

# Cleaning Up Your Act I

## The Minnie Kerchevsky Stories

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in the most unlikely places



A Collection of Stories For Growth by  
**DEE SHIPMAN**



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# Introduction

Real wisdom can often be found in the most unlikely places....not from teachers, coaches, professors and so on, but from ordinary people who have their own life experiences to draw on to help others.

Cleaning Up Your Act is a collection of the stories of one of these very special people.....

Minnie Kerchevsky is a so-called 'ordinary woman', a cleaner, a 'daily', with no pretensions, no super-ego... just a desire to make things better in any way she can; helping those around her to "clean up their acts" in her own unique and heart-warming way!

Minnie believes that what stops us being happy is thinking we don't have choices - and that feel-good is a state of mind we can always choose to be in!

So in 'Cleaning Up Your Act', we gradually learn about Minnie's own life and events - and how she dealt with challenges and learned how to see raindrops as sunbeams in disguise! - interwoven through the stories she shares about the people she impacts with the homespun wisdom that is the essence of who and how she is, because of who and how she has been.

Each of us has met Minnie, or someone like her, in our lives... and if we haven't, we're the poorer for it - so here's our chance to put that right!

# MEET THE AUTHOR

Dee Shipman began her professional career as an actress and singer, both in the theatre, and on TV, where she appeared in series such as The Avengers (Propellant 23) and Emergency - Ward 10. She then went on to a very successful career in radio, including co-presenting a



weekly series for the BBC Teen Scene, and having two series of her own for Radio Luxembourg Ready Steady Radio and Kids Like Us. During this period Dee was signed to Decca Records, and released a single of Mel Tormé's classic "Comin' Home Baby!" Dee also wrote for the magazine Pop Weekly, in which she had her own weekly column. As a singer, Dee recorded a twelve track LP that was produced by Norman Newell. The album featured such evergreen standards as "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?", "The Way You Look Tonight" and "One Hand, One Heart". The album was finally released in July 2008 by Stage Door Records. Titled 'She Isn't Me' the album concludes with a new recording from Dee Shipman and Roger Webb's musical 'Emma'.

## SONG WRITING

Dee first started writing lyrics when she began her song-writing collaboration with composer Roger Webb. Their considerable output included writing "Sad Song Lady" for Blossom Dearie, "The Rainbow

Bridge" for Danny Williams and "Making It By Myself" for the Kenneth Tynan and Clifford Williams musical Carte Blanche at the Phoenix Theatre in London ... the show wasn't well reviewed - but the song got rave notices! Dee and Roger also composed music and lyrics for three musical concepts A Kid For Two Farthings (based on the 1955 film of the Wolf Mankowitz modern classic story); The Last Touring Love Show; and Emma (based on the life of Emma Hamilton).

Dee went on to write songs with Marc Wilkinson, Werner Becker, George Garvarentz, Albert Van Dam, Ralph Lewin, and Herbert Chappell.

And then in 1976, Dee began a very important songwriting partnership with Charles Aznavour, which still continues, and has produced the Aznavour cult favourite "Pretty Shitty Days" as well as "A Very Private Christmas" and "You Make Me Hungry For Your Loving" amongst many others. It was Aznavour who introduced Dee to Petula Clark, and Dee and Petula wrote their first song together in 1978, and have been friends and partners since then. The Clark – Shipman partnership produced the original stage musical Someone Like You which toured the United Kingdom and transferred to the West End in 1990. Dee and Clark have also written over 50 songs together for Clark's commercial albums and singles, plus their second musical, J'Accuse.....!, based on the life of Emile Zola, and the Dreyfus Affair. Two songs from the score can be heard on the CD In Her Own Write, released by Sepia Records in 2007.

In 1989, while continuing to write all Aznavour's English lyrics, and

also working on two musicals with Clark, Dee wrote the script and co-produced a number of TV docudramas, including Blavatsky, and What happens When We Die, as well as Petain, charting the life of Philippe Pétain. The film featured Harry Andrews in the title role, his last film.. (Portions of the film's score, composed by Clark, can be heard on In Her Own Write.)

Charles Aznavour's musical Lautrec, with English lyrics by Dee, premiered at the Theatre Royal, Plymouth in March 2000 before transferring to the Shaftesbury Theatre, London.

Dee is also currently working on J'Accuse.....!, having now completed the book of the show as well as the lyrics.

## **NLP, COACHING, TRAINING, & WRITING**

Dee is an NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) Master Coach, Trainer, and Master Coach Trainer, and she and Paul Jacobs are partners in the Training & Coaching Organisation Paul founded nearly 20 years ago, New Oceans. Together they run regular Life, Business, Education, Coaching, and Performing & Creative Arts trainings, workshops, and seminars, in the UK and in the Middle East, and are both also extremely successful Master Coaches.

