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MBS ([00:00](#)):

Have I ever been embarrassed by some of the things I've done in the past? Oh, no doubt. One early version of my book *The Coaching Habit*, I started every chapter with an embarrassing story, I had so many stories to draw upon. I'm glad my editor told me to drop that version, it wasn't nearly as entertaining as I thought it was.

MBS ([00:21](#)):

Now have I ever been ashamed of the things I've done? Well, that's true as well. I can point to some things that I am ashamed about. I'm not going to tell stories about that because I'm ashamed of it. You know, those are harder to reframe as positive, they cut a little deeper.



MBS ([00:37](#)):

Have I ever felt ashamed of just me? Just me for being me? Of not feeling [inaudible 00:00:44] because of some unlikely so-called roll of the DNA dice? Well, no, I haven't. Gosh, what a privilege that turns out to be.

MBS ([00:57](#)):

Welcome to Two Pages With MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. My guest today is Julie Lythcott-Haims. She is a speaker and activist and an author. Her new book is *Your Turn: How To Be An Adult*, which quite frankly, feels like a topic helpful for anyone between the ages of, well, 16 and 116.

MBS ([01:24](#)):

Now Julie knows what it means to not fit in.

Julie ([01:27](#)):

I'm a 53 year old Black biracial, cisgendered woman. I'm in a heterosexual marriage to a cisgendered man. We both identify, however, as queer and bisexual. We've been together for 33 years.

MBS ([01:43](#)):

Julie says she's been transgressive since she arrived on this planet, born to a Black American woman and a white British woman, who dared to not only love one another but to marry and to have a child.

Julie ([01:55](#)):

I got the message as a very young child, Michael, that something was wrong with my parents' marriage, that something was wrong with my Black daddy, and that something was wrong with me. Those messages began to bore into my psyche at about age four. Certainly, by age seven. I'm talking about how



strangers regarded us, I'm talking about the questions I would get from classmates and neighbors and teachers and strangers.

MBS ([02:22](#)):

For all of her life, Julie has been otherized. She didn't fit in anywhere really, especially as a biracial child in a middle class, white neighborhood.

Julie ([02:32](#)):

I was born into liminal spaces. Classification schemes did not contemplate me positively. I have a big heart for humans who for whatever reason, for whatever aspect of their identity or identities, have been made to feel like, "Hey, you're not good enough. You don't belong here. We don't like you. Change yourself, fix yourself, be different."

MBS ([02:54](#)):

My guess is when your very existence is a transgression to the world around you, you can go one of two different ways. You can rebel or you can conform.

Julie ([03:04](#)):

For me, it pushed me toward the center, toward conformity. I can tell you now with great clarity at 53, having done the work to unpack and analyze and assess and even write memoir about this, that I was simply trying to be good enough in the eyes of white society. My parents chose to raise me in largely white spaces. This was my father coming up out of the Jim Crow South in America. Having been ostracized, otherized, beaten down, he was determined to get up and out, be the physician he wanted to be, and not be held back by other people's races, which meant he wanted the big house in the nice town and, typically, that meant an almost entirely white space. He delighted in the fact that the realtor didn't realize that she had just sold the house to a white woman and her Black husband.



MBS ([03:59](#)):

Right.

Julie ([03:59](#)):

That's who my father was, that was what was right and real for him. What that meant was I was this light skinned, fuzzy headed child in the 1970s and early '80s, who people just regarded as an oddity, as exotic. They wanted to touch my hair. I just wanted to please them. I wanted to not be different. I wanted to be like them, I wanted my hair to be straight like the white girls. I wanted to meet their approval and when bad things started to happen, like the N-word being written on my locker in high school on my 17th birthday, I just wanted to never be called the N-word again, which clearly, in my mind, at least, required conformity to their norms, to their ways of being. Really, in a sense, I was believing the stereotypes about Black people and just desperately trying not to be the stereotype.

MBS ([04:55](#)):

Of course. At that kind of movement to conformity and wanting to be part of the crowd, what were the prizes and the punishments of that for you?

Julie ([05:07](#)):

I'm really aware as we have this conversation that many kids choose the opposite, they choose to rebel. I didn't articulate my rebelliousness until I was fully an adult, with a few moments of rebelliousness in my teenage years but not really around this sort of racial belonging.

Julie ([05:27](#)):

The prizes were belonging. I was told ... This is what they told me, Michael, they said ... My best friend was watching *Gone With The Wind* when I came over to her house and if listeners don't know, that's a movie about the Antebellum





South, the South during the Civil War, and the South is portrayed as this elegant place with these beautiful outfits and slaves.

