

## Episode 006: “Take The Time That You Need” - Levi Macallister

*Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.*

**Lindsay Kolsch [over music]:** You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. We'll be sharing stories and conversations about topics we tend not to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide.

**Lindsay:** Each week you'll be hearing stories from some amazing people. We'll talk about how mental health has shaped their journey, and you'll continue to hear ways how you can carry this conversation into your community. We hope you'll not only connect to the episodes and conversations in a meaningful way, but we hope that maybe this podcast will make it easier for you to have conversations in your own life.

**Lindsay:** In this episode, TWLOHA founder Jamie Tworkowski talks with Levi Macallister, also known as Levi the Poet. Levi is a writer, musician, and spoken word artist. We've gotten to know him and his family and their story over the years. And I'm so excited to share this conversation with you. Levi talks about losing his dad to suicide and how that informed his own understanding of mental health. He also touched on his creative process and how he's working to take better care of himself. It's a moving episode, and it can be heavy at times, but I think it it's one you're going to love.

[music playing]

**Lindsay:** And a quick warning before you take a listen. There are mentions of suicide and methods used to attempt suicide. If you're in a season where that would be difficult to hear, we recommend you listen with a friend or save for a later time. And if you or someone you know needs help, you can always visit our Find Help page and find mental health resources in your community. We'll provide a link to that in our show notes.

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**Jamie Tworkowski:** What was it about the organization like, what was it that made you connect, relate, that made you care about the work that we were doing?

**Levi Macallister:** Well, the first time I went to Cornerstone was in 2007, and I'm pretty sure that's, that would have been my first introduction to To Write Love on Her Arms. And so music scene was a huge part of it. I mean obviously seeing a bunch of bands repping stuff and being a part of all of that world. And then, well, I mean, you know the story, but my dad committed suicide and so then when we started doing some work together out of that, uh, obviously I got more and more invested and was very thankful for y'all telling that story and sort of redeeming

aspect of it for me and my family. Um, but I think even before any of that stuff happened, I mean I struggled with a lot of depression, especially in high school and I graduated in '07.

**Levi:** So coming through a lot of that and then recognizing the work that you guys were doing and you know, halfway thinking it was cool because it was so very much a part of the music scene that I was involved of and then also benefiting from the type of content that you guys were putting out or just what you stood for in general was cathartic and sympathetic and a cool way and so I've followed it, you know, off and on since the beginning. But then definitely when I started putting more out and we connected together on the Rearview Memories Project and then I've written some stuff for you all since then as well and definitely have recommended your book to people and different things like that. Above always, man, Jamie, that words like friends, that's one of the best things. So well done. That's a great intro.

**Jamie:** Oh, man, thank you.

**Levi:** Always done that well.

**Jamie:** So where, kind of backing up a little bit, where or when did writing enter the picture for you?

**Levi:** The first thing I remember writing was a poem about such an...I had such an embarrassing poem. I think my mom maybe has it framed on her in her bathroom or something, but it was a poem about how everyone of every race and ethnic thing in the world needed to meet Jesus. I was in third grade maybe and being the pastor's kid. And so I, uh, I was a little kid writing about races and things, and I guess the best way to say it at this point would be that, um, it, it certainly wasn't politically correct in any way whatsoever. And I've since gone back and read it and my mom's like, oh, you should, you should go share this. It would, it would be so cute. You know, like, people would appreciate it. And I'm like, mom, I love you. And I love that you love me so much, but there is no way anyone will appreciate that. Never gonna happen.

**Levi:** But, uh, but yeah, so that, that was the first time. I remember I was sitting in the back of an auditorium or something like that. I was eating a chocolate chip muffin that cost fifty cents. And, um, I wrote that poem. And then after that I just sort of continued with journaling and writing that was a lot more personal. I mean all of it started out that way. There's, I've never thought of or would have ever dreamed of wanting to share anything. I mean I was terrified of giving a science fair presentation, let alone a bunch of journals that became performance pieces and ended up being extremely personal and yeah, it's been an interesting journey to say the least. But I did fall in love with writing, and I've got so many notebooks full of stuff that, you know, may never see the light of day, but it sure is cool to have all those memories.

