Welcome to Empowering Homeschool Conversations, your authority in navigating the world of homeschooling diverse learners. Featuring Peggy Ployer from Sped Homeschool, Annie Yorty from Annie Yorty.com, Leilani Melendez from Living with Eve, Stephanie Buckwalter from eLARP Learning, and Dawn Jackson from Dawn Jackson Educational Consulting and Tutoring. With over seventy five years of combined homeschooling expertise, experiences and perspectives, this group is eager to share their wealth of wisdom to empower your homeschooling journey. So grab your favorite mug, settle in and get ready for insightful discussions,

valuable insights and practical tips.
Give your homeschool the
power boost it needs to
successfully educate the
unique learners in your home.
Hello.
Today we have Michael
Hinkson on Empowered
Homeschool Conversations.
He is the author of the book,
Live Like a Guide Dog.
Welcome, Michael.
Thank you.
It's good to be here.
Great.
Well, you know,
I've heard some of your
other interviews from your earlier books.
Michael has written several
books about his different experiences,
and we'll talk about those as we go.
Now,
I know you have several drums you like

to beat when it comes to disability and awareness and advocacy. And I know our audience will learn a lot from your courage and insights. So let's talk about your dogs. Your book is titled Live Like a Guide Dog. I wish we had time to dive into the book in so many areas because the story of your guide dogs and in the process revealing the story of your own life is a fascinating combination of the mundane and the unexpected and how it all fits together. And you've woven your faith in between all of that too. And I think it's just awesome the way you've done that. So what made you decide to write it all down? Well, so I'm going to go back a little bit,

and I know you'll bring it up again. But I worked in the World Trade Center on September, and escaped with my guide dog, Roselle, my fifth guide dog. And we can talk about all that later if you'd like. But the bottom line is that after that, people started, when the media got my story, they started asking me to come and speak and talk about lessons to learn that we have learned from September eleventh and so on. And all that went well, but then the pandemic hit in twenty twenty. Now, I focused escaping from the World Trade Center, and there were reasons for that in terms of the preparations that I made to

be able to function and work in the World Trade Center. But in twenty twenty, when the pandemic struck, I realized that while I had talked about being calm and so on for, at that time, nineteen years, what I had never done was taught other people how they can learn to control fear. And you can control fear. We are afraid of so many things. We worry about so many things. And the bottom line is that We can learn to control our own fears and not let them, as I describe it, blind or overwhelm us, but rather we can learn to use fear as a very powerful tool to help keep us focused. I'm not going to say we can learn not to be afraid.

That isn't the issue.

The issue is that we can

learn to control fear.

Well, anyway,

there were reasons why I was

able to control my fears

and focus on September and

I decided it was time to

start teaching people about that.

because I wasn't traveling and speaking.

And so I began looking at ways to do that.

I also started looking at doing a podcast.

And I now do a podcast.

I've been hosting a podcast

called Unstoppable Mindset,

where inclusion, diversity,

and the unexpected meet

since August of twenty twenty one.

And we've now published over

two hundred seventy three

episodes since August of

twenty twenty one.

We're due twice a week.

So

I started thinking about how to approach this issue of controlling fear. And I had written a book, as you mentioned, called Thunderdog, the story of a blind man, his guide dog and the triumph of trust at ground zero. I wrote it with a woman named Susie Flory. So I reached out to Susie and said, would you collaborate with me on this? And she couldn't because she's in a PhD program. She's about to graduate and get her PhD. And so I, She introduced me to a woman named Carrie Wyatt Kent, and we started working on the book together and taught Carrie a lot. I learned a lot as we went through the process. But on August twenty of this year,

live like a guide dog, true stories of a blind man and his dog's. about being brave, overcoming adversity, and moving forward in faith was published. And the intent of the book is to teach people you can control fear. And the way I approach it is to use lessons I learned from working with eight guide dogs and my wife's service dog, Fantasia. who is also the mother of my seventh guide dog, Africa. And the lessons I learned from all of those dogs that helped me learn to control fear and focus and be able to do the things that need to be done when you need to do them. And the fact is that when

something unusual or scary happens,

we can deal with it if we learn how.

So that's what Live Like a

Guide Dog is really all about, you know,

as an example.

One of the things that we

talk about is the way dogs

behave they don't do what

if we're doing what if

about everything under the

Sun we worry about

everything which really

creates our own fears so

much because Over ninety

percent of all the things

we worry about we have no

control over anyway If we

would only learn to just

focus on the things over

which we do have control

and leave the rest alone we

would be a lot better off

in our lives and

Roselle was a perfect

example of that on

September eleventh when we

got home I took her harness

off and I was gonna take her out.

She would have none of it

She ran off grabbed her

favorite tug bone and

started playing tug-of-war

with my retired guide dog.

Lenny was over for her as as

I realized and so Those

kinds of things are the

kinds of examples that I

learned and there are a lot

of those in the book so the

book is about me and my

dogs the lessons I learned

from them and so on and and

it was a lot of fun to write and

It's a lot of fun to be able

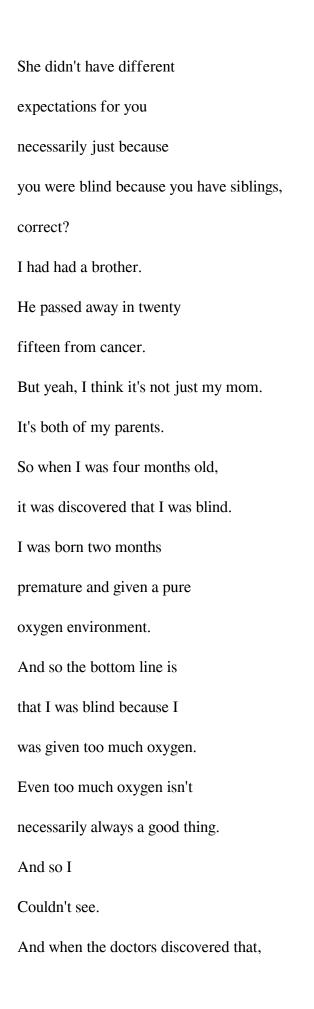
to talk about and to teach people about.

And that's great.

And I remember as I read through the book, some of the things you're talking about, that's all in there. So everything Michael's saying is actually in the book. So if any of it sparks your curiosity, be sure and follow up with reading. And I hope people and I hope people will. And when they do read it, I hope they will also go to Amazon and other places and give it a review. We really appreciate people's reviews. So read it. Please like it and give us a good review. Yes, those things are always helpful. They always help a helping hand in a lot of ways for the algorithms. Now, one thing I appreciate about the book is it's the perspective you give from going from a

child all the way to an adult.

