

unshackling-shame-to-find-freedom-with-paula-williams

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SPEAKERS

Paula Williams, Jennifer Malcolm

- J** Jennifer Malcolm 00:10
Welcome to the next episode of the Jennasis Speaks podcast The Transformative Power of Women's Stories where every woman has a story and every story matters. And as every week I say, yes, that means you if you're listening, that means you. And today I am elated, because I feel like I said this in our pre production. I met my twin on the other side of the US, Paula Williams. And she and I were introduced by a mutual friend Brendon, the who is in my EO Group here in Cleveland, and I believe went to high school with you?
- P** Paula Williams 00:43
Yes, Junior high and in high school.
- J** Jennifer Malcolm 00:46
So he knew about the my dream of the podcast. And he said, you have to be Paula, you guys are tracking and saying the same language and speaking the same thing. So he introduced us and here we are today. So welcome, my friend.
- P** Paula Williams 00:59

Thank you so much, my friend, my sister from another mother.



Jennifer Malcolm 01:02

Exactly. Excited I I cannot wait to unwrap what this essence is going to be today. And we're just surrendering and believing like this is going to be perfectly delivered in the manner that it's meant to be.



Paula Williams 01:18

Yep.



Jennifer Malcolm 01:19

All right. So Paula Williams is the founder of Shame Booth, a San Francisco born art installation, social movement and podcast, a graduate of the Chicago Art Institute. Paula is an artist who finds beauty not only in painting and sculpture, but in the people and places that others avoid her artistic focus. And our own struggles with addiction and mental health is why she looked for opportunities to help organizations that support people dealing with mental health issues, substance abuse and recovery, sex trafficking and homelessness. As a result of our experiences, Paula became sensitive to the insidious nature of unresolved shame. She believes secrecy and judgment allow shame to thrive. She was inspired to create the shame booth experience to change the public perception of shame. She lives in San Francisco, her adopted hometown with her three daughters and two dogs. So welcome my friend.



Paula Williams 02:16

Thank you so much. It's so fun to be here. I've done an interview in a really long time. So



Jennifer Malcolm 02:20

It's so good. I know you're super familiar with podcast cuz you had your own podcast. So this space and in the arena of just you know, connecting with the audience I know is very familiar to you. And I'm really honored to have you here.



Paula Williams 02:33

I'm honored to be a thank you so much.



Jennifer Malcolm 02:37

You're most welcome. So Shame Booth. I'm interested why this topic or how this topic on shame outside of your bio, and from your lips to the audience's ear really became something of passion. You know, was it something that you arrived to four years ago, five years ago? Or is it been something that's been welling up within you throughout a journey?



Paula Williams 02:59

Yes, thank you for the opportunity to talk about it. Yeah, it started as just a passion project. I knew I had an idea. I wasn't sure what it was gonna look like. My very best friend in the whole world Roland who is an astrology coach. And I started spending some time to figure out like, what, what what was gonna what was something that I wanted to create? And I was in, I'm in long term sobriety. I'll have 10 years next week, and long term therapy. So doing uncovering a lot of that, a lot of that shame and trauma. And then when Trump got elected, when he when the election happened that morning, that Wednesday morning, read, and I were walking along the beach in San Francisco Crissy Field, it's one of our most beautiful places. And the mood on that day was so somber, and so sad. What if I could create something that allowed people to speak their truth? What would it be like if I could create a space where I could invite people to speak their shame? And I started thinking about shame. Wow, you know, it's a shame is different from guilt. Guilt is this belief that we've done something bad, and you can with guilt, you can move to action to fix, create, you know, or fix it, or make amends or change your behavior. But shame is this whole internal thing that I'm broken, I'm bad, I'm worthless. And thinking about where we had come as a society we were all suffering. I mean, I'm saying all you know, the world but I was just thinking about my own life, like this idea that we're all suffering in silence, and we're so afraid to share our pain, our truth, our shame. with other people, and we're never going to get well. So if we're going to try to change the direction of this country, we have to start with ourselves. And I, and then I started I know I'm kind of rant I ramble a little bit on this because then I think well, and then the whole idea of a phone and what this representation of a telephone meant to me growing up is that you had a landline and that thing was attached to a wall. For all of our like, super young people like yeah, a phone was actually a phone, you would dial if you had buttons that was like you were super mod. But you would, you would, you would that was a lifeline for you. Like you would spend all day with your best friend at school and you couldn't wait to get home and talk to them for hours about all the shit that happened. And I just felt like we have lost that ability to use the phone for real connection. It had become this other thing. And I thought, Gosh, what if you created a space and then I'm like a booth Shiva. I'm like, oh, and then I had a bad experience in confessional when I was 17. So I started to think about this notion of a box, and a confessional, but creating it in a beautiful way, not in a darkened scary way. So anyway, I came to this idea is like, I need a phone booth. We're going to call it Shane

