

ROBERT IRVINE

MAGAZINE
SUMMER 2019

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

SUMMER COOKOUT

Master The Art Of
The Open Flame

**VALEN
KEEFER**

Transplant Advocate
& PKD Survivor

RESTAURANT: IMPOSSIBLE
THE PHENOMENON IS BACK! WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES



ROBERT IRVINE MAGAZINE

Nothing is Impossible

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ROBERT IRVINE

MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2019 /// Vol. 4, No. 6



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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Restaurant: Impossible is back—
and it's all thanks to you.

As I write this, I'm sitting down for what seems like the first time in a month. It's been busy—busier than usual, if that's possible. And it's been so busy, of course, because *Restaurant: Impossible* is back for a 15th season. I've had a lot more travelling and filming to do, and a lot of restaurants to fix.

I'm thrilled that Food Network, after green lighting four episodes of *R:I* earlier this year, fast-tracked brand new episodes for a full 15th season so quickly. There are a ton of restaurants out there who need our help and their owners are plenty thrilled, too.

But I don't get to go out and do what I do just because I enjoy it or because restaurant owners need help. I get to do this again because you showed up and watched the show in such huge numbers that it made renewal a no-brainer. I'm overcome with gratitude for the way you all responded that I'm actually a little lost for words right now. So I hope it suffices to simply tell you thank you.

Besides, I'd rather thank you by action than with a long flow-



Follow Robert on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).

ROBERT'S LETTER



The return of R:I has meant as much to Robert as it has to failing restaurant owners. Read Robert's column reflecting on what the show means to him [HERE](#).

ery letter. That means I intend to reward your loyalty by delivering the best possible show every single week. We've also got brand new episodes of R:I Revisited, where I check back with owners who appeared on the show in the past, and you won't want to miss those, either.

In the meantime, this issue is a special one for fans of R:I. There are two interviews with two people who make R:I what it is—designer Taniya Nayak (Pg. 20) and construction manager Tom Bury (Pg. 25).

Tom and Taniya sat down with *RI Magazine* GM Matt Tuthill for candid discussions about the difficulties of delivering quality work on an accelerated time-frame, how I've changed over the years, and much more. For fans of the show, these are must-reads! I hope you enjoy.

Elsewhere in the issue, you'll

find a feature story on Valen Keefer (Pg. 36), a polycystic kidney disease survivor who has undergone both kidney and liver transplants. Valen is an outspoken advocate for both PKD and organ donation. I hope you'll read her story with an open mind and consider the merits of organ donation or just donating a couple of dollars to a worthy cause.

We also sit down for an exclusive interview with Dom Famularo. Known as "The World's Drumming Ambassador" Dom has given drumming lessons to countless professionals and amateurs around the world. Name your favorite band. Whoever it is, Dom probably coached up the drummer at some point. And now you're saying, OK, but I'm not a drummer and have no use for an interview with a drumming coach. Well, the interview has nothing to do with drumming, re-

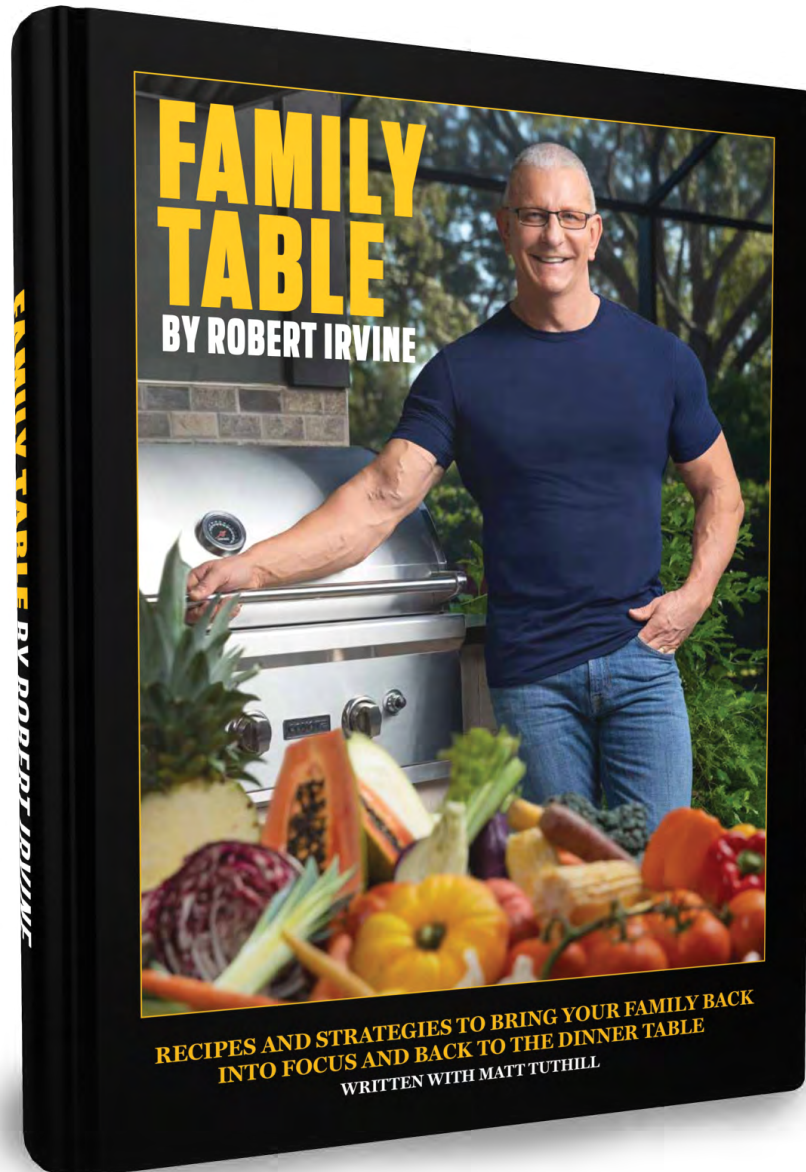
ally. Dom is also an accomplished self-help author. What he learned by pursuing his passion for drumming translates into his terrific book, *The Cycle of Self-Empowerment*. In our interview, he breaks these concepts down into advice you start using to improve your life today.

Lastly, it's summer, which means all-new summer workouts, grilling recipes, and gear. We hope you have as much fun reading this issue as we did putting it together. Enjoy the summer! And once again, THANK YOU!

Nothing is Impossible,

FAMILY TABLE

THE NEW COOKBOOK BY ROBERT IRVINE



72 EASY-TO-MAKE FAMILY-STYLE RECIPES
20 ESSAYS OUTLINING ROBERT'S STRATEGIES FOR A HEALTHY FAMILY
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THE WORLD IS YOUR GYM

Focus less on sets and reps. Just sweat every day.
BY PAUL ROBERTS



It's easy to get caught up in wanting to find the "best" workout before we get started. And who's to blame you? And what kind of advice would I be giving you if I argued against finding the best for yourself?

I'm not here to argue against

finding the best workout, per se. I'm just saying not to get too caught up in it. In my experience, we'd all be better served if we spent less time on trying to find perfection and avoid mistakes and more time on just getting going. Meaning: maybe Person

A has in it in their head that an ideal workout is 60-75 minutes in the gym, divided 60/40 between weight training and high intensity interval training. Person A wouldn't necessarily be wrong. But people who has a fixed notion of what's ideal tend to hold

IN THE GYM: PRO TIPS

out for the right time when this exact scenario can be executed.

Meanwhile, Person B, who has a more malleable idea of what's ideal or acceptable, tends to just get going. Maybe Person B also wants to go to the gym for 75 minutes and do the same workout as Person A. But whereas Person A would hold out for the right moment when they can do their full workout, Person B would take the 20, 30, or 40 minutes available to them at any given time and just get something done. Person B says, "Oh well. I can't do my full workout. I'll just go for a quick walk/jog/bike ride and do a few biceps curls. I'll do my full workout tomorrow."

If both these folks got to work out every day, Person A would likely make more progress over time. But life rarely makes way for Person A.

In my experience, Person B is almost always the type of personality to make more progress over time. They stay in shape and their weight doesn't fluctuate much over the years. That's because the unexpected is just about all we can ever really expect. Family and work emergencies come up. Life doesn't care much about our best-laid plans. It's fine to make them, but we'd all do a little better to be flexible and settle for getting something done, rather than just what we think is perfect. In the end, you won't just be healthier, you'll be happier, too.



You've got no time to get to the gym, but you have 15 minutes a long flight of stairs outside your office. Guess what? You have time for a great workout.

IN THE GYM: WORKOUT



SUMMER SIZZLE

Make the most of the sun and heat with this simple fat-burning circuit.

DIRECTIONS

Perform the workout as a circuit, resting only for one minute at the end of each round. Do four rounds total, being sure to warm up before the workout and cool down afterward.

EXERCISE

Bike Sprint*
Pushup
Bike Sprint
Dumbbell Row
Bike Sprint
Bodyweight Squat
Bike Sprint
DB Curl-to-Press
Plank

REPS

.25 miles
20
.25 miles
15 each side
.25 miles
25
.25 miles
20
45 seconds

EXERCISE DESCRIPTIONS

Bike Sprint:

Get on a stationary bike (or a road bike if you prefer) and sprint for a quarter mile, pumping your legs continuously without coasting. If doing it outside, you could put the dumbbells in a backpack, or work out on a track and stop on every lap.

IN THE GYM: WORKOUT

Pushup:

Perform standard pushups, keeping your back flat and getting as low to the ground as possible.

Dumbbell Row:

Rest your right knee on a weight bench or other sturdy object and brace your upper body with your right hand. With a dumbbell in your left hand, and your back parallel to the ground, row the weight to your shoulder, initiating the pull from your shoulder blade. After 15 reps, switch sides.

Bodyweight Squat:

Keeping your back straight and eyes forward, squat low to the ground, getting your thighs parallel to the floor on each rep. Initiate the move by flexing your hips backward. Drive through your heels to return to the start position.

Dumbbell Curl-to-Press:

Hold a pair of dumbbells in your hands and curl the weights upward; once the weights are at your shoulders, press the weights overhead to a full extension of your elbow. Return to the start. That's one rep.

Plank:

Lie facedown on the ground, bracing your body on your elbows. Keep your entire body straight; you should be able to draw an unbroken line between your ankles, knees, hips, and shoulders. Squeeze your abs and breathe behind the brace. Hold for the allotted time.



Above: a standard pushup. Below: a dumbbell row.





THE V02 MAX WORKOUT

Make the most of the sun and heat with this simple fat-burning circuit.

This magazine has spent many pages explaining the benefits of various training methods, most of which are aimed at getting you fit. Fitness meaning, to lose weight, build strength and endurance, and generally feel better. To date, however, we have never issued a workout specifically aimed at increasing one's V02 max, that is, the maximum

amount of oxygen your body can utilize during intense exercise. V02 max isn't just a fitness indicator, but one of the best overall health indicators, and study after study has shown that improving maximal oxygen uptake can greatly decrease your risk of early death.

"You want to work smarter, not necessarily harder," says Mark

Gantner, M.D., of Get Fit! V02 (GetFitVO2.com). "By getting tested, you maximize your time and knowing these numbers is crucial to making sure you're exercising in the right zone."

According to Gantner's co-founder and partner, Gregory Cuozzo, M.D., V02 max ought to be the next regularly checked vital sign. A body that can't

IN THE GYM: WORKOUT



process and use a mass quantity of oxygen under duress is a body that's in danger.

“Your V02 max is your fitness fingerprint,” Cuozzo says, adding, “The heartrate at which your body is burning fat versus when it’s just burning carbohydrates—that’s unique to all of us, and everyone should know it because it’s modifiable through your behavior, through exercise. You get your blood pressure and cholesterol checked. You need to know what your V02 max is.”