So it covers decades of your life. And as a parent of a child with a disability, it helps me look forward to see that my child, I learned several things from you already, that my child is more capable than I think. And that God will be there even when I'm not. So after I'm gone, or if she moves out on her own as you moved away from your parents too, and that there are good people who will help and not take advantage. So I'd like to ask about your mom. She seems to have had an incredible faith in your ability to learn and do. She didn't really treat you that different or expect.



they told my parents to

send me off to a home for

handicapped kids because no

blind child could ever grow

up to do anything and all I

would be is a drag on my parents.

And my parents said, you're wrong.

He can grow up to do

whatever he wants and we're

going to give him that opportunity.

And so both parents were

very significantly and

intimately involved in

teaching me that I could do

whatever I chose to do

And that blindness wasn't

what's going to stand in the way.

The reality is blindness for

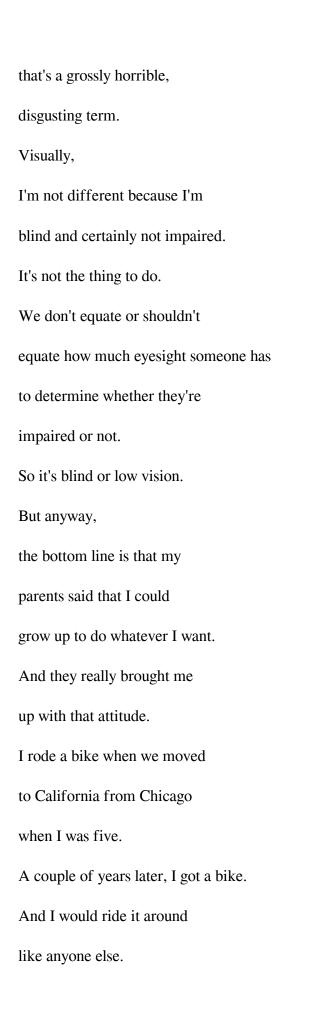
me and any other person who

is blind is not the problem.

So for blind or low vision people,

you'll notice I don't say

visually impaired because



I rode my bike to school, rode it around our neighborhood, and so on. I was always interested in science. I got a radio kit and then later my father, who waited for me to be able to do it so we could do it together, we got our ham radio licenses. I'm a ham radio operator. I have a master's degree in physics that I got from the University of California at Irvine. But, you know, the doctor said I couldn't do anything. So what can I say? I joined the Boy Scouts. I'm Eagle Scout and Vigil in the Order of the Arrow. And the bottom line is blindness isn't the problem. The real problem are the misconceptions and the attitudes that people have

about blindness. That's what really causes the difficulty because most people with eyesight think, well, if you are blind, you can't do anything because you can't see. The fact is. it's not a matter of being blind. It's a matter of people who are sighted think you can't. And so the result of that is that we're not given the same opportunities as other people and we have to fight for it. Some of us do. A lot of us don't. Parents don't necessarily teach blind children to be as confident and as competent as they can be. So it's an issue. But the fact of the matter

is that blindness isn't the problem. It's our attitudes about blindness that are the problems that we face. And I can see that in the world that I'm in with intellectual disability, whether it was in the school system. Because my daughter was in the public school system for a while. And her teachers were good, but they could only do so much with what they had. And I think that's the reason a lot of us end up homeschooling, especially with the special needs children. The children with disabilities is because there's we have a lot higher level of faith and belief in our children than other people do.

And it's so it's good to hear you say to be a living

example of a parent or parents who

didn't let disability stand in the way.

My parents were, my parents, if you will,

were risk takers.

I mean, they, they said, yeah,

you can ride a bike,

you can do all these sorts

of things and so on.

And they allowed me to explore.

Parents need to do that with their kids,

especially kids with disabilities,

let them explore,

let them find out what their limits are.

You can guide, you can observe,

but don't interfere.

Parents need to let kids

explore especially kids

with disabilities Otherwise,

you're never gonna find out

what you can and can't

really do if you're

sheltered all the time

That's a serious problem

and my parents were really

good about letting me

investigate and explore

things And I did I went to

school went to a public

school and I think for me

that was good because I got

to interact with people I met a

All sorts of different kinds

of people including some

people that discriminated

against blind people like

the superintendent of my

high school district Wouldn't uh, well,

he decided that guide dogs

I had a guide dog when I

went to high school

Couldn't ride on the school

bus because there was a

rule in the school district

that said live animals

can't be on school buses We

took it to the school board

the school board supported

the superintendent in a

three to two vote And we

had met the governor of

california the year before

at a boy scout function.

So my father wrote to the governor

And I don't know what happened,

but all I know is that on

one Friday afternoon,

the superintendent had just

returned from Sacramento,

where rumor has it he was

abused a great deal.

Would have loved to have

been a fly on the wall.

But anyway,

the word went out that I would

be allowed back on the bus.

And the reason I was allowed

back on the bus was because

there was a state law in California that said it was a felony to deny a blind person with a guide dog access to in transportation, any common carrier and school buses are defined as, as a common carrier. So the superintendent thought that his rule superseded state law, which it didn't. And the bottom line is that, that I got back on the school bus and that taught me a lot, but I wouldn't have learned any other way. That is. I learned you can fight city hall and win you, you need to prepare. And my father prepared a lot to go fight it at the school board level, which, um, which we didn't win, but by the same token, it opened the door to what came later. But it's all about having the opportunity. And so the more kids with disabilities especially are allowed to grow and explore, the better it is. I think one of the things you talk about in your book a lot is the preparation because I had a run-in with, what was it, City Hall? It was the school district. Same concept. Yes, mediation with the state. And by the end of that meeting, which was three or four hours long, and this was after three years of trying to do it through the IEP process, my daughter didn't have a communication, a way to communicate because by this point, That, you know,

school districts across the United States have been sued enough for people who are blind, for people who are deaf. So they had or and people who needed English as a second language. Those people had been in enough lawsuits to where the school districts have programs in place for them. People who don't who are nonverbal and don't communicate using words. don't have that. And so that's kind of what I was fighting for. And I ended up at the end of that three hour meeting, I actually got a job offer from the Office of Compliance. There you go. How does your daughter communicate? Right now,

we have just started therapy for

spelling to communicate.

