

EPISODE 24

[00:00:03] BW: *During that time, I just was just like someone unplugged me from the wall and I just fell into a dark pit. I just had no energy to do anything. Ended up in a really huge time of suicidal depression, where I just felt like all the work I'd done on myself and all the acts of courage I'd taken and all the decisions I'd done that was honoring my heart was – and I still hadn't got – I felt like I hadn't got anywhere. I was like, "Okay. Well, I'm still here. I'm still in pain; emotional pain. I'm still financially not strong. I'm still not knowing where I belong." Yeah, and so it got really bad.*

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:50] LW: Hi, friends. Welcome back to At The End Of The Tunnel, the podcast about hope, and more specifically, about regular people who've started extraordinary movements for social good. This week, I'm talking to Bronnie Ware, a former palliative nurse who wrote this article in 2009 called *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. Little did she know, it would go viral, being viewed over 8 million times and it helped to change the way that many of us now think about death.

Bronnie had a very interesting journey. She grew up in rural Australia, where she was the lone vegetarian in a meat-eating family. I know what that feels like. She tried the regular job thing, as many of us do, but it just wasn't working for her, no pun intended. She quit her job and she started nomading around before nomading was even a thing, and that's how she found her way into palliative care, because she needed a place to stay. One woman who gave her room and board ended up transitioning. That's what palliative care means. You look after dying patients in the last three to 12 weeks before their transition.

As it turned out, Bronnie was a natural at helping people transition. Her goal was just to treat everyone that she looked after like they were her grandmother. In the process, she observed how much people grow when faced with their own mortality and how each person experiences a variety of emotions, such as denial, and fear, and anger, and remorse, and then more denial, and then eventually, acceptance.

She reported that every single patient she worked with found their peace before they departed. Every single one of them. When questioned about any regrets that her patients had, or anything they wish they had done differently in life, she noticed that five themes kept emerging, with the most common one being, “I wish I had the courage to live a life true to myself and not the one that others expected of me. I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself and not the life that others expected of me.”

Then there was, “I wish I hadn't worked so hard,” which was reported by every male patient she looked after. Followed by, “I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings,” and “I wish I’d stayed in touch with my friends.” Then finally, there was, “I wish I’d let myself be happier,” which I’m sure we can all relate to.

Initially, I connected with Bronnie through social media, because although I heard about the top five regrets for many years, I never knew the author that was associated with it. Until I made one of my daily insight videos about the top five regrets and one of my followers connected me to Bronnie. Immediately, I knew that I wanted to share her backstory.

As usual, the universe conspired to bring us together. As a result, we got to do a deep dive into the genesis of her palliative work and how the top five regrets came to be. You're going to love hearing Bronnie's story, because she's lived almost exclusively from intuition without making many long-term plans and even without much consideration for how her dreams would eventually come together.

I think her life could be a blueprint for many of us who want to take that first step in the direction of our life goals, but you're just not quite sure where to begin. Guys, grab yourself some tea, sit back, and enjoy this fascinating conversation into the life of Bronnie Ware.

[EPISODE]

[00:04:25] LW: Bronnie, thank you so much for joining At The End Of The Tunnel. I'm super excited to have you on and just, I'm so grateful that you agreed and you accepted my invitation.

[00:04:35] BW: It's a pleasure to be here, Light. Thank you.

[00:04:37] LW: You're welcome. As always, I like to start these conversations talking about childhood. My question for you, just to lead the conversation off is if you can think back to the old days in what is it, northwest, New South Wales, where you grew up? What was your favorite toy or activity as a child?

[00:05:01] BW: I think hanging out with my dog was probably my favorite thing. We also had horses and I spent a lot of time swinging from the rafters at the top of the hay shed and falling down into big piles of hay. Yeah, I think my most peaceful time and happiest time was just being with my dog. I was a little girl when I got her. She was called Princess. As an Aussie, we abbreviate everything, so Priny. Yeah, Priny was probably the highlight of my childhood in that regard.

[00:05:34] LW: If you've ever been around dogs, it's self-evident why someone would love dogs. I'm just curious, in your younger mind, what about that relationship with the dog that you enjoy?

[00:05:46] BW: I think that in hindsight, because it was safe and that she loved me unconditionally. Yeah, I didn't have to be anything other than myself and she was just always there. I felt understood, I guess.

[00:06:01] LW: What kind of dog was she?

[00:06:02] BW: A Bitzer. Bits of everything is what we would call them.

[00:06:08] LW: What we would call a mutt over in the States.

[00:06:11] BW: Yeah. I guess, we do use that term sometimes, or a mongrel, a mixture of things. Yeah, Bitzer is what I always knew her as, a Bitzer. Yeah.

[00:06:23] LW: Word on the street is that you were driving since the age of seven.

[00:06:27] BW: I was. I learned to drive on a tractor, a little old Massey Ferguson tractor. We had to drive, because we were on a farm and the first farm we lived on was on a creek, and so

we had to move the irrigation pipes all the time. That was how we usually spent our school holidays in driving the tractor and moving the pipes, which was great, because we had water and it was a pretty dry climate, but it meant we also got flooded quite regularly. Us four kids would be in the news every couple of years, where we're on the back of the tractor being taken out of the flood water and the family was evacuating and us farm kids are just sitting on the guard, above the big wheel of the tractors to get out, carrying our dogs and cats.

Yeah, it was a great thing when it came to getting my license later that I was just so confident as a driver. We bought a bigger farm after that, so I had plenty of driving practice before my time.

[00:07:23] LW: When I turned 16, it took me about 30 days to get into my first car accident after getting my license. I'm curious, did you have any major mishaps at seven-years-old when you started driving?

[00:07:36] BW: No. None at all. We were really, really careful. No mishaps at all. I got side swiped by a semi-trailer when I was on my learners, but by then I was 17, or almost 17. The guy was in the wrong and it all got sorted out. No. No, none at all. My only mishap was about five years ago when I accidentally bumped into the back of a guy's ute, or utility. That's the only mishap I've ever had. No speeding tickets, no. None of it. Yeah. I'm good on the road. Yeah.

[00:08:11] LW: Then also, I read in your book that you had some pen pals and you were communicating with people through writing?

[00:08:18] BW: Yes. Yes. It's funny when you say –

[00:08:19] LW: All over the world?

[00:08:21] BW: Yeah. Some in America and England, which seemed all over the world for a farm kid from Australia. When you asked about the toy, I almost said a raccoon, if you had forced me to say something that was an actual toy, I would have said a raccoon that my pen friend gave to me from America, because we don't have raccoons in Australia.

She sent me one. Yeah, Charlie was my raccoon's name. Yeah, I did. I just found I joined pen pal clubs and where they hooked you up through the newspaper with all different pen pals from all over the world. I loved writing. I loved writing letters and receiving them.

[00:09:01] LW: What did you learn about yourself, or through the world from that experience of being a pen pal?

[00:09:06] BW: I knew that I wanted to live in a bigger world than just the local area. I knew that I wanted to discover the world a little bit. Yeah.

[00:09:14] LW: How did you get introduced to that?

[00:09:16] BW: To the pen pal, or to the travel?

[00:09:18] LW: The pen pal.

[00:09:20] BW: I think I just used to write to my grandmother and she would write back to me. She was in Sydney, which was about six, seven hours drive away. Yeah, I just loved letter writing. I got into the kids' section of the Sunday newspaper and they advertised something about pen pals and that was it. I think at one stage, I had about eight, or nine pen pals on the go.

[00:09:44] LW: That's amazing. You grew up basically on a working farm in Australia and you decided to become a vegetarian?