**Jamie:** Yeah. When did you start to share your writing?

**Levi:** The first friend that I remember sharing a substantial amount of it with was, her name was Dani [inaudible]. And that would have been in sixth or seventh grade. And uh, I noticed that she was a writer as well. I don't know, I forget how we connected on it, but I do remember trading, trading notebooks back and forth. And her really being someone that, uh, I kind of opened up to and then I start, you know, I would, I would turn in some school projects or things like that that were a little bit more vulnerable or a little bit more me. I hated school. So outside of just getting the thing done and in passing I guess and trying a bit more with it - would have been in middle school. But even even beyond that, I mean maybe a girlfriend in high school or things like that.

**Levi:** But when it really came to actually presenting anything in front of anyone, probably would have been 2000...I want to say eight. I graduated high school. I tried to go to college, I tried to take advantage of it and I hated it. And so I dropped out and I moved to Texas for a few months and wrote for a magazine called HM, called the Hard Music Magazine. I'm sure they, I know they used to run To Write Love...I think we had, maybe even while I was there, some To Write Love stuff and it was all a part of that same scene, but when I was out there, one of the interns really liked the poetry that I had begun to write, and I had a, a demo recording at that time and she liked it to the degree that she ended up doing a write-up about it for the magazine.

**Levi:** And I really think that I count that as one of the main times. It felt just very encouraging. And when I went back home at the end of all of that, it was enough to get me to start hopping on some shows. And I had some friends who knew that I wrote. There was another poet in the scene at the time, Bradley Hathaway, I don't know, if you knew him...

**Jamie:** Yeah, yeah.

**Levi:** So Bradley, Bradley was the first guy that I ever saw doing anything like what I started to do. And, uh, it was on a Chariot show in Albuquerque. I think Blind Side was the headliner, which is such a dope, stacked bill. I love that. But, uh, he was there and doing hard, you know, manly man and I'm hardcore and the booby poem and all of these things that came out on his first record, and I thought, what in the world is going on, you know, at this hardcore show and it.

**Levi:** But it was so cool because it existed inside of the scene and he was doing it and after that a lot of friends kind of just asked me to do some of the same. And, uh, so I started pursuing it. But, well, I don't know, it's weird to say I started pursuing it. I fell into it. I don't feel like it actually turned into a legitimate intentional pursuit for maybe even a couple of years. It was just kind of like, okay, well that's weird. Played some local shows. Now there's some people bringing me out on the road with them. But it sort of just felt like it was something that was happening to me, you know? And then eventually I had to decide, well am I going to keep doing this or not? And I guess I decided to.

**Jamie:** Where does mental health enter the picture for you in terms of becoming something you're aware of, something that you're starting to think about, whether it's in your own life or in the lives of people you care about?

**Levi:** It's weird thinking about that question and all of the things that I and my family have been through in hindsight, if that makes sense. Uh, I know that growing up my dad would go through these seasons that I could tell were off and that's really the only word that I had for it. And to a degree it's kind of still the only word that I do have for it. They were just strange, and he was more irritable or more down or less present. So in hindsight, I'm able to look back and kind of recognize these seasons of life that our family would go through every so often and say, okay, I can, I can see that for what it was at this point in time. I think personally I, and this was before I really understood or knew anything about my dad, I really faced, uh, some, some serious bouts of depression.