booth, and I need to go find a phone booth. So we found a phone booth on Craigslist, I bring it home, it sits in my garage for a month, and just threw some people I knew in the city said you should meet this couple that do sound. She's a journalist. And he's a furniture maker. And so I we met with them and shared our idea and they thought it was brilliant. And so we worked together with them to create a booth. And the color was very important. And the inside of the booth is a haint blue. And I did some research on what hate blue man it's a very popular color in the south. And it was tied back to African and, and also slaves. And the the idea of this color is it's as a protection against evil spirits. Everything seemed to be pretty intentional. So the inside of the booth, I had a neon sign created on the top that said speak your shame that would kind of blink almost like a vacancy sign that you would see in a motel something that you could see like from across, you know, a dark room. And I put a phone in a little like an old timey looking phone that had the capabilities to record. And I took it to a recovery event at that same place Crissy Field where I had this idea, and we set it up and people were like, holy, what is this, like? This is amazing. So we had about 25 recordings that day. And we were kind of like amazed at the level of honesty and vulnerability left on those recordings.



Jennifer Malcolm 08:07

I can't imagine and I want to just reiterate that piece that you said, as you're describing the phone and the why behind the phone and being in the same age of you know, we had the wall on the phone on our walls growing up and maybe you had the touch dial maybe you had the rotary rotary and, and I loved what you said because that phone was used for a place of connection, it was a place of community, it was a place to you said talk to your girlfriend's for hour, hours on end. And you're stretching that chord as far as you could to get close the door and have some privacy to talk to someone. And today our phones often cause isolation. They cause separation, they cause deception. They have they have and again, it can be used for good but I feel like the phone today because of technology and the ease of internet and all those things has really could turn a negative impact on the phone. And that your creative mind was to go back to the root of just the iconic piece of a phone that I kind of piece of if it was a confessional and having that privacy, the part of just talking out loud and not being judged or seen the intentionality about the color. Like there's a lot of deep thought which creates a space where people feel open or curious to explore. And for you to go and test this out and have 25 people who are willing to be vulnerable and to share depths of their stories that maybe it was their first time sharing maybe it was their 100th time sharing but sharing it out loud to an unknown entity. how powerful that is.



Paula Williams 09:50

You know when to like so I'm in. I'm in recovery. So I go to 12 step meetings I am member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Yes, that's to say it But I say it because I feel like I gotta say it. So people know like, Hey, you can be sober and there's nothing to be ashamed about, we get this opportunity in our in our 12 step work to do this type of thing where we write down, you know, we, we take an inventory of our behavior, we're able to say it to another person. And then we have relief. And then the circle of the healing that goes, that happens through this is, I'm able to unburden my shame, whatever it may be, it could be something as small as like, you, you know, you stole you know, a candy bar, when you were five to you were sexually assaulted by a family member, you know, the power of being able to say that out loud, to feel relief of getting that kind of off your heart, then somebody else hearing that, that's where the magic kind of takes it to a whole other level is that somebody has the privilege of hearing that and saying to themselves, me, too. Yeah, that's part and then that's that circle of me too. And then, hey, I have something I need to unburden. And then it's just this kind of ripple effect of, of healing.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 11:27

Right. And, and as you know, that is the core heart and essence of Jennasis Speaks is to is through collective vulnerability, we heal and grow together. And that could be through mental health. It could be through adoption stories, it could be through infertility stories, it could be through sexual abuse, trauma, divorce, but there are all these these stories, that we isolate ourselves. And we shame ourselves and we withdraw ourselves. And it's through using our voices and unlocking our voices, and activating the courage to just open our mouths and even poorly share our story who how are we do we stumbled out of our mouth that does not have to be articulate, but to have someone look across or hear you and say, I understand. And there's compassion and there's was birth through that is just deep healing, and that shame is broken off, or at least pushback. And it may not be overcome in that one instance. But courage does continue to arise and shame because it has to go further and further back, where the courageous woman, the courageous voice comes forward, that had been locked down before. And I think that you've just emulated it so well, and open up this, this beautiful space for people to come and connect in a way that a lot of us didn't know was possible.

P

Paula Williams 12:55

And I love, you know, this idea of what Jennasis is doing is that everyone has a story, and an authentic voice. And we've been told for centuries, you know, sit in the corner look pretty, don't be hysterical. You're crazy. You're too emotional. And we start to believe that about ourselves. And this whole idea that we're not crazy, we're not emotional, we just feel things, we have empathy, we feel things on a, on a level that, you know, it's a little harder

for men to get to that place. Absolutely. I'm rooting for them, but it's hard for them.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 13:36

And that's the whole ying yang of it all. And, and there used to be this, the men are the warriors, and the women are the empathetic compassion. And I'm trying to bridge those two things together. Like there is such warrior spirit in me, and warrior energy in me to advocate for position rights voice, that then there's also the intuitive and there's also the empathetic and is also the compassionate. And I think that those energies are within each of us, and maybe we have tendency toward one or the other. But that masculine and feminine energy is within each of us. And then on a collective universal global scale, is that pool for that for centuries. You know, women put one in the corner, make sure that they are barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen type scenario. And that time is done like that time is, you know, coming to a place where women are like not not any more. And I think the more that you and I and others continue to share, showcase this and and repeat it over and over again. Women are going to start awaken to their rightful and beautiful places on this earth.

