

#139 Living & Leaving Your Legacy with Merle R. Saferstein

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SPEAKERS

Michelle Glogovac, Merle R. Saferstein

Michelle Glogovac 00:01

You're listening to the mind simplified life podcast and this is episode number 139. Welcome to the my simplified life podcast, a place where you will learn that your past and even your present. Don't define your future. Regardless of what stage of life you're in, I want you to feel inspired and encouraged to pursue your dreams, simplify your life and start taking action today. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac, and I'm excited to share my stories and life lessons with you. We'll take you on my own journey. This is my simplified life. Hey, friends, welcome back for another episode. I'm your host, Michelle Glogovac. I am so excited to bring you today's guest, Merle, our SafeAssign, Merle is one of my clients whose book is being released today. It's called Living and leaving my legacy volume one guest friends, that means that a volume two is coming out next. It is a compilation of her journal entries. Over the span of decades, Merle covers everything from her marriage of 50 years to Darrell to being a mother of two children to her career, to what it was like to become a holocaust educator, and what those stories look like. She's truly what I call a woman who was ahead of her time and continues to be ahead of her time, she's going to share one of the funniest stories ever. That is cringe worthy, because it just represents what life was like for women just decades ago, and decades ago is not that long ago. So it's really fascinating to me to read about what her life has been like the lessons she's learned. And I was able to relate to so much of it. I loved reading her entries. And they told the story of her life and they continue to. So I know you're going to enjoy this conversation, not only about morals, life, but about journaling in general, I journaled as a child as a teenager in some of my college years, and then I stopped. And I don't really know why I stopped. But, you know, life happens. And it's just one of those things that went to the wayside. But it's something that I want to pick back up. And she has inspired me to do so. So listen in not only on morals life journey, but on what it's like to journal in general, and what it means for you to take up such a task for yourself, and the difference that it can make in your life. Hi, Merle. Michelle, I am so thrilled to talk to you our emails. They're just long, long messages to each other. And your book is just so incredible. Like I know you now we're we're friends, I'm gonna say that we are friends. I am so thrilled to share you with the rest of the world who doesn't already know you. Can you take a moment to introduce yourself, please? Sure.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 03:23

So I began as the director of Holocaust education in a Holocaust Center in South Florida. And I did that for 26 years. And then after that, I retired and developed a course called Living and leaving your legacy and have been teaching that and speaking about it for the last 10 years.

M

Michelle Glogovac 03:45

And it's all about journaling. And I love that your book which is launching this week. We're recording this early. But once this hits the airwaves, it will be launched into the world as a compilation of all of your journals, which is just absolutely mind boggling.

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Merle R. Saferstein 04:01

Well, it's a long time and coming Michelle, I started this project in 2002 and have been working on it for literally 20 years. So it's this is just the beginning of the next phase of something that's been going on for for a good part of the last 20 years.

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Michelle Glogovac 04:22

And when did you start journaling? Let's talk a bit about that.

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Merle R. Saferstein 04:25

So I began journaling. I wrote actually as a teenager, I kept journals or diaries in those days. But I actually began journaling in 1974 and I journaled for a few years, minimally and then in 1982, I really actually started seriously journaling where I was writing one time a day at least, but sometimes as many as four or five times a day and I never was any place without a journal. And so from 1974 until currently, I've completed 380 journals.

M

Michelle Glogovac 05:04

That's incredible. And I love in the book, how you you share it where you know, you're sitting here at dinner and you pull out your journal. And it's almost like it was your version of checking social media.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 05:18

There was no one on the other side, right?

M

Michelle Glogovac 05:20

You would fill out your journal instead of a phone

you would fill out your journal instead of a phone.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 05:23

Right? Right. Yeah. For me, journaling was just, I didn't really ever understand why I was journaling so much what compelled me to journal the way I did. But it was something that I knew I had to do. And, and so I just knew, and continued to write constantly. And, and still to this day do although I don't write as much as I did, then. But I, but I still almost every day, right.

