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DM - I'm Don Merrill and I'm talking with author Ren Green. Ren has just written a new book with a very long title, and Ren what's the title?

RG - It's a very long story about karma that will probably make me cry.

DM - Tell me about it?

RG - It's about child abuse, negligent schools, a psychotic break and burning man, and the bulk of the action takes place in Mountain View California which is notable because Google is headquartered there and I mentioned Google in the book.

DM - Okay. I was very interested in the different narrative voices that you use to tell the story. It seems like you use two or three different voices.

RG - That's for several reasons. First of all the book is partially about my different interactions with different school systems in Silicon Valley. It was what I observed as a mother, a stepmother, a volunteer and as an employee. I was an instructional aide for little while. So I had some unique opportunities to get into classrooms and see how children are treated and see best and worst practices upfront. The other reason there are number of voices in the book is that personnel at a Mountain View Whisman elementary school, Castro school, pushed me into a psychotic break. They had promised me assistance with my stepson's problems, empty promises, for months, for years. We were strung along, we were told the child problems were getting increasingly worse and there was no action from the school. And in my psychosis, this is pretty funny, in my psychosis I got in my head that I was on a mission from the universe, I rewrote Catholicism for myself, the religion I was raised with, and I believed that the universe wanted me to use the 1979 Newberry award-winning children's novel *The Westing Game* as a technical manual to solve my stepson's problems. And *The Westing Game* is all about identity. It's a book by Ellen Raskin and in it the main character, Samuel Westing, is actually one of multiple identities that he has, he's a master of disguise and he fakes his own death and brings together a collection of 16 people that he calls his nieces and nephews to teach them a lesson. To teach them to be better people, all in the context of this game aware they're all competing for a multimillion dollar grand prize which is an inheritance.

DM - So with that as a backdrop, what made you decide to write a book about your family's experience and your son's experience and your stepson's experience with the school system?

RG - I always wanted to write a book. It was a dream I've had since I was a young child, and if I had my way I'd be a children's author. And I think that if I write something else I'm going to focus on that genre. I love children's novels. But in particular this incident I describe in the book, my son who is now in college, when he was in elementary school he was very anxious child. He was a lot like me actually. And he started developing minor problems with school that slowly escalated. He went to an excellent elementary school. It was a parent participation school in which I got to teach and write curriculum for a couple of hours a week when my son was in kindergarten through fifth grade.

DM - Now had you ever done anything like that before?

RG - I've never taught before. I've never worked with children before. And I was quite frankly just

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going on raw talent and ability because I remembered what it was like to be a kid very vividly. And what it was like to be mistreated by teachers, and what impacts the best teachers had on me, and remembering that the teachers who were really awful and mean, at the age of 43, I cannot remember for the life of me anything any of those people taught me. That their attitudes far overshadowed the learning in the classroom. And so I kept that in mind when I was working with children. What kind of teacher did I want? So I was the teacher I wanted to be. When my son left this learning model, this parent participation rah rah learning model, he started developing real problems. He had a sixth grade teacher who simply would not work with us. He had developing learning disabilities and she was just angry that he wouldn't perform for her. She was very negative to him. We moved into a private school and the private school was fantastic for the first half of sixth grade. Then he got to seventh grade and he had immediate problems. He could not manage the freedom he had, freedom is the wrong word. He was expected to manage his homework to a degree that he never had to before. What we did not know was that he had executive functioning problems. And when he got to the seventh grade they had a project. They do an annual science fair every spring, and my son could not manage doing the project by himself. And a week before the actual science fair, his teacher called me and said you know he hasn't done anything. I was furious. He had been lying to me about the project, he had been telling me that it had been coming along really well. Then suddenly I heard he had done nothing and the teacher asked me what I wanted to do. I said well, what if he does come to the science fair with a blank board? And the teacher said oh thank God you said that, because so many parents would be ready to kill me right now. They be screaming about lawsuits. Natural consequences seem fair, let's go with that. And in the days leading up to the science fair, ...

DM - And I wanted to say I can't imagine allowing their child to go to a science fair with no project as a way of proving cause-and-effect consequences of their actions.

