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

Once long, long ago, I actually got on the phone and chatted with Brene Brown about the possibility of writing a book together about paradox. I thought with everything that she could bring, which is actually now I think about it, everything. And me, not entirely sure what I'd bring other than an idea for a book on paradox. But I thought we could co-create something fantastic, something fascinating between us.

([00:26](#)):

Now, my guess is once we rang off, she thought about that for about two seconds before deciding to write *Daring Greatly*, one of her other following great books. So it's clear that she made the right call and didn't co-write that book with me, but that doesn't stop me loving paradox. I think it's a place where logic bends, where unexpected combinations create magic, where the



impossible lurks. Paradox is where the shy mysteries of the universe peek out and wave hello.

[\(01:01\)](#):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, book that has shaped them. Brandi Stanley is the author of the book *This Plus That*. It's actually got the essence of paradox built into that. And there's already a generosity and an openness in that book title that I actually think you'll find in this conversation. Now, you'll find Brandi happily thriving in many intersections, including the one where this podcast lives. The intersection between the written word and speaking it out aloud.

Brandi [\(01:39\)](#):

I grew up around a lot of spoken word culture, poetry. And so, I think I just love how the written word sounds out loud.

MBS [\(01:48\)](#):

Now, you might've guessed that Brandi is a creative soul. And in fact, she describes herself as someone who is spiritual, even mystical. But she also has to exist here in the physical realm, where jobs and eating are things that you've actually got to figure out.

Brandi [\(02:04\)](#):

It can be difficult to figure out as spiritual leaning or mystic people in the world how you actually survive financially. And I spent about 20 years as a branding and marketing professional. It was the way I knew how to monetize sort of a mystical gift.

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

But I was curious if you dig down through that technical expertise, what's at the heart of it?



Brandi ([02:27](#)):

I have a gift, I think, for sort of spotting the essence of people and things. It's like another way of articulation, right? How can we articulate the essence of what you are and communicate that to a wider group of people, so that your people find you?

MBS ([02:43](#)):

This rings a bell for me. I often say that perhaps my best skill, my genius work, if you like, is unwierding stuff, helping find simplicity on the other side of complexity. Ironically, that's a long-winded, non-essential way of saying I try and find the essence, and things, and communicate it in a way that other people find helpful. Now, the essence of things, the essence of ideas is one thing. The essence of a person is another thing altogether, more complex and more elusive. And I was curious to know what Brandi believed her essence is.

Brandi ([03:24](#)):

I actually heard in a podcast, and I don't know if you do this in every episode, but I did hear it in the one with the woman who was speaking about grief and hospice care at the end, sort of closing with a question that's like, "What didn't we cover today?" And I was once in a workshop where one of the first things they asked us to do is to pair up with someone else, and to ask this total stranger, "What is it that you feel like no one ever asks you?" Like what's the thing that is missing basically that you don't... Sort of a way to say, how do you not feel seen?

([03:56](#)):

My answer would probably be... Yeah, what is my essence? I think probably I've always been interested in the deeply sort of spiritual, and mystical, and the existential, the hearts of what we're doing here. And I think every writer, and artist, and scientists, we're all sort of in our own way figuring out how to grapple or make meaning with life. You know? And so-



MBS ([04:18](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([04:19](#)):

... I think I sort of find myself in that lineage of tradition, I think. And that's where I like to sort of position myself, but not in a, I don't know, self-aggrandizing way. I think when you really get into any sort of mystical work or sort of grappling with those deeper questions, you realize how quickly you actually know nothing. It happens.

MBS ([04:45](#)):

Exactly. You are nothing. You know nothing, all of that.

Brandi ([04:48](#)):

Yeah. And I think I am currently, I think, just in a place where I am dealing with a lot of personal grief, and change, and loss, and feeling so ungrounded. And it's brought up so many those things where you go, "Aren't I a spiritual person? Can't I be okay with being ungrounded?" And you're like, "No. I'm just, today, I'm scared, and I'm flailing, and I'm sad, all those things."

