

“VOICES IN THE WILD, FOR THE WILD”

**UNTAMED  
VOICES**

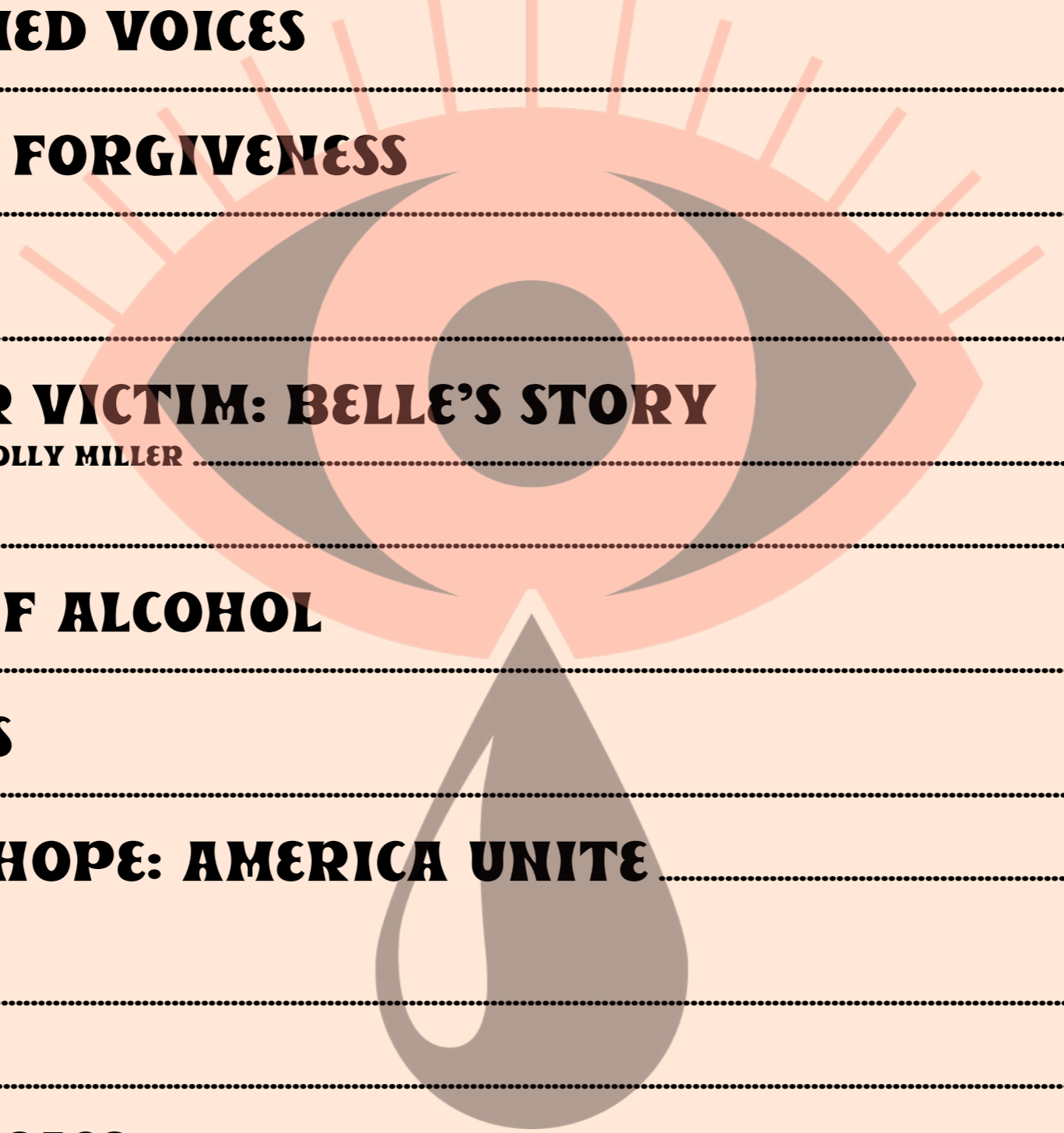
*Joshua Tree, Ca*

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# ABOUT UNTAMED VOICES

BY EMILY SILVER



Often people need permission, opportunity, and a platform. *Welcome to Untamed Voices.* A space/publication dedicated to hearing, uncovering, and discovering voices and stories in and around the Mojave Desert and beyond.

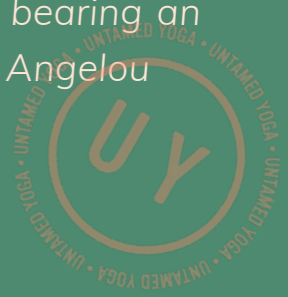
Through Untamed Voices, we have an opportunity to build community around

shared narratives, art, dance, music and spoken word.

As an artist, educator, and yoga student/teacher it has been at the root of all I do—that your voices are heard, and that people feel seen. Untamed Voices will be just that, a collaborative publication.

It is with great honor that you all out there take this from here, that you speak up and share with the community what you have to say.

*“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.” — Maya Angelou*





# THOUGHTS ON FORGIVENESS

BY MELISSA GRISI, LCSW

“You can’t forgive without loving. And I don’t mean sentimentality. I don’t mean mush. I mean having enough courage to stand up and say, ‘I forgive. I’m finished with it.’” – Maya Angelou

What is forgiveness?

If you were to define the word, how would you describe it?

Does it look different depending on the offense?

What about the person who committed the offense?

Does it change in definition when we talk about forgiving oneself vs. forgiving another person?

And finally, what would it look like if you forgave yourself?

There can be a spectrum of forgiveness because the act of forgiveness can be heavy and loaded. Forgiveness is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Consider your own experiences and beliefs about forgiveness. What do you



**As you set intentions or engage in self-study in this New Year, consider if there is anything you are holding onto that could be forgiven. Or perhaps you are having difficulty forgiving yourself. Are you ready and willing to forgive and release?**

consider permissible to forgive and what is not? For example, in your worldview, infidelity by a partner might be a forgivable offense. Yet, a person who committed a murder might not be worthy of forgiveness in your estimation. Yet, for others, the opposite might be true.

However, forgiveness, no matter what the circumstances, takes courage. And forgiving

ourselves might take the most courage of all. As a trauma-informed clinical therapist, I have seen many clients struggle to forgive themselves regarding many issues, mostly past actions.

A barrier to forgiveness is our shame, an underlying belief that we are not worthy. One may feel that you must suffer as payment or retribution for our sins. While others may feel that we need to continue punishing ourselves for our mistakes. This can be based on harm we may have caused others and/or the harm we’ve had done to ourselves. We may also find ourselves worrying that if we forgive others, does that mean we are condoning the offense? And furthermore, if one were to forgive an offense, does that make you complicit?

This dilemma of forgiveness is quite real and can be a total mind fuck. However, every person’s healing process is different, and forgiveness is not always a requirement.



“You do not have to forgive your parents to heal trauma. You do not have to forgive anyone to heal trauma. You do not have to forgive anyone for healing trauma. Forgiveness is not required to heal trauma. Forgiveness can be powerful and beautiful and a wonderful gift, and if we freely choose to give it. People who try to force forgiveness bring us further from healing, not closer,” states licensed clinical social worker, Britt Frank.

As we’ve entered into the New Year, many of us are taking time to reflect on 2020 and our experiences, individually and collectively. Perhaps in 2020, you did not show up as your “best self.” (Full disclosure, none of us did!) As you set intentions or engage in self-study in this New Year, consider if there is anything you are holding onto that could be forgiven. Or perhaps you are having difficulty forgiving yourself. Are you ready and willing to forgive and release?

As you navigate this process, bear in mind that the act of forgiveness is different for each of us. Consider the following steps you may walk through on your own forgiveness journey. Remember, not all will apply to your situation.

### Read, Read, Read

*Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*  
by Brené Brown

*The Book of Forgiving*  
by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu

*Long Walk to Freedom: An Autobiography*  
by Nelson Mandela

*The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*  
by Pema Chodron

*“My experience with forgiveness is that it sort-of comes spontaneously at a certain point, and to try to force it, it’s not really forgiveness. It’s spiritual jargon that you’re trying to live up to, but you’re just using it against yourself as a reason why you’re not okay.”*  
-Pema Chodron

1. Be aware of your beliefs about forgiveness. Are these beliefs flexible or rigid? Is there resistance to even looking at these beliefs? Who is deserving or not deserving of your forgiveness? What stories are you telling yourself? Are some of those stories outdated? Furthermore, do you even believe those stories anymore? Be curious.

2. Notice the emotions and physical sensations that arise with forgiveness. What is attached? Follow the thread from these experiences to examine what else is attached. Notice whether shame, guilt,

embarrassment, resentment, anger or other negative emotions arise. Be curious again. Yes, I know, it’s painful and uncomfortable. The only way out is through. Bring in your mindfulness practice. Notice these emotions as they are, without judgment, in real-time.

3. Decide on the outcome YOU want. Not what your family, partner, religion, culture, etc., want, but what you desire. Consider neutrality as an option, even if it is short-term. Be curious about neutrality. It is possible to find a middle ground between emotional charge/distress and forgiveness.

4. If you decide on forgiveness; get clear. What boundaries do you need to set for yourself and others as you navigate forgiveness?

5. How do you want to forgive? What will it look like? Will you contact the person and share? Will you quietly forgive? Will you write it down and burn it? Will there be a ritual around it?

Note: Steps 1 and 2 take time. Do not rush this process.







