

## Love What You Love Podcast

### Episode 12: Badass Historical Women with Diana Giovinazzo

#### August 4, 2020

Hey, I'm Julie Rose. Welcome to *Love What You Love*. I'm an author, creator, and enthusiast, and I've always been fascinated by the things that people are super into, because they're always a unique expression of curiosity, and joy, and wonder. So every week I'll introduce you to another fascinating human who's into really interesting stuff.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! This podcast exists to give you a bit of a rest; a bit of a respite, and to add a little light into the world, and hooo boy do we need it! I don't know about y'all, but it's August, and it feels like this year has been about 7,000 years long already. But I expect, for today's guest, this year has felt especially long, but for a much happier reason.

Diana Giovinazzo is an author of historical fiction whose debut novel *The Woman in Red* is out today! August 4th! Here's a bit of the blurb:

*Destiny toys with us all, but Anita Garibaldi is a force to be reckoned with. Forced into marriage at a young age, Anita feels trapped in a union she does not want. But when she meets the leader of the Brazilian resistance, Giuseppe Garibaldi, in 1839, everything changes.*

*Swept into a passionate affair with the idolized mercenary, Anita's life is suddenly consumed by the plight to liberate Southern Brazil from Portugal - a struggle that would cost thousands of lives and span almost ten bloody years. Little did she know that this first taste of revolution would lead her to cross oceans, traverse continents, and alter the course of her entire life - and the world.*

In my conversation with Diana, recorded way back in late February, we talk about uncovering women's stories; her strongest editor and biggest critic; why there's more to Italy than Ancient Rome, the Renaissance, and the Mafia; and so much more. So find out why Diana loves badass historical women and why you might learn to love them too.

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**Julie:** Diana, thank you so much for joining me!

**Diana:** Thank you for having me. It's such a pleasure to be here.

**Julie:** I'm so excited to talk to you, for lots of reasons. You have a book coming out, it's called *The Woman in Red*, and it's historical fiction. Can you tell me a little bit about what it is?

**Diana:** Well, *The Woman in Red* is the story of Anita Garibaldi. It's what you would call biographical historical fiction. It follows her from Brazil in her childhood to Uruguay, and then ultimately to Italy. If the name Garibaldi rings a bell, her husband Giuseppe Garibaldi was the man who united Italy and made Italy pretty much what it is today.

**Julie:** And how did you find out about her? What brought you to Anita?

**Diana:** I was doing research on my heritage. At the time I was looking into mostly women in immigration, and when you're looking into your Italian heritage, immigration is so prevalent, obviously, for many reasons. When I was going through my research, my dad was like, "You should really look into this woman named Anita Garibaldi." And I was like, "But she's not a US immigrant, this doesn't even involve what I'm researching," even though, mind you, I had no idea what I was ultimately going to do with that research.

And he was like, "No you should look into it! I think you'd be really interested in her story." I picked up a biography and I fell in love with her and her story. She was so amazing and so fierce. I feel like that word keeps getting used over and over again for her, but it's so true because she was a fighter. She often fought while pregnant.

**Julie:** Oh my god! [laughs]

**Diana:** I know! I can only imagine. She was very much an, "I'm going to do things my way," kind of woman, and that spoke to me.

**Julie:** So it came out of your research into your heritage, but had you been a writer prior to this?

**Diana:** I haven't actually... I never published anything. I always wanted to be a writer. For as long as I could remember I always wanted to be a writer, but it wasn't something that wasn't actually happening for me. Things happen where you hit these dead ends and it just doesn't seem to happen. When I was in my 20s - because that's, you know, 'just a few years ago' [laughs] - I had said, "All right, I'm going to actually try this thing. I'm going to *make* it happen for myself, this is what I want. It's what I've always wanted. Let's make this happen." And we lived in Texas at the time, my husband was in the military, and I tried so hard, and I fell flat on my face; completely, totally failed. It was rejections out the wazoo.

And when we left Texas, we moved back to California where we are now, I was like, "I need to be able to put food on the table. I need to be able to have a career," because I'm not one who really believes in starving for your art. Mama likes to eat! [laughs] So I was like, "I need to think realistically. Maybe writing isn't for me. Maybe this isn't the career that I'm meant to have." So I went and became a paralegal. Once I started going back and researching my family heritage and Italian history in general, it was something that piqued my interest quite a bit, that's when I discovered her, and that's when everything just, kind of, came into place.