([05:22](#)):

I hope that my essence is a practice of being in that space. And I think that's really what This Plus That even was about of grappling with contradiction, and uncertainty, and paradox, and all of those things. So yeah, I think seeming contradictions and paradox are sort of at the heart of what I'm walking around with every day.

MBS ([05:45](#)):

Do you remember the moment when you became first aware of mysticalness, if that's even a word. You know that kind of when that thing got awakened or that door got open for the first time?



Brandi ([06:06](#)):

Yeah, I think that's a pretty personal story, which is when I was younger, I grew up with an alcoholic parent and just in a sort of struggling family. I grew up as an only child, but I had a half-brother that didn't live with us. So I was the only kid in the house. And I remember in probably mid to late high school, I had been having a really hard time with life. Family life was difficult, and I didn't sort of know my place. And school, of course, at that age is just really a mess. You're just a personal mess.

([06:38](#)):

And I met someone on a bus. It was one of those truly mystical experiences where you're like, I was the shy kid. No reason at all for me to choose to sit down next to a stranger when there were tons of seats open on the bus. But I choose to sit down next to this person, and eventually become friends with her. And she sort of introduces me to... I grew up in Dallas, so I grew up in the South. So when we're talking mystical things, I started out in Christianity like a lot of folks in the Southern US have.

([07:10](#)):

And yeah, so I just became friends with her. And eventually, I remember walking outside one day between classes. And for someone who was just struggling so much and was I think probably grappling with a lot of depression and mental health issues at that age, I found myself walking outside between classes with a smile on my face. And I remember very distinctly thinking some sort of hole that I didn't even know existed feels like it's been filled. And I sort of continued learning in that sort of tradition. And eventually like a lot of people too who kind of grew up in it, it wasn't my family tradition.

([07:45](#)):

But I was still young enough that I sort of grew up in Christianity, and I started grappling with what that actually meant, and if what I was being told through the church was really what I believed, and all of those things. I mean, I even



think that before that, I remember moments where my parents would be fighting or something, and I would be alone in my room, and I'd be praying even though I didn't know what prayer was. And just sort of going like, I think probably bargaining even. If you help change this, I will do X. You know?

MBS ([08:17](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([08:19](#)):

I mean, I think whatever it was... I can't remember the name of the book, but I remember she opens it with something like, "I've always believed in whatever laid behind the universe," or something like that. And I think there was just always something in me that sort of believed in some sort of energy or spiritual force. I think I've given it a lot of names the same way that most of us have sort of grappled with naming it in a lot of different ways. But yeah, I think it's just always sort of been there. But that sort of high school experience is the first time I remember really concretely engaging with that.

MBS ([08:50](#)):

Yeah. You've already alluded to some of the things you've been wrestling with. I'm wondering what you've learned over time are sources of strength and stability for you.

Brandi ([09:10](#)):

You mean the things that sort of ground me?

MBS ([09:13](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([09:16](#)):

Weirdly and interestingly, I actually do think that books are one of those things.



MBS ([09:20](#)):

Second.

Brandi ([09:21](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([09:21](#)):

I'll just kind of violently agree with each other from here on in.

Brandi ([09:25](#)):

Great. I just find so much grounding and wisdom there. I think that's where I to tap into source in a lot of ways, right? Like where I meet sort of the things that light up the stuff in me that sort of makes me come alive. So when I get into those moments, it makes me feel very grounded. I think too in the very rare moments in my life where I've made it through conflict with people, and on the other side of that have felt a deeper sense of intimacy, and like, "Oh, whew." It's okay. We're okay. Life is okay. We can do this thing.

MBS ([09:58](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([09:58](#)):

You know? I'm not alone. We're in this together. We're willing to sort of suffer through this or work through these challenges, which I think just comes up because it's relevant in my life currently. And I think nature, you know?

MBS ([09:58](#)):

Yeah.



