

Layla: Hi, everybody and welcome to Good Ancestor podcast. I am your host, Layla Saad. Today, I'm speaking with the wonderful Jennifer Arnise who is doing incredible work around the black mother wound. Jennifer Arnise is an author, a healer and a transformational coach. She has dedicated to helping black women heal their deepest emotional pain, so they can experience more joy, pleasure and purpose in their life. Jennifer is the author of the book *Fuck That Cape: The Grown Woman's Unapologetic Guide to Putting Herself*. She lives in Atlanta with her son and their dog Bela. Welcome to the show Jennifer.

Jennifer: Thank you for having me.

Layla: Thank you for being here. As you know, this is a topic which is very close to my heart, both the work of the black mother wound and the work of as a black woman learning to put myself first. So, this is something that I'm really excited to be in conversation with you about. Before we begin, I just wanna have a quick trigger warning, we may talk about an experience in Jennifer's life that involves sexual assault and rape, and so if this is something that is a trigger for you, please make sure to take care of yourself through this conversation. So, thank you Jennifer for being here. Our very first question, who are some of the ancestors living or transitioned, familial or societal, who have influenced you on your journey?

Jennifer: For me, I think, when I think about this question I get so emotional and it seemed like a really simple question but I think about transitioned, familial ancestors I think about my mother's mother and my father's mother. My mother's mother had 14 children. She was born in 1919, never had a driver's license, never had in their whole life. I think about just the perspective of her life and how she had to raise her daughters. I think about my father's mother born in late 1800s and how she had to raise her daughter and what choices were available to her. I think about Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and how their books like blew my mind. Sonia Sanchez, how she opened me up to have the ability to put my grief into words, to put my love into words. I think those are like, you know, really a core group of women for me. I think about my mother and my aunts and just their journey in how the world is so different now than it was for them. And just the opportunities I have that they didn't have that shaped my perception that they didn't have and still may not have now, just because there are emotional technology that's available to us now and just everything that is out there that we can use for our benefits.

Layla: It's so interesting that the people that you spoke about, the ancestors that you spoke about in the familial category are all the women, right? And you're doing this really big work around healing the black mother wound. Tell us a little bit about what is a mother wound? And what specifically is the black mother wound? How would you describe that?

Jennifer: A mother wound, it is the first wound, I look at it as the first heartbreak from we talk about the mother wound in terms of the daughter or the child, it is her first heart break, it is when a daughter is not able to become autonomous in her own

life because of her attachment to her mother. She has not been able to individuate and see herself as a single standing person without the emotional, physical, mental, financial, energetic, umbilical cord that is still connected to her mother and it usually is because the mother has not been able to either by choice or doesn't know how to make that disconnection because the mother herself never learn how to individuate. So, she at one point was attached to her mother where she has a daughter and it gave her the space or I can detach from my mother now and I'm gonna attach to my own daughter. So, you have these 2 people that would never ever autonomous and so they become enmesh in a sense and so that's really what the mother wound is and when non-people of color speak about the mother wound, they talk about it being caused by the patriarchy. So it is this lack of control that women have been able to have in their own life based off of this masculine energy. The black mother wound has an intersectional space because it is not only the patriarchy that has stripped the power from the woman, it is the imperial racism and oppression of black people that have stripped the power from the black woman specifically which is something that the white woman has not experienced. So that is really what makes the black mother wound different and more layered.

Layla: Yeah. So, I came into speaking to about this just before we hit record, I learned first ever heard the term mother wound in 2016 and it came from searching for this thing that I had always carried with me that I couldn't understand, didn't know how to speak about which was this pain connected to my relationship with my mother. There were so much surrounding it for me that I wasn't able to talk about it because there was the shame of somehow that if I explored this work that I would be saying something negative about my mother which I didn't want to do. And at the same time, it's not popular for us to talk about mothers in this way in society especially if you are black and that the role that a black mother plays. But I did find this work and it was through white women and so when I came to learn about your work, I was really, really excited because though the work that I had learned from white women was very helpful for me to be able to put into words things that I could not understand and to understand how the patriarchy impacts relationships between daughters and mothers, there was this whole other layer missing that related specifically to being a black woman. And so your work really helps to take this deeper because there is when we talk about the patriarchy, I think when it's presented through the white women's lens of the patriarchy, they are talking about the white patriarchy.

Jennifer: Exactly.

Layla: Right? So they are not really talking about the impact of what it means to be a black woman and the relationships between black man and black masculinity and being a black woman.

Jennifer: Right.

Layla: And also not the relationship between black mothers and black daughters which is its own thing. How would you differentiate like other than they are white, we are

black, what are some of the textures that are added, the layers of being a black woman and looking at the black mother wound? What are some of the things that you know?

