

398: Fostering Unity with Julie Rose



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Jody Moore

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 398, Fostering Unity with Julie Rose.

Did you know that you can live a life that's even better than happy? My name is Jody Moore. I'm a master-certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. And if you're willing to go with me I can show you how. Let's go.

Hey there everybody, welcome to the podcast today. I am so excited to introduce you to my guest, Julie Rose. I'm going to just begin by reading her bio and then tell you a little bit about how I was introduced to her and her work. Says, Julie Rose has been a radio journalist for 20 years, reporting for NPR local stations in Salt Lake City and Charlotte, North Carolina as well as network shows including Morning Edition and All Things Considered.

Her feature in News Reporting won multiple national and regional Edward R. Murrow awards. In 2015 Julie began hosting BYU radio's daily live radio show on SiriusXM 143 called *Top of Mind*. And went on to win a Gracie Award for radio hosting. After several years on the air daily, Julie began fighting the urge to avoid the news completely because of how anxious and angry it made her feel.

She knew she couldn't be alone in that so in 2022 *Top of Mind* became the answer. Switching to a weekly podcast that tackles tough topics in a way that's honest and probing but also leaves people feeling empathetic and empowered. Find *Top of Mind* with Julie Rose anywhere you listen to podcasts.

So I was contacted by Julie Rose or somebody on her team and asked to be a guest on *Top of Mind*. And it was such an amazing experience, Julie is truly a top notch reporter in that their podcast is produced at such a high level. I started listening to it after being introduced to Julie and invited to be on her show. And discovered that she truly does have a talent for helping you look at all sides of a situation in a way that fosters unity.

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And I feel like in today's world where there's so much division and such a focus on division that anybody who is doing the tough work Julie's doing of digging in and helping us connect more with one another without losing sight of our values, without having to change our opinions is so needed and it felt just so comforting to me, the interaction that I've had with Julie. So I'm very excited for you to hear a little bit from her about how she's done that, how it's impacted her and how we can all do that in our daily lives.

You don't have to host a podcast in order to foster this in your daily life. So before I turn it over to my conversation with Julie Rose, let me remind you that we are currently open for Wellness Week. If you've ever considered coaching and wondered and been curious about whether or not you even would have time for it or if it would help you find the relief that you're looking for then make sure you check out Wellness Week, it's \$19, what have you got to lose? Come and check it out.

If you can't attend live you don't have to be there live to get the complete experience. We will be sending out replays as well. So head to jodymoore.com/intensive to join me for the upcoming Wellness Week. Without further ado, here is my conversation with Julie Rose.

Jody: Alright, well, I'm so excited to talk with you today. I love so much the work that you're doing and I'm excited to have you share some insight today. Let's begin with just a bit of an introduction if you wouldn't mind, telling people who you are and what you do. All your private information.

Julie: Well, I'm excited to be here. I am an open book so we'll get as in depth as you want. So I have been a radio journalist for 20 years and that included earlier on in my career doing public radio reporting for stations in Salt Lake City and then in North Carolina. And then in 2015 I started hosting a daily live radio show for BYU Radio called *Top of Mind* heard on satellite radio so it was every single day for two hours live on the radio.

Jody: That's intense.

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Julie: It was a lot talking about – and it was interviews. So interviewing people about all kinds of different things. Experts on, we did politics and if it was in the news, if it was top of mind we would talk about it. So I had to be up on a lot of big, big, big things going on all the time. And my hidden secret was that a couple of years into that, so we were live on the air for seven years. And several years into that I was dying because I didn't want to listen to the news.

It was my job to be listening to the news all the time, and so first thing I woke up in the morning and I'm listening to the news, the headlines and the podcasts and when I'm driving. And I wasn't listening to any music, it was just news, news, news because I needed to be up on what was going on in the world all the time and it was bumming me out. And I am a lifelong anxious person medicated for 20+ years. It was constantly I was into these anxiety spirals where it was making me angry and worried.

And so I would go through these spells where I could not muster the energy to listen to the news and I was trying not to tell anybody about that because I can't be a journalist and not listen to the news.

Jody: Your job kind of depended on it.

Julie: So it was this constant battle. And I had to believe that I wasn't the only one. There actually is some really interesting data. I've recently learned about, that 40% of Americans avoid the news, actively avoid the news at some point frequently in their lives for a lot of the same reasons.

Jody: I would be one of those, yeah.

Julie: Yeah, I mean because it's depressing or it feels hopeless or because it feels like it disagrees with your own viewpoint or whatever it is, lots and lots of reasons. For me it was mostly just that it was fueling my anxiety in a way that was outpacing my medication.

Jody: It was canceling it out, yeah.

