

FOREWORD

ALI MACGRAW, AWARD-WINNING ACTRESS AND ACTIVIST

I FIRST MET BELLA ABOUT TWENTY-EIGHT years ago, in Malibu, California, where she was spending a period of time in a facility that purported to help young teenagers who were, for various, tragic reasons, caught between new foster homes and, often, Juvenile Hall. There were certain of us who went up there once a week to try to help these kids have some sense that people cared for them and wanted to try to make life a little easier. It was a very disturbing experience, as all of the boys and girls there had childhoods of indescribable fear and sorrow and neglect, as well as unspeakable abuse of every imaginable variety. This was my first experience realizing firsthand just how tragically many young people have negotiated that time which is supposed to be all about Innocence and Love. I was shocked and deeply saddened, and although I did go there every week for a long time, I never felt that there was much I could do—frankly it was devastating to witness.

Among the numbers of boys and girls I met, there were several who stood out, and none more so than a beautiful thirteen year old girl: This was Bella. At that time I had only a sketchy idea of the exact nature of the horrors she had survived, but it was clear that she had endured a level of abuse that was unspeakable and life changing. With all that, there was an enormous spark of Life to this particular child, and I remember thinking right away that Bella had an inordinate amount of resilience and a lack of self-pity that was amazing, given her history. Weekly, too, a group of well-meaning “art therapists” came to the facility to perhaps help unlock some of the children’s pain through Art. Once, when we asked for whom a specific project was intended as a special gift, I remember Bella saying, “my father,” which stunned me, given the little I had learned of her home life. It was quite a revelation as to the deep, primal need kids have to reconstruct or remember their childhoods in an almost fairytale rewrite.

I spent a fair amount of time with Bella in particular, and grew to love her very special Spirit as well as her tough street-wise attitude. She was clearly a remarkable young woman, and I always thought that, given a chance, she would somehow work her way out of the darkness she had been forced to inhabit. Of course, I did not really know how that would come about, but I do remember thinking, “This one is a Survivor, and she is going to be Something.” I saw her on and off for some years and watched her grow into the beautiful woman she is today, and along the way she married, and had a family of wonderful little girls. I saw her when she was in a lovely home with her family (including her exceptional mother, a survivor herself) around her. I was thrilled to feel that she was happy at last, living with a man she loved and admired, and starting a brand-new life.

I will not spoil the extraordinary story you are about to read, except to say that her life took a surprising and terrifying turn several years ago, and the fact that this amazing woman—Bella—has turned her life into the inspiration it is now, is the reason for this book.

Bella is a creature of pure Light, and in spite of another chapter of harrowing fear and darkness, she has triumphed over all of it and created a life that will be an inspiration to all who read about it. In addition to her four girls, she has added a huge Facebook movement called *La Bella Mafia* where young women can go to be mentored by Bella and guided through some of the atrocities that she herself survived.

Bella offers Hope and Solution and a Future to all of these women, and she is the embodiment not only of those qualities, but also of Love and Faith of the purest kind. She is one of the most remarkable people I have ever met, and I adore her and know that she will touch the heart of each and every one of you as you read and hear her story. You are in for a mind-blowing account of Courage, Strength and Forgiveness—and Love.

ALI MACGRAW, AWARD-WINNING ACTRESS AND ACTIVIST