

290: Becoming the Permission You Seek (with Regina Louise)



Full Episode Transcript

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Jen Riday

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I am Dr. Jen Riday and you're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. We're talking about being the permission you seek. 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. Have you ever interacted with someone who when you hear about their life you think wow, I am in the presence of a strong, amazing, vibrant, powerful person? Well, that is my guest today. Her name is Regina Louise. Regina grew up in foster care. Her own mother was in foster care. And she suffered a lot of the things that can happen in foster care, significant trauma. She lived in over 30 foster homes, and group homes, and psychiatric facilities before the age of 18. So, when I hear that I think trauma.

And in this interview, Regina agrees, yes, she suffered some serious trauma during that time. The beautiful thing is though at the age of 11, Regina made the choice to give herself permission, to give herself consent to live a life of dignity. And that was the beginning. That was the pivotal moment when she went from victim to victor at age 11. And that didn't mean there wasn't more suffering. But you're going to hear how Regina has been able to look at her suffering and see how it's the gateway to recognizing so many important things about herself and about her humanity.

So let me tell you a little more about Regina. Regina Louise is the author of Permission Granted. You'll definitely want to get her book. It's so powerful. Her bestselling memoirs were made into the award winning Lifetime movie, I Am Somebody's Child: The Regina Louise Story. You can watch it on

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Amazon Prime right now. Regina is a Hoffman Process Teacher, a workshop facilitator and motivational speaker who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her story has been featured in media outlets like NPR's All Things Considered, Good Morning America and many more.

So why this episode? Won't it bring you down? No, it won't. It will inspire you. Because sometimes you meet people who have endured much more than perhaps we have. And watching these people's courage, and ability to thrive, and ability to defy expectations and love themselves into a high performing life like Regina describes of herself, is inspiring. If they can do it, we can do it. And I love how Regina is happy to be that inspiration for so many. Well, I am excited for you to hear this story so let's go ahead and jump in.

Jen: Hi, Regina, welcome to Vibrant Happy Women.

Regina: Hi there.

Jen: We saw your email telling us about your book and we instantly latched on. And we thought, oh, this is such a great story. So, tell us the name of your book and really dive into your story if you don't mind.

Regina: The title of my book is Permission Granted: Kickass Strategies to Bootstrap Your Way to Unconditional Self-Love. I began my life journey as a young girl who at the age of 11 took the rearing of my own life into my hands. I lived in a kinship home, if you will, in Austin, Texas.

I lived in the same foster home my biological mother resided in. And I was met with the same stringent, excessive force, neglect and abuse that she

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herself had faced and the difference was I stepped into my permission at a very young age to not hand my soul over to people who couldn't see me, who couldn't hear me.

Jen: I love how you say, I wasn't going to give my soul into the hands of people who didn't see me. That's powerful. So not everyone has the strength to make a statement like that. Where did it come from? What gave you that courage?

Regina: I believe I became courage in action. When you're 11, anybody were 11 I would imagine, freshly understood the power of John 3:16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, who so ever shall believe it shall not perish but have everlasting life. I believe that in the moment when I heard that and my own spirit recognized the truth of those words. I believe that my relationship with resilience was therefore born. And courage would be all that I would need to become in order to look at my life.

Similarly, that there was nothing that I couldn't face that I would not get through and see to the other side of the experience. And I had an adventure, some attitude if you were to take Huckleberry Finn and mash him up with Jim, his cocharacter in that story. I had the temerity, the guts of the masculine, so to speak. And then mixed with the feminine, so the masculine energies allowed me to take action, the feminine energies allow me to recognize and thus protect my own innocence. I became my own mother.

Jen: Yeah. So, your mother, biological mother was in a foster home and became pregnant with you. And then you grew up until the age of 11 in kind of a kinship home you said?

Regina: Right.

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Jen: Okay. And what happened after that? Because I know you lived in over 30 foster homes, is that right?

