

**EPISODE 43****[INTRODUCTION]**

*“TS: What I thought was betrayal of me was actually me realizing that I had been betraying myself all along. I had been betraying my intuition, my inner knowing, all in a way to be validated by being in relationship. That really was a huge turning point for me and really stepping into my power. I actually had written in my journal exactly what was going to happen, as far as the betrayal was concerned. It was like, part of me knew this is in the field, this is actually going to happen. Unfortunately, because you're hard headed and you don't listen to your own inner knowing, you're just going to have to learn the hard way.”*

**[00:00:55] LW:** Hey, there. It's Light Watkins, your host of At The End Of The Tunnel. This week on the podcast, I'm talking to one of my dear friends and mentors from back in my yoga teaching days. I don't know if you knew that about me, but I was a full-time yoga teacher for many years. Tracee Stanley owned a yoga studio in Los Angeles called Divine Motion. That ended up being one of the first yoga studios where it taught after my teacher training.

Since then, Tracee and I, evolved as teachers over the years. Now she's become one of the foremost leaders of Yoga nidra and mindfulness. She teaches all around the United States, when there's not a pandemic. She's even shared the stage with Oprah Winfrey and many others. Both Tracee and I were also one of just a handful of black teachers in Los Angeles back in the day. Thankfully, that's changed now, but we're going to talk a little bit about what that was like and how she felt about hiring me as one of her first yoga teachers in her studio.

We'll also break down the story of all of the leaps of faith that she had to take in order to become a teacher and a community leader, and eventually, the author that she's become today. Her book, *Radiant Rest*, just came out. It's all about Yoga nidra, which is a type of yoga that means, you're going to like this, it means the yoga of sleep. She's just an all-around

inspiring person. She's a wife, she's a step mom, an entrepreneur, a teacher, a student, a community leader. She teaches teachers and she's the host of The Radiant Rest Podcast.

Tracee has so much life experience and wisdom to share with us, about leaving her successful career as a film producer, to open the yoga studio and having to listen to her heart, about getting out of her earlier relationship and overcoming self-betrayal and finding her passion and her purpose. I just can't wait for you to experience this conversation. Without further ado, here is the *Radiant Rest* author, my dear friend, Miss Tracee Stanley.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:03:08] LW:** Tracee, thank you so much for coming on to At The End Of The Tunnel, as you may be familiar with. I like to start these conversations off talking about your childhood. The kickoff question is, when you think about your childhood, did you have a favorite toy or activity?

**[00:03:29] TS:** Thinking back to childhood, my favorite activity was reading.

**[00:03:33] LW:** What kind of books were you reading?

**[00:03:37] TS:** It's funny, when I think back to it, because my dad in particular was very strict. He was a very strict disciplinarian. I wasn't really allowed to go out and play with other kids. What I remember most is reading through the entire encyclopedia, A through Z. That's what I did.

**[00:04:01] LW:** What was the intention of reading the encyclopedia versus Curious George, or any these other children's books?

**[00:04:08] TS:** I definitely had Curious George and I definitely had other kids' books. I think I just became fascinated by things that I didn't know and gathering information somehow. I also feel like, I had this set of encyclopedias that was in my bedroom. It felt like I needed to read the

whole thing. That's what I remember most. If you were to ask me, what did I read, give you the names of books, I remember the encyclopedias.

**[00:04:42] LW:** Now, I don't know how old you are, but you just dated yourself with encyclopedias, because there are no kids right now with encyclopedias.

**[00:04:47] TS:** Is that really true? Because if that's true, that's really sad. We have Google, right? They don't need the encyclopedia.

**[00:04:56] LW:** I had encyclopedias growing up. When I was growing up, I definitely was not reading encyclopedias A to Z, but it was the television era. In my family, we spent tons of time just sitting in front of the television. Was that your experience as well? Or were you opting for the encyclopedia over the television?

**[00:05:19] TS:** No. I actually wasn't allowed to watch television. There were two and now I'm really going to date myself with one of these shows. There was Sesame Street, which is still on, that I was allowed to watch. There was Zoom. Do you remember Zoom?

**[00:05:36] LW:** No.

**[00:05:37] TS:** Okay. Well, it might have been an East Coast thing. There was a show called Zoom. It was like a Sesame Street that had dancing and music. Those were the only two shows that I was allowed to watch. My parents were very conscientious about what was on television at that time and specifically, how black people were being portrayed on television. That's why I wasn't allowed to watch TV. The next best thing was reading. I've learned to read at a really young age. Reading has always been a passion.

**[00:06:15] LW:** Talk a little bit about your childhood. We know you grew up in Long Island. Were your parents together? Do you have siblings? How was the vibe in your house overall?

**[00:06:25] TS:** Yes, my parents were together. I lived in a neighborhood, in an area called Huntington. Like I said, my parents, my dad specifically, was very strict. My family life was really in the home. The only time where we were out of the home was going on vacations, or going to church, because my grandmother was a reverend. On Saturdays and Sundays, my mom would take my brother and I to church. I have a younger brother. He's four years younger than me.

Looking back at it, of course, you're a child, so you don't realize the difference between your childhood, your life and someone else's life that's happening; was very, very strict. There were certain rooms in the house that we were not allowed to go into. There were certain things that we were not allowed to touch. We had a very strict wake up time and bedtime. My dad was former military, former Air Force. He didn't believe in laying around in bed. It's like, once the sun was up, you needed to get up.

We all had chores. My chores, once I got older, were mowing the lawn, washing the dishes and weeding the front yard. Nobody in the house, my brother or I got away without doing any work. There was no such thing as an allowance. There was no such thing as using the phone. It was very, very strict. My dad had, in talking to him about it later in life, he really felt like he wanted to protect us. He put all these things in place to try to protect us. I would also say, control us. Life was very controlled and very strict and very disciplined. I didn't really realized how disciplined it was, until I started to talk to other friends that were allowed to basically, just go and do whatever they wanted to do. I was like, "What do you mean, you get to do that?"

**[00:08:43] LW:** Did your dad impart any lessons that stand out to you now, from when you were a kid? What were a couple of the lessons that he would always reiterate?

**[00:08:55] TS:** Well, the first one is always be on time. Don't be late.

**[00:09:02] LW:** Why would he tell you to be on time? What was the importance of that?

**[00:09:06] TS:** I think that there was an expectation around stereotypes, around how black people showed up.

**[00:09:14] LW:** Colored people time. Yeah.

**[00:09:16] TS:** Yeah. It's like, you show up in excellence in everything that you do. That was his main message. His other message was really that his thriving and our thriving was a form of resistance, and that there was going to be people in the world who did not appreciate, or want you to thrive and that you needed to persevere, no matter what.

**[00:09:39] LW:** Was his family from the soSouth?

**[00:09:41] TS:** His family was from Bermuda. He grew up mostly in Bermuda. His dad died when he was very young. His dad, there's a mystery around where exactly he was from. We've heard all kinds of stories that he was born on a reservation, that he was from Ohio. Through ancestry DNA now, I've started to parse out what the trSouth was. The people who raised my dad for the most part were from Bermuda. The family homestead is in Bermuda. He really imparted these lessons that still stay with me.

**[00:10:26] LW:** How were you thinking about success in your younger years around that thriving as a form of resistance atmosphere?

**[00:10:36] TS:** When I was young, I saw myself becoming a lawyer. That was the thing that I wanted to do, was to be a lawyer. It really started with my fascination around the news. Some of the heroes that I had very early on, because there was a moment in time where I wanted to be a journalist. Then when I would look at who was on the news, as the news anchors, I never saw anyone that looked anything like me. Until one day, I discovered Melba Tolliver, who was a news anchor. I can't remember what station it was. Then just for whatever reason, I was very interested in some of the crimes that were happening. That took a trajectory into, "Oh, I think I would love to become a prosecutor at some point."

**[00:11:27] LW:** It sounds like, you guys were pretty conscious of race, which in my experience was the same. That's all we really talked about in our house growing up was black people,

white people. I grew up in Montgomery, Alabama, so there's a lot of stuff that happened down there, with the civil rights movement and all of that. Was that your experience as well?

**[00:11:47] TS:** Not exactly. The neighborhood that I grew up in was largely Jewish and Italian. We were one of two black families that lived on this block. Most of the people, with the exception of maybe one family, were not very happy when we moved into the neighborhood. What my dad really wanted us to understand was that we were very privileged, and that there were all these other things happening at the same time. Of course, then we were going to my grandmother's church on the weekends and staying at my grandma's house, which was in a neighborhood called Wyandanch, which was a black neighborhood. We always had both end.