But when she was younger,

we had learned up to three hundred

signs from using american

sign language okay great

and then she used an aac

device after that she got

an ipad six months after

they came out she was five

years old good for her and

so we had communication

that way but now we're

working on developing you

know full communication

with a communication device

she tended to just use a

few words yeah but she's

growing and that's great

Yeah, her communication has grown.

And even though her iPad was

recently broken,

And I won't say how,

but her iPad is recently broken. She is still able to communicate really well just by using the sign language that she learned a long time ago. So she has multiple ways. And I know in some of your chapters, you talk about when if your dog had to retire early or passed away, you had to wait on a new one that you had an alternate way to move around using the white stick. A cane, right. And the reality is I didn't use a cane Until I was eighteen. I used a guide dog before I learned to use a cane. But I can teach anyone to use a cane in five minutes. Teaching people to have the confidence to use a cane takes months.

Because to use a cane or a dog, you have to be aware of your surroundings. You have to know where you want to go and how to get there. Because a guide dog doesn't lead a blind person. The job of a guide dog is not to know where to go and how to get there. And I don't want my dog to know that. So when I was in the World Trade Center, if I had taught my dog one way to go places and that way was blocked, what would we do? It's my job to know that. The dog's job is to make sure that we walk safe. And so when I went to high school, we decided that was a big enough campus that made sense to get a dog if we could. And Guide Dogs for the Blind accepted me.

And then four years later, going into college, I went to a college preparatory program and They asked that I not bring my dog because they had mobility instructors up there and they thought they were going to teach me how to use a white cane. That took five minutes because I'm aware of my surroundings. I know how to travel. The cane just gives me the information that I need so that I don't walk off a curb or off of a clip or something. And what's really funny is that one of the mobility instructors while I was up at this course said, I'm going to really prove to you the value of using a cane.

And

We had to walk across campus

where we were to a dorm, and he said,

just follow me.

I'll show you how to use

this cane and use it well.

He didn't think I understood it all,

and I'd already been using

it for a couple of weeks.

Anyway, we started walking,

and he promptly got lost in

a parking lot.

It was sort of shaped like a horseshoe,

and there was one small entrance.

I found the way in and out

of the parking lot pretty quickly, and

I moved away from the entrance and said,

I figured it out.

And he says, no, you don't tell me.

I'll figure it out and then we'll go.

Took him forty five minutes to find it.

The reality is that

blindness isn't the problem.

Now, we have to learn skills.

And I had to learn the

alternatives to being able

to read signs and other things like that.

But there's so much value in

knowing things rather than

reading signs in the World

Trade Center on September eleventh.

If I had been in an area,

unfortunately I was not,

but if I had been in an

area where there was a lot

of smoke and so on,

and if I didn't know what to do,

I'd have to rely on

somebody who would be able to tell me.

The problem is they wouldn't

be able to know what to do

because the smoke would be

blocking their ability to read signs.

Whereas if I knew what to do

and I did know what to do,

I was able to function and

help other people and we survived. That was... One thing that was interesting to me, how your parents would help you when you were younger in high school and then in college, how your parents helped you learn the layout of the land so that you could memorize it and then use it in guiding your guide dog, basically. Helping being a team with your guide dog. That's another thing I want to talk about a little bit is the teamwork required. when using a guide dog. But so you had support. It's not like you were, because I think as parents, we're thinking someday our kids will be one hundred percent independent. And in reality,

nobody is one hundred

percent independent.

We all depend on other

people for something.

Mahatma Gandhi once said

interdependence is and

ought to be as much the

ideal of man as the self-sufficiency.

And, you know,

we really should learn that.

And that's kind of hard

because that's one of the

areas I know that special

needs parents struggle with

is how much you're just not

used to being that

dependent on people for whether it's,

you know,

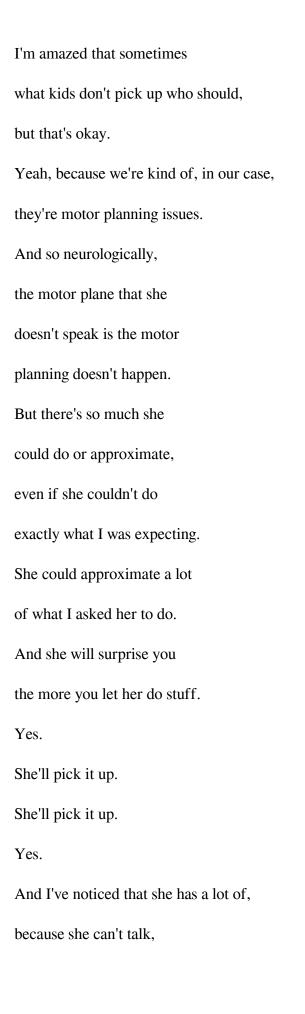
for therapy or medical advice or

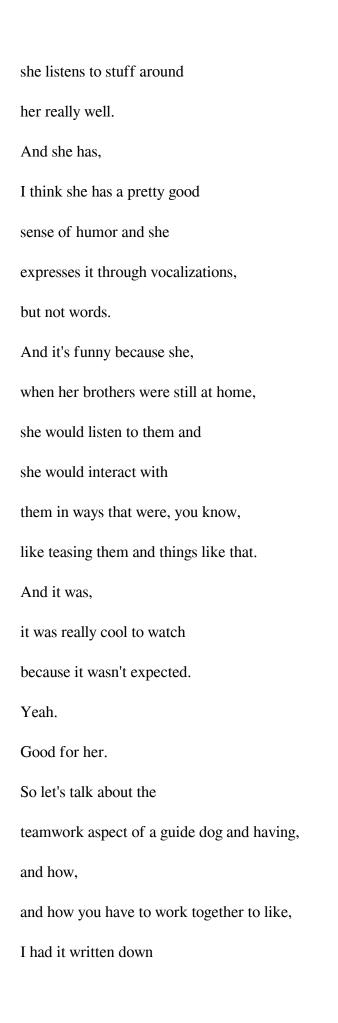
child care or training your

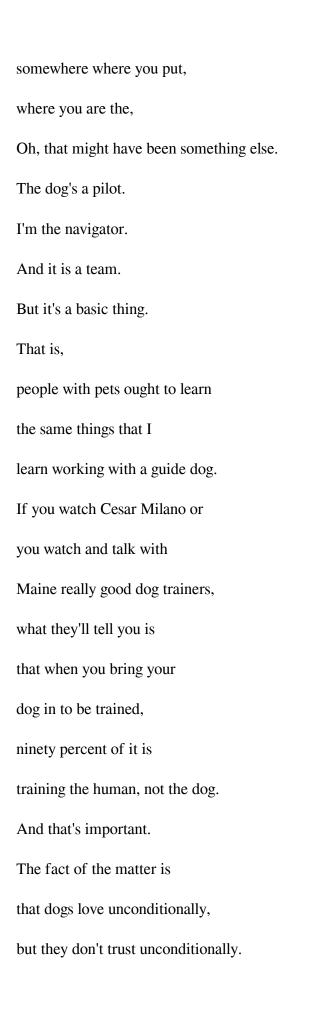
child to do something that

other kids just pick up easily.

