

Wynne Leon (00:03.601)

Welcome to the Sharing the Heart of the Matter podcast. Join us as we celebrate the brilliance of authors, storytellers, and creators.

Wynne Leon (00:16.13)

I'm Wynne Leon, and in this inspiring episode, co-host Vicki Atkinson and I are talking with film director, philanthropist, and author, Peter Samuelson. Peter directed such films as *Return of the Pink Panther* and *Revenge of the Nerds*. He's worked with Steve McQueen, Peter Sellers, and started four philanthropies, including one with Steven Spielberg.

And now he's written this incredible book that combines the amazing and entertaining episodes from all those adventures with reflective lessons and learning. He tells us how he came to write this book, writing at 5 a.m. each morning to alternate between lessons learned on some days and anecdotes on others. He tells us the story that sparked the first charity he founded, Starlight.

granting wishes to sick kids and their families.

Peter teaches a course called *Random Acts of Kindness and Pay it Forwards*. He explains the crossover between underprivileged kids and acts of service and tells some heart-grabbing stories. We talk about Peter's delightful father, Sir Sydney Samuelson, and his infectious ability to talk to everyone. Peter relates a wonderful story about how his dad

made a great connection to benefit his first star foundation and how the ripple effect of Sir Sydney's life continues on.

Wynne Leon (01:58.818)

Peter tells us how he fell in love with his now wife of 40 years, Saryl, and give some really solid advice about how to meet like-minded others. Vicki and I were transfixed by Peter's incredible energy and enthusiasm. His application of the second law of thermodynamics

will move you into wanting to make a difference. His stories will leave you smiling and charmed. Finding Happy.

is a great book that launches on Tuesday, June 10th. It's such a fun read for all, but especially young adults and a perfect gift idea for dads and grads. Join us for this inspiring episode with the delightful Peter Samuelson. We know you'll love it.

Wynne Leon (02:55.178)

you

Wynne Leon (03:07.64)

Peter Samuelson.

It's nice to be with you.

Vicki and I are delighted to have you and talk about your amazing book, Finding Happy, which will be coming out for publication on June 10th. You just tell so many incredible stories and lessons. So we want you to start with the story of the video that you made that inspired this book.

So I made a film a number of years ago about Oscar Wilde and I was desperate to cast an amazing British actor called Stephen Fry. I had Vanessa Redgrave, had Jude Law and I wanted Stephen Fry and we had all sorts of issues and problems and financing issues and so on and so forth.

And eventually we did cast him and we made the film. So I got to know him really well. He is arguably the highest IQ person and the best read person I've ever met. And he came out and spent a summer in LA a few years ago. And I pitched up to have lunch with him at his house in the Hollywood Hills. I put a camera on a tripod and I said,

Peter Samuelson (04:34.592)

simply look into the camera and answer one question, however short or long you want. Stephen what do you know now that you wish you knew when you were 18? And he just talked for 32 minutes and then we had lunch. And when I got back to the office, I realized he has talked about six subjects. So I cut it down into six.

roughly five minute clips and I put them up on the internet and sort of forgot all about them and the next time I looked two and a half million people had seen them and here we are at several years later it is you know I wish I could have that size of audience for some of the films I've made but it's it's like a perennial because there's a lot there for young people so

I wanted to write the autobiography because no one would believe the completely potty bananas things, scary things, funny things, ridiculous things that happen when you make films as a producer. But I also wanted to write a self-help book. I founded and I'm the serving president of firststar.org.

where we house, educate and encourage high school age kids in foster care. So therefore kids who've been abused or neglected. And our goal is to have them on the campus of a university for four years from 10th grade, well, from ninth grade through 12th grade, and then to get as many of them as possible into college. And the ones who don't go to college to get them into a productive career.

All of which we do. Six percent of American foster kids go to college. In the most recent crop, right now, you know, it's almost June. We already know 89 percent of our foster kids are going from 12th grade into colleges and universities. So it's a big, it's a big deal. It's very, very successful. And we've got 12 of these academies in the United States and three in the UK. And we're growing all the time.