P

Paula Williams 14:43

Yeah, and we have daughters, so the important thing is for them to see us lead. I've noticed big changes in my daughter's too to be able to speak up and ask for what they want and they need without without apologizing for it, too.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 15:02

No and my, my husband has said that to me, but that piece of don't apologize, because you're giving someone your power, then you're giving away your power. Say your mind, say your position, you could say it gently, you could say it firmly. You can say it, you know, however you want to say it, but don't apologize, because you have God given rights and for your emotions, your thoughts and your position. And don't apologize for them. Yeah, at what point did you realize like the the stuff that you were dealing with in your heart and mind was directly associated or tethered to shame? Instead of anger or guilt or remorse? Or so how did that bridge calm where that word shame was the one that was really rising to the top of the worker, what you were feeling in your heart, what you were seeing around you?

P

Paula Williams 15:56

Well, I would say like, personally, when I got sober, and I think the thing about like, why I

would drink was because I was trying to quiet the story. Or numb out the feelings or memories of, of like, bad stuff that had happened to me, you know, whether it's, you know, there were some, there were some definite things that happened, you know, as a kid getting molested by the creepy neighbor, or going off to college and coming out of a blackout. And some guys on top of you having sex like, those things happen, you know, they happen, and then you start to believe that it's my fault. And that I'm I must be a whore or a bad person, or I asked for it or deserved it. So then you end up staying in this cycle of, you don't want to look at it, it's too ugly, too painful. And for the first part, for me, it's fear, like, or fear is really like the core thing. So I would act, you know, you might be angry. You might be resentful, you might be combative, you might be whatever it is, but it's like underneath all that is just, it's just fear, you know, fear of not matter, you know that I don't matter that my voice isn't heard that my story doesn't matter that I won't have enough the the idea of scarcity, but then then you continue to like peel away and you're going Oh, it's it's this belief, this deep belief that I have been telling myself from the beginning, that I'm not valued, that I'm not smart enough. I didn't have the right education. I'm not skinny enough. I'm not, you know, whatever, I don't have whatever credentials, I don't deserve a seat at the table. I'm a terrible Mother, you know, all that stuff comes from, from shame. And it's hidden. People don't see that. So you can, you can look amazing, and I did, you can look amazing on the outside and inside, you're dying. And it is hard to keep that show, going, you know, and I think we do that.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 18:12

And I'm not just making this about women, you know, men do this as well, we put up that show. We put up that wall professionally, personally, in our marriage, in our neighborhood in our immediate family that I'm okay. And I actually as you were sharing what you were talking about with fear, I quickly just drew out this, like fear is almost like this door that we hide shame behind. So we're okay to show fear. We're okay to show it through anger through outbursts through tears through whatever that emotion is. That's an okay, emotion, where we really don't want people to see that shame. And I know that oftentimes, I get energized, or if I start yelling, or and someone's like, what is that about? I will say I'm afraid, I'm afraid of something. And so I'm angry, I'm lashing out, I'm raising my voice. And I know that's fear. But if you go deeper level, under it, it's about shame of not being good enough, not being worthy enough, not having enough. And I like the way that you put the fear and shame together.

P

Paula Williams 19:19

The other thing too is this whole idea is if you knew me, if you knew the things that I believe about myself, or the things that have happened to me, you won't love me either.

So I'm not going to let you get close to me. So what I would do is put on an armor. Yeah. And it took you you know, that's years and years of building that you know our armor to keep people at arm's length because I'm not going to let you get close to me. yet be disgusted. You know by what you find here. As well as if we ever find the courage to start taking the armor off or raising that shield or helmet off. We often do Find people who are not compassion. There's a ton of compassionate people who love us who we where we are. But there are those who, when we've raised that are show show a little bit of vulnerability where they do lash out at us. And they do judge us. And that immediate response was, yep, I knew it. I wasn't good enough.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 20:17

You're right, I'm not beautiful enough, I'm going to now put an extra layer of armor on, because I tried to connect. And you basically said it wasn't worthy. So again, you're validating the fear of if you knew me, you wouldn't like me either. And what you and I are also trying to break through is to change that narrative and to change that position and create a community. And that's my heart is to create a community of people who actually see that vulnerability is beautiful, and it's a strength and it brings community and connection versus disconnected judgment.