Well, most kids pick up easily.







But they're open to trust

and they're looking to form

trusting relationships if we allow it.

They want us to tell them

the rules and to show them

in ways that we can what we

expect from them.

And then we have to

reinforce the behavior when

they do obey the rules and

not get ticked off when

they don't obey the rules,

because that's probably

because we didn't

communicate or they hadn't

figured it out yet, but they will.

And so the fact of the

matter is that we have to

be the team leaders.

That's our job.

And working with a guide dog,

I'm the team leader.

And the dog wants me to be

the team leader. The dog wants me to express what I expect from the dog as we travel. On the other hand, the dog has authority too. So let's say we're walking down a sidewalk and we get to a curb. The dog will stop at the curb. And if the dog doesn't, we're going to have a discussion about a member of the team and what it's supposed to do. But that's generally not a problem. The dog will stop at the curb. And I listen to hear which way the traffic is going. When the traffic starts to go the way I want to go, then I will tell the dog forward. It's my job to tell the dog when I want the dog to go. But then if the dog doesn't go forward, when I expect the immediate

reaction I have is why? And probably by the time I asked that question, I hear a hybrid car pass in front of me going fast because I couldn't hear it. It was in battery mode or whatever, and I didn't hear it, but The dog saw it. The dog knew it wasn't safe to go. And the dog is able to use what's called intelligent disobedience to make decisions to keep us safe. And that's what the dog's job is. Of course, when that happens, the dog gets a lot of praise and rewards in various ways. And I say, what a great job. Now let's go. Because it's probably not because the dog saw a duck and got distracted.

These dogs don't get distracted. Very often, unless I allow that to happen. Well, I don't. So I keep the dog focused and there's a result. The dog does his or her job. And my job is to keep the team going. As I tell people as the team leader, I'm the confessor or the confessee. I'm the team leader. I'm the cheerleader. I'm the coach. I'm the teacher. And I have to do all of those things. I have to learn how to communicate with this creature that is different than I. And every dog has its own personalities, and I have to learn new personalities every time I get a new dog. But the fact is that that's part of my job in making the team work.

That's really interesting because some of the things you said kind of echo a little bit of parenting there. But it's interesting that the teamwork is just how important it is. And that you do have to be, there has to be a leader. There has to be a leader. And the dog wants me to be the leader. Typically speaking, dogs, when it's dealing with a human, instinctively know that we're supposed to be the leaders. And we have to take a good lead. productive leadership position and when we do and when we communicate with our dog friends and show them what we expect and encourage them to do it and when they do it reward them for it and encourage them

more it's a relationship that's second to none and it's the same thing that we should do when we're organizing a team of people good leaders know how to communicate with their teammates and Good team leaders aren't bosses. They don't boss people around. They encourage. Whenever I've hired salespeople, one of the first things I tell every salesperson that I've ever hired is, I hired you because you demonstrated to me that you can sell the product that we have to sell or sell whatever it is that we have to sell. sometimes I've been disappointed, but they convinced me at first. And so we hired them. So I tell them,

you've convinced me you can sell.

My job isn't to boss you around.

My job is to work with you

and figure out how I can

use my skills to add value

to what you do in order to

enhance what you do so that

you will be as productive

and as successful as you can be.

And the people who got that

who worked for me really

shined and did extremely well.

Some didn't do it and they

didn't sell as well because

the things that I do are

typically a little bit

different than what a lot of people do.

I do, as you point out, listen more.

I took a Dale Carnegie sales

course when I first started

in sales and I learned a

lot of things like don't

ask yes and no questions.

I always ask open-ended

questions whenever I can.

because I want to get more

information than a yes or a no.

And I also am very technical

with a master's degree in

physics and have helped our

engineers fix problems,

much less helping our

salespeople with engineering issues.

So there are a lot of ways

that I can add value to

what my salespeople do if

they let me do it, but it's their choice.

Now that's an interesting part.

And you bring this out in the book, as you,

as you go through and talk

about your different dogs,

you're also talking about

your life experiences.

And your rise from, you know,

graduating college and then

going into the workforce.

And I want to talk a little bit about your advocacy work because you've had to advocate for yourself from, you know, from the beginning because you started out into the workforce and all before the ADA. Is that correct? Yes. and the American with Disabilities Act. And so there were a lot of laws that weren't in place that you had to, you know, fight for your place in things. And then the discrimination about when people would, you'd send in a resume, this is when it was all done, you know, on paper, you had to send it through the mail and people would love your experience. But when they found out you're blind,

they just couldn't get past that. So talk about your advocacy work through, you know, through whatever stages you'd like to. Well. it's really all part of the same thing. I know what I'm capable of doing. And I also realize that most people think that blindness is the problem. Sometimes we can work through that and sometimes we can't. You know, nowadays we have the Americans with Disabilities Act. And so what happens with the ADA? Well, for you, when you work in an office, you have lights so that you can see where you're going. And when you're walking down a hall or you have windows, That's a reasonable accommodation for sighted people.

We have computer monitors. That's a reasonable accommodation for sighted people. We go into a lunchroom or a coffee room and there's usually a nice fancy touchscreen coffee machine. That's a reasonable accommodation for sighted people. But in all of those cases, If I need, for example, an inexpensive computer program called a screen reader to be able to verbalize whatever comes across the screen, the barriers go up. Oh. we don't have anything in our budget to allow for that. Come on, you're buying computer monitors, which costs at least as much as what my software program would cost.

It's just the attitudes that people have. And the other side of it is you can't approach it with hate. You can't approach it with anger. You have to, in a sense, outsmart and outlove the other person. And so I work to do that as much as I possibly can as we are doing the things that we need to do. And I've learned to help other people who are looking for jobs and advise them how they can interact and advocate for themselves because we're our own best advocates. We're also our own best teachers. I used to say when I would listen to my speeches because I like to record my speeches and then listen to them, see what maybe I could do better.