MBS ([05:49](#)):

Exactly. Beautiful outfits and slaves.

Julie ([05:51](#)):

Right. And slaves. My white friend loved this movie and she couldn't understand why I didn't love it. She said, "Wouldn't you have loved to have lived back then?" This was a white girl, just longing for the chivalry, longing for the dresses, and not seeing the slavery or not caring about the slavery. She'd say, "Wouldn't it have been great to have lived back then?" I said, no. She said, "Why not?" I said, "Because I would have been a slave" and I said that with such shame in my voice. She said, "Oh, but I mean if you weren't Black." I said, "But I am Black." She said, "I don't think of you as Black. I think of you as normal."

Julie ([06:34](#)):

She thought she was offering me a compliment. That was the prize offered. It wasn't a prize. Okay? As I began to see that, they don't actually know the fullness of who I am, they're saying you are different enough from the stereotype that we regard you as normal enough, like us, so I think the prizes were always punishments. I'm not sure ... I think it was always both.

MBS ([07:05](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. The stuff is entangled. It's tricky. There's that kind of acceptance and welcoming into it, at the cost of trading off your identity. Yeah, you're not Black, you're normal. It's like a high price for that prize, so to speak.

Julie ([07:24](#)):

Yup.



MBS ([07:25](#)):

Julie, will you tell us about the book you've chosen for us today?

Julie ([07:29](#)):

Absolutely. It's *Educated*, a memoir by Tara Westover.

MBS ([07:33](#)):

This is a great book, an amazing story. How did it come into your life? How did you discover it?

Julie ([07:41](#)):

Oh my gosh. Who couldn't discover it? [crosstalk 00:07:43].

MBS ([07:43](#)):

I know it's everywhere.

Julie ([07:43](#)):

It's been talked about everywhere. I'm a busy person. Writers read, of course, but I'm often reading what I'm asked to read, someone wants me to blurb their book, I've got a stack of maybe three, four books I seem to be needing to blurb at all times.

Julie ([07:59](#)):

I'm rarely doing volitional, pleasure reading, let's put it that way. I'm reading a ton but it's often work related. I'd been hearing about this book and wondering what's the big deal and then finally I went to a local fundraiser for affordable housing in my neck of the woods, which is Silicon Valley, San Francisco, Bay Area, California, USA, and it was a breakfast fundraiser.



Julie ([08:23](#)):

Lo and behold, Tara Westover was the keynote speaker. I thought what is she doing speaking at this event? What does her story have to do with affordable housing or supporting people who have been marginalized or historically excluded or oppressed?

Julie ([08:39](#)):

Well, I only had that question in my head for about a minute and a half. As she spoke, I began to appreciate what her story was about and I went out that day and bought her book.

MBS ([08:52](#)):

There's a lot in this book. I'm curious to know how you chose the two pages you're going to read for us.

Julie ([09:00](#)):

I'm interested in the ... Big picture, I'm interested in helping humans on their path. I root for humans, I'm interested in the human journey, I'm interested in what gets in our way, whether it's an obstacle that is external to us, someone else's racism, for example, or internal, something that is within us, we are essentially in our own way, and I've certainly done the work to rid myself of the internalized shame or internalized oppression we might say, or the implicit bias within myself toward my own people.

Julie ([09:38](#)):

Society taught me to loathe myself.

MBS ([09:41](#)):

Right.



Julie ([09:42](#)):

And I did. I've done the work to emerge from that self-loathing and claim a place of self-love as a Black woman and I am deeply drawn to stories where people come to terms with what they've been through, dare to speak it out loud to somebody, and then they discover the shame has been dislodged and no longer lives inside of them. There's just a few pages toward the back fifth of her book where she begins to emerge, she begins to tell the truth of what happened to her in childhood to her parents. She unburdens herself, not completely, but that there's a big stone that gets dislodged and you can feel it.

MBS ([10:28](#)):

Well, I'm very much looking forward to hearing this being read. Julie, over to you.

Julie ([10:34](#)):

Thank you, Michael. This is *Educated* by Tara Westover. I'm going to read from pages 272 and 273. The setup is she has had a lot go badly in her childhood, which was off the grid. She had siblings, one of whom was very physically violent toward her and nobody seemed to know or care if they did know. She finally in her young adulthood, tells her mother what happened.

Julie ([11:05](#)):

I'm reading from after she has had that conversation with her mother, which resulted in her mother ... It was an email conversation. It resulted in her mother writing, "You were my child. I should have protected you."