Brandi ([10:13](#)):

There are these really simple answers, books and nature. But truly, when I camp, actually, is one of the most grounded, and empowered, and solo camping. I have had moments in my life of feeling very terrified that I was going to become Christopher McCandless, which is Into the Wild, so I might just die in a van alone in the Alaskan wilderness or something.

MBS ([10:37](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([10:38](#)):

I think that sort of mystical tendency too, it's really hard for folks, I think, to grapple with being both sort of spiritual leaning who need a lot of deep alone time, and reflection, and all of those things at which we find alone in the wilderness very often.

MBS ([10:52](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([10:52](#)):

And also, being part of the world and having to be in modern society. So yeah, I think sort of regrounding myself in nature has always been a real... And I think a lot of what I write about sort of pulls in ecology too. I think ecology and the sciences in my artistic practice has always been... Just everything to do with the cosmos basically has always been really interesting to me. So anything that's sort of of the natural world I find myself in very often.

MBS ([11:24](#)):

Brandi, it feels like there's a lot to dig into, but I want to take you to the book you've chosen for us.



Brandi ([11:24](#)):

Awesome.

MBS ([11:30](#)):

What have you picked?

Brandi ([11:32](#)):

So the book I picked is called *Matter and Desire: An Erotic Ecology*, which is already a scandalous sounding title, but is not necessarily what it sounds like it's about.

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

Now, this is not a book I know at all. So how did it come into your life?

Brandi ([11:48](#)):

Yeah. So actually, I interviewed Andreas Weber on my podcast. And it was one of the most glorious two hours of my life I've ever spent. He's brilliant. But I was introduced to *Matter and Desire*, this book, around 2018 or 2019. And I tell a lot more of this story on that interview. But I interestingly was at a moment where I felt like I had been grappling with death in a real way. And I think it was more... I got really into social justice culture and all kinds of things in my early to mid-20s. And that sort of lasted a lot of time up through my mid-30s.

([12:29](#)):

And I think when Trump was elected in the US, a lot of people who were sort of left-leaning had a lot of questions about what that was going to mean for my life, and for my family's life, and future generations. There's so much more context I'd really love to provide around that, but won't. I'll spare everybody that, because there's a lot of different takes politically. But regardless, I was grappling with the idea of death, not necessarily like... Someone hadn't died in



my family, but it just felt like for the first time I was really going like, "Oh, my gosh." My own life might be on the line here.

MBS ([13:07](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([13:07](#)):

And also, I had a lot of people around me who were wondering whether or not they should have children because of the environment and all kinds of things. So anyway, someone had introduced me to this. And I had also just read Wendell Berry's *Art of the Commonplace*.

MBS ([13:24](#)):

Yes.

Brandi ([13:24](#)):

Or his collection of essays called *Art of the Commonplace*, and that really was the first entree. And then, interestingly had found *Matter and Desire* through a friend, the same friend who introduced me to Wendell Berry. And weirdly, they both deeply grapple with the idea of death, and contradiction, and aliveness, and how to live lives that are most alive. So this book sort of became, a handful of years later, it's still so meaningful to me. And every word of it is beautiful. I have a friend I've recommended it to who continually is like, "Brandi, I keep trying to read it, but I get a page in and there's so much to take in."

MBS ([13:24](#)):

Oh, I love things like that.

Brandi ([14:03](#)):

I put it down again.



MBS ([14:03](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([14:04](#)):

And I just never finish. So that's sort of what it's like.

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

That's wonderful.

Brandi ([14:09](#)):

Yeah.

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

And you've chosen two pages. How did you manage to choose two pages?

Brandi ([14:14](#)):

Yeah.

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

Every sentence is glorious.

Brandi ([14:16](#)):

Truly, it's [inaudible 00:14:17].

MBS ([14:17](#)):

There we go. I see that.

Brandi ([14:18](#)):

Here's the book. I don't know if you can see this. I mean, most of it it's underlined, so it was quite difficult to find two pages.



MBS ([14:28](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([14:28](#)):

Again, this is just where I'm at. And for whatever reason, sort of like you said when we got on, something finds you when it's supposed to. You know?

