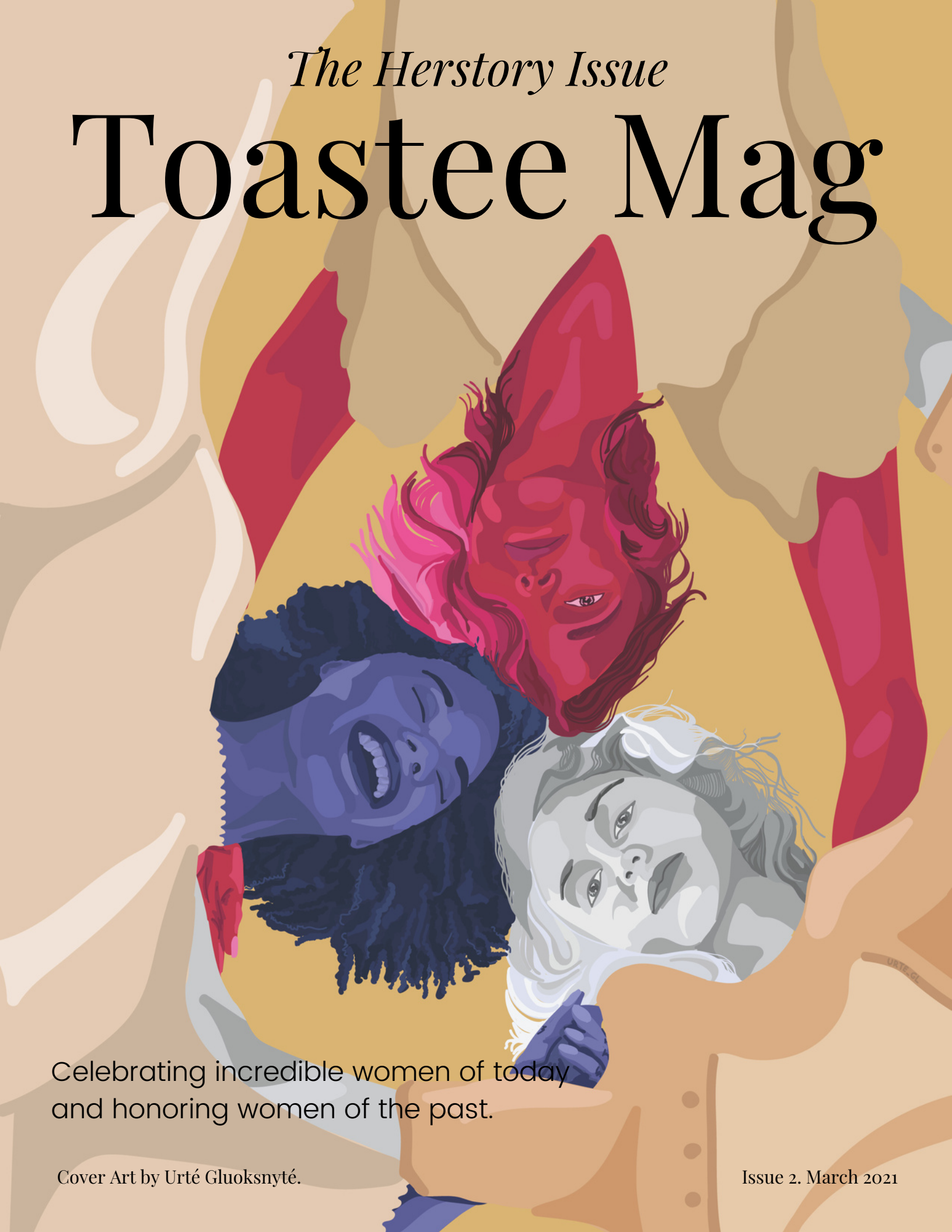


*The Herstory Issue*

# Toastee Mag



Celebrating incredible women of today  
and honoring women of the past.

Cover Art by Urté Gluoksnyté.

Issue 2. March 2021



Magazine cover art by Urtė Gluoksnytė.

Urtė is an artist based in Lithuania. Her work consists of digital art, photography, paintings, and sketch.

You can find her portfolio and contact her for commissions at [gluoksnyteu.wixsite.com/artist](https://gluoksnyteu.wixsite.com/artist). Follow her work on [@urte\\_g!](#) on Instagram and [urtegl](#) on Behance.

*Herstory*

*Celebrating*

**WOMEN**



Toastee Magazine | The Herstory Issue

Issue 2, March 2021



# Letter from the Editors

What started as an idea between two friends, turned into Toastee. And now, we're making another edition? Following the positive response, and frankly the simple pleasure of creating a magazine, we wanted to make another toast to people who are leading impactful change, inspiring others, and facilitating innovation.

This issue of Toastee is Herstory, Celebrating Women both Past and Present. While we will welcome future male contributors, this one is purposely allowing that bit more column space to women and highlighting their stories and contributions. Our hope and goal is in the elevation of female voices and inclusion of those forgotten.

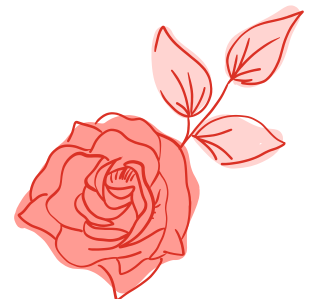
These pages are filled with stories, experiences, and advice from women of all walks of life, identities, backgrounds, and professions. Each and every one of them is carving out a better place in their sphere, whether it's advocating for the integration of Native American principles with Jaclyn Roessel (page 25), creating an anthropology of women's voices like Esther (page 107), or rising entrepreneurs like Jes Bailey of Crowdfund 360 (page 64). We raise a toast to their accomplishments and work to date, and equally to all the incredible women around the world.

This is also our own tribute to each other. Women supporting women—even from across an 8 hour time zone. I, Emer, could not, would not, do Toastee if not for the support, craic, and encouragement of Elizabeth. I, Elizabeth, would not have been able to start or finish these issues without the guidance, backing, and hilarious stories of Emer.

We're proud to announce that the time for Herstory is now!

Happy Reading,

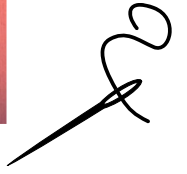
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# QUILTING



## Through the Generations

By Elizabeth Harris

Sewing used to be a skill that everyone had. Quilting was a household activity. Now, for many, sewing is a lost skill or only an occasional pastime. For more, quilting is akin to something reminiscent of pioneer days and Little House on the Prairie episodes. For Lucia Vigil Francis, quilting is more than a hobby. For her, it's a family tradition, a livelihood, and a passion that courses through her from past generations onto the next.

Lucia is a quilter based in the LA area. She specializes in making one-of-a-kind quilted bags that have been showcased at some of the biggest museums in the area, such as the LA County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Huntington Botanical Gardens and Library, the Museum of Latin America Art, and the Craft and Folk Art Museum (just to name a few!).

Lucia and her family are a beautiful product of LA. With Latino family roots from New Mexico on her paternal side, Hungarian ancestry on her maternal side, and her own American experiences, Lucia's style shows her Angeleno colors, blending multiple cultures and influences to create a unique look. Her bags are full of color, patterns, and prints from cute animal designs to Latin American symbols. This creativity and love for quilting began in childhood.

"We didn't go out and buy a ton of clothes. If we wanted something, we made it. So, it was just a real way to foster creativity, and I could escape into my own world. I had this whole world in my head, and I could make it come to life through whatever medium; whether it was embroidery,



Lucia Vigil Francis. LA-based quilter, purse designer, and craftswoman.



One of Lucia's art quilts featuring a bouquet of flowers and a hand-made doily from Mexico.

sewing by machine, sewing by hand, knitting, or macrame. I could ask my grandmother for help or advice. I was trying to remember who even taught me to sew, but it was just there in our house all the time. My mom sewed, my sister sewed, my grandmother sewed," Lucia recalls.

It wasn't just quilting and sewing that her family passed onto her. Her grandmother passed down an appreciation for fabrics. Ofelia "Faye" Gallegos, moved to LA in the 1940s from New Mexico and worked in the garment industry. Over the years, she collected fabric scraps slowly building a multi-generational quilt.

"She started this quilt in the 1950s, but she never finished it. Once my sister and I were young adults, we were looking through my grandma's things. We were like 'Grandma, what's this?!' So, we started working on it. My sister set it aside and I kept working on it. I finished that quilt right before my grandmother died. After she died, I took that quilt and quilts made from her other fabric scraps to a quilt show. The quilt appraiser, who knows all the background of fabrics, said some of the fabrics that I used were from the 1800s. My grandma had been saving these fabrics from her mom and her grandmother," Lucia tells me.

As Lucia grew up and traveled the world, this passion for sewing, quilting, and fabrics followed her. "Anywhere I moved I would make the curtains, I would make the bedspread, I would make everything just because I loved it. Also, after college, I backpacked around Asia and Europe for like a year. Textiles are my thing, so I was out observing methods and collecting fabrics. I also spent a semester in Nicaragua and Guatemala, which has an incredible textile tradition," she tells me.

After the birth of her daughter, she would make purses, making a practical bag for all the kid supplies. "I would be out with my daughter and boutique owners would say, 'Oh my god. I love your purse!' I would tell them thank you and that I made it, and they would start asking me for samples. That's how I started selling to boutiques," she explains.

As her business base grew, so did its reach. "One of the boutique owners said you should take these to the museums because of your fabrics. My thing is high-end, high-quality, latest fabrics. So, I cold-called the LACMA. They had a show coming up and needed bags like mine. It ended up being the largest order I ever had, and it just went from there," Lucia recounts.



Lucia's Dia de Los Muertos tote bag.

From museum orders to boutique shops, Lucia's business and the popularity of her purses grew. Despite the increased demand forcing Lucia to work with local manufacturers, she still tried to incorporate aspects of her Latin culture from the times sewing with her grandmother. "The dominant culture in the quilting world is Anglo, but what I learned from my grandmother was different because she's Latina. So, I just incorporated that into my quilts, like our Lady of Guadalupe and Dia de Los Muertos and all of those things," she explains.

Finding a home for her identity, both with clients and within the quilting community, was a challenge for Lucia, "I'm of Latina heritage, and I'm white-passing. When in the dominant culture, people would say this or that about my culture in front of me, not knowing what I am. If I said something about my art quilts

relating to my Latino culture, like Our Lady Guadalupe, it's like I'm speaking Greek to them."

Integrating her identity into her work, Lucia created two different lines for her purses, "I have my secular line and my Folklorico line because I had Our lady Guadalupe purses, backpacks, everything Our Lady Guadalupe and everything dia de Los Muertos, but people in the dominant culture would look at it almost they don't see it or like they're scared of it. Certain stores will feature that kind of look or cultural aesthetic and others just would not."

It wasn't until Lucia reconnected with an old colleague and friend that she found a home for her bicultural identity and heritage - Telas de la Vida. "Telas de la Vida is a Latinx flair to quilting. I'm Latina, but I'm also Anglo. Am I gonna fit in? Are they gonna accept me? So, I just emailed them, and they welcomed me with open arms. Now, I'm really happy to be a part of them. It's like 'Yay! I've found my home,'" she happily recalls.

From that home with Telas de la Vida, Lucia freely expresses her cultural heritage and her Angelena roots. Through Telas, Lucia has designed quilt squares for a community project with USC County Hospital as part of their reparation initiative for past forced and nonconsensual sterilization of women of color. With Telas members, Lucia has sown

thousands of masks and fundraised for the community during the pandemic.

Despite the pandemic halting her workshops and preventing her from searching for fabrics in person, Lucia continues selling to shops and connecting with her community in Telas de la Vida. Quilting remains an important part of her life, as she says, "It's how I express my outrage of things, and my growth, my hopes, and my dreams." It also continues to be a family affair with her own daughter taking up the mantle by sewing and crafting her own designs and clothes and continuing another generation of passionate quilters and sewers.

Lucia is an LA-based quilter and purse maker. You can learn more about her and check out her designs at [www.pursesbylucia.com](http://www.pursesbylucia.com). Make sure to follow her on Instagram @fabricxlucia.



Lucia's Sheltie, Candy, with her Forest Friends tote bag. The fabric was designed by Mia Charro.



# Women of the Vine

An interview with Ally Chapman, wine enthusiast and founder of The Femme Vine, by Elizabeth Harris.

Like so many industries, wine is very much a man's world, and in many male-dominated industries, women are kicking ass and leading the way! Be it revitalizing traditional production methods, experimenting with new flavors, or advocating and spreading the word of a wonderful new niche! Sadly, most of the time, these incredible stories and incredible products are often overshadowed or left to the side.

That's where The Femme Vine comes in "bringing modern drinkers and female vintners together to create more conscious consumers and promote gender equity in the world." Ally Chapman, Founder of The Femme Vine, created a place to celebrate, share stories, and increase access to amazing wines and the incredible women behind them.



Ally Chapman photographed by Patricia Niven.

Ally spoke with me about some of the incredible women of the wine world, challenging stereotypes, and how we can be conscious feminist consumers.

**Ally, it's apparent that you know a lot about wine and people in the industry. Where did this passion for wine come from?**

I would consider myself an avid wine drinker and an enthusiastic wine tourist. I've been really lucky to live in Europe and travel on wine holidays, where I was able to immerse myself in the culture and riches of the area.

When I would travel to these wine regions, I would often try to find female-run vineyards. It felt like search programs, like Google and Tour guides, would always fall short. Tour guides would say they knew a few but don't have a relationship with them. Or, Google would make it really difficult to filter down and find female-run vineyards. I thought if I am actively searching this out, and I am really willing to go to extraordinary lengths to find these women, what about the everyday consumer?

That sparked a desire to create The Femme Vine, a database that anyone could use to find women who are making incredible wines today. It doesn't make sense that a product that is so heavily marketed to women, who make the majority of the purchases, doesn't feed and sustain a system that women

have helped create. Instead, it's gone back into the pockets of men, which I don't agree with.

**I get you. It's like everything feminine is run by a man.**

Yes, exactly! I work in advertising, and I know marketing can often perpetuate a stereotype that doesn't reflect reality. I think our wine purchase should reflect the real reality of women creating innovative, fantastic wines in this space. This creates positive pressure from consumer demand for female-produced products.

When you go into a wine bar, a restaurant, a grocery store, or a wine shop, I want people to ask a simple question, "Do you have any wine made by women?" This will start a positive cycle of conscious consumption that can bring equity into wine.

**I love how you use the phrase Big Vine Energy. For those of us who don't follow you, what does it mean?**

Big Vine Energy is very much the brainchild of Esther Ajose and I having conversations about The Femme Vine.

When I was choosing a name for the brand, I was playing around with using the word "Vine." I talked to a friend about it, and he was



Morasini Bianco (left) and Marilina Rusera (right). Photo by: Patricia Niven

like, "Oh vines, they're a bit unruly." And I thought, Yeah, like all the best women!

So when we talk about Big Vine Energy, it's a breathing, thriving part of every woman and what she can tap into. Big Vine Energy is a whole vibe, a way of being. It embodies what I want the brand to give back to women: this sense of confidence; this sense of following your own tastes and not be defined by anyone else's; this swagger of "I know what I'm doing and I

know what I want, and I'm willing to bring other women along with me to get it."

**You spoke about this earlier that wine is associated with women, women primarily buy wine, wine is marked towards women. It's a very feminine thing, but it's super a male-dominated industry. Why do you think there is still that tradition?**

There's this idea that wine has always been a gentleman's game. As a category, it brands itself as being intimidating. You have to know the vintage, you have to know the varietal, you have to know what notes to think of. That's all bullsh\*t!

I mean, think about who you associate with being a wine expert. Who comes to mind? A lot of sommeliers are men. Robert Parker's system of ranking wine still dominates, and historically, a lot of men have led famous wineries in famous regions. Even families in France and Italy, who traditionally controlled a lot of the perceptions around wine, would often want to pass down their business to their sons. If there was a daughter, it was kind of like, "What are we going to do? Who's going to take care of this vineyard?" A lot of the women that I speak to today completely rebuff that idea.

It's also because it's a lot of hard work. If you think about making wine, it is not easy. It requires so much strength, so much tenacity, so much drive. You are constantly battling with nature and natural elements. You are also battling with this sense that you have to present yourself in this room, you have to get buyers, you have to have this air that you know exactly who you are and what you are doing. I think, unfortunately, a lot of women, due to institutionalized forces, felt that they could never take up that space, and own those rooms. You're starting to see more and more women starting to challenge that.

Something really nice that I heard from Katia Nussbaum at San Polino wine from the Montalcino region in Italy is that there have been loads of women who have been working in this industry, whether or not their names were on the bottle. It was this sense that women were invisible actors behind the scenes. You never got to truly appreciate how much a woman's touch went into wine for centuries. It's only today that they're coming out and owning their own labels, or taking over from their family and

rejecting the idea that only sons can inherit and only men can be working the land when it's just as much a woman's job and a woman's place.



Esther Ajose (left) with Ally. Wines: MUN Rosato Marche (left) and Chanteréves (right). Photo by: Patricia Niven.



**I noticed you ask every winemaker what they think are some of the misconceptions of wine. So, what are some of the big misconceptions about wine?**

The reason I ask that question is that I have a lot of friends who tell me that they find wine intimidating. Or, they say, "I only know that I like this one wine because it's the one we always buy," or "It's the one my partner always buys, so it's just what I go for."

That really shocked me because my friends are incredibly strong, independently-minded women. I just thought that's crazy. We know how we like our food, we know how we want to dress. So, why is wine something we can't engage with?!

That speaks to a big misconception, that to enjoy wine, you have to study and understand it at a depth and level that seems impressive to others. All the winemakers I've spoken to - and these are people that know the exact characteristics they want their wine to take on - will always say that it's their job to know the technical side, and it's our job to just enjoy the wine.

Elise Lane, who works at Laneberg wines in the UK, told me that wine is always for enjoyment and should never be a test. I think that is so so true.

**You write a lot about women coming out, establishing themselves in the industry,**

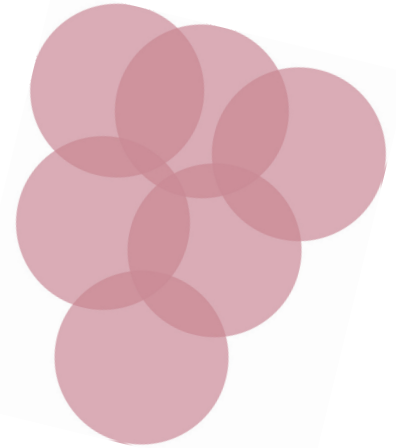
**taking ownership of family businesses, and starting their own label. How else has the wine industry been changing, and how have you seen women leading some of these changes?**

In the New York Times article that came out about two months ago, you still see that there is a dangerous level of sexism within the wine world, but female winemakers are finally being recognized for the gift they give this industry.

The fact is, you can look at every country and every region, and you can find a woman who is creating a fantastic wine. Without them and without their wines, this industry would not be as interesting as it is today.

For example, there's a recent focus on natural wine and low intervention wine. To your point of women being pioneers, some of the most innovative wines are being driven by women, like Arianna Occhipinti in Sicily. She practices low intervention winemaking, and she's credited by a lot of women I interview as an inspiration. She released her first wines when she was 22. It's incredible.

There's another woman named Julia Schittler, in the Rheinhessen region in German, who is 29. Four years ago, she took over from her family's label, and she wasn't afraid to change things. I think it's great to see a lot of women are looking at the wine industry and their wine as to how it relates to their palettes



and their choices. They want to create what they want this label to represent.

In France, I spoke to Mee Godard, who is in the Beaujolais region, and she said to me, "This label was something I did for myself. It was about me and the mark that I want to leave on this region and this world." I thought that was just so fantastic.

For every wine, there is a story of how it got there, and there's a strength in how the producer created it. I think we all should tell their stories.

**Sometimes the story will get you to the wine, not the label because you want to support the creator.**

That's another thing that has shifted in wine today is that wine carries a story. My parents' generation probably thought about wine based on the regions they knew. If it was a Bordeaux wine, it was good. If it's a Cabernet Sauvignon from California, then that's

where good Cabernet Sauvignon comes from.

But it's no longer just about what's on the label and where is it from. It's become how is it grown, how is it made. Then the logical next step, I hope to bring out, is who made it. Who is behind it? That goes for people of color and women. There has to be intersectionality in the wine world, which is, unfortunately, very white and very male.

**You've interviewed numerous women. What are some of the big things that you've learned from doing The Femme Vine?**

There are so many! It's hard to pick a few.

Definitely, one of the things that stands out to me is the physical exertion that wine takes that I didn't truly appreciate before. It is hard work, it is tiring, it is incredibly exhausting. It takes up so much of your time and mental-emotional energy because you're putting your soul into this product that you have to wait and see how it goes.



Corrina Wright from Oliver's Taranga says that you put in so much effort now, and it has to last for years. You have to know that someone could pick up your bottle in a few years and enjoy it. You have to really think about that and what that means and how much work has gone into it.

I now fully appreciate the prices of wine. Wine has always been seen as so expensive. That is a problem, how inaccessible the wine market can be because it is expensive. It is a discretionary purchase that can run into insane amounts of money to spend. What I learned is that what you're paying for is the work of a team of people, for the vineyard that needs to be regenerated and needs to be taken care of, and for all the hours and years spent trying to get this product to its best expression. Knowing that explains the case of why wines cost as much as they do.

Lastly, I think what I've been really heartened to see is how beautifully connected to art and nature these women find wine to be. They always talk about this perfect mixture of art and science and nature. Lots of women will say to me, "It's just fermented grapes. At the end of the day, I have to do what a farmer does. I have to cultivate and harvest these crops. Then, it's just fermented grape juice."

Still, there's so much seasonality, the flavor of the earth, and what has happened in the year that

gets wrapped up in the experience of what that wine ends up being. The best thing they can do is make a wine that is a reflection of a time and a place.

I don't think I really knew what terroir meant until I heard that. You are trying to get the grapes to their best expression, from the roots that they are from as well as from the air, the wind, the weather that affected them for that entire year. Veronique Boss Drouhin from Burgundy and Oregon talked about how years will go by, the vines will grow older, but the roots are in the same soil. It's the same land and the same earth. That's what you always have to remember and have to express.

I find that so beautiful and so touching about a very commoditized product.

**You've already mentioned a lot of amazing women, and each woman is incredible in her own way. Who are some of the women who really stuck out and inspired you?**

One of the first women to give me her time was Severine Pinte, who is in Canada. That was a really interesting interview because I never thought of Canada as having good wine, but it does. Severine is so dedicated to raising the profile of the region and helping people rethink where good wines come from.

I definitely think of Julia Schittler in the Rheinhessen region. Simply because of her youth and dedication to her



Photo by: Patricia Niven Food Styling: Loïc Parisot

own opinion. She talks a lot about how she came in and inherited a family label. But then, she created her own label, and she put her name on it. She has the Schittler family wines, and then, she has Julia Schittler as a label. I love that. I love how she knew those wines were going to be hers. She took what she grew up with, and she brought in innovation. She raised the bar for what could be accomplished in her vineyard. She's such a fantastic role model and an inspiration to lots of people.

Cheremie Law is absolutely fantastic. I think being a black woman in wine is nothing easy. It is something to be really admired. I love how she talks about Texas wine. She doesn't grow the

grapes herself, but she buys grapes from her friends, and all of her wines are Texas-grown and Texas-made. She talks about the relationships she has with growers and how important that is in creating her wines.

Finally, Sveva Sernia from Morasinsi Wine in Puglia. She stands out to me because she has such a beautiful story about her approach to wine. She talks about how agriculture is seen to be something that only old men do in Italy. It doesn't represent an opportunity and a career opportunity for young people. She told me she wants her wine to bring people home and bring people into agriculture as an opportunity to get involved. I think that is such a beautiful mission for

her to be on through what people are drinking.

However, all the women are just so unbelievably incredible.

**What advice do you have for people who want to learn more about wine and who want to be a more conscious consumer?**

I think 100% you can do it and you should do it.

Wine is one of those fun things to figure out what you like. There is something about wine that is so exploratory. There is always more to discover, there's always a different region, there's always a different grape. You can find and figure out the different personalities of wine that you like and why you like them.

I also say ask questions. If you're going to be a conscious consumer of wine, which I think everyone should be, ask questions. Ask where it's from, ask how it's made, ask who made it.

Or do your own research. If you go into a wine store, it's really easy, with our phones attached to us, to look up the label and see who's made it. You can probably find out a lot about them that you might not have known.

Lastly, go and visit these places. Go and visit these women. It is such a beautiful way to experience wine, to be in a vineyard sitting and drinking. If you're lucky enough, you'll be with the people behind the bottle in front of you.

### **What's next for The Femme Vine!?**

It's funny. I always just wanted to draw attention to these women. I always wanted to be a space where awareness can be built. That is still my goal - to try and make as many connections with female winemakers as possible so that I can provide a space where more people can find more wines to build into their everyday.

Regardless of if you only like white wine, or if you know exactly what vintage of Chablis you enjoy, I guarantee there is a woman making a wine that will fit your bill. I think it is high time that everyone knows about them. I just want to keep doing that.



Ally with a bottle of Agnes Paquet Pinot Noir. Photo by: Patricia Niven. Food Styling: Loïc Parisot.

To learn more about these amazing women of the vine and The Femme Vine, head to [www.thefemmevine.com](http://www.thefemmevine.com) for interviews and wine recommendations. Make sure to subscribe to The Femme Vine newsletter to learn more about these spectacular wines and the women behind them.

Follow Ally and The Femme Vine @thefemmevine on Instagram.

# Top 5 Wine Picks

## Red Wine

By Ally Chapman of **THE FEMME VINE**

I consider myself lucky to interview amazing female winemakers for The Femme Vine, and the world is very lucky to get to enjoy the riches they create. Each woman is a world-class example of talent, tenacity, and refinement in the wine industry. Whittling down an exemplary list of wines to just 5 was quite a task, but here are the bottles, and the women, I come back to again and again. For more on fantastic wines and the women who make them, check out my monthly newsletter. Sign up at [thefemmevine.com](http://thefemmevine.com).

Morgon Corcelette by Mee Godard (Domaine Mee Godard, Beaujolais, France)

## Sparkling Wine

Ali Boit Boit by Agnès Paquet (Domaine Agnès Paquet, Burgundy, France)

Agnès Paquet was born and raised in Burgundy. In 1999 she took over vineyards her family had owned and rented, and she created her own label. She counts herself lucky to be a part of the wine community in Burgundy - a region where many still cultivate and work the earth themselves. Agnès favors natural and biodynamic practices, including this sparkling wine made through Méthode Ancestrale, using indigenous yeast for fermentation that continues inside the bottle to deliver delicate bubbles alongside a tart apple-y taste!