P

Paula Williams 20:56

And this is where Brene Brown work, like really kicked my ass where I was like, Oh my god, she could be our other sister. I just have such a crush on her. I just love her so much. When I first heard her TED talk, I was like, what I saw every time like, yeah, so this whole idea about like creativity to as an artist, you know, you you have to show the world as an artist, you are your creative, you know, you are your your art. So like, yeah, I made this, this is me, and you show it to the world. And they go, Oh, that sucks. And you're like, well, you're saying I suck, so I must suck. But this whole idea of you have to be able to be vulnerable to be, you know, creative to put yourself out there and yes, not everybody's gonna like it. Not everybody is going to, you know, open you, you know, receive it with open arms. And that's, that's okay. Because for every 100 people that love it, you might have one person that's like, yeah, you suck in the front row. I'm going to focus on that one person who thinks I suck. And that's gonna take me that'll take me out. Oh, there's such good stuff here.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 22:06

It is and I love that piece. Because why do we gravitate? So you just said 100 people 99 could be applauding and, and saying this is the best thing ever. And that one naysayer,

the one person that we you know, choose to show our vulnerable self through our armor. Why do we allow them to a turtle crawl back into our shell and self protect? And I know that there's the flight and fight mechanism. I know there's, you know, psychology around it. But there's that piece to have you what some people may not like me, and that is okay. That is okay. So being strengthening that muscle that I'm not trying to hit 100% I mean, I should be trying to hit 50%. But the percent that I do hit that I am changing lives, I am instilling courage I am imparting voice, I am unlocking the warrior within them. That's a beautiful piece. And everyone else just needs to be like acknowledged put away and be like, Alright, you're not for me. And and that's okay. But I to dwell on the one naysayer out of the 100. And that does not help me.

P

Paula Williams 23:13

I love the flight flight, fight flight freeze. So I was at a women's retreat two summers ago, and there was a woman in our group. Aaron and she had this fourth theory and I think there was some some kind of literature on it. But is that, you know, as women, when they did this study, they only talk to the only did this flight freeze thing with like white men. So there's another thing to add to that is fight flight, freeze, and then gather. And I was like, wait, what is this? Tell me more. And she said, when the shit gets real when the house is on fire, and women gather, like and I just get chills like the women gather the babies they gather they they we don't we gather each other into this like protective circle. And I just think that is something to remember that when, especially now, when people are already so isolated, and COVID just bringing all of all the broken systems and structures to the surface is like, don't run, you know, gather your troops gather the people that you love and that you care about. And you know, that's where we can heal a lot of this.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 24:30

Absolutely. And my piggybacking off that I've used this analogy before but you know, I want to be this ember and that people come to you for warmth, for comfort for community, and that when they leave, they take a little bit of fire back to their community. They take a little bit and so you see this transference of heat and warmth and light as people come and gather and then refresh and take it back and multiply that out. So I have this visual of you know, me, I'm in Cleveland, Ohio, you're in San Francisco. But being this beacon of light, and as women are hearing or embracing, are curious that there's a fire that starts in their heart and in their homes, and in their communities. And as we continue to support each other, through these initiatives, then there's a global fire that we see each other through, you know, that that glimpse of the fire, fire a woman that you are, and we recognize each other because of that courageousness that has been brought to the surface and the shame that is being pushed down.



Paula Williams 25:45

So beautiful. You're so good, you're good at this. Like the face is all just like, lit up. And I love the idea of the Ember. So let me ask you this. How do you keep that Ember stoked and going without going out right now?



Jennifer Malcolm 26:04

I agree. And that's a great question. Because even through you know, we've been doing this podcast and, and stuff for about nine months. Now. There are times where I'm like, I'm, I'm empty, I am. I don't have it in me. So that same thing, and I think it's that when you have a community, I can be down and I have, you know, four or five girlfriends, I can be down, I could be on the floor, in my worst self assessment, shame ridden brokenness. And I love that the community aspect though, is the one that then breathes life back into me and brings courage back into my soul and reminds me of the words that we have co shared, co created, or that I have shared with them, that helps gather me, so I am I able to keep my fire going through the community aspect of it. Because if I do it by myself, in four months, I'll be burned out and alone. But through the community aspect and through connection, that's an ongoing connection, that people encouraged me as much as I'm able to encourage them. So that's a good I know, you flipped it on me, you interviewed me there.



Paula Williams 27:12

I did. It's like we need each other we're told for so you know, as a wife, a mother, all these things like we got this. And we could do it by ourselves. And then the notion I think too about like what my relationships were with girls in junior high in high school awful, is that everybody's out? It's a competition. Absolutely. And I think that has been such a detriment to to women is that the scarcity, that there's not enough light for me, there's not enough money, whatever it is. And so you've got to like get in there cat scratch, and bitch fight for your slice of the pie. When really, there's no, there's enough for all of us So, so being able to create that environment where we can invite those women who feel that way to like, Let down your armor. This is a safe space sister we see you know.



