

Welcome to Empowering  
Homeschool Conversations,  
your authority in  
navigating the world of  
homeschooling diverse learners.

Featuring Peggy Ployer from  
Sped Homeschool,  
Annie Yorty from AnnieYorty.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.

She didn't have different  
expectations for you  
necessarily just because  
you were blind because you have siblings,  
correct?

I had had a brother.

He passed away in twenty  
fifteen from cancer.

But yeah, I think it's not just my mom.

It's both of my parents.

So when I was four months old,  
it was discovered that I was blind.

I was born two months  
premature and given a pure  
oxygen environment.

And so the bottom line is  
that I was blind because I  
was given too much oxygen.

Even too much oxygen isn't  
necessarily always a good thing.

And so I

Couldn't see.

And when the doctors discovered that,

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

that's a grossly horrible,  
disgusting term.

Visually,

I'm not different because I'm  
blind and certainly not impaired.

It's not the thing to do.

We don't equate or shouldn't  
equate how much eyesight someone has  
to determine whether they're  
impaired or not.

So it's blind or low vision.

But anyway,

the bottom line is that my  
parents said that I could  
grow up to do whatever I want.

And they really brought me  
up with that attitude.

I rode a bike when we moved  
to California from Chicago  
when I was five.

A couple of years later, I got a bike.

And I would ride it around  
like anyone else.

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.



I'm amazed that sometimes  
what kids don't pick up who should,  
but that's okay.

Yeah, because we're kind of, in our case,  
they're motor planning issues.

And so neurologically,  
the motor plane that she  
doesn't speak is the motor  
planning doesn't happen.

But there's so much she  
could do or approximate,  
even if she couldn't do  
exactly what I was expecting.

She could approximate a lot  
of what I asked her to do.

And she will surprise you  
the more you let her do stuff.

Yes.

She'll pick it up.

She'll pick it up.

Yes.

And I've noticed that she has a lot of,  
because she can't talk,

she listens to stuff around

her really well.

And she has,

I think she has a pretty good

sense of humor and she

expresses it through vocalizations,

but not words.

And it's funny because she,

when her brothers were still at home,

she would listen to them and

she would interact with

them in ways that were, you know,

like teasing them and things like that.

And it was,

it was really cool to watch

because it wasn't expected.

Yeah.

Good for her.

So let's talk about the

teamwork aspect of a guide dog and having,

and how,

and how you have to work together to like,

I had it written down

somewhere where you put,  
where you are the,  
Oh, that might have been something else.

The dog's a pilot.

I'm the navigator.

And it is a team.

But it's a basic thing.

That is,

people with pets ought to learn  
the same things that I  
learn working with a guide dog.

If you watch Cesar Milano or  
you watch and talk with

Maine really good dog trainers,  
what they'll tell you is

that when you bring your  
dog in to be trained,

ninety percent of it is  
training the human, not the dog.

And that's important.

The fact of the matter is

that dogs love unconditionally,

but they don't trust unconditionally.

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.

and the surrounding area.

Now,

she could see all that because there  
was plenty of light coming  
in from outside.

But still,

so many people were upset  
because they didn't have  
all the light that they expected to see.

And they started scrambling,

trying to find their  
smartphones and so on so  
they could turn on more  
lights and have more light  
sources and so on.

And I started to think about that.

And I realized, and I've known,  
and I've called people with  
eyesight light-dependent people before.

But I've not really  
articulated it so much as  
that that's as much a  
disability as being blind.

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



deny life insurance to any  
person with a disability  
because of that disability,  
unless you can prove  
through actuarial  
statistics or evidentiary  
data that it's a higher risk.

And no one's done that yet.

Wow.

Because they can't, because it isn't true.

So,

and you were part of the National  
Federation for the Blind, right?

Of the Blind, yes.

Of the Blind?

National Federation of the Blind.

It's a consumer organization  
of some fifty thousand plus  
blind people across the country.

Yes.

And so thank you for all the  
work y'all have done, because it not only,  
as you're explaining,

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 have to modify it and  
massage it and also get to  
know what it says.

Sometimes it's pretty clever.

That's OK.

Yeah.

But it's not the end all.

I'm the end all.

And it's still my  
responsibility to put it all together.

Yeah, that's good.

Because ChatGPT is just  
another tool available.

ChatGPT is another tool.

And we need to take  
advantage of the tools that  
we have available to us to  
help us move forward in life.

But the best tool is our brain.

Yes, I agree.

That's,  
that's what one of my big things is  
trying to,

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

from Tower Two.

I tried to call my wife.

I couldn't get through.

We still didn't know what

was going on because nobody

on the stairs knew.

I didn't know.

The airplane hit eighteen

floors above us on the

other side of the building.

Of course, people always say, well,

you're blind.

You didn't know.

Excuse me.

Superman and X-ray vision are fiction.

The plane hit above us on

the other side of the building.

I didn't know.

No one knew.

We went all the way down the

stairs and not a single

person on the stairwell

with us knew what happened.

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,

I can't believe that you  
got us out of a building  
just to have it fall on us.

And I heard in my head as  
clearly as you hear me right now,  
a voice that said,  
don't worry about what you can't control.

Focus on running with  
Roselle and the rest will  
take care of itself.

And I had this absolute  
sense of certainty that if  
we work together and we would be fine,  
sense of peace that we'd be  
fine if we work together.

That was God talking to me.

So I absolutely know that it was.

And I am a firm believer  
that God talks to us.

Do we listen?

You know,

we're always busy telling God  
what we want.

God already knows what we want.

Come on, sports fans.

The real issue is,

are we listening to God

telling us how to get what

it is that we need to have?

And that's the important thing to do.

I guess that's true.

We tell God what we want,

but we don't listen to what we need.

Well,

and do we really need to tell God

what we want?

He already knows that.

Go on.

Or she, or whatever.

But the point is, God knows.

And then maybe it makes us feel good,

but we don't listen, as you said.

And that's the problem.

And that's part of what I

also talk about and live

like a guide dog.

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,

brought it back to the bed,  
got back up on the bed,  
because Karen would let her  
be on the bed.

I wouldn't let my guide dogs be on the bed,  
but Fantasia got to be on the bed.

She grabbed her bone.

She put the bone into the  
hole of the donut and then chewed on it.

She did all of that herself.

Very bright dog.

Again,

all of these dogs are extremely  
clever and teach us a lot.

Again,

we have to create the environment to  
encourage them to do that.

But that's what we love to do.

I think that's awesome.

I've I got an advanced copy of the book.

And so I've read I've read  
all these stories and.

I highly encourage anyone,

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](http://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](http://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.michaelhingston.com](http://www.michaelhingston.com).

Or email me,

[speaker at michaelhingston.com](mailto:speaker@michaelhingston.com).

And I'd love to meet you and  
talk with you and speak.

Great.

Well, thank you for joining me today,

Michael.

I'm sure you've blessed and  
educated many families today.

Well, I feel blessed for being here.

And if we should do another one of these,  
let's do it.

Any old time.

Okay.

Sounds good.

Maybe we need to have you on

Unstoppable Mindset to talk  
about some of your experiences.

Oh, I would love that.

All right.

I'll send you an email.

OK, thanks.

And for all of you tuning in,

let's you can look for new

episodes of empowering

homeschool conversations

each week where we talk to

people who will empower you

on your journey.

See you soon.

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,

a nonprofit that empowers

families to home educate

diverse learners.

To learn more, visit [spedhomeschool.com](http://spedhomeschool.com).