

EPISODE 145

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:03] NB: *I really wanted love and I was willing to do whatever it took to get that, and to be in a relationship where they weren't going to leave me, but it would definitely break me, because I would then be so afraid to leave, because then the emotional conditioning was you're worthless, you're broken, you're never going to find anyone. I empathize with –*

[0:00:25] LW: *Everyone else had left you. Everyone you cared about had left you at that point, so this is one thing you're holding on to.*

[0:00:32] NB: *You're holding on to it for dear life. I remember even in my therapist's office, just full hysterics and saying, 'But I don't know what else to do.' I remember him saying, 'Wow, Neeta. Just look yet where you have come and you can create a whole new life for yourself.' I would still make excuses, because I was in the suck. I was fully in it. That's why I have so much empathy for women who feel like they're stuck in it. I think that's where it comes from. There's that rock bottom and I definitely – that was the rock bottom, because my life was threatened. I mean, he threatened to end my life."*

[0:01:14] LW: Hello, friends. Welcome back to the Light Watkins Show, where I interview ordinary folks just like you and me, who've taken extraordinary leaps of faith in the direction of their path, their purpose, or what they've identified with as their mission. In doing so, they've been able to positively impact and inspire the lives of many other people who've either heard about their story, or who witnessed them in action, or who've directly benefited from their work.

This week, I'm in conversation with someone who has one of the most inspiring stories about resilience. Her name is Dr. Neeta Bhushan. Dr. Neeta is a mother, she's a wife, she's an entrepreneur, and a performance coach to thousands. She's also a podcaster, as well as an author of the recently released book, *That Sucked. Now What?* Which is a real talk guide to help you normalize the messy, chaotic and sometimes crappy human moments that we all face on this beautiful journey called life.

In this conversation, Dr. Neeta and I discussed her own messy and chaotic backstory, where she lost her mom and her dad to cancer and her brother to an asthma attack, all before the age of 19. A few years later, she's got all of the markers of success. She's an entrepreneur. She's married. She lives in a fancy house. She drives a fancy car, but she found herself in a years' long, physically abusive marriage. After seeing the file listing all of the incidents of abuse, even the judge asked her why she waited so long to get out of that marriage. That was her rock bottom moment.

She got herself out. She traveled the world and then several leaps of faith and a lot of inner work later, Neeta started a new life with a new loving husband. She became a mom and she switched careers to help entrepreneurs find their purpose. In other words, she turned her mess into her message. This is really the opportunity for all of us, not to be ashamed of what we've been through in life, but to use that to show others what is possible. Sometimes even just to show ourselves what's possible.

This was a really powerful conversation. I'm super excited for you to hear it. Without further ado, I want to introduce you to Dr. Neeta Bhushan.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:03:52] LW: Dr. Neeta, you're still keeping the doctor in your name, huh?

[0:03:56] NB: You know, it's –

[0:03:57] LW: I saw many podcasts as a Dr. Neeta, guest Dr. Neeta, but you're not really – you're not practicing anymore.

[0:04:03] NB: I'm not. It's interesting. Some people, like my publicist is like, "Keep it in there."

[0:04:09] LW: Oh, for credibility and social proof and all that.

[0:04:12] NB: Yeah. I feel like, when I haven't shared it, then when I do share, they're like, "Oh, wow. Why didn't you weave with that?" It's been very interesting. Then some people just assume that it's like doctor of emotional resilience or something like that.

[0:04:27] LW: They don't know you were a cosmetic dentist.

[0:04:29] NB: If there ever was a thing. I'm like, "Sure, yeah." But yeah, cosmetic dentist, we are. I uproot it to the four years that I did do my homage in dental school.

[0:04:43] LW: You were called Beta as a child. I saw you made a reference to Beta in the book.

[0:04:47] NB: Yeah. It's actually called Be-ta. Be-ta.

[0:04:50] LW: Be-ta.

[0:04:52] NB: Be-ta. There you go. There you go.

[0:04:53] LW: Be-ta, Be-ta.

[0:04:56] NB: Yeah. In Hindi means little one.

[0:04:59] LW: Beautiful. Okay, so your dad is Hindi. Your mom is Filipino. You grew up in Chicago. When you were a Beta, what were some of your earlier memories of activities, or toys, or what were you getting into it? What did you really enjoy?

[0:05:16] NB: Growing up Filipino-Indian, you're forced to do a lot of the traditional things. Dance was a big part of our life for sure. It was Indian classical dancing, and it was also Filipino classical dancing. If you've ever been to, I don't know, in the Philippines, they do the stick dance where you're dancing in between two sticks and it goes fast. I never became a break dancer when I was in high school, but a lot of our friends did, because they were able to dance between the sticks and that's what you did.

Hawaiian dancing was another big one that Filipinos toss their kids in. Yeah, I was a little – I wouldn't say my mom was a dance mom, but we were definitely shuttled in performances and piano was a big part of that. It was busy growing up, definitely.

[0:06:11] LW: When did Mario Kart come into the picture?

[0:06:14] NB: Mario Kart was a little older. Yeah. First, it was Mario Brothers, like Mario and Luigi, yes, Nintendo. Shout out to back in the day. Then Sonic.

[0:06:23] LW: Shout out to back in the day.

[0:06:28] NB: Then Sonic. I think I was a little too young for Atari. But yeah, it was definitely for me, Nintendo, and then Nintendo 64. Then Mario Kart came a little bit later. I think when my youngest brother came into the mix. Mario Kart was definitely one of those games that I loved.

[0:06:48] LW: Your parents are immigrants, right? What was the immigrant philosophy as young kids growing up in your household? I know, again, you mentioned in your book that there wasn't a lot of vulnerability expressed. You didn't show emotion. What was some of the messaging you still remember from both your parents being around?

[0:07:05] NB: Yeah. I think I only got validated around that time for my dad when I came back winning awards, for sure. It was something that he could brag about to his friends, right? Neeta won X whatever prize, or first place in this. Vinay won this, first place in this. DJ won this, or their dance troupe won this. It was a very proud and legacy building and success was a big thing. All –

[0:07:36] LW: Achievements.

[0:07:37] NB: Achievements were huge. Yeah. It's so huge. Luckily, I didn't really participate in the spelling bee, but that's very stereotypical for Filipino-Indian family, especially Indian part. But the sentiments growing up was study hard, no matter what. There's a bully, I remember being in the fifth grade and I came home crying. It was the fifth, or the sixth grade. I came home crying, because I was – I grew up in the city of Chicago. It was a magnate school, but it still was full-on

city. I just remember, there were times where you feel unsafe. Yeah, I was getting threatened to get beat up. If somebody's boyfriend was curious about you, or something like that, we were just so racially ambiguous, because my parents were immigrants.

Most of the time, nobody could tell or put us in the box of, are you Asian, or Spanish, or whatever. Half and half. It was, you got a lot of that attention, which also was very prime for bullying, at least in my experience. Yeah, I remember coming home crying to my parents and my dad's just like, "So what? Study." That was it. I was like, "Okay." Study hard. Maybe they won't bully you if you're the top of the class. He didn't understand that at all.

