

267: Unapologetic Living (with Vashti Whitfield)



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Jen Riday

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You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 267. We're talking in this episode about unapologetic living. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey my friends. We have survived, thrived, through an interesting time. The pandemic has been interesting. Notice my neutral adjective? Well, it has been a time where we get to analyze our lives at the very least. Well, today's guest is a master of what is called unapologetic living, accepting all of the twists, and turns, and dualities, and adversities, even adversities as far as death, or change, or divorce, or loss, or jumping in. All of this can be a part of unapologetic living.

This is the perfect episode for you if you're wondering what I should be doing now. What's your new normal going to be? Has life been happening for you or to you? As Vashti quotes in this episode, all we can ever be is happening in this moment. What does it mean to live unapologetically? How do we handle adversity, and struggle, and trials, and problems? How do we make decisions that can involve not only ourselves but our careers, our families, our relationships, everything we're doing?

Well, we're going to talk about all of these things and more in this episode about unapologetic living. This is the perfect episode if you need to grieve a loss. This is the perfect episode if you're contemplating a change in your circumstances, or in a relationship. This is the perfect episode for you if you simply want to be a person who grabs life by the cahonies, the horns and lives the way that feels aligned for you. Vashti has an interesting background. I ask her about it at the end of the episode but I'll preface it now.

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Vashti grew up traveling all over the place in a VW van with her mom and a sibling. She grew up seeing many parts of the world and she thinks out of the box. And sometimes it can be important for us to think out of the box as well, especially during a time of change and adjustment, figuring out your new normal post pandemic whenever that is. And like I just said a minute ago, all we can ever be is in the moment. That is a Ram Dass quote. Well, you're going to love this episode and just sit back and listen and allow the words to flow into your soul.

Vashti shares a lot of amazing things and the things you need to pick up are going to speak to you the most clearly. You don't need to remember everything but the things you need to hear will resonate for you and your soul. And if you want to take my advice I would listen to this episode multiple times, it is so full of many, many nuggets of wisdom. Without further ado let's jump in and hear this interview with Vashti.

Jen: Hey everyone. I'm talking with Vashti Whitfield today. And over the last 23 years Vashti has lived, worked and breathed a life driven by her passion to provoke, inspire and facilitate the transformation of human potential. Vashti is a true alchemist. And after the death of her husband Vashti chose to convert her own tragic loss into a catalyst to educate and inspire millions of people around the world. She has a globally acclaimed documentary feature film and a grief blog.

She's an internationally acclaimed performance coach and speaker, sought after resilience and mindset expert. And she is amazingly candid, and authentic, and vulnerable. So you're going to love this interview. Vashti, welcome, tell us where you're from, who you live with, what you do with your time especially during the past year, that might be an interesting answer.

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Vashti: I'm going to say, I always say good morning, good afternoon and good evening because where I'm currently situated in the world geographically is in gorgeous Sydney, Australia. Although I'm not born there, I'm from England originally and spent my whole childhood traveling the world, not in a kind of expat privileged way. Well, in a very privileged way in a VW camper van on the original hippie trail traveling through countries that we would never have the privilege to walk through these days.

So I'm in Sydney, Australia. I share my life with two incredible children, my son Jesse and my daughter Indi, 16 and 13, a cat called Narnia and now a wild and wonderful four year old Staffie called Storm, who has brought quite a storm to our life. I spend my time working between facilitating human potential for the living I like to say, for sort of the sort of high achievers and those wanting to play big in the world.

But then I also play with the other spectrum of life which is where I work, educating and teaching in the space of adversity, dealing with unexpected often traumatic change. And then also in the end of life space, so working with people readying themselves to lose somebody in their life and/or for those who are nearing the end of their own lives. And play with the whole notion of not only do we get to live an extraordinary and a good life, but we also get to orchestrate what is a controversial conversation which is what is a good death.

And then I also do a whole bunch of other stuff. I like to really lean into the poignant and the purposeful in life. But I also like to make that lighthearted, so I love standing up and making incredibly inappropriate kind of jokes and doing standup comedy as well because you've got to see the light in the dark as well. So I'm also known for my – let's call it lower tone as well.

Jen: Yeah, I like that, lower tone, that's great. So you have been in the self-help field, the human potential field for a while now. And somewhere in the

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middle of that journey your husband died. Tell us that story and how you thought about it, how you coped with it in your unique way.

