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

Here's a quote from a poem by the early 20th Century Spanish poet, Antonio Machado. "Traveler, there is no path. The path is made by walking." I love this. "Traveler, there is no path. The path is made by walking." Now, I've known this quote, I think, for about 20 years. I keep remembering it and recovering it and rediscovering it. But actually, it's only in writing this introduction to this podcast episode that I've given it any real thought.

MBS ([00:34](#)):

I think it's slightly subversive, disconcerting even. Here's now what I see in the depth of those lines, what seems obvious is not as certain as you might think and as it appears, what seems built is not as solid as it appears. And what you long for is not yet built, it's in the walking that the thing is revealed. It's in doing the work, being in service that the world we will want is created.



MBS ([01:07](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best 2 Pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Mia Birdsong is someone who's making the path by walking. She's the author of *How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship, and Community*. And she's self described as a pathfinder and a facilitator on the road to social justice. Mia has a definite bias to how she does this work.

Mia ([01:37](#)):

I really focus on the things that we need to build, the things we need to create, not so much so what we need to dismantle. I feel like there are other people who are focusing on those things and my lane really is about standing in the long arc and thinking about, in five generations, what is the world that I want my descendants to live in? And how do we create that right now?

MBS ([02:05](#)):

Mia is also a wife and a mother and a city farmer.

Mia ([02:09](#)):

I have a little city farm. I'm actually sitting in my studio looking out at my chickens and my bees right now. I also grow food and medicine on this little plot of land that we're stewarding.

MBS ([02:24](#)):

This lovely description reminds me actually of the Yeats poem, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*. "I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree, and a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made. Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee, and live alone in the bee-loud glade." But Mia's not one for living alone. In fact, the opposite. She holds a wide open, welcoming space for kith and for kin.



Mia ([02:57](#)):

I'm someone who really finds joy and purpose in the family that I make in the kinship that I kind of create with people who I'm not related to by blood or law. And I just think about how integral those people are to who I am and how my life kind of unfolds. And I feel like leaving them out and just mentioning my role as mom and wife is incomplete.

MBS ([03:33](#)):

Kinship's a powerful word, so I wanted to ask Mia what she meant by it.

Mia ([03:40](#)):

It feels beyond friend. It is really the people who I make different kinds of family with. And I'm smiling right now, not really from talking, because I'm thinking about those people.

MBS ([03:58](#)):

Yeah. You're feeling it. I know you love those people.

Mia ([04:00](#)):

Yeah. Totally. And I think in particular just during the pandemic, I think a lot of us have reconfigured our lives in multiple ways, right? And for me-

MBS ([04:11](#)):

Yeah. It's kind of reconfigured, but reconfigured.

Mia ([04:15](#)):

Yeah. Exactly. And so much of that for me has been about who I have kind of thrown in with and the ways in which we have supported each other. And through this process, not just so that we have survived, but that we've really built a kind of safety net for ourselves, a kind of like micro infrastructure so that we



are both holding each other emotionally and helping each other process all of the chaos and uncertainty.

Mia ([04:51](#)):

But we're also celebrating and finding a tremendous amount of joy and laughter in this time. And I think that right now, what I'm actually feeling is a lot of gratitude for the people who I've become closer to during this period and with whom I've created these relationships. I've made a couple of very good friends with people who I have never met in person.

Mia ([05:20](#)):

And I find that extraordinary for lots of reasons. I have this one friend, Kat, who lives in Seattle and we talk about how we're going to meet in person someday. And I realize I don't know how tall she is. She could have tentacles instead of legs for all I know. I've only seen her from the shoulders up. And there's this way in which I feel like so much of the way we relate to each other is in our physicality. And it's kind of like understanding each other's bodies. And to have made these relationships without having that is just interesting, and I'm curious to-

MBS ([06:06](#)):

Yeah. Unexpected.

Mia ([06:06](#)):

... see what will happen when we actually get to be in person with each other.

MBS ([06:12](#)):

Mia, was there a moment you remember where you first felt kinship? When did that seed get planted?



Mia ([06:21](#)):

That's a great question. I think that I certainly like, and I'm going to make a distinction between kinship and family and home, right?

MBS ([06:33](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mia ([06:33](#)):

Because I feel like I very much grew up feeling a sense of family and home. And I think the first thing that comes to mind honestly is, so I was a girl scout when I was in elementary school. I don't know if you have girl scouts where you're from.