My mom, she definitely worked a lot. I didn't really get to see her as much. My dad was definitely one that was home with us, because his office was very close to our house. He usually did that noon, evening routine with us. He was that emotional support. But it was very tough love.

[0:09:21] LW: What was your impression of their union, your mom and your dad when you were a kid? They seem like they're in love?

[0:09:27] NB: They were in love. I mean, it was definitely a love marriage for sure. My dad, and coming from a very different background than my mom, Filipinos, they're usually matriarchs. They're usually the ones that are very strong and sometimes lean into the masculine more, because they're holding up a household, they're doing a lot. That's just in the diaspora, that's in the culture. For Indians, they're very much a patriarchal society. There's definitely some disagreements there for sure.

I know that they had a loving relationship, but the cultural nuances, the differences, the fact that they both were very – my mom was very strong in her religion. She was Catholic and my dad was very spiritual. He grew up in India during a time where the partition happened five years after he was born. They really loved spirituality more than anything else. I think that he grew up going to the mandir, the Hindu temple and the gurdwara, the Sikh temple, because he was born in Punjab. Yeah, so he just had a very different way of tuning back into himself, but that was one of the initial places where I would learn about spirituality was literally through him.

[0:10:50] LW: Was there a little altar set up in your living room?

[0:10:52] NB: Oh, yeah. We had an altar set up, actually. Well, it's interesting, because if you've ever watched the movie *Coco* and *Coco* is very Catholic, but it's a Pixar movie about how they celebrate the day of the dead and Día de los Muertos, and how they have the altar set up for all of the family members that have passed away. Well, we had two altars. One for my Filipino side and my mom had my great grandfather and all of the ancestors there. Very much is so similar to that movie.

Then you would every year, around the day of the dead, or all Saints Day, the Catholic holiday, you would put offerings and food. But then you would go into the master bedroom of my parents and there was a huge altar, like a Pooja altar where my dad would have his mala beads and then he'd have his Agarbatti, the incense sticks and all of the deities, like Ganesha and Krishna. He was a big Hare Krishna guy, just because in Chicago, that was the only temple back in the 80s. That's where they got married. It was five minutes from our house, but that's where we grew up, chanting Hare Krishna. Yeah, that was a big part.

He was a very big advocate of, you can go to all of these different houses of worship, but make sure you just have your own. Even as I've gotten older, and especially through some of my dark times, I definitely would carry a tiny little altar with me. Whether it was a deity, whether it was a representation and a rock. Now, I've got all kinds of different tools. Even the earlier days, I definitely had something to ground me for sure.

[0:12:38] LW: When you were a kid, do you remember feeling like that was a special thing that your family experienced that other families didn't? Or were you embarrassed if anybody found out that there were all these altars in your house, that your dad used to chant to, or whatever? What was your relationship with that, with your friends?

[0:12:55] NB: No. I was, again, I grew up in the city of Chicago. All of my friends were either black or Spanish. I was the odd ball, mixed, Indian kid, and it wasn't cool to be Indian back then. I think you just want to belong at that time for sure. That's all you want to do is to fit in. I think, yeah, there was a lot of denying of what I was. There was a lot of denying of the practices, because we didn't have that much of a Filipino or Indian community until we got into dancing

and the dance community, which was very cultural. It's almost like, you had two identities from even within friend circles where, okay, you're not Filipino enough, you don't sing, you don't do karaoke, because I didn't. That's a Filipino joke, because every single Filipino person is an entertainer. Not our family. There was that.

Then there was also the Indian side, where you weren't Indian enough. It felt really interesting growing up in that mix. I feel like, no one's really asked me that. Thank you. That's a very great question. That definitely played a role as to in my childhood, what I was wanting to share, because we would do all of these really interesting, cool celebrations. Diwali was definitely not – They're like, “Wait. Why are you celebrating Christmas in October? What's that?” Now, of course, it's celebrating in all the ways. Yeah, it wasn't like that back then.

[0:14:33] LW: When you were 10-years-old, your mom was diagnosed with cancer. How did she find out she had cancer, or what were the symptoms that led her to go get the diagnosis?

[0:14:43] NB: Here's what I do remember from that time in my life, because during that time it was so chaotic. I just remember my mom finding a lump in her breast. I think she was in the shower. They just went and it was a routine – well, not a routine checkup, because at this point she had found something. Then they confirmed that it was breast cancer. I remember vividly that, and I mean, it's etched in my memory forever, but I remember being 10. I remember, she was going in for her biopsy, or her – the surgery, the mastectomy.

I remember being with my great grandmother, my lola. I had the chicken pox so I couldn't go with them. I remember having the chicken pox in my room and I'm like, everyone left. No one's at the house, because my mom was going through this big surgery. I guess, my brothers didn't have chicken pox at the time, but I did. No one told me anything about having the chicken pox. I'm like, “Why am I itching everywhere?” My poor, great grandmother, she only spoke a little bit of English. She only spoke Tagalog. I'm crying to her and telling her like, “I don't even know what to do. I'm itching everywhere.” All she does is she gives me a bottle of calamine lotion, that pink stuff. She's like, “Rub this on.” Because I think she was probably afraid of getting it. I don't know.

I just remember being so alone in my room and even crying, thinking like, how could they abandon me? I literally felt that that's where that abandonment wound started to come through. It was etched around that time for sure. It was such a pivotal moment. Then when everybody came back, I was like, "Where did everybody go?" Then that's when they said, "Yeah. Your mom has breast cancer and they've removed the tumor." I didn't really understand what that meant, but that would be the journey. It would be the journey of me stepping into a role of then caretaking.

[0:16:44] LW: Well, also a couple of years later with your mom having survived initially, you're out at the mall with your dad and you have a request. This leads to you having your first entrepreneurial adventure. Can you just share a little bit about that experience?

[0:17:00] NB: Oh, yeah. It was limited to 12-years-old and that would have put me in sixth grade, or something like that. Yeah, I remember at this point, my mom was in remission between when I was 12 and 14. I remember going to the mall, because that's what you did. It was Water Tower Mall, limited to, was the store and I passed through – yeah, I feel like we grew up the same time. I passed through that mall and I was like, glittery blue jeans. It was the jeans that had the rip on them, but it was glitter all the way through. I'm like, "Oh, my God. I need to have these jeans." I'm like, "Pa, can we do this? Can I get these? I promise, I won't ask for anything again." He's like, "No. No, you can't." It was a flat-out no.

I was so bummed, because I'm like, "It would make me the coolest girl in the sixth grade. Can I just have it?" He's like, "When you grow up and you make your own money, you can buy your own clothes. Right now, you have so many clothes." I just remember, I felt so defeated. I felt like, "Oh, gosh. He's not listening to me. This is so important." I remember going home and going in my room. I was determined, because I wanted those blue jeans and I wanted those blue jeans so bad. I started. I took my journal. Shout out to the journals that had the little locket and key back in the day. Well, I don't know if you kept a journal, but I sure did.

