

Fear Me Out Podcast

Episode 55

Hosted by Clinical Psychologist - Dana P. Saperstein PhD.

Guest Speaker

Mary Firestone – How Tragedy Redefines You

Kim Fauskee 00:00

So as Dana and I conclude the series, at least the initial series on finding herself from within, we welcome into the conversation for this episode, Mary Firestone, who through a tragic event, or occurrences of tragic events, took a long, hard look at her life and how she had lived her life and how she wanted to live it going forward through that process, which was a multifaceted process that involved a multitude of methodologies to get there came a book, and she was an author called *Trusting the Dawn*, which is in the shownotes, if anybody's interested. Mary also has a degree in clinical psychology. So as you listen to this episode, you'll understand why she is very eloquent in describing her past and her journey forward. But I think she is the perfect guest, as I said, in her multifaceted journey to kind of in this initial series, Dana enjoyed that interview. And what did you get from that interview, Dan?

Dr. Dana 01:10

You know, from my perspective, I believe that Mary Firestone is an incredibly resilient person. And listening to her describe how she survived a horrible trauma. And where it took her in her life is a true tale of resilience and commitment to healing. And I have to say that I really appreciate how hard she's worked at healing herself and moving forward in her life. It's very inspiring.

Kim Fauskee 01:34

So not only is this Mary have a fascinating story, which you're going to want to hear but but again, how Mary's process worked and, and what she's doing now makes this a very interesting conversation. So hope you enjoy our little discussion with Mary Firestone.

Dr. Dana 02:02

There are two basic motivating forces, fear and love. When we're afraid, we pull back from life. When we're in love, we open up to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance.

Fear Me Out 02:21

Coming to you from our studio in Santa Barbara, California. This is the theory out podcast. We're not your typical Self Help Program. Our show takes a deep dive into those psychological issues that affect us on a daily basis. We hope to shift your perspective and have you experiencing emotions differently. Now, here are your hosts, Kim foskey. And Dr. Dana Saperstein.

Kim Fauskee 02:44

Before we get started on the important subject of the day, I'm going to ask you ladies: Did you know On Instagram that there's actually an app called get paired. And it is developed by relationship experts suggesting conversations that you should have with your partner, including, if you're on a boring road trip, suggestions of conversations, you can have

Mary Firestone 03:10

different algorithms.

Kim Fauskee 03:13

So there's me so they have 100,000 followers. So there's at least 100,000 people out there that don't know what type of conversation to have with their partner. Wow. Sounds like a business idea. Well, it is a psychology podcast. So I thought I'd start out with that. And our listeners are probably going to get on with the topic of that anyway. Yeah. So anyway, we do have a special guest today. And I am going to introduce her here. Mary Firestone. Not only has a degree in clinical psychology, but she has recently published a book called Trusting the Dawn: How to choose freedom and joy after trauma. So welcome, Mary, thanks for being with us today.

Mary Firestone 04:00

Thank you for having me.

Kim Fauskee 04:01

So I'm going to start. We'll start, we'll work forward. So what was your life like before that morning in January 2018?

Mary Firestone 04:16

Well, my family and I had recently moved here from Los Angeles and we just bought the most bucolic 1890s, farmhouse and Montecito. It was in the perfect school district. Our son had an Oak Grove to play in. And then the Thomas fire broke out, which ravaged most of southern California. So we were evacuated for most of December, and then we only actually spent our fourth night in that house. When the mudslide happened

Dr. Dana 04:50

the fourth night, and the entirety of the removing here.

Mary Firestone 04:54

Well, we had rented nearby. Oh, so we've been in the area for two years. Are you okay?

Dr. Dana 05:00

But the house was brand new?

Mary Firestone 05:03

Yeah. Brand new to us. Oh my god. I've been there since 1890. What could go wrong?

Kim Fauskee 05:09

It's over 100 years.

Mary Firestone 05:10

Yeah, I know.

Kim Fauskee 05:12

So, again, for people that don't know what happened after the Thomas fire here, we had a major debris flow here in Santa Barbara County, that we had a significant loss of life. I think 24 people perished in those early morning hours. And so again, you were living a great life coming up from Southern California. Now living in the Montecito area. Yeah, right. Use

Mary Firestone 05:42

my neighbor, what

Kim Fauskee 05:43

was your neighbor? What can go wrong in the 1890s? House? Yeah. You were married at that time and had I believe a young child, right.

Mary Firestone 05:51

And I was married, and my son was four, and I was pregnant with my daughter at the time. Okay.

Kim Fauskee 05:56

So kind of describe the events of that early morning to us. Yeah.

Mary Firestone 06:02

So as I said, we had just moved in. And I remember that fourth night, I was reading a book on karma. My sister and I, and some friends were in a self help book club, because why not? And went to bed. And for no reason that I'm aware of it. Four o'clock in the morning, I woke up, and we hadn't put curtains in yet. So we had these huge French doors. And there was a massive gas explosion, actually. So the sky was like URI, a beautiful orange color. And because of that gas explosion, I could see and I saw this tidal wave of mud, just hurtling straight forward towards us. So

Kim Fauskee 06:47

you heard it before you saw it before you heard it?

Mary Firestone 06:50

I guess I think, you know, I feel like all my senses kind of collapsed at that moment, but I saw it and screamed at Napper. My husband is like, oh my god, it's a mudslide to get our son who's bedroom was upstairs.

Kim Fauskee 07:05

So it was a great news, by the way.

Mary Firestone 07:06

Thank you. So we started running, and I was right behind him. And yet like I couldn't go after Him because the mud at that point, like the glass doors had collapsed in I was like, up to my waist and mud and folders and glass and furniture.

Kim Fauskee 07:27

So you don't have a second story to to go to or

Mary Firestone 07:31

while my son was on the second story. So that's what Napper went running to go upstairs to get our son and he was just seconds ahead of you. Yeah, and I didn't have time to follow him. It was too hard. So I ran the other way, which was back to my bathroom. And there was a window there and I watched my second story house, the living room and then the children's bedrooms ripped off and twisted backwards. Getting hurtled down the mountain and I think it was like 30 miles an hour.

Dr. Dana 08:04

And your husband and your son were on the second floor.

