

INTERNET CULT FOLLOWERS GO MISSING

Families' Desperate Search for Loved Ones



Taylor & Travis
*Inside Their Whirlwind
Reunion in Australia!*



**Angela
Bassett**

How I Fought for My Dreams

The acclaimed movie and *9-1-1* star grew up poor with a single mom. Now she opens up about her surprising road to success, the support of her 'one true, beautiful love,' Courtney B. Vance, and sending their twins off to college: 'I hope they'll see that hard work pays off'

People
women
changing
the
world
2024

March 11, 2024

women changing the world

THESE 11 INNOVATORS,
ACTIVISTS AND ROLE MODELS
ARE MAKING A BIG DIFFERENCE
IN THEIR COMMUNITIES
AND BEYOND

Katy Perry & Angela Lerche EMPOWERING KIDS FROM UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE ARTS

→ She's one of the bestselling musicians of all time, but Katy Perry has always dreamed of leaving a legacy beyond her No. 1 hits. In 2018 the pop star and *American Idol* judge, 39, launched the Firework Foundation—which hosts annual summer sleepaway camps and partners with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America year-round—with her older sister Angela Lerche, 41. “The arts gave me such a different perspective than the one I grew up in. It expanded my mind and gave me confidence,” says Perry, who was raised by strict Pentecostal parents in Santa Barbara.

Growing up, their family struggled financially. “We relate to [these kids] so much,” says Lerche, who serves as president of the foundation. Five years ago they welcomed the first group of middle schoolers to Camp Firework, where kids from underserved areas surrounding Santa

Barbara participate in songwriting sessions, shoe design workshops and choreography classes.

“I’m up with them in the morning, and they’re throwing whipped cream on me in the evening,” says Perry. “The kids know me as the girl that sang ‘Roar’ or ‘Dark Horse,’ but I hope [by the end] they [think], ‘I too can live out my dreams like Katy Perry. She’s just like me, in a lot of goofy ways.’”

Perry and Lerche encourage the kids to take what they’ve learned—including mental health tools like Transcendental Meditation—back into the real world. “We [want to] support these young people throughout their whole educational journey,” says Perry. “I’m so grateful for my gift as a musician, but if in a hundred years nobody knows Katy Perry or the song ‘Firework,’ but they know what the Firework Foundation is, then I’ll have fulfilled my purpose.” —MELODY CHIU

THEIR IMPACT

400+

Number of Camp Firework attendees to date, 40 of whom have gone on to participate in the foundation's Leaders in Training program, which teaches skills from fashion design to filmmaking



Lighting a Spark

"We get to show these kids there's something better out there," says Lerche (right, with Perry at Camp Firework 2022). "To get to do it with my sister means so much."



14053

The executive order signed by President Biden in 2021 to improve public safety for Native Americans and address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous people, a victory for the MMIW movement shared by advocates like Reis

Kali Reis

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN

→ As Kali Reis was racking up wins in the boxing ring in her early 20s, the world champion heard of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) movement, a social campaign to bring awareness to the epidemic of violence faced by Native women. “I had a family member [go missing], so it hit close to home,” says Reis, who hails from Providence and is of Cape Verdean and Seaconke Wampanoag ancestry. “But a lot of times, as humans, we’re like little kids: We need picture books. We don’t want to read the words.”

So Reis, now 37, worked to paint a compelling picture of some stark truths: that Indigenous women are 10 times more likely to be murdered than women of other ethnicities and that more than four out of five have experienced violence. She began advocating for MMIW at conferences, on social media and even during fights, with special insignias stitched to her trunks. “It wasn’t like I set out to be an activist,” she says. “I just was using my voice with the platform I had.”

In 2021 she saw that platform get larger with her film debut in *Catch the Fair One*, about a half-Native American, half-Cape Verdean boxer tracking her abducted younger sister. Her performance caught the eye of Jodie Foster, who suggested Reis for the role of Evangeline Navarro, an Alaskan state trooper of Iñupiaq heritage, on *True Detective: Night Country*; next she’ll play a Native woman in *Wind River: Rising*. “I keep getting these opportunities to voice the voiceless,” she says. “The stories that are going to be [shared], the faces that are going to be seen, the truths that are going to be told—I’m so excited for all of it.” —JP MANGALINDAN



JUSTIN J. WEE



**'LISTENING TO YOUR BODY IS
AN INVESTMENT THAT PAYS
OFF FOREVER' —DEBORAH SZEKELY**

HER IMPACT

2022

The year the American flag was raised above the U.S. Capitol to celebrate Szekely (pictured at her Rancho La Puerta resort in 2021) and her work creating a "better, healthier and more peaceful world"

**Deborah
Szekely**

**PROVING
YOU'RE NEVER
TOO OLD—OR
TOO YOUNG—
TO BE HEALTHY**

→ Two months shy of her 102nd birthday, wellness pioneer Deborah Szekely is redefining what it means to live long and prosper. "The morning I turned 100, I laid in bed and said, 'Here's this great gift. What am I supposed to be doing with it?' And I couldn't think of anything special, so I just got up and kept doing my job."