Gantner and Cuozzo recommend getting checked regularly as a way of assessing the efficacy of your current training regimen. Learn more about how and where you can get assessed at their [WEBSITE](#), and check out the workout in the box at right to start moving your own V02 max in the right direction. To learn more about Doctors Gantner and Cuozzo, click [HERE](#).

Base conditioning program

Week	Frequency	Intensity	Time
1	3	30-40% HRR	15
2	3	30-40% HRR	20
3	4 (3)	30-40% HRR	20
4	4 (3)	40-50% HRR	25
5	4 (3)	40-50% HRR	30
6	4 (3)	40-50% HRR	30
7	5 (3)	40-50% HRR	35
8	5 (3)	40-50% HRR	40
9	5 (3)	50-60% HRR	45
10	5 (3)	50-60% HRR	50
11	5 (3)	50-60% HRR	55
12	5 (3)	50-60% HRR	60

(3) – Alternative program with 2 days of upper/lower body strength training

BARE BONES

Get up, get outside, and get ripped with these simple, affordable outdoor training implements.



RUNFast PRO VEST

The RUNFast Pro Max weighted vest fits the spirit of this month's pro tips column to a T. Make any cardio activity from walking to running to cycling exponentially more difficult and effective and build your core and stabilizing muscles while you're at it. Adjustable from 12-60 pounds, the RUNFast is a true efficiency multiplier.

Starting at \$26, [Amazon](#)



BATTLING ROPES

Stripped-down design aesthetics rule our current age, and when you add a single set of thick, durable battling ropes to your training arsenal, you can start to appreciate why. Your body doesn't really need much when it comes to the training implements you choose; it just wants constant motion. Fix the center of the rope around a sturdy anchor point like a heavy dumbbell and step away with the rest of the length, holding the ends. From there, perform dual slams, alternating slams, overhead arcs, and more. Cardio is great. Cardio with your upper body as the engine is an even better change of pace.



\$40, [Amazon](#)

IN THE KITCHEN: FOR STARTERS



FRENCH ONION FONDUE

Now built for sharing.

SERVES 3

YOU'LL NEED

1/2 tbsp grapeseed oil
1 onion, cut into thin julienne
1 clove garlic, sliced thin or minced
3 oz brown ale
4 oz beef stock
1 tsp fresh thyme leaves
1 bay leaf
1 tbsp unsalted butter
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 oz sharp cheddar, shredded
1 oz Swiss cheese, shredded
Four 1-inch-thick slices baguette, toasted

MAKE IT

- 1) In a pan over medium-low heat, heat the grapeseed oil. Add the onions and garlic and caramelize until golden brown, approximately 10 minutes.
- 2) Deglaze with the beer and let it cook out for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the beef stock, thyme and bay leaf, then bring to a boil. Let simmer for 10 more minutes.
- 3) Add the butter and slowly incorporate it into the broth so it thickens the broth lightly, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
- 4) Preheat the broiler on high.
- 5) Fill a small oven-safe bowl with

the onion mixture and cover with the Cheddar and Swiss. Melt the top under the broiler until golden, 1 to 2 minutes (or with a kitchen blowtorch). Serve with the toasted baguette.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 331
PROTEIN: 12 g
FAT: 18 g
CARBS: 27 g

IN THE KITCHEN: FOR STARTERS

BUFFALO WINGS

The pub classic, perfected.

SERVES 6

YOU'LL NEED

WINGS

2 lbs chicken wings
2 tbsp grapeseed oil
1 tbsp salt and pepper, equal blend
2 cups grapeseed oil, for frying

SAUCE

1 stick (¼ pound) butter, softened
¼ cup hot pepper sauce, like Frank's
2 tbsp honey
1 tsp celery seed
1 tsp kosher salt
Cayenne pepper (optional, for additional heat)

MAKE IT

1) Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2) Toss the wings with the 2 tbsp oil and the salt and pepper blend. Place on a sheet pan. Cook for 20-30 minutes. After cooking, remove the wings from the oven and cool for 10 minutes or more.
3) In mixing bowl, blend the butter, hot sauce, honey, celery seed and salt until well mixed.
4) Using the remaining oil, reheat a fryer to 375 degrees F. Add the wings to the fryer in batches and cook until crisp, 2 to 3 minutes. Once crisp, remove from the fryer

and allow excess grease to drain.
5) Toss the wings in the hot sauce and serve.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 490
PROTEIN: 22 g
FAT: 43 g
CARBS: 6 g



BROADEN YOUR PALATE

When you sip a great cocktail, you won't care that it's not made with your favorite spirit—and you might even discover a new one.

BY MARAT MAMEDOV, [Boardroom Spirits](#)

A man walks into a bar and the bartender asks what he's having. The man replies, "I'll take a whiskey drink." The bartender replies, "I make the best whiskey drink!" Excited, the man orders it and waits. The bartender returns with a shaken bourbon served up.

Technically the man received what he ordered, and the bartender did his job, but what if a diluted whiskey is not what you're into?

When a bartender asks you what you like to drink, or more commonly, what spirit do you like, people will generally specify vodka, or whiskey, or rum, or tequila, etc. The issue is you're describing a specific type of category of alcohol without the important descriptors of what you like to drink. For example, say you respond with "Vodka." Vodka is one of the most versatile spirits that can be made into a tart and herbal play on a



Cosmopolitan which is completely different than a dirty vodka Martini or a sweet Lemon Drop.

Maybe something boozy like a Vesper is what you were feeling. All these contain vodka but are dramatically different drinks. This is true of all spirit categories. The disparity only gets larger when getting into categories with more flavor. For gin, you have the bitter Negroni, the citrusy and herbal

Last Word, to a refreshing a crushable Gin and Tonic all the way to a traditional spirit forward Martini with a Twist.

The point is, when ordering a drink, get out of your comfort zone and bypass the "spirit of choice" question altogether. Instead, tell the bartender what you like to drink with key descriptors such as: spirit forward (boozy), fruity, citrusy, sweet, tart, bubbly,

IN THE KITCHEN: MIXOLOGY



The “Painkillerr” made with two types of rum, shown with optional garnish.

spicy, herbal, puckering, or bitter for example. These descriptors have the potential of opening your palate up to spirits that you may have never known you like.

I’m sure we’ve all had our bad gin experiences and we know people who outright avoid the category. However, there are many styles of gin and when used in cocktail according to your palate, gin is a wonderful spirit to work with. The issue is, as a consumer, when you only think about the spirit choice, you are preparing your mind and palate to search for the piney taste and decide that you don’t like it without giving the drink a fair shake, forgive the pun.

“KNEE BUCKLER”

YOU’LL NEED

1 oz Northbound Rye (equivalent high rye whiskey, such as Lot 40 or Old Potrero)

1 oz Boardroom FRESH Ginger Vodka

1 oz honey syrup

1 oz lime juice

MAKE IT

Shake and strain over crushed ice. Garnish with a lime wedge.

“PAINKILLER”

YOU’LL NEED

1 ½ oz aged Jamaican rum
½ oz Aged overproof (not 151) Carribean Rum
2 oz coconut cream

1 oz pineapple

1 oz fresh squeezed OJ

MAKE IT

Shake and serve over crushed ice in a ceramic tiki mug. Garnish with freshly ground Nutmeg and Pineapple wedge

“LAST WORD”

YOU’LL NEED

1 oz London Dry Gin (yes, the Christmas-tree-in-a-bottle stuff)

1 oz green chartreuse

1 oz Luxardo maraschino

1 oz lime juice

MAKE IT

Shake and strain into a stemmed glass. Garnish with Luxardo cherry (optional).

GRILL ESSENTIALS

Everything you need to master the open flame.

GRILL TOOLS ▶

This handsome stainless-steel set doesn't just include the standard tongs, spatula, grill fork, and grill brush; there's a matching corkscrew, eight corn holders, and four skewers to make kabobs. Handles engraved with an artful design. There's a lot here for the price.

\$22, [Amazon](#)



CHAR-BROIL SMOKER

Don't just grill this summer, but smoke like a pro. Ribs, brisket, wings, and more—are all greatly improved by a wood-fired smoker. This unit from Char-Broil makes it easy to build and maintain fires—and most crucially, keep a steady temperature—and to conduct conventional grilling. For the price point, this one covers everything you could want.

\$150, [Dick's](#) ▶



SPICE BLENDS ▼

Whether you're making ribs and steak, or just want to add an exotic twist to burgers and dogs, these four unique spice blends will elevate your backyard barbecue. This set of four blends includes Cajun blackened, Caribbean, chipotle and honey, and Vermont maple. Single-origin sourcing ensure these deliver pure flavor and nothing else.

\$36, [Uncommon Goods](#)



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The Robert Irvine Foundation is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of our military personnel, first responders, and their families. 100% of all funds raised go directly to those who need it most. To learn more about Robert's commitment to our military and first responders, please visit RobertIrvineFoundation.org



THE RETURN OF *RESTAURANT: IMPOSSIBLE*

A CONVERSATION WITH TANIYA NAYAK



Designer Taniya Nayak and contractor Tom Bury help Robert shoulder the burden of turning around failing restaurants every week on *Restaurant: Impossible*. They're so integral to the success of both the show and the revamped restaurants that it's hard to imagine *R:I* without them. Here in Part I talk to Taniya about creativity on a tight budget and the pressures of working under a severe time crunch. Read Part II with Tom on Page 25.

INTERVIEW BY MATT TUTHILL

INTERVIEW: TANIYA NAYAK



After so many years on the show, Taniya says continues to raise her own bar. “We know Robert’s standards and expectations and we’ve now adopted them to be our own standards and expectations.”

Robert Irvine Magazine: A lot has changed from the first run of the show to the second. In terms of what you bring to the show, viewers will be quick to notice that you now have a computer model of what you’re going to do and you present that before everyone gets to work. What was the genesis of that?

Taniya Nayak: To be honest with you, we’ve always done them even in previous seasons. They just never really showcased it. I have a design firm based in Boston and we’ve been doing those models for

a long, so, now for the new season they were like, “You know what? People want to see this, it’s a good idea to share it.” So we share it.

RI: Some of the restaurants that you guys have taken on seem a lot more challenging. Robert has said that you guys are getting later and later and really having to push the opening times. Tom attributed it to you guys wanting to outdo yourselves every single week. Do you feel that same pressure?

TN: Absolutely. It’s been nine

years since we started the show so we all know what the expectations are. We know Robert’s standards and expectations and we’ve now adopted them to be our own standards and expectations. We never want to leave a restaurant in a way that any of us would ever want to be left if someone else came in and redesigned our homes or our businesses. So, we always make sure that what we’re doing is being done correctly and for longevity. So, if it’s doing a floor, it’s a commercial grade floor and it’s going to be installed properly. If it’s furniture,

INTERVIEW: TANIYA NAYAK

we're looking for furniture that's commercial grade that will withstand the test of time.

But in addition to that, we're also trying to create unique moments that tell a story, and that tie the owner to the space so that they feel really proud of it. They should feel like it's theirs, and sometimes that takes a little creativity and thinking outside the box. So yes, they take a little longer sometimes.

RI: From a design standpoint that's always been the most interesting thing about watching you work, because I would never be able to define what your particular style or tastes are; you're so great at taking what is there and what those people are about, and making it something that's meaningful to them. Not just something that's aesthetically pleasing to you and to other designers.

TN: Exactly, it's all about them. But it's funny, we internally have a joke between Robert, Tom, and I that there's always this sign wall. So you'll find on every single restaurant that we do, I will always have the name of the restaurant in a huge sign on the inside of the restaurant. Which if you think about it, when you frequent a restaurant you don't typically see the sign on the inside.

RI: That's true.