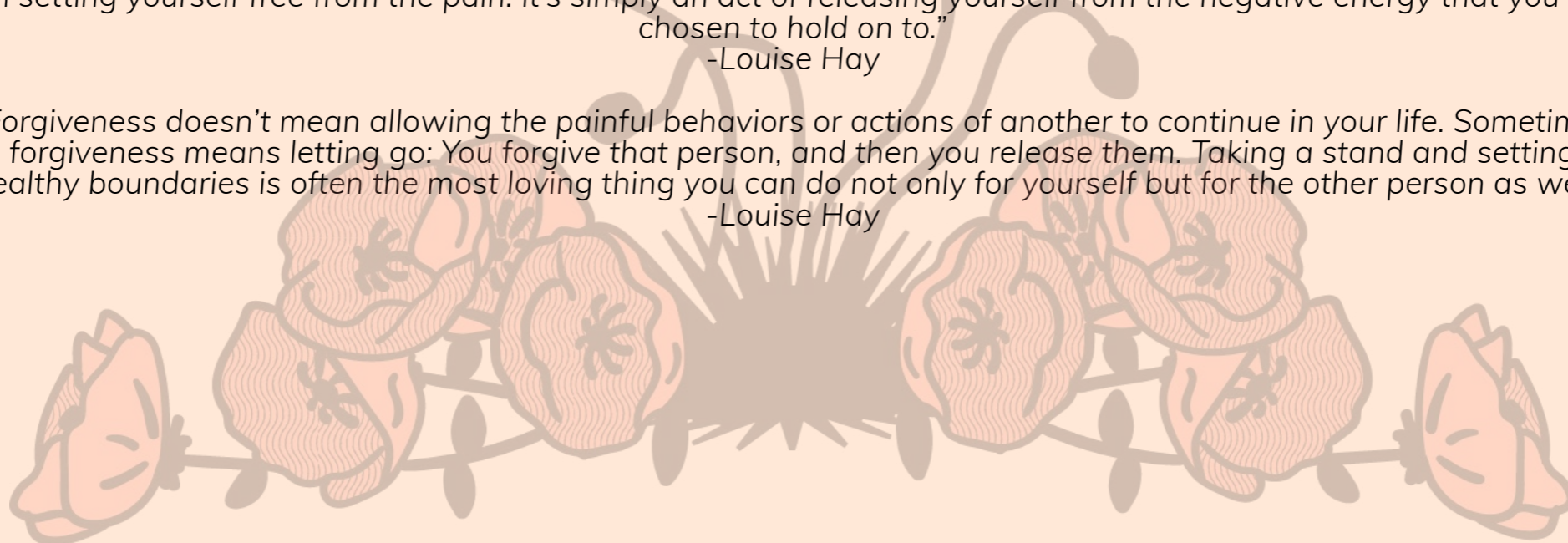
### Forgiveness Meditations by Louise Hay

“Forgiveness is a tricky and confusing concept for many people, but know that there’s a difference between forgiveness and acceptance. Forgiving someone doesn’t mean that you condone their behavior! The act of forgiveness takes place in your mind. It has nothing to do with the other person. The reality of true forgiveness lies in setting yourself free from the pain. It’s simply an act of releasing yourself from the negative energy that you’ve chosen to hold on to.”

-Louise Hay

“Forgiveness doesn’t mean allowing the painful behaviors or actions of another to continue in your life. Sometimes forgiveness means letting go: You forgive that person, and then you release them. Taking a stand and setting healthy boundaries is often the most loving thing you can do not only for yourself but for the other person as well.”

-Louise Hay



## ABOUT MELISSA GRISI, LCSW



Melissa Grisi is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW #85168), Certified Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor (CAADC), EMDR Certified Therapist and trauma-informed yoga teacher. Melissa uses a variety of therapy techniques and tools to help clients meet their goals. She is trained in the following: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), Gottman Method Relationship Therapy, trauma-sensitive yoga, mindfulness, relapse prevention and expressive arts.

After working as a social worker for nearly two decades, Melissa founded Blue Sky Therapy in 2020. Her clinical practice is a reflection of her professional passions, incorporating psychotherapy, trauma-informed yoga and expressive art into her therapy work. In her spare time, Melissa enjoys hiking in Joshua Tree National Park, practicing yoga, gardening, creating pottery and spending time with family and friends.

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**VANISHING**  
**BY KIRA-RASHIDA BÖLKE**  
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*Me pretending not to care about the world while laying in a bathtub hoping to melt.*



*Me enjoying my fleshprison while contemplating how to become a better human.*



*Me brushing my hair while thinking about life standing next to Tom's blobfish painting.*

Last year was a crazy one. In these times of an ongoing pandemic, I'd like to vanish sometimes.

Vanish into stardust, melt into water, float in the air or disappear in the night. Sometimes I feel too much exposure from the world around me. Daily news and images from all over the world, illustrating how poorly humankind is treated and treating each other. War and crime are everywhere. Everything gets sucked into my head and sticks in my brain.

I have mood swings that I've never had before. I feel frustrated, then utterly happy, then depressed, then at peace with all of it, then desperate, then optimistic, then annoyed, then happy again and on and on it goes. It is still such an unstable feeling to live and create in these times.

My freedom is limited, but my mind isn't. So I occupy myself with creating my own images, my own world, working out the things I feel or see. And often, I just melt into my brush strokes, drown in my color palette, float on my canvas, and vanish into my fantasy. The paintings I've created in the last 6 months or so represent my emotions and my thoughts. I had the time to think. This is how I feel creating during a pandemic. Creating a pandemic.

Most of the intentions I had for 2021 have already been postponed. Does that make me a bad person? I wanted to quit smoking, exercise more, and drink less. But I don't know if I can just yet. Not only because of the lockdown and the pandemic, but also because I am still young. The responsibilities I have, I can still manage to handle while staying exactly the way I am. So why change that?! It's like continuously having untamed voices in my head. Or a little angel on my shoulder and occasionally a devil.

Another somewhat paradoxical intention is to stay exactly how I am. I want to remain who I am in my heart—loving, caring, and a bit crazy. My intention, my hope, is that all this crap around me won't change me. That it won't change my inner self or my core.

Kira-Rashida Bölke is a German-born artist based in the Netherlands.





# VICTORY OVER VICTIM: BELLE'S STORY

BY BELLE MANNING WITH MOLLY MILLER

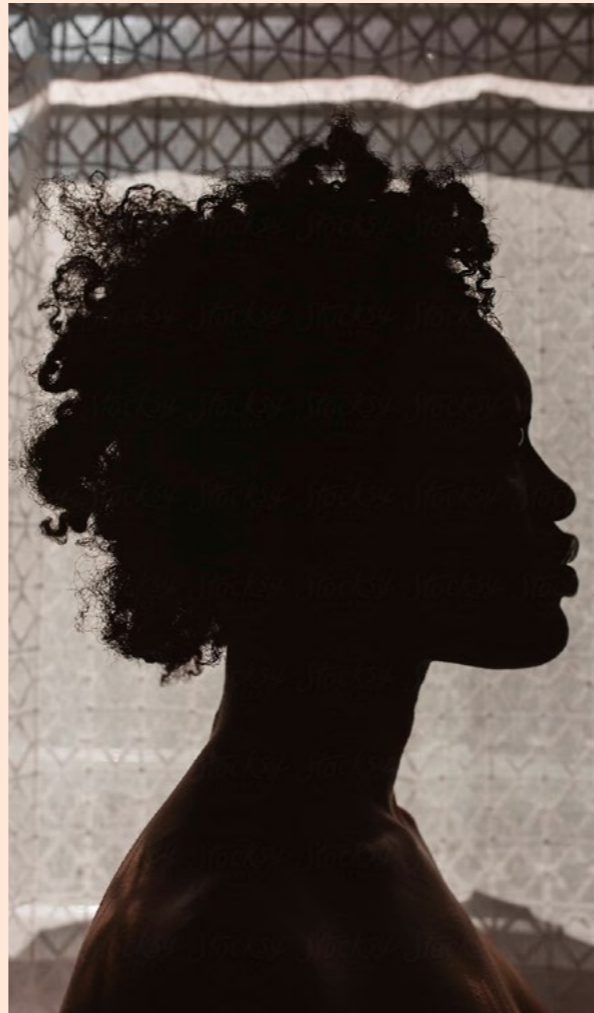
"Just let me see my face!"

Belle kept yelling, but the officers just laughed. Blood poured onto the pavement. Her blood. She could barely see it. One eye swollen shut, the other barely open. No one would give her a mirror.

It started at one am. Belle, twenty-one-years old and an aspiring model, was about to go to bed in her private room, part of a larger apartment with a shared living space and several other renters. She had just gotten back from spring break in Atlanta, a week that included a trip to the MLK museum, a visit to the Coca-Cola factory and plenty of clubbing. Now, with just two days before a runway show, Belle needed some serious rest and she was concerned about being too bloated from vacation to fit the garments that had been sized before her trip.

Then the arguing started in the common room.

Through her bedroom door, Belle heard the couple's fight escalate. She recognized their voices but didn't know them personally. They were new occupants in the apartment: a small woman with ratty hair and her tall stick-thin boyfriend. Belle didn't like to judge, but they seemed like junkies. Now, in the middle of the night, their speech sounded erratic. This wasn't the kind of fight you could arbitrate — it was one you avoided and prayed would



**"Belle" is not Belle's given name. She chose to leave her legal first name behind because it made her feel like she was living in the past. Now she has reinvented herself and her eyes are set on a bright future. Now she's not her baggage; she's just Belle.**

dissipate by morning. Belle rolled over in bed.

