



Kelly Corrigan says ‘I’m not interested in controversy. I’m interested in humanity.’



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USA TODAY

- Kelly Corrigan says what makes interviews work is finding universal stories that everyone can related to in some way.
- Kelly says stories that interest her are about humanity, not controversy.
- Kelly says that being curious helps you feel young and like you are "in a growth spurt."

Kelly Corrigan pulls her knees up to her chest and says she feels like her podcast listeners really are her friends. She tilts her head just so,

the same way she does when she is listening to guests such as Robin Roberts or James Corden on her PBS show “Tell Me More.”

Corrigan’s voice, so familiar to thousands of women who survived the pandemic listening to “Kelly Corrigan Wonders” as they took walks, or who felt community when they tuned in for her weekly Instagram Live chats that always ended with something good from the day, is just as warm in person. You are fairly certain by the end of the conversation that you really are friends, that she really is genuine – a smart and curious woman who makes you want to be a better person.

“A podcast listener or someone who watches the show or reads the books that I like are right to think that we're friends because we would be in most cases,” she says. “I think I attract a curious type, like someone who’s a lifelong learner, someone who’s trying to get better, trying to do better, trying to know more.”



Corrigan, 54, has been sharing her life publicly for the past three decades. She has written columns and bestselling books about marriage and motherhood, about surviving Stage 3 breast cancer in her 30s and about losing her father. She's given graduation speeches and gave a talk about women supporting each other that now has more than 5 million views on YouTube.

But it was perhaps during the pandemic that her voice became even more important, more elevated, more necessary by offering levity and optimism. Her PBS show launched in fall 2020 and later featured Jennifer Garner as a guest, and has included interviews with everyone from Lilly Singh to Steve Kerr. Her podcast soon expanded to three times a week.

Corrigan is both aware of her enormous platform and responsibility, yet humble about her success.

## **How vulnerability leads to community**

“You lead with your insecurities, you know people will join you,” she says, sitting in the kitchen of her Montana home, dressed in black pajama pants and a sweatshirt, and pointing out that she did put on a bra for the video interview. “It’s just my nature. I’m effusive and I’m unguarded.”

Mostly, she says, she finds stories that are universal, that everyone can relate to in some way. At some point in all of her interviews, there is a moment when listeners or viewers are nodding their head in

agreement, feeling just what she is, and often saying “exactly.”  
And “Exactly” was the name of her first podcast she created in 2017.

“I find that very encouraging, not only because it's clear that we're connecting,” she says. “But also because I am a person who's living a life and I like to know that other people are tripping over the same stones.”

**20 summer books:** 'Woman of Light,' Ottessa Moshfegh, Michael Mann's 'Heat 2'



She travels from her home in Bozeman, Montana, where she and her husband moved a year ago from the Bay Area, to talk with people – riding bikes with David Byrne or taking a walk in NYC with Anna Deavere Smith. Traveling to her guests both forces and allows her to be selective – not just whom she interviews, but the questions she asks.

## Talking to Melinda French Gates about everything but her divorce

She was scheduled to interview Melinda French Gates just a few weeks after Gates and her husband, Bill, had announced their divorce in 2021. Corrigan worried the interview would be canceled. But she had interviewed Melinda Gates, who co-founded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and is the bestselling author of “The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World” in the past and they had a good rapport. The interview took place.

“My friends were like, are you going to ask her about the divorce?” Corrigan says. “And I was like, no, like, who cares about the divorce? Like, do you know what she does? Do you know what she's been doing all these years? Like, she's trying to end genital mutilation. She's trying to end child marriage. She's trying to get girls educated all the way through high school, she's trying to help women find jobs and have their own money. She's trying to get people vaccinated worldwide. The stuff she's working on is so much more important than divorce gossip.”

Instead, they talked about Gates' life-changing trip to Africa that led to wide distribution of vaccines, and how data collection shows how much more unpaid women do than men. They talked about inspiring teen girls and becoming an empty-nester.

And this is what makes Corrigan's interviews different.

“I'm not interested in controversy," she says. "I'm interested in humanity. And I'm interested in world positive people.”



If she is talking to Judd Apatow, she doesn't ask what it's like to work with Seth Rogen even if “that could be a really fun conversation” but how Apatow and his wife, Leslie Mann, are launching two daughters into the “sometimes gnarly and dangerous world of Hollywood.”

They talked about parenting, but also Apatow's own childhood. She wound up with: “Judd Apatow telling me that his mom left when he was 13 years old and never came back and then said on her deathbed, ‘I didn't mean to be gone for that long.’”

Her podcast always ends with a few takeaways that she summarizes, from Roberts: “Optimism is not foolish, it's essential,” to Father Greg Boyle: “Being virtuous is not a linear process, it's often two steps forward, one step back.”

## Paving the way with Phil Donahue and Oprah

She credits Phil Donahue and Oprah Winfrey for paving the way for her conversations and shows. And she says researcher and author Brené Brown helped give people the language to talk about these feelings.

She says she loves living in this moment of psychological renaissance.

“This is the golden age of psychology, sociology and all the social sciences,” she says.

This allows people to talk about things that used to be considered taboo.

“People are talking now about issues. Almost everyone talks about therapy,” she says. “Some people talk about medication and many people are sharing about panic attacks, or infertility, or coming out to their parents, or terrible loss.”

Her job allows her an indulgence she used to deny herself. When her kids were younger, and she dropped them at school, she felt like she needed to do things considered “worthy,” like taking care of the house or making dinner.

Instead, she wanted to read and learn.

“Now, I feel completely justified reading and highlighting and scribbling in the margins and putting sticky notes on the pages of books during the day,” she says. “And that makes me feel really young

and like intellectually hungry and like I'm in a growth spurt. And I think that feeling of being in a growth spurt isn't that easy to come by when you're 54.”

Corrigan is part of a growing number of podcasts hosted by women that seek to inspire, teach and help people grow. Corrigan sees these as essential.

“They allow listeners and viewers to engage with ideas in a somewhat passive way,” she says. “Like I'm not going to spin around and ask you your opinion. You can absorb for a minute and you can let it settle in and you can let it contradict a previous belief quietly in the security of your own mind.”

It's this continued learning that Corrigan says keeps her going. It's talking to people and “checking the science.”

“I love being the student,” she says. “If I had to choose between student and teacher, I'd choose student.”

And she gives you the idea that you are right alongside her learning, too.

## **Where to find Kelly Corrigan**

[Pbs.com/Kelly](https://www.pbs.com/kelly) for all episodes of “Tell Me More” streaming for free on PBS



“Kelly Corrigan Wonders” is a podcast and a one-hour radio show played weekly on more than a dozen NPR stations including KQED and WHYY.

