

“VOICES IN THE WILD, FOR THE WILD”

**UNTAMED  
VOICES**

*Joshua Tree, Ca*

FEBRUARY 2021



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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*





# BOUNDARIES AS SELF-LOVE IN ACTION

## HOW WE CAN SET BOUNDARIES TO PROTECT OURSELVES AND OTHERS (AKA IT'S OKAY TO SAY NO)

**BY MELISSA GRISI, LCSW**

*Boundaries don't mean "I don't love you."*

*Boundaries mean "I am going to love you and love myself at the same time." – Cleo Wade*

In 2020, we all experienced some challenges to our boundaries while navigating the pandemic. For many of us, relationships changed in ways we didn't anticipate, such as pushback and fallout from saying "no" to invites and gatherings, turning down hugs, and avoiding visits with family. Other situations have simply been socially awkward, like asking people to back up when social distancing and to put on their mask.

For those of us actively doing anti-racism work, we have had to set boundaries with family, friends, and co-workers regarding racist statements or have had to unfollow people who post comments such as "All Lives Matter" and Q-Anon disinformation. Many relationships have changed in my own life; some are stronger than ever, and others no longer exist; much of this is because I have decided to honor myself and my boundaries.

For many of us, setting boundaries can be difficult. But to live a life that is authentically



***Give yourself permission to have boundaries and not feel guilty for it! Boundaries keep us and others safe. Let's normalize healthy boundaries together; by setting them, enforcing them, and honoring others.***

you, it is absolutely necessary. Boundaries are the limits we establish to protect ourselves. Boundaries communicate to others that we have self-respect and self-worth. When we set boundaries, we preserve our integrity, take responsibility for who we are, and take control of our life. Boundaries are not just essential to have with others; we need self-boundaries to be healthy, thriving humans. In fact, without healthy boundaries, we cannot perform genuine self-care. We'll give and give to others without nourishing ourselves. Without boundaries, we can become exhausted, depleted, bitter, and resentful.

When we experience trauma, adverse childhood events (ACEs), and/or chronic stress; setting boundaries can be especially difficult. Any type of abuse is a boundary violation. A hallmark of trauma is a loss of control and choice. When we don't have a choice, especially in relational trauma, our boundaries have been harmed. As children or adults, when our boundaries are violated or blurred, we can become confused, insecure, and feel a lack of safety. When we find ourselves in relationships where our boundaries are honored, we feel safe, heard, validated, and loved. Healing trauma involves restoring healthy boundaries with others but, most importantly, with ourselves. It is not possible to enjoy healthy relationships without boundaries. Each of us is a unique individual with distinct emotions, needs, and preferences, and this is equally true for our partners, family, and friends. To be successful in our relationships with others, we need to learn how to clearly and honestly communicate our boundaries.



Boundaries are typically organized by category, including time, physical, emotional, intellectual, sexual, and material.

- **Physical and sexual boundaries** often involve consent. These boundaries are specifically about your body and physical space. No one is allowed to touch you without your consent.
- **Time boundaries** can include how much time you spend on the phone with family members, ending work at a specific time of day, or how quickly you might respond to texts and/or emails.
- **Intellectual boundaries** involve establishing the worth of your knowledge and ideas. For example, in business, requesting fair compensation for your intellectual expertise and credentials.
- **Material boundaries** can include what you allow others to borrow from you.
- **Emotional boundaries** can include minimizing contact (or ending relationships) with toxic people in your life and engaging in healthy self-care practices to replenish your own emotional capacity.

there are three primary styles of boundaries: *rigid, porous, and healthy.*

**Rigid boundaries** tend to be closed off and guarded. Rigid boundaries can look like detachment and disconnect. Someone with rigid boundaries will rarely ask for help and often detach in their relationships with others, keeping their distance emotionally and physically. People with rigid boundaries tend to be avoidant in their relationships with others.

**Porous boundaries** tend to look like the person who overshares, fears rejection, is over-involved with others and has difficulty saying no (otherwise known as “people-pleasing”). People-pleasing puts others’ needs before our own. This action can also look like codependency, where we neglect ourselves to take care of others. Consuming ourselves with other people’s problems and a compulsive need to “fix” problems for them. Porous boundaries make our needs small and ourselves even smaller. Those with porous or undefined boundaries are typically conflict-avoidant and have difficulty standing up for themselves.

**Healthy boundaries** are grounded and rooted in a person knowing what they want and who they are. People with healthy boundaries tend to be aware of their personal wants and needs and can communicate these appropriately. Also, those with healthy boundaries can accept when others say no.



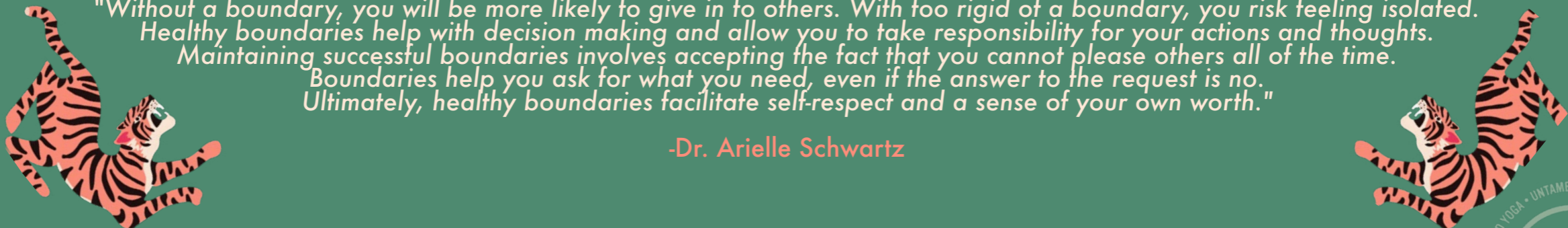


How to Establish Healthy Boundaries

1. First, begin with knowing that you have a right to personal boundaries.
2. Explore your beliefs about boundaries. Do you hold the belief that people who set boundaries (or say no) are selfish? How were boundaries modeled (or not) for you growing up? What is your family of origin's culture around boundaries? This self-inquiry can offer information about our current beliefs about boundaries, offer insight if we have difficulty setting them (porous), or challenges us to open up to others (rigid).
3. Next, begin to consider the situations and people that leave you feeling drained, exhausted, depleted, agitated, and/or shameful.
4. Identify the actions and behaviors that you find unacceptable. Let others know when they've crossed the line, acted inappropriately, or disrespected you in any way. Tell others when you need emotional and physical space.
5. Remember don't just focus on others; what about your own self-boundaries? What actions and behaviors do you engage in that are unhealthy for you? Where do you need to get real and honest with yourself and shift your self-boundaries? *(Examples of areas where self-boundaries need to be explored, reviewed, and potentially shifted include alcohol and/or drug use, relationships, work, sex, food, family, social media, etc.)*
6. Learn to say no. If this is difficult for you, consider Assertiveness Training. A good therapist can assist you. *(Check out our resource list on page 7)*
7. Trust and believe in yourself. You are the highest authority on you. Listen to your gut; it will guide you.
8. Remember, boundaries require practice, especially if we have experienced trauma. Practice setting boundaries, practice saying no, practice saying yes. Have compassion for yourself when you don't get it just right.