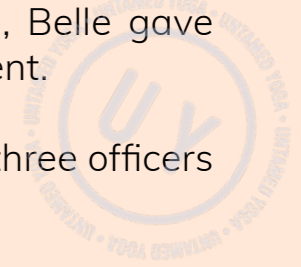
A body slammed into Belle's door. Another slam. She shot up and grabbed her cellphone, dialing 911. The unknown couple's dispute had somehow subsided, being replaced by a common desire to force entry into Belle's room. Screws flew off the door. Fractured

wood splintered from the frame. "Stay on the line," the 911 operator advised. It was an unnecessary suggestion: Belle was clinging to her phone like a life preserver. "Can you go out a window?" No. She was on the second floor with harsh concrete below. "Can you find someplace to hide?"

Before Belle could make a move, the door burst open, flying off its hinges. The couple stormed through the demolished doorframe. The woman held a knife and the man brandished his bare fists. Months later, Belle can barely remember what happened next. It was a blur of knocks to her head. Blunt, aggressive punches that made her face crack. She was dragged on the floor. Her phone was clawed out of her vice grip. By the time they threw her outside she couldn't feel her mouth and she could hardly see. Warm blood spilled down her chin.

Belle used all the strength left in her battered body to knock on neighbors' doors. Some doors remained locked — silence dismissing her cries for help. Others responded with outright aggression. Her frail bleeding body was mistaken for just another junkie. One man stood his ground and yelled, "Get the fuck off my porch or I'll beat your ass myself." Exhausted and dizzy from pain, Belle gave up and collapsed on the pavement.

When she woke up, there were three officers on the scene.



That's when she saw the policemen laugh. That's when she felt the pool of blood. That's when she begged for a mirror. That's when she realized no one cared about her story. The officers took statements from neighbors and from Belle's assailants. They all shrugged off the girl with the beaten face: she was probably on drugs. And because Belle was now "the girl on drugs" the officers didn't take her statement. But Belle is street smart; she picked up on the narrative floating around the crime scene, the smirks on the officer's faces, and the flippant attitude of the paramedics who arrived late. She asked the officers for all six of their names; they gave her two. Belle requested that they secure her valuables from inside the apartment so her attackers wouldn't steal more of her property; the officers said it wasn't their problem. She pleaded to go to the hospital to get a drug test to prove she was clean and to receive treatment for her head wound. They reluctantly agreed.

At the hospital, Belle was given a saline drip and little more than a passing glance from a doctor. Someone told her the officers would arrive shortly to get her statement for their report. No one ever came. She again asked for a mirror and was ignored. They discharged her after three hours. It was four in the morning and none of Belle's contacts were answering their phones. With no one to pick her up and no money for a cab, the

hospital staff gave her a map of the trains and sent her out the door.

She could barely see the map through her swollen eyes. The world was unsteady and Belle was still in shock, her face numb and feeling hollow. She couldn't go home and risk seeing her attackers. The only safe space left was her school, Los Angeles Trade-Technical College. Belle is still uncertain of how she made it to school that day. Somehow she navigated the trains despite being unfamiliar with the area. At one point she knows she got lost and a stranger walked her towards the school. It was a Hispanic man – at least that's what she thinks. She couldn't see him.

When she arrived at her school it was six am. The building was empty except for the janitors lining garbage cans and straightening chairs — final preparations before the faculty would settle in to welcome students to a new day of learning. Belle staggered to her counselor's office and laid herself on the cold ground in front of the locked door. When her counselor found Belle there an hour and a half later, she dropped to her knees and cradled Belle like her own child. Belle saw the terror in her counselor's eyes when she looked at her beaten face. She still hadn't seen herself but those eyes told her everything: it was bad. Really bad. For the first time in hours, Belle let herself be vulnerable. She cried.

The counselor cleaned her up and comforted her. She got her a mirror. The woman squinting back at Belle was bludgeoned: two black eyes, one swollen shut completely, the bruising seeped her dark skin in a violent magenta. Belle's left front tooth was broken in half, the nerve exposed and raw. Another tooth on the left side of her mouth was loose. Dried blood clung to her skin.

Months later, Belle reflected on how the trauma impacted her mentality. "I started to feel Black. I don't know if I ever felt Black before."

Belle had been in the foster system since she was a child. Her father was in jail for most of her childhood and her relationship with her biological mother had always been tenuous at best. She had her run-ins with the law and had served some time in prison. But this was the moment that made her feel most like a statistic — like someone the police deemed unworthy of justice. She explained, "When you watch the news or you see stuff about black people that say black women are independent but we're aggressive or we always have attitude or that black men are criminals or gang bangers or that they don't have compassion. I feel like I was starting to see how I fit that stereotype. Because before that I just felt like a person."



After the incident, Belle was sent to a psychiatric ward because she was honest with her counselor about having suicidal thoughts. The hospital refused to release her without someone to pick her up, so Belle had to reach out to her biological mother, who reluctantly took her in. Doctors at the psych ward warned Belle that her brain was still healing from trauma and that she needed to stay away from loud noises, keep her body warm, and get plenty of rest. Her mother dismissed these medical recommendations. She blared the TV, blasted the AC and woke Belle up at all hours. After a month, Belle decided to leave the house. She couldn't go back to the apartment so she went to a women's shelter where she stayed for two months until the staff kicked her out for not having a TB test. Left without a refuge in Los Angeles, Belle decided to move to Atlanta, Georgia, the last place that she remembered being happy.

Before she moved, Belle tried one last time to get justice for what had been done to her. She contacted a social worker online and told him about her situation. Empathetic to her trauma, the white, redheaded man picked Belle up in his car and drove her to the office of the detective that supposedly had been

assigned her case. They waited on a bench for an hour as an assistant looked for Belle's file. With each minute that passed the truth became clearer: the file wasn't there.

Maybe the file never even existed.

When the social worker stood up to check on the assistant's progress, Belle started sliding. Her vision went dark and she fell off the bench, hitting her head on the pointed corner where two walls intersected. Upon impact, Belle had a seizure, her body and brain spasming as a result of the past and present physical trauma. The social worker took her to the hospital. Her body was stabilized but her emotions were explosive. Angry about the injustice of the system, she yelled at everyone around her. She knew her fury wasn't directed at the right people but the right people weren't there to reprimand: the police, the assailants, and her neighbors were miles away all living their lives without the life changing burden of trauma that Belle now carried in her bones.

It's a year later and Belle is back in Los Angeles, splitting time between her sister's house and her friends' couches. Belle still has a split front tooth, but her smile and her attitude are beautiful. She wears her hair natural —

a style she's intentionally adopted to show her pride in being a black woman. It's a rare person who has the courage to emotionally confront their trauma and grow through the pain — but that's Belle. She wants to write a book and become a life coach, using her own experiences to teach young women that they are powerful and worthy of respect.

Sometimes Belle thinks about returning to her case — following up on that file and tracking down the detective that was supposed to investigate the incident — but not right now. Now is the time for her to strive for her full potential, to focus on the future and not the past.

When asked about what she's going to do next Belle says "I'm not going to fall victim. I'm going to have victory."





### What Is Crime Story?

Crime Story is a digital forum where criminal justice and storytelling meet. We aim to appeal to justice and crime story addicts who crave material that is both smart and serious-minded and engaging and entertaining.

Through print and mixed-media reporting, expert commentary and podcast series, we will present stories about crimes and trials that compellingly explore the functions (and dysfunctions) of the US criminal justice system. We will analyze the intentions, biases and effectiveness of current crime narratives in the way they are commonly presented.

A significant aspect of Crime Story's mission is to draw attention to programs that have demonstrated success in helping stem the tide of over-incarceration. As part of that mission, we published "The RightWay To Shut Off the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline" by Sean Smith. That piece told the story of how the RightWay Foundation — based in Los Angeles — is working to address the core reasons why 25% of California's recently emancipated foster youth are incarcerated within two years of emancipation. (This has become known as the Foster Care To Prison Pipeline.)

As a critical part of these efforts, the RightWay Foundation provides therapy for these youth to help them process their trauma and reclaim the narratives of their lives. In 2019, Crime Story and the RightWay Foundation launched a unique creative collaboration. Building off of their therapy efforts, and working closely with CRIME STORY journalists, a self-selected group of RightWay youth will craft narratives about their experiences in and out of the foster care system. These accounts will be published on the CRIME STORY website periodically.

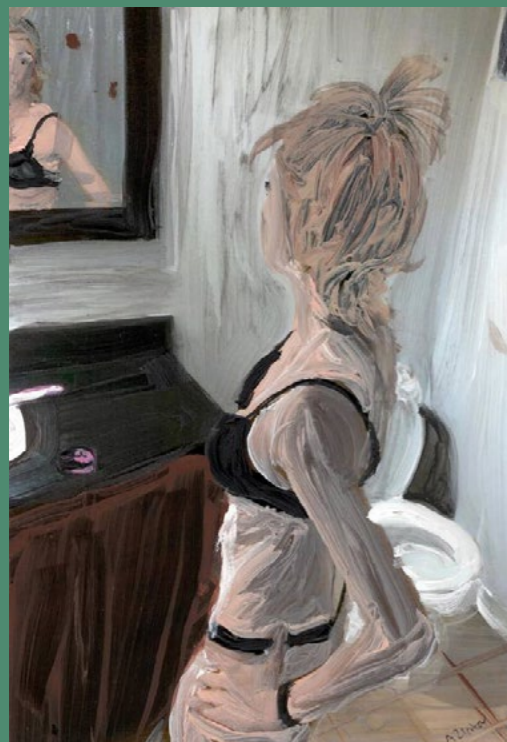


# ALLY ZLATAR

Ally Zlatar holds a BFA in Visual Art & Art History from Queen’s University & an MLitt Curatorial Practice from the Glasgow School of Art. She is currently pursuing her Doctorate of Creative Arts with the University of Queensland. She has a dualistic experience as a Curator/ Artist and has been involved in many projects and galleries globally. Ranging from projects with such galleries as Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Hunterian Art Gallery & Glasgow’s Centre for Contemporary Art. Working primarily in painting, she examines, instigates and provokes notions of the individual experience through specifically focusing on philosophical discourse, body image, embodiment and ethics.