I started writing all the ways. I'm like, okay, make my own money. Pa says that I have to make my own money. I said, "All right. Well, how can I do this?" Well, I wrote out how much it would cost. I don't know, I think the jeans back then were 25 bucks, or something like that. I remember, it was a lot of money for me. I looked up my piggy bank and you only have a few quarters in

there. I mean, it's not enough. I started to write down, okay, I can bake goods and I can sell it, because we lived in a high rise. We lived in a building. I can sell it to the women, the elderly people in my building and they'll probably buy stuff.

Then I wrote out, okay, watch my neighbor's cat, because there's somebody on our floor that had a cat. I just started writing all these things. Then I looked at my closet and I see, of course, I wasn't the tidiest person back then. I see clothes on the floor and he said – and I just remember, okay, pa said I have too many clothes. I look and I'm like, “Ooh, okay. Sell my clothes.” I literally – it was the light bulb moment for me that I'm – It was almost like, “I'll show you, pa.” I removed some of the clothes, then I was like, “Okay. This person, I think, would really like this. This person, I think would like this.” I literally put the clothes in my backpack.

The next day, I got to school and I passed notes and I think it was math class, but I said, “Can you meet me in the bathroom during lunchtime? I'm having a garage sale and maybe you might want to get some of these. I'm getting rid of these clothes.” Then a few of my friends, we were all into fashion, because we were very girly girls. I start giving my friends – I'm like, “Try this on.” Lo and behold, I sold two pieces of my clothing that day and it was 5 bucks each. I came home with \$10. I was really, really proud of those \$10 and I showed my dad and I said, “Pa, well, you told me that when I get my own money, I can buy my own clothes.” I showed him the \$10 that I got. He's like, “Beta, how did you get that?” He's like, “Who gave you that?” I said, “Well, my friends.” He's like, “What do you mean?” I said, “Well, you told me I had too many clothes, so I sold them.”

The look on his face, I know he was proud, but he was also like, “Why would they buy your clothes, your used clothes?” It was personal shopping invented before personal shopping became a thing. For those listening, did I actually become part of that being my journey? No. It was actually one of the few things that I tried when I really wanted what I wanted. I ended up getting those blue jeans and boy, did it feel good to put those blue jeans on.

[0:21:23] LW: Well, it changes your orientation, too, I think, as a person, as a young person, because now you monetized everything in your room. You're like, “Wait a minute. What else can I sell?”

[0:21:30] NB: What else can I sell?

[0:21:32] LW: How much is this worth? Was your mom back in her normal routine, or did her initial cancer scare shift her whole life and now she was, I don't know, spending more time at home, or what's going on there?

[0:21:46] NB: Oh, these are such great questions, love. It didn't stop her. It didn't stop her. It was one of those things where when she was in remission – and I think back then, there wasn't as much support for breast cancer as there is now. I think that, no, she wasn't part of a support group. She was still working quite a bit. I think that we were going through some financial troubles as a family, too, because when she got sick, I just remember there was a time where things were chaotic.

I think my mom had to get another job to support the family, because insurance stuff went out and it's one of the reasons why I'm such a big advocate for emotional and mental health, because yeah, she just went back to her ways of doing things. I think that definitely caused a big ruckus between my dad and her, because I think my dad really wanted her to just not be the same way that she was before. It caught up with her, because yeah, that cancer came back.

[0:23:03] LW: Around 15, 16, before you start to experience this string of losses, what was your idea of success? What did you want to be when you “grew up”?

[0:23:11] NB: Being 15, I didn't even know what I wanted to be. I knew I loved dancing and I loved gathering people. I was definitely a gatherer from a very young age, for sure. I think maybe that's part of my Dharma in many ways.

[0:23:30] LW: Had you been indoctrinated in your dad's idea? Like, do you have to achieve and then just keep achieving for the rest of your life, or were you a little skeptical and think, “Well, I don't know. Maybe I'll try some other things. I'll get through this while I'm at home, but then”?

[0:23:44] NB: That part was definitely ingrained. Like, okay, I'm not going to come home with less than an A. I'm going to strive for success. I'm going to do all the after-school activities. I

remember picking up a job when I was 15-years-old. I don't talk about this in the book, but my first job was working for a dentist, Dr. Horbal. You'd like this. I'm not making this up.

[0:24:10] LW: Dr. Horrible. That's his name?

[0:24:11] NB: Yeah, that was his – It's H-O-R-B-A-L. That's how he pronounced it. I was like, “Yo, you could just pronounce it Horbal.”

[0:24:19] LW: Who would ever go see Dr. Horrible for the dentist?

[0:24:23] NB: I'm telling you, I know.

[0:24:24] LW: It's not enough going to the dentist.

[0:24:28] NB: I'm telling you, he called himself Dr. Horrible. It was me at 15. That was one of my first jobs. I would work for him on Saturdays. I know. It's really funny. It's just so comedic. He was this Polish guy, and he really took me under his wing. I don't know how and why he decided to have a 15-year-old work at his office, but I was the one answering his phones and scheduling people for their appointments. I remember, that was literally one of the things that would for sure change my life, because when there was so much of this chaos going on at home with my mom sick, with their financial troubles, I knew that I'm like, okay, I can do something. That meant, “Oh, I can, I can actually entertain these people that don't want to get a root canal on a Saturday morning.”

Most of the people coming in, they were elderly, so they – it was a lot of grandma, grandpa energy. They loved me, because I was so young. Probably like, “What is this young teenage girl doing in this office?” I just remember, I felt so cool not having to work at Kmart back in the day, because that's the other thing that people would do for my age. Yeah, I just felt really professional and that I was actually doing something, knowing that some of the people were coming in and they definitely did not want to see Dr. Horbal. That would cultivate my sense of empathy and compassion. But also knowing that I could leave whatever was going on in my internal world, and I could focus on helping somebody else out.

[0:26:20] LW: Give us a little montage of what happens next from 16 to 19.

[0:26:24] NB: That would be the toughest years of my life. My mom, when she came out of the remission and was diagnosed again, when the cancer came back, it actually spread everywhere. Spread to her lungs, spread to her brain. I would say, the last year of her life, it was pretty bad. She was in a ventilator and she was in the ICU. I mean, things got pretty dark. She lost that battle when I was 16. Then a year later, my brother, DJ, he would be coming home. He went to a rival school from me in Chicago. He would be coming home from the homecoming game. We were going to meet that day. It was literally almost a year that my mom passed on my youngest brother's birthday.

His inhaler, he had an asthma attack and his inhaler wasn't working that day. They could not revive him in the ambulance. They had to rush him to the hospital. He literally had his lungs collapsed over his heart and gave out, and he died immediately. That was a huge shock, a huge trauma to just our entire family. I mean, it sent my dad into full – the heaviness and the depths and the horrific despair of grief and sorrow and loss. I think people in our community just didn't even know how to support.

Of course, you're just at a loss for words. You're like, "Wait." When you go through sudden death versus somebody that you know is diagnosed for something, I mean, they're both really painful, but the latter is even more shocking, because you are just not ever anticipating that, especially because he was healthy. He was my best friend. That was DJ.

Then two years after that, my dad and I, when we were trying to – We were starting to come out of this bubble of grief. When you're in that tunnel of grief, you're like, "Oh, shit. Is this ever going to end?" You have this constant PTSD if you – the phone rings and you're picking it up and you're like, "Oh, God. Is this going to be a terrible home call?" My nervous system was definitely in survival mode during that time. I remember that two years later after that, my dad was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer.