*"Without a boundary, you will be more likely to give in to others. With too rigid of a boundary, you risk feeling isolated. Healthy boundaries help with decision making and allow you to take responsibility for your actions and thoughts. Maintaining successful boundaries involves accepting the fact that you cannot please others all of the time. Boundaries help you ask for what you need, even if the answer to the request is no. Ultimately, healthy boundaries facilitate self-respect and a sense of your own worth."*

**-Dr. Arielle Schwartz**




How to Protect and Enforce Healthy Boundaries

1. Notice (and keep a list of) the people and activities that energize you and those that drain you. I love the quote: "Choose people who feel good to your nervous system" by Sasha Tozzi, Hypnotherapist. Your nervous system responses can give you a lot of information about who/what is healthy for you.
2. Make a list of specific relationships that have become stressful or draining for you. Try to identify how (and why) you allowed a boundary to be crossed. Notice any resentment, which can also be a clue we have allowed a boundary to be violated.
3. Whenever a new commitment or demand comes along, ask yourself (and your body) if you genuinely want to do it. And listen.
4. Notice when relationships cross over into territory you're not comfortable with and tap into your courage when you need to draw the line.
5. Know the difference between what feels like an obligation vs. genuine enthusiasm. Obligation blocks opportunity. If all of our energy and time is taken up with obligations (things we don't want to do), how can inspiration and opportunities come into your life?
6. Engage in a healthy self-care practice. You can't pour from an empty pitcher. What do you need to do to replenish yourself? Self-care isn't just massages or hot baths (although it can be!). Take an honest assessment about how you care for yourself physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and socially.
7. Setting boundaries may not come easily or quickly. Practice saying no, practice saying yes. Over time, it will become easier.

Our boundaries (and needs) can change over time, and our loved ones may not know when they do. There might be instances when individuals unknowingly cross your boundaries, and it is vital to speak up. It takes courage to set and enforce our boundaries, and having courage doesn't mean we're not scared or uncomfortable. We do it anyway, despite the fear and discomfort.

So give yourself permission to have boundaries and not feel guilty for it! Boundaries keep us and others safe. Let's normalize healthy boundaries together; by setting them, enforcing them, and honoring others.

"Love yourself enough to set boundaries.  
 Your time and energy are precious.  
 You get to choose how you use it.  
 You teach people how to treat you by deciding  
 what you will and won't accept."

-Anna Taylor

RESOURCE LIST

Boundaries and Protection by Pixie Lighthouse

Codependent No More by Melody Beattie

Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself by Dr. Kristin Neff

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## 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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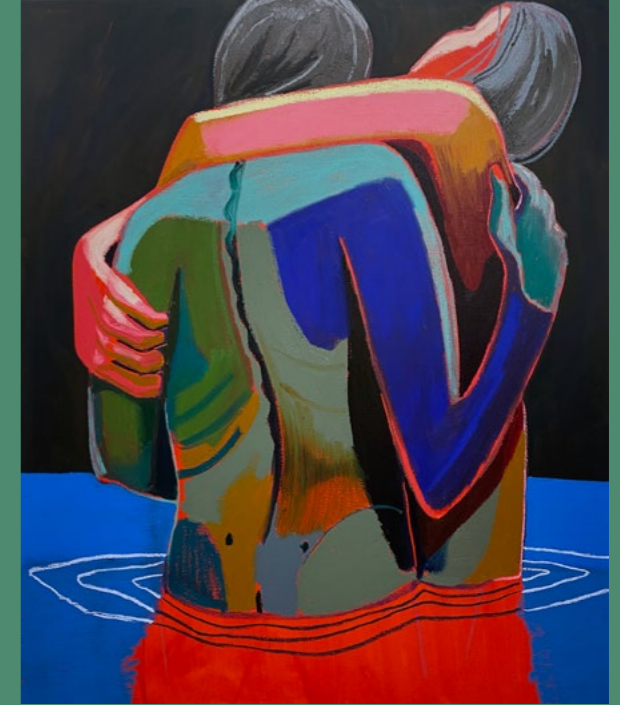




# TESS JENKINS

Tess Jenkins (b. 1986 Albany, NY) is an artist living in Flamingo Heights, CA. She is interested in the personal experiences and generational histories that are programmed into our bodies, and how those imprints effect our emotional, social and spiritual lives. She uses drawing and painting as tools of investigation to better understand our infinitely complicated, multi-layered bodysystems, how we relate to them, and how they effect our senses of self. She is a graduate of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and has exhibited in numerous group and solo exhibitions throughout the East and West Coasts.

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





# Q&A WITH FRANCO VEGA OF THE RIGHTWAY FOUNDATION

BY DYLAN SMITH

Most recently, I had the opportunity to interview Franco Vega, the Executive Director and Founder of The RightWay Foundation. The RightWay is an exceptional organization that helps transition-age foster youth acquire and maintain employment despite the overwhelming trauma they have endured throughout their lives. Untamed Yoga has partnered with the RightWay Foundation during the months of January, February, March to raise awareness and money for their mission and foundation. The studio has also offered yoga to their youth, administrators, and social workers.

On our Zoom call, Vega and I connected immediately. His passion and love for what he does was beyond evident. I found his stories and work truly inspiring. Our exchange was a beautiful reminder for me that we are nothing if we are not helping our fellow human beings. Even, creating art can be an act of service.

At the time of our interview, due to the pandemic, Vega has not seen many of his youth face-to-face in almost a year. Zoom has been extremely difficult, especially for his younger group. As an “in person, in your face” type of organization that provides meals for those enrolled, the Foundation has not been



**A former orphan and probation youth himself, Vega founded The RightWay Foundation in 2011 to provide LA County transition-age foster youth (ages 18-26) with support and training to get and keep jobs. Now in its ninth year, RightWay has served as a lifeline for hundreds of foster youth in LA County.**

able to offer services that many of his youth depend on.

Funding is also become increasingly unknown. It is nearly impossible to predict what numbers will look like in regards to donations as the financial strain of the country trickles down to donors being more conservative with their philanthropic assistance or lack thereof. However, despite an ever-changing fiscal landscape, Vega is confident that the organization’s corporate donors, funders and community genuinely care and have a vested interest in the population the foundation serves.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to chat with Vega and learn about The RightWay Foundation. He is a true example of how we, individually and collectively, can make positive change for the future generations of our community and the world.

**What challenges and obstacles is your organization (and foster youth, in general) facing going into 2021?**

Vega: The unknown, sadly, the date of when we can open our doors, and when they can just walk in without scheduling an appointment. All of my youth, 500 kids, have to call and set up an appointment when we used to have an open-door policy. Just show up as is. 4:59 pm and we close at 5 o’clock; you could be in the house. We are waiting on that time frame of when we can open up.

**What can a regular person do in their community to help foster youth? Things that cost very little or nothing at all that can make a big impact.**

Vega: First, get involved. The community should get involved. Our neighbors can get involved with helping raise our kids. That’s a big ask, but if you look at what comes out of the foster care system; homelessness, sex trafficking, incarceration, no



education it's a no brainer. Be there for your neighbor, and they'll be there for you in the future. You can't live in your silo, [where] it's all about you. You have to help and be a neighbor. Old folks should be guiding these young folks on what they need. I am a firm believer that the old school has to teach the new school "old school values".

**What hidden stigmas or obstacles do foster youth face? Things that an average person would never consider.**

Vega: One stigma is that people think the government is taking care of it all, that they're handling it and paying for everything ... that's not true. The government will pay for the kids who speak up and know how to maneuver the system to get all of its benefits. Another stigma is that these are bad kids; that's why they went into the foster system. 'What did they do?' No, what was done to them!

Website: [www.therightwayfoundation.org](http://www.therightwayfoundation.org)  
 Facebook: @therightwayfoundation  
 Instagram: therightwayfoundation  
 Twitter: therightway

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.

In December 2020, the organization was featured on the podcast *Our America* with Julián Castro the former United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Foster Care Transition Age Youth (TAY) and Re-entry Youth deserve to transition to safe, comfortable self-sufficiency when they exit from the foster care system or justice system. As long as foster care youth can easily access a proper support system, they are capable of self-sufficiency. The supports foster youth need the most include housing, therapy, job placement, financial literacy, career counseling, and education.