I used to say, well, I'm my own worst critic, so I'm going to really pick stuff up. I've realized over the last year alone that I'm not my own worst critic. I'm my own best teacher. And I need to approach it in a positive way, still listening to those recordings, but I'm my own best teacher. I'm going to see what worked, what didn't work. And what I need to do is not be negative about the things maybe that didn't work, but rather be go back and look at it, what could I have done better to fix it? Whether it's something simple or something bigger or whatever, that's why I'm my own best teacher. And I think that's true of all of us.

And Live Like a Guide Dog is also a book that talks all about how you can do much more introspection in your own world and teach yourself when you become afraid of something to recognize it and deal with it. You can... move forward in a very positive way. So I think advocacy is all about doing it for the right reason, but also advocacy is something, especially for people with disabilities that we need to learn to do. You mentioned the IEP. I think it's important for those who can do it for persons with disabilities to become part of the advocacy process and advocate for themselves. Now, having said that,

Let me go back a little bit because when I talk about persons with disabilities, I've changed my definition of what a person with a disability is. My diversity friends always talk about how a person with a disability isn't included in diversity because it's usually race, gender, sexual orientation. And when I say, where do you put disabilities and all that, oh, that's social justice. That's a crock. It's not. It's as much a minority group, if not more of a minority group, than any of those other diversity groups that they keep talking about, especially since there are

probably a whole lot more

of us than there are of any

of those other groups.

The CDC says,

twenty-five percent of all

persons have a disability.

I disagree with the CDC.

I believe a hundred percent

of all people have a

disability and I'll tell you why.

I went to a hotel last year in Hollywood,

California with my niece and nephew.

We were there for a function.

We put our luggage in our room.

It was three in the afternoon.

We were walking down the

main stairwell coming from

the third floor to the first floor.

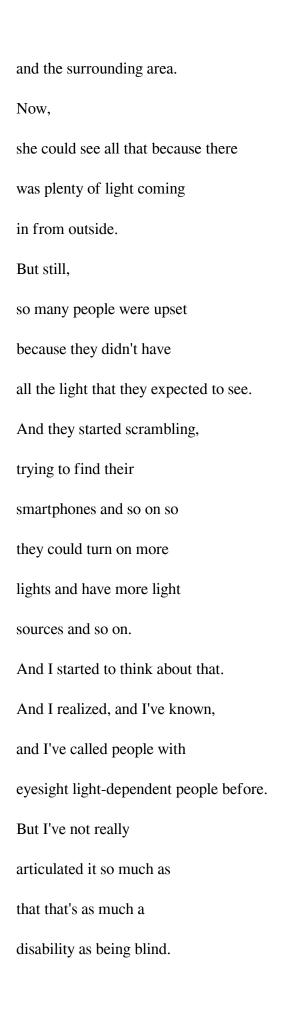
And all of a sudden I heard

people starting to scream in the lobby.

And I asked my niece, what's going on?

And she said,

we just lost power in the hotel.



But the fact of the matter is,

light dependence is as much

a disability as light independence,

if you will.

Being blind is no more of a

disability than being sighted,

and it's no less of a

disability than being sighted.

Thomas Edison invented the

electric light bulb back in

And for the past hundred and

forty six years,

we focused so much on

making light on demand

available that it covers up

your disability.

But it doesn't change the

fact that the disability is

there vis-a-vis when the

power goes out and you

don't have a smartphone

sitting right in front of

you already turned on.

You panic because you're so used to light, but it doesn't change the fact that you have a disability. So disability isn't a lack of ability or an inability, although my experts say it is because it starts with this disability. And my response is, yeah, well, so does discrete, so does disciple, so does discern. Now I'll start with DIS. It is not a lack of ability or an inability. Disability is a characteristic that every single person on the planet has. And what we need to recognize is it manifests itself differently for different people. That's an interesting way to look at it because the, with the light and the dark, because yes,

in a world where if it's daylight, But at nighttime, people with vision, with sight, would have a disability in the dark that you wouldn't have. Well, and in fact, at three in the afternoon, these people had the problem. Even though if they had just calmed down, they would have discovered they could see just fine. Thank you very much. That's interesting. Human nature. But it's what we're taught. It's the way we're brought up. So we're brought up to think eyesight's the only game in town. And so people think less of people who are blind or have other so-called disabilities. And so we don't get the same opportunities.

Insurance companies wouldn't

give us the ability to get

life insurance for many

years because they said we

had a higher mortality rate.

People with disabilities, as it were,

had a higher mortality rate.

And so we're not going to

sell you insurance.

Finally, somebody discovered

that they in fact really

didn't have a single

solitary mathematical model

or any actuarial statistics

or evidentiary data to

support that we were a

higher risk than anyone else.

And that started a movement,

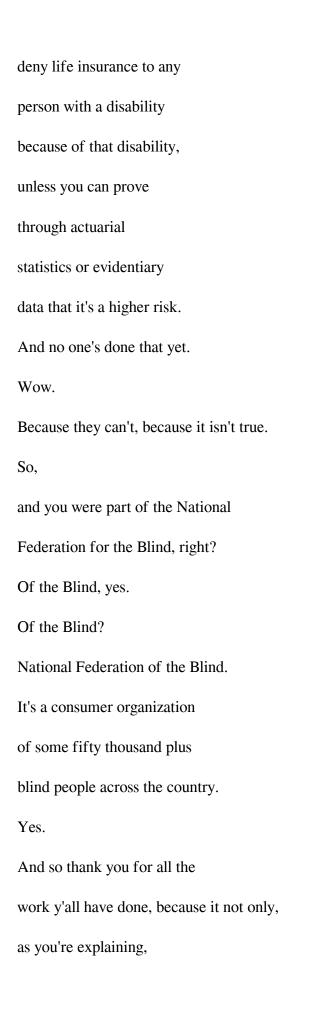
the National Federation of

the Blind started it and

other disability groups joined in.

So now it is illegal in

every state in the union to



the work that you're doing is not only affecting the blind community, but also anyone with a disability that's discriminated against by these organizations, companies, things like that. So I just appreciate the work that you've done in that area. Well, thank you. And, you know, it's ongoing. We're slowly making progress. The unemployment rate among employable person with disability is still high. I think for blind people, I believe I've heard it's in like the fifty percent range. And, you know, the fact is, it's not that we can't work. It's that other people think we can't work. So we're not given a chance.

And, you know, in schools today,

most educators say, well,

blind kids don't need to

learn Braille because they

can listen to computers and so on.

And that's a lot of

balderdash because Braille

is the only means by which

we have to read and write.

And the fact of the matter

is that every blind child

should be learning Braille.