[00:09:54] BW: Yes. Well, the first farm was loose land and cattle. Then when I was 13, we moved to a larger farm and that was sheep and wheat. What happened on the sheep farm is every now and then, a butcher would come out from town and all the local farmers would bring a beast over. They would be killed and cut up and put in the freezer by the end of the day.

I remember at one point hearing the animals over in the yards and thinking their moo and their sound is different today than it is normally. I recognized that they were scared and that they were actually – they knew they were going to die. Then at the end of that day, one of my jobs

was to write what cut of meat it was, like T-bone, or whatever, as we were putting the meat into the plastic bags and the meat was still warm. Then it went into a huge freezer, which supported the family for six months or whatever.

I just remember this really – just how warm the meat was, because until then, it had always come out of the freezer, or the fridge. It was always cold. Yeah, I just couldn't reconcile with that. I said to my mum, when I grew up, I'm going to be – On that day I said, I'm going to be a vegetarian. She said, "Well, that's fine love. Right now, you live here and get on with your job." It took me a while. But yes, I did eventually go down that road. Absolutely.

[00:11:20] LW: You describe yourself in hindsight as being the black sheep of the family. Was that the first time you stepped outside of convention that you remember?

[00:11:29] BW: No. I was a swimmer as well and they were all horse riders. That was probably the most obvious start to it, that I wanted to go off to swimming training at 6 in the morning. In the end, my mum took me out of swimming and put me on a horse, because she couldn't divide her time between all of us and the majority, one. All the other three wanted to be on a horse.

I went to pony camps. I did well. I had a fun time as a kid. You don't really know any different. Now that I'm grown up, I still swim six mornings a week and all of my siblings still ride horses and I don't. It was always there, the difference between me and my family.

[00:12:10] LW: You also became nomadic later on in life, which is something we're going to talk about, to solidify the black sheep aspect of what made you different from them. Before we get to that, I wanted to talk about your family dynamic. I know your dad had a couple of things he was passionate about. Can you talk a little bit about his occupation and your relationship to that?

[00:12:31] BW: Sure. Well, my dad was a guitarist, a songwriter and a radio announcer. He was also an accountant. My mum was a singer who became a nutritionist. They met through music. Dad was mum's backup guitarist on a live TV show in the 50s. I feel that dad in hindsight, was really out of his league as a father with four kids. He quit his music to support mum, because mum had four and five years, four children in five years.

He came home one day and mum was overwhelmed. That was it. He just quit his music, except for when his friends visited. In some ways, it was a very structured upbringing, a 9 to 5 accountant father background. Then all these hillbillies would turn up for three months a year and it would just turn into a mini-Nashville. We were at the country music capital of Australia is the town I grew up in.

Dad was quite a broken person and he was a very angry alcoholic. He certainly mellowed in his later years, but I spent most of my childhood really scared, just in terror of being heard, of not daring to speak up, because I learned somewhere in my child mind that the safest way for me to get through childhood was just to stay out of the way and not be noticed. It was it was a pretty tricky time. Then I was like him. I was the only one that went into music and I went into banking straight out of school.

I think that the reason my relationship with dad was so fraught with tension was because I was the most like him, in the sense that he was really sensitive and really creative, but he had to suppress a lot of that just to manage the family and the farm and his work.

[00:14:33] LW: What did you see yourself becoming when you were a kid, when you were in your teenage years before you started working at the bank? How did you see your life unfolding from that point?

[00:14:44] BW: Yeah. I wanted to be in maths and mathematics teacher. Maths and PE, physical education, because I loved sport. I thought I would do that. Yeah, maths and PE. I didn't really know how many options there were as an adult to choose from. That was from my reality as a child. It was like, okay. Well, I loved school. I love numbers. I love sport, so I'll just be a teacher for all that.

[00:15:10] LW: Did your dad teach you about songwriting or anything when you were a kid?

[00:15:14] BW: He got all four of us a guitar each at one stage. I don't know if he borrowed them all, because I don't remember them being around afterwards, but he gave us one lesson and then just said, "No, this is a waste of bloody time." No. I didn't write my first song till I was

35. I found my way really slowly to my music journey. Yeah, and he got a little bit involved then after he got through his own resistance to me writing songs. No, not at all.

Dad was pretty closed, unless his music friends were around and then he was usually happy drunk, and so then we were invited to sing along and stuff like that. The rest of the time, no. Dad didn't to share much of himself in that way.

[00:15:58] LW: Then, so after high school, you go to this local bank. You tell them, "Hey, I want to work at your bank," but in Sydney. They hired you. What do you think they saw in you when you went in there and propositioned them?

[00:16:10] BW: Well, I held down two jobs while I was at school, so I'd already shown that I was reliable, though one of those jobs was a money handling job and a cashier's job. I don't know. I think they just saw that it was easy, that I had the initiative to go in there. I had a grandmother in Sydney who I could live with, so they got me a job in the next suburb to where my grandma was within two weeks of finishing school. I don't know, Light. I think it was just that steadiness as a kid. I had a bit of common sense and I pretty much had it all worked out for them.

[00:16:46] LW: Well, you had been driving for 12 years at that point, so you had confidence.

[00:16:51] BW: Yeah, but in a gentle way. Yeah.

[00:16:56] LW: Then how was the banking industry for you?

[00:16:59] BW: Oh, it's okay. I got off the rails a little bit after that, because I had freedom for the first time ever and I had a lot of city friends and city kids grow up a lot faster than country kids. I was trying to catch up to them a little bit. I ended up in a relationship with a guy 10 years older than me within six months of leaving home.

[00:17:21] LW: You were engaged.

[00:17:22] BW: Yeah. Yeah. I actually married him. I didn't mention that in the book. I just didn't get around to it. A girl's got to have some secrets at some point. Yes, I was with a mortgage and

married at 20 and divorced a few years later. It was interesting, because if I wasn't going to be a maths and PE teacher, my other alternative career that I had considered was to join the mounted police force with the horses in being the police force. My first husband was actually a pot grower and dope dealer, so I went from this really good intention to bagging up his pot for him and stuff, even though I wasn't smoking. It was just such a different reality from my sweet intentions.

[00:18:08] LW: Well, you also had that night of the speed nearly overdose or something like that you talked about in the book. Was that around that time as well?

[00:18:16] BW: No. I hadn't woken up by then. That was about 10 years later.

[00:18:19] LW: Oh, wow. Okay. You were in it. You're in it for a little while.

[00:18:22] BW: Yeah. I was on self-destruct, but with an element of responsibility, all the way through for a good while. I had a lot of healing to do. A lot of healing to do around my self-worth and the scars I took out of my childhood. Yeah, so that awful incident I speak about in the book was when I was in London and that was in my 30s.

[00:18:46] LW: When did you recognize that banking – that your heart wasn't into what you were doing and that that was something that was important to you?

[00:18:54] BW: Not until I was almost 30. I was in banking for a long time, but I changed jobs within the banks and I ended up moving around a lot. As a result of that, I had quite an accelerated career path, because I would just go to a new town, relocate and go to a bank and they'd say, "Oh, well, we've got this job," and I'd say, "Oh, yeah. I could do that one. I've done this and this." I just kept putting myself up higher and higher and learning how to do the jobs on the go.

I had this theory in my 20s, that it didn't matter whether work was happy or not, as long as I was having fun outside of work. Then around 29, 30, that shifted and I just thought, I can't do this work anymore. I need a job with heart. I don't want to wear makeup to work. I don't want to wear

stockings and high heels. I just want to be me. Yeah, so it took a while. Then it took another few years to actually make those changes.

[00:19:54] LW: Talk about the importance of the inspiration factory during that time and how that played a role in moving that story forward.

