

RENOWNED AUTHOR  
AND JOURNALIST  
**Maria Shriver**  
REFLECTS ON WHY  
BEING YOURSELF IS  
ALWAYS ENOUGH.

# A Powerful Purpose

By Julie Kendrick  
Photo by Robert Trachtenberg

**W**henever she meets anyone new, Maria Shriver takes the direct approach. “I’m Maria,” she says, reaching out for a handshake and offering her trademark mile-wide smile. It’s her own way of claiming a name and an identity that have often been caught up in the stories of others — her uncles Robert and President John F. Kennedy, her parents, Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Sargent Shriver — and her life as the former First Lady of California.

These days, Shriver has “a lot of commas in my life,” as she puts it. The “commas” refer to all the roles she plays: devoted mother of four adult children, best-selling author, weekly digital newsletter columnist, Peabody- and Emmy Award-winning journalist and, most recently, podcast host. “My business card simply says, ‘Maria Shriver,’” she says, adding, “We’re all someone’s child, partner, sibling, parent. Those commas are our identity, but everything else in our life, like our job titles, are just roles.

“You need to know your name and who you are, and embrace that. For me, I am Maria, and what I think is good; what I am is good. I am enough. I don’t need a job title on my



Hair by Vito Esposito  
Makeup by Liz Castellanos

business card, because I don't go by a job, I go by passion, meaning and what's important to me. The job title I care most about is being the best human being I can be."

■ **Pay Attention to Your Brain**

Shriver, 63, grew up in a family that put an emphasis on accomplishment and service. Her mother, Eunice, was the founder of the Special Olympics and a pioneer for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. Shriver has recalled that when people would tell Maria how beautiful she was, her mother would say, "Your looks will go. Pay attention to your brain."

The brain — its workings, its health and its susceptibility to diseases such as Alzheimer's — is a major focus of Shriver's attention these days. Along with women's health, it remains one of her primary beats in her role as a special anchor for *NBC News*. It's not just an interest in the abstract sense, but one with a tragically personal connection in her life. Her father, Sargent Shriver, who

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—Maria Shriver

helped found the Peace Corps, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2003.

Shriver published a children's book, *What's Happening to Grandpa?*, that offers ideas on how to help and show love to someone with the disease. She was executive producer of HBO's *The Alzheimer's Project*. The four-part documentary series earned two Emmy Awards for developing a "television show with a conscience." The series covered the latest scientific research and examined the effects of the disease

on patients and families. Shriver's father died in 2011 at age 95.

■ **Time to Act**

With a family history such as that, another person might succumb to worry or fear. Not Shriver. Ever seeking to make a positive impact, she founded The Women's Alzheimer's Movement (WAM). The nonprofit organization is dedicated to raising awareness about women's increased risk for Alzheimer's, as well as raising funds to support critical women-based research. It focuses on educating the public — women and men — about lifestyle changes they can make to protect their brain health.

"You will never do great things by saying 'I'm scared,'" she says. "Your mind is your greatest asset. It's going to be with you for your entire lifetime, so the time to start taking care of it is now." She also urges everyone to get involved in the fight to raise money for research and let political leaders know your views. "If you sit still, nothing will happen," she says. And if you know someone who is a caregiver for a person with Alzheimer's, she has a special request: "Please help them and support them however you can."

■ **Taking Care**

Shriver offers some simple thoughts about how to keep your brain functioning at its peak: "Live as curiously as you can and as healthily as you can," she says. "Move, stay

Left: Maria with her father, Sargent Shriver, in 1989.



Clockwise from top left: Shriver chats with Jenna Bush Hager and Hoda Kotb on *Today* in 2019; Shriver with her children: Patrick, Christina, Katherine and Christopher Schwarzenegger; Shriver with her mother, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, brothers Robert Sargent Shriver III and Anthony K. Shriver and father Sargent Shriver.

If you can think, then you can write."

Shriver has even jumped into the world of podcasting with the launch of *Meaningful Conversations with Maria Shriver*. The podcast will "explore the life topics, issues and ideas that we're all thinking about," she says. It promises thought-provoking conversations on issues such as love, faith, family, gratitude, grief, health and wellness.

"My goal with the podcast is to have smart, spirited and spiritual discussions about the issues affecting us all," she says.

■ **Today and the Day After**

"I want people to know they are more in control of their fate than they think they are, and that their genes are not their destiny," she says.

"It's important to know that if Alzheimer's runs in your family, that does not necessarily mean you will get it. But it's also important to know that even if it doesn't run in your family, you're still at risk."

Still, maintaining a healthy lifestyle may be the best thing you can do to ensure that you can enjoy your life right now — and in the future. "How you live today will impact your tomorrow," Shriver says. "Even if your health has not been a priority before, you can begin to make the change today." •

connected and put good things in your mouth." What's her favorite ingredient? "Olive oil, olive oil, olive oil," she laughs.

With her no-nonsense style and direct approach, it's not a surprise that she's an advocate for having frank, open conversations about how you want to age. "Talk with those you love about the mental, social, spiritual and financial aspects that matter most to you. Start out in an easy, low-key way, and keep talking."

Most of all, she urges a reassessment of self-esteem: "Don't see yourself as old, but as a vibrant member of society. You have so much to learn and so much to give. You can have new dreams, careers and relationships. It's an exciting time to be an older adult."

■ **She's Been Thinking**

Her latest book, published last year, is the No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller *I've Been Thinking . . . : Reflections, Prayers and Meditations for a*

*Meaningful Life*. The book grew out of a weekly column that appears in her digital newsletter *The Sunday Paper*. Each short chapter begins with a quote from a noted thinker, including Maya Angelou, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, St. Ambrose and Shriver herself. Each chapter ends with a prayer.

In the book's introduction, she writes, "Let's face it: Life is one hell of a roller-coaster ride. And what has helped me get through it is my faith, my family, my friends and my writing. This book has one purpose: to get you to think about what constitutes a meaningful life for you. Just you. Because there is only one you, and you have only one life."

The companion piece to the book is *I've Been Thinking . . . The Journal: Inspirations, Prayers and Reflections for Your Meaningful Life*. "I wanted a journal that encourages readers to write about their own lives and what really matters to them," she says. "I believe that everyone is a writer, even if they don't believe they are good at it.

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