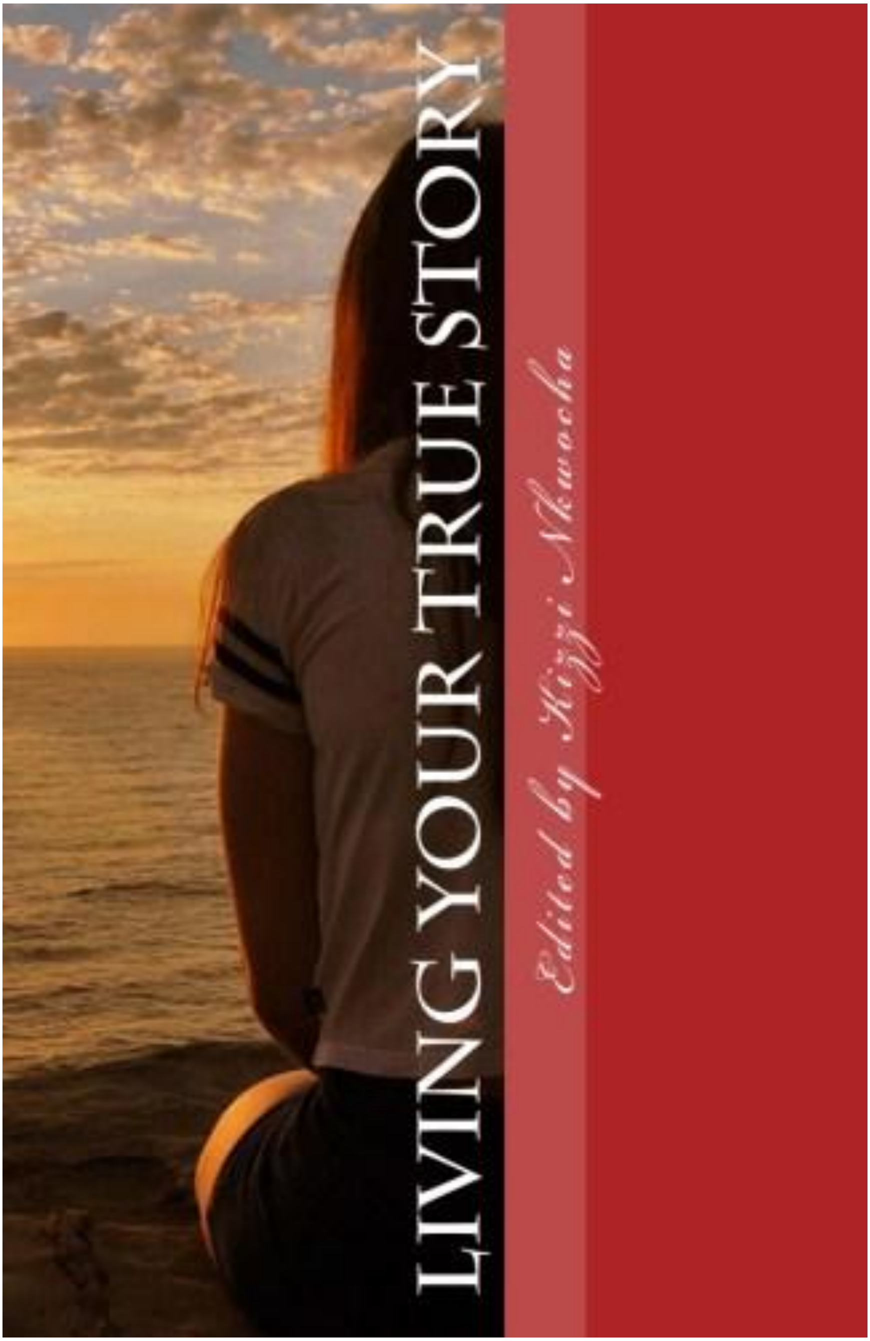

LIVING YOUR TRUE STORY

Edited by Kizzi Nkwocha

Living Your True Story

Research: James Miller, Helen Sykes, Melanie Jarvis-Vaughan, Peter Guthridge, Mark Gregory and Shawn Willis

Edited By Kizzi Nkwocha (c)

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Living Your True Story

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

Helen Keller

Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny, inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement.