RG - Well I knew parents who absolutely abjectly refuse to allow their children to fail. And one of the messages that we give children every single day in schools, because I was there I was in schools, it's okay to fail, we learn best from failing. And I thought okay let's let him fail and he'll learn something from this. And instead of, oh and he failed in a big way. The morning of the science fair I woke up to this pounding noise. And I couldn't understand what was. I got up, I walked past my son's room, my son's bedroom door was open and the room was empty, and I groggily wondered where my son was. And the pounding was somebody knocking on the front door. I opened the front door and my son had locked himself out of the apartment and he limped in. And he told me that he had thrown himself down the stairs to avoid going to the science fair, and it was all my fault. In fact we spent the morning at a medical facility. What he did was, we were on the second floor of a three floor apartment and he had gone to the landing between the second and third floor, he had climbed over the railing and dropped himself down on the ground. And he only broke a tiny bone in his foot. He could've damaged the growth plate which meant that he could've permanently disabled himself, he could've broken his neck and instead he broke this tiny bone in his foot. And after we got it set in a cast, I said to him you're going to the science fair. You're going back to school right now. If I don't take you back to school, I'll be rewarding you and if I reward you you'll do this again, and you are never doing this again. So he went to the science fair that night with a blank board,

DM - And a broken foot,

RG - And a broken foot and he told parent after parent after parent why he had a cast on his foot and why his board was blank. And that's what prompted my friend JD to say, wow you should

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write a book. And that's the long story to why I wrote a very long story. In 2006 when my son broke a bone in his foot, my friend JD just began to nag me and nag me and nag me about writing a book about school.

DM - You also tell the story of your own experience with school and your own experiences with family and their relationships with school. In fact it seems that your description of your brother, his experiences with school very closely parallel some of the experiences with your son, such that you want to make sure that they were not identical experiences.

RG - Yes. When my brother was an adult we found out that he was bipolar. And bipolar can look like ADHD in children. And I think part of what made my brother tick also was that he was extroverted, and I think bipolar can manifest very differently in introverts and extroverts. I'm an introvert with bipolar. I found out much much later in life that I am bipolar. But my brother had problems from the day he started school. He had self-control issues, he had attention issues, and in the 1970s in Catholic school this is a serious problem. So he became labeled as a problem child almost immediately. My parents spent his entire academic career fighting with educators over him. He acted out in classrooms because he wasn't getting what he needed. And when they begged schools to help them, they were told over and over again that my son, that I'm sorry my brother, my brother more or less didn't deserve an education. He didn't deserve future. That was the message they were given over and over and over. And it became a self-fulfilling prophecy. My brother went on to become a heroin addict. He went on to get into a lot of trouble with the law, he was a dealer for a while and one of the last times in life I've seen him, he had to leave the state he was living in for a couple of days because a rival dealer was trying to kill him. My brother had problems academically from the day he started school. I'm a little different I was the family golden child initially. I was reading before I was in school. I was very advanced in elementary school. I skip the sixth grade and it took me a long time to hit my head on a ceiling basically. School was just too easy and too boring and too stupid and I never had to bother working very hard. So I eventually tanked when I got to University. I went to the University of Virginia. Many mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bipolar, mania, depression, these things start to manifest in puberty to people's early 20s. The onset for schizophrenia is usually 19 to 20. For me I had trouble with depression starting at age 14 and I had my first manic episode at the University of Virginia.

DM - I wanted to tell you that reading your book, it seems that the storytelling is up and down. It seems like there are periods when you have these bursts of enthusiasm and optimism and then just as quickly it seems to slide down into dourness in this and hopelessness and it's up again.

RG - First of all everybody's life tends to be a roller coaster I think. But also mimics the experience of being bipolar which for those who don't know, you go from extreme states. You're really manic you feel invincible like your speed basically. Then you can suffer from crushing depression. So your experience of yourself is extreme highs and extreme lows. There's a blogger, a bipolar blogger named Natasha Tracy, she's at NatashaTracy.com, and she also blogs for a number of mental health gateways, and one of the points she makes about being manic is that you become another person. You become another person and that you're so busy becoming another person that you can't see your becoming a person but your friends can. And they can't tell you that you changing. It's hard to listen. And I become really outgoing, I become really pro-risk, I do crazy things. I would never, if I'm feeling calm, would never put up a website or YouTube video or whatever. So I become more outgoing, I become bigger risk taker, so yeah part of it is being manic. But as I've grown older, I've grown to accept that I am very introverted and I do need a lot of quiet cave time and the Internet is an introverts playground because it enables me the

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opportunity to be very social in a way that doesn't drain me personally because that's one of the things all being an introvert is that you find human interactions can really just gut you. I don't know.

DM - Okay. And I can see that in the writing of the book, I can see that you are going through that or was it just remembering you were going through that when you were going through those experiences?

RG - Well, I walked away from my children's school experiences with post-traumatic stress disorder as well. And when I was writing the book I want to portray the experience of having PTSD. The book is written in a very intense first-person perspective, present tense perspective, and I tried to be as in the moment with each experience as possible. So I tried to remain as true as possible to what was happening in the moment. To give readers a sense of how immediate these memories are, when I'm thinking about what went wrong with my stepson school it is happening in my head right this minute. So I think to answer your question I was, it was really the way it was in the moment although it's true that writing the book did have me bouncing up and down throughout the process.

