



Library podcast

Courtenay Hameister and Luke Burbank talk about 'Okay Fine Whatever'

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[00:00:24] Now, I am delighted to introduce this evening's speaker, Courtenay Hameister. Was host and head writer for Live Wire, a nationally syndicated public radio show, for nearly 12 years. During this time, she interviewed more than 500 people and wrote 200 personal essays the night before each show. Her work has also been featured in her McSweeney's, APM's Marketplace and More Magazine. Courtenay is here to talk about her book, *Okay Fine Whatever: The Year I Went from Being Afraid of Everything to Only Being Afraid of Most Things*, which is her hilarious account of facing her fears. So please help me welcome Courtenay Hameister.

[00:01:10] Thank you so much for having me to the Seattle Public Library and thank you so much to Luke Burbank for joining me tonight. I'm just going to read a very quick excerpt from the introduction to the book. It's called "Getting Plucky."

[00:01:23] Imagine you're eight years old, you're at a community pool in Akron, Ohio, with your entire extended family: uncles, cousins, grandparents and your older brother, whose opinion you hold in high regard because he can make realistic fart noises using his hand and armpit.

[00:01:39] You have made the egregious mistake of climbing to the top of the high dive. You are now standing at the edge of the diving board, looking down into the blue abyss miles below you, OK, like 16 feet below you. It feels like you're about to jump out of a plane or off a bridge or into the ocean in Jaws after you've already seen that one unfortunate teenager get pulled under.

[00:02:02] The fear feels insurmountable, but so does the ire of the five kids in line, including four on the ladder and one standing behind you at the other end of the board glaring. His sun-kissed arms akimbo. "Just go!" he whines. His plea is one of dozens you've heard for the past 10 minutes while staring into what to everyone else is a calm pool of a welcoming blue water.

Finally, the tension becomes too much for your knocking knees, and you sit down at the end of the board, triggering frustrated sighs and expletives from every diver in line. "You can do it, sweetie," your mother yells, her hand poised in a blocking the sun salute. "It'll be over in a second. Just jump." But you know something she doesn't. It's too late. You already know you can't do it. And now, instead of working up the courage to jump, you're working up the courage to walk the gauntlet of searing side eye you'll endure on the climb of shame down to the scorching pavement.

[00:02:59] This is where you learned it. You were not the leaping type.

[00:03:05] This story is both a true account of the first time I disappointed the crap out of my older brother and an encapsulation of how I lived my life up until a couple years ago. I was a toe dipper, a cringer, a waiter and seer. People wouldn't necessarily have known this because through a heroic feat of white knuckling, I managed to pass myself off as a regular, sometimes relaxed initiative, taking adult and a high functioning one at that. I had a cool job. I hosted Live Wire, a nationally syndicated public radio show wherein I interviewed fascinating people like Gus Van Sant, Tig Notaro, Mike Birbiglia and Carrie Brownstein and, and tried to keep from fear puking while on air. I was lucky, but I was also terrified. Every week I hosted the show. I looked like I was leaping, but I was still on that diving board and I hadn't moved an inch. And that's sort of where our story begins tonight. And in order to help me tell the rest of the story, I'd like to introduce the host, the current host of Live Wire Radio, Luke Burbank.

[00:04:17] I don't have a good side, but this is the less bad side. I like it. Courtenay Hameister, everybody. Thank you. Let's pick things up at my favorite part of the book, the part that's about me. Right? It's my favorite part too. Let's talk about the night that our lives intersected. Yes. Maybe not physically, because I don't think you were at the theater. I wasn't, but sort of cosmically. Yeah.

[00:04:45] Like, where were you at? On. On. In that moment.

[00:04:48] Well, I was at home. And so I mentioned in the introduction to the book that essentially what Live Wire had done was I had I had generalized anxiety disorder and I hadn't. And I I hadn't known about it for the first few years of Live Wire. And, so, the show would happen - and I called it my dread ball would show up on the Monday of the show at the writers' meeting.

[00:05:13] And then when the show happened, I was sort of those of you who have anxiety might relate to this, but I was sort of in the hamster ball of anxiety where it sort of fuzzies the world for you. It's it's like a plate of glass that you're seeing the world through. And you can't really hear people that clearly. And there's a lot of static. So anyway, the night before you hosted the show for the first time, you were going to be a guest on the show. And I had the beginning of a massive. I also have been diagnosed with OCD. And so a massive OCD attack that was sort of panicky. And I just knew, you know, for the first time in nine years, I'd been

hosting the show for nine years. And I just knew I couldn't do it with some help from my brother. He finally said, you you have to you've got to cancel. And so I called our producer, Robyn Tenenbaum, and I actually said I said, well, Luke's a host. We actually weirdly had booked you because I never had a backup as the host of the show. And we said, let's get this TBTL guy, Luke hosted a very successful podcast called Too Beautiful to Live.

[00:06:21] And we were like, let's see if maybe if I get sick, then Luke could host. This was all a lab experiment on me? That is messed up.

[00:06:30] Exactly. Exactly. And so I called Robyn and I said, look, couldn't we just get Luke to host the show?

[00:06:37] And as you know, at the time, the show had sketch comedy, multiple guests you had to interview, including musical guests, which is the hardest job in the world, interviewing musicians and somehow. And but you can probably tell your side of the story because you were, Robyn had a little trouble reaching you.

[00:06:57] I was dealing with a profound hangover on a Saturday morning, as was my want in those days.