TN: I always put it on the inside

because, for viewers watching, I want them to remember the restaurant. I don't want them to say, "Oh it was that restaurant that you did. I think it was in the Midwest or I think it was on the west coast." I want them to know at the end of that episode without a doubt who they are and where it's at.

RI: You and Tom are more like characters on the show now,

"I'm just super grateful. Tom, Robert, and the crew... we're such a family and it makes going to work fun."

where we get more of the banter between you guys and the gentle ribbing. There was a moment in one of the new episodes where you said, "Well this is the first time I've ever done tile like this," and Tom said, "You still haven't done tile. I'm doing it." Is the camera picking up stuff that has always been there? Or are you guys opening up more now?

TN: We've always had the banter, and I feel if you look back on shows over the duration of the

entire run, maybe early on we weren't as familiar and goofing around with one another. But I feel like Tom and I, we are brother and sister at this point; we pick on each other, but we love each other. And so we just love to give each other a hard time it makes us all laugh. And then Robert, of course, he thinks it's hysterical and he loves to jump in. In fact, Robert's the instigator a lot of times, between me and Tom picking on each other.

RI: Robert's intensity is a huge part of the show. How do you deal with it when he is not happy how things are going?

TN: I've seen a big change in Robert over the years. In the beginning, he used to scream and shout a lot and it would be intimidating and a little scary. But I'm so grateful for it, and I've told Robert this many times. I feel like he's made

me a better business person, a better leader, a better manager of these projects, and that's why I feel like to this day we get done on time. Not that we get done on time all the time, sometimes we don't, but I feel like it's running a lot smoother. We've become a well-oiled machine.

But to get back to the point, Robert has a different way about him now. It's a more silent command of the situation. It's more with his heart and less from his mouth.

INTERVIEW: TANIYA NAYAK

RI: In one of the most recent episodes Robert looked at the camera and said, “Listen, we’re all working really hard, and it’s very late, and those people have been waiting outside for over two hours so you should get that camera out of my face.” It was a very real moment. Very heartfelt. Not shouting at everyone to go faster.

TN: It’s true. It’s across the board, too, not just with us. I see it with the owners and how he approaches them. I would say he’s got this magic key where he can unlock their deepest, most personal setbacks, what’s holding them back. I don’t know how he gets this out of people, but he gets it out of them. He really has a gift for that.

RI: At what point in your career did you figure out how to take cheap materials and MacGyver them into uses that they were never intended for? I’m sorry for doubting you still at this point, but every time you start painting some cheap plastic trinket, I’m saying, “How is that going to work?” and then it’s, “Holy cow that worked.” Where did you get that from?

TN: That is like the biggest compliment ever so thank you for saying that. Between HGTV and



Just as Robert needs to work with the existing type of cuisine the restaurant is known for, Taniya can’t design from scratch. Rather, she needs to incorporate specific design elements that will be meaningful to the owners.

Food Network, I’ve been doing shows for the last 15 or 16 years of my life. Every one of these shows is typically budget-based, so you need to come up with these take-away DIY projects. It really starts to make you think outside the box.

And I get a lot of people who say to me, “Don’t you wish you had more time and more money to do these restaurants?” And I tell them every single time, “No way.” As for time, it’s a luxury to be able to see a restaurant from start to completion in a 24- to 30-hour timeframe. It’s very satisfying. As for the money, it makes you that much more creative when you don’t have the extra cash flow.

RI: Art from adversity.

TN: Exactly.

RI: What were you doing before you got into TV?

TN: I went for my undergrad in business marketing at UMass Lowell, and then I worked for a few years doing a bunch of jobs that I hated and I just wasn’t happy. I just wanted to go back and do something that I loved, and I always loved design. My dad’s an architect so I always grew up around it. I went back to get my Master’s in architecture at the Boston Architectural College, and when I was on the very tail end of the program, there was an audition for a show on ABC Family and it was the creators who made *Queer Eye* on Netflix. I auditioned for that show on a

INTERVIEW: TANIYA NAYAK

recommendation by the director at my school that all the students go and audition because he thought it would be a really fun learning experience. I went, and then I got it and that kind of changed the rest of my life.

RI: And when you're not filming R:I, what kind of work are you doing at your design firm?

TN: My firm is called Taniya Nayak Design and we do predominantly hospitality projects. We do a lot of restaurants, like Ruth's Chris Steak Houses across the country. We're averaging about five to seven

per year of those. They're revamping all of them.

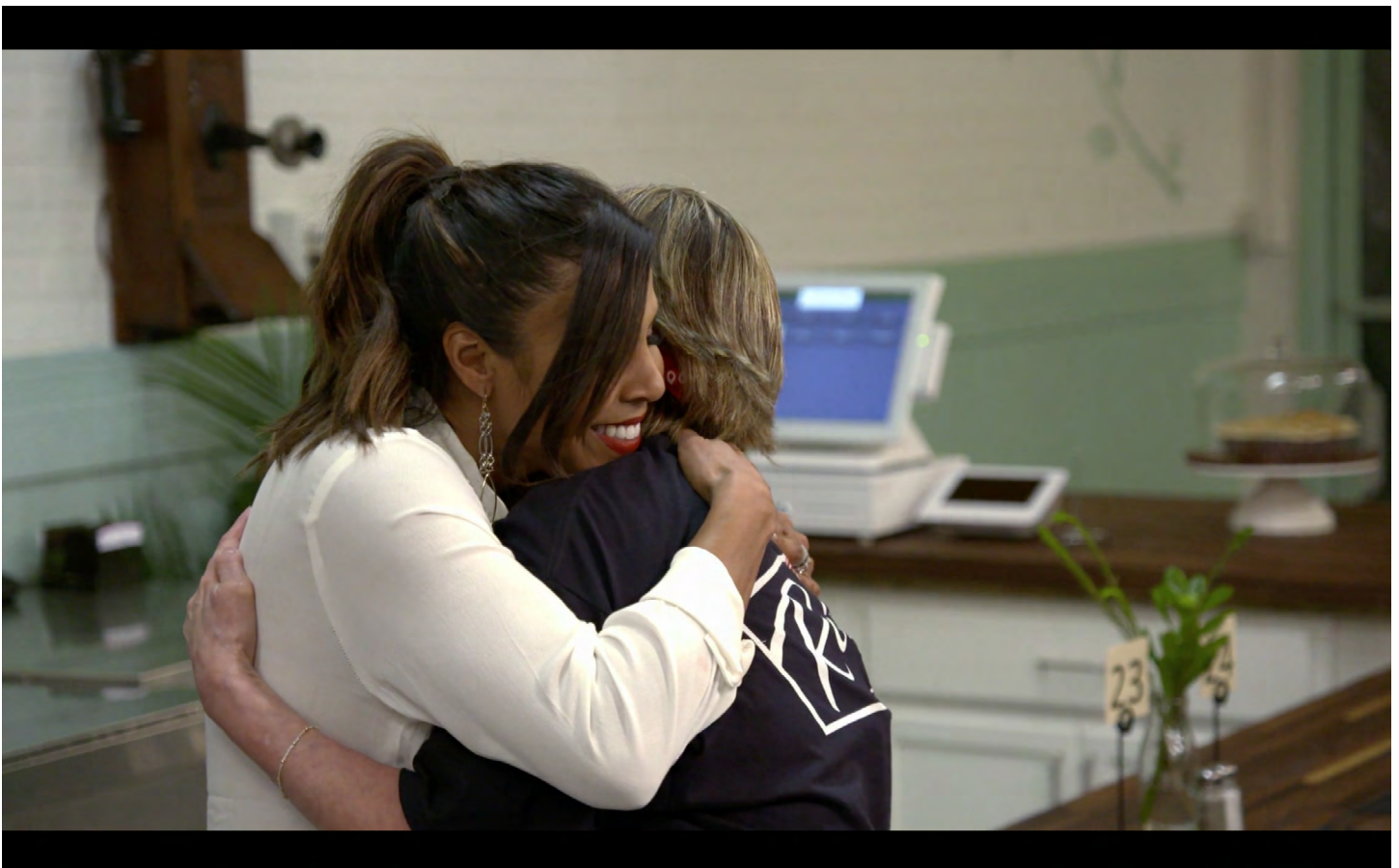
RI: Has the show changed your life? It had to have increased demand for your services.

TN: Yes, but let me just start by saying, from a personal standpoint, I love doing this show. I love it so much. I love the team, I love what we're able to do for people, helping people, and I love the fact that we get these just beautiful before-and-after transformations in such a short window of time. If you do what you love then great things come from that, and I can

definitely say I love doing this job. But from a business standpoint, it has certainly helped me not have to justify myself to potential clients.

I'm just super grateful. I'm really grateful that I have those guys in my life, Tom and Robert and the rest of the team. We're such a family and it makes going to work fun. If you're not having a good time doing what you do then, don't do it.

Want to have Taniya design a project for you? Check her out on the web at TaniyaNayak.com and follow here on Twitter: [@taniyanayak](https://twitter.com/taniyanayak).



Taniya shares in an end-of-show hug with another happy owner.

THE RETURN OF *RESTAURANT: IMPOSSIBLE*

A CONVERSION WITH TOM BURY



Contractor Tom Bury and designer Taniya Nayak help Robert shoulder the burden of turning around failing restaurants every week on *Restaurant: Impossible*.

They're so integral to the success of both the show and the revamped restaurants that it's hard to imagine R:I without them. Part I with Taniya is on Pg. 20, Here in Part II, Tom talks working on three hours' sleep, managing Robert's outbursts, and how *R:I* changed his life.

INTERVIEW BY MATT TUTHILL

INTERVIEW: TOM BURY

Robert Irvine Magazine: The magazine has followed up with a lot of restaurants from the original run of the show and the first thing we ask them is, “How have the renovations held up?” Not one person has said “Oh, well, after six months, this thing started to fall apart.” They all say the craftsmanship has been basically perfect.

The question is: if a private citizen outside of the TV show paid you for a big renovation, you wouldn’t try to do it in two days. So, how are you able to deliver the same quality of work when it’s done under duress on R:I?

Tom Bury: Well, at the end of an episode I’m always saying, “Oh, I wish I had more time to do this. I wish I had more time to that.” With that being said, we build restaurants and I understand durability. And we all actually care about the restaurant, not just about the TV show. Because anyone can make something for a TV show. I can make a bunch of pretty things that look great on camera that’ll fall down in a week, and then we can walk away not care. But we care.



While Robert formulates a new menu and financial plan for failing restaurateurs, Tom’s work is ongoing; he typically only sleeps three hours between Day One and Day Two of filming.

So, we spend time doing things that I know will last. Sometimes, that means using a couple of tricks in our bag, or using materials that I know will last over time. But we do pride ourselves on making sure that everything is made for a restaurant.

The designers do a great job also, working with me on that and finding new materials and new ways to use durable things in these restaurants. Because to be honest, when I see something that I know won’t last, I won’t do it. So, it’s a

pretty easy argument for me to win because I just say no. And I know Robert won’t let me do it. He doesn’t want it if it’s going to be cheap.

The designers are always trying to push the envelope, so God bless them. They’re trying to do things inexpensively and make an impact. That’s hard to do. But I’m very happy to hear that people aren’t reporting issues. There have been over 160 episodes of the show and I think three times we had to go back and make some additional repairs where they called us a few

INTERVIEW: TOM BURY

weeks later.

And we've learned from those mistakes. We're at a crazy level because of all the years that we've been doing this.

RI: That answer makes perfect sense, but every homeowner has had the experience of hiring a contractor for a simple job and then they discover rotted support beams or something like that and they're into something ten times bigger than what they thought it would be.

TB: We always have issues. Every single construction job is going to have an issue. And I always account for issues. I'm always leaving time in my schedule for the unknown. It does add time to the schedule a lot of times. Sometimes, it results in either cutting a project or doing something else, or streamlining or simplifying something.