Pronouns: She/Her  
<https://www.instagram.com/allycardone/>  
<https://allyz.cargo.site/>



Zlatar’s book, *The Starving Artist: Understanding Body Image and Eating Disorders within Contemporary Art*, is a research-based work and art collection that brings together a variety of individual experiences, mediums, and contributors. It explores our understanding of eating disorders, body image, and being unwell within contemporary art. It features works by over 25 international artists and these individuals examine the unwell body and can be found in over 30 universities world wide including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Sales of the book were used to provide financial assistance to individuals who are seeking inpatient or partial hospitalization programs, but have limited resources and are in financial need. The charity has raised over £5000 (a little over \$6800 USD) for eating disorder treatment.

<https://thestarvingartist.pb.studio/>





# ALL BECAUSE OF ALCOHOL

BY COURTNEY MCMAHON

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It's hard for me to narrow it down to one occasion where my drinking was a problem. Or tell you one way in which alcohol was negatively impacting my life. I never experienced a dramatic rock-bottom. I never labeled myself an alcoholic, went to a meeting, or found myself in rehab. The truth is I experienced several bottoms— I just experienced them privately. Dealing with things in private has always been a specialty of mine.

I could tell you about the time I started the night at happy hour and ended it by setting the office alarm off at 1am. A colleague of mine had the key and suggested our nightcap should be the bottle of bubbly in the office fridge. I showed up to work the next day, sure I would be fired. But I was cute, young (a little reckless), and really good at my job. So, instead, I got a slap on the wrist and got to work. I was 27 at the time.

I could tell you about the time I got a DUI driving on an unfamiliar road in upstate NY. A story that until now, only 4 other people knew— my 3 friends in the car that night and my lawyer. I convinced myself it wasn't really

all my fault. I was a city girl who wasn't used to counting drinks before driving. (We didn't drive at all in NYC.) Plus, there was a sweep that night, and lots of people got pulled over. It was just a case of wrong place, wrong time. I was 33 when that happened.

Instead, I'll tell you about the last time I drank, which, by comparison, is pretty insignificant. I visited my mom for the weekend and decided to meet an old friend for dinner and drinks. I had a glass of wine while I was getting ready. We met at our fave Mexican restaurant, and we each had a margarita, followed by one more. When the waitress came around to take our dessert order, we ordered shots instead. We left and went to a bar where I think we ordered another drink (maybe two). There was fun live music, and there were old faces that I was thrilled to see. This was fun! This was freedom!

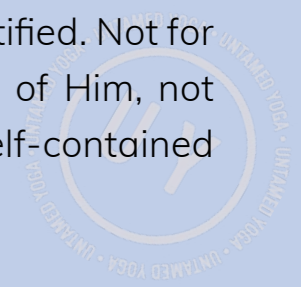
I took out my phone, and faster than I could blink, I had unblocked and texted, "I'm in town, come out :)."

He did.



I danced to the band. But, I sensed I was about to fade—soon, this wouldn't be cute. Better leave now. I snuck out without any goodbyes and spilled into an Uber and back to my mom's house. I remember sitting at her side door, checking my pockets and purse in search of keys I never found. I started sobbing. I still don't know if I was crying about the keys. I grabbed my phone and called Him. He came immediately, picked me up, took me to his apartment, and put me to bed.

The next morning I woke up mortified. Not for the way I had behaved in front of Him, not even for being there. It was a self-contained embarrassment.





Here I was, proving to myself (yet again) that I had zero control. One night out and 2 (or 3) too many drinks later, I had gone and undone months of boundaries I had set for myself, set with people from my past. I was hopeless. Undone, all because of alcohol.

I didn't wallow in it. I never did. Just like dealing with things in private, this was another trait ingrained in my DNA. I would deal with this mishap like I did everything else—pull myself up, shake myself off and make some vodka-lemonades out of lemons. I'm kidding (kind of).

I was sad and frustrated and lonely and once again angry at myself. But I didn't rush off. I wasn't about to let Him or anyone else know that I was out of control. I splashed some water on my face, swished some mouthwash, put on a couple slaps of the old spice deodorant I found, and smudged some lipstick on my cheeks for a splash of color. I put my sunglasses on and walked to the store to get the makings of breakfast and mimosas. I'd come back, we'd laugh, invited friends from upstairs to come down, made good 'old-fashioned self-deprecating jokes, and commenced to day-drink in the backyard.

See? I wasn't out of control at all. It was fun. It was funny. This was fine.

Except it wasn't fun, I wasn't fine. And being funny was just a cover-up to the tremendous amount of pain I was in. I was 36.

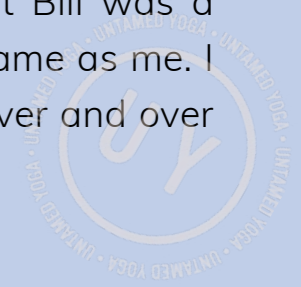
Drinking was ingrained in my life: my family gatherings, my work events, my social life, my New York City experience. Every event, every occasion, centered around drinks, and the next day centered around the hangover. Sure, my drinking came at a cost, but removing alcohol would cost me my usual.

Only I knew in my heart, in my soul, that carrying on like this wasn't an option. I knew this was a significant thing that was holding me back.

In June 2019, I gave in and decided to take a break from booze. I told myself it was just a cleanse, and I would be dabbling in cocktails in no time. Except this time felt different. This time, I sought out community and started to get curious about my why; why I drank, why I wanted to take a break, and if a break was really enough.

I started with a sober-summer challenge and found solace in the private Facebook group. I watched the daily videos. I even posted asking for advice on navigating my first drinking event without a drink in hand—a big step for the girl who did everything silently. Next, I started reading and listening to all the sober lit and recovery podcasts I could get my hands on. There were a million different reasons a person would decide to quit drinking, and I wanted to understand all of them. Sometimes I could relate to only a sliver of the story, and other times entire chapters could have been my life. I was alone, but I wasn't. I was meditating and praying daily at this point; I was asking for signs. I didn't know what the process was, but I was trusting it.

Once on a trip back to the city, I was listening to an episode of the *Sober Curious* podcast. It was an interview with Holly Whitaker, founder of a recovery program called Tempest. During the episode, they discussed the birth chart of Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). I learned that Bill was a Sagittarius sun, Pisces moon. Same as me. I played that bit of the podcast over and over and over again.



“Sagittarius, which is like super expansive, very kind-of forward-thinking; a big risk-taker. Um, and then he has a Pisces moon. Pisces moon is possibly the most emotionally sensitive and empathetic of all placements in astrology. My highly psychic friend, she’s always said, the one piece of advice for anyone with a Pisces moon, stay well clear of anything addictive.”

I just received my first sign.

I decided then and there — barely 2 months into my own sober journey — that I was done drinking for good. I felt relief. The voice inside me quieted down because I had finally heard (very clearly) what I was being told.

I didn’t realize it at the time, but the woman on that podcast was my downstairs neighbor. The woman, I knew only as Holly, was the same woman I exchanged texts with about the mail. I proceeded to read her book, *Quit Like A Woman*, cover to cover, on New Years Day of 2020. I was lying on the beach, hangover-free, feeling like the luckiest fucker in the whole entire world.

I had been given another sign.

My experience giving up alcohol was a not-so-gentle reminder that my ego is not in charge here. I had been betraying myself for



I asked a stranger to take this photo of me post-half-marathon in October 2019. I ran this race alone, just for me. This is real fun; this is real freedom.

years because I was sure I knew better than I felt. But that was all bullshit. I had to be broken. I had to get quiet in order to hear.

Removing alcohol from my life has been the best, most liberating decision I have made in my adult life. The commitment I made to myself in 2019 is one that I cherish and carry with me into each new year.

As I move into 2021, I have continued to offer prayers to release that which no longer serves me. To call-in all, I need to rise to the occasion of genuinely being me. I intend to move through my perfectionism and fear—two other things that have held me back tremendously. Two things I could quiet with

wine. Two things that came up for me when I sat down to write this piece.

Which story do I share? What if it doesn’t resonate? What if I fail at this? What if this is a bad idea? I froze and stared at the page, crossing out words, scribbling, and retreating into self-doubt. Then a text popped up. It was a photo of two quit lit books that my friend had just purchased, along with a note about her newfound commitment and desire to do the work. She also reminded me of an earlier text exchange. One in which I shared words that gave her the extra nudge she needed to dive in.

S: I had a few slip-ups, and I beat the hell out of myself. Reading your words was exactly what I needed. I’ve just been abstaining to the best of my ability, without doing the real self-work... that’s the missing piece.

C: Stop beating yourself up. We’re all imperfect. xx

I began to understand it wasn’t just external healing that I needed. So I turned my focus inward and got comfortable disappointing others if it meant loving myself.

Another answered prayer. And, another sign.





Do I think you should give up alcohol? Not necessarily. Do I think you should question the role alcohol plays in your life? Yes. Do I think you should take inventory of what's taking up unnecessary space in your life? Double yes. Do I think you should pray to Buddha or God or the Universe or the tree out back to help you release that stuff? Triple yes. Might that substance be holding you back? Maybe. I know it was for me.