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Julie: It was no longer working as well. So the way this ties into the podcast is that almost exactly a year ago in 2022 our management invited us to go to a weekly format and kind of shuffle it all up. And that was the chance for us to create a podcast that was going to address this problem that I was having and I felt I knew a lot of other people were having too. To be able to in a thoughtful way engage with the big issues because I want to be engaged with, I don't want to have my head buried in the sand all the time, that didn't feel good either.

So I want to be thinking deeply but also it needs to be in a way where it's thoughtful and it's not just about raising my blood pressure with people yelling or telling me how I should be thinking. And ideally leave me feeling hopeful and empowered at the end of the 52 minutes or whatever. So that is what we have taken on and it actually is, it's the podcast for anxious people who want to be engaged in the world. So that's *Top of Mind* currently weekly everywhere you get your podcasts.

Jody: I love it. So that's *Top of Mind*, it is on all the podcast platforms as well as BYU Radio?

Julie: Exactly. So you can get it on the BYU Radio website or the BYU Radio app. Or if you happen to live in Utah you can hear it on 107.9 FM. But the way to get the latest episodes once a week is on our podcast feed which is *Top of Mind* with Julie Rose, yeah.

Jody: Okay, perfect. And then recently you've launched a series within that podcast, the Stick With It series which is how you and I connected.

Julie: Yes and I'm so excited to have our listeners hear some of your story on our podcast. So we started as we were creating the podcast, I started realizing that I was having these moments where I was feeling myself, as we're trying to get perspectives that are diverse and we're not doing a lot of yelling. But we really want to probe these moments where you feel, okay, that feels a little challenging to the way I see things or I don't agree with that perspective.

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And I found this, I was having these moments as we were doing the interviews because we're tackling big stuff. Affirmative action and race and I'll tell you maybe a little later about the most recent episode that we did, that I really had a moment like this where I realized I was coming to a moment in the interviews where I could feel my – I'm like, "But what about, what about?" As I was trying to grapple with the idea. And feeling that discomfort and having to kind of stay open and curious and use some of the mindfulness techniques that I'd learned in my quest to conquer my anxiety.

And I always would get to a place then where if I could keep my defenses down long enough to really listen with curiosity and empathy, I would come to some kind of new realization. And it wouldn't necessarily change my mind. Sometimes it would just give me more clarity so I could better express my own viewpoint on the issue. In our daily life I feel these moments happen all the time. We call that a stick with it moment.

So you come up against a perspective that feels challenging, your natural defense is to, I'm going to shut down and go back to my safe place because this is not working for me or this feels really uncomfortable and instead you make the active choice to stick with that discomfort and see what happens when you can stay open to it rather than shut down. And so we started talking to people about, "What does this look like in your daily life?" Because I feel it happens a lot in encounters with other people, in sort of professional realizations or personal realizations.

And people have told us in sharing of these stories that it deepens a relationship or it renews a relationship, that they were on the verge of shutting down because the discomfort was so difficult over this issue that they disagreed with. Or that they had to do some soul searching and now feel like they're a better citizen or a kinder neighbor or even a more effective advocate. And so the podcast is kind of a weekly, for me it's a frequent exercise personally as we put the podcast together.

And we're creating it as a way that you can practice having a stick with it moment about a big issue. And then kind of take that skill of, I can sit with

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that discomfort. I can actually be open and curious and have empathy for this other perspective and the world didn't end actually that made me better. It made me a better advocate for what I care about.

Jody: And here's what I love about what you're saying is that in those interviews when you were having a bunch of thoughts and you were feeling triggered and feeling emotional about the topic. You chose because it was your professional role and the way you wanted to show up, to stick with it as you're describing. You chose to not react or lash out or let those emotions overtake you which is such powerful proof that we have the ability to do that. It doesn't mean we're perfect at it or that we always choose it.

But my mission is always teaching people, we have more power over our own thoughts and therefore over our own experience in what we contribute in the world than we realize. And when people say, "Well, what do you mean? If something's going to call me this name or say this thing how can I not get upset? How can I not be angry or hurt or scared or stressed?" Not to say that you shouldn't. I'm not trying to turn anybody into robots but it's such a great example of listen, if you were on TV or on the radio interviewing someone you would be able to for a little while manage yourself.

Julie: Yeah. So like I said, I've had anxiety for my whole life. I was a massively anxious little kid. I remember I was in my third grade and my teacher was like, "You've got to deal with Julie because she is so anxious all the time that she's disrupting the classroom." Because the minute they would say, "Here's what needs to happen." I'd be like, "Yeah, but, and how about I do this and what about this?"