Peter Samuelson (06:59.918)

The governor of California has just put a 1.8 million dollar grant allocation, whatever it should be called, into the California state budget. We've got some of our scholars, we call

them our students and staff up in Sacramento right now meeting with the assembly and senate budget committees because it's not as simple as the governor puts it in.

and everyone celebrates and then, you you spend it on foster kids. You actually have to keep it in the budget by going and meeting with everyone on the two committees and the state legislative analysts. So we've got all of that going on at the moment. So I wanted to write a book based on my pattern recognition of mentoring.

not just foster kids, but I'm also a member of an amazing thing called the mentor project. And I've developed sort of a list of, I realized two or three dozen issues, which most young adults, you know, the things that bother them that they're perplexed by are on those lists. So I started writing on alternate days, the autobiographical, you know, boy, have I worked with some crazy people.

You want to know some narcissists? Ask me. And on the odd number days writing the self-help book. And the only way I thought I'll get this done is I got up for like a year at five o'clock in the morning and wrote, I made myself write for one hour every morning before anybody phoned me and before I opened email. And halfway through, I realized why am I writing two separate books?

I've got examples from my, you know, checkered career as a film producer, which illustrate the life lessons that are in Finding Happy, the self-help book. I could combine them and that would kind of punch it up and make it hopefully a bit electrifying. So I did. And then, so I finished it. I finished the manuscript. I thought I'd have to self-publish it. Next thing I know, somebody suggested a...

Peter Samuelson (09:25.358)

an agent to me at Folio Literary, a guy called Jeff Silberman, brilliant man. He goes out with it. He gets a little bit of a bidding war going. Simon & Schuster Regalo get it. Then the next thing I know is that they ask, because he was clever and he didn't give them the world outside North America. They came back and they said, we need the world outside North America. We want the whole thing. So we gave them that. And June 10, you know, I just finished.

much to my, I love new experiences, completely new experiences, never done anything like this. I had to go and sit in a booth in Burbank for five days, six hours a day with a great big microphone and a guy called Paul on the other side of the glass. And I just had to read my book into the microphone. So there is an audio book, there's the Kindle electronic book and there's the paperback.

and

There you go. Well, you've delivered so well because it is both that that story of the crazy episodes that you've been a part of. One of my favorites being Peter Sellers dirty laundry in *Revenge of the Pink Panther*. Return. Yeah. *Return of the Pink Panther*. Sorry. Mixing that up with *Revenge of the Nerds*. With that one and.

There's great self-help moments and you deliver them both beautifully. You say that the only classes you feel qualified to teach other than filmmaking are random acts of kindnesses and pay it forwards. Can you tell us more about those courses that you teach?

Peter Samuelson (11:14.926)

It's the most wonderful thing. I love teaching it because honestly, I get so much more from the kids, the students than I put into it. All I do is I just frame it and then sort of light the touch paper and stand back and watch the fireworks. So the first class, 90 minutes, I say, OK, here's a question for you. I want you to think hard about this. You're walking along the sidewalk and in front of you, there is an old lady in rags.

and she's fast asleep face down, which of these three things do you do? A, stop and put some money, a dollar or something under her arm. Or B, do you wake her up and give her the dollar? Or C, do you not wake her up, not give her a dollar and just walk on by looking the other way?

Welcome.

Peter Samuelson (12:12.392)

And it leads to a very earnest conversation about the golden rule. The golden rule is in 170 world religions. Every single religion in the world has the sense of social justice, the sense of balance, the obligation if you are in this civilization, whether you're doing it for God or your village to lift other people up, you can't just sort of be complacent and sit there.