Vashti: Well, it's a very interesting question you're asking me because I had a really strong grounding in understanding human development. So from a very basic neuroscience understanding from the science aspect and the psychological aspect, to having been a performance coach for years. And then nothing like you having birthed six amazing babies into the world. But I had already brought in two babies into the world so I'd also had that vulnerability, but also the extraordinary experience of birth and what that means in terms of transformation.

So I'd kind of done life and birth. I'd also had this incredible experience with one of my best friends who died very young of cancer, who had died just hours before my daughter came into the world. So I'd had this almost preview of deep loss and supporting someone readying their end of life experience. However, nothing prepared me for – and us for the hard news one gets when you think you're going to be told it's a back injury, and when somebody says instead of, "You need to go and get some physiotherapy, you've actually got three to six months to live."

And when you hear a sentence like that, as the mother, and the lioness, and the wife, and the woman who is suddenly not only thinking about losing their partner, their best friend, their husband, the father of their children and what that means to your children. But you're also, and you may be able to relate to this and a number of the audience members will, you go into that anticipatory grief but also protection mode of how will I not only get through this but how will I then provide after?

And there's this really fascinating duality because from the get go you're not only staunchly there to support the outcome being only positive and that your partner and your husband will survive and we will get through this. But there is this duality of – and there's almost a guilt aspect to that

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instantaneously of protective survival mechanism, how will I do this on my own?

So the first part of that journey, and I bring that to point because it's something that is so challenging all the way through when we're supporting our partner through a terminal illness, is the duality of being so in the corner for only one outcome which is survival. And yet in the darker moments this experience of how will I survive and what will I have to do to bring these two children up on my own. So I wanted to just kind of put that as the first marker.

And I'm sorry to use the J word, in the journey, because that was one of the most powerful pieces was when you've been so connected to someone, where you've been interdependent. But also they're your partner in crime, your life partner, the person that you've journeyed through life and adventures, and created babies, and extraordinary things that people say you couldn't. And all of a sudden you begin to almost unconsciously and consciously uncouple from them. That's a really torturous feeling, Jen. It's guilt ridden, that's what I often say at the beginning.

Jen: Wow. I've never heard it described like that, that duality of they're going to be okay but actually no, let's begin uncoupling unconsciously. That's heavy.

Vashti: It's heavy but it's true, like everything in life, when you lean into the weight of it you can then – you can talk about it. And that leads me on to, and I mean just for the sake of everybody listening, there's two parts of the story. One is we go through his treatment and he's connected to a large TV network and they stand down the show that he was working on in full support. And a real manifestation of there is only going to be one outcome. And so we get to the end of the treatment which is actually a really beautiful time.

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Because this was a guy that had been working his butt off to, as an engineer to provide, because we had this kind of rule in our household that one of us would be on the ground with the babies because that's the way we wanted to parent. And so we made some big compromises and made things stretch far and wide. And he's juggling going to LA to try and make it and break through as an actor at 35, 36 years old whilst also abseiling down buildings as a civil engineer simultaneously.

And so we made this amazing thing happen which was following his passion and it's his creative dream. And then you get there and then you go, "Wow, we just made it." You got your little toes on the red carpet literally and then all of a sudden you find yourself in a chemo ward. So we go through the treatment but actually it was this incredible blessing because he had this opportunity for the first time to get to know his daughter because he hadn't really gotten to know this little Indigo girl because he'd been working so hard.

And so we had, I call it this calm space which was, you know, chemo can be the battleships, it can be like weapons of mass destruction. But this first series it was manageable. And so there was actually this beautiful time where it was almost like cocooning where there's a little family four, we got to hang out, living in New Zealand where we were filming the show, Spartacus. And he did it, we beat it we say, we were the kind of like the fairytale story. The engineer that gets to Hollywood then gets cancer and then beats cancer.

And then it was like life was about to go back to normal, which is what we're all sort of talking about now, whatever the normal is. And to cut a long story short which I'm sure a number of people that have heard me speak before have heard before, the cancer had not completely gone and it came back. That experience was, and I share this very clearly and is the name of our documentary which is Be Here Now which is you get what you get in this moment so lean into it because that's all you have.