[0:29:02] LW: It's interesting how you guys found that out, by dying his hair for the wedding.

[0:29:07] NB: Yeah. Yeah. It was so wild, because it was like, the universe, gods, or somebody was like, “Hey, you probably want to enjoy the last year of life with your dad.” It was just so bizarre. We were getting out of this. We were going to a family wedding, because that's what you do in Indian families. This was the first wedding that we would actually show up with my dad and my brother Vinay and I, we said, “Okay, let's dye your hair black,” because he had the silver fox hair. We did. We got this box dye and we were so excited that we could do this project together.

Immediately as the dye touched his hair, he started getting this anaphylactic shock, full-on. His face started to swell up. There we went again. My nervous system was like, “Oh, my God.” I had a call 911. The ambulance came. I mean, it was just – it was just a shit show. They rushed him to that same hospital, the same one that my mom was in, and with the same doctors and they said, “We're going to run a bunch of these tests just to make sure he's okay. We're going to do these X-rays. Just like, we're going to do a full body scan.

We're like, “Wait. Over a dye?” I didn't know. I was 18 at this point. I said, “Okay, we're going to say yes to all these tests.” It came back with, yeah. His chest X-ray came back with an inoperable tumor on his lung. He was in the best health and shape of his life. I mean, he smoked for 30 years, but I think after my mom got sick initially, he had stopped. He was just on the road to maximizing his health. He was jogging six miles a day. He was at AOL chat rooms, chatting it up with women across the states. He was doing his thing and he was finally starting to see light again in his life. He just didn't believe the diagnosis.

[0:31:10] LW: Yeah, no symptoms. He felt completely fine.

[0:31:13] NB: He felt fine. Totally okay. He was literally on a mission in his own way to really battle these doctors and wanting to do these kinds of different therapies. Now, again, didn't know about full nutrition. Didn't know about some of these other methods, the Gerson technique, Gerson method, etc. Back then, just didn't know. But in his own way, I think he was doing the best that he could. Yeah. Through chemo, radiation, we did all the traditional stuff. As they said, nine months later and nine months later, he went. At 19, I'm now the caretaker of my youngest brother at 14. It was such a tumultuous time for sure.

[0:32:04] LW: Were you left with a bunch of debt from your parents? All their hospital bills? Did you have their house? Was there a mortgage payment? What happened to all the aftermath and all of that?

[0:32:13] NB: Yeah. I mean, gosh. I don't even share this. I don't think I've ever shared this on any podcast. Thank you for diving so deeply into this. I so appreciate it. Yeah, there was a lot of debt. There totally was. I think, that's probably one of the reasons why I initially went into medicine. People don't realize –

[0:32:33] LW: You can make a lot of money fast.

[0:32:36] NB: Well, I mean, and to also, just I recognize on the other side that there's also a lot of people who you don't even know what happens, how they can afford care and what do you do? I mean, some of the things that I did when I first initially graduated dental school was work for public aid and just the access to care. I mean, that's a whole different story. Yeah. Did my parents run out of medical support? For sure.

I mean, luckily my grandmother, she was a social worker. My lola was a social worker for the state; my mom's mom. She was a caseworker. She knew the trouble that we were in financially. She got us on public aid, which is the food stamps and which is the insurance and which is the stipend, because otherwise, my dad's bills and my mom's bills were definitely enough to put us out of a house for sure.

[0:33:39] LW: If someone passes though, are you still – do you still have to pay those bills?

[0:33:43] NB: Yes, and they can push it on to you. That was definitely in our case. Yeah, I definitely had to grow up so fast in terms of estate lawyers and things like that. We were able to keep our house again, but there were a lot of things that just weren't thought through. They did the best that they could in terms of thinking through all of the scenarios. There was some life insurance stuff that my dad was able to have and my mom was able to have for us.

Again, where my upbringing growing up is like, save, save, save and making sure that you have enough for education, etcetera, etcetera. Even going into college, I took out all loans, or they

were scholarships, or I applied for extended, different scholarships and things. Yeah, it was definitely financially burdensome. But I was always lucky in getting really amazing jobs to support. At one point, I had three jobs. I was a tutor at a very distinct privileged private school that paid really well for a college student. Then I also was working at that dental office on the weekends. Then I was also doing some retail work as well, just to put food on the table.

Of course, my family stepped in. My aunts, my uncles, family friends, my now – I call them my bonus parents, Bua and Uncle Glen. I don't think I would be where I am without what I like to call my soul support posse, which includes a lot of my family.

[0:35:29] LW: When you decided to go to Rome shortly thereafter, you got pushed back from your grandmother and your aunt. Why did they push back? What made you say, “Fuck it. I'm going to go anyway”? In your words, not mine.

[0:35:43] NB: That's exactly what I said though. It was that time in my life, I think I was just done. I was so fed up with where I was. Being 19 and having to go through all of these things, I was just done. I wanted to live a normal life. I mean, there was a dream of mine to go away to college and I never could fulfill that dream, because that's senior year of high school is when my brother passed away and I had to stay home and take care of my family. I ended up going to Loyola University in Chicago, which was a 10-minute walking distance from my house. That's where that was.

I saw, it was like the universe stepping in again, where there was this – at one of the bulletin boards and the social hall at the university, it's like, “Study abroad. Rome.” I'm like, “Oh, yes. Get me the F out of here.” I just knew. My heart was like, “Yes, do it. Apply. Do whatever you need to do.” I applied. I got the scholarship to go. I said, “Here, I just got in and I need to go. I need to do it for school. Do it for dental school.” I remember my grandmother, my mom's mom and my dad's sister, these were the two matriarchs, they were like, “Absolutely not. What are you doing? How can you leave your brother? This is not responsible. Your dad just died. What are people going to think? Oh, my God. You can't go.” I said, “No, I have to go.”

It was just one of those things where I was not going to take no for an answer. My soul needed to leave. Ooh. Yeah, when I got to Rome, that eight and nine-hour flight from Chicago to Rome

and I stepped – and I did not know a lick of Italian. I didn't even know anybody in this program, by the way. It was all brand-new peeps. If you've ever been to Rome in the summer, it's a hub for young people to go study abroad. I mean, that's what you do. I obviously didn't know that back then. But you're with so many people from around the world. That just blew my mind. I'm like, this is what studying abroad is like. I can forget everything that I have ever gone through. I can just totally recreate, create a new identity here.

It just felt like a ton of bricks, just relieved off of my shoulders and just, I felt light. I felt like, “Oh, wow. This darkness is not here. It's not following me.” Just like the same routine, the same things over and over again for that, literally it was like a decade of my life and my most formative years. I'm getting into now, this was the summer of my 20th birthday and being in Rome, boy, that forever would change my life. To this day. Forever, Rome has such a – Italy has such a beautiful place in my heart, simply because of those two months there.

[0:38:59] LW: In the interest of time, we have to flash forward to you practicing cosmetic dentistry. You're married. You've rebuilt your life. You're successful on paper, but it's not all what it seems.