Julie ([11:20](#)):

"Mother and I spoke only once about that conversation, on the phone, a week later. 'It's being dealt with' she said, 'I told your father what you and your sister said. Shawn will get help.' I put the issue from my mind. My mother had taken up the cause. She was strong. She had built that business with all those people working for her and it dwarfed my father's business and all the other businesses



in the whole town. She, that docile woman, had a power in her the rest of us couldn't contemplate.

Julie ([11:57](#)):

Dad, he had changed. He was softer, more prone to laugh. The future could be different from the past. Even the past could be different from the past because my memories could change. I no longer remembered mother listening in the kitchen while Shawn pinned me to the floor, pressing my windpipe. I no longer remembered her looking away.

Julie ([12:25](#)):

My life in Cambridge was transformed or rather I was transformed into someone who believed she belonged in Cambridge. The shame I'd long felt about my family leaked out of me, almost overnight. For the first time in my life, I talked openly about where I'd come from. I admitted to my friends that I had never been to school. I described Bucks Peak with its many junkyards, barns, corrals. I even told them about the root cellar full of supplies in the wheat field and the gasoline buried near the old barn.

Julie ([13:03](#)):

I told them I had been poor, I told them I had been ignorant and in telling them this, I felt not the slightest prick of shame. Only then did I understand where the shame had come from. It wasn't that I hadn't studied in a marble conservatory or that my father wasn't a diplomat. It wasn't that dad was half out of his mind or that mother followed him. It had come from having a father who shoved me toward the chomping blades of the shear, instead of pulling me away from them. It had come from those moments on the floor, from knowing that mother was in the next room, closing her eyes and ears to me and choosing for that moment, not to be my mother at all.



Julie ([13:47](#)):

I fashioned a new history for myself. I became a popular dinner guest with my stories of hunting and horses, of scrapping and fighting mountain fires, of my brilliant mother, midwife and entrepreneur, of my eccentric father, a junkman and zealot. I thought I was finally being honest about the life I'd had before.

Julie ([14:10](#)):

It wasn't the truth exactly but it was true in a larger sense, true to what would be in the future, now that everything had changed for the better, now that mother had found her strength. The past was a ghost, insubstantial, unaffecting, only the future had weight."

MBS ([14:33](#)):

Thanks, Julie. You read beautifully. Thanks for bringing those two pages to life like that.

Julie ([14:38](#)):

Thank you.

MBS ([14:40](#)):

Was there something in particular about those two pages that struck a chord for you?

Julie ([14:46](#)):

Well, I too had my own unburdening moment at 39, after two decades, two and a half decades of trying to please white folks, meet with their approval, not be discarded, scorned, mistreated. I was working with an executive coach at Stanford around how to get along better with my colleagues. I was a very senior person. By this point, I had gotten my bachelor's degree, I had gotten my law degree, I had practiced law for four years, unlike you. We'll talk about that.



Julie ([15:21](#)):

Now I'm a dean at Stanford, I'll be a university administrator for 14 years, and this is sort of in year nine maybe, and working with an executive coach who is helping me work my shit out and she's working with my whole team, the people at my level and the guy we report to, and she gives me feedback that I am too emotional and too aggressive, according to my colleagues, who are all white and all have PhDs and I'm the youngest so I'm the wrong degree because I only have a JD, which in academia [crosstalk 00:15:54].

MBS ([15:56](#)):

You're a woman, you're Black, you don't have a PHD. You're just not ticking the boxes.

Julie ([15:58](#)):

Exactly and I'm the youngest. I'm the youngest. The feedback she's gotten from this 360, my coach Mary Ellen is my coach to this day, she's amazing, she said, "They think you're too emotional and too aggressive." I was like, "Wow. That's original. Those are stereotypes of Black women." She chuckled and she's like, "I'm not here for the stereotype. I'm here to know if your way of being is getting you what you want because I'm here to help you thrive."

Julie ([16:25](#)):

I had to admit to her that when I was a lawyer, being argumentative, being emotional, was currency, it was a way to make argument, it was a way to persuade, it was a way to win. But in academia, which is highly collegial and collaborative, it was not winning anything for me.

Julie ([16:42](#)):

I admitted to her that, "Okay, fine. I want to learn why I'm this way. Yes. Sometimes I'm too emotional, sometimes I'm too aggressive." She taught me mindfulness. She taught me the practice of scanning my body and what it was



doing in response to what I was observing and hearing. She taught me to scan my mind. She taught me to put a pause on impulses and reflexes so that I could decide if this is something I would like to respond to? If so, now or later. If now, what do I want to say? It allowed me to gain control over my way of showing up.

MBS ([17:16](#)):

Interesting.