MBS ([14:28](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([14:37](#)):

And these sort of called to me at the moment, and so that's where I landed.

MBS ([14:42](#)):

Perfect. Well, Brandi, I'm excited to hear this. This is going to be a new experience for me, so over to you.

Brandi ([14:42](#)):

Great.

MBS ([14:48](#)):

Thanks, Brandi.

Brandi ([14:49](#)):

Actually, I will also give a little bit more context, which is I think he is very much in the line of folks like Robin Wall Kimmerer and some of the sort of indigenous or ecological writers of the world. So if anyone likes Robin Wall Kimmerer, I think you'd really enjoy this. Okay. So yeah, so Andreas Weber is the author's name. And his website I think is even biopoetics.com or something like that. He's very much in my lane, which is mixing together things that seem unconnected in some way. So he is a very poetic biologist.



[\(15:23\)](#):

And so, the way he opens this piece is he's telling a story about a time at a conference where many young biologists and philosophers had gathered together to talk about what he said was an alternative view of life. He doesn't expand on that more, so I wish I knew what that meant or at least to him. So one night, they're all outside going back and forth between this cold pond and a steaming sauna, these two seeming extremes, right? And he winds up in conversation with one of his colleagues named, Cleve Cole brought about because of this setting of seeming contradictions, the very hot and the very cold.

"The reason Cleve prodded me so much about the opposition of the two elements of our chased bacchanalian enjoyment that evening had something to do with the questions that he was interested in that summer. How much opposition can a life form tolerate within itself? How much opposition is necessary for the process of life to progress at all? How crucial is the idea of opposition or paradox to our understanding of life? Cleve goes one step further. A cell only functions, he said to me, on that evening between a few sips of beer because it is incompatible with itself because its component parts are irreconcilable. Every cell is its own contradiction as long as it is alive. So for the individual parts of a cell, does living mean having to help one another understand each other? I asked in response. Precisely. He reflected on that a while, and then continued.

"In a cell, dimensions that are fully irreconcilable come into contact with one another. The genetic data, which is an abstract code, and the cell body, which is a concrete material being in space, both are incompatible with one another, and this incompatibility means that one always has to be translated into the other. Then, there is always an excess that cannot be transferred, I thought allowed. Understanding fails. But in the logic of this antithesis, it only has the chance to be understanding because it must ultimately fail. Were it not for the ever present possibility of death, beings would not need to be possessed by the urge



to evolve to go on existing. Without death, the being is a machine. Or more generally, aliveness must be able to fail if it is to be truly alive.

"Only because of death does life become creative. Yes, Clevi cried slapping his knee. In the lavish summer sunlight that spread between shadowy trees and seemed to dissolve the transparent blades of grass into the surrounding air, my own ruthless assessment seemed unreal to me. Was this very moment not one in which everything seemed to be in harmony, in which harmony actually proved to be the true character of the world? But I knew that Clevi's surprising hunches were usually accurate. And perhaps that evening at the height of midsummer was, in truth, an example of just that, of the necessity of death that would cause the pond to freeze over and stiffen the Linden trunks, so that after a while they might capture our hearts once more with the ecstatic hopes of spring.

"The northern summer splendor owes everything to the long, gloomy winter. All must be informed by darkness and all success by suffering, the philosopher and mystic Richard Rohr observes. This attitude, the ever present belief that you can rescue yourself in the security of just one side, ironing out painful contradictions once and for all robs us of our aliveness. The English philosopher Alan Watts says, 'By and large, Western civilization is a celebration of the illusion that good may exist without evil, light without darkness, and pleasure without pain, and this is true of both its Christian and secular technological phases.' This would mean that wherever there is beauty and productivity, there is also oblique abysmal side that we cannot avoid. Everything else is an illusion.