MBS ([06:49](#)):

We call them guides in Australia, but I was a boy scout, so similar.

Mia ([06:54](#)):

Yeah. And we would go on these camping trips. And I remember being in the forest kneeling down on the ground and looking at this piece of moss and these big trees above me. And I'm just looking at the ground and this piece of moss. And I think I was kind of thinking about, there was some story going through my head, some kind of like fanciful story going through my head about panthers or fairies or something like Smurfs, something like that.

MBS ([07:30](#)):

It's quite a choice, panthers, fairies or Smurfs. You've got the whole range there.

Mia ([07:38](#)):

All of them, I was a very imaginative child.



MBS ([07:40](#)):

I see that.

Mia ([07:42](#)):

And I remember just feeling this embodied sense of connection to the moss and the rocks that it was on and the ground, and the sense of belonging. And I feel like that is the thing that came to mind when you asked me that question about my kind of first memory of kinship.

MBS ([08:06](#)):

when I asked you who you were, you said, "Look, I'm a facilitator and I'm a builder." I've also seen you explain yourself as a pathfinder.

Mia ([08:14](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MBS ([08:16](#)):

What's the connection between finding a path and building something?

Mia ([08:22](#)):

That is a great question. So the way that I think of the pathfinding that I do is that it's not creating the path, right, it's revealing the path. It is that, if I'm facilitating a group of people through a process, right, it is about kind of uncovering something that is fundamentally human about them that they have lost their way or lost touch with.

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

And kind of coming back to that so that they can be in a deeper space of accountability and belonging and collectiveness with each other. When I think about it for us and like the future, right? Or I think about the book, right, my



book that I wrote. And that, for me, the process of writing that book really was pathfinding.

Mia ([09:19](#)):

It was that I had this longing and these questions about what it is to be a person in the world and how we be people with each other, especially coming from the states where we have such a deeply individualistic orientation toward how you are a person, and it doesn't work for us. It's not who humans fundamentally are. We are fundamentally social animals. We are tremendously interdependent.

Mia ([09:54](#)):

And there is this way in which we have lost our connection to that. So writing the book for me, which was, or the process of writing it, which was really dozens of conversations that I had with people who I felt had some insight into, or answers from me around how we be in more connection with each other and in deep a relationship with each other. So that process was really about, yeah, leading myself, right?

Mia ([10:23](#)):

Finding a path for myself toward that deeper connection. And thank goodness I did that before the pandemic because I think that the pandemic then kind of, for many people, it has been a tremendous isolating experience. And then I think there's some of us for whom it has actually brought us in deeper relationship with the people who are important to us. And I am thankfully very much on that side of things.

Mia ([10:51](#)):

And I think in terms of the difference between pathfinding and building, I mean, maybe building is not the thing that I would say that I do. I mean, it's not that I don't build things, I think that I do that, but I think maybe it's more about creating processes, right? In order to find the path that has been overgrown,



right, you have to have some of doing that. You have to have your machete or you have to have your-

MBS ([11:25](#)):

Playing thrower, or whatever might be. Yeah.

Mia ([11:26](#)):

Right. You'd have your compass, right, to all of those things. So I think it's about assembling the tools and then creating some process for the thing to happen. And it is not about finding paths that already exist and you're kind of going back to some abandoned place, right? It's not about finding old ruins or a ghost town.

Mia ([11:47](#)):

It really is finding our way back to ourselves so that we can... And the thing we're building, right, is the world we want to live in the future. And that's not about going back 100 years or 200 years. It really is about moving forward in the context that we have. But reconnecting to some of those things that we've become disconnected from that are in our past, but that are really, again, like they're in ourselves.

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

Yes. You mentioned longing and you mentioned it in your book as well, what we're longing for.

Mia ([12:24](#)):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MBS ([12:27](#)):

How does one, how do I connect to what I'm longing for?





Mia ([12:34](#)):

That's a great question. And I mean, I don't think there's one way to do that. So I'll tell you what I think works for me.

MBS ([12:43](#)):

Yeah.

Mia ([12:46](#)):

It is about creating enough presence in my day, for me to notice myself. Right? To actually feel what I'm feeling and not be thinking about what is it that I have to do after I do this one thing that I'm doing, right. It is about finding some spaciousness. And definitely that is sometimes moments by myself where I'm sitting in the sun or meditating or whatever.

