

[Filmmakers Making A Social Impact: Why & How Filmmaker Gen LaGreca of Winged Victory Foundation Is Helping To Change Our World](#) | by Yitzi Weiner | Authority Magazine | Sep, 2024 | [Medium](#)

Filmmakers Making A Social Impact: Why & How Filmmaker Gen LaGreca of Winged Victory Foundation Is Helping To Change Our World



[Yitzi Weiner](#)

Published in
[Authority Magazine](#)

16 min read



Beyond perfection is excellence. Get your work out. Of course, you want to be thorough, but refrain from being a perfectionist. For example, avoid overediting. I will sometimes edit and edit until I've virtually memorized my work. I then lose objectivity and reach a point of diminishing returns in which further edits aren't any

better than what I had before and might be worse.

As a part of our series about “[Filmmakers Making A Social Impact](#)” I had the pleasure of interviewing Gen LaGreca, President, Winged Victory Foundation.

Gen LaGreca is an award-winning executive producer, film writer, and novelist. Her writings offer innovative plots and themes that inspire freedom and personal achievement. Her recent movie Noble Vision has won over two dozen film festival awards. Gen’s four novels have won thirteen literary awards, garnered praise from magazine magnate Steve Forbes, Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, Past President of the American Medical Association Edward Annis, and others.

Gen has written the stage play adaptations of two of her novels, Just the Truth and Noble Vision. Her commentaries have appeared in Forbes, The Orange County Register, Real Clear Markets, and other publications.

Gen serves as president of the Winged Victory Foundation, whose mission is to advance liberty through storytelling and the arts.

Prior to fiction writing, Gen worked as a pharmaceutical chemist, business consultant, and corporate writer.

Thank you so much for doing this interview with us! Before we dive in, our readers would love to get to know you a bit. Can you share your “backstory” that brought you to this career?

My journey has had uphill climbs, sharp turns, and major forks in the road.

When I was in middle school, I planned to go to a vocational high school. No one in my family had ever gone to college, and the thought of my going never crossed my mind. My aunt, who was my only role model at the time, was a hair stylist, and cosmetology appealed to me as it was more glamorous than any other work the people around me were doing, so I was applying to high schools that offered that training.

It was a guidance counselor in my school who changed the entire course of my life. She called me into her office and explained that she couldn’t put my vocational applications through. I had apparently scored so high on IQ and other tests that she tried to persuade me I belonged in an academic high school preparing for college. She told me to think about the matter, adding that if I insisted on vocational school, she would need to see my parents in her office. This conversation set me wondering about new prospects and wider horizons, which quickly seemed exciting and challenging. I decided to take her advice.

This was a major turning point in my life. It showed me that I could dream a lot bigger than I was doing.

Fast-forward some years, and I graduated from an academic high school, then two colleges, where I received B.S. and M.A. degrees. Years later, I tracked this counselor down to tell her how she had changed my life. It was very gratifying to her. I say to whomever helps a young

person to *dream big* — be it a teacher, a counselor, a friend, or a parent — please know you're a hero of the highest order!

I went through several fields before I found my passion to write fiction and produce films. I was a pharmaceutical chemist, then a business consultant. All this background helps in my novels and films. For example, my first movie, *Noble Vision*, is a medical thriller, which calls on my experience in healthcare. My upcoming movie, *Just the Truth*, features a family's corporate dynasty, which calls on my experience in business.

It was when I was producing industrial video programs for my clients that I realized how much I liked writing and filming. I found another fork in the road that led to movie making. It's been an amazing ride!

Can you share the funniest or most interesting story that occurred to you in the course of your filmmaking career?

I was filming an industrial video at Gatwick Airport in London. In one of those impromptu moments, we enlisted a child who was on the set to play a part. His father, who worked for my client, was there to monitor the filming. We didn't finish the scene and were going to complete it the next day. We told the father and son not to change *anything*. We even suggested that the boy wear exactly the same underwear so that his appearance would have nothing at all different. Well, when he got home, his mother heard he was in a film and promptly sent him for a haircut! The moral to the story is, *always keep mom in the loop*.

As far as an interesting thing that happened, it was when we were filming the climactic scene in a movie. We had to shoot an exterior, nighttime, rooftop scene that was very dramatic as our character was on the ledge and about to jump. Just when we got to the roof, a rare celestial event occurred. A giant blue super-moon, visible only once every 14 years, came into full view in a cloudless sky exactly where we could place it in the shot — and magic happened! Mother Nature, the Goddess of the Moon Diana, or God (as you wish) was our set designer that night.

Who are some of the most interesting people you have interacted with? What was that like? Do you have any stories?