And then I say, okay, so it's in all these religions. But those of you who said you would give her a dollar, did you only say that because of God? What if you were an atheist? And they say, no, no, no, you could still feel that even if you were an atheist. Absolutely, you could stop and you could feel that feeling in your heart. There's something the matter with this picture. And so that leads to a conversation about the second law.

thermodynamics and in a class of 30 there's usually three or four who know what that says and of course what it says is in any closed system and a closed system can be the engine in your car, it can be your family, it can be your planet or your city. In any closed system if you do not apply energy you will have a phenomenon called entropy.

which means it'll all collapse and fall to bits. It'll end up in random nothingness. If you don't oil lubricate the engine, it will eventually stop going. If you don't nurture your family, you won't have a family. And if we don't take care of our planet, it's going to get so hot that we're going to have migration a thousand times greater than anything we've ever seen because that's the history of migration.

It's always because of climate of one kind or another. So we do that. And I say, you're going to love the class tomorrow. And I tease it by saying tomorrow, you are each going to receive \$200. We're getting \$200? And I say, you'll have to come along to the class tomorrow to find out. we sit there the next day and I say,

Peter Samuelson (14:34.702)

There is an amazingly generous, kind man in Dallas called Mort. And Mort has donated money so that each of you are going to receive \$200. And they say, we get \$200. And I say,

no, you don't get it. You can't keep it. You have to give it away. You have to write an essay to who or to what you wish it to go. And then we're actually going to go out and do it.

Whom?

Peter Samuelson (15:02.466)

And then a couple of weeks later, you're going to go and find out did the unhoused gentleman buy the shoes or did he buy a big bottle of brandy? Because philanthropy sometimes doesn't work. And they write the most. I cannot tell you how moving the little essays are. I'll only say one of them. My name is Jose. I'm 15 years old. I'm in the first Star Academy at UCLA.

I'm in foster care. I'm adding \$10 that I've saved up of my own, because that makes 210. And if you divide 210 by three, it's \$70. I need three times \$70 because it costs down at the Humane Society \$70 for them not to euthanize a puppy. And I am going to save three puppies because the last time I was down there,

I looked into the eyes of a puppy that had been very badly beaten. I my own eyes because I was very badly beaten myself. So I'm saving three puppies, love Jose. You know, and then we actually did it. And it's things like that, that are, I'll give you one more. My mom did some very bad things and now she's in prison for another two years, seven months.

Peter Samuelson (16:28.724)

four days they always know exactly how much longer the parent is going to be incarcerated. I know she hates the shampoo so I'm putting the money into her prison account so that she can buy better toiletries because I love her very much. That kind of thing. I mean the really extraordinary thing is like watching flowers grow as a result of the class and it's only two 90-minute classes

after we've done it, we've given away the money and worked out with whether it worked or not and so on and so forth. The kids are all taller, you know, it gives them agency. makes

them feel as though, maybe I'm not the worst off in the whole wide world. Maybe it is in my power. They've never had any power. All they do is the social worker says tomorrow at 9am pack your stuff.

in the trash bag because I'm picking you up and taking you to a new placement. But I don't want to go to a new place. Well, sorry, but you have to go to a new placement. Why do I have to go? Well, because we need this bed for somebody else and you're going to a new placement. you know, that kind of thing. And what does it do to your soul if what you're given is not a suitcase to pack your stuff, but a trash bag? tells you that everything you own is trash and probably you're trash as well. I just

I had a lunch in one of the academies in one of the residential sessions just recently with a young man and I said, you eat so much. I've never seen someone put away as much food as you always. And he said, well, I'm always hungry. And I said, why are you always hungry? He said, well, I always go to bed hungry in the placement. And I said, well, but can't you just go to the fridge and get a snack? And he said, no, there's a padlock on it. And I said, wait a minute, time out.

there is a padlock on the fridge. And I said, who have keys to the fridge padlock? And he said, well, the mother and the father, the foster carers and their teenage kids. I said, so does anyone else not get a key? says, no, I'm the only one. I'm the foster kid. I don't get the key. So I'm always hungry. You know, I think it's such a soul destroying.

