

EPISODE 20

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04] AM: Yeah. I was doing too much for sure, and this is where I started to have fall off the rails a little bit, to be honest. Because I had an inkling that I wanted to be true to myself and that I wanted to be of service, I felt this calling of a yoga teacher to help others. I felt this calling to use my life as an artist to help others. I was still in my 20s, navigating the world and there's only so many hours in the day. I was like, okay, well things started to get a little rickety. I'm not saying that I flew off the rails then, because it happened later. Just kidding. I was definitely – I started to struggle a little bit like, how could I be a school teacher, a nanny, a professional artist, a film – how could you do all that and also still not even be able to make the rent?

[00:01:03] LW: Hi, friends. Welcome back to another episode of At The End Of The Tunnel with me, Light Watkins. In today's interview, I got to chat with somebody who started with could be viewed as one of, if not the largest yoga communities in the world, but here's the thing, 99% of her yoga students have never actually seen her in person. They've only seen her through their device as she was instructing yoga from her living room in Austin, Texas, and usually with her co-teacher, Benji, curled up next to her yoga mat.

If you can't tell from the hints, I'm referring to Adriene Mishler, the Austin native who started the uber popular, Yoga With Adriene YouTube channel with a friend of hers in 2012, which grew into one of the most searched yoga platforms on the Internet. That's actually how I first discovered Adriene. It was a few years ago. I wanted to do yoga at home, so I went on to YouTube to search for yoga videos and I kept seeing Yoga With Adriene, Yoga With Adriene.

One day, I decided to give it a try. Very quickly, I became addicted, not just to the yoga, but to Adriene's ease of instruction, her style, her super-inviting home environment and to Benji, her lovely dog. As it turns out, I wasn't the only one completely obsessed with Adriene's videos. She's been featured on The Today Show a couple of times. Think Pieces have been written about Adriene and her dog. Some journalists have referred to her as the Mr. Rogers of yoga, or rather, Miss Rogers.

A lot of people say that if it wasn't for Adriene's yoga offerings, they wouldn't have made it through quarantine in 2020. As you'll hear in our conversation, Adriene was born into a theater family. She was an actress. She was a children's yoga teacher. She also worked in an ice cream shop and she had about three other jobs. As you'll also hear, Adriene was presented with the idea of starting a YouTube channel by a friend of hers who could see something in her that she couldn't quite see in herself and he wanted to help her launch this platform.

It all came down to a choice. Do you keep the stable job that will allow you to potentially retire at 40? Or do you take this crazy, risky, chancy opportunity of starting this online platform at a time when yoga was supposed to be this practice that could only be taught in person? Well, lucky for us, Adriene chose to take the leap of faith.

Like many movements, Yoga With Adriene was not an overnight sensation. The earlier videos were only getting 10, 20, maybe 30 views, but she kept at it. Through consistency and a deep desire to build an authentic community, Adriene's videos eventually caught fire. As of this conversation, her channel has amassed more than 7 million subscribers and her 500 plus videos that she's created have garnered over 600 million views. Holy moly. That's double the population of the United States.

I can't wait to share this conversation with you. We're going to examine how it all came together, what are the obstacles, what did she learn along the way, what was her mental state, all those things.

A couple of side notes though, this conversation actually took place before George Floyd happened. I'm only mentioning that, because we don't really talk a lot about her activism, which is something that I've been doing more and more of on my podcast interviews after George Floyd. I want to give Adriene credit, because she's emerged as one of the biggest voices in support of black lives and I just want to acknowledge that on the front-end and thank her for using her massive platform to bring more attention to social justice.

Secondly, we had a very long and deep and reflective conversation with a lot of fun little tangents. In the interest of just keeping it as streamlined as possible, I thought it was best to cut it down a bit. Yeah, one day maybe we'll release the whole unedited thing. For now, I'm honored

to introduce you to this amazing, beautiful, humble woman that has created so much inspiring content that has made the world a better place in so many ways. She's truly one of my personal inspirations. Without further ado, here is miss Adriene Mishler.

[EPISODE]

[00:05:34] LW: Adriene, thank you so much for joining the podcast. Super excited to talk about your story and your background. As always, I like to start my conversations talking about little Adriene, childhood. My question to you is thinking back, what was your favorite toy, or activity as a child?

[00:05:57] AM: The most memorable, I guess, would have to be something in the theater. I often would take an activity bag with me to my mom's work, which was the theater. She was a theater professor and then a director at night. My dad also worked in the theater. In fact, my parents met as actors.

I guess, the thing that comes to mind is just either being with my backpack of toys in the aisles of the theater, or this is funny, at home, back then the scenic design was done with a actual model. We had this model of the theater that my mom worked at and taught at. It's a beautiful theater in the round, located at the university that she worked at for 21 years, which also ended up being the university that I went to school and ultimately, I grew up there. It was called St. Edward's University, a catholic university here in Austin.

It was big. Big playground model of the theater in the round with the four **[inaudible 00:07:06]** and the four entrances and exits and the raked seating, four of them, and then empty stage. I played with that for the majority of my childhood just with different little toys, whether they were porcelain pieces of the nativity from Christmas, I'd put them on there. Or, I remember using McDonald's happy meal toys. It's that junk.

Also, strange things, like flowers and sticks. No joke, I was an only child who grew up in the theater, so maybe it's like, "Oh, yeah. It seems obvious." I was very imaginative and I played with that model off and on for a long time, just different things, creating different sets and different scenarios and environments.

[00:07:59] LW: Do you remember enjoying that as a child? Did you really look forward to being there in those aisles with your little toy bag? Or was it boring for you?

[00:08:08] AM: I think I remember being present and engaged. I mean, I'm sure just being a child, there were times where I'd prefer to do something else. In my memory, the feeling I have about it was that I was always really into it. I was always really happy to be there. I think my mom in particular did a good job of making sure I was still seen and felt. She would quite literally put me in the place, even though there wasn't a child in the chorus, or in the story at all.

She would also invite, or allow me to bring friends. I was very blessed to do a lot of incredible things that I know, I still to this moment have no idea how my parents did it, how they afforded gymnastics, ballet, tap jazz, all these things. I did go to camps. I went to horseback riding camps and took piano lessons early on.

I remember, my mom always allowing me to bring a friend, or multiple friends to the theater. Particularly, I have memories of spring break and the summer packing our lunches, packing those activity bags and just spending the whole day there with summer stock. I was either in the place, or I had a friend.

Then I was a very shy child, which I know is extremely hard to believe for most people in my life now. A lot of my mom's students were big brothers and big sisters. I was included. It was definitely not the type of childhood where it was like, "Here, go in here and close the door." I was always included.

[00:09:53] LW: Did you feel like you were a natural performer, or did you have to work hard at it?

[00:09:57] AM: I don't know if I had the awareness as a child that I was even performing. It was just innate. I'm sure I was very entertaining. It was strange. I was always performing. It's interesting to end up where I am now. My dad has pointed to this and named it lovingly, but I used to put on lots of plays in the house and dances and shows. We couldn't really afford a video camera, but every once in a while, my mom would have one for a project, rent it out from

the university. When she wasn't using it, I would heft it up on the tripod myself and hit record and we have these home videos of me dancing and performing and just doing number after number for just the camera. No one else is there. My dad, so we're like, "Yeah, I'm doing that now." Hopefully, to benefit others a little bit more. Yeah, I was always performing. I don't think I was aware of it though.

[00:11:02] LW: Okay. St. Edward's University, obviously is in Austin, Texas. You grew up in Austin. You grew up an only child. Sounds like both of your parents were in the household. Reflecting back in your whole childhood, how would you describe it?

[00:11:16] AM: Well, the older I get, the more experience I have with myself, but also as a witness, just being there for friends and in the community and just really, the more stories that I absorbed, the more I realized how incredibly blessed I was to have a totally nurtured childhood. I mean, we all fall and scrape our knee. I really had a loving childhood. I spent a lot of time with both of my parents. They did split up, I think, I was in third or fourth grade when they split up. Even that, they did in the most loving and amicable way for me and I can see that now, especially looking back. I would say, it was a very nurtured childhood. Very loving.

[00:12:08] LW: You were very happy? I was a very happy kid. A couple years ago, I wouldn't be able to say this just clearly, which is interesting, because I'd be afraid that people who didn't have happy childhood, or loving childhood would – that hearing this would make them feel sad. That's where I would go.

I realized now, again after hearing and just absorbing more and more stories, what a privilege and what a blessing that is and how to just name it and be grateful for it is actually a really empowering thing for me to then go, "Okay. I can take that energy and use it to help others."

[00:12:50] LW: Do you remember any of the lessons your parents instilled in you when you were younger?

[00:12:56] AM: Definitely, which is special, because I've always been really independent for better and for worse. A couple years ago, my cousin who I'm very close with, Alicia, I don't remember what we were talking about, but she had lovingly, or just a matter of fact, at least said

something like, "Well, you've always done things your own way." I don't really take offense to things easily, so it surprised me that that made me turn my head and I was like, "What do you mean?"

Although, it made me turn my head and I felt a little like, "Hey, what do you mean by that?"

She's right. It was great that I reacted to it, so that I could take a real mental note, because I have always done things my own way and been really independent. Having said that, I feel the essence of my parents who are thankfully still alive and healthy, I feel them almost every day in the work that I do.

I can remember my dad being really caring and creative. When I was a really young little girl, he would write me short stories, read them at bedtime. We had this character, Dobie Doo, that we would follow. I feel like, even though I don't remember the exact moral lessons of Dobie Doo right now, I know that he had a big heart and that there was lessons of compassion there and also, humor. It's probably where I get some of my silly humor from.

Then my mother really went to town. Did not hold back, in probably some of the more formidable years of my life, that pre-teen stage. Really, when I was 14, I was 18. When I was 18, I was 28. Then now I'm like, "Whoa! Slow it down. No, no, no. Let's go back. Let's find that young girl again."

[00:14:54] LW: When you were thinking about growing up and what do you want to be when you grew up, was acting always your main primary aspiration?

[00:15:02] AM: It was. I wanted to be a teacher as well. After I got over the whole primate biologist and those things, veterinarian. I was serious about the primate biologist thing for a while. I was really obsessed. I think like most young people, I had an affinity for animals and all that, but always wanted to be an actor. I think always wanted to be an artist. I realized that too. A couple years ago, I was having a conversation with a friend of mine who is actually from the UK and she's an artist and we were talking about what a gift it is to know what you want to do and to have known what you want to do. Of course, that can change and that would be a gift too, being able to change your mind.

In a lot of ways, I'm doing what I wanted to do. I realize I can't do it all. That's the thing that really has challenged me in the last five years in particular is like, "Oh, I can't really be a full-time actor, an artist and a full-time writer and entrepreneur and the type of guide and friend I want to be all at once."

[00:16:16] LW: When you were imagining your ascent into becoming a successful actress, were you imagining it as a film actor, a stage actor? Where were you thinking it would go?

[00:16:29] AM: I think as a kid, of course, I just wanted to be a famous actor. The thing is I was so immersed in academia. Of course, I didn't know that's what it was. No joke. No joke. I was so immersed in the classroom, the rehearsal room that I had a very different lens of it all. It wasn't until, I guess, I was starting high school that I started to even take note of Julia Roberts and Benjamin Bratt and what a beautiful couple they were and how my boyfriend at the time and I resembled them and maybe someday.