**Levi:** Uh, as I've mentioned in, in junior and senior years of high school. One such time that I particularly remember: I got to go overseas with my dad. He brought me on one of his trips and he made it a bit more touristy than a normal kind of work or missions trip of his, but what...we still got to go to a lot of the places that he had visited the meet a lot of these and these are people where I think regardless of what you believe about anything as far as faith or religion is concerned, it was just fascinating to meet these people who were willing to give up everything - including life and family - for the sake of this person who I had grown up being taught was God. And it was inspiring and it was all kinds of things. But I remember coming back from that experience to the States and experiencing such disillusionment about my own display of that belief and how everything here seemed to pale in comparison to the story that I just heard from the mom whose son was shot in front of the school. As an example for how you shouldn't have your Bible and your desk, I mean there were just the craziest stories.

**Levi:** And so I came home and I just thought, I don't, I don't think I believe in any of this anymore, and it, it really did rock my world, and I remember walking into my mom's room at one point in time and telling her, you wake up, you work, you go to school, you graduate, you get a slip of paper to make a bunch more, and then you die. And I felt very nihilistic about everything at the time, partially because I just thought, well, you know, I've been raised to believe that this God is my reason for existence and if there is no god, then there is no reason for existence. And that led me toward a pretty scary, definitely approaching on suicidal place. I mean, those thoughts were definitely in my mind a lot.

**Levi:** And um, you know, thank God that wasn't...didn't end up being the case, but it was, it was enough to really scare me - that's what I would use a lot of my writing for mean writing was always a really therapeutic thing for me, and it was a way for me to get some of those thoughts out and, uh, not always as far away as it as I think that I could have if I would have communicated more openly with others, but it was still a way for me to process some things. And so that, that was the first time I think for me that I can point to. And then once I kind of moved out of that season, started dealing with a lot, a lot more anxiety and that has lasted a lot longer.

**Levi:** I'm actually still kind of doing some therapy and processing through, uh, some of that. So it's not been consistent throughout the last 15 years or um, but it, but it's been actually, maybe that's not true. Maybe it has been kind of been an ongoing thing. And then, and then our experience with my dad, which I'm happy to dive into more detail about that. That brought the issue to the forefront of the conversation.

**Jamie:** Yeah. When did you lose your dad?

**Levi:** So we lost him in...it would have been January of 2011. You know, I'm going to share this story because I think it's pretty...I think it's pretty amazing to be honest. My dad, so my dad had a really difficult upbringing and there were multiple times when he was younger where he, I think it just adds context to his story. So he, he had attempted suicide as a young man, and uh, one time he tried to drive his truck off of a mountain, it ran out of gas.

**Levi:** So he gave up and went my home. And then another time he told our family that he was going to use a gun and that before he could pull the trigger, he said that he felt like God told him to go find a bible before he gave up on finding a reason to live. And regardless of what anyone thinks about that, the story is fascinating because he did just that by breaking into a library because he didn't have one, so he broke into a library and got a bible. And, and I think that it just sort of adds context to why he ended up going into the work that he did. Um, you know, doing missions and stuff like that as well. Uh, but through all of that, he was dealing with some mental health issues and was in and out of hospitals, uh, shortly after my folks got married.

**Levi:** So there was, there was all of this stuff and um, got on some medication that, you know, sort of helped balance him out for 25 years. I guess, I was, you know, that's about how long it ended up being. And so fast forward to the months leading up to 2011. I mean, the short version of the story is that he, he hurt his back really badly, um, a few different times in life and eventually had to get surgery and the surgery did not go well. It made things a lot worse and then the medication that he had to take for his back problems combined with an already deteriorating helpfulness of the medication that he had been on for such a long time just really started to mess with him mentally and psychologically and physiologically as well. And so he had been in and out of various hospitals leading up to that January.