Julie ([17:17](#)):

It wasn't about censorship. It was about sharpening my capacity to communicate in ways that would ultimately serve my aims. In the process of doing this, Michael, and I know this is maybe a longer answer than you thought you were going to get but I really wanted you to hear the backstory to this, which is trusting this coach, as I did, I was able ... We were focusing on so where does the emotion come from? You're learning to slow it down and decide whether to respond or not and how.

Julie ([17:49](#)):

But where are these triggers that are triggering the emotion coming from? I was able to say to her, that I had been ashamed to be Black and afraid of Black people and just trying to be what white people valued. I said this to her because what was happening was the triggers were you're not smart enough. I perceived people were dismissing me on the basis of my Blackness so I had to go to why do I feel that way? Well, I feel that way because childhood, childhood, childhood. I unburdened myself of this shame. I hated being Black, afraid of Black people, trying to be what white people valued, and I'm saying this, Michael, through tears and snot is running out of my nose and I'm so ashamed because I feel, Michael, that I'm the only human who has ever felt this way.





Julie ([18:35](#)):

I've not read a memoir about that, I've not read a novel about that. I don't know these truths from anyone else's life story. I discover that in unburdening myself, that those thoughts were dislodged. That I had spoken into the shame. It was as if a bully, the racism bully, had been chasing me all my life, always there, around the corner, ready to chase me ... I was running from it.

Julie ([19:06](#)):

This process was the equivalent of turning around, facing the bully with my hands on my hips to say, "This is what you have made me feel about myself and my people" and just naming it made the bully run away.

MBS ([19:19](#)):

Wow.

Julie ([19:19](#)):

I was filled with a sense of self-love that is the most beautiful, beautiful feeling. I went to work the next day and it was as if every Black person on the Stanford campus had gotten the memo saying, "Just smile at Julie today" because they were all smiling at me. Of course, they were smiling but they hadn't gotten a memo. I think the answer or the rationale here, the way to make any sense of this, is simply to say I was finally smiling at myself.

MBS ([19:46](#)):

Yeah.

Julie ([19:47](#)):

In the fullness of my identity. I could see myself and love that self, therefore, I could see and love Black people. It was a life changing experience. That's why I resonated with what Tara Westover was writing.



MBS ([20:03](#)):

No kidding.

Julie ([20:04](#)):

She was able to be the fullness of herself and I thought she described ... I chose it because I could relate in my own way but also I chose this book broadly because she writes so exquisitely about the details of family life, and the details of our emotional suffering and longing and all of those things. I thought it was just an exquisite combination, both in the craft of it and in the subject matter.

MBS ([20:34](#)):

What a moment of freedom to have just come to you like that. It's extraordinary. Julie, your new book is called *Your Turn: How To Be An Adult*. I'm wondering what the connection is between that moment of you, as you say, stepping into the fullness of your identity and what you talk about in this new book of yours.

Julie ([20:57](#)):

Yeah. It's deeply connected. I am so interested in each one of us unburdening ourselves from the shame installed in us by the opinions of others, number one. I'm interested in us making our way toward work, that we're good at and we love, because I know I was headed toward work that mattered to other people, corporate law, that it wasn't why I went to law school. I went to law school to help people so I was miserable.

Julie ([21:32](#)):

I'm interested in us ridding our minds of the expectations of others, about whom we should be. I'm interested in us making our way not just toward work that we love and are good at but toward communities and to be in relationships where we can simply be cherished as we are. This is a book about adulting, a stage of life you enter if you survive childhood. Spoiler alert, it's not a



mysterious place. It's really a state of mind. This is my life. I get to decide and, yeah, it's going to be hard and, yeah, there are going to be challenges and setbacks and pitfalls because that's what life entails and includes but also I can be in charge, I can choose, I have choice. I am not someone else's property, I am not here to be someone else's stereotype. I really like to quote the late poet Mary Oliver who asked in one of her poems, "Tell me what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life."

MBS ([22:31](#)):

Such a line.

Julie ([22:32](#)):

Michael, I do believe it's wild and I do believe it's precious and I do believe it's ours. That line from Mary Oliver animates these 459 pages of my new book.

MBS ([22:47](#)):

I love that. One of the chapters is Stop Pleasing Others. It's a little different from stepping into the fullness of your identity. I mean, that question your coach asked you, which is like is this way of behaving getting you what you want? Is that actually making you happy? You're like, well, actually, maybe not totally.

MBS ([23:08](#)):

There's this moment of self-acceptance for who you are and your kind of messy glory. But the idea of stop pleasing others is difficult. There's so much around us that says behave and fit into your place and kiss up and kick down, I'm exaggerating slightly, but it's a radical act to decide not to please others and to get clear on what you want for yourself. How do you help people make that shift? You've seen lots of young people walking this path.