"And it would also mean that after 200 years of intensive attempts to bring about enlightenment and illumination, now that our civilization has put the earth in a position more unsettling than any it has been in for the last 200 million years, perhaps the moment has come to say goodbye to our belief in a life without death. If this biology of death, an ecology of contradictions were true, that would open new doors. The world of healthy life would then be a good deal more problematic than it had once appeared to be, but also a good



deal closer to what it feels like on the inside in my experience. A challenge to turn contradictions into a narrative that produced meaning. I discovered that life, in truth, is a whole network of such incompatibilities, and I began to get used to the thought that this is perhaps the only reason that it functions at all."

MBS ([20:32](#)):

Beautiful. Thank you. Oh, my goodness. There's so much there.

Brandi ([20:35](#)):

Yeah.

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

I've got like 86 different questions I could ask you, but let me ask you this. What is it about this that struck so deep a chord with you?

Brandi ([20:47](#)):

Yeah, I think it's that line, especially right now, this attitude, the ever present belief that you can rescue yourself and the security of just one side ironing out painful contradictions once and for all robs us of our aliveness, is right now so present for me. I mean, again, I write so much about contradiction, and seeming disparity, and paradox, and all of these things. I say this a lot in interviews, which is that, I think our creative containers, the creative containers that we create are the... I heard someone say recently, "The next creative container we create is the next thing we need to heal us, basically."

([21:29](#)):

Some aspect of us that we need healed. And it became pretty evident in me that not long after creating This Plus That I thought it was about just really celebrating all of these cool people in the world who were mixing together all of these interesting things, and genres, and stuff. And what it became was or what it always was, but became evident to me later was something... A container for



me that allowed me to work out my own internal contradictions or seeming contradictions. And so, I talk about aliveness a lot.

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

But it has become very evident to me that in my own life, my own dying, and my own death, and not literally physical, but even spiritual or whatever, just a continual reworking and death or loss of different things about myself and my identity or what I believe is necessary, and I want so badly to get rid of it. I mean, conflict I think is sort of at the heart of this that I think conflict breeds intimacy, but intimacy requires real comfort with death. To be in relationship with people, or things, or nature even requires a safety that's created at the heart of it where you're actually allowed to work out all of these things that you're terrified of in yourself.

[\(23:01\)](#):

And therefore, terrified in other people also. And so, yeah, I think as much as my brain and my heart really want to embrace contradiction, beauty and aliveness, and all. Like, oh, contradiction is part of the world and paradox is part of the inherent fabric of the universe. I internally still have demons that so badly want to get rid of all of the ugly, and all of the painful, and my own terrible, awful, monstrous self that also is beautiful, and incredible, and smart, and intelligent, and writes well. All the nice things-

MBS [\(23:01\)](#):

All that.

Brandi [\(23:44\)](#):

... about me.

MBS [\(23:44\)](#):

Yeah.



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

And so, yeah, I feel really in it. And I think it's because I'm really in some sort of relational conflict at the moment, so yeah.

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

I can feel how you're in it at the moment. As you talk about being present to death and what's dying, the question I want to ask you is what do you feel is being born? What's emerging?

Brandi ([24:11](#)):

Yeah, what an incredible question. I mean, I think that's the question I've asked myself in the midst of the pain, right? Because I think when you're in it, you're just always like, "Okay, I need to know what is coming of this because it's so painful."

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

Yeah.

Brandi ([24:26](#)):

I think honestly, a lot of it has to do with my own... It's like a knowing I have that we are interdependent, that we are communal creatures. We need each other. But I think probably in a lot of ways, finding in my own self to sort of not be defined externally by other people or things. So what relationships I'm in, what work I'm doing, whatever I feel like it's interesting, I think, and so fitting to me that I sort of came into the work I thought I was here to do, and I still think I'm here to do in a lot of ways.

MBS ([25:05](#)):

Yeah.



Brandi ([25:05](#)):

And as soon as I got several months into that, the universe was like, "Oh, yeah. We're not going to let you have that until you sort of work out some issues that you have of over-identifying with it or..."

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

Right.

