

# Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR

## 1. **How was the idea to write *INVINCIBLE* born?**

I was looking for a practical book that could offer me solutions to help people who grew up with domestic violence. But as I searched for such a tool, I couldn't ever find one! There were a lot of memoirs and academic research-based books that clearly made the case for the problem but did not offer enough in the form of practical solutions that I was seeking and thought were needed.

## 2. **Why the title "*Invincible*" – don't you not think it sounds unapproachable to most?**

We spent a lot of time looking for the right title. A lot of them were fact-based and many were negative, sad and painful. I just wanted one that was hopeful. We tested many with a pilot group of individuals who came from childhood homes like these, to find out what most strongly resonated with them. "*Invincible*" was it. Also, there's really no word more fitting that better describes who they are, although they are mostly unaware of this fact. The definition of "*invincible*" is "*incapable of being overcome.*" And that's precisely what they are. They survived, they made it through all the pain and fear. Despite everything they endured, they're not dead, they're here today because they persevered. They've lived through the worst fear imaginable and they were not overcome. They are still standing. And so long as they realize the TRUTHS and get past the LIES, they will never be defeated because their lives have been so fire tested that they've become invincible. They inherited a powerful unexpected gift growing up with domestic violence – a hidden inheritance that gives them unique strengths others do not have. They just don't know it yet. But they will after reading this book. Also, this title stands out, because it's one of the last things most former children of domestic violence associate with themselves and believe they are. But if browsing the self-help section, looking for answers and solutions, whose attention wouldn't be drawn to "*Invincible*?" I know mine would and everyone we've surveyed felt the same. Seeing this claim on a book about them gives them a reputation to live up to – one that I hope compels them to pick up this book. And that must occur for their journey to begin.

## 3. **Why do you claim that this is the first book of its kind? What makes it that?**

This book is the first specifically meant for the 40 million former children of domestic violence. There has never before been a book on the market that speaks uniquely to them or aims to help them reshape their flawed belief system and self-concept, shaped in childhood by a set of Lies they learned that often carry over into adulthood and keep them from reaching their full potential. There are many research books, and memoirs, and books geared towards therapists and professionals. But none directed to me and others like me. I work a computer quite effectively even though I'm not a computer scientist. Why then can't I on my own learn how to undo what happened to me growing up with domestic violence? This is that book.

## 4. **How did the key theme of the Lies & Truths emerge?**

Since I was not a researcher or expert on the subject, I reached out to those who are. In 2010, my foundation hosted a summit of academics, neuroscientists, and researchers to figure out promising ways we could use their knowledge to help the billion people globally who were living or had lived with domestic violence as children. Key questions were: How do people who've grown up with domestic violence feel? What do they believe about themselves? What feelings do they experience most frequently? How do these feelings impact their lives? The words that came up most frequently were *guilty, resentful, sad, alone, angry, hopeless, worthless, fearful, self-conscious, and unloved*. I could relate – I realized that I believed each of these Lies about myself. These beliefs shaped my actions and many of those actions kept me from reaching my potential. I knew the same was true for many of the others who had grown up with a similar upbringing and who had learned and were carrying the same set of false beliefs. But for every Lie, there's always a corresponding Truth. And what we know is that we can unlearn what was learned and begin to transform our reality. I wanted all those who were impacted as I was in childhood and robbed of the life they were meant to lead, because of the Lies that were unconsciously coded, to have the opportunity to unlearn them and reclaim the life they were meant to have. That's how the book theme emerged.

## 5. **What do you believe are the most important messages or take-aways from this book?**

The simple but powerful message I hope to instill is that if you lived with domestic violence when you were young, you no longer have to live with the effects today. We are capable of change. Having grown up in that house, there are certain Lies you learned about who you believe you are, and they may be holding you back from reaching your full potential and experiencing happiness that was meant for you. For every Lie, there is a transformative Truth. And buried beneath all of our childhood pain is a whole arsenal of hidden strengths—

special gifts. That is our unexpected inheritance. Because you survived difficulties others never had to face, you have far more potential than you realize. These hidden gifts – qualities of resilience, courage, and perseverance – are now available to you as an adult. They are just below the surface, ready to be used to achieve whatever outcomes you wish.