Wynne Leon (18:50.168)

Well, and Peter, we love about your book, you use the word agency. that crossover from your role as a teacher and the heartfelt stories that come to something you say early on in the book, you write, when the world looks bleak, go micro. Focus on being the author of your life. When I read that, I felt the word agency because I think your book is such a beautiful companion piece.

for people who want to do the right thing, but need to hear the stories and be lifted up. But I think that's such a powerful statement about stay local, look at what you can do right in front of you. And children that are hungry because the refrigerator is padlocked, it speaks to

your philanthropy and the synergy, I think, around all the things that you're doing, including Finding Happy

to really inspire other people to get busy because there's work to be done.

Well, how great would it be if the book is a mechanism to, you know, bang on the water around me and make the ripples and if those ripples go out and lift up people who then help other people who help other people, or if it goes on to young adults who grow up to be older adults who, you know, marry and have children and then those children have children who have children.

It could be a very big pond, you know, as a kind of breeder reactor to make positive change around us. I do think it's a very threatening, unfortunate time and I'm not making a political statement at all, but I think to be 18 years old or 25 years old and trying to find your way, regardless of what politics you come from.

Wynne Leon (20:19.982)

Right

Peter Samuelson (20:44.318)

I think this is a very challenging time. And what I say in the book is if you aspire to something and you literally can't get there because other people won't let you well, you know, think of it this way. You're sitting in an envelope in the dark, but you have a pencil and you can choose to just sit there cross legged and not try anything. Or you can poke with the pencil in some direction.

And sure, occasionally, if you poke with the pencil, it'll go through the envelope. You'll say, whoops, I guess I will never be a concert pianist. But you can pull the pencil back and stick it at a tangent in another direction, and you can try that. So I try to sell the idea that being a young adult should be, to the greatest extent you can make it happen, a time to experiment.

before you all of a sudden wake up and think, I have to pay the rent. I have to put food on the table. I have to raise three children. I have to do this. I have to do that. While you can still experiment in your entry level or you're in college even better, you know, why is college so good for kids in foster care? Well, they have somewhere to live for another four years, right?

But your book is exceptional because you bring the lessons and the stories forward, but you don't let the reader off the hook. You have very insightful, reflective questions and prompts at the end, which, know, for the educator in me, that's the beauty of here, the story, apply the principle, make it resonate, you know, within your own life. And you do that throughout the book in a way that makes it.

I think a resource, not a one read, but a go back to it as needed.

Peter Samuelson (22:40.258)

Well, I hope so. mean, what I've been saying, because I've been doing these book launch things with the kids in First Star, shouldn't call them kids, the students, the scholars of First Star and the alumni. And I've been doing it with, you know, we have youth coaches who we employ who are ex foster youth, now undergrad or grad students. And we bring them back to, you know, help pull the younger kids up the ladder behind them. What I've been

younger

Peter Samuelson (23:09.534)

saying to them is, sure, if you want to go and sit on a rock somewhere, start on page one and end on page 350, you can do that. And it kind of hangs together that way. However, what I expect you'll do because you are millennial or Gen Z or Alpha at the younger end, what I expect you'll more likely do is there's a table of contents and you'll run your finger down that and say,

I've been bothered by exactly that. Let me go to chapter so and so I'll read that one first. it doesn't I mean the book is roughly chronological in terms of the life episodes, but that is trivial. Who cares? You know, I was younger at the beginning of the book and older at the end. Okay. But that's that's no relatively unimportant. I think it's fine.

to read it by topics in descending order. Where do you need help? Where do I get a mentor? I did a thing that's it's worked out so much better than I had expected. My graphic design ability is that of a newt. I I couldn't draw my way out of a paper bag, but what I did

of what bothers you.