One of the first documentaries my dad ever introduced me to, he took me to the movie theater to see *Eyes on the Prize*. He was into all kinds of literature and Malcolm X and Martin L. Southern King. He always made sure that we knew what was going on, even though it didn't seem like it could be affecting us, as much as it might have been affecting you growing up in someplace like Alabama.

**[00:13:07] LW:** Do you remember being profiled at all as a kid? Like you said, your neighbors didn't want you guys there. Was that your direct experience? Anything happened? Or it's just what he told you?

**[00:13:07] LW:** Do you remember being profiled at all as a kid? Like you said, your neighbors didn't want you guys there. Was that your direct experience? Anything happened? Or it's just what he told you?

**[00:13:16] TS:** No. Our literal next-door neighbor was taunting us and me in particular, because we walked to school. I had to deal with that. Even though it was not overtly racist. There were no slurs being thrown about. It was clear, and they were Puerto Rican. It was clear that there was some issue. What we learned later also was that the woman who lived next door to us had mental issues. The profiling would have been on playing in the front of my house, and there's somebody driving down the street that doesn't even live on the block that slows down to say, "Well, what are you doing there? What are you doing there?" Or you're driving in a car that

somebody doesn't think you deserve to drive in. "How did you get that car?" It was very subtle. There was never anything that was very overt, but it was enough that even as a child, I could pick up. This is what we would be calling profiling now.

**[00:14:42] LW:** How's your mental state as a kid? Sounds like you had a pretty happy childhood.

**[00:14:46] TS:** I got spanked a lot, because I didn't like – what we call abuse now. I got spanked a lot, because I really had a mind of my own and I wanted to question why things were the way they were, or why rules were set the way they were set. My dad did not appreciate critical thinking. He really wanted you to do what he told you to do, and that should be enough.

**[00:15:16] LW:** What was the most defiant thing you think you did back then, that just really pissed your dad off?

**[00:15:21] TS:** Oh, okay. Well, the most defiant thing, because I was pretty much in-line. His idea of being – doing what he said he wanted you to do was pretty over the top. One of the things was that he was like, "No, you can't use the phone." This is me being 15, when at the time where everybody is on the phone and talking and doing their things. He's like, "No. You're not allowed to use the phone." The reason why I wasn't allowed to use the phone was because he wanted to know who I would be talking to and what I would be saying.

He put a lock on the phone, basically. Because rotary dial phone. They have these little locks that you could slide into the circle and then it would lock. Then I figured out that, "Oh, if I took a paperclip, I might be able to pick this lock off and use the phone." About a week later, he figured out that I was using the phone and that that didn't end well.

**[00:16:28] LW:** It sounds like, you were looking forward to moving on after high school and establishing your own independence after growing up with such rigid rules around the house.

**[00:16:41] TS:** Yeah. I mean, it was really twofold. Because I really loved my dad more than anybody.

**[00:16:50] LW:** Stockholm Syndrome.

**[00:16:51] TS:** Yeah. Despite the fact that he was a disciplinarian, we had so much in common. I learned so much from him. He had an incredible sense of humor. He was an incredible entrepreneur who thought completely out of the box. His thinking out of the box was always something that other people would say, "Oh, no. You can't do that." He would always say, "Well, if I can visualize it, then I know I can do it." That's another lesson that I would say.

**[00:17:24] LW:** What's an example of that? What did he do that was so radical?

**[00:17:29] TS:** Back in the day, he was working as an insurance agent for Prudential Insurance Company. This is back in the day when the insurance agent would knock on the door. He just realized that there was a huge section of Long Island that was not being serviced by mostly the white insurance agents, because they were not going to go door-to-door in black neighborhoods.

He essentially mapped out all of these neighborhoods on Long Island, and basically, became one of the top selling insurance agents. Then once he did that, he thought, "Well, I can open my own agency." The people that he worked with was like, "There's no way you can do that. Nobody has ever left here and started their own agency." He's like, "I know that I can do that. I know that I can serve as many communities, because there were a lot of people coming from the Philippines. There were a lot of people coming from Russia. There were people coming from all over that were moving to Long Island.

Basically, what he did was he taught himself how to say a few different phrases in each one of those languages from the immigrant communities that were coming into Long Island. He opened his insurance agency. He made everybody feel completely welcome there. It was something that nobody was thinking about doing.



**[00:19:02] LW:** Did he talk about that back at the time, or you learned that later when you became an adult?

**[00:19:07] TS:** No, no, no. He talked about it at the time. He told me exactly what he was going to do.

**[00:19:12] LW:** He would come home from work and sit you down at dinner and give you the play-by-play of what was going on and how he was innovating.

**[00:19:20] TS:** He basically came home one day and said, "I'm starting my own agency. I'm leaving Prudential on this date. I have located the office building and I am going to purchase this office building and we're going to open up the agency in this building." I became his little helper, going into the office and cleaning out the office. He made flat flyers made, and so I was the one who went around the whole neighborhood and started putting flyers on the cars. I was very integral. As a very young teenager, I don't remember exactly how old I was, but it was probably 12 or 13. Just watching him building his empire and watching him build literally from nothing, other than an idea and a knowing that he had the ability to do it. Not listening to what anybody else said.

**[00:20:19] LW:** I love that. Obviously, you inherited some of that at that age. You started thinking out of the box as well.

**[00:20:25] TS:** I definitely inherited that. Also, I think more than anything, it was that I could do anything that I put my mind to.

**[00:20:34] LW:** Talk about your decision to go to Stony Brook, because I mean, it's not – it's not exactly an HBCU. It sounds like your dad was very focused on black excellence and this thing. Why Stony Brook, out of all the other colleges in the world?

**[00:20:48] TS:** That's such a great question. Trust me, I had my list of places. I was like, "I want to go here, here, here." He was like, "You're not going away to college." Because first of all, I skipped a grade. I graduated earlier than most of the – I was a year younger. He said, "No, you're not going away to school. You need to pick a school that you can either drive to, or take the train to." That's how Stony Brook was decided.

**[00:21:19] LW:** What was it? He needed the help at work? Or it was just occasion of keeping you at home.

**[00:21:21] TS:** No. He didn't want to let us out of his sight. This whole thing that not being able to go out, not going to parties, not going to friends, blah, blah, blah, the whole thing, it extended even to going away to school. That was not even on the table as an option to go away to school.

**[00:21:42] LW:** You mentioned in other interviews that you were an introvert. I maybe speculating here, but I'm seeing a pattern of you we're being conditioned not to be big and not to go off on your own and do these things. It's like, you're being conditioned to play small a bit.

**[00:21:58] TS:** 100%. There's no question about that.

**[00:22:01] LW:** There was a moment that I can't imagine he would be very happy with, when you were scouted by a modeling agent.

**[00:22:07] TS:** Oh, no. That was not a cute moment.

**[00:22:11] LW:** You get to your crossroads moment, where you have to make a decision. Talk about that.

**[00:22:17] TS:** Well, at that point, there were a couple of things that happened. One, this wasn't just like, "Hey, I'm going to pay for you to go to school," because everything that he wanted us to understand was that you have to work for what you want. There's no free ride

happening, no matter what the situation is. He wanted me to be working while I was in school. I had a job. The job that I had, it was at this place called The Party Experience. It started out with me blowing up balloons. Then eventually, I became the manager of the store.

For my age at that time, I was making what we would say would be halfway decent money. I started to realize like, "Oh, I can probably afford to get my own place with a girlfriend." I had that in the back of my mind. At the same time, part of me started rebelling against the feeling of being invisible. The idea of being invisible, being an introvert, being bullied while I was in school, because that was a very big part of my childhood was really being bullied very badly, that it was right on the precipice of me deciding that I'm going to – I need to move out.

When I got scouted as a model and then followed up on that and then wound up moving to New York City, that was really the thing that was like, "Oh, I've worked my entire life to move away from the city. Now you're going to go to and live in the city? You're never going to make it." I remember him saying, "You're never going to make it. Don't call me and ask me for a dollar." I was like, "Don't worry. I'm never going to call you and ask you for a single dollar." I never did, my entire life.

**[00:24:26] LW:** Talk about the moment you got scouted. Where were you and how did it go down?

**[00:24:31] TS:** Well, I was on the train. I don't remember where I was coming from, but I was on Long Island Railroad. This woman came up to me and she said, "I'm Whitney Houston's makeup artist. I think you should go to Elite Model agency." I was like, "I don't know what you're talking about. I've grown up my entire life, essentially feeling ugly. Definitely, not feeling cute. That sounds crazy." She said, "No, no, no. I think what we should do is we should meet up I should take your picture and do your makeup. Then I'll take the pictures to the modeling agency." That was the beginning.