[00:20:03] BW: Yes. I was living in Perth, which is the most isolated city in the world and the third windiest, just as a bit of trivia. A really great place with amazing sunsets on the water. I was traveling into the city on a train every day and I came across this bookstore called The Inspiration Factory. Every week, I went there and bought a book and read that book and went back the next week.

They're all inspirational, personal growth, self-help. It was before the internet was really kicking in as well. It was just such a positive place to be. It was operated by a gorgeous woman called Jennifer who was miles ahead of her years. Yeah, those books just started helping me believe that I could actually be more than I was and that it wasn't just airy-fairy stuff. It was actually, I don't have to be what my family have said I am, and that is I would never amount to anything and that I'm not deserving of stuff, goodness.

Yeah, so it was a massive year of transformation and it was all thanks to The Inspiration Factory. Even when you'd buy a book, they'd put a quote inside as a bookmark and there was a quote there. I think it was from Josie Bissett and it said, "Dreams come in a size too big, so you can grow into them." It really stayed with me and helped me then whenever I get frustrated. I just think, "Okay, my dreams are a size too big for me. I'm just growing into them." Helped me realize that good things take time and to realize that you can actually grow into your dreams. They're not just unattainable ideas that you have. You can achieve them, but you have to grow into them. Yeah.

[00:21:52] LW: What were some of the most influential books that you remember reading at the time, that really left an impression on you?

[00:21:58] BW: I think the most powerful in that time was *Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain. Sitting down by the river in Perth and you had to make a list of five things you liked and

five things that you were good at. The only things that fell in both columns for me was photography and writing and numbers. I thought, “Okay. Well, I’ve been working with numbers in a bank and I’m still not happy.” Dear, I think I could actually be a creative person.

It was such an awakening, because I just done the traditional path. My parents were Monday to Friday, 9 to 5’ers, and I’d gone down that road, and totally forgot that they were hugely creative people. Yeah, I just thought, “Could I actually be an artistic type of person? Maybe I’m an artistic type of person.” It was huge for me. Like, “Oh, my goodness. That’s a world I’ve never considered I might be a part of.” From then on, the journey really began then, because I had to undo all my old expectations, or my old conditioning, and just find the courage to keep going one step at a time, and find my way into that world, and to find a way to support myself in.

[00:23:11] LW: Were you meditating at the time?

[00:23:13] BW: I was meditating, but not with a passion which became my path later. I was doing guided meditations through – oh, my goodness. I can’t remember who. I can even see the tape covers. They’re on tapes on cassettes. It was Sanaya Roman. Sanaya Roman. I was doing meditation then. That was when I started it all and that was from The Inspiration Factory as well.

[00:23:38] LW: You weren’t married at the time. You were on your own?

[00:23:41] BW: No. I was with a new man that I’d brought back from England with me. Yeah.

[00:23:44] LW: Got it. You’d already done the trip to England at that point.

[00:23:47] BW: Yeah. Yes.

[00:23:49] LW: Okay. Let’s rewind a little bit and talk about that. You took a sabbatical from banking and you went to – did you go on your bush trip first, or did you go to England first?

[00:24:02] BW: My bush trip, as in the long walk that I did?

[00:24:04] LW: Yeah, the walk and the nomading and living in the jeep and all of that.

[00:24:09] BW: Yeah. Sorry, the book's not as chronological in mind as the patients were, because I used the stories in the book that were relevant to the lesson I was learning through yes, I've got you there.

[00:24:22] LW: Okay. Let's fill in that gap a little bit. You left banking.

[00:24:27] BW: Yeah. The walk was years later.

[00:24:29] LW: Okay. The trip to England was before that, when you worked with Agnes.

[00:24:34] BW: Yes. I was in banking for a long time. Then I went and lived on an island for a couple of years. Then I went over and lived in England for a few years. Yup. Then I came back and lived in Perth. Yeah, where I had that awakening.

[00:24:47] LW: You already had that experience then of being a live-in companion by the time you were in Perth and going to The Inspiration Factory and all that.

[00:24:57] BW: Yes. I had. I still fell back into banking as soon as I got back to Australia, even though I'd worked as a carer overseas, I just saw that as a travel job. I didn't realize that a seed had been planted and it was going to actually lead me into a whole new career.

When I came back to Australia, I had another couple of years temping in the banking industry. Then I just realized, I couldn't do this. Life called me back to be a carer again. Yeah, in England, I was a living carer.

[00:25:26] LW: Is that when you first went to Ruth after? Was she your first palliative care client/

[00:25:34] BW: Ruth was my first one. Yeah. That was when I was back in Australia. Yup.

[00:25:38] LW: Got it. Is that the one where you have to tell the white lie to get the job, about the fact that you had experience? Because you made a big deal about that in the book. I really related to that, because that's something, I think, people who are passionate about something,

you're going into a new field, you want to put yourself in the best position. You're getting told by someone with experience, "Hey, it's not a big deal if you just say you know what you're doing." You grappled with that for a lot, actually. Can you talk a little bit about that process?

[00:26:12] BW: Yes. It was actually my second patient, I lied to the family about, because the first one was just a live-in companion job that turned into palliative care. I was qualified for that. It was the second family and they asked me how long I'd been doing the work and just really trusted me with their mum that was Stella. The agency that I was working for had sent me into this job and said, "Don't tell them you've only had one client. Just tell them you've been with us for years, you're really good at this, you know what you're doing. Just go in there and ring us if you've got any problems." I was like, "Okay."

Yeah, the family were just lovely and they had so much trust in me that I felt very guilty about lying to them. I came clean years later to them, because I stayed in touch. Yeah, I hated it. I hated that I'd lied, even though I was doing the job I was being paid for. They were getting the service that they were paying for and more, because I got on so well with their mum and she was a meditator and a yoga teacher.

It just didn't sit easy with me, because I just think that as hard as honesty is, it really is the only way to be. It really went against my values, but I was so desperate for work and felt such a calling to be in this field and wanted to stay in it that I was worried that if I didn't go along with what my boss had said, then I may not actually have any work.

[00:27:38] LW: I'm curious, looking back at that moment now as someone who's had so much life experience, would you make the same choice to lie?

[00:27:46] BW: Good question. Possibly. Yeah, possibly. Because I felt such a strong calling to be in that work, it had taken me by surprise to be in palliative care with my first live-in companion in Australia when that turned into a terminal case. During that experience, I felt such a strong calling that, "Oh, okay. This is actually the job I've been asking for." I wanted a job with heart, where I could just be myself; no makeup, no high heels, all that. I realized that I'd been given that.

Yeah, I think because I wasn't qualified and I had such a an affinity with the role that I didn't want to waste my time leaving the role to go and study and then come back to it, I wanted to stay in it.

[00:28:31] LW: You said Ruth was not set up initially to be a palliative care situation, but then she ended up transitioning. That was the first time you'd seen someone do that, correct?

[00:28:43] BW: Yes. Yes.

[00:28:45] LW: Then Stella had her experience. When she transitioned, and something happened right at that moment that it surprised you. Can you talk a little bit about that?

[00:28:58] BW: Yeah. Well she'd been unconscious, in a coma for at least, I came in in the morning, at 8 in the morning, and she'd already been in that space before I left at 8:00 the night before. At least 12 hours, but closer to probably to about 16 or 20. Yeah, and I was just holding her hand. Actually, I wasn't. I was holding her foot, because her husband and her son were holding her hands, but they wanted me in the room.

