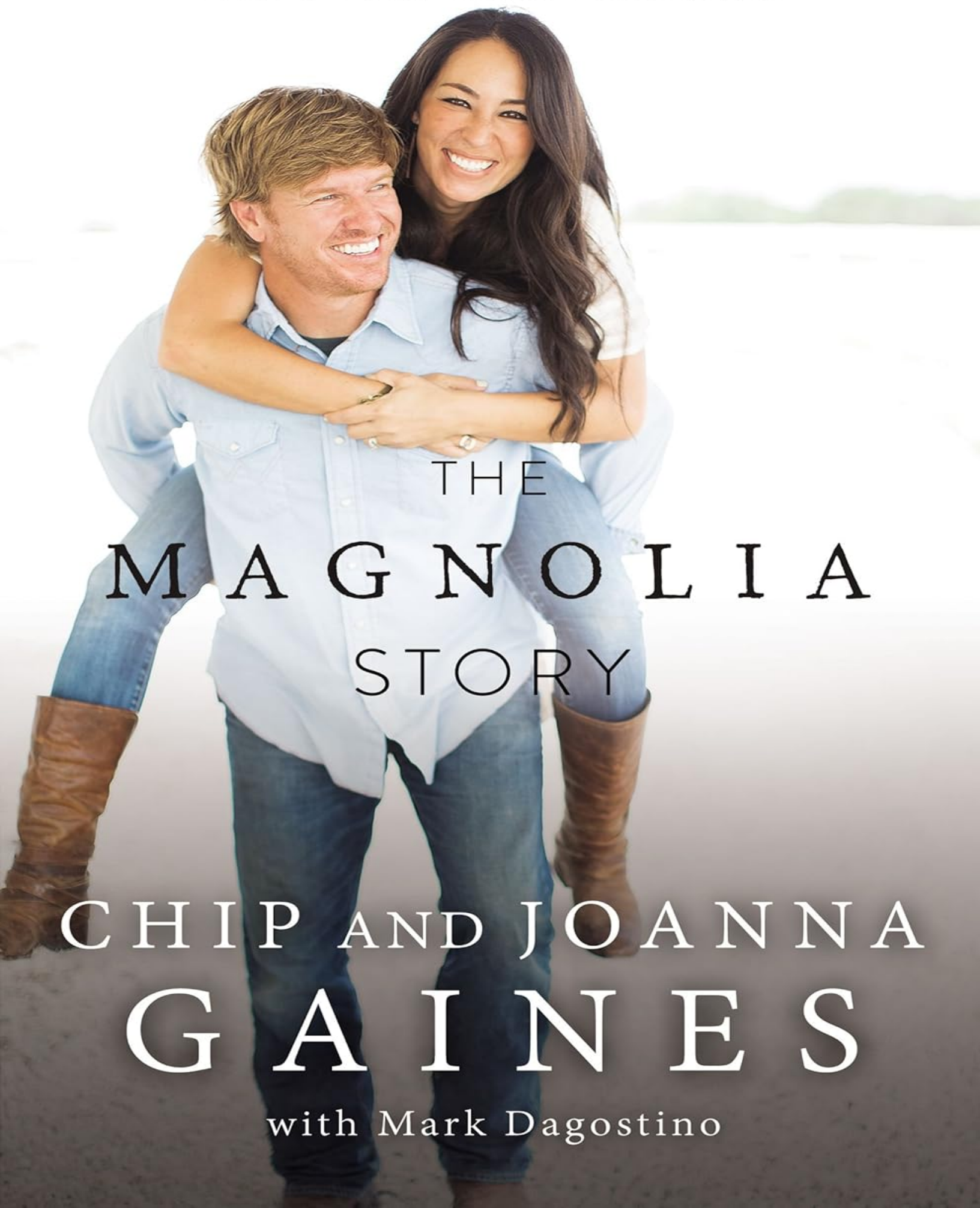


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



THE
MAGNOLIA
STORY

CHIP AND JOANNA
GAINES

with Mark Dagostino

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We would like to dedicate this book to our children—Drake, Ella Rose, Emmie Kay, and Duke—and to the children of Restoration Gateway. Our commitment to you will never fade.

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BLESSINGS IN (A BIG, UGLY) DISGUISE

I have always been one to play it safe. If it were up to me, the less risk involved the better. But this isn't how the story goes—because I am married to the one, the only, Chip Carter Gaines.

One day back in early 2012, my husband decided to go window-shopping online. That's always a risky thing to do, but when Chip's the man behind the mouse it can be downright dangerous. I never know what object—or animal—might show up at my front door on the back of some random delivery truck.

