

*Carmel Austin and friends present*

# Courageous Voices Unlocked



**"Empowered Stories of Moving  
from Brokenness to Freedom"**

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***Courageous  
Voices  
Unlocked***

**“Empowered Stories of Moving  
from Brokenness to Freedom”**

Carmel's Garden  
Shoalhaven NSW  
Australia  
www.carmelsgarden.com

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**Carmel's Garden**



**Carmel Austin Publishing**  
Unified Voices

## ENDORSEMENTS

It has been a privilege to walk alongside Carmel Austin through the years and witness her incredible growth and unwavering dedication. Carmel's journey, marked by both challenges and triumphs, has consistently been guided by her deep desire to uplift and support others. Through her writing, she extends her heartfelt wisdom to a broader audience, offering comfort and hope to those who need it most.

Carmel's storytelling beautifully combines eloquence and humour, drawing readers in and allowing them to see reflections of their own lives within her words. Her remarkable ability to make personal experiences relatable paves the way for God's healing and encouragement throughout her chapter, *Echoes of Hope*.

I am excited to see how many more lives will be touched and transformed by Carmel's work in *Courageous Voices Unlocked*. Her commitment to sharing not just her voice, but also the voices of others, will undoubtedly inspire and uplift many.

~ *Sharen Queripel, Church Administrator*



**Stephanie Miller's chapter, *Tacos, Shoes, and The Good News***, struck a deeply personal chord with me through its transparency and vulnerability. Having faced similar experiences, I thought the Lord had fully delivered me from the clutches of sin in that area, setting me free with His forgiveness. Yet, it wasn't until I read Stephanie's words that

I realized I was still carrying a lingering sense of shame from my past. Her chapter beautifully emphasizes the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ and the new identity we gain as His beloved daughters. In doing so, it became a tool the Lord used to further heal areas within me that I didn't even realize needed healing.

Stephanie also poignantly addresses the reason many women, who as young girls lacked the love of their earthly fathers, often seek to fill that void inappropriately through relationships with men who cannot truly love them. Thankfully, she highlights the Lord's love and mercy, which not only draws us into the arms of our Heavenly Father but also empowers us to forgive our earthly fathers for their shortcomings. I believe this chapter will touch the hearts of many women, offering them hope. Hope that, even if they did not receive the love they needed from their earthly father, and even if this led them into harmful relationships, God can and does rewrite our stories with His forgiveness and love. In Him, we are given a new life filled with His plans and promises for a glorious future. Above all, Stephanie's chapter delivers the transformative message that we are dearly loved by God—a message that truly makes all the difference in the world.

~ *Terry Gassett, Certified Licensed Professional Coach*



**Amanda Schaefer's words**, 'I need more than just being free for myself—I want everyone to be free!' perfectly capture the essence of her heart and mission in *Courageous Voices Unlocked*. Touched by the grace of God, Amanda's deepest desire is for others to experience the same glorious freedom she has found. Her genuine love for people shines through in

everything she does, and she is always seeking opportunities to share the love of Jesus Christ with those who do not yet know Him. Amanda's writing beautifully reflects her passionate faith, and through her eloquent words, she richly blesses all who read her work.

~ **Dawn R. Ward**, *Author of From Guilt to Grace: Hope and Healing for Christian Moms of Addicted Children, Founder of The Faith to Flourish*



**Teresa Dial's words** struck a deep chord within me, especially when she writes, 'Our souls, like silver, must transfer heat (trials) quickly back to Him to maintain proper function.' This quote resonated profoundly as it encapsulates the essence of the story—a journey from defining beauty through societal lenses to embracing the transformative power of faith. I admired the raw transparency that Teresa brings to the table, addressing everything from harmful acts and workplace struggles to the self-defeating thoughts that ultimately surrender to the name of Jesus.

Her writing is relatable and powerful, capturing the reader's attention from start to finish. For those who value honesty, unsweetened experiences, and the silver lining found by an overcomer in Christ, Teresa's story will undoubtedly resonate deeply.

~ **Molly Trotter-Gomez**, *Co-Founder, Kingdom Alliance, Leadership and Speaker Trainer*



**Dorease Rioux's writing** reflects her admiration for storytellers like CS Lewis, drawing readers into vivid scenes of her encounters with workplace bullies, whom she calls 'the coyotes.' These adversaries, like the bullies we all face, try to overshadow our light for reasons they may not fully understand.

Dorease's heart shines through with compassion, wisdom, and strength in every word. She invites readers into her journey, reminding us: 'I write this from battle scars, not wounds.' Her experiences teach without regret or bitterness, showing how we are often targeted in the areas we are meant to conquer. Her relationship with the Lord is woven throughout, portraying Him as the guide who helps her navigate through challenges and embrace her identity as a 'strong and courageous Braveheart.'