Jennifer: I think one of the main things and I talk about this in my book *Fuck That Cape* it is the crown of thorns that black woman wear around being strong. White woman don't have a narrative of the strong white woman, the strong white mother like you don't hear the strong Chinese mother, the strong Latina mother. You heard a strong black mother, the strong black woman. So, there is this sense of survival and struggle that a black woman carries that she then imparts to her daughter because it is the only way she feels her daughter can be safe. And I also when you look at that the street comes from literally fearing for your child's life. White mothers do not come up in society any that I really know of, not in America where you grow up and you fear for your daughter's life, where you fear for your son's literal life where you pray they come home from school.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: And that is something that informs parenting in such a way and then you take the slavery in how we were taught it is to be, you know, it's not like well, Sarah when you have an issue at school, you just go and tell your teacher and your teacher is gonna call me and you know, your father is at work and I'm at home and so I can be up there in 12 minutes because we live in walking distance to your school and they have my phone number and I also went to school with the principal and so I know everyone. All of these things versus a black mother, she works an hour and a half from the school, how you stay safe is you do what they say, you keep your mouth shut, don't say anything, don't you get into trouble, don't get sick, don't have any problem because if I'm not at work, I don't get paid. If I don't get paid, the lights get cut off. The lights get cut off then we're gonna freeze. It is like all of this pressure goes into this simple thing of how you just go to school and have a good day. It's not good enough to have a good day.

Layla: Yeah. Just going to school. Thank you for sharing that. What's interesting to me about this, not being African American and not having the lineage and history of enslaved ancestors though is that that strong black woman trope also applies to people who are not African American who are black but not African American. And that, you know, when you're saying about going to school I smiled because I remembered my mom would tell us, my mom is not a violent person, but she would tell us where she sent us to a school where we are the black people in the school.

Jennifer: Yes.

Layla: Right? So, she is telling us...

Jennifer: I was her.

Layla: Right. So, she is telling us if anybody messes with you like go crazy like throw chair, shout, scream, do whatever you need to do to show them not to mess with you again. Now, she is saying that to me and I'm like Mrs. Goody two-shoes like you know top of the class, love the gold stars and I'm like we can't do that mom like we will get into trouble with the teacher like we cannot do that and she is like don't worry I will sort it out with the teachers afterwards.

Jennifer: That's how I am with my son. He's like what? He's like "mom you're crazy". I'm like if they mess with you, if they say anything out of pocket, if you have an issue, this is the protocol like we have our own emergency protocol as black mothers to how we deal with things and the bottomline is I got your back, I will be up there and they know his school too.

Layla: Right. And so that's not something that white children have to be told or think about that white mothers have to pass on and so there's so much of it is connected to this energy of survival which is not imaginary, it's very real. As you walk this through, what's some of the implications can be just in that scenario of going to school. So, we as young black girls have that and we grow up into this women, right? And what I have come to realize in my own experience was that although I was growing in years I was not grown.

Jennifer: No. I was growing in years but I was still 9 years old.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: I was still 12 years old. I was still 16 years old. I had my son at 32 and I never could say it out loud but I still felt like a teenage mother.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: Even at 32, I felt like a teenage mother. I felt so ill-equipped because I had no sense of trust in my abilities as someone to make good decisions.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: Because I was raised that my mother knew what was best like it is one thing when you saw like, you know, parents know best. But if the message never transitions for you, you'll become a grown woman and you'll still think my parents know best. I don't know what I'm doing.

Layla: That's right. That's right. What is the process that is supposed to happen? If there was not this thing, what is supposed to happen?

Jennifer: I was thinking about and look at the other cultures that have quinceanera or bat mitzvahs where there are the ceremonies that helped to transition children into more adulthood where different responsibilities and levels of independence I should say because I think as in the black community, our children get lots of responsibilities.

Layla: Responsibilities, right.

Jennifer: But the reward of responsibility should be independence and more trust. But oftentimes that independence and trust is like, oh, no you don't get that because your responsibility that we give you it really isn't so you can grow into an accountable successful independent adult, it is so you can help sustain our household that we have here.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: There isn't a sense that you will take this information and then have your own household and make your own decisions. So I think the way that it should go is like with responsibility then also comes a sense of independence and then making more decisions for yourself and instead what happens in a black household many times is you have all this responsibility and you don't get to experience independence and then when you turn 18 they say you're on your own, get out.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: And so then you're in a shock and you don't really know how to apply all those things that you learned and it's like you're on your own now instead of like a steady transition like okay we're gonna go and open you up a bank account, you're gonna put this amount in, okay how much money did you make this week? Okay. Did you put your 10% in? Okay you put that in. Okay, I'm gonna buy, you know, me and your father going to buy a car, you're gonna come with us and you're gonna see how we negotiate buying a car. There's an event at work, we're gonna get you a suit and tie. You're gonna come with us to the event at work and just through that environment, you're gonna learn. I'm gonna take you to work with me. You're gonna come to work. My mother was a guard at the prison. I couldn't go to work with her. My father was a mechanic. So, those are the types of different things where you kinda grow into. When I look back, I do credit my parents because they were very big on teaching me skills like you need to know this. But it's still was life and you need to know this because you don't know what the hell is gonna go on. Like my father teaching me how to shoot a gun. You don't know when you're gonna need it, you know, I was like, okay, but these are still survival technique. You gotta learn to cook, clean, shoot a gun, fight, curse somebody out, you need to know those things. But nobody was like this is how you save money. This is how you build a successful partnership with someone in a marriage. This is how you--I can teach you how to get a job but I don't know how to teach you how to move up in your career, how to ask for more money, how to have a greater vision for your life.