I just had my hand on her foot. Then she'd had no response at all when we spoke with her. Nothing at all. Then she just opened her eyes and looked up in the corner where the wall and the ceiling joined. Looked up to the ceiling and just had the most incredibly, beautiful, radiant smile, and a look of recognition. She recognized someone there and she was like – She'd gone from this being in a coma and to that. All of us, the three of us were just like, “Oh, what's going on here?”

She just looked for a minute or two, just a moment or two, and then just closed – just went, “Aah.” Closed her eyes. Then that was it. She had died. I didn't know, because I'd only been around one dying person before her and that was a very different exit. Ruth was very obviously dying when her soul left her body. With Stella, it was so gentle.

Then her husband and the son are looking at me saying, “Is she dead? Is she dead?” My heart's beating out through my chest and I'm trying to feel a pulse and I didn't really know where to –

[00:30:40] LW: Were you holding the foot trying to feel the pulse?

[00:30:42] BW: No, I let go by then. I'm standing up and I've got my hand under her neck and I'm feeling her wrist. All I could feel was my heart going, "Boom, boom, boom." Because I was like, "What's going on here?" Yeah, I just didn't know. Then I just said to Stella, because we'd had such a spiritual connection. I just said, "Are you gone honey?" I just got the feeling, "Yeah, I'm gone." Then I said to the family, "Yes. Yeah, she's gone," and she was. That was it. She was gone. Yeah.

[00:31:13] LW: You've been reading all these spiritual books for all these years and studying this stuff and meditating. What did you take away from that experience when you saw that happen?

[00:31:21] BW: Oh, just how wrong we've got it in denying death and in being scared of death, because wherever she was going, or whatever she was seeing, I wanted a piece of that cake. She was so incredibly radiant and joyful, just absolutely overflowing with joy in that moment that I just thought, "Okay. Well, it's not where we go to. It's where we return to."

[00:31:47] LW: I heard one guru say something really profound. He said, if you really knew what was happening, you would mourn when someone was born and you would rejoice when they die.

[00:31:58] BW: That makes so much sense. Yes. Yeah, because life is so hard completing the loop. It can be as the human experience. Then when I saw where Stella was going, I've never been scared of death since, that no matter how many people I looked after following her, I've never been scared of death ever, because it's like, "Wow. This is beautiful and loving and it's all going to be fine."

[00:32:24] LW: Talk about Grace, your client Grace. What was the big learning from that experience?

[00:32:30] BW: Grace was only a really small woman. Really tiny. We connected very strongly straight away. She reminded me a little bit of my grandmother who'd also been a tiny woman. Grace had been married to the same man for over 50 years and in her words, he was a tyrant. She had wanted to go traveling and he didn't want to do any of that. She just dedicated her life to him without doing anything that she wanted to do ever. That's what it was like in those days. She was from an older generation and you'd never leave your husband. What would the neighbors think?

Yeah, and then when he got really ill and went into a nursing home, she started looking at travel brochures. She wanted to do some bus tours, just to see a bit more of Australia. She was all set to go. I think she was 86 at the time with a really good spirit, because she was finally free for the first time in her adult life. Within three weeks of him going into the nursing home, she became ill, and it turned out to be stage four lung cancer. She'd never been a smoker, but he smoked in the house all that time.

Grace had huge anguish and regret around the life she had led. Really opened my eyes up to how painful regrets are at the end of your life. Yeah, I was trying to become a singer-songwriter then and it was really hard. I didn't have a lot of confidence, but I wanted to get my message out there.

Grace held my hand really tightly one day and said to me, "Promise me, Bronnie. Promise this dying woman that you will always live the life you want to live. Not the life that others expect of you. Don't make the same mistakes as me." She was crying at the time and I was crying with her. It was a massive turning point for me, because it was the first time of many that would come, that would follow. It was the first time I'd seen firsthand, the pain and anguish of regrets on your deathbed and I thought, "I don't care how hard it's going to be to live the life that's true to my heart. It's never going to be as hard as getting to my deathbed with regrets."

It gave me so much courage and still does, because I am not going to be in that position. Yeah, she played a huge role in my life. Bless him.

[00:34:56] LW: Three things are happening in the background, as far as the book is concerned. Maybe it's off chronologically, but you were keeping a gratitude journal at the time.

[00:35:05] BW: Yes. Yes.

[00:35:06] LW: Were you recording all of these things and obviously, framing them in the context of gratitude, but it sounded like later on in your story, you were able to reflect back on some of these takeaways that you were experiencing with your various clients through that journal, unless there was a separate journal? Number two. Okay. Then number two, you were performing. You started performing your songs, because you wanted them to get out there and you realized, the only way they're going to get out there is if somebody sings them and the only person is going to sing them right now is me, but I'm not a great singer, but I'm going to do it anyway, because that's what I'm being called to do. Number three, you had tried to publish a photography book. Am I correct, were all those things happening around the same time?

[00:35:50] BW: Yes. Yes. The journal one was a gratitude journal and one was just a regular sort my head out journal. That's why I have such clear memories of my time, because my patients were asleep so much and I had to be in the room with them. I was either reading or writing in journals. I kept doing the singer-songwriter thing, because the pain of going back to banking and being in the wrong work drove me forward. Also, witnessing Grace's regrets helped me see, "Okay. I have a message to share. I have to find a way to do that."

The photography book, after all the inspiration from The Inspiration Factory, I'd done a lot of work realizing, "Okay. What am I good at?" That was photography, nature photography, and writing quotes. This was before the Internet. I had put it all together into a little gift book and I had been trying to get that published. After a couple of years, I was so dedicated. I just kept going and I had to print off a color copy every time. It was a massive thing. Rejection letters came as paper and envelopes and my rejection pile was probably about three inches high.

It was the frustration of that that made me pick up the guitar and start writing my first song. Then I thought, "Oh, okay. This might actually make more sense, because my parents were musicians. This is actually in my genes. I know nothing about the publishing industry. Maybe I'm meant to be a singer-songwriter instead." I did. I just kept putting myself out there all around the open mic nights and the singer-songwriter nights, until I started getting into festivals and that sort of thing. I can't say I honestly ever really look forward to any gig. I did. Yeah.

[00:37:46] LW: What was your mindset at the time? Were you very optimistic about things, or were you just feeling you were in a process of following your heart and the outcome wasn't even important?

[00:37:57] BW: The outcome was important, because the calling to share my message was so strong. I was meditating by then and I was going through some really big healing. To be honest, it was just a really hard chapter of my life. I was supporting all these families and dying people, but I had no support myself by then. I'd left the relationship with a guy from England as well.

I was on my own and just really, just very in so much emotional pain and with some very big walls around myself. I felt very isolated in life. That's probably why I was such a good carer, because I had a lot of love to give and I wasn't sharing it elsewhere. I felt safe with my patients, because when you're at the end of your life, there's really not much time left for nonsense in conversation. All of our conversations were really deep and beautiful. I don't know, Light. It was a strange old time.

I've always been very, very good at finding the blessings in disguise. I do think that's one of my strengths. Even when I'm going through a very hard time, I'm always determined to pull the lesson from it and pull the learning from it. Yeah, I was in that place where I was just doing the best I could and loving my patients as fully as I was able.

[00:39:19] LW: Just for clarification purposes, were you a singer-songwriter moonlighting as a palliative care worker, or were you a palliative care worker moonlighting as a singer-songwriter?

[00:39:31] BW: Well, I'd probably say, palliative care moonlighting as a singer-songwriter, because palliative care was –

[00:39:36] LW: It's not fair to revise history, by the way. I want you to answer that question from where you were at the time.

[00:39:42] BW: Well, in my mind, palliative care was paying me. I would have called myself a palliative carer, who was trying to become a singer-songwriter. Yeah.

