



**“Smart Talk Exceptional Women: Art & Insights Book” Inspired by Life and COVID-19
60+ women connected to Colorado’s CampExperience™ Network share
exceptional stories, art and poetry in “The STEW”**

Englewood, Colorado (November 10, 2020) – A majority of women thrive on real-life experiences, smart talk, innovative ideas and insights from other women. This is the inspiration behind the new book [“Smart Talk Exceptional Women: Art & Insights Book”](#) written by 60+ women connected to Colorado’s [CampExperience™ Network](#) during COVID-19. Known as “The STEW,” this colorful 200-page book launched Oct. 1, 2020 and features heartfelt stories written by 60+ women, poetry by Carol Calkins, and inspirational art by [Betsy Wiersma](#).

Wiersma, the visionary behind “The STEW,” has spent the last 15 years building the CampExperience™ Network and encouraging women to celebrate one other, network, and discover their own life journey. “The CampExperience™ Network is a sisterhood by choice, and the storytellers and poet in the book are women I have met along the way who opened their hearts and have the purpose of serving others,” Wiersma says. “These stories were written during COVID-19 and together form a recipe for life.”

The STEW Overview

“The STEW” is organized into five sections: Share Your Voice, Creativity Connects, Love Wins, Do Good Have Fun, and Fly! The authors range in age from 18 to 75 and reside in seven countries (Australia, England, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Norway and United States). A majority reside in the U.S. and represent six states: California, Colorado, Indiana, Tennessee, Utah and Washington. Follow “The STEW” on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

AUTHORS – A Sampling

Australian **Gretchen Gagel, PhD** is the managing director – Asia Pacific for Conversant, owner of Greatness Consulting, and affiliate professor at the University of Denver – Daniels School of Business and The Australian National University College of Business and Economics. The former president of The Women’s Foundation of Colorado and a female executive in the male-dominated industries of manufacturing, engineering and construction, Gagel developed a deep passion for investing in female leaders and is author of “8 Steps to Being a Great Working Mom.” In “The STEW,” Gagel writes about allowing your voice and the voice of others to be

heard. She emphasizes, “Giving people voice engages them, empowers them, and fuels such amazing collaboration and innovation.”

Based in Salt Lake City, Utah, **Brittani Coury** landed a silver medal in banked slalom snowboarding at the 2018 Paralympic Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea and also is a motivational speaker and registered nurse. When her World Cup season came to an abrupt end in March 2020 due to COVID-19, the 34-year-old put her scrubs back on to help out on the acute internal medicine floor at University of Utah Hospital. Originally from Durango, a terrible snowboarding accident shattered her right ankle in 2003, resulting in a joint that never healed, multiple operations and amputation below her right knee in 2011. Coury shares her journey to the Paralympics and expertly narrates what it was like to take three gutsy and nerve-racking runs to a silver medal. She says, “I knew this was my opportunity to be a positive example to the world of someone who gets back up when they’re knocked down.”

Holly Forlenza has never spoken a word but she has a lot to say. She has severe epilepsy and bilateral hearing loss and is on the autism spectrum. Sadly, Forlenza’s inability to speak masked her wisdom for more than 20 years, but she fortunately crossed paths with an expert in facilitated communication who recognized her literary skills in 2011. Through years of patience and practice, Forlenza now types on an iPad with the assistance of aides and expresses a message of love, hope and resilience. With her mother, Eileen, the duo shares Holly’s story with community groups, associations and corporations to inspire and advocate for others who are oppressed and unheard. In her STEW essay “How Love is in the Eyes of the People Before You,” Forlenza writes, “I think the things we as women need to do are simple. Loving yourself, loving others, and loving God. Sounds hard but we are the ones pushing ourselves to make others happy at our own expense. It is easy to do those three things if you slow down.”

As the CEO of Women’s Bean Project, **Tamra Ryan** has been the Denver-based organization’s visionary leader for more than 17 years. She has been instrumental in putting the organization on the national and international map as a high-performing and impactful social enterprise, which works to affect chronic unemployment and poverty among women. Ryan’s book “The Third Law” highlights societal obstacles and internal demons that must be overcome for marginalized women to change their lives, and is currently working on “Followship: How to be a leader worth following.” For “The STEW,” Ryan writes about the role of compassion and kindness in overcoming negative thoughts for ourselves and others. “First, we must give ourselves the grace to be messy and imperfect. Next, we must create a practice of imagining we are deserving of love from those who love us unconditionally. Finally, we can extend this same love to others.”

POET & ARTIST

Carol Calkins, PhD is a retired hospital and university administrator as well as a grandma, poet and executive director of the Global Sisterhood Network. She started writing poetry after the loss of a dear friend and was inspired even more by a CampExperience™ Fall Retreat that asked participants to “share their voice.” Carol rediscovered her lifelong love of poetry and is the author of five poetry books and HeartPoems, which are individual poem cards for sharing daily inspiration.

Betsy Wiersma combines positive intention, love and scrap materials. Her playful style calls forth our participation, as each piece encourages people to live their best lives and to savor the journey.

“At the ripe old age of 56, I stumbled upon an art program in California hosted by Kelly Rae Roberts. I booked a spot for myself and a friend; between serving the growing tribe in CampExperience™ and my daughter growing up, I realized I was not doing anything for myself,” she explains. “I needed to escape my normal life and responsibilities and let myself just be ... in art! Previously, I was a ‘craftlete’ and just made stuff. So from my soul came my first mixed-media art angels. First was Grace, then her sister Next, and my third piece Grow. I believe these angels were my self talking to myself.”

Since then, Wiersma has created more than 100 pieces, inspired and curated “The STEW,” and has designed and produced two inspirational card decks, greeting cards and blessing journals. She also shares stories of inspiration in the book

Where to Find The STEW

For more information and to purchase hardcover or paperback versions of “The STEW” and Wiersma’s art products, visit <https://campexperience.com/shop>. For the story of Betsy Wiersma and more of her art portfolio visit <https://betsywiersma.com>.

About the CampExperience™ Network

“Doing Good and Having Fun” is the motto of the Colorado-based [CampExperience™ Network](#) and the heart of the organization’s 15th anniversary celebration in 2020 in tandem with the launch of “Smart Talk Exceptional Women: Art & Insights Book.” In 15 years, the network has raised more than \$1 million in cash and in-kind donations from 5,000+ camp sisters and friends and grown from an annual fall retreat to 50 network events annually. These funds and CampExperience™ Network programs have supported more than 50 charities in Colorado and around the world. CampExperience contributes money raised and associated hands-on love and support to make a difference for people in need and builds valuable business and friendship connections among women. Follow CampExperience on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

About Betsy Wiersma

[Betsy Wiersma](#) is transforming how women connect, share their stories, build business and support one another through the [CampExperience™ Network](#), [Boost Power Podcast](#), [Sister Strong](#) podcast and video series, [Sister Stories](#) from around the world, [art products](#) and upcoming [Global Sisterhood Travel Adventures](#) that start in 2021.

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