

Ep #73: My Uncommon Story: Tales of a City Girl, the Light and the Dark



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hey, this is a new series where I'm giving you the context behind what I share in this podcast, i.e., what went on in my life to get me here. Think of this as part entrepreneurial mindset building told through stories, part historical nonfiction, and part audacious, salacious, beach read. I hope you enjoy.

You're listening to *The Uncommon Way Business and Life Coaching Podcast*, the only podcast that helps you unlock your next level in business and life by prioritizing your clarity and your own *Uncommon Way*. You will learn to maximize your mindset, mission, messaging, and strategy in order to create a true legacy. Here's your host, top-ranked business coach and reformed over-analyzer turned queen of clarity, Jenna Harrison.

Hello, and welcome back to *The Uncommon Way*, and specifically, these episodes of My Uncommon Story. Where I'm sharing all of the backstory behind the philosophies and values, and even the tactics I talk about in our normal episodes, for those of you who are interested.

So, we're now at the point in this series, where we'll be talking about my 20s, the latter half of my 20s when I lived in New York City. This is the episode where you are going to get a sneak peek into the New York art scene and New York in the early 2000s, which is right when the original *Sex and the City* was airing, by the way.

You're going to hear what 9/11 was like on the ground, and you're going to find out the thing that helped me decide I would never stop searching for my purpose, and really ended my inner debate on that subject once and for all.

Now, I do want to give a trigger warning here. There are some parts of the story about 9/11 that could be traumatic either for those of you who are there, or who have been in some sort of warlike situation. And so, obviously skip that section if it is going to be too much for you.

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There's specifically one point that is a bit graphic, and I will tell you when that is coming up so you can just hit that fast forward by 15 seconds button, and then you'll just skip over that. But I am going to say it just because it's part of my story. There's also going to be really fun parts of this episode, as well, it's not all dark.

So, when we left off, I had just left Spain and I was living at home with my parents. I got a job at a civil engineering firm, that I had worked at in high school, while I was trying to kind of get my thoughts together about my next steps. I spent about six months there, in the Seattle area, where grunge was now in full swing.

Remember, “Smells Like Teen Spirit” came out when I was in college. So, when I was in high school, there was already that movement and that energy in Seattle, but now it was fully commercial and playing on every radio station. I was very much in the heart of it.

But even though that sounds fun and interesting, I was miserable. I don't think I have ever cried so much. Now, in hindsight, I know about this thing called “seasonal affective disorder,” which I did not know about then. And of course, I had just moved from beautiful, sunny Spain, to a very drizzly, dreary Seattle in December. I guess it would have been January.

I'd really left my love, I'd left that lifestyle, and I'd left all the things, so it makes sense. But at one point, my mom finally said to me, “You know what? Why don't you go visit your college roommate in New York? You need to get out of here.” And so, I did.

It was springtime, and by the end of that week I knew I was moving to New York City. Of course, it was absolutely beautiful then in the city. It was very, very warm. I also noticed, that even when we were sitting in a cafe, if I just let my ear pick up on conversations happening at tables around me, they were so interesting. They were so intellectual and high level. This was just the air that you breathe in New York City.

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I, as you know if you've listened to the earlier episodes, I had grown up longing for this, and feeling like I wasn't allowed to be smart, and wasn't allowed to be intellectual. Then of course, I found it at college, I found my people. But I lost it again in Spain. And so, it just felt so good coming back to that.

I came home, told my parents I was moving, and I was going to save up for ... I don't remember if it was three months, maybe. I set a plan. It was like, "I'm going to save for three months, and that's going to be enough to afford the plane ticket back there and maybe a month of expenses." So, I had no money and no job.

You know what? It wasn't three months, now that I think about it. It was one month, because as I'm thinking about this now, I'm like well, why didn't I start looking for a job? It was because I think I only gave myself one month of expenses. I think that's what it was.

And so, yeah, I moved there with no money, no job. My roommate was just beautiful and generous enough to allow me to crash on her couch for one month. That was the plan. And so, that was really my timeline.

Now, shortly before leaving, as fate would have it, some of my friends from high school had invited me to a get-together that was happening at a music venue downtown. While I was there, I met this man named Dave. Now, Dave had grown up in the same town that I had. But he went to a different school. He lived in a different part of the town, so we'd never met. Even though our friends all seemed to know each other. Which was interesting.