Mary Firestone 08:08

I thought they were in it. The window literally facing back me was my son Evers bedroom window. So and I couldn't hear because it's a mountainside clearing was deafening. So on one side, I saw that part of the house go over. On the left side was my guest house that my mother was meant to be sleeping in and thank God she wasn't that just went whistling down cars just tumbling. I mean, it was literally like the apocalypse.

Justine Hamilton 08:39

And what saved the bathroom.

Mary Firestone 08:42

It's like, I mean, trusting there's so many like what ifs for me, that so many things had to line up so that we're all still alive. As you know, I've talked to another friend who lost his mother that night. And his wife's wound up very differently. Right? So I don't know. I mean, it was you're

Justine Hamilton 09:04

in this bathroom, seeing these buildings just careening past you thinking that your husband and son are in there,

Mary Firestone 09:13

thinking that they're gone thinking that the part of the house that I'm in is not going to hold? Right Thinking it was like that. I don't know if anyone ever saw that Naomi Watts tsunami movie, but that's what it looked and felt like so I was like, do I jump? Do I like I don't know what I do think God did not do that. But the mud eventually stopped like an inch below my bathroom countertop. And that's where I was for five hours and thinking that I thought everyone was gone. Yeah.

Justine Hamilton 09:45

And was it minutes that all of this the tsunami was happening or it was it?

Mary Firestone 09:50

I feel like I mean, my sense of time was a little shaky. I did have like a little clock on the bathroom counter. Which is how after things settled a little bit, I could mark time, but I would say like, the rain and that it felt like it was like an hour. I don't know if it was, but it was definitely an hour before, or maybe a little more than an hour before I could hear them.

Justine Hamilton 10:18

Okay. And so you're in your bathroom on the counter alone. Yeah, I'm thinking they're gone,

Mary Firestone 10:24

thinking they're gone, covered in toxic mud. And it had sewage in it, it had poison oak in it. Wet pregnant, cold was not like dark as it did get dark. So that's kind of the title of the book too. Trusting the dawn, I was sitting there on the countertop, praying for the dawn so I could see. And then also the metaphor that when we're in the aftermath of trauma can feel really dark and like it's never gonna get laid again. Chin trusting that it will.

Kim Fauskee 10:56

So as you're sitting on top of your bathroom counter, surrounded by three to four feet of mud. What are you feeling? At this point? I mean, was it sheer panic, or was it sheer panic initially, followed by some level of calm? And again, I guess we haven't gotten to the point of whether you knew if your husband and your child were still alive or not?

Mary Firestone 11:18

Yeah, I knew I mean, I would say again, like that night is very. It's like it seemed interminable and fleeting, all at once. And so, I mean, the whole range of emotions like, yeah, panic. Oh, my God. My death was felt very imminent. I thought they were dead. Then, you know, it was like a whole I wave then I had like experiences of definitely feeling a very divine loving presence with me. That's nice. Yeah, and I

Kim Fauskee 11:54

are you a spiritual person, normally or or organized religion type person. So is God been or a higher spirit been part of your life? Before that?

Mary Firestone 12:03

I was raised. I went to National Cathedral School for Girls. I went to like, religious camp in the South. I went to church. Yeah. Okay. So I was raised with traditional religion. And then I would say, by the time like, I was in college, I had become more spiritual than religious. So I've always believed in God and a higher power. And that night, I felt it. You know, I don't know how to describe it. So

Kim Fauskee 12:34

you felt like you weren't alone.

Mary Firestone 12:36

It was definitely not alone. There was like, some kind of presence with me. And when I could calm myself down enough, it was almost like this veil was lifted. I felt like I had glimpses of, like colors. And I don't, it's so hard to put into words, because it was not a 3d experience, but just a feeling of warmth and protection. And then I would see into Oh, my God, I smell gas. I'm going to die. Everyone's dead. What am I going to do? What the hell is my karma? That this is where I am right now. Stuff like that.

Justine Hamilton 13:13

And how long was it before you heard from your husband and son when you're in the bathroom?

Mary Firestone 13:20

I think about like an hour and a half.

Dr. Dana 13:23

What were they doing during that period of time? Do you know?

Mary Firestone 13:26

So they had found refuge in the upstairs bathroom? I guess bathrooms are a very safe place to be in and

Dr. Dana 13:34

run to the bathroom.

Kim Fauskee 13:35

That's our public service announcement.

Mary Firestone 13:40

Yeah, my son had been I guess, maybe the noise had woken him up. So he was standing at the top of the stairs. Oh, wow. Thank God and my Napper grabbed him and brought him into the bathroom where they were. So but again, the house didn't get it was literally like the center of the house. And I'm not sure if it's the plumbing or if it was a beam or if it was just a miracle. And we also had a pool. So I don't know if I like the boulders. I don't know. There again, so many

Justine Hamilton 14:14

he was haunting to see you know, it was I mean, you would drive by it. It was It was so sad. So devastating for so long.

Kim Fauskee 14:23

Yeah, I remember going through that area a couple days later, and then couldn't believe in again, not minimizing the 24 people that did perish that it should have been 224 People that perished just by just by the devastating scene out there.

Mary Firestone 14:39

Yeah, my son's room as you know, ripped in half and so you know, his little bookcase, it was out, like exposed with his little books and toys still on it. It was it was so weird. It would be like on one line, complete devastation. And then like right there, it's like a glass would still be sitting on the counter, you know, yeah.

Dr. Dana 15:01

How did you guys get together once you heard their voice?

