

The Art of Asking Everything

Leslie Salmon Jones: The Heart Doesn't Lie

Amanda Palmer 00:33

This is The Art of Asking Everything, I am Amanda Palmer. This week's guest is Leslie Salmon Jones, in The Heart Doesn't Lie.

I met Leslie in my 20s when I was living in Boston in an arts collective called the Cloud Club. And I was having weird problems with chronic soreness in my back and neck, and I could just never get comfortable. So I asked a local massage therapist that I knew if he had any recommendations for someone who wouldn't give me yet another massage, but someone who would actually teach me about my body, and what was going on with it, and how to get out of this cycle of pain that I was always in. And he was like, Amanda, Amanda, Amanda, you need Leslie Salmon Jones. And he was right. She helped me understand my body, what it did, how it worked, and my power, in a way that a normal back doctor just wouldn't have done. She just made me feel so incredibly okay. So of course I wanted her to be my friend.

Here is her basic bio: Leslie Salmon Jones is a professional dancer, yoga instructor, wellness coach, public speaker, and community activist. And along with her husband, Jeff W. Jones, she is the co-founder of a mash-up yoga-style called Afro-flow yoga, which combines African dance with yoga. And Leslie and Jeff travel all around the world, but actually lately, because Covid, they have been travelling using the internet. And they work with community organisations to, as they put it, help develop mastery over their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeings. That sounds lovely. I would love that.

About a year ago, I led a retreat in the woods of upstate New York for my patrons. This was back in July of 2019. And the retreat was called Real Compassion. And me and about 50 people hung out for a few days, and we ate and drank and talked and talked. And we learned about our bodies, and our hearts, and our habits. I wanted to do this with some leaders who knew what they were talking about, so I invited two people to co-teach this retreat with me. One was the bestselling writer and therapist and minister

Wayne Muller, who I also have a podcast interview coming up with, don't worry. And one was Leslie. And it was after that retreat, and actually going through many heavy-duty moments, emotional moments with a lot of people, that we sat down to have this conversation, in the woods, at the Omega Institute in upstate New York. And we originally talked for over two hours about how we met, about Leslie's experience growing up black in a very rich, white Toronto neighbourhood. We talked about my old house, the cloud Club, where Leslie first got to know me. We talked about how your body remembers trauma, the importance of self-compassion, and so much more. I think you guys are really going to enjoy this one.

Please welcome, as my friends call her back home, LSJ. Dear listener, Leslie Salmon Jones.

Leslie Salmon Jones, welcome to my podcast, The Art of Asking Everything. We are in a cabin in the woods, which is pretty weird. This is the first time I ever recorded the podcast in a cabin in the woods. We just finished this retreat. Maybe we should talk about how we met. And that will actually start to explain who you are. Cos they're related.

Leslie Salmon Jones 04:14

Yeah. Great.

Amanda Palmer 04:16

Do you remember when it was?

Leslie Salmon Jones 04:18

I wanna say it was probably about fifteen years ago.

Amanda Palmer 04:21

Oh my god!

Leslie Salmon Jones 04:24

I know! I know.

Amanda Palmer 04:25

Well I know I was living in the Cloud Club, so it couldn't have been more than that, but it was early days, and it was... Dresden Dolls were already touring. So it would be after 2003 or 4. That's when the band really started going at it. And it's also when I had money. There's like, before I had money and things that I couldn't afford, and then after

I started making money, and I actually could buy nice things. I can divide my life into two sections.

Leslie Salmon Jones 04:51

Yeah, and I had heard about you from Bob Vincent, our mutual bodyworker, structural integration, where we go on the table, and he'd go deep into our myofascial tissue, very intense body.

Amanda Palmer 05:07

So this is a guy, this guy Bob Vincent, who introduced me to Leslie, I forget who introduced me to Bob, but in my early 20s, I've always been really into massage and chiropractic and acupuncture, and anyone can touch my body for any reason, and I am psyched, cos I've always had neck and back problems from when I was a kid. I'd been getting massages from Bob, and he was like this miracle worker. And I can even divide my time getting massages into oh, there's a massage that you get, and then there's getting your body worked on by a master level body toucher like Bob Vincent. After many years of working with him, I was like, there are parts of my body that just aren't getting better. Yoga isn't doing it, exercise isn't doing it, massage isn't doing it. Things in there feel wrong, my hips are kind of fucked up, what do I do? Who do you go to? I don't go to my primary care physician. They don't really do this kind of stuff. He'll say go get some physiotherapy. And he said you need Leslie Salmon Jones. She does things to people. So I cold-called this woman, back when we called each other, and you came over to my house. Can you tell me what it felt like meeting me? Cos I have no idea, cos my house is weird.

Leslie Salmon Jones 06:35

Yeah yeah yeah, well to back up, I had been going to Bob cos I had lived in New York, and I was training at Alvin Ailey, and dance. And I had met this rolfer, which is this technique, which is what Bob did, and had a series of ten sessions, and it changed my life.

Amanda Palmer 06:58

And this is where they dig in deep under your muscles.

Leslie Salmon Jones 07:01

Yeah, and then any body stories, any trauma that had happened in my body, I was recording it all. Completely changed my life, I was dancing, I couldn't do the splits, and I started dancing again.

Amanda Palmer 07:14

Was it Bob working on you?

Leslie Salmon Jones 07:15

No, this is a rolfer in New York, he was the first Black rolfer in the world. He lived in Sweden, and he came to New York, and I was his muse. So I did ten sessions.

Amanda Palmer 07:30

Wait, what is that? What does a muse mean in this context, to be clear?

Leslie Salmon Jones 07:36

Well he had never worked on a Black woman before. And he was like, I am so curious if the emotion, the body is different, what comes up, and so any time he'd work on me, and he started with my feet all the way up to the top of my head, and my jaw, and my groin.

Amanda Palmer 07:57

And he's a Black guy from Sweden.

Leslie Salmon Jones 08:01

Right, yeah.

Amanda Palmer 08:02

Layers of weirdness.

Leslie Salmon Jones 08:03

Layers of weirdness. And so, I would record every session, all of the emotions that came up. So tremendous healing happened for me. And I remember, I couldn't do the splits, I was training at Alvin Ailey which is 8 hours a day.