**Julie:** So you said that you'd always wanted to be a writer. Was that from the time you were a little kid? And what about it was interesting for you?

**Diana:** That's a great question. It was something that I was always drawn to, the storytelling. I loved storytelling. I loved being able to tell stories, and share stories, and listen to stories. My very, very first memory is me sitting... Remember Teddy Ruxpin, right?

**Julie:** Mm-hmm!

**Diana:** My grandfather, he had Alzheimer's, and he was bedridden. So when I was a little girl, one of my very first memories was me sitting in one of those little wooden toddler chairs. I sat there, and I couldn't quite read yet, but I had the Teddy Ruxpin books. So I sat by his bedside and I made up stories to Teddy Ruxpin for him. I feel like maybe that was the beginning of it all.

**Julie:** Yeah, a way to connect and a way to, maybe, get out of the situation that you're in, because that's hard, seeing your grandfather like that.

**Diana:** Yeah.

**Julie:** So that was kind of the first thing. Did your folks read to you? And if so, what was your favorite book when they were reading to you?

**Diana:** Oh my goodness. My dad started reading to me when I was an infant. My parents were very big on literature. And it's funny now, because I love watching science fiction. He was very much into reading science fiction at the time, so he would read to me whatever he was reading.

**Julie:** Oh my goodness!

**Diana:** Yeah, I got science fiction and *Dr. Who*, all of that from a very, very early age. I honestly can't remember the stuff that they initially read to me. And I'm sure parents can remember this. I just remember books were always an everyday part of life. It was, "We'll go to the library on Saturdays and you get as many books as you want. We'll go to the bookstore..." And my mom was like, "Okay, you've got 20 minutes. Knock yourself out." She just let me go for it. She didn't have to worry about losing me in a clothing store. It was the bookstore. From the time I was a child, she was like, "We can never pass up a bookstore with you, ever!" They loved this and they cultivated it. There were always books and they were appreciated, for birthdays and Christmas. My mother was always very much, "You can have as many books as you want."

**Julie:** And that love for reading and for books has, obviously, brought you to the present. You and Michele have a podcast called *Wine, Women, and Words*. Tell me a little about the podcast and why you do it. What do you get out of it?

**Diana:** The podcast is where we interview authors, and Julie, we've had you on the podcast multiple times. We always loved you as a guest.

**Julie:** Yes! So fun.

**Diana:** And so, we just enjoy sitting down with authors, and talking to them, and learning about them as humans, learning about their writing process. Right now our biggest thing is finding out the weirdest thing they've ever googled. That's always fun, especially for the fantasy authors. We just love it. It's such great laughs.

**Julie:** That is great. So what *is* the weirdest thing that someone's googled?

**Diana:** Goodness... The author A. J. Hackwith who did *The Library of the Unwritten*, she's got some very interesting demons. [laughs] She's got these great characters that she had to develop, and there are all these really weird demons that she was googling in her search history.

**Julie:** Speaking of googling, and research, and things, you were doing research on your Italian family history. Obviously, nowadays, doing that kind of research is a lot easier, but what... Were you going on Ancestry.com, or was there, like, an archive that you were going to? Where were you doing your personal family history research?

**Diana:** At that time it was Ancestry.com where I was initially starting, and then that kind of branched into this interest of what it was like for Italian women immigrants. I always had this... you know, the whole feminist thing, and I started getting into women's history. When I was researching that, that led to, "What was it like for these female immigrants coming into the country at this time?" We hear about *The Godfather*, and we hear about the men's experience, but we never hear about the women's experiences through it all. There's the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, and we don't really get the details of *who* was in there, and what happened, and how traumatic it was for the country at the time when it happened.

So, that lead me into research about these other women, Italian women, in our history, because when you look at Italian history in general, as it's portrayed presently, you pretty much have three topics. You have the Mafia, you have the Renaissance, and then you have Ancient Rome. Those are the only narratives you seem to find. Don't get me wrong, Ancient Rome and the Renaissance; super cool. Alyssa Palombo is a great author. I love the books that she does with that. I love those; Rome and the Renaissance. I hate Mafia narratives.