He also worked for a civil engineer, and he was moving to New York City to be an artist. He was super-hot. We dated for about a month. He was very into music because, of course, he had been living there the whole time, and as a young adult had been able to move around more in the city. So, I really got into the music scene there and just had some really fun, interesting experiences during that time.

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Then, it was time for me to leave. So, we said we would stay in touch, of course. While I was in New York City, when I first arrived, I was just radiant. You know how when you go from a really dark period in your life, and then all of a sudden, you just feel like you're on top of the world? When I say radiant, I mean that I was just like a shining light.

I was just attracting so many things to me, so many potential job opportunities, and connections with different people. I was like, "Let's go into this club," I'd walk right into the front of the line and go inside, because why not, right? I was just so glowing and just so happy that people, especially in New York, would do a double take and then stop and end up talking to me. I was magnetic.

Even though there were some definite struggles during that time; I was job hunting everywhere, wasn't finding a job, and I couldn't get an apartment without a job. There were interviews, third round interviews, even for roommates. I wasn't even trying to actually rent the apartment; I just wanted a room in the apartment. The rental scene was so tight back then that they could be really choosy.

And so, the fact that I didn't have a job, of course, no one would rent to me directly. Again, because no job. Also, a big one was no rental history. Because I had lived in Spain, then college, and my parents before that, I didn't have a rental history. So, there were no landlords in New York that were going to rent to me.

I started looking at all sorts of random setups. Like, there was this building of kids really, on the Lower East Side, that were all living together in this kind of abandoned building, and they were all sharing bathrooms. I was considering that place. It was affordable.

Then there was another place, I remember, that I saw, right by Gramercy Park. The person brought me in, and I ended up becoming friends with him. He was a bartender, and I ended up working right near there so I would always stop in for a glass of wine. But he was like, "There's your bed," and

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he pointed to the sofa. It turns out it was a futon, that I actually ended up taking into my apartment later on. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Anyway, he had this futon that could convert into a bed. And then he had put up a hospital curtain, where there was a track along the ceiling, and I was supposed to just pull this curtain over. It was literally the size of the bed. That would have been all the room I would have had in this dude's living room. It was, in today's money, over \$1,000.

Yeah, it was just really crazy. But even so, deep down I just knew it would work, but I didn't know how. Right in the very last few days of that month, I found an apartment and a job within just a day of each other. And, they were within a couple of blocks from each other. So, this is really ideal.

The job was using my Spanish to help sell very high-ticket industrial items, like burners and boilers to a market in Central America. So, we were the intermediaries between these large U.S. manufacturers and the Central American market. We would take a cut off of that trade. We're talking about \$200,000 pieces of machinery. That's how we would make money.

The office was right on Union Square. My office literally was right on Union Square, and it overlooked the Greenmarket, the farmers market that would come in. I've told this story in other places, but that is where I say, later on of course, I felt like the fluorescent lights were just sucking the life out of me.

Every day I would look down on this beautiful market as the colors changed throughout the seasons, with the different flowers and produce they were bringing in. I would see people walking around there at 10:30 in the morning, just strolling around at 10:30 in the morning, and I thought, "Who are these people? Who are these people that aren't working a nine-to-five, and how can I be one of them?"

So, the apartment, on the other hand, was right on Gramercy Park. The fashion designer Thierry Mugler... I don't know how you say that... he lived

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in the same building. The fun thing about living on Gramercy Park is if you're in one of the buildings right there, you get a key for access to this private park. Now, private parks used to be all over New York City, they're not anymore, so this was really, really special, and exciting.

The place that I was living in wasn't a whole lot better than Anthony's place, but it was a little better. This woman basically had a bay window, and then there was kind of a shade or shutter that she would pull across.

It was deep enough that it allowed room for a single bed, a little desk, a tiny, little closet, and there was a window. At least it felt like privacy, but there was no actual wall or door or anything like that. I would just move these shutters back and forth to get in and out. But hey, it was a roof over my head.

She was an older woman who lived by herself, and she was really nice and fun. In fact, she's the one that said to me, called to me one night, and she's like, "Hey, Jen, have you seen this show? I think you'd really like it." It was *Sex and the City*, which was in maybe its second season. I think it was in its second season when I was there in New York.

Now, shortly thereafter, Dave moved. Again, I'm using a different name. But Dave moved to New York City, as well. And so, that was really fun because he opened up a whole new world to me, the art scene in New York and the design scene. We were going to all sorts of gallery openings. I was doing fun things with him.

