

# Trystan Reese Interview

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Welcome to Just breathe parenting your LGBTQ T. Love podcast, transforming the conversation around loving and raising an LGBTQ child filled with awesome guests, practical strategies and moving stories host Heather Hester always makes you feel like you're having a cozy chat. Wherever you are on this journey. Right now, in this moment in time, you are not alone. And here is Heather for this week's amazing episode.

Welcome to Just breathe, I am so happy that you are here. Before I jump into introductions for today's show, I just want to give a quick shout out to Liz Graham, who was the first person to use my new referral program. And so I just want to say thank you so much for helping me get the word out there. Today, I'm interviewing Tristan Reese, who is redefining the idea of family is June 29 memoir, how we do family covers so many important issues, from trans pregnancy, to adoption, to LGBTQ parenting. More it does. So in such an inspiring yet relatable tone. Kristen's voice shines through and the best way as he shares his story, and lessons applicable to every family trust, and I am so thrilled to have you today on the show. And to hear your story from your perspective. I was really, really drawn into your story from literally the very first page and I kind of sat down thinking, Okay, I'm going to read through this. And I know there'll be tons of stuff I want to highlight. And I was so compelled by your story and just the way that you shared it that I totally forgot to highlight. And I was just so into it. And it was awesome. And I read it in one sitting. And what I found, you did this really beautiful thing where it's both captivating, and it shares this really extraordinary story. But what you do by sharing that story with such vulnerability and openness really helps make it ordinary, right. And it's just this cool thing that you do. So I would really like to start right at the beginning of the book, being transgender is still not widely understood. People have lots of questions. There's lots of misunderstanding. And while everyone's experience is completely unique, I found such clarity and relatability in yours. Can you share just starting from the beginning? How you figured it out how you knew? And and then we'll go from there?

Sure. I mean, I think people really do want a straightforward, easy story about how I knew, you know, they, they seem to really want the like, I emerged from the womb 100% clear that I was a man. And like my story just doesn't happen to be that straightforward. I mean, I think number one, I was raised in a pretty, you know, pretty liberal accepting family, especially considering the era of the early 80s, especially considering that I was raised in a very conservative part of the country. But there wasn't much to rebel against in my family in terms of gender. And And in a way, of course, that's a benefit, right? It's, it's a benefit, to have all available paths in front of you and to not and to not have to rebel against something to assert your gender identity or gender expression. But in a way, for me, it also meant I didn't have an awareness that maybe there was something else going on for me around gender

until much later in my life until my late teens early 20s. Because I was just kind of allowed to if I want to short hair, I could just have short hair. If I wanted to wear dungarees instead of a dress, I was allowed to wear that too, you know, there just wasn't a lot of push in any direction, gender wise and so I really didn't, didn't really sit down to figure out who I was until my late teens. You know, that was the time when I thought like oh, okay, maybe there's something else going on. And maybe there are some some changes I could make to my body that would make me feel more whole and happy and you know, at home in my skin and so eventually I did those things and and that that that did help it turns out

I think it's really important to hear people's stories and people's experiences and that helps and just normalizing it for So many. I mean, I want to say kids, but I think people in general and their process and they're figuring it out, and they're understanding and wanting to feel just at home in their skin, right? Your early career was with the National LGBTQ Task Force, right? I'm wondering how your work there prepared you for all of your journeys in your early 20s. And then once you met Biff, and all of your journeys and adventures that the two of you have had?

Well, I can't really say that, like, you know, those early career, you know, choices that I made impacted necessarily my personal trajectory. But it did me and you know, one of the questions I get from a lot of other transgender men who've had babies is like, Why did your story catch on in mind? Did you know other people have really wanted to put themselves on the map and really be part of this bigger conversation about the transgender movement. And, you know, what I usually say to them is, you know, to be able to tell your story in a compelling, relatable, accessible way. That's a skill that I spent decades learning. It's not this didn't like my story catching on didn't happen by magic, it happened because I spent almost 10 years talking to straight people about LGBTQ issues, doing persuasion, learning about the science, of how do you actually change someone's mind, when it comes to supporting LGBTQ people, I use that I use all those principles. In my book, I used all those principles, when I worked with the media, you know that that is really the direct connection between those years I spent in the movement, doing community building, drink, persuasion, doing all of that, and then it really, I really feel like it set me up uniquely, to be in this position where I could tell my story and have access to truly millions of people all over the world. It's so weird, you know, but people I know, all over the globe would take like, you know, they take a picture of their TV and be like, you're on my TV right now in Spain. You know, like, my friends in Germany would like take a picture of like whatever newspaper was on the newsstand and be like, you're on the cover of the newspaper in Berlin. And, you know, again, that didn't happen by accident happened, because they spent all of those years investing in my own understanding of, of how do we talk about these issues and topics in a way that people get, you know, that resonates with them, that's easy for them to hear that they can have some empathy, and you can move the conversation forward. So I think that's that's how those are those years spent doing, you know, LGBTQ organizing, directly translated to me being able to tell my story.