Mia ([13:21](#)):

But sometimes it is actually when I'm with my kids or somebody who I love and we're in connection, right? But I'm in the moment with them, so we're laughing or we're talking or eating or cooking or whatever. But it is still the noticing, right. It's the noticing in those moments, what some part of us is trying to tell us some, something that's trying to speak itself into our awareness.

Mia ([13:53](#)):

And then I think there's a way in which we have to, like longing can be uncomfortable, right? So there's a way in which we have to also not be avoidant of the thing that is uncomfortable or turn away from it when it starts to kind of come up for us. So when I notice that I'm feeling that longing to just like, not turn away from it and just sit with it. I took a poetry writing class and it was a poetry writing class that was about love poems, but not about romantic love.

MBS ([14:31](#)):

Okay.



Mia ([14:32](#)):

And I wrote this poem about one of my best friends and the moment that I kind, what came up in my memory was this, he and I had left some theater performance and we were holding hands and running across the street to, I don't know where we're going. And as I remembered this moment, I had this very visceral memory of this longing that I had for him to have been somebody who I grew up with so that he would know me in a different way.

Mia ([15:12](#)):

So we met three years ago and there are all these ways in which we're very similar and he's definitely family. We became family with each other very quickly, but we met when we were in our mid-40s. So there's the whole part of my life that I can tell him about, but that he hasn't seen me through.

Mia ([15:39](#)):

And there's a way in which I had this longing for him to know me the way that someone who had known me all my life would know me. And there's obviously nothing to do about it because I haven't figured out time travel yet. It's not about something more of-

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

It's a money maker if you can figure out time travel, by the way. I mean, you're like-

Mia ([16:02](#)):

I mean, there might be money making, but I feel like that's also disastrous, right?

MBS ([16:05](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.



Mia ([16:05](#)):

Like the things that could go wrong. And [crosstalk 00:16:08] it's also not about a flaw in our relationship at all. The thing I was longing for is not something I can have. But I think in noticing that it helped me understand my relationship with him more deeply.

Mia ([16:23](#)):

It helped me understand the enthusiasm with which we both made a commitment to be each other's family. And the longevity we're anticipating for that because we didn't know each other for the first half of our lives, but we're very committed to making sure that we know each other for the rest of our lives.

MBS ([16:45](#)):

That's beautiful. Mia, what book have you chosen to read for us?

Mia ([16:51](#)):

So I'm going to read from Braiding Sweetgrass. I'm picking it up right now. Sorry for the rusting. Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer.

MBS ([17:03](#)):

This has been an incredible success and slightly surprising in my mind that a book like this has somehow found its way. How did it find its way to you?

Mia ([17:13](#)):

Well, I think that it's been such a success because I think it speaks to a longing that we have, right, for being able to marry these two things that I think in Western culture seem like binaries, right, science and then indigenous knowledge, right. That those are two different things and they're not. I think it was in the zeitgeist of my community. I don't know how I found it.



MBS ([17:43](#)):

Yes.

Mia ([17:43](#)):

I just feel like there was a period where everyone I knew was reading it.

MBS ([17:47](#)):

Exactly.

Mia ([17:48](#)):

And I will say, I have not finished it because it is a book that I read a chapter and then I just hold that. And I feel like it's so rich with information. Fascinating science and wisdom and teaching, right, that I have felt I can only take in so much at a time. So I read a chapter whenever I'm kind of called back to it.

MBS ([18:23](#)):

Right. Love that. How did you choose the pages to read for us?

Mia ([18:28](#)):

So they're among the ones that I've read. That's my first criteria.

MBS ([18:31](#)):

That's fair enough.

Mia ([18:33](#)):

So I'll set it up a little bit. She's writing about this ritual that her father did as she was growing up where he would make coffee and he would be outside with the coffee pot and before he would his own cup, he would pour out some onto the ground.



Mia ([18:55](#)):

She says like, she said, "The stream runs down over the smooth granite to merge with the lake water, as clear and brown as the coffee. I watched it trickle, picking up bits of pale lichen and soaking into tiny clumps of moss as it flows at the crack to the water's edge." And what her father says is, "Here's to the gods of Tahawus," when he pours this. So it's some of the pages kind of like about that ritual.