I couldn't deal with all the intrusive thoughts and so my dad, who happened to be a therapist, was really good at coaching me and giving me all these self-cues and reminders to try and control that. But I spent most of my life I think, I think as a result partly of his training as a cognitive behavioral therapist. I somehow got the idea that I could just control it all, that I could somehow just control my thoughts, that when the anxiety came along I could just sort of say, "Bye bye", and shut the door.

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I spent up until basically 2018, I am now hanging on by my fingernails. The medicine helped a little bit but I was frequently just overwhelmed with the anxiety spirals.

Jody: Sorry to interrupt. Do you think you were resisting it?

Julie: 100%. I was under the impression that I just needed to wrangle control of my intrusive thoughts and my anxiety and my emotions and kind of just grab it all and control it and turn it in the right direction. And I got to a point, long story short in 2018 where it was not working. I was waking up in the middle of the night in an anxiety panic or I was raging all the time over things, short fuse. And I was like, "I've got to fix this but I don't want to just take more medicine because I don't think that's the answer."

Yeah, so I actually ended up signing up for mindfulness training. So it's actually the MBS, our Mindfulness Based Stress reduction. Anyway, it was an eight week course where I went in thinking mindfulness, I don't know but I'm desperate. I've got to try something. I'm perfectly mindful of what I'm experiencing and it's a problem. So I had this moment of clarity after a couple of these sessions. We'd go for three hours once a week and we'd just sit on bolsters and we would just breathe and it was very much outside of my comfort zone.

But in the meditations, our instructor was talking about how when the intrusive thoughts are coming I'm like, "I can't clear my mind. I can't clear my mind." And he's like, "That's not the point. The point is to acknowledge and recognize them for what they are, to be present in your body." Which I had never really paid much attention to. And so this image that became so powerful for me was just the idea of, I can sit on the edge of a river and watch all of my anxious thoughts kind of flowing by in front of me. And I can just kind of relax and be like, "Hi, I see you, okay. That's interesting."

With curiosity like you were talking about, in these moments of anxiety if I'm open to it, I'm curious about it but not try to close it off or lock it down. I thought that was going to lead me into the depths of rumination. And it turned out that if I would just sit and stop fighting and kind of acknowledge

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for what it was and stay curious and focus on my breathing and recognize how my body was responding that it would actually pass. I never figured that out, for years of my life I'd never figured that out. So that was a moment where I was like, "Oh my goodness, okay."

Jody: That's beautiful.

Julie: Okay, so now, and that was also my engagement in news and engaging. The Stick With It idea was that I was often sort of resisting or feeling like I needed to jump in and clarify my view or argue or whatever because I needed to do something about these thoughts and these emotions rather than just be curious about them. But also be willing to say, "Okay, I'm uncomfortable here, tell me more."

Jody: Yeah, that's so beautiful. That's what we call processing emotion in my world and it's allowing it, being in your body with it, experiencing it. Because even though you're aware, these are just thoughts. Recently I heard a fellow coach say, "They're not just thoughts, they're thoughts which are super powerful, creating reactions in your body." But they're not facts, they're not truths. They don't have to control you. You can process emotion without acting out on it.

I wanted to ask you too and I'd love for you to share, like you said, some examples of some of the conversations you've had in Stick With It. I know, I listened to specifically the abortion talks which was amazing.

Julie: Can we talk about that for a minute because that is maybe my very favorite Stick With It story of all time? We can do it in a minute if you want.

Jody: Yes, I definitely want you to share that with us. Before we dive in I wanted to just kind of tie all of this around the idea of unity because I feel there's a lot of talk right now and there has been for years now of how divided we are especially in America, in the United States that there's so much division. And like you said, the news talks about that, I think we've all observed that. What I realized at some point myself was that if I wanted to

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be part of the solution I have to stop looking for and thinking about and focusing on division.

And I have to start looking for and thinking about and focusing on unity if what we want is unity. And I think that sometimes at least I know for me, my simple mind thinks that unity would mean that we all agree. And unity doesn't mean, we actually need people to have opposing viewpoints and we need to be able to disagree. And that's what I loved about the story you shared in the abortion talk. So I'll let you share whatever you want to about that.

Julie: You know, it's so interesting that you say that about unity because just the other day I was telling someone. I'm like, "So one of the reasons we're so polarized in this world is because we haven't learned how to disagree and still get along and be together and be united." Because somebody was saying, "I don't think getting along is the problem because I avidly disagree with my son on political issues so we just don't talk about it." He's like, "We get along great as long as we're not talking about religion or race or politics."

Jody: Money, yeah.

Julie: And I'm like, "Okay, but is that, I mean that's certainly a way to keep the peace." But I think there's a higher law, I think there is a way to kind of go better, one better and that is to understand how to really understand one another's differences and not just sort of fine, you believe that and I disagree with you, absolutely. And we'll just have to agree to disagree. But to really come to a place where we care deeply about one another and we disagree at the same time. And maybe the fact that we disagree can bring us closer together.