Regina: That's right. Well, after that one day, a day of reckoning came between myself and my caretaker. And the question was would I allow her to take out on me, which she really wanted to take out on my mother but did not have the courage to? Apparently she did not have the courage to ask my mother to come and get me. She did not have the courage to be with the distress that having me on that property, there were three houses on one property. She didn't have the courage to understand my plight as an abandoned child.

And it's easier oftentimes to place the sins of the mother on the child, that one has to look at every single day. And she couldn't reconcile her rage, her anger, her disappointment, any of those darker feelings. She couldn't reconcile those. And clearly there was a lot of vindictiveness there that she wanted to project onto my own innocence. I was innocent. And that's what went down. And I knew enough from the books I read to know this is not how I want to be treated.

And the irony of it is I would go to school or I would read books and I would recognize that I am the only one I know being treated this way. This isn't going to work. And so, I decided that should my caretaker/perpetrator come for me one more time, I made a pact with God back then. I made a pact with the god who I had fallen in love with via John 3:16. When at the end of the day what I now recognize is I stepped into my dignity at 11. And made a decision to not allow this person to eviscerate me. And as I said, I became the good enough mother I needed for myself.

Jen: Wow. So, the evisceration she was trying to perpetrate on you, was that physical, was that emotional? I'm sure definitely emotional.

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Regina: All of the above.

Jen: All of it.

Regina: So, it was neglect. We ate, I in particular, I was fed the leftovers. My brothers also, I have two brothers, we all have the same mother, different fathers. So, I had two brothers and I had an older sister. And my older sister was there but she was there five years before me. So, she had an opportunity to bond with the head of the household. And this other woman who for some reason loved to target me. She was the eldest foster child, let's just say, to keep it easy. And there was a bullseye on my head.

I was called precocious, I learned to read at a very, very young age. So, I understood and I saw things. I understood and I saw things. So, for me to make that pact with God, or my own innocence, or the good enough mother in me to, if this woman ever touches me again it will be a sign that she's trying to kill me. I mean it was that, it was on the level of annihilation for me. And that day came and she used a cutoff green water hose, like a garden hose. And she literally whipped me till the pink of my flesh showed through my skin. And it's like no, we're never going to have that again ever.

Jen: No. Yeah. So, you left. What did you do?

Regina: I zigzagged between this person and that person until I was sent to my biological mother. And I want to say, if readers really want to know they can read my first book, *Somebody's Someone*. And then I finish it up in my second book, *Someone Has Led This Child to Believe*, those two books, because I don't want to relive it right now. Those two books, I'm feeling particularly vulnerable right now. So, I don't want to recount that. But those two books are brilliant archives of what happened.

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And those two books are the fodder for the 2019 NAACP nominated film, *I Am Somebody's Child: The Regina Louise Story* which can be found on Amazon Prime.

Jen: Cool, that's so neat. So that movie kind of chronicles your story of what?

Regina: Of what a lot of what I just told you and how I eventually wind up in a level 14 residential treatment center in solitary confinement. Because I fell in love with a white woman who fell in love with me and wanted to adopt me. And she was not allowed. So, I'll leave it at that. If they want to know the rest, you've got to watch it.

Jen: Yeah, okay. I like that. Well, so pull us forward in time, you're living life very differently than you did then. What have you learned along the way? And what are you still learning?

Regina: What have I learned? I've learned a lot. I've learned that no one gets to be the arbiter of my life, my narrative and it is my sovereign right to be, the permission I seek to give myself consent. To allow myself to live a life of dignity which is to say to live a life of self-worth, a life of self-respect. And to claim my right to my own humanity. I mean who takes a 15 year old girl, slams her into a room without windows, without handles on the doors, and to leave her to herself? And at that time the light within me recognized the light that came, that spilled over the threshold of that door.