**Julie:** Is it just because it's so stereotypical?

**Diana:** It's very caricature. When you look at it from the perspective of immigrant's histories, it's not quite fair because you see these Italian men and women, women who are super submissive who just get beaten up all the time and have no say. And then you have these Italian men who are very brutish, and they want to subvert the culture, and they want to subvert the order of society.

There's a terrible museum in Nevada and it's all about the Mafia narrative. I went through there and it was very upsetting for me because it was... The opening video had something like, certain people "wanted to subvert the American dream..." and it was very, in some ways, kind of, anti-immigrant, when you look at it. It felt very anti-Italian where they portrayed this one narrative of, "This is what the Mafia is, and it's all Italians, and they're terrible, and they go around killing people."

During that time period, the '20s and '30s when you also have the Mafia happening... because the reality is, it did happen, but you also have organizations like the KKK putting out anti-Italian cartoons. There's some very, very disturbing cartoons that you can see there about it. That's the long story of why I don't like of Mafia narratives.

**Julie:** Understandably. So, because you saw these three threads, it's like, "I'm not seeing the stories I want to hear about."

**Diana:** Yeah, there's this whole section of Italian history that I just didn't know, that isn't taught to a lot of us. I didn't know about Unification. I had heard of the name Garibaldi; it was like he's just some dude. I had never heard of Anita before I started researching her, before my dad brought it up to me. When I started looking into that, I was like, "Whoa!" Italy wasn't a country until 1860.

**Julie:** Oh, it was that late?

**Diana:** Yeah. I didn't know that. We don't even think about the fact that they were controlled by... You know, Austria had a huge hand in controlling it in the north, and there were warring factions within the country, and there was a whole other kingdom in Southern Italy on top of that. The Unification Wars, that's history that I'm starting to really get into right now. There were so many interesting stories just within that. It's a period that's fascinating. Even World War II; when we look at World War II we just think Mussolini and that everybody just followed Mussolini in World War II in Italy, and that's not the case.

Recently I was reading the D-Day website. They had an article and they said that Italian women were a part of the resistance, more so than any of the Western ally countries. This is something we don't talk about and we don't see, and it's a history that I want to see more of. It's a narrative that I want to see more of when it comes to my culture.

Unification also had an effect on immigration, why so many of us ended up in the United States, and why so many of us are Southern Italians outside of Italy.

**Julie:** So, what was, like, the big wave of Italian immigration, and why Southern Italy?

**Diana:** A lot of the immigration started in the 19th century, and it kind of ended around World War II, when that big, major wave stopped. There's a lot in the United States, and the other big countries were Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. Tons of Italians in South America. In fact, I have some distant cousins, I found out a year ago, that are in Venezuela.

**Julie:** So, America, yeah, I get that, but why Uruguay? Why South America?

**Diana:** There was opportunity. There were opportunities for trade, for work. A lot of them went over there for work as well. In Southern Italy there was quite a bit of poverty. There was a lot of poverty during that timeframe so a lot of them came over because of that. They needed jobs. They couldn't put food on the table.

There was a thing that was called white widows, where the women would stay behind, and the men would come over to either South or North America to work. They'd leave the women behind and they'd send home money. So, they were white widows because their husbands weren't really dead but they were still on their own.

**Julie:** And having to make their own lives.

**Diana:** Mm-hmm, and they were having to take care of the family homestead, the children... You know, assuming... The husbands would come back and visit, the wife would get pregnant... So you had a lot of that, and it's a narrative that we just don't really get to see, and it's fascinating.

**Julie:** Yes, I was going to say, that's what I love about historical fiction, is that you can fill in the gaps. People don't learn about this kind of stuff, if at all, and certainly not in depth. That's what's so great about historical fiction is you have a chance to fill in those gaps and educate people.

**Diana:** I hope to educate people with Anita, but there's also the element that it's also fiction, and I'm telling a narrative and a story. As much as there's the real Anita, there's also my character Anita, and hopefully they're very in-line with each other. That's what I'm hoping for, and that's what I was aiming for. But historical fiction gives you a chance to be able to feel. That's one of the things I love about historical fiction. I get to *feel* what it was like. When you're looking at history, there's the dates, there's this war and this war, and this happened, you had kids... It's very down-the-line. But with historical fiction, it's the closest thing I have, I think, to being in a TARDIS because you get to feel what it was like there. You get to get a sense of what their life could have been like.