On this particular day, Chip happened to spot a used houseboat for sale.

We'd been living in a house that we were getting ready to flip and we'd just started renovating our farmhouse outside of Waco, Texas, which meant we were on the hunt for a temporary place to live. So Chip clicked through the pictures of that floating two-story shanty with its microscopic kitchen and had a full-blown Chip Gaines epiphany.

I really thought to myself, *How cool would it be to move our family onto a houseboat? We can put it on one of the lakes down here, and the kids and I can fish for breakfast from the balcony. Wow! Jo's gonna love this.*

So he bought it. Sight unseen. We just barely had our heads above water at that point, and he went and threw tens of thousands of dollars down on that thing. And then he didn't say a word. He had it shipped to Waco on a monster tractor-trailer and couldn't wait to show off his surprise when it finally arrived. After all our years of marriage, he was still clueless about how I might react.

I had no idea any of this was going on, of course. But right around that same time, on some random weeknight, I received a phone call from an out-of-state number I didn't recognize. I picked it up.

"Hi, I'm Katie Neff, and I work for a television production company," the woman on the line said. "I saw some of your designs online, and I was wondering . . ."

This Katie had apparently seen photos of our most recent flip house that I'd designed, the one we were living in at the time. A few weeks earlier a friend of mine, Molly, had submitted those photos to a popular blog called DesignMom.com, and I'd been excited that a blog with thousands of followers wanted to feature it. It was the first time my work had ever really been featured on a design blog other than my own. I had a loyal local following back then, but no national following to speak of.

"I loved what you did," Katie continued, "so I looked you up and read *your* blog too. I see that you and your husband work together, and I was just wondering: Would you ever want to be on a TV show?"

I sat there and thought, *Did I just hear that right?*

"What about us would you want to show on TV?" I asked.

"Well, we just love how organic it is—that you and your husband work together. Not only do you sell homes, but you also flip and renovate them. We think it's unique that you're a husband-and-wife team." She went on and on, and I finally said, "Well, let me talk to Chip and I'll get back with you."

I got with Chip, and he immediately said, "That's a scam. Don't call them back."

I was just skeptical. Back in high school I had some buddies who were always trying to get into modeling. They would go to these “agents” and “casting calls” and then wind up paying some guy \$1,000 to take their headshots, and nothing would ever come of it. So, yeah, I thought it was something like that.

Jo really thought we should give them a shot, but I was just like, “Jo, I’m telling you, there’s no way this is legit. We’re gonna meet these people, and they’ll get us all excited thinking they’re gonna make us famous or something, and then say, ‘Oh, by the way, you need to pay us twenty grand.’ ”

I somehow convinced Chip to let me call Katie back. We didn’t have a lot of money just lying around, so I knew there was no way anyone could trick us out of thousands of dollars. (Of course, I knew nothing about that houseboat yet!)

Sure enough, within a couple of weeks Katie sent an entire camera crew to Waco to spend five days filming us for what they called a “sizzle reel”—basically an extended commercial they would put together to try to sell a television series based on the two of us and our little business. They never asked us for any money at all. They were legit, which made us wonder: Why in the world would anyone care to watch us on TV? We don’t even *watch* TV. These people have to be nuts.

After the crew spent a couple of days with us, they started thinking they might be nuts too. Chip and I were *horrible*. We were scared of the cameras, which is hilarious because Chip is the most talkative guy I know. But like clockwork, the moment that red light turned on, he froze.

My mouth was all dry and I couldn’t think straight, and Jo was a little dull. They just followed Jo around and tried to make something out of nothing. It was pretty obvious this could not make good television. We were just awful. We really were.

The crew had me stand in my kitchen and try to make pancakes with the kids hanging off of my legs while Chip was basically sucking his thumb over in the corner, and the whole time I was trying to convince the kids not to look into the camera so it would look more “natural.” It certainly didn’t *feel* natural, and it definitely wasn’t any fun.

On the fourth day, just before the camera crew was scheduled to go home, their top guy pulled us aside and said, “Look, if something doesn’t happen here, there’s no way you guys are getting a show. This just isn’t working.”

We figured we were pretty much done at that point, and it didn’t really bother us at all. The two of us had never imagined we’d be on TV. We’d talked to friends about the kinds of things they watched on “reality TV,” and from what we could tell, none of it seemed like us anyway.