That's amazing. Yeah. That, could you actually just expand on that a little bit, because I think that those are pieces that all of us could benefit from learning, and learning how to, you know, Hone, because it just takes practice. It's not something that you hear or you read in a book, and you say, Okay, now I can do this. It takes practice. And that's what we all need to do, as not, you know, LGBTQ people, but also allies and advocates. I mean, that's one of the most important things we can do. Right. So could you share some some tips and tricks?

Yeah, I mean, absolutely. I think, by and large, what's what's most important is that when people go to try to do this kind of systems change work or culture change work, it's really important that first, you've done your healing work. And so Renee Brown says, if my healing is dependent upon your response to my story, I'm not ready to tell my story. And that's a really painful truth that it's it's hard for people to hear and believe people are like, even though I'm angry, wounded, broken, upset, I should still be able to make change. I mean, maybe, but what you're gonna find is the work is just going to traumatize and re traumatize you and the people that you're trying to organize and communicate with people know in their bodies, is is this person doing this work from a scar or a wound. And if you're doing the work from a wound, people feel it, it feels unsafe to them, it feels treacherous to them, they feel that and it puts them into that defensive space too. And in fact, not only will you not be effective and trying to do your work, you can actually cause greater harm. You can push people further away from moving forward and having a greater understanding of the community. One example is you know, I spoke at a conference with parents of trans youth and I said, you know, if you are still so angry and hurt and grieving for your kid, being in a trance for this possible future you imagine for your kid, you can't get up in front of the school board and convince them to change their non discrimination policies so that your child can use a safe bathroom. Right? Right, they are going to feel and know you are hurting. And when you do your work from that place, they're going to be like, well, that's when you end up yelling at people. Because really, you're yelling at yourself, you know. And so that's, that's really number one, before we even think about what tactics serve that larger strategy. First, it really is that mindset, the way that you show up in that work, you have to have done your own healing work with your community, before you can then engage. So that's number one is that mindset piece, I love that. And then number two is really understanding that this work is developmental. There are different stages that people go through as they come to understand except welcome, LGBTQ people. And so what may work for the principle of your kids school is going to be very different than what what might work for your conservative boss, whether you're the principal of your kids school may be like, Yes, I totally get it. Some kids are LGBTQ helped me develop a policy, or helped me understand why the language I used in that PTA email didn't work. That's very different than how you might approach your conservative boss, when you say, I'd love to be honored as an employee of the month, you know, at our big thing, I'd like to bring my family and by the way, you know, My son is going to bring his boyfriend's. Let's talk about how that's gonna work for you. Right? It's just a very different approach. So when I talked to a conservative outlet, media outlet, I'm using quite different language and framing than when I talked to Cosmo magazine, different people read those magazines, sure approaches are going to work. So really digging into what is my goal with this audience? And what are the values of this audience? So how can I frame this in language that people are really going to understand? And so that's the that's the tactical thing that I'll that I'll share that is I think, most useful when thinking about what do you want to see happen? What's the goal? And then who are the people that we're trying to persuade? And what messages are gonna resonate most with them?

Right, right. Oh, I love that. That's so helpful. And I think both of those, you know, doing the work, I talk about that a lot, you know, we have to do the work. And until we do that work, we can't move forward, one of my very first episodes I did was on the coming out process for your child, but then the follow up was the coming out process for the parent, and what the parent needs to work through, in order to be not only a supportive loving parent, but to be an effective ally. So I think those are fantastic points, and

really gives a great starting off place for people to say, Okay, this is this is what I need to do. And then this is who I'm talking to, right? This is who my community is, whether it's a work community, a school community, a family community, and how what words do I need to use? How do I relate to them, and then not just talking at them? Because I think that is, especially at the beginning, is so easy to do, because you just want to get it all out there. And this is how I feel right? And it's it just falls flat.