DM - When you were talking about the experiences that you had any didn't really hit a ceiling into University when I was reading the book it seemed to me that the first ceiling kit was when you were at that elementary school in France. Because it seems that you went from a big you even said yourself that you went from a big fish in a little pond to little fish in a big pot and it seems like your French classmates didn't really didn't really give you and your family a good time. Didn't have a good time there.

RG - Let's take from the beginning. My father was an IRS agent who specialized in America's an American corporations overseas, so from third to fifth grade, my family lived in Paris France. My dad worked at the Embassy there. We actually went to a Catholic school run by American nuns, and school was mostly fantastic in France. But it was our first experience living overseas and Americans were not super popular at this time. They were, we had already been meddling in Middle Eastern affairs, while we were in France the hostages in Iran were taken. So there was a strong anti-American undercurrent, and our neighbors in our Paris neighborhood actually took it out on us. So that was my first experience with hard-core bullying and the tragedy of that is that my parents, my parents always happened to appear when we cracked and start fighting back with these kids so what my parents saw was that we were the aggressors and that we were creating problems when in fact we were being very badly bullied. And so my parents never ever believed we were victims. The constant refrain was that will obviously you did something to instigate it. And I think that's one of the themes of the book, is about bullying and the impact that bullying can have on you as children and adults. It's pretty serious. It had a pretty serious impact on me. And then after three years in France, we went to Ottawa Ontario and there I was very very badly bullied. I was the only American student at this middle school, I started school two weeks late because we moved late, I have been working well ahead of grade level at my school in France and suddenly the school jumped me ahead to seventh grade. And my Canadian classmates were not thrilled that the American suddenly showed up, and I guess made them feel stupid. I did not want attention, I was the kind of kid who wanted to keep my head down to my nose clean and I didn't want anybody, I was very shy child. So the last thing I wanted was attention and suddenly I had a lot of it just for skipping a grade right in front of them.

DM - I want to make connection between that experience that you had in school and the

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experience that you had teaching school. Because I think it's interesting that you had a period when you were in school where you decided to kind of dumb yourself down because you are tired of being punished for being smart. But then when you are teaching school as an adult you wanted credit for what you knew and for how you help those kids in the school that you are volunteering at advance, but you weren't getting credit for that either. And I just wondered did it ever feel like I can't win here?

RG - I went to graduate school for a while, and a friend of mine there we talked about middle school for little bit and are middle school experiences. And he noted that when you get to middle school, it's cool to be intelligent in elementary school and you get to middle school and puberty sets in and group dynamics change in tween's and suddenly becomes harder to be smart, becomes uncool to be smart. And my entire identity was bundled into being academically advanced at that point. And it is extremely common even now, for girls particularly, to dumb themselves down when they get to middle school and high school because the are consequences, there are social consequences. And I think that when I got to be an adult, I wanted to be clear that it is groovy to be intelligent. To celebrate that. The school that my son attended, the elementary school my son attended, we talked a lot about Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which is used in schools to think about the different ways that we can be intelligent. And so not only was I trying to celebrate being smart and intelligence in the kids that I taught, but also to examine the different ways that we can be intelligent. So maybe you are struggling in a subject over here, but that doesn't make you dumb. That your weakness but you've got strength somewhere.

DM - Talk a little bit about that because if my understanding of that is correct, there are people who are intelligent because they draw their intelligence through tactile. And then there are people who draw their intelligence through visual. And then there are others who draw their intelligence through listening to instruction versus people who read instructions. That what you're talking about?

RG - Somewhat. That's part of it. But Gardner's theory in particular talks about kinesthetic intelligence. So people can move their bodies really well athletes and dancers. Interpersonal intelligence, extra personal intelligence, so how intelligent you are dealing with people, and how intelligent you are about yourself. Mathematical intelligence, logical thought intelligence. But part of it is how we internalize information. It's a way of thinking about what kinds of teaching serves as best as individuals.

DM - You had this tense of speaking, like him in talking to how you will come to respect your father for being a better listener. I was just trying to understand what tense that was because you use a couple of different tenses when you spoke.

RG - I kind of boxed myself into an authorial corner actually by focusing on the present tense. And there were times when I wanted to make editorial comments but I wanted, I did it in a way that indicates that someday I'm going to get to a different place around this.

DM - Right. That's what sounded like.

RG - Because the friend of mine who edited the book said, there were times when I just wanted to smack you. And when I was writing it there were times when I thought how could I have been

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so stupid about this organization, those people, the empty promises I heard. And I felt there were times I just had to say, you know what eventually I'm going to figure it out.

