ERP 079: A Personal Sharing Of My Honoring The Darkness

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Hi, thank you for joining today's podcast episode, episode 79. This episode is titled A Personal Sharing Of My Honoring The Darkness. If you listened to last week's podcast episode (episode 78) How To Honor The Darkness, I talked about the parts of ourselves - the shadow - where our fears, our insecurities, the things we're not proud of lay. We often tend to avoid, or deny, or by virtue of seeking all the positive we overlook the richness of our shadow.

Before we get started with today's episode, I want to just take a moment and invite you, if you're considering being on the show, either as an individual or in your relationship with your significant other, I just want to invite you to reach out to me. I would love to set up a time where you can get some personalized attention from me, some laser coaching, while being on the show and really creating more of a learning experience for us all. I think we learn through stories, we learn through people's experiences - hence I'm sharing a very personal story with you today - so I just want to invite more of you, if you've been contemplating whether or not you would want to get some of that laser coaching. I know some of you have expressed really wanting to work with me, but don't really feel like you can invest in relationship coaching at this time.

This is a great opportunity to get some really focused feedback that can help you have some next steps in your relationship; this can be with your significant other or just with yourself solely. Know that this will be aired on the show, so you want to be mindful of what you feel comfortable revealing.

You can find the ways to reach me on my website, which is DrJessicaHiggins.com, click on Contact and you can find a little bit more about that. I look forward to hearing from you, I look forward to having more of you on the show.

Also, in last week's podcast episode I mentioned a movie and I completely got it wrong, so I want to just correct that. I had said Fast Forward was the title of the movie with Jim Carrey, and actually the movie is Click! and it's with Adam Sandler. I think part of the reason I got that so wrong was I haven't even watched the entire movie, I just know the premise of it and I think I've caught certain clips. I just wanted to correct that, because I know that I completely got that wrong.

For today's podcast episode, I am going to share with you a little bit about a personal experience in my life, where I faced things that were in my shadow. Last week when I was writing the show notes - I write them actually after I produce the show, after I record and edit the show; I don't do a ton of editing, but I don't always know what I'm gonna say, so I write the show notes after I record it. And a quick side note, if you haven't listened to last week's podcast episode, I encourage you to do that before listening to today's podcast episode, because it does really lay out some fundamental groundwork pieces to support what I'm sharing with you today.

I'll just read a little bit about what I wrote:

"Over the past few days I've been putting the magnifying glass on my own shadow. It has been an incredibly rich experience. At times, I have laughed at my own immaturity, impatience, and reactivity."

Again, if you missed that show, please listen to it because you'll hear the examples that I'm referencing. These are show notes from last week's podcast episode.

"At other times, I have gotten in touch with some important emotion I have been wanting to avoid. Honoring my shadow is not a new concept, as I have been in the study and field of psychology for over 22 years. Throughout my professional development, I have studied how to work with the shadow. Throughout personal development, I have gone through many phases of deep inner work and facing issues I had never looked at before. Each time I was confronted with some opportunity to heal a part of my experience. I felt uneasy, scared, and uncomfortable. Yet, I have ALWAYS gained something tremendously positive out of the experience. I have never regretted the process, time, or energy spent to look at my shadow."

As I was writing this, I got this inner voice of "You can do way better than that", because I think when I shared with you guys last week, I shared little examples that are very current for me now, but as I'm describing the opportunity and the immense transformation that can occur when we face the parts of ourselves we have not wanted to look at - our own pain, our own fear - that actually can be a pretty big experience.

The examples that I shared with you don't really match the opportunity that I think I'm trying to describe here. So I've had this inner nudge to share an example of where I have gone inward and really faced parts of myself that I had previously ignored or had not wanted to look at. Actually, I have several that I could share with you. As I've mentioned, personal growth has been a part of my life for quite a long time, so I actually have several that I could choose from, and I felt more inspired to share with you a story that I have titled "Finding Family."

This idea occurred to me last week, and I had wanted to record this a couple days ago actually, and I have been a little bit hemming and hawing. I think that this is a pretty personal

story to share, and I'm a little nervous just to put it out there to thousands of you. Like I said, it's a personal story, but I really do believe in walking the talk, and I want to give you an example of what this looks like and what can happen when we are willing to look and confront the parts of ourselves that we are not proud of, or that we have fear around, or some level of insecurity.

In my hemming and hawing - it's so funny how life works! - I don't watch a lot of TV, but when I do, I don't actually watch live TV; I like to go on-demand and watch a show, because there's less commercials.