Yeah, and you love your kids. And so just you loving your kids is enough for you to make it past whatever kinds of internalized bias assumptions, stereotypes, fears you might have, that'll get you through, guess what your boss doesn't really care about your kids not to be mean to your boss, or whatever, you know, but that's not going to be enough to be able to just say, but it's the right thing to do. You know, my kid is LGBTQ. So I want us to have an LGBTQ working group to look at our policies and practices, look at our staff from the community, feeling included, like I want to they don't care that it's because your kid I mean, maybe they do. I'm not trying to be mean to bosses. But you know, you have to figure out maybe for them, it is going to be a little bit more of a business decision. right to say, you know, I'm motivated to look at this because my kid is LGBTQ and doing some more research, I think there's actually a really strong business case to be made for having this kind of working group. You know, maybe it is a business case. Maybe it's about a culture of belonging, maybe it's about people doing work effectively. You know, I work a lot with like very mainstream, big corporations. And often I say being able to do culturally competent work means that you remove the distractions of bias and people can work more effectively and more efficiently. Great, that makes sense to them. They're like that sounds good. I do not want my workers to be distracted, distracted and thinking that's not about selling now. It's about how are you framing the work so that it's gonna make sense of people you're talking to.

That's awesome. That is really so helpful. And you say it, I think this is why people think it's so easy, because you say it in a way that makes it sound like it's so easy. And there, as you know, like you said, there is a lot of work and practice that goes into being able to present in this way, where it just is like, this is what you do. And this is this is who you are, you know, where you need to go to find the information or what you need to practice what you need to work through all of that. So thank you for sharing that, I really appreciate it, I want to just dip into your book a little bit, I don't want to ruin it, because I want everybody to read it. Because it is such a phenomenal read. But almost every chapter of your book has a section at the end called notes from life in our family. I loved these because they were super, super helpful. They were topical, but they were just quite educational. And again, written in a way that anyone can understand them, where they're no matter where you are on this journey. There's going to be a light bulb moment for you. And I found that in the very first chapter, I think it was the how we do love. You had the whole section on understanding trans language, which I you know, I've read a ton on this. And I just thought this was so well done. And written in such a great way. Because I think a lot of parents, allies, advocates are like, we want to do the right thing we want to understand we and there's like this whole like scurrying of like oh my gosh, this is so scary. And and we don't want to be offensive. And we'd and I just have to read this. You're very ending paragraph if you don't mind from this because it is perfect. So you say your goal when learning these concepts should never be to know everything. It should be to know enough to be sensitive to others, to avoid ignorance, and to cultivate an attitude of humility that allows others to tell you when you've stepped out of line which is too thumbs up as my mentor Beth's zemsky. Am I saying her last name? Right? Okay, good,

says ally ship is the ability to view the world through multiple lenses. And learning about those who are different from you is a great way to sharpen that lens. Most everyone wants to, you know, I say that's very general sweeping generalization. But I like to think that most people want to do the right thing. And to learn and to understand. And I just thought this section in particular was so super helpful. But I will say that all of these, and I'm curious what your hope was, and creating these sections at the end of your, you know, each chapter, which was really a part of your story. And then you had this great educational piece.

Yeah, I mean, the goal was exactly what you just said it was to have people understand in as accessible language as possible. Some of these concepts that can get very heavy and theoretical and didactic, you know, we love words in the trans, the trans community. And sometimes things can get extremely complicated. And people are using words like sis heteronormativity. And I have to tell trans people, other trans educators, I'm just like, no one knows what that means. Right? If you're only speaking to people within the trans community, that's great. We need people doing work in the trans community use all the fancy words you want, that's fine. And if you're trying to be accessible to a wider audience, you have to understand, maybe not accept, but at least understand that most people have not spent any time thinking about this, right? And so getting this information in a shame free, accessible way, that's how we get people to the place we need them to be in order to do more effective work and not step in it quite as much. So that was really the goal there and I was reluctant to do anything that felt like teaching or preaching or advice anything like that. I was like, oh God, who am I to say, do this or do that? But, you know, my publisher was like, No, you need to tell people to do this or do that people are open to hearing it. So I was like, Okay, we'll see. So we'll see if

I am here to tell you that I thought it was quite quite helpful. And and it made for a really lovely balance. So, you know, from reading, you know, a chapter of your story and then going into this, you know, and it's not long. It's it's really the two or three pages Max, right. But it is like this perfect amount of teaching and education that so many of us want. And I think that's the biggest thing, you know, there's fear exists. And ignorance exists because the information isn't readily available or readily accessible. So, by doing this, you've done people a great favor, and, you know, a great service to say, here, here it is. So you understand better so you can practice this, and, and just, you know, kind of reminding everyone, it takes practice. Nobody's perfect, but you have to start somewhere with it. Right?

