

Transcript for Episode 307: “Jessica Morris: Fear Is a Liar”

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

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**LINDSAY KOLSCH:** You’re listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. Each episode we’ll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We’ll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery.

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**CHAD MOSES:** Hey everybody, this is Chad Moses, TWLOHA’s Director of Outreach. Today we’re wrapping up our storytelling series on the podcast. As you may know, TWLOHA started as an honest story about mental health and finding hope in the midst of dark times. It’s been an honor listening to the voices and stories of several authors who originally published their experiences with mental health on the TWLOHA blog.

In the last episode of the series, we’re featuring the words from our friend Jessica Morris and her blog titled “Fear Is a Liar.” In it, she explores her fear of not being worthy, how she found the courage to live in the present moment, and her belief that each and every one of us makes today better simply by being here. And we hope you’ll stick around after her reading to hear our one-on-one conversation about how she balances the mantra of living for today with the chapters of her story where she’s simply trying to survive.

[music playing]

**JESSICA MORRIS:** I used to be so afraid of today.

I use the term ‘used to be’ like I’ve climbed a mountain, and I’m staring down at base camp. But sometimes, I feel like I’m still at base camp.

In truth, I am still afraid of today. And not because it’s a special day—although I know somewhere out there it is. Aside from the fact it’s the start of National Suicide Prevention week, today 360,000 babies will be born, the Earth is rotating on an invisible axis, and you breathed. Breathing—even the heavy, painful kind, that comes after you have conquered the darkness, reminds me that each day is a miracle.

But that doesn’t change the fact that I am afraid of today.

I could blame my fear on lots of things. An anxiety disorder. OCD. Depression. (I went back to therapy this year and the wad of issues that came up could fuel the blame-game for a decade.)

But I think what it comes down to is this: I am afraid of today because I’m scared I’m not worthy of tomorrow.

I've been chasing tomorrow for a long time.

No one dreams bigger than I do—my heart is filled with hopes in foreign countries, and people I haven't yet met. The hope that tomorrow could be better got me over the line when I was suicidal and gave me air when my heart broke in two. The possibility of tomorrow pushes me to create something new on the days my work is rejected, and reminds me to stay the course. But when you keep chasing tomorrow, it inevitably becomes today. And the small miracles—the living, breathing kind—pass by in the wind. We forget that we have survived. We forget that we are more than what could be. We forget that we are alive.

I know what it's like to have a heart so heavy you feel like you're standing in quicksand. It makes it difficult to let yourself live for the here and now.

Sometimes my brain still feels like a ping-pong table. My anxiety propels an unlikely scenario into being, and some combination of my will power, medication, and years of self-care desperately tries to intercept before OCD comes up to bat to kickstart a full-blown panic party.

I thought the best way to overcome the pain was to push through and plan ahead—sometimes that's the only way to survive—but now I want to do more than survive. I want to live for today, not just tomorrow.

Even though fear screams that I am not worthy of goodness and hope, every sunrise reminds me that this is not true. Every night makes way for the promise of morning, and that means every breath I take is sacred.

So I'm going to try something new.

I'm going to live for today.

Because even though I am afraid, even though I make mistakes, even though my heart is heavy, I now know this truth: I make today better.

I am part of a universe of life that is ever connected and ever reliant on each character in its story. My love changes the lives of the people I meet. My breath fuels invisible forces that give life to trees that flourish and bloom, and my presence fills a unique void in time specially designed with me in mind.

If this is true, then I am certain: I make today better.

I want you to know this truth, too. Even if your body is rebelling against you, your mind is in chaos, and trauma has told you that you are too broken to be fixed—you make today better. Someone said that fear is a liar. A lifetime of living shows me just that. So let's chase the sunrise until our hearts are filled with the truth that we make today better.

Today, tomorrow, and with every breath to come. I promise—you make today better.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** Jess, thank you so much for finding the time. We are here in one spot, but also, what, 14 hours apart right now? Where are you talking to me from?

**JESS:** I am in Australia right now. I live about an hour from Melbourne, in the south of the country, if you can imagine a big map. So it's currently the morning, and it's your evening, and time zones are weird.

**CHAD:** Time is a myth. It's all made up. Now, for all of our Australian listeners, especially those in Victoria, what's your AFL team?