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Let us **support you as you build**  
your **career path**

<p><b>Careers of Focus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction</li> <li>• Carpentry</li> <li>• Film Production</li> <li>• Administrative Services</li> <li>• Performing Arts</li> </ul> <p><i>Just to name a few</i></p> <p><b>Supportive Services:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentorship</li> <li>• Therapy</li> <li>• Financial Literacy</li> <li>• Job Placement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Qualifications:</b></p> <p>18-24 years old Los Angeles County Resident</p> <p>Impacted by the criminal justice system (parole, probation, previously incarcerated, or in diversion program)</p>
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C H A N C E

UNTAMED VOICES



# GHOSTED BY MY BIOLOGICAL FATHER

BY SHAWANDA GATSON

So there I was, sitting on a beach in Hawaii contemplating a text I had received from a man that said he was my biological father's brother. My biological father would like to connect with me.

WTF??!!!

I don't remember if that was my exact reaction, but it's pretty darn close. Yet, I do remember that I didn't want anything to do with my biological father.

At that juncture in my life, my parents, Johnny and Charlotte Gatson had both passed. Mom in 2011 and Dad in 2015. To even consider connecting with my biological father was out of the question. It felt like a colossal and cosmic betrayal to them.

But sadly, I took the bait. I was cordial to this newfound "relative," as I had no qualms with him. I don't remember the exact wording (age does that to you), but there were only two things I wanted to know after a few pleasantries. I wanted to relay two very simple and direct questions to my absentee



Me and mom in 1978 right after I was born.

rolling stone: Where has he been? And, why now? His response, you ask? Nothing.

Silence.

Crickets.

I got ghosted by my biological father.

*(Insert Mortal Kombat-esque sound byte: FINISH HER!!!)*

This was not what I wanted to be thinking about on my vacation. It had the potential to cast a very dark shadow over this adventure. So, I filed it away in my "deal with it later" file

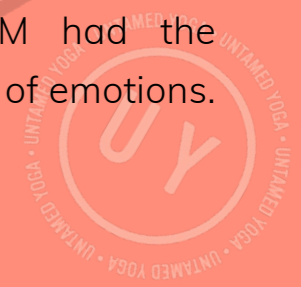
and enjoyed my trip. I didn't have time for this. And after I got back home, I would be busy. I had a life. I had responsibilities.

He didn't deserve my energy.

But, something had been triggered. And I didn't like it. I worked full-time as a teacher, my son was 13, and I was still married at the time. My life was non-stop. And full. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. *(Yes, I did just quote the first line from a Tale of Two Cities. Shout out to Amy Wood...honors English was da bomb! Go Wildcats!! TPHS Class of 1996!)*

Yet, this one message that dropped in my Facebook Messenger box out of nowhere was a big deal. And that seemingly small correspondence had excavated something in me. It was an unsettling feeling. It threatened to disrupt my life.

This deceptively "harmful" DM had the potential to open up a floodgate of emotions.





I didn't have time to unpack all this and open my life up to this man, my biological father—a stranger. I didn't know what fresh hell he might have brought with him into my life. I couldn't allow his attempt at rewriting or erasing the past to tornado through my life.

So, I did what all committed mothers, wives, sisters, daughters—women do: I closed that door.

When the buck stops with you, you don't get to just drop it all and fall apart.

I hope that anyone reading this can find something to resonate with, but my perspective is deeply entrenched in the roles and the various hats that I have worn throughout my adult life. The mom, the teacher, the wife, the sister, the Oreo, the co-worker, the codependent, the friend, the martyr, the repository, the good Christian, the daughter, the caretaker and the Swiss Army knife.

I was committed to my roles. I loved my roles. I had a purpose. I had a life. My life has undoubtedly been messy, but exquisitely so. I was the gatekeeper of my life, and I couldn't allow this man to enter.

He didn't deserve my energy. He had done nothing to get me to where I was in life. How dare he try to interrupt my life with his crumbs.

I was 37-years-old when I sat on that tropical shoreline. It had taken him 36.5 years to reach out to me. Even if I started the clock from when I became a legal adult...years.

He had 19 years.

And now he had the audacity to send a message through his brother. He hadn't even been brave enough to message me directly.

No, he did not deserve my energy.

He had done nothing to warrant my forgiveness or love.

At that moment, I chose a form of self-love. Of course, I didn't identify it as such at the time, but that's what it is. Because when I decided to close that door and move on, that's exactly what I did.

At that moment, I made an unconscious agreement with myself to readdress this at a later date. And yes, of course, it hurt. I was angry and sad. But, he did not deserve my energy.



Five months before I sat on the sandy North Shore beach, I had buried the man that raised me. My stepdad (who I just called my dad) had died on March 10, 2015.

As far as I was concerned, I no longer had any parents on this Earth. Mom was gone. Johnny Edward Gatson was my dad, and he had died.

So, yes, this other man did not deserve my energy.

So, I closed that door and moved on with my life.



My Premise

We all have issues. I have issues. You have issues.

Our issues affect the way we behave. Our issues affect the way we see the world. Our issues affect the way in which we interact with one another. Our issues affect the way in which we love ourselves.

Hold up! Before you start a Twitter petition to cancel me or toilet paper my house (ain't it cute that I think I'm that important...Lol), let's take a look at a few things. The first two definitions of the word **issue** in the dictionary are:

- 1: a vital or unsettled matter
- 2: concern, problem

Short and simple. No qualifiers that dictate your worth for having said issues. The issues you and I possess are simply unsettled matters that we get to choose when and how we handle. Sometimes I have handled my issues poorly, relying on unhealthy coping mechanisms.

- Learning to love yourself is hard.
- Learning to forgive yourself is even harder.
- Learning to do things differently is the hardest of them all.

To face my cornucopia of issues, I had to be willing to endure some pain. Because the only way for me to heal from my issues was to face them eventually. This process will look different for each person. Yet, regardless of how you chose to face your issues, it will most likely hurt. Things will most likely get painful. During this time, familiarity and comfort will act as powerful weapons of fear. They will threaten to keep you frozen. Stuck—ceasing to move forward. Some may even argue that familiarity and comfort aren't all that bad. And, I would agree. But, only to a certain extent.

There have been seasons in my life where things were familiar and comfortable. Things weren't perfect, but I knew what to expect. I had a routine. I had connection and belonging. I was happy and content. I held on to those seasons as long as I could because I knew they wouldn't last. Just as nature moves from summer to fall and winter to spring, our lives are constantly changing as well. Life is a perpetual cycle of growth and change. Following a season of harvest comes a season of planting and growth. And following a season of loss, there is grief.



*Dear Lovely Death*  
*by Langston Hughes*  
  
 Dear lovely Death  
 That taketh all things under wing—  
 Never to kill—  
 Only to change  
 Into some other thing  
 This suffering flesh,  
 To make it either more or less,  
 But not again the same—  
 Dear lovely Death,  
 Change is thy other name.