Then something happened. The very next morning, the houseboat arrived. With cameras rolling, Chip put a blindfold on me and drove me to an empty lot by the lake.

With all cameras on me, Chip released the blindfold and said, “Ta-da!”

I wasn’t sure what I was looking at. A shipwreck, maybe? On the back of a semi?

“What is that?” I said.

“I got this for you, Jo!” Chip replied.

“That *better* not be for me,” I said. It was the ugliest, rundown-looking, two-story shack of a boat I’d ever seen. “What the heck are we going to do with a houseboat?”

“That’s our new home!” Chip said, beaming with pride at his purchase.

“What? You are crazy. We are not living on a houseboat.”

It quickly dawned on me that this wasn’t a joke and Chip wasn’t even close to kidding. I wasn’t mishearing him. He was dead serious about making that boat our home for the next six months.

I just about lost it. “How can we live on the water, Chip? Three of our kids don’t even know how to swim! Did you think this through?!”

Then he fessed up and told me how much money he’d spent on it. As it all sank in, I realized I’d never been so mad at him—ever—and that’s saying something.

“Come on. At least come look at it. I know this can work,” he pleaded.

As soon as we walked a little closer, we could see the holes. *Holes*. In the *boat*.

We pulled ourselves up onto the flatbed and went inside to find the interior covered in mold. Someone had taken the AC unit out on top and left a gaping hole in the roof, so for years it had rained straight into the boat. We tried turning the engine over, and of course it didn’t start. That’s when Chip got angry. “I think I got scammed,” he said.

“Chip, did you even look at this thing before you bought it?”

“Well, no,” he said. “It was a great deal, and there were all kinds of pictures. It looked like it was in great shape. Oh, wait a minute. I bet the guy just put up pictures of this thing from when he bought it, like in 1980 or something. That sorry sucker.”

“Sorry sucker? Chip . . .”

By this point I’m trying to decide if we could scrap it for parts. My husband had made plenty of impulsive purchases. That’s just what he does. He’d gone and purchased the house we were currently in without showing that to me, either. But at least it was a house, with a roof, on a foundation. I’d gone along with it, as I always do, and over time I’d come to love that quirky shoe box of a house.

We had worked hard to make it our home. In fact, that house is where I’d had my epiphany about truly owning the space you’re in (a moment I’ll share with you later in this book) and where I’d designed the kids’ rooms that landed on the blog and caused the producer to call. I was already pretty upset that we were going to have to leave that house behind in a few months. But to think that we might have to move into this . . . *thing* was just too much.

“You need to return it,” I said.

“It’s paid for,” Chip said. “It’s done. I bought it as is.”

“Excuse me, semi driver!” I yelled to the man in the front seat. “I need you to hook that thing back up and take it back where it came from!”

Chip made it clear to me that once he made a deal—fair or not—that thing was ours now.

By that point the cameras had totally disappeared to both of us. We just completely forgot they were there. Chip’s arms were flailing around as he circled the boat, tallying up the problems he could find. My arms were flailing as I yelled at him for buying that dumb thing without talking to me first.

When I finally calmed down, I saw how disappointed he was and how bad he felt. I decided to take a deep breath and try to think this thing through.

“Maybe it’s not that bad,” I said. (I think I was trying to cheer myself up as much as I was trying to console Chip.) “If we fix up the interior and just get it to the point where we can get it onto the water, at least maybe then we can turn around, sell it, and get our money back.”

Over the course of the next hour or so, I really started to come around. I took another walk through the boat and started to picture how we could make it livable—maybe even kind of cool. After all, we’d conquered worse. We tore a few things apart right then and there, and I grabbed some paper and sketched out a new layout for the tiny kitchen. I talked to him about

potentially finishing an accent wall with shiplap—a kind of rough-textured pine paneling that fans of our show now know all too well.

“*Shiplap*?” Chip laughed. “That seems a little ironic to use on a *ship*, doesn’t it?”

“Ha-ha,” I replied. I was still not in the mood for his jokes, but this is how Chip backs me off the ledge—with his humor.

Then I asked him to help me lift something on the deck, and he said, “Aye, aye, matey!” in his best pirate voice, and slowly but surely I came around.

I can’t believe I’m saying this, but by the end of that afternoon I was actually a little bit excited about taking on such a big challenge. Chip was still deflated that he’d allowed himself to get duped, but he put his arm around me as we started walking back to the truck. I put my head on his shoulder. And the cameras captured the whole thing—just an average, roller-coaster afternoon in the lives of Chip and Joanna Gaines.