Julie ([23:45](#)):

Part of it, Michael, is age and stage. When we're young, we're seeking conformity, peer pressure is a very real and valid thing. As a matter of safety, going back in our ancestry, as homo sapiens, we have needed to know our group, the in group and the out group, that's very ingrained and when we're teenagers and young adults, typically, we're interested in what are our peers doing and let me be like them. That's valid.

Julie ([24:15](#)):

The older we get, the more we have life experiences that teach us, "Hey, wait a minute. I did the "right thing". I met the "right person". I went to the "right school". I'm in the "right profession." We discover there's nothing right about it at all, if I'm actually listening to my body, my hair is falling out, I have high blood pressure, I feel terribly afraid, I feel uncomfortable, I feel a longing for a life that I can envision myself having, that is right over there, if I could just find the guts to say, "You know what? What would I do if it was just up to me? I would do that."

Julie ([24:50](#)):

So many of us have experienced that and the older we get, the more self-reliant we are, the more financially independent we are, the more evidence we have that, you know what? I am okay being myself. Part of it is age and stage.

Julie ([25:07](#)):

What I try to do in the book is share my own narrative about some of my struggles in this regard and the book is also filled with the stories of 31 other humans who come from myriad walks of life, diversity in every way we can think of it, and I'm trying to say, "Look, look, look, look, listen to all of these other people who may be nothing like you and yet, look at what we all have in common, this yearning to be ourselves and to know we're okay."



Julie ([25:41](#)):

I try to tell good stories to help convince young people that it's delicious to stop pleasing others. The subtitle of that chapter is They Have No Idea Who You Are.

MBS ([25:52](#)):

Exactly.

Julie ([25:53](#)):

It's an invitation to know yourself. I put other stories in there so readers can listen to what it sounds like when someone has crossed that line. I'm hoping that other people's stories, including my own, will help pull readers through the stuck-edness that they may be experiencing in their own lives.

MBS ([26:10](#)):

I mean, I love that subtitle, They Have No Idea Who You Are because, for me, it has a double meaning. The first is they don't know you. They actually don't know who you are and then the nuances of what it makes up. They don't even really know what you want. Even more profound, for me, is they probably don't even know who you actually are. There's this great quote, and you probably know it, Julie, which is like, "I used to worry what people thought of me and then I realized people don't think of me." Everybody is thinking of themselves and all the other stuff going on in their life to spend any real time worrying about me.

Julie ([26:46](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([26:47](#)):

You've got some freedom to shape your path, shape your destiny.



Julie ([26:51](#)):

Yeah. I love that quote and the people I have in mind when I say stop pleasing others, they have no idea who you are, are the people in the lives of young people, in the US and Canada and Australia and plenty of other countries today and over the last 20 years where parenting has become hyper parenting, where parents are saying, "You will be this, you will do that, we will help and handle it and make it happen for you."

Julie ([27:16](#)):

There is so much noise in the heads of young people around you should study this, you should be a this, we expect you to do this, you're so good at this. This is the insidiousness when parents say, "I know you better than you know yourself." That makes me want to vomit. Like, no, you do not know your child better because you are not in their interior mind and if you are so wrapped up in their life, such that they don't even know their own voice, that is highly problematic, that warrants good therapy so that these two beings can disengage, so that this younger one can actually begin listening to that self and honoring what it says.

MBS ([27:54](#)):

Julie, how do you find your own voice? Because the story you tell of that moment with your coach feels extraordinary in that it was in a single bound, she was free. You know? In a single moment, it feels like, from your story, you were able to bring that shame out and be free of it. I don't hear that story that often. It feels like that's a rarer thing than a more common thing. When you've got young kids, and all of us who have so many things pulling us this way and that way, whether it's from our parents, helicopter parenting, as you talk about in your TED Talk or the pressure of social media, or whatever else, finding your own voice, so hard. How do you help people with that?



Julie ([28:39](#)):

A couple thoughts come to mind. First, we often are willing to acknowledge we have a voice telling us to do something else when we're miserable.

MBS ([28:51](#)):

Yeah. That's true.

Julie ([28:53](#)):

I was that miserable young corporate lawyer. I had "done everything right." I had gotten a job with a law firm in Silicon Valley, doing intellectual property litigation when the internet was becoming a thing, a very exciting time for copyright, trademark, and patents if you cared about those things but I had gone to law school to help people, to protect people, not to protect intellectual property.