DM - And I want to go back to that too. You are really angry at some of these organizations.

I am

DM - I mean whether it's the counseling organization, the school district, you really... As I was reading this book, I was thinking, okay is this a warning that she is writing for parents, is it an archive of your own personal experience or is it sort of like I told you people I was a come back and get you, and here it is.

RG - I told them I was going to write a book. I am angry. I am very angry. I worked my tail off for the Mountain View Whisman school district.

DM - And that's something else. In the book you don't identify them. But in the interview now, your identifying them.

RG - Yes. In the book I use aliases. The book is also about Burning Man project in Portland that I got involved with after I escaped Mountain View. And for my own entertainment, I gave all of these organizations and people aliases. I called the Mountain View Whisman school district Skull crusher Mountain View.

DM - Skull crusher, that's telling.

It's after a Jonathan Coulton song, skull crusher mountain. It's about a mad scientist, he's nuts. I became crazy doing what I was doing for them. But for 10 to 12 years, I was a very loyal volunteer. I got involved with the Mountain View educational foundation, I designed their logo. I taught many kids, I ran a PTA fundraiser, I sat on the district committee and I drank the Kool-Aid. I drank the Kool-Aid quite thoroughly. And all of the district literature over and over and over, we serve the needs of all children. We care about every child. If your child is struggling, we will do what it takes to get them what they need. And when my stepson, who was seven years younger than my son, began kindergarten and began struggling and part of it was because he had a mentally ill mother who was abusing him, and these people who had been telling me for years that they cared about every child dropped the ball on him. They didn't follow the law, they didn't deliver the service as promised and what really frustrated me about that was that the rhetoric was on target. That when I saw people in the same school district organization, get together work together and collaborate in a way they promise, they made magic for children. That they were able to solve problems for children quickly and early in their development. And watching people just evade and avoid their own values was infuriating and frustrating and it was detrimental the kid, it was detrimental to his classmates, it had a huge negative impact on the learning in the classrooms that he was in and it was devastating. The consequences to my family were devastating.

DM - Your focus to get them to follow their own rules was laserlike. I mean you researched the rules and regulations and policies and laws. And then you put those in their face and said this is who you say you are, this is what you're supposed to do, you are obligated to do it. Most times most people let that kind of stuff slide because they think, I can't fight the system. I don't think

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those ever crossed your mind.

RG - When you have front row seats to the complete destruction of someone's life the way I did with my brother, my brother was a super bright guy, he was one of the funniest people I've ever met, just really quick thinker, not get what he needed in school and to see him, to watch him become a heroin addict, to watch them try to kill himself over and over again, to watch him end up in jail busted for DUI, to have front row seats to this because educators would not work together, there was absolutely no way I was going to allow this to happen to my stepson, absolutely no way. I could not live with myself if I had just sat there and let the dysfunction slide because I understood all too well what some of the potential consequences could of been to that child's future.

DM - Well just by the fact that you read the westing game, the fact that you researched police interrogation techniques, I mean that tells me that you were very prepared to do whatever it took to get these people to follow their own rules.

RG - Well, the police interrogation techniques, as I said my stepson's mother was mentally ill. We strongly think it's a borderline personality. She was untreated and she refused to get help. She was keeping the child out of school, it's very common for borderline personalities and narcissistic mothers to sabotage their children's education. That's what she was doing and there were times when, there was a time when we get dragged into counseling with her, my husband and I, to talk to the child's mental health intern. And, oh God, everybody knew that woman was crazy, everybody knew she was being abusive to her child. Everybody knew it was emotional abuse, everybody knew she was sabotaging him except the mental health professionals in the equation. And so we picked him up and move into a different mental health facility, and when we all got dragged into this meeting together, I was like dammit, I'm going to manipulate her to do what I want so that they can see what were dealing with. So I went prepared. I thought we were going to be a long-term counseling situation with her but I did look up police interrogation techniques. How do you manipulate someone into giving you the information they want or to acting the way that you want in a high-stakes situation? That's the way I saw it.

DM - And so in the end, as it turned out, things worked out pretty well because your stepson his schooling education became more stabilized, he became a much happier and healthier child.

RG - He, it's little more involved than that. He did become a happier person. My husband worked overtime. I've never seen a man work so hard on his parenting.

DM - This is your ex?