MBS ([19:28](#)):

Beautiful.

Mia ([19:29](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([19:31](#)):

Well, I'm excited to sit with you and hear you read this. So over to you, Mia.

Mia ([19:40](#)):

All right. "A people's story moves along like a canoe caught in the current, being carried closer and closer to where we had begun. As I grew up, my family found again the tribal connection that had been frayed, but never broken, by history. We found the people who knew our true names. And when I first heard in Oklahoma the sending of thanks to the four directions at the sunrise lodge, the offering in the old language of the sacred tobacco, I heard it as if in my father's voice."

Mia ([20:12](#)):

"The language was different, but the heart was the same. Ours was a solitary ceremony, but fed from the same bond with the land, founded on respect and gratitude. Now the circle drawn around us is bigger, encompassing a whole people to which we again belong. But still the offering says, 'Here we are,' and



still I hear at the end of the words the land murmuring to itself, 'Oh, here are the ones who know how to say thank you.' Today my father can speak his prayer in our language, but it was, 'Here's to the gods of Tahawus that came first,' in the voice that I will always hear."

Mia ([20:53](#)):

"It was in the presence of ancient ceremonies that I understood that our coffee offering was not secondhand, it was ours. Much of who I am and what I do is wrapped up in my father's offering by the lake shore. Each day still begins with a version of, 'Here's to the gods of Tahawus, a thanksgiving for the day.' My work as an ecologist, a writer, a mother, as a traveler between scientific and traditional ways of knowing grows from the power of those words."

Mia ([21:24](#)):

"It reminds me of who we are. It reminds me of our gifts and our responsibility to those gifts. Ceremony is a vehicle for belonging to a family, to a people and to the land. At last, I thought that I understood the offering to the gods of Tahawus. It was, for me, the one thing that was not forgotten that could not be taken by history."

Mia ([21:49](#)):

"The knowing that we belonged to the land, that we were the people who knew how to say thank you. It welled up from a deep blood memory that the land, the lakes and the spirit had held for us. But years later, with my own answer already in place, I asked my father, 'Where did the ceremony come from? Did you learn it from your father, and he from his? Did it stretch all the way back to the time of the canoes?' He thought for a long time. 'No, I don't think so. It's just what we did. It seemed right.' That was all."



Mia ([22:25](#)):

"Some weeks went by, though, and when we spoke again, he said, 'I have been thinking about the coffee and how we started giving it to the ground. You know, it was boiled coffee, there's no filter. And if it boils too hard, the grounds foam up and get stuck in the spout. So the first cup you pour, you would get that plug of grounds and be spoiled. I think we first did it to clear the spout.'"

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

"It was as if he told that the water didn't change to wine, the whole web of gratitude, the whole story of remembrance was nothing more than the dumping of the grounds. But he said, 'There weren't always grounds to clear. It started out that way, but it became something else. A thought. It was a kind of respect, a kind of thanks. On a beautiful summer morning, I suppose you could call it joy.' That, I think, is the power of ceremony."

Mia ([23:18](#)):

"It marries the mundane to the sacred, the water turns to wine, the coffee to a prayer. The material and the spiritual mingle like grounds mingled with hummus, transformed like steam rising from a mug into the morning mist. What else can you offer the earth which has everything? What else can you give but something of yourself? A homemade ceremony, a ceremony that makes a home."

MBS ([23:48](#)):

Thank you. Where's the joy in that for you?

Mia ([23:53](#)):

Oh God, I mean, it's the small joy, right, that is the present moment of, her father specifically says like, "I know of warm summer days." So you can see like, again, like right now I'm looking out at this land that I'm sitting on and the tulips are blooming and the sourgrass is blooming.



Mia ([24:19](#)):

And I think about the moment I took this morning to just stand out there with the sun on my face, right, and be in gratitude and in noticing of the space that I was in, and like that kind of joy, which is a kind of just like aliveness is both totally profound and completely mundane. And I love that.

MBS ([24:45](#)):

Yes. I love that. And that's kind of the braiding of this book, the profound and the mundane.

Mia ([24:49](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.

MBS ([24:51](#)):

Mia, there was a phrase that struck a chord for me, which is understanding our gifts and our responsibilities to our gifts.

