

# Part I

# Say Yes to Your Immigrace

## Discover Your Genius

**H**ow many life-altering truths do you figure we reject or ignore on a daily basis? In my opinion, there are at least thousands of radical, world-changing realities around us that could make a profound difference in our lives that we routinely reject or ignore.

Take, for example, the definition of *genius*:

***genius*** • 'jēn-yəs | 'jē-nē-əs

a strong leaning or inclination • a peculiar, distinctive, or identifying character or spirit • the associations and traditions of a place • a personification or embodiment especially of a quality or condition • a single strongly marked capacity or aptitude • extraordinary intellectual power especially as manifested in creative activity • a person endowed with extraordinary mental superiority especially:  
a person with a very high IQ • showing or suggesting great cleverness, skill, or originality: brilliant<sup>1</sup>

You may have noticed, as I have, that somehow, as a society, we disregard the various definitions of *genius* and limit ourselves to “a person with a very high IQ.” It’s fascinating how limited we are in discussing such a powerful and expansive word. Not brilliant at all, and not of optimal benefit to us individually and collectively.

The truth is that *genius* does have a variety of forms and manifestations, and *genius* also represents, not only our “endowed” gifts and in-born inclinations, but also the gifts that we can and should develop over time.

Each of us, at various points in our lives, have exhibited, touched, or lived our genius, whether by displaying a strong leaning or inclination, reflecting a peculiar distinctive or identifying character or spirit, demonstrating the associations or traditions of a place, personifying or embodying a special quality or condition, demonstrating a single strong marked capacity, demonstrating extraordinary intellectual power in a creative activity, or showing or suggesting great skill, originality, or, my personal favorite, brilliance.

Yet most of us also reject or resist the idea that we are all geniuses. As though Einstein, Michelangelo, Picasso, and Isaac Newton are cut from different cloth, born with special, untouchable, unapproachable gifts, we place them on finely carved, engraved, and embossed pedestals. It is also noteworthy that the individuals typically associated with genius tend to be mostly men. A personal dream, and thank you for sharing in it by reading this book, is that references to genius do not lead us to default to images of men, e.g., Einstein, but that we recognize and acknowledge the genius of women. More than sixty years after Einstein walked the earth, it’s time to upgrade our genius software. It’s time to evolve our visual and mental representations of genius, including by recognizing and acknowledging those he’s inspired over the years and those who have come after him.

On a short list of eleven female geniuses, Fairygodboss.com—a career community for women—includes Sau Lan Wu, born in Hong Kong and immigrant to the United States. She played a major role in the discovery of the Higgs boson in particle physics theory. Marie

Curie, Polish immigrant to France and pioneering physicist and chemist, who won Nobel prizes for her work on radioactivity, occasionally makes an appearance in discussions of genius.

We must change the traditional misconceptions about genius because we know they are fundamentally flawed. We know that each and every day women contribute in extraordinary ways to the growth, evolution, and significant improvements in our world.

It is also a lie because we are all born with special gifts within us. The problem is, as we journey through life, we hide, cover up, lose, erode, reject, or forget those gifts, due to life experiences, disappointments, and our focusing on life's most pressing and immediate priorities. Worse still, based on experiences, we develop beliefs that contradict this fundamental truth.

Some resist the idea that we are all geniuses and they warn that we would somehow diminish the power of the word, on the premise that: "if everyone is a genius, no one is a genius." Rather than seeking to maintain the high status of the word, how about we focus on elevating people, so that we collectively elevate our life experiences through the power of creativity, passion, and of people living their fullest potential? I'm not for the trivialization of genius, but for the democratization of genius. To make it understandable, discernable, approachable, accessible, and available to all, should they choose to embrace it and attain that high level of greatness we are all capable of.

I advocate for demystifying concepts, principles, and ideas. Once demystified and available to all, I don't believe demystification automatically leads to irreverence. We can know and understand something or someone, yet still respect, revere, and treat them as sacred. This is the stuff that extraordinary marriages and relationships are made of. In fact, in my experience, when something or someone is truly beautiful and brilliant at their core, the more you know them, the more you love, appreciate, respect, and revere them.

Like a beautiful marriage that creates enormous happiness for those in and around it, my quest is to help you fall in love with your genius, value it enough to make time and space for it, nurture it and

grow it, so that through it, you create happiness for yourself, those around you, your community, and our world.

This brings us to the definition of *immigrace*. Let us now examine the definition of *immigrace*:

***immigrace* • 'imēgrās / | 'iməgrās**

immigrant's grace • immigrant's genius • unique gifts each  
immigrant woman brings into the world • an immigrant's  
expression of her highest purpose and potential

*Immigrace* is immigrant's grace and, more to it, immigrant's genius. *Immigrace* stands for the unique gifts each immigrant woman brings into the world, and into the United States. It is an immigrant's expression of her highest purpose and potential.