The second we start demolition, I'm already thinking about the end of that first day and I have a list of things I need to get done and if I can get them done. I'll give you an example from a recent episode: We came across a major problem tearing up tile and discovering that the sub-floor was just horrible. The guys had to skim coat the entire floor, and they were in our way the whole time. So, we had to shift gears. I had planned on

building this wall and I had to take it outside, pre-frame the wall in six different pieces, and make it like a Lego puzzle. That way, when the guys were done with the floor, we could bring it in and assemble it on Day Two. And that's what we did.

It wasn't the ideal way to do it. It took a little longer to do it that way, but I knew I had to start or we would not get the project done. So, I'm always kind of working ahead

"We spend a lot of time doing things that I know will last. Anyone can make something that'll fall down in a week."

trying to figure out what's going to impact our time. I'm never working on one project. I'm working on all the projects all the time.

RI: You work most of the time with Taniya Nayak. Does she know your skill set well enough at this point where she doesn't have to ask you any questions? Or do you still need to have a lot of input with her in the design before everything is presented to Robert in front of a camera?

TB: We always, always work together. It's their design 100% and it's not that they have to, but they want to collaborate. So, they're always throwing things out there and saying, "Hey, we were thinking about this. How can we make this happen?" I'll bring ideas to the table based on that and then Taniya's like, "Ooh, I like that. What if we did this and this?" We really work it together because, besides the design, I'm also thinking about cost and time. I always want to get to the solution that will give them 100% what they want on budget, on time.

We worked together for so long now that we're brother and sister. The nice part is I never question her designs because I've seen the results so many times and they're always so beautiful. So, if there's something where I'm like, "Ooh, that looks a little weird," I literally shut my mouth and just do it because I know at the end, it'll be perfect, like, "Wow, T. That looks amazing. It always does."

RI: In the show promotion, a lot is made of the \$10,000 budget being the absolute limit of what you guys can do. But it's always been kind of unclear to me, as a viewer, if that budget belongs to you and Taniya entirely. What happens if Robert needs to use some of that if the restaurant needs new plates or something like that?

INTERVIEW: TOM BURY

TB: The \$10,000 budget is technically the whole thing. But will it go slightly over sometimes if we run into a huge problem? Or, if they need new plates and silverware? Sometimes, but never by a lot. Any construction budget, you always have to have a contingency budget. I tell my clients that no matter what because there's always something you're missing. It's still a huge win. The results they get are usually worth \$75,000 to \$100,000.

RI: How much do you sleep between Day One Day Two?

TB: I try to get at least three to four hours with the guys. The reason is we found that working through the night, not sleeping at all, does not speed up the process because when you're not sleeping, the stuff you're doing in those last couple hours is really slow and inefficient. It makes no sense. By getting three hours of sleep, the work I can get done in that first hour we start is more than I would get done in those three hours of sleep.

RI: What do you do when you are not filming Restaurant Impossible?

TB: I do the same thing. I build restaurants. We do a lot of pharmacies, too. Oddly enough, we do these pharmacies based off our work on Restaurant Impossible. We fly all over the country, and do them in six days or seven days, almost like an extended Restaurant Impossible. Totally different budget, but same concept. We're able to get in out quickly.



Tom and Taniya have become proper characters on the show, a far cry from filming the pilot episode when Tom said, "I thought I'd never see any of these people again."

RI: Did you have a typical contracting business before R:I? Contractors don't usually fly around the country.

TB: Exactly. We did have a very typical business and doing stuff in the tri-state area. But we were building a lot of restaurants before we got on the show. It's kind of like our niche because we know them really well. They're very complex and we thrive on that. But since the show we do take on these odd-ball projects and do crazy time-frames. I get asked to do a Restaurant Impossible style thing all the time. It's become a style now.

RI: How did Robert find you?

TB: I did the pilot. The designers that were cast on the show, I had built a lot of restaurants for them. They knew the show seemed to be complex and they knew it was

right in my wheelhouse, so they dragged me in to do it. We were all in the middle of a huge project at the time when they asked me to do this. I said, "You guys are crazy. We don't have time to go play around on a TV show." But we did it and I loved it.

RI: Robert has had his moments on the show where we see that he's yelling at you or your crew. How do you manage those moments of intense stress with him?

TB: We always call it the Robert Factor. Just like me and Taniya are like brother and sister, me Robert are just brothers. He'll yell at me we'll genuinely get in an argument, and two minutes later, we're joking around and laughing. It's that kind of relationship where we don't take anything personally. It's work.

I think his yelling, a lot of times,

INTERVIEW: TOM BURY

people take it the wrong way. To me, it's kind of positive because he comes in and he's pushing me because he knows he can get more out of me. He's milking every drop. He's like, "I know you can do it." Sometimes, I need that kick in the ass. Just like the restaurant owners need it, I sometimes need it because on Day Two, I'm exhausted. Maybe I'm trying to mail something in and he's like, "Tom, come on. You can do better than this." So, he comes in and he yells and he's like, "This is unacceptable." I hate to say, but he's usually right.

And if he doesn't like something, he's also open to suggestions. So, we've learned and Taniya's learned that you can't just argue with the man and say no. You come up with a better solution. Saying no to him is not the answer.

RI: You better come to him with solutions and not problems.

TB: He's not a no guy. You know him.

RI: Off camera, he has mentioned that the show is running late on that second day and people are waiting very long outside the restaurant. Why do you think things are taking longer in this new season?

TB: The problem with the new season is that we are literally outdoing ourselves every week. Robert genuinely has been coming in every week and saying, "This is my favorite restaurant." It's become the joke on set that he's been saying it constantly. But we've been outdoing ourselves. So, we're just trying to do more and more and make the restaurants better and better.

Sure, I have a schedule in my head, but we're talking about hours. When one thing takes 20 minutes longer or a half an hour, times two, times three... all of a sudden, we're talking about two or three hours late. In the grand scheme of things, that's nothing. But for the show it makes a very big difference.

RI: As you look back on all these episodes and being able to change so many lives, how does that make you feel? I know your business has grown, but I'm asking more about your personal fulfillment.

TB: That truly is one of the driving forces behind me working on the show and all of us killing ourselves like that, week in and week out. It's because we truly care. Seeing those people's face on the second day, and just genuinely being able to do something amazing for somebody you don't know, it really does feel good.

Then hearing these success stories makes us even more motivated. It's amazing to hear someone that was \$600,000 in debt made \$3 million last year. All it took was us coming in and kicking them in the butt for two days, and redoing their restaurant with 10 grand.

It was a total game changer for me. I was running around building restaurants, very happy. And all of a sudden, here comes this TV show, which was one fun day that I thought I'd never see any of these people again. Then it turns into me marrying one of the producers,



Tom and Taniya acknowledge Robert has shifted tactics, using less shouting to get his point across when he's disappointed. But even the shouting, according to Tom, is taken the wrong way by many. "Sometimes I need it, because on Day Two, I'm exhausted."

INTERVIEW: TOM BURY



Tom and Taniya account for what they call “The Robert Factor” and won’t shoot down any idea until proposing a workable solution. “He’s not a no guy,” Tom says.

and running around the country with Robert, doing a hundred something episodes, being in almost every single state of this country at least one time if not multiple times, and learning how you could do things differently in construction, and how to speed things up, which I’m using at my everyday restaurants right now.

RI: You marrying a producer is a wonderful sub-plot in all this.

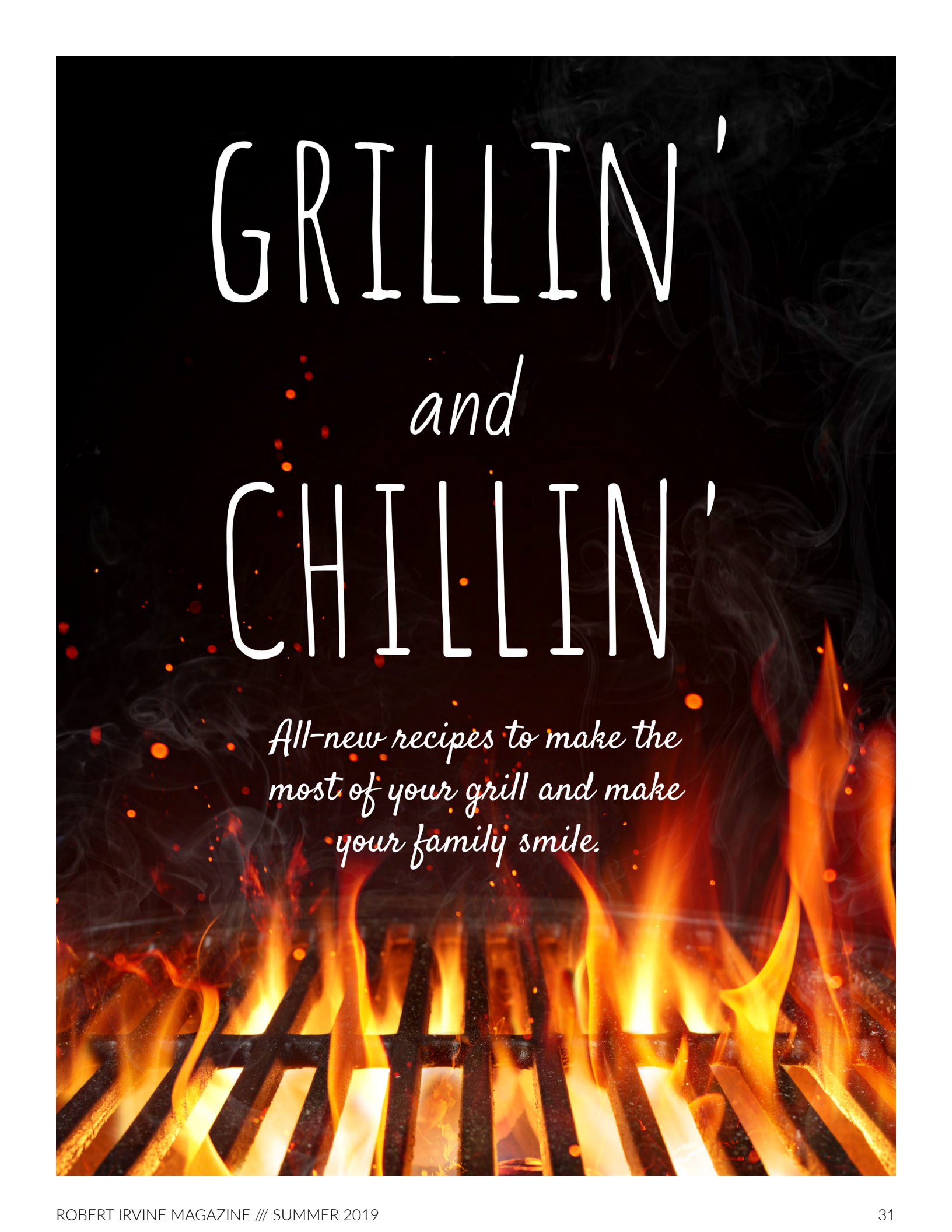
TB: Yeah, it is. She basically hired me. She was my boss.

RI: How did you ask her out?

TB: I was actually seeing somebody when I met her. We did the pilot and there was a huge break between the pilot and when it aired and when the rest of the shows got picked up. In that time I had become single and we chatted again on the next one. We exchanged numbers. I was living in Hoboken at the time and I was like, “Hey, I’d love to come down and take you out to dinner.” That’s how it started. Been dating ever since, now we’ve been married for three years and we have a one-year-old.

Robert is going to take full credit for hooking us up because he did. On that pilot episode, I think he got a vibe that she was into me a little bit. So, he was like a five-year-old in the middle, going, “Someone’s got the hots for you, Tom.” But he did bring it to my attention because I’m kind of blind to that stuff, I guess.