[00:07:04] And I lived in Mount Baker and I woke up to probably like 10 missed calls from the executive producer of the show. And I thought, that's unusual. You know, and I called her back and she said, ah, our host is not feeling well. Very diplomatic.

[00:07:22] Well, I mean, it was I mean, an accurate thing to the DSM. I was ill. I mean, and actually, you know what? Yeah.

[00:07:28] That's a that's a really good point to make. Is that one of the things that. So I think humanizing about your book is, is is that reminder that dealing with anxiety disorder, dealing with OCD, these these are not people being extra. This is a medical diagnosis. So, in fact, you were you were ill and it was. Yeah, it was quite an experience hosting the show, having not read any of the books or done any research on any of the guests.

[00:07:55] I'm proud to say that I still haven't.

[00:07:57] Six years later, I'm really rolling with that.

[00:08:00] You set the tone. I feel like in that first show. Yeah. And well, and

[00:08:04] I mean, one of the guests that you had to interview was David Shields, who is just he he's a Seattle writer who is brilliant. Sure. And just writes these incredibly, you know, they're they're very deep, very insightful, very and and very multi-layered books. And you had to

interview them without having read his book. I don't even know. What did you do? Remember what you guys chatted about? Was it just like, how's Portland for you?

[00:08:27] I mean, probably I'd say that was half the really the hardest part of that particular show for me wasn't interviewing the people who I hadn't prepped on. It was that there were still a seven minute gap in the show that was supposed to be you interviewing me. Yes. Where I then ended up interviewing myself. We called it Burbank on Burbank. And it was even by my standards, a level of narcissism that is. You want to talk about the DSM. It should be in there, right? What happened during that part of the show.

[00:08:55] I've always been so curious about this, though, how you were able to with this generalized anxiety disorder and the OCD and so much discomfort in being in the role of being a host in front of all these people. How were you able? You said, you know, a minute ago you talked about a sort of white knuckling it. But, I mean, how were you actually making it work as long as you did?

[00:09:18] Well, it's about not paying any attention to self-care or having any self-awareness. Well, that's the key. I really feel like that was the key. Well, I mean, I think that, you know, I did it in the first chapter of the book.

[00:09:32] You know, I spoke to you and I spoke to Ophira Eisenberg who hosts Ask Me Another on NPR. And I spoke to Todd Schultz, who's a friend and a psychologist.

[00:09:41] And and he talked about, you know, Todd. Todd wrote a book about Elliott Smith. And and he talked about Elliott's anxiety and the fact that Elliott just kept pushing through and and all of the performers who continually do this and. For Elliott Smith, it was because he had so much to say and he wanted people to hear him.

[00:10:04] And that's what I think from. And that wasn't necessarily it for me. I loved being able to do monologues and talk about what was going on in the world or what was going on in my life. But for me, so much of it was that I got to talk to people that I so admired. And as a creative person myself, I just felt like I was learning something every single time I got to talk to them. And I. And there was there was also something. And you may I don't know if you connect to this at all, but when I after I stepped down from being the host of the show. One of the things that I hadn't counted on because I continued to be a producer of the show was how what it made me feel like to be considered a peer of those people that I so admired. And that changes when you're a producer of the show because you're not sort of you're not on stage with them. And that had clearly meant a lot to me. I think that I like almost every woman that I know. And I don't want to just say this. This happens to women. But I I had a massive case of imposter syndrome. And I think that anything that you can do to to have the appearance of, you know, having your shit together, I think helps to chip away at that imposter syndrome a little bit. And so it was very odd, actually, because the audiences were a combination of this

thing that absolutely terrified me and this warm blanket of of acceptance that I needed. And so I was constantly battling with that.

[00:11:41] Well, and women are so, so sort of constantly underestimated and not seen. You were a woman who that had to see because you were the host. You had the microphone. You were introducing them. Yeah. And so that had to be, you know, a leveling that's, you know, frankly, long overdue. But also in an important part of how you identified.

[00:12:01] Yeah, absolutely. Like it it that helped a lot.

[00:12:05] Like even though one of my biggest fears because I'm sitting across these intelligent, these incredibly intelligent people, one of my biggest fears was looking dumb. So I would over I would over prepare everything and just really make sure that I really knew my stuff. And I think, you know, there was when I when I talked to you and when I talked to Ophira, I think another reason why you guys are are both more suited for this than I was has to do with sort of your perspective on life and that there is you know, the show is like three hours long because we would we would record two in a row. And Ophira told this great story about she was a standup comic. And the first time that she ever did a standup show, she got one laugh. And she was overjoyed.

[00:12:55] And she told me that story. And I just cringed hearing it.

[00:12:59] That's what it sounded like. Exactly. One person, laughing. Were you at Ophira's show? You've inspired an entire career for her. Exactly.

[00:13:08] Thank you. Because she's wonderful. But I just that's my worst nightmare. And I said, I don't understand. How were you so happy? And she said, I didn't know that person. I didn't know them. And I made them laugh. I made a stranger laugh. And she had those eyes. That's the way that she saw her life.

[00:13:25] And she knew sort of down to her bones that everything was going to be OK. And I because and I believe that it's my anxiety that has done this to me. Anxiety creates these massive ruts in your neuropathways that say everything's not going to work out. And so you cannot think that way and do this job, do the job that you do. Right. You have to just know that everything is going to be all right. Because it's your job to run this ship and the entire audience is on the ship with you. And no matter what you got to look like, everything's OK. And if you don't truly believe that, it's going to show.