Yeah,

we're going to use a computer for

some things, too,

but we should learn Braille

and and other things.

kinds of technologies are

existing to help whether

it's for people who are

blind or people with other

disabilities and so on but

the the literacy rate among

blind people has dropped to about ten percent who can read braille because educators don't emphasize it anymore what a disservice they are doing to every blind person by behaving that way I agree because my daughter who's non-verbal she's now on to learning her third way to communicate and it's important that you learn you know multiple modalities you shouldn't I I don't believe in you know one is the answer to everything and you can learn multiple ways to do something and it does it increases your thinking

skills even it would I

would think well because

when you're listening versus reading it's a totally different mental process well that's part of it but the other part of it is that with braille I am able to learn all about sentence structure. I learned a spell and other things that I will not learn by just listening to a voice or a computer or whatever. And it's important to do that. With Braille, I'm much more able to handle mathematical things and so on. And you can create tactile maps with Braille labels on them and so on. It's important that every blind child should learn Braille. Even older adults will learn some Braille if given the opportunity.

I'm the vice president of the board of an organization called the Colorado Center for the Blind, which is an orientation and adjustment center that teaches people who are losing their eyesight or who have lost their eyesight how to function. And it's mostly philosophical, but the Colorado Center teaches Braille, and older adults learn it at least well enough to be able to put labels on things and so on, because they're probably not going to really learn it to the extent that they'll be able to read and do a lot of other things like younger kids do. But I've seen so many people who grew up who were low

vision and the teacher said, well,

you don't need to learn Braille,

just use your eyes.

Yeah, well,

that doesn't really work very well.

And so many people have said,

I wish that I had learned Braille.

I wish that my teachers had

taught me Braille because I

could read a lot faster

with Braille than I ever

could with just reading.

using my eyes which give me

headaches after a while

because I can't read that

much with them that's

interesting because I had a

some friends of mine it was

a couple and they were both

blind and uh the wife had

some like low vision like

that where she if she did

certain things she she

could see some and her

husband was completely dark

with his vision

and she both of them knew

braille as a matter of fact

they met at a place that

teaches braille she was the

teacher and he was a

student they ended up

getting married having five

kids and homeschooling that

works but uh yeah and she

was uh it was amazing the

things that she could teach

her kids because she knew

braille and you know you

can get the books and all

that stuff but she taught

her kids to read which she

would use the braille and

then verbalize and teach

them to read it was it was amazing

Well, Braille is a true alternative,

not a substitute. Braille is an alternative to print. And anyone whose eyesight has diminished to the point where they have to use alternatives to full eyesight to function should really learn and develop the philosophy that they are blind. Yeah, they can still use eyesight perhaps, but if they learn the skills of Braille and learn about using a cane and so on, they will be much better off. For example, I know a gentleman who was losing his eyesight in New Jersey years ago. And the commission gave him a cane, but they didn't really philosophically get him to buy into all of that. And every day he would

travel into Philadelphia from where he lived. So he one day was walking along the train tracks to get into the car on the train to go across the river into Philadelphia. It was a cloudy or foggy day. He got to the entrance. He wasn't using his cane. He held it, but he wasn't using it. He turned to get into the car and promptly fell between two train cars because it wasn't a space for it to go into a car. It was between cars. And the train at that point just started to move while they got it stopped. But I will tell you that he became an avid cane user in the right way because what

he learned was you got to use that cane.

His eyesight didn't help him there.

And in his case, it was going to decrease,

which it did.

But the fact is that people

with eyesight who are going

to lose that eyesight,

even if you have a fair

amount of eyesight,

but you're not able to

function without using

alternatives to full eyesight,

you should recognize and

learn the skills of being a

blind person that will

enhance your life a lot.

that's true because even in

the spelling to communicate

uh community which is kind

of just forming and

developing based on this

way method of teaching

people non-verbal people to

communicate they include

and they don't call them

non-verbal they call them

non-speaking non-speaking

minimally speaking or

unreliable speaking all

benefit from using spelling

to communicate and it's the

same ideas even if you're

not even if you have some it

You know, it's a great, it's a better,

it's a good idea to have, you know,

full function in area

instead of partial function.

Right.

Just by learning a new skill.

Learning as many skills as

you can is important.

And in homeschooling,

that's what parents get to do.

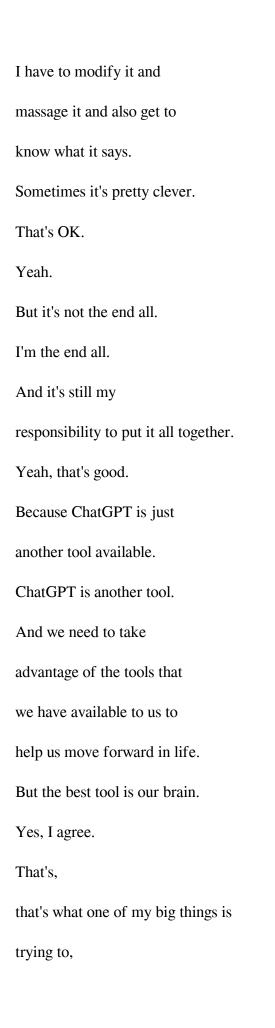
And I'm sure there are lots

of parents that shelter

kids with disabilities much

more than they should. But I'm glad that there are more and more people who are learning that in reality, let your kid explore. Let your kid do things. Don't shelter your child because that's not going to serve them in good stead when they grow up. I'm finding that out as my daughter is now out of high school. So I've seen that and there's, you know, I can't go back. I can't go backwards and think, oh, I wish I would have done this, that or the other. No, that doesn't help. Once and once you graduate high school, I mean, if you go to college, that's another four years of training. If you enter a program, an apprenticeship program,

be an electrician, that's five years. And if you get a master's degree, that's even more. So there's like a whole, there's it's, you never stop learning. You don't have to go back, just go forward and keep, keep teaching, keep learning and keep moving forward. Anybody who stops learning and become stagnant in that way is just not going to be productive in society. You know, I've, I continue to learn. I love learning. I love exploring new things. I think the internet is a treasure trove of data. And I use ChatGPT sometimes to do some work to help me in writing things, although I will never just turn something in the ChatGPT provides.



I always want to teach thinking skills. I could teach, you know, higher and higher levels of thinking, especially with some of the intellectual disability to help her be able to reason. Because if you think about it, that's really where independence comes from is the ability to think and problem solve. Yeah, absolutely. If you can't do that, you can't be, if you can't do that, you can't be independent. Right. What you were going to say before. try to focus on those great so we've got about just over ten minutes left your book at the end of each chapter you have a scripture verse and then a little prayer that goes

with the chapter and

overcoming fear so can you

talk a little bit about

your faith journey through

all of this my father and I

really had lots of deep

philosophical and religious

discussions he was the one

that contributed

For me, most of that.