Questioning your relationship with alcohol?  
Here are the resources referenced in this column:

[www.jointempest.com](http://www.jointempest.com)

*Quit Like A Woman*  
by Holly Whitaker

*Sober Curious Podcast*  
hosted by Ruby Warrington

### About Courtney McMahon

Courtney McMahon is a life-long east coaster, repressed artist, and self-proclaimed funny person. She's been blessed with a career in advertising that spans over 13 years, 10 of which she spent working way too many hours. She has worked with several notable clients throughout her career, including Verizon, Pandora Jewelry, Levis, Cole Haan, Converse, and Lexus.

In August of 2019, Courtney launched Project 30Somethings—a living archive about what it means to be a 30 something woman today—comprised of contributions from women all over the world.

Courtney recently left New York and moved to Connecticut so her soul-mate, Leo (her 12-year-old pug-mix), could finally have the yard he deserved. Her mission is to share her writing with women everywhere to build community so that they (we) can feel less alone. She promises to share the little bit she knows about some things each time she puts pen to paper.

She has been living a life free of alcohol since June 2019.



# TWO AMERICAS

BY JESSE DUQUETTE

DAILYDONDRAWINGS@GMAIL.COM

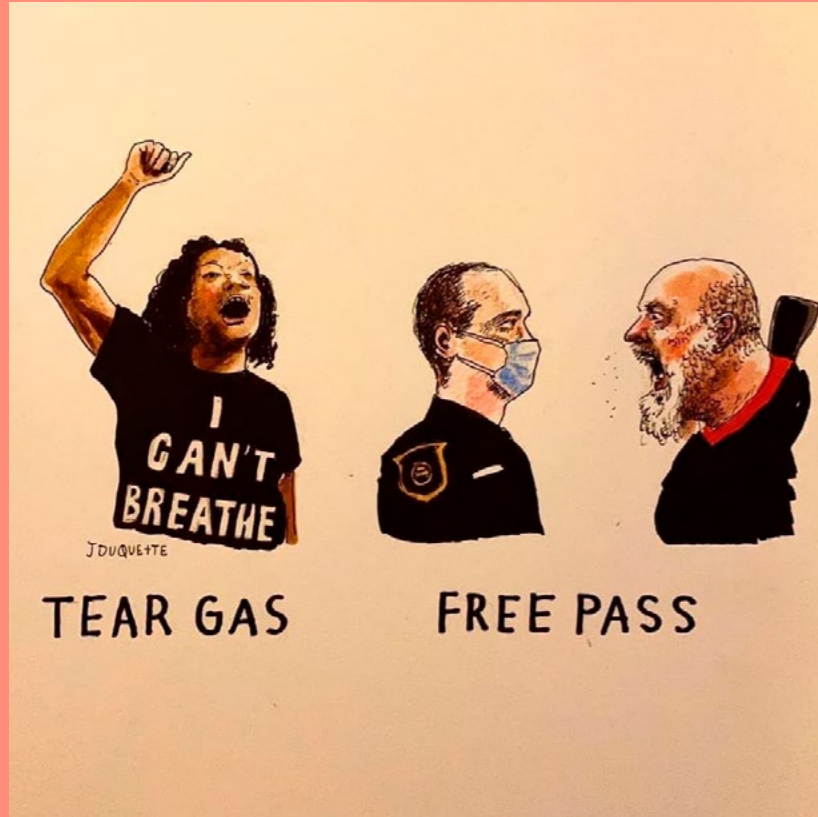
The attempted DC coup was just the latest and most blatantly obvious display of white supremacy and grievance dovetailing into a violent, national trauma—just as we saw in Tulsa, Rosewood, and throughout our history. While BLM protests at the Capitol this past spring were met by a heavily armed battalion, already dispatched and blocking off even the steps to the building, the insurrectionists were essentially invited in like students on a class trip.

But this is only half of the story. Going through footage and identifying the racist mob has uncovered what has long been understood: racists have effectively infiltrated every level and facet of law enforcement. This should be unsurprising as white supremacy and police are inextricably linked since the latter's inception; the police force started as slave-catchers, after all.

That this occurred on such a massive and public scale can only make what needs to happen now undeniable: a complete reimagining of our criminal justice and law enforcement apparatuses and a shift away from the modern era slavery of the carceral system.

Jesse Duquette is an amateur illustrator and professional layabout who has been documenting every day of the Trump administration with a crudely-drawn cartoon or two since the Inauguration. His work has been shown at his parents' house and at some very charitable galleries across the country, as well as the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. He currently lives in the hills of Western Massachusetts with his wife and son where he spends his time either obsessively collecting records or obsessively doodling dum-dums.

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# A BREATH OF HOPE: AMERICA UNITED



On January 20, Joseph Robinette Biden Jr was sworn in as the 46th President of the United States.

Excerpts from Biden's Inauguration speech:

"This is America's day. This is democracy's day. A day of history and hope. Of renewal and resolve. Through a crucible for the ages America has been tested anew and America has risen to the challenge. Today, we celebrate the triumph not of a candidate, but of a cause, the cause of democracy."

"Democracy is fragile. And at this hour, my friends, democracy has prevailed."

"The American story depends not on any one of us, not on some of us, but on all of us. On "We the People" who seek a more perfect Union. This is a great nation and we are a good people. Over the centuries through storm and strife, in peace and in war, we have come so far. But we still have far to go. We will press forward with speed and urgency, for we have much to do in this winter of peril and possibility. Much to repair. Much to restore. Much to heal. Much to build. And much to gain. Few periods in our nation's history have been more challenging or difficult than the one we're in now. A once-in-a-century virus silently stalks the country. It's taken as many lives in one year as America lost in all of World War II. Millions of jobs have been lost. Hundreds of thousands of businesses closed. A cry for racial justice some 400 years in the making moves us. The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer. A cry for survival comes from the planet itself. A cry that can't be any more desperate or any more clear. And now, a rise in political extremism, white supremacy, domestic terrorism that we must confront and we will defeat. To overcome these challenges – to restore the soul and to secure the future of America – requires more than words. It requires that most elusive of things in a democracy: Unity."

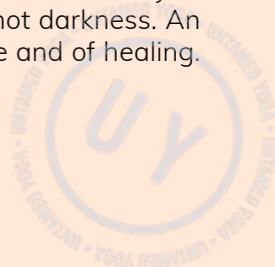
"History, faith, and reason show the way, the way of unity. We can see each other not as adversaries but as neighbors. We can treat each other with dignity and respect. We can join forces, stop the shouting, and lower the temperature. For without unity, there is no peace, only bitterness and fury. No progress, only exhausting outrage. No nation, only a state of chaos. This is our historic moment of crisis and challenge, and unity is the path forward. And, we must meet this moment as the United States of America. If we do that, I guarantee you, we will not fail. We have never, ever, ever failed in America when we have acted together. And so today, at this time and in this place, let us start afresh. All of us. Let us listen to one another. Hear one another. See one another. Show respect to one another. Politics need not be a raging fire destroying everything in its path. Every disagreement doesn't have to be a cause for total war. And, we must reject a culture in which facts themselves are manipulated and even manufactured. My fellow Americans, we have to be different than this. America has to be better than this. And, I believe America is better than this."

"Here we stand looking out to the great Mall where Dr. King spoke of his dream. Here we stand, where 108 years ago at another inaugural, thousands of protestors tried to block brave women from marching for the right to vote. Today, we mark the swearing-in of the first woman in American history elected to national office – Vice President Kamala Harris. Don't tell me things can't change. Here we stand across the Potomac from Arlington National Cemetery, where heroes who gave the last full measure of devotion rest in eternal peace. And here we stand, just days after a riotous mob thought they could use violence to silence the will of the people, to stop the work of our democracy, and to drive us from this sacred ground. That did not happen. It will never happen. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever."

"I understand that many Americans view the future with some fear and trepidation. I understand they worry about their jobs, about taking care of their families, about what comes next. I get it. But the answer is not to turn inward, to retreat into competing factions, distrusting those who don't look like you do, or worship the way you do, or don't get their news from the same sources you do. We must end this uncivil war that pits red against blue, rural versus urban, conservative versus liberal. We can do this if we open our souls instead of hardening our hearts. If we show a little tolerance and humility. If we're willing to stand in the other person's shoes just for a moment."

"My fellow Americans, in the work ahead of us, we will need each other. We will need all our strength to persevere through this dark winter. We are entering what may well be the toughest and deadliest period of the virus. We must set aside the politics and finally face this pandemic as one nation. I promise you this: as the Bible says weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning. We will get through this, together."

"I close today where I began, with a sacred oath. Before God and all of you I give you my word. I will always level with you. I will defend the Constitution. I will defend our democracy. I will defend America. I will give my all in your service thinking not of power, but of possibilities. Not of personal interest, but of the public good. And together, we shall write an American story of hope, not fear. Of unity, not division. Of light, not darkness. An American story of decency and dignity. Of love and of healing. Of greatness and of goodness."







On Wednesday, January 20, 2021, former U.S. Senator from California Kamala Harris became the first woman Vice President, the first Black Vice President, and the first South Asian Vice President. She is also the first graduate of a historically Black college (Howard University) and the first Black sorority (Alpha Kappa Alpha) member to do so. Harris used two Bibles to be sworn in at the inauguration. One Bible belonged to the late civil rights icon and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, who helped inspire her career path. The second Bible belonged to family friend Regina Shelton, whom Harris called a “second mother” to her and her sister. Justice Sonia Sotomayor administered the oath. Sotomayor, the first woman of color to serve on the Supreme Court, previously administered the vice-presidential oath to Biden in 2013.