Really, yeah, I was in this setting. It wasn't like, going to acting school. I was like this fly on the wall for Trojan women. I was watching to kill a mockingbird for the 90th time. Yes, I was singing songs to Greece. That was one of my first paid jobs, actually was working backstage for a summer production of Greece. I mean, that was my snobbery. As a teenager, I wanted to be a real actor. Then pretty early on when I was 17, I was introduced to a company based out of New York called Siti Company. I try to speak to Siti Company sometimes when I'm chatting about my background, because outside of my mother at that time, that was a big influence on the steps that I took into adulthood and also, to this daylight. That training and the people that I met doing that training and creating work with them in years to follow in a lot of ways, I believe that has a bigger influence on the way that I teach now than any of my yoga teacher training, or even my practice. It's vital that I think I met that company and that training when I did, because it influenced the steps that I was going to take moving forward, both as an actor and as a yoga teacher.

[00:18:34] LW: Let's talk about that for a second. You moved to New York from Austin to study with this acting group. What were some of the tenets of the training that you're experiencing with the group?

[00:18:45] AM: My mother, again, one of my biggest angels, being the artistic director at this point at St. Edward's, she had brought Anne Bogart, American theater director into town to do a symposium, so from New York. Anne brought some of her colleagues, her company members to follow up the symposium with a weekend of training and where we would get – it's not we, excuse me. Where my mother's students would get a taste of this professional training and their two sister trainings. One is called the Suzuki method of actor training.

It is a very physical practice, ultimately designed to be a vocal training. Then its counter training is called the viewpoints, which is developed by Anne Bogart, the director from a training that was originally developed in the dance world by a woman named Mary Overly, who bless her heart, just passed away. May she rest in peace.

That vocabulary, or that training was really built for the company to build new work, to create a shared vocabulary. I don't know if you're picking up on it, but I just get super nerdy and I'm already, if you can get a little taste of okay, we have this very physical, discipline training that's all about alignment and breath control, because we said it was a vocal training, and action within the alignment. It really mirrors the yoga that I share in a lot of ways.

Yeah, my mom had brought them to town and I was still in high school. I was still in high school and I probably drove my clunky, clunker-junker Volvo with no AC over to the university after getting out of high school. My mom had invited me to once again, be a fly on the wall if I wanted to. I did, because I was like, "Oh, yeah. I'm so smart. I know who Anne Bogart is." I went. As always, I had a little – I don't know if I had a little mole skin back then, but I had a little journal and a pen and I sat at the back of the hall. I was blown away. I could go on and on about this moment, this weekend, but in a nutshell, somebody asked me some questions and they turned everything on its side and I just got sucked in.

I was extremely inspired, which led me to then take my mom up on the offer for sitting in on the training. This was a Friday night and then the training was going to be Saturday and Sunday. This training is very rigorous. It is not for the faint of heart. Ultimately, it is one of the best in my opinion, professional trainings for live theater for performance. It made a lot of sense to me at the time. It was something that I could really dig into. The company was taking on a lot of classic texts, as they still do. We would do long pieces of challenging text, like Chekhov or Mr. Shakespeare, things like that. Just really juicy.

I got into the training and one of the company members, a man by the name of J. Ed Araiza; I remember him coming up to me afterwards and saying, because the company was then going to stay on, or come back to do a play. My mom really did an incredible thing by inviting them to come. It was special. I think a lot of people learned later what an incredible opportunity that was, but of course at the time, we were so naïve.

J. Ed came up to me after, I think, it was the first day at the end of the day and said, “Nice work, young lady. Are you auditioning tomorrow?” I was like, “Oh.” Struggling to find my voice, I was like, “I’m actually not a student. I’m in high school. I’m Melba’s daughter.” He didn’t break his focus with me. He looked at me, kept his gaze and said, “Nice work, young lady. Are you auditioning tomorrow?” I was like, “Oh.” I had one monologue in my pocket then and that was guess what? Surprise, Abigail, from the crucible, of course.

Some of those early days with that company are probably the scariest days of my life to date. I’m not talking nerves. I’m talking full-fledged vulnerability. I think beyond the actual training itself is my whole experience then at that age with the training has a lot, a lot, a lot to do with the person I am now, but also with the way I’ve decided to share things and build things and hold space.

[00:23:45] LW: What was the plan? You finished high school and then what were you going to do next?

[00:23:50] AM: That moment of meeting the company really sounds so dramatic, how apropos. It really changed my life, because my parents were really supportive of me doing whatever I felt called to do. I will be honest, there was this moment, because you know how in high school, they put you through some of those weird classes where they’re trying to help you find what you want to do and who you are and what your personality is. I wish we could get more meditation and yoga into those moments, versus those packets of weird questions that give you anxiety, because you’re like, “I don’t know. I could barely pick out this outfit today.” That said, I think those types of packets probably led me to think like, “Oh, should I be a lawyer? Or, I want to make money. I don’t know if you can make any money.”

[00:24:46] LW: Right. Because your parents were struggling, it sounds like.

[00:24:50] AM: Yeah. I mean, the fact that my mom went into academia is nothing short of amazing. Not because she's not smart, because she's a genius and in fact, she was the first of her siblings at the time, I think, to have gone to college. I think she's the first Mexican-American woman to get all of the PhDs that she has, which are three. She went for it. That's another really important part of my story too, because it's only now, I'm 35 and I'm learning Spanish for the first time. I'm really going back and looking at like, "Why don't I speak Spanish? My mom is Mexican."

When they came from Wyoming to Austin, it wasn't even that she was like, "No, miha. We can't speak Spanish." She said it, like didn't even cross her mind. She's so focused on she wanted more. She wanted to work in an environment that people like her were not getting hired. She was so focused on that that I didn't learn Spanish.

It's funny too, because she even says she didn't even know what she was getting herself into moving from Wyoming to Texas, being petite, Hispanic, darker-skinned lady. She said she looked back and realized, "Oh, wow. What were we thinking coming here to do that?" She did well. If weren't for that, I think it would have been even more of a struggle, although our angels are pretty good, so who knows?

The fact that my mom had worked her way up, basically – I mean, she really did work from the bottom to the top at that university. That had a big influence on how I saw things. The term 'starving artist' was revered and still is in a lot of ways as cool. That was a goal. Like, "Ooh, I can't wait to be a starving artist." Like, "What?"

One of my dear friends who I work with now on the FWFG team, we've had conversations about this probably once a year, how we really have to be conscious of that moving forward and especially when trying to save and promote the arts and nurture young artists as being honestly, changemakers. We have to catch ourselves as we're doing with a lot of things right now. Look at that framing and really ask like, "Is this serving?" The whole starving artist thing, it ain't serving. It sucks. In fact, in my hometown of my city, I've watched the starving artists go from being the coolest cats in town to having nothing, no space, no job, no art.

[00:27:34] LW: You ended up going to St. Edward's and studying acting and staying in Austin?

[00:27:40] AM: Yes. Sorry, I just went off on the starving artist thing. I guess, I had to get that out. Yeah. No, this is an interesting question for me, because this part of my childhood, or my story is I think, unique and strange and dream-like for me. Because I was very close with my high school drama teacher and I always loved to dance and I liked sports, I liked movement. I liked moving my body. I wasn't doing yoga per se, but I wasn't – I felt for a kid my age, I was in my body, probably more than other kids my age.

I was doing musical theater all through my pre-teen years. I was moving. Right around 1617, I was very close with my high school drama teacher and I loved to read. I replaced the model set design with shelves of old Samuel French scripts. I mean, I was in it. I didn't want to be there anymore. My best friend, Sydney, at school, I loved my high school drama teacher, I loved my community, but I wasn't into the environment. Sometimes I wonder, if I'm going to have a memory that pops up, and I don't say this jokingly or in jest. I mean, I say this with grace. Sometimes I wonder, is there something there that I'm not remembering that's going to reveal itself? Maybe my cousin says, I just always like to do things my own way.

Honestly, I think a lot of it was I was already spending so much time in the university setting with my mom and being treated an adult, whether I was worthy of it or not. Who knows? I was being treated like an adult and I was being asked hard questions. I was in these plays at night, where we would do script work and dramaturgy. It wasn't just learning steps. I was doing Spanish golden age plays and stuff like that. I think a lot of it was just that that I was growing. I was ready. I wanted to grow up faster than the structure of things were really letting me.

[00:29:57] LW: I know you were reading the spiritual books. Was that your thing, or were you religious? What was your centering? What was your method for centering yourself?

[00:30:04] AM: Yeah. Well, I grew up catholic. Surprise, from my mom's side of the family. Big Mexican family and Martinez family. My dad was Christian. Then both my parents shifted through their evolution into a more spiritual point of contemplation, I guess, space. They both are still to this moment, very spiritual. That's still very present in the way that we speak to one

another. Funny enough, I used to go to church. I was going to the little chapel with my mom at the university, Our Lady Queen of Peace is what it's called, and they had a great band.

I mean, catholic church really knows how to hoop it up. I used to love the music and the ritual and still do love the ritual of church. When my parents started to shift and investigate their own – I'm 35 now, so I'm like, I get it. They started to question things and just investigate other ways of practice, I guess, of contemplation. I was then going to church with my neighbor, who they would often take me in and same thing, she would come and stay with us. I used to go with their more traditional family to church and laugh in church, of course, till we were going to be. Then they would go out to a nice barbecue brunch afterwards.

I never had rituals like that. I helped on their train for a good bit. Then, probably around the time that I was maturing and beginning to come into my own 15, 16, 17, my mom and I had a little ritual of going to the bookstore just for fun, just to chill out and read and drink a coffee, or a tea and come home smelling like incense, because the whole store smelled like incense.

[00:32:08] LW: One of those spiritual book stores.

[00:32:10] AM: Yeah. It's actually just an independent bookstore that still is rocking and rolling here in my hometown now. Shout out to book people. They still do have a little section. Of course, back then I think it was a little more pungent. We would spend – this sounds so romantic, me telling it now. Sweet, but it's true. We would spend hours at the bookstore just – We would buy things too, but we would just read and peruse and sit on the ground and be together, but not together.

My mom, I think she would get immersed in astrology and I somehow landed in the Sufi poetry. It's not far. It's a couple doors down. That's a childhood memory that I have that I'll treasure forever. Sometimes when I'm feeling a little, "Eh," I will go to that bookstore on my own and just roll around with a coffee and spend some money there. That's when I started to pick up on some of the poetry that has carried me through to now really.

I think about my mom and how that was her time to let off steam and how yeah, sometimes we were reading books on acting, or theater, but no. I think, she was also using that time to engage

and teach herself about the things that fascinated her. I feel I've picked that up from both my parents. My dad is the same way. We just had a Zoom the other day just catching up. He's not downtrodden. He's still talking about all the things he wants to do and all the things he wants to learn and both my parents are like that. I can see that in me.

Oh, my God. Here I am at 17, 18, and I was already – I was out of the house. I moved out as soon as humanly possible, no offense to my mom. I just really wanted to. I wanted to own my life. I wanted to make some magic. I wanted to unfold the story. I was pretty excited and pretty scared, but I also think I must have had some confidence, probably thanks to my mom and dad, always encouraging me and telling me that I was worthy. I've been thinking about that a lot lately as I continue to build work for my current community, how important it is the way we speak to each other and how that can have such a big impact on the way we perceive ourselves, which of course, influences every step.