Layla: And what I hear you talking about is that you stay in that survival energy, you don't get taught how to thrive because that isn't something because of racism and white supremacy that we know is ours by right.

Jennifer: Right. Yes. And that's why I talk so much about my female ancestors because you know, I'm analog and digital. My mother pick cotton until she was 16 like that is a very definite way like so I'm only a couple of generations out where some people don't even have a real connection to Jim Crow segregation, slavery, my mother pick cotton, my grandmother pick cotton, you know, 1946 in rural South Carolina like I have a direct descendant I think my grandmother's uncle or her brother was harmed, so it's like there is not like, oh, this happened so long ago so to think about my mother's experience she was a grown woman before Martin Luther King came around. So, everything she already--the lack of power she had because of slavery, how even though they had money because my grandfather was a land owner, you had to pretend that you didn't have anything. Can you imagine not being able to be happy for yourself?

Layla: Yeah.

Jennifer: Because someone would see you and could feel you because you are happy for yourself.

Layla: Right. Right.

Jennifer: So, when I think about that mother wound, the trauma like right there is like it is not like way down the line, it's like right here.

Layla: And what you're talking about and this is what I came to understand the mother wound was about it was not about my individual relationship with my mother I mean it is, but it's not that that's it. It's actually being able to look at the bigger picture and understand what was her upbringing? Like what was her experience and what was her mother's experience and what was her mother's experience and how were they shaped by these things that we are not even in their control and how did that then trickle down to me right now and the blueprint that I was given and understanding that give me so much grace because I took on so much of it as personal. And it feels super personal. It's feels super, super personal.

Jennifer: It feels so personal, yes.

Layla: It feels so personal and I even noticed myself wanting to do this thing which I'm sure in your experience you've seen that many of us do when we are talking about this is to say, but my mother wasn't this and she wasn't this and she love me and she is like she was never abusive, her whole world is to this day, her children, right? And my experiences were my experiences.

Jennifer: Right. Yes. Both of those things can be true and the women that I worked with I tried to get them to understand their mother's trauma because oftentimes what happens in that mother wound is the mother has a very unrealistic expectation of her daughter, who her daughter should be, how she should perform, how she should show up and that becomes a really big rob because she can't see you or see us any differently and it's so frustrating because they spend a lot of time trying to be who she wants us to be. But then I turned it and I'm like the same way

she has unrealistic expectation of you, she doesn't really see you, you have an unrealistic expectation of her. You have no idea and I only come to know a lot of this as a mother.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: Nor should she know my life or things that impacted or in form how things that trigger me. So you're trying to say that as a mother, I don't have any triggers anymore. I know that's a god damn lie because I am a mother and I still have them and they still show up where I have to come back and be like I'm sorry, I kinda popped off. My response to this situation was not together. So, to think that she can have that I think when we can do that we can come with more grace for her and then we can have more grace for ourselves. It is like oh, okay, because our mother really is the core of who we think we are. We think we are her.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: Because that's just how we were born into like I'm her.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: So, if we have this real beef with her, we really have a beef with ourselves.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: And when we can see grace in her and see her as a human and be okay with that and be compassionate, we can then learn to be compassionate with ourselves because we think, oh, I'm her like we are her, you know what I'm saying. But when we can see her that way then we can be like, oh, then we can use that. It's almost like a trick of the mind to be like, okay, now how can I start to kind of heal this stuff that is going on with me and have some compassion for, you know, the reality of how I feel about her and choices that she made in our relationship.

Layla: Yes. I love that you said that. That if I think the beef is with her, it's actually with myself and that's what I ultimately have realized is with everything I thought was being projected at me, I do it to myself in even worse ways and that the work for me has become about really healing my relationship with myself and as I do, it changes my relationship with her.

Jennifer: That's what I tell people because they come to me and they wanna know how can I have a better relationship with my mother? How can I get her to understand where I'm coming from? How can I explain it and say it? How can I get stronger so when I come into a room with her, she will know that I'm a grown woman, I'm not intimidated I'm like it has nothing to do with her.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: When you heal, the energy of that changes automatically the relationship because it's a dance. So, when your moves changed, the other person has two choices, they can shift and do the dance you're doing or they can bow out and they can leave the dance floor. One of my favorite books I would tell is *The Dance of Anger*, I forgot the woman who wrote it and I think she has another book, *The Mother Dance* but *The Dance of Anger*, oh my god, it's so good. But she really talks about how relationships are at this kind of back and forth. So, instead of trying to teach my mother how to dance, no, you learn a different step. And that's when things changed.

Layla: Jennifer, how did you get into this work? We mentioned right at the beginning that, you know, you had this horrific sexual assault experience, is that how this work started for you?