**Levi:** And then finally, you know, I got a phone call from my sister one morning saying that he had left the house and that he had called my mom and said, 'Hey, you know, I love you. I might be back, but I don't know. And that's that.' And then we didn't hear from him for about three weeks. It was interesting because we had gone through the process, that exact process a few times before that, but he had never been gone for that long. So we sort of, you know, it's kind of this waiting game of hoping for the best but -

**Jamie:** Oh man.

**Levi:** Kind of bracing yourself for the worst, you know? And so at the end of that month, they've made a positive ID match and found him and had the memorial shortly thereafter. And it was such a whirlwind of a year of, Brandi and I got married two months later, April 2nd, and then we were on the road for 10 months immediately after, like, we didn't even go home after our honeymoon. We had the wedding and then the reception and then the honeymoon and then we just stayed on the road for, for a long time. It was wild, you know, and uh, and, and didn't leave then process much. So I'm processing a lot now or in the years since. So it was a crazy start to a really crazy year, man.

**Jamie:** Man. Thank you for, for sharing that. Um, there was someone who actually submitted a question on Instagram, and they asked how did your experiences with your father change how you approach your own mental health?

**Levi:** You know, I, I don't know that I gave any legitimate thought to my own mental health before all of this happened. I mean, I knew that I had gone through bouts of depression and I knew that I struggled, uh, to a large degree with it, but I don't know that I ever made the, made the connection or I certainly never...I mean, I haven't seen a counselor up until the last couple of years. I didn't think that there was anything wrong with that, but I also didn't pursue it myself. You know, kind of one of those kind of one of those, uh, 'Oh yeah, I've got great advice for you, but I'm not following it kind of thing,' you know? And um, it's hard for me to compare and contrast it because I think that my folks did the best that they knew how to do. And also tried to protect my, my sister and I, from what we couldn't understand at the time.

**Levi:** I think that I'm more vocal and sort of, if it were me, I would have communicated more openly. But I also have the utmost respect for their decision about the way that they went about trying to shield us from the worst of what was going on for quite a while. You know? I mean, I've always been, even before any of that stuff with my dad happened, I've always been pretty vocal and, and vulnerable if I can say that about myself or maybe blunt. Um, I don't like censorship very much and I don't like shying away from the things that are real and right in front of us. And so especially coming out of everything that happened with my dad, I think our entire family has been a lot more willing to simply call things as they are. And I think that I have always valued the people, whether they are folks like you running organizations like this or I don't know how great of an example of this is, but like the Conor Obersts of the world, these people that I saw saying things very bluntly and perhaps artistically or however they went about doing it, but they were getting it out there.

**Levi:** And I just, I've always valued that openness. And I think that it is far better than keeping things closeted up, and it's been an interesting balance of trying to do that well while also recognizing that, on the flip side, I don't do a great job of creating necessary and healthy boundaries for myself. And so I think that's something that I've been working on more as of late is knowing what the difference between, um, helpful vulnerability and something that a person like Brené Brown might call spotlighting, you know, and just blinding everyone with all of your stuff in a way that isn't helpful for you. I don't know that I've found the proper balance, but those

are a few things that I know my dad's life and death have have spurred in me. And also I think just advocating for a unity amongst people, uh, as everyone has their thing. I know that within the church, there's a lot of infighting.

**Levi:** And my dad was always so upset with that reality and always fought for the unity of the people that he was working with and whoever they happened to be upset with. I remember using his memorial to talk a little bit about that because there were a lot of people in that room who otherwise would not have been in a room together and I think that as devastating a situation, my dad would have been excited about the potential for reconciliation amongst them, and I think that we're living in a time that is deeply divided and where everything, whether it's a person or a Twitter timeline, is groaning for some form of connection and redemption.

[music playing]

**Lindsay:** Over the past 12 years, To Write Love on Her Arms has worked to build, share, and connect people to a collection of mental health resources. We're excited to announce that we have a brand new feature on our website called the Find Help Tool. This tool makes it easier for you to connect to free or reduced cost mental health resources in every zip code in America. To use the tool, simply enter your zip code and choose the level of care you're looking for. You can personalize the search results based on criteria like your age, gender, and cost.