Mary Firestone 15:05

Well, we didn't, because there was no way. I mean, I was completely trapped. I kept swinging myself, thank God, I wasn't further along in my pregnancy, I was just about four and a half, five months. But so I would swing myself over the mud to the window cell and kind of crouch there and like scream and assess. I mean, my neighbor's houses were completely destroyed around me, scream for help. And it wasn't until it was five hours later, when I'd seen a firefighter that sometime in the dark that night, but he was really far away. And he was like, oh, we'll be back in the morning. And I was like, what? Like, are you leaping? I don't know if you're allowed to swear on this. Like, are you fucking kidding me like the morning like, like, get back here. But five hours later, the helicopter started to come and pull people off their roofs. And I didn't think anyone could see me. I was screaming and waving. And finally the civilian named Orion Womack came charging through the mud and waiters and was like, we gotta get you out of here. And I was like, Well, wait, no, you're not wearing like an official who are you? And then I'm like, Oh, my God, I don't care and he had lost his dad and a lot, Conchita mudslides. So I don't know if that's what propelled him to get out there. But he got surfboards out of the garage that exploded open and put them on top of the mud and walked me on because he's like, we can't put you in the mood especially if you're pregnant. There's live wires there, sewage, whatever. And then he put me on the back of a firefighter who carried me up the rest of the way. And my name. My daughter's name is India, Orion after him. He's great. And he's actually come to me, where's

Dr. Dana 16:59

your husband on Sunday during this period of time? They had been

Mary Firestone 17:03

rescued, I guess, like minutes, you know, a few moments earlier. I think it was by the firefighter and they were on the hilltop and again, it was like devastation. Hell Yep. Fine. So when it was in my memory, I'm like, Was it an ambulance, I don't think it was an ambulance. It was like a fire truck. That brought us to my sister's house. But then we had to evacuate there. And we were like, carried out of Montecito. And those like, tanks military? Yeah, yes. Because the Yari couldn't drive, right?

Kim Fauskee 17:40

Yeah. And nobody was injured from your side of

Mary Firestone 17:45

Napper had a gash on his leg. I think I had terrible poison oak for weeks because I had been covered in mud. So when the nightmares didn't wake me up. I was woken up by poison oak. And I guess I've kind

of blocked this out but friends and families that I like tons of shards and splinters on my legs, that they but you know, to get out with some splinters and poison oaks pretty lucky.

Justine Hamilton 18:14

So you are just in a state of shock after all of this went down? Oh, yeah. How long do you think?

Mary Firestone 18:20

I don't know. It has been a long time. Yeah, I mean, was it weeks? Was it a month? Was it longer? I don't. Yeah, I mean, cuz I was also having to deal though, because we just lost our house. I had a four year old, we had nowhere to live. And then we wound up living in my friend from college, her dad's like, ridiculously amazing beach house up arrow, because there was nowhere to go. You couldn't rent anywhere. Right? There's so many people had been displaced

Justine Hamilton 18:50

and get anywhere with the freeway being closed for exactly over many days. That was Yeah.

Mary Firestone 18:55

And then I was pregnant too. So I was like, you know, I'm gonna go to doctor's appointments for that. And so I think like, my PTSD stuff was definitely active then. I mean, I had nightmares, I had fear anxiety, I was scared that everything was gonna kill me. And then panic attacks, which actually didn't happen for a while later, I think because I was holding so tightly, trying to get my quote unquote, life back together.

Justine Hamilton 19:27

And how were your friends and family responding around you was like, oh, sorry, but we we gotta get back to life and you'll be alright. And you survived and you're just like, oh my gosh, you don't understand yet.

Mary Firestone 19:41

Luckily, I did not have that experience. Well, it's, you know, certain people maybe, but for the most part, like it was my cousin Andrew, who came to get us from the triage center, and took us to his home and we lived with them for or a week or two weeks, maybe my friends rallied. They're incredible. All over the country in the world and even strangers in Santa Barbara like I'd every woman in Santa Barbara's pregnancy pants. Everyone was like bringing me stuff and toys forever. And so I had a really positive experience, which I recognize for other people that don't have that healing can be a longer harder road. Yeah.

Kim Fauskee 20:33

So let's talk about your postprocess. For you. We talked before we started recording the day that you actually have a graduate degree in clinical psychology, which I'm sure offered some level of baseline and, and knowledge and in terms of, of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and things like that. Had you had anything happen to you beforehand in your life growing up, that you could use as a reference point in dealing with trauma?

Mary Firestone 21:05

Yeah, um, first, I want to say that it was kind of interesting, though, because even though I have the background, and the intellectual understanding, for me, it was a completely different experience living it

Kim Fauskee 21:20

there when it actually happens to you and not somebody else. Right? Yeah. And

Mary Firestone 21:23

even like, the first panic attack I had, I was like, Did I eat something, you know, my, like getting sick? Like, I it took me not until the next one happened that I was like, hold on a minute. I think this is a panic attack. So yeah, I think maybe when it's you, and you're so in it, from my experience, I could recognize intellectually that these things were part of it. A part of like PTSD. But still I know, I was like, I'm just do go on about my business doing my thing. I do think in hindsight, you know, I had some instances of sexual abuse and childhood that I did not I have great parents, but and really smart parents, but I was never brought to therapy. And it wasn't until I was at Princeton, where they have like a free counseling center, that I marched myself right in there. And I've had a therapist ever since. So

Kim Fauskee 22:29

you were well aware of the sexual abuse that happened to you it what age seven, seven. So it wasn't a memory that you blocked out that suddenly by another trauma that occurred,

Mary Firestone 22:40

no, but I will say, in the healing from the mudslide there. It's the. And I know some people someone asked me like, oh, people are scared to begin their healing work on one thing, because then oh, my gosh, maybe you're opening Pandora's box. But the thing is, like, you know, and I've done a lot of work around the childhood stuff. But still, there was like, new, I experienced new healing modalities dealing with a mudslide that I wasn't expecting, like the ketamine therapy. The first image was like the seven year old's experience. So clearly, there was another layer that needed to be cleared and healed. And it was, so I'd rather you know, when people are like, Oh, I don't want to like but it's in there. And it's going to leak out one way or another. So when we rather just heal, I would.

Kim Fauskee 23:34

So. So you had it, you had a very good upbringing, you had you were victimized as a young person. Yeah, seems like you've dealt with that or dealt with it as much as you could at the time that you dealt with it. And then later on through college, it reappeared again, during this latest trauma that you have. So how drastically did your life shift after the mudslide and surviving that?