During my adventures in healthcare, I worked as an editor and ghostwriter for a prominent dentist who ran a practice-management consulting company that was highly esteemed in the profession. In his sixties, he bought acres of rocky land in California wine country and decided to start a winery. Imagine the skeptics: *A dentist in the wine business? Really?* He ended up producing award-winning wines that sold out as soon as they were available. His merlot was featured in a gala heads-of-state dinner at the White House, which caused my boss to quip, "Now the president of France gets to taste a good red wine."

He was a great role model in my life. I was writing my first novel when I worked for him. This was after I'd worked in other fields for years. He showed me that it's never too late in life to start something entirely new. If a new vision sparkles for you, follow your star!

Which people in history inspire you the most? Why?

I have to mention Aristotle. Not only did he give the human race the laws of logic, and the pursuit of happiness that is our unalienable right embedded in the Declaration of Independence was influenced by his ethics, but in his great work on esthetics, the *Poetics*, he defines important, timeless principles of dramatic writing at the dawn of drama. He explains the primary

importance of plot and how character development is woven in plot action, which is a Golden Rule for me. Reversals of fortune and sudden revelations that thrill audiences today thrilled Aristotle too. He admired these dramatic techniques in Sophocles' great play *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus learns in shocking revelations that he married his mother and killed his father. I work at constructing plots with surprises, twists, sudden revelations, and changes of fortune as described by our *first drama critic*.

I'd also have to name author Margaret Mitchell. Ever since I read *Gone with the Wind*, I was enthralled with sweeping stories that capture pivotal moments in history through art, through weaving a narrative story around actual events to make history and its impact on the people of the time unforgettable. I'd read about the Civil War in school textbooks, but they couldn't come close to leaving the indelible, deeply moving impression left on me by *Gone with the Wind*.

When I discovered Ayn Rand, I saw you could weave thought-provoking ideas into an entertaining narrative story. Her writings on the glory of the individual, free and unafraid, with a boundless potential for creativity, achievement, and happiness — just sang to me. I wanted to create strong-willed characters imbued with their own vision who don't take orders from any masters. Her novels were great examples of how to express an important theme through riveting plot action.

I had other mentors who weren't actual teachers but accomplished writers that showed me how to write through their novels, plays, and films that inspired me.

Let's now shift to the main focus of our interview, how are you using your success to bring goodness to the world? Can you share with us the meaningful or exciting social impact causes you are working on right now?

The sponsor of our films is our nonprofit charity, the Winged Victory Foundation, which celebrates and champions freedom through narrative films, plays, and novels. One of the things we do is community outreach. We enlisted an actor in our films to play James Madison in an event we produced in partnership with our local library, called *Meet James Madison*. We staged this event to honor Constitution Day. Families packed the room, listening to our engaging Mr. Madison explain such meaty subjects as the structure of our government, the function of each branch, the role of the states, the unalienable rights of the individual, the purpose of government, etc.—all designed to protect their freedom and prevent tyranny. I worried that the script we wrote for Mr. Madison would be too advanced, but I was happy to be wrong. Children as young as eight or ten years old were engaged with the concepts and able to grasp them.

Mr. Madison explained the Bill of Rights and gave prizes to the kids for reading them. One girl volunteered to read the First Amendment. She stumbled through some of the words but was absolutely unembarrassed and determined. We clapped when she finished, and she got a prize. You could tell it was a special moment of success for her.

When we told the kids we'd come back again to introduce them to other of our Founders, one of them asked Mr. Madison: "Could you come back next year as John Adams?" We partnered with the Remnant Trust, an organization that preserves ancient manuscripts dealing with liberty and human dignity. They brought a huge, ancient *Magna Carta* written in Latin, first and early editions of the *Federalist Papers* and the *Constitution*, and other historic works. The kids were allowed to soft-touch these documents, and they stood in line, some waiting a half hour, to see

and feel these texts. One child who was taking Latin was translating a passage in the *Magna Carta* for her parents.

I'm proud that our foundation created and produced *Meet James Madison*. It was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life to influence in a positive way the precious minds of these beautiful children. We made valuable information fun for them to learn by employing our craft of storytelling, acting, and entertainment.

Many of us have ideas, dreams, and passions, but never manifest it. But you did. Was there an “Aha Moment” that made you decide that you were actually going to step up and take action for this cause? What was that final trigger?

Actually, yes! When I was writing videos for staff training programs in the hospitality field, my scripts were becoming more and more colorful and plot-oriented, until one day, a client said to me: “Gen, I can’t have romance in this video about restaurant sanitation.” That was an *Aha Moment*. I realized I wanted to write fiction. I had no idea how to, only the desire to do it. It felt as if I were in St. Louis and wanted to get to Shangri-la. I had to find a way to get there.