M

Michelle Glogovac 05:55

And so the book is comprised of various chapters that are different categories of your life, from working to being a mother to marriage, and relationships and friendships. And throughout the entire book, I felt like you've been a woman ahead of your time. And it was so relatable even today with as you and I were talking about Roe v. Wade, before we recorded, you had all of these opinions and thoughts before, it was technically like, okay to talk about them out loud.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 06:30

Right. So that began, I got married in 1967. And I married my high school sweetheart. So we had been dating for five and a half years before we got married. And what ended up happening was in the very beginning, so in the in the mid 60s, when I got married, it was you, you do what your husband tells you to do. And I ended up wanting to get my ears pierced, I'll just tell you this, the store like this, that really changed the way things were for me. So I wanted to get my ears pierced, and my husband felt that pierced ears were barbaric. That was something his family decided, I have no idea why. And so he kept saying no, and then I became more insistent that I really wanted to. And our first year of marriage, I had gained 25 pounds. And he said to me, if you lose 25 pounds, you can get your ears pierced. And that's all I needed was to hear that, of course, I immediately went on a diet. I was teaching school at the time, I remember the day that I weighed 107, which meant that at one point I weighed 132.

M

Michelle Glogovac 07:44

Oh, no.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 07:45

And I'm short. And so I went into my principal's office, because in those days, we did not have our own phones. And I asked him if I could use my phone, his phone. And I called my doctor because we didn't have Claire's to get our ears pierced in those days either. I made an appointment, went in, got my ears pierced came home and basically said to my husband, that's the last time you will tell me what to do. And, and actually, in many ways it is the last time he has. And that's when I realized that that women needed to stand up and speak for themselves

and take care of their own business and not let someone else control it. So in talking about that, this issue with Roe versus Wade is really upsetting. Because I feel like we're going back in time. And it's hard to understand. Yeah,

M Michelle Glogovac 08:39

I've been saying that since last night that we've just turned back the clock and we're erasing all of the hard work that other people did before us. And it's just mind boggling to me. I don't understand it. It frustrates me, it angers me. It saddens me. Because, you know, it's other women also who are allowing this to happen. Who think it's okay. You know, and I think that even in your example of your husband saying, you know, you know you you can't get your ears pierced, there are still women out there who think that's okay.

M Merle R. Saferstein 09:14

Right, right. In, in the I think the early 70s Mary Bill Morgan wrote a book and talked about how important was to make sure you have makeup on, get dressed, greet your husband is the door was the slippers. Make dinner? Be that dutiful wife. And I remember reading that book and it was just insane. I was incensed. I could hardly believe it. But also around the same time that Equal Rights Amendment was up for passage and didn't pass. And I you know, I kept hearing about these women who thought it was okay to not pass this and these are things that personally I just can't understand.

M Michelle Glogovac 09:59

I can't either And I don't think that we ever will be able to understand it because that's not who we are. And that's not how we think, you know? Right, right. But let's get back to your book because there's so many parts that we could fill up like episode after episode just talking about volume one. And let's hit a bit about your career. Because you said you were an educator, you had all these experiences. I love how you share what your salary was. I'm like, Oh, bless your heart. Yeah. And then you you've you kind of fell into this career that is so rewarding and amazing, and just fits you so perfectly. So can you take everybody a bit on that journey of what your career started out as and how it ended up? Sure.

M Merle R. Saferstein 10:55

So originally, I always knew I wanted to be a teacher, and in my sophomore year of school, so it was in 1964, I decided I wanted to become a psychologist. And I remember calling home and saying to my parents, I think I want to switch my major. My man who is the Teacher said to me, oh, no, you need to stay in education, because you'll always have a job. And you know, now in retrospect, I laugh because I think psychologists definitely always have a job as well. But, and I'm not sorry, because education has really served me well. And I hope I have served it well. So I taught for four and a half years in elementary education, third grade in first grade. And then when my son and then I stopped working when I had children, and when my son went into preschool, I decided to teach preschool so that I could have the same hours as he had. And that way I could be home for my children. And so I did that, and then ended up directing a