Mary Firestone 24:05

Um, I mean, my life has completely changed, I think. And this is what I talked about in the book a lot. And what I want to offer people that go through trauma, that through the healing of it, like anytime, for me, and I know, Dana, this is not the maybe technical definition of trauma, which I do give a technical one in the book. But for me, the more and more I talk about it, and think about it and talk to other survivors, trauma is anytime when our mortality is pressed right up against us, because I mean, the only sure thing we know about living is that we're all going to die. And yet we don't think about it or talk

about it. And we spend a lot of our lives avoiding it. So when we are brought up against that reality through our own near death experience or someone else's, or anytime we feel like we're not going to survive. That, to me, is like, that's when I talk about trauma being a gift. And I don't mean, obviously, that the trauma is the gift. But what for me, what I found in my healing, and in talking to other survivors from all different kinds of trauma, is that the gift lies in the recognition of how fragile life is so that we stop wasting our time on the bullshit. And like really focus on living and being present and connecting to each other more to this amazing world more. So, feel like it's just a sign railed there. But that is a

Kim Fauskee 25:41

no, no. And I appreciate that. The candidness on that. I think that, you know, we've talked about this on the podcast before and probably multiple episodes where, you know, we kind of follow this linear path in our life that you know, go to college, get married, you have kids become successful, you're happy, you're content or whatever. And then something fuck that up. And it's like, okay, it gives you time to pause and think, have I been living this curated life? That's truly not me. And I'm not trying to put words in, not trying to put words in your mouth. But you know, did that kind of happen to you? Did you have for lack of a better term and Epiphany, like, okay, maybe this isn't the life that I was put on this planet to live, or at least how I felt that I should be living my life.

Mary Firestone 26:34

Yeah. Okay. Thank you for bringing back how life shifted. And I you know, and even what you say Kim, like, fucks it up, like, in a way. I'm like, all the things of fuck it up or make us pause. Now. I'm like, What's the opportunity here? And for me, the opportunity was, you know, I moved now I'm downtown Santa Barbara, near the mission, which I love. And I live around the corner from my sister and I can walk places. And so it's because

Kim Fauskee 27:00

I live there too. Oh, great.

Mary Firestone 27:03

Yeah, it's lovely. So we physically moved. And then, you know, I would say year, it gave me an opportunity to show up for my son in a way that, you know, my parents hadn't shown up for me, I, again, love my parents, I love you both. And you're great. But, you know, I brought my son to therapy. So we have like a very open dialogue around if things are hard or uncomfortable or scary, which I think is really important for kids will for all of us, but and then, two years later, I started I've always been a meditator. I've done Vedic meditation for gosh, long, like 20 years now. But during the beginning of the pandemic, I had read Joe Dispenza's books. And I was like, well, let's try you know, my husband at the time Napper. I'm like, Let's do his online stuff. And he says, in his books, like, be prepared, when you start to do this work, your life may look like chaos. You know, people or energies that are not in your frequency or in alignment will fall away. And literally, I kid you not, it was like, three months later. And I had an epiphany. And it's not likely to happen overnight. But that Napper, and I should not be married, that we had been great friends, we'd been together a long time we had these amazing children. But it wasn't right to stay married. So that was a huge shift. And now, you know, we had a really amicable divorce, and we're great co-parents, and you know, he has a partner. That's great. And, you know, and I have a partner. That's great. So that was a big shift, my work changed everything. Do

Justine Hamilton 29:03

you think any of this would have changed? If the mudslide wouldn't have happened?

Mary Firestone 29:08

I think that it would have, I think it just would have been like a longer, more drawn out process. So yeah, I think it would have I think it was a big catalyst though, right.

Kim Fauskee 29:22

So both you and your husband did Joe Dispenza this program together? Yeah. Did he have a similar PTSD experience to you in terms of what happened and in kind of going through that, that roll call of his life as well of where he wanted to be or what where he wanted to go or was he just trying to get through what had happened?

Mary Firestone 29:46

I mean, I can't speak for him but I think it was much more you know, he's open but it was much more like okay, we survived. Let's get back to that kind of thing.

Kim Fauskee 30:00

which I think is probably in Dana, you can chime in here, which is probably what most people want to do when they've had a significant trauma is trying to get back to normalcy as quickly as possible.

Dr. Dana 30:10

You know, my experience about what you're saying is true. And I will say that there's a couple of things that I think are really important in the face of what you're talking about. Number one is that I don't think that the feelings associated with trauma follow a linear progression. I've met people that were traumatized, I met a man once in his 80s, who was traumatized in World War Two, he never dealt with it, until he got in a car accident in his young 80s. And he ended up having flashbacks to the point where he ended up in the hospital actually believing he was back in World War Two, because he never dealt with the feelings associated with being on the bombers that flew to Germany and dropped all their bombs. What he told me is that not too many people died under those circumstances, but the other planes crashed, landed in England when they came back, because they weren't properly designed. And the landing gear didn't go down most of the time. So they died after feeling like they were going to be safe from who our enemy was terrible, they died because airplanes were rushed to production before they were safe to fly in. And so he just gave up meeting anybody on the airplanes, because most of the time the people died when they crash landed, you know, back in at the airfield again. So it lasted and really, truly, almost 60 years before he had an experience that was fairly dramatic. He was in an RV, or van by himself and flipped upside down. Nobody saw it happen. And he was stuck in the vehicle for days before they figured out where it was. And, you know, he didn't get hurt other than the fact that it awakened all of his trauma that had been living inside of them for most of his life. So I think what's really important for people to understand is that the feelings associated with trauma never go away until you deal with them. And it sounds like you did a lot of work to heal what happened to you. But there was a certain layer that was still living inside of you, that got re stimulated by that feeling of helplessness. And you know, you're talking about the potential loss of life. But I think that there's a lot of

feelings associated with a potential loss of life, like helplessness and feelings of being really alone and scared, and all the different feelings that are kind of going to come up when you're in a situation that is as traumatic as what you have been through. Yeah, the good thing is that for you is that you pay attention.