Peter Samuelson (24:34.318)

I love all newts and what they turn into and, you know, go kiss a frog. So what I did is I did a list of the words in the book in descending order of prevalence and omitting verbs and prepositions. So just nouns really. I used

one of the AI engines just to analyze and tell me the relative frequency of all these words. And I looked at it and I said, now I really see what my book is about. I did a word grid. I did the first version of this and then the publishers had their graphic designer make it much prettier. And they pointed out, for example,

you don't have to spell the whole word. It's actually good to just have LOV because the brain of the person standing in Barnes and Noble will hopefully say, it's about love and kindness and life and health and success and social media and mentors and support and exams and all of that. So, I mean, I'm really kind of a bit happy about this. I sort of think it turned out the way I wanted it to.

Having said all of that, if nobody except my close relatives, my family, buy the damn book, I'll be completely wrong.

Well, we know that that's not going to happen because reading that, it just resonated so much with us. And what I love what you said about the ripples is that in some ways, this started with your dad. mean, you tell a great story about riding with your dad on the tube stop to Golders Green, if I've got that right. And his ripples...

Wynne Leon (26:35.84)

you can see through your life and your work. So can you tell us that story of that tube ride?

My dad who died age 97 three years ago, would have been 100 this year, December 7.

an amazing man, left school at 14, dirt poor, they needed his paycheck to buy potatoes to put on the table and all that kind of thing, raised by a single mother with three brothers, never went to college, made something of himself, build up a great big business and you know, by the time he passed, he was a wealthy man.

And he did amazing public service and got knighted by the Queen and all that kind of thing. Amazing man. There's an old chapter about him in the book. Being raised by him was an honor and a privilege. one of the things we, the children, my two brothers and I, and the grandchildren always thought was hilarious was he was very brave on mass transit. He would make himself speak.

to the people sitting next to him. goal was that by the time he got off the bus or the tube or whatever it was, he would have done the most un-English thing, which was to have a detailed conversation with whoever was sitting next to him. And he would, you know, come home and say, I sat next to such an interesting young woman. Born in Nigeria, had to run away from Boko Haram, came to England, trained as a nurse. She's the

Wynne Leon (28:04.6)

woman.

Peter Samuelson (28:13.624)

head of pediatric nursing at a children's hospital and this and that and the other and so forth. And occasionally when I would go over and you know, obviously while my parents were alive, I would always stay with them in the old family home in my old room. He would, I was actually on a tube and it was crowded and I was sitting opposite him. So I couldn't hear what was going on, but he had an animated conversation with a woman.

And then we get off the tube and he gives me a business card and he says, contact this woman. I told her all about firststar.org and she wants you to contact her because she is at a funding charity and she thinks she could provide some financial support. And I did and she did. And we've sort of worked with them ever since. So, I mean, he was a very, you know, dare to do one of the life lessons I've put in the book is

If you want to be successful in school, here are some school hacks. Always, always without fail, ask a question in every single class. Put your hand up, frame a question in your head and whether you're scared or abashed or shy, just ask the question and try to make it an intelligent one. Why should you do that? Number one, because you might get the answer.

Number one.

Peter Samuelson (29:39.776)

Number two, because the teacher will love you because clearly you were listening. And number three, because you'll have to listen and pump a little bit of adrenaline. Yeah. And you will remember the class. Classes where you ask a question are classes where you remember the bit of the syllabus that was covered, which is why you are going to school. You're not doing it for the teacher. You're doing it for you. So don't sit at the back and, you know,

fly spitballs at the back of the heads of boys in the front. Just, you know, sit at the front and raise you. Be the teacher's pet. Watch how your grades go up. I dare you and I bet you. And there's all sorts of other things like, you know, how to shake hands, especially for kids who've been raised by wolves with no decent family.

They don't know how to brush their teeth. They don't know anything about financial literacy. What is a debit card? Is it different than a credit card? Who knows? You know, so the curriculum in First Star is one third academic, one third life skills, know, sex ed. What is the difference between love and sex? very different. Let's talk about that. And then the last third is community and family for kids who never had any.