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And when the cancer came back the reality was this thing you call normal or this life you thought you were going to get and you thought had come back to you, you need to let that go and embrace what the new normal is. And that embracing what that new normal was, was the reality that cancer and the question of mortality, will I make it or will I die, or do we have three months, do we have six months or do we have a whole lifetime? That became our new normality.

So then comes the reality of you really have now three to six months if you're lucky. And without treatment probably not that long. And we had this extraordinary TV network behind us which was before Netflix and before the world of streaming. And it was Starz, and it was one of the biggest TV productions at that point that had been made. And we had some incredible people like Rob Tapert, Chloe Smith who are remarkable producers in the US and Australasia.

Andy said, my late husband, he said, "I have to do something with this, this can't be here for nothing. Let's make a documentary." And so the day that we found out that his cancer had returned or not in fact left according to the specialists, we decided to make this documentary which we called Be Here Now. And it was a journey into the unknown and a journey of discovery where we didn't know the outcome. And it was about exploring what is this next chapter? Is it about life or is it about death?

And so through that year we had this extraordinary group of documentary makers led by Lilibet Foster and Sam Maydew the producer, Lilibet Foster is an Oscar nominee documentary maker who did it all from New York. And over that course of that year we explored all sorts of different ways for Andy to survive. And on the 11th of September, that very poignant day in the US he actually passed away in Sydney, Australia and said goodbye to us all.

And then it was me and these two beautiful children and crowd funding and creating a new normal for what life was like with one of our wheels missing,

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one man down and two little orphaned babies. And I call them orphaned because it felt like they were. And me redefining what the new normal was, who I was in the world with these two little people having never been one of those women that was going to do the solo mom gig. It wasn't in my plan.

And then in 2017 or 16 the documentary was finally finished and aired, and premiered around the world and that's where I began my journey working with grief, and working with adversity. And teaching, and educating in the space of living, and especially those who come from a very kind of privileged or high performance space, starting to look at life and leadership in a different way. And I traveled around with the documentary and it used as a powerful term, especially in the hospital system for teaching a different way of bedside manner.

But also for enabling people to experience grief and loss at the most personal level, the way Jen, that you would only get to experience if it was happening to you. And we tend to hide that away usually. When we are sick like an animal we almost hide ourselves. When we're going through treatment it can often be a very private experience. And this documentary, even if you know the ending as so many people do, they watch the documentary again and they're still hoping a different ending will take place.

And you get to experience both life, love, and grief, and loss in this 90 minute film which allows people to really look at life and potentially death, or the experience as a carer, or as a daughter, or as a family member and so on. And actually look at it in a very different way. And then cut to now nearly a decade later and two incredible children who have grown up with a vernacular of understanding that death is not just loss, it's also a part of life. And when we can learn to understand it, embrace it, incorporate it, we can actually live very different lives.

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So here we still are. We really have gotten off lightly with the pandemic. We have been almost living in a normality other than not being able to travel for I would say probably six months now, watching the rest of the world still struggling and finding their way through this. And life is, I don't like to use this word, but life is this wonderful way of experiencing everything having had death punctuated so profoundly so far.

Jen: And you're in Sydney and so Australia's been back to 'normal' for six months already, wow.

Vashti: At least, yeah.

Jen: Randy Jackson, I don't know if you know him. He traveled to Australia and he said it was unreal. They had guards outside of his door for two weeks. But, look, that all paid off and you have had such a different experience of the pandemic, yeah.

Vashti: Well, I always say Australia's the best kept secret. When I first came out here a friend of mine said, "Why don't you, you should go." We were drunk in a bar in New York in Manhattan when Manhattan was a very different place from how it is, more like Brooklyn is now. And he said, "You should go to Australia." Because I'm a bit of a kind of fitness bunny and I'm up at five running. And he said, "You would love it." And I said, "Why? Why would anyone go to Australia?" And he said, "No, it's not what you think."

Because I just imagined kangaroos bouncing down the road and people living off sausages and barbecues. I had this very closed idea. And where I live is essentially, it's a bit like Santa Monica, Venice and perhaps like America in the maybe 50s. It's just, it's a very peaceful little bubble which is, you know, the unfortunate thing is it's so far away from everyone. But that has its benefits in the same breath.