Yeah. I mean, it's again, it's like Bernie Brown says, like, let's be like, awkward, kind and brave, I think. She says, and people will say, Oh, it's it's so awkward. Yeah, yeah, totally. Let's get awkward, right, you know, or I did. My consulting firm, we hosted a land acknowledgments webinar, right, so we had an indigenous person come into this amazing training on how you can build more intentional, deeper relationships with indigenous communities and, and nations. And, you know, so many of the things in the chat were like, Linda, I'm just so it feels so awkward to approach someone in this way. And I, so I passed that question on the facilitator. And they said the same thing as like, Great, let's like get up better to be awkward and try, then to either not do anything at all, or to really step in it, you know, and so I tell people, like, it can be awkward to say, to your kid, even, you know, I really want to be a fantastic ally to you, like, I don't want to go overboard, but I also don't want to go under board. So like, how am I doing? It can be awkward to ask. And also, like, let's be humble, you know, let's say, I don't know all the things, I'm trusting you to tell me how I can do and be better. And I'm going to proactively

seek out opportunities for you to tell me you know, I know that there's a power differential here, that may prevent you from coming to me and really saying, Mom, I need you to chill out. Stop with the P flag thing. We don't need a rainbow flag in front of our house. Right? Or the other way, like, I need you to tell grandma, grandpa, I'm gay. Like, let's like I can't have you messing around anymore. This is what I need from you. Right? You know, sometimes our kids can't tell us those things. You know, they're scared, no. And so understanding those power dynamics and giving them a chance to tell us and being a safe person for them to come to, you know, that's what we hope.

Absolutely, and I that does take I think he is a great word humility. And in doing that big by allowing your kids to kind of see that shift of, I want to learn from you, I want to really understand where you are. And you can only do that by being super genuine, right? And, you know, kind of taking away that like, I'm the mom or I'm the dad and I'm, you know, whatever I'm in charge. And being like, really, it's a it does take practice and it is awkward, or, you know, I use the term messy all the time. You know, it's very messy, it can be very messy, but you just embrace that and go with it. And your kids will tell you, I mean, for instance, I love that you said the whole Pew flag thing because I about two weeks ago was like, All right, we're getting a flagpole. And we're putting up the pride flag and some other flags. And you know, my son's at NYU, my daughter's going to Michigan in the fall. And like, we've got a lot of flags, and this is exciting. And my daughter was like, Mom, we live on the corner of you know, that's kind of a busier Street. I really need for you. Yeah, take it down about 12 notches, because I am, I am enthusiastic, and I get excited. So and they'll tell you like this is too much or, and I've certainly you know, with Connor numerous times been like, I want to understand, but I don't want so much information. You know, there's there's a fine line between information that we don't necessarily need, but then again, sometimes having that extra information, helps you understand where they are with things. So it's messy. Like you said, Yep. And I love that you're you. Yes, you are a fan of Rene Brown who is hands down one of my favorites. She is just fantastic.

So I told my agent like that's, that's my dream is to be on Rene Browns podcast. So could you all work on that?

Yes. Oh, for sure. You need to be on there. She is such a great interviewer. Oh my goodness, I love listening to her podcasts. So fun. Well, yeah, you need to be on there. gotta see what we can do about this. From your words to whomever's. Right? We're just gonna throw this out to the universe, or manifest this right? Oh, my goodness. Okay, so the big topic, which I'm sure is one of the biggest things that everybody wants to ask you about, but I want you to talk about it in whatever way that you feel comfortable. I thought that you and the sharing of your story, you showed such courage and sharing your pregnancy journey from pre, all the discussions, everything that happened, you know, all the way through, and you chose to share that with the world. And there was a lot that came at you. You, you did get beautiful support. But you also got a lot of just ugliness. I'm wondering now, as you look back, if you are happy that you made that decision, I'd love to hear your thoughts on it, because it was just so incredibly courageous.