In the first 30 days, we've seen over 10,000 searches. We're so encouraged to see that people are finding the help that they need and deserve. So whether you're seeking help for yourself or someone you love, we invite you to check out our Find Help Tool at our website, that's T-W-L-O-H-A dot com, and click on the blue Find Help tab. You can also find the link to that in our show notes.

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**Jamie:** I wanted to ask about counseling. You mentioned that and I wonder has that been helpful for you?

**Levi:** Hugely. Yes. And honestly I don't know what everyone else's process with finding the right one and, you know, looks like. But I feel like my scenario has been somewhat miraculous. I got to a point in January of 2017 where I was having a really difficult time. I bought a one-way ticket to Seattle and told my wife I would be back when I could be back, but I felt like I needed it to get out of my head, um, and try to write, try to just. I was in a really bad place, I don't think I realized how bad of a place it was until quite a bit later. And for what it's worth, if you're in a bad place, don't go to Seattle in January to try to get out of it. That was, you know, tips. Helpful tips from Levi here. But, um, but sort of in the middle of that whole experience, Brandi and I realized how tumultuous my mind had become and uh, it sort of all came to a head, long story short, and decided "you take the time that you need, if you think that you still need more, but whenever you come back you've got to stop just talking about getting help.

**Levi:** You've got to go get help.” And so that seems like a pretty conclusive place to just decide, okay, well I don't know what else I'm going to do in Seattle then, so I'm coming home and I got to start on this stuff. And uh, you know, people will talk about how most of the time folks don't end up making a change until you're in the middle of a crisis and it's too painful to stay where you are.

**Jamie:** Definitely.

**Levi:** And so that, that's totally where it was. And so I came back, I started going to a counselor here in Albuquerque, and it has been wonderful. I'm so thankful for, uh, for the work that we've done together. I still tour. I'm still gone a lot. My life still isn't particularly rhythmic and, uh, sometimes that, that can, I think, get in the way in an unhealthy way.

**Levi:** Um, but I, you know, I kind of go back and forth with him when I'm on the road and when I come home. And, uh, and actually as of a couple of weeks ago, I started seeing a kind of a more specialized, um, cognitive behavioral therapist to try to work on some neurological rewiring of certain unhealthy patterns and decisions and things like that and ways of thinking and uh, I'm, earlier on, in that process, but already that has felt like a thing that's helpful too. And that came at the recommendation of the guy that I have been seeing for awhile. And so I just sort of thought, why would I not listen to you after how helpful this has been so far? So I can't recommend it enough and I wish I would've done it a very long time ago.

**Jamie:** What about, I guess we could call it self-care. Are there other tools or things that have been helpful to you as it relates to mental health or specifically anxiety?

**Levi:** Yeah, you know, Jamie, I'll be honest in saying I, uh, I have not been historically great by any means at self-care. I don't think that I have a particularly specific answer or enough of a track record with taking better care of myself to be able to give you a definitive case study.

**Jamie:** You took a social media break recently, right?

**Levi:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, I did. So I was going to say, I mean, those are some things. I mean, taking a break from the constant anxiety that the internet and the social media world is...is something. You know, I wrapped up a two or three or four weeks ago and we have some things on the calendar, but after that I sort of decided, okay, I'm going to press pause on this for a little while.

**Levi:** I've been going extremely hard since the beginning of summer and have basically been gone for four months, and I would, uh, I gotta, I gotta be in the same place. I gotta like I gotta exercise. I gotta, you know, so, so a lot of those things over the past three weeks have been really good and they have been...so I guess when I said that in the beginning, I just think for the first time rather than just thinking that self-care is a good thing to ascend to, actually being

intentional about putting in the work, you know, whether that is deleting the apps and turning the phone off or um, honestly lately I've been going through this...