Jennifer: You know, what's interesting is I've always had this, I was raped when I was 17, I've always had this nagging feeling that that was the most logical thing that could happen to me based off of--I didn't have vocabulary for it then but now as I do this work, because being raped is like the stripping of all your power and it's like the ultimate abandonment and I feel like I was groomed for that to some degree because I always had this and it's not her fault but a turbulent relationship with my mother in a sense that I didn't grow up in a home where there was this tenderness and where we were able to talk about our feelings and we didn't talk about how you deserve to be safe. It was like you're strong, you go out here, you do it type of thing and really when you make a mistake it's your fault. It's like there's very little room for error and I grew up in a very strict Pentecostal household. We will go to church like 5 days a week. I went to Christian school so it's like the wages of sin are death and it was just all of these things. And then when I looked back because when I was raped I didn't tell anybody. And I didn't even know how like my whole world throat shackled this shit down because there was even a period where I didn't even talk at all after that to even feel like I had the right to voice anything and it was meeting these women at school, these teachers who were triggering that same relationship. And so I've always known that we had this back and forth type of thing. And it wasn't until about 4 years ago where it like all blew up and there was so much I didn't remember and I was like hold up, after I wrote the book and after I came started really talking about my sexual trauma, it was like holy shit, my whole life is wrapped up in this relationship with her, everything, the men I date, the jobs I choose, where I live, how I parent, it was like I have been under a spell. I was not my own person and it blew my mind. It blew my mind how deeply the relationship had impacted and was impacting my whole life and from the freedom I felt from talking about my rape, I knew if I'm going through it, somebody else is going through it like I am the person I don't believe in elephants in the room. And my super power is talking about difficult things like I know I'm not the only one and I know how alone I always felt so my thing is I never want anybody to feel the way I feel. I never want anybody to feel like I'm going crazy, it's in my head, it's only me, it's my fault. Because those things almost made me kill myself. So when this came about, I was like oh shit, just put it out there, just say something because it was healing for me too to say it out loud because I needed someone else to say that it happened to



them too. I needed someone else to say girl, yes, I needed that and then when it happened, I was like, I'm not crazy because I really needed to know because if not then I was doomed because I don't know how to fix what's happening. And so from there, it just kind of just snowball, domino effect and it's just really about this community of exposing and creating this really safe space because the most diabolical thing that really black people can do is talk about their momma.

Layla: That's what I was about to say, it's a very taboo subject.

Jennifer: We can talk about everything except our momma like we can talk about sex, we can talk about drugs, I think people talk about being HIV positive, we can talk about being their pronouns are us and they, but to talk about your momma is still like tantamount to treason. It's like sacrilegious. And I know what it's like to have a pain and not be able to talk about it regardless of what it is. So my sexual trauma taught me that lesson. So now I'm just really implementing it with this separate trauma.

Layla: Right. Right. You've talked about the black mother wound as being a root trauma and a root wound which as we heal it, it helps us to heal other wounds as well.

Jennifer: Absolutely.

Layla: Can you talk about that?

Jennifer: Our mothers teach us if the world is safe or not. They teach us if we can trust others or not, if we can trust ourselves or not. They teach us if we are beautiful, if we are smart, if there is a world out there for us. So, if you are raised to believe that the world is small, the world is dangerous that there is no place for you that you should be afraid, how do you think you show up in the world? How do you think you make choices? How do you think you do where you don't stand up for yourself? So when you start to unravel that core wound because we know something isn't right with that as young people but because love is life. We need her love because she feeds us and takes care of us. We don't have our mother's love. It was like a logically it is the same as we're gonna die. That is also what's really difficult about this conversation, the love that we have for our mothers is literally attached to our physical life force. So when we are talking about detaching from that, it is like dying. So when we can really start to unravel that conversation and understand her perspective and that, oh, that's not a fact. She came from this place or this isn't true then we can start to see ourselves differently because we are looking at ourselves through her lens. So we can say, oh, maybe I can I spoke to--I had a call with a women yesterday and she wants to move to New York City. She lives in small southern town and she's always been made to believe because she grew up with this strong black woman and she is introverted and she is more quiet and she is more reserved that the world is going to eat her up. Here she is her 30s and she wants to move to New York City and she has a dream but that dream has been really cut off at the knees because of this story that they have told her because they think your survival is really based off where you've been able to go and you knock them in the head and like this is

certain way black woman gotta show up in this world otherwise, they are gonna eat you up. And so when we start to kinda talk about that and understand she was like, oh, like oh I can move. So what can happen if you move to New York City? Anything can happen then like your whole life can change when you see it differently like literally for people to really understand and I think it's difficult because people will say I love my mother. You can love your mother and she has still misinformed you about the possibilities for your life and you can create a new formation of what your life can be and that doesn't mean you're disrespecting her. It doesn't mean you don't love her. I think there's such a strong attachment between if I make a different choice for myself then she says I can make then I'm being a bad girl. I'm not obedient. I'm not honoring her. And that's not true.

Layla: This conversation is really feeding me. Thank you for everything that you're sharing and because it's so personal for me, you know, when I came into this work for myself looking at my mother wound it actually came at a point in my life where I was experiencing a lot of success and I was growing very rapidly and what I noticed was I was backing away from my success. It didn't look like the kind of self-sabotage where I was blowing things off and say I don't wanna do this anymore but it looked like I need to take a pause here. I need to take some time. I'm not really feeling the energy of it. I don't really know what's going on. I seemed to be losing my passion.