Brandi ([25:17](#)):

Whatever. And so I think, there's a lot of sort of internal self-confidence that I'm working through. Yeah. I mean, honestly the answer is, I think, I've been working through a lot of attachment wounding, I think. And so, that's sort of what comes up for me consistently in sort of conflict with people. And I think that's not abnormal. I think a lot of us are sort of like, we're sort of new to that language. And it's been helpful for a lot of people, so we're sort of working through that right now.

MBS ([25:45](#)):

Okay. Can you unpick what attachment wounding means?

Brandi ([25:48](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([25:48](#)):

That's a new phrase for me. And I've got a sense of what it might mean, but how do you talk about that?

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

Yeah, so I think the way I'd speak about it is sort of dynamics that we learned in early childhood or as very small, even babies. I think that we learn how to be in relationship with people and how to get our needs met. And when we've been



sort of wounded in a way, it sort of imprints on us a way to sort of behave in the world that teaches us how we are the only ways that do work in order to get our needs met that are actually quite unhealthy.

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

Right.

Brandi ([26:26](#)):

And so, you often hear people when talking about attachment, there's I think three or four different sort of buckets that you trend toward. My sort of growing belief is that we are all mostly a mix of them depending on the context and the dynamic of any particular relationship we're in. But it's like avoidant who sort of tend to back away when feeling scared, and anxious people who try to run toward when feeling scared, and people whose sort of are a mix of those, or just you even think about or you hear about sort of nervous system language of fight, flight, or freeze.

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

Sure. Yeah.

Brandi ([27:06](#)):

And so, that's sort of similar also.

MBS ([27:08](#)):

Nice.

Brandi ([27:10](#)):

Yeah.



MBS ([27:13](#)):

Paradox is something that you think about, and write about, and work with in terms of This Plus That. What paradoxes in you have you become reconciled with? And how did you find reconciliation?

Brandi ([27:37](#)):

Yeah, I think I'll at least start with lighter things there than all those emotional stuff I've been in. I mean, I think my greatest joys and the things that I do feel like I've done a better job of reconciling so far are, I think This Plus That largely started under a deep interest and the mashing together of art and science. I think those are historical generational divides that have been built, that tell us that we're all quite different from one another and various conceptions that come along with both of those categories. And I had grown up in what was my dad called the artistic or the creative side of the family, which is something he was told by his mother because he loved guitar, and I was a writer, and I've drawn for a lot of my life or whatever. And so, we were sort of the creatives.

[\(28:27\)](#):

And my dad's brother, my uncle, is a mathematician. And his wife is a philosopher and just a double doctorate in language and something else. They're just very smart people. And my grandfather was an engineer and my grandmother was a teacher. And so, my dad and I were sort of looked at like the creatives, and the other side was more scientific or engineering. And so sort of later in my adulthood, I found myself considering becoming an astronaut, which I started to take pretty seriously. It was not a joke for me. And yeah, I started to really follow that path. I got really curious about what it was that was really intriguing to me about quantum physics and all those things. And so, chase that down and just eventually started writing really about those intersections.



[\(29:21\)](#):

And I think that and me, there's been a lot of times even as a writer or a creative of any kind that being more even mystical has been hard because I know a lot of my audience started in a place where I was talking about scientific things. And so, I saw myself and still think grapple with it a bit in terms of like... What would the word be? Just sort of managing my language. How much I was willing to actually share, how I was sharing it, and not sort of displaying my full self. And so, yeah, I think that other thing is that growing up in a sort of Christian culture, I guess is what I'd call it, and then later coming out as queer and all of these things that were difficult contradictions about what I'd been told about my own identity, and what was okay about my mysticism, and all of that. And yeah, I think that one, by and large. My queerness feels so intertwined now with my mysticism.

MBS [\(29:21\)](#):

Right.

Brandi [\(30:21\)](#):

That I can't find a place to separate them at all, so yeah.

MBS [\(30:25\)](#):

Can you shed some light about how you intertwined them? Because me listening and asking questions, but other people listening as well might be saying, "I'm conscious of this paradox, this contradiction about who I am."

Brandi [\(30:45\)](#):

Yeah.

