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The Power of PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

Walt Disney's grandniece knows that life can be far from a fairy tale, but the award-winning filmmaker and philanthropist is bringing us closer.



I was afraid to be bold in my 20s. The first leap I took was moving from Los Angeles to New York City – far from my family of origin – to have the space to become myself.

My husband and I started a family foundation in 1991 because it seemed like a good thing to do. The next year I joined the NY Women's Foundation Board. On this board, you don't just read proposals, you go to Coney Island and talk to ex-heroin addicts about HIV and prostitutes. I learned a ton.

I didn't travel far when our four kids were little, but I travelled to all sides of my city. In New York, it's all here. My leash made me go micro before macro. I saw the local political landscape. I got onto a zillion non-profit boards and volunteered in little organizations. I got to see what people were stressed out by, whether lack of serviceable office equipment, or rats and guns.

When I finally travelled overseas to Liberia and Egypt, I was stunned — both by the severity of the problems, and by how people had the same struggles all over the world. The issues at job-training programs in Morocco were the same ones I heard in New York. I'm glad I first took the time to learn deeply about the problems at home.

With our family fund, called the Daphne Foundation, we did something smart. We took the time to list the grantees

that really moved us. During the reflection process, it was torture to say 'no' to requests, but we needed time to get clear. We discovered that we liked to focus on 'adolescent' organizations: groups that are no longer "the flavour of the month" for funders although they haven't yet reached institutional stability. Equipped with this focus, we went seeking our life partners. We have been funding some of the same

have a famous family name. The more people are afraid of or intimidated by me, the less they tell me the truth and the harder it is to truly connect. Every room I walk into I am seen as holding the checkbook to solve everyone's problems. Sometimes I feel like I'm going to die from all the people who want money from me. But if that's the price for engagement and self-respect, I'm willing to pay it.

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groups now for 10 years. The Daphne Foundation, now endowed and giving \$850,000 a year, has been a third of my total giving.

I recently self-financed an incredible film by and about women peacemakers in Liberia called *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. I am happily using my last name to get it publicity, glad that I can put both my money and privilege to such powerful use.

The position I am in life is sometimes challenging. I don't enjoy that many people are terrified of me, if not because I'm wealthy then because I

A lot of people give away the froth on their cappuccino. Why stop there? Over the past 10 years, I give all the income I don't spend. I've given away about a third of my net worth, although it has come back to me as quickly as I've given it away. I've started making million-dollar grants payable over four to five years.

But bolder giving isn't just about grant size; it's about being out in the world and working with other people. I'm far richer a person because of it. **B**

Excerpted from an interview with Abigail Disney on www.BolderGiving.org, where over a hundred profiles of bold givers can be read.