



Close stars in the third season of the legal drama *Damages*, which premieres this month on FX.

## GLENN CLOSE'S AHA! MOMENT

She always understood the power of words—but never more so than when she began speaking out about mental illness in her own family.

**A**S AN ACTRESS, I HAVE always loved words. I believe in their power. But certain words have power over us—until we destigmatize them and learn to speak them out loud, without fear or shame.

The first time I confronted an unspeakable word was in 1984, when I was in *Something About Amelia*, a TV movie that dealt with incest. I could hardly say “incest,” but when I did a superbly written piece about what had always been a dirty secret, the word lost its power over me and I could speak it openly. Then came Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*. Who could say “vagina” out loud before that play? After being in it, I actually walked

into a bike shop and asked for the “vagina-friendly” bike seat. I thought the guy behind the counter was going to pop a gasket. But it was the best way to describe what I was looking for.

My aha moment hit me several years ago, when I realized that three deeply frightening words had power over me: *schizophrenia*, *depression*, and *bipolar*. There is mental illness in my family. And I knew that if I really wanted to help, I would have to learn to say those words fearlessly, out loud. That’s the beginning.

I decided to work on destigmatizing those words with my sister, Jessie, who is a single parent with a bipolar disorder, and her son, Calen, who has schizo-affective disorder. Jessie, a born writer, is one of the

most creative people I know. She first showed symptoms in her midteens but wasn’t diagnosed until her mid-40s. We are lucky she is still here. Calen is a hugely gifted artist who got sick when he was 19 and has endured great suffering. What they both deal with day-to-day is hard to imagine. They are my heroes, as are Jessie’s two other children—living with a mom and brother who have mental illness is not an easy proposition.

There are toxic stigmas associated with mental illness: *All people living with it are out of control and dangerous. It is the fault of those afflicted. It can be overcome by an act of will—“They should just pull up their socks and get to work!”* Wrong on all counts. I needed to make sure I wasn’t carrying any unconscious bias myself, so I started volunteering at Fountain House, a community in New York City for people with all levels of mental illness. I got to look into their eyes, stand next to them, and work with them. The more I learned, the less I feared.

And my aha moment is beginning to have repercussions. A group of us, along with Fountain House, are launching a campaign called Bring Change 2 Mind. In June we went to Washington and presented our idea to the major mental health organizations. With their enthusiastic blessing and support, we shot our first public service announcement—in Grand Central Station—directed by Ron Howard. Jessie and I and our children are in it. And John Mayer gave us use of his exquisite song “Say.” [Bringchange2mind.org](http://Bringchange2mind.org) has links to all the major mental health groups. It will connect people to whatever they need: help, community, education, or a chance to join one of the organizations.

It is just the beginning, but I hope it will give people the courage to talk about mental illness, to lose their fear of the words, to conquer shame and stigma. Jessie and I felt a huge sense of relief when we decided to speak out. There is nothing to hide. Schizophrenia. Bipolar disorder. Depression. I have no fear. We are all connected, and none of us should ever feel marginalized, stigmatized, and alone. —As told to *Johanna Schneller*

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aha!  
moment

## Lauren Graham

# Dream Chaser

When her hopes of a dazzling Broadway debut were dimmed by mixed reviews, the *Parenthood* star found another reason to sing.

→ **WHEN I WAS A CHILD**, I dreamed of being in the theater the way other kids dreamed of becoming firemen or ballerinas. There was a brief respite from this fantasy when I wanted to be a jockey, but in the seventh grade, when I started to tower over all the boys, the dream of acting on-stage returned.

When I was offered the chance to be in the Broadway revival of *Guys and Dolls* last year, I ignored my fear of failure—and of winter in New York—and accepted. Rehearsals were amazing. I loved walking through Times

Square as I had when I was starting out, loved learning the classic material, and felt inspired by the other singers and dancers, each of whom was talented enough to play a leading role. I went home every day with aching feet and a feeling of fulfillment.

Then came opening night. I had somehow forgotten that, especially during a recession, a show had to be a certified hit to stay alive and thrive. The absence of phone calls the next day told me we had not achieved that status. When the phone finally rang, it was my friend and costar Oliver Platt. “Feel like

a brisket dinner?” he said. “Sure,” I replied.

Trudging through the snow on the way to his house, I wondered what the appropriate response to a day of mixed reviews might be. Solemn condolences? False bravado? Then he opened the door. We took one look at each other and started to laugh. I mean really laugh, like crazy people. We stood in the doorway in hysterics for what seemed like 15 minutes. The laughter said: *Who cares? What fun we’ve had! What a relief to have this out of the way!*

The rest of the run had its ups and downs, but from that day on I realized the power of choosing to be positive, and tried to put it into practice. The show had 120 performances, each of which gave me the opportunity to live my childhood dream, and I tried to bring that joy to every one of them. I wasn’t perfect, and the experience wasn’t what I had dreamed of as a kid, because it was grown-up real life. But I would take that reality over my childhood fantasy any day.