Amanda Palmer 08:18

Explain Alvin Ailey for someone who knows nothing about dance.

Leslie Salmon Jones 08:21

Thank you, so Alvin Ailey was one of the first Black modern dancers, contemporary dancers. Phenomenal. And he was from Toronto, so I trained in ballet when I was 7, and I saw Alvin Ailey in Toronto when I was 13, and I saw this amazing Black bodies leaping across the stage.

Amanda Palmer 08:46

What year...

Leslie Salmon Jones 08:47

I was 13.

Amanda Palmer 08:48

So this was like, 70s, 80s? Whatever, give us a decade, give us some context.

Leslie Salmon Jones 08:55

Hold on, let me think about that, that was in the 70s. And so I saw this grace and power across the stage, and I was like wow, I wanna do that.

So when I was in my 20s, I went back into dance, cos I had quit, cos I had so much shame around my body when I was a teenager. I had a lot of muscles, and I was like eugh. I just didn't feel feminine, whatever that means, whatever that meant at the time. And so I quit dance, and then, because I was rebuilding my identity, I found dance was at the heart of what I loved. I remembered my dream about Alvin Ailey. I told my parents, I'm going to New York, like, tomorrow. I have \$300 in my pocket.

Amanda Palmer 09:47

Wow. You pulled a Madonna.

Leslie Salmon Jones 09:49

I guess I did. And I went to New York, I went to Alvin Ailey, and I ended up taking the summer intensive program, which was like 8 hours a day, very intense heat, lots of people, training, it was like boot camp. And then I was gonna go back to Toronto, but then I was invited to stay on and train for two years.

Amanda Palmer 10:11

You got picked. Nice.

Leslie Salmon Jones 10:12

I got picked. And so I did the program, training for 8 hours a day, and it was like so hard, and so amazing, every part of my body ached, every day. But then I met this rolfer guy, and he was amazing.

Amanda Palmer 10:29

And this is in your 20s?

Leslie Salmon Jones 10:31

Yeah, this is in my 20s. You wanna know my age?

Amanda Palmer 10:34

No, I just wanna put you in time!

Leslie Salmon Jones 10:37

I'm happy to tell you. So I was in my 20s, I was about 24, this was in 91. Do the math, exactly. I think actually I was 23. So part of it was like, all the stuff, all the shame I had around my identity and my body image, when I was going through the rolf thing, I was facing it. I was writing about it, it was all coming up, so it was a tremendous healing for me. And then I found like, I was kind of rigid when I got there in my training, but after the rolfing sessions, I could do the splits! I was open, my heart was open, my shoulders were lax, I just had freedom in my body.

Then I met my husband in 94, and then I moved to Boston, and it had been probably 10 years.

Amanda Palmer 11:26

Since you'd been rolfed.

Leslie Salmon Jones 11:28

Since I'd been rolfed. And I was like, I need a tune up. Because I could feel things getting a little bit out of alignment. So I called someone, and I heard about Bob Vincent. So I started going for sessions, and every time I'd gotten on his table, he'd say, you've gotta meet Amanda Palmer. You've got to meet Amanda Palmer.

Amanda Palmer 11:49

And was this when he was on Mass Ave and Arlington? Yeah. So I was going to him around the same time. Cos I started with him, I think when I was at college or something, he was the local guy.

Leslie Salmon Jones 12:02

He finally connected.

Amanda Palmer 12:04

And I was probably in my mid-20s, something, when he connected us? Late 20s? You met me by coming over to my house to do our first session, we didn't have coffee or anything.

Leslie Salmon Jones 12:16

Right. You emailed me, and then you were like, I'm here for three months, I can finally do this, I'm finally taking care of myself, I have time to do this, to address...

Amanda Palmer 12:25

So I was on tour.

Leslie Salmon Jones 12:26

And then you had some time.

Amanda Palmer 12:28

So this was probably around 2003 or 4, when we were just starting hardcore touring, maybe 2005. So what do you remember about meeting me, and coming into my crazy house?

Leslie Salmon Jones 12:37

Wow! First of all, it was so fantastic, cos it was just like a wonderland of amazingness, and I just remember, I'm like wow! This woman is... incredible. It was just like, so much, there's just so much. I just...

Amanda Palmer 12:57

And when I say my house, just for the listeners, this is Lee's house. This is the Cloud Club, which has antique bric-a-brac, weird found art, starting in the 70s, up until the present day, and it's like, held together with magic and dreams. Four floors of Hobbit-hole, Alice in Wonderland, magic and dreamland.

Leslie Salmon Jones 13:20

And isn't there a tree that goes, like a wisteria vine or something?

Amanda Palmer 13:24

There was, the vine died. That's a long story. But there's also a cedar tree in the top floor of the house that you can climb, to get to a geodesic dome that sits atop the roof. I mean, it's a wild space. And since I didn't have room in my apartment, which is on the second floor, we went up to the top floor, which is the party space. And we did a workout.

Leslie Salmon Jones 13:46

I loved it. Because it felt so raw, cos Boston is so clean, and the straight, and coming from New York, I had a hard time coming from New York to Boston.

Amanda Palmer 13:59

Boston is pretty fucking straight, oh my god.

Leslie Salmon Jones 14:01

It's pretty fucking straight. So I was like, oh. So coming into your place was like oh, breath of fresh air, I was like yes, an artist! Someone who I can relate to.

Amanda Palmer 14:12

Well, and I worked on the assumption then, and I work on the assumption now, but I should challenge my assumptions, that the kind of people that you do private sessions for, for bodywork, are not bohemian people in their 20s, usually.

Leslie Salmon Jones 14:28

That would be true.

Amanda Palmer 14:29

They're probably the well-healed people with nice houses, with wall-to-wall carpeting.

Leslie Salmon Jones 14:33

Although in New York, I was with a lot of...

Amanda Palmer 14:36

All types.

Leslie Salmon Jones 14:37

All types. And mostly artists.

Amanda Palmer 14:40

All types move from Boston to New York.

Leslie Salmon Jones 14:43

Yeah, so I dealt with a lot of types in New York. I felt like I was a little piece of New York...

Amanda Palmer 14:49

To show up and help poor Boston, with its woeful straightness.

Music break - Look At All The Women In The Street

Amanda Palmer 15:00

So what I remember about that day is we spent about two hours together, and I remember, you basically led me through a body awareness, and a mini workout, and you took my body mass.