## White Wine

Sylvaner by Julia Schittler (Julia Schittler, Rheinhessen, Germany)

I fell in love with Julia's Sylvaner in a wine bar in Berlin a few years ago. When I started TFV, I knew I had to feature her on the site. When I spoke to Julia, who took over her family's operations when she was 24, I was struck by how confident and determined she was about her style of winemaking, and I was delighted to discover that the Sylvaner is also her favorite! It's a beautiful, bright white wine with aromas of nectarine and peach alongside some herbal notes. It has a really lovely, crisp taste with a slight spritz on the finish. As an added bonus, the bottle tells you its own story as Julia designed the label to include the wine's characteristics alongside flora and fauna from the vineyard.



I know, I know, Beaujolais is a bit of a love-hate wine, but when you taste Mee Godard's wines, I bet you'll find a newfound appreciation for the region. Mee is an independent woman in every sense. She largely tends to her vineyards by herself, and she told me that her label is all about doing something for herself, that will become the mark she leaves on the world. And what a mark it is! Gamay grapes in Mee's hands are beautifully vibrant and elegant, with nice tannins that round out beautifully on the finish. She coaxes out scents of black currant, violet, and black cherry to deliver a gorgeous wine that may get you rethinking Beaujolais as a whole!

## Orange Wine

**Si. Lello by Sarah Morris (Si Vintners, Margaret River, Australia)**

You know when you find a wine and after one sip, you know you'll be coming back to it time after time? When it comes to Orange, Si. Lello is it for me. Si Vintners is a label produced by a wife and husband team in Australia's Margaret River region. It's an incredibly balanced wine with a gorgeous honey orange color. On the nose, you'll find some floral elements like violet and orange blossoms alongside apricots and white peach. On the palate, it is medium-bodied with a gorgeous finish that brings the floral notes to life. To me, it is everything an Orange wine should be.



Photo by: Patricia Niven. Food Styling: Loïc Parisot.

## Rosé Wine

**Hip Rosé by Kristina Studzinski (Off the Line, East Sussex, England)**

This wine holds a very special place in my heart as we met Kristina and her partner, Ann-Marie, on the trip that inspired me to create The Femme Vine! Hip Rosé is the Provencal-style rosé in Off the Line's portfolio and has that tell-tale pale pink color. While it may look delicate, it's got lovely, pronounced redcurrant fruit and floral blossoms on the nose and a gorgeous finish that leaves you wanting more. It's a perfect aperitif, and in warmer months, a beautiful bottle to open up for a picnic or backyard tippie. And, it's a bottle with personality - who doesn't love a label that has a rose with a tattoo on its leaves?!

Ally Chapman is an American ex-pat living in London who spends her day working in advertising and her free time drinking wine and promoting gender equity within the wine industry. Ally is a strategic planner by trade and social anthropologist by training, who constantly seeks to understand human wants and desires to drive better purchasing behaviours that can benefit everyone. The Femme Vine is her first social enterprise venture.

Those are my picks, vines! Remember to check out [thefemmevine.com](http://thefemmevine.com) to sign up to the newsletter where you can learn more about spectacular wines, and the women behind them.

# Dance and the Space Between

By Elizabeth Harris



Dancer, Musician, Choreographer, Educator, Trailblazer. Joan Padeo is an incredible dancer and choreographer whose work can be seen on the screen, stage, and even in art exhibitions. We had the chance to interview Joan on her past work and her involvement in an exciting new project with Augmented and Virtual Reality.

**Joan, you've choreographed numerous pieces including creating your own shows. Growing up you focused mostly on ballet, what inspired you to focus more on modern dance and choreography?**

Yes, having only trained in Ballet until I was 13, I didn't realize how vast the dance world was until I attended Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. For those unfamiliar with dance, Modern dance is the umbrella over many codified techniques such as Graham, Limón, and Horton to name a few. When I was a freshman, Don Martin taught Horton Technique, and from that moment on I began to understand the breadth of what

dance could be. It also helped me begin to understand that there is no "foundation of all dance" technique.

I still love Ballet— I teach it and continue to take classes. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the art form itself and feel that I have to continue to train to do it justice. For me, I always felt most beautiful doing ballet in the classroom and not in performance. I feel I owe my technique to it and am grateful for the tools it's given me, but that genre is not when I feel most myself or alive on stage. It's a prim, proper, yet sweaty version of myself I like to keep in touch with, but not be.

My serious choreographic interests came later. I attended a conservatory on the East Coast where Ballet and Modern were held in the same esteem. Ironically, it was the Composition classes, Improvisation classes, and student-led improv jams after-hours that piqued my interest most. I was fortunate to be immersed in institutions that fostered my creativity and encouraged me to bring an idea into fruition through physicality. These were definitely defining factors.

From Joan's piece "Crest". Photo by Zachary Kemper.



**I noticed a lot of your stage works tend to focus on being on the edge, like the edge between right and wrong or being pushed to the edge. What are some of your inspirations? How would you describe your style?**

All of my works are reflections of specific moments I've experienced blown out to illustrate the depth of impact in that instant. Choreographing, to me, is coloring in visceral reactions and feelings by translating them through movement. Depending on the way movement is translated and what "colors" are used, I've learned you can manipulate movement to leave a specific taste in the audience's mouths.

I think "the being" between two things is how I often feel. It's as simple and as difficult as being present. It's playing with time which I enjoy because, like dance, time is not tangible nor linear.

On a more tangible note, I often draw inspiration from film. Sometimes it's a moment I want to capture, sometimes it's the tone.

I wouldn't say I have a style; the works I choreograph definitely fall under Contemporary dance, but even so, Contemporary is also an umbrella term for countless facets of dance. What I create is informed by my training, what I like, and what I want it to be. Sometimes it feels bigger than

myself, and that's when it excites me. That's a feeling I try to find in every process.

So to answer your question, I'd say if the choreography makes me feel like I need to step up and maybe don't even have the chops to do yet, then I'd say that's my style. I believe notable art is demanding, and I think I've become better by trying to do things I can't do....yet.

**With the pandemic this past year and theatres closed, how has it been for you? How have you adapted?**

The biggest hurdle at the beginning of the pandemic was the sudden isolation from the dance community. I've learned a lot about myself, and what I need in terms of social interaction. Being a dancer is an incredibly social profession: you sweat with the company, you train with your friends, you partner with all types of bodies. I miss every aspect of taking classes with people and working on projects together. It still feels odd sweating it out by myself while looking at a screen full of other people, but I remain optimistic and look forward to dancing and working with the dance community at full capacity once it's safe to do so.

The next obstacle was and still is the lack of appropriate flooring. Never in my life have I missed

a sprung floor more. (A sprung floor is specially constructed flooring that reduces impact, absorbs shock, and also rebounds the energy thrown into it). While it is definitely not the first time dancers have had to dance on a non-sprung floor or even concrete, it is the extended period of activities on unforgiving flooring that makes it so harsh on the body. I'm finding a lot more body conditioning, in general, has felt more necessary.

**I think you have worked on some really cool projects like Runway Ballet, Metatronia at the Hammer, and Songbird, just to name a few. One of your next projects is with B. Dunn Movement's immersive project which will incorporate AR and VR. Can you tell us more about that?**

Thank you! Yes, it's a reimagining of a previous work of the company. The new project is called ECHO: Immersive Experience (EIE), and its roots come from its namesake dance theatre piece, ECHO. I performed in the first iteration of the work in 2014, which was the MFA thesis project by Brigitte Dunn-Korpela, now Artistic Director of the company. ECHO served as the catalyst to create B. Dunn Movement. The new iteration is not only an evening-length concert piece but now also includes an immersive experience, making it the company's most ambitious project to date. It's a long-term project that we are aiming to present when the pandemic has completely passed.

Without giving away too much, the work includes most of the company's resident collaborators each working on a scale much grander than any works in the past repertoire. Taking our Animator/XR Director, for example, he is not merely adding sketches or creating a video to play on a projector in the background during a

dance performance, but creating the world that both the dancers and audience experience. In our EIE Workshop last month, he demonstrated a crash course on his studies of water movement, and how to replicate the texture. After that, he manipulates how the water behaves, and how it reacts to foreign objects. Once he renders the images and videos, that is merely the baseline for the application of the virtual environment that we will perform in. Being that the subject matter pulls greatly from the Middle Passage, much of the opening scene focuses on interacting with water.

**How has the process of developing the choreography for that project been for you? It must be a unique challenge with AR and VR tech.**

There are four of us involved in the research and development phase: The Artistic Director (AD), myself as the Assistant Choreographer, and two other dancers. The material is generated through improvisation guided by set prompts and goals from the AD. Two out of the three dancers were in the original version of ECHO, so choices are sometimes informed by past layers of the piece. What's beautiful about having multiple dancers follow the same prompt is that in the attempt to arrive at the same place, each person finds a different way there. We have an incredible amount of source material from the original version of the work, but since each of the artists involved has grown since the first iteration there's a sense of liberation in physically redefining the work. Even though the AR and VR elements are new, at this point in the process choreographing material has not felt that different from previous works. I think those challenges will come later. Something I foresee that could become challenging is the amount of material we will need to pre-record for the live experience. It means that the dancers will likely have several tracks (different versions of the same dance).



EIE Sketches: Nak Choi // Dancer: Joan Padeo // Courtesy of B. Dunn Movement.

**You've conquered many challenges. What are some of the things that you have achieved so far that you're proud of?**

One work of mine from a while ago is called Still Not for You. I made it for myself, and I made it to give a voice to those who have found themselves in a situation where they were stripped of all agency. It's not necessarily the steps or the sequences that I'm proud of, but the place I pulled from in order to create the work. It revolved around the idea that even if I were reduced to nothing, I would still find dignity in my existence. I've grown both as a person and as an artist since then, so I think it would be something worth revisiting at some point.

When it comes to choreographing, I've let go of the fear of failure. I've accepted the fact that not everything I make is going to be "good." Everyone's taste is so subjective anyway, so I've decided to trust my own instincts.

The most important achievement is that I've learned to love myself. It not only enriches my life but informs my art.

You can see some of Joan's work across the stage and screen on her website [www.joanhollypadeo.com](http://www.joanhollypadeo.com). To keep up to date with her new projects and work, make sure to follow her [@joanpadeo.choreo](#) on Instagram and [@joanpadeo](#) on Facebook.

Joan Padeo photographed by Zachary Kemper.

**What advice do you have for an aspiring dancer or choreographer?**

For Dancers:

Don't waste your time pursuing dance if you do not truly love it.

Compare only to yourself.

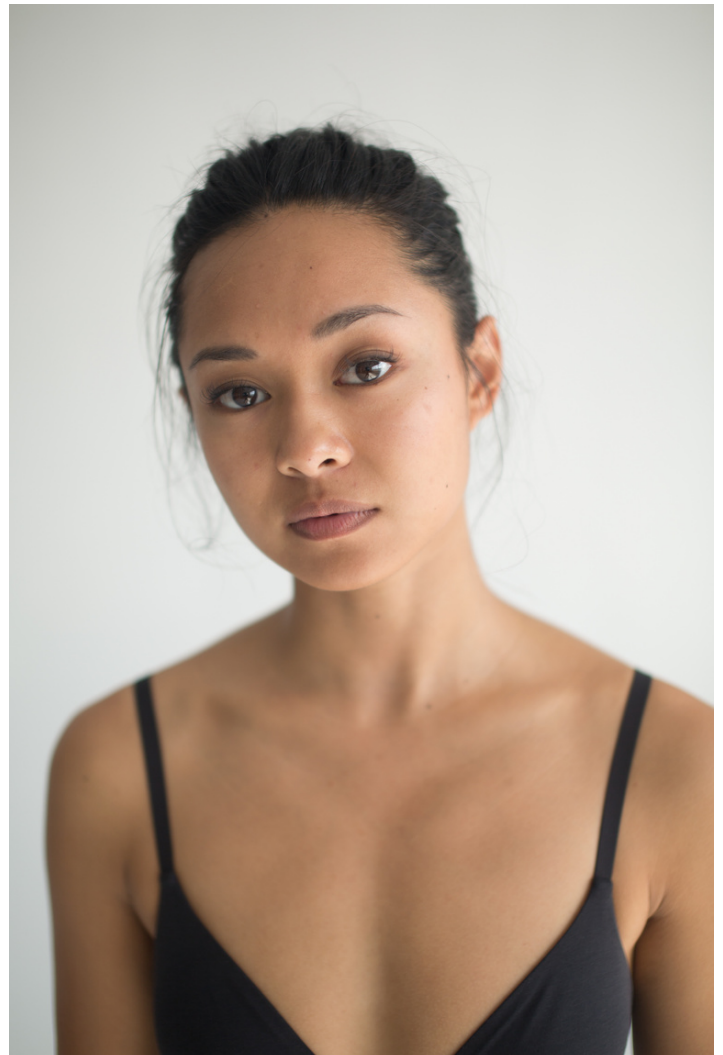
Be kind to your body.

Be kind to your mind.

For Choreographers:

The things you make are not who you are.

Not everyone will like your work, but your work was also not made for everyone.



# From Engineer to Fashion Company



An interview with the co-founder of Kalle Bag, Malika Rizqia Anindita by Elizabeth Harris.

From an engineer to a digital marketer and serial entrepreneur, Malika Rizqia Anindita is one of the founders of Kalle bags. Based in Indonesia, Malika's company creates beautiful and functional bags for the working woman. She also has a blog sharing stories and reviews of life, running a business, and now being a mother.

I reconnected with Malika (we were friends in college) on her journey from an engineer to now the owner of an accessories company!

**Malika, it has been so cool to see you start and grow Kalle after studying entrepreneurship together. What inspired you to pursue fashion after studying engineering?**

I have always been fascinated by the idea of entrepreneurship. You identify something that the market wants, you find the gap that has not yet been fulfilled, and you deliver it to your market. It's so interesting and challenging!

In fact, I have been selling clothes and bags while I was studying engineering. That's when I realized that wow, this is much more interesting than the field I was currently studying! So, I decided to pursue it further.

**I love the bags at Kalle, and how they combine function and classic fashion. What's your story behind starting Kalle?**

I started selling laptop bags in my college years studying engineering. I was reselling bags, I didn't manufacture them myself. At that time, I realized there was this unmet demand for a fashionable laptop bag for women.

Most of the laptop bags available at that time were for college students, certainly not appropriate for meetings. Or they might be too formal and not stylish. That's the reason my business partner and I created Kalle.

**It's been nearly 3 years since starting and you've sold out of bags over the years. That must be so exciting each time! How was it at the start getting Kalle up and running?**

It was really challenging at first! I must say, getting a business to start is a lot of work.

Finding the right bag maker was tough. We did not know where to start, so we literally went to this area in my hometown where there were a lot of shoe and bag makers. They were all handmade and home-based. So we had to knock on doors and ask if they could make the bags that we wanted.

Why not go to large manufacturers? Well, the minimum quantity that they required was too costly for us at that time. It was the only option we had.

And finding the right material, too, was challenging. Most vegan leathers that are strong were too heavy, and the light ones are easily torn. That's

why we're super in love with our current material that is lightweight and really strong!

**We spoke before about how the pandemic has affected the ebbs and flows of your business. What were some of the challenges you overcame?**

At the beginning of the pandemic, around March, the Indonesian government imposed almost a full-scale lockdown. Every office must be closed, and everyone had to work from home. With that, our sales plummeted.

We had several bag makers hired at that time, and it was hard because we really did not want to let them go. Yet, on the other hand, we barely made any sales.

We asked them to make cloth masks at first. They were puzzled by the change, and we did not tell them how we struggled, because we did not want to worry them. We know they had families, and some even have small children.

Then, we pivoted to make hazmat suits for medical workers. We went to a government hospital, showing our material and a sample of a hazmat suit that we made. Thankfully it passed their requirements.



We didn't make any profits for the months that we made the hazmat suits because it was for charity. But we kept our bag makers, and that's what matters.

Once the lockdown restrictions were relaxed, people were able to go back to work and our sales have once again gone back to where it was before the pandemic. We have even increased our production capacity and are buying new machines.

**On your blog, Malika, you write about your experiences, and one of the main themes this past year has been about being a working mom running a fashion company during a pandemic. How has that been for you?**

My baby boy was born in May 2020, two months after the pandemic. Being a new mom is hard, even more so during a pandemic and when you're trying to keep your business afloat.

I think it's all about trying to do your best with the time and resources that you have, don't strive for perfection.

For instance, I sometimes feel guilty whenever I work on my business while caring for my baby. I feel that I'm not 100% present for him. But on the other hand, I would also feel guilty if I think I haven't done enough for my business! It gets more complicated because I couldn't hire a nanny during a pandemic out of health concerns.

Then I realized that time management is key. There will be times when I will put down my phone and laptop and just play with my baby. But there would also be times when I need to work, and I would make sure he plays by himself safely. And that's okay because you can't

possibly do everything at once.

**Malika, you have done a lot in your life and career and at Kalle! What are some of your proudest achievements?**

I think the first time we hired machines and set up our own bag workshop! It feels so good to have full control over the bags that we make, from the material, quality, and production speed.

And to be able to increase our sales almost 100% from last year also felt really, really good. It's nice to bounce back from the lockdown effect.

**What do you have next for yourself and for Kalle?**

Going forward, we really want to expand our business, increase our sales, and ship overseas! We currently only ship to Indonesia and Malaysia, and it will be great if we could expand our shipping coverage more.

We also have so many ideas about new bags, both for laptops or daily bags. It's an exciting time to grow because our business has returned to normal now. And people are more optimistic because of the vaccine, and we really hope once the pandemic is over, we could increase our growth even more.



All Kalle bags combine fashion and function.

Find beautiful, functional bags From Monday to Sunday, Work to Play at [www.yourkalle.com](http://www.yourkalle.com). Make sure to follow them @yourkalle on Instagram.

You can keep up to date with Malika's adventures at <https://malikarizqia.wordpress.com/>.



# The Story of A Grownup Navajo Woman

Jaclyn Roessel  
photographed by  
Nanibaa Beck



An interview with Grownup Navajo founder and co-founder of the Native Women Lead, Jaclyn Roessel by Elizabeth Harris.

The Navajo Nation is one of the many indigenous communities, cultures, and peoples of the United States. Their historical lands span across much of the current American southwest. The Navajo, also known as the Diné, have a rich culture full of beautiful customs, nuanced knowledge systems, and profound philosophies. Despite hundreds of years of colonization, many of these customs and thoughts still continue. One Navajo woman has continued these traditions and sought ways to integrate them into our modern world.

Meet Jaclyn Roessel. Jaclyn is part of the Navajo Nation. She worked 11 years in museum curation and started many blogs and enterprises, including Grownup Navajo. Since leaving the museum life, she has worked with various organizations, tribes, and people to educate and integrate indigenous systems and philosophies. Through her work, she

has helped numerous people begin their journey of decolonization while supporting the development of a more connected and just world.

I got to speak with her about her story as a Navajo woman and how we can use indigenous teachings to create a better world.

**Jaclyn, you do a lot. You've started multiple blogs, multiple companies, how do you describe yourself?**

I am a proud Navajo woman who is dedicated to the advocacy, promotion, and celebration of indigenous culture and values.

**You were at the Heard Museum in Phoenix for 11 years. Then you left to focus more on Grownup Navajo and educating the public and working**



**with companies. Can you tell us about your experience starting and growing Grownup Navajo?**

What's interesting about Grown Up Navajo is that it started as a blog. The blog began in 2012, and it started as this process of grieving for my grandmother who passed away very suddenly. When I started Grownup Navajo, it was simply a way for me to process how youth would learn about my culture and about my people without my grandmother in my life.

Initially, for those first few years, it existed solely as a blog. As I began to invest more time in my museum career, I realized the impact of institutional racism. Being the only indigenous person at the senior management level of an organization was incredibly isolating, lonely, traumatic, and tiring. I had so many comp hours I never took. It was so hard for me to take vacation time.

However, at the same time, Grownup Navajo was growing in a way that I couldn't have predicted. We were doing collaborations with people and planning in-person events. There was this wildly beautiful culmination of growth that was happening.

It came to this place where it was in opposition to my work. It was competing for time

with my day job. I knew I wouldn't get the support to do all the things that I wanted to at the museum, and there were a series of events that led me to decide to move on and let go of my position and bet on myself.

Leaving the museum, I also decided to leave Phoenix. I was in a long-distance relationship at the time, with my now-husband, and I decided to move to New Mexico. It wasn't far away, but it was a world away in terms of my network and a new environment. This move was a way for me to invest in myself and build out what I thought could be possible. Working in a museum was really slow to move and change. Now, I could actually make an impact by building a company that could support the integration of indigenous ways of knowing, practices, and knowledge systems.

It was at the beginning part of the diversity and inclusion wave that has just continued to grow. I have always seen the possibility and recognized it. We have our own languages as indigenous people to describe how we inherently value every individual's perspective and their being. Everyone has sacredness as part of them. Through these different lenses, we achieve what in English we call diversity and inclusion.

Starting Grownup Navajo, the company, was this interesting evolution. It became a way to introduce people to these systems and models and

to work with the community better. I worked with a lot of non-indigenous institutions, both museums and arts and culture organizations, and now government entities, non-governmental organizations, and nonprofits that really want to embed indigenous teachings or learn how to work better with indigenous nations and communities. I even work with indigenous organizations that want to focus on the integration of their own principles and values into their organizations too.

It's become a company that I describe now as a digital media and education company because we do the education part around our training that focuses on inclusion and intersectionality and anti-racism, but we still have the content of having a blog, video channels, and our social media campaigns for a more personal perspective of these ideas and thoughts at an everyday level. Within this past year, I have become a certified personal coach, and I've integrated coaching techniques into my practice, facilitation, and work with one and one clients.

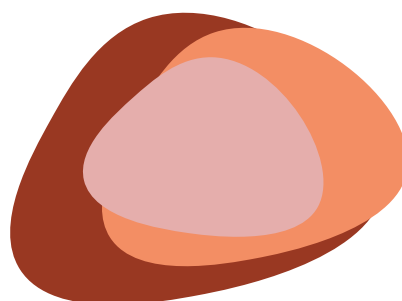
**You talked about integrating Indigenous knowledge systems. How are they different compared to very Euro-Western-centric America?**

I start from a place that I know and grown up with, which is the Diné culture. In Diné culture, we have philosophies and principles that guide our every day, that place us in the

order of the cosmos, and that instruct us on how to be respectful, contributing members of community and society.

One of the foundation pieces that I integrate into my life and practice is the principle of K'é. K'é kind of translates into kinship, but it has a more expansive definition. It's not just the kinship of being related to each other, like blood relations. It's, in the way that I was taught, this responsibility through relationality. Because we are 5 fingered people, because we all come from a particular place or community, we are responsible to each other. We have this civic responsibility to be engaged with each other's healing and each other's health and wellness.

I think that a lot of indigenous nations have their own words for kinship, community, relationships, or philosophies that relate to this idea of being in connection with each other. I always caution people from making generalizations of indigenous people, but this is probably one of the safe generalizations that you can make: that indigenous people have a core concept, guiding principle, philosophy, or word in their language that relates to a sense of kinship, relationship, or relationality with each other.



The conversations we're having around race, the conversations that we're having around community care in regards to the pandemic, the way that communities have stepped up, all of these actions are practices that support relationality. They're in stark contrast to capitalism and the way that white supremacy wants to make us all islands. Capitalism and white supremacy do not want us to be interdependent. These systems thrive on toxic individualism.

I see that it's really important to recognize relationality as being something that isn't counter to that. It's not reactive to these systems. These concepts of relationality have been inherently embedded in the thriving, the surviving, and the continuation of indigenous culture all over the world. Being connected to each other is what made us stronger. It's really important to contextualize it as a way of knowing that precedes these systems of oppression that have been introduced to these lands, specifically what is known as the United States.

**You talked about this principle of interconnectedness in nearly every indigenous group. Has your work brought you in collaboration with other indigenous groups outside of the US? I know you have worked with various indigenous groups within the US.**

Not yet. I hope that is part of the work that can grow and expand, especially when it's safe to come back together after the pandemic. I'm really excited about a lot of those possibilities. We have to look at global examples, not just regional examples.

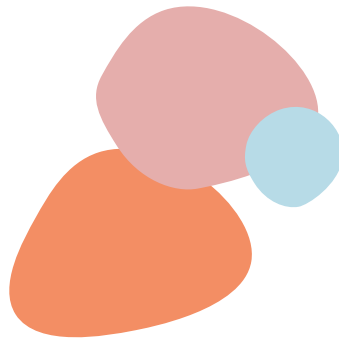
Colonisations didn't just happen here. Not everything has to be a reaction to colonization, but we can recognize that indigeneity is a global experience that can be shared and learned from.

**You make a great point that this country (the US) has been colonized. I don't just mean the European colonizers but also the American colonizers. That's something that people don't think about living in the US.**

**So, a couple of years back you started the Native Women Lead with other incredible Native American women. Can you tell us more about bringing that together?**

It wasn't until I moved here (New Mexico) fully that I was able to connect with some incredible indigenous women and entrepreneurs who are doing a lot of incredible work locally. We came together through an invitation from my colleague's sister, and fellow co-founder. It was for a panel discussion that was part of this global economic summit that was in town.

Nobody came to that conversation. It was such a blow, we were so excited and really looking forward to this



panel discussion and sharing what it's like to be an indigenous woman entering the entrepreneurial world. We had all levels of business owners on this panel. It was just amazing, but nobody showed up. It did allow us to recognize that we needed the space and the time to connect with each other.

We had a series of conversations over the next 4 or 5 months that shaped our desires. We felt there was a need for a gathering place for indigenous women and entrepreneurs of all levels of business to learn from each other so that we can create a community and connection with each other.

We put that event together in 2018, and it sold out. We were beyond capacity. It was such a phenomenal experience having all these incredible indigenous women, entrepreneurs on stage sharing their experiences, talking about investment, and talking about the challenges of balancing culture and business obligations. We had keynotes to raise money for a birthing facility and other entrepreneurial endeavors. It was just so amazing.

As co-founders, there are 7 of us, we were all just blown away by the need and by how people wanted this. We had no

idea. Since then, we've continued the summit. We had another in-person event in 2019. Then last spring, we went digital because of the pandemic. In that amount of time, we have engaged close to 500 different women from all over North America.

It's been a really profound experience to be part of a collective that has shown that women, that indigenous women can be collaborative. There are so many places where women are pitted against each other in a competition that capitalism has a setup where somebody has to lose. Our organization stands in contrast to that. We believe that we are stronger if we help each other. Like Congresswoman Haaland, how can we leave the ladder so that other women can climb up? She's one of the biggest supporters of our work.

I think across the board we've created incredible opportunities. We've invested in indigenous women businesses, we have provided emergency fund relief, as part of the pandemic we've fundraised and supported indigenous entrepreneurs. It's been amazing to be part of an organization that is saying that we don't have to play by these rules that were never meant for us. We can completely envision and revolutionize a system so that our people and our women win. That's really what Native Women Lead does.

**You speak a lot about your grandmother in your blog, and the Native Women Lead has a matriarch fund. Can you tell us**



### **more about matriarchal culture in the Diné?**

Our community, the Navajo Nation, our people are a matriarchal society, and we're also a matrilineal society.