Jennifer: We have all the right words.

Layla: Right? And I couldn't figure out why and so when I came through doing some work with an energy healer and who is an intuitive and that was the thing that she struck upon which was to me huge because I was like you don't know me so you don't know that that is my actual story and it's the first time someone has actually said it, this is the thing. This is the thing you are carrying. It really strikes me how much of our personal power is caught up in this wound and in this place and that as we work to heal it, we release more of our power. What I found though for my experience is that as I released some of that wounding and got some more healing and release of that freedom and that independence that I was afraid of. I was afraid of being autonomous.

Jennifer: Yes. Because we've never transitioned into it. It's like win the lottery. You have all of this money. What am I supposed to do with it? No take it. I want it.

Layla: That's it. Right. And as I continue to do more of the work, I continue to see, okay, I give myself a little freedom but there's still always freedom that I'm not giving myself and I inched towards, this year I went on a very big summer holiday with my family as you know, and my invitation to myself was go and have the most fun you've ever had in your life and have it like you're the child you, not the adult you, not the mother you, but the little you.

Jennifer: I watched it sometimes in tears, yes.

Layla: Right. And so I was talking to my mentor about it when I came back and I was explaining how it felt at first. And I said, you know, it feels like we ever had to go in a shower and there's no hot water, it's only cold water and so you don't have a choice, you're gonna have to shower in this cold water and you get inside and you kind of your heart starts raising and you kinda feel this anxiety but the more that you let the water fall onto you then, you know, acclimatize and you're okay with it I said that's what joy felt like to me. It was fear first and trepidation, right?

Jennifer: Yup.

Layla: And so often we hear about this idea that the reclamation of joy for black woman is revolutionary. And it's so is and at the same time one of the things that I have become really intentional about is not making my joy an act of war like not making my joy an act of resistance against other people's definitions of what I'm supposed to happen, who I'm supposed to be, but letting the joy just be joy. Does that make sense?

Jennifer: Yes. Yes. And that is an act of autonomy at the same time.

Layla: Right. Right.

Jennifer: Because it's so just about me.

Layla: Right. And so that's the point that I want to drive home there because I think we take that strong black woman thing into our healing and so we are like I'm gonna do this joy thing but it's really intense when we do it.

Jennifer: Because everything that we do has to mean something.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: Everything that we do has to be important because there is something right on everything all the time. And I have enjoyed the summer being just useless, just watching Murder, She Wrote and Magnum P.I., paying my bills on time. But sometimes I get caught up like I should be doing something. What should I be doing? For where I feel a panic. I feel a guilt. There should be a bigger point to this. I need to do an IG live about this right now. I need to share it. I need to write a post. I need to do an email about what I learned today, about this happiness and I was like why isn't it okay for it just to be for me? Why isn't it okay for just to be for me, me, me, me, me freakin' me.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: I don't have to prove that I'm not selfish. I don't have to prove that I'm not vain. I don't have to prove that I'm not self-centered. I don't have to prove that I care about people. I don't have to prove that... Can you just make it about you and then just go take a nap, wake up, go laugh like can you build that in and then what happens is when it's time for you to show up, you can really show up in a different

way with even greater ideas but learning how to like keep something for yourself and it's just not about just about me because nobody else's business, it's just for me.

Layla: What do you think that we think is that risk if it's just for me?

Jennifer: That we are somehow, well for one, our mothers didn't do that, so I'm kind of--it's almost like I'm defacing her legacy like what she gave me was to go, go, go, do do, do, all of this and for me not to do that is like did she waste all that time on me? Then now I wanna sit up here and eat ice cream in the bed that I just wanna go laugh with my friends, I just wanna walk, I just wanna shop on Forever 21 and buy shit that I shouldn't buy, you know, just on sale of course. I think we think that. I think we think that we don't have a right to it like there's something that we always have to be proving and preparing for like something's gonna happen or this is like it's just so much. I don't even think it's conscious it's just this hum of who we should be and living up to this expectation because there's always this thing of like I wanna honor her because we are still looking for our mother's validation. We are still looking for her to say, she's our Jesus, we can say, well, you don't worship Jesus, we are talking about regular black folks in American like you know, Jesus as the pentacle you want to touch the hymn really the black mother is Jesus, really, you know, like we want to hear you have done well, you have done well. And we are just looking for that and we are trying to get it from now social media but it still goes back to would she be proud of this? Can I tell myself that this is okay? And we were raised to be so hypercritical of ourselves at the same time that of everything that we do.

Layla: I love that you said that about social media though because something that I realized is, okay, as a child it was specifically her attention that I wanted but now as an adult we look to other people online, do they see me, can they validate me, can they give me permission, am I allowed to be here and so we are outsourcing that job of loving ourselves to anybody else who can fill that role and it's this hungry energy of like get, get, get, get, get but never being able to fully receive.

Jennifer: Right.

Layla: It's like and I'll call myself out as the first who does this but there are so many of us successful black women however you choose to determine and define success but women who are really doing things in their families, in their communities and then the world that are just mind blowing and we cannot receive the compliments, we cannot see ourselves the way other see us, we don't give ourselves the time to stop and celebrate. There are so many ways in which we minimize who we actually are and how we are actually be.