[00:14:01] I think. I often describe the feeling of being up there hosting a show in front of a bunch of people as you're sort of you're like a duck and you are at your job is to look extremely calm above the surface of the water.

[00:14:15] But below the surface, you're just paddling like mad and you're just thinking of all of the things that are going wrong, all of the jokes that didn't land, all of the timing cues you're not hitting and you like to be placid above the surface of the water is really the skill of doing it like right now. This is a mess, but none of these people know it. That's the level of calm that I'm trying to bring to this conversation. But I want to talk about the genesis of the book a little bit. *Okay Fine Whatever*. Which is, by the way, one of the greatest titles of of all books I've ever read. *The Year I Went from Being Afraid of Everything to Only Being Afraid of Most Things*, I the the only other titles that that even sort of rivaled it were the other possible titles of the book.

[00:14:58] Is that what that page is. Yeah, it was my publisher didn't like the title so I had to send like fifteen additional titles, possible title.

[00:15:06] I like though that you've passive aggressively got the rejected titles included on like the fourth page of the book. Did they include.

[00:15:13] It's a fake title book. *Fraidy Cat the Year I Gave My Comfort Zone the Finger. She Who Hesitates had to Take Life by the Horns, but Only If Life has Been Dehorned, Because Otherwise That Would Be Dangerous*. Then, *The Only Thing We Have to Fear is Well, Actually There are a Lot of Things to Fear*.

[00:15:30] That's my triumph memoir. Like any one of those, would be a stellar title for this book. I'm glad you settled on *Okay Fine Whatever*.

[00:15:40] How did the like the genesis of this book, the genesis of this book get started? Because it started off as a series of basically columns you were writing, right? Yeah.

[00:15:49] Yeah, I I sort of. So. So not having this massive dread really actually kind of opened me up. You know, I had some time on my hands and I kind of just recognized, you know, there's a scene in the book where I really, I really, it, it landed on me what I had lost when I lost the show. And what it had meant to me. And, and I just didn't want to lose something this wonderful again. Right. I mean, I you know, it's one of the coolest jobs in Portland, I think, you know, I mean, it's wonderful what you get to do every week.

[00:16:26] Well, the funny part is that I always thought you were crazy about this dread ball, but I've got a decent sized one worked up. There are so many things I feel like we're just drilling down into the nitty gritty of this very unique experience of hosting this particular radio show.

[00:16:39] But it's funny because there's so many things that make total sense to me now as the host of the show. Oh yeah. Just like there's just a lot of socializing and a lot of nervousness before and a lot of, you know, like so. So, yeah, I mean, I'm just you. The good news is your feelings were valid.

[00:16:57] That's upper helpful to hear. The show is a very cool job. It is a very cool job to have.

[00:17:00] Yeah. And yeah. It's a really powerful moment in the book, which again, not to sort of bend this back around to myself, but it's it was heartbreaking for me as your friend to read this, which was like you and I were at this after party. Yeah. And like, you're in the bathroom crying your eyes out.

[00:17:18] And I'm probably I'm like, fourth highball just. Yeah, just feeling great because I'm in this I'm in this like afterglow of the show happening again. Yeah. And I were in reading it. I've actually really felt sad that I had not been able to show up for you there.

[00:17:34] Like understand what you were going through better.

[00:17:35] Well we didn't know each other. Really. Right. I mean he had just been hosting the show for about a month. And I was sitting at the producer's table that night, but I sort of saw him. It was after the show and I saw him holding court. You know, he had a couple of the show guests and he had audience members sitting there. And what I talked about. The audience is that warm, can be that warm blanket. And if you have really low self-esteem, it really can help you not feel like a piece of garbage. To have people coming up to you and saying, I was amazing that I love that so much and and thank you for bringing this band in my life, for this author in my life.

[00:18:12] On the subject of which Courtenay will be signing books after this. If anyone would like to step over there and help her feel less like a piece of garbage and buy a book, it would be a great way to do it. Right?

[00:18:24] But I like it. It just it all hit me at once and I had to hide in the bathroom and cry. And I. The worst part of it was that I did figure out I didn't want you to see me. I didn't want you to know how much it hurt to lose the show. And so I managed to get out without you seeing me. But one of the other producers came up to me outside and he was like, are you OK? And I said, you know, I'm really not. And he he said, this is the worst. He said, they still love you. Court. And it was just, and at once it was lovely to hear. And I said, they don't. I said they don't even see me anymore. And I also just felt so terrible that I was a person who would need to hear that, you know?

[00:19:15] So I was in this place where I had just I'd lost this wonderful thing. And I just thought, let's figure out how not to lose something like that, like this again. And I thought, is there a way that I can teach my brain, you know, that everything is going to be okay somehow by just trying little things, you know, little, little things that scare me and then sort of processing those experiences. And and then because I do feel like and bravery is, I think, massively overused, but being adventuresome is a muscle and. And so that's what I that's what I thought that I would try to do. And I didn't think that I would end up being an optimist. I wasn't deluded.

[00:19:58] Mean, even though I I do have mental illness.

[00:20:03] It does not present in that particular fashion.

[00:20:06] Exactly. But I thought, you know. But I thought maybe I can. I can think that everything is going to be OK and try some stuff.