preschool. And then for a very short period of time, I took a job as administrative assistant at a private high school. In the interim, for five years, I was director of a day camp, which had 350 kids, it was a huge camp in a really wonderful, fun experience. But I took this job at the high school thinking that it was time for me to move on to a different phase of education. And it was a disaster. And I write about it in the book. And it was really unfortunate, but it happened as it will. And so when I quit the job, and I quit in the middle of the year, which was really upsetting to me, because I was afraid of the message it was giving to my children to you know, that it was okay to quit. Although in retrospect, I realized the message, the most important message I gave them was if you're not happy, you don't belong there, find something where you are happy. So I took, I took about two and a half years and decided to write a book, I was looking for a job financially, we really needed the money. But I also each time I went for an interview, I would sit there and think I'm not going to be able to do this. This is not a job that I can take. And so I kept getting job offers, it was crazy. And people were saying how can you not accept these jobs, but each time I knew that I would not be happy. And so while he was so on, and I live in Miami, Florida, and I live near the beach, and I was walking to the beach or jogging each morning, and I would jog along the ocean and see a man who was doing the same thing I was and then we would end up very close to each other. And he was sitting with his books surrounding him and he wouldn't be writing and I wouldn't be doing the same thing. And eventually, after about a month of just waving to each other. He stopped and talked to me. His name was Tom and he had been a former priest and had just left the priesthood and actually was working on documentary on the Moral Majority. So fast forward, he left Miami and went to first Washington DC and then New York. And he was doing temp work. And he ended up getting a job working for someone who was the president of the Anne Frank Center in New York. And they hired him to be the executive director of the Anne Frank Center. And all along, which is I think, kind of ironic again, my mother who had such an influence on me was only afraid that here was this Catholic man trying to convert me. As it turned out, that really changed things. So So Tom, right, as soon as he got the job, learned that the Anne Frank Center in Amsterdam had gotten a photograph album that someone had found in just your drawers in Germany, and it was Anne Frank family photo album, and they recognized and Frank and they sent it to the Amsterdam museum. And that museum then put it together in an X addition called the Anne Frank in the world, 1929 to 1945. It's 800 photographs. So it's her family surrounded by photographs of the Holocaust. And it tells the story of the Holocaust, in terms job was to send her around the world. I mean, around the country, I'm staring at a world, the Amsterdam center was sending it around the world to different places they had, there were two exhibits going at the same time. So Tom called me and asked me if this would be something I'd be willing to do. And it was a volunteer position. And I really needed the money. But my husband was wonderful, and said, This is something that you have to do and spirit, and Frank speaks to your soul. And as a journal writer, it was something that was really important to me. And so I brought the exhibit to Miami, I had a goal of having 50,000 People see it in six weeks, and we had well over 60,000 people. And during that experience, I met Holocaust survivors, I understood the real importance of teaching about discrimination and prejudice. And in many ways, through the programming I did, I was able to bring the different communities in Miami, and we are really multicultural here, together. And I did a program for students and ended up asking two of the women from the Holocaust Center in South Florida, to come and speak at the program. And they did they saw what I was what I had done with all these high school students. And they asked me to come as a volunteer and help them set up some student programming. So I went as a volunteer, because at that point, after the exhibit was over, I still didn't have a job. And shortly after I started their their secretary quit, they asked me if I would be the secretary, I said, I will, for a few months. And then if I'm not in education, I need to move on.

And the rest is history. So I was there for 26 years. And it was a huge privilege to be able to work with Holocaust survivors. During my time there, I worked with about 500 Holocaust survivors, and got to know them and learn so much from them.

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Michelle Glogovac 17:16

It's amazing, the story is incredible. I love that you did it at first as a volunteer. And I think that's something really important for people to hear, too, that, you know, in order to figure out what you want to do, or what you're meant to do, you have to try new things. And maybe you don't get paid at first. But then it can, you know, turn into a 26 year career in which you do get paid. And it's also something though, that isn't just a financial payment you receive, but such a fulfilling type of work that you did, and to be rewarded in that sense to know that you've done so much good. And sharing these stories and making sure they're kept alive. Because again, we go back to what our current state of the world is. And, you know, these survivors, we're losing them just as we're losing our World War Two veterans. And when we lose them, we lose their stories.