I knew I wasn't going to live in this place on Gramercy Park forever, so I was still continuing to do my apartment hunting. One of the important things was that I had brought my dog back from Spain. And so, she was currently living with my parents, and I wanted to bring her out to live with me.

Now, in the end, I never ended up doing that because I kind of grew up and realized that she would have been inside while I was working all day. She was much better off living with my parents. But I hadn't quite been able to

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separate from her emotionally yet, so I assumed, of course, I was bringing her to live with me.

It was really, really hard to find apartments that would allow dogs and all the things, so I decided I wasn't going to take no for an answer. I decided to buy my own place. Now, that was not common back then. People have gotten braver and bolder, and they would be willing to do things like that at a younger age, I believe. But back then it probably wasn't common.

But I realized it would actually be cheaper, my monthly payment would be smaller, if I could buy rather than rent. It was a time of very, very easy credit. This is before the housing collapse, of course. And I'd be able to have my dog. Now, what it did require, and I don't remember how I found this out, it must have just been the mortgage broker or something who told me, but it required a large amount of credit card maneuvering.

It turns out that at that time, the amount of debt that you carried was far less important than your monthly payment. So, even if you are carrying a large amount of debt, they still assumed you could make your monthly payments, if that was within the tolerance window when they were doing their calculations.

I also needed to save up to have enough for a downpayment. So, I was constantly... Do you know that scene in *Reality Bites*? I don't know if you remember it. Where she needs cash, and so she's using her dad's credit card to pay for gas and then taking people's cash instead. That's exactly the kind of thing that was going on.

Anywhere that I could get someone to give me cash, I was putting it on my credit card. I was building up huge debt on my credit card, doing all the things I could in my personal life to put everything on the card. And over time, over a couple months or so, I was able to start building up this nest egg. Which is so difficult.

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No 25-year-old in New York really... Unless they are making huge money as a stockbroker. New York's just so expensive. No one has a nest egg; we all live hand to mouth.

But I was determined. Actually, finding the place was hard. There was a lot of demand. I remember my boss knew about what was going on, and so... Was I online? Yeah, we must have had the internet. I must have been online, or some paper had just come out or something, and I remember saying, "Oh, there's an open house today," at this place.

Thankfully he was like, "Leave, go there." Because you had to be the first in line and then just basically say, "I'll take it." So, sure enough, I was out there. I was the first one. I was hours before the open house. I waited, and more people came, but I was the first one there. And then, when the realtor finally came and we all walked up, I said I was the first one here.

We walked up five flights of stairs, because this was a fifth-floor walkup in the East Village. Actually, in Alphabet City, which is fully gentrified now, but was not then. Anyway, we walked up to the top, he opened the door, it was just this tiny little box of a studio, but it had amazing light. I just said, "I'll take it. I'll take it." Then we went into contract.

I hustled even harder to make sure that I'd be able to make all the deadlines, and have the downpayment that I needed to. One of the things I was doing was, Dave ended up helping me out with this, I ended up moving in with him for a couple of months to save money on rent.

Here's what was going on with Dave at the time. He wanted to move into a neighborhood where he'd be really surrounded by other artists and be very much in that scene. But he needed a place that was also affordable. And so, he found this little unknown area of Brooklyn called Williamsburg.

I'm laughing, because those of you in the city know that Williamsburg is very well-known now. But it wasn't then. It was this community of mainly Polish immigrants, lots of pierogi shops, and it was very kind of ugly and

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dark. Just a bunch of brick buildings, no decoration, no shops on the street, really nothing like that. It had just started to gentrify, so there were just a few artists that had bought up lofts and were living in the area.

There was one bar, and you knew it because it had a red light outside. That was it, it was like a speakeasy. There was no sign up or anything. I remember when Dave took me there the first time, it was just like, oh my gosh. You open the door, and they had these heavy curtains so you could start hearing this muffled music, but you couldn't really see it. That's where they, of course, carded you.

Then, you pushed open these black, heavy, velvet curtains, you're walking over this black metal walkway, and underneath it they had water filled with black ink. And so, you're just surrounded by this blackness, but it's glistening because of the lights. They had a live band area at the other end. It was this huge industrial space. You had to walk over this kind of little maze thing to get to the bar area.