Leslie Salmon Jones 15:13

I did?

Amanda Palmer 15:14

Yeah. You had a machine with you, and you took my body mass.

Leslie Salmon Jones 15:16

I did have a machine, that was back in the day.

Amanda Palmer 15:19

It was interesting, I was like, I don't even know if that machine is on, but she's telling me that my body is technically okay. Normal, according to a machine. And then I remember ending the session with this power, grabbing energy from the universe, and I was like, an old version of me, the punk rock, I hate woo people, teenage version of me, would look at this and think that it was really corny. This version of me that is now embodied in the world, that has come to understand that there is so much power in my body that has been shamed and untapped, is so fucking excited to finally meet an ally, who's not afraid of me, who doesn't think I'm weird, who's gonna help me befriend my body.

So you became an ally in my life, but then of course I was also off on tour for 9 months at a time, and it's not like we have seen each other once a month since then. Our relationship has been touch and go, and I think we only did a handful of sessions.

Leslie Salmon Jones 16:20

Yeah, but they were intense.

Amanda Palmer 16:21

They were intense.

Leslie Salmon Jones 16:2

And they were concentrated. It was good, because we went so deep. And then I remember seeing you in action, in your shows, and I was like oh, that's why the hip is like that, because you were like leaning in. So yeah, it was really an incredible time.

Amanda Palmer 16:42

By way of getting to know you, what was it that came up in the rolf thing, about your body, and your shame, and your past history story? And now you're a healer yourself, now.

Leslie Salmon Jones 16:58

Okay, taking me back. It's so interesting, when you're in the healing journey, how raw things are. And then, beyond that, I'm always on the healing journey. But I would say that when I was growing up in Toronto, and I grew up in a predominantly white neighbourhood, so my background is my grandparents were Jamaican, three of my grandparents. And the only grandparent I knew was my Scottish-Irish-Canadian grandmother, Violet Belle. Wow. And she was amazing, she was pretty fierce.

Amanda Palmer 17:34

Violet Belle.

Leslie Salmon Jones 17:35

Yeah, Violet Belle, but she was interesting, she was really spunky. Her mother was Scottish, so my ancestors came from Dundee, Scotland. They have a thousand acres of land, upstate New York, and then they heard about this free land in Canada. So they went over to Ontario, and founded a place called New Dundee. And it's still there. And it was a mill town, it was an old mill town, so we have all that history. And then my great grandmother married my great grandfather, who was an Irishman. So at the time, it was a mixed marriage, and so my grandmother was disowned from the wealth, from the whole family.

Amanda Palmer 18:23

Because she married down.

Leslie Salmon Jones 18:25

Cos she married down.

Amanda Palmer 18:25

Ah, shit.

Leslie Salmon Jones 18:28

And then, my great grandmother and my great grandfather, they were from that Christian science background, and my grandmother had polio when she was about 5, in her legs. And the doctors told them she'd never walk

Amanda Palmer 18:43

This is Violet Belle?

Leslie Salmon Jones 18:44

Yeah, that's Violet Belle. So they prayed on her, and then not only did she walk again, but she became this incredible sprinter. She even would race, when she was six months pregnant. She was an amazing runner. So she was really strong-minded, and then my great grandparents, in Toronto there's something called the CNE, the Ontario CNE, where people come, and my grandfather had come from Jamaica, and he went from Jamaica to Egypt, this is in the early 1900s. He went to Boston, to go to MIT, because he wanted to fight in the war, but he was too young, and his parents were like, you're not gonna do that. He wanted to fight in the British war. And so they sent him to MIT. So he was probably one of the first Black people at MIT, most likely one of the first.

He ended up leaving, he didn't tell his parents, and he went up to Siberia to fight in the war. And then he got shrapnel wounds, so he ended up in Toronto. And he got an order from the Queen, to greet the other military who came in, and also helped a lot of Jamaican folks come in. And so my great grandparents ended up down at the CNE, Canadian National Exhibition, and it happens every summer, and it's a place where people gather, and there's all kinds of things happening there. It's like a cultural place.

So he was there, and they fell in love with him. They took him home for Sunday dinner, and introduced him to my grandmother. Yes. So they fell in love, so this is a mixed marriage back in the early 1900s. So I come from that lineage of people, who are going against the grain, against society, for love. I know, I know!

Growing up, my mom, who'd come from this mixed marriage, and she was of five, she had four siblings. So my mom was very light complexion, and grew up in Toronto. But she was called the n-word, and growing up, they were discriminated against. She met my dad, Canadian, born in Toronto but of Jamaican descent, beautiful, dark, strong, he was really strong, looked like an athlete. She married him, and she was the only one of her siblings who married someone Black. All my other aunts and uncles married

someone of European descent, apart from my other aunt married someone Korean, but he wasn't physically a person of colour.

So my cousins, my first cousins, are blonde, blue eyes, visibly white. They have a quarter Black, but we're first cousins, and we grew up together, and we love each other, and we would hang out, and we'd be like, we're cousins! And they're like, who's adopted? And we're like, nobody, we're blood cousins. So I grew up like that. And so, the neighbourhood that I grew up in, my dad had been orphaned, and he wanted to go to med school, and he became a musician, and he couldn't get into med school, and he became a surgeon. And he became Canada's first Black chief of surgery.

Amanda Palmer 22:20

There's a lot of first Black in this story.

Leslie Salmon Jones 22:22

Yeah, exactly. I grew up in a predominantly white neighbourhood, and with that came a lot of body image issues. Now, I know, as young people, probably most people have body image issues. On top of that, not seeing Black bodies reflected in media, it can create some issues. And in school, it was just my family, and to this day in our neighbourhood, the neighbourhood we grew up in, there are really not many people of colour. So my mom's still there after fifty-something years. And Prince actually moved into the neighbourhood.

Amanda Palmer 23:09

He left Minneapolis?

Leslie Salmon Jones 23:11

Yeah, he married someone from Toronto.

Amanda Palmer 23:14

Oh wow. I didn't even know that.

Leslie Salmon Jones 23:16

The other thing about this area, it's extremely affluent.

Amanda Palmer 23:20

So it's your mom, and Prince.

Leslie Salmon Jones 23:22

Basically.