My ex. My ex-husband became a much better father. And just having that emotional and psychological stability in the child's life made a huge difference. But actually I got more ruthless than police interrogation techniques. When my stepson's school finally said we put in writing, we know she's the problem and were not conduit thing about it, his second grade teacher told me she was afraid his anxiety could lead to depression someday,

DM - Which might lead to suicide

RG - Which might lead to suicide

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DM - And that was a big trigger for you

RG - That was a huge trigger because my brother had tried to kill himself multiple times, my son had thrown himself down over the side of our building and I just could not allow that to happen. Absolute refused to allow that to happen. That's what I had a psychotic break. That's what I thought the universe was putting me on a mission to use The Westing Game to fix problems. And it turned out that the child's maternal grandmother, a regional social service director for a Midwestern division of the Salvation Army. So she was a social services professional. She had been asked to help and she had enabled her daughter's to continually academically abuse her child. So I just snapped and I got into my head that it was my job to threaten this woman with blackmail. And that was pretty much what finally did the trick. When I, I brought down the hammer on the child's maternal grandmother and said your daughters act like this, you need to do something about it you need to leverage your professional experience in your contacts, and you need to deal with it.

DM - Tell me how burning Man fits in with all this

Things escalated to the point where I caught this school districts mental health contract or basically breaking the law. They are still illegally withholding my stepson's records, mental health records from his father. And initially they handed over one year after following the initial request, we went back to them and said look you didn't, we know he was seen there for two years. They initially told us, well he wasn't our patient for the second year when in fact we had multiple witnesses including a former intern for the organization who told us that, yes in fact he was seen there. I brought this to the attention of the school district leadership, and they, two of them told me in emails that, that their relationships with their mental health contractor were too delicate for them to enforce state and federal patients rights law. Which was absolutely outrageous to me. And then I actually had open complaints against a of couple personnel at the time. And I learned a few months later by a local paper the Mountain View voice, that when they were telling me that their interpersonal relationships were too delicate for them to follow the law, a principle that I had an open complaint with was dating the school district superintendent and they were able to manage that little sticky interpersonal problem just fine. They hired a lawyer to rearrange their chain of command so that these two could basically go steady while they were not providing any kind of oversight to their mental health contractor. So I didn't know what to do with this. I just could not quit fighting. And at some point I read that YouTube videos were all the rage in getting consumer complaints resolved. A bunch of Bank of America customers had made YouTube videos that actually lit a fire under the bank to change some policies. And so I made this YouTube video about the school district's ridiculous response to my concerns and brought it to the attention of the parents at my stepson's school. And they completely blew me off, but I'm also, I was a raver in California and I've also been to Burning Man. And what the parents of that school didn't know was that I also asked a bunch of ravers and people with burning man for assistance for getting the word out about this injustice about the school district. And the burners and ravers busted their butts to help me. They spread that link to the YouTube video around, they did everything they could to try to get me help and attention and support, they accompanied, two of them accompanied me to a school board meeting. And while the parents just completely blew me off. And again, community is a very big buzzword in rave and Burning Man communities and it was a very big buzzword at my son's school the rah rah community school. And when the parents had an opportunity to exercise good community, they completely failed, they completely failed me. And while the people who go to the woods and listen to electronic music and often take

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drugs, they actually were more invested in fairness and justice for children in Mountain View.

DM - Your whole story is about reasonableness and how it's ignored. I mean one of the questions I have is how could anybody ignore reasonableness.

RG - You know, it's a microcosm. I think the school district in California is a microcosm of what's happening at the top levels of federal government. You have a collection of people who seem to have forgotten why they're in these positions in the first place and who they're supposed to be serving.

DM - But most people don't have your kind of advocacy. So like you said, when you were at the school board meetings and you are trying to get others parents to buy into, because I assume you aren't the only parents who had these kinds of issues with their children with the school district, with the counseling agency, but yet these other parents didn't go the extra mile. They didn't do that kind of work.

RG - I think part of it's socially common. I think part of it's an outcome of the helicopter parent attitude. Everybody wants something, every body wants everything to be nice. Nobody wants to rock the boat, nobody wants to be the one to say you're wrong. Or they can't necessarily believe, Oh this person is so nice how could they possibly be totally destroying somebody else's life. Or they just don't want to get involved. There's all kinds of reasons that people just, they just don't want to get involved. I don't know, that's one of the problems with my story. That's one of my frustrations with myself. I just can't let it go. That other people seem to be able to walk through life and accept all manner of dysfunction around them, all manner of sacrifice of values for personal comfort. I find the whole thing frustrating. Just having been really involved in the school every year, they get all crazy for Martin Luther King day and celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. and all his accomplishments. And obviously, marching on Washington was not comfortable, being fire hosed and arrested and attacked by dogs not comfortable. It's like they did can't make the connection between the effort and the outcome.

DM - And that made me think of two other things. You don't seem to have a whole lot of patience for anyone that you seem to perceive to be below you intellectually.

RG - No, no and I think part of that is a function of when you're they rock star academic as a kid, that something may instill in you pretty young, that being intellectual is superior. But it's this kind of narrow intellect. But as you pointed out, I'm angry and I'm not going to deny it.