I had some confidence. I must have, because I went to that theater director, Anne Bogart, who's huge, and asked her for a letter recommendation. Because at this point, I had gone to their training in upstate New York and I was the youngest person to ever attend at 17-years-old. From that point then, I did some training with them in LA. I mean, I was pretty committed. I was working. I had plans to audition at Juilliard and NYU in Colombia, which I ended up auditioning at some of those, just to say I did it. Because my mom was bringing Siti Company back to Austin to work at St. Edward's – and I was a good student. I wasn't a perfect student, but I was an A student. I ended up getting my GED, just so that I could graduate a year early, so that I can enroll in college a year early, so that I could be a part of the beginning of this collaboration with Siti Company in an official capacity.

Because I was already spending more time at the university than at school. I had all of these absences. I had A's, but the absences were starting to mess with my report card. I always had a way of – I have friends who tease me to this day like, "Only you would miss your geometry final and then somehow talk the teacher into letting you take it after school was over and then passing." I just think that was a clear sign that I was ready to start something.

I look back and I'm like, "That's crazy that I did that, because I feel like I could have potentially harmed myself in that." Now that was a big move. I graduated a year early. The sad part about

that was leaving my beloved best friend behind and leaving that environment a little early, but I didn't take a year off. I immersed immediately into private catholic university setting, where I started and still have some of those relationships, some beautiful, creative and also, just friendships.

[00:36:57] LW: As far as your trajectory was, you were on the way to becoming a working professional actor and possibly, even moving to New York or LA at some point soon after that.

[00:37:09] AM: Yeah. Well, because I fell so in love with the training, it was a whole new world, because it no longer put an end point on work. It was all about process, which is funny enough, we talk about that in yoga all the time. Or at least, I hope we are. Yeah, it was about the process of creating. Even in the art itself, it was this whole new world was opened up to me in which asking questions were now more important than presenting something.

Right away, I think the first show, yeah, the first show I did with J. Ed, which was one of several and even the work that I did up with the company in Upstate New York, there was already political elements in the work. When I went and did the training in Upstate New York, you have to be accepted into this training. For me to get accepted at 17 was a big deal. I'd never been away from a home. I was staying indoors.

I remember two weeks into the four-week training, Anne Bogart herself in our Monday composition class was speaking, talking to something. Without taking a breath, landed her eyes on me and said, "Did everyone know, Adriene's only 17?" I was just like, "No." Mortified, because I'm working with these people in small groups to build composition. Even then, yeah, there are elements of politics there and morality. I mean, come on. It's the classics.

At that point, I was working on Marivaux's La Dispute. We were working on that piece. Anyway, when I came back to Austin, enrolled in school early, I even got a performance scholarship, which is amazing, because obviously, there's the element of nepotism, so my mom was not allowed to be involved in any of my stuff. I got a performance scholarship anyway, so that helped me pay for some things.

The first piece I did with J. Ed was political. It wasn't just that I was being introduced to avant-garde theater. It was, I was creating meaningful work. Who cares if it was meaningful to everyone or not? I was learning what that felt like, the difference. We were creating work that asked questions in a nutshell.

[00:39:30] LW: Was there any yoga happening in your life at this time?

[00:39:33] AM: Well, when I went to beautiful Saratoga Springs for this first Siti Company training, at that pivotal age, 17, I came back and I was like, "Damn. I am weak." Because this training was super physical. Just my nature, my personality, I do have a perfectionista side, I admit. I came back and was just like, "Okay. Well, what the hell do I need to do to make sure I'm not weak like that ever again? To make sure that I'm not caught in the headlights like that ever again." Also, practically thinking –

[00:40:11] LW: Did something happen, specifically were you on stage when you realized how weak you were?

[00:40:16] AM: The training itself is very physically demanding. You do the training to help basically, equip you for rehearsal. Rehearsals were great. I actually was having a visit with J. Ed, who's now a character in this storytelling today, last year, and we were laughing. I actually went to visit him. They have a little farm in Upstate New York. Different spot. I went to visit him before I taught at the Omega Institute, which was a big deal for me, because I also grew up looking at Omega Institute ads on the back of a crappy magazine. For me to be invited to teach there was very sweet.

I went there before that, because they're relatively close to each other. We were laughing around the fire at how that year, I was – I don't know if it was because I was that age and I was the perfect picture of a young ingenue or something. I don't know. I was in the most compositions, the most performances, like final performances than anyone else. I had my group, but then other groups had stolen me to be in their final performances. I had not remembered that. I'm like, "Wow. I was so brave. I can't believe I did that."

Nothing happened. I mean, there were moments where I would go to shower at the end of the day and maybe try to shave my legs and the pressure of a razor on my quad would be so sore, I couldn't do it. You're that sore. You can't walk up the stairs sore. No, I think I think it's always just been my nature. Nothing happened. I just wanted to be better. I mean, that's what I'm chewing on right now is like, "Oh, here I am thinking I'm doing a good job. Mm-mm. I can do more. I can do better. Give me a chance. People, give me a chance," were all the vibe I'm rocking right now.

Honestly, I came home and started going to the yoga studio, because I was like, this will be a great thing for everything that I want to do right now. Plus, I just felt comfortable in that space. My mom had already really started to embrace Baha'i Faith. There was a lot of new principles of loving that had been introduced into my home. At that point, it was just my mom and I living together. I was full-on roomy gal before Remy was ever questioned, or got popular at the end of yoga classes.

[00:42:46] LW: What year was this that you took your first yoga class?

[00:42:49] AM: Well, I might have gone to class prior, but I started going right when I was 17. After I went to the training, I enrolled in at St. Edward's and I enrolled in an early morning kundalini class with the university. I was like, "Might as well get credit for it." I was doing both. I was doing hatha at the studio, kundalini in my freshman year of college, which was actually my senior year of high school. My teacher there, Bagaret Crow, he was not just teaching kundalini, he was – This is such a great little bang for your buck time of my life. I swear, my angels are good.

He wasn't just teaching alternate nostril breathing, or slap your face with water seven times and call it a day. One of our required reading wasn't just Shakta Kaur Khalsa's book, but it was also the work of Byron Katie. Here and here's a discount, if you want the tapes, which I did have the tapes, dude, and I played Byron Katie Loving What Is tapes in my clunker-junker.

[00:43:55] LW: Wow. With no air-conditioner.

[00:43:57] AM: I know. With no AC. I guess, the reason why I feel these details are important, I'm realizing now, because I'm like, oh, man. I started to get insecure just talking about myself

like this, but these are all interesting. I won't say important, because this was all happening before this was the way it is now, in that it wasn't popular. It wasn't a salvation, mainstream salvation. It wasn't even a modern tool bag yet, toolkit. These were still, dare I say, being treated more sacred. I just got into it.

Then I was doing kundalini and then the hatha classes not long after that, about 18-years-old. That's when I was like, "Okay. I'm going to do this yoga teacher training, because they were promoting it at the studio." The thing is I love being in the classroom. That's the weird thing about leaving high school early is I've always loved school and I love learning. To this day, I like being in this seat of the student. I like being in the classroom.

[00:45:04] LW: What was your mental state like at that time?

[00:45:07] AM: I think I was hungry. My darker days came a little later. At this point, I was just really hungry. I went off kilter later, but at this point, I feel I was pretty poised. I was a little hippie gal, and I say that lovingly. I was a student. Oh, my God. This is the first time I was reading. It was the first time I was enrolled in a philosophy and literature class. I was just like, I was in a really potentially well-balanced state of nerd, art and artist and Austinite.

[00:45:50] LW: Were you that young kid who was learning all this new language for spiritual practices and going around and coaching people, unsolicited? Or you just, hearing Byron Katie and all of these other things and just keeping it for yourself and applying it to your own experience?

[00:46:09] AM: Yeah, it was very private. It wasn't like I was hiding it. Only the people that were in my close circle would even know that I was jamming on that pretty hard. I actually am really good friends with some of those people who can remember, like Byron Katie being on the fridge. In fact, I used to have this funny little card. I don't know what it was, but it's a little reminder. It was a Byron Katie thing and it said something like, "I hear what you're saying." That's what it said at the top. Then at the bottom it said, "And no." That became a joke. Oh, man.

[00:46:51] LW: Your friends would say that to you? They would tease you?

[00:46:53] AM: Yeah. I have one friend in particular that I work closely with, who if he hears this, he's going to have a good giggle. I hear what you're saying. Even though we might have said it joking, it was going into our consciousness, these things. Oh, yeah. That house at the time, I had little Sufi poetry sayings up everywhere. I had quotes everywhere, positive affirmations, lots of Louise Hay. I was a total Louise Hay kid.

It seems silly and you won't find that in my house now. Back then, I mean, yeah, it was seeping in, because I mean, I kept it up, kept those things up forever. That was really my mom's influence. For the most part, no, I wasn't really sharing that with anyone, unless they came over and read it on my fridge, or in my bathroom. It didn't come till much later that I started to have more of an experience with yoga, specifically, then I started to do that thing, that everyone does at one point where they're like, "No, please try it." You're like, "No, I don't like. I don't onions or whatever." They're like, "No. Please try. You can't even taste the onions. Please, please try it." You're like, "No, really. I can't even stand the smell." "You're like, "Please try it. It's so good." I hit that phase a little later, closer to when I started the YouTube channel.

[00:48:14] LW: This is a yoga teacher training in kundalini, you said?

[00:48:17] AM: No. I chose the hatha path, because I'm still pragmatic-minded. This was before yoga was popular like it is now. I was like, if I do hatha, just, I did the research and I was like, I will be able to do more if I'm hatha certified and then I can always go back and train in kundalini. Or, I can incorporate kundalini into the hatha, but this is the tree trunk. This is just looking at the book list, you could tell like, "Okay. Yeah, this is the wisest, most comprehensive choice." That's what I did. I could not afford, oh, my goodness. I could not afford it. It had to have been a lot less expensive than it is now, but let me tell you –

[00:49:01] LW: This is in 2002, or 2003?

[00:49:04] AM: Yeah, 2002 is when I came back from Skidmore. Yeah, 2002, 2003.

[00:49:09] LW: Trainings were about \$2,000 back then, because that's when I did mine was in 2002.

[00:49:14] AM: Yeah. Well, and I had just come off this big month-long training, which is the most expensive damn thing I had done to date, which my Uncle Mike, everyone chipped in, actually everyone. I had a little graduated early party. I still graduated and I have to hand it to my parents too. They held strong. They didn't say no for fear of what the family would think. I get feeling a little emotional all of a sudden thinking about it, because that's proof that they believed that I was a smart, intelligent, capable young lady. If they didn't, I just think they would have not let me do.

I wasn't that good at being stubborn. I did what I wanted, but I don't know if I was that strong. Maybe they'd say something different like, "No, you were going to do whatever you wanted to do either way."

[00:50:08] LW: I'm curious though, why take a yoga teacher training as an actor? Were you thinking, "I would just do this part-time and pay for my – subsidize my acting work?"

[00:50:18] AM: Yeah, it's a great question. It's a good, honest question for this time period too, because we just weren't seeing like, "Oh, yeah. I could be a yoga teacher the way we are now." I'm not saying that with any judgment. I'm just saying, it just wasn't – The yoga teachers, or a lot of them in my studio were still wearing turbans, because it was a big kundalini-owned studio. That's a great question.

I think, truly, truly, it was that I moved out early and I wanted a little jump start in my life and I also didn't live in the dorm. I didn't want to live in the dorm. Again, very blessed, very spoiled, but we didn't have that much money. I like to be self-sufficient still, big time to this day. That has really helped me out actually a lot as an entrepreneur too. Just having that deep down inside me somewhere. I'm learning now in recent years how important it is to also collaborate, not just so I keep learning, but because I can't do everything myself.