**6. *How difficult was it to open up your life and tell the story of CDV by telling your own very personal and private story?***

It was difficult, in the beginning. My mother was upset about it, which made me more upset. As I learned, this is one reason why no one talks about it – out of fear that their parents would be upset. So they wait until they're dead. I spoke with my mom and we didn't want to do that, so I pressed ahead with this and it got easier to tell my story. But to write about the childhood experiences of the others featured in the book and to hear their pain and struggle, I felt it. I felt their emotions. They were mine. But I also got to feel their confidence, freedom, passion, guidance, gratitude, compassion, accomplishment, trust, attractiveness, and love as their story concluded.

**7. *What was the worst part about growing up with domestic violence?***

The uncertainty, the fear. Not knowing what would happen from one moment to the next. Not knowing what to expect. Not being able to stop it. Waking up in the middle of the night to screams, the noise of things being knocked over. Cracking the door open, my heart pounding, creeping down the stairs, not knowing what terrible scene I would find there. Having to relive this fear night after night. Close second were the consuming feelings of guilt and worthlessness – thinking it's my fault that it keeps happening, that it's up to me to stop it, that I can stop it, if only I wasn't such a coward. And feeling so worthless because I failed. And although, many times I was physically hit, that pain, that feeling was nothing compared to the anxiety from the build-up and the guilt of not being able to stop it. I, as many people who grew up living with domestic violence that I spoke with would agree, would have preferred to take the physical beating on any given night than have to endure the anticipation and the guilt.

**8. *What were the feelings you most often felt growing up in that home?***

I felt every single Lie growing up. But I most strongly felt intense feelings of shame, guilt, and worthlessness that I wasn't able to stop it. I believed it was my job to stop it and I should have been able to, but failed. I had failed to protect her, because I was too much of a coward to take action. The guilt and feeling of worthlessness lasted for years. I also felt angry and resentful that I had to endure this ordeal while others were living carefree lives, blissfully unaware of what was happening to me, loved and happy. I envied them. Also, often, after the violence had ended, my mother would take it out on me. So, I felt unloved. I had to be unloved – if all of this was happening around me day after day and no one thought of me. I felt alone – I was sure that no one else had to face what I faced and knowing I absolutely couldn't tell anyone about it made me feel even more alone and disconnected from others – trapped in my silence.

**9. *Was there a specific moment that sparked clarity when you knew you were going to tackle childhood domestic violence at some point in your future?***

The first defining moment was when at the age of seven, deeply wounded by the violence I was seeing everyday at home, I vowed to do everything I could to end domestic violence. This promise led me down a critical path in more ways than I realized. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but as I look back, I realize my entire adult life has been about trying to answer the question, "What happens to people who grow up living with domestic violence?" I may not have been asking the right questions most of the time, but I was always seeking the answers. Walking down this path, it was inevitable that one day I would take more decisive action towards tangible solutions. The second defining moment was much later, during a business meeting I was having at Nickelodeon, completely unrelated to this issue. Their executives shared a fascinating statistic about what most parents believed were their fondest memories from childhood. My childhood memories were mostly awful. But, I thought, why should that have to be the case for others who grow up the same way? At that moment, I knew that I could do something to change those memories for them...and that I would. Soon after, in 2007, I created the Makers of Memories foundation, which provided trips for kids who shared my childhood background, to help give them joyful memories. They needed dreams to get through the nightmares and I was determined to give them that. But one day, while on a trip to Disney World, I was reminded by a young child that my efforts were off the mark. This led me on a journey of more learning that brought about new revelations about how to effectively tackle this problem, transforming the purpose, scope, and action plan of my foundation into what would ultimately become Children of Domestic Violence.

**10. How did you end up not repeating the cycle of violence – what would you attribute that to?**

I hate suffering. All the memories I had of my childhood were awful. I could never imagine being responsible for causing such pain to another, especially not my own children. This was unthinkable to me. I believe at the forefront was the unique, inherited ability to truly understand pain and fear that kept me from going down a path that would have caused similar pain and fear to someone whom I love.

**11. What motivates you today to continue striving towards your full potential? What drives you?**

Esteem for self when I achieve things that are difficult and see firsthand the evidence that proves and reinforces the TRUTHS I now know – that I'm confident, free, passionate, guided, grateful, compassionate, accomplished, trusting, attractive, and loving. Also, a strong desire to ensure that the 1 billion others who grew up living with domestic violence as I did have access to these same TRUTHS.