Nothing really came of that. Then, I wound up going into the city with a boyfriend who was going into an agency to do a go see for a commercial. The head of the agency came out, because I was sitting outside and he said, "You need to come upstairs. I want to take pictures

of you.” That was David Bossman. That was my official scouting moment that actually led to me working. Then after that, I was in Paris.

**[00:25:48] LW:** What year was this?

**[00:25:50] TS:** I want to say, maybe '88.

**[00:25:54] LW:** David Bossman was the hottest thing in New York at that time. That's pretty exciting.

**[00:25:59] TS:** Yeah. I didn't know that. I literally didn't know that. I was just like, “Okay, there's this guy who wants me to go up to the roof and take some pictures.” I had no idea. I figured it out when he picked up the phone and I was sent to Elle Magazine to meet with the editor. Still, I was so sheltered, that I did not know. I didn't know any really what was going on.

**[00:26:23] LW:** Were you confident at the time in yourself?

**[00:26:25] TS:** No. I was completely unconfident, which is why I was not successful. Any of these go sees that he was sending me to, because I was completely introverted. They could see that I was so different than a lot of those girls who were coming in, that were worldly and all the things. The editor at Elle had basically told David Bossman, “She needs to go to Paris.” I think that they thought, Paris was the place that you would mature.

**[00:26:59] LW:** If your dad didn't like the fact you're getting into modeling, he really didn't like the fact that you were about to go to Paris.

**[00:27:04] TS:** Oh, no. Well, he didn't like the fact that I moved to New York. Then, when I was going to Paris, I think on the one hand, he was like, “Hmm, you're getting to travel,” which is something that he loved to do. That was one thing. He did not like the idea that I was modeling. It wasn't until I had a layout, in Essence Magazine, that he'd started to – he was like,

“Oh, a little bit more.” Then I was sending him postcards from every place where I was. Clearly, I was making my own way in the world.

Luckily, because of the discipline of how I grew up, I never tried drugs. I wasn't interested in drinking, because I was able to be an observer to other friends who went through those things that I was able to say, “Okay, that's not something that I want to do.” It was interesting. Also, being an introvert, I was always observing what was going on around me, as opposed to trying to jump into what was happening.

**[00:28:10] LW:** Then back then, the South African modeling market was really starting to emerge.

**[00:28:15] TS:** Yeah. I didn't get to the South African market until much later, because I had been approached to go to South Africa. I remember speaking to the booker and saying, “Well, what about apartheid? I'm not going to South Africa during apartheid.” She said, “Oh, don't worry. We'll stamp your passport, honored white.” I was like, “No, you won't. That is never going to happen and I am not going.”

It wasn't until many years later, when Nelson Mandela was elected president, that I got a call from that same booker. I just happened to be watching the celebrations on television when she called. I thought, I would be a fool to not let somebody pay me to go to South Africa at this time in history and experience what's happening right now. That's how I wound up going to South Africa.

**[00:29:21] LW:** Little did you know, you were really going to South Africa, so you could have this awakening on your balcony. Talk about that moment.

**[00:29:30] TS:** I can tell, you've been listening to some other podcasts. Yeah. It's true. I didn't know that that was going to happen. It was such a profound moment that it literally changed the course of my life. The moment was I was sitting on my balcony. I was living in this part of Cape Town called Tamboerskloof, where my balcony was facing Table Mountain, which is

beautiful. If you haven't ever seen Table Mountain, many times it's covered with what they call the tablecloth of fog.

It was very, very early in the morning, just before the sun was rising. For whatever reason, this moment of peace and stillness just emerged out of nowhere. It was such a stillness, that it felt like, all of these answers to questions that I had just descended down into me and I had this knowing. I don't know how long it lasted. It probably was not very long, but it seemed like forever. It was this moment where time and space seem to dissolve.

When it was finished, I was up, I think I was writing. Then my roommates eventually got up and I was telling them what happened. They were looking at me like I was insane. "What? You don't know what you're talking about." Then eventually, there was one person in the community that I spoke to and he said, "Oh, I know exactly what happened to you. Let me take you to this bookstore." We went to the bookstore. he piled up a bunch of books. He said, "These are the books that you need to read." I started reading them. That was the beginning of shifting my perspective about life, about the nature of reality, about synchronicity. They're just completely like – It was like, someone coming in and scrubbing your whole mind and just pouring in light.

**[00:31:47] LW:** Prior to that moment on the balcony, did you have any spiritual foundation? Had you even thought about spirituality, or yoga, or any of that stuff?

**[00:31:58] TS:** Well, I would say my grandmother set the tone for the idea that there's something greater. The way in which she did that was as the granddaughter of the reverend, getting saved as something that is on the menu. I remember at one point, everything was happening. People were getting saved and I as the introvert was sitting back watching what was happening. At one point, she looked at me and she laid hands on me and I fell out. Afterwards, I remember thinking, that is something very specific. That energy. Because I was watching everybody not knowing, are they performing? What's happening?

Then when it happened to me, I was like, “Oh, wait. There's an energy that exists that she was able to transfer to me.” This idea of energy, which I would now say – we could also say was almost like a Shaktipat, she was doing, was one thing. I had a girlfriend, her name is Naboo Shea. She was the first person to show me sun salutations. We were in New York City. She's like, “I've been doing this thing called yoga. Let me show you the sun salutations.” We did the sun salutations and she was going to day with life, back in the day when he had his –

**[00:33:28] LW:** Jivamukti.

**[00:33:30] TS:** It was actually before Jivamukti. It was pre-Jivamukti. It was expensive. There was no way. At least for me, I was like, I can't afford to go pay this however much it was at the time, a couple times a week. I never really wound up going. Two things that happened during childhood was that my mother was studying for her master's degree. They used to be these books by the pound, where you would just pay books by the pound, and you'd bring the books home. She would do books by the pound, she'd bring them home.

One of the books that she brought was a book on astral projection. I picked up that book. I thought, “Oh, this is a good way to get out of the house,” because I'm not allowed to leave. I started reading and doing some of the practices of the astral projection book. Then, one other thing that happened was one of the other books that we had was *Chant to be Happy* that my dad had, because he was a big fan of The Beatles also. In that book is The Hari Krishna mantra.

I remember reading the Hari Krishna, trying to read the Hari Krishna mantra. Then, also hearing other music like, My Sweet Lord, where it was in there as well. Also, I probably had collected over the years, many, many versions of the Bhagavad Gita. Because every time we went to the airport, for whatever reason, the Hari Krishnas would beeline for me specifically. In my whole family, I would be the one. I think, it was probably because everybody else was eyes ahead, keep going. I would be looking with curiosity and they would give me the book. It was in the field.

**[00:35:26] LW:** What were some of the books that you remember being introduced to at that time, that really shaped the beginnings of your path?

**[00:35:35] TS:** Well, one of the first ones was – he gave me *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. That was mind blowing. I remember reading the poem about your children are not really your children. How I grew up that was an interesting reframe. There were some books, well, *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* was the biggest one, that had the biggest impact. Jonathan Livingston's *Seagull. Illusions* by Richard Bach.

Then I also had a book on the chakras by Harish Johari. That was the first time that I ever meditated self-guided. I read the book and there was a practice, I believe, in the book of where you're going to see certain colors of the chakras. I did that practice. It was just an experience. What I realized after reading and having that experience with the chakra meditation was that I needed to do this more. I needed to learn more about it. At that time, they weren't yoga studios and meditation studios in Johannesburg, which is where I was at the time. It wasn't until I got back to LA that I started to explore meditation.

**[00:37:06] LW:** Obviously, you were on the cusp of graduating yourself from modeling. Was that a tough decision to make? Then also, what was going on behind the scenes? I'm not sure if you were in a relationship and that's why you moved to LA or what the deal was. Just talk a little bit about that transition.

**[00:37:23] TS:** I got to South Africa from LA. I was in LA, went to South Africa. While I was in South Africa, after having that experience of reading all of those books and started to shift my mindset, starting to shift the way that I was eating, just becoming really clear, also with boundaries, about what I was going to do and what I was not going to do. At that time, there were no girls really working with natural hair in South Africa, if you can believe that or not. At the time, my hair was twisted and it was natural. I've been wearing my hair natural for a long time. I just said, "You know what? I'm not going to put a wig on. If you want me, this is how it is, that you're going to have to hire me the way I am."



Just starting to put down and become more empowered in my own voice in a way. Then what happened was that I was traveling from Cape Town to Johannesburg and I had everything that I owned with me, including all my tear sheets, all zed cards, all the blah, blah, blah. My friend Linda picked me up and we decided to go get a tea prior to heading over to her apartment. Somebody broke in to the car. We were walking back from the tea place. I see one of my shoes and some broken glass on the ground. I was like, "Oh, this isn't good. Somebody broke into the car."