[00:20:14] Can you list and remember, this is going to be on KUOW here in Seattle.

[00:20:19] Can you list some of the projects that you embarked on in this book? *Okay Fine Whatever.*

[00:20:27] So I. The ones that are somewhat G-rated or PG-13, I. Because there was a lot of dating involved. I was an extremely late bloomer dating wise. And so this year also was a catch up for me. And so I went on 28 first dates and about 100 total dates that year. But beyond that, I went to a sensory deprivation tank. I went to professional cuddler. I went to, which I have to tell you, people have read the book and they have they have had to stop reading that chapter. I've been told by multiple like podcast hosts they said I had to put that. I just skip that chapter. Why? It made them so anxious, actually. Really, it made them so uncomfortable they couldn't read it.

[00:21:11] I find it probably not coincidental that it was other people who are somewhat performative because there's a sort of closeness and putting your guard down and kind of lack of irony that you have to get into. I mean, that comes out in that chapter that you have to really surrender to the process.

[00:21:28] Absolutely. Yeah. Which was really hard for me, By the way,

[00:21:32] Professional cuddler, I've been offering this service for free for years.

[00:21:37] Still no takers. But, you know, see me after the show. Business is bad.

[00:21:42] Yeah, I yeah, I went to and I went to build your own burrito night at a sex club. Yes. In Portland called Club Sesso. It was Ron Jeremy's club at the time. The Hedgehog. Is it? Is that what he's called?

[00:21:57] At times when people I knew were seeking those films out in the mid-90s, possibly Kerrigan's (SP) pharmacy on Aurora. He was referred to as such. What is what I loved about your trip to the sex club was you were sort of on the fence until you heard they had a buffet. And then you went to the website to confirm they had a buffet.

[00:22:18] Exactly. Well, there's it's my thing. My my whole thing was like there's just not like nothing too terrible can happen around a sneeze guard. I felt like. Yeah, like I just felt like, oh, there's you know, there's party trays and it'll be fine.

[00:22:34] Everything will be fine. Some amount of what we think of normal life occurring in this dungeon of who knows what.

[00:22:42] And there was I mean, you walked in and there were just people kind of hanging out at the bar. But some of them were half naked and there was porn everywhere and and people dangling from ropes.

[00:22:54] It was shibari night, which is the ancient art of Japanese rope torture.

[00:22:59] So that's tomorrow night here at the library. So come back.

[00:23:06] One of the things, Court, about this book it is in and reading it that I was struck by was it's a real honest experience and that involves a lot of your, you know, sexual activity. And I wondered and I hope this doesn't sound gendered because I don't mean this as a woman that you should have pause about this, but as a person. Sure. Were you concerned about people knowing a lot more about you in that part of your life? Because I feel like I got to know you a lot better for reading the book.

[00:23:38] I know it is really awkward.

[00:23:40] And the funny thing is, like, I've had so many people sort of that I you know, that I hang out with or that I work with who read it. And the most awkward moment for me was when my vet was like looking at my cat's butt, and he was like, I read your book and suddenly it was just like, oh, and. For some reason, that was really hard for me because I just he's such a sweet man and I just wanted to apologize. But but I mean, I have an odd thing and I don't know why I have it, but but I just am a person who who doesn't care what people know about me.

[00:24:15] Like like I know, you know, when you have a former lover and you see them somewhere and you just want to do whatever you can to like act like you don't care about them anymore.

[00:24:26] Well, I sometimes do that during a relationship, which has been unsuccessful thus far.

[00:24:33] Yeah, I know what you mean. Tried to play it cool when you run back into them. Exactly.

[00:24:37] But I. I had an experience with an ex-boyfriend where I just you know, we saw each other and I just I said it's been really hard. I really miss you a lot. And I didn't want to get back

together with him, but I didn't have any trouble with him knowing that about me. I mean, other things like obviously. But so there's a thing where if everyone knows a piece of information, you know how you get into a relationship and sometimes you're concerned about revealing yourself because you're afraid that person is going to use it as ammunition against you. Because they are one of the few people who know it. If everyone has a piece of information, it's not ammunition anymore. You know, I mean, I was I was a virgin until I was 34 accidentally. No one can throw that at me. You know, as a hit because. Yeah, it's in my book. What else do you have? Yeah, I told literally everyone. Right.

[00:25:32] You have the biggest megaphone you could. And you're like, these are the things that give me some possible embarrassment. Yeah. Here they are. Yeah.

[00:25:40] Did that really serve the purpose of kind of taking their power away as as potential insults or weapons or things that you might feel some sort of self-consciousness around?

[00:25:50] I think that it did. I mean, I do have a little bit of I did for a for a very long time when I was a virgin for so long, I felt a lot of shame around it. And and I think part of the reason now that I don't have any you know, I mean, of course, part of the reason I don't have any sexual shame is that I am not a Christian and it's not part of my you know, I don't I don't see it as connected in any way to morality. So as long as no one gets hurt, I feel like whatever choices that I make are okay. But I also there is, I think, a part of me that thinks that because I waited so long to have sex, that I'm sort of a virgin emeritus like it just get to for the rest of my life. Just be like, yeah. No, I I'm cool. It's cool. Whatever I do now, I just I have. I had a I have a get out of shame free card or something.

[00:26:46] Do you think I mean you this book started as a series of articles where you would do these things that really tested your kind of comfort zone.

[00:26:55] And then it became a book and like. Did it actually change you in some way? The process of doing all this stuff?