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Jen: Yeah, I love that, US in the 1950s, this sounds amazing, that's what we all crave and want again, well, maybe, parts of it. So that's amazing. You've done so much. The death happened and what's interesting about your story, for many people that would shut them down but you just let it still be a part of life, a part of the helping other people, the documentary, part of your kids' story. And is that kind of part of how you teach leadership and adapting to adversity?

Vashti: Well, I think it's like a rudder. When you have something extraordinary happen in your life, whether that's birth, whether that's adversity, whether you lose someone. You either learn from it or you shut down from it. You either lose yourself, a side of yourself or you find a side of yourself, or you acknowledge the duality of both because we have – and this is a big part of the work I do. If you embrace and acknowledge that all the way through life from losing a teddy, or a pet, or a divorce very young, or a best friend no longer wanting to talk to you in the playground.

We have grief and loss from the get go and the sooner we can actually recognize what loss is and the actual psychological process of grieving, unrelated to a physical death. And we can actually acknowledge how extraordinarily resilient we are from the get go. When we look at, yeah, I made it through that. And I got over that, we can actually start to recognize that this thing or these things that we're so terrified of usually we've already had dealings with.

And so death coming into my world for a second time so poignantly but with my husband being a very different experience and the father of my children. Because you also, it's not just you, you know this as a mother, you're breathing for two other people as well when you can barely breathe yourself in situations like that. And so that whole experience of everything in life, every great speaker talks about this and philosopher. Everything in life either happens for you or it happens to you.

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So you either get stuck into the victimization or the trauma of it or you learn to manage to experience that traumatic part of it and then to embrace the learning and the offering that it gives you. And so that's why I talk about being a transformational facilitator and coach because it's how do you convert and transform what is stopping you into being able to start you? And how do you convert what has happened to you as something that you can use from a legacy perspective to give back to others.

And there's a great coach that I worked with many years ago who's a remarkable woman, her name's Lola White. She talked about the give and get theory. When you're given something, even if it feels like something's been taken away, what have you gained from that? But then as a result what do you give back? And that's just simply my philosophy. So that can come through in corporate culture as it's happening constantly where you go in an organization it's like 3,000 people are made redundant.

How do you sit with somebody and have them see when they're about to lose their house and potentially tell their family that they have to go into all sorts of tragedy and trauma? How do you have someone actually reframe that to be potentially a gift? And so my work is always in enabling people to look at life's experiences and the human experience in a different way so that it doesn't just feel like robbery, that it actually feels like you're gaining something as part of your life.

Jen: Yeah. I like that. So things happen in life, what about those situations where you get to choose a change? Like wanting a career change, or choosing to end a relationship, sometimes it'd be easier if something would just happen to decide it for you. How do you know when to say, "This thing is not for me anymore?" You know what I'm saying?

Vashti: I do and I love that question. It's just such a juicy one. Well, I'm going to break it down. So the first part of your question was when you know, when you intuitively know that it's time for a change, it's time to step

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out of a relationship, it's time to leave your job, it's time to move country, not when the pandemic's happening, ideally. It's this really interesting thing between courage and responsibility. Because I deal with this all the time, people say, "Well look, if I just hang in there maybe another year or two I might be made redundant."

Or, "If I just carry on showing up in my relationship like this it'll probably break down anyway." And I always have this conversation which is let's reverse your life. Let's look, let's sit here like without any teeth rocking in a chair if we have that luxury and let's look back at your life and let's imagine looking at that experience.

Do you want to say you sat it out, and that's not a real grammatically correct word, sat, but you chose to sit in that same situation and wait for it to happen because you didn't have the courage or the desire to actually be a leader in that particular moment in your own life. Is that how you want to look back? And whenever you ask someone that question they say, "Well, no." And then the next question I say is, "Okay, let's look at your", and this sounds predictable, "But let's look at your core values. What is most important to you? What do you value most in other people? Let's look at attributes."

And usually, in fact 99.99% it's like, "Well, bravery, or inspiration, or I love that that person just went after what they wanted." And then you go, "Okay, so let's go back and sit in our chair and look back at your life and let's look at what happens if you play it out the way you're going to play, that you're going to wait for somebody to give you that opportunity." And that is never aligned. That's never aligned with who that person wants to be and how they want to show up in their life. But also how they want to punctuate their legacy and how they inspire other people.

And so it comes back to this whole juicy little – it's a little bit like, you know when you have a splinter and it's just below the surface but you've got to

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squeeze, but you're too afraid of the pain so you're kind of just going to let it sit there and fester? It is about having that courageous, that moment of pain and that moment of actually pushing out the potential of who you know you can be if you backed yourself.