A matrilineal society indicates the clanship system that we identify and find belonging. Our clans are passed through the mothers. My sons and my children will be my clan. That will be their identifying clan.

Then the matriarchal part is the belief that women have been and are the backbones of our families and of our communities. When we look back in time, we can see evidence of different

women who took on leadership positions, who were involved in decision-making. It was often said in our society that the women were the ones who made the decisions around the acquiring of land through marriage, who kept an understanding of moving livestock, who held important conversations, and who gave input on who was going to lead our communities.

That's not to say there wasn't an imbalance. I think it's really important to recognize that when we talk about patriarchy, and how toxic patriarchy is, it is this imbalance. We use the word in English, matriarchy, but it's really beyond that in our own understanding as a community and as a culture. We believe that men and women have values. And beyond that, we even have 4 different genders. There was cohesion and harmony that was created and that existed prior to the settler-colonial America and other colonial forces coming into these lands.

This land has always been indigenous land. It will always be indigenous land regardless of what we call these places in English. It's really important to recognize that this idea of matriarchy and patriarchy are really formed around our understanding of balance, gender, and the sexes. There was a lot of decision-making power that native women had. Because of colonization and the ongoing nature of colonization, there is oftentimes an erasure of the importance of women.

Within a lot of organizations that I support, they look at how to honor the contributions, leadership, support, and medicines that indigenous women have. It looks different depending on the organization, and it looks different on an organizational level compared to an individual level.

I think at the heart it's really about the practices. The way of remembering how we used to honor all communities, particularly women, and also recognizing that a lot of what work has to do with truth-telling around how we got separated from these ideals. A lot of that separation is through the integration and adoption of US governmental policies, and the impact of different churches and denominations that have continuously tried to convert us and persecute us. Those are all the ways that we've become separated from these knowledge and power systems.

### **What advice do you have for our readers to**

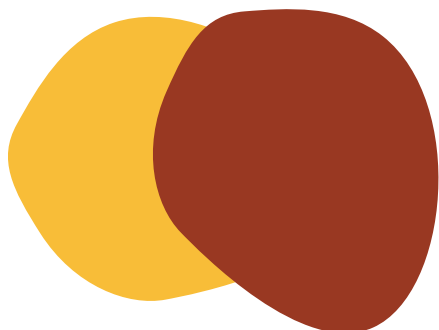
## respectfully integrate Native cultures and work on our decolonization?

I think just being able to increase your intake of indigenous thought leaders, making sure you're diversifying your feed, and you are reading articles about indigenous people by indigenous people. Media outlets, like Indian Country Today, are a great start. There are just tons of articles that you can enjoy and learn from that can point you to examples of other people to follow.

I think it's important to learn about the importance of making land acknowledgments. So much of the continuation and perpetuation of settler colonialism is embedded in the fact that we don't recognize that all the land, no matter where you are in the United State, is indigenous land. I don't care if you're in LA or Boston, everything is indigenous land regardless of how long you've been tied to that place or your family has been tied to a place. The history of indigenous people precedes all other histories.

We worked on a project with the department of arts and culture, and you can download our land acknowledgment kit. It tells you more about the importance of offering land acknowledgments and what it means. That in itself is an act of decolonization and truth-telling. There is so much that can be gained and garnered from. Think about taking on land acknowledgment as part of your practice and developing other action sets and tools where you are, whether that's mutual aid funds or fundraising efforts. Some communities have land trust funds where you can pay for the land that you live on, just like you pay rent.

All of that is again part of this decolonial wave that has a lot of promise in dismantling colonization and other systems of oppression that suppress and erase indigenous people.



## What advice do you have for entrepreneurs?

I think that at this point in time any company that is just starting or a company that wants to be relevant has to recognize that it's easier to do the work with the community than it is to do by yourself. Nobody does it all.

Also, you may be funding it all by yourself, but you're still benefiting from settler-colonial actions because the land that you're building your business on is only made possible by the stealing of indigenous land. That's where our work around awareness and the development of being anti-racist is acknowledging the fact that nothing is accomplished all on your own. That's a big myth.

Check out Jaclyn's blog and company Grownup Navajo at [grownupnavajo.com](http://grownupnavajo.com). You can also follow Grownup Navajo on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter @grownupnavajo.

Make sure to check out and download the land acknowledgment kit that Jaclyn worked on with the US Department of Arts and Cultures at [usdac.us/nativeland](http://usdac.us/nativeland).

To find out events, summits, and how to support Native women entrepreneurs, visit Native Women's Lead, where Jaclyn is a cofounder, at [www.nativewomenlead.org](http://www.nativewomenlead.org). You can follow them on social @nativewomenlead on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Lastly, if you want to get in contact and collaborate with Jaclyn, you can visit her website [www.jaclynroessel.com](http://www.jaclynroessel.com). You can also follow her on social @jacroessel on Instagram and Twitter. If you love her work and want to support her, why not buy her a coffee at [www.buymeacoffee.com/jacroessel](http://www.buymeacoffee.com/jacroessel).

# hope and hospitality

## THE WOMXN OF ARTSAKH AID

By Lucine Garibian



Names from left to right: Mariam Avagyan, Maria Kjderian, Sose Simavoryan, Margarita Gevorgyan, Lucine Garibian.

My name is Lucine (Lucy) Garibian. I'm an Armenian-American woman born and raised in LA. At the end of 2020, I decided to spend 6 weeks in Armenia. 2020 was a difficult year for Armenians all over the world and it has somewhat improved because of the incredible efforts of womxn here in Armenia.

For those of you who don't know, from September 27, 2020 to November 10, 2020, there was a war between Artsakh/Armenia and Azerbaijan/Turkey. This war took place in the Nagorno Karabakh region in the Caucasus, or more commonly known in the community as Artsakh, which is an area predominantly inhabited by ethnic Armenians. This region has historically been a place of contention between Armenia and



Zaruhi Muradyan (left) and Lilit Arakelian (right) from the Muradyan Art Gallery Initiative.

Azerbaijan. However, this changed when Azerbaijani forces with great support from Turkey launched an attack in the Artsakh region on September 27th. This war lasted 6 weeks resulting in the death of thousands including civilians. If you want to read up more on the conflict and the history of the region, there are some sources at the end. But in the spirit of this magazine, the focus will be on the amazing womxn that I've met here taking charge of humanitarian efforts.

I'll start from the beginning. Before I even arrived in Armenia on Feb 3, I met a woman named Mariam Avagyan on Instagram. She connected me with Kooyrigs, an organization that started in Armenia in 2018 to create a sense of belonging for all Armenians and elevate

diverse Armenian voices. In 2020, Kooyrigs bravely shifted course to fundraise for humanitarian crises, starting with the Beirut blast and continuing on with displaced Artsakh refugees and pregnant women of Armenia and Artsakh. To this day, they are the only organization in Armenia that is delivering this aid specifically to pregnant women. This aid includes diapers, lotions, soaps, vitamins, and medications which they hand-deliver monthly to nearly 200 pregnant women and new mothers.

Another initiative I have worked closely with here has been Muradyan Art Gallery Initiative. This effort works out of an art gallery in Yerevan. All of the paintings have been removed from the wall, and the largest room has many

women (mostly from Artsakh) sewing mattresses that are donated to families.

The next room is where they pile clothing donations where people can come to pick them up. The office is the last room. When you open the door a cloud of cigarette smoke makes its exit, and at the head of the office sits Zaruhi Muradyan. She and her husband Hakob have coordinated multiple fundraising efforts. During the war, they would fundraise and deliver blankets for refugees and soldiers to sleep on. They raised funds for families to buy homes, deliver bags of food, trained soldiers in the Azerbaijani language and self-defense to just name a few.

Eyes on Artsakh is another nonprofit organization that a couple of friends of mine, Melanie Moradi and RP Zargarian, created since the start of the war. Their aim was to provide on the ground emergency supplies to displaced families and families of fallen and wounded soldiers. They buy supplies and food in bulk, pack boxes with a mix of dry food, and hand-deliver to each family. Currently, they are switching gears and providing monthly stipends for families of fallen and wounded soldiers.

I came to Armenia with this organization to deliver money to the affected families, who in return told me stories about their loved ones. In one family, a mother, Mery, talked about her son who



went missing for 10 days. During those 10 days she found herself going “crazy,” she wasn’t able to do any of her daily routines. She couldn’t sleep or eat, completing any task was monumentally difficult. At the end of those 10 days she received word that her son died on the battlefield, and they were only able to recognize him from his chest tattoo. I can’t even imagine what it’s like for a family member to go missing, and hearing of sons that are still missing even months after the war ended seems torturous. Another family we visited had a fallen soldier in the family named Abraham. After spending 30 minutes tearfully telling us about their heroic son, they told us that they get some sense of hope and energy from visits from the diasporan Armenians. They feel seen and remembered. Gestures like these help organizations, like Eyes on Artsakh and Kooryigs, to keep going through all the emotional burnout.

Most of the work that we do as volunteers is fundraise, package and deliver boxes, organize, plan beneficial projects, and keep records. The work is different on a daily basis, and all the organizations have learned to be adaptable. Not every family needs the same aid, some need their utility bills to be paid, others need maternal medicines, while others need therapists.

The strength that the Armenian community exhibited in 2020 had a lot to

do with everybody’s unique way of contributing to this effort. While the ultimate contribution was from the Armenians living in Armenia, supporting soldiers, and fighting themselves, the diaspora raised money and spread awareness. One incredible silver lining from all this is seeing the unification of the Armenian Diaspora, supporting each other no matter where we grew up and what circumstances we were raised in. I’m so thankful for the friends that I’ve made through this difficult time, all contributing with their unique strengths.

Personally, what I want to see most is a change in the narrative around the Armenian culture. I know it’s so important to know about the Artsakh war, the injustices and crimes against humanity, as

well as historical injustices and genocides. What I want to see is a rise in interest in our food, dance, culture, and history. We are a people marked by trauma but we express ourselves through our culture—it is our savior, our connection, and our sense of belonging. Every single family that we visited offered us coffee and some snacks. Armenians have a strong sense of hospitality in our culture. No matter how little any family has, they are always willing to give you everything they can. The word “հյուրասիրություն” (hospitality) in Armenian directly translates to “love guests.” Every host will make you feel like you’re at your own grandma’s house, and that’s how I want Armenians to be remembered. I want everyone to feel the love that I’ve been so incredibly lucky to



Left to right: Karen, Ruben Hakhverdyan (well-known armenian singer), Lucine Garibian, mother of a fallen soldier, RP Zargarian, Melanie Moradi, and Kahren.

experience while I've been here.

Most of all, I have been so lucky to know these amazing womxn from all over the world. They've paused their whole lives and quit their jobs to come to this little, yet important, country in the Caucasus to help in whatever way they can. What we need is hope that we can put our country back stronger than it was before. Invest in agriculture, in new and sustainable businesses, in technical schools, and in education. Thank you to Toastee Mag for giving me this opportunity to humanize us and put a spotlight on the strong and courageous womxn working on the ground.

If you want to learn more about how to make a contribution, here is a list of organizations and initiatives that I love, some that I have worked with:

- Eyes on Artsakh (@eyesonartsakh on Instagram)
- Kooyrigs (kooyrigs.org)
- Muradyan Art Gallery InitiativeHidden Road Initiative (<https://www.hiddenroadinitiative.org/>)
- Paros Foundation (<https://parosfoundation.org/>)
- Artsakh Relocation Project (<https://www.artsakhrelocation.org/>)
- Children of Armenia Fund (COAF) (<https://www.coaf.org/en/>)

Here are some sources where you can learn about the history of the conflict and the current situation:

- EVN Report (<https://www.evnreport.com/spotlight-karabakh>)
- Civilnet (www.civilnet.am)
- Hetq (www.hetq.am)
- Also the Documentary "Parts of a Circle"



Lucy created an Etsy shop called Plant Mom Macrame to sell her macrame crafts with all proceeds going to Kooyrigs. Follow her @plantmommacrame on Instagram.

Lucy also has a GoFundMe campaign to raise funds for Artsakh refugees with Eyes on Artsakh. You can donate to her GoFundMe via her story on our website and her Plant Mom Macrame Instagram.

# Time Traveling with



## An Interview with Beckett Graham and Susan Vollenweider of The History Chicks by Elizabeth Harris.

Two women. Half the population. Several thousand years of history. About an hour. That is the incredible duo of Beckett Graham and Susan Vollenweider of the amazing podcast The History Chicks. Every fortnight since 2011, they sit down, discuss notes, and share stories of incredible female figures, both real and fictional, of our past.

I came across the History Chicks podcast as a recommendation from a friend. After the first episode, I was hooked. It was hilarious, fun, enthralling, and uplifting

to have the history and stories of so many incredible women shared internationally. Hey, don't take my word for it. They have been a finalist in the People's Choice Podcast Award for Education 6 years in a row; they won the Mixcloud Online Radio Awards for Best Talk Show in Education; and, they come highly recommended from Travel and Leisure, BBC Culture, the American Library Association, and so many more.

When we wanted to celebrate women and women's history in this issue of Toastee, I knew I needed to reach out to Beckett and Susan. Despite having day jobs, they put on an incredible, historically rich, and superbly well-researched show. After doing over 170 episodes, I am sure they know a thing or two about women's history and its importance. I was fortunate enough to be able to speak with Beckett and Susan about the making of The History Chicks and the importance of Herstory.

**Susan and Beckett, I am so excited to be interviewing you. I am a big fan of your podcast. What got you two to start making The History Chicks?**

Thank you, that's great to hear, we're glad you like it! Beckett had read a book, "To Marry an English Lord" by Carol Wallace and Gail MacColl about American heiresses who traded substantial dowries for aristocratic titles through marriage during the Gilded Age. She wanted to learn more about it, looked for a podcast on the subject, and found nothing. This was in 2010, there wasn't the mass of podcast choices that there are now, so she thought, "I guess I'll just have to make it myself." She contacted Susan, a woman she only knew online, and within a couple of months, The History Chicks was launched.

**You share a lot of incredible resources and it definitely shows how much in-depth and thorough research you do. Can you share with us a bit about your research process?**

Once we've decided on a subject we each go our own way and research independently starting with our different library systems.

We love to be able to recommend books to listeners that are readily available because we know that we won't be able to get the entire story into an episode and people are going to want to learn more on their own so we always make sure we have readily available books.

We read a lot of books and reputable online sources, not only biographies but background information-- where did she live? What did she do? What major events were going on during her lifetime? Who was she interacting with? What were her challenges?

We handwrite notes as we go and never discuss her with each other so our recorded conversation is fresh. When we feel comfortable with the amount of information we have, we



Susan Vollenweider of The History Chicks.

each write what is essentially a 20-30 page research paper on the woman's life from birth to death. It's these last notes that we keep in front of us during our conversations. It's exciting for us to see the same woman through the eyes of each other--things that one of us finds interesting, the other might gloss over.

**One of the things that I really love about your show is that you have a very empathetic portrayal of the women and other characters in history. A lot of female historical figures, characters in history textbooks, and in common knowledge have a one-sided view, and in many cases a negative view. How can we ensure that going forward we present the whole picture of someone?**

When people study history, not just the professionals, but anyone with an interest in history thinks beyond the timeline they'll see more of the story. Sometimes something as simple as getting your hands on a primary source document, which is becoming easier with the vast amount of digitized documents online, you'll see the person or event differently than a history book may record it. Sure, it's biased but whoever created that document lived at the same time-- and it is often the journals or letters of the very person you're studying. Those add more layers to her story.

Think of a historical



Beckett Graham of The History Chicks.

woman that you "know" as very serious, confident, and with great drive. Now imagine reading her journal or letters to confidants and learning that she fretted over the most common things like unrequited love, an uncontrollable fondness for sweets, a confession where she felt defeated, concerns for her children...suddenly her character is relatable. That should become the story that is shared, not just a timeline.

**Women are often left out of history, or they play the side character, but from listening to your podcast, I've learned that many of the female side characters were actually huge powerhouses. For instance, Queen Catherine of Aragon held significant power, even organizing troops to quell Scottish rebels. Why are women so often left out of**



Katherine of Aragon is commonly known as the first wife of Henry VIII. When Henry VIII was out in France, Katherine led English troops to victory against a Scottish invasion. There is more to her, and you learn more about her in episode 22 of *The History Chicks*.

### **history, and why is women's history so important?**

"The patriarchy" is an easy answer, but it's too broad of one. In the movie, *The Holiday*, one of the main characters says, "You're supposed to be the leading lady of your own life..." We get to look at our subjects as the leading ladies, not hidden behind the men who made the laws and fought the wars...and wrote the history books. Those guys are merely supporting players for us. Women may have seemed out of the picture while the focus was on the men, but women weren't out of the action. These women were 50% of the population who were busy getting things done without scribes at their heels.

### **Besides the podcast, you've created this incredible and supportive community. How did this happen?**

By accident? We met on a mom's message board here in Kansas City in 2009. We met online and we thought that we would give the same opportunity to people who listen to the show, so, we started our private Facebook group for that purpose. When (pre-Covid) people started to have meet-ups at historic places in their own area, we knew that relationships were forming. Now we have a book club, a community heirloom recipe list, an impressive list of recommended podcasts, a growing list of recommended books written by women, and a weekly Zoom trivia game. On Tuesdays, we celebrate each other's recent accomplishments (everything from breaking through depression to babies being born and businesses being launched), and each week we have a themed baking challenge on Sundays where we show-off (failure or success) in a parade of baked goods. One of the coolest parts is that all those activities are member-created and led, and we just get to play along.

### **After so many years and numerous episodes later, what have you gotten out of doing the podcast (besides tons of historical information and expertise)?**

This is going to sound

corny, but so be it: We've been rewarded with a very special friendship with each other, and we've met and befriended people that we would never have known in the normal courses of our lives.

### **The History Chicks has been around for 10 years! Congratulations! So, what's next for the two of you for this podcast?**

Thank you! We really just focus on the next episode and then the one after that. We try not to put more than that on our History Chicks plates, but we would love to fire-up our other podcast, *The Recappery*, to annotate historically based media (it's more chill than that sounds.) When the pandemic is over, we would like to do more live events and we're working on a book (which we don't like to talk about because it is far from complete.) We're really excited about the first, of, hopefully several, History Chicks Field trips-- we'll be traveling with listeners--in person!-- to the places we've been talking about for years. The first trip is to London, it was supposed to be last June but was rescheduled to this year due to the pandemic.

You can find more about the podcast, listen to the episodes, and find their in-depth show notes at [thehistorychicks.com](http://thehistorychicks.com). You can also listen to the podcast on Wondery, Apple Podcast, Spotify, and wherever else you get your podcasts.

# The History Chick's Favorite Episodes

Interested to learn more about incredible women of History? With over 10 years of experience, 170+ shows, and covering women from all over the world, The History Chicks podcast is a great place to start. We asked Beckett Graham and Susan Vollenweider, co-hosts and founders of The History Chicks, to share their favorite episodes and chicks.

## Beckett's Favorites

### 1. Josephine Baker (Episodes 34 and 35)

Her story really blindsided me, I was very surprised by a lot of it that I didn't know because I just knew her on the surface.



### 2. Typhoid Mary (Episodes 149)

It's good to know the full story of a phrase that is being bandied about quite regularly in the news and on social media.



### 3. Fannie Lou Hamer (Episode 154)

She is so relevant for today and she's a massive figure in the civil rights movement that most people don't learn about in school.



### 4. Wonder Woman (Episode 164 and 165)

Wonder Woman because there are so many different elements to that story and it involved girl power on a lot of levels.



### 5. Aunt Jemima (Episode 155)

Aunt Jemima because her history goes way way back to the 1800s it has quite a lot of nuances that I thought needed to be brought forward to understand why a brand might consider, even at such a late date, removing such a figure from their product.



# Susan's Favorites

## 1 Annie Londonderry (Episode 123)

She was a woman that few have heard of that did one really remarkable thing in her life: she was the right woman at the right stage of her life at the right moment in time to solo ride a bike around the world. It was one of the most fun conversations we've had.



## 4 Fannie Lou Hamer (Episode 154)

I didn't know much about her going in, she wasn't mentioned in my schools even when we were learning about the Civil Rights movement--but she was such an important part of it that it was an honor to get to share her story. I don't say that about all our subjects. Sure, I enjoy covering their lives, I'm delighted that we get to bring them to people, but Fannie Lou and Mary Church Terrell are two that I felt honored to share.



## 2 Ella Fitzgerald (Episode 18 and 170)

I always liked her music, but after researching and talking about her I deeply admire her as a person, she had a quiet strength that I feel even now.



## 5 Mary Church Terrell (Episode 144 and 146)

She was born the year the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, died the year US schools were desegregated and, in between, worked for civil rights. She had a very full life of activism but isn't as well known as she should be.



## 3 Beatrix Potter (Episode 64 and 106)

She was so true to herself, knew her passions early on, and although she did have doors closed to her because she was a woman, she lived her life exactly how she wanted despite societal pressures



You can find more about the podcast, listen to the episodes, and find their in-depth show notes at [thehistorychicks.com](http://thehistorychicks.com). You can also listen to the podcast on Wondery, Apple Podcast, Spotify, and wherever else you get your podcasts.



# An Educational Series Fighting Systemic Racism

An interview with Serria Rego, founder of The Black Wealth Matters, An Educational Series by Elizabeth Harris.

2019 revived Black Lives Matter and put a spotlight on systemic racism in the US and around the world. It reinvigorated a new generation of changemakers, initiatives, and organizations fighting racism and working to elevate their communities. One of these new initiatives that sprung out of this is the Black Wealth Matters, An Educational Series.

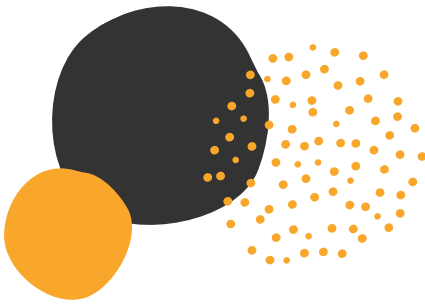
Led by Serria Rego, financial professional and activist, Black Wealth Matters, an Educational Series emerged as a way to combat the financial effects of systemic racism. Series 1, entitled "Voting and Health" featured an incredible lineup of doctors, public officials, attorneys, and environmentalists.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Serria about creating this educational series and the impact she has seen on her community.

**Serria, you have a really cool background from modeling to finance. What is the story behind creating Black Wealth Matters, An Educational Series?**

I'm from Chicago, born and raised but my family was from Mississippi. My grandma left Mississippi when a lot of the black folks were exiting the South (The Great Migration). I'm talking about her because she shaped a lot of my life and that put me in the position that I am now.





She had 12 kids, but she wasn't able to bring them all to Chicago at once, so she brought a few. She couldn't read or write, but she was still able to get jobs. As I started growing up and becoming more aware of people and our limitations, I kept wondering why my grandma couldn't read and write. My other friends had grandparents that knew how to read and write.

Coincidentally, I began to study money. The first book I read was *Wealth Secrets of the One Percent*, and it covered a lot of American history. That, of course, led me to slavery which then pointed me to Jim Crowe and how in the South, well after slavery, they were still kidnapping the black folks and not letting them go to school and making the kids work.

That's why my grandma couldn't read. Even though slavery was over, she was still being treated like a slave. I had no idea. As an adult, I blamed her for not being educated, not understanding that she wasn't educated because she wasn't allowed.

I went down that rabbit hole learning more about black history in America. Then George Floyd was murdered on live TV. I remember being scared to watch it. I

remember thinking, "I'm not going to watch it. It's going to make me crazy!"

I remember I just saw a picture of it. I saw a picture of him on the ground and I had nightmares. I would wake up at like 2:30 in the morning. It was just so jarring for me.

When I started putting two and two together, I realized that it's the system. When people say systemic racism, it's everything. It's so much that very few understand all of it.

I've recruited professionals to share little pieces, my intention is that through the exposure of all these little pieces, we can start putting the puzzle together so that we can ultimately dismantle systemic racism because systemic racism is the government and the direct result of it is poverty.

### **For someone new coming to this, how do you define systemic racism?**

I define systemic racism as the entire system that consists of racist laws and a racist culture that creates poverty and harm in and towards the Black community.

### **Why do you think poverty is the biggest harm to the Black community? Why is poverty such a powerful thing?**

America is capitalistic. America runs on money. People come from all over the world to take part in our capitalistic society. Capital is

power. Capital is safety. Capital is a voice. Capital is everything. The lack of capital means you disappear. You're exposed, you're in danger.

When I think about a group being poor, slaves were poor. They had nothing. To keep slaves at the mercy of the system, the system had to keep them poor. Once Blacks started making money during the Reconstruction, in spite of the system, that became a problem. The lynching occurred. A majority of the people lynched were business owners.

The System has been more intentional about keeping Blacks poor than we realize. It's in their best interest to remove us from money, to



Serria, a former model now financial advisor and educator.

EXCLUSIVE: Register at [bwmeducationalseries.com](http://bwmeducationalseries.com)

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Aisaha Braveboy the first speaker of the Black Wealth Matters Series 1.

keep us poor, to keep us in debt. That's why I think systemic racism and poverty are related, and why I think poverty is dangerous.

Poverty isn't a tool. Poverty is a weapon. Poverty has been weaponized against the Black community.

**That's a powerful statement. But yes, if you are living in poverty, you don't have the means or the capital to influence your system.**

George Floyd died over \$20. He got the attention of the police over \$20. Poverty exposes you to things that keep you vulnerable that keep you in a position of not being heard.

**In your series you have our experts talking about their field, but you also challenge them to learn about the history and the past of their area. How has that been for them?**

When smart people realize that they don't know something, they look at it as a great opportunity to learn more.

Another reason that I wanted to have this series is that there is an elite group in every race and sub-sector. Black elites are our educated, our entertainers are rich, but Black educated are the elite. I find there is a divide between the elite and everyone else and it's getting bigger. All of my speakers are elite and I see this as an opportunity to reconnect them with

everyday people. The speakers give out their contact information, social media handles, and welcome questions from the guests.

**Can you talk about your team? You have such a diverse team putting all of this together.**

My team is amazing. My right hand is a young lady named Kathy Flores. Kathy is from Honduras. She and her family raised supplies to help with the hurricane relief efforts there, and they went to Honduras to help distribute the supplies.

Jaime Haile is Jewish and she is very familiar with the struggles that impact Blacks. She combs the internet for great speakers. Fabiana is Indian, by way of St. Lucia and her children are Black and Indian. She knows the ups and downs of raising Black men.

Gilbert Aguilar is from an amazing entrepreneurial family and he loves history and making an impact. When I first started working with Gilbert, I didn't realize that there was racism in the Latin community towards Blacks sometimes. He shared that with me.

It's getting bigger and bigger, but they all have some connection to the Black community and humanity.