[00:39:55] LW: Then you got sick and you healed yourself, which I thought was really fascinating, because you didn't opt for the surgery that was recommended. You apparently used fasting and visualization and all of that. Can you talk a little bit about that experience and what you worked on it?

[00:40:11] BW: Yeah. I didn't write in the book what it was, because I didn't want to become an advocate for the situation, because back then I had so much fear around becoming a public person anyway and we're all on such different journeys with our health. I had a melanoma on my leg. I had nurse people with skin cancer who died. I didn't want to say in the book I healed myself of melanoma, because I can't be responsible for what other people have done. I've since been on a whole different healing journey with my health and haven't healed that completely. We've all got a different path to go on.

I came across this book and it's called *Cell-Level Healing* by Joyce Whiteley-Hawkes. It had a huge effect on me. I'd had a melanoma removed and the skin specialist said, the surgeon said I had to have a skin graft and have more work done. I just sat with it and asked my body, "Was it all gone, or wasn't it, and what did I want?" Also, because I'm very fair-skinned and I'd already had a lot of sunspots, burn off and different things going on. I felt I was getting a little bit sick of damage to my skin.

I'd also ridden my bike into a barbed wire fence as a kid and I got a scooter scar somewhere else. There's a few scars on my body. Yeah, so I chose not to go ahead with surgery. I went on a fast, and just shut out the world, and went into some really deep meditative spaces for it. I'd been fasting for a few days. Then I just had this urgency to purge. I'd been meditating for a few hours, just sitting in silence for a few hours, and doing these meditations that I learned from this book, *Cell-Level Healing* and asking my cells to eradicate my body from any cells that were not beneficial to my body.

Then I just had to run to the toilet and vomited, full on, into it. It's amazing how much stuff is stored in the digestive system and within our body, because I was there for a good few hours, just vomiting, and then just sitting there, then a little bit more. It was the deepest purge I've ever done.

After that, I just knew that it was gone and I've never had any problem at all with that scar, where the melanoma was. That's over 20 years ago now. It was a pretty amazing time.

[00:42:50] LW: Was that something you advertised at the time? Because I can imagine, it can be a little bit bewildering to certain people, especially with your family and stuff like that.

[00:43:00] BW: Oh, no. I don't think they even know it now.

[00:43:08] LW: I know the feeling.

[00:43:10] BW: Yeah, my mum would, because I share everything with her. No. My siblings here just living their own lives. Yeah. No. No, I didn't advertise it to anyone. It was a very solitary thing. It was between me and my body. I shared it with a couple of friends who really believed in me, but it's a hard thing to share, because obviously, people are going to project their fear on to you. Even if they love you, they're like, "Oh, okay." I couldn't risk that. I couldn't risk taking on anyone's fear. I had enough to deal with through my own – not through my own fear, but worried about their fear disconnecting me from my faith and from my knowing that I'd made the right choice. No, it was just really just between me and God.

[00:43:57] LW: What would you say was guiding you around that time? Was it the meditation, or was it something else?

[00:44:02] BW: Yeah. Meditation had become a huge part of my life then. Yeah, that's what it was. It was meditation. It just taken me so far inward that I now trusted what was the wisdom that came from within miles more than I would from any outside advice.

That's a wonderful freedom, but it's also a big responsibility, because you've got to make your own decisions.

[00:44:30] LW: Speaking of that, you have another wonderful story that I would love to hear about, with your first album coming to fruition, and how your friend, Leanne, how that all came

together. Can you just touch on that a little bit, because I think it's really cool to hear how that trust and the intuition plays out?

[00:44:49] BW: For sure. I knew it was time to record my first album. Everything in me said, “Yep, go and do it.” I had all my musicians lined up and everything else, but I didn't have any money to do it. I had hardly any money to do it. It's certainly not enough to record it, but it was just such a strong guidance within me. Just yes, do it.

I just started getting organized and got everyone in place and that included my producer, who was also my guitarist. He was a married man with two kids. He had big financial responsibilities and time responsibilities. Then it got up to – I went away on a little singing camp for a couple of days in anticipation. We were due to start on the Monday. I was moving into a house, my favorite house sit. I was house sitting a lot then into my favorite house sit that weekend. On the Friday before we were due to start, I still didn't have the money and I was \$5,000 short which is a lot of money to come up with out of the blue.

It had been building for about a week. Okay, I've followed this. I've honored this, but I am getting really, really scared here, because I've got to pay this guy and I've got to pay all the other musicians. What am I going to do? On the Friday evening, I went and sat on my meditation cushion in a panic really, just in such a panic thinking, what am I going to do? I was really scared. Very, very scared. I meditated and just said, “I'm really scared here. I don't know what to do.” I just got, let it go. Just let it go. Go out and just forget about it for tonight. Go out and have a good night.

I went out with a mate. I had planned to go and see a band and I was going to do it on my own. Then a friend got in touch and said she wanted to go to this book shop that has a cafe and how about we go there? I said, “Yeah, sure. Let's do that.” It felt like a good distraction from my own head to be with someone else. Then she ran into another friend of hers. While my mate was – our mutual friend was off looking at the books, I sat down with her friend and we just got chatting. She said, “Tell me about your life. My life's really awful. It's crap at the moment.” That's what she said. “My life's crap. Tell me about your life right now.”

I said, "Well, actually. My life's pretty crap too right now." I said, "I'm waiting on a miracle and I'm right at the 11th hour and I'm really scared and I don't know what I'm going to do. Tell me about your life instead." She said, "No, no. I want to hear about yours. Tell me what is all this about." I just said, "Well, I'm due to start recording my album on Monday and I don't have any money and I need at least \$5,000 and I'm really scared, and I don't know what to do, but I just felt my heart just said to do this and get on with it."

She said, "Well, my life is crap, because I'm going through a really shocking divorce. I've wanted to support the arts for years, and my husband wouldn't let me support the arts, so I'm going to use the money I'm getting from him to support the arts. I'm going to turn up on Monday morning at your house with \$5,000 in cash." She did. Yeah, I just burst into tears, of course. I just thought to myself, how do we ever question it? Because we don't need it before we need it. I got it when I needed it.

We always think we need it before that. I'd had little leaps of faith prior to that time and I'd always landed on my feet. There was always a solution was presented at the last minute. Because this one was so large and involved so many other people, it just seemed huge, but it just taught me that we only think we need the money a month before, or a week before, or whatever, because it's for our own security. Life just knows that it'll come if you get out of the way. I'm trying to give it to you, but get out of the way.

Yeah, she turned up and she just said, "I just want to have my name on the album cover as the executive producer." I said, "Sure." She just came in. Didn't want to get involved. Just lay on the floor on the thick lush carpet of this house and just sat there while we started recording the album and came to the launch. Yeah, and didn't stay in touch or anything. Was just quite detached from the whole process, but it was a guardian. It was an angel.

[00:49:19] LW: Was this when you were still doing the palliative care, or did the album come out then?

[00:49:23] BW: Yes.

[00:49:25] LW: How did it go?

[00:49:25] BW: It was okay. I wasn't really confident. It was the start of me trying to back myself. I'm really proud of what I put out there, considering how vulnerable and broken I was at the time. It was well received. A couple of the songs got a little bit of airplay in Australia and I got into some folk festivals to play out, just small folk festivals. I never really made it hugely in Australia. My heart was just, I hated going to gigs at 10:00 at night and playing in pubs. Yeah, it was a hard road, but my music was such a joy to me besides that aspect of it. Yeah.