Yeah, I mean, it didn't feel courageous at the time, but honestly, I think it's just because I don't know, I'm naive, stupid. One of those. You know, I just I just really thought I'm prepared for this, you know, I'm prepared mentally to be able to withstand whatever does come my way. And I'm prepared, literally, you

know, I have all of this advanced training on how to tell my story well, so that the most number of people will see it, resonate with it, understand that and then hopefully be inspired to take action to support transgender people in whatever way is right for them. Right. So I was just woefully unprepared. And you know, this really is, it really is my least favorite question is when people basically are asking, like, Do you regret it? You know, right. And, and, you know, I don't I really don't believe I don't believe in regret What's done is done. There's no reason to look back. And like, was it worth it. And I still don't know, I may go to my grave not knowing it. It's wonderful that people saw my story. It's wonderful that people reached out and show the impact that had on their lives. And I hope it continues to ripple out and make change. That's, that's great. But like, I'm not completely selfless person. And so while I'm delighted that some people were able to hear my story, and that it made a difference for them. I can't avoid the very real impact that telling my story had on me and my spirit and who I am and how I see the world. Sure, no parts of me died. When when I got the backlash that I did, you know, the parts of me that fundamentally believe that people are good, that believe that change really is possible. The parts of me that we're not aware of how incredibly brutal and disgusting and vicious people can be like, that never comes back. You know, once I heard of you is gone. It's gone forever. Right. And, you know, my, my partner who had already been exposed to the more vicious parts of humanity, you know, it's like, yeah, it's a gift, like naivete like it's, it's not good. It's a gift to have that go away. And to really understand more clearly, what the world is not how you want it to be. I thought that I thought that seeing the world as a fundamentally good place, I thought that was the gift. And now I have to move forward and figure out who who am I? If I'm not naive and optimistic, then like, what, what of me is even left? Those are the things that people liked about me, you know? And so I don't know, you know, I don't know, was it a net positive and negative? Did it cause more harm than good out in the world? Did it cause more harm than good within myself? I just don't know, I may not know for many years, if ever, if ever. So the jury's still out. Okay, well,

I apologize for asking one of your least favorite questions. But I thought, Oh, no, no, not at all. I all, not at all. It's just I don't have a simple answer is no, of course not. Of course, you don't and I didn't think that you would, but I I was wondering, you know, where you kind of were on the spectrum of all of those feelings that you know, you related so well in the book. You know, it's interesting that you said that the toll that it took on you because that's what I kept thinking as I was reading this and thinking, Oh, my goodness, he's, you know, you are growing a life inside of you and simultaneously, just all of this nastiness coming at you. And that, that is so hard. And and I think, you know, you have a very tender spirit. And that I think that's even more difficult on on those who are more tender spirited. And so I am sorry that I asked the question, but I, I also, you know, I think it's important for people to hear how their words affect people. I used to be in an accountability group with this woman who I said, you know, words can't hurt, words can't hurt. I remember thinking, What's the dumbest thing I've ever heard, of course, words can hurt deeply. The end, it doesn't matter who they're from, I guess I just wanted you to know that your courage, your vulnerability. And I think there is a very tender spirit still there. So I don't think you lost all of it.

Thank you. I know Vic says, I like the EU now even more than the EU from before. And there's a poet that I really love that actually met on Instagram of all places. And this person is both a visual artist, and a writer. And there's this incredible, I'm a part of their Patreon. Like community, and so I get something every month from them. And they, you know, had this beautiful thing that they sent out this beautiful

illustration where if you can imagine it's there's like a before and there's an after, and in the before, there's a big blue circle. That is safety. And then there's like a little tiny, orange circle that's like unsafe. And then the after is like there's a big orange circle that says unsafe and a little tiny blue circle that is safe. And it's like before and after. I was like oh yeah, you know, it just hit me really deeply that like that's that before the world before this happened, the world felt really safe to me. And of course, that's a function of my privilege. And of course, theoretically, and ideologically. And certainly in my values, I understood that that's not true for everyone. But it was true for me. And then after what happens with me telling my story, it was it was like unsafety was everywhere. And there were only little tiny pockets of the world that were safe. within a company accompanying, you know, there was this little poem that they'd written, you know, that that really said, like, I love how openly you stepped into things before. And I love how careful you are now. And then at the very end, the poem says, Did you catch that? I love how you are now.

I love that.

And of course, it wasn't written for me, it was just like a poem they wrote. But like, it had never occurred to me to love who I am now and to, to, I guess, don't to stop grieving for who I was, but like, what are the benefits of being careful? And keeping myself safe? And understanding that, yes, the world is not safe, and maybe that's okay. Right? That they're both okay. And that you can have love for how freely you were before something happened. And you can also have love for how careful you are now, right? It was, it was really profound for me to get this little note from them in the mail, I have it up next to my desk, where I work all day, every day, to try to remember to have love for who we are now.