Can you tell us a story about a particular individual who was impacted or helped by your cause?

The foundation sponsors a classroom reading program based on my novel *Just the Truth*, a murder mystery about a newswoman who battles powerful political adversaries to solve the murder of a source with information detrimental to them. Our educational materials show teachers how to use the story to incorporate civics lessons about freedom of the press, free speech, and other constitutional issues. A teacher who was excited about having a contemporary novel that would teach important concepts, asked his students to act out one of the scenes.

Well, the students really got into it. They came dressed as the various characters. One wore a big hat and tie and played a business tycoon. Another played the glamorous head of a celebrity entertainment network, another played the CEO of a football team, etc. It was rewarding for the teacher and students — and for me! The teacher came away finding what he called an excellent way of teaching and a break from the classics with a contemporary story the kids could relate to.

It takes effort for teachers to go beyond their already overloaded curriculum and make the time for something new and creative that they believe in. This teacher did, and I think the experience influenced his teaching methods for the future too.

Are there three things that individuals, society or the government can do to support you in this effort?

One, for government: Protect free speech and don't even think of trying to suppress it in any way, directly or indirectly. Stay out of our work. Let the ideas come! Let my ideas and diametrically opposite ideas flow freely. Private-sector outlets like social media and search engine giants, which state that they're neutral platforms for the free exchange of ideas, rather than platforms promoting a certain viewpoint, should walk-the-walk. It's not up to them or the government to decide for the rest of us what's valid or invalid, what's real or fake.

Two, for individuals: Support movies you value and that have messages you want to spread. Tell friends to watch them and, importantly, *write reviews*. Customer feedback is a powerful way to support deserving films, and it doesn't cost you any money. Don't think of it as writing a

“review,” which sounds time-consuming and daunting. Think of it as merely giving a few comments about an aspect or two of the work that appealed to you.

Three: If you like what you read in this interview, check out the Winged Victory Foundation’s website (www.wingedvictoryfoundation.org) and Facebook page ([Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/WingedVictoryFoundation)), and donate to our cause. Your gift is tax deductible and greatly appreciated.



What are your “5 things I wish someone told me when I first started” and why. Please share a story or example for each.

1. Consider the stage-play route for your stories. Discovering live theatre as a place for my stories was another Ah-ha moment that changed my life! After publishing my first novel, I quickly wrote a screenplay. I tried to sell my script to a studio, then tried to put an indie film project together. Nothing worked. The world of movies was closed to me.

Then, a friend was describing how much she enjoyed watching a play that was adapted from a novel. I asked if she thought my novels would make good plays. She said without hesitation, “Absolutely!” That was an epiphany for me. I didn’t know how to write a play script, so I employed the “empirical” or “experiential” way I learned novel and screenplay writing — not by reading books, but by seeing examples of work I admire, then analyzing it and defining the techniques. I bought play scripts that were adaptations of novels, and I watched performances of the plays on YouTube. I saw where a chapter in a book becomes a mere messenger relating the information on stage, or a scene in a book is reduced to a few simple lines of dialog and props on stage. It was fascinating. I wrote a play for my novel *Just the Truth*. We had a wonderful run in a local venue using community-theatre cast and crew.

Then, some creative filmmakers in my area suggested we could film the stage play. That was my introduction to filmmaking! Although we filmed the play on a soundstage without all the cinematic elements of a movie, the story and production were compelling enough to win 10 film festival awards!

Our second and current offering, *Noble Vision*, is a giant step forward with a more significant budget. Filmed on location with professional actors, it won 26 festival awards and obtained distribution. We look forward to its release in October.

All of this happened because I created a stage play of one of my novels and got my foot in the door to dramatic adaptations of my work.

2. Empirical learning and self-teaching can be very powerful. Look to the best writers to be your teachers. Analyze work that you love. I do not mean in any way to copy stories or characters, but just to learn the techniques of the craft. For example, one novelist had a wonderful way of ending her chapters that made me want to turn the page. I learned how to end chapters in my novels and scenes in my screenplays with a zinger fact or teaser, so the reader wants to go on. Another novelist wove two stories together: one showing what the killer was doing and the other showing what his unsuspecting victim was doing. It's a wonderful technique for building suspense that I used in one of my stories. I have notebooks of handwritten notes on novels, plays, movies, TV stories, and operas that appealed to me and why they did. It was the most wonderful experience to learn this way. I'm not saying the books aren't helpful. I just found this way the most valuable for me.