It was like, who would think that this would be buried here in the middle of nowhere? But it was so fun that he chose an apartment there. And then I got to be like one of the first inhabitants, in terms of the gentrified young, urban kids, artists, people that were moving into that area. Of course, I'm sure that the Polish working-class people did not think it was such a fun turn of events.

I moved into my Manhattan apartment right before my 25th birthday, because I wanted to be able to say that I had pulled this off when I was 25. I was very adamant about how the closing date had to be before my birthday. There were hiccups, of course, as there always are with buying property, but I managed to pull it off.

Really, no one could believe that I had done this, that I had moved to New York with no money, no job, and less than a year later I owned my own place. Even though that burner and boiler job was not the thing that I had

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always aspired to be part of, it paid well. I am just so grateful to have had that. To really land in New York City and set myself up for success.

So, there were a lot of fun things in that period. Of course, being in New York. I remember that first month, when I had been trying to find the job, I'd look at people on the subway just going about their daily lives, and I thought, "Oh my gosh, if I could just be one of them. If I could just be a New Yorker, I would be so happy. I would have made it. If I can make it in this city, I can make it anywhere." And now, I was.

That felt like a huge rush, just to be an adult, really. To be a city girl. To be knowing my way around, and to really be getting deeper and deeper into this New York art and design scene. It was something I hadn't experienced before, or known about before.

This was a time where we were looking at Cindy Sherman's art on the wall, and Damien Hirst was, of course, having these exhibits where he was presenting cows in very weird ways. Dave was very into the Fluxus movement, which was all about decaying organic matter. So, we were looking at lots of melted chocolate.

He actually was doing these really cool things with coffee that then would grow mold on it, which was this beautiful silvery color. You get the earth tones and the silvers. I still have one of his pieces, that I love.

It felt like a hidden world. You would go to this strange, seemingly deserted building in Chelsea, take a freight elevator up to a certain floor, get past the bouncer of course, and just be in this brightly lit room full of all sorts of people you'd never expect to be there, with tons of free stuff to eat and drink.

There was also the dating thing. Because even though we were seeing each other, our relationship kept becoming open. We'd have an open relationship, then we'd close it off and be monogamous, and then go back

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into an open relationship; on and off, on and off. Basically, it usually corresponded to every time I'd get upset with him.

When I'd get upset and I'd decide that he just wasn't putting enough of his side into the relationship, where I wasn't being treated well enough, or something. But I'd be like, "That's it. I want to see other people. We need to have an open relationship."

So, I dated an aide to the mayor of DC, a man from a winery in California, a preppy guy from Chappaqua, where the Clintons now live. They were just fun people. There were parties in the Hamptons, dinner out, and season tickets to the opera. Really living the highlife, and knowing little speakeasies, like I talked about.

There was a place in Williamsburg called Cokie's; you can imagine maybe what's coming. It was, on the front end, a music venue for Cuban jazz. It attracted a lot of working-class Latinos and Latinas. But if you went beyond that, back into the back room, there was a little photo booth thing, you would sit in it, and you would buy cocaine. Then you'd go back out, and you'd be able to do your lines right there.

It was the strangest group of people. Because, like I said, you have this working-class population, you have the artists from Williamsburg, and then you have the stockbrokers that find out about this place and come over from Manhattan. It was a very interesting time to be alive.

It felt like I owned this city. I was deeply in love with New York, and felt like I had found home. But there was a big problem. Well, of course, one of the problems is that all the money flew right out of my hands, as it does with most people living in New York. But the other bigger problem, was not knowing what I wanted to do with my life.

But before I get into that, there's one other interesting story from this time. It's kind of sad in hindsight, but luckily it didn't affect me in that way. I was walking home from work one day, and this man came chasing me down.

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He said that he'd been a block back, he was huffing and puffing, and he came running after me.

He said that he was an Oscar winning writer and director, and that he wanted me to be in his next movie. Now, I think at the time, there was some reason where I was like, "Yeah, I have to go somewhere." As I'm thinking, walking home from work, the only place I would have been going was to a nail appointment. I had get my nails done.

Obviously, I didn't really believe him. But he gave me his card, and he said, "Please, let's meet. I really want to talk to you about this opportunity." And so, I thought about it and thought about it. I figured, what the heck, I can go somewhere public. I'll be safe.

And so, we agreed to meet up at the Royalton. I'd looked him up by then, and seen pictures. Okay, we must have been using the internet more because I was able to look him up. Absolutely, he was who he said he was. So, we met at the Royalton, and he told me about the movie.