**12. In what ways has dedicating yourself to finding answers and solutions to childhood domestic violence changed your life? What new things did you discover about yourself?**

I was compelled to seek answers because this was an issue that deeply impacted me and my family. Growing up, I felt alone and believed I was the only one going through this. There were things I struggled with and after some moments of insight and conversations that pointed me in the right direction, I spent the last 7 years researching this issue and finding out everything I could. I connected with experts and leading researchers to draw from their extensive knowledge base and followed the breadcrumbs to the Truth. What I discovered were the answers to many of the questions I had growing up – about my home, the violence, my feelings, my ability to persevere, and the beliefs I held. I discovered the Lies learned in childhood that I had held for years which were keeping me from my true potential. I also discovered the hidden “gifts” of living with domestic violence as a child – the special, uncommon strengths I could harness and apply each day to help get me closer to my goals. Following this path, I arrived at, essentially, the formula for overcoming the negative effects and discovering the path to a fulfilled life. By being conscious of my thoughts and feelings, understanding them, then applying some simple steps to control the meaning and changing some simple habits, I could unlearn the Lies and shift my belief system to achieve freedom from my childhood and post traumatic growth. I began to apply this formula consistently each day and witnessed a positive transformation in many facets of my life. These same principles, Truths & simple steps, laid out in the book, can help the nearly 1 billion others like me to do the same.

**13. With regard to the Lies and Truths about growing up with domestic violence, do you think you've learned to embrace all the Truths? Or do you think you're still working towards that?**

I've learned and live more of the Truths than the Lies. In his work, Dr. John Schindler defines happiness as “having pleasant thoughts most of the time.” I love that definition because I can understand it and it is a clear benchmark against which I measure my progress with unlearning the Lies and living the Truths each day. I certainly have pleasant thoughts much more often than not now. But I still struggle at times. We cannot change our coding and transform our life overnight. But that's a good thing because it keeps me vigilant. It reminds me how deeply some Lies are ingrained and that it takes conscious recognition and consistent action to learn to control the meaning, erase the Lies and live the Truths.

**14. Why do you encourage children of domestic violence to forgive the abusive caregiver who physically, emotionally, financially, or psychologically prayed on the abused adult in the households where they grew up?**

It isn't easy to forgive someone who has hurt you or indirectly caused you pain during the most vulnerable and helpless time in your life – we know that. And what period in your life is more vulnerable than childhood, when you're unable to support yourself, care for yourself, make choices or have the freedom to take action – when you're almost entirely dependent on others? It's especially difficult to forgive when those who've hurt you and deprived you of your most basic human need as a child – the need for security – are precisely the people whose job it is to love, care for, and keep you safe, the people whom your entire love is wrapped around. You grow up feeling a deep sense of hurt and loss, and you learn to feel resentment and anger towards them for putting you through it. But Anger and Resentment are two of the most common and destructive LIES we learn when we grow up living with domestic violence that keep us trapped in the cycle or hold us back from the things we want – positive interactions with others, strong, lasting relationships, happiness. By forgiving, not for the sake of those who've hurt us but for our own sake, and letting go of that pain, we can begin to unlearn these Lies and live the Truths. Also, because of what we went through, it's easy and feels “natural” to demonize those who hurt us. But the truth is many of them were us just a generation or two ago – children of domestic violence who grew up in homes very similar to ours. My mom did. Her boyfriend did. They also carried the Anger and Resentment, and the other common LIES. They

never unlearned what was learned in childhood, so they just repeated it, passing it on to us. Over half of all children who live in homes with domestic violence today are raised by parents who had a similar upbringing. The cycle can never end until we unlearn the Lies learned in childhood, discover the Truths, and find a different path.

**15. When you say “children of domestic violence” whom are you referring to? Whom does this category encompass?**

Did you grow up living with domestic violence? Did your parents or those who cared for you hurt one another, verbally or physically? You were there? You saw it, heard it, felt it? Any person who grows up living in a home with domestic violence is a child of domestic violence. They experienced childhood domestic violence. It is a global problem that crosses all racial lines, all contents. Nearly 1 billion people are impacted worldwide and 275 million children globally experience it each year. In the U.S. alone, 5 million children are living in homes with domestic violence today and 40 million adults grew up living with it, just like I did. That’s 1 in 7 people.