Everything was gone. The only thing that was in the car still was a book that I was reading that was *Long Walk to Freedom* that had my passport and my ticket home inside. I stood there and I was like, "Oh, this is like *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* when the gas station is burning down." I'm done with modeling. I'm taking this as a sign that I'm not supposed to be doing this anymore, and that I need to move on.

I called my booker and I told her this is what happened and I'm leaving. In two days, I booked a flight. I'm leaving in two days. They were just beside themselves like, "What do you mean? Da, da, da." There's a whole big drama. I said, "No, I'm leaving." That was the end of the modeling career. That's how it ended, was with my stuff getting stolen. They tried everything. "Oh my god, you have all these tear sheets. You're working every day, blah, blah, blah." It was like, there's something more.

Now, had I not had that experience on the balcony, had I not had this beautiful person and Dhoni Anasatazi give me all of these books and say, "Here, this is what is happening to you, or what happened to you," I probably would have been completely devastated. Because my identity would have been so connected to all of those things that were lost; my clothes, my tear sheets, my this, my that, that it just would have been completely debilitating. I could very well see how easy it could have been for the agency to keep me there for another year, trying to make up for all of those things that I thought I lost, which in reality, what I realized in that moment was that I actually gained something.

**[00:40:55] LW:** Well, it sounds like you had either consciously, or subconsciously redefined success for yourself.

**[00:41:03] TS:** Yes. Yeah. I mean, I feel more so – I actually define who I was, because up until then I was using modeling as the way to travel around the world, which was something that I love to do when families would go on vacation, whatever else. Also, to be able to just explore. All of those years of reading the encyclopedias and seeing all these pictures of all these different places, I was basically living that out, not because I wanted to be a model, but really because I wanted to explore.

I was in a career that I really didn't want to be in. It didn't suit me to be as an introvert, everything that you were required to do in order to actually be successful as a model was completely antithetic to who I was as a person. While I was in South Africa, the embargoes had ended, but they were still basically in effect, because you couldn't get things that you might want to get, like film.

I had actually found this flea market that was selling all of these 16-millimeter and 8-millimeter cameras, basically for nothing. They were brand new, because they couldn't get the film, but I could get the film sent to me from friends. I had started this thing of taking pictures and filming all these different locations that I was going to, and thinking about ideas around making a documentary movie.

One of the things that was in my mind was, “Oh, when I go back to LA, I want to find out how do you get a movie financed? Could I come back to South Africa and make this movie that had this thought about making movie about the street kids,” because there were a lot of kids that were addicted to drugs that were very young. Even though there were a lot of liberal South Africans at that time, there was also this thing that was happening where these kids were not – no one was doing anything about these children. I had this idea of this would be an interesting documentary to make. I left. When I left, my thought was, I want to learn how to finance a movie.

**[00:43:31] LW:** I want to go off-road for a second, because –

**[00:43:35] TS:** Uh-oh.

**[00:43:36] LW:** No, no. You mentioned your friend, Linda. I heard you tell a story about the water bottle. I would love for you to share that story just to give us an understanding of the culture of South Africa, aside from people breaking into cars. There's another side to that.

**[00:43:53] TS:** Oh, 100%. Yeah, the water bottle story. Linda Zappa, she's a beautiful casa model, who lived in Cape Town at the time. Now she lives in Florida. She is from this small village called Mthatha, which is the same village that Nelson Mandela was born in. Every year, she there was this beauty pageant that was happening. She invited me to be one of the judges at the beauty pageant. Of course, I was like, “Yes.” I'm bringing all my mac makeup and we're going to make-up the girls and we're going to do this whole thing.

It was a really hot, sweltering day. I was flying from Cape Town. I get onto this plane, which is this tiny little plane, like a prop plane. It's sweltering. There's literally no air-conditioning, okay. It's really bad. I get on the plane and I have my bottle of water. The cap was closed, and I have my bottle of water in my right hand, I have my person on my on my other shoulder. I'm looking to see where my seat is. This older man, older, black African man takes the bottle, takes the water off, takes it out of my hand, takes a swig, puts the cap back on and hands it to me. I was like, “What? I cannot believe that this person just took this bottle out of my hand and started drinking it and then gave it back to me.”

Then I was like, “Wait a second.” Because the next person then took the bottle and took a swig. I said, “Oh, if I have something, everybody on this plane has something.” This is the difference between this idea of not only did that it takes a village to raise a child, right? That's a famous saying that we always hear. It's like, the health of the village is dependent on everybody in the village. If you have one thing, everybody has it. That was a game changer.

**[00:46:08] LW:** Did you have aspirations at that time when you were transitioning to Los Angeles to be married, or to have kids, or any of the conventional stuff that young women think about? Or were you thinking, “I’m going to become a Hollywood mogul one day and direct documentaries and whatnot”?

**[00:46:28] TS:** Ever since I was about 12, or 13, I knew that I was not going to have children. That was never an aspiration that I had. What I did feel is that I would have children in my life, whether that was – and mostly I thought that I was going to adopt children. I think that that was because of the example of my grandmother, that she brought in some kids that were from the foster system. She adopted them and then learned that they had other brothers and sisters and cousins, then she went and adopted those kids as well.

She basically had six kids that were in her home, that were not her biological children that she raised. That was an example of something where I had been thinking that the world was overpopulated, that I would rather adopt kids, that I didn't need to have my own children. Plus, I think as a young child going through encyclopedias and being a voracious reader and seeing pictures of childbirth, I think that that also had an effect on me. I never put my worth in this idea of something conventional. I definitely think, I thought that I would be in a relationship, I would be married. I don't know. It wasn't like this fairy tale visual. I definitely saw things being a little bit different for me.

**[00:48:04] LW:** Was your entree into the production, film production, was it pretty seamless, easy? Or do you have to work some magic to get that?

**[00:48:12] TS:** No. It was very synchronistic. I feel like the energy that was carried forth from reading *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* carried through. Because when I got back to LA, I got a call from a friend of mine, who told me he was starting a production company and asked me if I wanted to come and intern, I have no idea why he called me, or asked me about this. Basically, that's what happened. I went and I interned at his company for a year. His brother had a company that was running simultaneously and I wound up eventually going to work for the brother. We grew that company from four people to 40 people and first-look deals with Warner Brothers and all kinds of things happened during that time.

**[00:49:03] LW:** It sounds like, you had a pretty lucrative situation in South Africa. Did you have money saved up? How are you funding your life in this internship?

**[00:49:12] TS:** That's a great question that no one has ever asked. The situation in South Africa, first of all, was lucrative while you were in South Africa. Because the rand at that time, I think was seven to one. It was working every day, blah, blah, blah. When you translate that money, when you actually get back, it's actually not that much money. It's really more about you're going there for the tear sheets. You're going there to prove to the editors in America that you're actually "worthy" of an eight-page editorial in such and such a magazine. Because look, South African Cosmopolitan did this eight-page spread, whatever it is.

What happened when I got back because I had a agency in LA, is I basically said to them, and this is part of the speaking up for myself. I basically said, "I'm not going on anymore go sees. Here's my book. It's direct booking only. Don't call me with a go see. It's only direct booking. Done." I got lucky. I'm sure they thought, "Who does she think she is?" I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to go in go sees anymore. I felt if there's something happening, where I can walk in and get the job, because someone knows me, then great. The process of putting yourself constantly in front of someone to judge you. I mean, I literally had someone tell me, "Oh, your lips are too big. When you take pictures, you need to suck your lips in. You're too muscular. Are you working out?" All these things.

It's literally a litany of judgments coming all the time. I got lucky, where I did somehow, I don't even know how this happened again, but I got a commercial campaign for Nestea, that this director, Peter Care was directing. That was a direct booking. I went in and I met with the director. Then all of a sudden, there were these couple of commercials. Those couple of commercials kept me in a position, where I was able to live, because I had this little apartment with that was \$350 a month. I could intern and still live off of what I was making from the commercials.

**[00:51:46] LW:** Meanwhile, you're now introduced to the Bodhi Tree bookstore.

**[00:51:50] TS:** You do your homework. I'm very impressed. Yes, the Bodhi Tree. The Bodhi Tree. Yes.

**[00:51:59] LW:** There's a whole scene associated with that. When did you start going to Yoga West?

**[00:52:03] TS:** That's a good question. I discovered Yoga West, probably around '96, because I started doing yoga at a yoga studio around '95, which is the same time that I started working in the film business. The teacher that I was studying with, he was a Kundalini teacher, he, at some point, Yogi Bhanjan, was coming to LA. He said, "Okay. I want to bring the whole class to meet my teacher." We did this pilgrimage to Yoga West. I feel it was '96, or '97. Somewhere around there. That was my introduction to yoga West.

