles that can help each of us chart the course of our life:

See Your Own True Potential
H*ave a Heart for Others*
I*dentify and Meet Pressing Needs*
Navigate the Course of Change
E*xpect Success*

Their collective wisdom helped me survive my ordeal. They led by example and inspired me to be the best at being myself. They taught me to S.H.I.N.E.

Far too often, we must endure personal tragedy before we examine our lives and begin to live the lessons we've been taught. But why wait? Now is the time for action. My hope is that no matter where you're from, where you've been, or where you are in your life, my story and the lessons of my fourteen mentors will inspire you to be exceptional, to be yourself, and to S.H.I.N.E.

Origin of the Book

My destiny was altered during World War II in a small French village called Poillé-sur-Vègre. At noon on July 4, 1943, my great uncle David Butcher's plane was shot down over Nazi-occupied France. He was the only survivor. What began with an explosion at 28,000 feet became an odyssey that spanned the following six months. With the help of the French Resistance, he eventually escaped to Spain and returned to the United States, but his stories, which he shared with me as I was growing up, would greatly influence the course of my own life.

When I was seventeen, my family hosted a young French student named Jean-Louis. During a family visit with my grandparents, we took out a dusty folder filled with postwar letters and mementos and shared David Butcher's incredible story. Moved by the events surrounding the crash and the relationships my uncle developed with those who saved him, Jean-Louis returned to France with a mission: to reconnect my family with Alfred Auduc, a well-known Resistance hero who had been responsible for my uncle's safekeeping.

Jean-Louis completed his mission, and the rest is history. In 1984, at the age of twenty, I had the great honor of returning to France with my uncle nearly forty years after he was shot down in World War II. I was immediately adopted by the family of Alfred Auduc and began my own journey into the French language and culture, a journey that brought me great fulfillment and eventually led me to write this book.

On that trip, Alfred Auduc told me about the 650 inhabitants of the tight-knit village of Oradour-sur-Glane who were brutally murdered during a Nazi attack in 1943. In 2003 I visited the village with Katrina Seibert, a close friend who was teaching English in the city of Limoges. Katrina knew my uncle's story and my personal interest in World War II, so she planned the outing. As we drove into the parking lot of the visitor's center, I could almost taste the oppressive feeling of the disaster that had occurred there. Left untouched for decades, the destroyed homes, stores and church of Oradour-sur-Glane are a timeless monument to the terrors of war. Katrina and I hired a personal guide and began our walk through the empty streets. The silence was overpowering.

We listened carefully as our guide explained how Nazi soldiers had cloistered men and boys in barns and stuffed women and children into the church with military precision. With evil determination, they prevented any possibility of escape by posting sentries who guarded exits. When the hour of mass killing struck, the Nazi soldiers spewed volleys of bullets from their machine guns, methodically cutting down the men and boys.

Next, they set fire to the church full of people. Hundreds of women and children died. Within a few short hours, Oradour-sur-Glane became a gripping memorial to the barbaric nature of the Nazi regime and its sympathizers.

Stunned, Katrina and I walked the streets in disbelief, peering into the destroyed homes and shops of this once-bustling community. Then we entered the burned-out church. The wind was quietly blowing

through the glassless window frames as the sun shimmered at odd angles through what had once been the roof. Looking down, I tried to comprehend how human beings could be so cruel and uncivilized.

“Do you know what those spots are?” our guide asked, pointing at the floor.

I stared at the strange gray blotches. They varied in size and covered most of the floor in this part of the church. I shook my head.

“This is where they found the largest pile of human ash,” he said. “What you’re looking at is the residue of melted flesh from many of the women and children who gathered in this area. They were literally incinerated by the heat of the fire and exploding grenades.” He told us that only eight people in the village survived.

I couldn’t fathom how a place of worship for seven centuries could be used for such infinite evil. On this spot, the best and worst of mankind were forever united.

The visit to Oradour-sur-Glane resonated in my mind for days. And a question haunted me: what has humanity learned from this? And, on a more personal level, what have I learned? Oradour-sur-Glane had spoken to me, and my teacher’s mind looked for ways to integrate this tragedy into my curriculum. How could I share the power of this life-altering experience with my students?