I felt then that I didn't want to have to rely on anyone. I wanted to do things for myself. I'd already been working a lot. In fact, I started working really early for this exact same reason. Everything from working in the snow cone stand, to working backstage, to working in the costume shop as a cleaner, as an organizer. I cleaned houses for many years, until I kept getting sick because of that. Also, the owner of the company was a toxic dude, so I was like, "You know what? Peace." Then I did a lot of babysitting, a lot of nanny work.

I knew that I needed to get smart about how I was going to make money. I say this with love, but just with honesty, I just didn't want to work in the service industry. That whole actors, waiting tables thing. I honestly didn't think I'd be good at it too. It wasn't that I was just being – and I wanted to be a teacher. I always wanted to have a teaching voice, because I had seen my mom my whole life use that voice and the truth is, honest to God, truth is I was strategically thinking, “This would be a great supplemental job to my acting career.” I thought I had that idea on my own. Not that it would become an actual career.

I also had studied American sign language in high school up until that point. I at this point, really, truly thought I could also be an interpreter, because we have a big deaf culture here in Austin. We have the Texas School for the Deaf here right in the center of the city. That was still on the table.

[00:53:04] LW: Did you start teaching right away right after your training was done? If so, what was your first teaching experience? Or, were you a fish out of water, or were you a fish in water, or you're natural?

[00:53:15] AM: The thing is I had so many things going on that were jazzing me. I mean, that's the thing is I was never bored. To this day as I speak to you now, I'm in my house and I've been here for quite some time, due to shelter in place in my city. I'm just not bored. Again, this is one of those things like, if you're the type of person that gets bored, it's all good. Don't worry. To each his own. I have never been one of those people.

I was going to school. I was in play, so I would do rehearsals. Then in years to follow, I would work in the mornings, I would nanny in the afternoons, go to classes, then also do play. There's so much going on that I started to get my foot in the door in local theater, outside of my mom's program and getting serious about being a performer, which led me to do some crazy, awesome things. Like a play that I developed with a company called Refraction Arts Project.

At the time, we took a show to New York Cringefest. That was my first mention in the New York Times was a picture of me, dancing in the show about the myth, the Greek myth of Philomel, this devastating story. Me going to New York Fringe with that show, caused me to miss X

amount of teacher training classes, because they were only held on the weekends. This was such a new offering. I'm just going to do real talk. If you missed your anatomy class, say one Saturday, August 4th, you had to wait till the next August 4th to get that anatomy class. Maybe not the whole year, but it wasn't like, "Oh, you'll just pick up in the next training. Or oh, we'll just send you a PDF and you just do this and then you can meet your teacher." No.

It was like, if you weren't there for anatomy 3 on August 4th, then you're going to need to wait until we offer anatomy 3 again, which will be next year and probably, you're going to have to pay \$25 or something like that. That was a really long, hopefully fun, just kidding, way of saying I had so much going on that my teacher training was almost my side hustle.

People knew that I had this side hustle. I think they respected it and thought it was cool. I feel like I went to yoga university, because I wasn't in and out in a year. It was almost four years. Almost four years just for a 200-hour, dude. Now of course, I've had the opportunity to do continued education and all of amazing things that I would have never at the time thought that I could ever afford.

No shame. Four years. In a lot of ways, again, not to sound annoying, but thank you, angels. I think it was a blessing in disguise, no doubt, that my training was pulled wide, like a long piece of taffy, so that I could grow up a little bit within that training and within that experience, so that yes, when I was done, I was so ready.

[00:56:31] LW: Had you latched on to a certain teacher as a mentor, to yoga teacher as a mentor? If so, did you have a plan for how you were going to teach yoga afterwards?

[00:56:40] AM: Yeah. Well, you go through the training. Originally, I'm just looking at paper. Okay, check, check, check, check. You know what's crazy? I've shared this before in public, but I think you might get a kick out of this. It was so different back then. Do you remember, if you were a coffee drinker, or I'm an 18-year-old on my –

[00:57:02] LW: Yeah. I was a strict vegan back then. I didn't drink. I didn't do anything that was considered impure, or toxic to the body.

[00:57:08] AM: Oh, because of your environment though, right? Because that was the rule. Not because that wasn't inside you, but there's Benji. For me, it was just so interesting, because if I had a coffee, I would leave it and I wasn't done, but I spent precious \$3 on that, I would still leave it in the car before I went in the studio, because that just wasn't part of the yogic way. You didn't bring your coffee into the studio. If you did, you were a bad yogi or something.

That's a silly example, but those examples existed within the fabric of this experience is all I'm trying to say. Part of what I've done, sometimes on purpose and sometimes just subconsciously is trying to demystify a lot of those things that don't make you feel welcome in this environment that's supposed to be for you to bring your difficulty and just bring yourself and bring –

Anyway. I was checking boxes is what I'm saying, because I just wasn't – I was nervous. I got to the box, basically of, you need to have someone you can mentor with. I'm like, "Oh, damn. That's going to be a harder box to check than this and this." You wanted to find a mentor, because they wanted you to of course, create a relationship with someone where you could ask questions, beautiful. Where you can observe, yes, so important. Also, eventually to assistant teach, to practice.

At this point, I had been treated an adult for some time. I had a relationship to what authenticity felt like, even though I didn't know how to name it back then. I just couldn't find anyone. I was just like, "Oh, I don't –" I'm, "Mm-mm. Mm-mm. Mm-mm." Then one day, I was just like, "Well, we're just going to get to that box whenever, because I still have other shit I can be doing in my binder, while I'm doing plays in school."

One day, I took one class with this woman, Brigitte. She read *The Guest House* at the end of class. We didn't have social media. For me, it was like, "I know this moment." Not to mention, it's a beautiful piece of writing. Yeah, I had a release. I mean, I don't know if that's the exact moment, but I definitely cried tears of joy in that moment and I was like, I don't know this woman. I'm scared, but I'm going to ask her, because I know. I know now.

Just the way she moved and the way she carried herself in the way, also her voice, like the way she used her voice. It was just so different. I just went right up to her after class. I think I was shaking. I know I was shaking and I asked her. This was a big moment as well, because I think

there was a reason that I couldn't find my mentor there in that studio space. She ended up, that teacher invited me over to another place in town. Yeah, on the other side of the tracks. No, just kidding. It was called Healing and Yoga.

Her partner at the time was also – they were running it together. His name is Murti Hower and he became a big teacher and influence. It's funny, because I didn't actually spend that much time with these people. I mean, I spent a huge chunk of time in a very poorest part of my life. In the grand scheme, it's funny because they're both in Hawaii now.

I've actually just exchanged with Murti recently and I would have never in a million years thought I would be doing what I'm doing now, one. Two, to be able to look back and say thank you and to make people who believed in you proud is a big deal. They both welcomed me into the community there. Some of our most "senior teachers" like, the teachers here in Austin that have been around a long time, some of them I met there. They were a bit further along in their journey than me as a teacher, of course.

Once again, I'm in this time, I'm in this space at the right time as a young person, fly on the wall. Too young to be there. When a spot opened up for kids yoga teacher, there were all of these other people in-line in the community that should have received that job and they gave it to me. You can ask my mom, there were even people in the community that were like, "What?" I did that with so much pure devotion for many years. That's really where I fell in love with the idea of using the calling of a yoga teacher to help others.

[01:02:03] LW: How many classes did they give you per week?

[01:02:06] AM: On Saturday mornings is when Murti, the big teachers would teach that Saturday morning. I'll never forget, when I first started teaching Saturday morning I was like, "Oh, wow. I've made it." Then I was like, "Get me out of here." No, just kidding. Yeah, he taught on Saturdays, and so I was going to do the kids yoga class while he was teaching, so that the kids, the parents could go to class of Murti, the kids would come to me. They wouldn't do yoga the full time as the adult class, so we would – there's a little playground. We do a little gathering time, then we do yoga and then I do a story and a snack afterwards. The snack was all me,

dude. I brought that. I paid for it. I went to Whole Foods, I bought it. I did this for many, many years of my early days of teaching, and in a way, still now.

[01:02:49] LW: How did you know how to teach children? Because you don't typically learn how to teach kids on a yoga teacher training.

[01:02:56] AM: No, you don't. I taught myself through books. The thing is we didn't have video. We did not have video. There were no videos. There were no videos. Books, I remember getting books from a half price bookstore. I didn't even have Amazon, nor did I have any money to get anything ordered from the Internet anyway. It was really, I had the Internet, but I was really creating my own lessons and taking stuff for my mom.

I was just doing my own thing there. I think that that was a huge – that was my first business was Love Kids Yoga. That was my first DBA that I went and got. I remember, I had one of my students who ended up being the younger sister of a fellow I dated for many years. This is just a fun little connection. She did the logo for Love Kids Yoga. That was really my first business. I would do that on Saturday mornings.

Even if I was up late Friday night, which I most certainly was, doing rehearsals and having a Jamison, or whatever after rehearsals to wind down, I was still up there with my bag and with everything, working on Saturday mornings.

Then on Sunday mornings, that's when Brigitte would teach and I would also show up, same thing and I would work the table. I would pull out all the mats and sweep the floor. I had no money, but that was my trade, as I was making some money on the kids' yoga. Then on Sundays, I would work the table and then get to practice for free. I was allowed to lay my mat out in the back before and then I would check everyone in. At the last moment, I'd probably usually always miss the tune in, but I would just slide in, and so then I was practicing with my teacher.

I don't need a cookie, or a pat on the back. In the spirit of telling the down and dirty stuff and not just sharing the highlights, this sounds like a great deal, but at the time it was hard, because I was living in the nightlife and I was getting up and making this a priority. Oh, I mean, basically, I don't want to let anyone down. I knew that I had been given a great opportunity. The practice

was changing me too. It wasn't just about getting somewhere. I was feeling something. I was having my own experience that I was investigating.

[01:05:23] LW: What did you learn from teaching kids? What were some of the lessons did you learn?

[01:05:27] AM: I think I learned a lot about the power of invitation, versus dictation. Not dictation, but you know what I mean, the art really of inviting someone to do something, versus telling them what they should be doing. That's so important with children and it's so important with adults. I think along those same lines, I think the power of story and threading a clear beginning, middle and end and letting that be something that feels playful and creative, I think that is a big part of what I am doing now still that is different, than how we're trained to teach.

Ultimately, it gave me a chance to find my voice in a non-threatening environment and to really move from a place of love, which I know that sounds like just lip service these days, but it's so true. I was having a heartfelt experience every single time. Even when it was hard, it was my job to make it beautiful, to make it fun anyway, even when somebody's having a struggle, or to get – I wanted those kids to go back to their parents and say, they want to come back. In a lot of ways, I do that now at the yoga theater. I'm like, "Look, I'm not your guru, but I am here to try to coerce you to come back to yourself really."

[01:07:00] LW: Did you ultimately get to teach adult classes? If so, what would you find that you enjoyed the most?

[01:07:06] AM: Right. Then, from working and just being in the community. I think that was the real outside of the fact that my whole life, the rehearsal room and being in a play and being in an ensemble, I know what it's like to be in a company. It's special. That's why when people was like, "Oh, yeah. Only child." I'm like, "Don't be so quick to throw me into your only child zone," even though I do it to myself too, sometimes just be funny. I've always felt I've had a lot of brothers and sisters growing up with my mom's students and just being in companies. I'm sure people who grew up on teams, sports teams, they have that with that part of their story, or that experience.