[00:50:05] LW: You told this story in your book about where you just gave a metaphor for the typical drunk Aussie guy who would come up in front of you on stage and pretend he was God's gift to women and you went through this whole thing. It was really funny. I just wanted to put that out there. Did you feel like you're living your purpose at the time when you were doing the palliative care and the music and trying to do the photography and all of that? How closely were you aligned with what you felt was your purpose?

[00:50:29] BW: I felt I was, because I was honoring my creative talents and I was making a difference in the world in a way that wasn't selling insurance to people in the bank. As long as it wasn't anything to do with banking. Yeah, I did. I felt I was on the right path and I was meditating two hours a day, an hour morning and afternoon. I was very connected to my inner guidance. I had no idea that I would be called onto the author's path, and I am so grateful for that, that I could get my message out there in a way that's much more suitable to my quiet nature than playing in really loud pubs. Yeah.

[00:51:11] LW: At the time, you I guess, saw yourself just I'm going to be house-sitting and nomading and taking up little jobs here and taking a little time off in between clients to reboot and trying to do some creative pursuits here and there. That's what you saw for yourself for the next foreseeable future?

[00:51:27] BW: Yes. Yeah. My cousin's friend who I used to play music with a bit, he said to me one night, "Well, you've got to settle down sometime, Bronnie." I said, "Do I? Why?" He said, "Well, everyone does." I said, "No, not everyone does." He said, "Okay. Tell me then, where would you like to be when you're 50?" I think I was about 30 at the time. "Where would you like

to be?" I said, "I'd love to own a motorhome." I did actually find a settled bone in my body years later.

Yeah, that was where I was at back then, Light. I was just drifting and letting life take me wherever it wanted to go.

[00:52:05] LW: Well, you eventually graduated yourself from the palliative care work and you've got yourself settled into a cottage. That was another great story. We don't have to get into that, because there's so many great stories. You got all this second-hand furniture. It was timed perfectly without trying to time it and it just all came together. That's right at the beginning of the songwriting in the women's prisons endeavor, for which you had zero experience teaching people. You had no budget. How did that all come together?

[00:52:35] BW: Yeah. I just got this really absurd idea one day when I was with a patient that I wanted to teach songwriting in a jail.

[00:52:44] LW: That's so random.

[00:52:46] BW: I know. I know. I've never been inside a jail in my life. I knew no one who'd been inside a jail. I have no idea what that was about. The only thing I could put it down to is I wanted to work where there was some hope. At least, if I was helping people in jail, they could have some hope to improve their life. I'm not sure. I really don't know. It was just a guided thing.

Through one of my patient's friends, I ended up finding some funding for a jail. It took about a year or so, but she had said to me, because this patient was a really hard work and a very authoritarian woman and she'd been – she was just really hard work. Her friend said to me, "I've seen how you look after her. If you can do that, you can do anything. I'll help you find the funding." I said, "Okay, great. Thank you." Ae had to find an hospice organization, charity organization, to fund the donations through the philanthropic grant that I got.

Yeah, I taught in a jail. I went to a jail and said that I'd like to set up a songwriting program and that I was working on finding some funding and they said, "Sure, that sounds fine." Because to

them, I was a volunteer. I was offering something for nothing to them. I was supposed to have all this security training and everything else, I found out six months into the job, but I hadn't.

One day someone said, "How come you've got your handbag with you in the staff area?" I said, "Well, I'm just going to put it in the locker." They said, "Yeah, but you can't bring a handbag in." I said, "Why not? I have every week for the last six months." They said, "You have to empty your contents and put them in a plastic bag, so they can be seen." I said, "Oh, no one's ever stopped me." They said, "Okay."

There were all these loopholes that the doors just opened for me, which was good, because I had actually snuck in a couple of CDs for them for the students, because they needed some music. Yeah, so I taught songwriting for healing to a beautiful group of women. It was then that I actually realized how much I needed to be looked after myself, because they gave me so much love, I thought I was there helping them and I was in teaching them how to play the guitar and how to write basic songs.

I guess, they were just sensitive good-hearted women who got lost along the way. I received so much love and genuine care from them that they were healing me as much as I was healing them. It was a really unexpected time, to be honest.

[00:55:29] LW: You had a bit of a dark night of the soul moment, a little bit after that. Yeah. Can you talk a little bit about that suicidal thoughts and depression?

[00:55:39] BW: Yeah, the works. Yeah. Once the funding ran out from the jail, my energy was just getting lower and lower. Some new neighbors had moved in next door to the cottage I was living in and they were fighting all the time, so it wasn't a nice home environment either. I just had this calling to move back to the country and I hadn't lived in a rural area for years, like 25, 27 years or something. I rented this house on a cattle farm, a vegan on a cattle farm. It was right by a creek and it was beautiful. I just thought I'd just have a little break. I had a little bit of savings. I thought I'd have a break for a month or so, then I'll start looking for some work.

During that time, it was just like someone unplugged me from the wall and I just fell into a dark pit. I just had no energy to do anything and ended up in a really huge time of suicidal

depression, where I just felt like all the work I'd done on myself and all the acts of courage I'd taken and all the decisions I'd done that was honoring my heart was – I still hadn't got – I felt like I hadn't got anywhere. I was like, "Okay. Well, I'm still here. I'm still in pain. Emotional pain. I'm still financially not strong. I'm still not knowing where I belong." Yeah, and so it got really bad. Shockingly bad.

I found an amazing counsellor and counseling in those days wasn't as big in Australia as it is in the states. It was quite something, I'd I wouldn't tell anyone I was having counseling. It was that stigma in those days. She was just brilliant. She just said, "What are you doing? You're trying to go for a gold medal in the carers Olympics. You got to look after yourself." She just helped me amazingly.

In the end, I did just reach a breaking point where I thought I can't live with this anymore and I tried to write my farewell letter, which was really just to my mum in apology. I worked out this road I was going to drive off. I owned a van, so I was right at the windscreen. You sit right at the front of a van. I was all set to do it and in tears and trying to write this scribble, this letter, but I was just so distraught that I couldn't write it properly.

Then the phone rang. I don't know why I picked it up, because I normally don't pick up numbers I didn't know. I'd let them go to the message bank. It was just this really chirpy voice, "Hello, is that Bronnie." I'm like, "Yeah, who's this?" I can't remember her name, but it's so and so. She was from a health insurance thing offering me ambulance insurance. My number was silent. I hadn't given it out to anyone. I'd protected it for years. I'd always been really private in my personal details. Yeah, and here's this woman just ringing out of the blue and reminding me that, "Oh, I might not actually succeed in killing myself. I might actually need an ambulance and be even worse off."

Yeah, then I just thought, "Ah, okay. Okay." I'm just like, "No, I don't want any ambulance insurance. Thanks." Just [inaudible 00:58:49].

[00:58:49] LW: I'm not going to need it anymore.

[00:58:52] BW: No, exactly. Exactly. Yeah.

[00:58:54] LW: I have a question about this experience. You also mentioned that there was a friend of yours that would call you and he'd say funny stuff like, "You better not be killing yourself right now." Is there anything that anyone could have done to help you get through that period looking back on it now? Or, maybe even thinking about how you were at the time?

I just had a friend commit suicide recently. I was in touch with him. I knew he was having suicidal thoughts. I'm just curious from that vantage point, when you're in it, is it about people calling you more? Is there anything people can do to help? Or is it just a lost cause? Obviously, there are exceptions and everyone's thing is different, but just, I'm wondering what your experience was.

[00:59:40] BW: Well, you can't escape yourself. It doesn't matter how much support you might get from externally. You still have to deal with the internals. Meditation is probably what saved me. During the day, I would still somehow sit and still have that sense of connection with divinity and think, "Okay, there's still love somewhere within me." I think that the greatest thing we can do for anyone with depression is accept where they're at and not try to fix them, because that puts a lot of pressure on people. We are naturally good – humanity is naturally good and wants to support each other and we do naturally care for each other and underneath all the other fear and nonsense, but we are naturally good, instinctively.