At the end of the day, I want to fight poverty. That's my goal, I want to fight poverty. I can't do it alone. My intention with the series is to find my tribe and find like-minded people.

**What are some of the achievements so far from running the Black Wealth Matters, an Educational Series?**

For me, the achievement is being comfortable with saying the term systemic racism. I wasn't comfortable acknowledging racism for a very long time because I felt like it gave me an excuse to not fight. Well, what's the use? It's just going to be this big System and I'm not going to win.

But now, I know that's not true. Now I'm at the point where I just speak the same truth regardless of who's in front of me. I didn't do that before this series.

**What is your advice on how we can tackle systemic racism?**

I would say learn about how it occurs. Then understand we all have a choice. Choice A might be a way to fight systemic racism and choice B might be a way to allow it to keep going. Choose A.

But to choose A, you need to know what A is. Research the history of systemic racism so you understand how the system is built. Find people who are educated. Most of the time educated people are not going to damage their reputation by lying to you.

I was having a conversation on the internet with a guy who was saying he was an observer. We don't need observers. Get off your butt and figure out a way to be active, when in doubt support those who are active.

The next Black Wealth Matters, An Educational Series 2 will be focusing on "Policing." To sign-up for the next session go to their website [www.bwmeducationalservices.com](http://www.bwmeducationalservices.com) where you can also see past speakers.

Make sure to follow Black Wealth Matters, an Educational Series @bwmseries on Instagram and Facebook.

To keep up to date with Serria follow her on Instagram @serriasays and the entire team is on the Black Wealth Matters Series website on the "About Us" page.

# A Home for the Artistic Soul

By Elizabeth Harris

Being an artist, a designer, a singer, a chef, a creative of any type can be some of the most fulfilling work. It's also some of the hardest with the constant stream of content creation, comparing oneself to others, and inconsistent flow of work.

Still, there is room for everyone to be great and unlock their full creative potential while finding balance with their inner life and wellbeing. That is where Debrianna Debolt, founder of Olive Home, can come in and help. I got to interview Debrianna and share her creative journey and her journey helping others on theirs.

**Debrianna, you've written an album and started a business. How do you describe yourself?**

I am a creative who is passionate about creatives. First and foremost, I am an artist. Yes, I make music, create beautiful spaces for people to be together, I enjoy cooking and baking bread, etc... but over all of that I see the world through a lens of beauty and wonder. I long to give people language for their life through melodies and lyrics, and sometimes through an extravagant night of hosting.

From there, I am passionate about creatives and



Debrianna Debolt, founder of Olive Home and coach and mentor to creatives.



Debianna's home, her current base for Olive Home, a place for creatives.

helping them steward their inner life and creative process. I help creatives become whole and healthy by teaching them how to live from their original design. I help unlock artists who have been burnt out, locked up, and shut down.

### **What is Olive Home? It's a really interesting business.**

Thank You! Olive Home has many different facets.

First and foremost, Olive Home houses the Creative Mentorship. The Creative Mentorship is a 3-6 month season where I work with artists one on one. I create a Formation Plan that helps them clearly articulate their creative history, creative tensions, and creative passions. Throughout their mentorship, we work on

cultivating a healthy soul (because all creativity flows from that place). I also help launch them into their creative dreams by practically setting attainable goals and helping them find the first step towards the vision in their heart. We work through finding the invitations in creative blocks and discovering the mindsets that they have built over the course of their life. It's a ton of healing, discovery, and beauty!

Olive Home is also a platform for me to release more music, and as it grows and where other artists will be able to release music as well. My music will now be under the name Olive Home and I cannot wait to help other artists release music under that name as well!

Other than that, Olive

Home serves as an educational source. Through retreats, workshops, and creative prompts, Olive Home helps teach creatives how to tend to their inner life and develop a sustainable creative process.

### **What is the story of how and why you started it?**

At the start of last year, everything in my life shifted. I moved states, got married, stopped working in church ministry for the first time since I was...12, and I had no job! Every door that I thought would be opened quickly closed, and I found myself really reevaluating what I wanted to do with my life. I was asking myself what I really thought was important.

From there and an

entire year of processing, Olive Home was dreamt up. At the end of the day, I realized I wanted to create music and help other people navigate the murky waters of the creative process. So I developed a Creative Mentorship where people would commit 3-6 months of intentional time to honor the artist that they are. I developed the mentorship to help heal creatives who are burnt out, tired and shut down. Olive Home is meant for creatives to learn sustainable tools that will help them throughout their creative process, and ultimately in every area of their lives.

I started Olive Home because I believe that intentionally walking through life with one person at a time can change the world. If one person is whole and healthy in every dimension of their soul, it will completely revolutionize their sphere of influence. I've seen it happen over and over again, and I am a product of that mindset. I am forever indebted to all those amazing mentors and teachers who spent hours, days, probably years of their life, mentoring me and helping me navigate all the inner workings of my heart and mind.

**I noticed Olive Home is focused on helping creatives and, specifically, creative formation. Can you tell us more about that?**

Yes of course! As humans who have a soul, we are multidimensional, layered, and intricately, uniquely designed. Creativity is an expression of our souls. If we want to have a healthy creative process, we must attend to our multidimensional soul. Creative Formation is about going to the root of our creativity and starting there.

To make this really practical, say an artist struggles with Creative Comparison. Most people just live with the toxic mindset or they try and force themselves to stop comparing, but it's too hard because they are caught up in a cycle. Creative Formation helps the artist find the root of their Creative Comparison, the fears involved, the wounds throughout their life that might have caused them to build those mindsets and habits.



Debrianna is also a singer-songwriter and musician.



Olive Home offers Creative Mentorship and a platform for writings and melodies.

You'll see that Creative Comparison is simply a symptom of deeper things within your soul. Some of my students say that the Mentorship feels like Creative Therapy... and I'm not mad about it! Everything flows from the heart, and that is where Creative Formation happens.

**That's really interesting! After helping so many creatives, have you seen changes in your creativity and how you approach your art?**

Absolutely! It is less hurried. It is less anxious. It is more balanced. More concerned about the process than the product. I am asking myself more than ever, "How is this forming me?" and "Who am I becoming?" It feels like the important things are back at the center of my creative process. More than anything, I

am loving what I create and that is a joy like no other!

**Amazing! Given your experience as a creative and working with so many, what advice do you have for our readers who are looking to unlock their creativity?**

What a stunning question! If you feel blocked, rest. Slow Down. Find a way, any way, to draw back. Your answer will not be found in doing more. Your blocks are invitations to greater freedom, but you just need to take enough time to see what is really being made available to you. You are worth the time it takes to slow down. You are worth the time it takes to heal. You are not late. There is room for you to be all that you are. Get your eyes off others and show up to your own life.

**What's next for your business?**

I want to launch online courses and begin offering some workshops for creatives! I am also releasing new music in a few months and can hardly wait for that as well. Other than that, I am slowly working through writing a book and just enjoying those I am currently mentoring. It feels surreal to be able to call this my career, so I'm taking it all in!

To learn more about Olive Home check out their website at [www.ourolivehome.com](http://www.ourolivehome.com). To keep up to date with Debrianna and her work, make sure to follow her [@OurOliveHome](#) on Facebook and [@our.olivehome](#) on Instagram. You can also check out her videos on her Youtube Channel, OurOliveHome.



# Pulling Back the Curtains on Machismo

By Elizabeth Harris

If you walk around the THEXCHANGE in Charlotte, NC, you'll come upon a mural. You'll see the vivid colors of jaguars pulling a folk cart bursting with tropical flowers along a road overflowing with gold and jewels with a young girl proudly directing the jaguars forward. What you'll notice is that this beautiful creation of Latinx art is calling out for climate change action, but, with a twist. It feels very Latinx - the colors, the flora and fauna, and the traditional cart- but has a fresh and modern sense. It's this beautiful combination, bringing together two worlds and using this hybrid experience to call forth change, by Charlotte-based artist Irisol Gonzalez.

What continues to draw me to Irisol's work is her beautiful way of combining her Latinx, Costa Rican heritage, with her American experiences, creating art that shows a new modern Latin-American perspective while creating dialogue on social and environmental change.

Like many artists, art has been a passion for her since childhood, but, life and career expectations can get in the way. Irisol recalls, "I was working at a finance company and I was asked to do a poster for a team. They gave me some markers and a poster board, and I spent 5 hours on that poster board. I was like, 'I've been happier these 5 hours than all of the times at this place combined.'"

With a handful of commissions and support from local grants, Irisol was finally able to take the leap and begin her career as a full-time artist. "I had a few commissions for people who I knew, and I decided that I was going to quit my job. The commissions that I had will let me sustain myself for a few months while I did this. I just went for it. I started getting more commissions to sustain myself and it started growing," she recalls.



And has she flourished! These past four years Irisol has not only grown her flow of commissions but continues to receive recognition and awards and for her work domestically and internationally. She had a solo exhibition in Spain, her work was exhibited at the Tubman-Mahan Gallery in Washington, DC, and the CAM Raleigh and Raleigh Fine Arts Society in Raleigh, NC for starters. She's an Inaugural ASC Emerging Creator Fellowship Recipient, a former META Mural Resident, and was awarded the Art Pop Street Gallery Charlotte to just name a few. The mural of jaguars pulling a cart overflowing with lush flora is her Climate Change Mural part of Charlotte's Talking Walls initiative.

How has she developed as an artist? "It has definitely become more concept-based than it was at the beginning. In the beginning, it was more focused on aesthetics. And now it's secondary to the concept. My idea is to be deeper with my work and I hope that as I continue to make it that it'll continue to be heavier in context."

One of the concepts seen throughout much of her artwork is identity. More specifically, Irisol's finding a way to balance her Costa Rican roots with her American experiences and define what her identity means to her. "There's always this clash of being a Latin-American and what that means in terms of culture and growing up. I try to explore it in a way that combines them (Latinx and American). For a very long time, I saw them as this is my Costa Rican culture and this is my American culture, and I either fit into one of those but I never fit into any of those. Then I went to Costa Rica, they would be like, 'You haven't experienced a lot of the things we have therefore, you can't really talk about this experience the way I can.' Same for the American. I'm never going to be American. I wasn't born here. There's a big part of my life that I didn't experience here. So I'm never gonna do that either."

Despite these feelings of being stuck between worlds as an outsider, Irisol steadily bloomed into her hybrid Costa Rican-American





Irisol at work on her Climate Change Mural. Photographer: Brook Brown Photography.

self. “I’m no longer trying to fit into these boxes. I’m okay with being on the outside of both of them because for a long time I wasn’t. Now, it’s like I understand that I’m going to be an outsider for both of them because I’m this new thing. In my art, I express it by mixing things. In a lot of my murals, I put my American culture and Costa Rican. It looks like a hot mess sometimes. ‘You got a banana tree and a cardinal?’ Yes! Because that’s who I am,” she tells me.

This beautifully clashing, challenging, and appreciation for the two worlds is evident in her new series *Machismo*. “*Machismo* is sexism in Latin American culture. It’s gender roles that are masochistic and misogynistic. It’s the patriarchy,” Irisol explains. It is through her insider-outsider experience that Irisol is the best placed to explore the sexism and everyday misogyny many may experience in Latin American culture.

In the *Machismo* series, viewers are presented with jarring, theatrical, and slightly comical images, like viewing a theatre show, with curtains framing each scene. “The curtains are a criticism of Latin American culture,” Irisol tells me. “You might go to a house that doesn’t have floors because they’re poor but they’ll have these royal curtains in their house. To me, that is so superficial the way that you’re trying to show off but in reality, this is not your reality. I feel like that is a metaphor for *machismo* itself.”

These curtains also emphasize the roles, the acts, the characters, the costumes we all play in our everyday lives. Irisol explains, “These roles that we create for ourselves in the way that we behave. It’s not who we are, it’s how we want people to see.”

Talking about choosing what we see or don’t, all the women from the young wives to the *Abuela* are blindfolded. “Their faces are covered because their identity doesn’t matter. They’re just women. In *Machismo* culture, it doesn’t matter if it’s a mother, an aunt, a neighbor, the women are seen as a

service. Therefore, her thoughts, who she is, and what she wants do not matter. That's why their faces are covered. Their identity is irrelevant," she clarifies.

Cleverly, Irisol notes that the girls can see, they're not blindfolded. They also don't have halos. It's like they're watching, waiting, in training. "The girls aren't covered because they're learning from this but eventually their faces will be covered. The little girl if you noticed doesn't have a halo. That's because women have to earn their halo, but the men are born with a halo. They're born saintly, they're born great. If the girl earns her halo, she becomes a 'good' woman like the other women."

As we chat during the interview, I glance through her paintings. It's clear women are a tool, a figure in service to men, but not just any servant - a Virgin Mary-like servant, the ideal woman. "They're also dressed like the Virgin Mary, all of

them. The closer she is to being a virgin, the closer she is to the idealistic woman, giving herself up in service to a man to make him happy and to make him comfortable. That's a good woman."

You may be thinking, "Wow, why do men treat women this way?" or "Why are the women doing this?" In the end, it's both men and women responsible for the perpetuation of this culture. It's the everyday abuses of misogyny from both men and women on men and women. Irisol adds, "My series is not so much about this is what men are. It's about how women are also participants and active subjects passing it on to their children and continue to support machismo. I find it interesting that when people talk about misogyny they tend to go directly to abuse. But, what I am saying is it's the little things in our everyday that's making the difference and pulling the strings."

What are these everyday misogynies?



Machismo #1 by Irisol Gonzalez (2020) is the first piece in her Machismo series.



“A mom feeding meat to only the men is telling your daughters you are not worthy enough, you are not equal to a man. What does that do to your self-esteem growing up and the things that you allow to happen?”

Say, a woman who has 4 girls and 1 boy, teaches those girls to care for that boy. That boy grows up and he doesn't know how to care for himself. He's not a self-sufficient adult.

Telling boys that you can't cry. Imagine not being able to cry? I think about this all the time. How would you take that out not being able to cry? Not being able to express yourself and release in that way? Or, having men not be able to appreciate the beauty of a flower. Why would you take that sensibility away? It's those little things that eventually you are creating a sociopath. You don't know how to process emotion. The only thing you go to is anger.”

The men and women in her paintings are simply reflections of the culprits and the victims, the actors and the perpetrators, the men and the women in our daily life passing down machismo, from one generation to the next. Telling the boys and men they're saints requiring no self-sufficiency, and the girls they are merely saintly servants if they learn to be. Irisol's art is simply showing this.

“It's very easy when you see abuse and say that's not me. When you see someone feeding someone else something different, you're like okay well maybe that is. It hits you differently. It's a sting you feel because you don't expect it. If somebody is talking crap about your everyday life, then at that point you've got decisions to make.

And now, you know. Now, you know this is wrong. Now, you know that this is wrong, and you either change it or you're a hypocrite. But you can't unknow it, and that's what I want.”

Image: Machismo #2 by Irisol Gonzalez (2020) as part of her Machismo series.

So what's the response to these jarring, eye-opening, slap-in-the-face pieces? Well, pretty darn positive, and if it isn't, it's doing its job. "It's been great. It's created so much conversation and fights. Actually, in my family, it was really funny. We were talking about service and the value of these women. If you were to put a price on the service they give to these men, they (men) wouldn't be able to pay for it. If you had to get a babysitter, somebody to cook for you, somebody to clean your house, they wouldn't be able to pay for it. That created a whole lot of chaos."

Isn't that the purpose of art? To create release, conversations, and inspire change? To be a mirror of ourselves, our lives, our cultures. Toastee certainly thinks so, and so does Irisol. In fact, she's only getting started on Machismo and will be producing over 40 pieces this year! From a giant mural resembling The Last Supper to smaller paintings focusing on the deeply personal and the more light-hearted experiences of her life.

But the artist has more for herself and her community. "I'm going to be doing murals this year. I have some that I'm doing around Charlotte with Latinx neighborhoods. I want to bring in community murals and activate spaces in those neighborhoods. I noticed that a lot of the art stays in certain areas. That's why I want to bring it into these other areas where it's not as accessible. Art does you good. It's good for the soul. It makes people feel like they're a part of something," she tells me.

From a childhood in Costa Rica to finding her hybrid Latin-American identity in North Carolina to now challenging and celebrating her heritage, Irisol is certainly stepping out, turning heads, raising hell, and starting much-needed reflections and conversations. We are sure to be seeing more of her in the future.

To learn more about Irisol, check out her artwork, and connect for a commission visit her website [www.irisolgonzalez.com](http://www.irisolgonzalez.com). Make sure to keep up to date with her and the Machismo series follow her on social @irisolgonzalezart on Instagram and Facebook.

If you like this story on Irisol, her more about her from the artist herself. Check out her on CreativeMornings on Youtube, which starts at minute 55.



The brains the talent behind Climate Change Action and the Machismo series - Irisol Gonzalez. Photographer: CHD:WCK! photography.

# ETHICAL FASHION INSPIRED BY THE POWER OF THE MOON.



With all of us at home during the pandemic, our sweatpants and athleisure have become our everyday staples. If we're going to be home all day, we may as well be comfortable right? I know I have.

But shouldn't we feel that the clothes we wear make us look good and we feel cute in them? Shouldn't they be made with fabrics that won't hurt the Earth we inhabit? Shouldn't they be made by skilled workers who are treated fairly and paid a living wage? Shouldn't our clothing purchases support brands that are truly working on diversity, not just advertising it?

That's where Julia Ahrens and Miakoda come in. Miakoda is Julia's one-woman show clothing company. Julia designs, manufactures, and advertises her products sustainably and ethically in NYC! She uses her growing platform





Julia Ahrens, founder and designer behind Miakoda.

to raise environmental and social issues through the brands and influencers she works with and the models she hires. Not to mention, I love her clothes, and Julia is an absolutely lovely person. When putting together the Herstory issue, Julia was one of the first women I thought of, and I had the absolute pleasure of speaking with her about her company, social sustainability, and what we can do to play a part.

**Julia, Miakoda is 8 years old. Congrats! Can you tell us more about how you started Miakoda?**

I went to Parsons School of Design and at the end of my junior year, I went vegan. That summer I worked at Club Monaco. I met one of my best friends there, and I just loved working at the company. I wanted to work there, but I had this moral and ethical

debate in my head. I was working in accessories and they wanted me to work with leather.

I remember one day I was stapling leather to pieces of paper for them. I was like, "This is a cow's skin and I'm stapling it to paper." I was a shoe fanatic before that. I was buying designer shoes, leather shoes. I never thought about it before that. Going vegan changed my mindset and I just couldn't do this. That was a pivotal moment for me.

I started learning about environmentalism and ethical fashion around the same time the Dhaka factory collapsed in Bangladesh. Ethical fashion became more of a thing that was in people's minds and conversations. I was interviewing at other companies like J Crew, and other higher-end designer companies, but I don't even know where they made the clothes. I turned to my mom and my dad and said, "I just can't do this."

I remember we went to Paris and London for my college graduation. My mom told me that I could pick out one piece of clothing from the high-end department stores that I want to buy to remember this trip and celebrate my graduation. I couldn't find anything. I didn't know where it was made. I didn't know what it was made of. I felt so distressed. My sister turned to me on that trip and said, "If you can't find what you're looking for, other people must be looking for it too and you should start it on your own."

She's a silent partner in Miakoda because when I started I didn't have the money to start. I worked all through college, all through high school, so I took my savings and money from my sister and said, "Okay I'm doing this." She's never made a penny off of Miakoda because it's really hard to make money as a small business, but she's super supportive. She's always gung-ho about everything that I'm doing and questions me to be a better person and Miakoda to be a better brand. That's pretty much how it started.

The first 5 years were the hardest. I was constantly like, "What am I doing?!" I had no idea how to do this, I've made many very expensive mistakes, and finally, in the 6th and 7th year, I have a business.

My number one advice to people starting is not to expect to make money in their first 5 years. It's really difficult. There's a lot of really expensive mistakes. You'll make money and you'll spend a lot of money. I considered it my crash course in business school because it's like I paid for another college education or master's degree because of the very expensive mistakes.

**You speak a lot about sustainability on your company's blog and on social media. For our readers who are new to you, what does sustainability mean to you?**

The biggest thing it means to me is something that you can continue for a long time. There are so many things in the fashion industry that just aren't going to last. Clothing won't last. The way



Laura Ahrens (left) co-owner of Miakoda and sister of Julia (right).

workers are underpaid, they can't sustain their life. Being able to sustain the people that support you is really important to me and not hurting our planet. Sustainability means working with environmentally-friendly materials, paying everyone we work with a fair living wage, and then social sustainability came into play this year.

When George Floyd was murdered and Black Lives Matter became a movement, I looked at myself and said, "What am I doing to not perpetuate racism and social injustice?" Of course, I've been interested in working with models of different ethnicities and sizes, but it's really not enough.

I ended up talking to one of the modeling agencies that I've been working with this year, We Speak Models. They

are amazing, and they have the most inclusive group of models and all of their models are the nicest, most talented people.

They asked if I was interested in talking about anti-racism and social inequality with one of their models, who is passionate about this, and wants to help brands who care about these matters to be better about it. I was like, "Yep, put me in touch with her."

Her name is Quincie Zairi, and we ended up working together. She consulted me on how we could do better and what we can do, including working with Black models who have darker skin or aren't the Americanized sense of beauty. I never realized but they don't get signed agencies. Quincie was working with an agency that



said they couldn't add another Black model. There's a limited number of Black models, but they can put as many white models as they want. Seriously?

So, I went back and looked at all the Black models I used. Of course, they're beautiful, wonderful, talented beings, but they all look very European. Quincie gave me suggestions of models to work with and Black brands and people of color. I've found so many amazing brands through this.

Starting a business for me was hard enough. I struggled. But she was explaining how difficult it was for minorities. I went and lived with my parents. I lived with my mom and I didn't have to worry about paying bills, paying rent. Many people don't have that same ability growing up in lower-income families. Their parents need them to help pull their weight, and they don't have the same parental support. I'm very grateful for that opportunity.



Quincie Zari who worked with Julia on social sustainability. Photo by Rochelle Brock.

Working with Quincie was amazing. She's an incredible model. She's an awesome human being. After we finished working together, she could have been done with me. Instead, she sent me an email follow-up saying, "Hey I know you're trying really hard and you're doing a great job, but maybe you should do XYZ." I was like OMG thank you! She would follow up again and say, "You're doing a great job, you're really taking on what we talked about into consideration." I was like "Aah thank you!" because you never really know.

You don't always realize your prejudices. She said being racist isn't necessarily a negative thing because everyone is a little bit racist to some degree. You shouldn't be defensive of, "Oh I'm not racist." It should be, "Let me introspectively look at myself and see where I have my biases." Maybe I have fewer biases than someone who we would label as racist, but there are always opportunities to be better.

That's one of the things that I've learned in business is to listen to feedback because there are always opportunities to grow and do better and be better. Taking that feedback from other people just makes you a better person and a better brand.

**Wow! That's awesome! So, how do you design your clothes and products so that they are sustainable?**

One of the things I've been working on in 2020 is expanding our size range. I want to be body positive

because beauty standards absolutely suck in America and all over the world, and breaking those beauty standards has always been important to me.

I've always wanted my customers to be able to relate to that model, influencer, and the person wearing the clothes, and want to wear that too because it makes them feel beautiful to see themselves represented. When I look at a website and there are tall, size double 0 women who have no legs, I don't relate to that at all. It makes me feel terrible, and it must make other people who really can't see themselves feel terrible.

Also, body image for women is so messed up. I want to counter that but my size range only went up to XXL. I saw so many people talking about inclusive sizing, but it's really hard to make a lot of sizes because it's really expensive. When I went up to XXL, my XXLs did not sell. I had to pay people to buy them. It was ridiculous. So, if I had to expand my size range, how am I going to get people with plus-size bodies to buy my clothing? I spoke to clothing brands who do inclusive sizing and they said it was absolutely worth it, just go for it, and you're gonna see that it's really rewarding.

I spoke to Fruit Label and Sotella who are two amazing companies. They're incredible owners with incredible missions, they're both sustainable, ethically made, all the goodness in the world, and they have inclusive sizing. I looked at them and that's where I want to be. I want to do that because it's important. So, I've been working on that in 2020. Being inclusive with sizing and going up to 4XL, so that it can fit up to a size 28 where our previous size went up to size 16/18. I'm super excited about that.

It's also about using eco-friendly materials and using ethical manufacturing practices. I went to our factory yesterday. I got there at 4 o'clock and there was no one there because they're mothers and they want to be home with their families. That was the thing that sold me on the factory I work with. The first time I went there, the owner said to come at 4 o'clock. I showed up at 4 o'clock and it was empty. I



Headband (\$14). Sweatshirt 3.0 (\$50). French Terry Jogger (\$92). Model is Bri Scalesse. Photo by Stephanie Price.

was like where are all of your sewers. He says, "They prefer to come in early so that they can be home with their families." I love that.

It's not a sweatshop where they're working until 9 o'clock at night or midnight, not getting paid, not getting breaks. During the pandemic, he picked them up and drove them to the factory so that they didn't have to take public transport and bought them food from local restaurants so that they could have the business. I was like that's exactly who I want to work with.

**I know manufacturing and manufacturing in fashion don't have the best reputation. How did you find this incredible manufacturer?**

The first factory that I worked with was a tiny factory in Manhattan that I worked with when I was in

college. The owner was great but the prices were high. We've actually lowered Miakoda's prices substantially since then. Before there was nothing under \$100 because my cost of manufacturing was so expensive. I didn't know their full ethics because of this big language barrier but everyone seemed happy working there and eating together.

Then I moved to another factory. The main people who worked at the front of the factory spoke English well and it was easy to communicate with them. They all assured me it was great. Then they pulled the wool over my eyes and hiked my prices up, mid-production run, and were terrible partners. I thought, "If they're doing this to me, what are they doing to other people?" I just went in, took all my stuff, and decided that I'm going to do a lot of research when picking my next production partner.

I met so many factories that were all smoke and mirrors and just tell you what you want. When I met Eric, who does our production now, he was just so nice. He sat and talked with me for 2 hours, and he wasn't getting paid, he was just chatting with me. People would come in and talk to him. Someone would ask if they could leave now and he would be like, "Yeah, you can leave." He had Fashion Revolution posters up at the front of his factory, and he was very proud to have it made in America. He is who I wanted to work with. He is so wonderful.

### **What advice do you have on how we can be conscious consumers and be more sustainable and socially sustainable?**

Counterintuitive to what a brand would say, because brands need to make money, is to buy less and buy from companies who you feel are doing really good things. The way I've transformed my life shop is that I look for brands who are doing really cool things. This

past year I've bought a jumpsuit from Sotella, and a shirt and a pair of pants from Free Label. My parents got me a pair of boots from Good Guys Don't Wear Leather, which is another really cool company. Besides that, everything that I've bought has been second-hand.

It's so easy to get wrapped up in trends. Try to buy from a small company that's doing what you want to see brands doing. It may be hard to find companies out there who are doing it but they are there. Instagram is a great place to find those companies and connect with them. If you send that company a DM or an email and you ask them a question and they don't give you an answer, then they don't deserve your money.