Her chapter encourages readers to exchange fear for love, rejection for acceptance, and shame for honor through Jesus. It's a powerful reminder to embrace our true identity in Christ and rise above life's challenges.

~ *Karen Stally, Co-Founder of The Winning Warrior Network, Author, Speaker, and Certified Life Coach*



**ShonaRobyn's chapter** is a beautiful and powerful message about God's great love for us, especially through times of adversity. She guides us through her own personal journey of self-discovery and weaves her beautiful insights along the way. Her story serves as a poignant reminder of the healing power of nature and how we are all connected as one.

~ *Marie Ramos*



**M. DeAnne Morrell's** chapter, "Ride the Wave of Courage," is an inspiring journey of courage and self-discovery. It showcases the power of stepping outside one's comfort zone and embracing the unknown with grace and determination. DeAnne's storytelling is both heartwarming and relatable, making you feel like you're riding alongside her, experiencing each thrill, challenge, and triumph. From motorcycle rides with her father to mastering the art of riding solo, her chapter beautifully captures the essence of courage.

What stands out is DeAnne's authenticity in sharing her struggles and victories. Her reflections on finding confidence, learning at her own pace, and rekindling her passion after setbacks are relatable and inspiring. Her journey reminds us that self-discovery often involves moments of doubt and fear, but those moments shape us into who we're meant to be. DeAnne calls us all to ride our own waves of courage and embrace our destiny that awaits.

~ *Sue Beck, Worship Leader and Student of Coach MD*



**Nic Henry Jones' story** is a powerful testament to resilience, faith, and transformation. From a young age, Nic felt a call to a higher purpose, navigating personal and professional setbacks that ultimately shaped her into the remarkable person she is today. Her journey, marked by challenges and triumphs, underscores the profound truth that God uses every experience—joyous or painful—to craft a masterpiece out of our lives.

Nic's life now reflects her deep alignment with her faith

and purpose. Through her businesses, books, and leadership roles, she is committed to helping others discover their identity in God. Her story serves as a poignant reminder that no matter how difficult the journey, hope and potential abound when we align with our true identity in God.

~ *Maree Cutler Naroba*, Founder, *The Deborah Business Education Hub & Deborah Conference*, Business Strategist, Author



**Cynthia Kelly's** chapter, *Divine Dialogue*, is a profound exploration of the power of words and faith. Cynthia seamlessly intertwines personal experiences with spiritual insights, crafting a narrative that is both inspiring and transformative. This work offers more than just a reflection on the impact of words; it is a powerful testament to the significance of aligning our thoughts and speech with God's truth. Truly a remarkable read!

~ *Andrew Sutherland*



**Catherine's** story is a testament to her remarkable journey of self-reflection and understanding of life's experiences, both challenging and positive, that have shaped her. Her writing beautifully encapsulates how an inner voice finds strength through kindness to others, the joys found in music, and, most importantly, an unwavering love, trust, and faith in God.

God bless your journey of self-care, Catherine.

~*Cei Harris*

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## PREFACE

Welcome to *Courageous Voices Unlocked*, where you will journey alongside a unique group of courageous women who have faced life's most challenging trials with unwavering determination. This book is more than a collection of stories; it's a powerful testament to the human spirit's ability to confront fears, embrace vulnerabilities, and bravely step into the unknown.

As co-authors, we've come together to shine a light on the many paths of courage that reside within us all. Each chapter serves as a window into our souls, offering insights into resilience, faith, and the will to rise above life's daunting challenges.

From the depths of infertility to unearthing hidden dreams, from reclaiming heritage to overcoming destructive habits, from healing trauma to finding God's grace and love, these narratives weave a rich tapestry of human experience. Each story is a thread in this fabric, contributing to a mosaic of emotions, hard-earned wisdom, and enduring hope. Though our stories are diverse, we are united by a common thread—the relentless pursuit of purpose and the courage to turn pain into the power of our testimony.

*Courageous Voices Unlocked* is more than just a book; it is a sanctuary for those who dare to dream, refuse to be defined by their circumstances, and seek to unleash their authentic voices. As the visionary and lead author, I find this project deeply personal, and every story shared holds a piece of my heart.

Throughout these pages, you may see reflections of your own struggles and triumphs. You might find solace in

knowing you are not alone and inspiration in how others have navigated their paths from brokenness to Freedom. This anthology is a reminder that, no matter how broken we may feel, within each of us lies the seed of redemption, nurtured by the courage to speak our truths so others may walk in freedom and courage.