Golda Meir

Achievement of your happiness is the only moral purpose of your life, and that happiness, not pain or mindless self-indulgence, is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values.

Ayn Rand

The amazing people showcased in this book

Dawn Cady, Ellie Burscough, Keith Grinsted, Simon Rumney, Karen Alexander, Ruth Bradshaw, Bronwen Sciortino, Laura Phelan, Hollie Fielder, Katie Clayton, Rochelle Courtenay, Vanessa Cullen, Marilyn L. Redmond, Jacqui Olliver, Lannah Sawers-Diggins, Sandy Hobley, Tara Scammell, Gordon Rutty and Karen Chaston.

Gems Inside

Overcoming Difficulties by Believing in Yourself

How Yoga And Meditation Helped Me Overcome Grief

Why I Became An Organ Donor

Being in 'Love and Gratitude' Over a Death of a Loved One

Introduction

Welcome to Living Your True Story, the long-awaited sequel (and I guess update) to The Book of Amazing People, a ground-breaking project that honours and showcases individual success and achievement.

In the chapters of this book you will read inspiring and motivating real-life stories of ordinary people making their lives truly extraordinary.

Some of our contributors have overcome loss, serious illness and heartache. Many have transformed their lives through physical and emotional change while others have established successful businesses against the odds. Hopefully by reading this book you will have an insight into what success means to you and how to achieve it.

When researching the stories for this edition of Living Your True Story, we asked ourselves three key questions: What internal characteristics do these individuals possess and what external factors have been present in their lives? What advice do they have to help ordinary people build personal strengths to overcome the challenges they face?

By answering these questions, I hope Living Your True Story will provide valuable insights that will help you learn to lead a *self-determined* life. But what is self-determination? There are many definitions to choose from. The following definition – and my personal favourite - incorporates a number of common themes found in other definitions.

Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behaviour. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination.

I believe gaining control over your life involves learning and then successfully applying a number of self-determination skills, such as goal setting, understanding your abilities and disabilities, problem solving, and self-advocacy. The personal process of learning, using, and self-evaluating these skills in a variety of settings is at the heart of self-determination. It is also at the heart of Living Your True Story. Read. Learn. Succeed.

Kizzi Nkwocha, Publisher of My Entrepreneur Magazine

About Kizzi Nkwocha

Kizzi Nkwocha is the editor of My Making Money Magazine, The Sussex Newspaper and My Entrepreneur Magazine. He made his mark in the UK as publicist, journalist and social media pioneer.

As a widely respected and successful media consultant Nkwocha has represented a diverse range of clients including the King of Uganda, mistresses of President Clinton, Amnesty International, Pakistani cricket captain Wasim Akram, campaign group Jubilee 2000, Dragons Den businessman, Levi Roots and world record teenage sailor, Michael Perham.

Nkwocha has also become a well-known personality on both radio and television. He has been the focus of a Channel 4 documentary on publicity and has hosted his own talk show, London Line, on Sky TV.

He also co-presented a weekly current affairs program in Spain on Radio Onda Cero International and both radio and TV shows in Cyprus. His books have included the fiction novel, Heavens Fire, the business guide books: Business, Business, Business!, Mind Your Own Business, Insiders Know-How: Public Relations and the international bestseller SocMed: Social Media For Business.

Follow Kizzi on Twitter: https://twitter.com/kizzinkwocha

Never Give Up

Lying in the dark, curled in the foetal position on my bed with blankets over my body, I could hear my husband and little boy playing in the living room.

Alfie was 18 months old, and like most boys of that age, full of energy, curiosity and mischief. That morning, while I was lying on the couch, Alfie had jumped on me in fun. This is something that others might laugh off, but after being in chronic pain for more than two years, waves of intense pain had been arcing through my body for hours.

I still can't remember all the things I said to him that morning. Living in a fog on multiple pain killers made me feel doughy and dulled my senses. But the one thing I do remember is yelling at him and telling him that I wish he'd never been born.

So there I was, lying on my bed, feeling alone, thinking things like, "I'm a disgusting human being" "I'm a burden" "I'm worthless" ". The pain I had been feeling for over two years was exhausting enough, but on that day it was so intense I wanted to die.