It's so easy to just want to fix people. I think that acceptance is probably the thing that actually was the greatest act of love that I received, because it made me feel, "Okay, I've got support there, but I've got support no matter what. I don't have to pretend to be better today and I don't have to take their advice." A lot of friends dropped away, because they just couldn't handle me. I was in that space for about six months.

Those that stayed were just – they weren't trying to fix me. They were just like, "Well, how are you today?" I'd say, "Well, I'm elsewhere. I'm not so good." Then they wouldn't say, you've got to get out and meet more people, or why don't you try this or try that, because they knew me well enough to know I was giving it my best shot to heal as it was.

I think at some point, all of us have to be cracked open. That's how it came for me, that it cracked me open through depression after giving for so many years and not receiving. If we're trying to distract people from that lesson, I mean, some people, like your friend, won't come back from it and they will take their life. There's a lot of people who would go through depression that, if they were given acceptance and the right environment to heal, eventually they would actually come through it and think, "Yeah, okay. I'm starting to come through this. I was feeling a little bit, just a millimeter lighter today." The next day, "Oh, okay. I'm feeling a little bit lighter." It's not an overnight thing, but you do, yeah, there is a turning point.

[01:02:14] LW: I got a sense from your book that the depression for you just lifted. Was it more of a gradual process than what you articulated in the book?

[01:02:22] BW: No. I mean, it did lift. It lifted the actual suicidal thoughts, the doom, the heaviness, that did lift for me. Absolutely, it lifted. What I mean is it was still a gradual process to get back into life, to find my way back into being capable of working. It was just like each day like, "Okay. I'm feeling a little bit more capable today. Today, I can do this." I could drive to town and have a conversation with their shop assistant, or whatever. Yeah, my life transformed really quickly and that's when my blog took off straight almost immediately following that, where I just said, "Okay. I'm coming through. I'm through the worst of it."

The ambulance time was a turning point and I knew then, "Okay, I'm not going to kill myself." I've got to that point where I was that close to doing it. I want to value the gift of my life. Now show me how to live in a different way, and so that's how the cloud lifted and my eyes were open to new colors. It was like the whole farm was illuminated, like I'd come off so I'm really – like I'd been in a 20-day silent retreat or something and all my senses were heightened. Yeah, it was pretty phenomenal for me how it all happened.

[01:03:40] LW: You'd already started Inspiration and Chai at that point.

[01:03:44] BW: Yes. I started that when I was teaching in the jail. I've been writing it all the way through. A lot of those articles aren't on the blog anymore. Yeah, I was still writing at least every couple of weeks for it, but I wasn't writing about me going through depression. I was writing about beautiful things that were happening in nature and using that as a tool for teaching. Yeah.

[01:04:07] LW: Talk about writing the top five regrets. What inspired that article at the time that you actually sat down and wrote it? Why that day?

[01:04:18] BW: Yeah. While I was in the jail and I'd come back from a really awful gig and I just didn't want to do any more gigs. A music magazine had asked me to write an article about teaching in the jail. I did that. Then I wrote that for them and then I thought, "Why aren't I writing more? I love writing. Not just songwriting. I love writing. I'll start a blog."

I've just been to some seminar thing that they were saying how to make money, from being online and one of those people was a blogger. I thought, "Oh, maybe I'll start a blog and I could make money from that somehow." Yeah, so I just thought, what do I write about? I even googled good blog topics. Instead, my guidance inside just said, "Write what you know." I thought, "Okay. Well, I've just finished working with the dying people. Their regrets shape my life. It transformed my life over the last eight years. I'm going to write about their regrets," because that was my biggest takeaway from all those years was how painful regrets are at the end.

I just sat down and wrote it, because I'd been mastering it and recognizing what the regrets were for eight years. I put it on my blog, while I was teaching in the jail. Then I went through this whole time of depression and suicidal thoughts. Then, as I came out of that, as I was taking one step back and then next step back, then the blog just took off. Then I was offered a deal with an agent to get the book published. She just said, "Do you want to write a book?" I said, "Yeah, everyone's got a book in them." I said, "I could only write this book if I wrote it as a memoir, because death is so unrelatable to living people. I knew that if I wrote it as a transformation of my own life, then people would connect with that and death would become a bit more relatable through my exposure to it."

Yeah, so I signed to her. Then it was rejected by 25 publishers. I was released, so I put it out myself. Then by then, I was in a new relationship and I was pregnant. Then in the same 24 hours as my daughter was born, my dream publishing house offered me a publishing deal. Then it became their fastest foreign rights seller in history, in Hay House history. It's now in 32 languages with a movie in the pipeline.

We don't know. We don't know the seeds that we sow when we sow them, because that was in the cottage near the jail when I wrote that article and I still had to go through that massive healing process. What that did was it cracked me open and helped me let go of so much nonsense that had been holding me back. Yeah.

[01:07:05] LW: I have one question about your process when you were writing that article, because as a writer, you've been writing for decades. Every set time you sat down, you wrote in your gratitude journal, you wrote in your regular journal, you're telling these stories, you're remembering these things, there must not have been anything different about that particular day and that particular post. Maybe before that, you were only getting, I don't know, 30 people looking at your blog or something like that.

When you were writing it out, the five regrets, did it come out as five regrets, or did it come out – you just listed all of the regrets and you said, “Well, let me consolidate these into five different things.” Did you already have that narrative in your consciousness before and you sat down and just wrote it out? Or were you channeling it, like Neil Donald watching his conversations with God experience? What was that process like?

[01:07:56] BW: Well, I'd just been to this seminar about blogging and they had said, make sure you have good titles. Top 5, top 10, top whatever. That's how that came about. Though initially, I didn't even call it *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. I just called it *Regrets of the Dying*.

I had already recognized five themes that had already happened naturally, that there were five themes, but I hadn't identified it to myself that there were five. It was just like, oh, here's that I wish I hadn't worked so hard conversation again. I've had this conversation before. Oh, here's this one. Because they came from different angles. I hadn't actually narrowed them down into five bullet points, but I also knew that there were these five common conversations, even though I hadn't numbered them. It was just because of this seminar, which I hadn't enjoyed at all, but it gave me the idea to put it into point form that I thought, “Okay. Well, let me sit and think about this properly.”

I sat down and I wrote out what each of the regrets were. I thought, “Oh, okay. It's five.” Then I'd looked at a couple others, I thought, “No, that's the same as number one, but it's just said a bit

differently. Oh, that's the same as number four, but said a bit differently.” That's when I, yeah, just got it got it down to five.

[01:09:15] LW: That article ended up getting, I think, something like eight million views in three years. What do you think it was that caused people to connect with those five regrets?

[01:09:26] BW: I think that it was so simply written, because I'm not an academic. I just wrote it as one person talking to another, so it was very relatable. I just think it was the timing, just that I found a niche where the world's consciousness was ready for it. I certainly didn't intend to. I just wrote what I knew, and that was what I knew.

I think that mostly, because it gave people permission to make changes, and so many positive changes in the world have been made as a result of the article and then the book, through people that have read it.

[01:10:04] LW: When you were getting rejected 20 and 25 times, what message did that send to you as someone who written this viral article about this important subject?

[01:10:15] BW: Well, I just thought, “Stuff them.” I just thought, “Okay. Well, I've been rejected from so many gigs I applied to get, and so many festivals I tried to get into.” I just kept going with that and being independent. I thought, “Okay. Well, clearly there's a message here. I guess the amount of people who had read it and were writing to me, telling me how the message had affected them, gave me the confidence to think no, okay, well, stuff it. If you guys don't want to publish me, I'll publish it myself.