Interested in hiring Tom and his company for a dramatic transformation of your own? Check him out on the web at Division9dc.com and Tom-Bury.com.



GRILLIN' *and* CHILLIN'

*All-new recipes to make the
most of your grill and make
your family smile.*



GRILLED EGGPLANT

SERVES 4

YOU'LL NEED

- 2 whole eggplant
- 2 tbsp grapeseed oil
- 2 tsp Kosher Salt
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- 3 tbsp crumbled feta cheese
- 5 basil leaves, torn
- 1 spicy Italian sausage, grilled and sliced

MAKE IT

1. Using a fork, poke holes in the eggplant starting at the top and going to the bottom, the entire way around.
2. Place eggplant on a sheet tray and coat with grapeseed oil, and kosher salt. Allow to sit for approximately 2 hours prior to cooking.
3. Place eggplant on medium to a low grill, and cook for 30 minutes turning frequently.
4. It is OK to have some char but don't let the eggplant burn. It can be hard to see because of the eggplant's dark color.

5. After the eggplant is just cooked through, cut in half, top with basic tomato sauce, sliced sausage, and crumbled feta.
6. Place back on a low grill and cook for approximately 7 to 10 minutes.

THE MACROS

- CALORIES: 302
- PROTEIN: 10
- FAT: 20
- CARBS: 26

ASIAN MARINATED CHICKEN THIGHS

SERVES 3

YOU'LL NEED

6 chicken thighs, skin on
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp maple syrup
1 tbsp chili Paste
6 oz cilantro, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 thumb ginger, minced.

MAKE IT

1. Create the marinade by mixing the soy sauce, maple syrup, chili paste, cilantro, garlic, and ginger in a large mixing bowl.
2. Add chicken thighs to the mixture and allow to marinate for at least 24 hours prior to cooking.
3. Season chicken thighs lightly with salt and pepper. Place on hot grill and allow to cook for 8 min-

utes on each side, or until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 495
PROTEIN: 64
FAT: 22
CARBS: 5



GRILLED ESCAROLE

SERVES 4

YOU'LL NEED

3 heads of escarole, halved
2 tbsp grapeseed oil
1 cup white beans
1 cup red onions, sliced
2 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
½ cup red wine vinegar

MAKE IT

1. In a mixing bowl add escarole, 1 tbsp grapeseed oil, salt and pepper.
2. Place escarole on a hot grill and cook for 3 minutes, allowing it to get a light char.
3. Place in a mixing bowl with beans, sliced onions, Parmesan cheese, remaining grapeseed oil, lemon zest, juice and red wine vinegar.

4. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 175
PROTEIN: 7
FAT: 8
CARBS: 20

GRILLED ROMANO BEAN & TOMATO SALAD

SERVES 4

YOU'LL NEED

SALAD

15 Romano beans, cleaned
2 heirloom tomatoes, quartered
1 tbsp goat cheese, whipped
1 tsp black pepper
2 oz purple basil
2 tbsp ginger vinaigrette
8 cherry tomatoes
3 tbsp grapeseed oil

GINGER VINAIGRETTE

2 thumbs ginger
3 cloves garlic
2 tbsp champagne vinegar
1 tbsp honey
6 tbsp grapeseed oil

MAKE IT

1. In a large mixing bowl, add Romano beans, tomatoes, and season with salt, pepper, and grapeseed oil.
2. Place the Romano beans and tomatoes on a medium hot grill and allow to cook for 5 minutes on each side.
3. After the Romano beans come off the grill, cut in half.
4. Toss tomatoes, beans, basil, with ginger vinaigrette. Season with salt and pepper.
5. In a mixing bowl, add goat cheese and ground black pepper.
6. Place mixed goat cheese on the bottom of the serving vessel and top with Romano beans and tomatoes.

GINGER VINAIGRETTE

1. In a large mixing bowl, add champagne vinegar, garlic, honey, and ginger.
2. Slowly incorporate grapeseed oil, making an emulsion.
3. Season with salt and pepper

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 169
PROTEIN: 3
FAT: 15
CARBS: 7

GRILLIN' & CHILLIN'



BEEF & PORK SLIDERS

SERVES 12

YOU'LL NEED

4 tbsp butter
1 cup yellow onion, thinly sliced
1 tsp white pepper
2 tsp kosher salt, divided
12 oz 80/20 ground beef
12 oz ground pork
1 tsp black pepper
¼ cup equal parts
- Mayonnaise
- Mustard
1 tsp lemon juice
1 cup romaine hearts, thinly sliced
12 slices cheese of choice (Gruyere, baby Swiss, or Gloucester recommended)
12 petit slider buns, toasted

MAKE IT

1) In a saute pan over high heat, add the butter, onions, white pepper and 1 tsp salt and cook until butter has melted.
2) Reduce the heat to medium and finish cooking the onions until slightly browned on the edges, 7-8 minutes.
3) Mix the beef, pork, remaining tsp of salt, and black pepper in a bowl. DO NOT overmix or the burger will be tough.
4) Portion the meat into 12 balls, 2 oz each, then flatten into patties.
5) Grill the burgers on medium-high heat for 4-5 minutes per side, or until internal temperature reaches 160 degrees.

6) Combine the mayo-mustard mixture with the lemon juice and shredded romaine. Spread this over the bottom of each bun. Top with a burger, some caramelized onion, and cheese of choice. Add top bun and serve.

THE MACROS

CALORIES: 389
PROTEIN: 256 = 21
FAT: 22
CARBS: 19

THE INVINCIBLE VALEN KEEFER



Photo by [Trinity Walker Keefer](#)

A polycystic kidney disease survivor, Valen Keefer's life has been a long series of complicated surgeries—including two transplants—and countless setbacks and near-misses. So why is she still smiling?

BY MATT TUTHILL

VALEN KEEFER



Valen delivering a speech for the University Kidney Research Organization. Valen's incredible journey and passion for advocacy has made her the ideal spokesperson. You can watch the full speech [HERE](#).

She's been defying the odds from the very beginning. Long before she knew she had polycystic kidney disease. Long before that disease caused both kidneys to blow up to the size of footballs and require a transplant at the age of 18. And long before her liver, with malformed bile ducts that caused sepsis, gave out and required another transplant.

To get the full scope of Valen Keefer's against-all-odds story, you have to go back to before she was born, with her mother Pam Cover sitting in the parking lot of York Hospital in Pennsylvania in 1982, tissues in her hands, her husband

Bill beside her, as she grappled with the most important decision of her life. Pam, early on in her pregnancy with Valen, was scheduled to have an abortion that day. Pam's doctor had said the procedure would be wise on account of the fact that Pam suffered from polycystic kidney disease (PKD) and stood a 50 percent chance of passing it on to her child.

Pam and her husband Bill already had one child, but had learned more about the difficulties of PKD in the intervening years. And on that fateful day, they were only six months removed from losing Pam's mother Pauline to the disease. To spare another soul from the agony of PKD, an abortion felt like mercy.

PKD, which afflicts over half a million people in the U.S. and 12.5 million people worldwide, riddles the kidneys with fluid-filled cysts, greatly reducing their ability to carry out their crucial function of filtering waste products from the body. In turn, this can lead to high blood pressure, kidney and liver cysts, cyst bleeds, aneurysms, diverticulosis, and heart problems. In some cases—like Valen's—the cysts cause the kidneys to exponentially increase in size. There is no cure.

That grim reality of PKD swirled in Pam and Bill's minds as they sat in the car, staring around at the other cars in the parking lot. But for as much as they couldn't bear the

VALEN KEEFER

thought of sharing this disease with another person, Pam had another image she couldn't get out of her head. Some days prior, she went for a walk and witnessed a mother pushing her child in a stroller. She made eye contact with the child, and later told author Dennis McCloskey in his biography of Valen, *My Favorite American*, that the child gave her "a penetrating look... I knew immediately those beautiful eyes were telling me to have this baby inside me."

Pam didn't tell Valen about the near-abortion until 2007, when her daughter was 25 years old.

But by that point, Valen was already deep into a medical odyssey that would see her receive not just kidney and liver transplants, but spend seven months on dialysis, six months on a feeding tube when she came down with pancreatitis, receive over 70 blood transfusions, and undergo dozens of other procedures and surgeries to treat everything from scoliosis to skin cancer. Her medical history is a morbid, but clichéd punchline. Indeed, if she didn't have bad luck, it seems she'd have no luck at all.

And yet, despite life pummeling her at nearly every turn, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone more in love with life itself. Valen's gratitude is boundless, and extends to everyone from her doctors to random people who drop by to comment when she posts on Instagram, where she flashes her movie-star smile for hundreds of pictures, all of which contain a callback to her overwhelming sense of gratitude, to PKD awareness, or an upcoming fundraiser. Valen's "thank you" comes from the heart, and she says it constantly. Suffice it to say she held no ill will toward her mother, and instead thanked her for being brave enough to go against



Valen, with her kidney donor Sally Robertson. "None of us know how long we're here," Sally says. "We don't. But I think we're to make the best of the time that we have. We're to love other people in the very best way that we can while we're here."

VALEN KEEFER



Left, Valen's husband Noah greets her as she awakens from liver transplant surgery. At right, still recovering several days after surgery. Interested in learning more about being an organ donor? Visit donatelife.net.

her doctor's recommendation.

Valen's deepest, most heartfelt gratitude, however, seems reserved for her donors, both her living donor, Sally Robertson, who gave up a kidney for Valen back in 2002, and her deceased liver donor, whose family she hopes to meet some day. (Valen wrote a letter to the family of her deceased donor; that family then has the option to reply or not on their own timeline.)

"This gift is... miraculous and

mind-blowing and surreal," Valen says, "and still hard for me to comprehend seventeen years later... It's something that I can't even explain looking at Sally, just thinking of how selfless she is."

Valen and Sally connected via Sally's daughter, Emily, who met when they were in eighth grade. Sally had been vaguely aware of Valen's health complications over the years, but didn't get the full picture until Emily and Valen graduated high school

and roomed together at Millersville University in Pennsylvania. That's when Valen's kidney condition, which had worsened throughout her senior year of high school, bloomed into a critical emergency.

Valen spent the next year in the hospital as doctors tried a number of procedures and medications to drain the cysts and stop the bleeding, but nothing was effective. All the while, Valen's kidneys continued to grow to such unfathomable

VALEN KEEFER

proportions that strangers, thinking she was well into a pregnancy, didn't hesitate to ask her for her due date. It was disheartening, but the least of Valen's worries. The kidneys were so huge they pushed up against her lungs, making it difficult to breathe.

"And it was just constant looking in the toilet," Valen says. "I remember my mom and I standing at Hershey Medical Center and we just wanted to see yellow pee. And we just were so disappointed every

time because it would be red. I was losing so much blood that they were giving me transfusion after transfusion to replenish it. And then they got to where they looked at my parents and said, 'There's nothing more we can do.'"

Valen's parents wouldn't hear of it, and transferred Valen to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. Specialists at the hospital decided to remove both kidneys and place Valen on dialysis until a donor could be found. When

Sally heard of the situation, she immediately volunteered.

Sally, a deeply religious and spiritual woman, says she made a leap of faith that felt like true destiny.

"I could feel the Lord saying to me, 'You're going to do this. This is what I have planned for you,'" Sally recalls. "And I really had a peace about it. In my heart, I knew it was going to work."

The transplant wasn't just successful, it marked a major turning



Sally and Valen celebrate the anniversary of Sally's donation. This summer marks seventeen years since the kidney transplant.

VALEN KEEFER



Above, with Noah Keefers, whom she married in 2011. At left, the liver transplant scars on Christmas Day 2018, four months after surgery; she's wearing a bow to denote that she'd been given an incredible gift. Valen has over 60 inches of scars on her body from various surgeries. Below, treasuring each sunrise and every breath of fresh air. Follow Valen on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).