And that's where I planted my seeds of possibility. And it's like in the best of movies, we get what's called callbacks, certain things are planted at the beginning of the movie that must be reconciled by the end in order for that character to have a change. So, I feel that my life has been very much like that. And my childhood and young adulthood I planted my own possibilities into the light of life and what I believed to be the truth. And then I grew

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myself up to be worthy of my own creative possibilities. And my now life is an expression of that, is it is that, those callbacks, having their moment.

I don't want my live to be the Jacobian gun or the smoking gun. I want my life to be real because my life is real. I am real. I matter. I am not, that's what I've learned, I am so much more than a premeditated thumbnail sketch of someone else's projection of me based on race, creed, color, gender. I have made serious inroads to step outside of the heteronormative classifications of who I get to be. I have worked to close the gap on my own disadvantage. I have redefined how to have the American dream on my terms.

I graduated from two colleges, two universities by the time I was 51 years old. I went back because I make vows to myself and I keep them. And in my late 40s when my son was failing college, failing it miserably. I went back to school as a way to become the competition, to become the competitor he needed because he suffered a serious injury that waylaid his dreams to become a professional basketball player. So, he was giving up on himself. So, I thought let me be that competition for him. So, it's like, dude, let's see who can get our BA first.

And of course, as it should be as far as I'm concerned, I got through it in this case. I beat him to the finish line. But he came in a few months later and happily so. And then I went on to grad school because I received what's called the Dean's Distinguished Fellow from the University of California, Riverside. I did my undergraduate at California Institute of Integral Studies. It's like a Montessori school for adults who can afford it.

Jen: Wow. Neat.

Regina: And which I am still not affording but hey, I did what I had to do. And then I received, as I said, the Dean's Distinguished Fellow, to receive

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my terminal degree, equivalent to a PhD in creative writing and writing for the performing arts. So, I conferred my degree in 2015. So, it's just been six years.

Jen: Wow, that's impressive. I can tell you're a woman who – well, first of all that you keep your vows to yourself. These days I feel that so many of us want things but don't stick to it, or commit, or have that integrity that clearly is so important to you.

Regina: Right. I mean I have things that I'm not as empowered to add vitality to. And then I have those things that there's no way. There's just no way that I won't bring to fruition. And one of the things, Jen, that I think is I have to slow down sometimes and recognize I may not have the level of success that I desire, that I feel I deserve. But what I do have is that I have manifested every dream for the most part that I've ever wanted.

And again, my dream of course is to have the work I do become a household name or at the very minimum to make an impact on the world stage in such a way that my life was – and the way that I lived, that my childhood none of it was in vain. But in fact, because I was willing to be intimate and courageous with my pain and my suffering. I was able to bring myself on the other side and thus able to encourage others to do the same. To have my life be exemplary of what's possible when we make that decision to step from victim to victor.

Jen: Yes. Isn't that the decision of a lifetime, switching from victim to victor?

Regina: I think it is.

Jen: I really do too, that is the decision.

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Regina: Yeah, I do.

Jen: Yes. Wow. And what great parenting that you helped your son make that decision as well with the little challenge in college, yeah. That's neat.

Regina: Right. Otherwise, he would have party – I was on my way, I lived in Marina del Rey in LA at the time. And I had come to the Bay Area to visit people. And I didn't have a chance to see him that particular time. I was on Amtrak heading back to LA and my instinct said get off the train. And I literally, I had gotten on the train, I boarded the train in Martinez. I deboarded one station away in Antioch, called my son's father and said, "Can you meet me tomorrow? I think we need to go have an intervention."

I'm so glad I followed that because when we got to his apartment there were seven guys all high and not high like a drug house. We're not talking that kind of a thing. But boys being boys partying and this was the hangover pad. And I literally nearly took the door off the hinges. And told every boy, "Get up and get out." And my ex-husband, he doesn't come at things that way. But I am when it comes to my kid and when it comes to modeling to my kid, when it's necessary to be the hammer and drop the hammer.