Amanda Palmer 23:23

Alright. That's not bad.

Leslie Salmon Jones 23:26

So it's an affluent neighbourhood, so that also had a whole different etiquette and things, so I grew up and there were mansions and I'd play, and there were tennis courts, swimming pools inside the house, bowling alleys.

Amanda Palmer 23:41

Cos it's cold. Cos it's Toronto.

Leslie Salmon Jones 23:44

Well also, it was an affluent neighborhood, right. So that was a whole other thing. So body image, you know, didn't see myself reflected. So I shrunk myself, so small. Even like, my hair, you know, people would say, oh, your hair, can I touch your hair? Oh, can I touch your, because people don't see, right? So you start feeling a little self conscious, and then somewhat objectified, and then blah, blah, blah. My mom, people would look at my mom and say, that can't be your mom. Yeah, because she's lighter. Right. So things like that.

I had a lot of body shame. My muscular build was... I felt really masculine. Although now I love it, but I hated it back then. When I started doing the healing, and went on the rolfing table, even somebody touching my feet, going into my feet, had a story. My feet were flat. They were wide. This kind of thing. Every part of my body, I faced the hatred that I had. And that was quite a journey of releasing, and forgiveness.

And I remember even traumas that would happen, even just painful things that happened. I had told the story in the workshop that I had a friend one day, we were riding, I was probably like, seven years old. And you know how you ride on your banana bike, and you're so excited, and I was running down, riding down a hill, and she was in front of me and she slammed on the brakes, and I went flying over the handlebars, and landed in the handlebar in my solar plexus, and it knocked the wind into me, and I forgot that story. So as I was being rolfed, when he came to my solar plexus, I gasped, and I could barely breathe when he just even touched his finger. I wrote down the story, like all of the stories that lived in my body

Music break - There Will Be No Intermission

Amanda Palmer 25:59

Were you talking about this on the table? Or was all this done in silence? And as your memories came up, would you talk?

Leslie Salmon Jones

Sometimes I would, and sometimes I wouldn't. Because sometimes it took some time to process, and then I'd write it, and then I'd talk to him when I got back. Because the information didn't always come right away. So it might come the next day when I'm writing. And then when I go back on the table, I'd talk to him. So it just depended on how deep the information was, and when it came to me. There was definitely a lot of gender stuff for sure, that's all so much deep, deep, deep conditioning. The racial things that would happen that were their own separate traumas. And I mean, I could go into stories, but it's just like, you remember, the body remembers the stories, I remember the stories.

I remember our family, in our neighborhoods, sometimes just walking home, and it wasn't safe, because someone had my sister on the ground, like, pinned her down and said they were going to kill her because she's because she's... you know, calling her n-word, and running home to my mom, and trying to get help, little things like that - well, they're pretty significant things.

This is kind of a cute story. I've always had guys in my life, like, I love the guys. And I love women also, but I've always had a connection when I was a little girl, like I was married at three. At five, I had this boyfriend, this Italian guy. We loved each other. We just loved each other, and we knew we were different, but we didn't quite know how. And we found out that we were both Christian. So we'd walk around the neighborhood and said, we can get married, because we're both Christian.

Amanda Palmer 28:09

I love that you needed a reason.

Leslie Salmon Jones 28:10

Right, exactly. And we'd kiss each other, and we just loved each other so much. And so we'd hold hands and all of that. And then maybe in grade one, he had a gang of friends, and they were all guys, and cool, I was hanging out with the guys, and just me and the guys and John, and so happy. And I remember one day, we were all playing, and one of the guys had a dog, and I was kind of afraid of dogs. And the dog started chasing us, we were running, and the dog chased us, and jumped on my leg and scratched my leg,

and I was like, oh my God, your dog bit me! Oh my god! And so, the kid was like, that's ridiculous. My dog didn't bite you.

So now here's like, all of these boys lined up in front of me. John's at the very end, and the guy whose dog scratched me was at the beginning of the line, right? And they're all looking at me. And the guy who has the dog says, who likes black people anyways? And so, went down the line. This guy says, I don't. I don't. I don't. I don't, I don't. And then it got to John. And there was silence. And I was looking in his eyes, and he was looking at my eyes. Now, we had loved each other. And he looks at his friends, and he looks at me, he looks at his friend. He's like, trying to figure out what to say, what to do. And then finally, he looks at me, and he says, I don't. No.

So that crushed me, and I mean, it was one thing his friends, I really didn't care what they thought, but it was him. So I remember running home, mom! Mom! Bawling, saying John says he doesn't like black people! So like, like things like that would happen, pretty much daily.

Amanda Palmer 30:18

First of all, my sister made me get married when I was six. Without my consent. She made me kiss him. And I actually put this in a song, so she had been given a Make and Bake Oven. And she needed an excuse to make a thing, so she decided she'd make a wedding cake, and then she needed a wedding, and she just grabbed me, my cruel older sister. She's like, you and Jared are gonna get married so I can make a wedding cake, I just hated it. Cos he was gross, and he was a boy. He was the enemy.

But also, I really wanted to be a boy. I didn't want to be a tomboy. And I didn't want to be a boy, I just wanted what they had. I just wanted the freedom, and the power. They just all seemed so lucky. Add another layer - because I was a privileged white suburban girl. I didn't want to be rich. I didn't want to be not white. I just wanted to be a boy, right? Because I knew I was second class. I mean, who knows what other layers might have been there, metaphysically. You're dealing with layers of the othering, different classness, from race, gender... I don't know at what point you saw your wealth privilege, but living in Lexington, Massachusetts, you're not confronted with a lot of people who don't have money. And I remember the first times I was in middle school, and went over to the houses of my friends who lived on the other side of the tracks, literally. And was just like... I didn't know this was a thing. I didn't know that people in my middle school actually lived on welfare. Lived in poverty. Had moms who were crouching in the bedroom crying, and there was no money to buy groceries. That just wasn't my world. We had our problems, but they weren't those problems.

Your wealth of knowledge about the body, and what it holds onto when you're navigating childhood, trying to figure out, what is this bag of flesh that I'm carrying around, and what do I do with it, and what does it mean, and it's so interesting, even now, just in my mid 40s, I'm just starting to unpack all those systems of thinking that I had about myself from when I was 7, 14, even 25, 30, before I really even peeked into the fields of freedom where I could really just love this body.