—As told to Crystal G. Martin



# Eva Longoria Parker's Aha! Moment

The *Desperate Housewives* actress had always thought ethnicity defined her—until a trip to Mexico showed her what she's really about.

I AM MEXICAN-AMERICAN—I COULDN'T be any more 50-50. I eat tacos and guacamole, but I love apple pie. I listen to mariachi music, but I also love Justin Timberlake. At my wedding reception, we had a beautiful cake, but we also served pan de polvo, a traditional Mexican wedding cookie.

I'm proud to have a Mexican heritage, and I'd always deeply rooted my identity in it. Then, about ten years ago, I went to Mexico to visit the ruins of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan. I remember thinking before I left, *I can't wait to go to Mexico to learn about my heritage*. But when I got there, I was perceived as American because I didn't speak Spanish and at the time knew very little about the history of Mexico. Yet in America, I was considered Mexican because of how I looked and my last name. It was confusing. I thought, *If I'm not Mexican, and I'm not American, who am I?*

When I got home to Texas, I educated myself about my family's history. I studied Latino art, literature, and history and traced my family's genealogy back through Mexico to Spain. I also researched the histories of other ethnic groups in this country. Whether it was African-Americans, German immigrants, or Jews from Europe, I saw that every ethnic group had gone through struggles, but we all still identify ourselves as Americans. My aha moment came when I realized that my identity is not about where my family came from; instead, it's about who I am and who I want to be. Ever since, I've tried to define myself by the work I do to help others, and by the people who motivate me—the people I look up to.

My mother is one of those people. My older sister, Lisa, is intellectually disabled, and when she

was a child, my mother sat with her at school every day to make sure she was learning. My mother later became a teacher's assistant and then a special education teacher. In her 25 years of work, she touched the lives of thousands of students. She taught me to speak for those who are voiceless and to embrace public service as a personal responsibility.

My family's experience inspired me to found Eva's Heroes, an after-school program in San Antonio for young adults with developmental disabilities. Working with these kids, I've seen the excitement a new experience can bring them. Even if it's a small thing, like doing an art project or going bowling, the joy they feel is palpable.

This work has helped me find something bigger than myself, but it has also helped me find my true self. My identity doesn't have to be Mexican; it doesn't have to be American—my philanthropy defines who I really am.

—As told to Crystal Martin



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# Christiane Amanpour's Aha! Moment

The intrepid foreign correspondent and new host of ABC's *This Week* lived a sheltered childhood in Iran, until a "seismic political shift" in her country opened her eyes and gave her life purpose.

**I**N 1978 I WAS 20 AND LIVING WITH MY family in Iran. I was between high school and college, trying to figure out what to do with myself. But I always assumed a few things were fairly certain: I would marry early, stay in Iran, and continue to live a relatively sheltered life.

The Iranian Revolution changed all that. I remember sitting on the porch with my parents and sisters in the evenings listening to the low, rumbling voice of Ayatollah Khomeini broadcast from the nearby mosque, preaching prayer and revolution. We'd all look at each other, wondering what this seismic political shift would mean—both for our lives and for our country. At the time, Iran was a monarchy, and under the shah, people hadn't been involved in politics—certainly not my family. We didn't know you could question the system.

Eight months before the shah was overthrown, I was in the living room with my father. He was staring out the window, and he said, "It's all over. Nothing is ever going to be the same." When your father, the adult you most depend on, says that, and you can feel his deep, deep sadness, uncertainty, and fear, it has an effect.

To quell protests, the shah instituted martial law, with a curfew of 9 P.M. One night, when my father and I were walking home from a dinner party, soldiers suddenly came upon us and pointed their bayonets at us, forcing us to hurry home.

Those were scary, uncertain times, but each hardship solidified in my mind that I wanted to be in the middle of global events. Not as a victim, as I had been, but as a storyteller. I'd found my life's mission, and there was no looking back.

Then something serendipitous happened: My sister had been attending a small journalism college in London, but she decided after one term that she



Amanpour's fearless reporting has taken her from Bosnia to Rwanda.

didn't want to continue. To avoid our family having to forfeit the tuition, I took her place. That's why I sometimes call myself an "accidental journalist." Six months later, I realized I needed to come to the United States; I thought, *If I have a mission and work hard, I can be successful in this country.*

I studied at the University of Rhode Island, got an internship at a local news station, and then went to CNN—which had been in existence only three years. I've now been telling stories from around the world for more than two decades. When I think back on that time in Iran, I know that every one of my experiences then gave me the insight and empathy to communicate with the American people—whether it's illuminating the human story behind civil conflict or continuing the exploration of Islam. What happens globally impacts America every day, and I am committed to making the world understandable. —As told to Crystal G. Martin

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