As I continued my travels through France, I thought about the handful of survivors. I wondered whether their unique and painful experiences had forced them to reassess the very basis of their existence. I wondered what their message would have been to me, and ultimately to my students. Education and knowledge are the most effective weapons in fighting ignorance and guarding against the repetition of ugly historical events. And I was sure that their wisdom would have shed much light on the subject. Though I would never have the chance to speak with them, the impact of the visit to Oradour-sur-Glane would change the course of my life.

Two days after leaving the village, I arrived in Mougins. Perched on a mountain top overlooking the Mediterranean in southern

France, this quaint medieval village was the summer residence of Jacques Antoine, a well-known television producer and author whom you will meet in Chapter Twenty-Two.

Shortly after I arrived in Mougins, Jacques and I launched into a discussion of the pros and cons of working in public education. Eventually, the conversation landed on a seemingly simple assignment I had given in an advanced French class the previous spring.

I had told the students to “Write two double-spaced pages in French about your role model.” Providing further clarification, I asked, “Who has inspired or challenged you to become a better human being?” I encouraged my students to look among family members, peers, their community and beyond. To my surprise, nearly one-half of my students were incapable of naming a specific role model who had impacted them in such a way. One student even asked if she could write about a cartoon character!

Jacques’ probing questions and verbal banter led me to share an idea I’d been formulating for quite some time. “Don’t you think there are common threads that link role models together?” I asked. “There must be a way of finding connections between attitudes, behaviors and, ultimately, actions. I think it would be very interesting to draw up a list of relevant life questions, then interview people from around the world who are positive role models. Perhaps I could develop insight into what makes them function by asking the same questions, then comparing and analyzing the responses. This information could help students and adults improve themselves and ultimately make a positive impact upon others. What do you think?”

Jacques concurred. “I think the concept is simple, yet fascinating.”

I spent the rest of the summer contemplating potential questions. Do exceptional people have a particular mind set? What have they learned from others? Do they still look to others for encouragement or knowledge? Do they believe in fate or do they think that people control their own destiny? What drives some to work tirelessly

towards a goal while others simply give up? Do their commonalities transcend borders, cultures and civilizations?

I returned to the classroom that fall, still impacted by my visit to Oradour-sur-Glane and prompted to action by Jacques. My students were immediately interested in participating in the role model project. Together we drew up a list of questions to ask during interviews, eventually narrowing our list to fifteen. They were not only interested in life's big questions. Many were curious about the personal lives and experiences that help form the personalities of inspirational people. They wanted to know whether these individuals overcame hardship or personal challenge while becoming who they are. With additional input from adult friends and colleagues, the list grew to twenty-four questions.

Our interview questions now ready, I launched a series of discussions about the value of seeking out and learning from positive role models. During these conversations, students expressed their ideas about role models and the value of learning from leaders. What they shared fascinated me, and helped guide the twelve-year journey that became this book.

Who's in Your Mirror?

A few months after formulating my questions, I began the lengthy process of searching out and contacting individuals to interview. While some were part of my personal world, others I'd observed from afar for many years. Shortly after beginning research, a writer friend told me, "Projects like this take on a life of their own. You'll see!" In little time her words came true. The unbelievable adventure that initially grew out of a desire to help my students, quickly turned into a personal journey of self-discovery.

Soon after I began the interview process, I found that positive role models are much like mirrors. Fixed to walls or tucked away in purses, mirrors are common fixtures of our daily routine. We use them for primping and plucking, straightening and smoothing. We use them to notice and then change whatever we dislike about our physical appearance. And just as we use mirrors to reflect upon our physical appearance, we can use positive role models to illuminate our inner selves.

As I traveled the world interviewing the extraordinary subjects of this book, the conversations challenged me to evaluate my own

substance and life direction through introspection. Again and again I was forced to consider what I was doing with my skills, abilities and talents. Like mirrors, the men and women in this book reflected my inner self back to me, causing me to ask questions about what pieces I might need to adjust. Am I making the most of my true potential? Do I invest time and energy fully into what I'm capable of accomplishing? And, what about my actions? Are they self-serving, or are they kind and generous?