In 2006, Dee wrote the world's first - and only! - NLP Songs For Change, a unique musical interpretation of the tools and techniques of NLP. The music for this CD is in Country style, and was composed and performed by Wes McGhee.

Dee has also written several books of short stories, based on her NLP experiences:- The Sunbeam Collection Vol.1, The Sunbeam Collection Vol.2, and All We Are Is Our Stories. Vol.1. She has also written three volumes of the Magic 7 series - 'Coaching Tips', 'Stress Busting Tips' and 'Sales Tips'. Dee is currently writing Volume 2. of All We Are Is Our Stories, plus a book on Inspirational Parenting; and she has just completed writing - and illustrating! - her latest book, an NLP primer with a difference, The Mop Is Not The Cherry Tree!

Dee's passion is to grow others to fulfil their own potential, in whichever area it may be. So she is a well respected figure in the corporate world, coaching senior executives in the business field. And of course in her own specialist areas of the performing and creative arts Dee is internationally known to have her own unique way of helping artists and artistes to achieve success.

She also has a great way of helping in all kinds of health challenges.

# Cleaning Up Your Act - Part 1

## MINNIE

You mis - heard my name -I'm not Millie...I'm Minnie - Minnie Kerchevsky. When I was born they called me Miriam; but I was so puny, they didn't think I'd survive! So they gave me a new name to give me a new life.....and Mum said as I was so small they'd call me Minnie instead!

I think that's what I do, in a funny kind of way, cleaning all these people's homes and offices.....it's like I'm giving them a fresh identity, a new way of living. Listen to me already.....! But you know something even crazier? ,

I also sometimes think there's a part of me, deep inside, who is still Miriam .....and that maybe we're all really all the different parts of us we might have been, and can still be if we want to.....but what do I know? I'm just a cleaner from Clapton.....!

You know Clapton? Used to be a poor but respectable part of London..... But now? Well, you should see the price of the houses! I don't know if that's about how the value of property has gone up, or how the value of money has gone down! Both probably.....I've found that life is not very often about "either or", it's mostly about "and", isn't it?. All I know is, Sarah Jane, my daughter, can't afford anywhere

round here: she's moved out to Watford.....and that's not exactly cheap, is it? But that's another story.

So yes - as I was saying, I'm Minnie: I'm sixty-eight, a bit overweight (so the new name all those years ago really worked!), and I clean to earn some extra money....no, that's not the whole of it - I do need the money, sure....but also I actually enjoy what I do! And not many people nowadays can honestly say that, can they? Which is sad really.....

But also funny .....a nice Jewish girl who loves housework! When my mother's biggest dream was to be able to afford someone who came in to clean for her! And what happened? Eventually the time came when she could afford it.....and you know what? Every Friday morning, for an hour before Gladys the cleaner arrived, my mother would go round the place furiously tidying, dusting

"I don't want she should think we live like pigs!", Mum would exclaim!

But I love making things clean, sorting out a mess; I like everything in its place. Because then my head feels tidier inside as well. Of course that's not how I was brought up....I mean, Mum tried her best.....but with two of them and three kids in a council flat it wasn't easy for *her*. I sometimes think that's why I'm like I am. I mean, it's just the natural way of things, isn't it? We start off doing what they do, talking like they do, being little copies of the grown-ups round us; then we go through what Mum used to call "a phase" - we do the exact opposite!

And then we seem to strike a balance somewhere between the two extremes - like them, but not, different but not. And maybe that's

when we're most ourselves. Course, then as we get older, we start to get more like them again.....! The number of times lately I've found myself saying or doing something, and I've thought

"Oh my God - I'm turning into my mother!" Funny really.....

But you know, secretly I find it's sort of comforting as well: because I like to see patterns in things, in life. I always think it makes the world seem more....more... intentional somehow. Yes, that's definitely the word - intentional. Like there really is order, and not chaos. That someone or something somewhere had a plan, that things don't just happen. And it's just that because we're so caught up in our tiny part of this pattern, we can't see the whole thing.

Do you know, it's just dawned on me, telling you that.....maybe that's another reason I love cleaning other people's places - because I'm not caught up emotionally in their chaos! I can stand back, see what the big pattern is - how their office, or kitchen, or whatever, is meant to look, and then get on with sorting it out!

And maybe that's the secret of how I deal with any kind of mess in life..... maybe I 'step back' from it for a minute, and I imagine I'm standing on the moon, looking down at it: and then all the feelings inside me seem to change! It's like stepping out of who I am, and seeing what a small part of the pattern it really is.....and then I can go in and clean up the mess, just like it was someone else's!

But what do I know? I would think that, wouldn't I..... a cleaner from Clapton?