CREDIT:AP/Getty Images

Excerpts from Harris’ first address as Vice President on the evening of January 20:

“In many ways this moment embodies our character as a nation. It demonstrates who we are, even in dark times. We not only dream, we do. We not only see what has been, we see what can be. We shoot for the moon and then we plant our flag on it. We are bold, fearless, and ambitious. We are undaunted in our belief that we shall overcome, that we will rise up.”

“American aspiration is what drove the women of this nation throughout history to demand equal rights and the authors of the Bill of Rights to claim freedoms that had rarely been written down before. A great experiment takes great determination. The will to do the work and then the wisdom to keep refining, keep tinkering, keep perfecting.”

Watch the full address here:  
<https://youtu.be/QJyV-1VwqPE>



Vice President Kamala Harris wore a liquid sequin cocktail dress with a floor-length silk tuxedo overcoat for the inauguration ball. The ensemble was created by African-American and LA-based fashion designer, Sergio Hudson.

CREDIT:AP/Getty Images





**“The Hill We Climb”**

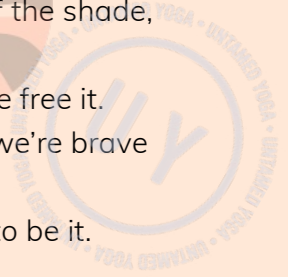
When day comes we ask ourselves  
 Where can we find light in this never-ending  
 shade?  
 The loss we carry,  
 A sea we must wade.  
 We braved the belly of the beast;  
 We’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace.  
 And the norms and notions of what just is  
 Isn’t always justice.  
 And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it.  
 Somehow we do it;  
 Somehow we’ve weathered and witnessed  
 A nation that isn’t broken but simply unfinished.  
 We, the successors of a country and a time  
 Where a skinny black girl descended from slaves  
 And raised by a single mother can dream of  
 becoming president,  
 Only to find herself reciting for one.  
 And yes we are far from polished, far from  
 pristine,  
 But that doesn’t mean we aren’t striving to form a  
 union that is perfect.  
 We are striving to forge a union with purpose,  
 To compose a country committed to all cultures,  
 colors, characters and conditions of man.  
 And so we lift our gaze not to what stands  
 between us,  
 But what stands before us.  
 We close the divide, because we know to put our  
 future first,  
 We must first put our differences aside.  
 We lay down our arms  
 So we can reach out our arms to one another.  
 We seek harm to none and harmony for all.  
 Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:  
 That even as we grieved, we grew,  
 That even as we hurt, we hoped,  
 That even as we tired, we tried,



**Amanda Gorman was hand-picked by First Lady Jill Biden to recite “The Hill We Climb” at the inauguration of President Biden.**  
 CREDIT: AP/Getty Images

That we’ll forever be tied together, victorious—  
 Not because we will never again know defeat  
 But because we will never again sow division.  
 Scripture tells us to envision  
 That everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree,  
 And no one shall make them afraid.  
 If we’re to live up to our own time,  
 then victory won’t lie in the blade but in all the bridges we’ve made.  
 That is the promised glade,  
 The hill we climb if only we dare it.  
 Because being American is more than a pride we inherit,  
 It’s the past we step into and how we repair it.  
 We’ve seen a force that would shatter our nation rather than share it,  
 Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.  
 And this effort very nearly succeeded,  
 But while democracy can be periodically delayed  
 It can never be permanently defeated.  
 In this truth, in this faith we trust,  
 For while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us.  
 This is the era of just redemption.  
 We feared at its inception.  
 We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour,  
 But within it we found the power  
 To author a new chapter,  
 To offer hope and laughter,  
 To ourselves sow. While once we asked:

How could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?  
 Now we assert: How could catastrophe possibly  
 prevail over us?  
 We will not march back to what was,  
 But move to what shall be,  
 A country that is bruised but whole,  
 Benevolent but bold,  
 Fierce and free.  
 We will not be turned around or interrupted by  
 intimidation  
 Because we know our inaction and inertia will be  
 the inheritance of the next generation.  
 Our blunders become their burdens  
 But one thing is certain:  
 If we merge mercy with might and might with  
 right,  
 Then love becomes our legacy  
 And change our children’s birthright.  
 So let us leave behind a country better than the  
 one we were left.  
 With every breath of my bronze pounded chest,  
 We will raise this wounded world into a wondrous  
 one.  
 We will rise from the golden hills of the West.  
 We will rise from the windswept Northeast where  
 our forefathers first realized revolution.  
 We will rise from the lakeland cities of the  
 Midwestern states.  
 We will rise from the sunbaked South.  
 We will rebuild, reconcile and recover  
 In every known nook of our nation,  
 In every corner called our country,  
 Our people, diverse and beautiful,  
 Will emerge battered and beautiful.  
 When day comes we step out of the shade,  
 Aflame and unafraid.  
 The new dawn blooms as we free it.  
 For there is always light if only we’re brave  
 enough to see it,  
 If only we’re brave enough to be it.







**Who is Amanda Gorman?**

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Gorman first found her love of poetry after hearing her teacher read Ray Bradbury’s “Dandelion Wine” in class. Poetry became her outlet to cope with her speech impediment. Similar to how President Biden had a stutter growing up, Gorman had difficulty pronouncing certain sounds.

At age 14, Gorman joined WriteGirl, a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles that promotes creativity and self-expression to empower girls, attending their monthly creative writing workshops and working one-on-one with writing mentors.

When she was 16, she was named the first-ever Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate. Gorman also became a youth delegate for the United Nations. Soon after, in 2014, she was named the inaugural Los Angeles Youth Poet Laureate. The following year, she published her first poetry collection, “The One for Whom Food Is Not Enough.”

In 2017, while a sophomore at Harvard University, Gorman was named the first National Youth Poet Laureate. She went on to graduate cum laude from Harvard University. Penguin Random House recently released Gorman’s children’s book, Change Sings, and her poetry collection, The Hill We Climb Poems. The illustrations for Change Sings were drawn by New York Loren Long illustrator who illustrated New York Times bestsellers Of Thee I Sing by Barack Obama and Love by Matt de la Pena.

As an activist, Gorman worked on the local, national and international levels to support girls’ education and empowerment. Her activism efforts and poetry have been featured on the Today Show, PBS Kids, and CBS This Morning, and in the New York Times, Vogue, Essence, and O magazine. Gorman has voiced her intention to run for president in 2036, the first election cycle in which she’ll be old enough to do so. Seeing Kamala Harris elected to Vice President reinvigorated her plans to run.

Learn more about Gorman at: [www.amandasgorman.com](http://www.amandasgorman.com)





### Who is Andrea Hall?

Andrea Hall, 47, was the first Black woman hired to a station at the City of Albany Fire Department when she started her career in 1993 and the first Black woman to become fire captain at Fulton County Fire Rescue over 16 years ago. She has been a firefighter for 28 years.

Hall began her firefighting career in her hometown of Albany, Georgia, in 1993. She was inspired to become a firefighter by one of her cousins, who became a firefighter first. In addition to her role as fire captain, Hall also serves as the president of the International Association of Firefighters Local 3920, who formally endorsed Biden for the Democratic nomination in April 2019. The IAFF was the first major labor union to officially back a candidate in the 2020 election.

Hall’s younger sister, Whitney Williams-Smith, is also a firefighter. Williams-Smith was drawn to the career field because of her sister. She was in attendance at the inauguration with Hall.

It has been reported that after saying yes, Hall started practicing repeatedly. She made a note each time she recited the pledge and had made enough tallies “to fill almost an entire 80-page notebook.”



Georgia Fire Captain Andrea Hall led the Pledge of Allegiance for President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris’s inauguration. In addition to a verbal recitation, Andrea led the pledge in American Sign Language – further emphasizing the event’s inclusive “America United” theme.

CREDIT: AP/Getty Images

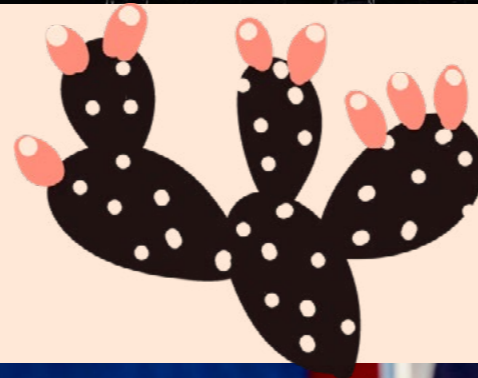






The inaugural benediction was given by Rev. Silvester Beaman, who leads Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Wilmington, Delaware. Beaman was close friends with the President's late son, Beau Biden and has been connected to the President since 1993.

CREDIT: AP/Getty Images



Father Leo O'Donovan, a Jesuit Catholic priest, who delivered the opening prayer during the event, previously presided at the funeral of the president's son, Beau Biden, in 2015. Rev. O'Donovan serves as Director of Mission for Jesuit Refugee Service and is also president emeritus of Georgetown University.

CREDIT: AP/Getty Images



Jennifer Lopez sang "This Land Is Your Land" and "America the Beautiful" at Joe Biden's inauguration. After reciting part of the Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish, Lopez closed with "let's get loud."

CREDIT: AP/Getty Images



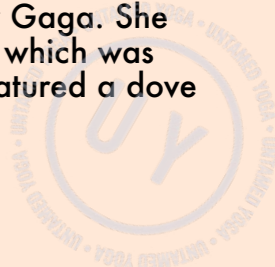
Country singer, Garth Brooks, sang the hymn "Amazing Grace" during the inauguration ceremonies.