[0:39:15] NB: Yeah. I used my 20s to really prove myself and it started in Rome. It started in Rome where I could create whatever I want, because I ended up there and I could share whatever I choose to share in order to be accepted, in order to not be the weird one. In order to not be the weird girl that has all of this drama in her life. These were the beliefs that I had in my head, or the stories that I had in my head. Very pivotal point in my life, December 31st, 2011, where I thought I had done such a good job of convincing to the outside world that I had made it, that I had this very lucrative practice. It was a seven-figure business. I wasn't even 30. I had 10 people working under me. It was all the ego, the bells and whistles. Every single check mark was box was checked off for me proverbially.

I found myself in – I was married. I had this big dream wedding. I fell in love and I thought that all of those things were going to mask what I was really feeling. It didn't, because I was literally in a toxic relationship. I was in an abusive marriage. December 31st was literally the day that I actually admitted to myself, because I was in such denial, such denial to my family, such denial

to my friends and more importantly, such denial to myself, because I had been now spiritually broken, mentally just completely off, emotionally distraught. Physically, I was in fear.

That would then take me through the darkest night of the soul of leaving haphazardly in the middle of the night. This was New Year's Eve, 2011. Take whatever I could and literally say goodbye to that life.

[0:41:15] LW: You were staring in this mirror and looking at all your stuff that you've accumulated and all that. What preceded that night? Because you also mentioned being in court and having – Your file was stapled together, because there's so many instances of physical abuse. Did something happen? Was there abuse that happened just before you decided this is it?

[0:41:35] NB: Yeah. Oh, yeah. That was the cherry on top. It was the last time I would allow him to strike his fist across my face.

[0:41:43] LW: Did it ever leave marks? Were you wearing a lot of makeup when you went to work? Did people notice at work? Did everybody know, but you didn't realize everybody knew?

[0:41:53] NB: I think that if you had met us, you'd probably know. Just in, again, I think hurt people hurt people, and I'm not going to speak on my ex's behalf, right? It's your quintessential co-dependent relationship, where it's the narcissistic and the co-dependent, perhaps maybe sociopathic. But I really wanted love. I was willing to do whatever it took to get that and to be in a relationship where they weren't going to leave me, but it would definitely break me, because I would then be so afraid to leave, because then the emotional conditioning was you're worthless, you're broken, you're never going to find anyone. I empathize with –

[0:42:41] LW: Well, everyone else had left you. Everyone you cared about had left you at that point. This is one thing you're holding onto.

[0:42:48] NB: Holding on to it for dear life. I remember even in my therapist's office, just full hysterics and saying, "But I don't know what else to do." I remember him saying, "Wow, Neeta. Just look at where you have come and you can create a whole new life for yourself." I would still

make excuses, because I was in the suck. I was fully in it. That's where I have so much empathy for women who feel like they have to be – they're stuck in it. I think that's where it comes. There's that rock bottom and I definitely – that was the rock bottom, because my life was threatened. I mean, he threatened to end my life.

When that happened, I'm like, "Okay, this is serious. We're not kidding around anymore. Who am I kidding?" There I am in this five-story home, where I thought everything led to all the success, but I was so broken on the inside. I'm just so ashamed of what people would think. So ashamed that like, "Ah, she couldn't keep this marriage." Because that was the mentality I grew up. God, did it feel so good to leave.

Yeah, the first few days, the first few initial weeks, that was dark. It got messy. It got so dark. I don't even talk a lot about the details anymore. Everything that you can ever imagine and a tumultuous divorce came out from me getting a restraining order, standing before the judge. I remember the judge putting her glasses down and being like, "What took you so long, honey?" I remember shaking, because I was so afraid at that point of public speaking, because I was not the only person in the courtroom. There was a whole line of other women. Some of them had tiny little kids and I'm shaking, because I'm so afraid of what the world would think. Man, after those words left my mouth, it was like, again, full liberation. Full liberation and full empowerment and agency, and starting to cultivate that resiliency that I talk about in the book.

[0:45:01] LW: If someone had stopped you going into court that day and said, "Hey, Neeta. You're going to one day become a huge wellness influencer and leadership coach and entrepreneur. You're going to be giving talks on massive stages and inspiring all these people over the world." Would you have believed them?

[0:45:17] NB: No.

[0:45:18] LW: You're going to use your story of being abused. You're going to speak very publicly and openly about it. You're going to write books about it.

[0:45:25] NB: You're not going to be shaking anymore like you are right now.

[0:45:28] LW: You won't be shaking anymore. Would you have believed them? Would you have thought it would be possible in a million years?

[0:45:33] NB: No, not in a million years. Not in a million years. I think for whoever is listening, or maybe you have a friend going through something like this, that's where the mess can really be the magic. When we dive into it, when we accept it, it could truly be a lead to your next chapter. I even remember my divorce lawyer, I was such a hot mess at that time. I felt like I couldn't trust anyone.

I went through a lot of betrayal, even in my dental office and things like I said, were really dark for a while. She said, "Neeta, I'm going to talk to you in five years and you are going to be a whole different person." I still remember those words. It was crazy, because five years later, I'm sending her all of these people, because people are coming up to me asking me like, "Who do I go to for my divorce?" It's just so interesting that wow, yeah. It's true. It's true.

[0:46:30] LW: You went through this period of saying yes to everything. What happened? Did you read *The Surrender Experiment*, or how did you get this idea to just say yes and you ended up in this improv class. Talk about that period.

[0:46:43] NB: Oh, man. I think I needed – I was in such a rock bottom state, like zero confidence. Just really in fear. I totally had PTSD that I had to recreate a whole community that I had left. Whole friend circle. I think now you should know that I thrive in community. For me to walk away from that life and all of those people, and I needed to do something completely different. I didn't know what it was, but I definitely dove into all kinds of things. Improv and stand-up comedy were my saving grace.

I remember my one of my friends was saying, "Hey, there's this thing. You should totally go to it." I said, "Well, where is it at?" They're like, "Well, it's at Second City." I'm like, "Second City, that's where people go where they want to be – it's Saturday Night Live. I can't do that."

[0:47:40] LW: Saturday Night Live.

[0:47:42] NB: That's not me. Literally, the greats go there, right? Because it was in Chicago and they're like, "Come on. I think it'd be good for you. Just try it out. Just try one." I remember, I was also reading *The Power of Intention* by Wayne Dyer. That was on repeat in my life during that time, one of my favorite, favorite books, still all time. I feel like he's such a godsend, but he, of course, *The Surrender Experiment* was part of that. Shonda Rhimes, *Year of Yes*. All of those books were just so pivotal during that time. It was almost just like, okay, fine, if it scares you, then just say yes to it. Just do it. Because I was just on a mission to find people that were just so different than what suckiness that I was in at that time.

I did the improv. I said yes to a Bible study group, like hardcore, the non-denominational Christian group. I still, I'm so thankful for that community for the longest time, but then I became the leader of that small group. Then we started talking about all sorts of things. Then that turned into starting a book club, which then that turned into what we would call today, a female mastermind. Because again, I was looking for community.