VALEN KEEFER

point in Valen's life. When she was back on her feet, she dove into her advocacy work for PKD awareness and, more generally, for organ donation. In 2008, she became the subject of *My Favorite American*. She was energetic and productive, but a new normal had taken root: twenty pills a day and monthly labs to ensure her body wasn't rejecting the new kidney.

A short time after that she met Noah Keefer through mutual friends. Valen, a woman who wears her heart on her sleeve, was drawn to the same in Noah.

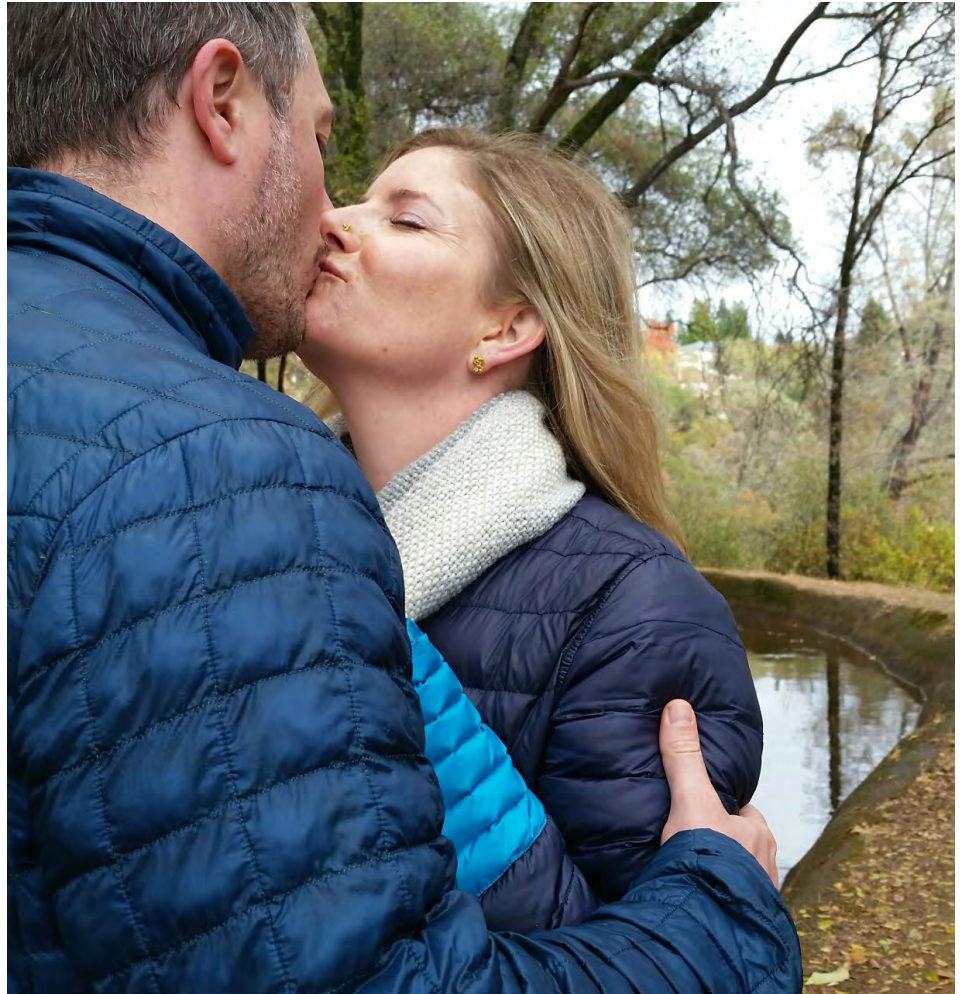
"People always say things about me smiling all the time," Valen says, "and you don't necessarily see men like that. I was like, 'Oh my gosh. He looks so happy. That's adorable.'"

Noah offered to buy her a drink and Valen declined, blurting out that she couldn't because of her kidney transplant. Subsequent attempts at small talk yielded more extraordinary details.

"He called me a couple days later to just talk and see if I wanted to hang out," Valen recalls. "I said, 'Well, I can't. I'm in Washington, D.C. about to speak to the congressional kidney caucus about polycystic kidney disease.' He was like, 'Oh my gosh. OK.'"

When they finally met up for a date, they ordered the same thing—chicken Caesar salad and water.

"We just kind of looked at each other and realized, 'Yeah. This is gonna work.'"



Valen and her husband Noah. "I was not blessed with great health, but I am rich in love," Valen says.

They married in 2011, but unbeknownst to Valen, her health complications were far from over.

Seemingly random illnesses in 2014 and 2015 gave way to a life-threatening bout of sepsis in 2016. Being a transplant patient, Valen is on a lifetime regimen of immuno-suppressant drugs; her immune system will always identify her transplanted kidney as a foreign body and could reject it at any time. And since she's never fighting with the full strength of her immune system, any time she gets sick she has to rush to the emergency room as even a minor infection

could quickly get out of hand.

Doctors treated the sepsis with antibiotics and IV fluids and sent Valen home without a firm diagnosis. After repeat bouts, however, they believed she had primary sclerosing cholangitis, or PSC. But Valen found it hard to believe that she could suffer from both PKD and an unrelated liver disease. Doing her own research, she found that some PKD patients suffer from Caroli's disease, which adversely affects the bile ducts of the liver and can cause sepsis.

Whatever the case, time was short; by 2018 Valen was in dire need of

VALEN KEEFER

a liver transplant. Facing a long wait list in California—where she’s lived with Noah since 2010—she also wait-listed in St. Louis. She and Noah were forced to relocate temporarily while she waited. Once doctors informed her that she was at the top of the list for her blood group in St. Louis, she and Noah temporarily relocated there.

After a week, she got the call. After eight hours on the operating table at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, she emerged yet again as a survivor. Six weeks later she was back home.

Pathology of her original liver revealed that she did not have primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC) as doctors suspected, nor textbook Caroli’s disease, but bile duct malformations as a direct result of her PKD.

Genetically, no one in Valen’s family has had as harrowing of an ordeal. Her older brother has suffered some complications, and so has her mother Pam, though she is healthy today at the age of 63.

Once Valen was back on her feet, she went right back to her advocacy efforts: public speaking, cutting videos for Barnes-Jewish Hospital, working on the organizing committee for the Corks for a Cure event, and appearing at the Dreamwalk

Fashion Show—a body inclusive fashion show—in NYC on September 15.

These are just a few more notches in an already stacked resume; Valen has spoken at over 80 events across North America, written over 250 inspirational blog posts for non-profit organizations, helped the PKD

“I have a mission to use this gift the best way possible. I never feel like I’m done.”

Foundation raise over \$1,000,000 to help find a cure, and in 2017 received the Bounce Back Give Back Award—given to extraordinary organ recipients from the Chris Klug Foundation.

It’s easy to see why Valen, with her boundless energy, passion and gratitude for life—and yes, that smile—is the ideal spokesperson for PKD awareness and organ donation. She proves there is not just life with severe PKD, but potentially a great one. With enough exposure to Valen’s particular brand of

optimism, potential donors start to get a picture that they wouldn’t just be giving a few more years so a sick person could barely chug along—but maybe deliver a ripple effect like Valen’s where you don’t just save a life, but positively affect every life the recipient’s touches.

That’s been Sally’s experience, and watching Valen make the most out of her life has been its own reward.

“I tell her, ‘I just love watching you grow older,’” Sally says. “I love seeing her age because I know she’s still here because she wouldn’t have been if she didn’t have the transplant.

“And now it’s the same thing with her liver. It’s just been really humbling.

Humbling for me to have been the one

God choose to help her. And that’s how I feel. I love her dearly, and I just want her life to be full of joy. I truly do... None of us know how long we’re here. We don’t. But I think we’re to make the best of the time that we have. We’re to love other people in the very best way that we can while we’re here.”

This is, of course, the driving force behind Valen’s tireless work ethic, as she toes the line every day between survival and advocacy.

“I’m technically balancing three different immune systems,” Valen

VALEN KEEFER

explains. “My immune system, the liver, and the kidney, because they’re all different. So, we have to balance the meds and make all of us happy and, well, and it’s a constant struggle... Realistically, the organs won’t last forever, and with being transplanted so young I’ll need another kidney, I’ll probably need another liver, and thinking about that...”

It’s one of the few times Valen seems lost for words, but she soon finds positive footing.

“This is when I focus on my extraordinary caregivers and the

appreciation I have for my parents and Noah,” Valen says. “I never imagined to find a husband so dedicated, supportive, patient, caring and loving as Noah. We approach this transplant journey as a team and I can’t imagine doing it without him. He gives me something to look forward to and something to fight for. My parents were amazing throughout my childhood and are still extremely supportive and dedicated.

“I was not blessed with great health but I sure am rich in love.”

“I have a mission to use this gift

the best way possible,” Valen continues. “I never feel like, ‘I’m done. I’ve thanked her.’ I’ll never feel that way. It’s a continuous mission. So, I thank her—and my liver donor—by action. I thank them every day by taking really good care of myself and by showing others how amazing the gift of life is. I want people to know, ‘If I’m an organ donor, this is how recipients are grateful. This is what they do with my gift.’ I want to set an example for that.”

Wherever else Valen’s story might lead, it doesn’t feel premature to say: mission accomplished.



Valen has continued her advocacy work after recovering from liver transplant surgery. Read Valen’s inspirational blog at PKDwillnotbeatme.com. Watch one of Valen’s many TV interviews [HERE](#). If you’re interested in collaborating with Valen in her advocacy efforts, e-mail her at: pkdwillnotbeatme@yahoo.com

RI MAG INTERVIEW: DOM FAMULARO



“Drumming’s Global Ambassador” has been traveling the world for 40 years, coaching amateur percussionists to world-famous professionals, and everyone in between. He’s also an in-demand motivational speaker and the author of several books, including *The Cycle of Self Empowerment*. Here, he shares tactics with you on how to empower your self and start getting the most out of life.

INTERVIEW BY MATT TUTHILL

RI Magazine: What originally got you behind a drum kid?

Dom Famularo: Easy. I was a kid and it was February 9, 1964, and the Beatles went on the Ed Sullivan Show. When they came on and started playing, it was monumental how many

musicians were inspired. It was thousands. It started there. I took some lessons. Grew more to see what my potential was. At 12, I started working paid gigs while his friends were taking paper routes.

I started doing jingle work in

the 70s. It was a time when every commercial had an original song. The scene got crazy and there were lots of drugs in the studios. I pulled myself out of that business, formed a few different bands, and developed a teaching program. Enough to make a great living.

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You write in your book, *The Cycle of Self Empowerment*, that your dad didn't originally approve of your drumming and told you, "Most people don't like their jobs or make enough money." Did he eventually get it?

My father was one of the Greatest Generation. He saw the need for more soldiers, left high school to join after reading about the Battle of the Bulge. He saw massive combat. We didn't know about a lot of that until the last year of his life when he moved in with us. He had dementia, which gave him clearer memory of events 70 years ago than what he had for breakfast.

He had a gas station and auto shop with his brothers. He worked hard to raise four children. I said, "Gee dad, you want me to find a job I don't like so I can not make money." He said, "No, I want you to be happy." I said this makes me happy and he didn't know how to battle that.

Seven years later he came back to me. His clothes were greasy, hands filthy. I was sweaty, 18 years old, bashing away at the drums. He had been sitting behind me. He said, "I've been watching you practice. You're really into this."

I told my parents, the support I need is not financial. You can choose not support me and if I fail, you're a part of my failure because you didn't support me. If you support me and I fail, it's on me. I made the mistakes. If you don't support me and I succeed, then I did it alone. But if you support me and I succeed, we succeed together."