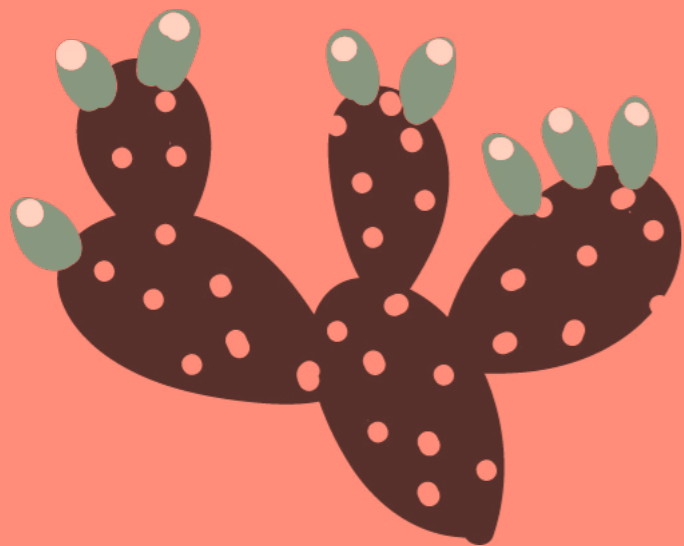
Season of Grief

Grief is not just for death. (Although, grieving death is one of the hardest.) Grief is a process of mourning and learning to accept a new normal. When one has chosen to live wholeheartedly, grief is inevitable. Grief is not a one size fits all type of emotion or process. Humans grieve small things and big things. Some grief is brief, and some quite a bit longer. Even after I've grieved and accepted my "new" normal after losing my parents, there are still moments and days that suck. However, I didn't realize that I needed to grieve the absence of my biological father as well.

Through a lot of really intense inner work, I have since discovered that I had been carrying around an unrealistic and unhealthy notion of love. The attention and love that I have sought from the opposite sex stem from a few things, but most likely, it started with my biological father. My mother married young, and about six months after I was born, she left that marriage. I can't speak to everything that went down, but I know that she left because it was the safest and healthiest choice. She left, and he never came looking for me.

My mom remarried when I was two, and my step dad became my dad. When I was 5-years-old, my stepdad officially adopted me. Up until that point, I still have my biological father's last name, but now it was official. I was ShaWanda LaTreece Gatson. Johnny Gatson was officially my dad and I was officially his daughter. He had filled the void that my biological father had left. My stepdad had been there, so I had a dad. So there really wasn't anything I needed to grieve.

At least so I thought.



The man in this photo, Johnny Gatson, is my hero. He was sent into my mom's lives to help pour love into two vessels that had been discarded by another man. He wasn't my stepdad; he was just my dad.



My dad, Johnny, was a great dad. He gave the best hugs and was an excellent cook. He always had a cup of coffee in his hands, day and night. He was smart, funny and a fantastic singer. He worked hard for our family and was an honorable man. He loved us. He took care of us. He never made me feel like I wasn't his blood. Even after my younger sister was born, he never favored one over the other.

He made me believe that I could do whatever I set my mind to. His love and support gave me confidence. We had a rocky season when I was a teenager, but as teenagers, we can be assholes...so that was normal. My dad never gave up on me. He made me feel completely loved. He was my hero.

But, after that moment on the beach. After that message, doubts crept in. The whispers became louder.

"You're not enough. Mind your peas and cues, or he might leave too."



"When we spend a lifetime trying to distance ourselves from the parts of our lives that don't fit with who we think we're supposed to be, we stand outside of our story and hustle for our worthiness by constantly performing, perfecting, pleasing, and proving."

The Hustle

It's taken many years to realize that I had built large portions of my romantic life on faulty information. The first man who was supposed to love me didn't. I had always thought that since my stepdad (I never called him that) had been so amazing, I would be okay. I was not damaged. Or was I? And there it was. I had some daddy issues. I was a stereotype. Dammit!

My DNA is a combination of two people: my mom and my biological father. And deep in a place that I dared not to visit was the infection. A puss-filled malignant tumor of rejection. It

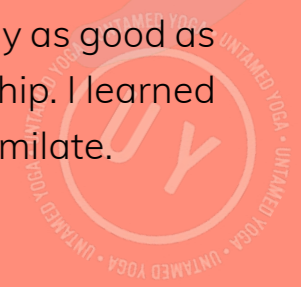
had been there my entire life and had spread silently through my veins over the course of my life. Everything wasn't all dark and twisty. Yet, I had convinced myself that I needed to become indispensable to others to keep them from leaving. If I showed others how much I loved them, they wouldn't leave.

That's when the hustle began.

I've spent too many years of my life trying to earn and keep love. Years hustling to be worthy of love. Because surely if my biological father didn't see me as a priority, then I must not be one. And if my biological father left and didn't look back, then eventually everyone else would do the same. If the first man who should have been there to validate my worth rejected me, so would every other person. Not just in my romantic life, but in all my relationships.

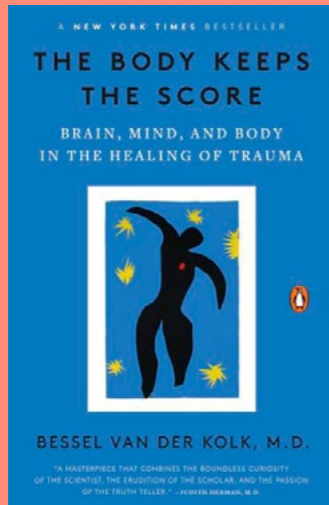
So, I learned how to be a people pleaser. I learned to be a helper. I learned to be an achiever.

I learned that I needed to bring something to the table. I learned that I was only as good as what I could give into a relationship. I learned how to be a chameleon—to assimilate.





Pay-per-View Smackdown: Self-Love vs. Trauma



*"We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has lasting consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present. Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very capacity to think."*

The events of 2020 have opened up a global conversation about the different facets and severity of trauma. It has been said the first 3-5 years of a child's life is crucial in regards to attachment development. It's vital that during this phase, children feel safe and secure in their relationships with their mother, father, and other primary caregivers. This allows us to develop a healthy sense of self that forms the foundation for creating meaningful, healthy relationships as adults.

Through this journey of self-love that I've been on for the past several years, I have discovered that I exhibit the traits of an anxious attachment style. Initially, I was confused as to how this was possible. I'd had a decent life and a good childhood. I've had love and friendship in my life. I'm not afraid to seek adventure and be curious. I practice gratitude and mindfulness. I had a good life, despite my childhood setbacks. But, I could still hear it--the whispers. An incessant hum like that of a mosquito buzzing around your ear on a humid Mississippi evening.

*"You're not enough. Mind your peas and cues, or people will leave too."*

Maybe I need to revisit my premise? We all have issues. I have issues. You have issues. Our issues affect the way we behave. Our issues affect the way to see the world. Our issues affect the way in which we interact with one another. Our issues affect the way in which we love ourselves. I still stand firmly on this premise, but there was something I missed.

I don't have to let my issues continue to affect me (or at least not to the degree which they did before).

Self-love is another one of life's many paradoxes because it is both universal and individual. Universally, I am not the first human being to do this work. I am not the first human being to struggle with self-acceptance. I am not the first human exploring

the link between my past and my present.

I am certainly not the first person to have a biological parent abandon them. On an individual level, self-love is a deeply personal pursuit. I think we all share basic elements of being human, but how it all comes together is the part that makes our individual experience unique. You are the only one that can do your work. I am the only one that can do my work.

I wish I knew what my mother was thinking the day she left my biological father. What had happened to make her go? What was her tipping point? What had been the last straw?

**"Self-love is the forgiveness, acceptance, and respect for who you are deep down - all your beautiful and hideous parts included. When you love yourself, you take care of yourself, you honor your limitations, you listen to your needs, and you respect your dreams enough to act on them. When you love yourself, your happiness, health, and fulfillment are all of supreme importance because you realize that without loving yourself, you will never be able to genuinely love others."**

**~Aletheia Luna,  
spiritual counselor and writer**



As messy as it is to let go and silence the erroneous whispers, it can be done. I wonder if she realized what I realize as I type these words—she chose self-love.

My biological father was not meant to be in my life. Yet, his abandonment still left an indelible scar. However, I fear that the wounds, issues, and scars would have been monumentally worse had my mom stayed.

My mom and I were sent a beautiful gift after she left. My stepdad, my dad, Johnny Gatson. He was sent into mine and mom's lives to help pour love into two vessels that had been discarded by another. I wasn't the only one that had been hurt by his abandonment—no doubt my mom had her own whispers and wounds to contend with.