**JESS:** Oh, good question. So, I live in the city of Geelong. So the Geelong cats. And if I didn't go for them in this city, there would be trouble. There is no way. I can't not do that.

**CHAD:** Holding down the fort. I like it. So these words that you wrote for this “Fear Is a Liar” blog, you wrote that piece about a year ago for National Suicide Prevention Week. Can you talk a little bit about where you were mentally, then, when you wrote the words, and how that's maybe changed and evolved now?

**JESS:** I think when I wrote “Fear Is a Liar” about a year ago now, which is wild, I was in a really hopeful place. My life was in a state of transition in the sense that I have been living between two countries for probably about a decade now, between Australia and America. And I was looking at applying to do study full time in the USA. So essentially, I was sort of looking to pick myself up after all these years, a lot of what I've been preparing for, and plant myself somewhere. It would mean settling down and expanding my career in music journalism and doing all these things that I've really worked hard for for a long time. But in the midst of that excitement and those hopes, there's also the ever-present fear of, what if it doesn't happen? And what if I'm disappointed? So I wrote “Fear Is a Liar” sort of actually in an attempt to keep myself present. To sort of say, I can dream big, and I can have these hopes. And I have them because I've lived through so much, but I need to stay grounded in this moment, because if I don't do that, then I will never even reach them. And something even better might be on the other side, that I don't even expect. So that's a bit different at 2020, now that we've got COVID, and all those fun things happening in the world.

**CHAD:** What are some ways, I guess, looking back over maybe just this past year, but perhaps even this past decade that you referenced, what are some ways that fear has manifested in your life? And in those moments, what's kind of motivated you through them? What's carried you through it?

**JESS:** When I think about fear, I generally think about my anxiety disorder, which I was diagnosed with when I was about 13. And I'm 30 now, so it's been half my life. But I know that fear had a role to play through my entire life just naturally, as part of my chemical DNA. But I think particularly in the last decade, fear has looked like me actively trying to push myself out of uncomfortable places. So when I was first diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and extreme depression, I was afraid to walk outside. I didn't want to go to school, I didn't want to answer the phone. And I would set goals with my therapist. And we would be like, "Today I'm going to walk past the popular kids. That's my goal. I'm just gonna get to school today and walk past the popular kids." And that was my Everest at the time. And I found over the years that by continually doing that, and working through those moments, those steps sort of became bigger. So in the last decade, facing my fear has actually been, "Get on an airplane and travel to a different country," which I've had the privilege of doing, and "Talk to that person who looks different to you. And maybe believe that you have something to offer the world and that you could write something. Or that you could talk to someone who has something beautiful to offer the world." So I think over the course of my life, the massive fears, they've changed in what they look like, but how I approach them is basically the same. Work towards it, and then run towards it head on, and just take it down as best as I can.

**CHAD:** I love how you were framing those conversations with your therapist, with your counselor, about naming the manifestation of that fear. Once you name it, then we can develop a plan together on ways we can address it. I think that's one way of showing that it's not going to be a one size fits all solution, because it's not a one size fits all problem, right?

**JESS:** Yeah, no, absolutely. And I think because I've been in and out of counseling for so long now... And I was really, really fortunate that when I first really strongly showed the symptoms of anxiety and depression, my parents observed it. They were aware of stuff with mental health. They put me into counseling. That was a game changer for me. I wouldn't be here if that didn't happen. But because I was put into this environment straight away with a therapist where we talked about "What is anxiety? What is depression? What is triggering this stuff? And what are the thoughts? Why do you actually have these fears?" Because of that, I've had a language through the rest of my life to actually say, "Well, this is what I'm afraid of. Why am I afraid of it? What are the reasons to be afraid of it?" And I've been able to look at things logically, but also feel them. Because we all know that fear isn't always rational, right? Like, we feel it and you can like have a full blown panic attack, while knowing that the earth is going to keep spinning even though your body's telling you it's not. So, having that language has really helped me to plant and stay grounded and rooted and really take control of my fear as best as I can.

**CHAD:** And I think even in this discussion, it's fair to admit that fear is a big word. You have anthropologists, you have biologists, you have psychologists that say fear has a role to play in human experience, you know? What's a stick and what's a snake? Fear helps keep us safe as we're taking in all this extra information around us. So do you think that fear serves any

purpose in our lives? And is there a power to be found in sharing what those fears are with other people?