Mary Firestone 32:34

Well, yeah, and that's something and then an interview that I was just writing this morning, someone asked like, how can people start to claim their power again, after a trauma, and I think that's one of the main things is that recognize, like being in touch with your body and your body's responses, and acknowledging them, right, instead of being unconscious, I think so many of us, and especially after a trauma, the tendency can want to be to, to go up or out of the body. So again, again, the book, I've got, like, all kinds of modalities and tools and ways to to be more present in your body and, and how to deal with those triggers when they come up. You know,

Dr. Dana 33:21

Most people tend to focus on their symptoms, because those are the most annoying reactions to whatever it is that happens. And, sadly, a lot of therapy involves symptomatic treatment. And I think it does people a disservice, because you already feel like there's something wrong with you. And then the therapist agrees with you that your symptoms are a sign that there's something wrong with you, instead of understanding that your symptoms are a form of communication. Yeah, I love that, right. And there are waves of reminding you that there's stuff that you haven't dealt with, right? So it's really important to be curious about, not what's wrong with you, but why your symptoms are ever present and won't leave you alone. Because they're trying to help you wake up to something that's on a much deeper level that you can be aware of, and sometimes people are not aware of it at all. And the difference between people who heal trauma and those who just sort of deal with the symptoms has to do with whether you take them seriously enough to look beyond how they're affecting you on an immediate basis, which it sounds like you've done and then you continue to do

Mary Firestone 34:23

Yeah, I think that's something too. It's like healing is ongoing. I don't think any of us are like he'll checked like, you know, it's like there's always some where else to go and something another way to look at something and that is something you know, I grew up in like the 1980s and like Nancy Reagan just say no era drugs, and it's such a goody two shoes and yet, in the healing from the mudslide, I discovered ketamine therapy which was completely changed my life and And, you know, I think getting to see if you know, thinking about all the different layers that we are like our intellectual rational layer, and then the emotional and then like our subconscious and where a lot of this stuff I think can live. So, for me to be able to kind of go underneath was really empowering and clear it a lot. And

Justine Hamilton 35:25

you think that because you talked about a lot of the different modalities that you tried in the book, and would you say ketamine was the one that really had the most clearing of trauma for you? Um, MDMA sounded pretty big for you also.

Mary Firestone 35:39

Yeah. All the drugs. I know. Sorry. Yeah. I've

Kim Fauskee 35:45

done MDMA and LSD. Yeah. Okay. So in. And I'm glad Justine asked that question, because I wanted to go a little bit more into the ketamine thing, because we are doing a series on psychedelics coming up. And, I've done them myself for the healing of trauma. So I think it's interesting because it's out there. Now with documentaries. It's out there being more publicized now, in terms of people getting through traumas, and in the the issue that I personally have with the information that's been out there now is it's being people are trying to say it's the miracle thing that that's all you need to do now. And I'm saying that's not the thing. It's now it's an augmentation to other modalities that you need to work through the trauma. So can you tell us a little bit how ketamine helped you?

Mary Firestone 36:36

Yeah, I do want to say that I agree with you. i And, you know, to your question, Justine, like, I think it was definitely one thing that helped me, and I'd also been doing a lot of other work prior to doing it, you know, I'd been in talk therapy, I'd done cranial sacral, I'd done EMDR. I'd done a lot of work before I did ketamine and I also want to say too, as it is becoming kind of trendy and all these like ketamine bars are popping up, which I think are missing the point. For me, the ketamine was really profound, because I worked with an amazing psychiatrist, Dr. Jeff Becker, who I love. But you know, we talked prior, like, what are my goals, we had the sessions with the journeys. And then we had integration sessions, which I think integration was something that came up from like, all different kinds of trauma experts to shaman to you know, that's like a big theme is how do we integrate what we see in our honor? Absolutely. It's very important. Yeah, rather than just like, Oh, that was cool. Right now, I saw a gorilla, you know?

Kim Fauskee 37:48

Well, it's part of it because you've done the work already. So you understand that, and I appreciate it from your practitioner standpoint is and we've heard from guests that we had on a couple of weeks ago that do facilitations of these journeys, and they said that's what's missing is that people that haven't done the back work before, have and again, I'm not talking about seeing serpents and things like that, but are but are visualizing these traumas or these past things that happen in life, but now I don't know have what to do with it.

Mary Firestone 38:18

Yeah. Yeah. Well, for me, in my integration with Dr. Becker, you know, the first ketamine session I had. And I'd gone in very intentionally with the mudslide like show me what I need to know. And the first image I had that was coherent was of Mary at seven, with this seven year old man. And but I was like watching it, it was like, depersonalized I felt safe. I felt, you know, warm and comfortable. Just kind of like I was watching the scene. And then all of a sudden, this big gorillas face literally materializes out of the darkness. And first it was like, Ooh, am I scared of this gorilla? And I was like, nope, nope, this is a good girl. And the girl came and scooped little seven year old Mary out of the scene and away from that man. And in talking with Dr. Becker after he's like, okay, yeah, like your fierce gorilla self showed up and is taking care of your seven year old self.

Kim Fauskee 39:19

And this goes back to your sexual abuse. I'm sorry. Yeah,

Mary Firestone 39:23

exactly. So that was empowering rather than like, Oh, cool. A gorilla came and saved me. It was like, No, they saved you. That's like your park going back to take care of your seven year old Mary. So you know, things that was like the first image that I had in the ketamine I also did have an image of the mudslide. It looks like a renaissance oil painting. And I was somewhere hovering over the Pacific again, safe, warm, protected, kind of watching and I saw these beautiful Angels pouring like golden mud kind of down the mountain. And these beams of light were the people that lost their lives were being pulled up. And this knowing that, that it wasn't personal, that it was an act of nature that it was just, it just was so and I think, to doing the ketamine and even Holotropic breathwork, which is another way to access an altered state without taking anything, but recognizing that these other realities are here and present all the time, but we're just not paying attention to them. So it was incredibly healing for me, the ketamine and the MDMA. MDMA was healing to tell us about that. MDMA is not psychedelic so your private you know, you're in your body, you know, where you are, your everything is heightened, no fight or flight? Yeah, no fight or flight. It's, you know, they call it a, like a real heart opener. So, when I did that, my first thing was, okay, let's look at the mudslide. And I was like, okay, like, the triggers are, like, pretty neutralized, I think I'm feeling okay with that. And then again, the sexual abuse stuff came back up again. And I had another healing experience with that, where I recognized that, just as just as the mudslide was a force of nature, coming down, that what was moving through those men was a force of nature. And I just happened to be in their path. So for me, it was this feeling. And I think a lot of times of sexual abuse, we can really feel that it's very personal, because it feels very personal. And yet my healing epiphany was that it really didn't have anything to do with me, it had to do with them. And that force of nature, right, which was very healing and liberating.