Then I started going to Yoga West after work. There was an agent at William Morris, his name was Eric. One day, I don't even know how it happened that we started talking. He's like, "Oh, yeah. I go to Yoga West too." Secretly, we're in the film business, we're going to Yoga West and doing yoga after, trying to get out of work early, so we can go do yoga.

That was, I feel like the first time where I started to hear a little bit about yogic philosophy, because I was then introduced to Guru Singh. Guru Singh was always reading from the Book of the Golden Temple. It was just a really interesting place to be, where you're hearing these teachings, you're doing these practices, you're having tea afterwards, meeting people who are like-minded. It was one of those classes that where Yogi Bhanjan was actually in LA, where I was getting into my car. I was in a relationship at that time. As I was getting into my car, there was this voice that said, "If you keep practicing yoga, you're not going to be able to stay with your partner." I thought, "Oh. Well, I guess I'm not going to practice yoga anymore."

**[00:54:18] LW:** No, Tracee. That's the wrong takeaway.

**[00:54:20] TS:** It was the wrong takeaway. Back to the question that you just asked about wanting to be married and wanting to have kids, it's like, I definitely want it to be in a relationship. Where I was at that time was that being in a relationship validated me more than following my own truth, which is where more yoga was leading me closer to the truth of who I really was. The relationship was keeping me stuck.

**[00:54:55] LW:** Now let me guess. You were dating your father.

**[00:54:58] TS:** No. Actually, it was the opposite. It was the exact opposite. I'm still friends with the man that I was dating at the time. He was a free spirit. He was a comedian. There was no discipline. It was really about life is a way to be joyful. It's a place to celebrate. His thing was making other people happy. He also wasn't willing to grow. He was very happy being exactly how he was, without wanting, or having a desire. There wasn't an inert desire that had risen to the surface yet, of wanting to grow.

That actually is where exactly what I heard was just, basically, you're with someone who isn't willing to grow. You're seeking. That's all you're doing right now is seeking to grow. You can't be with someone who's not willing to grow. Eventually, it's not going to work.

**[00:56:09] LW:** What happens? Did you go back to yoga?

**[00:56:11] TS:** About five months later, I looked in the mirror at myself, of how I was feeling physically, how I was looking physically, everything. I thought, the magic, the sparkle is gone. I'm going back to yoga. When I went back to yoga, it wasn't long after that, that we split up.

**[00:56:35] LW:** I would also imagine that prior to that point, you were a film producer, who was doing yoga, and then that decision made you transition into a yogi, who was practicing film production.

**[00:56:52] TS:** Yes, that's for sure. I feel like, once I was introduced to the Yoga Sutras, which I found at the Bodhi Tree and I took with me on a yoga retreat and read sutra 136 that talks about this light inside of us that's beyond all sorrow. Being able to read about the eight limbs,

which previously to that had not been introduced. Because before that, it was like, Kundalini Yoga was listening to the teachings of the Golden Temple, but I wasn't really reading anything. This was the first time that I was reading this text that was like this systematic map to Samadhi. Then I was also realizing that wait a second, there's all these other things about yoga that talk about really the lifestyle and how you're supposed to live and your attitudes and your restraints that I need to incorporate. I started to incorporate that into life and into work as much as I could.

**[00:58:04] LW:** Now, you've had an epiphany in the balcony in South Africa. You had an epiphany getting in your car. Now you have two points of references for where your life should go.

**[00:58:14] TS:** There's actually three, because the third one is getting my stuff stolen.

**[00:58:18] LW:** Oh, and realizing you have to leave South Africa. That's three. Did you feel that was all coming from the same place? Had you started identifying, "Okay. That's my heart, or that's my intuition, or that's the universe." Or what were you calling it at that time?

**[00:58:34] TS:** I was calling it more like the universe, this synchronicity. I didn't have the nuanced understanding of pinpointing exactly where that all was coming from. Not at all.

**[00:58:49] LW:** Right. There was a tangible feeling associated with –

**[00:58:53] TS:** 100%.

**[00:58:54] LW:** - with that language.

**[00:58:55] TS:** I knew that it had to do with me being still, especially hearing when I was getting into my car. That to me felt it was directly connected to practice.



**[00:59:06] LW:** You had another one, not long after that. Or, I think it's not long after that, which told you to open up a yoga studio.

**[00:59:17] TS:** Yes. It's true.

**[00:59:18] LW:** You weren't even a yoga teacher.

**[00:59:20] TS:** No. I wasn't a yoga teacher at all. I was a film producer.

**[00:59:25] LW:** And you're black. Black people don't open up yoga studios. And you're a woman.

**[00:59:31] TS:** And I'm a woman. Already, I was black and a woman as a film producer. At that time, I think it was really – I know, there are other people who are producing movies that were black and women. Tracey Edmonds was one of the only people that I was meeting with, that looked like me, and Deborah Chase Martin.

What happened with that is that I was having a massage with my friend, Melanie, who we used to call the crystal healer. We go into her space and she had all these crystals, more crystals than I've ever seen anywhere. She was doing what I now know is Thai yoga massage and mixed with somatic healing. It was very interesting, what she was doing. At some point in the massage, I'll never forget it. She had me over her back. I was in a heart opener and I was over her back. I just had this knowing, just very similar to the balcony moment of all the questions being answered. You have to open a yoga studio.

I thought, "That is insane. I'm in the middle of this career." Then the intellect starts to come in and the intellect comes in and basically says, well, in five years, you should open a yoga studio. Okay, great. At the time, I had been renting this apartment and it was a space that was again, this is synchronistic, because this space was on – it was on Beverly Boulevard, next door to Kings Road Cafe. It had been abandoned for 10 years. Nobody had been there. It was

a commercial space on the street that still had an apartment that had not been licensed as a commercial space yet, so it was still residential.

A friend of mine was purchasing this building. I heard that they were, and I said, "Oh, there's an apartment in this place? I want to go see it." I went. Saw it. I basically said, "Fine, I'm going to renovate this thing and make it an apartment." I'm going to rent the whole place, even the storefront and I started renting out the downstairs to the casting directors and the upstairs was the production office. In the back, that's where I was living. It was perfect. After hearing this and thinking about it, I was like, "Oh, this downstairs place could be a yoga studio. This upstairs place could be a Reiki studio, or something." It was just the thought.

I told one person. I told literally one person. "Oh, I think I'm going to open a yoga studio one day." To make a long story short, less than a year after that, I opened the studio with a partner, with a new boyfriend. We opened the yoga studio. He was actually a martial arts teacher. He was teaching martial arts. Then I was basically hiring all my friends, because at that time, it was right around the time where everybody started doing yoga teacher trainings. I had all these amazing friends that were graduating as yoga teachers.

I was like, "Okay, I'm going to open the studio on donation. We're basically just going to have my friends come and teach yoga." It was a tiny space. It was, I don't know, maybe 25 people could fit in that room. Basically, that was it. I felt the call that I heard was that you need to provide a space for people to practice yoga, that feels welcoming, that is diverse, that is not a place where people don't feel comfortable, because I had been in situations where I was coming to a yoga studio as a black woman and feeling as though I wasn't welcome there. Or having people make assumptions that, "Oh, this is your first time." It's like well, I'm dressed in head to toe in Lululemon, or whatever it is.

I have a manduka mat. Do you really think this is my first time coming to yoga? No. Then part of that ego is like, okay, so now when I roll out my mat and everyone's looking, I have to pop out a handstand, just to let you know that, no. I didn't want other people to feel they had to be in that situation. That was it. We opened up the studio. Because I lived upstairs, every once in

a while someone would call in sick. If it was a weekend and I was around, I would have to go down and teach the class.

I said, "Oh, well. Maybe I should go do a yoga teacher training, because I don't want to be inexperienced. I don't want to take a class from someone who's not certified. Let me go do a teacher training." That was the beginning of the real shift of trying to integrate these two things, two parts of myself.

**[01:04:55] LW:** That's when we crossed paths for the first time.

**[01:04:58] TS:** It is.

**[01:04:59] LW:** I'm just curious, speaking of people with lacking in competence, what was your experience of me as a brand-new yoga teacher? Because I was not confident back in those days. I remember, you took a couple of classes that I taught. It was probably three or four people in the class. Wasn't very crowded. I think, you'd only have two or three – there's only two or three mats in with the studio, but it was really long. It's like a railroad house in New York.