DM - Or sugarcoated it.

RG - Right. I'm not going to sugarcoat it and if this is happened to you, wouldn't you be mad?

DM - Yes.

RG - I mean, being mad is really a reasonable response. So I run out of patience for people who kept telling me the same silly things over and over again. Will we can't help because our hands are tied, blah blah blah. It was unbelievably frustrating.

DM - Whether it was the counseling agency or whether it was your stepson's mom, or the school

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district, it seemed like you could probably have a lot of patience for someone who was just not capable of getting it. But you had less patience for people who clearly could get it but chose not to.

RG - Will these people all had educations behind them that told them that mental illness needs to be, that it develops, that it needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible. I mean we're talking about people who, some of these people have degrees in education from Stanford. And the book ends with an interview with a heavy metal musician who also goes to burning man, who is also credentialed teacher in Portland and he's pretty fresh out of school school. And demonstrated to me that the problem is that school sites, the problem is at therapy organizations, that these people learn what they're supposed to, they get the right foundations of knowledge about how to interact with people, of how to solve their problems. But something seems to go awry at the school site, or in the therapist's office. That they seem to check their educations at the door. And that, I find that, incredible he frustrating. If I know it you've got a PhD in education and I know that you got extensive academic knowledge about how to serve the needs of the children you're supposed to be putting first, I find that absolutely aggravating. Because those people aren't ignorant, they in fact did homework and wrote papers and wrote Masters theses, and doctorates that they in fact had been immersed in this knowledge for years and years and years. So that makes me particularly angry. I wasn't telling them anything that they should not have already known.

DM - The thing about novel like yours, first would you call her novel?

RG - It's a creative nonfiction.

DM - The thing about this is, a lot of times when you ask people how much of this has to do with your own life, people say well there are elements of it about me but is not really about me because they always keep that distance. You don't want to keep the distance. You want people to know that this happened to me. And I just wondered, why are you completely revealing yourself like this?

RG - As a country, we are in the middle of a national education crisis. Our college graduation rates are the lowest in first world countries. We are getting our butts kicked academically by school systems all around the world, notably Finland. We know that Asian countries far excel in math over us. And our politicians keep coming up with what seem like really simplistic responses. Like No Child Left Behind was George W. Bush's brainchild. And testing children to determine how good their teachers are. And one of the reasons why wrote this book is to show how complicated it is. It is complicated that a child could be tanking academically because he's got a learning disability that's not being addressed. The child can be tanking academically because his parents are idiots, or abusive, or one of the biggest problems I saw at school sites was actually bad administrators, bad principles. So we are repeatedly punishing teachers over and over and over because of student test score outcomes when fact it's complicated. There are so many things could go wrong at school site. I recently met another Portland teacher and we talked about, well what would you do and what solutions would you Institute? It's so complicated. And we want to legislate these simple, easy solutions. If we get rid of the unions, well have better schools. If we test the hell out of our kids, we'll have better schools. If we change the curriculum will have better schools. What my book reveals is that any one can be a problem at any time and the biggest problem in a child's life academically is the adult who won't collaborate. And that can be anyone it can be the counselor, it can be the teacher, it can be to resource person, it can be the principal, it

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can be the parent.

DM - Your husband's ex-wife, she homeschooled.

RG - No she wanted a homeschool. My ex-husband's wife who we were eventually told had a borderline personality by licensed counselor, she had an undergraduate and graduate degrees in child development and desperately wanted to be a teacher. And she was a terrible parent. Here's an example of disconnect between the education and behavior. Academically she demonstrated over and over that she understood that certain things were appropriate in child development and yet she would just treat her toddler like an adult, she turned that kid into a huge brat and she desperately wanted to homeschool him which would've been an absolute disaster. He was falling behind in reading and writing which were her favorite subjects and excelling in my husband's favorites which were math and science. Our theory was that she did want that child in school because she didn't want to hear criticism of her parenting.

DM - Well, the reason I bring that up is because, as you know homeschooling has had a resurgence in the last decade or so. And a lot of people feel that the education system does suffer from a lot of things you're talking about, bad educators, bad policy, bad administrators. And so people are sort of reverting to homeschooling and they want to have more control over their child's education. So then what you think about that? What do you think about homeschooling as a viable alternative to the problems that the public school system faces?