CREDIT: AP/Getty Images



The national anthem was sung by Lady Gaga. She wore an eye-catching golden brooch, which was attached to the lapel of her dress and featured a dove carrying an olive branch.

CREDIT: AP/Getty Images





# MY LIST

BY SHAWANDA GATSON

Since 2019, I have been doing a lot more reading. Primarily non-fiction, but there are some fiction titles I have enjoyed. And in 2020, I began listening to a ton of podcasts and watching documentaries on various random topics. I was craving information. I've also really gotten into watching the different Netflix comedy specials. As of late, I have enjoyed specials by Trevor Noah, John Mulaney, Leslie Jones, Hannah Gadsby, Kevin Hart, and Jo Koy. (Yvonne Orji has a great special too, but it's on HBO Max.)

I wanted to read and hear people's stories. I wanted laugh and cry. I wanted to think deeply. I wanted to absorb and learn from the struggles and triumphs of a diverse group of voices. Because although I may not share the same belief system as another person, I feel strongly that we are all more alike than we are different. And at our core, we all want the same things in life: love, belonging, respect, compassion, forgiveness, safety, and autonomy.

One of the books that I resonated with in particular was *Untamed* by Glennon Doyle. I first became aware of Doyle after listening to a Ted Talk she gave about mental health. In a 2016 *Washington Post*



**Earning my MFA, after two failed attempts at graduate school, is one of my most cherished accomplishments. I wish my parents had been there to see it, but I'm grateful that my son and sister were there to share that moment with me.**

article, Doyle revealed what inspired her to begin her Momastery blog:

*"In 2009, the Virginia native was living in Centreville, feeling starved of authentic connection, when she noticed people posting Facebook lists of "25 Things About Me." While her baby napped, Doyle Melton banged out her own list. She wrote about her conflicted feelings about parenthood and marriage and about her stained daily existence.*

*"My number six was, 'I'm a recovering food and alcohol addict, but I still find myself missing food and booze in the same twisted way someone can still love a person who beats them and leaves them for dead..."*

Later, she noticed that her friend's number six was, "My favorite snack food is hummus."

So, as I sat to face myself and prepare to enter 2021 with intention and accountability, I decided to create my own list. This list includes happy things and not so happy things. It consists of randomnesses that is my life—things I believe others may be able to relate to. Things that maybe highlight how we are more alike than different. And perhaps by sharing my list, you and I will feel a little less alone during this time of isolation and polarization. And maybe even a little more connected.

***"There is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself."***  
**Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette* (2018)**





After losing over 100 pounds, I was finally able to mark skydiving off my bucket list. I had always wanted to go but couldn't because I was over the weight restrictions.

## 25 Things About Me: Untamed Edition

1. I want to be in two places at one time. I love the desert and the life I have here, but I miss my sister, who lives in Houston, very much.
2. I've had my heart broken friends, and it was just as painful as romantic heartbreak. In some instances, it hurt worse. But, I've done my share of breaking. Sometimes friendships can be mended. Sometimes they can't. Only time determines that.
3. I've struggled with feelings of "not being enough" since I was a teenager. I re-read some of my old diaries and found that it was a recurring theme. I'm working on figuring out the "why" and then the "how" of moving forward from it. I've discovered that race played a more significant role than I once thought. When all the images of "beauty" you see on a daily basis don't look like you, it does affect you. A lot.
4. I am an introvert with extrovert tendencies. I am very quiet and reserved in new situations. People have often assumed I was mean or stuck up because of my RBF. Small talk is also

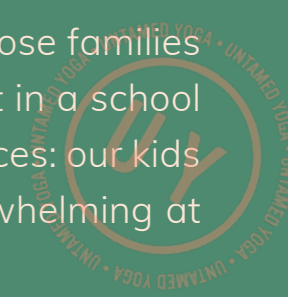
challenging; it takes a lot of energy out of me. But, when I'm in a familiar environment, where I feel more comfortable, I am more extroverted. Yet, without ample time by myself in a quiet space, I get drained quite easily.

5. On all my childhood report cards, I typically got an S- or N in the "avoids needless talking" category. I used to finish all my work and then start chatting with the kids that sat around me. When I began teaching, karma came back to bite me in the ass. Lol.
6. My Enneagram number is a 2 (the Helper) with a wing 3 (the Achiever). My love language is acts of service, and my apology language is making restitution. I'm a Pisces and an INFJ (The Advocate) on the Meyer's Briggs. In Harry Potter, I am House Hufflepuff. So basically, I'm a sensitive, overachieving helper who finds it easier to stand up for others than myself. I often get tunnel vision, get stuck on small details and think my way is the correct way, with the best intentions, which drives my friends and family crazy. I'm getting better though.
7. I started doing yoga two years ago. I've shed many tears on my yoga mat. It came into my life when I needed it the most. Yoga is for all people of all shapes and sizes. It's not about being super bendy. (I'm not super flexible). It's about finding peace within. There is tremendous healing in learning to connect to your breath.
8. One of my favorite songs of all time is "I Won't Back Down" by Tom Petty. (No, I'll stand my ground. Won't be turned around. And I'll keep this world from draggin' me down, Gonna stand my ground. And I won't back down)





9. Growing up, I remember being taught that you shouldn't discuss race, religion, or politics in polite company. I now understand why. Those are three of the most loaded topics in existence. I'm just now, at the age of 42, feeling comfortable talking about these things publicly. Yet, I still find it quite difficult.
10. My highest recorded weight was 267 pounds. Binge-eating and a sedentary lifestyle were my emotional coping mechanisms. I tried EVERY diet known to man to lose weight. I even did a damn summer boot camp...two of them. The weight always came back. I finally decided to have bariatric surgery when I had to get off a ride at Knotts Berry Farm because they couldn't latch the harness over my chest. I was on a field trip with my students when that happened. They had to make an announcement over the intercom that "someone needed to exit the ride." It was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life.
11. I have an irrational fear of sharks, frogs, lizards, and crickets. I remember calling my dad once to come to shoo away a frog that had taken up residence at my front door. He came to save the day. No questions asked.
12. Last summer, I went to an ashram in Colorado. I was meant to be there for 30 days but had to come back early because our sweet girl, Gretchen, had to be put down. She became seriously ill the day after I left. They found cancer, and she deteriorated very quickly. I didn't make it home in time to be with her when my son, ex-husband, and childhood best friend took her to the vet. It was a brutal experience. The similarities to my parents' deaths were almost unbearable.
13. I always feel the absence of my parents. I'm not always sad, but it's something you never forget or get over completely.
14. My favorite tequila brand is Espolon Blanco. I enjoy taking a shot and dancing with abandon in my bedroom. I particularly like 90s pop, R&B, and hip hop. (I've been to not one, but two Snoop Dogg concerts..." Drop it like it's hot. Drop it like it's hot.")
15. I went through a significant burnout in 2020. I was initially ashamed to tell my students and others that I was going on a 5-week medical leave for mental health reasons. I remember one of my students asking me if 5 weeks would be enough time. I thought it would be, but it's taken longer than expected. My cup was completely depleted. I'm still working on filling it back up, learning to be gentle with myself and to not rush the process.
16. I don't go to church anymore. I miss my church community, but I'm exactly where I need to be in this season of my life. I don't hate the church as an institution, but there are many things I disagree with. I'm working through that. But, I feel closer to my Creator than I have in a really long time.
17. I miss my former students. I truly loved each of my kids, even the challenging kiddos. I love being a teacher, but I hate grading papers! (Except for writing. I always enjoyed reading my students' writing. Kids tend to share really deep and personal things in their writing.)
18. I've taught in different classroom settings in two different states. I've taught children whose families are affluent, and some whose families lived below the poverty level. I've taught in a school where the student population was 99% African-American, and I've taught in a school that was primarily Caucasian. I've taught in a public school, and I've taught in a private school. One thing was true in ALL instances: our kids are really hurting. There are a lot of unmet emotional needs and unresolved trauma in American classrooms. It got very overwhelming at times, but I just tried to love them all as best I could.



19. My online dating stories are hilarious! (Some might even make you blush...lol)
20. After my divorce, I fell in love with a beautiful man that only a handful of people knew about. I fell HARD. He broke my heart. I held on longer than I should have. And let me tell you, heartbreak sucks at any age. Through the process of loving and losing him, my heart cracked wide open. It exposed the wounded places in my heart that needed healing.
21. I had two failed attempts at getting my graduate degree. I foolishly started two graduate programs in the fall of 2002 after having my son. All while working full-time in financial aid, being newly married, and being a new mom with postpartum depression...fun times! So when I finally earned my MFA in Creative Writing in 2019, it was one of the happiest days of my life.
22. I love to read, but I haven't read all the classics in English and British literature. I've tried several times, but I lose interest very quickly. But, I have read the Twilight books multiple time. (I see you snickering. Don't judge me...lol)
23. I feel the privilege and oppression of my life in equal measure. I know that I have been afforded opportunities that Black women in the 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s would have never imagined possible. But make no mistake, I am always acutely aware of my race. The full spectrum of the systematic racism that plagues our country threatens to break my spirit at times. Being truly "woke" guts you in a visceral way. It's seeing all the ugly and hateful truth of our past and present while desperately trying to figure out how one person can positively contribute to a better tomorrow. And whether we can forgive and trust one another again. It's daunting.
24. I keep my head shaved because my real hair is thin and patchy. My mother started losing her hair in her thirties. After years of wearing braids, cornrows, relaxers, wigs, and ALL the damn products...I just couldn't anymore. It's taken time for me to see beauty when I look in the mirror, but I see it now. I see my mother and my son when I look in the mirror. I see me. And I like me. It's taken a long time to say that.
25. This is me—failures and victories. Some of the challenges happened to me, and others I had an active part in, but I'm still standing. I am grateful for my life. Not because it's perfect, but because it's my life. I don't love the heartaches and challenges, but unfortunately, we can't escape them. Yes, there are a number of external factors that threaten to uproot me on a daily basis; but, I'm going to keep showing up and keep choosing the light. I'll grieve what needs to be grieved, face what needs to be faced, and let go what needs to be let go. And, I will be grateful for all the rest. I will smile and laugh as often as I can, even when the storms threaten to take me under. I love my life not because of the struggle but despite them.