**[01:05:27] TS:** Yeah. It was a long studio. Yeah. It's funny, because I don't remember how I got referred to you.

**[01:05:36] LW:** I think I cold called you. I think I came to the studio, maybe took a class.

**[01:05:41] TS:** That's what it is. Yeah.

**[01:05:43] LW:** I've been teaching at just wherever I could get pickup gigs. I was just looking to get as much experience as possible. I remember meeting you, and my impressions of you was that you were very quiet. You're very serious, not in a serious way, but just you were thorough. You were about the business of doing what you were doing. There's no nonsense.

**[01:06:08] TS:** That's my dad right there.

**[01:06:10] LW:** Yeah. You had your business and you were just doing your thing. I have no idea why you decided to allow me to come in there and basically, practice teaching. What do you remember from those days?

**[01:06:24] TS:** What I remember is that you are sincere. What I remember is that I wanted to have a black man teaching yoga.

**[01:06:35] LW:** Because you and I are probably the only black people in LA at the time, who were in the yoga scene.

**[01:06:40] TS:** Yeah. There's Taj Paxton. She had her studio.

**[01:06:45] LW:** In the Silver Lake.

**[01:06:46] TS:** In Silver Lake. Also, I remember taking your class and feeling like, this class is very athletic. It's a workout. People are going to love the class and they're going to love him. He's got a great smile, great personality. He needs to be here. That was it. It was just that simple.

**[01:07:09] LW:** That's so funny. Because if I were to go back and teach yoga today, it would not be athletic.

**[01:07:15] TS:** No, I know. I don't remember there being any meditative, real meditative qualities in the class, but I remember, this is a good workout.

**[01:07:26] LW:** Were you doing this as a way to make money? Or were you doing it purely as a service to a community of people who felt uncomfortable, or both?

**[01:07:35] TS:** Yeah. It was definitely not to make money.

**[01:07:41] LW:** Vision didn't come with a profit plan to make.

**[01:07:45] TS:** No, it did not. It actually did not make any money, until maybe a few years in. It was really – and I was lucky and privileged enough that I had some disposable income, because I didn't have kids. I was successful in what I was doing at the time. Back then, a space over by Kings Road was not very expensive. I was really inspired by Brian Caste. He was one of the people that once I started practicing Hatha Yoga, I started going to his studio. I know that I could not have gone as many times as I was going to his class and other people who I knew were going twice a day sometimes, if those classes were not on donation.

What I saw in his space was a much more diverse group of people than in any other space in LA, because people were coming from everywhere, because those classes, if you had a \$1, you could pay a \$1. If you had \$20, you could pay \$20. There was no judgment or shame about any of it. He really believed that the universe was going to take care of him, which is also very much similar to the *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*. I really believed that as well. It proved out to be true, that teachers could make money. The studio, I eventually was able to sustain itself. It was good.

**[01:09:22] LW:** What would you say was the most challenging aspect of being a yoga studio owner, a donation-based yoga studio owner during that time in LA?

**[01:09:30] TS:** Well, during that time in LA, what was interesting is that there were other yoga studios that were about seven miles away, which in my mind was far enough away. One night, I was in the yoga studio, the lights were off. I saw someone who used to be one of my teachers, who had a studio that was not – that was seven miles away, do a U-turn in the middle of Beverly Boulevard and pull up in front of our studio and take a schedule. The next thing I knew, I got a call from three different teachers who studied with this person. One of them was on the schedule. They basically said, “Hey, I just got a call. I can't teach at your studio anymore. There's going to be a seven-mile radius, that if anybody teaches at another studio within seven miles, they won't be able to teach at someone so studio.”

One of the other teachers who was aspiring to teach at that place was told by the studio owner, “If you teach there, you're never going to teach at my studio.” Then one person who was teaching there, who had a very big following, and when I say big following, like 25 people in Divine Motion was a big following. Everybody's packed in. That he wanted her to come and teach and he wanted to make sure that she took all of her students from Divine Motion and brought them over to his studio.

What I started to realize was like, “Oh, this idea of the yoga sutras is not really flowing through what I'm seeing is the business of yoga.” That was very interesting. Then what it meant was, because this particular studio was teaching a very specific style of yoga, that I had to make the decision, I'm not going to be offering that style of yoga, because I'm putting my business in jeopardy of losing teachers, the moment they have a following, even though my intention is to give teachers, especially new teachers a place to flourish, a place to grow without being dogmatic.

It's like, we had teachers that were teaching all different styles of yoga. That there was really something for everybody, was the whole idea. That was really challenging to see how the yoga community at that time was not interested in coming together and supporting one another, but many of them were interested in competition. Then there were other studio owners, like Taj Paxton, who I would go to her studio and I would teach a class, or a workshop. Then we would also talk about different ideas and what was going on in our businesses. It was just really a very interesting time.

**[01:12:38] LW:** remember back when I was teaching yoga, relationships always presented a curveball, because you could be one way in your relationship, but then you're in the class teaching people these yogic principles, a lot of times they align, a lot of times they didn't align. I'm just curious what your experiences were in that regard with relationships and how much your yoga practice influenced any growth, or transformations that you had.

**[01:13:07] TS:** Well, the partner that I opened up the studio with, we were in a romantic relationship. One of the things that I noticed was, I think I ascribed qualities onto someone that I wished they had, that they didn't actually have. That perhaps, they felt as though they needed

to grow into those qualities. It was a struggle, because there wasn't a lot of work that had already been done. I think that there was a part of being able to see that I had already started incorporating these things as much as I could. I made an assumption that someone else had already done the same thing and that just wasn't the case. I learned about making projections onto other people, or seeing someone's potential and being in a relationship with the potential, as opposed to the reality.

**[01:14:09] LW:** That relationship obviously ended.

**[01:14:11] TS:** It did. It ended and that was a very painful relationship, that ended in betrayal. For me, what I thought was betrayal of me, was actually me realizing that I had been betraying myself all along. I had been betraying my intuition, my inner knowing, all in a way to be validated by being in relationship. That really was a huge turning point for me and really stepping into my power.

**[01:14:46] LW:** That's interesting, because I found in my life that when you do listen to your intuition multiple times and then you portray it, it can feel even more gut-wrenching. Because you knew better.

**[01:15:02] TS:** You knew better. You didn't do it. Yeah. I mean, it's exactly right. It's going back to this idea of dimming my light. That's what the core of the relationship. The core of the relationship was that I needed to dim my light, in order for someone else to shine and in order for the relationship to thrive, it was the only way that that relationship was going to be able to thrive is for me to become invisible. That was a betrayal of my knowing. Even when the relationship was over and I looked back at my journals, I actually had written in my journal exactly what was going to happen, as far as the betrayal was concerned.

It was like, part of me knew this is in the field, this is actually going to happen, but unfortunately, because you're hard-headed and you don't listen to your own inner knowing, you're just going to have to learn the hard way. It usually takes me once or twice and then I learn.

**[01:16:06] LW:** Well, in the meantime, you do have teachers. You're studying with Gary Kraftsow, Sally Kempton and Rod Stryker being one of, I think, your primary teacher. What were some of the learnings that you were getting from those teachers that were helping you to navigate those aspects of your life, relationships and otherwise?

**[01:16:25] TS:** At that point in time, Rod Stryker was my primary teacher. The teaching that he brought forward that was really powerful is basically, the teachings which he shares in his book around the four desires, really illuminating the negative bossiness, the samskaras and how they interplay and create beliefs and create patterns and create habits and lessons that we have to keep learning and how to unravel those. The book is a good system. It's a good systematic way of how to unravel those. That was an amazing teaching.

Then, there are teachings from the Himalayan tradition, around the cave of the heart. Those were the teachings that took me from this space of betrayal, to really then going full circle, back to sutra 136. Actually, having an experience of unconditional light, unconditional joy, unconditional love that's always present within us, that is not conditioned upon anything else. It's not reliant upon our circumstances, or around a partner, or another person. That was probably the most significant turning point for me is this experience of betrayal. Understanding how I was complicit in the betrayal myself, of the betrayal of myself. The pattern that started as a very little girl, of dimming my light so that others could shine, because that would make me safe.

As long as I was able to make you shine, then I was safe. Then, also looking at like, oh, I even actually chose a career that was basically me behind the scenes, helping people with their scripts, giving actors their first opportunity, or whatever it is producing. I'm producing opportunities for other people to shine, while I stay behind the scenes and use my creativity, which is something that I have since learned to be able to harness, but to use my creativity so that others could shine. I got to see all of the little ways in which relationships that I had were also based in that same dynamic. It's not to say that you don't want other people to shine, but not to your own detriment.