I was watching a Modern Family episode and it was Clean Out Your Junk Drawer. I didn't even know... I just picked the first one that I saw, and it was all about this very thing, a metaphor of cleaning out the parts of your emotional junk drawer, the stuff that you don't attend to, that really carry some weight and some significance. Obviously, there's a ton of humor about it, and there's this psychologist in there who's trying to facilitate... It's a little ridiculous, but there's an end quote, and I'll put a link on the show notes for you if you want to look at this. I'll read it to you, and this is really as it relates to relationship; that's the bigger focus here.

In partnership, we are gonna rub up against each other in ways that are gonna activate the parts of ourselves that we don't want to look at. Sometimes we have an old wound, some pain, an insecurity or a fear, and what gets activated is gonna feel really challenging. We have a choice at that point, of how we deal with that discomfort.

I'm inviting you to look at it, and that there's a real beauty and richness to face it and be with it and look at it, and it can be transformational, because there's a belief in psychology that the things that are getting activated that maybe we would label as bad, are actually coming up for healing, for our growth, for our wholeness, and to be loved. It's almost like all the yucky-ness is coming to the surface to be purified, or to let love transform.

When we think about pure love - the energy of love, not the physical, how we love each other, but the feeling and the quality of love is pure. The unconditional love, "I love all parts of your being. Everything" - that's the kind of love that we ultimately want to be in the energy of.

Going back to this Modern Family episode, Jay is reading part of this Clean Out Your Junk Drawer book, but you see the interactions of a few people; it's like the voiceover.

"*Why do we choose partners so different from ourselves? It's not fate or chance or clichés like, "the heart wants what the heart wants". We choose our partners because they represent the unfinished business from our childhood. And we choose them because they manifest the qualities we wish we had. In doing so, in choosing such a challenging partner and working to give them what they need, we chart a course for our own growth.*"

I really believe that when we do personal healing work, looking at our shadow, it allows us to love more fully and it allows us to be in relationship that much more consciously. I think that they're really related. If you're in relationship, I think your relationship can trigger or activate or point out where you pain spots are. Then it is the individual choice to look and do that work.

If you're not in relationship, I think your individual work allows you to be better prepared for a relationship, in a much more rich and full, aware and conscious way. If you're in relationship, your individual healing work still affects your ability to be in relationship at a higher level.

Essentially, our individual growth affects our relationship growth, and vice versa - our relationship growth affects our individual growth, and that's one of the reasons why I love how dynamic relationships are, and how rich the opportunities are for real healing and wholeness and growth.

This story I'm gonna share with you is a real personal story, and I truly believe some part of my being had wanted to do this work before entering into a deeper level of relationship like marriage. I was friends with my husband while this was all happening, but I think it prepared me to be more available for adult relationship, the real partnership that I really longed for.

Finding Family

My father died when I was only three months old. Growing up, I longed to have a solid, strong, loving father in my life, that strong paternal presence. In his absence, I would often fantasize that he was somehow watching over me, protecting me, and really with me. There were times at night where I would look at the stars and I would think of him. I even appointed a star to represent him.

If you recall the movie Lion King, when it came out I remember being greatly touched by the great kings of the past. There is this scene where Mufasa is telling Simba, "Let me tell you something my father told me. Look at the stars. The great kings of the past look down on us from those stars." Simba says, "Really?" and Mufasa says, "Yes. So whenever you feel alone just remember, those kings will always be there to guide you, and so will I."

I remember seeing that scene in Lion King, and I was a young adult, I was probably in my 20s at the time, and I remember balling... It just touched that place in me that really felt a lack. There was a bit of a hole.

In fact, any movie that touched on the topic of adoption, of not knowing where you came from or great loss, really deeply touched a sorrow in me.

My mom was 21 when she had me, and she was living the "hippie" lifestyle at the time. I never even had a photograph of my biological father, and I always wondered who he was, and

who he was within me. I could see and recognize the qualities and traits that I received from my mother, because I grew up with her. She has been in my life my whole life. However, I did not know the qualities and the traits that I got from him.

My mom did have some guilt or shame of not giving me a more traditional upbringing, so I would periodically ask her about him and she would share a little, but at the same time she didn't have a lot to share with me. They were together for a period of time, but not a great length of time and were not married, so she felt this deep regret for not having given me more of that stability.

However, in my mind I was less interested in her decisions prior, and more interested in the half of me that I knew nothing about.

This happened throughout my upbringing, up until my late twenties. There were times, periodically, that I would ask my mom, see if I could get any more information, and also somewhere along the line I had learned that I had a half-brother, as my biological father had been married, had had a son, and was divorced before he got together with my mom. He was quite a few years older than my mom when I was conceived.