That's why I have a whole section about sustainability, ethics, and what we're doing in social sustainability. If you're not putting it out there, you're probably not doing it. If you are doing it, trust me, it's very expensive and very time-consuming, you're going



The Oversized Tee (\$62). Model is Vish Singh. Photo by Rochelle Brock.

Julia Ahrens, founder and designer behind Miakoda.



to want to share that with people because you're going to want to connect with people who care about what you're doing and what you're spending so much time on.

If a company is just spending a lot of time on designing something, they're going to show you. If ethics, sustainability, and social sustainability are just as important as the product, then they will be highlighted.

**What advice do you have for other businesses on how they can be ethical, sustainable, and socially sustainable?**

You have to care about it. Miakoda is the lovechild of my ethics and morals, so everything that I believe and I wanted to see in a company I put in Miakoda. If you don't care about these things but you want your brand to care about these things, you're going to have to care about these things.

You'll make mistakes along the way. I've done things that I look back and wish I didn't do. I wish I read more about recycled polyester and how it sheds more in the wash and how it's questionably

sustainable. I used it before in my line, and then I realized it's not something that you want to use because when you wash it, it goes right back into the waterways. Now, we're not going to use that and I'm gonna share with you why we're no longer using this.

You'll learn and you'll make mistakes, but you need to be open to mistakes and open to learning. The biggest thing is that it needs to be coming from a place of passion and that you truly care about it.

**What's next for Miakoda? I know you've been talking about expanding your size range.**

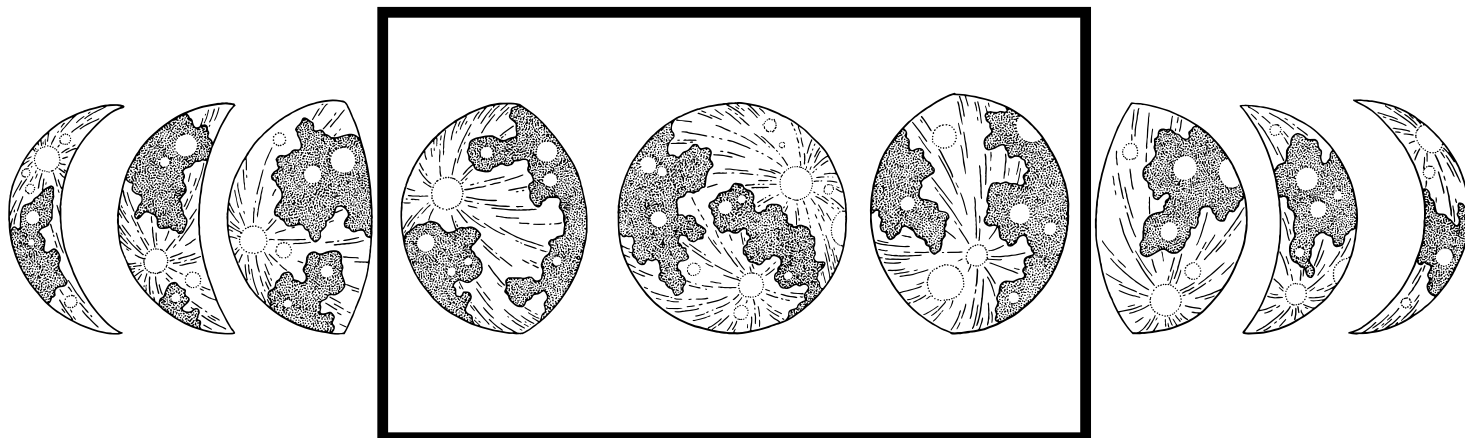
That's my number 1 excitement for 2021. It's been something that I've been thinking about for a long time. It's also a huge source of guilt for me. I feel bad that I haven't done this. I've had people reach out saying that they would love to wear my clothing but I have not given them that opportunity. I think it's a horrible feeling to look at something and to think that's really cute but then feeling bad about your body because you can't fit into it. That's wrong.

Also, you can't just grade the pattern to be

bigger for plus sizes. Their body distributes weight and increases in size in a different way than grading XS, S, M, L. Even XXL you should probably refit the patterns, but I just never did that. Now, I've fixed a lot of the XXL patterns for this year's editions, but it's very time-consuming and expensive. With the pandemic and getting a loan and stimulus check for my business, I decided I'm going to put all this money into expanding our size range. That's the thing I'm most excited about. That's my number 1 plan.

I've also reconnected with my best friend from my Club Monaco days. She started a small company that's ethically made and sustainable. I love her company and I love what's she's doing and what she stands for. We're doing a collaboration and I'm so excited about it. It's bras and underwear. Many people have asked for that in the past, and it will be her first size-inclusive line. I'm just excited to work with someone passionate about the same things that I'm passionate about.

Shop Miakoda's line of ethical clothing at [www.miakodanewyork.com](http://www.miakodanewyork.com). Keep up to what's happening with Miakoda @miakodanewyork on Facebook and Instagram. You can also follow Julia's life and inspiration @miakodamoodboard on Instagram.



# Ethical #OOTD

## WITH MIAKODA

Miakoda is an eco-friendly, sustainable, and ethically made comfy clothing company in the heart of New York. We worked with them to curate two comfy, cute, and eco-friendly outfits for every body.

### The Tank Crop Top (\$58)

The perfect fitted crop. Soft to the touch and cut just above the belly button. Pair with some high-waisted bottoms or layer under another top for an outfit that will flatter any figure.

### High Waisted Leggings (\$98)

A fan favorite, the high-waisted leggings are made with bamboo for a super soft, moisture-wicking stretch. Perfect for yoga, hiking, HIT, or our favorite activity: lounging on the couch watching Netflix.



Left: Model is Constance Smith. Photo by Stephanie Price.  
Right: Model is Yel Rennalls. Photo by Stephanie Price.



## **The Moon Headband (\$14)**

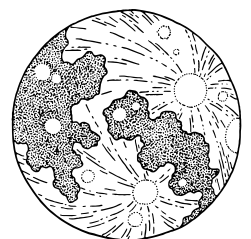
The right headband can make a world of difference and complete any outfit. So why not go for one inspired by the power of the moon that's also good for the Earth!

## **Sweatshirt 3.0 (\$50)**

It's time to get cozy and cute! The Sweatshirt 3.0 blends comfort and style with a box cut that goes with every body in every season.

## **The French Terry Jogger (\$92)**

Comfy, warm, and extremely soft with a slimming fit that will spruce up any stay-at-home outfit for an afternoon walk or the weekly shop.



You can order all of these items at [www.miakodanewyork.com](http://www.miakodanewyork.com). Make sure to follow them @miakodanewyork on Instagram and Facebook for more Ethical OOTD inspiration!

# Going Against the Crowd

## JESS BAILEY

An interview with entrepreneur and founder of Crowdfund 360 by Elizabeth Harris.

Crowdfunding has become such a phenomenon. Being a digital nomad is now one of the dream careers. Behind these trends are a lot of hard work and thought.

I spoke with Jes Bailey. Jes is the founder of Crowdfund 360 which focuses on coaching, training and supporting crowdfunding campaigns for both startups and third sector organizations. She's even conducted training sessions for the UN and EU!

Because her work takes her everywhere and she can work from anywhere, before the pandemic, Jes was living the digital nomad life, traveling across Europe and working pretty much anywhere her heart desired. I talked with Jes about crowdfunding, living a modern nomadic life, and their hard realities.

**Jes, can you start by telling our Toastee Audience a little about how you began in the arena of crowdfunding?**

Before starting Crowdfund 360, I worked in Human Rights and International Development and I thought I wanted to be a human rights lawyer. My undergraduate degree was in Geography and International Development, and I wanted to work in the field for a bit before I committed to a Masters. As much as I liked human rights law, I realized I was never going to be one of those stereotypical lawyers - I like wearing jeans and flip flops and I don't like mornings, I don't like dressing up in 'office attire'. I like hula hooping and surfing in my spare time!



Jes Bailey, digital nomad and founder of Crowdfund 360, giving a presentation on crowdfunding.



I was working in The Hague (the Netherlands), on a human rights project in Bangladesh and got frustrated wondering if the work was actually doing anything, or were we just spending all our time chasing EU money. I went out to Bangladesh, and thought, you can change the law, but bad people are still going to do bad things. We were working to get street kids out of jail. They get rounded up on the streets, put in jail, and are forgotten about until they are 18, as they are not in any systems. We used to go into the jails, identify the street kids and try to figure out where they had come from. From this, I thought it's not the law that needs to change, it's the awareness.

I like graphic design as well as the academic paper side of studying, so felt communications was a more suitable field of study to pursue and began looking at masters in the political and communications sector. There was one Masters in Political Communications in Amsterdam, and as I was already living in Holland, where it was 10 times cheaper than the one in London for Human Rights law! Amsterdam is the best place in Europe for communication science, and I thought that's the one for me. Because of the work I had been doing in the charity sector, I did my thesis and all my research on the non-governmental sector rather than the political sector. My thesis was about interactivity and charitable giving.

Say for example I see a charity advert in a newspaper, a video ad, or an ad in an app, my research was asking: does it affect how likely people are to give money, and does that affect how much money people give? This would help charities understand how best to raise money from individual people. Obviously, that's quite linked to crowdfunding!

After my Master's, I applied for three jobs, one in Bangladesh, one in Holland, and one in London. The one in London was at a crowdfunding platform, and the others were in the social enterprise/charity sector. I thought to myself, this crowdfunding thing seems cool because it's related to my thesis. I have never lived in London and it had been 6 years since I was back in the UK, so wanted to give that a go. I'd done Holland, I'd done Bangladesh, let's see what London is like!

I handed my thesis in on a Friday and started the job on Monday, so I had one weekend to pick everything up and move back to the UK. It was a rollercoaster, but I loved it. I went all around England training small charities on crowdfunding and teaching workshops. I taught an online course to charities all across the world about how to crowdfund. I loved it and thought this is what I want to do.

My contract came to an end and I went to all the other platforms and asked for a job. Back in 2016, none of the platforms hired anyone to help organizations succeed - which

is ridiculous! The Head of Europe at Indiegogo and I met for a coffee (I was asking for a job) and he told me I'd never get hired by a platform. They have too many campaigns and that I should go set up my own business because people needed what I was doing.

At the time, I never thought I'd set up a business. I always thought I'd work in the charity sector. I carried on applying for other jobs in PR, Comms- but this niggly in the back of my mind kept telling me if I don't take this chance now, when am I going to in the future? At that point I had really low rent, living with some family members, I didn't have any dependents, no worries with life. If it all went wrong, that was a great time for it to all go wrong! I wasn't going to lose much, I was the only one starving at the end of the day. And that was 4 years ago.



Jes Bailey at the UN after running a crowdfunding sessions with them.

**Congratulations on making it 4 years in the game! How has it been building the business? The beginning was relatively easy.**

I think for a lot of people the beginning is easier because it's the time when everyone is enthusiastic and wants to support you. It's the time when all your friends share your website, there is support from incubators, networks, and there are a lot of workshops and webinars for new businesses. I was lucky in that crowdfunding was a known thing, and I already had clients lined up and ready for when I left my previous role. After the first 6 months, the excitement of a new business and we want to help you's wear out.

Crowdfunding is very seasonal. It's really hard to raise money in the summer, and again in the December and January period. In the summer everyone is on holiday and not thinking about looking at a computer screen. In December-January everyone is thinking about Christmas. My 6-month mark coincided with summer and all my first clients' fundraising campaigns ended, but no one was interested in signing up to do it again. People might want to raise money in September, but they're not necessarily thinking about it in July, they're still on holiday mode.

I started questioning my decision to start a business, I had no income, no clients- it's a complete disaster! September came around and



Jes running a crowdfunding workshop at a startup center.

it went straight back up. So the next year, I knew it was going to be bad in the summer. Even in an average month, the last week is the hardest as everyone is waiting to get paid, but the first week is great because everyone has got paid. Even during the week, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are the best days to launch a campaign, because everyone is procrastinating at work. Friday and Sunday are the worst days as everyone is too busy thinking about work and doesn't want to look at a computer screen.

**I've also worked in the Charity Sector, and I wanted to ask about your experience.**

There are misconceptions about when you fundraise and raise money, and how this can help support the charity. There are loads of misconceptions. The

biggest misconception is that small charities can't run big crowdfunding campaigns, but actually small charities and organizations do better at crowdfunding than big ones because they have a face and a personality.

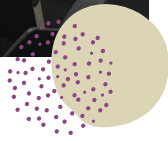
Crowdfunding needs every person in the organization to be involved. If the founder doesn't care, if the operations manager doesn't use their network, it won't work. A lot of other people just see the task of fundraising as a task for the fundraiser's role, but they all need to work as a team. A lot of my early work is talking with the entire team to get everyone to buy into this.

The other big issues are time and resources. A lot of the roles are part-time, they have other things to do. Crowdfunding is 24/7 once you get into it. You get pledges every day, you need to update every day, and as much as you can schedule these things, a lot of the other things happen like getting a request for



Detail

Jes running a crowdfunding session.



a radio interview or a TV promo for a campaign. You can't say "No, sorry I don't work on Tuesdays." That is not going to be good for your campaign. PR like this can really blow up the project.

The biggest misconception about crowdfunding is that people just want to give you money. The number of emails I get that saying, "I want to raise a million pounds but I don't have an email list or a social media following." No one is going to come and run towards you and buy it if they haven't heard what you're doing. If you go out into the street and ask for money, people are going to ignore you. It's the same online, most people are going to ignore you. Emails have a conversion rate of 25% whereas a Facebook post has a conversion rate of only 4% - imagine how big your following would need to be if you relied only on social media.

We always have a minimum of 2 months of preparation. Once you click live, there is no going back. We all know that first impressions are key. If people come to me halfway through a campaign looking for it to be saved, it is a lot of hard work as there may already be a sour taste in the audience's mouth. We're not starting at a neutral level, we're starting in a negative zone and trying to bring people up to positive which is very hard.

It's all about the preparation work and spending as much time and resources and effort as possible to make sure that prep work is going to work. When the campaign is live, you have 5 weeks of emails ready and the social media posts ready beforehand. All that's changing on the halfway email is how much money has been raised. When

the campaign is live, it's much more important to be having phone calls and coffee meetings where possible with people who would be giving you larger amounts of money because no one is going to give you a larger sum of money after reading an email - they want to meet you, talk to you, face to face, have a chat about the plans, brainstorm, do their due diligence. If there is no time for that because emails are being written or you're creating social media posts then that investment is most likely lost. The preparation is there to make the campaign as smooth as possible.

I always tell people, if you just want the money don't bother crowdfunding because it is so much work. But if you want to grow your email list, increase your social media following and the engagement that you get with them, if you want to get PR and press coverage, if you want to build up a little pool of ambassadors or volunteers that are super pro your organization, if you want to use the successful campaign in future funding bids or for future investment to show that you can get that many customers or donors in 35 days, then it's worth it. But if you just need a one-off sum, then there are going to be easier ways to find that money.

**Jes, you used to travel all around Europe and beyond giving presentations and training sessions. Would you describe yourself as a digital nomad?**



Jes with her bags living the digital nomad life.

Not at the moment. Pre-pandemic in 2018, yes, I was in 12 countries and took 17 flights. In 2019 I decided not to catch an airplane. It felt like I'd spent all of 2018 in the airport, I needed a break. I got a camper van with solar power so I could drive and work. At the end of 2018, I had been so sick of living out of Airbnb, I wanted to have my own space, a base that I could travel from.

It's not as glamorous. I remember in October 2018 I woke up one morning in a hotel in the North of England, and I just thought to myself, "I don't know where I am, what city am I in again?" It had been a crazy month where I had been in different cities in England, Scotland, and Germany in one month, it was ridiculous. I woke up thinking, "I think I'm in England. I think, but it could be Scotland, but I don't remember what city I'm in." It took me some time to remember, and it threw me all day, I felt so disjointed. I don't think people talk about the flip side of it enough because you get so used to it, and it's so idealized on Instagram and all those things. The reality is it can be really hard.

### **From 2016 to now, what are some of the ups and downs?**

The biggest ups have been looking back on it and seeing how far I've come. I did not think I'd be in the position to have my own business. No one in my family went to university, I'm the only person in my family to have left the country, the second to have left our town, so I went outside the box!

I didn't know it would go as well as it has. I've managed to buy a house, on my own, after 3 years. Looking back now and thinking about 2016 Jes, if I had known what was

coming for me, I don't think I would have believed it. The opportunity to live a life I want to live, travel where and when I want, for however long I want. There have been times in the 4 years where I've questioned why I chose this, if my life would be better if I'd taken a more traditional trajectory, but, right now I wouldn't change it. I'm thankful for 2016 Jes for being brave and taking that jump, it was a good decision.

But, there are downs. If you get sick when self-employed, it's really hard. 2019 was not a good year for me. I threw myself into work and I paid for that later on. I live far from family members, and I have to earn money to pay rent. This year I also injured my neck and I could not work as much as I wanted to. I don't have that safety net as much as in a typical job. The upsides are that I did a workshop for the UN, I was on BBC radio, I traveled to over 20 countries doing crowdfunding workshops. My best friend is in LA, so I don't get to see her, but I went to LA for a month and worked there. She had to go to Portugal, so I just went there for a month because I could. So having that freedom makes it worth it.

### **What advice would you have for our readers who want to start their own business and venture out on their own?**

You're never going to know enough so just do it. Know some stuff, but research where you want to go, where you'd like to live, and if there is internet service. You'll never know everything, but you'll never think you're ready enough to launch.

Another bit of advice is don't jump in the deep end straight away. Wind down your current role, going full-time to part-time, build the idea up- the website, the logo, the blog articles, the YouTube videos. Build your offering to a point where you're ready to sell with customers. I built my first online course over the Christmas break in



A glimpse into Jes' van life as a digital nomad.

2016 so when January 1st came, I knew I had a product to sell to everyone else.

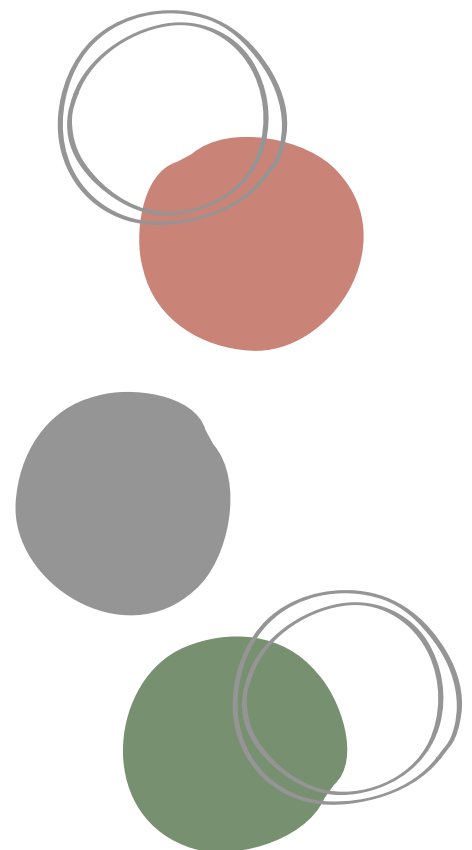
### **What's next for you Jes?**

I've just launched a new course on how to build a crowd to help those in the really early days of launching a business. It is about targeting people before even thinking about crowdfunding, before launching a new product. It covers building a landing page that's going to convert into email addresses, building a mail chimp funnel, building a social media following, and finding your target market so that you are ready to crowdfund and you have an engaged audience of customers ready. I'll focus on this for the first half of this year, and see if it's a good offering.

I'm also working on my clients, keeping my success rate high, and educating people that crowdfunding is a lot of work. We do a lot of youtube videos with people who have crowdfunded to talk about the ups and downs, to talk about what worked and what didn't to share with people who want to crowdfund.

Inspired to learn more about crowdfunding and plan a crowdfunding campaign, check out Jes' company Crowdfund 360 at [www.crowdfund-360.com](http://www.crowdfund-360.com).

You can find resources and her crowdfunding services there. Make sure to keep up to date with Jes and Crowdfund 360 by following her on social @crowdfund360 on Twitter and @jes\_crowdfund360 on Instagram.



# STORM CHASER

## THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

By Elizabeth Harris



Storm chasers have a reputation as being reckless daredevils, searching for the next storm. In reality, many storm chasers are just really big nerds keen on observing weather systems and show a very healthy appreciation for the forces of meteorology. In a typically male-dominated community, women are making their own stake in the storm chasing and weather communities. Women like Chelsea Burnett.

Chelsea Burnett is a storm chaser and weather safety educator. She knows first-hand the awe and the impact extreme weather events can have. It was instilled in her from a young age. She grew up in Oklahoma, an area with such frequent tornadoes and storms it's known as Tornado Alley. Big weather events were a part of regular life for Chelsea. Unlike other kids, Chelsea wasn't scared but fascinated by these monstrous storms.

"I would wake up in the middle of the night and hear the storms. I would get up out of bed and peek out the blinds and try to stay up and watch it. I just had this pre-built-in passion for weather.

I remember one summer in middle school, I was given an alarm clock that had a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) weather radar. It had a button that you could press on the radio and it would play the forecast. I was obsessed!

One summer I documented the weather at the time and my observations. I kept a diary over a summer of what the weather conditions were. I still have that diary too," she recalls.

A tornado photographed by Chelsea Burnett.

With encouragement from her family, Chelsea's passion for weather grew, but it didn't start to directly influence her life's direction until May 3rd, 1999, the Bridge Creek–Moore tornado. A total of 74 tornadoes touched down across Oklahoma and Kansas in one day. The aftermath was a total loss of 40 lives, almost 700 injured, and extensive damage to homes and infrastructure totaling over \$1.2 Billion and even impacted Chelsea's family. It inspired her to turn her passion into a lifelong career: "I had one plan: to get a degree in meteorology from the University of Oklahoma which is one of the top schools for meteorology."

Chelsea was admitted to her dream school and her dream program at the best college for meteorology in the US. But, life had other plans. Chelsea was one of the 75% of her meteorology class that did not go on to graduate. Resilient, she moved down to Dallas-Fort Worth to start a new path.

In Texas, Chelsea was first introduced to a community of storm chasers. "2010 is when I went to my first weather conference. I didn't know it was a thing [Neither did Toastee!]. I met David Rightmer, owner of Texas Stormchasers. We hit it off, and he asked me to go storm chasing with him." Chelsea dabbled in Storm Chasing before a different front hit her - Life. Chelsea got married, bought a house, started a family, and storm chasing and weather took a back seat in her life.

In 2015 Chelsea saw her very first tornado up, close, and center, "After that, I just hit it in high gear. I was newly divorced, and I decided then that a big change was happening in my life so I should change everything else in my life that I was unhappy with. I got a new job, and I was able to spend more time with my son, who was 18 months at the time. All these things led up to where I am now," she tells me.

Where is she now? Chelsea is now a solid member of the weather community and a 5-year member of Texas Storm Chasers. On top of that, she uses her passion for weather to help with national data gathering and is actively changing our perceptions of storm chasers.

"There are many storm chasers like me who really enjoy being out there. In turn, we're able to take what we see, what's happening,



Chelsea Burnett. Storm chaser and weather safety educator.

and we can relay that information back to the National Weather Service all with a few taps on an app called RadarScope. I document what we see and what's happening which the National Weather Service can't see. Their meteorologists are in the office looking at the radar, they can only see what's happening on the radar and guess what's going on. They use us as storm chasers to confirm there's about to be a tornado and issue a tornado warning. That's the majority of storm chasers.

We don't earn money from this. This is not a steady salary job or hourly job by any means for anyone. We are family people, we have jobs, and we have commitments outside of storm chasing," she shares.

Chelsea is using her platform with Texas Storm Chasers and her experiences to educate the community on weather safety, particularly in her own area of Dallas-Fort Worth, which is flourishing with a new influx of migration. It's the city with the highest annual population growth in the United States. "A lot of these people are coming in from California, from the East Coast, from up North. They have no clue what our weather is like here until they spend Spring with us. The overall mission of Texas Storm Chasers is to provide content and information for people. We are an additional source where they can find non-hyped, straightforward information," Chelsea explains.

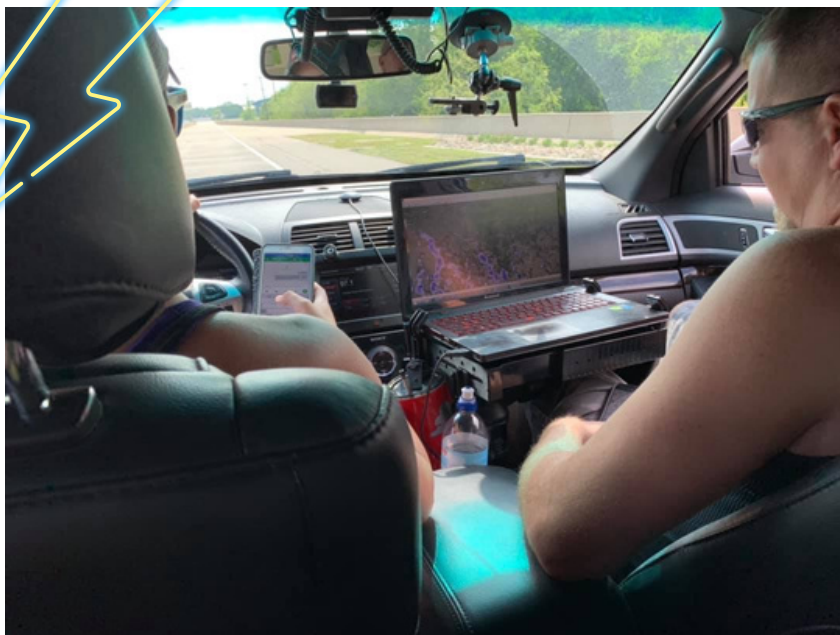
Through her weather safety presentations, Chelsea educates kids in Scouts BSA and schools, promotes awareness in corporate seminars and members of Homeowner Associations. With the pandemic pushing everything in life to the internet, she can now reach even more people who would have not been otherwise able to afford one of her presentations.

For Chelsea, the best part of becoming a storm chaser is joining a

community of fellow weather self-described nerds, and using her storm chasing for the greater good. Not content with just volunteering time to collect data for the National Weather Service, Chelsea helps those affected by extreme weather and tornadoes like the one that ignited her lifelong interest.

"So many storm chasers are truly compassionate for others. One night there was a tornado event that my spouse and several other chasers were following. They stopped at a house that had just been hit and pulled an elderly gentleman out of a basement. People like us will stop the chase in a heartbeat to help out where we're needed. We're the first people on the scene and we can make a difference," Chelsea explains.

It's more than just the thrill of the chase for Chelsea, the center of her work remains her childhood passion and respect for weather. As Chelsea says, "There are more opportunities than spotting tornadoes the entire time."