As my human design as a generator, I just needed to generate these different kinds of opportunities for myself. That meant saying yes to even psychedelic experiences and yes to different kinds of shamans, yes to alternative modes of healing, yes to thought-talk therapy, yes to – Just saying yes. What I was saying no to was male relationships at the time. That part of my life was definitely closed for a while, until I was able to open up myself to love again. I think, I really needed to do the work for myself. That meant looking at – I remember, gosh, one of the books that I read, because I definitely went into the whole narcissistic, co-dependent relationships. There was a ton of books that I was just – I was getting my PhD in that whole field at that time, because I was just obsessed with, okay, how was I co-dependent? What were some of my characteristics? Why did I want that? It was massive self-growth and massive reading. I just became voracious at consuming to literally get out of this time.

One of the greatest things that I still keep today is the time at stand-up comedy, because that, again, legit scared me. I'm like, there's no way. How can you create a joke out of a one line? It just required so much energy and so much thoughtfulness and specificity. Of course, me as a recovering perfectionist, I'm like, "Well, what if they don't laugh at my jokes?" Saying yes to that just blew my mind away, where then I entered a pitch competition. I got into this VC realm of venture capitalists. They were actually putting on an incubator.

I said I would be an angel investor, because they needed women who were also small business owners to advise some of these females who were talking about their startups. I'm like, "Okay, what's a startup?" I didn't even know what that was. They're like, "Well, you have a startup. You started your dental practice." I'm like, "Yeah."

I sat through one of these and that again, blew me to another level, because in each of these instances, I was the small fish. I didn't want to be on Saturday Night Live. I didn't care to be a standup comedian. I didn't care to be a VC. I was not pitching to get money for a startup. I was just there, just saying yes to these opportunities. What started to happen was, I started to say yes to some of the things that I really was passionate about, which was women and girls. Then I started a non-profit. Then that led me to San Francisco and going to the Bay Area and learning from people at the Stanford Business School, because they then ran the non-profit management school, because they're teaching these non-profits how to make money as well.

That blew myself away, because I'm like, "Wow, in medicine and in dentistry, no one's talking about this. No one's talking about failing first." We're all talking about how to be perfect and how to be lauded by the accomplishments that we've had and it's very egoistic in that community, where then you go into the startup community and they're like, "Yeah, I want you to fail. I'm not going to give you money until I see you have some sweat equity, some grit." That then changed my life, because then as I was starting to gain momentum in my non-profit and it was very small. It ended up being something very national and local to these universities. But it really got my foot in the door being around really big giants and titans who was actually saving the water crisis and climate change.

Then I realized like, oh, wow, okay, this is my little tiny little effort here, but I can actually learn from some of these people who are really doing major things in the world. Once they got to know the resiliency and the emotional grit at the time that I was starting to cultivate and talk about as one of my talking pieces for the non-profit as well, that's what would start my speaking career. That's what would really start my advisory into the world of startups and angel investing. Then actually making the hard decision to sell my dental practice and move to the Bay area.

[0:53:56] LW: Internally, what was your mental state like? You've done all this work, right? You've been exposed this whole of the world. Did that help to cure the anxiety, or whatever you felt, or the PTSD that you had been carrying around since you were 16-years-old?

[0:54:12] NB: I think it transmuted and it transformed into, "Oh, wow. Okay, there's something bigger than this." Because every time that I would share my story, whether it was at a high school and many times the speaking was at high schools, or different organizations, and this was before it became these corporate events. Knowing that other people felt solace in hearing my story, it gave more fuel to, all right, this is what we're doing.

It also just activated more of like, okay, I need to do more research on this. I need to do more research as to why we are suffering in our mental health, why in my dental world, our practice was growing at an exponential rate 20%, 30% and I wasn't even there. My leadership completely changed. So many things completely changed when I started to just expand. One of the concepts that I talk about in the book is really tap into your bounce factor. It wasn't until that I was making peace with one of the pillars, which is your upbringing. For me, making peace with my upbringing and really loving the fact that, hey, all of these things happen for me was a huge perspective shift.

Allowing myself to get that support, because that second pillar of building your bounce factor is, how are you invoking good stress and how are you surrounding yourself and looking at your current environment right now, and is it actually supporting you? One of the things that I knew I needed constantly was advisors; advisors, mentors, coaches, healers, people that would take me to that next level in my thinking, in the way that I operated, in the way that I was healing. I honestly prioritized healing, because for a whole decade before that, I didn't even know. I had no idea I became such a wellness and health geek, obviously, because I went through all those losses. I also think that I became really obsessed with alternative modes of healing. That's where it literally took me around the world.

[0:56:46] LW: Let's talk about the book. I mean, you have so many great stories. I wanted to talk about your next marriage and all that, which is put the one you're in right now and your beautiful kids and the birth stories. But you ended up writing this book *That Sucked. Now What?* Obviously, anyone who's heard this interview up at this point can understand how you coined

that phrase, right, based on your own life experiences. For the listener, how do you define a moment of suck? Let's say your parents haven't died and all that, but how do you know you're in a moment of suck?

[0:57:19] NB: Oh, yeah. Well, something that you had thought that was going to go your way, didn't. Maybe it was a breakup. Maybe it was a slight from your friend, or a ghost from somebody that you thought that you were going to go on a date with and they ghosted you.

[0:57:35] LW: Maybe the babysitter ghosted you.

[0:57:37] NB: Maybe the babysitter ghosted, because that's definitely happened to me many times. Maybe the fact that you needed somebody to cover for you and they didn't show up, or they betrayed you. They were talking behind your back and you found out. Or you got a notice in the mail that you had to pay an extra few thousand dollars in your tax bill and you don't actually have the money, because you had to use it to cover your parents' roof, or whatever the case is. It's something that completely caught you off guard that was unexpected. A breakup, a loss, a betrayal from a friend, a slight from a friend. Maybe even something that you worked so hard on, like a promotion, or a gig and you were the next contender and they picked somebody else. These are all moments of suck.

[0:58:31] LW: We've all experienced these and typically, the response is, let me react to it. Let me feel victimized by it. Let me do the woes me thing. What are you offering as alternatives to stay empowered when you're experiencing a moment of suck?

[0:58:49] NB: Embrace it. Embrace the suck.

[0:58:52] LW: How do you do that? Realistically, how do you embrace the suck?

[0:58:54] NB: Yeah. Well, first, I think it's so easy as humans, like what do we want to do? What's the thing that we want to do? We want to bury, we want to distract, we want to escape the suck, we want to avoid that discomfort of the feeling. We pick up our phone, we swipe left, we swipe right, we go on IG, we check our email, we turn on the TV, we Netflix and chill, we go to the cupboard, we get the ice cream out, the chocolate, the wine, the mushrooms, all of the

things. Escapism is such a real thing and we're good at it. We're really good at escaping. What I'm asking you to do is to lean into the suck. Lean into that discomfort. How do you do that? Well, one of the first ways to do that is actually honor the moment.