And so, they ran and I just told him, "Pack your bag. Don't talk to me. Don't say a word. Pack your bag. It's not an option." And I just said, "Don't speak to me. I will be in the car. Let's go." And I tell you, that changed his life.

Jen: Aww, yeah, tough love is a real thing for sure.

Regina: Yeah. And my ex-husband owned a house out in the Boondocks, really, really far in the Boondocks, this massive house of nine rooms. And he told my son, "The only thing you will get is internet." And then obviously

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you won't have to pay. "But anything else you're going to have to figure out how to survive. This is one step away from being in the desert, good luck with that."

Jen: Wow.

Regina: Right. And so, we supported him to figure it out and he did.

Jen: Wow, that's neat. That's really neat. I like that story. Well, so as someone who – I think we all have traumas. You had traumas, a lot of people think we can only talk about big T trauma. But I think we all have at least little T traumas. Through your experiences what has helped you to deal with the traumas you have faced in your past when you were young as they come up for you in adulthood, which I assume they do? They seem to for the rest of us. Yeah, what helps you?

Regina: Oh, my goodness. Yes. To face it. It's easy to sex it, text it, drink it, eat it, have affairs through it, diminish our essence, do to ourselves what was done unto us. But those are the normative ways in dealing with or not, rather, dealing with traumas. I have spent my life facing the depth, the width, the length of my trauma. My entire life has been mitigated to some degree by the traumas that were acted upon me as well as the ones that I unwittingly reenacted upon myself.

And it wasn't until maybe a year and a half ago before I began to write this book that I recognized how I had been, even though I had a lot of success. That's easy. That's intellect. The intellect is always going to solve to keep me safe, to keep me in the game. But what it cannot do is support me necessarily in dropping down and taking that 18 inch journey from my head to my heart. And so, I have learned to better live in my heart and from my heart. And in taking that journey and having the courage, being the courage to face some of my deepest, darkest fears.

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And in my book I have a strategy titled Grow Through What You Go Through which is a saying that was penned by Eric Butterworth from The New Thought Movement. And that is when I truly dropped down as I wrote Grow Through What You Go Through. Because I could never understand how terrors, fingerprints that show us aloneness, deep aloneness, how and why I felt the way I felt. Why was I somewhat of an autophobic or monophobic, afraid to be alone with myself? What is that? Why was that?

And it was in sitting through day, after day, after day of a gnarly, gnarly pain and terror that took six weeks for me to get some mastery over, some agency over, that I recognized my life the way that I have lived it is the cautionary tale or exemplary of what we as humans strive to never have happen. And that is to be shunned from the pack, to be left behind, to feel the truth of one's own existential nature. To know terror, to know what it means to be radically, unapologetically rejected and abandoned.

And then to walk side by side, abandonment on one side, rejection on the other and to befriend that. To understand the gifts of abandonment, the gifts of rejection. So, for me I am a firm believer, if I could bat my eyes and go through therapeutic training I would become an internal family systems expert. Because it's in internal family systems that there is room for the multiplicity of cells, and parts, and aspects that are within us. And intuitively before I knew about IFS I was drawn to inner child work, emotional child work.

And I am that devotee who believes in the power. I understand the neuroplasticity of the brain. And I understand what it means to create new neural biological pathways. So, I know that the brain doesn't know the difference between my mama holding me and me putting my hands on my heart and having oxytocin release to re-parent, relieve to me the trauma response in the moment.

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Jen: I love that. So, it's true, you became your own mother. And everyone can do that, can't they?

Regina: Absolutely. Absolutely. I was always suspect of this buzzword, self-love, self-care. And I thought what about those of us who were brutally abused and abandoned, and I'm not just saying people from foster care. I work as a Hoffman Process Teacher. I don't know if you're familiar with the Hoffman Process. But it is a brilliant psychoeducational experience that happens over seven days for students, eight days for me as a teacher.