**[01:19:12] LW:** I guess, what I'm hearing out of that is you want to surround yourself with other people who are good people and have good energy, and I guess, who have tapped into something within themselves, which are not oftentimes the popular people. It's not usually the successful people who are doing that. The story that I'm thinking about with this comment is you produce 30 something films in your career in Hollywood. The last one, the experiment, you did something different that you'd never done before. You and Forest Whitaker and the other producer decided to experiment literally, with the hiring of the crew. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**[01:19:57] TS:** Yeah. I see us in the office right now having that conversation. Because I threw it out there. I was like, let's just see what happens. The decision was really made between the three of us. Anytime that you're making a movie, there's usually a trifecta of the director, the first AD and maybe the producer. Sometimes the producer gets left off to the side. That was our trifecta. It was Forrest Whitaker, Tim Bui myself in the office, in the production office. We were getting all the resumes and headshots and this and that. We just said, we need to hire people based on energy. We don't want any drama on the set. We really want to be around people who have great energy. We're not going to worry about if someone got an Oscar nomination for sound design.

When they come in for the interview, if the vibe feels right, that's what we're going with. That's how we hired everybody. There was literally no drama on the set. At the end when we had the wrap party, which usually the guys from the transpo department never show up for the wrap party. They're basically clock in, clock out. We're done. Everybody showed up. I got so many emails from people saying, this was the most amazing set, the most amazing energy, the most amazing family that was created during this time. It was just beautiful to see how an intention and really sticking with that intention can really shift everything. It was a completely different experience from anything that I had ever done, or worked on before.

**[01:21:57] LW:** Did you have another sign, or intuitive hit from the universe that it was time to leave the traditional filmmaking behind at that point and go all-in on the yoga?

**[01:22:08] TS:** Yeah. There had been several knocks up against the head that had come, which really had a lot to do with integrity. Because anytime you're dealing with lots of money, there's always issues of people and integrity. Essentially, at some point, it's just been like, okay, if I can't be in complete control of what's happening, then I can't work for anyone else. What I did was I left working for other people and I started my own company.

I basically had some projects that we were trying to get off the ground. At the time, they were before their time. I've since seen a couple of them actually being made now, just in 20 – we're doing this to 2021. In 2020, there were a couple of these shows that I had pitched a while ago, almost eight years ago now, that the executives that were hearing these ideas, most of the time didn't get them. Some of the times when they did get them, they were super excited. “Oh, we're going to make a show about spirituality, or about a medical intuit, or whatever it is.” They would take it up the chain, but there were other people who just didn't get it.

I'm happy to see – Sometimes the idea drops down, but it's not yours to do. I feel that's probably what happened. It wasn't mine to do. Then at some point, I was called by a friend who said, “Hey, I have someone that I want you to meet, and they're going to come to your house, and I want to bring them over to your house for a private session.” I was like, “A private session. I don't do private sessions at my house. But okay. This person is somebody I trust, whatever. It's a friend of theirs. Something must be going on.”

He comes over, rings the doorbell. I open the door and it's Marianne Williamson. I meet Marianne. I'd lead her through a yoga session. I'm not quite sure why I'm leading her through yoga and meditation. She at the end says, “Hey, I have this book coming out and I'm going to do a tour with a couple of retreats and I want you to be the yoga teacher.”

**[01:24:29] LW:** She was auditioning you.

**[01:24:31] TS:** Essentially, I was being secretly auditioned. I wound up going to San Diego first with her to do this retreat, for this book that she had. There were going to be about, I think, a 150 to 200 people at this retreat. At that time, it was definitely the most people that I would

have ever been teaching yoga to. I remember thinking to myself, “Oh, there's a paddleboard place right over here,” because we were on the beach. I'm going to teach my yoga in the morning. I'm going to go paddleboarding in the afternoon. I'm going to be relaxing in later and then I'm going to come back at night to finish up and teach the yoga.

The day before the retreat was going to start, she says, “Oh, I just want you to know that you're not just a yoga teacher. You're a co-facilitator here. You are going to be here from morning until night to co-facilitate along with me and another woman named Grace, who is a psychotherapist. Because we never know when someone is going to have their breakthrough. Their breakthrough could happen with you in the bathroom, or with Grace at lunch, or with me on stage. We're a cohesive unit. This is not just about every person having their little bubble. You are teaching alongside me.”

I remember thinking, “Oh, I don't know if I'm ready for that.” That was really the moment that experience of traveling with Marianne and co-facilitating these retreats with her, completely shifted my perception and understanding of what it meant to hold space and what it meant to hold transformational space and what we would now call, thanks to Mickey Scott Bay Jones poem, Brave Space. It was a game changer. That was when I decided what kind of teacher I wanted to be.

**[01:26:34] LW:** Talk a little bit about the beginnings of Yoga nidra and why that specifically out of all of the yoga styles, why you felt connected to Yoga nidra?

**[01:26:43] TS:** Great question. I was introduced to Yoga nidra, just before I did yoga teacher training. It was a extremely profound experience, where I think for the first time, I experienced my own inner vibration.

**[01:26:59] LW:** You didn't you didn't have to wait until the universe is saying you a sign. You could actually create – you could generate that same vibration on your own.

**[01:27:05] TS:** I feel like that's where Yoga nidra leads you. It's basically, you're following prana back to its source at the deepest level of Yoga nidra. I did not know that at the time, because I was young in my practice, but I knew that I was feeling a vibration, a stillness, a peace. Now I know that that was my inner vibration. That was my personal vibration, that is similar, if not the same as the universe, right? If I had known better, because there's many things I could have learned from having the experience of my inner vibration, especially in relationship, but I didn't know. Here I am wanting to know more and more and more about Yoga nidra.

My teacher at the time was Rod Stryker. He would always say, when he would teach us how to teach, "Don't ever just leave people in Shavasana. You need to guide them somewhere. Because now they're ready to surrender."

**[01:28:15] LW:** Shavasana is the corpse pose at the very end of the yoga class, where you're just lying there on your back.

**[01:28:21] TS:** Right. We were learning techniques of guided relaxation as part of our yoga teacher training, without it ever really being named Yoga nidra, or deep relaxation. I always thought, "Oh, okay. This is just how we do Shavasana in this tradition." Then I discovered the blue book. I started reading that and reading from scripts and using those scripts for my classes. Also, continuing to deepen my practice. The response that I was getting from students, almost felt like the Yoga nidra practices were more profound than the Asana.

I had already gathered up enough information and experience to understand that the yoga is leading us to a place where we can be still in meditation. That was always a very important part of my yoga classes. Then to bring in the Yoga nidra as another place to touch into our inner true self, then also have meditation, I started shifting my classes to really be one-third Asana, one-third Yoga nidra, and one-third meditation.

**[01:29:46] LW:** What's the etymology of Yoga nidra?

**[01:29:49] TS:** Nidra. It's commonly translated as the yoga of sleep. As I also understand it, the word nidra comes from two words, ni and dru, meaning void and to draw forth. This idea of to draw forth from the void. If we think about that void, it's really this place of what could be known as the fourth state of consciousness. Waking, dreaming, deep sleep and turia. That fourth state of consciousness that is very similar, the same to as Samadhi. When we think about it, and once I realized this piece, this was also a game changer, is that Yoga nidra is actually a full system of yoga. It incorporates all of the same limbs of yoga that we usually think about when we think about Asana classes.

The Asana, or the Asana in this case, is the pose of Shavasana, a supported posture. We're always going to be bringing awareness to our breath, and then eventually, withdrawing all of our senses into pratyahara. Then of course, during the relaxation, there's some points of concentration where you're systematically relaxing. Then you start to fall into this space of meditation and beyond that, in Yoga nidra. It's actually more accessible to people in general, because it's done in a supine position, or supported position. Because most people, and I know you don't teach meditation this way. A lot of people that are teaching meditation, it feels like the spine needs to be perfectly erect and there's this almost rigidity, or masculine edge around the posture that doesn't allow you to be effortless. Yoga nidra is all about non-doing and effortlessness.

**[01:31:52] LW:** Out of all of the different modalities that are associated with the practice of meditation, why did that resonate with you so much, so much so that you ended up writing the definitive book on Yoga nidra, *Radiant Rest*, which we'll talk about in a moment?

**[01:32:10] TS:** Because it's what we need. Rest is the aftertaste of the practice. Not about taking a nap. It's really about being able to touch in to something that is supporting you, that you don't even realize in your conscious waking state is there. Yoga nidra is really about giving your body permission to go to sleep, your mind permission to go to sleep, while your consciousness stays awake and aware.