**Levi:** It looks like a freaking corporate management book, but it's this thing called *Getting Things Done* by this guy David Allen, and I've been reading this book about...It's honestly funny how much it matches up with some of this stuff that I'm going through it in the therapy right now as far as creating rhythms and, um, decluttering life and even down to super practical stuff like creating workflows and being a lot better with a calendar and saying no a lot more. And you know, especially now going back to talking about my nephew being born and just being around, uh, and, and recognizing how little I actually am around. Trying to make a more intentional effort to focus on the relationships that matter to me and, and not just be the good intentions guy, you know? Which I, I think I have been and I'm certainly guilty of. But the thought only counts for so long at all if it counts at all. So yeah, I, I, I'll say that I have been working extremely hard over the last a little bit now to live in a healthier space, which has been really nice. Really nice.

**Jamie:** I'm so glad to hear it.

**Levi:** Yeah, thank you.

**Jamie:** I wanted to do a few more questions, uh, that came from other people. And I feel like as a fan of your work, your honesty and vulnerability stands out. So not just the talent, not just the writing, but I think so many people would agree you're willing to be so vulnerable and that is powerful for people. And so there were a couple of questions. Someone asked, "Do you feel like you have to linger in your pain for a long time in order to create your art?"

**Levi:** That's a great question. And I know a lot of artists struggle, creative people talk about that or that's a common theme. And I'll say that I used to. I used to think that more. I don't think that anymore. It was a time really, really early on when I started touring. I played a show somewhere in nowhere Oklahoma, or maybe Arkansas, I don't know. I have no idea where it was and I don't know the guy's name or where his house was that we stayed. I don't know any of that, but I remember this conversation that I had with a guy who hosted us after a show, and he asked me that question, and he said..it felt like a father moment. I mean, he was probably my dad's age and, and maybe that's part of what impacted me so much, but he said, "You can continue to write and to create and to perform and to transform um, you know, to the degree that you have any control whatsoever over transformation for others. You can continue to make a difference without having to go back and flagellate yourself every single night by reliving all of those things that contributed to the words that you're sharing."

**Levi:** That has stuck with me ever since. And honestly ever since then...that was probably a year into touring. And I used to have this sort of mental state that I would try to get into before a show or try to, you know, really conjure it up so it really felt raw, so it really felt I'm genuine. And ever since then I just haven't. I mean, sometimes I can find myself in those places. Uh, I guess I won't deny that, although I will say that I don't think that it happens enough for me to even call it

unhealthy. I think that I am able to perform and to do what I'm doing in a way that doesn't constantly reignite the trauma that brought me there. And not all of it is trauma, you know, that makes everything that I do sound like the heaviest thing in the world.

**Levi:** I love laughing a lot too. You know? It's funny. It was really funny, man, when I started getting more comfortable with playing shows because people would hear recordings and be like, oh my gosh, it's, you know, I couldn't drop a joke without anybody thinking, you know, they'd just be crickets. It's like, well, you're supposed to be the serious guy.

**Jamie:** Yeah, sure.

**Levi:** It was the personality that, you know, it took awhile I think for some of my personality to catch up with people when, when all they hear is, it's a heavy discography, but I don't feel like I have to relive the moments or stay in them or try to prolong them somehow. Unfortunately, I'll say this, I find myself in them for a long enough as it is without having to try at times and I'm really thankful for what some of those things have been able to be transformed into, but I don't feel like I, I force myself to stay there at all.

**Jamie:** What has that process of vulnerability or honesty, what has that been like? Has that...Has that kind of always been there for you or has that gotten easier over time or is it something you've had to navigate and wrestle with?

**Levi:** I do think that it's always come relatively naturally. I don't know if it's gotten easier over time, which is interesting to me. When I started sharing my writing and then anyone cared about it, all of the sudden there's this temptation to go in the direction of pleasing somebody and doing whatever you're doing for *not you* anymore, you know? I mean all of this stuff. Literally, the first record that I put out was my journal pieces that I recreated into performance poems and started sharing, and so at the time that I wrote them, I had no intent of doing that. And there was no filter that I had to process any of the writing through. Um, I think that as time has gone on, there have been seasons of, you know, do I say that? This person might be bummed about this? Or this group might not align so much with this thing that I have to say. And I think it has been a struggle for me at times. I think that thankfully I have been patient enough through those seasons to just sort of wait it out until I feel like I, I know that I can honestly say that I haven't put out something for the sake of trying to get somebody else to dig it. I'm kind of thankful for that even though, uh, you know, I could be a better, I don't know, marketer. I don't know what I mean. Like, ah, cool. Yeah, I was honest, but nobody bought it.