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Merle R. Saferstein 18:17

Right. And our the our center actually started doing interviewing in 1980. And we have the only standardized self produced collection in the in the country. Recently, I I understand this, Steven Spielberg is now taking their collection and digitizing it and doing some of the holograms with with two of our Holocaust survivors. So that this will continue on, which is really exciting. But for me, the programming that we did was with high school students and college students, and we had students meeting survivors sitting at tables with them and having the opportunity to listen to their stories. But also to understand that at one point, these survivors were were teenagers just like they were and had the same hopes and dreams that they have. And then suddenly, because of prejudice, their lives were turned upside down and ended up losing families and whatever. And so what we would do in these programs is we would let the students be immersed in the Holocaust experience and then we would change the focus and say, Okay, so this is what happened to them. What is happening to you in your life. This was before bowling was really noted the way it is now but students were able to talk about their experiences with prejudice and and understand in a way that they might not have ever had they not met the Holocaust survivors. We also did had a yearly annual contest, writing contest and a visual arts contest. We, in any given year sent out speakers to about to 18,000 students a year. So I mean a month, not a year, I'm sorry a year. And so the program was extensive. And the survivors who were generous enough to share their stories even also painful understood that they were helping to pass along the important messages. And many survivors said to me, I tell the story because my parents begged me to live and tell the story. And so I feel obligated in some way to be able to pass along their stories. In Volume Two of my book, I have about 30 different vignettes of Holocaust stories, different, different experiences that they, they had people that I knew well, it's pretty brutal, but I think it's really important, and probably the most significant of all the writing I've ever done.

M

Michelle Glogovac 20:56

I can't wait to read it, because I love to volume one. Thank you. And I, one of the other great parts of your story is how you took months and went and lived on the beach by yourself.

Because I think that I know that for me, that's a fantasy. And I'm sure that for many others out there listening, that sounds like a fantasy dream come true. To be able to be in a beach, in a hotel by yourself for months, you read, you wrote your book, your journals, you were going through them, you took your walks on the beach, and you and your family was totally okay with it. And they survived.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 21:37

Well, they did survive. They did really well. My daughter was already out of the house, she graduated college and my son was in college, but it was during the summertime. What happened, what really planted the seed for me was many, many years ago, I read the book a gift, a gift from the sea by Admiral Lindbergh. And she had taken two weeks and gone off to the beach. And when I read it so long ago, I just the fantasy of that just kind of was planted in my mind and thought someday I want to do that. And it all happened because one of my friends for my 50th birthday said you know what, I want to give you a week at the beach. And so that just kind of evolved into three months. My husband was tremendously generous and letting me do that. It was a state in a place that only had five units. So there were it was really very small. And I was right on the ocean. And at the time, it was the first time I ever went back and read my journals. And I read about 60 journals, and wrote a book called The necklace of pearls from them. What I realized in retrospect is that I just wrote the fluff of my life, and did not write any of the tough stuff, because I was not at that point, willing to put it out there. And so I put it aside, I had an agent never got published. I just it's literally in my drawer. But I knew that someday I was going to go back and read them. And when I went back, I looked at what I had done from those volumes from the first 60 volumes and realized that I really needed to start and go back to the beginning to read them because I had left out so much is a really important stuff that I think people might relate to. So I spent those three months. And there were the other four units were filled with men who were roofers from South Carolina. And I kind of felt safe in that way. I stayed there, my husband, I asked him if he wanted to come and stay anytime. But it was on the beach. It was hot. Although there were reasons he he wanted air conditioning. And the actual deal was I could have the place for a much lesser amount if I didn't have air conditioning. And I had fans and I was fine with it. He wasn't. And actually the truth is, that was fine with me because I really had the time. So he would come and have dinner with me a few times a week. And once a week I would go home, drop off journals, get changes of clothes for the week, and then go back to the beach and stay there. So and I did work through that time. But I was I have no idea what I accomplished. Because I was emotionally mentally and yeah, it was it was an experience of a lifetime. Really.

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Michelle Glogovac 24:34

It's so therapeutic

M

Merle R. Saferstein 24:36

sounding and oh my god, it was wonderful.

M

Michelle Glogovac 24:40

Michelle Glogovac 24:10

I need to do it. Do so if I have to wait until then I've got nine years to play.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 24:45

Okay. I guess I'm really fortunate because I have a husband who was so supportive of whatever I do. I mean, that's really from where we came to where we are. It's pretty incredible and he just He goes along with whatever I want. I just so appreciate that. Not everyone is fortunate.

M

Michelle Glogovac 25:06

But I think you're also you also set the ground rules when you got your ears pierced.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 25:10

I did. I did.