I had always wanted to reach out and learn about him, my biological father. I also wanted to meet my half-brother, but I can tell you, I was so unsure about how I would be received. I felt afraid of being disregarded and rejected, and I felt completely overwhelmed of not knowing how to approach the situation. As I said, my mother had put that chapter behind her, and we now lived in a completely different state. This all happened in Cleveland, Ohio, where she was raised and brought up, and we had moved to Portland, Oregon. So it was this very distant past, and I wasn't even sure how to navigate the whole thing. But I had always thought one day I will try to learn and I will try to find my half-brother.

Fast-forward - August 2005. I enter into my PhD program. At the time, I had a masters in psychology and an undergrad in psychology, and I had done an enormous amount of personal growth and psychology work up until this point. Part of the reason of me going into this PhD program was that it was a much more integrative program, it was more holistic. I wanted to learn about positive psychology, I wanted to learn about somatic psychology and spiritual psychology - all these different modalities, creative art therapy, as well as continue the rigor of a PhD clinical psychology track.

In this particular PhD program, the first year is designed not only to do your academics, but to do an intensive experiential deep-dive into your own personal work. Part of the philosophy is in order to assist others in their personal healing and transformation, you had to have gone through the fire of your own personal healing and inner work. You can't lead someone confidently if you haven't been able to do your own personal work, look at your own demons in the closet, or something like that; the things you have not wanted to look at.

That could be anything that we might label as insignificant, like "I was made fun of in 3rd grade"... It runs the gamut, it's very personalized. We don't measure the significance of it based on what it is, but just that it has meaning to you.

Entering into this first year, I remember thinking, "Yeah!! Personal growth - I've been doing this, I have been on this path of personal growth for a long time. I've done deep dives, I've done intensive work, I've done retreats, I feel very comfortable with my inner world and looking at the parts of myself that have experienced pain or difficulty, and this will not be a biggie for me."

In the beginning of the semester of the first year, I remember feeling pretty much in my element. I love psychology, I love learning about personal growth, so I enjoyed the academic study and I also was loving the experiential classes with my cohort, where we would do our personal work, whether or not it was somatic psychology, creative expression psychology - whatever the content, it was experiential. We were using our own personal journey and life to do these processes. It's walking the talk, doing the work that we would then ask one of our clients to do down the road.

So as I said, I was able to connect and tune into parts of myself that I hadn't explored before. I think that our inner psyche is like an onion, they say; you're always peeling back the layers, so there were things that I was getting in touch with that felt really important and got great value in, and felt significant. I felt very comfortable with the process, because in general, like I said, I believe in this work, I am an advocate of it. I obviously chose this as a career, and I felt like I was just continuing my process.

In October - three months into the start of the program - I had a profound experience. I was with some of my classmates and we were engaged in this exercise that one of my classmates -- actually, this was an advanced student, and he was leading us into this experience. It had to do with the lineage of our ancestors; basically, all the people that came before us in our family tree.

The person that was facilitating the exercise was inviting us to think about all of our ancestors behind us - our grandparents, our great-grandparents and all the people that have contributed to our existing in the world. There was a part of it that he wanted us to contemplate the salty, the challenging times; these ancestors, the people that came before us, also had challenges, had obstacles to overcome, had hardships.

And they also had the sweet, the beautiful, the love, the awe, the mystery, the specialness of whatever they experienced in their life. They too had sweet times. At one point he invited us - as we were thinking about all these people that came before us, almost lined up; if you were to map a family tree behind us - to turn around and imagine facing them all. So I turned around and I felt this immediate blast of white light, and I just felt what I imagined my father's presence or energy. It wasn't anything weird, it was just what I had always imagined

him to feel like. And it was just this radiant, bright light, almost blinding, and him essentially saying to me, "Remember how brilliant you are."

Obviously - I can feel the emotion of it now - it was pretty special, and this whole experience, there was a lot to it, but that's the part I wanna share with you. So I proceeded to go home... At the time my roommate was a student fellow at Stanford University in Palo Alto, and I was telling her about this experience of what this exercise had brought to me with my biological father; because there'd be times where I would really not think about him too much, and then there'd be other times where I'd think about him... There's just certain things that would bring him to mind, but it wasn't like I thought about him every day.

So I was telling her that at some point in my life I had always thought that I would want to learn more about him, and the story around it all. Being who she is, she hopped online and started researching my biological father. I was like, "Oh my goodness, you're off and going!" [laughs] and I wasn't even sure I was ready, but it seemed like something was in motion; something got opened up, and it was in motion.