Julie ([29:14](#)):

Though, I was good at it, they told me I was good at it, I was mentored, I was given opportunity. The people I worked with were kind and smart. The paycheck was great. My body was telling me, "We are desperately unhappy in here." I had high blood pressure. I had high blood pressure only at work. My doctor made me check it five times a day. I had a knot in my stomach every Sunday at two at the thought of going back on Monday.

Julie ([29:43](#)):

I was talking to a friend who left Wall Street, Kristen Coe, she said, "Julie, I only left Wall Street when my hair was falling out. It was like the evidence. I could show people, 'Look, I'm losing my hair.'" When we're miserable, we feel ... Now I have proof that this isn't okay or that I can't handle it. Whatever the it is, I have evidence. Our own feelings often don't feel to us to be substantial proof. When the body is starting to break down, we're like, "Okay."



Julie ([30:16](#)):

I'm here saying don't wait for your hair to fall out. Don't wait for the knot in your stomach or the high blood pressure. Where do you find your inner voice, Michael? One answer is when you're miserable, you're often willing to say, "Okay, fine. [crosstalk 00:30:30]. What do I really want to do?"

Julie ([30:32](#)):

Short of the ... Many steps before the body is breaking down, now, available to each one of us, here in this conversation, listening, speaking, we can say to ourselves, "What would I do if it was just up to me?"

MBS ([30:48](#)):

Right.

Julie ([30:49](#)):

What would I do if no one else was watching? What would I do if it didn't matter to anybody else what I did? What would I do if they loved me no matter what I did? These questions help jostle us out of that, "Well, I'm supposed to", "I ought to", "I should", people like me, my family. It frees you up. It's a brainstorm. It's just you imposing upon your mind a little brainstorm activity that is just about you and answers will come.

Julie ([31:15](#)):

This is when my students will say, "Well, I'd go be a wilderness naturalist but who does that?" I would just be silent and I'd look at them and say, "People do that. Why not you?" "Well, I can't. I got a major in econ." "Why?" "Well, because ..." Then we get into the oughts and shoulds.

MBS ([31:32](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.





Julie ([31:33](#)):

I always thought ... I often thought the students were often majoring in what they thought they should major in and minoring in their joy. I often saw it as my job to elevate the status of the minor because that was evidence of what the inner voice really wanted to do.

MBS ([31:49](#)):

Julie, I love your insight about that kind of visceral somatic wisdom, the wisdom of the body. In part, because it's something ... I'm a bit of a head intellectual guy so I'm trying really hard to try and notice what my body is telling me. How do you navigate around ... I'm not sure if this is the right language but let's call it false positives.

MBS ([32:12](#)):

Here's my hypothesis and you can tell me if I've got parts of it wrong, I may have, that part of being raised as a young person with a helicopter parent is that you do become a big fragile and a bit precious and a bit, "This is too hard. I don't want to do this. I only want to do the things that I can get As in or succeed in or get the medal for. Therefore, there's a bunch of things that feel hard and I don't want to do them."

MBS ([32:37](#)):

I'm wondering how you notice what's hard but powerful. I mean, one of my mantras at the moment is we unlock our greatness by taking on the hard things versus we get crushed by taking on something that is hard and miserable.

Julie ([32:55](#)):

I love that. I'm not sure ... I'm trying to visualize everything you've just said and squared against everything I've studied and write about. Here's what's coming. Often the helicopter kids are doing very hard things, number one. Often what



they're asked to do is incredibly hard. It's just what's problematic is it's someone else's life plan for them.

Julie ([33:23](#)):

They may be quite good at hard things. They're just doing the wrong hard things, wrong in the sense of it's not what they would choose. Some of them are definitely being over-helped. There's one type of helicopter parenting that's telling you you have to be a tennis star or a brain surgeon and that's hard stuff.

Julie ([33:41](#)):

Another type of helicopter parenting is the concierge, helper, handler, fixer, who will turn in things for you and make sure your deadlines are met and have the tough conversations for you and, certainly, somebody raised that way can be met with life, as it turns out, is so much harder, edgier, than I had ever been led to believe because I've been over-handled and those young people are sort of like veal out there in young adult land.

Julie ([34:10](#)):

I think you're right that some of them may be turning away from the hard things that would liberate them or help them ... I forget the quote but blossom and become and may not know what's hard and actual misery versus hard and worth it. Yeah. What a lovely question.

MBS ([34:33](#)):

Yeah. It's tricky. It's messy and complex. I'm quite happily child-free so I don't actually have to deal with it. I get to watch my brothers raising their kids. They're all teenagers. They're trying to navigate that, which is how much do I let them find their own path? And allow extracurricular to be part of the magic that shapes them. How much do I try and nudge them to get them across certain finish lines? I see both my brothers and their partners wrestling with that. I see the kids wrestling with it as well. I'm like that looks hard, good luck.