They've either been abused or they've been neglected. There's this whole new category in the last five or eight years, which is that the parents are not evil people, but they became addicted to fentanyl and unable to take care of their kids. And then the kids went into foster care. And the sad reality of most foster care is it defines its job. 2,200 jurisdictions in the United States

They've all worked out how to do foster care, usually run by the local authority, the city, the town, the county, whatever. And they think their job is, okay, we've had an allegation of abuse or neglect. The police and a social worker will go in and investigate. If they validate the abuse or neglect, we will remove the kid and we will put them somewhere safe.

Peter Samuelson (31:59.17)

We will keep them somewhere safe, usually a different place every few months. And when they turn 18, usually, we will say, happy birthday, Harry, send us a postcard. Now, I don't know about you ladies, but I've actually never met an 18 year old who was an adult. And I'm including my four children in that. I think if you're really lucky, kids turn into...

self-sufficient adults in their mid to late 20s and you better have some grownups helping them until then. foster care thinks its job almost always ends with taking care of the kids. But think of a family, a good family, a good, you know, prospering middle-class family. The job parenting doesn't end

when you cross your kid over the road so they don't get run over. That's just the beginning of it. You listen to them plinking away on a piano and you say, Sheila, wow, you enjoy trying to play the piano all by yourself? Would you like lessons? You could play it really well, you

know, we'll get you a tutor. You know, it just begins there. you're a really fast runner. We got to get you on the track team at school.

And on and on and on.

the job of parenting and in a way I had no idea what the curriculum should be. I just said, if these were my children, what would I do? And the answer is much better academics because if you don't have an SAT or an ACT score, you're not going to go to college or university even if you're very well behaved and pleasant to be with.

Peter Samuelson (33:54.606)

you actually have to have the grades as well. So academic because mostly these poor kids who have gone to poor kids schools where the teaching is, you know, very C plus, A, B minus. So we fix that, you know, we're better to do it than at a university. They know a thing about teaching young people. So we do that. We have so many people who volunteer to teach. We never know what to do with some most of them. And then the second

part of the curriculum life skills because why would they know how to brush their teeth if nobody ever took 10 minutes to tell them? Why would they know? And then the third thing is, okay, you had a very rough go of it, not your fault. You are the author of the story of the rest of your life. And look to the left, look to the right. These are your new siblings.

Well, and what I love that you did forgive me for interrupting Peter but what I love that you did I you know with my my background being more mental health that you have a chapter in the book I think it's 37 where rather than blame laying You know, are you very kind of clearly say this is what you do when people you love or who loved you lose their way lose their compass and so it you know addiction, know mental health issues so

There are plenty of books out there and resources where it begins with let me lay blame and then we'll work on helping you get to where you need to go. But your approach is so soft and gentle about accepting, know, that sometimes people disappoint us and we end up in

harm's way. But the point is now to look for the helpers and embrace the opportunities. And I was so pleased to see that woven into your book.

because I think it's sometimes overlooked or it's dealt with with a very heavy hand. But you did that. Chef's kiss. Well done.

Peter Samuelson (35:51.308)

Well, I think, you know, what is the core value? Kindness. You know, you can choose to do things cruelly or kindly, just about everything in your life and every interpersonal relationship. Kindly is much better. And it comes around and helps you back. And there's a whole chapter about how to apologize and what is redemption.

and that redemption includes you have to kind of expiate your guilt for doing some bad thing. You have to do something good to make up for it. And you should do that because you would feel less guilty if you were a net plus to the universe. So.

Can I embarrass you with another one of my favorite lines from the book? It's about the apology. You say this and it's so good. By apologizing, you almost completely remove the other person's ability to blame you more. It's a liberation statement. I've never heard that expressed quite that way before, but that was a brilliant thought for the generation that you're trying to speak to. It is powerful.