We believe in Jesus.

We believe in God.

And we believe that we're

all part of that.

And so when I was growing up,

my father would read some

things from books to me.

He read me, for example,

The Greatest Story Ever

Told by Fulton Isley and so on.

And he read me other books.

And we talked about them and

talked about God.

and talked about the

significance of what God really offers us,

which is the opportunity to

make choices and do things.

You know, and a lot of people say, well,

why doesn't God step in and

keep this from happening?

And the response is,

if people would understand it,

God doesn't step in because

God gave us free will and choice.

And it's up to us to make

the decisions to deal with something, um,

It's not up to God to do that.

That's what's so cool about God.

And the fact of the matter

is that I have always had a

very strong faith in my life,

and I will continue to do that.

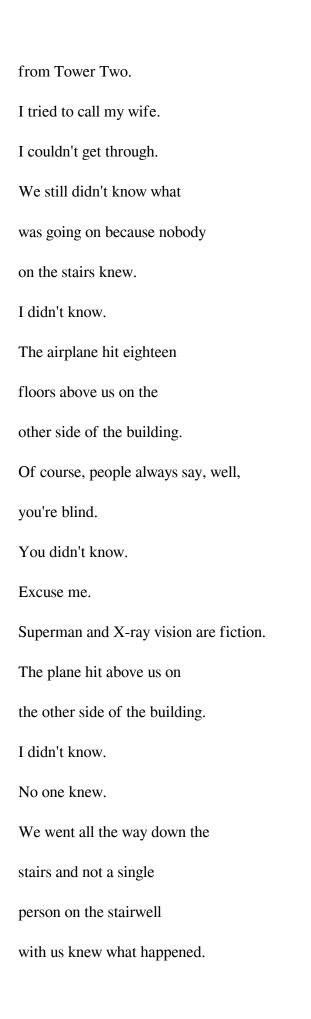
And it has nothing to do

with any particular religion.

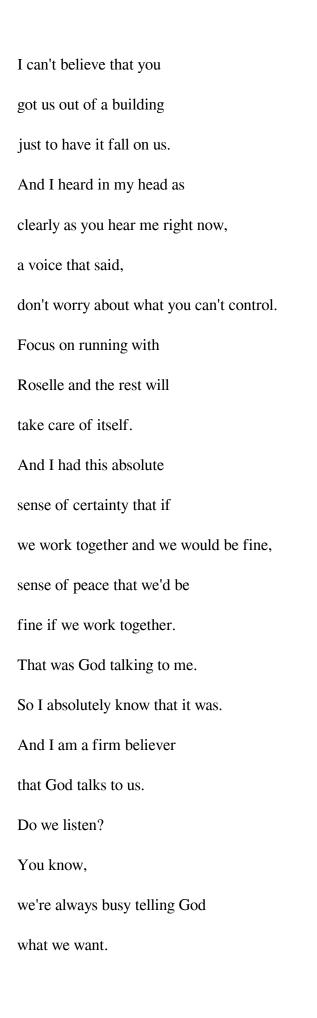
And I'm not going to side

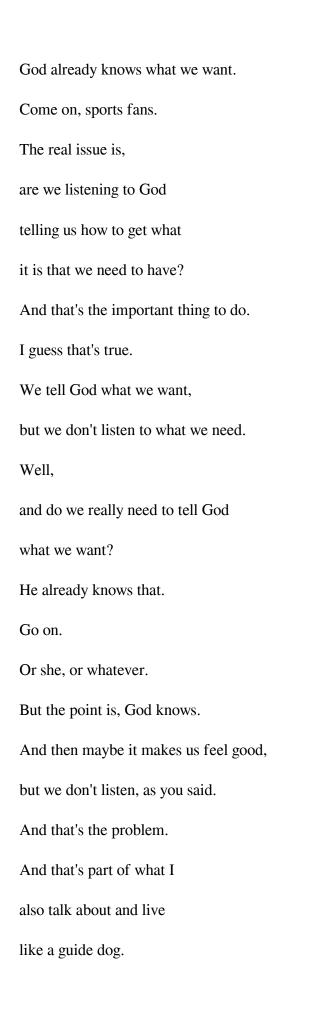
and say that one religion

is better than other religions. It's all about believing in God. And that's the only thing that I do draw the line at. I am not an atheist. I believe in God, and I always will. And if you read my other book, Thunder Dog, have you read that? Oh, no, not yet. Okay, so you got to get Thunder Dog, which is my story in the World Trade Center. But in one of the chapters in Thunder Dog, the chapter is basically one where we've escaped from the towers, and we're at the corner of Vesey Street and Broadway. And my colleague, David Frank, wanted to take pictures of what he was seeing up in the fire from Tower Two. because we were only like about a hundred yards away



We assumed an airplane hit the building because we smelled the fumes from burning jet fuel. But anyway, I had just put my phone away and David was putting his camera away when a police officer yelled, get out of here. It's coming down now. And all of a sudden we heard this rumble. I describe it as kind of a combination of a freight train and a waterfall sound. You could hear glass breaking and metal clattering. And then this white noise sound of the building collapsing. David ran, he was gone. I turned a hundred and eighty degrees with Roselle and we ran back the way we came. And as soon as I started to run, I said to myself, God,





And we did in Thunderdog as well. Don't worry about the things that you can't control. Focus on what you can and let the rest alone. And you'll be a lot less fearful and have a much better life. So give me a summary of, you kind of did at the beginning of just all the things that you, um, Do you have, have you ever done this? I don't know if this is asking too much on the fly, like all of a sudden, but could you give us like a one sentence description of what you learned from each of your guide dogs? Like if I gave your, the, the name, you could just give like the, the main point of what you learned. I learned a lot of the same

things from all of them, but like Squire,

um, was, was very patient.

Um, um, Holland, my second guide dog.