## **Cleaning Up Your Act - Part 2**

### **THE MIRIAM PART OF ME**

You remember I told you about being named Miriam when I was born? And then because they thought I was too weak and small to live, they gave me a new name, and that's how I became Minnie? Well the strange thing is, although I've been Minnie for nearly all my sixty-eight years, my parents were right...because Miriam didn't die - she's still here inside me!

I don't know if I can explain what I mean; but it's like sometimes, when I'm in a situation that's getting me angry, or impatient with someone, or something, and I can hear my voice getting louder, and I can feel my temper rising to where I might say something I'll regret later, there's suddenly this quiet, gentle little voice in my head, saying "It's okay Bubbela, don't upset yourself.....life's good, isn't it?"

And that's not like the Minnie me at all, so it must be Miriam, mustn't it? Although now I come to think of it, she's not the only one in there! Let me make something clear.....it's definitely not like being..... what do they call it?, oh yes - schizophrenic, because I know these aren't real people in my head.....! I know that what I'm 'hearing' is just the different parts of me - the mothering part of me, the wife part, the daughter part, the cleaner part, of me myself; and also the people in my life - my family, people I've known - it's like I have a video album of them all, inside my head! But I think it's just natural.....specially

maybe for women; I mean, don't they say we're good at multi-tasking? Well then maybe each different job is being done by a different part of us!

And don't tell me I'm the only one who thinks this way either....I remember my Auntie Judy, who had a button business with her husband, my uncle Dave - if you phoned her at the office, this posh voice would answer the phone

"Good morning, Bronsky's Buttons. May I help you?" Then I'd say

"Hello Auntie Judy",

and suddenly she was instantly back to being the person and the voice I'd known all my life....."Oh it's you Minnie darling; what do you want, quickly, I'm busy!" You see what I mean? A totally different person! But both exactly the right one for the job!

So I've come to the conclusion it's not some craziness of mine, it's normal, it's our way of coping . And not just women , men as well..... take my Jack, for instance.

Did I mention Jack, my husband? He was a lovely man.....give his last shilling ( that's old money for those of you too young to remember!) to someone, he would. And often did, which I admit didn't always make me very happy, specially when I needed it for the gas meter! And always singing, laughing, joking...a good man.

And you could always depend on him - he was like this strong person who would stand up for me, for the kids, against anyone, in any situation.

And yet, for himself? Never! The number of times I begged him to start his own little business, because he hated the big company he worked for. They treated him like dirt: no, that's not what I mean. What I really mean is, they treated him like he was invisible. He'd been there so long, they didn't see him any more. Always passed him over when it came to promotion.

But he'd never say a word....just smile, and take it. Even when I could see how it aggravated him so much, he'd bottle it all up. So what happened to the strong Jack who'd stand up to be counted for anyone else? That Jack just sat down quietly in a corner in his head, and let another part of himself take over - the one who didn't want to rock any boats, make any trouble. You see....? All the different parts of ourselves we have inside. And each one doing what they do best.

So who's to say that that part of Jack was wrong? He wanted to keep a safe regular wage coming in, so we'd always have some kind of security. Life was different then....if you had a job, unless you did something terrible, you knew you had it 'til you retired.

Today, there isn't such a thing....even the kids with University degrees can't be sure of even getting a job, let alone keeping it! So it's no good me giving my grandson, Anthony, the same advice I would have done with someone his age thirty years ago....the world's changed, so I have to change which 'inner me' talks to him.

Before it might have been the part of me who, a lot like that part of Jack, thinks the most important thing in life is to fit in, to have security. But now the part of me that will be more useful for my

Anthony is the part that has the courage to be creative, to be  
itself.....the part that doesn't say

"I'll change who I am to be what the world will accept", but says

"This is who I am, let me change the world!"

Sometimes I wish I'd listened to that part of myself more  
often.....because that's the me who would never regret what she's done  
- only what she didn't do.. .

I'll maybe tell you some other time....

## **Cleaning Up Your Act - Part 3**

### **MELANIE FROM ACCOUNTS**

So okay....maybe I shouldn't have sat in the Managing Director's chair that night last year! But he'd left the office at six o'clock - and it was half past nine, and I'm still there. And I'm a bit tired.....I'd cleaned my lady in Fulham's house at seven that morning, then her friend's place in Chelsea. Then I went home and looked after my neighbour's little girl for a few hours while she went to visit her husband in ....but that's another story!

Then at five thirty I get into the offices to clean; and by seven I thought that I had the place to myself as usual; I quite enjoy that - it's like the outside matches the inside of my head, which is most times the only place I can get a bit of peace, talk things over with all the different parts of me, or not, if I don't feel like talking. And when the offices are empty, and my body is busy cleaning, I can be quiet inside and out.