Well, they're used to, and therefore I grasped to find valid life hacks, quick 45 second pick me ups, solutions to things, sort of paradigms that you can invoke that will help you a lot. And I do think hardly anyone apologizes in a self-helpfully way.

because most people apologize, say, well, you know, I was having a bad day and this person was mean to me and yeah, sorry, I did so and so. It's not an apology. If you make a full-throated apology, it completely takes the wind out of the sails of the person who is angry with you. It is a rare person who can continue to be angry with a person who wholeheartedly apologizes.

Peter Samuelson (38:02.498)

But there is no reason why and I've had this come up roses for me personally. There was someone who did me a terrible, awful thing in business. mean, honestly a fraud and I wouldn't have anything to do with her. then months later, a FedEx letter, a handwritten four page letter arrived apologizing.

And all the women in my family said to heck with her. Don't reply. She's a terrible, awful person. And I did reply and I said, I think it was a very brave thing that you did. Please consider yourself forgiven. However, go read your Bible to expiate a sin. You have to seek redemption. And what that means is you have to do some good stuff.

You have to put yourself out and lift up your planet somehow or other, your community, your family, your people, your civilization. And she did. And I was able to say, wow, congratulations. This is so amazing.

It's a great hack. It's again, you have many of them in the book, but that's one that just really jumped out at me because I think some of the younger sometimes are quick to be in defense mode, you know, and letting go of that. Peter, you've been married for 40 years. You have four exceptional kids. You have created these four incredible nonprofits. You've made so many incredible, wonderful films. You've raised

Yeah.

Wynne Leon (39:53.496)

So much money for nonprofits. That's a lot to be proud of. I mean, I could keep going, but I'm just gonna try to sum that up there. You write, love and empathy are pillars of the meaning of life. Go find yours.

And then some sort of amazing... It's at the end of a chapter. tried... Somebody said to me, if you want to write punchy prose, always have like a telling sentence at the very end of a

chapter. You know, leave that in their head when they go off to make lunch. And that's one of those. yeah. But I think it's the truth. I think no one can really thrive...

without unconditional love. And if you can't get it from your family, you have to find somebody else to give it to you. And you have to be very careful. mean, young women who are in foster care, good Lord. mean, sex trafficking is the other side of the coin of group foster homes. The pimp parks in his Cadillac out front.

and the young lady age 14 or 15 comes out because she's just had a row with someone and the pimp says, I've been mean to you again. you look hungry. Can I buy you a hamburger? And that is where the grooming starts. So we have to be so careful that we don't, you know, create that conduit. having said that, I do think that

we can help young people by getting them outside their own negative vicious circle and showing them that there are these adjacent virtuous circles. The more you volunteer, the more you will meet great people. know, hey, I met my wife by volunteering. The most amazing thing, my very first charity, the Starlight Children's Foundation, years, decades ago,

Peter Samuelson (42:08.622)

After my cousin introduced me to a very seriously ill little boy, Sean, and we brought him to LA with his mom and we spent two weeks trying to make him happy and we did and he went home and he passed away and we realized that we'd done something terrific for him but also for his mom and that we had, it wasn't even difficult what we did. And I called a meeting because what do film producers do? We call them.

I love it

Also, what we do is we cast and just as you cast a film, you cast a meeting. What do I need for this meeting next week? I need a lawyer. I need an accountant. I need a publicist. I need someone who understands how to organize an entity. I need a bookkeeper. I need a graphic

designer. I need someone who understands the politics of hospitals, etc. So when I said, okay, let's do it.

And they all said, yeah, let's do it. I said, you know, maybe we could grant five, six, seven wishes a year, something, you know, like that. Got to be a lot of sick kids in the world. And the lawyer said, so I need to incorporate it, get a 501 C3 nonprofit certificate. What do you want to call it? And I said, I don't know. What should we call it? And there was a young lady there with whom I had had one date.