And four to five teachers would come together as a team and we support anywhere from 18 to 40 students, COVID, because of COVID it's been more like 24. We haven't reached full capacity yet. But one of the things that I know to be true is to learn to reparent, to learn what, as Derek Winnicott calls the good enough parent, to be willing to open to put skin in the game.

And what I've learned from people that I have engaged with, walked alongside in the journey from billionaires to dog walkers, it does not matter your ethnicity. It does not matter your level of privilege. It does not matter your socioeconomics. Dollars and cents really don't matter when it comes to the traumas that bind us.

Jen: I love that.

Regina: It doesn't matter. That's the suffering as Kristen Neff would say, the researcher on self-compassion, at the end of the day our ability to connect in our common humanity is what can stay us. And to remember that to be human is to suffer. I mean for those of us in the west and who believe in the premises of Christianity, or Catholicism, or any of the religious practices that are based on the Christ.

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If we cannot see that Christ, 12 stations of the cross and the fact that the spirit, having a human experience was crucified and brought back in the way of a resurrection, also known as resilience, if you were to ask me. If I don't have a model or if I don't recognize the experience of what it means that to be human is to suffer, then it would be difficult for me to also say I believe in Christianity. Because to me that is the gateway to recognizing that it's both and, we're spirit and human, both and.

And part of that, part and parcel is to know there is – like I tell my students when they come with, for them, maybe seemingly insurmountable situations, feelings, experiences, they want, I make it clear to them there is no harm. There is no experience, no trauma that's too big for number one, me to hold, and for this process that you're going to embark upon for the next seven days. There is nothing that's too big to be held, to be metabolized because at the end of the day that's what it means to heal is to metabolize our experiences, to validate them as opposed to running. There's no running here.

Jen: Face and feel, metabolize, move it on through, right?

Regina: Absolutely. Be worthy, understand that you are worthy of whatever experience you have. And to meet our own innocence with innocence, and with compassion, and with empathy to get off our backs and get on our sides which is another strategy. Let's get off our backs, let's get on our sides. Let's get down into the fox hole and walk a mile in our own shoes, empathy with that.

Jen: That's neat, yeah. I like that. That's a neat phrase. Well, this has been powerful. And I imagine you have so much more you can teach us. Where can we go to learn more about you and what you're doing?

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Regina: Right. I invite people to follow me on Instagram. For those of you who are on Instagram my handle is @therealreginalouise, my first and last name @the, the article therealreginalouise. And I can be found on Facebook, Regina Louise, and then I have a website that is ever growing – ever being updated to meet the needs of visitors, albeit a little bit slower in that I'm on this extensive podcast book tour. But my website is www.iamreginalouise.com, again, www.iamreginalouise.com.

Jen: That's great. Thank you so much. We will have those on our show notes page. And I just want to say, I love how you say I am Regina Louise because I can feel your reverence and deep love and affection for yourself.

Regina: Thank you.

Jen: And I think we all want that. So, thank you for being an example of that. It's important work.

Regina: You're very welcome. You're very welcome. I appreciate you sharing your platform with me because as you know, or maybe you don't know, but as a woman who identifies as African American this is a new endeavor into personal growth. And it is a space that is predominantly dominated by men. And for me to take a risk and play in this space is huge. It's a lifetime dream come true. So, to those people such as yourself who are willing to use your platform to support and proliferate what I believe is possible for us. Thank you.

Jen: You're welcome. I am honored you would be here. Thank you so much. Take care, Regina.

Regina: You too.

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I love the raw strength and elegant ability to talk about her feelings and experience that Regina showed us in this interview. I want to challenge you to think about what Regina said, that you can give yourself the permission you seek, that you can give yourself consent to live a life of dignity. Beautiful. And additionally, her idea of stepping outside of heteronormity, being like everyone else. But to give yourself permission to live your life of dignity as a mom, as a wife, as a person, as an employee, in all of those roles.

I wish you the best with this. I hope you have clarity on this path and this journey of being your most vibrant and happy self. And I will see you again next time. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.