Julie ([35:11](#)):

Yeah. I think what it speaks to is kids need to leave our homes knowing how to work hard. They need to be given expectations that are high and that they meet, not arbitrary, you must be ... Everyone in our family plays the piano, therefore, you have to play the piano. But whatever it is you love and you're good at, and I always speak to those two circles and the Venn diagram overlap, that's where the rewarding work is, the overlap of what you're good at and you love, helping your kid figure out, "Okay, of these options, what really lights you up?"

Julie ([35:48](#)):

We want to encourage you to lean into the things that matter to you and to go for mastery and to go for excellence and all of that and to work hard and to pick yourself up when you fail because you will fail. We all do. Your other parent and I have and we want you to know how to learn from those things and bounce back.

Julie ([36:07](#)):

We need to have expectations. We should just not be acting like they're little dogs on a leash that we've entered into a very elite dog show where the end of the day, we go home with a trophy and we feel proud of us for what this dog/child did.

MBS ([36:24](#)):

Julie, on your website, you describe yourself as an author, a speaker, and an activist. Tell me about being an activist.

Julie ([36:36](#)):

I think it goes back to my parents are both quite active in the causes they believe in. They were in my childhood. I was a delegate ... Not a delegate. I showed up at the 1984 Democratic Caucus in Wisconsin, in the room for Jesse



Jackson, who was a Black man running for president, which was audacious in the minds of many in 1984. I was 16. I loved standing up for something I believed in and sharing what I thought, even though, this is the transgressive/rebellious piece, right? Nobody thought Jesse could win but I was there anyway to say his candidacy matters. Representation matters is what we would say today.

Julie ([37:20](#)):

I was in college when apartheid was still the law of the land in South Africa and college students across the country, including on my campus, were protesting against it. I participated in marches. I went to my state capitol, Sacramento, to lobby for more funding for public schools.

Julie ([37:41](#)):

I've registered people to vote. I became an Obama delegate to the convention in 2008, representing my part of California. I went to the border last summer, two summers ago. I went to the border, the Texas border at Clint in El Paso because for a year, I'd been wringing my hands over what's happening with migrant kids being separated from their parents and finally, I said, "God damn it, Julie. You're self-employed. Tell yourself you're going to take some days off work and drive your fricking Jeep Wrangler from California to Texas and go stand up for those kids."

Julie ([38:16](#)):

I did. I took people with me and we generated media attention of some kind. You know, I'm willing to stand on street corners, I'm willing to stand up for what matters, I'm willing, certainly, around Black lives ... I have shown up at rallies and marches and I have always spoken my mind, Michael. Often, I've been told it's too much.



Julie ([38:41](#)):

I think when you're in the realm of ... When you're on a street corner or you're marching down a street, it doesn't matter what other people think. You have decided, "I need to speak up. I am going to use my body and my voice and my presence in these moments, in my life, to try to push this gear, this particular gear that is stuck to use myself to push it forward and get it unstuck."

MBS ([39:08](#)):

You know, I think I saw somewhere else on your website about a broader commitment you have in your life around helping people move from fear to love. It feels that that's true around parenting and around adulting and around activism. I'm wondering what you think keeps us stuck in fear.

Julie ([39:32](#)):

Well, if love is the opposite of fear, I'm not sure it is but let's go there, we are afraid we might not be loved. We are afraid we might extend our hand or make an effort and be rejected. We are afraid we will be unheard and unseen.

Julie ([39:51](#)):

Somehow the fear gives us strength. It gives us anger. Anger sits on top of fear. It gives us a way of being. We can define a set of boundaries and keep ourselves there. Love is about freedom. It is about possibility. It's about risk taking. It's about being open.

Julie ([40:08](#)):

We don't want to be rejected. We do not want to be rejected. We'd rather erect all of these barriers so that nobody can get in and actually hurt us by not loving us, by not accepting us.



MBS ([40:25](#)):

You know, it's that great tension of life, which is between finding our own voice and finding our authentic self and wanting to conform and be part of the crowd. We're pulled endlessly between those two poles I feel. You know? I certainly feel that myself. It's like, look, part of I think finding an authentic voice and taking a stand on things can mean loneliness. But being part of a crowd means boredom. I'm like neither of those are a perfect choice. How do I navigate my way between them?