Absolutely, absolutely. I think that is a gift and it's one of those and right, it doesn't have to be one or the other. It's it's and, and just learning to embrace both of those and knowing that, you know, grieving what was is a process that there isn't a timeframe on and, and embracing, you know, kind of stepping into the very clinical term that my therapist and I use your Eunice it's it's super technical be be in your Eunice Yes, being you and loving all of you. Is that

Oh, Eunice like y o u and e s s Yeah. And like, like you like like unclinc What? Your Yunus your

Yunus Exactly, yes. Yes, it's it's it's not clinical or technical, but it works. So it's easy to it's easy to wrap your head around and just be like, Oh, yeah, like everything that makes you who you are. And that's beautiful. So thank you for sharing that with with me and with everyone. You share a really great section at the very end of the book and your appendix called how we do activism, which I loved. And I learned so much from that as well. And I am just wondering if you could share a little bit specifically About the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. I thought that was Yeah. Oh, cool. I loved that. And it's so applicable to all types of activism. It's not, you know, specific to one type, right? So it's something we all can use, and learn to use. And whatever type of work we're doing.

Yeah, I mean, that's a tool I've been using for, like, 12 years. And so yes, I use it all the time. And I really, I mean, I feel like I really could write an entire book that specifically about this, I mean, now I've done I've used this tool. And just for obviously, I don't want to nerd out about it too much without explaining it. You know, it's this theory, that changes developmental, that people go through different

stages, as they come to really understand both the similarities they have with people who are different from them, as well as the very real differences that we have across lines of race, gender, class, ability, right, the shade sanity, but also the very real things, the differences that make a difference, you know, again, as Beth Beth zemsky, one of my mentors, says, and so that's, that's a tool that I use, it's a model that I use, it's it's an actual administrative tool that people can like, take, it's an assessment, you get a coach, someone goes through it with you. Okay, I've done now just dozens of those. And I love that tool. I love that model. I could nerd out about it for ever. Oh, I'm sure you're like, Okay, let's just throw it at the end somewhere,

you know. And, of course, here's me, let's talk about this, because it's so fascinating. But I think that one of the things that one of the several things that I found fascinating, first of all, it does line up a little bit with the whole coming out the stages of coming out, and with the denial and the defensiveness, and then the acceptance and the, you know, moving forward, right. And but the one thing that I think a lot of us, who are, who are allies and advocates, but not members of the community, and even in doing anti racism work as a white person. So I think we get caught up hung up on the differences. And then we kind of panic, right? How do we handle the panic? The the differences? How do we do this? How do we heal what's in us? Do we have anything within us? I don't know. Is it there? it? I think it is I, you know, there there are all these questions, right, that it brings up and I'm wondering if you can speak to that, and perhaps share your thoughts on how to navigate that.

Yeah, I mean, it's, the way that the model works is it really teaches us that we can really only do work from our frame. So from whatever stage we're in, that's how we're going to view everything. And so, you know, for example, if you are just coming out as LGBTQ, and maybe you've moved out of the denial stage, and you're into the polarization, so that stage two was polarization. You may, either way, you're going to see the world in black and white, and good and bad. Like that's sort of the natural place where that stage shows up. And you may view yourself your identities, your community as good and everyone else's bad. Or vice versa, you may view yourself and your community as bad, your identities as bad and the rest of the world is good. Wait, and we're seeing this already show up as we do every single year that I've come around, should we allow, quote unquote, allow drag queens and the leather community to be at pride? Right? So this is like a super classic example. So you I really hope that you aren't being exposed these conversations, I hope that they are appropriately siloed just inside the LGBTQ community itself. But this is a conversation that comes up every year LGBTQ people say they're making us look bad. They're confusing us. Right? And the underlying message, it's, it's polarization, it's why can't we just be more like them? Right? And so that's that stage, a brain station? Why can't we just be more like them? And can you all just act more like them? So it's, it's the stage, that's it, and hopefully, people find eventually find people who are not in that stage that can pull them forward? Or the opposite, which is like, you'll see, I'm sure that you are seeing posts on social media that like when you say LGBTQIA that A is not for ally. Right, that's polarization. Like you are not in our community, right, or like hashtag down with Sis, right, trans people, you know, you know dogging on people who are not Trans is polarization, it's a stage that people are in. And they can only see the world through that frame, they can't see all the incredible cisgender people who are doing doing really bold and brave work, or they're risking a lot to push forward change for trans people, they can't see that, you know, that's, that's, oh, that's performative, right? That's fine. They can only see it through their lens sure frame. And so you know, that's why I, that's another model too, because it takes the shame out of