**Levi:** It, it is really weird when I saw a meme lately of this dude playing piano and on the top it said I hate, it's a thought bubble and it just says "I hate this." And then underneath it says *how to know if you're a true professional*. And I don't feel that way, you know, all of the time. But there are definitely times where it feels like, man, I took something that I really loved and I made a. I made a career out of it and, or, or other people made it a career. I mean, I couldn't do it without anyone caring. But was it good? Is that a good thing? I don't know. Sometimes, sometimes it

does seem like it'd be nicer to not have to think through some of that stuff and just put out or get out whatever the heck I want to, you know. I don't know. It's a tension that I think that every artist has to live in and uh, every, every person has to live in that to some degree or another, regardless of whether they're trying to make art a thing.

**Jamie:** Is it rewarding or meaningful when you get to connect with people, even connect fans who appreciate that honesty or they relate to your poems or your songs?

**Levi:** Yeah, without a doubt. I like what I do without the validation and I know that I can be someone who longs too much for validation. Um, but it accentuates the meaning. I mean it - **I love people. I love them. I want us to thrive. I want people to feel comfortable inside of their own skin. I want people to be filled with joy and live abundant lives.** And so, to think that any of the work that I have contributed to this world has been a part of that for someone or even, even prevented death, which has been the testimony many a time over is just, it's unfathomable. I can't put words to it. How in the world am I blessed or privileged or whatever enough to have been someone who is, who is contributing to your life in the way that I have? And that will always be a miracle to me.

**Jamie:** I got one more question from someone else.

**Levi:** Sure.

**Jamie:** And I really liked this one and this one is maybe less about you and less about your career. Does writing and being creative still have value even when no one sees it?

**Levi:** Oh yeah. I love that. That's a great question, and the answer is yeah. I wish that I could say I write every single day. I'm getting closer to being able to say that and a lot of that stuff no one will ever read. Even in the times where I think that I hate writing - because those times exist too - I still sit down and do it. I mean it's a part of me and a part of what I love. Yeah, and so I would say yes sometimes for the pure enjoyment of it, sometimes because it's a way that I have found that I am able to pull evasive or whatever thoughts I might be having that are just swirling around in the room outside of my brain and I can pull them down onto a page and try to make some sense of whatever is going on there.

**Levi:** I love writing and I always tell people, you know, I, I don't get a ton of messages that are like, hey, how do you, you know, make it? That's such a relative thing, making it. But I do get enough messages from people who want to know what to do next or how to write or if they want to go perform and I, you know, part of the thought that I have is just keep loving what you're doing and, you know, if you want to perform great. That's great, but go try it out and because you might not once you actually experience it, but some of the stuff that's already right in front of you. I mean it'd be cool if some people could hear it and that's relatively, that's a relatively simple goal to reach. But I would hope that if you love this thing that you can just continue to

love it regardless because I think it's a gift. I consider it for me a gift and I would consider it that regardless of whether or not anyone else thought so.

**Jamie:** So kind of wrapping up, I wonder sort of two parts. What are you excited about kind of when you look ahead and then also just how can people connect with you? How can people find more about what you're doing?