Julie ([41:02](#)):

Well, you find the right crowd I guess but I totally agree with you. As I have gotten clearer about what I cannot tolerate or abide as a Black woman in America, and I have dared to speak up, I have faced rejection. I have decided the pain of staying in those spaces is, over time, a numbing of my spirit. I can sit in a discussion group as the only or one of a handful of women of color and listen to the droning on of opinions that fly in the face of respect and dignity and kindness towards marginalized people and I can sit there, I can speak up, and I can continue to speak up but I can ultimately decide, "I'm going to leave because I'm not getting anywhere and to be here is eroding my spirit" or I can decide, "I love these people, I really want to help these people try to understand a different point of view. I am going to stay."

Julie ([42:02](#)):

I have discovered when I leave ... For most of my life, I decided to stay and I was the token Black person. I've decided, no, my self-care, my choice is to find groups who cherish me for me and who have individuals I can cherish. Maybe it's smaller groups. Maybe my world is shrinking but it is becoming more of a place where I feel I can thrive. I'm not closing myself off from people I disagree with. There's plenty of people I disagree with, with whom I interact but where I choose to spend my social life, the organizations I choose to give my time to, I'm really clear that maybe a bit of loneliness is the price for the integrity.



Julie ([42:52](#)):

I don't want to be in a group of people that aren't in anguish when a Black child is murdered. I have decided to [crosstalk 00:43:01].

MBS ([43:00](#)):

It's lonely in a different way.

Julie ([43:03](#)):

Yeah. Or that fewer friends but deeper connections to those people are probably the greater prize than being in a community with dozens or hundreds where many of those people do not honor the things that are fundamental to me.

MBS ([43:27](#)):

Julie, it's been a wonderful conversation. Thank you.

Julie ([43:30](#)):

Thank you.

MBS ([43:32](#)):

As a final question, is there anything that needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Julie ([43:41](#)):

Yeah. This conversation hasn't just been between you and me.

MBS ([43:45](#)):

Right.



Julie ([43:46](#)):

We are fortunate in that other humans, unseen, unnamed, have chosen to spend some precious time with us. I just want to extend to you gratitude and to them, they've stuck with us for however many minutes this turned out to be. They're here right now listening. I don't take a minute of that for granted. They've heard something in our conversation that pulled at them.

MBS ([44:11](#)):

Yeah.

Julie ([44:12](#)):

That tugged at them. They needed it, they wanted it. There's something in them right now that's going, "Yup. Yup. Yup. Okay." I'm just here to say this is my work. I'm interested. I'm interested in their why. I'm interested in what's going on. I try to write about the things that make us feel alone or ashamed and I try to help people feel less alone. I think there's some people listening, maybe a lot, who are feeling a little less alone because of the conversation you chose to have with me.

MBS ([44:46](#)):

Did you hear that phrase, the fullness of your identity? I remember as a kid, in the backseat of my parents' car, it's summer, it's hot, it's dusty and we're coming back from Araluen in New South Wales. Now, in my mind, Araluen grows the best peaches in the world and the one I was eating was perfect. It was big, perfectly colored, kind of a range of oranges and pinks on the outside. Then big, white flesh biting into it. There's juice everywhere.

MBS ([45:20](#)):

This peach is as peach as it's possible to be. I would love my existence to be as full of me as that peach was as full of peach. I don't think this is grasping after ever more and FOMO and the like. It's about figuring yourself out. I mean, that's





work. Then backing yourself, finding your people, finding your battles, and finding your joys.

MBS ([45:49](#)):

You can find out more about Julie at her website, Julie Lythcott-Haims. I'll spell that out for you. It's all one word, Julie, J-U-L-I-E, Lythcott, L-Y-T-H-C-O-T-T, Haims, H-A-I-M-S, dot com. And on social, she's at JLythcottHaims, so without the Julie but JLythcottHaims on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and even Clubhouse.

MBS ([46:15](#)):

She's got a series of great books, a great TED Talk, but her newest book is, as I said, Your Turn: How To Be An Adult. I mean, what a great title.

MBS ([46:23](#)):

Thanks, of course, for listening to the interview and to the podcast, for spreading the word. If there's somebody for whom this interview would really strike a chord, of course, I'm very appreciative if you're willing to send it on and mention it to them. I've very grateful if you've written a review. Reviews, as minor as they might feel to you, they mean a good deal to me because it's one of the ways the algorithms and the technology gods help make this podcast findable for other people.

MBS ([46:50](#)):

If you'd like more, there is actually a free membership associated with this podcast. It's called the [inaudible 00:46:56] Freeze, named after my favorite library at Oxford where all the cool books were kept. In this free membership, you get transcripts to other podcasts, you get some unreleased podcasts, there's a list of my 10 favorite books. It's just a bunch of good things there. Totally free. It's a way of actually gathering the readers of the podcast here together. You're awesome and you're doing great.