Storm chasers on the road during the pursuit of a storm. Photo by Jason Cooley.

You can learn more about Chelsea's work in storm chasing and weather safety at [texasstormchasers.com](https://texasstormchasers.com). You can also follow them [@texasstormchasers](https://www.instagram.com/texasstormchasers) on Instagram and Facebook and [@txstormchasers](https://twitter.com/txstormchasers) on Twitter.



# A Cost to STRENGTH

An interview with Clinical Psychologist, Researcher, and Mental Health and Wellbeing Expert, Dr. Akilah Reynolds by Elizabeth Harris.



Dr. Akilah Reynolds. Clinical Psychologist, Researcher, and Mental Health and Wellbeing Expert. Photography by Onye Creative Studios. Make-up by Brandon Horsely-Thompson.

We can all agree that this past year of the pandemic has brought extra stress to our lives, but it has also put a brighter spotlight on the importance of mindfulness and mental health. The Black Lives Matter movement, protesting police brutality and systematic racism brought Black mental health and wellbeing to the forefront of much of society. Toastee Mag had the honor of speaking with Dr. Akilah Reynolds.

Dr. Akilah is a psychologist at The Black Girl Doctor, a co-founder of SBW Wellness Collaborative, and a curriculum consultant for the University of California Los Angeles. A frequent contributor and public speaker, including being a guest on Taraji P. Henson's show Peace of Mind, Dr. Akilah is a rising star that you will definitely be hearing more of in the future.

**Dr. Akilah, Toastee is very proud to speak with such an accomplished and recognized psychologist and advocate. Can you tell us how you got started in psychology and mental health?**

I didn't grow up wanting to be a psychologist. When I got into college I was an undeclared, undecided major. I had a lot of interests, and I used that time in college to try a lot of different things and see what worked well for me.

Originally, I started majoring in psychology because it was interesting to me. I ended up being a psychologist because I thought it was the best route to provide healthcare to help people in need and tackle a subject that I think is really important, but what is not always at the forefront - our mental health. It became

about wanting to help myself because I felt there was a lot I could grow and learn about. I also wanted to help my family and to help my community. I'm a jack of many trades, and I have my hands in many things, and I have a lot of different interests. I thought psychology would allow me to multi-task, do multiple things, and nurse the many interests that I have.

As I went through a lot of schooling and training, I started to see myself grow. That's when I really started to sip the kool-aid. Through my Master's degree, my Ph.D., and my 2 years at a post-doc fellowship, I think that during the process the biggest thing that would happen is that I would change, that I would grow, and that I would feel better.

I truly believe mental health is the bedrock of life's success. The things that you want in life, you're able to get those when you feel well emotionally. I want to see people live their dreams, I want to see people feel empowered, I want to see people live to live their best life. My way of helping, encouraging, and motivating is through mental health and psychology.

**It's been really good to see more efforts around the promotion of mental health in Black communities and trying to reduce the stigma. From your research and experience, how do you see mental health evolving and changing in Black communities?**

When I was younger, it wasn't something that was talked about. It was not talked about in the community or even talked about in my family. I never learned what to do with my emotions. I just experienced them, but I never had a way to channel them. I wasn't taught to do that.

That's interesting because I come from a family that's in the healthcare industry. They come from the physical side, but the mental health side just wasn't talked about. The only time I learned or talked about mental health is when unfortunately you see people who are very mentally ill.

Particularly in the Black community, it's something you really don't talk about. Growing up, I didn't know a lot of people who sought treatment or got treatment. It was really stigmatized, and if you did need help, you were "crazy" basically.

What I have seen over time and through the beauty of me being a part of the field is that mental health is everything. The statistics are that about 1 out of 5 people may have a diagnosable mental illness or a mental

disorder in a given year. But 5 out of 5 people have mental health. What I mean about that is we all have mental health, it's a part of who we are. Whether or not you have a disorder, people do experience life challenges, and you want to make sure that you feel emotionally and mentally well.

Over the course of my life and my career, I've seen mental health generally in the public and the Black community starting to be talked about a lot more. I think the stigma is starting to be reduced. I don't think it's completely gone. I also think I have been around a lot of Black mental health professionals. I have the privilege to be so close to Black people who look at the mental health aspect of life so seriously. For me, that's beautiful.

I had the honor of being a guest on a new show, Taraji P Henson's Peace of Mind on Facebook Watch, where Taraji and her best friend just tackle



mental health issues. There is this big actress who champions mental health and who shares that she has a therapist herself. When she has guests on, she asks if they have a therapist. Her point is to destigmatize mental health in the Black community, provide education about different issues that impact the Black community, and encourage people to really take care of themselves.

Being part of that show and seeing what she's been doing, gives me great pleasure and a great honor. I'm seeing that it's moving in the direction that people are being open and honest about mental health and that it's not stigmatized as much. Though, I do think we have a way to go.

**Broadly speaking, it is a general understanding that Black communities face an overwhelming amount of stress when compared to White communities. Is this true and how has that affected mental health in Black communities?**

There's research that indicates that racial trauma, stress, and minor aggressions have an impact on our emotional wellbeing. For many years Black people didn't have the luxury, privilege, and maybe even the right to speak to be open and honest about how those things impact them emotionally. When you're so focused on surviving in this country, some of the racial-ethnic stress and trauma is truly life or death. When you have to live like that, you're in a mode where you're focused on living, you're focused on survival, whatever that looks like.

Now, when I look at research on the strong, independent Black female, there's this movement or evolution of Black women, particularly- I think Black men as well but the research I focus on is Black women- that many people see this idea of strong as important. They're also seeing the underbelly of strength comes at a cost.

Your humanity is wrapped up in being open and honest and honoring your emotions, setting boundaries, not taking on too much, and managing stress. When you



Dr. Akilah is also a psychologist at The Black Girl Doctor. Photography by Onye Creative Studios. Make-up by Brandon Horsely-Thompson.

deny yourself your humanity, you aren't allowed to do those normal human things, and it comes at a cost emotionally. Depression, overeating, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders are all impacted by the level of stress and racial trauma that people experience.

I co-founded the SBW Wellness Collaborative with a friend and a researcher in this area. We go out and do community events and we talk with Black women who are interested in this work and understand the experience of strength. They understand why they have used this way of coping that is passed down, that Black people and Black women learned as a way to survive emotional trauma. They also recognize how it impacted them negatively emotionally, and they want more balance. They want more for themselves, and they want to be well. Giving them the space to do so, where they can put down strength, where they can be more flexible with their views of strength and decide that they don't want to be that. I've seen many Black women become more open to interrogating what strength looks like in their lives, how it impacts them and being more open to doing something different.

**You are highly focused on the role of community and research in the SBW Wellness Collaborative. What inspired you to start it?**

It goes back to when I was in a doctoral program.

To tell you a little bit about my educational background, I have a 4-year degree in psychology. I first went to UC Irvine and then back to the Bay area to finish school at UC Berkeley. By that time, I had decided that I wanted to become a psychologist. So, I moved to the East Coast to New York City to go to Columbia University for my Master's in psychological counseling. From there, I hopped over to the University of Houston and got a Ph.D. in counseling psychology.

While I was at Houston, I really appreciated that I had a Black woman adviser and I had an incredible team of Black women psychologists around me. It was the one period of time that I got to be surrounded by Black women who wanted the same things and believed in the same thing as me.

While I was there, I was researching Black-oriented reality television and the stereotypes of Black women. I wanted to see if young Black women endorsed more stereotypes if they watched more reality TV. While I was doing that research, I learned that I was looking at 3 different stereotypes. One is Sapphire, which is also known as the angry Black woman who is super angry and degrading. The other stereotype is Jezebel, where there is an overly sexualized image of Black women. Then, there is the strong Black woman schema.

When I gathered my research, what I noticed was that young Black women were rejecting the more negative stereotypes of being sexually promiscuous and angry. By and large, they were endorsing the strong Black woman. I was speaking with my advisor on why we are seeing this pattern, why are we rejecting two stereotypes but not the other stereotype. It became clear in the conversations on a more anecdotal and personal perspective that the strong black woman is a real-life thing.

I didn't think about it because it came more naturally to me. When I was doing research, I realized I am a strong black woman.



Dr. Akilah is a co-founder of the SBW Wellness Collaborative. Photography by Onye Creative Studios. Make-up by Brandon Horsely-Thompson.

The women who raised me in my life, my mom and my two older sisters, they're strong too. If you had asked me what it means to be a Black woman, strong would have been one of the first things that come to mind. It was such a badge of honor. It was what you do. But in the conversations that I was having with my advisor, I started to realize that there is a cost to strength. It got me through a lot of things, and it got many of the Black women I know through a lot of things. They're resilient, they overcame a lot of hardship, but I also noticed the emotional struggles they experienced and the emotional struggles that I experienced even in grad school. I was struggling emotionally.

It wasn't the intellectual issue, it was the emotional impact that I didn't realize the doctoral program would have on me. I was dealing with emotional struggles and stress. I was noticing that because I was taught to be strong I was disallowing myself my humanity and to express my feelings.

Say that when something bad happens to you when you go through a stressful dramatic event, you don't just shrug your shoulders and keep going, but I learned to do that. When something bad happens to me, I may cry it out a bit and then I just moved on like it never happened. The truth is that your body keeps the score. Whatever happens to you, your body makes note of that. That is when I started to identify that

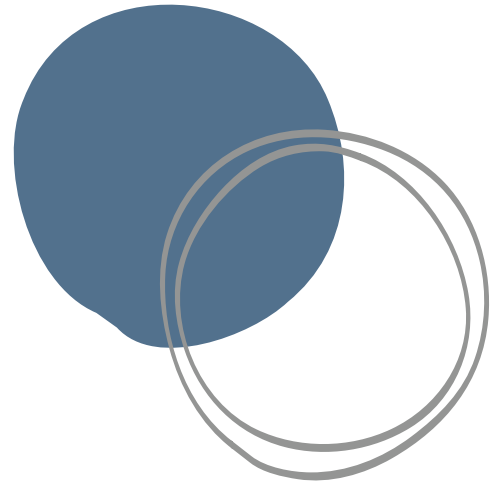
being strong isn't all that it's cracked up to be. From that point on, I knew that I needed to work in this particular area and help Black women with this particular thing.

When I finished grad school, moved back to California, and was working, I was talking with a colleague of mine, who is a friend, and we decided we wanted to do more research in this area. As we did more research, we applied to a couple of small grants. We got some small grants to do community workshops and that's how it started going. The research and community work are very connected because we wanted to be research based. Also, it was personal to us. We lived the experience of being strong.

**A cost to strength. It's like balance, a give and take. With all of your accolades and triumphs, what are some of your proud achievements so far?**

I think for me it's been honestly moving across the country so many different times and creating a life for myself. I was truly a very shy child. I always had dreams of moving to LA, New York City, and traveling the world. I wasn't sure how I would do that.

The ability to move away from my family, who have been my base, and live in New York City which was a dream for me, and to live in Houston which was never a dream for me. At first, I didn't like the move but ended up living there



for 4 years. It was an amazing place, and I made some really good friends. Then moving to Los Angeles, that has been a dream for me as well.

I've been away from my family my whole adulthood. Being able to be away from them but connected to them, and be able to connect with many friends, who I consider family along the way, are some of the biggest honors of my life. I've had to move, and start over again, and again, and again. I've done it so successfully that I created strong relationships.

When I speak about being very shy as a child, the truth is that I probably had social anxiety. The more I moved, the more I was able to come out of my shell quicker. Being on Taraji's show was a culmination of all the work that I had done from my childhood to my adulthood to manage my shyness.

Those are my biggest accomplishments. When I was a child, I imagined being able to do these things but not really sure how. I was terrified. Being able to see myself grow and be on Taraji's show even though I was so scared to speak. I was able to do it, conquer my fears, and have

this amazing group of family and friends that I feel blessed and honor to have.

### **What advice do you have for our Toastee audience?**

One of the things that I think is important nowadays is that I think there is a big push for this grind culture where you always have to be working and pushing the envelope.

I'm an ambitious woman working hard and I respect that. I also think it's important to be still sometimes, to know when it is your time to be still, and to honor when your mind and your body are telling you to be still. That might mean being still for a particular season of your life or it might mean taking time to rest and sleep regularly.

I'm coming to the point in my life, after the grind of the past year and pandemic, where I'm slowing myself down. It's really scary because I'm like everything is going to pass me by. But, I also know that these still moments of my life have been important for me and that if my body is telling me that I need to be still, then I have to make time for my wellness. Because if you don't make time for wellness, you will be forced to make time for illness.

One of the things that I regularly encourage people is to take care of themselves. Resting and getting good sleep. I'm not one of those people that will grind, grind, grind and sleep when I die. I discourage that. Sleep is super important and I encourage you to get your sleep.

Another thing is that I encourage joy. I feel that having fun, having a good time, laughing, being around family and friends, doing things that you love, and having hobbies just for the sake of having hobbies are important. Enjoying life becomes super important for your relationships, your general life satisfaction, and your wellness. Every single day I encourage creating intentional pieces of joy. It could be as simple as listening to a song and dancing for a few minutes. Whatever it is, find moments of joy and relish them, embrace them, and take part in them.

For the pandemic, I encourage people to be intentional about connecting with people socially. Even if you can't visit and be with them, be creative in finding ways to connect.

The last thing is if you need professional help, go and get it. Seek out therapy if you feel it

will be helpful for you. If you're unsure, consult with a therapist of some kind. Take that step to take care of yourself. Know that if you take care of yourself, your emotional state of being and your mental health are the bedrock to life's success. The people that you see that are really, really successful, when they're not mentally well you see them unravel even in all of their success.

To learn more about Dr. Akilah and find her podcast and show appearances visit her website [www.drakilah.com](http://www.drakilah.com). Keep up to date with her on social @dr.akilah on Instagram, @drakilahreynolds on Facebook, and @drakilah on Twitter.

Dr. Akilah is also a psychologist at The Black Girl Doctor. Make sure to check them out and to book a session with Dr. Akilah at [www.theblackgirldoctor.com](http://www.theblackgirldoctor.com). You can follow them @theblackgirldoctor on Instagram and Facebook.

Lastly, don't forget to check out Dr. Akilah's organization SBW Wellness Collaborative at [sbwwellness.org](http://sbwwellness.org). Keep up to date with them @sbw.selfcare on Instagram.



Dr. Akilah photographed by Onye Creative Studios. Make-up by Brandon Horsely-Thompson.



# Laying Out The Law With Lourdes

By Elizabeth Harris

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Lourdes Casanova is a criminal defense and immigration lawyer who founded her own law firm in Palm Beach County, Florida. Within her primary areas of criminal defense, traffic law, and immigration, Lourdes handles some unique cases, including fish and wildlife citations, food and restaurant violations, and even crime victim representation.

We were fortunate to be able to speak with Lourdes about her career and our legal rights.

**Lourdes, you cover a lot of different cases in your firm. Can you tell us about how you became a lawyer and started your firm?**

I knew I wanted to be a lawyer at an early age. I can't remember the exact moment that I decided my career path, but I do recall a school assignment in my 7th grade English class that asked what my future goals were. I was 12 years old at the time. My three goals were: (1) go to college, (2) become a lawyer, and (3) meet the Backstreet Boys. I'm still working on the third goal!

I was always interested in criminal law, probably because I watched America's Most Wanted and Unsolved Mysteries as a kid. I developed an interest in immigration law later on, as I grew older and began to understand everything that my family went through to get

to this country and achieve legal status. With these two areas of law in mind, I took classes in law school that prepared me to become a criminal and immigration lawyer.

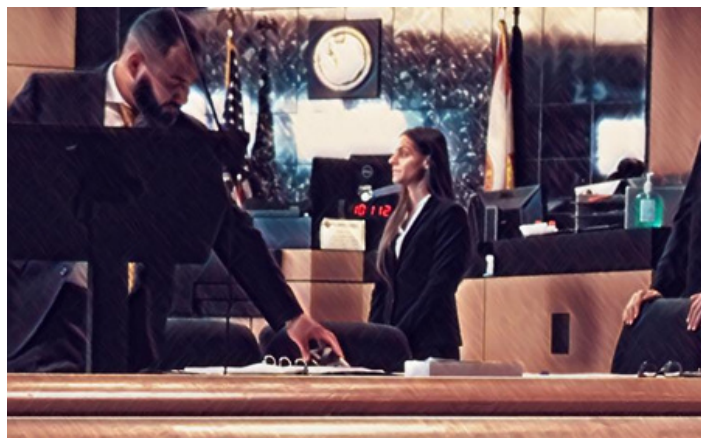
My legal career began as a prosecutor at the State Attorney's Office, where I fulfilled my dream of conducting jury trials on a regular basis. After a few years, I decided to transition to the private sector so I could practice more than one area of law and have a greater say in my own cases. In 2015, I founded Casanova Law.

**You do more than the typical criminal defense and traffic cases. What are some of the more unusual or surprising types of cases that you do as well?**

Over the years, I have really gotten into environmental and public health cases. This includes the defense of fish and wildlife violations, littering, and food violations in markets and restaurants. In these situations, I am usually able to save small business owners from shutting down, while also helping them get in compliance with the laws to protect the public. It is a win-win when I can protect my clients' rights while also contributing to the greater good.

**In starting your own law firm, how was that? How has that been during the pandemic?**

A little-known fact is that I started my law firm after I was laid-off from a small firm that could no longer afford an associate. Even though I had contemplated starting my own firm in the long-run, my opportunity came sooner than expected and under less-than-desirable circumstances. Suffice it to say, it was not easy to



Lourdes in the court room. She started her career as a prosecutor.



Lourdes (left) at the Coral Springs Community Law Day.

get up and running without notice or preparation. On the other hand, there was no greater motivator to succeed than having just experienced failure. I incorporated the day after I lost my job, hustled to advertise and network, and built a thriving law firm from the ground up. It was the best move I ever made.

I have the same survival mentality now as I did when I started. This has helped me greatly during the pandemic, where economic and health uncertainties have heightened. I just keep giving it my all, focus on helping people, and continue to look forward. So far, I am fortunate to still have clients who prioritize legal representation despite their own financial and medical challenges. I am grateful for this and am more determined than ever to succeed for my clients.

**You spoke about how coming from an immigrant family from Cuba has been a prominent influence. How has it influenced your law practice and your engagement with your local Latin community?**

My family left everything they knew for the promise of freedom and a better life in the United States. I was only able to achieve the American dream because of the incredible and unimaginable sacrifices made by them. My gratitude has instilled in me a desire to help others achieve the same dream.





One of those moments happened when I was a prosecutor and someone in the courtroom audience asked me if I was there because it was “take your daughter to work day.” Another time, a coworker made fun of my “Spanish” pronunciation of a word during the trial.

Now that I have my own business, my all-female staff gets calls from people asking to speak with “Mister” Casanova - assuming the attorney is male. Every once in a while, we also get questions regarding my racial and ethnic background before scheduling a consultation. My thought is, why does it matter?

**Immigration is one of the big issues in the US. You’ve handled a lot of immigration cases, and you come from a family of immigrants. Based on your experience, what are some of the misconceptions of immigration?**

Sadly, there are so many misconceptions about immigration that I can’t list them all in this interview. The biggest misconception seems to be that immigrants come here and “use our taxpayer dollars” to get on government assistance “and not work.” This couldn’t be further from the truth. Immigrants - my family included - are the hardest-working people I know. Regarding government assistance, undocumented immigrants cannot legally receive public aid. Yet, despite their limited economic opportunity and many times their inability to get legal status, most undocumented immigrants pay taxes, file their tax returns yearly, work hard, and abide by our laws.

The physical and emotional journey to legal status is personal to me. I helped my family members study for their citizenship tests. I witnessed them struggling with lengthy paperwork, grasping the English language, and enduring intimidating immigration interviews.

This perspective not only drove me to practice immigration law but has also blessed me with an empathic platform to personally advocate for the undocumented through community organizations and events. Many of our undocumented immigrants in the U.S. come from Latin America - just like my family. For this reason, I stay involved in the local Hispanic community through volunteer work, educating the public, and coordinating charitable acts. My current leadership position as Corresponding Secretary of the Palm Beach County Hispanic Bar Association has allowed me to engage with the Hispanic community in a really meaningful way.

**The legal profession is still predominantly white and male. As a woman and as a Latin woman, what has your experience been like?**

I’ve been lucky to be surrounded by so many people who consider being a woman and being Latina an asset rather than a weakness. However, there have been a few moments in my legal career that remind me our society still has room for improvement.



Lourdes supporting a local community event.

Another big misconception deals with the term “anchor baby.” Some people believe that immigrants can achieve legal status easily by traveling here and having their children born in the USA. There is no such form of “easy” and “fast” immigration relief. In fact, children can only petition for their parents when they turn 21.

### **How can we protect our rights? And how can we work with a lawyer to do so?**

Protecting your rights starts with knowing your rights. Learn about the law by getting information from trusted sources. These include lawyers, nonprofit civil liberties organizations, and self-help legal books in the library.

If you hire a lawyer for a criminal or immigration case, trust and cooperation are key. Your lawyer will need as much information as possible about you and your case in order to optimize your representation. Ideally, your lawyer will serve not only as the protector of your rights, but also a reliable source of knowledge that can help you protect yourself.

### **What advice do you have for anyone interested in pursuing a legal career?**

Choose a path that harmonizes with your core beliefs. There are many lawyers out there, but the ones who practice law with a purpose will ultimately be the most successful. Potential clients can tell who is in it for the right reasons. Also, remember that success goes beyond money; job satisfaction, work-life balance, positive community influence, and giving back contribute to a fulfilling career.

To learn more about Lourdes Casanova’s work, check out her firm’s website <https://www.casanovalawpa.com/>. You can also follow her on social media @casanovalawpa on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



# Assembling Dreams

BY ELIZABETH HARRIS



Ginger Mayerson, an LA-based collage artist.

Making collages started out as a fun weekly creative pastime with a friend has now become part of a career for artist Ginger Mayerson. Ginger is an LA-based artist. Originally a trained composer, Ginger has been making collages for her own amusement for years. "All the things you learn from composition, consistency, and having a whole from start to finish that just transfer right over into collage," she recounts. Since 2007, she has been showing her collages in exhibitions and shows throughout LA and even had her works published in multiple books.

I first came upon Ginger's work at a local coffee shop, Kafn. There a selection of her works hanging on the walls providing some very much needed beautiful visual stimuli. What drew me to her collages was her use of old and new, bright and dark, pensive and funny.

While living and traveling around Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, Ginger explored the local art scenes which still influence her work today. "I love Warsaw because the art scene was all 20th and 21st-century works. While living in Prague I went to the show of a very famous collage artist, Jiří Kolář. He's the same 60's era as all those same crazy collage artists right before Andy Warhol and Pop art. This show had a big effect on me because I really enjoyed it and found it very inspirational," she recalls.

Upon returning to the US, Ginger found opportunities in LA working at USC which became her treasure trove of supplies and inspiration. With USC needing to make space in storage every so often, Ginger would have access to vintage books, catalogs, magazines, and other printed works. These vintage finds along with magazines from friends and local periodicals combine to create work that shows a nod to the influence of Jiří Kolář while combining the local elements and environs in Los Angeles and the past to create something new and modern.

Over the years, her collages have become a mirror to herself. They are Ginger's way of exploring fantasies, dreams, stylistic choices, reflections, and evolution. Now, for the artist, her next evolution will be applying her artistic style to a more traditional medium - painting. I am sure through like collages, they'll be anything but traditional. They'll be her new medium of assembling dreams.

Kangaroo Coast (2017) by  
Ginger Mayerson.



Full Moon (2019) by Ginger  
Mayerson.

They're All Drunked Dogs (2017) by Ginger Mayerson.





Watery (2019) by Ginger Mayerson.



You can see Ginger's work first at Kafn Coffee in Adam Hills in Glendale, CA. Her works are up for sale at the cafe. Not to mention, they have great coffee, drinks, and devilishly good chocolate cake. To check out more of Ginger's work, visit her site [www.collage.gingermayerson.com](http://www.collage.gingermayerson.com). Ginger also keeps a blog that you can check out at [www.gm.wapshottpress.org](http://www.gm.wapshottpress.org).

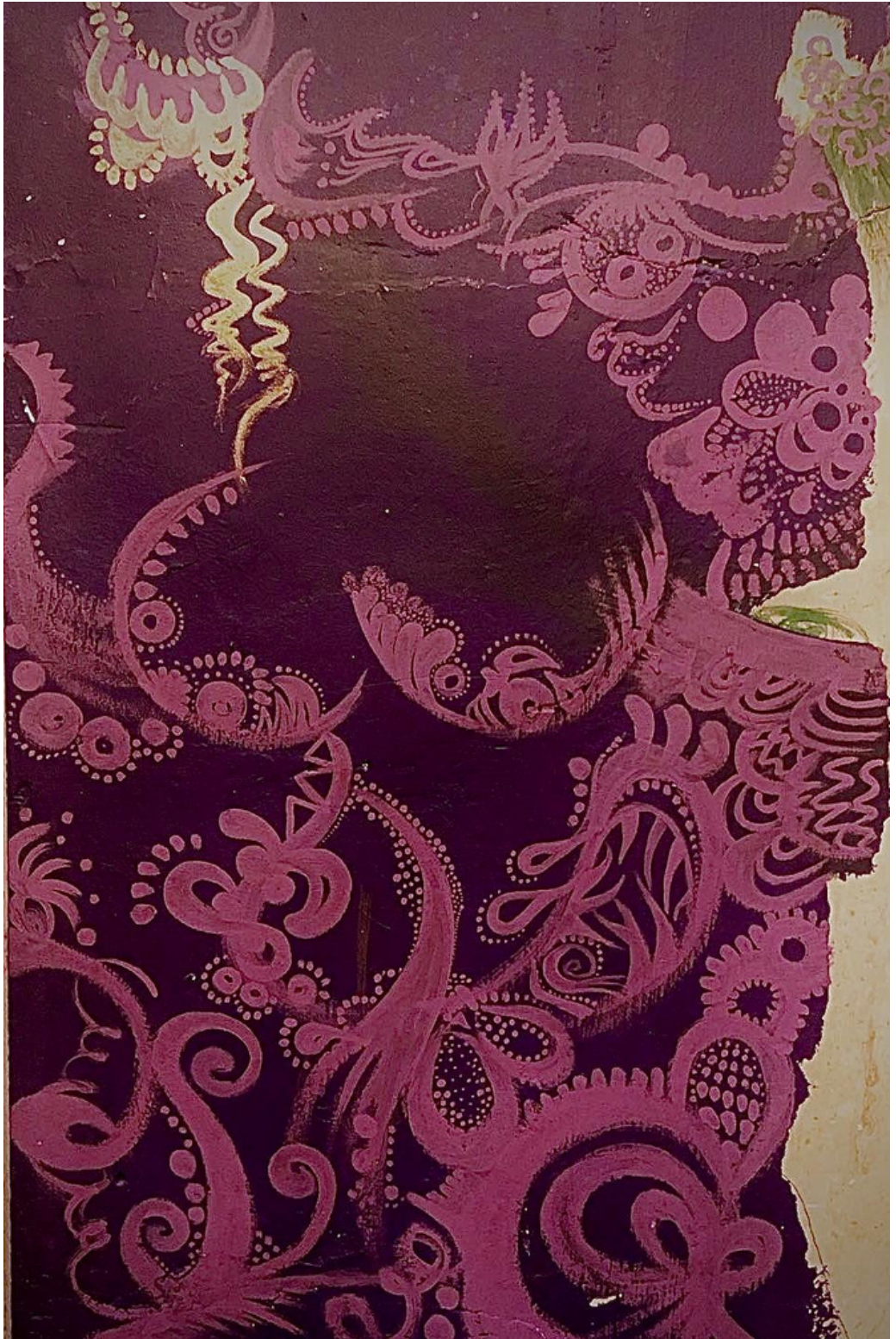
# Self Portraits

BY YUAYO LI

I am a part-time accountant and a full-time explorer. These self-portraits are about how I feel. The theme is about understanding myself, and acknowledging the change in emotions, the flow of the strokes without judging. Sometimes when we say something is 'ugly', we are not talking about the aesthetics, we are judging ourselves.