M

Michelle Glogovac 25:14

And so the whole journaling process, you obviously, are teaching classes on this and workshops, and how do people get into it to a to a spot that they can write down pieces like you you have, and that it really reflects, I think that maybe there's some out there who think like the Dear Diary, you know, right. Today was an awful day and I ate eggs for breakfast, you know, versus the way that you write? How do you guide people through that process of starting to journal?

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Merle R. Saferstein 25:50

Okay, so first, I just want to, I just want to come clean and say that my some of my earlier journals have a lot of what you described in it, I used to write how far I ran, how much I ate, what I weighed. But diaries are more of a just a recording of one's life, where journaling is a deeper, I think, a deeper process. And so basically, there are people who write who need a prompt. And then there are people who can just sit down and write, I do not need a prompt I never have, how I help people is by encouraging them to understand the benefits of journaling. And there are so many, you know, health wise, it's just, it's been known that people who journal recover from illnesses faster. Psychologically, it's therapeutic. So basically, if someone is really stuck, and doesn't know where to start, I might say, right, start with this prompt, right now I or I'm feeling or something that just is very open ended. But just can can just put you in the present in the moment. So in my book, what I've done is at the end of each chapter, I have written several journal prompts that people can actually write on. So what I'm hoping and I think that this is important, there are two things about this book that I'm hoping I will accomplish by having written one is to encourage people to journal and the other is to help people understand that by reading my my life, which is my life as it is, what I really want is for them to reflect on their own life. And so the journal prompts in each chapter, help people look at their own lives. So what they're thinking about the particular subjects that I've written about,

and then I leave two pages, two blank pages for people to actually journal. So that's after every after each chapter, the very first chapter is called The Journey for journaling. And it talks about my history of journaling. And I think that it gives enough information, for example, there's, there is a list of the benefits of journaling. And there are different, different ways and ideas of what when I put into my journals, I had a friend who was in analysis for four years, and I was reading my journals, it took me 14 years to go through these journals to just get the basic material to put in the book. And my friend said to me, you know, you're doing in your journals, what I'm doing with a therapist, with an analyst, and the only differences, I'm paying a lot of money and you're not

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Michelle Glogovac 28:46

when you're gonna make money off.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 28:48

We'll see. So, so the, the journaling process is, is, is really crucial to who I am. And if people can understand. So after the first chapter, I have prompts for people who have never journal, people who journal and then people who doesn't matter whether you journal or not just general prompts to just get people started. So that might be a way if someone is interested in journaling. After reading the first chapter and writing these prompts, that might be a way to get started. And the other thing is Michelle, I am always available for anyone who wants encouragement or guidance in terms of germline because it's that important to me, I believe that it makes a huge difference in our lives.

M

Michelle Glogovac 29:37

And I have to add that once you read the book, I find myself I'll be driving in the car, something will happen during the day and I'm like, Oh, that would be something that Merle would write about her journal. You start to think in that way of oh, I should probably write this down or I you know, I could write my comeback for that in the journal But I won't say it out loud. You get in people's heads in the book, at least you did for me?

M

Merle R. Saferstein 30:07

Well, well, my hope is that that my life will resonate for other people. And that people understand the gift that journaling is. And I have had people throughout this entire process. Say to me, I only wish that I had journaled, you have all this information, and people, people in my life will call me and say, can you go back in your journals and tell me when we did such and such, but the truth is that I and I really do believe this, that it is never too late to start. So people say, Oh, I only wish I had and then like, well start today. Because you have that. And another thing that I encourages, is parents to journal about their children's experiences. When my grandchildren were born, and the day each girl was born, I started a journal that I've written strictly for them. And so those are gifts, you know, they're gifts that we can give to other people. But I, but above all, and I feel this way about the legacy work in general. While we think we're, we're leaving a gift to someone else, the real gift is doing it for ourselves. And inevitably,

in my classes, people always say, you know, I thought I wrote my ethical well, and I thought it was for someone else. But doing it was a huge gift to myself, because it helps us to reflect on our lives. And what's important to us, what matters are life lessons, our values and beliefs. And those are the kinds of things that I think lead to a meaningful life.