And the support I want is, when someone asks you what does your third son do, you proudly say he's following his dreams into the music industry. You don't say, "Eh, he's a musician and who knows what's gonna happen with that?"

"I said, I'm making money. Paying my own bills. I'm gonna make this work." My father said, "I'm gonna support you 1000 percent."

Both of them on their death beds at different times said, "Wow, you did it." And I said, "No. We did it."

A parallel today might be a parent worried that their kid is YouTube gaming commentator or something like that.

Absolutely. That's getting huge. When they say think out of the box, they mean, live out of the box. I live so far out of the box I think of crazy things. I have a friend who makes \$70,000/month off of 800,000 YouTube subscribers. Outside of something illegal, 70K a month? I'm in! I'm building my YouTube channel [THE SESSIONS](#). I have to think of



a 21st Century Mentality. If I think in the 20th century mentality, I fail.

Right. If you hung onto the idea that you need to put a record out, obviously that's not the way the industry works now.

There are no record stores. I still get people who send me CDs of their music. I have to get a special attachment for my computer to even listen to it. There's no drives

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on the computers. All of my drum books – we have physical copies from one company, digitally from another.

You have a quote early in the book: We become actors in our lives rather than playwrights of our own destiny. Why does life feel like that a lot? That life is something that happens to other people and we're just observers. They're on a stage. We're in the audience, as Ian Anderson wrote.

People have a tendency to think they are doomed to fail. They use the words and thoughts of failure. I removed the word “problem” from my vocabulary. I have zero problems. Problem is a negative word. It weighs on your shoulder and pushes you down. A problem with my car, my house, my girlfriend... I replaced it with the word challenge. With a challenge, you lift yourself to rise to the chal-

lenge. People think that if they talk themselves out of success they can be safe. Because then when they don't get the success, they didn't fail. I enjoy failing. That's where I learn the most. There are two paths: least resistance and most resistance.

When I was young and drumming someone told me to get a job at the post office. That it would be an easy job that I could glide through and get a pension. That was least resistance. In most resistance, I grow the most. I

still do that. When you step onstage you have to be able to take risk and accept failure as a part of success.

I've read that about procrastination as well. It's not laziness, per se, but about owning the moment and protecting yourself from work that could turn out badly or unfulfilling.

Procrastination is a great way to not fail. I didn't do it so I didn't

“If you think someone just has a gift, I will argue like a prosecutor that the gift was earned. Not something that just appeared.”

fail. In reality, they failed. It takes a certain level of courage. It's not a word just to refer to heroism, but something that we need to have to explore our creativity.

Do you think this phenomenon gets worse with social media? People are exposed to idealized images and it gives them this false sense that everyone else has it made?

It's a very sharp, double-edged

sword. What the internet gives us is incredible opportunity. I'm sitting here with you and making money from my YouTube channel without doing anything. People watch and subscribe while I'm sleeping. The internet gave me that chance to reach the world. The saying used to be, “Think globally, act locally.” Now I tell people, “Think globally, act globally.” Fifty percent of my students are Skype. I taught eight lessons the other day to people in eight different countries. They all paid through PayPal. I never left my property.

But the internet can also be overwhelming. If we compare ourselves to others, that's where the procrastination comes in. “Oh, I'll never be that good.” It's easy to talk ourselves out of greatness.

The self-help world is huge on perception, particularly the notion that the world is what you perceive it to be. Do you see a danger in that? Because there's a whole legion of people out there who think that anything they don't like to hear is “fake news.”

There's an inherent danger in the amount of information we have access to because we cannot believe it all. I don't like to use the term fake news. We have to get smarter about information that comes to us. When I see what's happening in the world and the divisiveness and arguing, they're easier to control.

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People are confused and frustrated.

It's one thing to be passionate/successful at what you're doing, but where did the power of positive thinking or law of attraction come to you?

Just imagine doing something you absolutely love doing and being excited about it. And then making a good living out of it, a house, a wife, three kids, paying for all their college. You don't have to worry about being positive or negative when you're engaged with that kind of passion. I meet a lot of people who think they're not good enough. Is it luck or hard work? The harder you work the luckier you get, Thomas Jefferson said. Nothing came easy and nothing is free. The positive attitude reprogrammed me so that every day was positive. When I would meet a negative person, I'd ask them what they do for a living and the negativity usually sprang from the fact that they hated their job, their boss, their commute. My commute is to the studio in my back yard. Or to JFK to travel the world. Hard work is easy; people want to be around positive people.

A lot of self-help gurus or new-age thinkers will say things like, "Universal source energy is flowing around us and being grateful amplifies it" and they describe a magical process where you're pulling things to you. What you're saying is a lot simpler. People see you smile and they say, "Oh, that's good. He's smiling so now I am too. Yes, let's spend more time with him."



Empowerment means to give power. And I cannot make you happy unless I am happy. I cannot love you until I love myself. I cannot give you power unless I have done that for myself. My next book is called *Owning Now*. I'm not worried about everything

that happened yesterday or what I have to do this afternoon. A person that lives with regrets is living in the past. A person with anxiety is living in the future that hasn't arrived yet. A person that is at peace with themselves is living in the now.

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I've noticed the higher up the ladder of success you go, the more those people employ exactly what you're talking about. With a lot of people I've interviewed – celebrities and other successful people – you understand that they're very busy and maybe they're in the habit of checking their phones a lot. "Hold on a sec, I need to see this e-mail." But right now I have your undivided attention. And at the highest levels of success, I see that. I got that from interviewing The Rock, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Michael Strahan. They were completely dialed into the fact that the only point of power is right now.

We have to own the moment. You can't glaze the moment. You can't semi-own the moment. The energy is all here. The Secret, The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, all the Tony Robbins stuff. I've read tons of books and some of the stuff I agreed with and some stuff I didn't. But I at least saw the direction they were going. I know that if I can get inside this conversation 110 percent and put maximum passion into each word I'm saying and you capture that and put this out in an article and someone somewhere around the world reads it and that comes across, then we've made a difference. If that happens, then we're onto something.

Stuck people look to poke holes in the story of the successful person. "Oh, Dom, you're lucky because you knew what you want-

ed to do. Me? Eh. I don't know." Athletes, musicians, and actors are most often perceived as being lucky because they're perceived as naturally gifted – looking right past the decades of blood, sweat, and tears.

A couple things: Parents will often call me up and say they have a 12- or 13-year-old who loves to play and they want to get my opinion on if the child has talent. And when that call comes in I say, that's not what I do. I'm not a judge of talent. If your child comes here, has an open mind to take in new information and wants to learn, then I can work with that.

And if you think someone just has a gift, I will argue like a prosecutor that the gift was earned, not something that just appeared. Mozart as a child, in the womb, his father played piano constantly for him, and other live music. Then they put him on a piano immediately. So by the time he was five he could play, but if you look back at what his father did – it didn't magically appear.

I didn't have a gift. I had an incredible desire to learn a craft and I've put thousands of hours into from practice to research. That gave me the confidence and skill.

But what about the person who says they don't even know what they want to do? They don't know what they're passionate about.

I think that's where the book comes in. I wore glasses as a kid, I stammered. I was bullied for these

things. Then I found something that gave me a reward.. When I saw people react to my playing, it didn't matter that I couldn't see that well or speak that well.

I said to my three boys: I'll pay for your college, but you've got to go to college for your passion – something that makes you excited. If it's knitting, we'll find the best knitting teacher ever and we're gonna do that. The second thing, you gotta get straight As. One B and you're on your own. Inspire the investor. There's a certain level of fear that goes into that. They delivered A's all four years.

Talk about creativity for a second because when you're using the conscious mind, it's a grind and it can take forever. But if you can remove the conscious mind and you stop thinking about it, you enter a flow state where it feels really easy and good.

That's unconscious competence. Which means you're at a high level of competence and you're unaware of it. There are four levels that we travel to get there. It starts with unconscious incompetence. Let's say when we first start to play the drums, we don't know the technique, it's terrible but we don't know but we're having fun and that's great. Then you hear someone who's really good and you move to conscious incompetence and you know you're not good. Then stage three is conscious competence because you become the constant learner, listening, reading, constant

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awareness. Now at unconscious competence, I can get onstage and do it and not have to think about it.

We have to provoke our creativity by planting seeds of open-mindedness to ourselves. And that's the key to me, having an open mind.

In that third stage, a lot of people possess that but don't graduate to the fourth level. And the work produced at that stage is a grind. Because you're thinking about everything you're doing. In music, that would be a piece that is technically correct but it lacks that extra thing that makes it feel natural.

In certain areas not everyone achieves that, but everyone learns unconscious competence with their language. You speak and you

have the unconscious competence. You are just expressing. You aren't thinking about which nouns, which vowels, which consonants. With my music students, I tell them you want to get your music skills to the same level as their language skills. Where it becomes raw expression.

I always come back to the stuck person. Never mind a passion for learning and getting a job you love. What about the person who's morbidly obese and every single thing they do is a struggle?

I ask, "What is the essence of life? What are you looking for out of this life?" Happiness? Success? What do these things mean to you, anyway? For me it's very simple: To matter. I'm on this planet now. Can I make a difference? If you're just going

through life to exist and to take, there's a challenge with that. Some people have baggage that they can't get out of that hole. And they use words and thoughts of failure.

I can't do that. There's no way. I don't have that kind of patience, that kind of talent.

And they stay in that safe zone of doing nothing. Their essence of life is to do nothing. So I have to question. If that's what's you want to do, you're doing it well. If you're 800 pounds, and want to lead an impactful life, you have to show the effort to want to change. And when you do you can inspire other people. Because now it's not just about you, it's about others and when you can give people a cause like that it can really start to turn them around.

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And everyone has baggage. You can go through each piece and try to resolve it. A challenge with a sibling, or a fight many years ago. The second thing you can do with baggage is put it in the closet, close the door, and say I'm gonna get to it later. And some things you do have to put off, but the problem is every time you open that door you say, "Oh jeez I gotta get to this."

Or you can take all the baggage down to the nearest river and dropkick it into the water.

I believe the resolution is in all three.

Some things you have to face, some you have to put off, and some you have to let go. Challenges come up all the time. My wife and I unfortunately lost a child – stillborn. You face these challenges, look at it, then on behalf of my three boys you go on to show them strength, accept that it was meant for you to experience that, and then you move on.

Sorry, but to give this a dark turn: Terrorists, mass shooters, these are people who desperately want to matter. And we look at all this stupid reasons when we try to figure it out: What books were



Famularo is as talented a motivational speaker as he is a drummer. His book, *The Cycle of Self Empowerment*, is a master class for making the most of your life.

they reading? What video games were they playing? What music did they listen to? But really, this was a person who was forgotten and wanted to matter.

And America has gotten to a dark place where there's no compassion. People live in this world of America and this American mentality and it's all they know...

And the American mentality is that if you don't make a ton of money and drive an awesome car, you totally screwed up.

That is the disease of capitalism. That you're drawn to objects. I don't love anything unless it can love me back. Not my house, my car, my studio. As long as I have memories of

my family. The capitalism disease is to step on the next person. Compassion is to care about others. We've lost that compassion. We have to be healthier in how we see our neighbors. In how we see people who have less than what we have.

And remember:

Watch your thoughts, they become your words. Watch your words, they become your actions. Watch your actions, they become your character. What your character, it becomes your destiny.

Follow Dom on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#).

Order his book, *The Cycle of Self Empowerment* and book one-on-one sessions at DomFamularo.com/Shop

FACING DOWN DESPERATION

A reader approaches the end of his rope.
Our expert delivers a host of resources—and hope.