[00:27:04] It did. I mean, I don't. I don't want to give it all away. All right. It's kind of spoiler alert. I think that I think that we have been lied to in so many books, in so many films, in every type of medium that's out there. We have been lied to because we all have seen the epiphany scene in every movie. We've all read it and in so many books. And it's made us believe that change is instantaneous. That it certainly OK. It takes a while. But man, once you have this realization, your life's completely different and change is so frustratingly incremental and tiny and slow that I think that if you write a book about a year, there's there's no unless you're lying. You really can't. You really can't say everything changed. But what I will say is that for me.

[00:28:10] I you know, prior to this book, if someone were to come to me and say, oh, my gosh, let's you know, have you ever tried naked bobsledding? I would I would say, oh, that's that sounds terrifying. No, thank you. And I think for me in this in this experience, one thing

changed in that, and that is the word interesting. And that is that if someone were to come to me now, I would say, well, that sounds interesting.

[00:28:39] And I think that that's enough. And that's.

[00:28:43] And if you change an hour in in. So in it's 2020 now if you do one thing that changes an hour of your life out of one out of the full year 2020, you changed your life. That changed your life. Right. I think that we all just we have this idea in our head that changing your life is this massive overhaul or some huge change. And the thing is, like these incremental changes are freaking gigantic, you know, because they all lead to other changes. Some things are as simple as just, you know, if I take a walk around the block a different way, you know, to get to work. And I see a new coffee shop. And then the next day I try that new coffee shop, you know, and the next day I read a magazine in that coffee shop that has a restaurant that I've never heard of. And I try that restaurant. These little things are all enough to change your life, you know? And I think we had Joshua Foer on the show. Yeah. He wrote a book called *Moonwalking with Einstein*. And one of the things that he talked about was he spoke to this memory expert who said that the brain is one of our most is the most efficient organ we have in our body.

[00:30:00] And so what it tends to do is if you do something in your life every single day, say you have a job and you just go in and it's it's the same thing, every single day. What your brain does is it accordions those experiences that are exactly the same. So it feels, you know, how sometimes we'll be like that. That was a year ago. It feels like yesterday. And it's probably because you haven't had a lot of different experiences when you then change your experience every day, even in the smallest way. Your brain doesn't accordion it. So it actually makes your life feel longer. Wow. And that's what I wanted. Like I wanted, you know, to not have my life accordion itself together because I was doing the same thing all the time. And my anxiety was forcing me to do that. It shrinks your experiences. And that's you know, it's not fair. You know, it doesn't enrich. I mean, I felt like my life wasn't as enriched as a person who was willing to take more chances.

[00:30:58] I'm curious about the kind of there's a couple things in the book that that really struck me. And I was trying to square them with knowing you as a person and the really strong self sort of possessed person that you are. You talk a lot about body image. And you, and a large part of this book is you kind of trying to find, if not love, at least, you know, people to go on dates with. Right. And yet I know that you're not a person who would ever define themselves by those two things. How do you balance kind of how do you hold those ideas at the same time?

[00:31:31] It's I have to say, it's it's very, very diffi- It's very, very difficult to be.

[00:31:41] A fat feminist who hasn't yet come to fat acceptance in herself. I have fat acceptance for every woman but myself. It's completely bizarre. And that has that is still totally a part of my struggle.

[00:32:00] And I. I've been working really hard to be healthy and and and not and not, you know, not working on being thin. There's a great book called *Health at Every Size* by Linda Bacon, which I think is hilarious that that's her name. Yeah. A book called *The Anti-Diet* that I've been reading. I mean, there's we've been lied to by diet culture. So I am trying so much to just integrate all of that in. But it hasn't landed so well with me that I haven't continued to worry about my body. So I'm absolutely still struggling with that. But I also really struggle throughout this book with how much I wanted love. I mean, I had for a very long time in my life just kind of ignored it.

[00:32:43] And because I was really heavy at the time, I just didn't really feel like it wasn't that I didn't feel like I deserved love. It was that I was so ashamed of my body that I didn't want anyone to touch it, you know? And so I. And so that's why I really avoided it. And and so my ex. And so this year, you know, if you're. I was forty five at the time. And the thing is like. This this sounds very cynical, but I think that our relationships are in our early life, are practice, like people have, tend to have like five or six or practice relationships before they land somebody. And so I'm at forty five going, well, I'm screwed. I'm completely behind. I haven't had like I've had like two practice relationships, you know, and I know it sounds terrible, but. So that's why I sort of was doing all of this very quickly. And I guess I guess I didn't feel a lot of shame around that because I around how hard I was working because. Like I there's a there's a story in the book of a friend of mine who who we were. We were having a party in the backyard and she asked me how my summer was going and I told her about all of my dates that I had been on. And she said, oh, well, do you have any stories that aren't about you looking for a man? And. Yeah, and I, and it, man, it was it was it was like a gut punch to me, but she didn't know. I mean, I knew her. I knew her experience. She'd had tons of girlfriends throughout her life and she had no idea what it's like to live in this culture and not be paired off your whole life. She doesn't know what it feels like to feel like you. What happens is when you don't get it, you feel like you don't deserve it. When you you know, and it's it it absolutely affects you psychologically to not be touched. They've done studies on rats. Right. And we're exactly like rats.

[00:34:45] Yeah. But I've been doing some non-scientifically sanctioned studies on rats at my house.