My own personal experience has been, is that I've received a lot of awakening from this practice, as well as it has deepened my meditation practice. I feel like, it's a practice that beyond the yoga studio, beyond the meditation studio, it's the practice that you can actually teach in the basement of a church. You can teach it to the military, as Richard Miller has been doing for years now and doing all this research around PTSD and his system called iRest. It's accessible to everyone, because it's something that we're all very familiar with is this idea of resting, this idea of sleeping.

**[01:33:32] LW:** You mentioned that it could be done on an airplane.

**[01:33:35] TS:** Oh, absolutely. I've done it on an airplane. You can be in a reclined position. You can be sideline, if you're pregnant. You can be sitting up against the wall, even with eyes half open. There's so many different ways. Essentially, the two most important things are that you're comfortable and that you feel safe.

**[01:33:54] LW:** Your book, *Radiant Rest*, which is a treasure trove of different practices and rituals and mantras to help people drop into that state, can it be translated easily through reading? Or do you need to be guided by someone on a say, recording, or someone live with you? What would the differences be?

**[01:34:13] TS:** That's a great question. My experience has been that I was first introduced to it being done live with a teacher. Then listening to recordings. Then eventually, I decided to see what it would be like to try to guide myself through the practice. All three of those are available. If you're first starting out and you really just are wanting to make the practice available to you as a spiritual practice, to be able to rest, I would highly recommend listening to the recordings.

It's one of the reasons why with the book, actually come the downloads, so that people can, instead of reading it, they can actually get the download and they can do the practice. If you're a teacher, or somebody who wants to go deeper into the practice, eventually, I believe that self-guiding is the deepest version of the practice that you'll be able to access. Self-guiding requires this unique balance of effortlessness. Also, a little bit of self-effort, to be able to guide

yourself through, which is that consciousness staying awake and aware. My deepest experiences of the practice, or the technique of Yoga nidra has been when I've self-guided myself.

**[01:35:38] LW:** Beautiful. The book comes out in March 2021, on your birthday week.

**[01:35:42] TS:** March 9<sup>th</sup>. March 9<sup>th</sup>.

**[01:35:45] LW:** Right, March, but the year 2021. March 9, 2021.

**[01:35:47] TS:** Yeah, 2021.

**[01:35:48] LW:** Which is your birthday week. I heard through the grapevine that you have a birthday ritual that you do every year.

**[01:35:54] TS:** I do.

**[01:35:56] LW:** Can you talk about that? I think it's really fascinating.

**[01:36:00] TS:** My birthday ritual, I write my own eulogy. I write the eulogy from the perspective of all of the things that I achieved and all of the things that I left undone, which is inspired by one of the practices in Rod Stryker's book, in his workbook for the four desires. It is a really powerful practice to really get yourself back on track, if you've lost track of what you're here to do. It's really starts to put you more in alignment with Dharma. Moves you away from all the things that you've been distracting yourself with and all the beliefs, also.

**[01:36:44] LW:** That's really interesting. Speaking of that, and for those of you who don't know, eulogy is the speech someone will give at your funeral. Obviously, you've had to think about this very Western idea of success year after year when you're writing that. What is the most important thing to me in my life? How are you thinking about that today? What is your idea of

what's the most important thing to do before you transition on? What area of life would that fall into?

**[01:37:14] TS:** Well, the most important thing for me is to share the tools that I've been given, the tools that I've been lucky enough to receive from my teachers that I know are powerful, to help people see where they have these limiting beliefs and that limiting beliefs that they can rise above. Also, for people to be able to be as rested as possible. I believe that Yoga nidra is that tool. It's one of the reasons why I spend so much time training teachers to teach Yoga nidra and to share Yoga nidra. At the same time, I just continue to be a student, all the time of everything that interests me, so that I can continue to deepen my own spiritual journey.

**[01:38:07] LW:** What does a bad day look like for you, Tracee? Because you seem like you're pretty happy most of the time. What brings you down?

**[01:38:15] TS:** Well.

**[01:38:16] LW:** Post storming the capital?

**[01:38:17] TS:** Yeah. Watching the news right now would bring me down. Knowing that racism is a problem that may be more pervasive than people had realized and that it's surprising to people, brings me down. At the same time, I feel like, again, sharing these tools, especially the tools of rest and deep relaxation, are here to help, especially those people who are on the front lines of fighting to make sure that these things change and the people who are on the receiving end.

I recently taught a group of women. This woman from, I believe she was from Alabama, actually, she's a 70-something-year-old-woman. She said to me, "This is the first time in my life I ever gave myself permission to rest." Hearing that from a 70-year-old black woman, who is around the same age as my mom, that was just like, "Okay. I am doing my dharma."



**[01:39:28] LW:** That's wonderful. Final question for you here. If you could go back to your 18, 19-year-old self and give yourself any life wisdom, what would you say to teenage Tracee?

**[01:39:41] TS:** Teenage Tracee would need to hear that she is powerful, and that she's not defined by anybody else's limited idea of who she is, or what she's capable of, or who she should be.

**[01:40:00] LW:** Beautiful. I want to offer a reflection of my own. Normally, when I ask people what their favorite toy or activity is, there will be some theme that emerges through their life. You threw me a curveball with the encyclopedias. I've never had that one before. I'll tell you what's coming through me. I'm just going to say what's coming through me. I'm not going to edit it too much. When I think about encyclopedia and the curiosity that drives one to devour the encyclopedia from A to Z, is you're looking at all of the different expressions of life. Underneath that, though, you're really looking at who am I in relationship to this thing, or to this phenomenon, or to this force, or to this, whatever you're looking at.

It's really the beginnings of a path of self-realization. Because the ultimate discovery is that, underneath all of those things, we're all connected, we're all one and who I am is a lot bigger than I ever, ever thought I was. It's not surprising that your life ended up taking the path that it took, from starting off in this very curious, observant child who was full of wonder and curiosity. I just want to acknowledge you for staying the course in that and for showing up in the way that you've shown up in my life, giving me one of my first teaching opportunities in the yoga, which is what really started my own conscious path and what I'm doing right now.

We could even make the argument that if that hadn't happened, we wouldn't be having this conversation right now. There would be no podcast. There would be no meditation and none of that stuff. I'm just grateful that we crossed paths. I'm grateful that you accepted this invitation to come on to the podcast.

I didn't really know a lot about your backstory, but the more I researched, the more other interviews I heard, I was just so impressed with you and I really hope everybody gets an

opportunity to get their hands on *Radiant Rest* and follows you on social media. Obviously, we'll link everything in the show notes. Hopefully, we'll get a chance to cross paths again in person at some point, when all this pandemic stuff has been sorted out.

**[01:42:20] TS:** Thank you so much. I really am grateful for you. You'll read a little acknowledgement to you in the back of my book when it comes out. Thank you so much, Light. Really, really appreciate being here with you.

**[01:42:35] LW:** Wow. thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[01:42:37] LW:** Thank you for listening to my conversation with Tracee Stanley. You definitely want to pick up a copy of *Radiant Rest*, which is available everywhere books are sold. You also want to follow her on social media @Tracee\_Stanley. She spells Tracee, T-R-A-C-E-E\_S-T-A-N-L-E-Y. Check out The Radiant Rest Podcast on all of the podcast platforms. We'll of course, put the links in the show notes, which you can get at [lightwatkins.com/tunnel](http://lightwatkins.com/tunnel).

If you're inspired by hearing Tracee's story and you have not left a rating yet, that is the best way that you can support this podcast as of now. It only takes you 10 seconds. I'll walk you through it really quickly. Look down at your phone screen, click where it says At The End Of The Tunnel, which is in purple. If you're not listening to this podcast, on the Apple Podcast app, look for a button that says Listen on Apple podcast. Once you get there, click the purple link, then scroll down past the previous episodes to where it says Ratings and Reviews and just tap on the star in the far right and you've left a rating. It's literally that easy. I thank you in advance for taking those 10 seconds to do that.

Also, my next book, which is called *Knowing Where to Look: A 108 Daily Doses of Inspiration* is coming out in May. It's now available for pre-order everywhere books are sold. It's based on those daily inspirational emails that I've been sending out since 2016. If you like those and if

you like these podcast conversations, it's all about inspiration. You're going to love that book. You'll want to check it out as well. Please preorder that when you can. You can go to [lightwatkins.com](http://lightwatkins.com) and you'll find all the links to do that.

Otherwise, thanks again for listening and for sharing this conversation with your friends and your followers. I'll see you back here next week with another amazing story from the end of the tunnel. In the meantime, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of faith and I'm sending you lots of peace and love. Have a blessed day.

[END]