And that is what just blew my mind about the abortion talks story. So the backstory people need to understand and this is actually one of our most recent episodes on the *Top of Mind* podcast. So people can go listen to it as well to get all the full details. But the short of it is, that there was a period

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in the 90s where the abortion debate in America, there were supreme court cases that were sort of refining the Roe vs. Wade ruling.

And there were protests all across the country but Boston had sort of become the epicenter because of its very liberal politics among a lot of the population and elected officials but also because of the Catholic church's presence and the diocese. The cardinal had a very strong voice there. So weekly protests out in front of abortion clinics and things had gotten really heated. It felt like a [inaudible] the folks who were there at the time said. And a giant tragedy strikes, an anti-abortion activist went to a couple of abortion clinics and killed several women. I mean it was a trauma.

And the abortion activists, the leaders of the movements on both sides of the issue in Boston at the time knew they had to do something but they didn't know what. Clearly we disavow this man who did this but also how have we contributed, they took some ownership, how have we contributed to that rhetoric, the level of anger and vitriol? And secretly six leaders so three on the pro-choice side, that's the label they choose for themselves and three on the pro-life side which is the label they prefer.

They were invited to secretly meet for a couple of sessions and talk and all of the women said, "What's the point? First of all I disagree with these people so fundamentally I will never change my mind." And they were scared. They were terrified in the way that you might be scared if you were going into the room with somebody who fundamentally believed you were evil in some way which is how they had kind of come to see this on this really difficult issue that strikes so closely to the heart of so much of what people believe.

Anyway, so they were like, "Look, we're not going to change our minds but if you think that talking a couple of times is going to make a difference, fine, because we've got to do something. We've got to bring down the temperature." Well, over the course of those four meetings they find themselves so engaged in one another they had to very early on establish, and this is all done in secret because they didn't want their movements to know. They realized early on that they're not going to agree on anything.

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They're not even looking for common ground but the dialogues were structured in a way that they all had to agree on what words they could use for one another, which is really important. They had to establish a level of trust and respect for one another. Ultimately they went on for six years. Six years of meeting once a month secretly. They would just disappear. And one of them said that their assistant thought they were having an affair because they would just mysteriously disappear for an hour once a month. Nobody knew this was going on.

And in the course of it these six women came to care for one another deeply, to see one another as human. And the amazing thing for me was two things, first of all the result was that it brought down the tenor, the rhetoric of how they were speaking about the issue. They could no longer use dehumanizing language or inflammatory language in the same way because they had sat so often across from one another sharing meals together. And hearing one another's personal stories about why they felt so strongly about abortion in the way that they felt.

So they automatically started, brought down the rhetoric and people outside who didn't know the meetings were happening knew that something had changed. That these women were refusing to go on television and debate each other with the same kind of rancor that they might have done before. They weren't writing such inflammatory words about the opposite side in their opinion pieces in the newspaper. So they made a huge change just by coming to care for one another. They become really, really close friends.

At the end of it they go public, they write this op ed in the Boston Globe that makes national news. People are shocked, how could you possibly sit together. And then a lot of people like me couldn't, I still even after all of that, reading their article and stuff I'm like, "But what did you accomplish?"

Jody: What was the point? Yeah.

Julie: Yeah. So the rhetoric mattered but they also talked about the value for them personally was that they came to be better advocates for their

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views. Nobody changed their mind on the topic of abortion. They actually got stronger in their own views by listening openly and with curiosity to the opposing view that they disagreed with. They worked really hard to not debate and argue but to listen was the fundamental piece, listen and share of what they did for those six years. So as a result they became better advocates, more effective advocates for their own views.

They got more clarity plus they deepened a relationship and built empathy. And I just think it's so counterintuitive but it's stunning to think in our own lives. So then I started thinking, well, gosh, how could I take that model with a family member who has very different political views than me. And so many times those conversations have ended terribly because I have gone in there and felt compelled to counter their viewpoint. It starts well because I say, "Tell me, why do you support this politician?" And then they'll say, "Well, because they did this and this and this."

And I'm like, "Well, you're just spouting what you heard on Fox News, tell me more." Or, "You're just spouting what you heard on MSNBC but what about this." Or, "You know that that's not right." And immediately I'm in, "Well, let me tell you my viewpoint now." Instead of being like, "Interesting, tell me more, what is your personal experience with that issue then? Do you remember the first time you really came to feel this way? Is this new for you? And how do you feel about people who have an opposing view?"