It was back in my single days and I had had one date and I had phoned her and said, hi, remember me? I'm so sorry. I should have phoned you and my bad. I'm having a meeting. I need an accountant. Would you please come to this meeting? And when the lawyer said, what do you want to call the charity? She said, you know that children's rhyme starlight, star bright, first star I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I might have this wish I wish tonight. She said, why don't we call it the Starlight Children's Foundation?

Peter Samuelson (44:07.118)

And we all said, yeah, sounds really good. And the graphic designer said, I see it in my mind's eye, I'll do some roughs. It's a child reaching for a star. Said, yes, happy and ambitious, the silver cloud in the black nightmare of the silver lining in the black cloud of, know, awfulness and pain and suffering and whatnot in illness.

And that was the beginning of the Starlight Children's Foundation, which all these years later has raised well over a billion dollars. But back to that meeting, that was the second date with that young lady, accountant. And then it was a third and a fifth and a 10th. And then we did a Christmas party where we had a live band in the auditorium of the Children's Ward at County USC Medical Center in downtown LA, just east of downtown. And we had

you know, all the kids from the ward had come in and the band was playing and the kids were dancing except there was one little girl who was so ill that she couldn't get out of bed and they had wheeled her entire bed with an IV and everything into the room and she was dancing horizontally in her bed. And we had these adult sized character costumes that had been donated to us by SeaWorld.

and they were all marine animals and one of them was a dolphin and in the chest of the dolphin was kind of like a grill for the adult inside to look out and looking out of it was my accountant with whom I had had, I don't know, five dates by then and as I looked in, I saw all her mascara had run because she was so moved as was I by the kid.

trying to dance horizontal in the bed. honest to God, I thought to myself, think I love this person. eventually, you know, we have more dates and whatnot. There is nothing like volunteering for a nonprofit to meet the love of your life, not to mention really wonderful friends. Why would anybody be there if they're a negative so and so?

Peter Samuelson (46:28.012)

You don't have bullies volunteer to spend 10 hours a week helping seriously ill children, foster kids or the homeless. So it's like a, it's a filter that gets rid of a whole lot of crummy people. And what you're left with is some pretty splendid young adults. Well, pal around with them, lick envelopes with them, volunteer.

love that you brought it full circle. I love service, finding happy, empathy. We love this book. We love this conversation. Peter, thank you so much for your time and we just can't wait for the world to feel the ripples of your book.

Well, I'm dying. The publisher says I'm mad, but I've actually put my email address in the book. You have to look for it. But I'm really looking forward to getting reactions from young adults or anybody and creating a bit of a feedback loop. And it goes on sale June 10. It's a Kindle, it's a paperback, it's an audio book, as they say, wherever books are sold. And

The other funny thing that just happened is it's gone into all the bookstores you would imagine, Barnes and Noble. And then the publisher sent me an email. It's gone into Target. And when I told the family, my adult, my son said, where are they going to put the display of books in Target? I said, I have no idea. He said, I think the books should go between the condoms and the plastic cutlery.

whatever

Wynne Leon (48:09.922)

Hahaha

And I said, I think that is its natural place in the universe. I'm very grateful.

You know, I have kids that are five and nine and they like to make these little bags for the homeless people that they see. put granola bars and then they put a couple dollars of their own money in and we drive around. We spend a lot of time driving around giving them out. So I was telling my daughter about your book and so.

Well, she'll send you an email, Absolutely. And I just have to add that there's so many glorious stories in the book for those that are looking for inspiration, but also for the movie buffs that may be listening or watching some of your stories. would be a whole other podcast just to dive into, you know, my, my movie heart and my husband's were just, you know, singing about some of the.

humorous anecdotes that you shared and you were there on the scene. So I think it's just there are a lot of layers. So, so much to enjoy.

Peter Samuelson (49:08.718)

You're very kind. really appreciate your time. Thank you, those of you listening to this. And onwards we roll. It'll be what it'll be. I've got my fingers crossed. Thank you.

Congratulations, Peter. Thank you. Bye bye.

Wynne Leon (49:30.67)

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