So anyway, I'm making my way along to the Accounts department, when I hear something. To be honest, it scared me a bit....well it was so unexpected, wasn't it? I realise it's coming from the Accounts office.....so I get my mop in both hands ready to defend myself - honestly, I make myself laugh sometimes, the daft things I come up

with.....! What did I think I would have done if it had been an intruder..? Squeegie-d them into submission!?! But it makes you feel better, doesn't it.....?

Anyway, I pushed open the door, as quietly as I could, and looked round it; At first I couldn't see anything unusual.....then I heard the noise again, coming from the other side of the computers.... So I crept into the office until I could get a proper look.....and there she was - Melanie from Accounts, sitting at her desk, crying and snuffling her way through a box of Kleenex Balsam tissues!

"Bubbela, what's the matter?" I said, and I went and pulled up a chair next to her, and put my arm round her. "What's happened?" She's a lovely girl - well woman, really; I think she must be in her late thirties; pretty, and small.

"Oh Minnie", she hiccups into my shoulder, "I don't think I can stand it here any more! I absolutely hate this job! The people are okay, but it's the job itself.....sitting at this bloody desk and computer eight hours every day, adding and subtracting 'til the numbers are like ants marching over my life!"

She sat up a bit, and took another tissue, and I said

"So what would you like to do instead? And she looks at me a bit embarrassed and says shyly

"I'd like to be a dance teacher....."

“Nu? So why don’t you do that?” And she looks at me and half-smiles sadly, and says “I can’t afford to Minnie! It’s too big a risk - to leave a regular paid job when I’ve got Susie”

And I remember hearing that she’s a single mother, which must be really hard. And just as I’m wondering what I can say or do to help her, Miriam quietly says in my head

“It’s ‘either or’ again isn’t it?” Of course.....! So I say to Melanie

“You know Melanie darling, I’m a lot older than you (like that’s a big surprise to her, I’m sure!). And the funny thing I’ve found in life is that it’s not often about ‘either or’ - it’s much more often about ‘and’.....” Now she’s sitting up straighter and her eyes are dry, and I can tell she’s actually listening.

“I mean, how would things feel different if you didn’t expect this job to fulfil you, only to pay your mortgage etc; and you start teaching dance in a small way, maybe evenings or weekends, and don’t expect it to pay, just do it to make you feel good? Would that maybe make a difference?”

And she looks at me wide-eyed, and suddenly grins. “What have I got to lose by giving it a go?” she says. “Thanks Minnie!” And she closes down the computer, and goes off home. And that’s when I finished cleaning and went and sat in the Managing Director’s chair, wondering still about Melanie.....

So what brought it all back to me today? Well, when I got to the offices again this afternoon, there were balloons and people having a drink; and there was Melanie, cutting a cake.

“Oh I didn’t know it was your birthday today !”

“It’s not, Millie” she laughed. “It’s my leaving party!” And she walked me over to a couple of chairs, and said

“You were right.....I took your advice, you remember? And I started teaching dance a couple of evenings a week, and it grew and grew! So then I was doing weekends as well. And the funny thing was, the job here seemed much more bearable....! And there was no pressure on me to make the dance teaching pay.....but you know what? It has! And I can afford to do less days here, which they’ve agreed to, and more days building my dance business!”

And she gave me a big hug

“Thank you so much Minnie....you’ve changed my life!”

“No, no-one can change anyone else, darling - you did it yourself” I told Melanie. But what do I know.....a cleaner from Clapton?

## Cleaning Up Your Act - Part 4

### GETTING IT OFF MY CHEST!

You know something else I’ve noticed over the years I’ve spent listening to other people talking - and talking to myself? It’s this - the words people use, the way they describe things, says more than what

they intend! Can you believe it!? Let me give you a for instance....my Jack's sister, Ruby, was always upset at the world; she'd say things like

"You know what really makes me sick, Minnie? It's the way people are full of crap, pardon my French. I can't stomach it!"

And you know something.....she was getting worse and worse pains, she went to the doctor, and was told she had Irritable Bowel Syndrome.....!

And there was also Carol, who job-shared with Melanie in Accounts – she was off for a week with a frozen shoulder....and you know what? Her mother had died three months before, and Carol had to sort everything out.....her brother was "too busy", her sister "lived too far away".....and Carol told me one day

"I'm having to shoulder all the responsibility for the whole family.....!"

Things like that, they make you look at life differently, don't they? And for me, the more I heard, the more it started me really noticing the things I say myself!

Like a few months ago.....the offices took on a new night caretaker. And from the first time I let myself in, he was like the Gestapo..

"Who are you?" "Where's your pass and name tag?" And in such a tone of voice! Sounds silly, I know, but it started really getting me down; every time I got to the offices, this interrogation. And he was getting nastier and nastier, as well; making sneering remarks about a "fat old woman like you shouldn't be in a smart place like this", and "Doesn't