**Julie:** Exactly. So, it all kind of got started with your family history research. What was your research process as you were getting ready to write this book?

**Diana:** For starters, I picked up a biography. That's usually the best place to start, but there wasn't really much about Anita. There wasn't much that was really told in her voice. So, her biography was by a guy, and then her husband wrote... He loved to write. Garibaldi was quite a writer, so there was a lot of really great gems in his writing. He talked about his love for Anita. He talked about what it was like for them going through some of these things, and he alluded to some things...

I got really lucky. There was a book... And I need to remember the name of this book, it's very long. *Garibaldi and Rio Grande Do Sul's War of Independence from Brazil: The Memoirs of Luigi Rossetti, John Griggs, and Anita Garibaldi*. In this book she was in a conversation with a friend, Felicidad, who is in my book, and they have this conversation and she starts to tell them all about... She tells Felicidad about her story. So, I have Anita's story as told to Felicidad. I was so lucky, and I was able to use her words to try to tell her story.

**Julie:** That's amazing. Now, in terms of, like, creating the color of daily life for Anita and folks, how did you approach that research?

**Diana:** I did a lot of research on the culture. I had a sense of the Italian culture, and I went and researched Southern Brazilian culture because Southern Brazilian culture, obviously, is very different from... I don't want to say very different, but it is a bit different from Northern Brazilian culture. And you have the gauchos, so I needed to engross myself in gaucho history, and gaucho ways, what they did.

As I was writing that first part of the book about Brazil, I was really studying Brazilian culture, and then I went from Brazil to Uruguay. Again, studying the Uruguayan culture and as much Uruguayan history as I could soak up. Then, same with Italy; try to get more of the history, wrap my head around this unification struggle that, really, was a 100-year struggle for them overall just to try to unify as one nation.

**Julie:** So when you were doing this research, how long did it take you to actually... from the time you're like, "Hey this is a great idea," to the time you actually started writing? Or did you research as you were writing?

**Diana:** I like to research as I write. I like to do that. I have a tendency to research, read, get as much information as possible, and start to draft, and get ideas, and put down notes. Then I draft, then I go back, and that draft will create questions in my head of, "What's happening? What about this? Could this happen this way? Can I find something to confirm this?" And I go back and research those specific questions that I have, and then go back to the next draft and work on that based on the information I've gleaned.

**Julie:** Now, do you have, like, a critique group that you work with, or just one person? How do you do your drafting?

**Diana:** I work better with one-on-one than I do with a critique group. I'm one of those writers... I'm a very solo writer, I find. I'm a very social person, as you know, Julie. I'm always out and on the go, but when it comes to writing a drafting, I feel like that's something all my own, and it's my time to focus and be anti-social. It's *my* time. When I was writing *The Woman in Red*, I found a friend, actually. We became really good friends, and she was my critique partner. Her name's Amanda. She actually has a podcast called *To Boldly Write*.

I was able to get to know her and work with her, and having that one-on-one feedback worked really well for me because there is that danger of writing "to" someone, but it's also great to have that personal, established relationship with somebody who can really talk to you, truly, about your writing and be like, "No, this whole section doesn't work." And you know that they come from a place of love as opposed to outright criticism. I've done critique groups before and my experiences with them haven't been great. It felt a lot like writing by committee, and I just can't do it.

**Julie:** Either in the writing of the book, or the research as part of it, what was most surprising to you?

**Diana:** Oh, I've got a great story for you on that.

**Julie:** Yeah, bring it!

**Diana:** So, when I was going through the biography, the biographer talked about this episode that happened in her life where... She's about seven or eight months pregnant, and she's at a battle, on a horse, and everything... I can just picture all the pregnant women and moms cringing and going, "Ooh! that woman! She was able to put up with this!" But she's in the back directing the supply lines, and there was an ambush, and they shot the horse out from under her.

**Julie:** [gasp!]

**Diana:** It gets better. She falls, and she winds up captured by the Brazilian Army. While she's captured by them, they inform her that her husband's dead and she's just got to tell them everything. So, the way the biographer explains it is that somebody recognized her. Somebody from her village recognized her, and that was why they were able to be like, "That's Anita Garibaldi. That's Giuseppe's woman. Let's go get her."