And it's a big thing to step away from a job when you've got responsibilities, to step away from a relationship when you've never been alone in your life and you don't know if you can make it. It's not a little thing but it is the first step into living the rest of your life and showing up as the person you want to be. But it also, the other thing I want to say, especially you gave the example of a relationship. Often that person knows it's time to end or is taking you for granted. And it takes you to step away to actually really open it up for everybody else.

And if there are children watching your relationship and watching you play out in a relationship or staying in a job that you loathe, or that is sucking the life out of you, that is not being the inspiring role model that you just think it is. Sometimes we tell ourselves that we've got to be the provider. We tell ourselves we have to stay because what will it mean if you break up the relationship? But we're actually, and this is a hard hitting statement I'm going to make, we're actually doing more harm than good often by sticking in something that's misaligned to us.

Jen: Yeah, for sure. A thought comes up for me here, I can almost hear some people I think who are ready for a change and there's this argument that comes up. Well, but what if I'm not supposed to do that? What would you say, a divine thing, a God thing? It's tricky to talk about it isn't it? Yeah.

Vashti: It's not, I don't think it is. I think it's, you know, one of the questions that people always ask me is, "Is it too late? I'm in my 40s or I'm in my 50s, should I just stick it out?" And I had only 13 years with the kids' dad and there's this line in the documentary and this sounds a little bit egoic, but it's not meant to. I'll explain it. And he says, "I don't think I would have had the

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life I had if I hadn't met Vashti." And what he means by that is that he wouldn't have gone from engineer to try modeling, to try acting, to just keep going back and forth at LA.

He would have played it safe because he was brought up by two incredibly loving parents but it was about just play it safe. Don't worry if you don't love the job, you've got an income. Don't worry if you don't love that person with every part of you, that's a steady partner. It was about playing it safe. And so the reason I bring point to that is in 10 years of life he changed his career, he got paid to walk around in a loincloth and yield swords and roll around naked with beautiful women. He got the opportunity to move to Australia and learn to surf.

He brought two babies into this world with almost no cash at all. There was no safety of like yeah, we're ready. And he journeyed through life and all of that happened in that small amount of time. So when anybody says to me, "Is it too late or should I do this?" Do you want to take your last breath, and I know it sounds so cheesy and corny, and look back and go, you know what? I tried it and it didn't work but at least I tried. It's about that. It's about that, you don't know but also ask yourself what it is you get from playing it safe and the story you're telling yourself of how it serves others.

And actually look at it a different way. Reframe the story of what it might look like and what you might teach others by being brave and going for it.

Jen: I love that. I have two phrases swimming in my mind as you said that. Take the leap and then also the phrase, I choose to live. Living is so much more courageous, right, than playing it safe?

Vashti: It really is. And something – and I don't want to drop the tone because I can hear in your voice, there's that essence and that kind of joie de vivre of yeah, just grab it by the big and hairy ones, you know what I mean. But I also think, there was a really interesting point in my husband's

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life and I've seen this many times where we come towards the end of our life and we have all these people going, "Fight, fight, drink the smoothies", or, "Come on, I want you to live." And there comes a point with people where they're like, "No, I'm actually choosing to let go."

For those at the end of it, "I'm choosing to," there's a powerful choice as well in surrender. And whether that's saying, "Let me go", at the end of life, "Let me go, be peaceful, be sad but let me go." Sometimes that happens in life as well, in relationships, in jobs, it's like you have to be powerful. And there's this beautiful – I'm very mindful of the appropriate language, but original settlers, Native American which is it's a good day to die. And that is not about necessarily your last breath but it's about letting go of our sides of ourselves, that it's time to let go.

We're no longer that person, we're now this person. So it's not just it's a good day to live but it's this good day to die meaning it's a good day to let go of that thing we're holding onto that's keeping us trapped, keeping us small and not allowing us to be the potential of who we're capable of being for ourself and others.

Jen: And with the pandemic kind of coming to an end, how would you apply that, it's a good day to die?