Jennifer Malcolm 28:05

And that piece too is why the when I study I try to study holistically. So Brene Brown is one of my favorite authors. Glennon Doyle is one of my favorite authors. I love Jen Sincero, who also talks You're a Badass and that abundance mentality and that there is enough out there. And we have to activate and we have to move energy into an abundance

mentality, whether it's for us personally for healing or money. So I love that piece of we do get, you know, in that scarcity mentality and that competitive nature between women, and to change that narrative to say there's more than enough, there's more than enough opportunity. There's more than enough platforms, there's more than enough money, there's more than enough lovers and, and significant others out there, that we don't have to be in competition with each other. So I'm gonna go back to the Shame Booth, because you're talking about this work and you had 25 courageous people who came through and recorded, but what did you then do with these recordings? You know, you gave us opportunity for someone to come in, pick up a phone, share, stuff, their stories, but then what did you do with that sacred story?

P

Paula Williams 29:19

Yeah, it is sacred. Well, during that first day, we were like that we're onto something here. And the Tonica Tangente who is was in his journey, is a journalist and has had experience and has had her own podcast she has had I think the content in here could be a podcast. And I thought, and this was 2017 podcasts were taking off, but I thought everybody has a podcast, you know, that just seems I don't want to do that. And she said, Okay, well, I think we should really think about it. And then we actually started to really listen in the studio. We listened to these recordings all of us together as a team and we're like, Alright, let's let's See what we can do here. And then we took the booth to some more events, we took it to pride. San Francisco pride is is pretty big here. And we knew that there was a lot of shame in you know, sexual, gender and sexuality and the LGBTQIA. community. And we thought, let's bring it there. And that also was a huge light, that kind of light bulb that went off was like, here's another community who also has something to say. And then we just started to over time, we have collected about 1000 recordings. And we hired an intern, Tanya and Philip hired an intern for the summer, who sat down over the course of three months and categorized each recording. And we had about 12 tags, we had another guy who built kind of a database for us called the shame of shame cloud. And we put them in different categories, whether it's family, relationships, finance, addiction, trauma, all of that. And so we were able to categorize them, so that we could pull those back out, when we had a podcast with a specific theme.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 31:27

I got, I'm getting chills, really, I'm getting chills. Because after you and I first talked last fall, I literally went to my team, and I was like, I want her booth I want like, it just so resonated. And I am so eager to see how the work that you birthed and Jennasis Speaks can pull a bridge, because I think that piece of just being able to share things that you don't want to tell anyone else. And even though you know what's recorded, there's something about

that sacred space, sharing a sacred story that gets it out of your mind and out of your soul, you are releasing it, you're seeing it with your mouth, you're hanging out with your ears, but you're also just surrendering that I'm leaving it in this booth, or I'm leaving part of this in this booth. And I think it's just absolutely beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

P

Paula Williams 32:20

Thanks. I want to say preface to like people sign a release, okay? They're like, is this going to be used? And I said, if I sign a release, one gal went in there and said, I don't or came up to us at pride and said, this is cool. And she was but I'm not going to do it. And I said, Well, why not? She said, because I'm too ashamed of somebody else hearing it. Like, well, that's kind of the point, right? So I said, well tell you what, why don't you just go in the booth and try it out. And the booth is like completely Stark. It's just this hazy blue, and the phone and I said just take some deep breaths and, and pick up the phone and see what happens. Did she come out sobbing and she said, Oh my god, where's that paper, I'll sign it, I get it, I get the I get the power of the release. And then also how it can help other people unlock their shame and heal. So sometimes you just that's the coolest part about being at events too. That's my favorite part. And that's the part that we haven't been able to do since COVID is when we take this booth out into public space, people go nuts and I love having these one on one intense conversations with other people about shame and also seeing the transformation that happens physiol I see it physiologically when they step out of the booth. They are standing a little bit taller, with a little more pride and it's even if even if it lasts like an hour.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 33:45

Absolutely. So how did you personally handle that's a lot of emotion, a lot of just emotionality and heaviness when you're hearing people's stories. So how were you able to listen to individual stories you said you have around 1000? How are you able to facilitate those stories of you know, people coming in wanting to go into the shame booth? How did that personally impact you?