3. Avoid formulas. If you come across this kind of advice, be skeptical: "voiceover is bad," "keep flashbacks to a minimum," "the story must begin with dialog," "every lead character has to have a transformation," etc. Within 5 minutes, I'll bet you can come up with exceptions to rules like these in stories that worked brilliantly and were blockbuster hits. For example, in *Citizen Kane*, among other successful films, the entire story is told in flashback. As another example, there's a sci-fi movie with a legendary director in which the first 15 minutes are entirely flashback and almost entirely voiceover, and it has 7.4 out of 10 stars with 500,000 ratings on IMDb. The audience wants to be thrilled, and there are many ways to accomplish that. There's no one-size-fits-all. Your particular story, itself, has to dictate the approach you'll take.

4. Beyond perfection is excellence. Get your work out. Of course, you want to be thorough, but refrain from being a perfectionist. For example, avoid overediting. I will sometimes edit and edit until I've virtually memorized my work. I then lose objectivity and reach a point of diminishing returns in which further edits aren't any better than what I had before and might be worse.

5. Write to please yourself. Create what you love, what sings to you, not what you think an agent wants. That could backfire. For example, I was in a session at a writer's conference in which a literary agent was telling us writers the kind of material she was looking for. One of the writers in the group said, and I'm paraphrasing: *Last year you said you were looking for mysteries with women sleuths, so I went home and wrote one. Would you look at my manuscript?* The agent replied: *Oh, that was last year. This year, I'm not looking for women sleuths any more.* The writer was crushed. There were times when I was lured into changing my work to please an agent, but the result was uninspired, and the agent didn't take me on anyway.

If you could tell other young people one thing about why they should consider making a positive impact on our environment or society, like you, what would you tell them?

Of course, there are charities, which are wonderful ways to help others, and it's great to get involved with the ones you believe in, but also and perhaps more importantly, don't underestimate your gift to the world through your work. Take credit for that! When you do what you love and it's a worthy endeavor, you make a positive impact on the world. For example, the

hero of *Noble Vision* is a neurosurgeon with a cure for nerve injury. This could wipe out paralysis caused by spinal cord injuries or stroke. The female lead is a ballerina. Through their chosen professions they bring crucial cures and joyful entertainment to society.

We are very blessed that many other Social Impact Heroes read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US, whom you would like to collaborate with, and why? He or she might see this. :-)

Yes, I'd love to meet the superb British creator and writer of my favorite television series, *Foyle's War*: Anthony Horowitz.

The setting is England during the Second World War. The series revolves around the civilian population as Detective Christopher Foyle, an absolute rock of honesty and justice and a quiet hero of the highest order, solves murders in the town of Hastings. These plots, the various murder mysteries, are brilliantly and seamlessly interwoven with an expansive theme: the trials and tribulations of the British people during the war. The themes cover virtually every aspect of living through the war. In one episode, the building where Foyle's assistant, Samantha, lives is bombed, and we see her, unbeknownst to Foyle, sleeping in one of the jail cells as she and the other British people stoically pick up the pieces, return to work, and carry on.

In *Foyle's War*, every character, scene, and line of dialog is essential to solving the mystery and expressing the theme. I'll give you just one example of how the plot and theme are interwoven, which is one of the great gifts of Anthony Horowitz: This episode cover the evacuation of Dunkirk in which the British civilians were called upon by Winston Churchill to rescue the British and Allied forces trapped in the French port of Dunkirk. Every recreational boater and fisherman had to drop everything to cross the English Channel and save the military. It was an extraordinary historical event. Now, there's a murder in Hastings, and the suspect is a young man who is the son of a fisherman. Foyle has to arrest him. But his father pleads with Foyle that he needs the son to help man his boat to rescue the troops. Although the father believes his son is innocent, he solemnly vows to Foyle that he will turn his son in to face justice, but they first have to go to Dunkirk. Observe the moral dilemma for Foyle and the father, and notice how this epic historical event is portrayed through the murder mystery. Did Foyle make a great exception and release the young man to his father? Did his father keep his word? Was the boy innocent or guilty? You'll have to see the episode to find out.

I learned much about essentialized plot writing and theme integration from Anthony Horowitz. I'd love to meet him, just to thank him!!

Can you please give us your favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

If it's going to be, it's up to me. At critical moments, I was given good advice and had important role models. However, I really had to make things happen for myself. I had to be the Prime Mover in my life, and that's what makes life exciting. You try new things, you take risks, and you keep your eye on the goal posts!

How can our readers follow you online?

Follow me on [Facebook](#) and the Winged Victory Foundation on [Facebook](#).

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/wingedvictoryfoundation>

Website: <https://www.wingedvictoryfoundation.org>

Please see our trailer for Noble Vision: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZH6FeUo29E>

This was great, thank you so much for sharing your story and doing this with us. We wish you continued success!

[Written by Yitzi Weiner](#)