When I was going through her conversations with Felicidad, it wasn't in there. She didn't talk about it at all. I was like, "This is really confusing." She doesn't talk about it at all. Did it not happen? What's the deal? So then I went to Garibaldi's memoirs and I got to the part where the thing happened, falls from the horse, and he says it happened. And he said... And I love this, because only a husband could... You know, husbands and wives get this, where he was like, "She was captured, and there were some words exchanged between her and the guards..." And I was like, "Oh, I know what that means!" And he said, "They told her that I was dead, and she went searching for me, but she couldn't find me, so she ran away. She was able to escape."

And I was like, "Okay, Garibaldi says it happened. The biographer says it happened. The stories don't quite fully match up with each other. I've got to find if this actually happened." So I go through the memoirs and I start skimming through to see if it's maybe in another place. At the end of the memoirs of Felicidad, towards the end, they find a way for her and Garibaldi to get married, officially married in a church. Before she gets married she sits down with a minister and he asks her if she has anything to confess. That's when she tells a story of falling from the horse and searching the battlefield.

What surprised me the most, I think, was when the priest asked her about this, about if she had any sins to confess, the sin that she confessed was vanity. And it was vanity because they recognized her for who she was as a person and not for being his spouse, or somebody's daughter, or somebody's mother. She was recognized as being Anita Garibaldi, the woman fighter than everybody's been talking about, and she was famous.

So, when she went to go searching for her husband, it wasn't just about searching and finding her husband, it was about determining whether or not he still lived. Because if he didn't live, she was like, "I could take my child, and I can go off, and I can be just as famous as him, or ever more so." And that was just so surprising for me. It wasn't just the surprising aspect of it, it was the fact that what really came into place was how

important this story is, and how often we as modern women take things like this for granted. Woman can be more famous and more recognized than their husbands! But she didn't have that choice.

**Julie:** Wow. So... Well, you don't have to spoil your own book. [laughs] I'm just very curious how she, kind of, reconciled that with herself.

**Diana:** Well, if you pick up a copy of *The Woman in Red* available on shelves August 4th, you can get the question answered.

**Julie:** [laughs] I just set that out for you and you ate it right up.

**Diana:** Thank you. Set and spike! [laughs] I appreciate it.

**Julie:** That's right. I love it. So, has this process branched off into other interests, be it research interests, or just interests general that you had not anticipated?

**Diana:** Research interests, really. When I started... I haven't been writing in the blog for years now because things got a little busy, but I started getting really into women's history. I was like, "What other women are there out there that I don't know?" I didn't know about Anita and I was kind of mad, like, "Nobody told me about this awesome woman! What other awesome women are out there that I need to know??" So, I had really gotten into researching women's history, and got into women's history, and I never expected to have this interest in Unification history. I didn't even know the fact that Italy... their unification story. In writing Anita, I fell back in love with my own culture because there was so much history that I just wasn't aware of and I wasn't made aware of.

**Julie:** When you're writing someone who's an actual historical personage, how do you get into their brain in order to write the dialogue? I'm really curious about that process.

**Diana:** I try to see the world through their eyes, and that's why I feel like description and dialogue go along together, because the description will help me see things through their eyes. If I can imagine what it smells like, what's going on outside around her, that's going to help put me into the frame of the dialogue and put me in the frame of her mindset.

**Julie:** So, you want people to learn about these women, or this history. What do you want them to get out of it? What do you want them to take away from it?

**Diana:** These women succeeded in spite of what was thrown at them, in spite of what society said they couldn't do. Anita succeeded in creating her own life for herself in fighting for the rights of others in spite of society telling her she couldn't do it, that she should be a passive woman, and just wait for her husband, and accept the life in the small town of Brazil that she was given. I want people to glean that from that, where they can succeed in spite of whatever crap is going on around them. These women did it, so you can do it too!