[00:34:51] And they need the touching. They need. Right. Yeah, exactly. I mean, you've heard Muskrat Love. Sure. Absolutely. A song for the ages. We are old, people. We try to keep our music references squarely in 1974 here on the Courtenay and Luke show. Exactly.

[00:35:10] No, I mean, it went and you know, I think Russian babies. Right. I mean, they've. It changes. It changes the way your brain functions, it changes. It changes your actually your

makeup. Right. So I'm not going to be ashamed of that. I'm not going to be ashamed of needing love and needing. I mean, I you know, the tragedy of it that I avoided being touched for so long is how much it means to me when I have it. You know, I mean, that was one of the things that I was kind of exploring at the cuddler. You know, I'm a big fan. And so, you know, I think you're right, though. I mean, it's again, both of those things like being a feminist. It's really hard being a feminist and really wanting a man in my life and really feeling like I I might need one that doesn't that doesn't feel good. You know, it's really it is hard to square those things. But I think because I survived for so long without one. I feel like I don't I don't need a man in my life because I can't function without him. I just enjoy having sex with him and like hanging out.

[00:36:17] Yeah.

[00:36:17] And if he wasn't there, I might find another man to have sex with and hang out with or not because I absolutely 100 percent know how. Like what I wanted to say to that friend of mine was, oh, are we going to like compete on who's better at being single and living without a person because I will win. Like I won that battle, you know?

[00:36:40] So, yeah, my hope is that, well, actually, I don't know how you feel caught, but I don't know if that person has checked into the Seattle Public Library podcast and is hearing this, but it's maybe news to her how damaging this comment was.

[00:36:53] Like, has she read the book? Does she know how much that kind of was the wrong thing to say in that moment?

[00:36:58] You know, what's interesting is that I think she has read the book and I don't think she recognized herself. I don't think she remembered it.

[00:37:06] Wow. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah.

[00:37:09] Well, I mean, there there is a moment in the book and I was hoping you could read from it where you have made a connection with someone.

[00:37:16] Things are going pretty well. Yeah. And then, you know, things go less.

[00:37:23] Well. Could you read a little bit from from this chapter about about that particular event.

[00:37:35] Yeah, no. I think we have time. You guys guys going to stick around for a minute. Good. Yeah. They soldered the doors shut. Right.

[00:37:46] I don't think they have a choice. Right.

[00:37:49] So as I said, I did a lot of dating in this in this year. And so this was and I and I numbered all of my dates in the book. And so this one is called "Adventures In Intimacy, Wherein I Test the Boundaries of Affection and My Bladder." By April, I had been seeing number 28 for three months because of that, many of my other adventures started to quiet down, no speed dating or polyamorous married guys with kids toys on the guest bed to shove away and sad to say, significantly fewer naked people dangling from ropes in sex clubs. But that doesn't mean I wasn't still exploring new territory. Between December and April, I grabbed my wrench, strapped on my waders and began plumbing the depths of emotional intimacy.

[00:38:32] I didn't have a lot of romantic intimacy experience, but I. But I did tend to get overly intimate with people because as this book clearly illustrates, I am an oversharer.

[00:38:44] Someone could make a lot of money selling shock collars to daters. You could program in a certain phrase like heroin overdose, short prison stay, or mashed potato codependency. And as soon as the first couple of syllables came out of your mouth, you'd get a shock. So I've known to leap past levels of intimacy, but more impressive. Three months into my relationship with number 28, I actually created a level all my own. I call it the bladder oversharing level. One night in early April, I was making dinner at his house. Lucky for me, he was used to cooking for two kids and didn't have a history of foodies in his past relationships. So my cooking struck him as interesting and exotic and not pizza as the smell of red curry and Thai basil wafted through his chicken, chicken? Wafted through his kitchen for probably the first time ever. I felt like a culinary ambassador. He was standing in the kitchen with me, leaning on the counter and chatting as I cooked. It was a deeply domestic scene and the significance of it wasn't lost on me. At one point he said something funny. At that same moment, tragically, I happened to be gnawing on a chunk of baby carrot. I proceeded to inhale a relatively large chunk of carrot which caused me to start coughing and not just small lady like coughing, but the kind of a full body hacking that happens when your esophagus believes it's in a life or death struggle with a vegetable.

[00:40:04] And that's when it happened. I peed my pants.

[00:40:10] I was wearing a skirt. But you get the idea. It wasn't one long pants peeing, but a series of smaller cough induced urine explosions that soon escaped the bounds of the urine soaked crotch area. Until it wasn't just a pants being anymore, it was a shoes peeing. One would think in a situation like this, I'd just be with my esophagus just straight up, putting all my energy into surviving this carrot battle. But all my brain could think was did I just fucking pee on my boyfriend's floral kitchen mat? Did that just happen? He asked me if I was okay and could he help and could he get me some water? And I kept shaking my head no, as if to say don't come near me, I'm a monster.

[00:40:51] Finally, the coughing fit ended. I stood there in my pee shoes and wished for a teleportation device that never came. Do you need anything? He asked. I don't know, I thought. Adult diapers, a pressure washer, a time machine so I can go back until four years

ago me to do more kegels. At this point, I was still in denial about him finding out. My mind raced with ways that I could distract him long enough to get upstairs and shower. Should I start a fire? I could start a small one. Not big enough to do any real damage. Just big enough so that the cleanup would take approximately 20 minutes. I wonder what percentage of house fires are started by people who just peed their pants and are trying to cover it up. I finally decided I had to tell him because the small pool of urine at my feet was going to give me away no matter what. I mean, unless the entire kitchen was engulfed in flames.