Vashti: Jen, I can be a little bit controversial in the death space because I'm very mindful of what I say because death and letting go of someone we love can be the most traumatic experience you could possibly ever imagine. And I work with a lot of people who have lost children, who are in the process of losing children which is the unimaginable. I also have a firm belief which is a hard thing to rationalize that death is a part of our life and we're not all supposed to be here for 80 years. And our world is extraordinarily populated.

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And it's gut wrenching and heartbreaking and as I've said already, using that word 'unimaginable', but until we embrace that sometimes life steps in and takes away life and throws death at us in the harshest most bizarre and unimaginable way. Until we can embrace that like everything in life it keeps throwing these lessons at us until we get it.

And so I say to everybody, as much as it is the most heartbreaking thing possible to lose someone you love or to let go of your own life, it is also very much made a teaching of how we embrace life but also what we need to learn from death to make it an important part of how to live, and how to lead, and how to cultivate a more purposeful legacy.

Jen: Yeah. So we're stepping into our new normal.

Vashti: The cancer's a really interesting one, you hear, and I'm very mindful not to swear on your show. But we hear a lot of the eff cancer and kick the ass of cancer. And of course we need to find a way. But as human beings, especially western human beings we have this sort of arrogance I find about being able to, you know, look, at what we're doing to the planet, to animals, yeah, to our world. And we're doing some great things but we're doing more terrible things to it.

And we have this thing that we have to be able to overcome everything because we're human beings and we can get to space and we can figure everything out. And we are finding extraordinary ways of treating cancer and treating diseases that we never thought we would be able to treat. And then the pandemic comes along and kicks us in the arse and goes, well, actually no, here you go, eat this. And so I do believe wholeheartedly that something comes to remind us that we are fragile human beings and kind of know your place a little bit, have a bit more respect.

And it makes us sit up and appreciate what we do have. You think about not being able to go outside, people not being able to get treatment in the

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hospitals because they're so full. And all of a sudden just being able to go outside and breathe fresh air suddenly becomes a gift. And so what I really hope is this new normal that you talk about doesn't just go back into this entitlement that we seem to have as a species, especially in a western mindset, that we need to learn the lessons that it's tried to teach us otherwise I firmly believe something will come with even a greater kick.

Jen: Yeah, I would agree with that. That's beautiful. Well, kind of a final area I want to talk about is you discuss leadership. And we have – I'd love to hear your thoughts on old models of leadership and what you think is coming, how things are changing.

Vashti: I would say from an old leadership perspective there's two things I want to say, because it's an ocean in terms of conversation that we could have. The old school of leadership, correct and command, tell, direct, overpower is shifting to empower, to self-direct, to find the potential within to self-manage, to lead and to be able to make decisions for oneself. And that's what I see is a kind of pivotal instrumental change.

It's no longer about overpowering. It is actually about empowering. And it's no longer about disempowering and manipulating, it's about embracing and encouraging human potential so that people can consciously not only lead but let's look at the pandemic, now work from home. Now lead from home. And to be able to manage a whole team from a laptop, you can't just tell people what to do. You now need to have this almost like a different kind of coaching culture in the way that you are leading others.

You talk about, look at Simon Sinek, you look at Brené Brown, there's a different tonality coming to the education of leadership now. It's not so much about being the all stoic powerful leader. It's about being able to create stability but to also expose vulnerability. The humanity is coming out because people can relate to it.

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So now we have and you've already picked up, this is one of my favorite words because it's just so beautiful to say as well. We have this duality of how someone can be solid, and stable, and have compassion, and empathy, but can also inspire vision, can inspire hope. And can also show up as a 100% authentic, own their mistakes, own their vulnerability, share where they messed up and how they overcame that because that is what humans beings are, there's the duality of both.

And that's what I see as the most remarkable shift taking place, which is where for me it's such a pleasure. And there are just boundless opportunities to work because there is a new tonality in leadership. It's a welcoming of a very different style of leadership and it's a beginning to silence what was sought after especially, and I'm leading into a different conversation here now which is about the invitation of diversity and inclusion.

And so we're now looking at a legacy which is not just based on meeting the stats in terms of gender equality, but it's actually now a prerequisite. So, as we welcome in a different style of leadership what we're actually starting to see is a disregard for the old style and slowly, it's not there yet, the lack of acceptance for the old style and a huge welcoming for a new way of leading.

Jen: Yes, for sure. And I kind of see that leadership style translating into parenting as well. I've seen you actually on Instagram with your kids and I'd love to hear about your thoughts on this leadership style as a parent.