There was never a thought of quitting when it came to the book, especially because I didn't know what else I was going to do. I knew I couldn't go back to care work. I knew I couldn't go back to banking. I knew that I was a different person than who'd gone into depression, so I was pretty much just open to whatever life put in front of me then. I knew no other way forward. It was almost like I burnt my bridges behind me. Yeah, so I just thought okay, well, I'll put it out myself and that's what I did. Then four months later, it had gained enough traction to for me to be offered a publishing deal in the same 24 hours as my daughter was born. Yeah.

[01:11:40] LW: It's amazing. We're going to wrap this up now, because I want to respect your time. I normally ask the question, how do you define success? Obviously, the conversations I'm having, we're not talking about material success, so people will talk about following your heart and things like that.

You have a catchphrase and I'm going to just fit this into this question. Smile and know. You said, smile and know a lot, near the end of the book that I read about the top five regrets. I want you to just talk about what that actually means in a practical sense.

[01:12:14] BW: Okay. If you're doubting something and you're getting caught up in the fear of it, if you actually just smile and think about it, then you can't feel scared and sad about it. I had asked for some guidance like, how's this going to unfold and I got that guidance? Just smile and know. It's an act of faith, faith with joy attached.

If you get yourself all caught up in trying to work out how everything's going to happen, you don't need to know all the how's, just smile and know that it will. That's it. Just smile and know, and then you're getting out of the way, and life can breathe a big sigh of relief and say, "Oh, thank goodness. Now I can help you. Yeah, you're ready."

[01:13:00] LW: Beautiful. Thank you. The last thing I want to do here, I like to loop it back around and just offer a few reflections of my own after hearing more of your story. Almost without exception, Bronnie, when I have these conversations with people and they talk about the things that they've experienced in their life, there's a strong connection to their favorite toy, or activity as a child.

When you were back in Northwest New South Wales, you and Prinny having your adventures and experiences, the thing that she made you feel is the thing that you essentially helped us feel. You helped your palliative clients feel that. You helped women in the jail feel that. Even to an extent the people who you were performing for, feeling that, because you're leading with vulnerability, you're leading with your heart. That's what cute little animals do. That's what dogs do and that's what we love about them. We feel like we can be ourselves around them. You've embodied that in your work. I just want to acknowledge you for that and acknowledge your courage and your bravery.

There's so much we didn't really talk about in your story, which is a good thing. It's a good thing that you've done so much in that regard that we couldn't even get to all of it in a reasonable amount of time. I encourage those of you who are listening to definitely pick up – You've written three books now, correct?

[01:14:21] BW: Yes.

[01:14:22] LW: The Top Five Regrets.

[01:14:25] BW: Yeah. Then *Your Year For Change* and *Bloom*. Five regrets is what everyone knows. Yeah.

[01:14:31] LW: Yeah. Did you write it yourself? Because it's so well written, it almost feels like there's a ghost writer or something helping you out.

[01:14:39] BW: No. I wrote it and I sent it out unedited. It had reached over a million people globally before it was edited. It was only when I said to the publisher, “Do you think we could edit it before the film comes out?” Whenever that's going to be. COVID has delayed it. They said, “Yeah, let's just do it now anyway.” The new release is an edited version. No. I just wrote like I was writing to my best friend.

[01:15:02] LW: I love it.

[01:15:03] BW: Maybe why it's done so well. I don't know.

[01:15:06] LW: Who would you like to play you in the film? The young Bronnie.

[01:15:12] BW: Yeah. I really like Mia Wasikowska. I think that's how I'd say her name. I really love her. I'd like it to be an Aussie. Probably, Chris Hemsworth could be my love interest, I guess.

[01:15:30] LW: Well, we're looking forward to that.

[01:15:32] BW: I don't know. Whoever, whoever resonates with the story the best. Yeah.

[01:15:38] LW: Yeah. Well, look, again, thank you so much for just being on your path and being courageous enough to be the black sheep and to own that role in your life and to blaze the trail for the rest of us. We didn't get a chance to talk about my personal experiences, but we have a lot in common with nomading and just a lot of the things following your heart and meditation, etc., etc. I was super excited to talk to you.

I did want to mention though, that you do have a course right now called Write For Delight Course that you created for people who like you were at one time, have this inclination to express and be creative in creative writing. Is that something that is on offer and how do people find it?

[01:16:16] BW: Yeah, sure. I've got Regret-Free & Loving it and Write for Delight. Two courses. They're at bronnieware.com. Yeah, Write for Delight is aimed at people who just keep talking themselves out of it and think too far ahead and forget how much pleasure there is in expressing themselves through writing. It's helping a lot of people. Hopefully, it will help some of your audience as well, Light.

I also like to say thank you for what you're bringing to the world. You have such a wisdom and lovely energy about you. I'm really delighted that life has come and crossed our paths together through that strange sphere of social media. Many blessings to you and I'm so grateful.

[01:16:57] LW: Thank you. Yeah, we've made it to the end of the tunnel here. It's funny, because I have been so familiar with the five regrets for a long time. I first heard it in a song by this – it's like a compilation album called One Giant Leap. I don't know if you know about that, but in one of the songs there's an opening dialogue where this person, I think it's a scientist talking about the five regrets. It's been in my consciousness ever since then and of course, I've seen it a lot. It's definitely out there. It's pretty prevalent, as you know. I was excited to put a face to a concept, or a philosophy that makes all the sense in the world.

Yeah, thank you so much for joining this conversation and I'm wishing you all the best and everybody, like I said, make sure you read more of the work. It'll leave you so inspired, to keep going even though things aren't necessarily happening in the way that you think they should be happening. Just smile and know.

[END OF EPISODE]

[01:18:03] LW: Thank you for listening to my chat with Miss Bronnie Ware. She's written *The Top Five Regrets for the Dying*, plus two other books. She's currently offering a writing course called Write for Delight, which looks very exciting. If you've been wanting to tell your story, Write for Delight could be that first step that we were talking about in the introduction. At least check it out and see if it's something that resonates and you can get details in the show notes below.

In the meantime, if you want to hear more stories like Bronnie's, please make sure to subscribe to the podcast and poke around a little bit in the archive. You're going to find several other episodes with fascinating people who've overcome all kinds of crazy odds in order to discover and start their movement.

As you'll see, there are no super humans out there. These are normal people like you and me. The only difference is they said yes to what was in their heart and they kept saying yes, even when it seemed scary to do so. That's it. The path is built into our life. All we have to do is say yes to what we're feeling and sensing in our heart. It seems too simple to be true, but that's why I wanted to share these stories, because I think we need to hear it over and over and over again in order to gain the level of trust that it takes, in our own heart, to keep saying yes to it.

That's why I'm so appreciative of all of you who've taken a couple minutes to rate and review the podcast, because the time you spend doing that will help countless other people discover these incredible stories, and maybe they'll be inspired to start their movements as well. Also, don't forget, there's a transcript of the interview on my website, lightwatkins.com/tunnel, along with a link to sign up for my Daily Dose of Inspiration e-mail, which is a short and sweet daily motivational message that you'll get from me each morning at 6 a.m. Pacific time. I've been sending this out to thousands of people every day since 2016 and people get addicted to them, which is a good addiction.

Of course, if you have any feedback, or suggestions, you can reach me directly at 323-405-9166. Thanks again for listening and I look forward to seeing you back here, same time, same place next week with another story from the end of the tunnel.

[END]