Go in trying to understand and kind of just sit with the discomfort of hearing all this stuff that challenges me can deepen a relationship which is appealing to me. But also hopefully make me better at expressing my own perspective.

Jody: And when you say, Julie, that it made, in the abortion talks, it made these women more effective advocates. What I love about their story is not only effective at standing up for the cause that they believe in but effective in that they're doing it with respect for the opposing side. Like you said, they're minimizing the judgment and the negative hateful language and to me that's ultimately what we want. I mean you think of an issue like

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abortion, it's about human life and it's about the value we have for human beings both their life and their agency.

Julie: Yeah. You could not find an issue more sort of deeply tied to what people believe about the essence of being a human. And another thing that I felt was very interesting because then part of the episode couldn't we also just not talk about it? Wouldn't that be another option?

Jody: It would be easier.

Julie: Safer, easier. And one of the experts I talked to said, "Well, look, when you have an issue like this where there is so much – where it's so deeply tied to what people believe and there's so little interest among most people in changing their actual viewpoint on the issue. What's the point in talking if you're not going to convince people to your side? Well, the point can be that if you can build a bridge across that one issue and come to at least respect one another as human beings with dignity who have opposing views but feel very strongly for very human reasons.

Come to understand that the nuance of that then you're able to see, it's like you can get that out of the way so that you can actually then focus on a lot of issues where you might actually have common ground but you're so busy not working together on solving those issues. Whether it's child poverty or whether it's supporting families or whether it's pregnancy prevention or whatever it is.

If you're so busy, they're the enemy, we disagree, we'll never see each other. Then you actually are missing a lot of opportunities to say, "Alright, now I'm very clear about how you feel and how I feel and we feel we can respect each other but guess what. We can also communicate and work together and I trust you enough to be able to try to work with you on some of these other issues. We can get a lot more done if we're not."

And I think what's happened, unfortunately a lot of the polarization that we're experiencing is because it's so easy today to basically create a little bubble where you don't have to engage with anyone you disagree with on

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anything deeply meaningful. Social media feeds and I mean the housing patterns are such that we're very, very segregated politically and racially in America today. And with so many media options you don't have to be exposed to another side of an issue unless you choose it.

You just can pick the outlet that fits your world view and then we're never challenged so we don't really have the practice of understanding how to sit and listen to an opposing view.

Jody: Yeah. And one thing I just want to add on to what you're saying is that technology is so smart nowadays. It feeds our confirmation bias so even in the morning when I wake up and I have alerts from the news app on my phone, it's not giving me a cross section of the news, it's giving me news stories that it thinks I will click on. I know this because I get a lot of stories about what Disneyland rides are open or closed because my kids are obsessed with Disneyland. I'm like, "That's not the big thing happening in the news." But that's what appears when I open my phone.

It's reinforcing my own confirmation bias and I want to connect the dots too to what you're saying and the work that I do with people personally, people who are listening to this podcast who are trying to develop themselves is that the better you get at loosening up that tight grip on your thoughts, obviously it helps us be better in relationships, better in our communities, better citizens. But for you personally we all have thoughts even about ourselves that if we were wrong about that that would be a huge relief.

And I feel when you are willing to consider that either you're wrong or at least you don't have the full picture or your misunderstanding or prejudging then you become empowered to do that even in your own life. So I had this experience when I was in college, I went to Utah State and for one of my political sciences classes we went down to the Capitol in Salt Lake and sat in the rooms where the senate meets and everything. And they wanted us to experience a little bit of a mock debate.

And so they gave us an issue like should we be selling cigarettes in vending machines at high schools or colleges or something? I don't

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remember. Whatever it was I remember immediately going, no, we shouldn't. That was my thought, no, why would we do that, that's a terrible idea.

Julie: I don't need to think about this anymore, easy.

Jody: And then as the opposing side started presenting their reasons and their logic all of a sudden I started seeing, again, I don't know that I'm changing my mind but they're making some valid points that I had never considered. Yes, cigarettes are terrible for their health but so are the food that we serve in the vending machines at the schools. Anyway they just had some points and I was like, "I can see where you're coming from on that one."

And just that one experience opened my mind to there is so much more to any story or argument than what my simple mind realizes. And it's natural for us to go talk about issues with all the people that already agree with us. I'm the same way. I listen to the podcast, I watch the news, I talk to people who agree with me.

Julie: Yeah. But it's terrifying to think that you're going to have to go in and maybe not actually be able to defend your viewpoint as effectively. I don't feel always very confident. I don't want to lose an argument so in some ways it's easier to not have to go and have these tougher conversations because what if I find out for example that my viewpoint actually causes harm. That feels terrible.