But, she did what all committed mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, women do: she closed that door and moved on with her life as best she could.

The journey to self-love is an ongoing exploration that requires courage, forgiveness, and patience. These are all traits I learned from my parents—Johnny and Charlotte Gatson.

I believe that because of them, self-love has



**My parents, Johnny and Charlotte, outside their home in Canton, Mississippi several years before their passing.**

always been with me. It's been like a dormant superpower that wakes up slowly over time. It resides deep in my core. I haven't always been able to harness the full power of self-love, but it was there silently holding me up. The storms, disappointments, and losses of life leave an imprint. But, we can learn not to allow that imprint to puppet master us.

As my self-love grows, the more hurt I release. As my wounds heal, the quieter the whispers become. The more I forgive and accept myself, the more I forgive and accept others. The less energy I give to things that aren't good for me, the more energy I have for the things that are good for me. I don't want this to have control over me anymore. I don't want to hustle for my worthiness. I don't want to accept crumbs.

It's been almost six years since that day on the

beach. I still don't have a relationship with my biological father, and I'm okay with that because the part of me that was still carrying that pain is shedding the dead weight.

The love I give and share with others is unconditional, but there are conditions to whether or not I will allow a person into the inner sanctum of my heart. I have learned that I need to safeguard my heart. Not with walls, but with a locked door. I get to choose who I let in and how I allow myself to be treated in all my relationships—romantic, platonic or familial. I don't have to retaliate, seek revenge or hate when someone violates my boundaries. But, I sure as hell will let them know and potentially take that key back if they choose not to continually violate my boundaries.

Having issues doesn't make me less than, weak or irrevocably damaged—I'm just a human being on a journey to becoming the healthiest version of myself and loving myself every step of the way.







**Bell Hooks**

"If any female feels she need anything beyond herself to legitimate and validate her existence, she is already giving away her power to be self-defining, her agency."

**Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics, 2000**

My agency, my capacity to act independently and to make my own free choices, is rooted in my ability to forgive and release. Not to absolve my biological father or any other person or entity that has limited or taken away my agency; but, to emancipate myself. I have taken back my power of self-defining. I get to choose for myself my worth. I get to turn over every faucet of my life, the good bits and the not so great bits, and choose how those bits affect my life. I get to choose.

I define my worth, not anyone else.

Sometimes I still stumble. Sometimes I accept too little or give too much. Sometimes I hold on too tight or forget to forgive. But, those actions don't diminish my worth; it just means I'm human. And the whispers, they sound a bit different these days.

I am enough, I have always been enough, and I will always be enough.



**Yoga, mediation, and mindfulness have helped me practice self-love.**

Explore the core beliefs that keep you small  
*(excerpt from "How to Love Yourself: Ultimate Beginner's Guide" by Aletheia Luna)*

Excavating your core beliefs (the main ideas you have about yourself) can and will transform your life if you know how to do it properly... Common ones include "I am bad," "There's something innately wrong with me," "I'm not worth it," "I'm unlovable," "I'm irrevocably broken."

There are many ways to uncover and change your core beliefs. One practice I have recently discovered is how powerful the use of a mirror can be. Stand in front of a mirror in your house and designate at least ten minutes to stand alone and undisturbed with yourself. Then, simply look at yourself. Gaze into your eyes. What emotions and thoughts emerge? Mirror work is one of the most direct and dynamic ways of uncovering your self-talk and core beliefs. Pay attention to the inner dialogue that sounds like the following: "I look so ugly," "This is stupid," "There's something wrong with me," and notice what type of thoughts and feelings you keep having. Then, enfold your body in a hug, look at yourself and say, "It's okay, I am here for you, I accept you" (or whatever feels the most loving and authentic to you). Write about your experience in your journal.

Source: <https://lonewolf.com/how-to-love-yourself-more/>





# A SOUL AWAKENING

BY MISTY EVANS

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## Phoenix

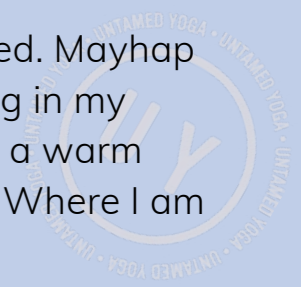
Growing takes time. Every time I think my soul complete, I am growing again. New skin, soul, mind, body, spirit. Like the phoenix, I crumble in ashes daily, only to be renewed by the flames of love that slowly lick at my patched-up heart. My spirit glides then, like the birds I see in the sky, so weightless. Weightless. Fearless. Fearless. My hope, my faith, and my love save me daily from death, the mind-blowing death that occurs to soul. I am here, grounded in the roots of my spirit, dancing in the ocean waves, covering myself in the thick black mud of life. My lotus heart bursts through the mud, gleaming golden, sparkling. I forget sometimes as I am wrestling with life. I remember that's a choice, too, to try to wrestle and control instead of flowing through the endless rocking waves. I have gone under a few times, only to burst through, gasping for my life. My life, my love, my dream. Always, my spirit will soar. Like the phoenix, I rise from my ashes again. I cannot be contained. I am divine spirit rising.

## Reverberation of love

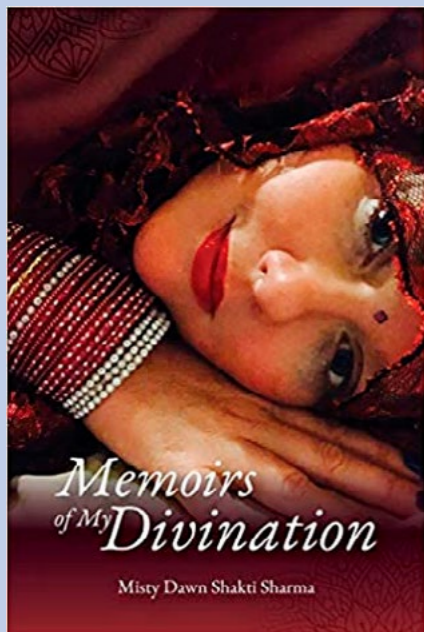
Love is not bound or set by any species. It reverberates high among the jungle skies and low among the darkest soil. It does not call to man or woman, rich or poor. It answers purely to soul. Love knows no bounds. It cannot be held and coveted, kept wrapped and sound. Love is the ever-moving pure essence, cracking open hearts again and again, overflowing the cup inside you again and again. Till you scream out in pure joy, pure bliss, at the feel of divinity, at the feeling of what we truly are. Wrapping you sound in her arms, Ma is here.

## Wild song

My eyes are wide open, and so is my heart. I cannot turn away from what calls me. The wild song of my soul demands to be followed. Mayhap this will always be a lonely road. I have cried a million tears, not in vain. As I cry, I ascend again and again off the banks of hell, rising in my purity of heart and mind, my open generosity of love. At times, the silence is deafening, maddening, as I cannot hear, and all I see is a warm blackness that blankets me. I have come too far to turn back. I swim slowly but with purpose through the dark, deep, warm waters. Where I am going, few have been. Where I have been, few are going.







I love the theme for this issue because it is one that I think every person can benefit from. We are at our naturally social beings and so the majority of our lives is spent in relationships. I truly believe that the more you learn to love yourself the more you will learn what boundaries you need to set, and with whom. Learning to set healthy boundaries is an important part of soul development. My poetry talks a lot about love. Because I feel that love is the most important subject of my life and existence. I also learned the hard lesson of not begging for love.

I have learned to love people while letting them go. Boundaries were a huge part of this work. And while you may think it is cold-hearted to ever say goodbye to people you love, I feel each of us has the right to be a free soul and set the boundaries that bear importance for you. An excerpt from the section of my book titled "Transmutation" says "Internal transformations from the inside out are always the hardest, the rawest. Like being gutted and opened in a way you have never opened before. They are also the most beautiful."