The head cameraman came jogging over to us before we drove away. Chip rolled down his window and said sarcastically, “How’s *that* for reality TV?” We were both feeling embarrassed that this is how we had spent our last day of trying to get this stinkin’ television show.

“Well,” the guy said, breaking into a great big smile, “if I do my job, you two just landed yourself a reality TV show.”

What? We were floored. We couldn’t believe it. How was *that* a show? But lo and behold, he was right. That rotten houseboat turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Over the course of the next few months, the production company’s head of development, Patrick Jager, championed our show tirelessly—until HGTV decided we were just what they wanted. Apparently one of the big selling points was the “authenticity” we’d shown during that humbling afternoon. We couldn’t have scripted it even if we’d tried. There was something about Chip’s impulsiveness, his riskiness, combined with my reaction to his riskiness and the way we worked it out as a couple, that landed us the show.

A few months later, the cameras were back—and *Fixer Upper* was born. Our quiet little lives turned completely upside down as our life’s work became a hit TV show. After years of toiling away semi-anonymously here in Waco, trying to make ends meet while designing our clients’ dream homes and doing our best to raise our four kids right, our world changed in a way that was much different than either of us ever could have imagined.

Now that we’ve had some time to reflect on it, it’s as if our whole lives had been preparing us for this experience. We didn’t know it at the time, but it’s as if the seeds had been planted long ago.

Have you ever looked at the bud of a magnolia flower? It’s a tight little pod that stays closed up for a long time on the end of its branch until one day, out of nowhere, it finally bursts open into this gigantic, gorgeous, fragrant flower that’s ten times bigger than the bud itself. It’s impossible to imagine that such a big beautiful thing could pop out of that tiny little bud. But it does. And that’s sort of what getting “discovered” and sharing our lives on *Fixer Upper* feels like to us.

We never could have imagined being on TV together, touching the lives of so many people, especially back when we were two broke newlyweds sleeping on the floor of our eight-hundred-square-foot house while we renovated it, or when I first opened and then had to *close* my little Magnolia shop on Bosque Boulevard. I have to wonder, though, if it was just a happy coincidence that we decided to name that shop Magnolia. Or was it something more? Because it’s staggering to think just how much it has blossomed.

As we finished up writing this book, HGTV was airing the third season of *Fixer Upper*, and we’d started filming seasons four and five. And that’s only part of the excitement. Thanks to the show’s popularity, we outgrew our beloved “Little Shop on Bosque.” In 2015, to make

room for all our new customers, we moved the shop into a converted, early twentieth-century cotton-oil mill. Our new property is marked by two giant, rusty, abandoned silos in the heart of downtown Waco—easy to spot from miles away. It's a place where we're proud to welcome our out-of-town visitors.

To get how exciting this is for us, you have to understand where it all started: a little shop, one employee, and a shopgirl who was happy to see eight customers a day. The reality that thousands of visitors are coming to our town to experience Magnolia Market at the Silos is not only an honor, it's one of the single greatest accomplishments of our careers.

We've also had the great thrill of seeing our friends' businesses boom, since we've gotten to incorporate their work and artistry into the shop and the show. That was our goal from the beginning—to bless our community, our friends, and our viewers through this unbelievable platform we've been given.

Chip and I have received generous opportunities to speak all over the country, to give DIY tips on talk shows, to design our own furniture, rug and paint lines, and now to write a book. A book! Can you believe it?

For the two of us, writing these pages has offered a welcome chance to stop and look back on the story of our lives, and it certainly has been an eye-opening process. How many of us take the time to relive half a lifetime's worth of happy memories, cringeworthy failures, and unforgettable adventures together? How many of us get a chance to sit down and talk about the rough times we overcame in the past or to laugh about the stupid mistakes we made when we were young?

Working on this book has allowed us to look back on all the things that brought us here to the farm, to this place we love so much, and to this busy, exciting season in our lives. And let me tell you, it's been one heck of a journey. We're still trying to figure out how to make this new life work for us and our kids, smack-dab in the middle of these exciting new adventures we've been on. Writing it all down has also allowed us to reflect on the inspiration we've picked up and the lessons we've learned along the way—and there have been many!

We feel so blessed to be able to share all of this with you in the hope that you'll find new ways to love the space and season you're in too.

Even after all of this thinking and talking and writing, Chip and I still look at each other at the end of the day and say, "Us? Really?" Honestly, we're still pretty baffled as to why people seem to like watching the two of us be "us" on national TV, because these are the same old things we've been doing since the very day we met. But that's a story for another chapter.