Jennifer: But we have been taught that's what we should do.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: We've been taught the honor at our virtue is to how much can we do and how little can we ask for? We have been taught that that is the measure of our womanhood, how much we can defer our own personal gratification. How much we can look like I don't need to be loved by others. I don't need that. I don't need the help of like we have been taught that that is our virtue and when I think about black nannies raising white woman's children and how she cannot say I'm hungry, I'm tired, my feet hurt, I had to get on the bus at 4:30 this morning, my kids are at home sick, they've got test, and she's rewarded for her denial. She is rewarded by giving her full undying attention to others who don't give a fuck about her.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: And that is seen as how you move ahead in the world. So everything that you accomplish is not for you. It's to show how much I can do and how little that I need for myself and no one else is taught that. I don't know who else has taught that besides us that you should take some time for yourself. You don't hear the doctor telling the black woman, well first of all, black woman is not going to damn doctor first of all for you to even tell her you need to take some time for yourself, it's okay, take aspirin, drink a glass of wine. There is no sense of that type of compassion for us that's built in because we are the mules. So like our value is in how much you can put on your back and we've been taught that that is our honor and if the southern church, you would be rewarded in heaven, you know, that's the bill of good that we've sold that, you know, one day when you die, it will be okay but we are literally taught that and it's just killing us.

Layla: What is it that you are guiding black woman to do to break all of this?

Jennifer: So many women are in their early stages of it. First is really the acknowledgment and that before woman tells me her story, I said you don't have to tell me what happened, I already believe you. You don't have to prove it to me whatever you say happen, however you feel about it, I'm completely onboard with you. You know, just to first feel like this is a true story. That's why I am so vulnerable and so transparent about my story so you don't know you're the only one because once you know you're not the only one the light can start to get in and you're like, oh, all you need to be able to say to yourself is oh I'm not crazy. From there, you have an inner guidance that kind of always showing you different things so everybody's healing path has its own variations but really is primarily about the acknowledgment of your story. And that you have a right to it and just, you know, starting to--I always talk to women about that, they always think again that I'm gonna tell them how to engage to their mother. This is how, you know, we're gonna create a healing strategy around engaging your mother and convincing her and showing her. It's like no there's none of that like part of the call I had yesterday was I want you to start looking for job to New York. She was like, oh. So in a way I am also mothering them because what if she had a mother that said girl you can live anywhere, you can live anywhere you want to. You can get a job anywhere, you can make it anywhere. So, for me it's just to say those things that I know that need to be said and have already framed it and we built enough trust to where is like, oh, okay you know. And also to learn how to see their mother's

life as a real human being, so they can also release some of those expectations you have on her and be able to approach that with more grace because like we talk about earlier then you have more grace and compassion with yourself.

Layla:

That's so beautiful. One thing that strikes me about all of this and again just referencing from my own story, you know, I had an experience that happened a couple of weeks ago where my mother called me crying with pride for me and my work, she read the advance copy of my book which I did not expect. I didn't expect her to do because she doesn't read much anymore and even when she did it wasn't nonfiction and she read crying with absolute just pride and "I'm so proud of you and I can't believe you've done this and everyone needs to read this" and the reason why it meant so much to me was as a child, I had loved writing and she had encouraged me at first and then realized oh she's like this is the path that she wants to go down is writing and I need her to be a lawyer or an engineer or a doctor because that's the way that she's gonna have a good life. And so she really discouraged me from writing and there was clear point in my teenage history where I remember making a decision I'm not gonna write anymore. And so to come full circle to now where I have done the work not to prove to her that I'm good enough but to come to a place to myself where I know I'm good enough and then have her reflect back to me I see you not because you became who I wanted you to be, I see you for you. That was everything to me, everything to me and at the same time I know everyone's journey is not gonna be like that. There isn't gonna be the happy ending. There isn't gonna necessarily be a time when you are going to do everything so well that she'll eventually just come around, that's not everyone's door.

Jennifer:

Yes, absolutely. And for them I always talk about because you don't know what's gonna happen. I always tell people like a 1975 Chevy and you're in a 2018 Honda Accord like what do you want this Chevy to do like you already got 400,000 miles on it. You know, it's only so far sometimes how far, you know, it only can go but so far. So I talked about building support systems with other people but first understanding what your needs are, how can people support you? What is it look like when people are nurturing of you so you can find that in other places so your cup is not so empty that it's like this is the only person that can fill it in a way it doesn't happen you're so upset but it's like because as an autonomous individual, it is our job to fill our own cup. It's a bonus to have our mother come in and pour it overflowing, but it really is a job of a capable woman to make sure that her cup is filled. Because we already know we are pouring into others, but to be able to build that type of support around people and to take away the people who are taking out of that cup, it still feels that when we have that but first we have to learn how to be able to even receive that because we think if we don't get it from her, we don't deserve to get it from anyone and we have to break that cycle because that's not true either.

Layla:

That's so huge. That is so huge Jennifer because that is so true or we discount it when we receive it from others.