MBS [\(30:45\)](#):

But I'm looking for a way not to... What is the saying? Believe in the rescuing yourself. Believing in one of those and not the others, but bringing them



together. And there's work involved in doing that. What was the work? How did you find a way of bringing them together rather than pushing one away?

Brandi ([31:07](#)):

Yeah. I mean, to be fair. I mean, that's like a 10 plus year process, right?

MBS ([31:13](#)):

Yeah.

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

I can condense that down though. I think for me, often the work of doing that, of grappling with and sort of integrating, I think that's a great word for what-

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

Rephrase. Yeah.

Brandi ([31:23](#)):

... that work is to integrate these seemingly disparate parts of ourselves is... I think I've always seen my gift or one of my biggest gifts as being a translator. I think because I kind of have always floated in between worlds. I sort of pick up on the languages of whichever community I seem to be a part of. And if you put me in a group of Christians, I can say something scientific in a way that actually translates to them and vice versa. And so, I think what that really is at the heart of it is pattern recognition. So you start to-

MBS ([32:03](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([32:04](#)):

... spot-



MBS ([32:04](#)):

Smart.

Brandi ([32:05](#)):

... the same way this group does this one thing is actually really similar to the way this other group does this other thing. And if they just said it in a way that the other group recognized, it would translate to their ear a lot better. And so I think for me, everything from being in a car and listening to a spiritual podcast from one of my favorite spiritual teachers, who had a guest on at some point, I don't know, eight years ago maybe, who was talking about the nature of God, and Christ, and all of these things. And I had this out loud sort of revelation where I was like, "Oh, my God." He says something that I think is hilarious and requires more context. But the line was, "Christ was the original punk."

MBS ([32:49](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([32:49](#)):

And I remember saying out loud, "Oh, my God. Christ was the original queer." The values, and the thought, and the belief system inside of queerness, I was like, "That's what Christ and God were speaking to. That's the same essence." And so I think, yeah, that started for me to really mesh and integrate those things together where I could spot patterns across all of the different things. And then learn to go like, "Oh, these are actually all one and the same."

MBS ([33:22](#)):

I'm going to ask you a question I think follows up from that. Because in some ways I feel what you've named there is a gift of being, as you say, in between worlds. One of the words you use on your website is fugitive, and I think that's a really resonant word.



Brandi ([33:42](#)):

Stolen from Bayo Akomolafe, but yes.

MBS ([33:44](#)):

Right. Who's a wonderful teacher as well.

Brandi ([33:49](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([33:50](#)):

What's the gift you feel you've been granted by being a fugitive or an outsider all between worlds?

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

Yeah. I think it's helping people be seen when they feel like they don't belong, when they've been sort of told you're supposed to look like this one thing or this one way. You're supposed to behave this one way or believe these certain things. And if you don't fully... I think a lot of my past, because of the religious sort of context comes with a lot of recognition that we can make anything into a religion if we try hard enough.

MBS ([34:32](#)):

Right.

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

And so, I think it's an ability to empathize and create common ground with people who feel like, "Wait a second. I believe 90% of what this thing is saying, but not the other 10%."

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

Right.



Brandi ([34:46](#)):

And because of that, the people who are in the group are telling me that I don't belong or making me feel as though I don't belong. And so, I think it's in a lot of ways creating a space for people who feel like they've been told that they can only be one thing or that there's only one right way to be if they believe or love a particular thing.

MBS ([35:12](#)):

What have you learned about self-care on this journey?

Brandi ([35:19](#)):

Yeah. I think a lot of my answer with that has to do with the idea of nourishment. And actually goes a lot back to Andreas Weber, the idea of aliveness. So nourishment to me is a question about what it is that we feed ourselves that brings us most alive. And so to me, that really leaks through everything. That's what work am I doing that brings me most alive? Even recently I think realizing often when I do work for other people just to make money instead of doing work that I love to do, it's often rooted in a fear that I'm not safe or that... Yeah, it's so much easier to give my own life away than it is to believe that my own life and aliveness is possible, I think.