That Healing and Yoga time, that was the first time I was introduced to being in a Kula. Being with a community of people that would not maybe normally gather for the same movie, or the same vote the same way, or even shop at the same grocery store. It was cool. It was like, the first time I was in something different, where not everyone maybe thought the same. That was my first taste of Kula. I really found my voice there. There were people, I think that saw something in me trying to be brave and not play small and tell this story right. I think, there were people there that saw things of me outside of Brigitte and Murti.

There was a woman there who she had trusted me with her children, her babies, for so long and they had such a nice experience with me that when she opened up a studio, oh, my gosh. I'm just actually called at the time, Austin Kula Yoga. It's not that anymore. I was invited to come teach the kids. Again though, it was just still the kids. Then I started getting real. I started doing toddler classes. I started doing mommy and baby. If it had anything to do with kids' yoga in Austin, Texas in that era, it was mine. I was all over the place.

Then from there, I started going to other different studios, because the studios were like, "Oh, yeah. This genius. We can have a kids' class, while we have this class, or we can have a toddler's class while we have this class." I would say, the whole first portion of my teaching career was with babies, toddlers and kids, and then later on, teens. I was still working with kids, still praying someone would see me as a real yoga teacher. Excuse me, but that's how my mindset was at the time. That's not what I'm saying now. I was like, "Please, God. Let me get a real teaching gig."

I was into it, because I was growing something. In the meantime, I started working for an after-school program called Creativity Club. Then I started teaching creative drama to kids. Now I'm doing kids' yoga and creative drama. We're talking four years, again, another university setting of teaching kids' yoga and performance. From there, I ended up moving to a private high school, where I taught theater arts for a bit and I [inaudible 01:10:15] a musical performance there and then yoga.

It wasn't until, I guess, I was 25 that I really was like – I was doing some adult classes and just different angels started giving me opportunities. I got my first adult class at this co-op, but I had to pay for the space. At that time, only my mom and my boyfriend at the time and then maybe

one other person would come. That one other person, I had told him to come for free, so then I was just paying to teach for many years.

That wasn't one time, just for people who are working their way through. That was a good year. I was like, "Oh, my God." It was like, my dirty little secret. I'm just paying to teach and whoever does the books here, I hope they don't think I'm just a total idiot.

[01:11:03] LW: What about the acting? Are you still thinking, "I'm going to do full-time acting one day. I'm just still doing this part-time." Or where is it now in terms of your focus?

[01:11:13] AM: I'm still acting at this point and I'm doing it non-stop. I am doing back-to-back plays, like in rehearsal for a play, while I'm in a run of a show for another play. That's a similar story. I got my foot in the door through Professional Austin Theater Community as an assistant stage manager. One of my good friends and collaborators and to this day is just one of my favorite actors; Jenny Larson, who ended up becoming a big confidant and collaborator for me later on in Yoga With Adriene when I started teaching at Salvage Vanguard Theater, but still doing plays this whole time.

She got me my first gig, early 20s with the Salvage Vanguard Theater, which I later became a company member at and that's where I started doing my independent classes, so it took a full circle thing. To make this knot so much more long-winded, I'll say I was like Cinderella when my friends got to be performing for many years. I was doing the laundry. I was making blood packets. I was getting everything ready for them.

It wasn't until a little later on that I started to get hired. Then once I started to get hired, I was non-stop working. I don't say that with a hair flick, or anything, but I was a hard worker. Who the hell wouldn't want me there? I was extremely hard-working and probably psychotically devoted to the theater.

[01:12:42] LW: Were you making money as an actor at that point, or were you still mostly work-free?

[01:12:45] AM: Yeah. I was living that starving artist life. I was piecing it all together. No, I was definitely getting paid. I wasn't doing any of that for free. There were definitely moments where I'd like to think I helped teach, guide, move some of that, even in smallest ways. For example, I can think of someone that I totally worship now as a director, but I remember when he first came to Austin and had this incredible piece that had my name all over it. There was no pay. I was like, "Oh, I can't. I'm not doing it." Then it was like, okay a \$100. It was six weeks of Shakespearean work. You're like, "No."

Then this is when rent's starting to get higher and it's all starting – is the beginning of what I've now lived through as the end of a huge downfall of arts and in particular, the theater spaces in my hometown. Yeah. I was definitely getting paid. I was piecing it altogether. Then a really pivotal moment came when I was invited to become a company member at Salvage Vanguard. A beautiful teacher had already been utilizing that space, a friend of ours who's actually a teacher at the studio here in Austin that I'm co-owner at now.

Anyway, opportunity came up for me to start teaching in the lobby there. We're talking the theater lobby. I was like, "Yeah, I'll take it. How much do I pay each month? Okay, that's way better than what I've been paying anywhere else, so let's do it." I just took it and ran with it. From there, I started teaching at the Blanton Museum of Art. Then, instead of traveling all around town to sub-classes, or pay to teach at the co-op, or do kids classes, all of a sudden, I was creating these opportunities for myself to teach. More importantly, I was attracting people who wouldn't normally feel comfortable going to the studio, or the gym, even the YMCA, not even the fancy, or the fancy gym. That happened organically, just by the very nature of where I was posting up, basically.

[01:14:55] LW: Talk about Spiderbaby, because I'm assuming that happened around this time.

[01:14:59] AM: No. Just kidding. Yeah. I don't normally love this word, but this is a circumstance in which it is to me, very appropriate. I was hustling. I was hustling, doing all the things. It's true. I mean, there's a reason why I don't like that word now, it's probably because of what I have been through and how I used to actually romanticize the hustle big time. I thought that was – that's a thing. Starving artists was like, you're busting every part of your being, but you're making not enough money to get by. You're an artist.

There came a point, I was teaching at the high school. I was nannying for a dear friend of mine, a baby and then I was nannying for an Indian family after school, which taught me – they taught me a lot; how to cook for myself. It also just was like, it slowed me down a little bit to be able to take care of their girls and even contribute around their house and just slow down my own pace before going back to rehearsal. That was an important part of that time for me.

I started to get a little more confident. I started to get some positive feedback. I was getting some recognition, which is hard for me to accept, but in retrospect, really beautiful and something that I'm proud of. I was like, "Well, maybe I need to take this to where there's a little more money." I started auditioning for commercials and for films. I was booking a lot of commercials. I started doing voiceover work, which I still do now.

I started to become immersed in the Austin film scene. I was invited to audition for this indie horror film about three girls who are in a band, a punk rock band. It's about their experience, basically, through an apocalypse. I can't remember why originally, but I had passed on it. Then when it circled back to me, it came back to me through friends, instead of the agent. The friends that it came through, they were like, people that I really loved and that were talented and super smart and super cool. I was like, "Hmm. Maybe I should give this another try." It was for a lead. It was for one of the principal roles.

I went on tape. I don't know if it was live stream, or if I did on tape, but with my now business partner, who was directing. He co-wrote it and his now wife, Hilah, was one of the other – the gal, one of the other principal ladies. She and I at that point, had done theater together. Some people, you let them see you, they let you see them and you just know. At that point, I had already a kindred energy with Hilah, and I thought she was really cool too. I was like, "Yeah, let's do this." I got cast.

It was actually a really difficult experience in many ways, but I think that I learned so much about film acting on the piece. It never got finished due to a bit of discrepancy and miscommunication. I don't even know, to be honest, between the Austin team and the producer. Yeah, I think we often high-five, toast, cheers to the Spider Babies, because from that project, Chris and Hilah met and they have a beautiful son now and we have Yoga With Adriene.

[01:18:45] LW: You're hustling. You're doing all these different jobs. Are you living hand-to-mouth? Are you saving money for a certain thing? What's your financial state at that time?

[01:18:57] AM: Check-to-check for sure. This is personal, but my parents were good to me. They helped me out through the beginning stages there. I think it was me, not them that was like, I really wanted to be self-sufficient as soon as humanly possible. That's what I did. If I was in a really tight pickle, most of the time I would work it out myself most of the time. Then life happens and things evolve and we got to a point where it was every man for himself. My mom and my dad and I all – “You good? Okay. You good? Okay. You good?”

I was definitely working check-to-check, but I was in scenarios that were really blessed. I nannied after school for a family. A lot of what I did during my 20s, I look back on and I'm like, “Wow, people trusted me big time with their everything.” Keys to the costume shop, keys to the house, folding laundry and putting it in drawers. I did another nanny job too with a dear friend of mine where I'm thinking, not only do people trust me with the keys to their home, but they trust me with their home and with the things they leave out, metaphorically and literally. It's really interesting that all of my jobs seem to have this like, I had a lot of keys, basically. I had a lot of keys on my keychain.

I think the reason I bring that up is not to brag, but to say, I was already creating relationship-based work, versus just transactional. Show up for your shift. Do it and leave. Within that comes some cool things. You get fed. The food that I would do *mise en place* for Po, Po Ruvi, so she could come home after work and cook her meal, she would leave for me and with instructions and then I would know how to make this Indian dish. Throughout the course of me working with them, I grew my Indian kitchen.

Every holiday, they would give me one – one year I had a pressure cooker, which is big deal for my broke butt back then. Then that Christmas, I got my own Indian spice rack, spice dish. I was being taken care of in interesting ways during this time, but very much check-to-check. Spider Babies was actually very alluring, because it was because of the relationship that Chris had made with this producer, I was going to get paid. There was some money to pay the principal actors. That was a big part of why I was like, “Oh, yes. Finally.”

Yeah, I was doing too much for sure. This is where I started to fall off the rails a little bit, to be honest. Because I had an inkling that I wanted to be true to myself and that I wanted to be of service. I felt this calling of a yoga teacher to help others. I felt this calling to use my life as an artist to help others. I was still in my 20s, navigating the world and there's only so many hours in the day. I was like, okay. Well, once you have your first Red Bull, you're like, absolutely not. I'm a very clean person. I grew up healthy.

Once you have your first Red Bull and you're like, "Oh, the show was a lot better tonight after I had that Red Bull. Damn. Damn it. That's so gross. Oh, I can't believe you drink those things. Here, give me one." Things started to get a little rickety. I'm not saying that I flew off the rails then, because that happened later. Just kidding.

I started to struggle a little bit. How could I be a school teacher, a nanny a professional artist, a film – How could you do all that and also still not even be able to make the rent? Things started to get a little interesting. That is why when Chris wrote me a random e-mail about gauging my interest in doing a YouTube channel, I lit up like, "Ooh, what? This could be cool." Because I was hustling. I was teaching adults at this time and I was teaching all over town and not making any money. I was using my classes at the theater to try to creatively get people to come, but most of them were coming for free.

[01:23:39] LW: Had Chris taken your class and he thought you were an exceptional teacher, or something?

[01:23:45] AM: No. I'm fairly certain that it was the fact that I was at this point, I was that person that was comedy. I had Facebook at this point, at that point. I was posting anything I could think of to get people to come check it out, I was doing it. I was trying to be creative and fun. I would do that thing, like free kombucha. Or, I remember once seeing a Facebook memory where I was like, "Wow, Adriene. Wow." Where it was like, today was Shirley Temple's birthday. Come to yoga and get a free healthy Shirley Temple after class.