Or what if I find out that because I thought I knew everything I needed to know that I have been missing out on some big opportunity or I have intentionally turned my back on something that could have made my life better. And it was because of my ignorance and I'm terrified to discover that too. It's safer and easier to just feel I know what I need to know and I'm the right one and everything's fine and this feels comfortable. And not have to be challenged, not have to stick with that discomfort.

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Jody: Yeah. But if we approach it like there's not an argument that I have to defend or win and I don't have to agree with this person, I can just walk away going, "Huh, that's interesting."

Julie: And I don't have to try to convince them, it's not about winning an argument. That was one of the things that the women who participated in the abortion talks talked about. The hardest thing for them was as staunch advocates who were constantly called upon to voice their opinion and defend their position on abortion. That they went into these meetings and they had to learn how to not constantly be thinking of what their rebuttal was going to be.

They were asked to not debate or counter with their own perspective when someone shared something. And so which was deeply uncomfortable to sort of let go of that, let go of the, I've got to be thinking, what about this, what about this. And be able to just be – I don't know, it sounds cheesy but just be present with and listening openly with empathy for the person who was sharing. And just honoring that led them to a place they couldn't have gotten otherwise if they had been so concerned about trying to win the argument.

Jody: Yeah. And I loved how their relationships became personal. They felt supported by one another personally, even though they disagreed about this topic.

Julie: They're really close friends. This was in the 90s. To this day they get together once every month or so and they go out for dinner and then someone orders a dessert. And they all get spoons and eat off the same plate. They're dear friends and staunchly in disagreement with one another on this issue that they care so deeply about. It's really stunning but for me it's freeing. It gave me a huge amount of confidence to feel like, okay, I don't need to be afraid of what might happen if I listen really closely to a viewpoint that is really off-putting to me or that really kind of shakes me.

I don't have to worry that I'm going to lose my footing or that I'm going to lose my, you know, I can just listen with the goal of understanding, with

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empathy and it can sort of flow through me and we're going to get to a place where I'm going to feel more clarity and that's it. For me, it's the best part of my job is when I'm in the middle of these interviews and I'm trying really hard to sort of listen and understand. And all of a sudden a light bulb goes on and I have this moment of clarity and it's just thrilling and makes me a better person. I can take that into my daily life.

Jody: That's beautiful, yeah, it's expansive. So you alluded in the beginning to a recent interview you did that triggered some thoughts and feelings for you.

Julie: Sure. So one of the most difficult topics for me to know how to talk about or be willing to talk about publicly is race because I'm a white woman. I was raised in a predominantly white community with very little exposure to people of any other race except white. Didn't ever really consider that race applied to me because like so many of us do, race is something that if you're Black or you're Brown you have a race but white is not a race. And it's a weird thing but I've come to recognize.

I lived for a period of time in the south where for the first time I had the experience of being the only white person in a room when I would go out to report and realizing how little I had really thought about what race means and how it's affected my life and the ways in which I have had opportunities and been treated in a certain way simply because of the color of my skin. So anyway it's been quite a journey for me. I've had a lot of these Stick With It moments about different issues regarding race.

I tell one on the podcast about white privilege and coming to sort of feel really uncomfortable with that idea thinking I didn't have it. Anyway, so it's a whole long story of coming to a place where I have a clearer understanding of what whiteness might have meant in my life. But most recently I think maybe more than any other podcast I have wanted to do an episode about teaching race in schools. About this very complicated issue and people have gotten so angry over the last couple of years about CRT and whether we should teach race in schools and how we should teach it and who's getting harmed.

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And is it safe for the kids? And how are they going to end up feeling if we teach it this way or that way? I think for me the Stick With It piece of it that I wanted to share is that I really wanted to do this episode for a year and I was terrified. How are we going to do a conversation that doesn't just raise people's hackles so quickly that they shut down and are incapable of sticking with the discomfort? And what can we add to this when it's clear that there is no compromise? I can't bring two people on either side. I've seen all of the yelling on the school board meetings.

This just feels like one of those third real conversations that's not going to work. So what I needed to do I realized was go find some conversations, find some people who had really complicated viewpoints. They needed to be viewpoints that people were not ever going to hear in these sort of short soundbites up on TV or on these YouTube videos.

Jody: So you wanted a well thought out?

Julie: But complicated so for example the episode includes because thought out is one, I definitely wanted someone who wasn't just going to yell but was going to be very thoughtful about their perspective. And it had some personal, something in the game, some skin in the game, that they were affected. That they had kids in these schools who would be affected because you can go anywhere and you can find, here's the view in support of teaching about race and slavery in this particular way. And here's the view opposed to that.

I needed more in order to feel like I was actually able to sit with the discomfort in a way that would get me to some more clarity. So ultimately the episode turned out being one giant Stick With It experience for me because we were able to find a mother who is Black, whose children look white because their father's white and the mother is Black but fairly light skinned. So her children are so light skinned that they are frequently assumed to be white by strangers.