MBS ([36:15](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([36:16](#)):

And so, yeah, self-care to me is a constant question of like, "How am I nourishing myself or how am I giving away my nourishment?" And I often use sort of the language of empty calories, that I think we often feed ourselves empty calories in order to feel full, but-



MBS ([36:42](#)):

Right.

Brandi ([36:42](#)):

... we don't. We feel an emptiness, whether it's eating terrible food all the time, or doing work we don't love constantly, or just being so busy that we just never are present for life. You know?

MBS ([36:42](#)):

Yeah.

Brandi ([36:57](#)):

It's how can I keep myself as distracted as possible in order to get through this rather than, how can I be as nourished, and present, and well-fed as possible? And I mean that very liberally. You know?

MBS ([36:57](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, I hear you.

Brandi ([37:12](#)):

So, yeah.

MBS ([37:17](#)):

Brandi, it's been a lovely conversation. Thank you. You said you'd listened to a previous interview with Kathryn Mannix. And you're right, I have a question that I finished with. And I'm going to ask you the same question I asked her, and it's this, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

Brandi ([37:43](#)):



I mean, I don't know. I think the thing that comes up for me right now, which is really the only truth I can tell, is I don't know. I think maybe sharing what I've most needed to tell myself recently, which is all of my faults are not singular, meaning you're not alone. There's a reason that we all struggle with similar things, the culture, and a complex set of life systems that keep us in this place, and family dynamics, and all of these things.

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

But they might manifest maybe in different ways, but they're really all at heart, I think a root of the same sickness, which is being separated from ourselves, and from each other, and from what lies behind the... Nature, and source, and all of those things. But yeah, I don't know. Maybe it's like at its simplest like you're not terrible. Or maybe you are terrible, but you're also a lot of other beautiful things.

MBS [\(38:53\)](#):

Here's the line that has stuck with me from this conversation with Brandi, and this is a quote, "I think conflict breeds intimacy, but intimacy requires real comfort with death. To be in relationship with people, or things, or nature even, you require a safety that's created at the heart of it where you're actually allowed to work out all these things that you're terrified of in yourself, and therefore terrified of in other people as well." Conflict breeds intimacy. Wow. What if getting better at disagreeing, at fighting, at clashing was helpful?

[\(39:39\)](#):

And then, of course, you can imagine doing that badly. In fact, you probably don't have to imagine it. You've probably like me done it badly. But I'd love to continue deepening my capacity to disagree as a commitment to deepening my capacity to be intimate, to share what's most precious to me and about me. In my newest book, *How to Work With Almost Anyone*, I say, a best possible relationship should be safe, vital, and repairable. And it's a paradox, and it's nice to finish with a paradox just like we started, that things get Safer by us getting better at conflict.



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

Two, actually three episodes to recommend this week that build off this one, Mia Birdsong, *The Sacred and The Mundane*. Wonderful conversation about *Braiding Sweetgrasses*, the book that she read. And really rich, nuanced conversation about what was sacred and how that grew from the mundane. Thibault Manekin, second interview, which is like *How to Surrender to Your Heart*, a story of seeking a life of purpose.

[\(40:54\)](#):

And then Kathryn Mannix, who I think we actually referenced briefly in the interview, such a good writer about palliative care, about facing into death. I don't have the name of that interview to hand, but I loved my conversation with Kathryn. And of course, if you want more information about Brandi Stanley, I'd point you to her website, thisplusthat.com. And there's a newsletter there, and there's a podcast there as well. Thank you for listening. Appreciate you.

[\(41:22\)](#):

Thank you for loving the podcast and however you do that. Listening to it is an act of love, and so thank you for that. If you're so moved to pass the interview on, share it with somebody, give it a review, pick it up in some way in the world, then that's deeply appreciated as well. I'm hoping people discover this podcast. I want to keep doing it. I really want it to take off and grow the audience, and you can really help me in that. So thank you for all you do. You're awesome and you're doing great.