I hope these courageous voices resonate with you on your own journey. As we reflect on the impact of *The Artist Haven*, the first book that brought together many of these powerful stories, it's inspiring to see some of the same authors return for this sequel. Alongside their voices, we also welcome new storytellers who bring fresh perspectives. The friendships and connections forged through our shared experiences continue to grow, extending beyond the pages and enriching our lives.

As you explore *Courageous Voices Unlocked*, may you find the strength to embrace your own journey with renewed energy and resolve. Let these stories accompany you on your path, recognising that our shared experiences have the power to awaken the courage within each of us. May you be inspired to step into your greater destiny as you embrace the truths and bravery these pages reveal.

With heartfelt gratitude,

*Coach Carmel Austin and the Co-Authors of Courageous Voices Unlocked*

# DEDICATION



To my Dad, Ignazio Spaccavento ‘Tassy Spacc,’ my Hero:

Even though you faced your own challenges in life, you always showed me love and acceptance through your discipline, sense of humor, and skills in dancing, playing tola, and snooker. Even when it was hard for me to understand as a little girl, you were there for me. Now, as a mature woman who loves life and embraces my uniqueness, I am deeply grateful for your unwavering love and support. Though you are now in heaven with our family, I miss you with everything that is within me every day and will always carry you and Mum in my heart, actions, and thoughts. Thank you for everything, Daddy.

Your loving daughter, Carmel xx

# ECHOES OF HOPE

CONFRONTING THE UNEXPECTED

**Carmel Austin**

Wholeness Coach, Artisan, Podcaster,  
Publisher & Digital Growth Mentor

**Shoalhaven NSW, Australia**

*“Beyond grief of loss is a road less travelled,  
that takes you into your greater destiny.”*

~ Carmel Austin

## **Navigating the Depths: My Journey Through Infertility and Beyond**

In the quiet corridors of my heart, a story has been unfolding for decades. It’s a tale of loss, grief, and the unyielding hope that continues to burn within me.

I’ve poured my thoughts, prayers, and emotions into journals piling up in a cupboard, each line etched with the intention to light a path for women navigating infertility and loss. It’s been an odyssey of both highs and lows, filled with hospital visits, surgeries, and the profound emotional struggles that accompany my journey into wholeness.

Life, as I’ve come to understand, is a treasure trove of experiences waiting to be uncovered. I invite you to join me on a journey of exploration—a journey that led me to discover the tapestry of my heritage and the deep-seated dreams that define my heart.

As a woman marred by the shame of infertility and loss, I

often convinced myself that I was alone in my grief, creating an isolating parallel world that trapped me. But I stand here today to proclaim that I am not alone. I have travelled those same rocky roads, and I understand the pain, the confusion, and the yearning for a community that comprehends the language of grief, a community that would be able to help me move toward the endless opportunities of freedom and grace.

The labyrinth of grief is never traversed with ease, especially when faced with the stark reality that the arms I long to cradle my children in will remain empty on this earth. It's a pain that pierces the heart's deepest recesses, a constant, slow leak of hopes and dreams lost. I have ascended to the mountaintops of triumph and plunged into the valleys of despair, living on an emotional roller coaster. Yet, through it all, I've discovered that I can find a way forward, embracing the journey with courage and finding the grace that awaits on the other side.

Amidst these storms of doubt and fear, a heavenly voice bid me to take a leap of faith. It was an eleventh-hour encounter with destiny, as God's presence materialized when I stood at the crossroads of disappointment and desperation. Just when I believed that the dreams nestled in my heart were fading, an Angelic whisper rekindled the flame within me. It was the miraculous birth of a new chapter, a testament that even amidst the darkest moments, heaven had plans for me.



I've toiled with diligence, hands on the plow, working toward my aspirations and life goals. I've learned to trust the 90-degree turns that God presents, even when disappointment looms large. This trust has led me to a revelation: realising the longing for my own biological

children doesn't diminish my identity as a woman. Instead, it propels me to embrace my other God-given talents, empowering me to transmute my story into a source of encouragement for others.

My journey to becoming a wholeness coach has taken its own path. Investing in myself to follow my dreams has unfolded in unexpected ways, guiding me through various roles as an entrepreneur, artist, coach, and mentor. When I was young, I always felt like I was different, standing out from the crowd and speaking my mind, expressing my mother's heart beyond my capacity, and stretching my tent pegs wider than I ever imagined.

I spent a lot of time creating pictures and coming up with ideas outside the box, dreaming of writing and role-playing as a child, standing on stages, and leading others on a unique journey of adventure and experiences. I was always dreaming that life was mine to create and become whoever I wanted. At times, I thought that role play and dreaming was a coping mechanism to help me through very difficult days of not fitting into the world and trying to live up to people's false expectations.