It was going to star Leonardo DiCaprio. He was going to be in college. There was going to be kind of a professor romantic interest for him, and also a cheerleader. And he wanted me to be the cheerleader, which no one had ever mistaken me for a cheerleader type before. I was definitely the studious professor type. So, right away that felt off.

But what went on there, in that bar that night, was this almost intellectual battle of wits. Where he wanted me to come up to his hotel room, and I did not want to go up to his hotel room. And so, we argued about it for hours, but in this like...

I can't tell you how brilliant he was, how smart, and how he was able to kind of keep this conversation flowing. How he was able to bring in actors, taking risks, needing to see this side of me, and how we could even keep the door open.

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All the time, I'm resisting this. He's wanting to bring me up there, and he starts getting very graphic, even about being honest about what he would want to do with me when we're up there. I finally looked at him and I said, "You know what? I'm just not hungry enough. I'm not hungry enough to go through this."

When I look back, I always thought I didn't want to be famous. I wanted to be well known and well respected in my field, whatever I was going to end up doing, but I had no interest in fame. You still wonder, though. Would you really, if you were presented with that opportunity?

But then and there, I was like, no, no, not really, not this much. So, that was the end of that story. Of course, it was long before any of the Me Too movement or Harvey Weinstein. I just find it such an interesting precursor for what we know now happens later in history.

Of course, whenever I'd watch his movies after that, I'd always look at all the bit parts of female actors, let alone the leads, and think, "What did they have to do to get there?" Who knows? Maybe that was just his pickup line with strangers. Maybe he didn't actually do that with the actors. We don't know.

But back to what I was saying about how even though my life looked so great on paper, I was really down. There was the relationship drama that was always going on with Dave, or whomever. There was also, I haven't mentioned Paco, my Spanish boyfriend.

We had stayed in touch, but he could really see the writing on the wall with how much I loved New York. He was the one that then ended that, at that point.

There was work drama. Of course, this feeling of having my soul sucked out of me. There was 'what to do with my life' drama. There was 'this isn't how I thought my life would go' drama. I had complete delusions of grandeur.

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I have stories from when I was in first year of high school and writing about our future, where I talked about how I was just going to be the president of some huge company in my 20s and I was going to buy my own island; not saying it's not possible.

But this is because I had really been so different, compared to everyone in my high school. I'd gone after these big dreams, gotten into this fancy school, and I hadn't quite had an opportunity yet to sink into the fact that that might not happen for me.

Maybe I was just a big fish in a small pond, and now I'm just a fish. And yet, here I am in this job where, yes, I was getting paid well and I got to travel throughout Central America, but really, I was a glorified administrative assistant working on contracts. Just an intermediary between different companies processing paperwork, really. Who had no idea what she wanted to do with her life.

Plus, the hormones. Oh my gosh, can we talk about the hormones of the 20s? With, again, no information really. So, just tons of stress, rushing around, poor eating, no sleep, and my hormones were just pinging everywhere.

Around that time, Swarthmore offered a book club for alumni in the area. I joined that. A Swarthmore professor had created the syllabus, and on the syllabus was a couple of Virginia Woolf books, *A Room of One's Own*, and *Mrs. Dalloway*. Then, as a follow on to those, *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham.

I don't know if you've read these, and I don't want to give any spoilers away, but we know that Virginia Woolf, in her own life, was thinking about suicide. And, that comes up in these books. The books are about, especially *Mrs. Dalloway*, is about a woman who goes about the day with everything seemingly wonderful, and what a nice life she has, but for the darkness inside, the deep depression, and pain.

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Reading that really amplified my own experience in the worst way. When I was in Spain, and I went through a period of depression. I blamed a lot of it on Spain and on the life that I had there, my inability to really work and to stand out. But here in New York, I had endless opportunity.

I saw that the problem was me. I had no kind of growth mentality whatsoever. Remember, I'd grown up with either you're smart, or you're not smart. You're good at this, or you're not good at this. So, I read that as failure. I had failed at 26 years old. Well, I must not be going anywhere in life.

This was my first bout of really contemplating suicide. I didn't move forward with it, obviously. I'd decided I just couldn't do that to the people I'd leave behind, my mom specifically. But it was a very, very dark period. I had a lot of people, as I would try to open up about this or talk about this, say things to me like, "But you should be so grateful. I mean, look around you, you have such a great life."