P

Paula Williams 34:15

My husband left me like, I mean, at the end of the day is like I'm out of here you're kind of bumming me out with all this trauma and shame shit. I mean, it's it's more than that. But however, I feel like I became so obsessed with this work. I mean, I was a stay at home mom, john for so long. I didn't have a career. I was an artist, but I was I wasn't doing anything with it. And so when I when I found this passion, I was all in I mean, I'm an addict. So whether I'm doing a line of coke or I'm going to spend, you know 12 hours a day

listening to recordings, it doesn't matter. So I think it had an impact on me. To the point where even my my shrink was like you need to take it Like, you can't hold this. And so there's that bit that bigger piece of that. But also we have volunteered. I mean, we we're not, we're not clinical psychologists, right? We're just, we have our own experience and our own story. But we're not like mental health professionals. And that has also been something that has been brought up was like, Well, what if someone has a serious like, what if they're triggered, you know, and something serious. And I said, Well, we kind of did work on our website for some services. It wasn't really thorough enough, frankly. But there were some places where we could point people in the direction to seek help. But our volunteers who we just loved so much, they're called the shame dames. And they wear these red Dickey's jumpsuits. And the whole idea about that is, is also bringing in a performance piece. And having them kind of be the docents of the booth to kind of walk people through the process and talk to them before and after. And, you know, we've had a couple of volunteers who were really affected by some of the stories, which were, I can think of one in particular, that was pretty horrific, or pretty horrific. And we realized that we needed to create a space for our volunteers after an event to kind of have a closing date now just to kind of debrief. And give them the opportunity to just leave that here. Don't take that home with you. That also needed some work too. So thinking about when we do get to go back out into the world, being being more mindful about how we prep our volunteers to handle that. But, you know, it's taken a toll it also cause caused me to have some impacted some of my closest relationships too, because I was so obsessed with it, that I wanted other people to get on board. Like, have you read this? Have you? Did you read Chanel Miller's, you know, memoir, have you read, you know, I can't even think off the top of my head. But it was like, I was so obsessed with movies, and books and podcasts that were all related to really gnarly trauma. And friends would say I can't. So that's kind of why one of the reasons I'm in this kind of long pause is trying to figure out what's what's gonna emerge after this. But we can talk.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 37:46

And that sounds like wisdom because we we are struggling with and I'm struggling with my team knows I'm struggling with over the last six months, we've had several podcasts that have been about sexual trauma that have been about childhood sexual abuse. I released mine, early December about my date rape that happened six years ago in a business setting. And here I am a business owner. I was single mom,

P

Paula Williams 38:14

One second, can you just I want to look at you because I think this is so important. I used to drop shit like that. Like, yeah, I was raped by this. And it's like, okay, I want to look at

you like I am. I am sorry. Sorry, that happened to you. Like, let's honor that, because that is not. And that's not who you are. You are not a victim. It's just part of who you are. That's making you an awesome woman who is helping other people. So I just want to say like I see you girl. Thank you. I'm sorry, that happened to you.

J Jennifer Malcolm 38:49

Thank you. And it's interesting, because we're now looking at the sacred stories we've had. Since my podcast came out in December. I've had 30 plus women who have either emailed me called me asked for coffee that they had never told anyone or maybe they had told someone about their sexual abuse. And to me, it was so sad. And that's why I use the word sacred stories, because I just felt like I was handed these like sacred baby stories that were so precious, and women, that things happen to them at age, you know, 12-14, and they're now 50-60 years old and still crying through the trauma of it. And so I'm looking to say, How do I continue to build this, this platform? Because I'm not a mental health professional. I'm never going to be a mental health professional. But how do I safely facilitate, to honor the story but also give them the care and help that they need if they need it, if they choose to engage And so we're asking those questions. And so that's another piece of, of this journey of Jennasis. Where do we go from here? How do we navigate? And these are the conversations that we do need to have, I need to have to take this to another level. And I honor your pause, I honor, you know, to say, you know, I need to step back, there's something, there's things that I can do a little differently. And I learned from, you know, round one, you know, providing them on the website, how to support volunteers, how to maybe leave and create better boundaries for yourself. So your friends, you know, aren't overwhelmed. But it's hard because there's a fire in my soul for advocacy now, and then the fire in my soul to bring this to other people. That's important tonight, and I sense and feel that fire in you as well.

P Paula Williams 40:49

I want to share this really cool thing that happened in September of 2018. And I was in DC I was right in between it was during the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. And when they when they had taken a break. I happened to be in DC for some family business. And I had packed up all I packed up to jumpsuits. We also have these like big underpants that say no shame on them. And that's all about like body positivity and stuff. And also they're comfortable. And we my my girlfriend from New York took the train down and we brought out a banner that we had rolled out in front of the White House for and asked people to write down who their Brett Kavanaugh was anyway. So I had people write and there was a woman she just kept kind of passing and on the third pass. And she's just standing there. And I said, What, what's what's happening, she said, my husband made me come back.