When you look at it, can you even know what was what? Or do you just look at it and you're like, it was all happening and thank Christ I got out?

You know, like your feet, like, there they are. They're not boy feet there, they're not...

Leslie Salmon Jones 33:28

Yeah, I mean there's so much, even just with the feet, because as a dancer, there's so much there.

Amanda Palmer 33:£5

They're not ballerina feet.

Leslie Salmon Jone 33:36

Right, right. Although, my feet, I have this really strong point, that a lot of ballerinas would die for. So it was kind of like, I have got big strong Jamaican feet with a powerful point. So I just learned to love, so they're big, so what? So they're wide, so what? And so you love the parts of yourself. It's such a gift to look through the lens of so many lenses, look through your body. But I really did work on unpacking all of the things, for many, many, many years, all of the layers. Ultimately, it was about that self love, self compassion that we've been talking about all week.

Amanda Palmer 34:28

When you look at the seeds of another way of thinking, of having compassion for yourself, and love for yourself, and befriending this body that you wound up in, was that Alvin Ailey? What is the lineage of people who turned you on to the idea that maybe this was the way ahead?

Leslie Salmon Jones 34:51

Fortunately, it was my parents. And I know not everyone has that story. My mom is just an amazing human. She was a nurse, and civil rights activist, human rights activist, and just the most incredible mother, and mother to many. I would watch her fill her well. She

taught me self care, which is really quite amazing. I remember being like, three years old, and going to nursery school, and kids would call me chocolate pudding or whatever the names were, and I'd come home crying mom, they called me chocolate pudding! And she said, just call them snowball. Or something like that, you know, just take the drama out of it. That was a way, when I was really young.

But then what she helped me with, was she helped me get my voice. So when I was in public school, kindergarten, grade one, grade two, there were so many racial stereotypes because we were the only Black family. So even the teachers were like, oh, they're dumb. Whatever it was. Swimming teacher was like, she looked at my mom, we had a pool in the back yard. And my parents had a swimming instructor come over, and I'm the darkest child in the family, and she looked at me, and she says, I can't teach her. She's a sinker. Yeah. So my mom fired her right away.

But things like that, every day there was something. So these stereotypes, everyday we'd face, so I would be able to tell my mom and say, hey, mom, this teacher said this, or this teacher laughed when the kids were teasing me. She said, okay, well let's go in, to talk to the teacher. Let's go in to talk to the principal. So we'd sit down, and we'd say, okay, we're coming in. Instead of my mom speaking on my behalf, she would say, speak. So I was able to speak to the principal, or the teacher, my truth. And that was the most powerful thing. You know, that was an act of compassion, self love, self care. So she taught me at aa very young age.

Music break - You'd Think I'd Shot Their Children

Leslie Salmon Jones 37:38

And then my dad as well, being this tall, he looked like Sidney Poitier. He passed away in 2005, but he was always, you know, in the hospital, the only Black doctor. He had so much discrimination, but never did he have resentment for it. He just always had so much love, and handled things with so much grace, and he was a very elegant man.

So I never saw him shrink himself. And he stood tall, and he was like, posture as straight as a ruler. Amazing. Chest muscles just so strong. Never shrunk down. And my parents gained so much respect in the community. They're so loved and revered in the community. They were amazing role models.

So I have two brothers and a sister. And the baby.

Amanda Palmer 38:46

Do you think they took all the same tools away from your mom and dad that you did?

Leslie Salmon Jones 38:52

I would say yes. It's amazing how you can grow up with siblings, and they all have a different story. It's like, was that the same household? It's amazing.

My parents encouraged us to be who we are, so we're all doing very different things. So my oldest brother, he's a neuropsychologist, and he deals with head trauma. And, really a humble guy, he wrote all of these books when my dad had dementia. And we were asking the doctors, you know, what should we do? And they said, ask your brother, because we've read all his books, he's basically our Guru. So that's my oldest brother.

And then my second oldest brother, so that's Doug, my brother, and he's named after my dad, Dr. John Douglas Salmon. And then my second oldest brother, Warren. He was the one we were growing up with, who read Malcolm X at like, 12 years old. And he was like, you don't know your roots! You Oreo cookies, you're black on the outside, white on the inside! He was militant. We'd go on camping trips in the summer, and my parents would step out the car and go to the little tour office, to get a map or something, and he'd turn around and he'd be like, you Oreo cookie!

So he grilled us, which was really good, I'm glad he did that, actually, because we were growing up and really didn't know our roots, until the movie Roots came out. Because there's no Black history. It's like, where did we come from?

Amanda Palmer 40:33

Well, especially in Toronto.

Leslie Salmon Jones 40:34

In Toronto, in Canada, there was nothing in the educational systems, it was just like, the teachers would put on a film of somewhere in Africa, and people in grass skirts, topless or something, and people would look at us and say, is that what you do at home? It's like no, actually, that's not what we do at home.

Warren, he stuck to his roots, and he developed afrocentric software for the educational system. It's called Ashaware, he sells it to schools.

Amanda Palmer 41:07

What does that mean, African software?

Leslie Salmon Jones 41:09

Afrocentric, so it's basically an educational tool to give you Black history.

Amanda Palmer

So software that goes out, and it's educational. Wow.

Leslie Salmon Jones 41:18

Yeah. So it's in schools, and he's sold it in schools in the US, and in Canada, and then he also has something called First Fridays, in Toronto. It's a networking for Black businesses, where people can come, and they can share their work. And so that's been going on for about 20 years. And he's really followed in my mom's footsteps in terms of being an activist, and our family is very prominent in the community, in the Black community, and also in the community at large, because my mom was a Metro counsellor, she was a politician.

And then my sister, who's pretty amazing, she's reinvented herself, her name's Heather. When she graduated from college, our neighbours started the Toronto Raptors who just won, woohoo! Finally, after 20 years. But our neighbors actually own the team, they started the team. We grew up with them. And so when she graduated, they gave her a gig, so she was part of building the Toronto Raptors. And then she was sort of on the track to corporate America, and she got a job in the NBA, but then she married this actor named Clark Johnson, and then she got into Hollywood, and she's just had so many different lives, but right now, she has done a total healing, and is living in Maui. She has a retreat centre, and she's a sound healer. And teaches aerial yoga, she's really amazing, with her partner, who's a musician. So oftentimes, my sister, my husband, her partner, and I, we collaborate. We do these incredible workshops together. So it's like, she's on one end of the continent, I'm on the other, and we're parallel in some ways.