[00:41:44] Um, underwear I responded.

[00:41:46] I just peed my pants. Ah, intimacy, those memorable thresholds, recross like the first kiss, the first time you cry in front of your partner and the first root vegetable induced bladder explosion.

[00:41:59] So here it is. Here is the first moment that I can't hide my humanity from you no matter how hard I try. I thought back to the reasonably well-dressed and well-spoken bon vivant I'd presented myself as on the second date. That was such a cute skirt. It didn't have any pee on it.

[00:42:16] I remembered the social butterfly I became when he met all my friends on Valentine's Day. And then there was the decent cook who enjoyed a good laugh. The person he'd known just three minutes before, dead. They were all dead. Or, not dead exactly.

[00:42:30] Just flailing around on the wet kitchen floor and needing to be woven into a new incontinent version of me. He ran upstairs to get me a pair of his boxer briefs. I went into his guest bathroom and took off my wet underwear while he was gone. And I'm sorry about this. I really, really am. I put them in my purse. Thankfully, there wasn't enough collateral damage to my skirt to make it unwearable. I pulled it off, put my foot into the sink, splashed water all up, all the way up my leg and onto the floor into another puddle.

[00:42:59] And then did the same with the other foot. I used his hand towel to dry everything and then refolded it and to put it back on the towel rack. So the unused side was available to future guests who hadn't peed themselves. I apologize for that too. When I emerged from the bathroom, he offered me the boxer briefs and asked again if there was anything he could do. I told him to stay out of the kitchen for a couple of minutes and he went and sat on the couch. I clean the floor and the floral kitchen mat using paper towels and Lysol. All the while I was wondering how one brings sexy back after an incident like this. Justin Timberlake probably never peed his pants while making dinner for Jessica Biel.

[00:43:37] I mean, what am I, 80? Or rather what is my vagina 80?

[00:43:43] Three months is a significant moment in a relationship. It's often that fish or cut bait point where you've gotten semi-serious but not totally serious when you start to think. I've

already invested three months in this. Is there enough to invest more or should I come up with an escape plan? Complicating matters during this time is that you're still deeply in the Limerence phase of love. This is a word coined by a psychologist, Dorothy Tennov, to describe the phase of love where you're still obsessed with the other person. His desires, his feelings, what it feels like when he touches you. What he'll look like in a tux on your wedding day. It's that 1 to 2 year phase when you're not thinking clearly because your neurons are all clogged with lust and misguided hope. Limerence is probably why some relationships that are doomed last a bit longer than they otherwise would.

[00:44:31] But if anything can break through the fog of Limerence, it's a splash of pee. That's what was going through my head as I finished cooking dinner and we chatted. Anyway, I think we'll be able to get the product back on schedule as long as things go smoothly, smoothly this week. My brain. I'm sorry, I didn't hear what you just said. I peed my pants earlier. I was distracted for most of the remaining food prep to the point that I'm lucky to still have on my fingers. But then we finished cooking and sat down and had a lovely meal and I forgot a little. Give me the right entrée and I'll forget that I accidentally ran over someone with my car. Then we retired to the couch where we chatted some more, made a couple of hilarious adult diaper jokes, then made out. So he must've forgotten a little too. It turns out sexy did come back in just a couple of hours later. The only way I can explain it is that I was dating someone who liked humans. I woke up the next morning and cooked breakfast without incident. I looked across the table at him as I ate my eggs, and I realized that while I wasn't planning on testing the boundaries of his affection for me like that again, I almost definitely would again and again against my will. Why do I know this?

[00:45:40] Because I once put a tiny candy bar down my pants so I wouldn't eat it. Because I cry when I get angry, which makes me angrier. Because I like John Denver unironically. These are bombs that are just waiting to go off some day and they will go off.

[00:45:57] Relationships are all fun and games until someone pees her pants or likes John Denver, and that's where the real intimacy begins when you realize the other person can forgive, disinfect his kitchen and move on with his affection for you largely intact. And when that happens, your affection for him grows because of it. I think falling in love is half attraction to the best parts of someone and half gratitude for that person's ability to forgive the worst parts of you. Whatever the reason, we seem to be falling for each other. So if you're looking for relationship advice, I'm kind of an expert now. I just tell people to buy a family size can of Lysol and hope for the best.

[00:46:35] Courtenay Hameister reading from *Okay Fine Whatever*.

[00:46:42] I think we have a couple of minutes left. If anybody had any questions from the audience.

[00:46:49] How do you eat a carrot without peeing your pants?

[00:46:52] I mean, does any of that all the topics are on the table right now. Hi there. Hello.

[00:46:58] My question is, so you wrote these in a series of articles, then you kind of compile them into a book. Also, thank you for being here. And my question is, you know, when you go through, I always thought about, or wonder about memoirs like people sort of when you you had sort of several discrete events. Did you like sort of after they were done, write them down, take notes and then like. Sort of were you like as you were going through the event, like sort of planning, how would like form into an article or was it like later as you writing the book where things kind of took shape and like had like arcs like how what was sort of more important like this sort of right afterwards, kind of writing stuff down or maybe like later kind of going through the editing process. Thanks for the question.