Reflecting on my childhood, I realise life was not always pleasant, despite having a loving home with parents who provided for us. I had friends, went to school, and had my whole life ahead of me. But things took a turn when I was held back in fifth grade due to a lack of understanding that I am unique. My life struggles living with dyslexia and Irlen syndrome made me feel different. I had to repeat 5th class because the teacher misunderstood my learning ability and the transition to a new group of classmates brought its own set of challenges.

Entering a new classroom, I faced immense adversity with my studies and the nun who was both my teacher and the principal for three years. Having to stay in the same room

with the class set up as a co-learning room with 5th and 6th-grade girls, I found myself among girls who didn't understand me and had their own emotional issues to deal with. I became the target of bad behaviour that caused me to be oppressed, enduring terrible treatment that left me feeling overwhelmed and lost. My mum did her best to support me, but the damage was done, and I struggled to cope with the emotional and physical toll it took on me.

It took a long time for me to discover my true healthy identity. I was well into my fifties when I began to understand more about myself and the challenges I faced. I started to understand my struggles were not just academic but rooted in traumatic experiences, including a near-drowning incident at a young age. These revelations have helped me piece together the puzzle of my lost identity and understand why I felt different from others.



One of the most profound lessons I learned on my journey was the importance of forgiveness. Despite the pain and hurt I experienced, discovering the power of forgiveness and accepting myself as a unique creation, beautifully made as a woman in God's image, allowed me to forgive myself, my family, and my peers who I felt had judged and hurt me.

I knew holding onto bitterness would only weigh me down. I had to forgive myself for thinking I did not fit in and forgive those who I felt had wronged me. Through forgiveness, I found freedom and the ability to move forward with my life. This newfound forgiveness enabled me to embark on a journey of self-love and discovery, deepening my relationship with my Heavenly Father who loves me unconditionally.

As I continued to heal, I embraced purpose and community. I realised my story was meant to be shared. I embarked on a journey of self-expression through writing and creating art which brings healing and balance to my soul, connecting with other like-minded creatives who share similar experiences. Building a community of support and inclusivity has become my mission, I love to encourage others to embrace their uniqueness and walk out their divine purpose.

Today, I am grateful for the opportunity to empower other creatives on their own journeys of healing and self-discovery. Through coaching and collaboration, I love to help people, especially women, break free from the chains of bitterness and step into their true potential. My hope is that by sharing my story and offering support, I can inspire others to embrace forgiveness, find their voice, and live a life of fulfillment and purpose.

In the past, it seemed like I was always speaking up for the lost and lonely, the broken-hearted and the misfits. I believe I was searching to be accepted and express my creative self in all its uniqueness. Today as the author I am now sharing my narrative with the world. Through each twist and turn, I've gleaned wisdom, drawing strength from my multicultural upbringing and the challenges it posed. Our home was filled with multiple languages spoken and with my dyslexia, I struggled with who I was, why I was on this earth, and where I fitted in. The hurdles I faced have shaped my determination and drive, pushing me to excel in areas where my talents naturally bloomed.

Attending art classes and learning how to sew as a young girl brought me much freedom to express my creativity and shine through my natural talents. I seemed to always be struggling to keep up with my peers when it came to academic skills and those who seemed to have their lives sorted. I was clouded by rose-coloured glasses.

Never in my wildest imagination did I think that when I entered my early 40s I would start wearing blue-tinted glasses to help my brain function better and cope with everyday tasks that life brings my way and be diagnosed with Irlen syndrome.

*“Life’s challenges and winding paths have shaped me into the strong, confident, compassionate woman I am today. I embrace my purpose with creativity and a deep love for life.”*

## **Destiny Unearthed: Embracing Hidden Dreams and Heritage**

As we continue to journey through the corridors of my life, I want to unveil a phase that has been instrumental in shaping my creative expression and becoming the person I am today. This phase marked a time of exploration, a period where I travelled the ancient roads of destiny and discovered more of my family heritage, unearthing the hidden dreams that were tucked away in the recesses of my heart.

In 2010, walking the pebble-stone roads of Israel, I traced my ancestors’ footsteps to the Holy Land and the shores of Lebanon. I sought to understand the threads that wove the fabric of my identity as a Christian, daughter and wife, born into a traditional Catholic family. I wanted to explore more of my Lebanese roots, uncovering stories of resilience, courage, and unwavering faith. This voyage into the past provided a mirror into the essence of who I am today, infusing my journey with a profound sense of purpose.

But this journey wasn’t just about tracing footsteps; it was about stepping into my footprints of destiny. It was a call to embrace my dreams that have long whispered in the chambers of my heart. As I ventured deeper, I discovered hidden aspirations, and passions that had been waiting for their moment in the spotlight.