I had always thought that suicide was the ultimate selfish choice. But all I felt at that time was that it was the most selfless thing I could do. My reasoning was that my husband and son wouldn't have to see me like this anymore. I even started thinking about how I would end my life so my family wouldn't have to find me.

It was in the midst of this thick, spiralling blackness that I heard a clear voice in my head saying, "it's not true". With the loud jumble of truly awful thoughts, made worse by multiple painkillers, I wondered if I was hearing things. So I tuned in and heard it again, then kept listening for it and focusing on it, eventually drowning out all the horrible thoughts and allowing me to focus on reality. That voice saved my life, and it wasn't the first time it had happened.

Pain had appeared throughout my life a number of times. From the age of seven I recall having intense cramping in my stomach that resulted in me crawling on the floor of my room. My parents didn't help me; my mother was emotionally and physically abusive, and suffered from mental health issues, and my father was just distant. I learned to keep quiet about the pain and just get on with it because talking about it would result in abuse and a beating.

Finally after years of shame and hiding my pain, at the age of 17 my parents listened to me after I told them I found blood in my stool. I remember feeling excited that they were finally taking me seriously. They took me to a doctor, who referred me to a specialist.

The specialist did some tests, then told my parents and I in no uncertain terms that it was, "all in my head". To say my mother was angry is a gross understatement, so I weathered her anger and carried on dealing with stomach pain.

Nearly five years later, my symptoms got dramatically worse. I had been bleeding for two months, going to the toilet some days over 60 times, I had an inability to eat and knew there was something seriously wrong. I was so weak that I would pass out regularly during the day.

You may be wondering why I didn't seek help. All I felt at the time was that no-one believed me or noticed, and I had to just get on with it. Despite my symptoms not one person checked in or asked if I was OK. My whole life I had felt invisible and ignored by my family, then to top that off; in effect a specialist told them that I was lying.

I felt that no-one in the world believed I was really unwell or cared about me. What else could I do?

Despite all this I managed to keep going and hold down a good job. One day at work, I started having severe cramps in the stomach that resulted in me sitting on the toilet for hours. Alone in the toilet stall I felt my heart race, palms sweat and panic rising. With no other option and feeling desperate, weak and scared, I called my mother, who swore at me, saying she, "couldn't believe I was dragging her out of the f***ing house".

Mum arrived in a taxi and took me to hospital. I asked the nurses for a bedpan so I could show them what was wrong, and then presented it to them half filled with blood. I still remember the look on my mother's face because it was one of the rare times she actually believed what I was saying, "my daughter's just done this, get someone to see her NOW!"

They admitted me immediately, carried out a lot of tests and couldn't figure out what was wrong. By that point I hadn't eaten for three weeks.

About a week or so later I was lying in my bed in the ward, when a doctor came in and wheeled me out for more tests. He tried to do a colonoscopy on me but couldn't because my bowel was so inflamed. The doctor diagnosed me with ulcerative colitis and told me it was so severe that my organs were shutting down.

Ulcerative colitis is a bowel disease that causes small sores to form in the rectum and intestine due to inflammation[1]. This in turn causes the sufferers to empty their bowels rapidly and frequently. The diagnosis finally explained what had been wrong with me throughout my teens and late childhood.

The strange thing was that no-one at the hospital seemed to know who the doctor was that diagnosed me. I described him to them as, "tall with blonde hair, and a Dutch accent". None of the staff knew who I was talking about, but his notes were proof that someone had diagnosed me. I still wonder today if this was some kind of divine intervention, because without his diagnosis who knows how long it would've taken them to figure out what was wrong with me.

During my time in hospital, and because of the extensive damage to my bowel, they wheeled my bed down for surgery to remove it three times. Each time a clear voice in my head told me: *no, you will heal yourself*. I had to refuse to sign the consent form despite a lot of pressure from the doctors and nurses taking care of me.

The doctors agreed to trial a new approach on me: anti-rejection drugs. Slowly things started to improve, so they sent me home after six weeks in bed. I left the hospital in a wheelchair.

I spent three months in that chair which allowed my organs to heal while my muscles slowly wasted. One day I decided I'd had enough time in the wheelchair and willed myself to stand up and walk. I started by pulling myself along the walls, crawling if needed just to build up the strength to walk again.