Amanda Palmer 43:23

That's really interesting that you both came around to healing. And your brother.

Music break - Look At All The Women In The Street

Amanda Palmer 43:38

We were talking about the origins of your ability to recover and heal from all of that. How do I get out of here, this confusion, this self hatred, this trauma. There's the stories, and there's the tools, and there's the work. It is always interesting looking at the family lineage. I'm looking at my own family right now in such a new way, especially having

had a child, and being able to look a lot more dispassionately. No resentment, no regret, an open, bizarre curiosity. What happened? To me, to the other girls i was growing up with, to my sister, like what was that?

I had a sense, growing up. I mean, I grew up angry. But it wasn't very discriminating, and it wasn't very defined, and it was an anger wrapped in confusion. But I knew I was pissed. I knew I was pissed, and I didn't really know where to head with that. I knew, intuitively, that making art, and going into that dark space was preferable to harming myself. There was a lot of darkness and that it was going to have to get out somehow. I looked towards art and music as like... I was like, if I'm gonna head somewhere, I don't know where I'm going, but those people look like they've got it figured out. Those women screaming at those instruments, that looks like an option, so that's where I'm heading.

But also interestingly, my plan B, if I ever had a plan B and I kind of had a plan B in college, was to be a massage therapist. Because I loved touching people's bodies and making them feel better. I was like, oh, it just feels so good to concretely rub somebody's feet, neck, body, I was an under the table massage therapist all through college, that's how I earned my cigarette and beer money. And I loved it. And I actually don't see a chasm of difference between body work and stage music work. I mean, if you peel it all away, you are trying to connect with people and make them feel something better, maybe help.

It's so interesting to think of you like growing up in this environment. We just know what we know. There you are, in that neighbourhood, in that family, knowing what you know, hating your body. And then there's the dot dot dot, it's like, so Leslie, how did you get out of there?

Leslie Salmon Jones 46:42

Right. When I was born in the 60s, I came out with two fists. Civil rights. I came out of the womb, I had my fists up ready to fight. I remember feeling that warrior spirit, like, that fight. I was ready to fight the world, and my mom unfortunately was the one who I was aiming that toward, my anger. I'm little.

Amanda Palmer 47:10

She's the one who's there.

Leslie Salmon Jones 47:12

She was the one who was there.

Amanda Palmer 47:14

She was safe.

Leslie Salmon Jones 47:15

So I was frustrated. She was safe. And before i was 6 years old, I was fighting her all the time. Because I was the youngest of four, I think we talked about that. And I was like, you brought me in this world, you better pay attention, but she had...

Amanda Palmer 47:30

Other shit to do.

Leslie Salmon Jones 47:32

So I would just give her a real hard time, but I would tell her terrible things. I would be like, don't you tell my daddy I was mean to you today, like and then I would just love my dad. It was like, he would come home and I'd run, dad! Daddy! So just actually, she would say that out of the four kids.... So she was like, first one, she had it under control. Second, under control. Third, under control. Fourth, she had to go to parenting classes to figure me out. So she did, you know, figure out a good technique, and the technique was to talk to me. To sit down and say, Leslie, why did you do that? Why did you say that? So she taught me emotional intelligence at such a young age. And I actually had to think about why I said something, or the action. Why I stuck the gum in the whatever. Why I hid her car keys.

Amanda Palmer 48:25

Were you hiding her car keys so that...

Leslie Salmon Jones 48:27

Oh no, I was hiding, yeah. And then when I started thinking about it, and then I remember relatives would come over and say, were you mean to your mom today? And the accountability, it started weighing on me. And then I started shifting my behaviour. Then my mom and I would sit down, I remember at 6, like, can we talk? 7, can we talk? 50, can we talk? We have this amazing relationship.

But she really helped me. I used to have hairy fits, like the rage would just come up, I couldn't find something, and I'd throw things all over the place. And she taught me how to like, hone that. Really work with my anger. And so, in working with my anger, my parents also, what they did was that they exposed me, like you said, you go across the way to this other neighbourhood and realise that people... So what my parents did was

they exposed us to community service. So even though we grew up in this affluent neighbourhood, they never, ever wanted us to have that kind of privileged attitude. So, on the weekends we would go in, if people came from Jamaica, we'd give them our clothes, they exposed us, exposed us, exposed us, to the realities of life.

And so, I used to have friends who lived in the projects, and I'd go to see them on the weekends. What happened was, because of where I lived, there were some people who didn't like me coming over there. So I would get death threats, from people who were jealous.

Amanda Palmer 50:21

Their parents?

Leslie Salmon Jones 50:23

No, from people in the projects. Like, don't you bring your Black ass in this area, or whatever it was. So, here in my neighborhood, I really didn't feel 100% welcome. And outside of the neighbourhood, I didn't feel welcome. So what happened was that I started internalising it. And what I would do is, I'd shrink my light. Because anytime I would go somewhere, I just felt like I was making too much of a... I had too much of a presence. So I would shrink myself. And in shrinking myself, I started harming myself. Smoking, drinking, whatever, just not choosing to be healthy. And I think many young people do that. But in that process, I actually was hanging out with people who didn't have my best interest.

Amanda Palmer 51:17

You don't say.

Leslie Salmon Jones 51:21

They didn't have my back. And because I was just trying to fit in. I'm sure we all know.

Amanda Palmer 51:24

Oh, I was there. I was on that same smoking corner.

Leslie Salmon Jones 51:30

Yeah, exactly. So in that, I actually met somebody. I could say now he's probably extremely mentally ill. And maybe bipolar, schizo.

Amanda Palmer 51:43

Where are you now, late teens?

Leslie Salmon Jones 51:44

This is late teens.

Amanda Palmer 51:46

This is also in my era of incredibly poor taste in men. Something about that age.

Leslie Salmon Jones 51:54

No wonder we like each other.

Amanda Palmer 51:55

Hot drug dealers! What is it about hot drug dealers in trenchcoats?