*"Internal transformations from the inside out are always the hardest, the rawest. Like being gutted and opened in a way you have never opened before. They are also the most beautiful."  
(excerpt from poem, "Transmutation")*

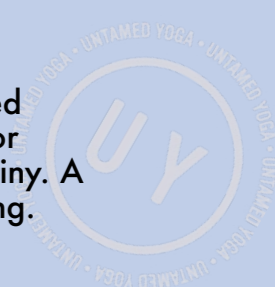
When I think back on how this book came to be it takes me through an interesting journey. The title of my book, "Memoirs of My Divination" translates to "the memories of my journey to find god."

A journey of a young woman who had been through some hard times and was finally at a place she could begin to look at herself and heal. This is the story of a soul awakening. I love the journey these poems take you on, and the feelings they will provoke. Like a wave of energy these poems will carry you, and my hope is that you will be forever changed, a little more open, a little more inspired to explore yourself and journey deeper into the mysteries of the divine.

<https://halopublishing.com/misty-dawn-shakti-sharma/>  
Instagram: misty.shakti.sharma



Misty Dawn Shakti Sharma is a Registered Nurse who has learned so much by her interactions with humanity. Sharma experienced a longing to journey deeper into the mysteries of the universe. Into discovering her own soul. She was searching outside herself for completion, happiness, and retribution. She was surprised to find she was the Mystic, the great Sage of her own life and her own destiny. A love of spirituality, mentalphysics, and learning led her to begin a journey to self-discovery. What she experienced was life changing.



# TRAPPED IN A LOOP

BY COURTNEY MCMAHON

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Before I admitted drinking was a problem, everything else was. Life was a never ending loop.

I sat with my therapist talking about the usual: my laundry list of professional goals and my emotionally void relationship. I sat there, in a daze, I could hear him, but I wasn't listening. "I've been here before," I interrupted. Not in some wu-wu, déjà vu way. I had been there before, both literally and figuratively. Five years prior, I had sat on that same couch — in need of a safe space where I could breathe and speak freely— while my very long relationship (and very short marriage) was coming to an end.

I met my husband when I was 23. I reluctantly started texting him after a friend shared my number. For weeks, I experienced many cute, coordinated "coincidences" where he would show up on his skateboard to all of my favorite Brooklyn haunts. I liked the way he kept his Camel Lights in his shirt pocket. I liked that he lived on North 7th. I loved how he appeared to give zero fucks—something I was also trying to do. One day, when I was getting ready for class, my neon green Nokia



buzzed with a text from him —I'm smitten— and I agreed to go out on a proper date.

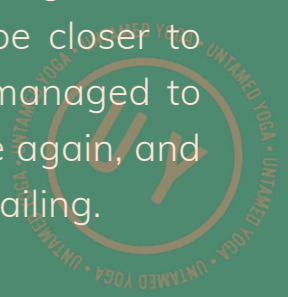
In the beginning, I loved his persistence. I loved the way he met me after my last class on Fridays. I loved that he knew about romantic Italian restaurants and cozy vodka bars. Mostly, I loved that he seemed so sure of something I was not: us.

In the end, he loved secrets, he loved lies (so much so that he believed them to be true) and he loved his newfound friendship with a girl called Melinda. More than anything, he loved pills. He loved pills.

Me? I didn't know what I loved anymore and I was too exhausted to like anything. Heartbroken doesn't begin to touch what I felt. The life that I had become so adept at protecting now just appeared like one big lie. When I started reaching through the veil of perfection and started asking for help—I saw all the lies.

I knew I was resilient. I knew I could afford the rent on my own, thanks to my brand new promotion. But there was something about the last stop on the R train that was utterly depressing. There was something about picking up a single eggroll and a bottle of wine each night and calling it dinner that was just downright sad. This was all just a reminder of what I already knew: I was utterly and completely alone.

I used the last bit of energy and money I had to pack my belongings and move out of the middle-of-nowhere apartment he made us rent (then left me in) and into a single room. One of which, I had rented to be closer to friends. In just one year, I had managed to get married, move, turn 30, move again, and file for divorce. I was winning at failing.





I had failed at being married. After being married, I failed at dating. I failed at casual sex. I failed at light conversation, and I didn't even attempt deep conversation. I failed at reading signals. I failed at sending them. I had missed out on those vital years in your 20s where you learn the nuances of flirtatious texting, what to wear, and when to leave. Being single was a bizarre and brutal game. I was determined to wrap this up so I could nestle into a comfortably uncomfortable relationship. My bar was so low when it came to a partner— all I wanted was not to fight and not be rejected.

We met on the 4th of July. He was tall, incredibly handsome, and we had immediate sparks. I was wearing a red bandana and was drunk on margaritas. I think someone may have introduced us after they caught us staring, but I don't remember, to be honest. All I remember are his eyes, his hair, and the fact that it felt fated when we ran into each other later, at bar number 2. I got the impression that He was an adventurer, an explorer, someone with a lust for life. Someone who lusted after me. I gave Him the impression that I was stable.

I loved that He wanted everything immediately with me (or at least he let me think that). It felt like the opposite of what I had had previously

with my husband. Yet, that was only because I remembered the end more than I remembered the beginning. I needed to escape so badly; it felt like fucking survival. I began creating the grandest of escape routes from my mundane life. Whatever this new thing was, I invested everything in it. I wanted to prove I could do it. I wanted to prove to myself and everyone else that I was loveable, that I was capable. I moved out of the city and in with Him. His work took him away during the week, but I liked the solitude. It gave me time to be sad about my previous life without knowing it— especially when you drown out the buzz of sadness with reality TV and red wine.

By the time the weekend rolled around, I was ready to be happy for Him. To embrace this other person that could fill the voided parts of me. When we were together, we didn't have deep conversations, but we also didn't fight. We didn't stay up late talking about shared dreams and ambitions, but he also never rejected my naked body. This was proof I was making massive strides in my partnering skills. I got pregnant, and three months later— just four days shy of my 12-week ultrasound— I had a miscarriage.

I had failed at being pregnant.

After my miscarriage, the loneliness and

rejection came swooping back in with aggression. Without the bliss of impending motherhood and a baby to bond us, I started seeing all the roadblocks. The insurmountable one ways in which we wouldn't work—or more importantly, shouldn't work. I consciously ignored them. I never pressured him to talk about our loss or pressured myself to open up about it. No. If there was one thing I had learned in my previous relationship, my feelings were just ammunition for manipulation down the line. No one was going to know me enough to get to me like that again. Instead, I sat tight and let it all come undone.

Even the anticipation of heartbreak hadn't reduced the sting. I kept my head above water; I kept powering through. I was, after all, a pro at big breakups, at moving, and shifting my focus back into work— all the while reminding myself that I had failed at being loveable, and I clearly wasn't a capable adult.

I got a new job back in my old city. I should never have left her like that when clearly we still had so much to give to (or take from) one and another. I got a new apartment. I worked insanely long hours — I was hitting my New York City stride again. At the urging of my girlfriends, I once again started failing at



dating. I made sure to pick people that were more emotionally unavailable than me—and I was pretty unavailable—only to experience the same soul-crushing heartbreak when rejection soon followed. It was as if there was this ancient heartbreak ember burning inside me, and all it took was one, “but I’d really like to be friends,” to ignite a full fucking flame again. Each time, I could sense the let-down coming, but I never moved out of the way. I always sat tight, and I always let it unravel. I was a pro at that too. At least there was something I wasn’t failing at.