In a way, that was the kids' yoga teacher in me. The creative drama teacher. It came from a sweet place. What was really happening is, or Valentine's Day, or self-love. Free rose if you

come to class. The problem was I was buying all those roses and I was buying all those cherries and I was buying everything that I was giving away at yoga that no one was paying. Then people started to donate at Salvage Vanguard.

I think he knew that I was comfortable on camera, I think. I don't want to say he was impressed, but I think he was – I think he had a lot of respect for me in the way that I worked on that film anyway. I mean, the bottom line was we enjoyed working together. When you know, you know that's true. I think it was more that he knew I was passionate about –

[01:25:10] LW: What was his pitch? “Hey, we're going to just do this thing starting next week, or think about it.” Or what?

[01:25:15] AM: Yeah. I think, he was just trying to take my pulse. He had created a cooking show with Hilah, called Hilah Cooking. That ended up doing really well and was really fun and was positioned like, this is not for chefs. This is just for everyday people who want to have a little fun and be able to cook their own meals for themselves and their family. Hilah has a wonderful personality and I think the two of them had so much fun building it, that that really ended up coming out in the videos. It did really well. I think, again –

[01:25:48] LW: When you say it did really well, you mean it was making – was earning income for them? That was how they were paying for things?

[01:25:54] AM: Well, at first it didn't make any money. It started to become a thing. For one, people were watching it. I think, again, I can't really speak for Chris, but I think it was his experience with Hilah Cooking coupled with where he was, honest to God, just in that time. The movie didn't make – He had put everything into the movie and I don't think he wanted to go back to an office job, even though he ended up doing that for quite some time. Yeah, I think he was just exploring.

I honestly think he was interested. It wasn't just like, “Make money,” even though we needed to make money. It was like, YouTube was changing. At that time, it was already starting to thrive and move in different ways in other big cities, but not quite in Austin yet. Chris was really getting

into that. I think he was just good at it and inquisitive enough to get feedback that was like, “Yeah, let's keep doing this.”

He wanted to do something in health and wellness. Knew that I was comfortable on camera. Knew that I was really trying to do something with this this yoga thing. Because at that point, everyone who knew me knew that I was teaching. We talked about it for, we like to joke, we talked about it for two years back and forth, just in passing, before we actually started to make some moves.

[01:27:13] LW: The problem though is back then, YouTube is relatively newish. Yoga, it's like, I can imagine as a yoga teacher, you were probably like, “Well, what about alignment? How do I keep people safe and the whole thing of taking this “sacred art” and introducing it to video?” Was that a conflict of yours at all, or am I just projecting?

[01:27:36] AM: No, it's a big one. I'll put another little dollop of that on top and be honest and say, not only was that a real problem for me, I was afraid to mess up, because I was afraid of doing something wrong. I felt like I could maybe jam this out. It was just too good of an opportunity to not try, but I could see in the back of my head like, “Oh, my teachers.” Or just everyone in yoga looking at me, thinking that –

[01:28:07] LW: She's watering it down.

[01:28:08] AM: Yeah. Because also, and here's the down and dirty is I admit, especially back then, I mean, and this is something that I'm actually investigating right now for real. When is my desire to want to be like getting in the way of actually creating a new groove, whether the groove is good or bad, we're not even getting that far? When is my desire to want to be getting in the way of me creating a new group, period?

This was one of those moments where I was like, “Hmm.” I even had someone recently ask me like, “Were you a teacher's pet?” I was like, “What?” I got all defensive. Then I started thinking about that a couple days after and I'm like, “Yeah, I am.” Rven right now, I'm taking Spanish through online one-on-one. I love my profesora. I want to make her proud. I don't want to show up unfocused or frazzled. I want to do well for the both of us. It's still in me. I felt I was walking

on eggshells, to be honest, for a long, long, long time. I think that's why I went a little overboard in the beginning.

[01:29:23] LW: He sent you the e-mail. You've been talking about it. What eventually got you to the point where you're like, "Okay. We're doing it on a Saturday at 10:00. Come to my house and shoot it."

[01:29:34] AM: I think it was just where we both were in our lives. I had no space when the e-mail came through. He was also starting a new chapter, so to speak. I think it just took us that long for the stars to align, honestly for us to get together. Maybe too in the back of my head, maybe it was just that we were going to let it gestate. Here's the thing, this is actually key. We never were thinking that it was going to be a business or anything like, let's start. Okay, so we need to have a meeting to plan out how we're going to do this business. It was more like, "Hey, should we finally meet up?" We had a drink. Our first yoga with Adriene meeting, we had a beverage at a bar on South Lamar in Austin. It's main road, because Chris lived over there at the time. Like, "What?"

I like to share that part of the story. I don't even think it's funny. I just think it's interesting. We weren't meaning like, "Okay. Let's change the way we see yoga and health and wellness, or let's —" I thought, maybe I could pay some of my flip phone bill, maybe. It really was in the spirit of experimentation. There was a ton of unknowns and no real pressure at all. There was nothing speeding it up, or pushing it along. So much so that for the first year or two even, if we said we were going to shoot on a Saturday and one of us didn't feel like it, we just called the person up and said, "Hey, do you mind if we save it and shoot next weekend?" That's what we did.

[01:31:21] LW: What was the setup like? The first time, you just came over with a little point-and-shoot, or was an actual film camera, or what?

[01:31:29] AM: Well, it's interesting. I actually lived in another house when his first e-mail came through. In that process between when I received his inquiry and when we began, I moved to a new house. When I moved into the new house, I walked into this dining room and saw this beautiful window wall with these old school built-in benches. It was a old house, but I was like,

“This is it.” I was like, “We can shoot the yoga videos in here, if we ever do that thing, whatever.” I was like, “We could do it in here.”

I’m going to be honest. In the early days, we had a little bit of a Dharma and Greg thing going. Okay, I’m in charge of all the yoga, all the content, I guess. We didn’t even call it content then, it’s funny. You’re in charge of all the other stuff; the tech, the camera. We worked like that in the beginning really well. We were just playing and exploring. I think it took a lot of trust and honestly, maybe we’re just cosmically a good team, because we had fun. Chris is a smart guy. He said early on, “We don’t have to try to make everything perfect, but rather, just be yourself. Let’s just work with what we have.”

Then strategically, I remember him saying, “Each time, let’s just try to make one thing better,” which is something that I’ve passed on when people ask me for advice and I’m like, “Oh, I don’t know if you want my advice, but let’s see.” I like to share that. It can be overwhelming and you can also think that you need all fancy stuff to make meaningful work. Really, you don’t. A better way to approach it sometimes is just like, okay, what’s one thing we can make better? Sometimes it’s like, me. Stop smacking, or keep eye contact, or be yourself. Stop trying to act like a yoga teacher.

Then sometimes it’s camera movement, or light. Thank God, we had all the windows. We had a lot of natural light. Then we had two little soft boxes that were basically, Hilah Cooking. Everything was Hilah Cooking equipment, so that was great. We had pretty much just bare-bone basics. Even my yoga clothes. I had two pairs of pants that were okay, because the other ones had a hole in the crotch. That’s what it was like.

I remember doing my makeup in my bathroom a little bit, combing my hair, looking at my journal, my notes. I took copious amounts of notes back then, trying to basically memorize them, simulating what I would do in a performance. Then something started to happen in which, Chris, I think started to get really interested in the yoga and the meaning behind it. Then I started to get interested in what he was doing.

One thing I’m always to this day, I feel so grateful that my angels paired me up with Chris, because Chris has always gone out of his way to teach me. There’s always been a transparency both ways in why I’m doing this. This is why I’m doing it this way and then I’ll do

the same thing on my own. This is why we're doing this today, instead of a flow, because I want to make sure we have all the foundations before we get into that bootylicious stuff, whatever. We really taught each other a lot along the way and still do.

[01:34:53] LW: What was the engagement like when you guys first started? Did you film a bunch of episodes first and then you started putting them out? Or did you just put them out one after the other one as soon as you were done filming?

[01:35:04] AM: Yeah. We made an intro video with Hilah as our third man, third woman. I was so nervous. It was so crazy, because I felt so vulnerable. That's no joke. I was like, "Oh, my God. What am I doing?" You can see it in the very, very, very first Yoga With Adriene video, uploaded September 2012. I mean, I look at that person and I'm just like, **[inaudible 01:35:29]**. It's sweet. That's the one thing is it's very sweet. It's very pure. I'm like, "Hi, what's up? I'm Adriene Mishler. I'm an Austinite. I'm an actor and yoga teacher and dog owner." You see my old dog there. It's very pure. I don't know what I was expecting, but I thought something would happen, but then nothing really happened. I was just like, "Whew! We did it."

Then we started doing the yoga. At the time, we were doing one at a time. Like I said, if we did reschedule, we would reschedule enough to still do it, so we could put out one at a time. Then it got to be like, okay, maybe two at a time. I can't honestly believe to this day that we would do one at a time.

[01:36:17] LW: It's like shooting a movie in sequence, right? It's like that.

[01:36:19] AM: Yeah, no kidding. To answer your question, nobody watched, or engaged at all for a long time. In fact, this is why I don't know who I think I am, but I often do feel the darn thing is blessed or guided by angels who are so much bigger than me, because why were we even doing that? I mean, I guess Chris was working on things and I'm just like, I'm not a failure, so I keep going. I'm going to keep going.

We were doing it for so long before receiving any feedback, or any views. Then I'll never forget the day where I popped back on a video and was like, "Oh, my word. 100 views?" It was like, the floor just – it was amazing. I'm still not really a big number person. We've had quite the year

this year with numbers, but I didn't check in with views all that often throughout the course of the journey. I know it sounds like I'm just saying that and I don't know why I wouldn't just be addicted to it. It's my thing. It's me. It's me putting myself out there, but I don't know. I just don't really care, I guess.

I did start to care, basically we started to really see some movement and I started to get more engaged when we did the first 30-day yoga journey. I think, it's not that I all of a sudden woke up excited about the numbers and that they were bigger, but I started to see a new possibility. I started to see return guests, return friends.

[01:37:54] LW: What year was the first one? 2014?

[01:37:56] AM: 15.

[01:37:57] LW: That was the same year you were the most searched, biggest Google search from yoga?

[01:38:01] AM: Yeah. I think that was due to the 30-days of yoga, which is wild to think about, because the channel was so small.

[01:38:09] LW: Now, Chris was also The Wizard of Oz, right? Wasn't he working all the meta tags and all of the algorithm stuff, SEO stuff in the background?

[01:38:19] AM: 100%. I love the way you put things. This is a good example. In all my days, I've never thought of Chris as a Wizard of Oz, especially during that time. That is the most perfect way of describing him. In the moment, it was like, that was actually, we're not supposed to talk about that. Just do the work, because we really wanted all of that to be invisible. Still do now. That's not the focus.

I got to a point where I basically started talking about Chris in every interview, because it just felt wrong. In the beginning, it was like, yeah, we were really positioning it as just a gal in my living room. Let's do some yoga for free. You don't have to have anything fancy. You don't have to

have tight yoga pants. You don't even have to like yourself. You are welcome here. Just come along.

[01:39:08] LW: Would you say you had found your yoga teaching voice by that point? Or were you still developing it?

[01:39:15] AM: I had found a voice. I think it was and is in development. I know that sounds like I'm just trying to again, check the box and say the right answer, but I mean that. Again, this has been coming up for me a lot lately for many reasons. One, being that our audience has really grown during the year 2020, for obvious reasons. Two, the world is changing and it always has been, but there's a unique window right now that I'm looking through. It's inviting me to look at just the way that I'm using my voice, even in just the Asana-led practice, because Asana is so powerful, the way we teach Asanas.