Leslie Salmon Jones 52:02

Yeah, exactly. And so this guy, he was 11 years older than me, and he ended up... He was really imbalanced, so he was either extremely dark, like, extremely destructive, and extremely creative at the same time. And when I realised he was not stable, I tried to pull myself away from him. And in doing that, he actually was like a vampire type of person. He was into black magic.

Amanda Palmer 52:37

Real black magic.

Leslie Salmon Jones 52:38

Real black magic.

Amanda Palmer 52:39

Oh shit. And this is all in Toronto?

Leslie Salmon Jones 52:45

Uh huh. And at the time, luckily, I had an aunt who was an astrologist clairvoyant, so I kind of was in the realm of understanding a little bit more than the...

Amanda Palmer 52:56

You had a Rolodex for that.

Leslie Salmon Jones 52:58

I had a Rolodex. So, when I was trying to get myself away from him, he was trying to pull me in. And I didn't realize exactly what he was doing, but I was walking around like

a zombie. I was literally, it was like I was in the dark, and I felt like I was holding on to my life by my fingernails, it was like being in a whirlpool, and you're on the edge, and you're just trying to get a grip, and you're slipping.

So my loved ones, they didn't know what was going on, I couldn't really explain it, and I was in a spiritual crisis. I couldn't find my light. I always had my light, and I couldn't find it. It was like someone had shut off the lights.

And then I found out one day, we were business partners, and I happened to walk in on him, and he had...

Amanda Palmer 53:49

Wait, you were business partners with black magic guy?

Leslie Salmon Jones 53:51

Yeah, yeah, I actually had a studio and a kind of after hours club at the time. And anyhow, I walked into the studio. We had this amazing creative community, it was dancing all night, and we had artists, and musicians, and it was like, amazing, incredible. You would have loved it.

Amanda Palmer 54:20

It sounds arty and sexy.

Leslie Salmon Jones 54:21

Yeah, exactly. So I had walked in on him one day, and I was trying to get out of his life, get my stuff and go. And I walked in and he had candles, and he had a bracelet of mine with my sweat on it, and my hair, and all these crazy things, and a diagram of my life, and he was like, I'm here to take everything away from you.

Amanda Palmer 54:49

Jesus. Leslie!

Leslie Salmon Jones 54:54

Yeah, I know it's kind of a dark story.

Amanda Palmer 54:55

No, I mean, I've got some of my own from my own crazy-ass drug dealing corruptors. But what happened?

Leslie Salmons Jones 55:04

So it was almost like someone was holding a gun to my head without holding the gun...

Amanda Palmer 55:11

I mean, it sounds terrifying.

Leslie Salmon Jones 55:13

It was terrifying. I was like, hey, you don't need to do that, blah blah blah, I kind of talked myself out the door. But at that point, I was like, I am in deep trouble. I don't know what this is about. But it's a spiritual, energetic thing. So I called my aunt. I couldn't talk to anybody about it.

Amanda Palmer 55:34

Which side of the family?

Leslie Salmon Jones 55:35

On my dad's side. She was the first. She was the only one conceived in Jamaica. She's powerful. She's like "Sevilla Concepción." So I called her. Aunt Stivella. She could see spirits, she would do readings for people in the Plaza Hotel in New York. People would come from all over the world.

Amanda Palmer 56:04

This is right on theme with your life, by the way. That that would be her venue. Of course she's at the Plaza!

Leslie Salmon Jones 56:14

Exactly. So I called her up and I said, okay, this is what's happening. And she said, alright, you're really young to be going through this. She was amazed how deep I had gone into this energetic field. So she said, okay, this is what you're gonna do. You're going to cleanse. You're gonna drink lemon water. You're gonna bathe, throw salt, do all these things, all these rituals. Read the psalm in the Bible, I think it was Psalm 141, and the 23rd Psalm, and then she said, I'm going to give you this mantra, and I want you to repeat this every day. And it goes, I, and you say your full name, will not permit any person, place or thing to ruin my inner structure. Not on the mental plane, spiritual plane, physical plane, or emotional plane.

So I did. I followed her, I quit all the unhealthy habits, I started cleansing, I started running, I started getting my mind straight, and I remembered myself. And I remembered that dance, that Alvin Ailey dream. So I went back to dance for six months.

And so I just started rebuilding myself, and finding my way back to my light. And he was okay. Nothing terrible, but he kind of... our business fell apart.

Amanda Palmer 57:48

I mean, in the movie, he would be falling off a cliff into a pit of fire.

54:16

Leslie Salmon Jones 57:53

He's still alive as far as I know, I've seen him.

Amanda Palmer 57:58

Did you ever make peace with him?

Leslie Salmon Jones 57:59

I have made tremendous peace with myself. And I've seen him. I've seen him a few times. And I saw him in Trinidad. Like, after I did a lot of healing, went to Alvin Ailey, and I was telling this story the other day, how my husband now, we were in Trinidad, if you ever get a chance to go to Carnival, it's the most amazing thing. And you can play mass, and so my husband and I had these warrior head dresses on, with feathers, and we were just dancing in the hot sun, and we had bands around our arms, and it was like, glistening with sweat, just dancing, dancing. And out of nowhere, when I'm in my fullest power, is this guy in my face. And I looked at him. And all of a sudden... he shrunk. And I realise, he's just a human being. And from that moment, I really forgave him. And not only did I forgive him, I am so grateful to him, because I found my light. If it weren't for him...

Amanda Palmer 59:17

Who knows?

Leslie Salmon Jones 59:18

I found my power. And then I've seen him since, and it's cool, it's all good. But no hard feelings. Because, you know, we're in this... He was a mirror to help me.

Music break - I Don't Have This Shit Figured Out

Amanda Palmer 59:39

And now you teach. You help people. What do you think is the simplest thing that you have taken away from all this, that you've learned?

Leslie Salmon Jones 59:52

I would say the simplest thing is something that we all share, is the breath. Going into the breath. The breath is life, so, when we come into our vessels out of the womb, the first thing we do is we go... *(breathes in)* We inhale. We're out of the water. And that's life. That's the energizing. That's the inspiration, that... *(breathes in)* inspirer. Inspiring. And then the exhale is when we... *(breathes out)* that's when we leave our vessels, that's the last thing we do. That's the rest.