Jennifer: Yes. And we punish ourselves and we punish her. We risk all the things because we're trying to--she's supposed it won't mean anything until she gives it to me. So I'm not gonna take it from anybody which is a very juvenile way of looking at things and again that feeds back into the wound because we've never transitioned into how to solve problems. A child solves a problem by putting their foot down and pounding.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: So, we are still using really ineffective methods but we are still working from that wounded child perspective and not understanding the implication it has as adult because now you're missing out on so much that's really right there available because the world is a loving place. No matter what happens there's so much love, there's so much support and acceptance and love that this world can have for us if we are primarily, you know, it's not how can I go out and get love? How can I go out and get this success? It is like how can I make myself receptive? And then it really comes fleeting in. That is the work how can I become receptive?

Layla: Right. Right. And that again being someone who I've had to take a real look at myself and one of the things that I know is I resist receiving help and if anyone had told me you carry the archetype of the strong black woman I would say, no, that's not me. I'm actually a very sensitive, very quite person, I don't have like I associate that energy with my mother. I don't associate it with myself but I look at myself and I'm like well you don't let anyone help you ever. You're trying to do everything yourself and you want it done perfectly and you act like you don't feel your feelings and inside this is how you're really feeling, right? So, let's be real, right?

Jennifer: Right.

Layla: I've learned that so much of it is about realizing that I have to simultaneously do the work of learning to nurture and mother the little baby and it give her sense of safety while at the same time pulling my big girl panties up and making decisions for myself about who I want to be, how I want to be, what I want my life to be that it's both at the same time. Is that youth comes love?

Jennifer: Yes. And the amazing thing is when we tend to that little girl she is the one who has the answers. She is the one who has the power and helps us to integrate and has a confidence to be like that's what I like. I like the red one. It's not even like a, oh, back and forth, should I get the red one? Is it gonna make me a little like a hoe? Are they gonna like it? She has been comforted in such a way that now she feels free to speak and she says I like the red one. I like her. I don't wanna be friends with them anymore. I'm hungry. I'm full. I'm sleepy. I want some ice cream. And she trust you so much and you create this relationship with her that is like, oh, it makes it so much easier to move in the world without all of the internal conflict about these decisions. I have an idea. I wanna paint this. I wanna write that. That feels really good. That paragraph you wrote, that was good. That was really nice right there. I need some help with that. Ask her if she will help you with

that. I want a pedicure. It's just like because you have that with her, she makes the other things easier and not like, oh, how do I live in these two worlds, you know what I'm saying? It's like she has all of this wisdom already that kind of you all are now like a tag team. So it's like okay we're gonna...

Layla: I love that so much. That's really gonna stick with me. I really love that because she carries the wisdom of the easy answers that she is the internal guidance. She does not over complicate it which we do.

Jennifer: If you look at your kids, your kids don't over complicate. It's like I don't like it. I don't like green beans. They don't like green beans.

Layla: Right. You know, it's funny today I was--my daughter's birthday is coming up and another mother from the class messaged me and it turns out Maya's friend's birthday is on the same day so Maya has been planning her birthday for months so this mother then asked me do you wanna do that birthday on the same day? And in my mind I'm like I know Maya she's not gonna wanna do that. Like she's a Libra like she's just like it's my day.

Jennifer: Yes. My son is a Libra.

Layla: Right? So, I picked her from school and I explained to her you know, and it's her friend, it's one of her best friends and I say, well, this is the idea that she had in mind and her face was just like uh-uh, uh-uh, uh-uh, uh-uh, uh-uh and it was just that. I was like are you sure you don't wanna think about it? That's what I would do. May be I should--what will she say? May be she'll feel bad. That's what it is.

Jennifer: But really you know the answer is really--we already know it is like how can I talk myself into doing something I don't wanna do.

Layla: That's right. That's right.

Jennifer: Because what's really important is okay what if she wants to do it together so we save money and I'm being selfish because of that or what if she doesn't come to the party? What if she thinks my daughter is spoiled? You know, all of this accommodations versus and then the wake of it then the day never turns out right then you're mad about it after it's over versus she said she would really--she wants to have her own party.

Layla: Yup. That's what I ended up telling her. But that just struck me at such a moment and she didn't have to think it's not about her, it's my day. This is what I want. And it just that kind of like self-knowledge really inspires me.

Jennifer: Yeah. And every day is our day. And every day we know what we want. So, it's really just this undoing of how we make a decision. I'm dating right now out in this internet dating streets. I'm here in these streets and a guy I realized I wouldn't let conversations go on longer than they should even when I know it wasn't for me. So I was like I'm gonna do something differently so the guy was talking in 10



minutes and I was like this isn't a good fit. So when my time came to time in, I let him know and I already knew based on the things he said what he was gonna say. I let him know like, you know, you're a nice person but we are not a fit, we don't want the same things. And he said, "well, how do you I mean do you mind if I ask you how do you know that? Like what makes you think you know that? Obviously, you're trying to devalue what I'm saying right now, right?"

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: I said if somebody eats spaghetti and they liked spaghetti they liked it. If they don't like spaghetti nobody comes out and says why don't you like spaghetti? And he had nothing to say. It doesn't taste good.