Well, but I know why you're asking me that. Yeah, I had found a voice then and honestly, it was like a sink or swim scenario, my friend. It was like, how do you be yourself, but also gain the trust of the friend on the other end, the viewer? I was just giving it my best shot. I wanted to prove that I was worthy of holding space. Honestly, the thing is I did know a lot. I'm a total nerd. I like to be prepared. That has never changed.

I also had already experienced classes with people, where the teachers seemed to be taking a little bit more than they were giving inadvertently. I got to the point where I would shiver when I would hear a yoga teacher just try to spout their knowledge off. I was finding it. I was having to act confident, even when I didn't feel confident, to figure out what worked. What worked, meaning what felt good and honest to me, not what got good feedback.

[01:41:06] LW: What was the moment where you felt like, "Wow, this is really – this could be my everything? I mean, I'm still going to act, but I can really take this thing to another level"? What was that moment like?

[01:41:17] AM: Well, I think I realized pretty early on when we did – Before we did the 30-day yoga journey, we actually experimented with a little program called reboot. It was a 29-day yoga journey, but it was only four videos. The idea was that you did the same video every day for a

week, for four weeks. Because repetition is one of the big elements of my previous training that we spoke about, I used that, the repetition to guide the program, which is called reboot.

We shot it in my one of my best friend's studio for free. Hired a buddy. I don't even know if we paid him, or if we didn't, we should have. We always pay people. Just kidding. I'm sure we paid him. Very homemade is the point. Even the sound design, I did it all on Chris's computer, back in Chris and Hilah's back room and I used all Austin, Texas artists. I literally sound designed it.

I swelled with inhale, reach for the sky. Hours and hours and hours of tedious work and same with Chris. We didn't know how to sell a program, or build a website, or do any of that. He was teach – we were teaching ourselves as we were going along. While we were teaching ourselves this, we did something that we never have done ever again, but we started to sell it before it was done.

We had the content. Neither one of us would be that silly, but it wasn't finished. People started to join. The thing is at the very last minute, I got scared, because my whole thing, which we haven't really even spoken to, but I don't think we need to, but the whole thing that really was the pivotal shift was that things were changing not on YouTube only, but outside. Yoga classes were jumping from 10 bucks, 8 bucks to 10 bucks, to 17, 24. I'm going to say it, I always have said it, there's no reason why I would stop saying this now.

The culture of yogis were really predominantly wealthy white women in expensive, stretchy pants. That was just blatant. I was like, this sucks, because I'm devoted to this and I can't afford to go to class. Now, it's being infiltrated by – I mean, I felt it. I was there. At that time, I was sweeping and scrubbing floors just to take class on my side of town, which is East Austin. That was starting to shift, which caused me to feel nervous about charging for a program.

At the very last minute, Chris and I were like, "Okay. We're going to add this calendar. We're going to add this." "Ah, maybe we'll do a – Should we do an opportunity to join a Facebook group, so people can talk about it? Then we'll just close it down when it's done?" It was just an afterthought, because that wasn't – That thing that was happening, that's the thing. I'm not trying to say too, we started this. It just wasn't a thing that – We just weren't seeing it, so we had

nothing to compare it to, I guess all I'm saying. That, that my friend, that group, we call that group to this day, founding members, the FWFG founding members.

[01:44:42] LW: Find What Feels Good.

[01:44:43] AM: Yeah. Find What Feels Good founding members. At that time, it was called Reboot 29-day yoga experience. Because that was the thing, that was the thing that really changed it all for me. That was the fact that I was starting to engage with people all over the world and witness them engage and be vulnerable. I don't know. Just coming from an artist's background, it was like, "Oh, my God. We're having conversations. We're not just doing yoga."

[01:45:12] LW: It's like a talk back, after a show. It's like, you can actually engage with the audience.

[01:45:18] AM: Yes. That was cool, because it was – I had this like, okay, focusing on ways to be more inclusive. I had this whole high going. Then when we did that, it was like, things started to percolate in a different way. I don't know. I know I'm overtalking all of these already, but that that was cool. It was cool to see the diversity in the room and to get a positive feedback of you can say everyone's invited all you want. You can say, "Oh, yeah. Yoga for all." You got to take it to them and get people to talk. This is something that's coming up a lot right now, for obvious reasons. That was when everything changed. We ended up naming that group Find What Feels Good founding members and creating a Facebook group for Yoga With Adriene, that ended up becoming so big, and so beautiful that it became unmanageable.

Now we have our own social media site called Find What Feels Good Kula community of the heart. We were working with mining networks for a long time before that was even public, especially Chris. I mean, he's like, "We got to get this off Facebook." At that point, we had already met Sarah, who is now our community director and membership director now as well, just last year. Together, we've built our own social media space. Not again, it sounds like, "Oh, well isn't that just creating a private space where more people can't gather?" It's the opposite. It's like, really? Taking responsibility for the whole yoga for all, because –

This is something eventually I need to sit down and write about and delve into in a more thoughtful way, find the words. I certainly don't have them now. How do we find ways to keep

everyone together? You can't just say, yoga for all and be like, "That's it." You can't just say like, may all beings be free and happy and that's it. How do you really foster and hold space for everyone? That social site is something I'm really proud of, because it's free too.

[01:47:14] LW: I want to go back into those first three years a little bit with you and talk about your process. In terms of, I know you you're still acting and that's almost a full-time endeavor for you. I would imagine, you don't have a whole lot of time to plan for your classes, because you're so busy doing these plays on top of plays and rehearsals and things like that. Is my imagination correct, or are you actually spending a fair amount of time planning your contribution to Yoga With Adriene, even though you're not really getting that many views?

[01:47:54] AM: I had a lot more time than I realized at the time. Looking back, the perspective of course, for me has changed. Now I'm like, oh, to go back, I would long for those long hours of journal time. I can remember using the mornings. I wasn't ever really working in the mornings. I had a job along the lines of people trusting me and looking back and being like, "I cannot believe I was given that much responsibility at that stage and that age and trust."

I had worked for a while as a preschool teacher, again, basically just accepting any job the art school here would give me. That was with the city. I had just going back for a moment. I had accepted a job there teaching preschool creative drama. Now I was doing the elementary, I was doing the preschool. That landed me a professional job with benefits in the registrar of the school, which is run by the City of Austin. Then that led me to creating a relationship with the head of the registrar and she basically created a job for me as her assistant, managing the admissions for the school. This is crazy.

I'm not experienced enough to have this job, but I have it. It was a big win for me. It plays into a big essence or flavor of my 20s, which was I was always and similarly, I guess from when I was in high school, I wasn't trying to act older than I was, but I was always trying to prove myself. I took things very seriously. I actually worked there for a good bit. Basically, before we started Yoga With Adriene, came to a point and through reflection of being in a relationship and all these things that help contribute to you making big decisions, I finally just had this moment where I was like, "This is too much for me right now. There's no way I can continue to do this work that I'm getting through my agent, or even teach yoga, if I'm sitting at this desk for X amount of hours, Monday through Friday." I left. For many years, I thought that could have been

a big mistake. You could have retired when you were 41. You would have had benefits. I didn't have insurance.

[01:50:30] LW: That process to leave, was that difficult for you to make?

[01:50:32] AM: It was mostly an inner turmoil, to be honest for that one. I've had similar experiences. I had one later after we had started Yoga With Adriene 2 when working with the school, where that one, I think I self-sabotaged, to be honest, to just create a change and movement, as one does sometimes if we're not practicing mindfulness as a discipline. Whatever, I was learning.

I go back to mention that, because yes, now here in the first three years of Yoga With Adriene, I had been in more than just the nanny, after-school teacher work environment. I had been seated at a job. I had been working crazy hours, basically teaching myself. I was doing brown bear, brown bear plays with preschools, children. I don't have siblings. One can say you're born with a certain nature to be good with children, but it was a fake it until you make it mentality in almost every single one of my jobs up until that point.

All of this to say, by the time I had this opportunity with Yoga With Adriene, one, I didn't really see it as a job for quite some time. Two, I think I did have time. It was less computer and a lot of books. I was enjoying that task. It felt very fulfilling. I did have a brief job during the first three years of Yoga With Adriene, working at a vegan ice cream shop, part-time as well. Yeah, the first three years, it didn't really feel like a job. I enjoyed it, and so I guess I made the time. If anything, I was like, yeah, trying to figure out how to memorize my lines for the night time. That was the struggle.

[01:52:20] LW: When you were on camera as an experienced performer, would you say you were performing at all? Or was it really a 100% you in that scenario? Was it a very intentional thing, breaking the fourth wall? Or did it just happen organically and you guys saw the people responding to it?

[01:52:38] AM: It was intentional. It was not easy at first. I mean, in a lot of ways, it's still a practice now, especially because I have more awareness in every nook and cranny of what people are seeing, of what they're going to say. I try to beat him to the punch and I can

anticipate more now than ever before, what people might be perceiving or experiencing. It's still a practice. In the early days, it was definitely intentional and it was not easy.

In fact, there are somewhere, I don't know where they are and I don't know if I want to know. There are a couple episodes, as we called them back then, that never saw the light of day. Probably because it was just not – Authentic wasn't a word we were even using. It wasn't a part of our verbal vocabulary. It was a felt thing. Chris, we were experimenting. He was a good friend and a good director really, a good outside eye. Like, "Okay. Now, let's do that all again, but let's try to streamline it and just be yourself a little more." Wasn't exactly telling me what to do, but inviting me to like, "Try it again. Let's try it again. Try it again."

Then I think it became an organic thing. I just became – I'm not more comfortable, but more committed really to that being the thing that we were doing, the way in which, I say this all the time, sometimes it's not what you do, but how you do it. It's focusing on that in the beginning a lot with intention.

[01:54:23] LW: Talk a little bit about Benji and how Benji came to be a part of your life and then this production.

[01:54:28] AM: He always had this idea that it should feel you're just in the room with me. I was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." That's so great for yoga too, because we are actually trying to not change, or transform, or yearn, or it's okay to yearn actually, but we're not aiming for an end-goal, or something that we're not. We're peeling back the layers. I like the image of peeling back the old paint and getting to that OG, awesome vintage wallpaper that's just been there forever.

There was this idea of not trying to become something, but to undo and return back to one's true self, back to home. We're like, "Yeah. It worked both ways." He gave me the image, or the contemplation of Mr. Rogers. That really stuck with me, because I grew up with Mr. Rogers. It was, I don't know, I think from the very beginning that we make the production feel invisible, but that it still is really high-quality and that you really feel like, I was just a friend in my house and you were in your house.

The dog, my first dog's name was Blue, creative name for a blue healer, also like Benji. He had a little more border collie in him, so he was a little bit different. Blue originally was pushed out of the frame. Like, "Oh, we're doing our yoga." Every once in a while, he would mosey in and we would just keep rolling. Gosh, it seemed so crazy at the time, we just thought that was so fun. I've got a thrill. Just big beaming smile like, "Yes, Blue's going to be in this episode." Or, there's an old Halloween video where I put Blue in a blue crayon costume, which I never do by the way, for those listening. I'm not one to dress my animal up. Not that there's anything wrong with that. It's just not my thing.

Yeah, he would mosey in and out and that was great. When he passed away, I was devastated. The community, even though it was small at that time, was really connected. We shared a vocabulary and Blue was a mascot. I know it sounds totally ridiculous, although maybe not now, because a vice article just came out yesterday about Benji, solely about Benji.