*"I don't tell you this... so you think of me as a victim. I am not a victim. I tell you this because my story has value. My story has value. I tell you this 'cause I want you to know, I need you to know, what I know. To be rendered powerless does not destroy your humanity. Your resilience is your humanity. The only people who lose their humanity are those who believe they have the right to render another human being powerless. They are the weak. To yield and not break, that is incredible strength. You destroy the woman, you destroy the past she represents. I will not allow my story... to be destroyed. What I would have done to have heard a story like mine. Not for blame. Not for reputation, not for money, not for power. But to feel less alone."*

Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette* (2018)



# SHEILA B



Sheila B's passion for creative and magical designs is reflected in her unique and bold adornments. A former make-up artist and wardrobe stylist, Sheila B brings her cosmic visions to life through her opulent and expressive pieces. Inspired by all things natural and mystical, she draws upon a wide array of influences from the past, present, and future to bring her jewelry to life- with color, crystals, stones and feathers, fossils, bones, wood and precious metals in her striking designs. She connects to the pieces she finds and infuses them with her positive energy for the wearer to feel inspired and empowered.



Sheila B Jewelry Showroom/Atra Nova Vintage Store/Promised Land  
61871 29 Palms Highway  
Joshua Tree, CA

OPEN: Friday-Sunday, 11am-5pm  
For Appointments, please call: (323) 285-0266

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# SHARE YOUR VOICE

Each issue of Untamed Voices will include a curated collection of written and visual stories centered upon a theme that reflect the multi-faceted voices represented in our community and beyond. It is our hope that by sharing ALL our stories, past and present, that we will be reminded of our common humanity. Let your “untamed voice” be heard and share from the heart.

## General Guidelines

### Written Work

- Looking for original fiction, non-fiction and/or poetry.
- All written pieces should be 1500 words or less.
- Publication ready, with only light copy editing needed.
- This is an open call, and may be reposted.
- This is an unpaid experience, but you will get your own byline.
- No fee to submit.
- You may submit up to TWO pieces of written work for consideration.
- Please submit as a word document or an accessible Google Drive/Docs link.
- Include a short bio, photo and full contact information.

### Visual Work

- Artists are welcome to submit works in any medium: painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, photography, textile, installation, mixed media, digital, performance and film (only jpg + link to video) etc.
- All visual art mediums are welcome.
- This is an unpaid publication.
- No fee to submit.
- You may submit up to TWO pieces of visual work.
- Please submit a high resolution photo of your work or link.
- A brief narrative (500 words or less) about the piece including: name, medium, year and inspiration behind the work
- Include a short bio, photo and full contact information.

Legal Disclaimer

Untamed Voices ask for first publication rights. You may publish your work featured on the site elsewhere following initial publication, but please credit Untamed Voices with first publication.





**Conditional Love: Loving with Boundaries**

The idea that love comes with conditions may seem foreign to some. Conditional love isn't about a person having to prove themselves or jump through hoops for your affection. Nor, is it about keeping scores or quid pro quo. Conditional love is about setting healthy boundaries. Boundaries on how you want to be treated and the behavior in which you will accept or not accept in a relationship. And this includes self-love, romantic and platonic relationships, familial relations, love for our community and even a love for nature.

What boundaries have you set in your life? What situations have you found yourself in that are boundaryless? How has conditional love manifested in your life? What relationships need your attention? How do you define and walk in love?

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 6, 2021**

Email to [untamedvoices@untamedyogastudio.com](mailto:untamedvoices@untamedyogastudio.com) with the subject line: February 2021

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**A Curious Life: Finding your inspiration and having the courage to explore**

Curiosity is the spark that keeps life interesting. Curiosity is the undercurrent that drives our desire to try new things. Curiosity is the force that gives us the appetite to create. Curiosity is the root of inspiration. When curiosity arrives in our lives, we are given a choice. We can ignore it, run from it or fear it. Or we can have the courage to explore and embrace it wholeheartedly.

What inspires you? Where has your curiosity and your courage taken you? In what ways have you ignored, run from or feared curiosity? In what ways have you opened yourself up to exploration?

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 10, 2021**

Email to [untamedvoices@untamedyogastudio.com](mailto:untamedvoices@untamedyogastudio.com) with the subject line: March 2021





# BEHIND UNTAMED VOICES



**ShaWanda Gatson - Managing Editor**

ShaWanda is an educator, writer, storyteller, and yogi. She was born in Mississippi, but raised in 29 Palms and has lived in the Morongo Basin for over 20 years. ShaWanda has a bachelor's degree from Pepperdine University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University. She writes fiction for children, narrative non-fiction, and dabbles in poetry and short stories.

ShaWanda is currently working on her yoga certification and will begin teaching in 2021. Her areas of interest are yin and restorative yoga. It is her desire to help share this transformative and healing practice with children and women of color and other marginalized communities.

ShaWanda lives in Yucca Valley with her son, Mateo, and their miniature schnauzer, Duchess. When not writing or doing yoga, ShaWanda enjoys reading, traveling, dancing, cooking for family and friends, and binge-watching tv shows.

Follow her on Facebook  
@shawandagatsonwrites



**Emily Silver - Editor In Chief**

Emily Silver is an artist, yogi, educator, and art gallery owner located in Yucca Valley CA. Emily is originally from New York where she received her BFA from SVA in NYC, her MFA from Penn State University. She is on the faculty at Santa Monica College and Copper Mountain College, where she has been teaching in the art departments for over 10 years.

She has been practicing on her mat for over 17 years and teaching yoga in the hi-desert, Los Angeles, Seattle and Portland over the last few years.

**Yoga Trainings:**

- 500RYT Hatha training from Modo Yoga. Kelowna, BC
- 50hrs Yin Training, Joe Barnett, Encinitas CA
- 100hrs Vinyasa Flow, North Vancouver BC
- 40hrs Flow State Advanced Sequencing .
- 50hrs Yin Training, Bernie Clark
- Currently enrolled in IAYT 805 Yoga Therapy program

Follow her @emilysilverstudio  
@untamedyoga

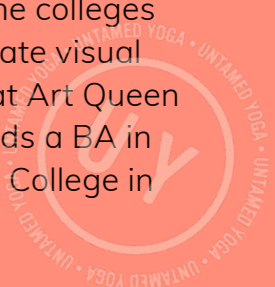


**Dylan Smith - Associate Editor**

Dylan Smith is a Southern California based dancer, choreographer, teaching and visual artist. He was the recipient of Broadway World San Francisco Best Choreography in 2015. Dylan is an accomplished teaching artist and choreographer that instructs all over the world at various colleges, universities and studios teaching master classes and setting original works including:

Broadway Dance Center, Alvin Ailey School of Dance, Rutgers University, Sonoma State University and Santa Rosa Junior College.

Behind the table, Mr. Smith has worked with the Emmy Award winning RWS Entertainment Group as an audition choreographer/coordinator and assistant to the casting director. Dylan trains college bound performers on their dance technique, audition material and has successfully gotten many of said hopefuls into the colleges of their choice. He is also a passionate visual artist with an upcoming solo exhibit at Art Queen in Joshua Tree, California. Dylan holds a BA in Dance from Marymount Manhattan College in New York City.





THE RIGHTWAY FOUNDATION  
HELP TRANSITION-AGE FOSTER  
YOUTH GET AND KEEP GOOD JOBS  
DESPITE THE OVERWHELMING  
TRAUMA THEY HAVE ENDURED  
THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.

MOST FOSTER YOUTH WHO HAVE  
AGED OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE  
SYSTEM HAVE EXPERIENCED  
A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF  
TRAUMA. PAIN AND FEELINGS  
OF POWERLESSNESS DO NOT  
JUST DISAPPEAR. WITHOUT  
CONFRONTING THEIR PAST  
TRAUMA IN A HEALTHY WAY, IT  
IS DIFFICULT FOR OUR YOUTH  
TO HOLD A JOB, SUPPORT THEIR  
FAMILY, OR HAVE A REWARDING  
FUTURE.



AT RIGHTWAY, THERAPY AND  
COUNSELING ARE MAJOR PARTS  
OF THE EMPLOYMENT MODEL,  
STARTING WITHIN THE INITIAL  
OPERATION EMANCIPATION JOB  
TRAINING AND CONTINUING  
IN ONE-ON-ONE AND GROUP  
SETTINGS FOR PROGRAM  
PARTICIPANTS AND ALUMNI.  
RIGHTWAY'S GOAL IS TO GIVE  
FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AND RE-  
ENTRY YOUTH THE TRAINING,  
THERAPY, AND GUIDANCE THEY  
NEED TO LIVE THEIR BEST LIVES.



# UNTAMED YOGA

*Joshua Tree, California*