I've been carrying around this, this shame around the sexual assault for so long. It's just impacting everything. And I said, well, write it down. Get rid of it. So she sat down on the sidewalk, and just read the name, paused for a little bit, and then kind of let it go and then walked away. And I just Ah, that is that's part of this release, right? The part of telling your story whether maybe she couldn't people can't say it out loud yet. Maybe that's the first step just writing down the name. So good.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 42:45

And it's that activation piece, you're you're doing something. And I love what you just said, write it down. For me, I don't have the courage, maybe I don't have the voice yet. Maybe I'm not there to delve into any of the details or to share it or to see people's reactions. But there is that activation piece and leaning in.

P

Paula Williams 43:08

So it's like I I wish there was a way to follow up. And I think that's kind of where I want to go next is okay, you've released your shame, or you're on your way to really see your shame. So let's not stay in it. Like that. What's on the other side of that it's freedom, baby freedom. So like. So just think about, like, how could we create that next, and I think you're doing that with the work that you're doing is you're bringing that think so

J

Jennifer Malcolm 43:38

But I think that the the bridge is is that you're giving this opportunity for people to to acknowledge and have that shame, and I'm doing some of that work. But I do believe that there is going to be continued bridges between the work you're doing and the work that we're doing. Because there is it's in your heart to say now now what do we do? How do we activate this? How do we get people into that freedom, and joy and courageous voice. And it doesn't mean that we never feel that shame again, or that trigger again, or that trauma again, or that regret again. But it is with less pain, and it's with less intensity than we had experienced before. And the freedom on the other side is immensely beautiful. But it's also getting through that wall or door fear that you talked about earlier, to push back back and allow shame to be released in order to get to that freedom. Good.

P

Paula Williams 44:35

Or women who have a lot to offer who might not feel like Oh, I can't start a shame booth. I can't start you know Jennasis and it's like know that but you've got your own thing. And it might not be it might just be you like reading a really good book or maybe you learn

how to knit something beautiful or maybe you cook something really delicious. Like it doesn't have to be that's I think where women get stuck they go why I can't do that.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 45:01

So I appreciate what you're saying. Because I do think that women we tend to compare I can't, I'm not doing a shame booth. I'm not doing a women's movement, but they are the small activations, the small yeses in our heart, the small self care, the cooking, the ability to knit and the things that you were saying to draw to be an artist. And for me, my one also is just to be a compassionate listener, why don't we close with what you're going to kind of what's on your horizon through 2021? And then we'll look at what does your freedom look like?

P

Paula Williams 45:34

Yeah, I had a I had a gal reached out to me sent me an email saying she's working in. She wants to create an app, a shame booth app, had some other idea about creating a space where people could, like, tell their secrets or their stories. And a friend of hers said, oh, there's something already like that out there. It's called shame booth. She's like, what? So she went and checked it out. And send me an email and said she and we've been thinking about creating an app. And so we're in conversations with this woman about what that might look like. So that could be super cool, because we did have a hotline and nobody's using it, this whole idea of people using a hotline like a phone. Nobody was using it, the only people that were calling were me and my colleague, Tanya's nine year old daughter, Nora, I can't wait to get back up to do live events, we have a really gorgeous partnership with she recovers. There are their international organization created by a mom and daughter team out of British Columbia. And they do these incredible recovery events all over. And we had a big one in Miami that we had to cancel. So it's going to be rescheduled, I think for the fall of 2021. And that's where I've gotten a lot of movement in that community of recovery, and not just recovering from drugs and alcohol. But there's a notion that we're all recovering from something.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 47:04

I think it's beautiful. And I think that's the beautiful part of your work is that you're touching. So you're the center of, of a wheel with so many spokes coming out. And you're hitting so many different audiences. Because no matter your age, gender, sexual orientation, partnership, etc. we all deal with shame in some way. And getting through that barrier. And through that fear wall to the other side of healing and freedom is going to be contagious.



Paula Williams 47:35

I really would like to get more. Sis, gender men, white dudes. White straight dudes in the booth. There we have maybe 10 recordings. Wow. them and it's I think that is a goal of mine is to get different voices inside that booth.



Jennifer Malcolm 47:56

What does freedom look like for Paula, Paula Williams, when you come through and you're on the other side and your arms are raised? What does that freedom look like?



Paula Williams 48:05

That is a good question. Well read my astrologists says I'm in store for a sexual awakening that doesn't follow any social norms.



Jennifer Malcolm 48:13

There you go.