M

Michelle Glogovac 31:42

I love that. That's beautiful. Thank you, as I look over at my bookshelf, and I see there's empty journals, they're like, yeah, maybe today's the day we bring it out, and you know, start writing in there. And another thing that you mentioned in the the first journaling chapter is that you, you love beautiful journals, you have a certain pen that you use, I shared that I love writing with blue ink. So that's what I write with. But I think that those are also important things to consider, you know, because you should be happy as you're journaling. And I feel like these little pieces of, you know, whether we call it beauty or, you know, an indulgence of I'm gonna get a fabric covered note pad or, or whatever it is, that should be considered to and it's important that you love what you're writing in.

M

Merle R. Saferstein 32:36

Absolutely, absolutely. And I, I actually have a few fountain pens now that I write with. And I early on was writing with peacock blue ink, that was my color. Now I write only with black ink. I'm not sure why. But that's what I do. I'm very particular, about the kinds of journals I write in mostly about the line spacing, I think that's really important for me, people, people give me gifts all the time of journals, because they know a journal. And so often those are the things that I read gift to others, because I know what makes me happy when a journal. Michelle, I wanted to say one thing, when you talk about your bookshelf, and you have empty, you have empty journals. i When I received the first copy of my book back, it's huge. It's really big. It's an eight by 10 book. And it's almost an eighth of an inch thick. And seeing that seeing it in that size and realizing the value the amount of information and the amount of writing that I did just in that is it really blew me away. So it's an assumption

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Michelle Glogovac 33:50

I have in my head. So I have a picture in my head of what you're safe boxes, your lock boxes must look like with all of your journals. And the fact that you could combine them, you know, to be just in an eight by 10, that's an inch thick, is truly mind boggling to

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Merle R. Saferstein 34:09

well, there's a lot that is not in there. I mean, I originally when I started the the this volume is from 359 volumes, and some of the chapters so I would take out excerpts according to different topics. And some of the chapters were as many as 450 pages worth of of excerpts that I whittled down to 30 pages. So around approximately 30 pages. So it was a process that took me six years after 14 years of taking up the excerpts. It took about six years to whittle them down to a size that makes you know makes sense at least some sense.

M Michelle Glogovac 34:53

And you know, I have to also say that reading it you do get the full story of your life even though they're excerpts Did you fully understand whatever it was that you were going through at the time, whether we talk about your marriage, or motherhood, or your career, all of these things, there's enough in there and in the excerpts that you understand what the whole story actually was?

M Merle R. Saferstein 35:19

Well, I think the threads that run through the chapters, and so those threads together create a, a tapestry of my life. I think that in some, sometimes people, some of the early readers had said to me, you know, I think you need to explain this, you know, you just need more detail. And like, I put in when I was comfortable with, and sometimes in one chapter, I might mention something, but like you said, you see it in another chapter. So it just kind of it all kind of weaves together in some way. Yeah.

M Michelle Glogovac 35:57

I love it. I can't wait for everyone to read it. And I'm really excited for volume two.

M Merle R. Saferstein 36:04

Thank you. Thank you.

M Michelle Glogovac 36:06

Can you share with everyone where they can find the book and buy it?

M Merle R. Saferstein 36:09

Yes, the book will be on Amazon. And it is the title is living and leaving my legacy volume one. Also, on my website, you can click on there and you can order the book that way.

M Michelle Glogovac 36:26

And we'll have all of the links in the show notes on the website. Thank you so much for sharing of yourself, not just today, but in your book and just showing the whole world what living a real, truly fulfilling life that has impact is like,

M Merle R. Saferstein 36:43

Thank you, Michelle, thank you. It was really a wonderful opportunity to be here and to get to

Thank you, Michelle, thank you. It was really a wonderful opportunity to be here and to get to know you as I have. I'm grateful. Thank you.



Michelle Glogovac 36:53

Thank you. I love talking to Merle, she and I have such incredible email exchanges. And when we get to chatting we could go on for hours seriously. There's so much that we can share and so much that we have in common. So it's always such a pleasure to get to talk to her. I hope that you go out and read her book. And I hope that she encourages you to start journaling yourself to leave your legacy to your children, to your family and to yourself because you more than deserve this. So go out go by living and leaving my legacy volume one today and get your journal out and start writing down all of those memories and what's going on in your life today.