That job has been the one she's practiced for more than eight decades: helping people understand that good health is within everyone's reach. It started at home. Szekely's mother was vice president of the New York Vegetarian Society and fed the family a diet of raw foods, years before terms like farm-to-table and organic were commonplace. "In school, nobody wanted to share my whole wheat bread and chopped nuts, so I felt myself a pariah—and then I decided I'd become a flag-waver," Szekely says.

She founded wellness resorts Golden Door and Rancho La Puerta, which she opened when she was 18 with her late husband, Edmond—and she's taken her healthy message wide ever since, championing for school lunch programs to serve more nutritious, plant-forward meals and working with Congress on initiatives to educate children on health and fitness. "Anyone can have a healthy routine," says Szekely. "You don't need the fancy equipment—only a little motivation to make yourself a priority every day." Her secret is simplicity: Eat fresh foods, move your body, sleep well, and form strong relationships.

Szekely still walks an hour every day ("my dog demands it," she jokes), relishes a pescatarian diet, attends the theater and regularly gives lectures at Rancho on holistic living. "If you do all these things, you can be my age, still active and having fun. And I am having lots of fun." —SONAL DUTT

Helen Christoni & Emma Heming Willis

ENCOURAGING WOMEN TO MAKE TIME FOR BRAIN HEALTH

→ Emma Heming Willis first experienced brain fog after the birth of her youngest daughter, Evelyn, 9, in 2014. Her doctor dismissed it as “mommy brain.” Unconvinced, the entrepreneur and model, who also shares daughter Mabel, 11, with her husband, actor Bruce Willis, sought out a specialist. “I’d never heard the term ‘brain health’ before,” she says. The fog lifted thanks to “fistfuls” of daily supplements and healthy lifestyle tweaks, but she was stunned by how little brain health was considered in everyday life: “My doctor will talk to me about my breast health, my cholesterol, my heart, but not about my brain.”

So in 2020, Heming Willis, 47, alongside business partner Helen Christoni, 53, co-founded Make Time, a wellness brand and movement to raise awareness of the importance of brain health, particularly for women. The cause has become deeply personal. Heming Willis and family revealed in February 2023 that Bruce had been diagnosed with frontotemporal

dementia (FTD). Christoni lost both her grandmother and her mother-in-law to dementia and her daughter to mental health issues. “All families are affected by this,” says Christoni. “We found ourselves in this position, with this mission. Your purpose finds you.”

“Making time,” Christoni points out, can be as simple as a quickie adventure (the pair recently tried yoga with baby goats) or making plans with a friend. As a caregiver herself, Heming Willis has learned the value of recharging and the comfort in shared experience. (Part of the proceeds from Make Time’s line, including multivitamins and supplements, benefits Hilarity for Charity, a nonprofit dedicated to caring for families affected by Alzheimer’s.) “I’ve been able to lean in on this new community I find myself in, so giving back to people who are on this journey as care partners has been super meaningful,” Heming Willis says. “Community is everything.” —ELIZABETH LEONARD



THEIR IMPACT

TWO-THIRDS

Fraction of Alzheimer’s patients and caregivers, according to a 2023 report by the Alzheimer’s Association, who are women—the primary inspiration behind Make Time’s efforts to support research and education

Brain Trust

Christoni (left) and Heming Willis have a purpose-driven wellness mission for Make Time that includes a podcast and drinkable-supplements line.



You Can Be Loud in This Library

"We're highlighting stories that often go unheard," says Santos (in black, with Crowell, right). Below: the two with wrapped books at a February pop-up.



THEIR IMPACT

\$300K

Amount the Every Body Campaign, with help from 60+ brand sponsors, is targeting to raise for SisterSong to support access to women's health care

Jordan-Risa Santos & Laney Crowell

USING THE POWER OF BOOKS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

→ When Laney Crowell, CEO and founder of the clean beauty brand Saie, was considering the next steps of the Every Body Campaign, an initiative she launched in October 2022 to mobilize other brands to support reproductive justice, she thought of Jordan-Risa Santos. The two had been "Internet friends" for years, and she was intrigued by Santos's Seen Library, which hosts pop-up book events mostly in Los Angeles to help people connect and have meaningful conversations. While Every Body had been largely Internet-based, Crowell, 42, was ready for a real-life component. "It felt like incredible synergy," she says. "Education is a huge part of justice, and books are getting banned now."