All human beings come into this world with unique gifts and talents, but for us as immigrant women, regardless of what age we migrated to the United States, we carried within us big, bold dreams and the highest expression of our life's purpose. The United States, as the greatest freedom experiment in the history of mankind, stood for the incubator in which all of our highest dreams could be created, honed, and launched into the world.

## Immigrace and Being

Less than specific goals and accomplishments, *immigrace* is first and foremost about who we are in the world. It's about the presence we bring to our work and lives and how we choose to live.

I advocate for the preeminence of being because even the experts on the subject of genius, of whom I've gained tremendous insights over the years, tend to speak of genius as something you do, a place you visit, or a place in which you operate. Robert Greene explores the attainment of mastery—something you get. He studies masters

such as Einstein and Freddie Roach and talks about primal curiosity, learning above all else, gathering skills, and combining skills in a unique way. *The Big Leap* by Gay Hendricks is also a wonderful exploration of the idea of genius, and speaks of functioning in your genius zone, which Hendricks brilliantly distinguishes from the zone of incompetence, the zone of competence, and even the zone of excellence. But there's a sense in which it is a place you go and that it could be outside of you. Robin Sharma's *The 5AM Club* expounds on how the practice of rising early enables people to take control of their day. That said, I think they would all agree that who we are is preeminent.

I also argue for the preeminence of who we are because the joy is unquestionably in the journey. The radical beauty and learnings in life are not embedded in our loftiest intentions and goals, but they unfold and become evident in who we become in the process.

With that in mind, let's explore the core characteristics of immigrace.

## Core Characteristics of Immigrace

- *Natural Inclination:* Immigrace is rooted in and honors the natural gifts, inclinations, and interests of the individual.
- *Eternal:* Immigrace is not time-bound, but includes a commitment to growth, continuous experimentation, and ongoing learning. It seeks to touch on something beyond this world, ditches perfection, and embraces the journey, uncertainty, and not having all the answers.
- *Purposeful and Legacy-Driven:* Immigrace is a commitment to living the purpose for which we were placed on earth.
- *Not Only One Thing:* Immigrace is not only one thing and can relate to multiple gifts, interests, and purposes. As we

evolve and our journeys evolve, our purposes do as well. As we increase in strength, we set new goals and destinations.

- *The Heroine's Journey*: Immigrace is feminine. In my view, the voice of the immigrant woman as a leader hasn't previously been clearly articulated. As immigration is celebrated, it is often done from a male perspective. Books such as *Immigrant, Inc.* highlight the stories of men who have boldly charted the course of freedom and who have, through their entrepreneurship, created bold American Dreams.

As you read through the various stories in this book, you'll note that these women are on remarkable and beautiful journeys.

Immigrace is not only about the journey to the United States (beyond the customs and migration borders when we travel by land, air, or sea), but also the journey each woman continues to embark upon as she moves through the oceans, peaks, valleys, highways, and byways of life in the United States. It's about living that genius, beyond the borders that life, systemic limitations or discrimination places on us, as well as those we may unwittingly place on ourselves. The truth is, when we embrace our genius, there are no borders.

You'll hear about each woman's journey from her unique, female perspective and how she's navigating life—the personal, professional, spiritual, and physical—and you'll hear how she brings forth the beautiful, bold, undeniable truth which she came to the United States and the world to express.

Each woman knows that her story is unique and unrepeatable. She takes full ownership of her entire journey—past, present, and future—who she is and where she is going.

- *Leadership*: Immigrace is a commitment to brilliance and excellence, to honing one's natural gifts, and to being a leader in the world. Mediocrity is not at all correlated with

immigrace. In addition, immigrace is generous, humble, servant leadership.

- *Creativity*: Immigrace is putting things in the world that weren't previously there, or significantly improving things around us, and thereby putting a unique mark on families, industries, communities, and the world.
- *Passionate*: Immigrace is embracing life with intense desire and enthusiasm and a sense of living it fully.

Immigrace permeates the entire book, and, as noted above, each chapter identifies the immigrace of each woman featured. We also explore creativity and innovation in more detail in Part V. We kick off with this first section by meeting three phenomenal women:

- Paola Prestini, artistic visionary, impresario, and trailblazer. Italy-born Paola is a successful music composer and producer in a male-dominated world. She shares what she learned from her mother's divorce shortly after the family's relocation to the US. She also shares how a mentor radically redefined her professional path by teaching her the importance of being dedicated to her own art before she helping those around her.
- Hsing-ay Hsu, concert pianist, educator, and producer. Born in China to a family of musicians, Hsing-ay reflects on the family's journey to America in search of religious freedom, the negative effects of pressures on Asian women to excel, and how the immigrant experience taught her to have difficult conversations.
- Bisila Bokoko, international businesswoman, entrepreneur, global leadership expert, and philanthropist. Spanish-born

Bisila is the founder and CEO of BBES, a New York-based business development agency that represents, promotes and markets brands internationally. She shares about being a cultural hybrid, overcoming personal and professional challenges, and being the key to unlocking global potential for people and brands.

The section then concludes with the immigrace journal and how you can apply the principles of tapping into your immigrace in your life.