Mia ([24:58](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([24:59](#)):

What does responsibility to our gifts mean to you?

Mia ([25:06](#)):

So I think it is about claiming them, right. So not denying that they exist or somehow diminishing them and kind of talking about them as if they're not like a big deal, right. That they're not special in some way. I think there's that piece. And then I think there is the piece that's about figuring out what you're supposed to do with them.





MBS ([25:37](#)):

Right.

Mia ([25:37](#)):

Right. Like that there is some responsibility to use the gift in the way that it seems like it was supposed to be used. And then that's the reason that you have it, right. I think I'm someone who, it took me a while to figure out what my gifts were. I think I was looking for something that was like a task or a job, right, that I'm good at. Science or writing or like something like that. And I think that what I was kind of slowly figured out was that my gift really is about connecting and bridge building. Or maybe it's actually bridge revealing, right.

MBS ([26:34](#)):

Right. It became a metaphor here.

Mia ([26:34](#)):

But if a bridge was kind of a pathway. But that the bridge is there. I think one of my gifts is seeing people, right. Being able to like connect to pretty much anyone even if it doesn't appear that we would have anything to connect around. This friend who I was talking to about, like he and I are in many ways, I think at first glance, very, very different people.

Mia ([27:09](#)):

And I remember when we met, we met at a dinner and we sat across from each other and there was nothing in his bio that suggested that he would be interesting at all, but there was something that I was immediately just drawn to. And he didn't really say much of anything, it was just like, it was what happened. And I was like, the next time we met, I had already decided that he and I were-

MBS ([27:38](#)):

Were kin. Yeah.



Mia ([27:39](#)):

Yeah. Exactly. And I behaved accordingly and he accepted that. So, yeah. And I think that so much of the work that I do is a kind of research that is talking to people about their stories. And I mean, I love asking people questions about themselves and listening to their stories. And I think we don't get very many opportunities in our lives to actually sit and tell a story and have somebody listen to the whole thing.

MBS ([28:18](#)):

How did your sense of your gifts emerge? I mean, not obvious from the start, it took some time and you found them. But I'm wondering, what was the uncovering of those?

Mia ([28:34](#)):

I think it was over time, right? So I think part of my gifts are these things that have either been places that I kept returning to, these things I kept returning to.

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

Yeah. It's okay.

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

And in some cases were things that didn't feel like gifts. They felt like, so for example, my mom is a white woman from Georgia and my dad was a black man from Jamaica. So in America I'm biracial, but I'm also bicultural. My dad was an immigrant, so I'm first generation on his side. So there are all these ways in which I felt divided.

MBS ([29:26](#)):

But maybe braided.



Mia ([29:29](#)):

Yes. But I didn't feel... No, but braiding is integrated. Right?

MBS ([29:33](#)):

Right, right, right.

Mia ([29:33](#)):

So I felt very like, oh, I exist in these multiple places.

MBS ([29:37](#)):

I understand. Yeah.

Mia ([29:38](#)):

When I was in when I was in high school, I was both, I was a cheerleader. I was captain of the cheerleaders. I was also in theater stuff. And I spent my weekends with nerdy white boys watching Alfred Hitchcock movies and playing cards. So again, like these worlds that didn't really interact and I was in all of them. And I think I had this story that I could never find a place where I totally belonged, because I could only be part of myself in all of those places.

Mia ([30:13](#)):

And I think as I've grown up and I'm like, oh, I actually belong in all those places. And I can be my whole self anywhere. And the people who connect to a particular part of me will still be able to like, they'll be able to handle the rest of me. It's not like the part of me that likes to watch Alfred Hitchcock movies, like the cheerleaders are not going to be like, "Oh my God, what's wrong with you?"

Mia ([30:36](#)):

They're going to be like, "Oh, that's interesting," because people are deeper than that. Right? So I think at some point I felt more integrated and there was a kind of liberation that came with realizing that I actually can belong everywhere that



I am. And there is a kind of, it's not just a kind of liberation, but I feel like there's a kind of rebellion in that.

Mia ([30:56](#)):

Because certainly growing up in America as a black woman, that is not the kind of narrative that I hear, that I belong everywhere. And to be able to push back against that and claim that, and not in a colonial, like I'm putting my stake in the ground in this place whether or not you want me, but more that my ability to connect with people allowed me to create space of belonging for myself, wherever I am.