**16. What does your foundation CDV do and what are you trying to accomplish?**

CDV (Children of Domestic Violence) is a national nonprofit that work to help those who grow up living with domestic violence reach their full potential. It was created to define, obtain universal awareness of, and solve childhood domestic violence through scalable solutions accessible to all who are in need. Awareness of the children in homes with violence is currently less than 10%. Without awareness, there can be no change – 80% of change is awareness. Hence, it is essential that we elevate the much needed public awareness and understanding of this issue to the level of other current high-profile issues such as childhood obesity, autism, and breast cancer. By raising awareness, we can for the first time validate the experience of the hundreds of millions who never before had a name for what they went through, allow them to fully understand how it impacted their lives, and help them overcome their past so they can live the lives they were meant to lead. Awareness itself is curative, and will also reshape the way we as a society – from academia, to medicine, to judicial institutions, to public agencies – treat and respond to this issue and those affected by it; the way we provide care, assistance, and justice to these who experienced it. We’re also creating scalable solutions that have few barriers to access and can help the greatest number of people possible. This book is one of these solutions. Our *Change a Life* program, created by one of the world’s leading researchers and endorsed by UNICEF and Children’s Mercy Hospital, is another. Our award-winning documentary film, *The Children Next Door*, is another. We are committed to making the tools and solutions universally available to those who need them so we can start to make a meaningful dent on this issue, which has never been openly discussed or systemically addressed before.

**17. What is childhood domestic violence and how does it differ from domestic violence or child abuse?**

Childhood domestic violence is growing up in a home with domestic violence. The violence, occurring between your parents or caregivers, may have been physically, or non-physical where words were used as weapons, or both. Maybe in the home, the children were physically hurt as well. Or maybe not. Childhood domestic violence is different from domestic violence, which happens entirely between two adults, and speaks specifically to the childhood experience of living in a home like this. Child abuse on the other hand is when the violence is targeted specifically towards or inflicted onto the child. What we know is that at least half of the children who live in homes with domestic violence (2.5 million) are directly abused themselves. So, there is a strong correlation between childhood domestic violence and child abuse. But the other 2.5 million in these homes are never physically touched. Yet, they are significantly impacted nonetheless. The one thing you should know – and the science is very clear on this – is that witnessing domestic violence is just as damaging as physical child abuse, if not more so psychologically. Plus that word “WITNESS” doesn’t quite fit because it doesn’t adequately describe the impact of the experience. So, while childhood domestic violence often overlaps with children who are abused, it also covers a much larger group of children who’re never physically touched, so have never really been acknowledged until now.

**18. What do you believe is the biggest reason less than 10% of the general population knows about children of domestic violence and what are the greatest barriers?**

The lack of awareness is primarily grounded in 2 main issues – a communications issue and a social stigma issue. First, until now, there was no name to reflect this category – the terms “childhood domestic violence” or “children of domestic violence” did not exist. The nearly 1 billion who grew up living with domestic violence didn’t have a name for what they went through and no one knew what to call it. When something is undefined, it is difficult to understand, relate, speak about, or even think about, because our brain is programmed to process information using known words. Within the research community, for a few decades,

it's been referred to as CWIPV – children witnesses to intimate partner violence – a lengthy, awkward, and impersonal phrase that never caught on. Also, all the research accumulated over the past two-decades has never effectively carried over to the mainstream public. So, up until now, there has been a pervasive lack of understanding about the true impact on the children, which understanding is critical to elevating and reshaping the dialogue. So, many of the nearly 1 billion people who experienced childhood domestic violence aren't able to connect the dots between what they experienced in childhood and the issues they face today. Second, domestic violence has always carried a lot of stigma, being viewed as an uncomfortable, private, and shameful matter that is not to be discussed publicly. If you are or were impacted, you learn that telling is something you don't do. As a child, you're afraid that if you tell, you might get the people you love in trouble or end up being taken away. As an adult, you believe it would be betraying or dishonoring your family, so you keep the secret to yourself. You just don't talk about it. And this well-kept secret stays behind closed doors. But ironically, one of the most effectively ways to overcome it, according to leading researchers, is to talk about it. The goal is to elevate awareness of this issue much as it happened with breast cancer over the past 3 decades, because there are important parallels here. Breast cancer too was a silent, shameful issue 30 years ago. Now, it's pink cleats on Super Bowl Sunday. We know it can be done – we can transform the social consciousness on this issue by building this community, mobilizing it, and creating a movement.