Um, and we wrote a lot about,

about Holland.

was a was a wonderful dog um

and took a lot of

adventures with me and and

figured out how to how to

be a good guide dog even in

the snow of boston klondike

my third guide dog

experienced fear he was

afraid and we I don't know

what caused it but when I

was getting him we were

riding our bus from guide

dogs for the blind into san

francisco and we got to

where we were going to get

off this this guide dog's

bus and he just started

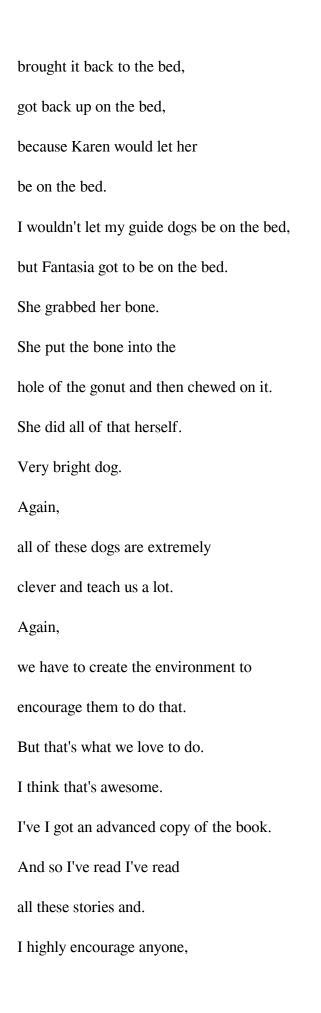
shaking and shivering and

what I learned was be patient, encourage him. And within a couple of days, he was over the fear. Lenny was a very bright dog, a very sensitive dog. And Lenny was a dog who loved everyone. But she also, again, really adapted very well to working with me. Roselle certainly was a dog who as I requested when I was going to go get her, had an on and off switch. She knew when the harness went on to work and focus and not be distracted. And she wasn't. She did exactly the kinds of things that she was supposed to do, but she also knew to expect things from me as every guide dog did. Meryl, my sixth guide dog,

only worked for about eighteen months. And Meryl, the problem with Meryl was that she had a type A personality. She could not leave work at the office. So when we came home or when the harness wasn't on, she wouldn't play with the other dogs. She would snap at them. She followed me around everywhere. She could not relax. And that caught up with her, which taught me a lot about being patient and recognizing that I can learn to deal with stress because Meryl couldn't. Africa, my seventh guide dog who worked from two thousand eight to February of two thousand eighteen was, again, a yellow Labrador retriever. And a real cutie.

And Africa focused very well. And Africa taught me a lot about how to react in different kinds of situations. And we had a lot of adventures together. We went to the Netherlands together. We went other places together. And then now I have Alamo. who's my first black lab. And Alamo is just extremely bright. Um, he, in some senses, I think is the brightest guide dog that I have ever had because Alamo just figures things out. He amazes me when he figures out things as, as we're, as we're walking. And he just seems to know what I want, which is one of those seamless relationships. So all of them Fantasia. who was my wife's service dog was a breeder for guide

dogs for the blind. And we chose to be what was called a breeder keeper so she could live at our home rather than staying in kennels all the time. But she figured out that Karen was in a wheelchair. And if Karen dropped things on the floor, Fantasia figured out to pick them up and give them to her on her own. She taught herself to be my wife's service dog. She was extremely intelligent. There's a dog toy called a donut, which looks like a donut. except it's a very hard rubber toy. And one day, Fantasia was on the bed chewing on a bone, but the bone kept slipping away. She dropped the bone, jumped off the bed, went into the living room, found a gonut,



especially if you're a dog

lover or even just overcoming fear,

whether on behalf of your child,

for your child or about your own life,

there is so much wisdom to

be gleaned from this book.

And there is so much just the stories,

just the mundane and just

how things can change in an

instant and the ups and

downs of a life over

decades and how you face

those with courage.

And I just think in the same

way that many people from

this book will learn about being brave,

overcoming adversity,

and moving forward in their

faith with whoever they

team with to go forward in life.

Well.

one of the things that I wanted to

make sure we didn't do is

preach at people. That's easy to do. It's all about, for me, telling stories and telling people what I've learned, but then it's up to them as to how they want to use it. And that's extremely important. But I hope people will read the book and that they will learn some things from it. Now that the pandemic has ended, and even though now Karen passed away, we were married for two years, but I can now travel and speak again. So I literally travel and speak all over the country, literally all over the world. And so if anyone wants a speaker, knows any organization that wants to hire a keynote speaker to come and inspire, it is what I do.

And we can work out whatever

the speaking fee needs to be.

I'm not locked into a particular number.

I need to afford to be able to travel.

But I love to work with people.

And so if anybody needs a speaker,

we're open to it.

Yeah, so give us your website.

So give us your website and

how people can reach you.

So people can reach me at

www.michaelhingson.com.

That's M-I-C-H-A-E-L

H-I-N-G-S-O-N.com.

We're on LinkedIn, Michael Hinkson.

You can also email me,

speaker at michaelhinkson.com,

and I will respond to any

emails that I get.

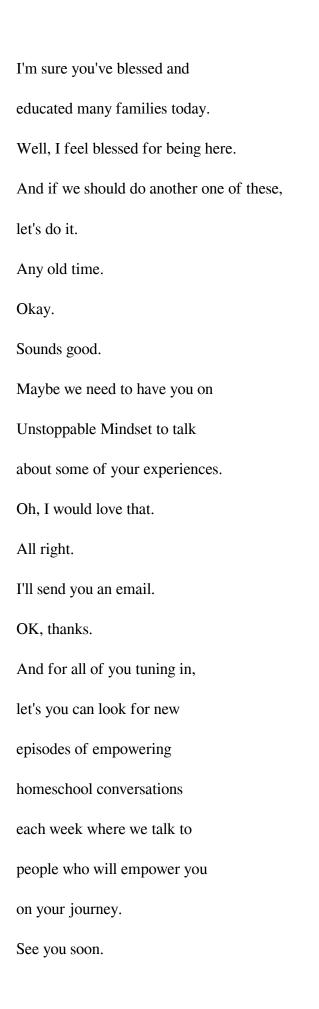
And I mentioned the podcast,

so if you'd like to listen to our podcast,

you can go to

michaelhinkson.com slash podcast,

or go to anywhere podcasts are hosted, whether it's Apple, iHeart, or whatever. And you can listen to our podcasts. And the idea behind the podcast is people are more unstoppable than they think they are. And I use every episode to help listeners recognize that. And so that's what it's about. But you definitely go to the website and learn about what I do. There are a lot of videos up on YouTube as well. But again, feel free to go to www.michaelhingson.com. Or email me. speaker at michaelhingston.com. And I'd love to meet you and talk with you and speak. Great. Well, thank you for joining me today, Michael.



God bless.
God bless.
I'm trying to play a little ending video,
but it's not happening.
This has been Empowering
Homeschool Conversations
provided by Sped Homeschool,
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