MBS ([31:27](#)):

I'm wondering, to kind of nod to the story of pouring the coffee and clearing the plug of grounds, was there a process where you needed to clear something to make this work more obvious, more easier for you?

Mia ([31:48](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I think that it was clearing away, like old stories I had about who I was or what was for me. I think that so much of, certainly my kind of like life experience, but also the work that I do with folks is about supporting them in putting down old stories and figuring out what are the new stories that they actually want to tell, right?

Mia ([32:25](#)):

What are the new stories about who they want to be themselves or who they want to be together. And then sometimes it's actually like, what is the actual story? Because we have some old story that we've just been holding onto, and that the holding on of that story hasn't allowed us to see the story that actually is being told. I think that that's the thing that I've had to clear.



MBS ([32:50](#)):

Yeah.

Mia ([32:51](#)):

I think though that so much about what resonated with me about that passage is about how that process, right, is grounding, right? It allows us to place ourselves in a larger context and in doing so kind of, well, we're doing it with some humility, right, and some appreciation. And that helps us make place, right?

Mia ([33:26](#)):

It helps us make place among the people we're with or the land that we're with. And that that actually is in some ways literally grounding. And I think that's part of what, when we have things to clear, it is about getting rid of the stuff that is in our way or that is blocking our view or undermining our gifts so that we can get grounded and be where we are.

MBS ([33:58](#)):

I'm curious around what it takes to tell a new story. And also, how do you find a way of creating a new story that is about you, but is also about your place and your context. Because actually when you tell, what's your new story, where I go is into an individualistic answer, here I am. Let me be the hero of this new narrative.

MBS ([34:27](#)):

And I do think part of what you're speaking to is to say, you're both the center of your story and you're also part of a woven cloth of other stories and other context and other place. What do you think is the essence of a new story?



Mia ([34:47](#)):

Well, the thing that comes to mind is that... So okay, so some of the work that I do is around narrative and culture change. And one of the things that I hear people who are marginalized say, and I'll speak specifically to black folks, is things like we're not meant to survive here. And kind of talking about the American context, right, there's this, and it said with a kind of pride, right?

Mia ([35:26](#)):

Like, "We're still here and we were not meant to survive here." And for me, I hear that and I'm like, "Well, according to whom?" Right. Whose determination are we centering when we say that? And in my mind, like part of the shift there is that I'm centering, I'm like, I'm meant to survive on the planet. Right? The earth is not racist, right? The earth is not trying to oppress and diminish black people.

Mia ([36:08](#)):

So I think there is this way in which I'm like, sure, absolutely in the context of the United States there are all these systems and structures that are harmful to us, but I absolutely am meant to survive. Because I think it does something to our people to have a story that you're not meant to survive, right. And that you don't belong someplace, right.

Mia ([36:35](#)):

And so I'm like, "Oh, how can we reframe? Whose idea of belonging and survival are we centering and how can we shift that center? How can we shift that focus to something that says, absolutely we are meant to survive and absolutely we belong here?" And the thing that is telling us that is the thing we're trying to make obsolete and irrelevant.

Mia ([37:03](#)):

I think it requires, and you asked me what it requires to do that, I think it requires a kind of, I mean, to some extent it requires just an examination of the things



that we think of as truth. Right? And that requires critical thinking and I think being in conversation about those things with other people who are interested in kind of that examination and that kind of thinking.

Mia ([37:34](#)):

And then fundamentally, I think it means that we have to come to a deep place of loving ourselves. Because in order for me to believe, right, to see that I actually belong, like I have to deeply love. And I don't mean myself personally. I mean, I love black people. And I'm part of that, for sure. But that is a collective kind of love.

Mia ([37:59](#)):

I love so many things about us, including the ways in which we have survived in the face of systems and forces that have tried to end us and diminish us. But that kind of love also sees beyond the thing that has been limiting us for hundreds of years. I mean, it sees not just potentially kind of who we were before, right. But more than that, for me, it is about who I feel like we are, what I want for us in the future, what I want for us in terms of how we think about place and ourselves and what's possible for us and what is for us.

MBS ([38:47](#)):

Mia, this has been such a rich conversation, so thank you. As a final question, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation?