RG - It depends who's doing it. My husband's ex-wife said homeschooling so many times that my husband and I never wanted to hear the term homeschooling ever again. But I do have friends who homeschool their children, and they are doing fantastic jobs. Homeschooling is tough. Homeschooling is tough. Trying to wear the parroting hat in the teaching hat, because you're balancing multiple types of relationships with your child when you're homeschooling. Finding the materials, knowing what materials to trust. But my friends who homeschool have done a fantastic job of figuring out what kind of learners their children are, which makes a huge difference. Figuring out the best possible materials, because they are not slaves to anyone's district or state curriculum. They can pretty much find the best fit for their kids. And they're also very good at making sure their children are well socialized. One of my friends who homeschools, her daughter's kids were all very involved or are all very involved in gymnastics, so they have always had teammates and friends. The friends I know who did it were very conscious of all the issues and are doing everything in their power to get their kids everything they need.

DM - And your exposure has been across all kinds of available teaching. There's been homeschooling, there's been public school and then private school. Talk about private school a little bit because you also have lots of experience with private school.

RG - Private school is not a guarantee. And I also have, my son's elementary school was public but alternative. He went to another public elementary school for half a year. He ended up at a Montessori school, K-8 Montessori school, and he finally landed a charter school. So I have had experience with multiple formats. And they all had the same kinds of problems. And I think that's where things I found interesting. Even though it was frustrating at the time and I wanted to scream, they all had similar problems. People who don't want to admit that the child is not thriving on their watch. People who don't want to do the self-examination that's required, and when that happens a private school it's really frustrating because it's an expensive loss. When my son was at the private Montessori school, finally my ex-husband, his father and I started more or less

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homeschooling our child. My ex-husband was paying \$18,000 a year so that we could buy books we can buy materials, we can make sure the kid gets always work done and because it's Montessori format, they don't allow parents in the classroom. They're very uptight about the kind of training people get when they're in the classroom. And personally I think that's a mistake. That's a mistake. I think if you're dealing with a school that doesn't want you in the classroom, that doesn't want their teachers technique's and methods scrutinized, in real-time, during learning and instruction hours, run. Run away. Right away, because you can't have an honest, intellectual discussion with the person who will not allow you anywhere on their turf. And I think that when you got a child who's got special needs and learning problems, it is essential that you get a systemic response. You get everybody to the table, that everybody can have an honest conversation and make a contribution. And the Montessori schools attitude was, well, you're not trained. You don't get it. You don't understand. When in fact, they were the problem in my son's life.

DM - A lot of parents are very passionate about their child's education while their children are school-age. And then after their children get out of the school system, I mean you can see this problem with school districts and the revenue base. Parents who have had children in school and no longer have children in school don't want to have to pay for school because they don't have to pay the property taxes since they don't have kids in school anymore. Why do I have to pay? I'm just wondering, do you think that parents, adults, society needs to get more involved in the welfare of the school system and the welfare of the children who become the next generation of community?

RG - I think absolutely. Because the social consequences of the kids who don't get the education to which they are legally entitled, that were all paying for, the social consequences are huge. The other night I watched PBS Frontline episode about Adam Lanza who shot the kids at Sandy Hook elementary school. And sure enough, I predicted, that that child had special needs. And sure enough absolutely, he had an IEP, an individualized education plan, from a young age, he had all sorts of learning problems. Now I'm not saying learning problems create criminals, that's absolutely not true. And I'm not a criminal even though I had learning problems later in life. But I've also seen in my brother's behavior, my brother cost taxpayers more money in the justice system because he became a junkie. He became a criminal. And we all pay for that. Everybody was paying taxes in the 80s and 90s paid for my brothers problems. And so if we don't get children what they need, they put a dent on systems as adults. They become involved in social service programs. If they can't support themselves because they didn't you get the education you are supposed to get in the first place. But this isn't new, we already knew this. We already know that from looking at kids in poor urban environments that their prospects, when they don't have good teachers, when they don't have good schools, when they don't have school supplies, when they don't have safe classrooms, when they don't have enough money for desks and textbooks, we already know it's going to have a huge negative impact on their adult lives. Girls can get pregnant early. You know, if we want fewer welfare mothers we should invest more money and time in schools. If we want fewer drug addicts, then they should have better prospects in schools because school, what school dictates for the rest of our lives is huge. Is huge.

DM - So what do you hope to accomplish with this? What you want to see happen when this thing hits the e-book reader?