it, it takes the judgment out of it, it's right, no one's good or bad, you can only see the world through your lens. Right. And what ally ship I hope encourages us to do is to broaden the lens is to use the power of empathy, to see the world through other people's eyes and to be open and to be curious and to be humble, to hopefully move into being able to see that we are all so deeply and profoundly interconnected to each other. And, and we truly are that spider web where you pull on one piece we all, you know, all of us are moved when one of us is harmed, and one of us is lifted up, all of us are lifted up. You know, it's it's hard to see that when you're in some of those beginning stages. And I saw my parents go through the same thing. No, you're not really trans, you couldn't possibly be trans. This is just a fad. This is just a trend. This is just a stage like they definitely did all of that. It's like, Okay, fine. You know, you can be trans but but anytime there's a bug, I'm like, you're allowed. Right, exactly. polarization,

you know, right, that's fine. It's part it's part of the process. That's part of the work. But I think that what is really, and this is just how my personal brain works, but I, I work well, when I know there are steps and there's a process and there's Okay, this is where I am now I want to I want to understand everything. So I spend a lot of time trying to understand things, and that not everybody works that way I realize that. But this is so I find so helpful. Not only in my own work, but as I'm working with other people, and as other people, you know, ask questions, or I see things that are, you know, out on social media or out in the world, and I can better say, Oh, well, that's what's going on. Instead of, you know, what sometimes tends to be a mama bear response, you know, don't don't even mess with my kid. Right? these morons? Right, exactly, exactly. What these people what? They don't know any better. He I love the spider web analogy. Because, you know, I truly, firmly believe that we are all humans, and we are all connected. And that things like this, it's fear. Like the baseline is fear. And so when, what whatever stage happens, or whatever you're going through, and and it comes out, as you know, ugliness, it's fear. I've just so believe that it's fear. And so I kind of pull that apart. And I think well, what are what is this person afraid ever? What are they? What is this community afraid of? And, and how can we work to alleviate that fear or share information that will make this less scary, that could be incredibly naive. But

I figured you might appreciate that.

For I mean, truly, for people who haven't had a lot of exposure to LGBTQ issues, to transgender people to transgender families, they may find themselves defensive, because they are worried right, that somehow they are going to be left behind, right, that somehow they're going to be made irrelevant. The world is moving forward. And I don't understand any of this. So why don't I double down, right, that fear of irrelevance is just it's really potent. And that's part of where storytelling can come in, is because it's not anybody saying you're bad or wrong, or I don't care about you, or you know, you're soon going to be, you know, no longer important in this new society that's creating. Instead it's saying, Look at how much we have in common. I have kids, you have kids, right? All right work to build a family, you work to build a family, harm has come to me harm has come to you. And so that's part of why I was hoping that my story would start to push forward this conversation is because I hope that a story as opposed to like a TED talk, you know, or a lecture or a policy that your boss is implementing. Right. We're currently at school telling you that you're wrong because you use the wrong pronoun for their kid, whatever it is. A story can kind of circumvent all of that. It's also Why I use humor when I'm, you know, presenting to

groups or when I'm doing coaching is because it's just science, when we laugh, it kind of like hacks our defensiveness a little bit. When we're touched, it hacks our defensiveness, you know, and then we're more open to we're, it's easier for me to, like, sneak some messages in there. Absolutely. Well,

it makes you so relatable, right? I mean, I find that I default to humor, you know, if I'm, if I'm nervous, or if I'm, you know, really wanting to share something, and I'm not quite sure, like how to humor is the easiest way to just put everybody kind of on, like, take all of like the, you know, out of it. And I love that this is a science back there, because it was just a coping technique for me.

Think that, but really, I mean, let's think about as feeble as our little human brains are, they're also brilliant in lots of ways, you know, we're always bringing in data points that we're not aware of. And I would venture to say that there are times when you have yelled at someone about something. And there are times when you've like, been self effacing, or like made a little joke at your own expense or at someone else's expense, but in a loving way. And you have your body has felt, oh, this is easier, this is more effective. Oh, let's do this more. So you say oh, I don't know, I was just, I'd venture to say that of all the millions of data points your brain has taken it. It has noticed that when you make a joke about something, when you talk about something using an analogy, instead of something that's super theoretical, it's more effective, it gets in and it gets in at a deeper level. And that's that really is like what the science tells us storytelling, being open, curious, connecting with people. in political science. It's called stickiness, but the messages that are shared and that kind of container are stickier. They last longer, they are deeper, they're more resonant kinds of things. And that's what I was hoping my story. And that's what I'm hoping my book is going to do that's going to be sticky. Well, here it learn something not even notice that they're learning something and that it's going to stick with them. Absolutely.