Mia ([39:01](#)):

The other thing that I think is, this is the passage that I read, the other kind of invitation I see in it is this, she talks about this kind of marrying of the mundane and the sacred. And I love that in part because it kind of, it strips away the kind of accessory and frill, right, from ceremony. And reminds us that things like weddings and graduations and birth, like these things that have a lot of stuff around them.



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

Poses. Yeah.

Mia ([39:40](#)):

Yes. Are fundamentally very simple, right. They're meant to connect-

MBS ([39:50](#)):

[crosstalk 00:39:50] a threshold. Yeah.

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

Yeah. Right. Where it's a milestone, it's connecting our individual cells with the collective and our collective kind of to all that is. And To be clear, I love an ornate ritual. I celebrate my birthday for like a week. I want cake. I want all the things.

MBS ([40:06](#)):

Right. All the things.

Mia ([40:10](#)):

But under all of those is something very simple that is being acknowledged. And I think that just recognizing that puts things into perspective. I think take some of the pressure off of how we can find these moments of ritual in our lives, right. They don't have to be... So I have this altar in the space that I'm in and I used to feel like, okay, I want to do something at my altar every day.

Mia ([40:37](#)):

And I used to think it had to be this whole thing where I light the candles. And I do some kind of room clearing thing. And I pull tarot cards and I do my prayers to my ancestors. And then I do my prayers to my descendants. And then I do my prayers to the [inaudible 00:40:54] and the gods and the universe. And it was a whole thing.





Mia ([40:58](#)):

And I was like, I can't do that every morning. I don't have time for that. And then at some point I was like, oh, but I don't need to do all that. It can be one thing and it can be really, really simple and it still serves a purpose, right, that I need it to serve.

Mia ([41:18](#)):

And sometimes I can do a whole ornate thing if I'm feeling moved to do that, but that I can make it this very simple thing allows me to do it more regularly so that I can have it be part of my daily life. And I think that that piece, the pause that a simple ritual like that requires is very small, but it just brings us to our now. And I think that it is profound in its ability to do that.

MBS ([41:51](#)):

There's so much good to braid together here. First, the phrase from the reading that Mia and I talked about, to have responsibility to our own gifts. For me, that's a nudge to say, stop playing small. When we think our gifts are a thing just for us, it's easy enough to be a little dismissive about them. To underplay them. They're just X, they're just for Y, I'm just this person.

MBS ([42:24](#)):

But when you think of your gifts as of being of service to the world, your family, your community, your team, your organization, then I think it's harder to under commit to them. We need you, I guess I need you to take responsibility for your gifts, responsibilities for your freedom.

MBS ([42:45](#)):



And to that piece, that come as part of the conversation, I want to weave in this idea of, also from the reading, the mundane and the sacred, remember the grounds of coffee that Mia read about? I think our gifts are these grounds of coffee. They're both every day and they're also something extraordinary. You dismiss the magic of who you are when you underplay your gifts, you underplay the best of who you might be.

MBS ([43:15](#)):

You've enjoy this conversation with Mia, and it was such a pleasure to talk to her. I've got two other interviews that I might suggest for you. Tope Folarin. Our conversation was about Living in Two Worlds. He's a guy I'd met through the Rhode scholarship connection, but he's a poet. And also the executive director of a foundation.

MBS ([43:35](#)):

And I love the way he plays at, not just in the work he does, but also he is biracial and what it means to be a man of color living and working in America. And then the second interview I thought might be interesting is Jordan Dinwiddie. She is an amazing young woman in the advertising space. That interview is How to be 100% Yourself.

MBS ([43:59](#)):

She's the first person who read from a graphic novel for 2 Pages, which was so disconcerting a little bit, but also so cool. And you might enjoy that conversation as well. For about more about Mia, her website is [miabirdsong.com](http://miabirdsong.com), M-I-A birdsong.com, Mia Birdsong. Thank you for listening. You're awesome. You're doing great. I really appreciate your time and your presence on this podcast with me.



MBS ([44:28](#)):

If you have a chance to give it a blurb, a rating, fantastic. If you have a chance to recommend this interview to somebody who you think would like to hear it, I appreciate that as well. And if you want a little more, there is a little membership site where you can get excess, additional resources, it's called the Duke Humfrey's library. And you'll find it on the [mbs.works](#) website when you click through on the podcast. You're awesome. You're doing great.