And so she was able to express how much race affects her kids and the things that are going on in school when they are in this in between place

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where they have to out themselves as Black, they identify as Black. But people will say and do things around them not knowing that they're Black. So they're not necessarily experiencing racism but they're seeing things happen, other children saying things that they wouldn't say to a white person. And these kids are hearing it and they have their Black identity.

And so she was talking about the ways in which harm is already being done to her kids because of the lack of education about what race even is among the other kids in her school or the effects of the N word for example. So she had one very nuanced perspective because she was also saying, "Look, I would love it if their teachers could have these conversations and could lead these discussions and handle the difficulty and the emotion that's going to come up and so that every child leaves the room feeling affirmed and not ashamed.

But that's a lot to ask of teachers. And if they're not equipped to handle it or confident then no, I'd rather they not do it." We were able to find a woman who was white who has four children who are all siblings but they're Black, they're adopted. So she has Black children in a similarly mostly white school. And her kids are experiencing racist treatment and being called really awful things and having their color of their skin demeaned. And this mother is so concerned about how teachers and the administrators might handle it in a way that will leave their child feeling even lesser.

Her concern is I'd rather be the one that teaches all of this to them and empowers them because I know what I want my children to feel and how I want them to walk in the world and I don't have enough confidence that the teachers with the training that they're receiving and with the various CRT or whatever it is that informs their teaching is actually – I don't want my kids harmed. Both of these mothers don't want their children harmed.

Jody: And both of them feel that they could probably do a better job or handle it the way that they feel is appropriate for their children versus delegating it to a school.

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Julie: Which is 100% common ground that you wouldn't necessarily expect to find in an issue like this. But they also feel like in both cases, yeah, if we had teachers who are equipped to do this, that would be a better world for my children.

Jody: Yeah, because think of all the kids who don't have parents at home that are going to sit down and have a conversation about race.

Julie: Exactly. And here are two mothers who have children who are affected by this issue in a way that a lot of people I think who are arguing, it's more theoretical for us. It's like, I'm going to take my stand but I don't have kids in that school right now. And then we heard from a teacher who also talked about how hard it is for a teacher whose primary goal is to make sure that the children in that room at the end of every day feel fully human and fully respected in their humanity.

And how so many of these kids don't have parents who are equipped to do these kinds of things and teachers feel like part of my job is to create better citizens in the world. And so I feel like I need to if I can but it's hard because I don't feel like I'm trusted. And one of the things I really came to was for me being so surprised at some of the nuance of these perspectives by these two moms that have pretty opposing views on exactly how school districts should go about this.

And a teacher who's white who's like, "Look, I feel insecure but I feel I need to be able to do this for my kids and I wish I had the confidence and the trust from teachers and administrators to really be able to figure this out because it's going to be messy." It came down to me realizing that it's not so much an issue of curriculum, it's an issue of trust. And how do we regain that trust? I mean I think part of it is recognizing we all have the same goal which is to make sure that kids aren't harmed.

And if I can trust that that's what you want even though your way to get there is different than my way to get there, can that be the foundation of these dialogues that can lead to a place where none of us changes our minds but the kids are still okay. We actually are making better socially

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literate children in the world. So we never come to, here's the solution kind of thing on our podcast. But that whole episode for me from not wanting to tackle this issue at all, finally deciding I was going to commit to do it and sit with the anxiety and discomfort of feeling like what if we fail.

And really kind of lean into the most difficult perspectives possible that we could find, the most complicated perspectives of people and their identities and then just hope that we were somehow going to get to a moment where it felt like we had a little more clarity. And when we got to that moment I was like, it didn't come, the clarity about the trust and everything for me didn't come until we were at the final end of the editing and the scripting phase and I was like, "Oh, this has been the most painful episode to birth."

Jody: A long time coming.

Julie: And I've stressed about it for so many hours and we stuck with it. And I felt we got to some place that for me was really enlightening.

Jody: That's so beautiful.

Julie: Yeah, thanks for letting me share that.

Jody: As a journalist do you ever worry about cancel culture?

Julie: All the time. All the time. I mean my anxiety is rooted in my inability to control every outcome.

Jody: As it is for all of us, yes, that's what anxiety is. That's a great definition.

Julie: Okay. So for me, I want everyone to have the same experience that I had. I can't control how people are going to perceive the words I say or the words that guests say or the way that I do the interaction with somebody in an interview. I can't control it but that makes me crazy because I don't want to hurt people's feelings. I don't want to be misunderstood. I don't ever want to be perceived as sort of hot takes and inflaming these divisions. That's the whole point of what I want to do.