[01:57:00] LW: Benji's got his own profiles now.

[01:57:02] AM: Dude, the scales have tipped. Oh, my gosh.

[01:57:07] LW: No comment. Benji says, no comment.

[01:57:10] AM: Yeah. It's so funny. It was such a devastating moment for me. The community really responded so lovingly. In fact, I have a little watercolor painting of Blue, my first love, on my mantle that someone in the yoga community, yoga theater community had painted. It still sits on my mantle now. All this to say, that was that experience. Then when Benji came along, I don't even know if I was ready for a new puppy, but my boyfriend and his son at the time moving from their heart space, they were trying to help heal my broken heart and gifted me with the classic puppy dog under the tree at Christmas time scenario. It was dear Benji.

He's a real doll. This time around, I decided to keep him in the videos. In the early days as a puppy, no. As soon as he proved that he could hang, I started to bring him in. Then to answer your question, he became organically a bit of a tool to also teach, like you don't need fancy yoga pants. You don't need the perfect time allotted. You don't need all the things that you think you need to show up for yourself for this particular practice. You don't need. All that with just the dog

being in the room seems crazy, but I know now from the feedback for many years now, that it does set the tone in a different way.

[01:58:52] LW: You're about over 500 videos in now. Your videos have been viewed over half a billion times, which is incredible. What have you learned about yourself throughout this process, known as Yoga With Adriene?

[01:59:09] AM: I mean, everything. Ultimately, I've learned to move in a way that is focused on exploration, study versus doing, or being. There's something about the consistency and the real, just opportunity to show up and serve others that obviously bounces back to oneself. For me, it's been although sometimes scary, because it's on display and that's something that I never planned really, or even hoped for, but it's been a real opportunity of self-study.

My whole journey is recorded between my journals and the project. It really started out as a project, as an experiment. I've learned that for every bit of myself that I put into it is – that's the exact same amount that I get reflected back from someone. It may not be the same story, but it's a big human experiment. I've learned everything. I know that's an easy – it's not a compound answer, but what have I not learned from this experience –

[02:00:30] LW: That's the better question, right? What you have not learned?

[02:00:32] AM: Yeah. There's something really special about remembering this idea that we are a reflection of one another and putting that in action through the regular daily practice, the consistency of showing up. We're still allowing it to unfold now, but I think there's something really specific about the daily, the regular practice, the showing up on a consistent basis to simply study, self-study, commit to a little inquiry. I've really felt I'm living a once-in-a-lifetime experience to be able to serve others and also have that just daily reminder that we are a reflection of one another.

[02:01:22] LW: What have you learned about people in this process?

[02:01:25] AM: I've learned that people are good and that most people are afraid to lean into vulnerable places. Of course, that's different for everyone. I hope that the Yoga With Adriene

experience, whatever that is, but the exchange we'll call it, I hope that that is something that beyond just being accessible, which is something and affordable. It's free. I hope that beyond those things that I have put, I've implemented to try to take away the obstacles, that it's a place where people can explore themselves and explore their edges and get to know them, so that they can find their center and yeah, I really do think that we all share this common desire to be centered.

Maybe that's what good is. I don't know what good is, to be honest. My life is definitely better for having had the experience and now – the continued experience to talk to people and to practice daily being an active listener. This is not just responding to e-mails. This is participating in the exchange. In fact, I thought this a lot in the early days and now it's like, "Ooh, Lord. How do I keep up?" I'm trying. That's why I built a team out of true necessity, not out of desire.

A lot of times when we consider community building, it's not enough to just put the content out and it's not enough to just provide whatever it is you're providing. You have to nurture it beyond that. It has to be something that if somebody has a question, you're going to take responsibility. Be there for them for the next step, for the next step and the next step. You can't say please lean into – lean into this vulnerable place. Let go of that which is not serving you and then walk away. I had to make some sacrifices big time, to be able to make that my number one relationship for many years. Now, I'm at a place where I'm made those sacrifices and I'm able to have a team of people that I respect and trust to help me nurture the follow-through, so that I can have a life beyond that as well.

[02:03:57] LW: What's the strangest place you've ever been recognized in public?

[02:04:00] AM: I called the local vegetarian cafe recently just to see what their menu was like, because we're trying to support our local businesses. The dude was like, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Are you Yoga With Adriene?" I was like, "Oh, man. I need to change my caller ID." No, it was sweet. Bathrooms are funny. We're in shelter and place right now and a family was on a bike and a woman said hello to me and Benji. They passed me and she turned back and said – I don't know if she said, "You're keeping us alive," but, "You're keeping us together or something right now," and I thought that was sweet.

A long time ago, in 2013 or 14, I was in LA with my ex-partner and his son and we went to Disneyland. These two beautiful Latina girls recognized me and asked me for a picture. At that point, that had only happened a handful of times. That was really crazy in my bling. Yeah. No, it's cool. Here's the thing is I'm human. Obviously, it feels good. The truth is because I'm so close to and connected to my mission, even back then I was laying in my bed, thinking about like, we're contributing to the future of yoga. We could really influence this ancient practice and how it is revered and utilized in future generations to come. That's where my brain is.

When someone says hi to me, when I get off a plane at Heathrow and there's a woman waiting for her daughter, but then she sees me before her daughter and she's like, "Oh, my God! Yoga With Adriene," and gives me a big hug. Sure, I'm flattered, but I'm also going like, "Damn. This is so cool, because this means that that many people are practicing at home." I think the at-home practice is very different than the group practice and they're both lovely. I could go on and on about how I think an at-home practice is ideal for healing and just for overall living in modern day society in a healthy way. That's all other conversation.

[02:06:18] LW: Young women in their 20s came to you and said, "Hey, I want to do something like what you're doing," what advice do you have for me? Whether it's with meditation channel, or yoga channel, or a cooking channel, or anything else. What would you tell them?

[02:06:33] AM: I would tell them to focus on their why. Get really clear, without any judgment. Can start at the top of the page. Get really clear on the why and to be open to your why evolving and transforming. You can change your mind, basically is what I would remind them, but get really clear, because I think that is extremely important, especially now in modern day, where a lot of young people – and all kinds of people.

I mean, look at us too. We want to devote ourselves to our why, which might be devoting to being of service to others, or simply helping others find their meaningful contribution to society, or helping others heal from trauma. Whatever it is, but to get really clear, because then when the business isn't going well, or when you're in that process of building something, you have something really concrete to spin around, or to ground in, because it can be really discouraging.

Honestly, I'm just realizing, this is advice that was given to me as a young actor from someone that I really respect. Holy moly, I'm just having a lightbulb moment of connecting these two myself, of she looked me dead set. I know that this person thought I was talented and respected me as a hard worker, had seen my ethic. I even think she saw my heart, as a kindhearted person. Someone that would bring something to rehearsal to share with everyone or whatever.

She straight up told me. She was like, "Look, the thing is find something else besides this." I had already been teaching yoga and everything, but the advice was very clear and it was like, find something that you really care about that has a clear why, something that really interests you. She wasn't even speaking in terms of being of service to others, but find something that's really meaningful to you, so that on the days where you go and you drive in your clunker-junker to an audition and you're completely soaked with sweat before you even get into the room, and it goes horribly and you feel looked down upon, it's just this demeaning experience, then you can walk out and go back to the other thing for a bit and nurture something that feels meaningful.

Especially to young yoga teachers, I think it's important to be clear on your why. Then, also to let whatever it is you're sharing be a reflection of your experience, not something that was taught to you. My mentor, I've mentioned several times J. Ed. We used to have a consideration for rehearsal, which was you do all your homework, you do all your dramaturgy and we did full-on table work. We do that for a week, or depending on the scenario. You put all that information, you do all your research, and then you throw it away. Toss it away and just know that that all lives inside you.

I'm not there to prove my knowledge. I'm here to lovingly coerce an honest and true experience. Same thing as an actor. If you're trying to recreate last night's performance, it's going to suck. You have to be really present with energy in the room.

[02:09:59] LW: I like to end these interviews by just offering up a little reflection of my own from hearing your story, starting with childhood. It seems to me that you started off the way you ended up with where you are right now, with you're known for breaking the fourth wall through your work, with Yoga With Adriene. As a child in that theater, that's exactly what you were doing as you were sitting there in the aisle playing and your mom was the professor. You were

essentially breaking the fourth wall. With the model theater in the round and playing with that, it's like, there were almost no boundaries for what was possible.

I feel like you did that with yoga. You brought yoga into living rooms, away from this – it was going into this very elitist direction and you made it available for a lot of people, so you took down those walls. You took down the most important wall, which was the fourth wall and made people feel there was a part of something bigger than just themselves in the communal sense. I just want to acknowledge you for that and for your courage and your commitment. It's not easy to do something every week and dedicate that much time and energy and trust into that process.

Like you said, from your training, you learned to not be outcome-oriented, but to be process-oriented. It seems like your whole life had been preparing you for this. I don't know if sometimes when we're in it, we can't really see it, but I'm just curious, does that resonate with you?

[02:11:43] AM: It does. You're good. Wow, you're good. I think you're good. It does. I say that, I probably would have shied away from that answer a couple years ago, but right now, especially right now, 2020, I feel like, "Man. I should be so lucky to have something to share, even if it's just a peace practice for the day." Yeah, I feel very lucky to be in the position that I'm in.

I didn't mention this before but I had vocal surgery twice throughout the course of Yoga With Adriene, completely losing my voice. I knew after that first time that I lost my voice and had to actually borrow money from Hilah Cooking business, because we hadn't made any money yet. To even get the first surgery, I knew that my angels were trying to tell me something. I didn't know what it was and I didn't listen.

Then a year later, I basically had the same surgery on the same vocal cord. I was like, "Oh, no. What's going to happen? I'm going to lose my voice." I've been thinking about the voice a lot lately and how I feel that we all have a responsibility, but we also have – we should be so lucky that – I'm so lucky to even have my voice, so what am I going to do with it?

[02:13:07] LW: Exactly what you're doing with it. Using it for good. Thank you very much for talking to me.

[02:13:13] AM: Wow, thank you. It really is an honor and a pleasure and I hope I get the honor and pleasure of doing a role reversal soon.

[02:13:22] LW: Yeah, absolutely.

[02:13:23] AM: Thoughtfully prompting you. Thank you so much.

[END OF EPISODE]

[02:13:29] LW: Thank you for listening to my interview with Adriene Mishler of Yoga With Adriene. If you're inspired to do a deeper dive into her world, she's got a community called Find What Feels Good that you can join. She's also got a weekly love letter, which is the newsletter that she sends out to her subscribers. You can get links to all of that in the show notes below.

If you want to hear more stories like Adriene's, make sure you subscribe to this podcast and check out the archive. You're going to find tons of other interviews with amazing people, some of them you've heard about, some of them you haven't, but all of them share something in common that you can take from their interview. They had to overcome some form of challenge, or obstacle, whether it was personal, or financial, or emotional, or mental, in order to start their movement. There's always a cost to starting your movement.

What I keep finding is that your greatest obstacle, the one that you wrestle with the most is usually, 99% of the time, the gateway to your liberation. You're not only starting a movement, you're also becoming personally more liberated, or self-realized, or whatever you want to call it.

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I look forward to hearing from you and thanks again for listening. I can't wait to see you next week with another conversation from the end of the tunnel.

[END]