The only way to do that is to when something happens, it's our immediate reaction to change, shift, bury, and numb. I want you to say, "Okay. Well, that sucked. Now what? That sucked." Even just saying that mantra, I'm giving you an anchor to actually shift and acknowledge, because I'm not saying this sucks. I'm saying that sucked, because we're giving reverence to the thing that happened that we can't control, that it actually happened. Yeah, it was big. We're honoring it. We're accepting our reality. Our reality, you can't change. We can only accept. In that moment, you're actually – that suck is your mantra. You're saying, "Shit, that's big. I can't deny it. I can't deny my humanity and I have feelings around it. What do we do next?"

Well, number two, we identify our emotion. Okay. Well, how do we do that? Well, see what is coming up. What is rising to the top? Are your fists getting clenched, or maybe you start to clench your jaws, or you have tension headaches that you notice, or maybe your stomach is in knots. These are ways where we tend to bury and we're like, "No, I'm good. I'm actually really good right now, but you're clenching your fists. You're just lying to nobody, but yourself." To feel that, to allow it, to allow it. I think some of us, or most of us, we're afraid of being stuck in the suck. We're afraid that if we do allow ourselves to feel that anxiety, to feel that overwhelm, to feel that jealousy, the rage, the discomfort, that we're going to get stuck in it, we're going to get swept away in it. What's the worst-case scenario that can happen if you're stuck in it? Because I've got tons of tools to help you get out to fly forward.

One of the things for people who aren't comfortable in doing this work is you can set a timer. You can actually say, "All right, I'm going to set a timer for 30 seconds. I'm going to whine and I'm going to bitch and I'm going to say like, I can't believe I didn't get this thing. I didn't get this opportunity." Set your whining timer. Have your pity party of one for that minute to feel and allow and process and state out loud. Many times, we have a – it's like the pressure cooker. That pressure is building up and that's where we're tense. If we're allowing ourselves to express and really opening our vocal cords, that vagus nerve runs from our head to our toes. If we're able to say out loud even, opening up our vocal cords in a scream, in a moan, in maybe singing, chanting even, to allow ourselves to center our nervous system. That's what we want to do.

In order to center it, we've got to release it. Some of you might like the fives, that process that I actually talk about. I'm talking about it and three steps right now. Some of you might say, well, actually, no, walking outside works for me, or grounding in my closet where my kids can't find me for two minutes before I start screaming at them, well, I can tune in, that's perfect too. But it's your way of emotionally regulating that feels good. I would definitely suggest, yeah, notice where that feeling is coming first. Take a deep breath. Put your hand over your heart.

We can actually do this. We can be that embrace from a caretaker, coming back from school at 5 or 6, when we wanted the embrace of our loved one. Well, as an adult, you could actually do that. When you're putting your hand to your heart, that's signaling your rest and digest system to say, "Okay, I got this." There's that mind-body connection where we're not ruminating in our thoughts. We're bringing it back to our body.

[1:03:43] LW: What about the now what part? What do you do next? Let's say, you sat in it, you've acknowledged it. Now what?

[1:03:53] NB: The now what can look so different. The now what can be the reality that you create, right? The now what can be completely different, completely imperfect than that suck. It's one of the reasons why, even in my cover, it's depicted so differently. It's to give you the permission to suck, especially if you're doing something completely new, completely scary, completely different than you normally would. The now what can be something completely bold and just giving yourself permission to go in a different direction than you normally would.

In the book, part three of the book is all dedicated to building flying forward past the sucky moments, so that you're not stuck in the suck. That we can climb out of the suck and actually fly forward. Some of the strategies that I talk about when you are literally rising out from the suck is it's going to be wobbly. You're going to feel like, "Oh, my gosh. Am I doing things right? I'm feeling really open right now, because I want to open my heart to love again. But maybe I'm also reserved, because the duality of both of those emotions, the conflicting emotions, they coexist and that's normal." To actually lean into it with curiosity and say, "Okay, I am going to do this."

Have compassion for yourself in that stage because you're creating baby steps. You're not going to get it right. It's going to be messy and embracing the magic along the way is one of the biggest things that I can recommend.

[1:05:34] LW: You are a living example of someone who has literally turned her mess into a very powerful message. I'm curious what you're thinking is around other people going through certain things. Do people go through things randomly? Do you think that the things that we go through that suck, we're supposed to use them in some way as our message? Should we be looking in that direction when we come out of that sucky phase and start thinking, "Okay. Well, I was depressed for whatever, how many years. Should I write about my depression?" What would be a good first step to process and move forward? Or, what's you're thinking about that?"

[1:06:13] NB: Absolutely. In flying forward, which is part three of the book, we talk about the thriving stage. Thriving stage could really look like, how are you alchemizing? How are you integrating all of the lessons in your life? We all have these adventures. Some of us take those adventures and – those messy moments, it becomes our Dharma. It becomes our path to either teach others. We want to do that, because it's giving us life and it's giving us juice. Some of us maybe don't want to do that. Maybe we are inspired by it, but maybe we want to give back in a different way.

It could look like not quitting your day job, but it could look like, maybe finding organizations that you can actually support, that have helped you in that way. You could do it that way. Some people are thinking like, they can mentor the next generation, so that they don't have to go through the same types of things that they did. Or, maybe they're just doing it within their family, so that their lineage can stop the generational trauma from passing through, because now they know better. They've done the work. And/or maybe they're getting checked up even faster and easier, because they know that they carry this medical trait, or disease that they want to make sure that they're not passing it down to their family. It could look very different, right?

Even in my subtitle, "How to Embrace Joy in Chaos and Find Magic in the Mess," that's my invitation to everyone listening, is that maybe some of these circumstances, if we haven't learned what the universe, what source, what that next evolution, that next path for ourselves, what we're really having to do in our lives and if we haven't cultivated that yet, those same

lessons may show up in different ways, different circumstances, different setbacks, different challenges until we start to gain the lessons for ourselves.

I think it is such a beautiful way to encapsulate how we can turn in some of those suckiest moments into magical moments that can really be fuel for other people. Most importantly, fuel for our next becoming, that next evolution of ourself, the next level in Mario Kart, if we were thinking that this life is that game, right? It's like, that first level is going to be super easy. As we do the work, as we do that introspection, perhaps life will throw different kinds of curveballs. That's that level two. Then when you've gone through all of those hurdles, you're ready for that next evolution again. It's going to look different.

In this book, you have a lot of the tools that will not only help you thrive, but it'll also help you when you're falling and going through that stage of falling and embracing that suck moment to actually alchemize even faster into that next part of you.

[1:09:27] LW: Something else that I think is really powerful about your book is that you get lots and lots of case studies of people who you've worked with and who've gone through a sucky moment. You get to see almost from every single angle what different examples of that would be. Just to entice the listener to pick up the book more, if you did a meta-analysis of all your case studies, because you've worked with thousands of people at this point, what would you say is the most unexpected outcome of embracing the suck that you've seen people have?