Justine Hamilton 42:06

And so you wrote in your book that you forgave this man, or these men, which is huge, that's really hard to come by.

Mary Firestone 42:14

Yes. And sometimes I still go back and forth on that. But I also realized too, and I was just speaking with some other survivors of sexual abuse. They forget forgiveness is not for them. I mean, this guy has been dead for like decades, and probably not thought about it much when he was alive. I'm the one that's been like dragging around this resentment and anger. And so forgiveness is really like for you, not for them. So and again, I want to say, we're not excusing anybody, we're not, you know, it's but again, that forgiveness piece just to integrate and be more whole within ourselves. I think.

Kim Fauskee 42:55

So I want to ask you that question. Dana. How important is forgiveness by a victim in healing trauma? In your opinion?

Dr. Dana 43:05

I'm going to answer that question. But I want to say something really quick before that, which is that when after the mudslide happened, the most, the most, the most number of people that came to see

me as a result of their trauma are men between the ages of 40 and 70. And they were not people that were harmed by any physical manifestation of the mudslide. They were people that didn't feel like they properly protected their families. And men have a tendency to see themselves, especially old school, that it's their job to protect their families. And so that has to do with the forgiveness part of her which is that because nothing happened to them, everybody said to them, what's your problem? You didn't lose your house, you didn't lose anything. You know, why are you fussing? Why are you having nightmares? Why are you feeling so vulnerable? And made to feel really ashamed of themselves for having symptoms, when nothing happened to them. But what happened was that they saw everything. You know, they saw people jumping out of their windows, and they saw people dying, all kinds of stuff. And for a lot of men, it's really hard to forgive themselves for their vulnerability and for not being able, like your husband not being able to protect his family from what happened. Same thing happened with COVID. And invisible enemies started potentially taking us out. And so men who believe that it's their job to protect their families, how do you protect yourself against something that's invisible? That could kill you, and especially because we were filled with every amount of fear that could ever exist in all that? So I mean, I wanted to mention that forgiving yourself was also really important. And yes, forgiving the people that have hurt you, I think is really essential to the healing process because most of the people like sexual abusers, they don't have a conscience. Otherwise they would never do what they do. Add. So you're not going to get a whole lot of satisfaction out of the people that have harmed you most of the time. Occasionally it happens. But that's very rare. Most of the time, the person says, Well, you know, I either I didn't do it, or the person asked for it, or they deserved it somehow, because it's all part of their pathology. So coming to terms of that, by healing your own wounds, and being able to get to a place where, where you don't feel enraged all the time. And, and that little four year old part of all of us that wants to get revenge is allowed to rest a little bit and not feel like you know, everywhere you go, that reminds you of what happened to you want to go and, you know, when we talked about it the other day, I get super heated when we talk about sexual abuse, not because of my own trauma, but because of so much that I hear about what happens to people and how devastating it is to their their lives. And any kind of trauma that happens afterwards, is going to bring everything that's ever happened to you before that time. I used to work with a lot of people that were in minor car accidents, but couldn't get back in their car, because they had so much anxiety. And not a single one of those people had escaped their childhood without being abused in some way. So the violence of the sounds and everything that happens when you're in a car accident, really stimulates post traumatic stress, the same thing that happens when you're in a mudslide, the sounds and the smells. And it's an incredibly intense experience for all of your senses. And they get really triggered big time. And it brings back everything that you've ever tried to come to terms with, and even have come to terms with to whatever degree. So your situation is, I hate to say normal, but I mean, this is what happens. And people either choose to deal with it, and try to figure a way to come to terms with it, or they don't. I will say sadly that women are I mean, this is not sad for women, but men are a little more hesitant to admit victimization. The men that came to see me as a result of feeling having panic attacks because of the mudslide when nothing happened to them, their wives half the time we're saying to them, you know what the hell's wrong with you, you should be grateful, why are you feeling bad. So they're made to feel really ashamed of their symptoms, which was very sad for me, because their symptoms were quite legitimate. These are powerful people who are really successful that have done everything they could to make their, their own life and their family's life, you know, as seamless as possible. And that was all taken away from them in an instant. So anyway, I hope I answered your question.

Kim Fauskee 47:33

Now you did. Marry, how did you do it? Have you changed your relationship with fear? Since going through this, this latest episode, or even even before?

Mary Firestone 47:46

Hmm, well, first of all, I want to say that I think what you guys are doing with this podcast and what you're saying about the men and you know, feeling ashamed, and I think it's so great that you guys are having these conversations, because that is one of the things if we if we cannot identify that what we've been through is traumatic, and see it as an opportunity to heal and clear things and we're gonna stay stuck in that. But the whole reason I think you guys are doing this podcast and why I wrote this book is as an offering of hope that like, yes, you've gone through hard things. We all have gone through hard things. If people live long enough, you're going to be victimized in one way or another. Dr. Edith Eger, who I love, who's a Holocaust survivor, she wrote the choice in the book, and the book, she wrote the choice and the gift, and she's had a thriving practice in La Hoya. She's been a psychologist for decades. She says, victimization is a part of life. Victim hood is our choice. So I think by having these conversations by, you know, the work I did for the book, and offering that as a way of hope and for people to find their healing and do it because when you get on the other side of trauma and healing from it for me, I have found like so much greater joy, love capacity. So I think I like trauma and victim I see it as if we take it as an opportunity, my relationship with fear. I think going back to what we were saying earlier in the conversation is about recognizing our triggers. I definitely am in touch with my body. I mean, I meditate every day, I practice Qigong, I exercise, I have my programs to keep myself in alignment with myself so that when I feel fear, it's like okay, let's check in with that. Like, Where's that coming from? Is it mine? Is it somebody else's? You know, we are talking here earlier about being empathic, I feel other people's stuff. Am I feeling their fear? Or am I fear? You know, so I think I have become better acquainted of it. And if this makes sense, I'm not afraid of my fear. It's like, okay, what is it trying to tell me?

Kim Fauskee 50:24

And how does intuition play a part in your life? Because you kind of answered that, I think already, but I'll let you expand on that a little bit.