**19. Why do some children overcome this experience while so many others do not? What are the decisive factors that foster resiliency and lead to success?**

There are a number of factors that affect why some who grow up with domestic violence overcome the negative effects and reach their potential while so many others do not. Researchers call these “protective factors” and they vary. But there are two most essential factors that foster resiliency. The first is The One – a caring adult who steps into the life of a child with simple support and messages of hope to help them see the Truth they are unable to see for themselves. Any caring adult can play that role, whether the child chooses to disclose their secret or not. Another very important factor if you were impacted, according to researchers, is to talk about it. Sharing your story validates your experience, and also allows you to reflect on your past to start the path of healing. Conversation begins to transform the meaning. Researchers agree, the difference between children of domestic violence who go on to reach their full potential compared to those who do not is that they shared their experience with another, in particular with an adult who was able to help them see the Truth. The single best predictor of whether an adult is in a relationship that is domestically violent is whether they were a child of domestic violence themselves. Children of domestic violence are three times more likely to repeat the cycle as adults, because they're simply repeating what they learned as children. This is why more than half of all children living with domestic violence today are being raised by parents who were just those children a generation prior – adults who had no one to step in to help them unlearn the Lies and discover the Truth. And how can they see it today if they are ashamed to talk about it, don't know what to call it, and no one don't talk about it. Leading experts on the brain agree that they will not reach their full potential unless they unlearn the Lies that were absorbed in childhood. The pathway to resiliency, from post-traumatic stress to post-traumatic growth, comes only when they are able to unlearn what was learned and embrace the Truth.

**20. What do you see the future hold for the foundation? What does the future hold for *Invincible*? For children of domestic violence?**

The demand is high and the current solutions are few. I know that CDV will be a pioneer in this new space to fill a very large unmet need. The foundation will be a significant part of something significant – reshaping the lives and fostering the full potential of nearly 1 billion people globally who grew up living with domestic violence. We aim to turn the tide on childhood domestic violence by helping those impacted unlearn what they learned in childhood, discover their uncommon strength, and reach their full potential. I see the foundation having tremendous success, as we proactively build awareness and deploy resources of scale to provide the blueprints for success to these individuals. The conversation has begun and the need for change is extremely pressing. With this new movement, children of domestic violence now for the first time have a name for what they went through, a community to belong to, and resources to turn to. They've never had better odds of overcoming their childhood, changing their lives, and achieving their potential than they do now. I believe millions will embrace this opportunity and achieve the life they were always meant to have. The positive benefit – for both individual and society as a whole – is immeasurable. I believe *Invincible* will be a catalyst and an essential missing link in a dialogue and system of help to this population that has been lacking until now. It will be a source of hope and inspiration and will plant the seeds for change for millions who grew up with domestic violence and have never had a step-by-step guide to control the meaning and overcome their past. Now they can. This book helps them do that. They CAN reach their potential.

## **21. How do we overcome the lack of awareness?**

There are plenty of ways. We all can do our part. Awareness is the single most important and effective driver of change. First, we need to make it OK to talk about it. We need to overcome the stigma associated with the topic. We need to overcome the “privacy” notion, the shame factor that prevents so many from speaking out and so many others from helping when they can. How? Start a conversation – talk to someone about this issue, this book, this foundation. If you experienced it, share your story with others whom you trust. Or you can share it on our website to help inspire others. Join the conversation on Facebook or Twitter or at CDV.org and share a comment about the issue, or simply share our posts with others. Second, educate yourself on the topic. Discover the facts and gain a full understanding of its true impact. Third, take our *Change a Life* program, which you will find on our website. It’s the first of its kind, developed by the world leading researcher to train any caring adult how to step into the life of a child with simple support and messages of hope that can help change their life. Forth, you can acquire our award-winning film *The Children Next Door* and host a screening at your organization or in your local community to start a conversation. Visit us at [www.cdv.org/get-involved](http://www.cdv.org/get-involved) to learn other simple ways you can make a difference.