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The thing I feel I can offer the world is a way to think about these issues that kind of cut through the polarization and make a bridge. And so yes, I'm terrified of making a certain group of people so angry that they want to marshal their resources and try to brand me as something that's the opposite of what I really see myself as. I think personally I have always been afraid of how other people will perceive me as a journalist. And so I am so careful about not saying things online.

I feel I can't really truly speak passionately about things that matter to me out of fear that that's going to undermine my journalistic credibility. And I would rather people not know where I stand on any issue especially as we're doing the interview. And that I can be kind of a chameleon so I can stand in for the listener. So more so even in cancel culture I often feel this tension where there are things that I care about that I'd like to be able to be an advocate for but I'm always kind of centering myself because I worry that that will somehow undermine my credibility with people who maybe disagree on that issue.

So it's tricky because we can't please everybody. I know even in our Stick With It conversation that our listeners will hear from you, we can't. We can't be everything to everyone.

Jody: Yeah. And I guess my question for you is because there's a lot of people who listen to this podcast that are building coaching practices for example like myself. Or some other kind of business where they're not doing the same work you are as a journalist but they're still putting content out there trying to help people talking about issues like challenges in marriages, infidelity, anxiety even. Topics that can offend people let's just say. And so I'd love for you to share what gives you the courage to dive in even just having a conversation about race for example?

I know many of us, myself included, would feel, whether or not I voice my own opinions, I would be worried that I would get the verbiage wrong, that I would say it wrong, that I would offend someone. It's such a volatile issue and there's so many different opinions about the right way. And I couldn't

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possibly even study all of those. What gives you the courage to still dive in and have those conversations even though you're afraid?

Julie: Yeah. I have to come at it with complete and utter humility. And I am never going to put myself up as an expert on, well, really any topic except my own lived experience. The only thing I can speak to as an expert are the aspects of what it's like to live as me in the world. Everything else is stuff that I care about or that I'm learning.

And so a lot of what I try to do is make sure and especially when we're doing these episodes. If I'm unsure or feel especially when I'm doing topics where I'm afraid to say the wrong thing and this especially happens on topics with regard to race I try to be very honest about my own identity. And acknowledge that I may have blind spots and if I'm nervous to ask a question because I don't know how it's going to come off sometimes I'm not very eloquent as I'm kind of clearly trying to figure out how to say this thing.

And oftentimes what I have found is that if I've built enough of trust with the person I'm talking to, I can sort of say, "I want to ask this question or I really want to understand but I'm not sure how to ask it and I hope that this isn't offensive. So please help me understand what I'm missing here. But this is what I'm perceiving, am I getting this right?" I have found that especially in conversation, I think it is entirely a different thing if I am going to put up reels on Instagram or TikTok or wherever where I am sort of saying my piece but I don't have the authority to be able to speak about all kinds of topics.

Jody: You know you don't need any authority to put up TikToks, just saying.

Julie: I'm never going to be a hot take person, a pundit, but when it comes to having the conversations I think it's very much about educating yourself in advance because it never helps to just walk in ignorant and start being a bull in a China shop and just demanding answers and being told. And the other thing is your tone and your humility.

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And I always, always go in acknowledging what I don't know and in the tone of the voice and in the way that I set up the conversation and in the way that I ask questions where I'm perfectly willing to say, "I don't really understand this. Can you help me understand what we mean by this?" And then I try to just listen with empathy and be open to the fact that I'm wrong or that I've had a blind spot that's been so gigantic that it's led me to say hurtful things in the past without realizing it and that that's okay. I'd rather know so I don't do it again.

Jody: Yeah, that's amazing. That's beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing that and thank you, Julie, for the work that you're doing. I love your podcast so much. Everybody head over to *Top of Mind* podcast to hear more from Julie Rose and the guests that she's bringing on her show. We appreciate you so much. Thanks for taking the time to come on.

Julie: Thank you, Jody, it's been a real pleasure. I appreciate you letting me share.

Jody: And don't forget, you can hear my episode on *Top of Mind* coming in the near future. Stay tuned.

Julie: That's right, in the very near future. We'll make sure to let everybody know. I can't wait for people to hear your Stick With It story.

Jody: Alright, thanks, Julie.

Julie: You're welcome. Bye, Jody.

Hey there, if you enjoy this podcast or even if you just find that it sort of piques your curiosity, or it makes you think, you're going to love the book that I wrote. It's called *Better Than Happy: Connecting with Divinity Through Conscious Thinking*. And it's available now at Amazon in print or kindle version. Or if you want me to read it to you, head over to audible and grab the audio version. And why not grab a copy for your sister, your best friend, or your mom while you're there too. Just saying.