The voice had been right. If I'd had bowel surgery I would be wearing a colostomy bag for the rest of my life. Although it took some time, my body did heal itself and learned to walk again.

Just over 10 years later after I had moved to Australia from the UK where I met my husband, the voice came to my rescue again. At 11 weeks pregnant, I started having stabbing pains radiating through my chest that felt like a heart attack. I presented at the emergency department, where the doctor took a brief look at me and said, "it's just indigestion".

That voice again: *this is serious.* Later that week I was attending an antenatal clinic, chatting with the doctor when I heard the voice: *say something.* Feeling nervous about saying something after being dismissed at the hospital, I spoke up. The doctor looked through my test results, and called a professor as I sat there and listened. It sounded serious.

As soon as she got off the phone, the doctor explained that I had kidney disease, and was in the early stages of Renal Failure with Renal Tuberlar acidosis. If this wasn't picked up, my body would've aborted my pregnancy. I was taken straight to hospital where I remained for a week to get treatment. Again the inner voice proved to be right. Without listening I would've lost my beautiful baby boy.

Despite this diagnosis, the prognosis for my pregnancy was good and I was feeling pretty well.

At five and a half months pregnant with my husband away for work, I was at work myself when I slipped in some water on the kitchen floor. To stop myself from falling and protect my baby, I turned and caught the sink with my hands. Whilst I had shielded my belly from harm, in twisting I seriously injured myself. I was the last one in the office that day so although I was lying on the floor in agony, I managed to drive home.

Later that night I was still in a lot of pain, so I sent a text message to my manager letting her know about my injury. Her response was that she, “couldn’t afford for me to have time off work”. She expected me there and used an angry, threatening tone in her message, so I drove in to work the next day. When I arrived I had to hold on to cars and walls to get into the office.

Some of you reading my story are no doubt wondering why I listened and went to work. Looking back, I now know it’s because of the years of bullying and abuse from my family. I’d always been told what to do, and not believed by my family. This incident took me back to feeling the same way, so I just did what I was told.

I sat at my desk sobbing until someone called human resources, who called an ambulance to take me to hospital. I was diagnosed with a torn tendon and ligament in my leg and a split pubic bone, and sent home in a taxi with painkillers. Due to the injury and the pain I could barely walk.

The following day my manager called me and said I had to return to work. She said it was standard practice to return workers to their workplace as soon as possible, especially as my job was a desk job. So despite being in pain and unable to walk property I followed her direction and returned to work on sticks. Human resources removed me again; this time I was sent home and a workers compensation (insurance) claim was initiated.

While my husband was away for two weeks I was stuck at home alone unable to get to the shops. I lived on Indian cuisine; thankfully there was one Indian Restaurant that delivered because at that time our home had no mobile reception or internet access.

For the remainder of my pregnancy I used walking sticks, was unable to return to work, housebound, and on a doctor’s advice was having Panadeine Forte for the pain. I’ve since found out that was the wrong thing for a pregnant women with kidney disease to be doing. Despite another instance of the wrong advice from a doctor, Alfie was born healthy.

Throughout my pregnancy I kept hoping that the birth would go smoothly, especially given what had happened so far. But it wasn't to be. Due to my injury I was deemed unfit to give birth, had a C section where they discovered that Alfie had swallowed amniotic fluid. This can be life threatening so my husband and I were terrified he wouldn't make it.

After the C section, my blood pressure dropped so low they kept me in observation for three hours. During this time I didn't know if Alfie was alive. I later found out my husband had called through to recovery but the message didn't get passed on.

When I was deemed fit to return to the ward, an orderly wheeled my bed to maternity. The room was full, and because he couldn't manoeuvre my bed in, he left me in the corridor and said he'd let a nurse know. No-one came to check on me. I waited for what felt like an eternity.

There I was, lying in a corridor alone, exhausted after major surgery, still unsure if my baby had survived. I started to cry, then sob, then scream, so hysterically that my stitches burst.

A nurse approached and asked what was wrong. Between sobs I explained that I didn't know how long it had been since the birth, and I didn't even know if my baby was alive. The nurse apologised for not coming earlier, tried to call the nursery and couldn't get through. I screamed at her to go there and find out.