We haven't touched on the adoption of Lucas and Haley who Oh, my goodness, I mean, I just kind of want to throw these little teasers out there, because, holy cow, everyone, this is an extraordinary story. I mean, you so you and Beth had only been together for a year, correct? When you learned that you would be taken care of. I was Beth's sister's kids, Right you are, you're taking them into your care. This story is extraordinary. And these two went from just overnight becoming parents, and parents of your three year old and a one year old, the lovely ways that you shared what that experience was like, there are pieces that every person can relate to. And then just going into your, you know, marriage, and you're having a baby, and all the work that the two of you, you know, did before you met and are doing now, it's just so extraordinary. So I'm putting links everywhere for everyone to buy this book. I am going to actually maybe consider this required reading for listening to my podcast. I think it might be a required reading book. It's that good that it's released on June 29. Correct?

Yes, that's right. It was supposed to come out yesterday. And because of the Suez Canal, like speaking was all being interconnected, right. Because of whatever happened on the Suez Canal, all the publishing, printing, shipping, things got pushed back. Oh, my guess now it's gonna be at the end of the month. Oh, is that wild?

See? Amazing, amazing. Wow, that people will hear about this before Well, before the 29th. So we are in good shape for that. So is there anything else that you words of wisdom or a story you'd like to share before we wrap up?

Yeah, I mean, I think the only thing is thinking about you know, I really should have pitch that I do a co interview with my mom for your podcast, you know, because because my mom has just had such a I think it's really really interesting and unique journey. As a parent, you know, coming to coming to love and accepts me and all of my uniquenesses absolutely, but he really what I learned in our relationship, as you know, for LGBTQ the parents of LGBTQ kids, you know, your process, your healing, it matters so much and it's not your kid's job to support you through it. Like you Other grownups to support you through and even if you see your kid is super mature, even if they are legally an adult, you know, don't put that on them. Because I think that was the hardest part for me was to be expected to carry that burden for my mother while she was going through her own stuff. And you know, she kept saying, well, I just don't understand. And, you know, I have brothers grow. I had brothers growing up and like, I wanted to do the boy thing, and I didn't want to be a boy, I'm like, good for you like, right? This isn't about you. You know, I wish that she'd had somewhere else to put all of that Stroman drinks, you know. And so I think that's like, my one learning. For parents having been on the receiving end of that is like, you deserve to have your process but like somewhere else, from your kid? Yeah. And I think the other thing is, and this is in the very, very, very end of the book in the acknowledgments. I do acknowledge my parents, and specifically my mom. And specifically for, you know, I said, like, I'm going to be talking about you in the book, do you want to read any of it? And she said, No, it's your story. And I think there's something really beautiful and profound about a parent, really letting go of what does the way that my kids sees the world and the way the world sees my kid? Like, what does that reflect on me? And at what point does that just get to be their story? And I really love that she didn't want to censor me and didn't want to say, well, that's not how I remember it. You know, she really just said, It's yours. It's yours. It's how ever you want. And I think that that was just so beautiful, and freeing and profound. And I think that any, any parent could learn from my mom in in understanding that the world may reflect what your child's journey is on you. And you don't have to take that on.

Right. Right. That is beautiful. And perhaps we will have to reconnect in six to 12 months and have your mom on as well, because I think that's always, you know, Connor and I have done a number of episodes together. And it has been so much fun, because, you know, him sharing his perspective, as well as, you know, when you did this, or when you said this, and we have this total? You know, it's such a lovely thing for people to hear, because they connect with that. And they say, oh, okay, I'm not the only one that's feeling that way. It's like a huge sigh of relief. Right? So those are two fantastic points. And we'll just have to circle back once all of the excitement around your, your book, you know, gets out there and, and you're, you're used to all of the goodness. And that comes from that. So I just want to thank you. Thank you for sharing.

Of course, thank you for having me on your show. I wish you and all of your listeners most of whom are parents, I know we're in that that middle space, I assume of being excited for what the future holds for their, their children and also a little wary of how the world is going to treat their kids. And I hope my story helps them see that there are lots of possibilities ahead for everyone. Yes, yes, absolutely. Thank you. Thank you.

Thanks so much for joining Heather today. Remember to just breathe. Take a few minutes every day to calm and center yourself. Reach out anytime with ideas, questions or feedback. Please rate and review just breathe on your favorite platform. Subscribe to Heather's website WWW dot chrysalis mama.com to receive her monthly newsletter and stay informed. Join the private just breathe Facebook community to chat with other parents and allies and share with anyone who needs to know that they are not alone.