And so, I have such a tender place in my heart for anybody that is a seeker. That really knows something is not aligned in their life, and they're trying to solve what that piece is. I just kept futzing along, kept trying to move forward, day after day. And then of course, escape through drugs or something on the weekends.

This was all, really within just that first year in New York. But it occurred to me that maybe I would be a designer. So, of course, I'm moving in the design scene. I had been in Spain with a lot of jewelry designers, and I had watched them work and admired the craftsmanship.

I decided to pursue a degree in Jewelry Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology. So, I was going to work by day, and of course, getting my degree by night. Computer automated design, CAD work in the jewelry industry had just started. And 3D printers were just being used, just being invented, really, and then just being used for the jewelry industry.

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And so, I was lucky enough to move into that side of design, which since so few people were doing it, it was a very marketable skill. I ended up dropping out of FIT just to study with the professor specifically, who had a foothold in this. From there, from the Fashion Institute of Technology, I also lucked into a job in the jewelry industry.

Now, I wasn't designing. I wasn't working on jewelry, but I was doing marketing for them. And so, I learned a lot about websites and promotion and coming up with creative ways to bring in more revenue and more business.

Plus, I had started my own company, where I would do CAD designs for New York City jewelers. Basically, the reason it was so revolutionary is because in the old days, if you had a ring design and you needed to make all the different sizes of rings for your clientele, you would have to hand make little wax molds in all of these different sizes. And, you'd need to pay a person to do that.

But once you had the design in the computer, the software could scale it out for you. And so, it really was a game changer. There were some other problems that would come out on the other side, but I mean, it was groundbreaking.

So, I realized that this was marketable, and I dreamed of just being able to work from anywhere. Doing this work from Morocco. Again, this is a totally different time. You might be nodding your head, being like, "Yeah, that sounds reasonable post-COVID," right? But this was not anything that people did.

This was, maybe... I don't know, I have this freak genius channel in Human Design, where I just kind of know things. Or it could have just been that I happen to have a knack for seeing the writing on the wall. But I moved through life asking, why not? Why can't I do that thing?

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It's, of course, the question that used to drive my dad crazy. But it served me well at this period. And so, I then reentered a period where life really seemed amazing. I'd decided, maybe life was about just having fun and living each day to the fullest. Maybe we don't need purpose. If I'm bringing beauty to the world, isn't that enough? Beauty, for beauty's sake?

I felt like I had direction and a plan. I loved my city. I had made some great friends. My boyfriend was having more and more success, and that was exciting. He was becoming more and more, I don't know, committed, I guess. More engaged as a boyfriend. And, I was living the life.

I remember during that time, feeling deeply held. Having come through that dark period, and once again, just feeling deeply held. Like I had a very close relationship with Spirit. I delighted in whatever the Universe was bringing me. Whatever interesting person I would meet that day in the little local grocery stores.

I remember, where I lived in the East Village and where I had moved into my new jewelry job, my apartment was on 11th and Avenue A, between A and B. The jewelry job was on the corner of Broadway and Houston. For those of you that know the Angelika theater, we were right on top. They had these beautiful halfmoon windows, that was the floor where we were.

So, it was pretty much a direct diagonal line to get from one place to the other. Meaning, there are endless variations for how I could move on the grid; left and right, left and right, left and right; to then eventually get to my work.

And so, each day I would go to work following the stoplights. I believed they were signs from the Universe. If the stoplight was red here, I was meant to turn left. I would walk until I hit another stoplight, and that's when I was meant to turn right. Stick with me here, this is all leading up to something.

I remember it was Fashion Week, and I felt like I had really hit my stride. It's an early fall, and it's just this period of extreme endorphins. Where the heat

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of the city breaks, and there's Christmas in the air. People have returned to the city from being away for the summer, or on holiday for the summer.

It was Fashion Week, and so all the different boutiques and different designers were having parties. We, of course, had found all the best ones. That was our dinner every night. It was just eating up all their hors d'oeuvres and wine.

We'd start out with champagne at this party and a little apéritif or a little appetizer. Then we'd go on to the other party, and that's where we would have our wine and a main course. And, we'd repeat it the next day. It was a series of different gallery openings and boutiques celebrating Fashion Week.