She brought my husband back with her who was very angry that I'd been left in a corridor with no dignity and that his message about Alfie wasn't passed on. He had some very strong words with the nurse, then wheeled me into a private room and told her it was now mine. I was so grateful for my husband's help, relieved that everything was OK, and couldn't wait to finally meet my baby.

It was only later we found out that all of my things, and the clothes and supplies for my newborn had been stolen from the ward while I was in recovery. After everything else that had happened it was almost unbelievable.

I returned home with Alfie to settle in to life with my baby. Because of the muscle wastage from the injury during my pregnancy, I had to use a Zimmer frame for a week and build up my strength to walk again. I could only take tiny steps and walk for a couple of minutes.

The physio who assessed me found out that during that fall I had also dislocated my hips. This was the missing piece of information that explained the amount of pain I'd felt in pregnancy, and made me feel vindicated. Yet again the medical profession had let me down with misdiagnoses, made me feel like a liar, and provided a poor standard of care.

Like any new mum I was looking forward to life with my baby, but when Alfie reached six months old, I was still in pain. The pain in my right leg felt like an intense toothache and still wouldn't move properly. Unfortunately Alfie cried a lot, and each time he did my pain went through the roof.

So what did I do? Consult the medical profession again. A physiotherapist told me there was no clinical understanding of why I was in so much pain (which to me felt like, "Dawn, you're lying"… again).

A neurosurgeon I had consulted to help rid me of my pain booked me into a pain clinic to get some relief. The clinic promptly lost my referral and file, forgot me, and in the end it took me nine months to get a nerve block.

So when Alfie was 15 months old I finally had some pain relief to look forward to. As I was waiting to be put under, the neurosurgeon said, "I just realised I've booked you in for the wrong nerve block, but I'm going to give it to you anyway". That was the last terrifying thing I heard before I the anaesthetic took effect.

When I woke I was told I had been given a nerve block for my back and not my leg, and that I needed to come back for the correct nerve block surgery. I couldn't believe this had happened but was desperate for pain relief so booked in for the right surgery.

When I woke in recovery after nerve block surgery on my leg, I realised I had no feeling in my right leg. The doctor told me to come back in two weeks as it should've worn off by then. So while I waited to see him again, I managed by limping around with one leg not working and a small baby at home.

Two weeks later when I returned to the doctor, I said, “it feels like my leg doesn't belong to me”. The doctor explained that this can happen in some cases, and that I would need to learn to walk again.

Looking back now I can see that this was the third time in my life I'd had to learn to walk again due to muscle wastage or chronic illness. And again, the medical profession had totally let me down. Despite having a supportive, loving husband, I felt desperate and alone with the amount of pain I was in, and felt there were no other avenues for help.

With no other choice and still in pain, I went back to see my doctor (a GP) who diagnosed me with Hashimoto's thyroiditis (an underactive thyroid). At one of these visits, feeling powerless and like these medical issues would never end, I started to cry tears of frustration and anger. I remember looking at the doctor and telling him I didn't want to get out of bed, and wanted to die. I wasn't enjoying time with my child, and felt like a terrible mother and a burden to my family.

My GP referred me to a psychologist who diagnosed me with depression and severe anxiety from isolation. Because of my pain, I wasn't able to leave the house and connect with friends or meet other mums. I was alone at home, in pain, in a very dark place.

I was also addicted to painkillers, taking 13 every day. Watching the clock, I would wait until I could take the next tablet. Despite the long list of ridiculously strong painkillers, they didn't really reduce the pain, just put me into a confused, tired fog.

So this is how I arrived at that point, lying in my bed in the foetal position, seriously considering suicide. Pain had been a part of my life so many times that I couldn't see a way out. The medical profession had treated me like a liar and let me down over and over again. And the worst part that made me feel so low: I could see the impact of all of this on my beautiful son and wonderful, supportive husband.

Despite being in such an inky, dark place, I knew the voice had saved me twice before, so it just might be right. It felt like grabbing onto the only tiny bit of help and hope available to me. Deep down inside I knew I had to stop relying on doctors, and help myself.