Paula Williams 48:14

So TBD on that I've had two quite quite titillating experiences and COVID. And I'll just say my itches, were scratched. So that can, that will, because I'm coming out of a 31 year marriage. And that's, that kind of took me by surprise. But I feel like it's now been a real gift. Because I realized how much I lost myself in the dynamic of a partnership for that long, and how I became somebody else. And now I feel like I'm awakening to the woman I was always meant to be. And I'm, yeah, I'm a little scared, but I'm also like, I'm, I'm totally going to be fine. I have amazing support. And I have friends that are just like, cheering me on and excited about all of my endeavors or like go out and do some recon, you know, tell us what you've been doing. And so, so freedom there and also, you know, seeing seeing the incredible work that my daughters are doing both in the own you know, professional capacity and also in their own personal growth. I'm just so proud Retta and I've been talking a lot and I've been talking and I think you and I even talked about this is there are so many of us women in our in our kids are gone, you know relationships and it's like what's next for us and this whole idea of the third act, and I feel like there is such juicy stuff in that area. I don't know really what it looks like but um We've been really talking about how we can create another, not another, but just work with those other women who are stuck who feel like they have nothing to contribute or that their experience, their life experience doesn't hold value, when in fact it does and how to how to create this next

third chapter for us. And I don't know what it looks like I'm putting it out there. But I feel like there is something really exciting in that piece.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 50:36

Because there's a lot of us that, you know, I have two kids that are at in college now I have one left. She's a sophomore, we have two years left with her before she's off to college. It is the What next? And what is the purpose and whether you're married, not married, whatever path you're on, and for you having the end of a 31 year old marriage? Like that's a huge chapter two in a huge chasm to be like, Alright, who is Paula? Who does Paula want to be? What is in your heart that maybe you weren't able to release? Or create? Or relinquish? Because of a relationship? And that thing that was bad relationship? I don't know. None of you know, but who are you and who, who are you meant to be? And I think that piece is exciting, as it unfolds to you day by day. And as you're on this journey, in finding individuals like myself, who are going to champion you on and be a huge cheerleader for you. It's, it's a new, it's a new arena. So I love that third act.

P

Paula Williams 51:39

And to say yes, and not to say yes, at the expense of our own, you know, not to say yes to things that we really don't want to do. As women, we do that a lot. You know, we'll make commitments and say, Sure, I'll make cupcakes for the team or for all hosts, the company party, but really like, what do what do I want to do and be able to say yes to those things, then.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 52:04

So as we wrap up, what is a piece of advice you would give a woman to start this shame journey, or start this place of I want to have a conversation, I want to confront shame in my life, what's a piece of advice from a shame expert as yourself, that you would give?

P

Paula Williams 52:24

Well, I can just say, for my own experience, what what helps me now is finding that space in between, like the chaos for me, the quiet. And the, you know, it's it's squirrel season, right? So I've got a lot of squirrels living in my head who are causing a lot of distraction for me and putting a lot of fear in there. But if I can just find that space of quiet, then I'm able to really tap into this inner wisdom and this intuition, that's getting stronger, the more I feed it, and I we all have it. And if you're really still struggling with that, find out where it hurts. You know, for me, it's like in my chest. And it's like when things come up for you and

you you have a visceral reaction to that. Spend some time getting quiet and thinking about what is that? Where does that come from? And I would also say, if you're not in, you're not seeking therapy, do it. Find a really good therapist, and start peeling, peeling that onion. And yes, it's terrifying. It is terrifying, but I can tell you the the freedom and the beauty and the strength you will get from walking through that will change everything. So don't Don't be afraid.



Jennifer Malcolm 53:54

And if you are afraid, there are individuals like yourself and organizations like yourself and organizations like Jennasis. And there's throughout the communities around us advocates to hold your hand and to support and to encourage and it can be the quietness of support, it can be the robustness of support, but we're here for you as well.



Paula Williams 54:21

And you're not alone even though you think that you are completely alone and that your story is unique. It isn't there are many of us who share that same story and we are not our story.



Jennifer Malcolm 54:31

Yeah. Oh they love that. Good reminder. I am so honored that Brendan connected with you to me and that you are like minded and your heart and soul and different and you have your own nuances but that we speak the same language and really honored that you were here with us today.



Paula Williams 54:54

Same I'm so glad we found each other.



Jennifer Malcolm 54:56

I am to like this is like such a gift and COVID Those are some COVID keeps and you're one of them. So I'm excited at this on on folds. And as our work continues to cross pollinate with each other, that we're honoring Women's International Day, this week, and that you're here and this story, and breaking out the shame and walking into freedom is the legacy that you're going to live.



Paula Williams 55:24

Right on sista. Awesome,



Jennifer Malcolm 55:27

So good. All right. Well, thanks, ladies for checking in today. And men, those who you are who are courageous to listen to a women's podcast, you are always welcome here. We added a few of you. And we were excited that you're here and we are blessed that you took the time today and we look forward to connecting with you next week. All right, have a good one. Bye. Bye. Thank you for listening to the Jennasis Speaks podcast. If you love the show, one of the best things you can do is to share it with a friend. Tell them what you like about it, how it inspires you and invite them to listen. Subscribe to the Jennasis movement to empower women's voices and reclaim the power over your own narrative.