Together, they created the Every Body Library, a collection of books about women's rights and experiences, including some, like *Forever...* by

Judy Blume and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, that have been removed from shelves by state legislatures. At their first pop-up in New York City in February, titles were wrapped in cream-colored paper, symbolically encouraging attendees not to judge a book by its cover. One hundred percent of the proceeds from book sales at the weeklong event benefited SisterSong, a national organization devoted to helping marginalized communities get access to healthcare, including contraception, sex education, prenatal care, domestic violence assistance and more. "These topics are stigmatized," says Santos, 32. "We're trying to support a deeper understanding."

Adds Crowell: "Human rights are being stripped [away]. When that happens, you end up with a lot of very passionate people who want to create change. We're putting our stake in the ground." —WENDY GROSSMAN KANTOR



Facing Facts

"They're not just numbers," says Krieger (right, with Babcock in Maryland in February). "These are mothers, fathers, friends, daughters and sons. This is our future—and it's dying."

THEIR IMPACT

1,800+
Number of people who have attended Lost Voices of Fentanyl rallies in Washington, D.C., to demand action on the opioid crisis

April Babcock & Virginia Krieger

TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE TO END THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

→ When April Babcock and Virginia Krieger see how their advocacy group Lost Voices of Fentanyl has grown in the past three and a half years, it shakes them. "We cry," admits Krieger, 59, whose daughter Tiffany Robertson died from a fentanyl overdose in 2015, at age 26. "When we grow, it means more loss, more suffering, more families and children going through this."

They also know their group's 32,000 Facebook members represent only a fraction of the loss caused by fentanyl, which killed more than 112,000 people in the U.S. last year. "I'm on the phone with another mom or dad every day," says Babcock, 51, whose son Austen died in 2019, at 25; she launched the nonprofit from his empty bedroom in their home in Maryland. "It's nonstop."

The two mothers first connected on social media. "We were sisters in grief," says Krieger,

who lives in Ohio. They have joined forces to amplify other grieving families' voices through rallies (their fourth D.C. protest is scheduled for July 13) and to drive legislative change. Among the group's priorities: harsher penalties for distribution in cases of death or injury (Babcock is testifying in Maryland's state legislature on two related bills this month); the creation of a federal requirement that the opioid antidote Narcan be as available as fire extinguishers; and the closing of a loophole that allows small international packages of fentanyl to bypass customs.

"When we see the death toll continuing to go up, we start to feel powerless," says Krieger. "But then we remember we're doing it for the living. We can't bring back our children, but we can prevent it from happening to somebody else. That keeps us moving." —EILEEN FINAN

Marlee
Matlin

ADVOCATING FOR ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

→ Watching Super Bowl LVIII on Feb. 11, Marlee Matlin felt disappointed, but it had nothing to do with the final score. Though Reba McEntire, Post Malone and Andra Day, the preshow acts at Las Vegas's Allegiant Stadium, were each accompanied by a live American Sign Language performer on the field, CBS didn't show the ASL performers on television. Matlin, who is deaf, vented to her 400,000 followers on X (formerly Twitter) and tagged CBS. "It's important to acknowledge the lack of accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing in that particular moment," says the Oscar winner, 58, through her longtime interpreter, Jack Jason. (At press time the network had not replied.)

It's just the latest reminder that despite the work the CODA star has done for decades with organizations like the National Association of

the Deaf (NAD), the Starkey Hearing Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union, there's much room for improvement. "Even something as simple as watching TV as a family requires access," says the mother of four, who, alongside NAD, successfully lobbied Congress to require streaming services to provide closed captioning for all programming in 2014. NAD's goals include getting more ASL interpreters in senior facilities, providing resources for the parents of deaf babies and improving the well-being of deaf youth.

Matlin quips that it doesn't require "rocket science" to make a difference, just more collaboration between deaf and hearing people. In that spirit, she will continue to "make noise for access," as she puts it. "It's just part of who I am."

—ERIC ANDERSSON

HER IMPACT

48M

Number of deaf and hard-of-hearing people living in the U.S. who now have access to closed captioning on streaming services thanks in part to Matlin's advocacy