Yuyao Li is a Scotland-based artist where you can find many of her works on the walls of her home. To keep up to date with her and see more of her works, follow Yuyao [@liyuyaohi](#) on Instagram.



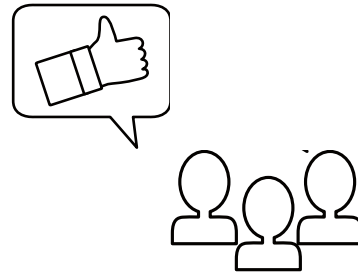
# Just Because You're an Influencer Doesn't Make You an Activist

By Aine Mulloy

Aine Mulloy, a joint friend of E&E, is actively engaged in promoting societal change, a Forbes Top 100 EU female founder to follow, and was a co-founder of GirlCrew. We asked Aine to pen an opinion piece, knowing her voice was one we truly wanted to amplify as part of Toastee's Herstory edition. With her own words on contemporary activism, she shows a fine balance between content creators and activists, and the importance of active participation.

To say the last year has been tough is an understatement, for many it has been one of the toughest years of our lives. We've collectively navigated a pandemic – to varying degrees of success –, communities were hit by natural disasters, economic hardship was rife, and the brutality of racism reared its head again, and again, and again. March heralds the annual celebration of International Women's Day, but as it does the same old questions also rise again: Who gets to speak when, where, and how. Today everyone has a platform, a personal brand, and a voice. But in the world of a constant news cycle and virality does a large social media following indicate anything beyond just that? Does follower count mark integrity, quality, nuanced conversation, or merely just those who have managed to shout loudest, longest, and had some wins along the way. If everyone has a megaphone how do you filter out the noise?

In the arena of social media, we're seeing a new trend emerge. Influencers who feel compelled to speak on social issues. While of course, there is importance and merit in those with platforms speaking up about injustice. However, this does what social media tends to do and filters out nuance, while glossing over trauma and grassroots works. These are instead replaced by clicks, likes, and campaigns with good intentions that invariably fall apart. Sometimes with hundreds of thousands of dollars going missing in the process, diverting funds from registered charities



and air organisations. Do those who have built their platforms on content, spicy tweets, and the odd nod to feminism really need to be at the fore of such conversations? We are told to smash the patriarchy, fight injustice, and be fully-fledged feminists without blemish. But, when the lines between influencers and activists blur we need to be cautious.

That's not to say there aren't influencers doing good work, but activists play a different role. Activists are well versed in the spaces in which they work, are focused primarily on grassroots organisation and the goal is collective justice. They favour the whole over the individual, which is at odds with the current influencer culture- where a few rise to the top, funded by the many. This may seem rather doom and gloom, but it's quite the opposite. In fact, with a little digging you can find incredible people doing amazing work in and for their communities. They may not have the biggest followings but each has plenty we all can learn from. The people I've listed here- some influencers, some activists, some writers, are all challengers. They challenge us to think differently, which may sometimes be uncomfortable, but always eye-opening.

### Digital Ethics & Self Care – Seyi Akiwowo

A British-Nigerian activist and campaigner, Akiwowo is the founder and director of Glitch, a non-profit campaigning to end online abuse. She famously delivered a speech at the European Parliament calling on countries to atone for their colonial pasts only to be booed by the audience and racially abused on Twitter when the video went viral. Her organisation, Glitch is a UK charity working to bring awareness to online abuse and advocate for systemic change from tech companies and governments. In 2019, she delivered a TedTalk How to fix the glitch in our online communities and has been previously selected as the Amnesty International Human Rights Defender and the Digital Leader of the Year.

### LGBTQ+ Rights – Charlene Carruthers

Founder of the Black Youth Project 100, Carruthers identifies as a “Black, queer, feminist community organizer and writer.” Focused on Black liberation, her work brings together grassroots community groups to advocate and share power. Through the Black Youth Project, Carruthers aims to build a member-led organisation of Black 18 to 35-year-olds dedicated to freedom for all, fighting for immigration rights, economic justice, and civil rights all around the world. And in 2018 she published her bestselling book *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*.

### Racial Inequality – Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza & Patrisse Cullors

Given the year that’s just been, it would be remiss not to include Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Cullors, co-founders of the Black Lives Matter Network. Founded in 2013, the project started as an online platform providing activists and supporters with guiding principles and goals, but without a hierarchy or centralised system. Initiated after the 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin, the movement protests police brutality and racially motivated violence in all forms. While figures vary from source to source it is estimated between 15-26 million people participated in the 2020 protests – making it among the largest movements in the USA’s history. It also sparked a worldwide conversation with protests being held under the slogan all around the globe. Today the group has over 40 chapters spanning across the US.

### Sustainability, Fashion & Privilege – Aja Barber

Aja Barber is a writer, consultant, and stylist whose work deals with the intersections of sustainability and the fashion landscape. Exploring privilege, wealth inequality, racism, feminism, and colonialism. Eschewing the fast fashion models of over-consumption, Barber encourages people to assess their own shopping habits. Seeking a world in which people don’t become billionaires through fashion, Barber encourages her readers to make more sustainable choices. Shedding light on the terminology, performative advertising, and more on fashion corporations.

### Sex Educator & Social Justice Disruptor – Ericka Hart

As a Black queer femme activist, Ericka Hart’s work tackles racial, social, and gender issues. As an educator, their work brings to the foreground the damage and limitations of oppressive systems. After going viral for going topless at Afropunk, revealing the scars of their double mastectomy – Hart is a breast cancer survivor –, she realised the importance of including disability and chronic illness in conversations around sex. Pushing for a move towards a more human and transparent approach to sex education.

Each of these people are helping to change how we perceive the world and each other. While we have come a long way, there is still work to be done and it's important that doesn't get lost in the shuffle as people clamour to appear informed.

Over the last few years we've seen a rise in feminist lite content, pink pussy hats marching on Washington, badass boss babe emblazoned on t-shirts, and #girlboss slapped on coffee mugs. As the shine of these began to wane, we saw podcasts after podcast emerge, viral Twitter threads being spun off into books, and the poaching of content – generally from older, minority, researchers/writers/activists – spun into a twirly font and reposted in a sea of millennial pink Instagram tiles. This is done without context, nuance, or shame. We've been told to lean in, take a seat at the table, build platforms and take up space but when those from marginalised communities do so, they often fall prey to the same vicious cycle. Their content reaches smaller, and oftentimes more engaged audiences, only to be picked up and reposted without credit.

Movements such as the body positivity movement, founded by fat Black women are now fronted by thin, white women who hunch over and puff up their stomachs to show how unflattering the camera can be and that they are “real too.” The founding voices of the movement have been completely erased.



The radical act of self-love removed and rebranded to sell everything from make-up to weight loss pills. The real and political act of fat, Black, oftentimes queer, women taking up space and just loving themselves in a world that tells them not to was swept away in a filtered sea. And this is the problem. When everything and anything can become content nothing is real. It's all been reduced to clicks.

Part of the problem, of course, is that social media is not really about the conversation. Of course, it will be sold as space to “find your tribe” and build a community, but it's purposefully designed to do the opposite. It's not about thoughtful discussion, it's about reaction and nothing drives virality like anger. Outrage is actively rewarded and every interaction becomes polarising. Either you are with me or against me. To question is to invite anger and harassment.

This division can also be seen in how interactions are framed, everything has become a debate rather than a conversation. Debate inherently implies a winner – and therefore, a loser. It is a point-scoring exercise which favours those in positions of power. Those with an extensive vocabulary, and the stereotypical indicators that command

attention regardless of content. It is also much easier to debate topics when they are separate from your existence. Debating whether or not you deserve basic human rights is exhausting and upsetting. But of course, there's no place for emotion in debate as to show vulnerability is still largely seen as a sign of weakness. To crack under pressure is “to be owned”, “destroyed” or similar. Again, it doesn't actually matter what either person is saying because perception is all that matters. With everything up for debate, we are saying that those who are marginalised need to play by the rules of the majority to try to win crumbs. In turn when complex, social topics are reduced to sound bites and character limits and played out publicly, it's clear who will lose.

It is in this murky space then, that influencers are continuing to weigh in. Acutely aware of how algorithms work, the importance of reach, and being seen to be doing something part of the conversation. What they have to add is questionable but there are enough Angela Davis quotes floating around to pull together a caption and call it a day. With access to unlimited information, everyone is informed, but very few are knowledgeable. And unfortunately, in this gap, the real work is left in the shade.

To counter this we are seeing communities spring up that are embedding basic principles and readings into their work. Similar to how the Black Panthers used to operate, this ensures a base level of knowledge from participants

– and requires attendees to actually do the work. While all people might be equal, not all opinions are and that's important. If you haven't done the work, and cannot contribute to the discourse then you simply cannot engage. This might seem like it is exclusive, but it carries an important message, activism is not easy. It's hard, unpaid, emotionally and physically taxing, and often undervalued. Therefore, to become an active part of the solution it is imperative that people equip themselves with the right information to become active, positive participants in a space, and in doing so you are also caring for others by showing the process respect and continuing to build your own arsenal.



Make sure to follow Aine @aine.simone on Instagram, and check out her 2018 TedX Talk.

# EMBRACING INTERSECTIONS IN *environmentalism*



An interview with Olivia Sweeney, a Black and Green Ambassador, sustainability consultant, and engineer by Elizabeth Harris.

Olivia Sweeney, an engineer by training, a sustainability consultant by trade, and a Black and Green Ambassador.



Olivia Sweeney is a lifelong environmentalist, perhaps even before she knew it. Her passion for the environment and sustainability influenced much of her life from becoming a vegetarian to choosing to study chemical engineering and even working at Lush for a few years. When I think of Olivia, sustainability advocate and engineer are some of the first things that come to mind, but she's way more than that.

She's a dancer, a musician, a vegetarian, an adventurer, a cool person, a Brit, a rebel, a Black woman, an avid fanfiction reader, a period drama lover, a multicultural individual, a theatre lover, and the list goes on and on. She's at the intersection of so many things which have influenced her life and environmentalism journey.

Just before the pandemic, Olivia moved to Bristol to work at a sustainable waste consultancy. During the early months of the world settling into a new normal, she took the extra time to join Black and Green ambassadors, an intersectional environmentalist group. Given Olivia's experience with sustainability, environmentalism, and her own intersections, I thought she would be a perfect person to speak with about what it means to be an environmentalist, and that's what we did.



**Intersectional environmentalism is something that's come into the forefront this past year. What is intersectional environmentalism?**

It's about how different people interact with the environment in different ways, and how they take space in nature differently. It gives space to the fact that everyone is different and celebrates the different things that are brought to the table.

Intersectionality is like a Venn diagram. If all the different parts of your being are little circles, the intersection is where all those circles overlap and make you unique. When thinking of the environment it is how all those different layers make your experience and your connection or sense of belonging to your environment different, it will also influence how you engage with the environmental movement changes.

It's one of those complicated things because it's big and it's unique to everyone. Nobody has that same amalgamation of different circles. Some of my intersections are the black community and environmentalism, and my experiences of these shape



my understanding, and what I think the future should look like.

**And now Olivia, you're doing intersectional, community, environmentalism work with Black and Green Ambassadors in Bristol. Can you tell us more about that?**

I've been a Black and Green ambassador since October 2020. I stumbled across it when I was on furlough because I felt I wasn't doing anything and now I work 6 days a week. Be careful for what you wish for!

It's a National Lottery Funded project. It's a collaboration between Bristol Green Capital Partnership which is a network of organisations that have pledged to work towards a sustainable city and Ujima radio, which is a local radio station. Our mission is to "Lead, connect, and celebrate diverse community action." It's all about allowing people who don't see themselves as an environmentalist or don't want to see themselves as an environmentalist to take up the space.

We give a platform through the radio. We talk and work with the black and brown community in Bristol to talk about climate change, what are people care about right now, what people are already doing, and what people hope to do or see change in their local area. It's about allowing everyone to be part of building whatever this great green future is.

There's a term coined by

a professor (Julian Agyeman) called Just Transitions or Just Sustainability. Yes, we all want to live in a green future where we have minimal impact on the planet. But if we don't consider all the inequalities that we suffer from now, we're just going to be exactly where we are today but with a solar panel and an electric car. That's not what I want. We deserve better, and the first part of achieving that is allowing everyone to have a voice and platform.

Bristol is a very diverse place but it's also a very ghettoized place. So, we, as Black and Green Ambassadors are trying to bridge the communication and cultural gap between the black and brown community of Bristol and the City Council, the traditional environmental sector, and businesses. We're trying to bridge that gap from a bottom-up approach. Whatever we do, we want it to be community-driven.

Another element is also going into the Environmental sector and talking about experiences, diversity, and inclusion. I think the environmental sector is the second least diverse sector in the UK, bested only by farming. We're working on making them be more accessible to more people.



**It seems that intersectional environmentalism and climate justice touch more than the environment, like culture as well.**

Well, firstly on a big scale, I think intersectional environmentalism and climate justice look have a lot in common. It's the idea that different people are affected by things in different ways because of what they look like or who they are, and as a result of this have varying levels of power to influence change. I would say intersectional environmentalism is acknowledging this and listening/learning about the differences, climate justice takes this further and requires action.

Then there's the cultural aspect. There are things that are always called green and sustainable and others are not. I think that's very much about who's doing it.

It could be things like the word "veganism." It seems to be everywhere at the moment. But plant-based diets have been part of cultures around the world for hundreds if not thousands of years (Ital - Jamacain just one example) Now all of sudden, it is cooperated by this green movement and framed in a different way. The local communities that have been doing it for decades and centuries are not acknowledged or celebrated for the fact that they've been living these sustainable diets forever. This excludes people, intersectional environmentalism is about inclusion.

I have spoken a lot about culture, but that is just one part of it. Black and Brown communities suffer disproportionately from the impacts of climate change. One focus for me at the moment is climate justice through air pollution. Air Quality has been at the forefront in Bristol and the UK recently. Just before Christmas after years of fighting 'air pollution' was listed as a cause of death on an 8-year-old girl's death certificate. This was a landmark moment, and has brought Air Pollution to people's attention, but also highlighted the role social and racial justice plays in this

In Bristol, we have toxic air. The people that are having to live with the worst effects of this are contributing the least and have the least power to affect change and continue to be disenfranchised from that conversation.

It's thinking about how all the different layers of who you are and how the world sees you and the power you have in the world affect your ability to engage with your environment and to be a part of the solution.

**You've mentioned how the environmental sector is very monocultural and white. Why do you think that is and other groups haven't been brought into the discussion?**

I think there's this perception, particularly in the UK, that the environmental movement was born in the 60s and 70s, at least that was my perception for a very long time.



And that conjures a very particular image of what someone who cares for the environment looks like. It's dominated by this western perception.

Sustainability has become a luxury. You have to pay more for stuff that is greener. That is partly the reason I feel the environmental movement has become a very middle-class movement. Branding and advertising and the media then perpetuate this image, and it continues to become exclusionary.

I think everyone is doing something to help the environment. There's so much going out there that's not using that word (environmentalism) because that word brings a very particular image. Environmentalism has been 'tarnished' in some ways as being a lefty thing and people of a certain economic status aren't allowed to engage in it because they can't afford to pay extra to have an electric car or extra to have sustainable clothes or extra to shop at their local farmers market. If I can't pay my weekly bills, why should I engage in this alternate reality?

I think that's one of the things that keep diverse

communities (Black & Brown) outside the green movement. The mainstream live in the middle, and minoritised communities live outside of that. It is really hard to inspire people with another alternate reality when their everyday experience is already so different from the 'norm.'

So a green future can feel even further away. If the mainstream doesn't acknowledge that people are pushed out of this already. How can you expect people to believe in a utopia all the way on the other side?

**How has your view of intersectionality and sustainability changed from doing Black and Green?**

I think I've become more of a radical. I've become more revolutionary. It's been really energizing because I'm around an inspirational group of people all the time.

I've had a very white upbringing. From 16, I went to a really posh grammar school, then I went to Edinburgh University, I work in the Environmental sector, so my immediate surroundings aren't always my cultural community. It's just been really nice to be in a space where I don't have to explain things or be worried about people understanding where I am coming from. It's just been great to be around a more diverse group of people all the time, it is more relaxing and more stimulating at the same time!

The first time I really saw climate justice was when I was working at Lush. It had to do with land rights in South America. The

African descendant community within South American had very little rights and fought for their land rights and justice. That was the first really clear case of how race and environment intersect and how issues of justice on both sides are really important.

It used to be a thing that was outside of the UK in my head. With Black and Green, I've learned that issues of climate justice are also happening here. There are issues here that are not just an issue of the environment. It brought clarity and it's highlighted the big and small of it.

Black and Green Ambassadors has also made me think more locally and look at tangible activities. You can get carried away in the climate justice movement about saving the world and forget to save your city or your street.

I've always worked in the environmental sector so you can forget that it is not diverse and that you're not hearing diverse thoughts. It's not just about the Black community, it's about the diversity of thoughts and opinions and experiences in all capacities. When you are in a monoculture, it becomes like an echo chamber and you can forget there are other schools of thought. It's been really eye-opening and exciting to learn that there's so much else going on and there are so many other ways to approach things.

**What advice do you have for people to be intersectional environmentalists?**

It is about not seeing 'environmentalism' as this separate thing that happens outside of day-to-day life, it is about seeing it in everything, who we are, and what we do. It is about embracing every part of you and how that means your experiences of nature, of climate changes your understanding of solutions are different, appreciating that, and then listening and learning and collaborating with the person next to you who is unique.

Don't get hung up on what is being called environmental and sustainable. Do what makes your immediate place, your immediate environment better. Understand what's unique about you and your lived experience. Don't think that what has been touted as the green solution is the only way because there are a hell of a lot more ways out there.

Don't be intimidated by environmentalism because it's big and there is a lot going on. Think about what you can do in your day-to-day. Think about what you can do in your street to make things better. Then talk to your next-door neighbor about it.

I'm going to go to recycling as an example because that's the field I work in. Nobody puts things in the right recycling bin. That's a problem with the system, but let's not get into that. If you manage to learn the right way, that's really great. So tell your mum, your dad, your next-door neighbor what bin they should be putting things in. They're

more likely to listen to you than they are to read a letter that comes through from the local council in the mail.

When I was studying, I thought I was going to invent a new form of energy that was gonna just save the planet. It's going to be so good that everyone will be, "Damn! We need to do that!" But that's not realistic expectations of how things are gonna go!

Don't try to save the planet, try to make your footprint a little bit smaller or your place a little bit better. That will perpetuate.

Don't listen to the haters!



Black and Green Ambassadors is a programme by Bristol Green Capital Partnerships. You can learn more about them at [bristolgreencapital.org](http://bristolgreencapital.org). You can follow the work of Olivia and the Black and Green Ambassadors @ujimaBlackGreen on Twitter and @blackandgreenambassadors on Facebook

# A Journey of Recovery and Peer Support

Yasmin Flasterstein (she/her),  
Co-founder and Executive  
Director of Peer Support Space,  
Inc.



Yasmin Flasterstein (she/her) is a Co-Founder and Executive Director of Peer Support Space. If you do a quick Google search, you will find that she speaks out for crime survivors, her story was read into the congressional record for Women's History Month, she is a founding member of the Orlando Trans Collective, and that she sits on multiple mental health peer-focused boards in Florida.

She is an incredible woman who is taking experiences of trauma and distress and creating peer communities to foster recovery, acceptance, and growth. She also uses her platform to destigmatize mental health within LGBTQ+, Latinx, and Black communities while advocating for a mental health system that provides quality services where no communities are left behind.

We got to speak with Yasmin about her experience and how we can work towards being allies and support the communities around us.

**Yasmin, you have done so much for mental health advocacy. How did this passion and work begin?**

I think I always struggled with my own mental health but didn't understand the language to express my grapples with it until I was older. Mental illness aside, we all have mental health. Fitting in was never easy for me. I didn't have the "picture perfect" family, I was bisexual, a minority religion for my area, mixed race and moved so many times to so many small towns I never felt like I fully fit into any crowd.

Initially, I got into mental health advocacy because I was advocating for my brother and the negative experiences he had with the mental health system. As I advanced professionally, I had the privilege to meet so many bravely vulnerable individuals. As an empath, I absorbed their deep pain, and it fueled me to want to create a world where individuals didn't have to struggle alone,

where it was okay to reach out for help, and where that help was available.

I didn't have my own major mental health breakdown until I was in my twenties and already extremely involved in the mental health field. In retrospect, I had a lot of trauma growing up, maybe it was internalized stigma, my naive childlike energy, or constantly looking out for my brother which made me overlook my own struggles. When I was twenty-two, I began experiencing flashbacks to a trauma I experienced when I was seventeen.

Weird right? There was no obvious trigger, trauma can just be weird like that sometimes. It made previous experiences that seemed like distant memories feel vivid and present. I could no longer sleep, I was scared all the time, and I no longer took any interest in activities I used to enjoy. My partner at the time couldn't support me through it (insert overwhelming feeling of being "too broken" to be loved that would follow me) and I ended up single and totally alone during what was the hardest time of my life.

To make matters worse, in the next 3 months, I experienced gun violence, sexual assault, robbery, witnessed a friend die by suicide, and got into a car accident that would leave me without my main coping skill of dance. I was this face of mental health advocacy, a community leader and advocate, but I couldn't keep it together myself. I didn't want to die, but I was exhausted from feeling so constantly terrified, frustrated by my memory gaps, and felt suffocated by my inability to express what I was going through without dance. I wasn't sure how to help myself at that moment, but with my other coping skills unavailable with my new mobility impairments, I began to heal through helping and from it found healing for myself.

**Wow that's an incredible story. Then in 2019, you started Peer Support Space, Inc with Dandelion Hill. What inspired both of you to start it?**

Dandelion (they/them) and myself were both inspired by our personal and professional experiences to start Peer Support Space.

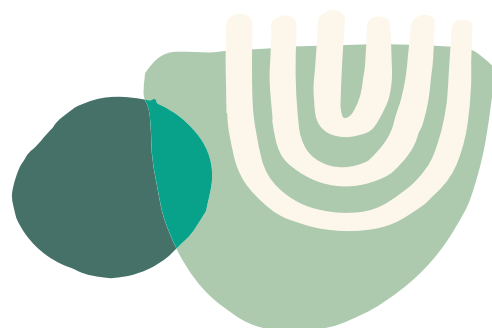
Dandelion is a survivor of domestic violence, childhood sexual assault, and suicidality. I am a suicide survivor, and live with cPTSD, Dissociative Disorder, mobility impairments, and a traumatic brain injury. While we both share unique and

personal stories, we both felt peer services - human connection and knowing we were not alone - kept us alive during our darkest moments struggling with suicidality.

I met Dandelion when we worked together on a program that was created in response to the tragedy at Pulse nightclub, to help provide free counseling to those affected directly or indirectly. Dandelion started the program and I was their assistant and eventually took over as they started a new career path working as a peer specialist. Those affected by the tragedy were predominantly from LGBTQ+, Latinx and Black communities. We had to work extremely hard to find therapists who were trauma-informed, LGBTQ+ affirming, and experienced with working with Black and/or Latinx communities. What I found was that for many, it didn't matter that free counseling was available. There was such a history of distrust in the mental health system for these communities, compounded with stigma about reaching out for help, that individuals naturally turned to one another for support even though we were offering free counseling.

During this same time, I was working additionally as a supervisor at a residential treatment center, this was a clinical role and I was not allowed to personally disclose, as well as part time overseeing a peer program at a nonprofit, where I was supported in personally disclosing. I noticed the juxtaposing reactions I would get from individuals in the clinical setting, "who the heck is this little girl telling me what to do", verses when I worked in a peer setting and would share parts of myself and people would open up in ways I had never seen before.

I had spent my whole life pissed off at the mental health system. I nearly didn't get into the mental health field because I didn't want to touch





what was such a broken system that lacked the services to prevent crisis and repeatedly had individuals falling through the cracks, gaslighting them into feeling like it was their fault and not the system's. When systems are broken, communities turn to one another for support. I began learning about peer-led organizations, organizations led for and by individuals with their own mental health challenges, and was amazed. These peer services were filling SO many gaps of the mental health system that I spent years upset about. I finally had a solution, one that could focus on communities most often left behind, for what cost less than crisis services and could help avoid reaching a point of crisis.

I reached out to Dandelion saying I had no plan and no money, asking if they wanted to work full time. I knew they had experience building a program from the ground up, that they were as passionate as I am about the broken state of the mental health system, and that they were one of only a few Nationally Certified Peer Specialists in the state of Florida. I had some business savvy but was actually really new to peer services. I needed Dandelion to be the moral compass of the organization, guiding us in a way that embraces the core values of peer services.

Anyways, Dandelion said "yes" to my idea and together we created Peer Support Space, building peer-led recovery communities for communities that lack access to quality mental health services. An organization that has since provided no-cost services to over 8,000 individuals.