**Julie:** I love that. I'm very curious to know what your dad thinks of your book.

**Diana:** He hasn't read it all the way through yet.

**Julie:** What?!

**Diana:** No. He's read bits and pieces. He's read the epilogue, and he's heard the very first part about it. With my father, he's very much into literature as well, so there's always this, kind of, father-daughter dynamic, where if I have my father reading and giving me...

he's going to give me critique ideas. He's going to give me his advice. Whether I like it or not, I'll get my father's advice. If I did that, then a lot of it would be reading towards him. He's my father and I don't want to receive that early criticism from it. Like with my husband, he didn't read it until the box of advanced copies arrived at our door. He waited a couple of weeks and was like, "I really want to read one. People keep asking me if I've read your book, and I keep telling them no, and they keep looking at me like I'm weird."

He's like, "I'd like to read one." So I let him read it, and it worked out well, where I waited about a week before I said anything to see how he liked it. It was funny because he noticed that too, and he was like, "So, you want to ask me, don't you?" And I was like, "Yes!!" But thankfully, he liked it.

**Julie:** That's good. He can stay married to you.

**Diana:** Exactly. So, it's one of those things, when it comes to family, I try to keep it separated. My dad can read it on his own, in his house, when I don't see him reading it.

**Julie:** So, I know you guys ask this on your podcast, so I have to ask you. When you're casting your movie, who are you casting?

**Diana:** Let's see. For Garibaldi himself, I'm kind of thinking somebody of Chris Hemsworth's stature.

**Julie:** *Well!* [laughs]

**Diana:** That's the Garibaldi... Somebody similar to Sam Heughan in *Outlander*.

**Julie:** Girl! I had no idea!

**Diana:** Yeah! Ladies, this is why you want to read the book! For Anita, I don't have a specific actress in mind for her. I have a very specific look in my head for Anita and I have not really come across the actress that I would want to play her. For Luigi Rossetti, who was Garibaldi's best friend, I would say somebody like Thomas Hiddleston would be good. John Griggs, another best friend of Garibaldi's, I kind of see somebody along the lines... maybe on the Chris Evans side or... He's one of the sons from *This Is Us*.

**Julie:** Are there any examples of biographical historical fiction about women that you... besides your own, of course. We'll put links in the show notes! What other books would you recommend people check out?

**Diana:** Greer Macallister's books are fantastic. Another great... Alyssa Palombo, she does some great... I call her my 'Italian sister from another mister'. She and I have so much in common, and so much love of the Italian culture, and we're like, "Wow, so much in common!" We've built up this great friendship. Her books are great. Elise Hooper is doing some great stuff for the American historical fiction, as is Stephanie Dray, Heather Webb. There's a lot out there.

It's become a section of historical fiction where, you know, women are filling in the gaps. I'm saying women, it's mostly women writers. Quite a few represent the literary world now. We're filling in a lot of the gaps that the historical records left out. Some of it is... obviously it's fictional, but we're giving voice to these women that just weren't normally in the historical record.

**Julie:** As I said, this podcast, theoretically, will come out either the day before or the day after your book comes out, so congratulations!

**Diana:** Thank you!

**Julie:** Where can people find the book? Where can they find you online and learn more about it?

**Diana:** If you want to find me on the social media stuff, I'm @DianaGauthor, and there's also DianaGiovinazzo.com. But my book is going to be available anywhere you find books. Amazon, Barnes & Noble, your indie bookstore; all over the place.

**Julie:** Awesome. Thank you so much for taking the time. I'm really excited to read your book. It sounds amazing!

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Huge thanks to Diana for the chat. You can get Diana's debut novel, *The Woman in Red*, anywhere you get books. Also, here's a cool secret: Her next novel has been picked up for publication! *I am Charlotte: The Story of Maria Carolina Charlotte*, the Queen of Naples and Sicily, will be published in the spring of 2022.

You can find Diana on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) @DianaGauthor, and [DianaGiovinazzo.com](#). I'll include links in the show notes, along with links to Diana's favorite nonprofits. A rotating list of my favorite nonprofits is in the show notes as well.

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Be good to yourselves, be good to each other, and love the hell out of whatever it is that you love. You need it, and we need it. Thanks for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

## **Links:**

Find Diana at [DianaGiovinazzo.com](#), on [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#)

[The Woman in Red](#)

[Wine, Women and Words](#)

## **Diana's favorite charities:**

[Human Services Association](#), Bell Gardens, California

[We Need Diverse Books](#)

[The Los Angeles Chapter of the Women's National Book Association](#)

[We the Protesters](#)

[Fisher House](#)

**A rotating list of my favorite nonprofits:**

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