Mary Firestone 50:33

Yeah, I think somebody said, some great teacher who was it that prayer is when we talk to God and intuition is God talking to us. And again, it's like in my daily practices, it's making time to listen. So I work harder on making time for that now, ever since this happened, and really a lot knowing that there is this higher power that is, you know, co creating my life with me. So when I got an impulse, like, oh, you should call it like, do it? Oh, you should reach out to them, do it. Oh, you should maybe not go to this thing. Don't. So I would say I'm really working at being a better listener.

Kim Fauskee 51:22

So you used to, and you talked about this a little bit before ask that question, you used too powerful words, in the byline of the title of your book, freedom and joy. Were those things that you were experiencing? Before this latest trauma? Or were or where you're prohibiting yourself from a little bit

from both of those that are finally working through this trauma? Release yourself to be able to fully experience freedom and joy, if that makes sense?

Mary Firestone 51:54

Um, I think that I've always been, like, I'll, an optimist. Always, I've always looked for the, the, the joy. And freedom was something that I had to fight harder for just growing up in, you know, Washington, DC, and you know, I have a Southern belle mom. And, you know, it was, you know, to look right, and go to the right schools and do the right stuff. And so I had a lot of that pressure, which did not feel like freedom. But I also kept seeking out my freedom. I knew that I needed to leave National Cathedral School for Girls. So I went to boarding school, which was a form of freedom, the kinds of people that I met there the opportunities that I had. And joy. Yeah, I think those things expanded for me. But no, I wasn't like a sad wallflower before.

Justine Hamilton 52:56

I was, I know, after the mudslide, your life has changed a lot. You've done it. I mean, you did work on yourself before and you're You were fantastic food before the mudslide, you're fantastic after? But how has it sort of impacted friends and family? Do they think you're the same old person? Do they see a difference in you?

Mary Firestone 53:18

I mean, I would say I mean, I'm, I'm sure we have to bring them in here. But I think when we go through hard times you really know who your friends are, and who steps up. And you know, I have a whole chapter on that in the book about relationships in the wake of trauma, and sometimes, certain relationships fall away. And that's okay. Right. And now, there's people in my life that I'm more in alignment with. And I think one of the things I love about it, and even again, like bringing it back to this conversation, having written this book, and having these conversations, I love it, because we just like get right to it. And that is how I've been my whole life. I'm like, I don't want to do the small talk I can. I went to Princeton, I know how to small talk my way out of anything. But I love just getting to the heart of stuff. And like, you know, so I think that has been a really big shift.

Justine Hamilton 54:19

And are your friends and family. cool with that? Are you going a little too deep with some of them now?

Mary Firestone 54:27

The ones that aren't cool are no longer still in my inner circle. So that has been a big shift. It's like, you know who? The people that are close to me. We go there.

Justine Hamilton 54:37

Yeah. And I was just curious, going back a little bit earlier. What gave you the courage to try to do all this healing to write the book like what where did that courage come from? Because it would have been a lot easier like a lot of people do just go about your daily life. You're fine, you survived, but that that took a lot for what you went through

Mary Firestone 55:01

I think that I don't know if you experienced this when you were pregnant. But in both of my pregnancies, even without the trauma, I had this, like, huge push. I mean, I've always been a curious person and wanting to, you know, like self development and self discovery, and then sharing that, which is what my sister and I, our retreats are all about as sharing tools and practitioners that have worked with us with others. So I've always had that in me. And then like, when you're pregnant, I had this huge drive to like, I want to, like heal as much of my own crap. So I passes. Yeah, has little bit as I can down. So I think I felt an urgency probably around that, being pregnant with India. And then I mean, I, I just knew on some level that there was just more to do, clearly. And then the book came, like a year later, I was on my way back from my 20th Princeton reunion, where I'd been talking about it a lot, because I had seen a lot of people for the first time, and everyone was asking you about it. So it's telling the story and telling the story and telling the story over and over and over again. And on the plane ride home. I was like, Wait, hold on, like, you know, people that have been like, ah, PTSD are gonna be fucked for the rest of your life. You're like, you know, and, and realizing that is just not true. i Yes, I had I was I still having symptoms? Yes. And I was having these amazing experiences that I wouldn't have had otherwise. So it was the book, I don't know, if it was courageous, it just felt like something that had to, I wanted to share because I wanted other people to know that there was hope. And if I can do it, and if all these other people I interviewed in the book can do it, then they can do it too. And here's a million, not a million, but here's tons of different ways.

Justine Hamilton 56:59

It's like a journal of different healing modalities. It's great. You can learn about yoga, ketamine, MDMA, I mean, all of them. So it's, it's nice that you really just kind of went through each one and explained how it worked for you, how it didn't, etc. So I think it offers a lot of value. Thank you.

Mary Firestone 57:17

Yeah. I just wanted people to find their own way in because there is no one way and there's no, you know, we're all different and, and also with different times, like there's different things, different therapies that might be right at a certain time, and are maybe not right for you at all, or what are you doing now? Oh, gosh, well, I have my therapist, who I love, Kim Vincent, who kind of does a little bit of everything you think kind of like, like, she does some hypnosis to like you, Dana, and we do NLP, sometimes. Some energy stuff. And then I do acupuncture. I do my Qigong every day, but I'm always open, you know, it's like, Well, someone was just bringing up something new. And I haven't tried that. Maybe, too. Exactly.

Kim Fauskee 58:07

So I'm interested, obviously, we need to get to talking about your book a little bit here. How has writing a book changed your life or maybe expedited your healing process in some way? Or were there surprises in terms of because we talked about this about how not so much how you want to get your story out there, but how you thought your story, and some of the modalities you use to heal yourself and then interviewing other people would help other people out there that are going through similar processes right now? Was there surprises to you in terms of writing it and how it may have helped you in the healing process that you didn't think it would? or were there other surprises that came out in the writing process?