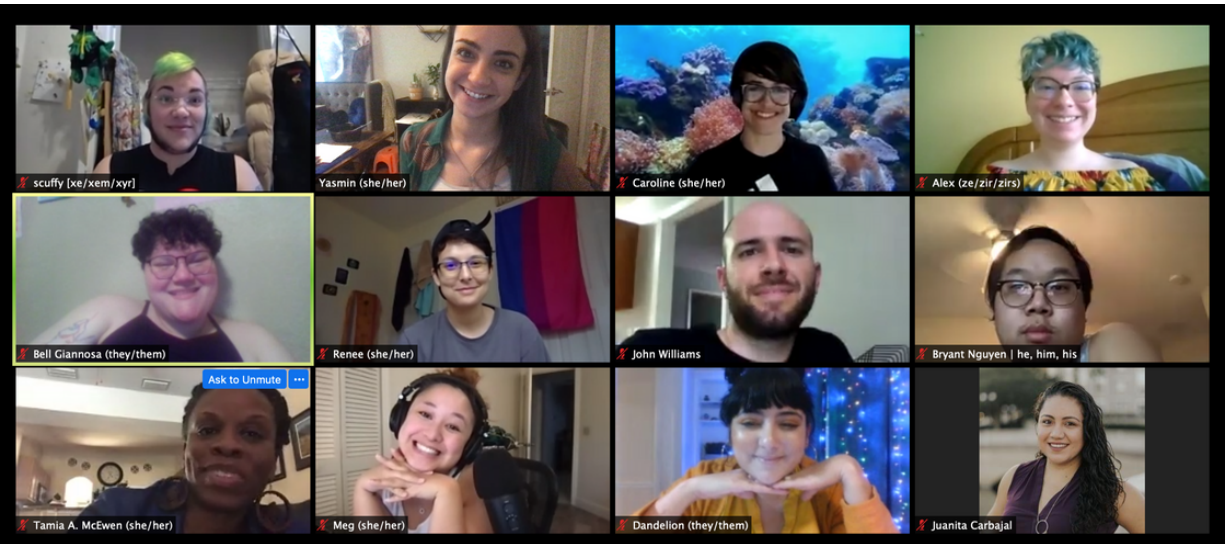
**Your focus at the Peer Support Space is recovery and peer support. For our readers who are new to the mental health community, what do these terms mean?**

Recovery is a very broad term that has been used, adopted, and shared by many that have overcome obstacles to mental wellness. Recovery is an ongoing journey and is unique to every individual. Peer supporters believe that there is no one way to find mental wellness and therefore, no two people will ever have the same recovery journey.

Peer services are services that are given by someone that shares a similar lived experience with the individual receiving services. The services are based on a mutual relationship where both parties are equals. Those receiving the services are always the driver of their own recovery, given the right to make their own choices and control their healing including how they understand, address their lived experience, mental health, and identities. A peer professional holds space for individuals as they navigate their own unique journeys. Not someone who will make "the rain go away", but someone who will walk with you through that rain. In a world where mental health is so deeply stigmatized, it can be more approachable to reach out to someone who "has been there before." It is already really hard to navigate our system when you are well, so having a community to help individuals navigate resources when you are unwell is an immense help. Research shows that those using peer services are not only more satisfied with their overall wellness but with the other services they use in tandem with peer services.

Those accessing traditional mental health services, including peer services, are usually affluent, cisgender, heterosexual, and white. Every community is unique and nobody can understand needs, culture, and nuances like members from the community itself. This makes services led for and by communities particularly important. Finally, my favorite part about peer services, the power of having a support system when you are struggling. The hardest part for me when I was in my lowest of lows was this immense feeling of being alone (a feeling so many with mental health obstacles feel as they struggle in silence and isolation), I never want anyone to feel that way. Peer Support Space is where the chosen family can heal together.

**How has it been running your nonprofit? How have you two been able to manage the pandemic?**



Zoom meeting with some of Peer Support Space’s community facilitators.

Candidly, running a nonprofit is tough. If I knew at the time of wanting to start what I know now, and if I didn’t have the support of being a part of Maven Leadership Collective- I don’t know if I would’ve done it. I am immensely passionate and confident about the impact of peer services and it seems like every time I feel discouraged, someone shares how they were impacted by Peer Support Space and it gives me the fuel to keep advocating. It’s a lot of pressure to have the responsibility of finding sustainable funding to keep services, and the jobs of individuals, fall on your shoulders. All while simultaneously overseeing direct services, program development, community building, and more- there are SO many moving pieces. It is difficult to exist within a system you hope to change. I’ve never been 100% confident about the correct path forward for our intended goals and I struggle a lot with imposter syndrome. I have been immensely moved though by how much support Dandelion (so grateful for them) and I have received. There is deep power in having a collective of passion, talents, and creativity behind us. We are so grateful for how many people have supported and aided our progress along the way.

With Dandelion and I both having a history in creating emergency mental health responses, we stepped up immediately the day stay-at-home orders were given in mid-March in Central Florida and began offering community gatherings twice a day at 12 PM and 6 PM each day, Monday-Saturday

to combat the need for human connection during mandated social distancing. We thought, wrongly, that the pandemic would last only two weeks. Remember when we all thought this would only last two weeks? We are proud to have continued these digital resources today, over 750 peer-led community gatherings have been held by Peer Support Space during the pandemic. Anyone from anywhere is welcome to use these services as long as they are over 18. The pandemic has pushed us to no longer be local, we have welcomed individuals from over 10 states and 8 countries (yay silver linings!). We have digital community gatherings that are for the general community, specific populations, or that focus on certain wellness activities. Individuals use our daily digital gatherings as frequent or randomly as it meets their needs. There’s no requirement to share, to have your video on, or to register in advance. We take turns sharing whatever we want and then get to say if we want feedback, advice, or just want to share. This is a great resource for individuals to build their support system as they navigate their mental health journeys as well as this unique time. To keep our new friends from around the world, our goal is to continue these digital services even when we move back to in-person services.

**I’m constantly learning about mental health. What are some misconceptions our readers should know about?**

While I have learned a lot about mental health through my personal and professional experiences, I think that everyone is an expert in themselves. There are so many ways to recover, and I hope that individuals find what works for them. Taking a pause sometimes is progress. Recovery is ongoing and not linear. I think that the only thing shameful about mental health is the stigma we place on it. I think one of the most impactful ways to destigmatize mental health is to stop using mental health disorders as adjectives and start having conversations about mental health instead.

Our current mental health system lacks cultural considerations, accessibility, and affordability; it focuses on crisis care and keeps leaving the same communities behind. When what exists isn't working- we need to build new ways to educate, advocate for and strive for a world that normalizes and supports mental health struggles and where all individuals can be met with quality mental health services for their unique recovery journeys. It is not enough to say "it is okay to get help"- we need to make sure that help is available.

It isn't true that you are not worthy of love until you love yourself, every single person is worthy

of love even when they don't feel it for themselves in the moment. It's okay if the thing keeping you alive another day isn't your will to live but is a pet, an upcoming coffee date with a friend, or a favorite TV episode coming out soon. When the idea of staying alive your whole life may feel overwhelming, it's okay to take it day by day or moment by moment. Feeling hopeless is so, so valid but I have learned that feeling hopeless doesn't mean there is no hope. You don't have to feel such deep pain alone- reach out. Even if your support system may be small now, there are strangers that don't know you but genuinely care about you- I care about you. Keep fighting. Life can suck, but you got this. You've survived 100% of what you've been through so far and I am so proud of you for that.

**I've seen you speak about your own experiences of trauma and distress. What you have gone through is terrible. What was your journey like to not only thrive after the experiences but also bravely share your story publicly?**

I share my story because when I was going through my darkest times, I was in a really unique position working in the mental health field, where I



Group photo from Peer Support Space's Open House Celebration. Photo by JD Castro.



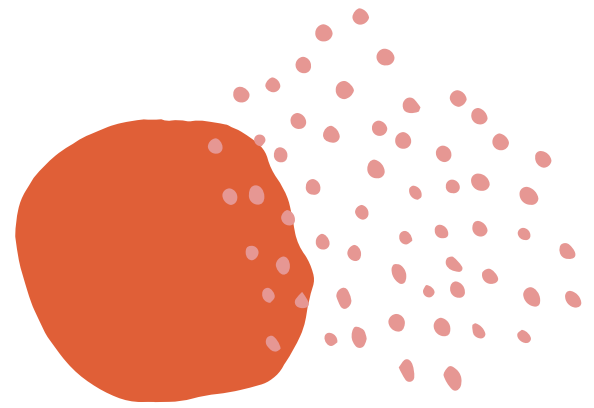
got to witness the journeys of so many. Knowing that I was not alone in struggling kept me fighting when I didn't want to. Because our mental health struggles are something we are pressured to feel like we should hide, most people don't have these examples and feel really alone. While I don't have all the solutions -only what has helped me- I want people to feel the common humanity that we are not alone in struggling.

I think that sharing your story is an immensely personal decision and nobody should feel pressured to do so; it's a decision that should be given immense thought. Nobody is entitled to know about your trauma. If, what, to who, and when you share is up to you. I share because I heal through helping. My dissociation helps me get through tough moments of sharing, I have learned with time that dissociation can suck but is also a superpower.

Post-traumatic stress is talked about a lot more than post-traumatic growth. I am so grateful to have been able to make something tangible and positive out of what I have gone through. In many ways, I have thrived. On the flip side, in many ways, I still struggle immensely. My personal recovery has been up and down. As I write this interview, I have been in a deep, dark down. The difference this time is I don't feel as alone.

**Some of your achievements are just wow like having your story read in Congress for Women's History month! Looking back, what are some of your achievements and work that you are most proud of?**

There was a moment (5 months into Peer Support Space) during our first annual fundraiser, a dark humor comedy show called "Stand Up for Suicide Prevention", where I shared that we helped 800 individuals. I remember vividly standing on stage and pausing while everyone clapped. We've since helped over 8,000 individuals but I think it was in that moment on stage where "oh s\*\*\*, We ARE doing this" really hit me. Some of my additional favorite accomplishments have been our ribbon-cutting ceremony on our first anniversary that opened our peer-led drop-in center, our response to the pandemic, the testimonies we have received from our participants, having Peer Support Space's services shared when I am not around, a local gain



of knowledge and respect for peer services, being able to create 12 unique recovery communities, expanding our direct services to also starting peer-led advocacy initiatives, and being reached out to for paid speaking engagements that I used to be the one reaching out to places to try to do for free.

**What advice do you have for our readers to be a mental health ally?**

We can all play a role in raising mental health awareness whether it is sharing our own experiences more openly, reaching out to friends and asking "how are you, really?", spreading resources, volunteering, or donating to your favorite cause. When your friends are struggling, try not to jump to "fix" them, sometimes people just want to vent without being made to feel broken (if there was an easy fix and we could "just think positively" we would have done that by now). Ask individuals how THEY want to be supported instead of jumping to support them how YOU would want to be supported. You do not need to work in the mental health advocacy field to be a mental health advocate. Are you a parent? Give your kids the language to express feelings and role model your own struggles. Are you an employer? Give your employees mental health days the same as you do sick days and give realistic workloads along with a living wage. Are you in retail? Ask people how they are doing, give compliments, give empathy. You never know what kind of day somebody is having. One of the most moving moments in my life was when a stranger ahead of my car paid for my drive-thru meal. An act of kindness can make a world of a difference or even keep someone alive. Be kind, educate yourself, be a role model, get involved- it takes a community to heal a community.

## So, Yasmin, what is next for you and Peer Support Space?

Peer Support Space is currently fundraising to begin offering overnight peer respite services in our recently donated building. A peer respite is a voluntary, home-like, non-medical space where people can get away while being supported from trained peer professionals. Filling the gap between inpatient and outpatient services, our respite will be an opportunity to get away before reaching a point of crisis or a stopping point after crisis before going back home- focusing on preventative care and sustainable wellness. Individuals can stay overnight for up to 7 nights per month while remaining the drivers of their own recovery and creating their own personalized recovery plan.

I am hoping to demonstrate the effectiveness of peer services locally to have Peer Support Space serve as an example of what a diverse, peer-led organization can look like. Who knows? Maybe even have a few Peer Support Spaces one day.

As for me, I hope to continue working on my work-life balance, find new exciting nature spots, and discover the next best trash reality TV show that will distract me through the serious.

Make sure to check our Peer Support Space, Inc at [peersupportspace.org](http://peersupportspace.org). Follow them and Yasmin's work @PeerSupportSpace on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn and @PeerHealing on Twitter.



Yasmin (left) with Peer Support Space Co-founder Dandelion Hill (they/them) (right).

**EXTRACTS FROM**

**AN ANTHOLOGY:**

**APERTURE**

Esther Ajose

# APERTURE

DUE WINTER 2021

.01

Esther / Christina / Zainab  
/Ally / Lara / Kirsty/

Toastee is especially excited to debut an extract from our Toastee contributor, and dear friend, Esther Ajose's upcoming work on an anthology of female voices and experiences. This is an ongoing piece of work, an accumulation of over 2 years of consideration (contemplation), a journal, passed from woman to woman to detail a stream of consciousness, creating a collective of women's narratives.

AN EXTRACT

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This commitment, I do thus make, to hope. Verb. Not I am hoping, but that I have hope. To pursue the evolution of my moral imagination. To act as the lens through which light travels – for myself. To create the space for others to do the same. And with this, I start with my written consciousness, and hand over the pen, the keypad, and invite the voices of others to add to the stream. With that, I welcome you. To the many apertures of this work. Esther, Christina, Zainab, Ally, Lara, Kirsty, and the plethora of voices to come.

As I wade through the stream of queries in my mind, I travel and return back to the same destination: to bear witness. I think that we have mistaken empathy as walking in someone else's shoes. Let us be clear, you can't. But what we can do is witness, and accompany. Accompany, how do we accompany? The Jewish and Christian tradition have a supplication they render that I find fascinating; an emphasis on the "softening of the heart" or more directly, the biblical verse that says, "Give me a heart of flesh", a heart that feels and is deeply open to experience, whether it's joy or pain, finding the places where weeping and joy can come together or where yearning and delight can come together.

But what if we have been collectively living with undiagnosed arrhythmia? The culprit behind our condition – that for so long has caused our hearts to beat unnaturally – being the acceptance of the lie that guardedness is protection. If we are a collective body, and the purpose of the heart is to oxygenate other parts of the body, doesn't this guardedness actually harm us? They say we live in a 'dog-eat-dog' world and that we must first look after 'number one'. But if we are one as collective, perhaps it is time we start putting the collective first?

But that takes work. To be willing to elasticize the heart. Not the fidget around until the buzzer dings type of work – no--the roll up the sleeves, tie up the hair, and the double knot the shoelaces type. After our shared and collective trauma over the last year, are we finally ready for that? Have our values expanded to the extent that we see the humanity in others? What habits of the heart do we need to learn? To unlearn? The questions seem endless, yet – possess answers closer than we think. I'm willing to hold to the claim that it boils down to these short words 'I like you because...I love you despite...'

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That with each human we experience life with, we may do so, with a spirit of 'because' and a heart of 'despite'. A human is a human because of other humans. Is it time to bring that closer to our fleshy organ in the chest.

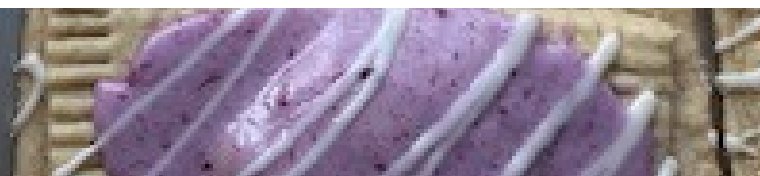
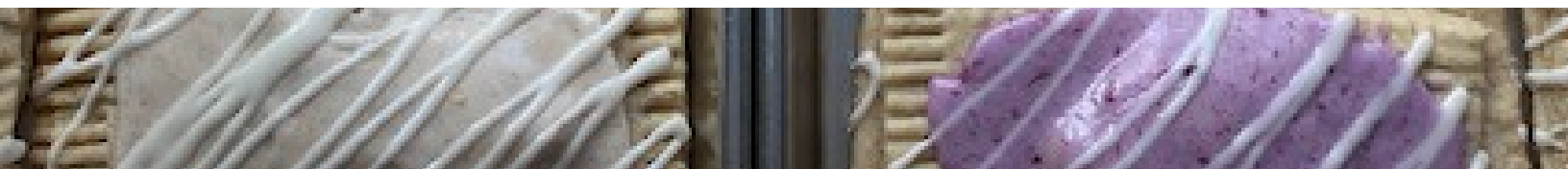
How do we prepare the chest for such a heart? To ensure it's not just cavity; a home for a heart but not a place for it to blossom. The beating of a heart – abnormal or part of a brilliant musical symphony – does not mean we all feel. As we experience life, how do we get beyond the thumping, the constant drumming reminder of blood flowing, and find what bonds us beyond this bodily music. How do we exercise the muscle of the heart to care? To dare to put others before ourselves. To say and believe that our veins arrive at the same destination and “I would stop mine before I allowed yours to be cut off” And that “mine would no longer beat the same to know yours is unable to”

There's something of a dissonance between what we may pertain and what we act upon. Do we not spend our young female life in a kind of false consciousness? Are we not trying to grasp our true selves, and at what it is to be a woman before we even get to this quiet empathetic understanding of others? With our own edifice of emotional fecund, we in turn build a double empathy problem. We can point and say that others don't understand 'us' when it is ourselves who need to remain open, and to be ready to receive. It is only when we are truly still that we may feel that beating of our heart in our chest. Here the challenge is remaining in our own body and self, whilst being open to hearing the beat and flow of others. Bear witness. Listen.

# POPTARTS



BY JENNA GRAHAM



# Recipe Corner: Poptarts, from Jenna Graham

Interviewed (and taste tested) by Emer O' Shea

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Jenna Graham and I met almost a decade ago in a bakery in Rhode Island. Jenna started as my manager, running a staff of over 10 in a busy tourist town with a heavy footfall of hungry customers and display cabinets full of meticulously decorated baked goods. I was always impressed by Jenna's work ethic. The place ran seamlessly, even with the line out the front door, amongst the chaos of children dropping cupcakes and frosting all over the floor.

I still don't understand how people managed to get frosting under the seats. Under the seats? But, it was fun to go to work with Jenna. In my opinion, it's the best way to be a manager. As a shout-out to exceptional women past and present, I wanted to give a shout-out to Jenna, and she kindly provided a recipe contribution to the 'Herstory' edition.

There are 2 options to this recipe, Blueberry, and Apple Cinnamon, with the measurements given in 'cups'. Don't have measuring cups? Don't worry. Use an actual cup and adjust accordingly for this easy, but delicious homemade American treat!





### Blueberry Filling

- 2 cups frozen blueberries
- 1/3 c. sugar
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch mixed with 2 Tbsp. water
- 1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

### Blueberry Filling Directions

1. In a saucepan, combine frozen blueberries, sugar, lemon juice, and vanilla extract over medium heat.
2. Stir occasionally, allowing the blueberries to soften and release their juices, about 10 minutes
3. Stir in cornstarch dissolved in water and lower heat a bit.
4. Continue to cook for 5-8 more minutes, until filling thickens.

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*Or*

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### Apple Filling

- 3-4 medium apples of choice shredded (I like to use honey crisp or Fuji!)
- 1/3 cups brown sugar 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 Tbsp. corn starch (or cornflour)
- 2 Tbsp. melted butter (Substitute with any dairy alternative you want)
- Juice from 1 lemon

### Apple Filling Directions:

1. Peel and cut your apples into slices. Pulse the slices in a food processor until thin shreds are left (don't overdo it or you'll make apple sauce!)
2. Add apple shreds to a bowl along with the remaining ingredients and mix until combined.

### Pop Tart Pastry Crust

- 1 ½ cup cold butter (Substitute with any dairy alternative you want)
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. salt 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 6-10+ Tbsp. cold water

### Pastry crust Directions

1. Add cold butter to a mixer and mix for a few seconds just to get smooth.
2. Add flour, salt, and cinnamon
3. Mix on low/medium until clumps start to form
4. Add cold water, 1 Tablespoon at a time until the dough sticks together but is not sticky/wet.

### Pop tart Icing/Glaze

- 3 Tbsp. very soft or melted butter (Substitute whichever butter you want, and have, dairy, or dairy alternative)
- 1 cup powdered sugar ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- 2-3 Tbsp. (dairy or non-dairy) milk of choice
- Blueberry icing Add 1Tbsp. of blueberry filling (Once cooled)
- Apple Cinnamon Icing add 1-2 tsp. cinnamon

### Icing Directions

1. Put butter, icing sugar, vanilla extract, and milk of choice in a bowl. Either mix by hand with a whisk until combined, or in a mixing bowl to get a silky fluffy texture. Add more sugar if too thin. Add milk if too thick. We want a consistency close to molasses.
2. Once mixed, add the last ingredient for the flavor of pop tart you are going to make and stir until combined.

## ASSEMBLY!

1. Lightly flour a work surface and roll out your pastry dough to 1/8-1/4 inch thickness. (or thicker/thinner on your preference!)
2. Cut rectangles about 3x5 in. to get the size of a typically packaged pop tart.
3. Lay half of your rectangles on a tin foil-lined baking sheet (no need to grease) and place 1-2 Tablespoons of filling in the center leaving about 1/2 -1 inch of space along all edges.
4. Place the rectangle dough that does not have filling on top of the filled rectangles. Press the edges of both rectangles together with the prongs of a fork until all "closed" up!
5. Poke 2-3 holes into the tops of the pop tarts with the same fork to allow air to escape when in the oven.



Emer's attempt versus Jennas masterpiece



# All good Ideas STEM FROM

2020 the year when the sounds of applause for health care professions, front-line workers, and scientists globally researching vaccines and pioneering treatments could be heard globally. In Toastees Herstory edition, we wanted to highlight some of the women who have contributed to the advancement of science and medicine, past and present leading us towards a safer world and inspiring the next generation of innovators in science, medicine, and technology.

by Emer O' Shea

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## ANIKA CHEBROLU

Anika Chebrolu, a then 14-year-old from Texas won the 2020 3M Young Scientist Challenge for the discovery of a potential therapy to COVID-19, a science project she started in her bedroom. Anika's winning invention uses an in-silico methodology to discover a lead molecule that can selectively bind to the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Anika (now 15) said she was inspired to find potential cures to viruses after learning about the 1918 flu pandemic and finding out how many people die every year in the United States despite annual vaccinations and anti-influenza drugs on the market.

2

## DR. ÖZLEM TÜRECI

Dr. Özlem TÜreci is the co-founder of the biotechnology company BioNTech. In 2020, her company, which she runs with her husband developed the first approved RNA-based vaccine against COVID-19.

3

## EUNICE FOOTE

Eunice Foote was an American Scientist and women's rights activist who, in 1856, conducted an experiment to show how greenhouse gases affected the atmosphere. She used an air pump to fill glass cylinders with different gases and then tested the effect of sunlight on them. One was carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>. "The receiver containing the gas became itself much heated... and on being removed, it was many times as long in cooling..." Foote's experiment suggested that CO<sub>2</sub> and water vapour trap heat more than other gases do and the potential effects on our climate began to emerge. She published an article on her findings, but at a Scientific Conference, did not present her own work as women were not really allowed to speak. Three years later, Irish man John Tyndall conducted further experiments and was credited with proving the connection between greenhouse gases (such as CO<sub>2</sub>) and rising temperatures (i.e. Greenhouse effect)

4

## FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Florence Nightingale attributed with key nursing values- practicing good hygiene, washing hands regularly, and carrying out evidence-based practices. Born into a wealthy aristocratic family in 1820, she wanted to work as a nurse- a profession that was not seen as a respectable job for a woman at the time. Despite her family's disapproval, she self-educated in science and gained some nursing experience in Germany before leading a contingent of Volunteer nurses to a Military hospital in Scutari in Modern Day Turkey to support soldiers in the Crimean War. Most soldiers were dying of diseases such as typhus, typhoid, and cholera but her practices reportedly reduced the death rate in the hospital from 42.7% to 2%. Upon returning to the UK, she prioritised establishing Nursing as a respected profession. Nightingale founded the nursing School at St. Thomas Hospital London, developed Palliative care and Midwifery, and helped to reshape the health system across the UK.

5

## HENRIETTA LACKS

Henrietta Lacks, a tobacco farmer from Virginia in the U.S. died of cervical cancer in 1951, but, her legacy still lives on today through the immortalised cell line, HeLa. Using the HeLa line has aided the development of the Polio Vaccine, the HPV Vaccine and used extensively in research labs worldwide since



6

## MARIE CURIE

Marie Curie, known for her work on radioactivity is only one of four people to have received multiple Nobel laureates (Physics and Chemistry) and the first woman to receive a Nobel prize. A Professor of General Physics in the Faculty of Sciences, she was the first woman to hold the position. She was also appointed Director of the Curie Laboratory in the Radium Institute of the University of Paris, founded in 1914. Her research was crucial in the development of x-rays in surgery, with Curie herself helping to equip ambulances with x-ray equipment. Her name remains immortalized in helping fund and support the next generation of researchers. The European Commission-funded Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research fellowship support researchers at all stages of their careers, by providing excellent and innovative research training as well as career and knowledge-exchange opportunities, with an emphasis on worldwide and cross-sector researcher mobility are eligible for funding.

7

## RACHEL LEVINE

Dr. Rachel Levine is a pediatrician and Pennsylvania's secretary of health and holds the position of Professor in both pediatrics and psychiatry at the Penn State College of Medicine. A Harvard University and Tulane Medical school graduate, Dr. Levine was the chief resident at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. In 2015 Dr Levine was promoted to Pennsylvania's physician general, the state's top doctor. Impressed with her background in behavioral and mental health, the state Senate voted unanimously to approve her. Dr. Levine has risen to national prominence for leading the state's public health response to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. On 25th February 2021, President Joe Biden nominated Dr. Levine for assistant health secretary for health at the Department of Health and Human Services. The process could see her making history to become the first openly transgender federal official to be confirmed by the US Senate.



8

## ROSALIND FRANKLIN

Rosalind Franklin's research data was the first to demonstrate the basic dimensions of DNA strands and reveal the molecule was in two matching parts, running in opposite directions. In 1951 she began working in John Randall's lab at King's College London. She had nearly figured out the molecule's structure when Maurice Wilkins, another researcher in Randall's lab who was also studying DNA, showed one of Franklin's X-ray images to James Watson. Watson quickly figured out the structure was a double helix and, with Francis Crick, used her data to support their research and published the findings in the journal Nature. The three- Crick, Watson, and Wilkins- were awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, omitting Franklin.

9

## SUSAN WOJCICKI

Susan Wojcicki is the current CEO of YouTube Google's first HQ was in Susan's garage. Not the only technology trailblazer in the family, her sister Anne Wojcicki founded the personal genetics company 23andMe.

10

## TU YOUYOU

Tu Youyou is the chief scientist at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine born in China in 1930, she studied traditional Chinese and herbal medicines, found a reference in ancient medical texts to using sweet wormwood to treat intermittent fevers- a symptom of malaria. In the 1970s, after studies of traditional herbal medicines, Youyou and her research team were able to extract a substance, artemisinin, which inhibits the malaria parasite from worm-wood. In a most altruistic move, Youyou volunteered to be the first human subject to test the substance. Antimalarial drugs based on artemisinin have led to the survival and improved health of millions of people, and won her the 2015 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for her discovery, which has been deemed "arguably the most important pharmaceutical intervention in the last half-century"

# *Herstory*

*Celebrating*

**WOMEN**



Thank you to all of our contributors and supporters for making Herstory a reality! We are so happy to have 20+ women represented!

Thank you! Happy Women's History Month!

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