Vashti: That's a really wonderful question. I love that you asked about that. Well, I talk a lot about unapologetic leadership and one of the things I did that didn't make business sense or financial sense is when my husband died and we had a beautiful property. But bearing in mind he'd only just kind of made it so we were still paying off money we'd owed. My kids always laugh, they're like, "Mom, if we Google you apparently you're worth

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this many millions. So how come we can't have a new pair of sneakers right now?"

And I always say, "Look, I'm still chasing my tail." But the point I'm making about unapologetic leadership from the parenting is I chose to sell a property and just have a good couple of years. And that was a gift that was, I'm here, I know how lucky I am. But I chose to be a 100% there for my children, their dad having died and literally not make the best financial decisions to be that. Now, to me that is my version of unapologetic leadership.

And as a parent I chose that I wanted to be there and I had that luxury to live off that, to be there wholly and solely to bring up Jesse and to bring up Indi. And as a result of that I've had to chase my tail a number of different times and still continue to do so as a solo parent.

My conscious choice always is if I die tomorrow it's my responsibility today to be the person I want to be to integrate my son and my daughter into the world, not as two people but as two individuals. And to be able to meet their needs, to be that guide, to teach them not just to be able to put them through school because that's only one part of education. And again talking about the vast majority of the world who aren't even entitled to an education, school is a luxury. But for me it is only one part of what we teach our children and how we teach them to be in the world.

And so from a leadership perspective, I often make choices that are completely contradictory and controversial to other parents because I choose to meet my kids independently each and every moment as Jesse and Indi and explore, and by the way, I didn't always get it to this point. It's taken me a while to get here, to explore what they need in the moment.

And from a leadership perspective and a parenting perspective, what that means, and it kind of goes back to the title of the documentary and what

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Ram Dass always talks about which is all you can ever be is in the moment. And as a parent you have wisdom and age on your side. But you also have biases and you also have fears. And often as parents what we do is project our fear of maybe we weren't popular, or maybe we didn't have enough money, or maybe we had a volatile parent.

And so all we want to do is protect our kids from having that. We want them to grow up with the best. We want to make sure that they're thinking about pensions or taking the sensible job. But so much of that is not about being in the moment with what that human being, not all your children as a collective need, but what that one human being, that person that you are looking at, listening to, being present with, what they need in the moment.

And so to me, and we are constantly having to clean up our mess, we don't always get it right. Is like going back and saying, "The way I just spoke to you then, that's not cool. And you are right, that was me being overwhelmed by my situation and that was me talking to you rudely because I wasn't managing how I was feeling." And explaining that as opposed to just moving through it and your child going, "What did I do wrong?" Or, "Mom's a bit grumpy", or, "What's going on?" And so for me that is unapologetic leadership as a parent, for me.

And I'm only speaking on behalf of myself which is making choices that are in the best interest of that human being in front of you and what you need to show up and be and do, and put aside, and let go of to actually empower them to become, to grow into this remarkable little being they are. And I just want to share one thing with you which has been – was life changing for me as a parent. And it was the hardest thing I've ever done but it also gave me enormous permission.

Somebody asked me at one of the documentary screenings, I can't remember if it was in Sydney or New York but they said, you know, I do these big kind of keynotes at the end of showing the documentary based

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on using fear and adversity as the kind of guide and teacher in our lives. And she asked me, “What’s the biggest thing you learned for yourself as a parent from this whole experience?” And the answer I gave her was, “Never let your own fear get in the way of another human being’s journey even if it is your child or the person you would literally kill for.”

And I realized that I’d been living the first few years of my husband’s death with my children trying to overprotect them, so fearful, going to Father’s Day events and talking about sport with dads and trying to be the dad as well as the mom. And I realized not only can I not live like that, but I was trying to protect my kids’ lives within an inch of them because I didn’t want them to feel any more pain. But then I realized that if you don’t experience those things in your life you’re not living out the life you’re supposed to live.

And so unapologetically now I don’t always get in the way, when my kids go surfing or skating and people are like, “Aren’t you scared that this will happen?” And I say, “I’m more scared that they won’t get to experience the life that’s there for them.”

Jen: Wow, there you go, unapologetic living is kind of a new term you could pull from all that.

Vashti: Yeah, I like it. Can I take that from you? Everybody living, leading and dying, I’m going to take it all.