This last time, it lasted a year. This last time I mistook passion and partying for love and connection. We started dating just before Halloween after I asked Him to kiss me while we stood waiting for drinks at a bar. I remember looking at Him, a long time acquaintance, through the lens of four wines thinking, ‘how have I never seen him before?’ We spent that weekend together, then every weekend together. Then, just before Christmas, on my birthday, He told me he loved me. I told him I did too. The earth slowed and dropped from under me because this time (this time, I was sure) it was going to be different. We wanted the same things, albeit mostly unspoken things, but the same nonetheless. He was driven—hyper-focused on work—just like me. So instead of being concerned that he wasn’t able to talk or text



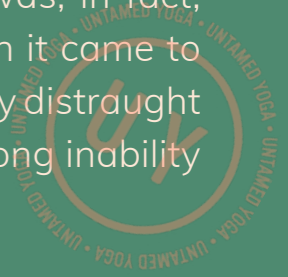
Not yet drunk on margaritas, in my red bandana. (July 4, 2014)

Monday through Thursday, I respected that kind of commitment. He adored his friends and family so much, which was something else we shared. He loved them so much. They had their own dedicated boxes far away from me and much closer to his heart than the one I sat in. I loved his devotion.

But our weekends (the magical 48 hours we had together) were the drunken bedrock on which we were building a relationship. Weekends were when we would run around our magical city, drinking and laughing and being in love—or maybe mistaking the buzz of the cocktails and NYC for the feeling of being in love. Did I ever doubt it? All the time. But, all I had to do was refer back to that birthday when he told me he loved me (and when I said it too), and any doubt was brushed away. Or swept under the rug. Just like my ex

and my ex before that, he liked a version of me that didn’t really exist— a version I could never uphold. He had a passion for life and for escaping life that didn’t include me. And, the only glimpses I got into his soul, and the only glimpses I gave him into mine were late at night when we were too exhausted to perform for one and another and were fading off to sleep.

This last time, I tolerated even more. I held onto the words ‘I love you,’ like they were tangible, like they were unwavering, and as if they spoke louder than actions. He became less and less available, and I began to feel less and less seen until I felt virtually invisible. Had I been emotionally capable of ending things, I would have, but I was paralyzed. I knew what the outcome would be, and I was dreading it, but I still couldn’t move. My resources were exhausted, but I still had desperation, and desperation is an incredible thing. This need to prove to myself I was loveable kept forcing me back into the same position again and again. So, I sat tight until it unraveled; until the inevitable wave of heartbreak came up to meet me, and I could utter the words, what’s wrong with me, once more. This last time, it finally proved my theory that I was, in fact, the world’s biggest fuck-up when it came to relationships. I cried and felt utterly distraught over what would surely be a lifelong inability to successfully couple.





Then, I focused on my new job, my new job title, and my new salary.

“I’ve been here before,” I interrupted.

This was the loop.

In February of 2019, I took a Karma Of Love workshop. I signed up for the class in an act of desperation. Outwardly my life was progressing, but inside I was suffocating from anxiety. I was trapped in a loop. I was sure that understanding and healing around my romantic relationships would fix this.

I decided that the Karma course would heal the things that were wrong with me so that I, too, could be someone deserving of a romantic relationship. More importantly, a healthy romantic relationship. I went to the class, and I committed to the assignments. For one month, I would focus on my goal (I wanted a committed partner). I would hold myself accountable. I would meditate. I would commit small acts of kindness. I would plant seeds. If I gave love out, love would come back to me.

But the thing is, all I did was commit acts of kindness for others. I was depleted from giving and doing and showing up and being

available. You needed a ride? I got you. You needed to cry and be reassured? I was your girl. You needed someone who would work all night on a presentation? Me. You needed meals and care-taking post surgery? That was me too. If I was in your life, you had me, on-demand.

Wasn’t this planting the seeds? And if so, shouldn’t I be overflowing with the abundance of love I so craved in my life? I didn’t understand at all. I was doing the work described in the course, but wasn’t seeing any returns. I was doubtful, but still, I continued. Each time I sat down to meditate, I became more aware of my own space, my own time, and my own energy. Each time I sat down, the more things became clear.

My first realization: I had spent years being unkind to the one person who was guaranteed to be there until the end: me.

My second realization: I didn’t want to manifest a romantic relationship at all. I wanted that shit as far away from me as possible. At least for a while, at least while I sorted out my first realization.

I hated the thought of my own company. How about I work on that, instead.

I started to spend more time with myself, sometimes being quiet, asking questions, and listening for answers. How long had I allowed myself to be divided from my soul—to look for myself in another person? How long had I bought into this idea of a one-size-fits-all love or the concept of failing at my journey? How long would I continue handing out pieces of myself like I was some “sample sale flyer” to anyone and everyone who needed something from me? I hadn’t found real intimacy in marriage, in sex, or moving in together, or even in the words, ‘I love you.’ Just like I hadn’t forged real bonds over a happy hour or a bottle of expensive wine or by being the last one at the party. The thing I said I wanted most—real love, real connection, real commitment—was everything I was keeping at bay.

The reason the seeds that I planted hadn’t grown was simple. I hadn’t been fully present when I was planting those seeds and committing those acts of kindness. Because being fully present was an impossibility for me.

It was then that I started checking in with myself regularly and became friends with the word no.



The practice didn't stop me from being generous or cause me to become entirely selfish. Instead, it forced me to be more conscientious about where my energy went. It brought awareness that I can choose when and how to be generous. I started to be more concerned with how I felt and what I needed. Most importantly, I stopped living in fear of losing people or missing out on an experience. I did lose people; I did miss experiences. But now I knew I wasn't missing out. Now I had the skills to sit in-it—all alone—and to process it.

I stopped categorizing everything in the realm of past romance (and the past in general) as a failure and started looking at them merely as experiences— some more painful than others, but still only experiences that I needed for my growth.

I wasn't afraid of the loop anymore. I called bullshit on the loop. I was more than capable.

Capable of recognizing the things (including the shittiest things) that disconnect me from my soul. Capable of trusting myself to recognize these things sooner now. Capable of moving out of the way rather than my previous "sit tight and let it unravel" behavior. Capable of seeing and believing that I was completely loveable. I had always known that. There had just been so much fucking



A snap from one of the 48 hours spent running around in our magical city. (December 2017)

chatter in the front of my head all the time, that I hadn't been able to hear that for a very long time.

Holding space for myself had to come first.

Much like drinking, relationships were a way that I had been abandoning myself and denying myself connection. They were fillers — both provided me with the illusion or the promise of something more. Both had me convinced it was me that needed to change based on rules and expectations that weren't healthy. Rules that made me feel like I sucked. I sucked at drinking. I sucked at picking

men. I sucked at following the relationship progression that would prove my loveability. But those beliefs were lies, lies that held me back. I was just fine. I had just been trying to live by someone else's rules when I needed to write my own.

I almost didn't want to walk into that workshop back in February of 2019 because there was a snowstorm, I had lost my wallet, and my phone was going to die — all surface shit to the billion ways I felt I had zero control over my life — but I did it anyway. I made a choice. No more excuses.

No more loop.

*Mentioned in this Column*

The Karma Of Love workshop was a catalyst for major change in my life; my entryway into a meditation practice that would open me up to the realization I was living by rules that didn't work for me (and I was capable of writing my own).

This course was taught by Rachel Webb, who is the Co-Director of Three Jewels in NYC. [www.threejewels.org](http://www.threejewels.org)





## OPERATION: LET IT GO

BY MATTY LAND



**The beginning is the toughest. It requires one to be proactive. Our innate response is to hide away because it isn't easy, but with results come incentive. And in time you will begin to feel hungry for a sledgehammer because it's time to take down all the walls!**

Awareness is the birth and the death of all things. You don't become friends with someone until you are aware of their existence, same as you don't start a diet until you become aware that your pants no longer fit. This concept can be applied to the inner-workings of the human mind as well. I wasn't aware that I was taking on others' problems until I started wondering why certain relationships left me feeling depleted instead of energized or peaceful. Pain is a warning that something's wrong and I-was-constantly-in-pain.