[1:10:02] NB: Oh, yeah. That they're not so hard on themselves anymore. That I think that if, especially when we're coming from backgrounds where we are not allowed to express our voice, or we're not allowed to share what's really on our mind, or we've been oppressed in some way, or we're the people pleasers and we don't want to get things wrong, well, now they're on the other side, so unapologetic. There's this liberation, there's this freedom that comes from embracing the suck. Because then it's this lightness. It's this levity to – That's why the book is not called *Fly Forward*. It's called *That Sucks. Now What?* It's to literally give grace in the human experience. I think that has been the through-line for everybody who has been able to embrace the suck. I mean, from CEOs to everyday moms, to everyday humans that are, I think, so often, we put so much pressure on ourselves. This is that book that allows you to have fun in the process.

[1:11:12] LW: You still find yourself having a little bit of PTSD around your kid? You have two kids now and your family and the things that you care about.

[1:11:22] NB: I feel like, it's changed now. I definitely, and I think I talk about this in the book as well, the postpartum depression with both of my kids were definitely eye-opening. They were eye-opening, because I know that a lot of moms go into the worry factor. I went into the worrying phase. I mean, that's I feel like, super normal. As a mom, you want to make sure that they're alive and breathing. But I think that for me, it was mostly postpartum rage that came up a lot, where I needed to make peace with the anger that I couldn't actually express when I was a teenager, when my dad got his diagnosis. I couldn't express that rage. I had to suppress it. It just couldn't go anywhere, when I couldn't take care of my kids, because I'm healing and my mother-in-law is here and matriarchs and my family are around to support me and I just wanted to deny everyone's help, because for the first time, those feelings were coming back and I'm like, "Ooh, that feeling felt familiar and I don't like that, but I can't do anything about it."

I think it definitely expanded my realm of emotional capacity, which was very different than going through PTSD of loss. Because it was, wow, I'm taking care of this young person now and I need to really focus in on my own regulation of my emotions and explore what that actually means. Hence, that's why this book was born.

[1:13:02] LW: How are you defining success these days? You've achieved so much and you have – again, on paper, you have the perfect family and all of that. How are you measuring that now?

[1:13:14] NB: Now, I feel like, it's basically the relationships that I've been able to cultivate. I think, it's one of the reasons why I started podcasting. I never thought I was going to start one. A couple years ago, I was in just the thickness of the pandemic and pregnant and all the things. Because I had started one a long time ago and I got so burned out by it, and I remember that my husband was like, "This is what you do. You love having conversations with people." We would just have them. Because we're big community builders, so we'd be like, "Come over." We've said it to you, too. Come over when you're in LA, or whatever. Because that's just how we are. We've been able to amass a community throughout the world.

It starts with relationships and friendships in that way. I think, one of the ways to really go deep with somebody is that one-on-one conversation, which is what we've been able to do in the 90 minutes. I think that's our level of success. I was so thankful this year that we were able to take 16 of our friends to Turkey for a big milestone birthday that I had. I'm like, "Wow, we are able to do this." It just shows that community is just so – it has been literally the through-line from me being 12, 13, 14-years-old to even now. Yeah, and I'm so unapologetic and cultivating those relationships and friendships on a deeper level.

[1:14:49] LW: Final question for you. Do you miss anything about being a dentist?

[1:14:53] NB: Oh gosh, no. No. It's funny when people ask me that, I'm like, "No, I don't." Oh, gosh. No. No.

[1:15:03] LW: That's so interesting.

[1:15:03] NB: It's, yeah.

[1:15:04] LW: I think dentistry is one of the most suicidal occupations, or something, right?

[1:15:10] NB: You know what I loved about it? I'll tell you what I loved about it. I love the human aspect. I love the intimacy, because literally, someone's like –

[1:15:20] LW: Doesn't get more intimate. Well, maybe proctology.

[1:15:21] NB: Just right here. Yeah, yeah. You're close. You're very close. I loved the intimacy. I loved that connection. I did cosmetics, and so, I think that it really shaped the way that they saw themselves and their external confidence, and that was able to play a role in that. But really going deeper, what I really loved was the transformation, right? I didn't really care to do the millimeters of the – I love the artwork around it, but I loved seeing their face when they would see what they looked in the mirror after something was repaired, or you could see their full smile again, or you could see the facial aesthetics being done and that was cool.

I loved building a team and empowering the team and doing team things for the community. Again, community builder, right? I loved getting everybody involved. It was such a small town that we were doing this. It was the suburbs of Chicago. That was what I loved. I still do that. I'm just a different way.

[1:16:24] LW: I was going to say, that you're doing it, you're still doing it.

[1:16:27] NB: It's a different way.

[1:16:28] LW: I say that the best makeup is your smile and you're still doing that. You're taking people's messy, emotional stuff and life stuff and you're turning it into something that's actually beautiful, or helping them to do that. Just want to acknowledge you for, gosh, man, you've gone through so much and you're still here and you're still shining, even brighter than ever. It's an honor to know you and to call you a friend. I look forward to connecting with you all in person again. Next time I come to your city, we'll definitely connect and I'll come on to your podcast.

[1:17:03] NB: Yes. Do it. We'll do it. We'll get you on everyone's podcast when you come out here.

[1:17:09] LW: Awesome. Awesome. Well, thank you again for being so open and generous in your share. Look forward to sharing this with my audience.

[1:17:15] NB: Oh, my gosh. Well, I have to say, you're an incredible interviewer, love. A lot of the questions. Thank you. Thank you for your intentionality and thank you for your light. That's who you are.

[1:17:27] LW: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:17:29] LW: Thank you so much for listening to my interview with Dr. Neeta Bhushan. For more inspiration, make sure to follow Dr. Neeta on the socials. She is @neeta N-E-E-T-A and

then Bhushan is spelled B-H-U-S-H-A-N. Of course, I'll drop links to everything that Dr. Neeta and I discussed in the shownotes on my website, which is lightwattkins.com/show.

If this is your first time listening to the Light Watkins Show, we've got an incredible archive of interviews with many other luminaries, who share how they found their path and their purpose. People like Yung Pueblo, Ava DuVernay, Ed Mylett and many more. You can also search these interviews by subject matter, in case you want to hear more episodes about people who've taken leaps of faith, or people who've overcome financial struggles, or who've navigated health challenges. You can get a list of all of that at the Light Watkins Show, as well as the video playlist which you can find on our YouTube channel, if you just search Light Watkins Podcast.

Last but not least, we also post the unedited version of every podcast inside of my Happiness Insiders online community, which is at thehappinessinsiders.com, for those of you who like to hear all the false starts and the chit chat and the mistakes, because we leave all of that in. Once you get into that community, you'll also have access to my 108-day meditation challenge, along with other challenges and master classes for becoming the best version of you.

Finally, to help me bring you the best guests possible, it would go a really long way if you could take 10 seconds to rate the podcast. All you do is glance down at your device, click the name of the podcast, scroll down past those first seven or eight episodes, you'll see a space with five blank stars. If you found this conversation inspiring, click the star all the way on the right, you could give us a five-star review. If you want to go the extra mile, you can actually leave a written review about maybe the episode, or about how the podcast makes you feel. That would help new people who are coming to the podcast to see what people say about it and it also helps guests who I'm trying to bring onto the podcast to see that, "Oh, people really like this show and they feel very inspired by it." Thank you very much for that. It really does have a huge impact in all ways.

I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like me and you, taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. Until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of faith. If no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. Thank you and have a great day.

[END]