I started by trialling something that seemed a bit unconventional called Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). I had read about it on the internet (it seemed people were having great results), and thought it would be worth a try to get off my painkillers.

What is EFT? "A form of psychological acupressure, based on the same energy meridians used in traditional acupuncture to treat physical and emotional ailments for over five thousand years, but without the invasiveness of needles"[2].

Basically it's using a sequence of tapping on the body's energy meridians, to help remove any disruptions in the body's energy systems. I have to say at first I was sceptical, but with time and dedication, I slowly decreased the amount of painkillers I was taking.

From starting out just working through the pain in the different areas of my body, I then used tapping when I felt like taking a painkiller. At first that didn't always work but eventually I stopped taking painkillers altogether.

My own success with EFT led me to want to study it and learn more about the modality. This was a journey of self-discovery that led me to want to help others in chronic pain to find freedom from pain. In fact, if you're wondering how I can talk about all of the painful events of my life so openly, I credit EFT with allowing me to release a lot of old trauma and talk about it.

Everything I went through ignited a passion in me to help others heal themselves and achieve freedom from pain. After my epiphany that day and my early successes with EFT, I spent every waking moment learning how to heal myself. From this I learned what worked and what didn't, and became inspired to develop a range of tools that I know will help people achieve freedom from pain.

You might think that given how long and painful my story is that it's unique, but often I hear the same things from my clients: feeling alone, invalidated by doctors, told they'll just have to live with their pain, with cycles of painkiller addiction, depression and anxiety, having suicidal thoughts, and no quality of life. No-one should have to live like that. That's why I'm so excited to help by offering people another choice and a way out that I know really works.

Looking back on all the terrible things I've been through, I'm truly grateful for the lessons I've learned, the opportunity to work through pain and trauma and be "me" again, and for helping me to find my purpose. What really lights me up is helping others feel the same way and seeing my client's start to smile as they begin to enjoy life again. For me, there's no greater reward.

What is chronic pain?

"1 in 5 Australians live with persistent pain" - Australian Pain Management Association[3].

Chronic pain is any pain that lasts longer than the healing time of three months. Sometimes doctors can't pinpoint the cause of the pain, and not having a diagnosis can be very frustrating.

It occurs because of changes to the nerves or nervous system which keeps the nerves firing and signalling pain. It can be intense, unrelenting and lead to various degrees of disability if not managed well[4].

My tips for healing yourself:

- Be open minded about talking to someone other than your doctor and investigating alternative therapies.
- Be kind to yourself. This may sound simple but really work on loving yourself "warts and all" and prioritise working on yourself daily. It's the first step: taking daily action.
- Get in touch with, and listen to that inner voice. Everyone is so busy with busy thoughts running around their head; I think a lot of us have forgotten to listen to the voice. Whether you call it an inkling, gut feeling, or intuition, it's important, and I'm living proof of that.
- I believe that to truly remove pain, the root cause or trauma needs to be found because that's what triggers everything. Often with my clients I find it's unresolved emotional trauma that can be the root cause, and identifying this starts the healing process.
- Use the right tools every day. My own experience led me to develop some tools to help my clients, that I offer free on my website. Visit: https://www.dawncady.com.au/free-resources/

Dawn Cady

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About the author

I struggled with chronic pain from age 7 to age 37 - 30 years of suffering with pain! Not only did I battle several diseases, I also suffered a disability from an accident I had while I was pregnant.

I endured two nervous breakdowns and horrific full-body pain, but worse, I had a horrible relationship with my son. I had no job. I was miserable. I truly hated my life and, quite honestly, did not even want to be alive. One day I realised that there just had to be a better way. And there is! I am now able to do things I couldn’t even dream of before - I can dance again; I actively play, and have a loving relationship, with my little boy; I can get in and out of a canoe! I am active and can do anything my heart desires, both physically and emotionally.

I know how it feels to be ignored, to be put in the "too hard" basket. I know the thought of trying something else is paralysing, because another failure would be just too much to bear. I get it, I was there once. But there is always a choice to make...mine was either to give up and live in pain (and probably get worse and end up in a wheelchair), or to keep trying until I find the answers that lead to relief. It took 15 years of research, and many failures, but I did it! And now I help others with what I have learnt so that they may live the lives they've dreamed of - and much more.