**Levi:** I am excited about things that have to do with, with Levi the Poet. And I'm really thankful, uh, you know, occupationally for, for what this has been an is and I think what it, what it still can be. But I think that as of right now I really am more excited about some of the personal growth and relational healing and just some of the stuff that we, we did talk about a little bit earlier, whether that's come through counseling or whether it might be happening through a bit more presence in a place or with a person or a bit less, you know, external noise. I mean I always sort of experience these seasons of the tail end of a really intense touring season where I'm just like done and I'm ready to just be home and be around people. And so there's a degree to which, that this feeling is somewhat normal, but I think that, I think that above and beyond it, I'm excited about just, I'm excited about my own stuff, but I'm excited about like being around people and being a normal human who's, who's in a place for a little bit more than a couple of days before he's out again.

**Levi:** And uh, like one of the things I'm stoked about is my wife, Brandi, she's a CrossFit trainer. And uh, this last year she got a certification called BirthFit, which is, uh, a program that, that crossfit has to help coaches train postpartum mothers. And Brandi loves fitness. She loves that world. And I love seeing her thrive in it. Like I want to be a part of helping other dreams happen and come true. And over the course of the last couple of years, whether it's behind the scenes or in writing or, or contributing to other projects that some people have going on, I've gotten the chance to do a little bit more of that. And it's been really nice not having everything revolve so much around me or my vision or what I want and being able to feel like I can contribute to the good of others.

**Levi:** And so, so that stuff is what's really, I think, exciting to me right now. I'm pumped about some of the shows that are coming up. You know, you had asked earlier about ways that people could connect. I do this thing called Fraction and it's a, for all intents and purposes, is basically a patreon and that's what people understand better, you know, it's a branded thing that's out there. I just sort of treated it a little bit more like a product than a donation-based thing. So it's own community, and I do a bunch of writing there. And I'm honestly, even in a social media fast thing, a lot more active there, and stuff like that has been fun because it's felt, it's felt creative to me, communal to me, hopefully to others as well. And so there are definitely a bunch of things floating around right now that I'm pumped about, but I'm particularly excited about doing something a little bit slower, even if it's just in the immediate future, you know what I mean? Just being present.

**Jamie:** That's so good. Is there anything else? Is there anything you feel like we missed or something you're thinking about or want people to know about?

**Levi:** I don't think so. I mean obviously if anybody wants to hear any of the things that I do or whatever, there's a, you know, if you just search Levi the Poet, you can just find it. Easiest thing in the whole world. But I don't know. I mean I, there's always a pitch to give and I, I, I'm, I'm just, I guess the last thing for me would be, you know, you and, and Chad and Claire, like all these, like you guys have really made a significant difference in my life. I know in a lot of people's lives, but I think just personally, um, I really, really value you and, and the work that you're doing and the genuineness of your care and humanity toward me and our family and everyone. And it means a lot and I know that life isn't easy for anybody. So thanks for your selflessness in, uh, in the work that you've chosen to do. And, and whether or not you always feel selfless or not is not the point, you know, because obviously we don't always, but it means a lot. So thanks for inviting me to be a part of your lives.

[music playing]

**Lindsay:** Thank you so much for joining us on this week's episode of the To Write Love on Her Arms Podcast.

We're so grateful to Levi for sharing his story. If you want to learn more about Levi's work and poetry, you can check out [levithepoet.net](http://levithepoet.net). You can also find a link to that in our Show Notes.

We hope each episode is a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone. We understand that so many of you listening might be struggling or know someone who is struggling with the issues that we've been talking about. We believe that help exists. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources at our website: [twloha.com](http://twloha.com) and click the "Find Help" at the top of the page. Or if you need to talk to someone right now, you can always connect to with our friends at Crisis Text Line. You simply text the word TWLOHA, that T-W-L-O-H-A, to 741741, and you'll be connected to a trained crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

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A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The TWLOHA Podcast is produced by Mark Codgen. Editorial support was provided by Claire Biggs and Jennie Armstrong of Lore de Force. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. I'm Lindsay Kolsch. Thank you so much for listening.

To Write Love on Her Arms is a nonprofit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help to people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery.

You can find more information about TWLOHA at [twloha.com](https://www.twloha.com).