She had found his death certificate in the morning. I think she had printed it out and gave it to me, and she said, "I wanna go with you." Because we had talked about maybe going to the cemetery where he was buried and see his grave site. And I was like, "Okay... I have to think about this. This is happening."

I started to look into arrangements; I remember telling my mom about it and contemplating whether or not I should reach out to my half brother, not even knowing where to start. She said, "I wanna help. I wanna hire a private investigator to find him."

The private investigator did what he did, and basically provided me with my half-brother's mother's phone number, so my biological father's ex-wife. As you can imagine, that's my point of contact - my biological father's ex-wife - and it's a little awkward, imagining calling her.

It's been thirty years plus since he passed... So I'm petrified. I think I waited a few days and I mustered up the courage to dial her phone number, and she picks up. I don't even know what I said; the conversation was awkward and she felt guarded - as she should be. Thirty years later, a woman is explaining that she thinks she is your ex-husband's daughter, and is looking to get in touch with your son. That's not a phone call that you expect to receive.

Understandably, as she should have been, she was pretty guarded. She was taken aback and kind of cautious, however she wasn't opposed to talking with me, or sharing with me her son's contact information.

I remember feeling a little glimmer of hope. I got off the phone and I remember feeling super nervous and also excited. I remember thinking, "I might actually have a shot at seeing a photo of him, of learning who he is, and who he is in me."

Over the course of the next couple of weeks I had a few more conversations with her and let her know that I was gonna be planning a trip to visit his grave site and to his hometown, and then I would be making my way up to Cleveland, where she lived, where my half-brother lived at the time, where my grandparents lived and where my mom grew up and where I was conceived.

She let me know that she wanted to see me, and she had a requirement. She wanted me to take a genetics test. So in full compliance, I took this genetics test which I sent in, and then my half brother did the same. I remember getting the results, talking to the technician, and she said, "I have never seen a sibling test so conclusive. Sibling tests don't come out this conclusive." She said, "Yes, you are siblings."

With those results, I set out on this journey - I might add, I was in a PhD program... I had a tremendous amount of course work, I was in this deep experiential process with my cohort, and financially, time-wise, energy-wise it wasn't the most convenient. Yet, how could I say no to this?

The opportunity was emerging. I was noticing the opportunity and the potential. I could have said no. I would have great reason that it wasn't the right time, yet I had a friend that was willing to go with me. I had made contact with people that were open to meeting me, and luckily my grandparents still lived in the Cleveland area, right outside of Cleveland, by Chagrin Falls, and it was happening. The time felt right, so I said yes.

My friend and I got on a plane, and in a nutshell, we visited his hometown, we saw where he grew up, we met his relatives, cousins, old friends, and I visited his grave site.

It's interesting... I thought visiting his grave site would be a pretty emotional experience, yet when I was there I didn't feel that it represented him and his life. I felt more as though it was a deep honoring and a deep respect for him and where he came from. I felt deeply honored to have the opportunity to be there, to experience that, yet it didn't feel as though it helped me know him anymore.

The trip was magical. There were many stories and special moments and synchronicities that brought me great pause, and I could share probably for several hours with you, but what I will say is that when people were describing aspects of my biological father, I felt as though they were describing parts of me. The depth in his eyes and eye-contact, how he looked into people's eyes, his fierce loyalty, his love for his family and his community, and his adventurous spirit. In some ways, it felt as though people were touching and reminding me of what I'd known all along. Parts of my being that had been with me all along, and it just helped solidify in me.

After several days of exploring the area and meeting with people, visiting and hearing stories, my friend was ready to make her way back to Palo Alto, California. I drove her to the airport and I began my trip up to Cleveland, Ohio.

As I tell this story, I'm gonna share with you the second part next week... But as I share this story with you, I just wanna say that my heart is full of gratitude. Gratitude for the support that I had to do this work for my dear friend, from my mother, from this program that I think created a container for me to look at those very deep parts of myself that I was scared to look at. The beauty of the experience was a bonus. I can tell you that regardless of the results or the outcome that I got to experience, it was more of the process of who I became in the journey of it all. It was my wholeness, my healing, my completeness that came through the willingness to do this, the willingness to do the work.

Stay tuned next week for the second portion of this story, and I'll leave you with a quote by Joseph Campbell:

"*The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure that you seek."*

Thank you for listening today's episode and for listening to my personal sharing of a time when I honored my darkness, my shadow.

If you have any questions or would like to reach out to me, you can find me on my website, which is DrJessicaHiggins.com. Click on Contact, and you can find the ways to reach me there.

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Until next time, I hope you take great care.

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