QUESTION: I am near desperate; I am a single parent of four kids, two with learning disabilities. The three youngest live with me. I have had a weight problem my whole life. Now I'm 58 it is becoming more critical to lose weight and get healthy. I've tried a billion times. Usually fails. I do walk a lot but I eat like a wild animal. My kids are very dependent on me. They need me for a few more years. I can't die. Not yet. Not until I'm sure they are all set for life. Able to take care of themselves. Also I haven't been on a date in years. My body is disgusting. I'm kind of a train wreck. Any advice?

- *Anonymous, via e-mail*

ANSWER BY MIKE SIMONE,
Founder, [Human Fit Project](#)

We commend you for everything you're doing on the family front. That is a lot of work. It's clear that you're aware that taking care of yourself is key in helping others.



That said, you need a plan to manage it all. Let's see what we can do.

For starters, if you're truly serious, it's time to establish a strong support system. Pick one or two people that you love and trust — this could be a friend or a family member — as long as you know they have your best interests at heart. Express to this person or persons how you feel, what you're trying to accomplish, and why it's so important here and now. You might also want to ask them why they think you've failed in the past.

Set up a check-in system so they can help hold you accountable. This could be something as simple as an email, a text exchange, phone call, or in-person conversation, but the key is to put it in your calendar with alerts or notifications to make sure they happen.

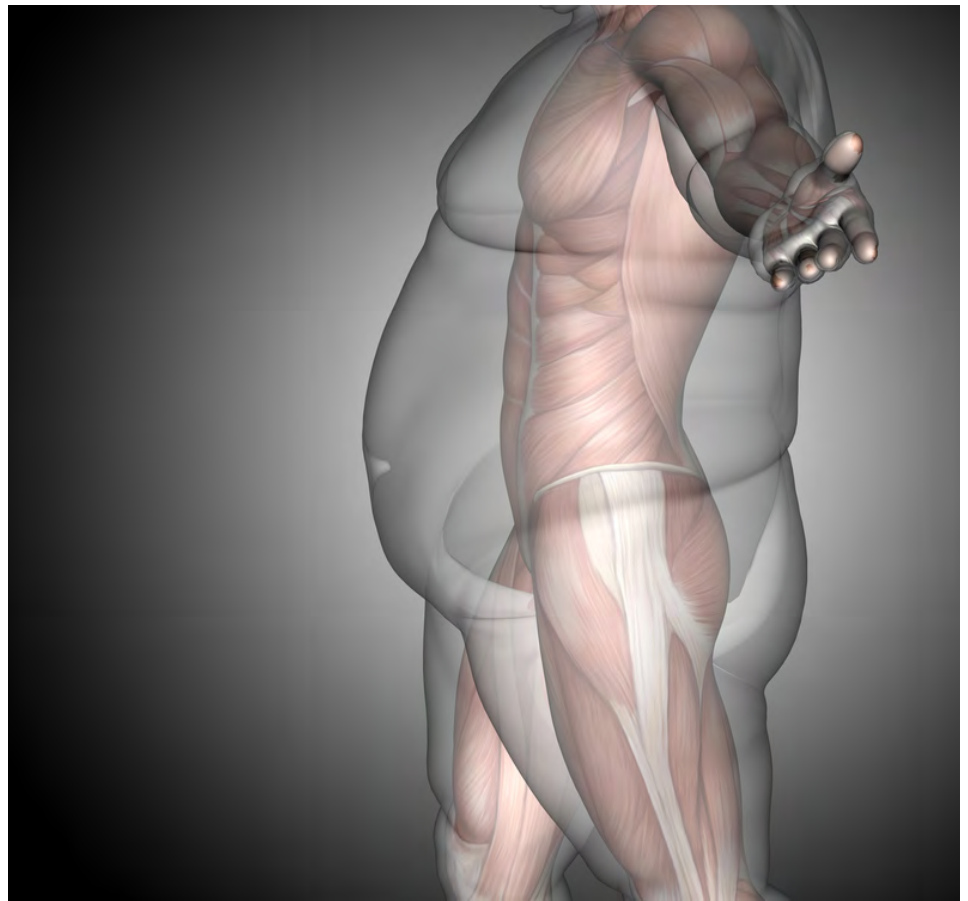
Next, consider expanding your support system to include a personal trainer or online trainer, a nutritionist or dietician, and even a cognitive behavioral therapist. Considering you've struggled with this for much of your life, this

ASK US ANYTHING

would be a smart route to go. That's not to say you cannot do it on your own, but it's much easier when you've got a real team of licensed professionals in your corner. Plus, the financial investment might be the extra motivation you need to succeed.

Now, if you do decide to go at it on your own, the first thing you'll need is to use a site or app to look up how much food you need to lose, gain, or maintain your weight based on your gender, age, height, weight, and activity level. It's quite simple: If you're eating more than your body needs, you'll be gaining weight. After you've established what you need, you'll want to begin logging everything you eat for a week or two. Be very mindful of portion sizes. It's very easy to underestimate how much you're consuming. In addition to getting an estimate of your caloric intake, you'll also want to log your macronutrients which are protein, carbs, and fats. You could try and shoot for a 50/30/20 protein to carbohydrate to fat ratio.

Next, get a clear bill of health from your doctor to assess your activity or fitness plan and modify as necessary. [The American Heart Association recommends](#) at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity (this could even be a brisk walk) or 75 minutes of vigorous cardio (ideally short but tough intervals on the bike, treadmill, or rowing machine) per week. You could start at even half of that and with each week you could progressively add more and more minutes of exercise. You should also be



No matter how much weight you've gained, a healthier, more energetic person is hiding underneath. You get to decide if

more mindful of how much sitting you're doing throughout the day, or missing out on other opportunities to be active. For example, can you take the stairs instead of the escalator? Can you walk to work? Try and identify as many other opportunities to get "accidental exercise" where you can.

In addition to boosting your daily activity and logging regular cardio minutes, make sure you're strength training for 30-60 minutes at least two days, but preferably three to four days per week. That's what's going to help you build the muscle you need to keep your calorie burn strong. Looking for a plan? [Try one of these 30 from the HumanFit-](#)

[Project.com](#).

Beyond that, remember: You are in charge of your own destiny. Your past is just that—the past. Decide to make this happen and you can. And when you're tempted to go back to your old ways, look at the faces of your beautiful kids and remember why you're doing this.

Mike Simone is the former executive digital director of Men's Fitness magazine. He's also the founder of [HumanFitProject.com](#), a fitness and wellness brand, and [DigitalFitness-Advisor.com](#), an exclusive training and nutrition programming service. Follow him on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), and [Twitter](#).

ROBERT'S "WHY"

In July, Robert hosted Gold Star families at Robert Irvine's Public House, offering a glimpse at why he does what he does.



Robert barks out orders to Gold Star families taking part in a salsa-making competition at Robert Irvine's Public House on July 20. To learn more about the Robert Irvine Foundation or to make a donation, click [HERE](#).

On July 20, The Robert Irvine Foundation hosted a special event for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors. TAPS—which assists Gold Star families, or families who suffered the loss of a loved one in the military—brought Gold Star families to Robert Irvine's Public House at the Tropicana in Las Vegas to take part in a salsa-making competition, with Robert overseeing the action.

Robert broke up the action by adding additional challenges, such as a

pushup contest, and other variables. After the contest, families enjoyed dinner at the Public House. Robert had fun hosting the event, but it was clear he had an emotional connection to the proceedings, as well.

"When you can give just a little bit of relief, a moment of fun, a moment where people can forget themselves and their pain, to a family who's been through a tragedy like this, it's means a lot," Robert said.

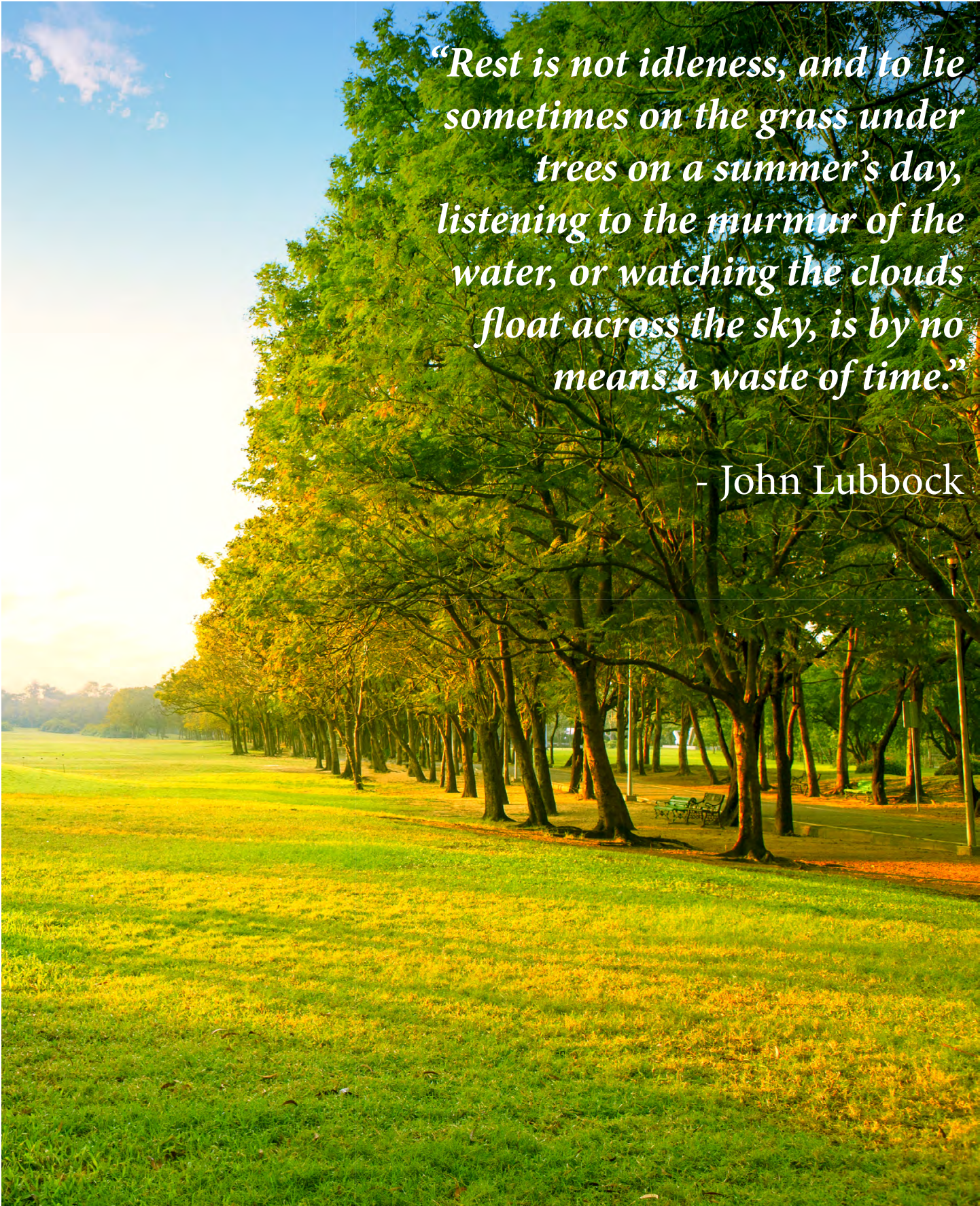
"This is the hidden cost of our freedom—not just the men and

women who put themselves into harm's way and sometimes don't come home—but their families. The families of the fallen carry a burden that is heavier than most of us could ever fathom. It is incumbent on all of us to give back to them and to honor the sacrifices made by their loved ones.

"This means everything to me," he continued. "It's why we do what we do."

Watch a local news report from Las Vegas covering the event [HERE](#).

WORDS TO LIVE BY



*“Rest is not idleness, and to lie
sometimes on the grass under
trees on a summer’s day,
listening to the murmur of the
water, or watching the clouds
float across the sky, is by no
means a waste of time.”*

- John Lubbock