I remember getting up one morning and just feeling so happy. It was the most beautiful day that you can ever imagine. There were just no clouds. I grabbed a slight little cardigan sweater, and I was so happy and in love with life. I was walking by a little corner grocery store, and someone was calling out, "Did you hear that a plane hit the World Trade Center?"

It just seemed crazy. I continued to walk, and as I walked, I heard little voices here and there and different people talking. At first, I thought it was just a joke, of course. Then, more and more people were kind of buzzing about this on the street.

I got to my work and everyone was saying, "Did you hear that a tourist plane hit the World Trade Center?" I remember saying that to the doorman/handyman of the building, and he was saying, "Yeah, I'm going to turn on the radio." I went upstairs, walked in where we had, again, these big, big windows, full south facing, and there it was. There was the tower burning, with a fireball in the center of it.

You've seen it on TV. I just had a different point of view. We turned on the radio, and we're trying to figure out what is happening. "How could that have happened? Maybe the pilot had a heart attack or something? And

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they, of all the things, coincidentally flew into the World Trade Center? This is such a tragedy, what happened?”

All of a sudden, we heard this noise. It was a very loud buzz, and something shot across the skyline, from right to left, and smack straight into that second tower. It was the second plane hitting the second tower. All of a sudden, all of us knew that this was different. That this was actually an attack.

Somehow, I knew right away that there was a possibility we wouldn't have phone access. I was worried that my parents would wake up and worry about me. So, my first thought really, of course in a tragedy, is your loved ones.

I've told this story before, but I called my mom and stepdad first; the family that I'd grown up with. I called them first, the phone rang and my dad answered; 30 years military; and I said, “Dad, I'm okay, but you need to turn on the TV because we're under attack. They've hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.”

He said, “Oh, okay, thanks for calling, darlin'. I love you.” That was where I got to see his military training kicking in, and the difference in worldview where he could take that information and assimilate it so quickly. Because it was so early on the West Coast, my dad and stepmom had their phone silenced, so I was able to just leave a message.

Then, within a very short amount of time, there was no way to call out of New York City. And so, we sat there heartbroken, just watching the towers burn and praying that as many lives could be saved as possible. It was actually the second tower that fell first. We saw it buckle. We saw the steel expand and then woosh, the whole thing just collapsed. It happened so quickly.

We were absolutely in shock, and we were just praying so hard. By now, the radio is finally up on what's actually happening and giving out this

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information. I think anyone who was awake then was just watching the second tower, and praying for it to stand, as a sign of resilience; a New York resilience.

This is the trigger warning, where you just want to jump ahead 15 seconds. But we were seeing bits of what looked like black pieces coming from the building, which I now believe were people jumping. I realized that the second... When we were starting to get news, the second and third days following. It was like nothing I'd ever seen before.

So, they wanted everyone to return to their houses. We just didn't know what was next. We didn't know if planes would come in and start bombing us. We didn't know if New York City was going to be hit even more. The officials were urging everyone to just return to their homes, and stay in their homes.

I remember just walking home in a daze, stopping to get some groceries quickly, and everyone just not talking to each other. It was just silence. We just all walked like the robots. I went up to my house and went up. I had roof access, so I went up on my roof. I remember smoking a cigarette, which I rarely, rarely did, and sitting there with this full view of smoke. Just smoke coming up where the towers used to be.

The next days very much felt like I was in a war zone. The city was cordoned off from 14th Street and below. Remember, I lived on 11th Street, so I was in that area. To maintain this barricade, there were tanks. Ben tells me now they're not actually tanks, there's a word for them, but they had treads.

They were part of the National Guard that were moved in to protect the city from we don't know what. To see armed guards patrolling Avenue A and 1st Avenue, and all the smoke in the air, you all it was so surreal. Everything was happening in slow motion.

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Of course, we were glued to the TV. But other than that, I remember being so out of my faculties that I was stepping off a curb and someone literally grabbed me by the back of my shirt and pulled me back just as a bus came by.

I remember I would walk over to visit a friend of mine, who lived in the West Village and was further south. So, there wasn't that same militarized environment there, and it felt like such a good getaway. But in order to get to her house, or if she were coming to mine, what we had to pass through was one of the largest hospitals in that part of town.

At this point, in the first days after, everyone that had had a loved one in the tower hoped that they had been brought to a hospital, and just hadn't been discovered yet or were unconscious. And so, you'd see people wandering around with these huge placards. Huge signs with their loved one's picture posted on the sign saying, "Have you seen my loved one?"