Taking that awareness under my arm, I sought solace in the paths my experience

Imagine, if you will, your body. All its systems: the nerves, bones, and veins strategically laid out to optimize the animation of your form. Now imagine that there is another you, an overlay that exists in the same space as your organs and faculties but is invisible, or only a figment of the mind's eye. Some of us are healthy as can be, yet that overlay is a bigger mess than the New York City Transit System. While you may eat an apple a day, you are also taking in the emotions of everyone, including yourself, filling each cavity to the brim with energy that isn't beneficial to your existence.

A few years ago, I was a mess. As an empathic individual, I took on the problems of everyone around me, both in physical proximity and the global abstract; I was a hoarder of the shared anxiety and acute trauma we all experience here in this mortal coil. All of the world's vices could not suffice in allowing me to completely forget that I was not happy with how I was living my life.

What was the solution? I let it all go.

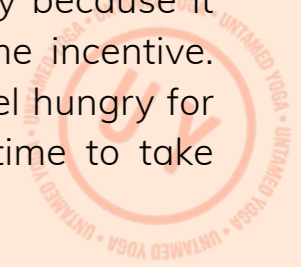
Now I understand that this statement's simplicity might piss some people off, but the real experiences of this journey as a human tend to be so.

What is the first step, you ask? Awareness.

placed me on; meditation, a friendly ear, running through the park after work, as well as numerous books and articles that referenced the events I was experiencing. For me, it meant the conscious ending of certain dynamics in my life. Of course, we should work toward strengthening the relationships most important to us, but there's also the steadfast reality that even people we call family are sometimes beyond reproach. Consciously ending things means telling someone they can't reverse their pick-up truck and dump on you. Or maybe it's a toxic work environment that has become more of an issue than a human resources department can mend.

A lot of times, these experiences match our willingness to comply. Once you've said 'no' to someone, chances are they will back off. The more you say no, the less likely you will attract that scenario into your day to day life.

The beginning is the toughest. It requires one to be proactive; you must attend the meditation classes, you must pick up the phone to call friends to express how you feel, you must put in your two weeks at the awful job and change the trajectory. Our innate response is to hide away because it isn't easy, but with results come incentive. And in time you will begin to feel hungry for a sledgehammer because it's time to take down all the walls!



One of the greatest gifts I was given was the practice of EFT, which stands for emotional freedom technique and involves the placing of oneself in an emotional scenario and self-tapping certain points on the human body, releasing the physical energy trapped within a loop. Starting at the surface, I worked my way down to the darkest corners of my attic. The results were so good that I'd even do it on the subway, turning my back to prying eyes, of course, when there was something that came up to the surface. The awareness that I wasn't feeling good was a reminder to use this tool I had inherited so that I could cue it up and knock it out.

To start, during EFT, I'd think about the issues impeding my evolution. I allowed myself to fall into the sensations of heaviness and the disjointed extent of my body's relationship to me in the form of chest pains and headaches. As a visual person, I would describe it as a tuba filled with mud so packed that no sound would come out when I blew into it. As I repeated the exercise, it was like a hand scooping out the mud bit by bit until the damn tuba was cleared out entirely. And then finally, taking a cosmic hose to polish the rest.

I now blow in, and the instrument sings!

While I learned the technique in-person and as much as I wish I could FaceTime you all personally, there are many videos and groups online that go into greater detail should you find yourself interested in EFT. While not all expressions of the technique are the same, it's the intent we give to these acts that provide them with the power to transform our lives. I know the soul directs us to the right teachers in my heart and that you will find the solutions you seek.

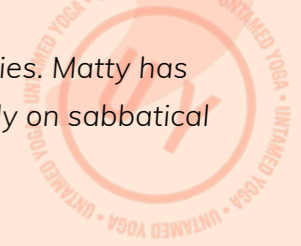
I don't want to downplay trauma and the serious adverse effects on the human psyche and all forms of health; some experiences happen to us that breach the dimension of typical interpersonal drama. While the more prolific cases take longer to solve, we are all bestowed the same right to leave it all behind. If this is your case, I sincerely implore you to seek treatment from a professional with whom you can build trust and who will give you the tools to begin to unpack.

Think about a time when you've looked around your home and thought to yourself, 'I have to pick up these clothes and wash these dishes because the place looks a mess.' Begrudgingly, you do it only to feel so proud at what you've accomplished, making you much more comfortable in body and spirit.

Letting go is not just about an attic full of issues; you can apply this tenet to everything in your life. Too busy? Cut back. Feeling drained? Take a break. Feeling claustrophobic? Donate the things you don't use so that someone else can enjoy them!

I'm admittedly a bit of a fanatic when it comes to purging, but there was nothing more satisfying than the relief of knowing that the things holding me back were fleeing my life. Yes, you will cry and laugh and ache a LOT, but the feeling of empty space is undeniable in its magnificence.

*Mattyland is both a principality and a person. Mattyland is a state known for its lush rolling hills and pink sand beaches set upon unending trails beneath leafy canopies. Matty has spent the majority of his life on the spiritual treadmill that is urban dwelling, having lived in New York, Los Angeles, and Portland, Oregon, respectively. Matty is currently on sabbatical in Upstate, NY, resting up for his next role as an attendant at the information desk of humanity's higher dimensional awakening.*





# 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.





**Issue: #6, April 2021**

**Theme: Authentic Communication**

Social influencer, Neil Patel, defines authenticity as “staying true to who you are, what you do, and who you serve.” Everything about us communicates something to the world. From our outward appearance to our choice in music and movies, says volumes. However, sometimes we have allowed the messages that we put out in the world to be created by others. We may find ourselves playing a role or code-switching to tailor the messages we communicate.

In the world of business, authentic communication means listening more often than you speak, and when listening, focusing on the speaker and his or her message content, rather than thinking about how to respond. Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, says “Communication works best when we combine appropriateness with authenticity, finding that sweet spot where opinions are not brutally honest but delicately honest.”

Are you an authentic communicator? In both your professional and personal life? What have you learned? What mistakes have you made? How do you communicate to the world? Tell us your story.

**Submission Deadline: March 14, 2021**

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**Issue: #7, May 2021**

**Theme: Play and Gratitude**

Life gets heavy. We are confronted with uncomfortable, frustrating and challenging situations every day. Some may find themselves in situations that are so dark, they have very little hope of things turning around. Regardless of our circumstances, it is essential to find levity when you can.

What things do you do for “play” that are essential to your well-being? How could a change in perspective toward gratitude be helpful in your life? How does anchoring ourselves in the present help open up space in our lives?

*“We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”*

*~George Bernard Shaw*

**Submission Deadline: March 31, 2021**





**Issue: #8, June 2021****Theme: Roots Identify & Autonomy**

In 1996, Ancestry.com began offering online services to help people discover more details about their origins. Origin stories in tv, movies and literature are equally intriguing. As humans, we seem to be compelled to know where we come from. Our origin story, our roots, give us grounding. The negative and positive elements of our origin story come together to create our identity. This coming together or concoction of ingredients is the basis of who we are and how we live our lives. Armed (or crippled) with this knowledge leads us to seek purpose and autonomy for our lives. A trauma response is about trying to regain control of your world (your body) after a boundary has been violated. Coming-of-age is about stepping into new found freedom and possibilities. Dreams, goals and accomplishments are an incarnation or a fulfillment of our quest to be the architects of our lives.

How has your roots and identify shaped your life? In what ways have you sought and exercised your agency and autonomy? What changes do you need to make? What realizations have you discovered? What needs to be embraced? What needs to be let go?

Who are you? We want to know.

**Submission Deadline: April 30, 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](#)





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*

