

## Lesra Martin

When Lesra Martin sets foot in a boxing ring, it's natural his first thought is of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter.

He thinks of how Carter interpreted the ring — an arena of his livelihood, where he demonstrated substance over form. Martin's feat in the courtroom with Carter is probably his best-known accomplishment — made famous by the Hollywood movie *The Hurricane* — but the ring doesn't embody his career success. For Martin, the ring has its own meaning.

"The boxing ring itself has always had a hidden gem of a message," Martin said.

"I often think of the arena as a little bit of a challenge one has with one's self. You have an opponent. You also have an opponent in life, but the biggest opponent for all of us has got to be ourselves. At least it is for me."

Raised on the violent streets of Bushwick in Brooklyn, New York, Martin often sees the world partly through the eyes of an illiterate 15-year-old boy.

His greatest obstacle has been combatting his inner demons, even while gracing world stages from the United Nations to The Oprah Winfrey Show as a successful lawyer and literacy advocate. In the back of his mind has always been the doubt he could accomplish something, that he couldn't become a contributing member of society.

"Even though you have that initial fear and panic that you may not be able to do something — because that never leaves you — you do begin to realize, I've been here before and I can overcome this," he said.

"When you're faced with hurdles in life, it reminds you of never giving up on your dreams, your aspirations and your purpose."

Martin said the greatest purpose in life is to

lead a life of purpose. He has spent his entire life searching for his purpose and the beauty is "it's constantly taking new forms", he said.

While he once would have defined success as getting food on the table, today, at 51 years old, it's raising two beautiful daughters and learning to live with self-doubt and fear stemming from his past.

"What constitutes one's greatest success, that's an ongoing thing," Martin said. "I always think there is something more to do and some greater goal to reach. It's hard for me to say what my greatest success has been. I don't really know what tomorrow brings."

While continuing to be a fierce advocate for education as an ambassador for ABC Life Literacy and speaking around the world, Martin hopes to establish a literacy organization where people can face their fears of learning to read and write. He has a scholarship fund for students of Douglas College and hopes to establish one for Kamloops students, as well.

Perhaps his greatest success will one day be giving children the same opportunity he was given at 15 when strangers took him in, helped educate him, enabled him to attend the University of Toronto and later receive his law degree from Dalhousie University.

"For me, the vision of the future would be all of us coming together to lend a hand to ensure as many people as possible have proper access to opportunity and education," Martin said.

"If you give a kid a chance, if you help somebody out and they embrace that help, then you can help change that person's life. If we all did that, can you imagine how beautiful our community would be?"

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Photo: Lesra Martin, pictured here in the Kamloops Boxing Academy ring, finds special meaning in the square space pugilists share between the ropes.