And the breath is the life, when we follow the inhalation and the exhalation. There's so much power in the breath. And so much that breath has taught me. If I get scared... *(choking sounds)* or if I, you know, just to release, it's like finding the softness or... You know, the breath is such a great teacher, and something that is with us for our whole lives. And I do a lot of work with trauma, with people who've experienced trauma. And that's the first place I start. It's the most accessible. And as you're aware, Amanda, with the practice of breath, it brings us into the present moment. When we focus on the breath, we can be completely present, not worried about yesterday or tomorrow.

Amanda Palmer 61:38

What is always happening.

Leslie Salmon Jones 61:39

Which is always happening.

Amanda Palmer 61:41

Well, the only other thing that's happening that's easy to pay attention to, in our bodies, is our breath. I mean, we could sit with a stethoscope and listen to the beating of our own heart, but breath's way easier, because it's right there, you can really feel it, and you can really hear it.

But for someone who has never meditated, has never done yoga, is listening to us completely confused, because they don't know what it means even, to pay attention to their breath, or like, so what... so you're breathing, great, what does that mean? How would you explain to a total... I wanna say lay person, whatever, a novice, who has never done any kind of yoga meditation. When you say the breath, and I assume you mean paying attention to the breath, what if someone is out there listening, thinking like okay, but how? What? What do you mean? Tell me something concrete. What would you say?

Leslie Salmon Jones 62:53

I would say to check in with yourself, to even see where you are on the journey. Maybe it's like, are you resistant to even hearing about self care? Some people are resistant to even self care, which is many people.

Amanda Palmer 63:11

Even the word would probably give some people heebie-jeebies.

Leslie Salmon Jones 63:14

Absolutely.

Amanda Palmer 63:14

Cos self care is for dirty hippies. Or clean hippies. Yoga people.

Leslie Salmon Jones 63:22

Right. We're all on different levels, and different paths, and so if self care is something that's triggering, that word, I just start with like, where are you at in this moment?

Actually, it's okay where you are. You don't have to be anywhere but where you are.

Beginning with the breath, is noticing where you're holding your breath as of right now. If

I'm talking to someone out there who wants to practice, just taking a moment, even let's

take a moment. Feel your breath. Where it is in your body. Whether it's rapid, shallow.

Noticing the breath. Slow it down. You're taking a deep breath in, and... exhaling and

letting it go, and then checking in, and notice how that felt. And there is no one way. I

could say the breath, but some people that might not resonate with. We had tools, you

can give people tools, whether it's meditation...

What is amazing is like, if we're talking about the body, we have the pain body that we have to navigate through. And it's like a landmine. Because sometimes we're dealing with our own pain body, but then we meet someone else's pain body.

Amanda Palmer 65:01

And can you explain pain body?

Leslie Salmon Jones 65:06

Yeah, it's an accumulation of maybe past traumas or, you know, emotions that gather.

And it's not necessarily a physical thing, but it's like the combination of the armor, that

we're protecting ourselves, and when people get a little close, and when we go in close,

there's a lot of tenderness. And so, the work that we were doing in the circle was, we

created the environment for people to feel safe enough to go into the deepest, darkest

parts of themselves. And to touch that place of, and define that place of, self compassion.

It's a practice. I mean, it's not gonna happen overnight. Some people might happen overnight, for some people it could be a lifetime practice. So, I would say, for me, finding my way out of it, was finding it through my heart. So, the heart is like, when I was in my crisis, I had to listen to my heart. I could not listen to my head. My head was not making any sense at the time.

Amanda Palmer 66:26

What did it mean to listen to your heart?

Leslie Salmon Jones 66:29

it's like that resonance of something that brought me joy. I can explain it like, if you have a pet, or someone you love, and that feeling, that warmth, that tickly feeling, or tingly feeling, or that pull of something that resonates with you, if you will. And I think really a pet or a baby or a loved one, that feeling when you think of something that you connect with, or someone that you connect with. That's how I had to rebuild myself, finding those things. Again, the head will lead me astray sometimes, because of all the thoughts and all of the limitations. The heart doesn't lie.

So I would say that in the week that we were together with the 60 people, we gave the opportunity for people to create a little spaciousness in their hearts, to go into those places. And we all have different things, like you. You said the music. You saw artists who were performing, and that tugged your heart, and that's what made you follow the path.

Humans want connection. They want connection. We are creatures of connection. That's the beauty of slowing down and listening. And not only listening, but also being heard. And people had the space to share their stories. It's like, I can see energetically the shift, and the opening.

Amanda Palmer 68:24

I love you.

Leslie Salmon Jones 68:25

Thank you.

Amanda Palmer 68:26

Thanks for doing this.

Leslie Salmon Jones 68:27

Thank you.

Amanda Palmer 68:40

This has been The Art of Asking Everything podcast. I am Amanda Palmer. Thank you so much to my guest, Leslie Salmon Jones. This was recorded at the Omega Institute at Rhinebeck, New York, with engineer John Corrs, in their special fancy podcasting room.

The theme song you're listening to right now is called Bottomfeeder, from my 2012 crowdfunded album Theatre Is Evil. Many thanks to Jherek Bischoff who arranged and mixed the inbetween-y orchestral music that you hear in this podcast. Those are sort of snippets based off songs from my latest album, There Will Be No Intermission, which you should listen to if you like very sad, depressing songs about feelings. You can also go support Jherek on Patreon, he's an amazing arranger and composer, and highly recommended by me.

For all the music you heard in this episode, you can go to the new and improved amandapalmer.net/podcast

Millions of thanks to my podcast assistant, social media helper, and additional engineer Xanthea O'Connor. Many thanks to everyone at Team AFP: Hayley, Michael, Jordan, Alex, I love all you guys, thank you so much. And thanks go to Nick Rizzuto, Brittney Bomberger, Allie Cohen, and Braxton Carter.

And last but not least, this whole podcast would not be possible without my patrons. At current count, about 15,000 of them. They make it possible for this podcast to have no ads, no sponsors, no censorship, no bullshit, we are just the media, doing what we do. So special thanks are due to my high level patrons, Simon Oliver, Saint Alexander, Birdie Black, Ruth Ann Harnisch, and Leela Cosgrove, thank you guys so much for helping me make this.

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Thank you so much everyone.

Signing off, this is Amanda Fucking Palmer. Keep on asking everything.