It's sad to look back on, and it was just very, very tragic. Of course, all the firefighters that were lost, and the first responders. There were crowds gathered in front of every firehouse. We were laying out flowers, we were donating food. And there was the deepest, deepest love for New York City. There was such a pride and such a coming togetherness.

But I remember not everyone felt that way. My boyfriend Dave, for one, he was deciding if this city was this dangerous, maybe he should go move somewhere else. I felt the opposite. I felt that if I died here, I was meant to die here, because this is my place.

In all of those crazy emotions, somehow, I became very angry with Dave. I don't know, I judged him for being scared. I judged him for being not enough of a New Yorker. It's challenging to look back and really weed all of this out, but that is when I emotionally disconnected from him. We didn't actually break up yet, but it was a period of a kind of psychological separation.

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And, it was really a period of doubling down on purpose. Because I started asking myself, “When the towers fall, what's really important?” That's what tragedies do. They do show you what matters in your life and what does feel important. I realized that I just couldn't make jewelry for my life. That might be fine for other people, but it wasn't my thing. I was not going to settle for anything less than really finding my thing.

Now, in hindsight, I can realize that I was in a lot of shock, cycling through all of the emotions, and it was traumatic for me. But never in a million years did I even think of getting therapy. It wasn't as common as it is nowadays. I know for a lot of people the trauma of that event was in feeling that we could be hit on our own soil. That we weren't always safe.

But for me, it was a surprise, of course, but it didn't feel surprising. In my travels, I had heard from many people that despised or even hated the United States. The way in which it was really traumatic for me, is a belief that when things are going really, really good, watch out. The worst is about to come.

Again, I had grown up with some death happening around me in the pilot community. And so, I was familiar with the tragic brevity of life and the unexpected, but I had never correlated it in my mind with ‘when things get to their best, the worst is about to come.’

And so, I got a deep unsafety with that exhale. With that feeling of, “Oh, things are good.” Now, that felt very unsafe to me, and it led me to seize up many times thereafter, especially in business. When things got good, my nervous system would freak out.

I would self-sabotage in the way of freezing. Maybe I just would stop working on my business. I would stop taking actions that would move my business forward, I think is the better way of saying it. I rarely would stop working on the business.

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Or I would move into fight response by just overworking and staying ridiculously busy, which only pretty much have the same effect because I wasn't really signing as many clients either. And of course, I already had that pattern habit of overwork, too. And so, this just fed into that.

I'd had that pattern from striving to get into the best college, from striving to put money on the table when I was in Spain, from striving to figure out my purpose and get myself to my dream life. And of course, had no tools to manage my brain, or to see what was working for me now, or to lean into any kind of trust.

I really felt like there had been an opening in my world. Like an earthquake had happened and the ground had cracked open, letting in evil. A very dark period was coming forth. Before, everyone was just generally good. After this moment, there was so much evil all around.

I'll go into that more next time, because I did freefall after that. Though, in hindsight, I don't have that same perspective on these events, I do still see it as a big awakening and a loss of innocence. Though, thankfully, not my loss of optimism, because that has returned.

Anyway, instead of getting the help I so desperately needed, some of which I'm only now getting. I mean, I still have a trigger when I hear a certain type of low plane flying with a certain type of sound. I freeze up. But I know that if I had gotten help then right, it might have helped me shave off a decade or a decade and a half of pain. But instead, I just engaged in lots of risky and self-sabotaging behavior, which I will go into next week.

There's one last thing, which is a kind of a fun anecdote. But as the country was gearing up for war in Afghanistan, and there were, of course, protests going on, I remember walking into work one day, and in the inbox for mail, Time magazine was on the top. It had a picture of Saddam Hussein on it.

Somehow, I just knew in that minute. I picked up the magazine, and I said to my coworkers, "Oh, my God, they're going after Saddam." Everyone

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thought I was being ridiculous. They're like, "We are going into Afghanistan. Why are you talking about Iraq?" But I was just cynical enough by then, to really think that when press starts getting planted, I believed, that there was a reason for that. It turned out, there was.

Alright, my friends, part of me wants to leave this on a happier note, but it wasn't a happy time. Instead, what I want to say, is that if you are in a dark period, I feel for you. I hope that you are getting the help that I did not let myself get. Because, friend, deep down, you know who you are. And each day, whether you can see it right now or not, you are moving into the life you're here to create.

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