Mary Firestone 58:56

Well, writing a book takes a really long time, as you guys know, it took me like three years. And especially when I think you know, there's research involved in interviews, and so I think, and somehow, like I didn't, I lost sight of that in a good way, like how long the whole experience was taking me because I was just so in it. One thing that was a surprise, I guess, was different themes that would come up based on the very different people that I was talking to, you know, a young psychologist and a South African shaman using the same word to describe, you know, initiation. So how different themes kept coming up. Also how nature was such a through line and so many different modalities with so many different people in how resilient people are I remember the people that I interviewed the, you know, one, my friends, Kathy and Amy Eldon are incredible. Cathy lost her son and Amy, her brother. He was the youngest photojournalist for writers and he was killed by an angry mob in Somalia. And they have, they talk very openly in the book about their grief and their healing. And how they channeled that into a nonprofit called creative visions. It gives activists all over the world a voice and a platform. So for me, it was just like being surprised by how amazing people are. And resilient and yeah, and how are again, it's like this feeling that we're much more connected than we go about. Supposing we are.

Kim Fauskee 1:00:52

So what was more of a catharsis for you, then?

Mary Firestone 1:00:56

Oh, in the book? Yeah. Yeah, I think every time we witness someone else's healing, or hear someone else's story, I think it's healing for us, too. So I think that the experience of interviewing and hearing the stories and connecting is healing. It was healing for me. And then, yeah, putting an offering out there. I think actually, Dana, you probably know, properly, but like the seven stages of grief, Elisabeth Kubler Ross returning, but now now there's an eighth one, there's something that's about kind of paying it forward, like using your healing as a way to help somebody else. Am I making that?

Dr. Dana 1:01:41

Why we became psychologists? Yeah. Understanding the pain and using it as Yeah. As a gift to others.

Mary Firestone 1:01:50

Yeah. And how there's something very healing about that. Yeah,

Dr. Dana 1:01:55

it feels good. It's fun. Yeah, me. Yeah. I really enjoy it.

Mary Firestone 1:01:59

Yeah, me too. So yes, it was very cathartic.

Kim Fauskee 1:02:04

So you made an important point earlier on in the conversation, that healing is a journey. There. There is no finish line. Right? I think, you know, people hope again, and we preach this on this podcast, that there is no magic pill, there is no magic wand, right? That, you do have to do the work. It's going to be painful, it's going to hurt. But eventually, you're going to get to the other side. But again, there is no

finish line, right? Because like you said, there's still things that come up, there are familiar patterns or whatever, that you have to kind of continually work yourself through and be cognise Enough. So what's kind of next for you? I mean, you've done a lot of the common modalities, you're doing some of the stuff that's up and coming right now. I mean, like me, I see myself on that continual journey of healing that way and making an informed decision about what's right for me and, and what to try. But is there something else out there that you're hoping to do or wanting to do? Or investigating right now?

Mary Firestone 1:03:11

Um, people keep asking me about ayahuasca. I feel like that's like the trendy thing right now. And I was actually going to do that for the book. And then I listened to a podcast, Tim Ferriss was interviewing Blake Mycoskie, the guy that did Tom shoes. Yeah, exactly. And they were saying, Blake, it had like two experience journeys, I think they call them the first one was super healing and positive and then he did it again. And afterwards, he was stuck in this state of like, not knowing what was real and what wasn't real and it sounded terrifying. And he was terrified by that. And they were saying, I don't understand why it's like, you know, I WASPA is the most intense psychedelic so why are people going to that you know, it's like start with this then do that then do that then like maybe you find your healing at these you know, lesser level levels,

Justine Hamilton 1:04:14

then anything that involves a bucket or two

Mary Firestone 1:04:16

I'm I feel the same way. So I mean, that's on my I'm I don't feel like that's right for me. I'm not sure yet, but I'm definitely being thoughtful about it. I'm open to it. Certainly. I think I'm interested in exploring that with a lot of different people. And I also want to say that all though, for me, my perspective is that although healing is ongoing, it does not that shouldn't be daunting. Like it's on again, it's opportunities to like, oh, like what are the daily routine? Yeah, and like to discover parts of yourself and connect with other people. more fully so.

Kim Fauskee 1:05:02

And I also you and your sister are entrepreneurs and you do seminars, you have products and stuff like that talk a little bit about what you and your sister you together.

Mary Firestone 1:05:10

Yeah, Lucy and I founded Firestone sisters really spot on name 10 years ago. And we formed it. We were doing a lot of travel writing at the time. And we really wanted to offer experiences for people to connect with themselves more fully and live their true life and not like the prescribed, Do this, do that whatever, and the healing, but we always were like green juice and wine, like all of it and in beautiful places. So we've been doing that for 10 years. And then we also developed an essential oil based perfume that we designed to make you feel good, not just smell good. So everything that we put in there has a specific purpose. And I have a whole chapter about that in the book, Aromatherapy is always about the feeling, right? It's always about the feeling. That's right. So in the oils, there's like, you know, again, I think there's there are practices that people have been doing for 1000s of years that

work. So it's, you know, let people say woowoo, I'm like, well, people have been doing you know, using aromatherapy, Flower Essences Chinese medicine for 1000s of years. So

Kim Fauskee 1:06:25

different strokes for different folks, whatever. Like you said, what works for one may not work for another totally. But as long as you have options for life is golden, is what I say, Justine or Dana, gonna get let you to have some closing questions or thoughts.

Justine Hamilton 1:06:40

I am ready for your next book. No, I think you've been on an incredible journey. It's nice to hear about and see. And I just want to thank you for coming on and sharing it with us. I know. It's very sacred to you and to us. And I just appreciate that. So thank you, thank you.

Dr. Dana 1:07:01

I appreciate your candidness and your willingness to be open because not everybody's comfortable talking about trauma. And you do it in a very, very eloquent sweet way. So thank you.

Kim Fauskee 1:07:15

So those people that are interested in Mary and Mary's book will will certainly in the show notes, put a link to your book, if they're interested in purchasing send that to your website and any of your products and seminars and again, my utmost appreciation for you being here and and being candid and honest with us and and we appreciate it. So best of luck to you going forward.

Mary Firestone 1:07:39

Thank you guys. Thanks, everyone.

Fear Me Out 1:07:43

We appreciate our listeners and are interested in your comments and suggestions. Feel free to email us at your mail podcast@gmail.com If you're interested in becoming a sponsor for this podcast, please email us at your mail podcast@gmail.com Thank you for listening. See you next time.