Their life stories taught me that everyone knows defeat. Everyone fails. But they also forced me to ask myself: How do I face these failures? Do I have optimism because of what I've learned? Do I have the strength and resolve to change my course?

The exceptional people in this book compelled me to look at myself from a variety of angles, which led me to think of them as different kinds of mirrors.

The “Standard Model”

Simple and honest, the standard mirror portrays one's physical state at a particular time. The image that is reflected provides a snapshot that is unaltered and impartial. Like a silent counselor, it provides essential information: the hair that is out of place, the accidental make-up mishap. The standard mirror is an honest reflection that helps us improve our appearance.

A positive role model provides similar feedback. By giving us a clear reflection, he or she helps us see ourselves as we truly are. And by seeing ourselves clearly, we can determine the substance of our achievements and our character. This analysis, the product of an inner reflective process, may serve as a source of desired change.

The “Magnifier”

A common fixture in home and hotel bathrooms, this mirror is specifically designed to magnify images. Its enlarged reflections help us get an impeccably close shave or attend to an undesirable blemish.

Often available in fog-free glass, it is unaffected by the surrounding environment and makes it possible to see flaws and imperfections that might otherwise be overlooked.

Being reflected by this type of positive role model enables us to take a closer look at our inner selves. By doing so, we can notice our own unflattering or undesirable attitudes and behaviors. Focused attention on these limitations becomes a powerful ally as we work to resolve issues we may prefer to overlook. Learning from those who have already looked deeply into the mirror and dealt with personal challenges helps us to face our own demons.

The “Convex”

Curved in shape, this mirror provides a panoramic view that helps to prevent accidents. Pedestrians and drivers can use it to see around corners into areas that are physically out of their line of vision. Its widened scope enables viewers to capture maximum information without having to move.

Positive role models are similar because they help us broaden our vision. Many obstacles in life can be overcome by widening our view of a difficult situation, and role models are often those who can see and reflect this wider view back to us. When we can learn from them and take action from this wider view, possibilities open up that we could never imagine from the narrower perspective.

Additional Information on Interviewees

Nancy Brinker

Susan G. Komen for the Cure

~ ww5.komen.org ~

Cheryl Brown Henderson

The Brown Foundation for Educational Equity,
Excellence and Research

~ www.brownvboard.org ~

Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site

~ www.nps.gov/brvb ~

Dr. Leland Hartwell

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center

~ www.fhcrc.org ~

Alexandre Jollien

~ www.alexandre-jollien.ch ~

Betsy King

Golf Fore Africa

~ www.golfforeafrika.org ~

The Fellowship for Christian Athletes

~ www.fca.org ~

Habitat for Humanity

~ www.habitat.org ~

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The material in this book was gathered largely from in-person interviews with each of the fourteen exceptional people you read about. The following resources were used to collect additional information.

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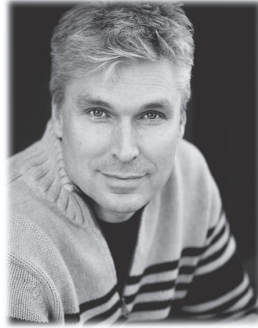
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About the Author



Jon Eric Magnus is an award-winning high school teacher and adjunct professor at the University of Washington. He has traveled through twenty-five countries and speaks English, French, Spanish and conversational German. He spent eight years in Europe where he worked as a translator and interpreter for Virgin France and the Observatoire Français des Drogues et des Toxicomanies (French Observatory of Drugs and Drug Addiction).

In 2003, Jon received the Heart of the Panther award for excellence in teaching and is recognized as an Educator of Excellence by Washington State University. In 2013, the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center/Fiestas Mexicanas named him “Humanitarian Extraordinaire” for his work in service of others. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies from the University of Washington and a Master of Arts degree in Education from Central Washington University. He currently resides in Cashmere, Washington.