RG - One of the questions I want people to ask themselves is what is crazy? What does it mean to be crazy? What's crazier, having a degree in education and then abusing your child and taking

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all that knowledge and throwing out the window and mistreating your child? What's crazy? I don't know. I would like people's eyes to be open to the impact of the special needs child on their classrooms. For parents to realize that the child, even if your kids are doing fine in class, that child is sucking up resources, that child is sucking up teachers time, that child is draining resources and impacting the education of the people around them. I would like people to be aware that the lack of due process in schools actually allows us to continue down a very destructive, negative path nationally. Like I've said, we have the lowest college graduation rate in the first world countries. I would like people's eyes to be open to how few consequences there are for adults in our education systems, and how it is a very complicated system and situation and that we just can't keep punishing teachers and we can't keep threatening to yank the unions. We should all be thinking about ourselves in broader terms. As adults and how we behave, and how we respond to the rules, and what our real values are. And ideally, if I absolutely had to make a wish list, I would mandate school counselors for every school. That's not true. Elementary schools are not required to have school counselors when we know that the research is out there that we know, that the sooner we deal with kids problems, the better off that child would be, the better off the school communities going to be, the less impact that child can have on resources later in school and in life. But if I could make my wish list and wave my wand and turn things into law, I would definitely come up with ways to examine administrator behavior, examine leadership behavior and take a good look at whether or not policies are being made to actually to serve children. And Michelle Rhee is a controversial figure and I don't, I approve where she's coming from in that adults do a lot of self-serving things in schools on taxpayer dime. I don't agree with her methods in dealing with them but she is a leading national voice who's talking about how adults just do whatever they want with no consequence and how unfair it is, and how it wastes money and waste resources and waste time. And waste futures.

DM - So, this book took a lot out of you?

RG - It did. I spent, I spent, like I said I'm bipolar, and I was in a manic state the whole time I was writing. I recently finished. I crashed. I crashed into a depressive phase, I was running on absolute pure mania to complete the book, to write the book, to think about the book.

DM - Well for people who suffer from the same manic and depressive swings that you do, at least they know that if there is a project that I have on hold, there's no reason that they have to keep it on hold. They can get it done. They can do it because you did it.

RG - I learned I was bipolar in late 2011. And one of the things that people say about being bipolar, it's like fun half the time. Mania is a high. Mania is a high. It's can be a very productive state if you've got something going on. Fixation is bundled in with mania, and that really helps me write a book because I was just so driven to it. So mania can be very useful. But it's also very destructive. I described how in a manic state, I got involved with a man while I was married, believing that, once again I was on a mission from the universe. It is not uncommon for people to have affairs when their manic. It's not uncommon for people to spend a lot of money they don't have. So it can be extraordinarily destructive if you don't have something productive to put your energy into.

DM - Right and I mean, anybody who would know that and read the book and sees your own personal travails, they would probably wonder, well Your Honor this is not a credible witness. Because, how would we believe and depend on her story when we can see, personally, she's kind of flaky?

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RG - That's true. And I was thinking about this earlier. One of the things, I mean I end up having, I destroyed my marriage after I busted my butt for my stepson to fix our lives and get my husband's ex-wife under control, I ultimately destroyed our marriage by getting involved with a man during a manic episode believing that I had trained my entire life to be with him and he was my destiny when really I was just in a profound manic state. I saw something shiny and I went for it. But the other part, the point I make in the book is that well you know everybody else has been lying so now it's my turn. And I think one of the things that does is it demonstrates that when you are living in a state of dysfunction for so long, it's hard to hold on to your values. I mean you mentioned that I feel very strongly about my values, but they went to hell eventually too. Because I just surrounded by people who doing whatever they want and then finally found a compelling reason to do whatever the hell I wanted. And so I think that's why it's one of the reasons why it's really important that adults act like adults because we can drag each other down. So no, I'm by far perfect human being. I've made many mistakes. I've done a lot of stupid things. I've blown up my life so many times, it's ridiculous. And for being a credible witness, well I wouldn't have written the book unless I really could prove every word of it. I have a stash of documentation that people left trails. So I may not be the most likable witness and I may not be the nicest person but I can prove myself in a court of law which is all that really matter to me. Because it enabled me to write the book that I wanted to write.

DM - Speaking of that, do you have any other books planned or are you going run for the hills now?

RG - I've got a deal with the one book. Like you said, it actually did take a lot out of me and I am looking forward to having conversations with people about it, not just in front of microphones. But to get people's experiences at the final at their stories are. Because my told people I was writing a book about education and burning man, people would tell me all their stories and so I'm not alone. All kinds of people have been crapped on by their teachers or not got what they need from schools, or their educations didn't exactly prepare them for real life. So I think everyone has a school story. Mine just happen to be really extreme and intense.

DM - OK Ren I really enjoyed this conversation. And tell me the name of your book again.

RG - It's called a very long story about karma that will probably make me cry. I wrote it, I'm Ren Green, and I co-anchor the news here as Ren Green but I wrote it as RenSter which is my Burning Man name. You get information on buying the book at my website, baconpirates.com which is exactly what it sounds like – Baconpirates.com.

DM - Alright Ren, thanks a lot. This has been a pleasure.

RG - Thank you Don.

DM - I'm Don Merrill. Thanks for listening.

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