Jen: Yes. I mean we need a whole new episode on unapologetic living. My mind is blown. I love that. Vashti you are a wise woman. Where did you grow up? Where did you learn to think so out of the box? I think you’re special, really cool.

Vashti: You’re very lovely for saying that. I had amazing parents, both for their creativity. My mom is just the most incredible human being having come from post war Austrian refugees escaping Hitler. So she grew up in a

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place of fear. And so of course she went the opposite end and she drove singlehandedly in a little VW camper van from England all the way to India with two kids, not really knowing how it was going to turn out.

Jen: Wow. Wow.

Vashti: Chasing my dad who had exited the picture because he didn't want to do small children in the countryside and they rekindled later. So I grew up in very strange unpredictable places, in Afghanistan with revolutions going on, with parents fighting all the time. It was very unstable, but very beautiful and boundary-less which has its detriment as well, situations. So I grew up always on the edge watching incredible cultures and incredible things and not quite knowing where I fit, fitting everywhere and fitting nowhere.

And that's given me this extraordinary ability to sit in a hospice and feel like I belong there, but also to sit on the outer or to sit in life and feel like I belong there, but to sit and watch. And I think those two experiences of having traveled the world so young but also having been the peacemaker in a very passionate but very tumultuous relationship, it's always given me this ability to drive, you know, to jump slap bang in the center of an explosion because that's where it's happening, fearlessly.

But to also then sit on the side and watch it and understand the chaos where everybody else is going, "Oh my God, this shouldn't be happening." I'm like, "It's happening because it's exactly where it's meant to be." And so I feel like that that sort of gave me this extraordinary ability to see things from a different perspective and also be in the eye of the storm and kind of not juggle it but grow from the chaos if you like because I can make sense of it.

Jen: Almost like saying chaos should be happening. What would happen if we all looked at it that way? Much easier.

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Vashti: But it is. It's like light and dark, the storm and the calm. It is the duality of life. It's love and loss. Without one we can't see the other. And we're not the first people to crack this insight. It's life. It's the whole of humanity.

Jen: Well, beautiful. I have loved every minute of this interview. I appreciate it so much. Where can people follow you if they want to know more about you?

Vashti: Yeah, absolutely. Okay, so two things, for anybody that is interested in the documentary because at the moment it's no longer on Netflix. If you go to www.beherenowfilm.com you can at this stage find out all about the documentary, all about the beautiful late and great Andy Whitfield because he's an inspiration to so many men, people coming off tours, people going through extraordinary experiences. He's a beautiful man to follow, to learn from. And Kanopy as in public libraries, K.a.n.o.p.y. if you are a member or you just join a library, you can download and watch the documentary there.

But it will have a new platform soon, so you can go to the site, Be Here Now Film site to find out about that, sorry, beherenowfilm.com. But for me if you're interested in daily learnings and connecting you can follow Vashti Whitfield on Instagram and/or go to my website. But I say check in with Instagram, you can also find me on Clubhouse very sporadically because that is just a vortex that we can get far too lost in, even though it's a magnificent site. And reach out to me any time if you're interested in support, in speaking and/or in collaborating to create human potential.

Jen: Thank you so much Vashti. I'm so honored you would be on the show.

Vashti: And to you Jen because you are the remarkable, remarkable archetype of a woman. I take my hat off to you and I salute you, and I commend you for who you're being in the world.

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Jen: Thank you. I'll take those words and I appreciate it so much. Take care.

I hope that interview inspired you as much as it did me. I love that idea of taking the leap, choosing to live in alignment, living unapologetically. I also love that idea that sometimes making a change is exactly what we or our loved ones need. It's exactly the path we're meant to be on. So take some time to reflect on this. What is ahead for you?

What needs to be ahead for you? What changes are you afraid to make? What things have happened, adversities and otherwise that you might choose to change your perspective on, realizing that all of this is happening for you not to you? So many things to think about.

I want thank you for listening and wish you all the best in creating a life that is in alignment, truly living your life, whatever amount of it you have left, whatever is happening in that life, choose to live unapologetically. I will be thinking about the same things, maybe I'll talk about some of the changes I'm going to be making in the episodes ahead when I decide what those are. Alright, my friends, I will be back again next week, until then make it a vibrant, happy, unapologetic life. Take care.

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