Layla: Right, to me.

Jennifer: To me. Why do I have to keep eating something when I taste it, it doesn't taste good to me.

Layla: Yeah.

Jennifer: And how often we are eating relationships that don't taste good to us, making decisions that don't--but our taste buds have been so assimilated we don't even know what we like.

Layla: Right and that's a huge part of it is getting to learn ourselves again, getting to remember ourselves again.

Jennifer: And that's when that young girl comes because she already know. She's got the Encyclopedia of you already. Like you don't like that, that didn't feel good, remember when you did that, when you said that and they said that and that didn't feel good, we're not gonna do that anymore. Okay. You know, it's like a partnership because I had told a little girl from me like I jacked up I'm sorry like what do you need from me? I'm gonna be here for you like we really have real conversations and it like helps me out here in this real streets. Because really she never was parented in a way that she needed. So now I can go back and re-parent her. So that's the healing of the wound is not fixing the relationship with my actual mother, it is me becoming my mother that I need.

Layla: Oh, I love this so much. I'm really gonna take this with me because it's just not flip things completely but just help me to clarify a few things about how I be in relationship with myself and with that little girl and I've been pouring so much into helping her feel safe so that she can speak up to me, but I hadn't made that distinction of that I don't just make her feel safe and she stays there in the past. It's now, okay, I healed my past and now I'm here to be the grown woman. Do you see the difference, right?

Jennifer: Yes. Uh-huh.

Layla: Yes.

Jennifer: You carry her?

Layla: I carry her, she helps me to be a grown woman.

Jennifer: She integrates.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Absolutely. She transitions you into that and sometimes she helps you to be the child.

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: Because sometimes that's what we need too.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: And the child needs help. The child doesn't have all the answers and the child is like what's that? How do you do that?

Layla: Right.

Jennifer: You know, so she helps us be all those things.

Layla: Yeah. She's a really wise guide. I feel really nourished by this conversation Jennifer.

Jennifer: Yes. Me too. Because you're reminding me of things.

Layla: I'm glad. As we round up, I have two more questions for you. If we imagine a world in which more black women are aware of what the black mother wound is and are working to heal it and to heal themselves, how or what do you see is being different in the world than what we see now when we have more black women who in that space for themselves?

Jennifer: You know, I think about the culture of this country, you know what I saw, I see black women CEOs. I see compassionate police officers, I see an awareness and a reverence for the earth, I see a decline in climate change, I see chicken with no antibiotics and steroids, I see school curriculums that are eclectic and that represent everyone in the classroom. I always say this one, black women heal the entire world heals.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: We raised everybody.

Layla: That's right.

Jennifer: So imagine as coming from a space of power, we informed everything, we are implanted as seeds in every structure in this nation, child care, corporate, the education system, the cafeteria, the bus driver, the maid, the seamstress, the factory worker, like we are everywhere so I see this conglomerate of community that we create and the nature of who we are is being so freaking inclusive that I believe that our power would not become this elitist thing but envelope everyone and teach everyone how to kind of show up. That's why I always know like this work is so--because when black woman heal, it affects the entire planet like unequivocally. We are there but we don't know our power so to understand that and for it to be balanced out, I see loving relationships between us and our partners, women to women, men to women, I see boys growing up with a reverence for women. I see women growing up with a reverence for themselves. I see the music we hear on the radio is different. Everything changes. Everything changes.

Layla: Yeah. Which is a perfect way to end with our final question in this sacred work that you are doing and the way that you be in the world Jennifer, what does it mean to you to be a good ancestor?

Jennifer: Oh man, I owe it to my ancestors, you know, first of all. But to be a good ancestor is to undo the things that were harmful to me, to be a good ancestor means to tell the truth, speak truth to power, being a good ancestor means leaving a legacy of healing. It totally means let me make it really personal, and this line makes me emotional, when I think about when my son has children. The access he will have to love in his life, how he will love a woman, their children, there has been a line in the sand for not speaking what's true, there's been a line drawn in the sand for feeling that we have to give ourselves a way, there's been a line drawn in the sand about not feeling that we are not good enough, we will have a greater vision for our lives, so I think about who my son's grandchildren will be because of I have chosen to be for him. So, you know.

Layla: I love you. I love you.

Jennifer: I love you too.

Layla: And this is why I love you because that is what it means to me too what to me being a good ancestor the first place I look at is my children, my children's children, you know, my descendants. What line am I drawing that I'm saying this was okay before but then I came along and said no, this is where we gonna change things up and what impacts that down the line.

Jennifer: Yeah, absolutely. Because they are gonna go to schools, they're gonna go to workplaces, they're gonna go into grocery stores so whatever I give him, he will give them and it will touch, it will just go out this way as well and I'm honored.

Layla: And the beautiful thing is with what you've shared and what with so many of the guest that I have had the pleasure of interviewing in this show is that so many of us are doing it for our children or for our immediate family and yet the whole world gets to benefit.

Jennifer: Everyone, absolutely.

Layla: Everyone.

Jennifer: Yes.

Layla: Thank you, Jennifer.

Jennifer: Thank you.