[00:47:46] I. So it was a column before it was a book. So I had a column called *The Reluctant Adventurer*. And so I would do these things knowing that I was going to write about them, which really changed the experience, by the way, like especially for an introvert like me, I don't like talking to strangers. And it made me like when we went to the sex club, there was this guy and he had DM. He was he looked he was dressed like a coach and he had a whistle and he had the words DM on his shirt. And I was curious in a million years and never would have gone up to him. But I knew I was writing a column about this. So I said, what does DM mean? You know, and it turned out he was like the dungeon master. And he but he, they go around and they make sure nobody gets hurt. Right.

[00:48:30] Because if you're if people are being tied up and all that stuff and they blow the whistle, if somebody is doing something that's not okay? Do they have instant replay now, is it like the NFL?

[00:48:42] You know what? Maybe. Did I add the whistle as the whistle in the book? I don't. But the point is, he had the capacity. He absolutely has. If he says something has to stop, it has to stop. Right. Right. So in any case. So I knew that.

[00:48:55] So I would have the experience. I would write the column. And, you know, I wrote the column like I wrote my essays for the show, just like when the day that it was due, I would just write it and get it out. And I didn't feel bad about it. I mean, I felt bad about kind of my writing process, which is in air quotes for the radio audience. Until I that's how Cheryl Strayed wrote Dear Sugar.

[00:49:18] Like she always did the night before at three o'clock in the morning. So, you know, I'm doing it just like the pros.

[00:49:24] Luke Exactly. Cheryl Strayed, who is a good friend of yours and is one of the people who wrote a great blurb for *Okay Fine Whatever*.

[00:49:30] That was yeah, that which was very, very lovely of her to do that. She's kind of a busy lady it turns out. Yeah.

[00:49:36] But so. So I would I would do that. And then once I actually I got the book deal based on the columns. And so then I really had to try to expand on them and try to remember a little bit more what happened. But you talk about the arc, and that's what's interesting about if you write things, if you write these episodes. Right. What happens is after I turned in my first draft and I'd also been writing these essays for Live Wire, you know, 200 of these essays for Live Wire. And what my editor returns. You know, my first draft back to me. And she said, you need to this book needs to have an arc to it. You're tying up every chapter in this little bow. And you can't do that because that's what I was used to. I was used to writing episodically. So that was a real change for me. And also, you know, I was honest at the beginning of this book and said not everything. Everything in this book happened. It just didn't necessarily happen in the order that it's in. My editor and I actually shifted some things that it didn't really matter when they happened. So we shifted them and put them in an order that made a little bit more sense. Yeah.

[00:50:44] If that is answer, are you working on a project like this? Are you curious about, about the sort of process of making something?

[00:50:53] Ok. We'll look for it. Anybody else?

[00:50:59] A good question that was on my list and I forgot about that. No joke. Good thinking.

[00:51:04] In Portland, we have something called ecstatic dance and you can go naked, ecstatic dance. And I chose not to do that. And for obvious reasons, based on what you know about me right now and I, I'm trying to think of whether I would do it now because you know how you get older and you start not caring what people think.

[00:51:28] I just read this article in *The New York Times* about naked cooking in Florida.

[00:51:33] I don't you guys saw that. It sounds great.

[00:51:37] Everybody is just of a certain age and they are just giving zero fucks, right? Like the bar they go to at this naked resort is called The Butt Hut. The Butt Hut? There's just a ton of volleyball being played. And it just seems like a very free, easy environment for people. A lot of the people in this article said that they had a lot of social anxiety and they didn't like dinner parties because of all the weird small talk that happens. Yeah, once they were naked, it just the small talk became the least weird thing that was happening and they became fans of dinner parties.

[00:52:07] See, that's fantastic. I sort of I think I understood where they were coming from.

[00:52:11] Well, I think, you know, it's interestingly enough, like for work. About six months ago, I had I had to go zip lining. I had to go zip lining in Hawaii. And one of the things that I had to do was zip line over 450 feet above ground over two waterfalls.

[00:52:28] And I did it. It was something that I just thought I could never do, something like that. I always tell people, like for the book, I didn't jump out of planes because I'm an anxious person. And what I realized when I was able to do that was my fears are not about dying.

[00:52:41] My fears are about humiliation and shame and making a fool of myself. That's where my biggest fears are. And so, you know, zip lining 450 feet above the ground. No problem. It turned out so.

[00:52:55] Oh, I mean, I'm with you, Court, like I think you and I are very different, but also very similar in some ways. Like so long as it's not embarrassing. I'm fine with dying. Really? Like you're not afraid to die. I'm. I'm at the point where I'm on a plane and there's turbulence. I think if it's quick. I've had a good run.

[00:53:13] You have had an interesting life. Yeah, I know. I mean. Yeah.

[00:53:16] So how do you continue hosting the show? Because the like the the possibility for humiliation when you're when you're in front of 400 people. You know, once a week is huge.

[00:53:26] And I somehow have this great fear of being humiliated and also tendency towards creating situations where I will probably be more humiliated. Right. Which is really weird. Yeah, I don't yeah. I understand that dynamic either, but it is. It's an odd job. Do we want to. It sounds like we maybe have something going on. Should we kind of wrap things up, Stesha? What do you think? Okay. Thank you so much for coming out tonight.

[00:53:48] One more time, please, for my friend Courtenay Hameister, thank you for being here. And and please come say hi to Court and buy a book. Thank you.

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