**JESS:** I don't think I would be the person I am today if I hadn't faced fear. I think that there's an element where fear is a healthy part of human existence like, a stick or a snake? I have a distinct memory of a conversation with my psychiatric nurse. When I was 14, I was talking about fear with him and he said, "Fear is there to let you know that it's a stupid idea to jump out of the airplane and skydive." And some people love that. It's like fear is there to let us know that we are taking a risk. But for a lot of us, fear can become all encompassing. And sometimes it gets so big that it becomes irrational or prevents us from taking necessary risks or necessary steps to health and healing. So I think fear plays an essential role in our life, and we can actually use it. Instead of being a stumbling block or something that just pushes us over, we can use it to like leap onto and leap on to the next thing. And we can actually use fear to propel us to whatever is ahead. To become a greater sense of ourself, in the sense we become stronger through it. I think when we are able to do that there is so much power in being able to share our story. That no matter where we are in our journey with fear or mental health, that it's essential that we share that with someone, whether it's like a counselor or a close friend. I think no matter how broken or helpless we feel, it's always essential that we share a story with someone. Because it deserves to have a platform, it deserves to be heard. And I found in my own life that, as I've healed and gotten healthier, I've had the capacity then to share my story with a wide audience and say, "I've been there. I get it. Fear is huge. Fear is big. It's an Everest. But what it's screaming at you isn't true, you can actually climb this. You can actually get over it." And by sharing your story with other people, I actually find that it has given me the momentum and the tools to face my fears and even try something bigger than that next time.

**CHAD:** I love that. You were kind of hinting at it right there, that fear does have a voice. And when we are sharing our mental health journey with other people, we are finding and curating opposing voices. So it doesn't mean that fear is ever going to go away, but perhaps it can be drowned out with more rational perspectives. We can get a three dimensional view of it, maybe even four dimensions, if we get enough voices into it through the experience of time and people that have been there. I just love the idea that, if fear is going to isolate us, then sharing our story is going to radically connect us. And, man, Jess, I'm just so thankful that you're sharing your story with us and that you've had so many people that have been able to share their stories with you to kind of keep this carousel going.

**JESS:** I think one of the coolest things about my journey with mental health... As much as like, when I was a teenager, I always thought of myself as a depressed kid. And the only way I made sense of my depression and suicidal thoughts was by telling people, "I'm going through this, but look, I'm alive!" And that wasn't always healthy, but that's the only way I knew to make sense of it. And as I matured, I was like, "Okay, I still want to share my story. But how can I focus it? How can I share it with people in a platform where it is safe, where it is valued, and where it's actually useful?" And as I've learned to do that, especially through my journalism,

that's given me the ability to tell people stories and to share their stories. I've realized for me that my purpose for living is essentially to share other people's stories. So as a journalist, I ask the questions, and then give people the platform to share their own journey. And I wouldn't be able to do that if I hadn't learned how to share my story or hadn't lived my story to this moment, at least. So that's been really cool.

**CHAD:** That's so cool. Thanks for sharing that. In the blog, you wrote about wanting to live for today rather than just survive. But I think if we're honest, sometimes surviving in and of itself is a triumph when we're dealing with mental health challenges. So I'm curious if you think that there's a space in which those two can coexist, what does it look like to bridge the gap? Or, What does it look like to hold intention, these ideas of living for today and just surviving?

**JESS:** Yes, I'm so glad you brought that up. Because if I'm honest, the last seven or eight months have been me surviving. There are some moments in my recovery journey, when I am able to say I'm at such a healthy point that I can look towards the future but remain grounded in the now. I can engage with the great things in my life right now, like the community that I have. When I'm in a really positive place with my mental health, I can do that. I can be like, "I want to live for today. I'm going to enjoy every moment." But since that happens, like Australia, we had bushfires earlier this year, which I had to cover as a journalist. We've had COVID. There's been so much happening in the world. And between that and just everyday life, I have really struggled in the ability to say, "I just want to live for today." Because I'm just like, "Today is really, really crap. I really just want to hide in bed today. And it's really, really scary." So I think the gap between living for today and surviving for tomorrow is just that we need to make it through this moment. So whether it's breath by breath—or my best friend and I, we always use animals, "bird by bird." Let's just do the next thing that needs to be done, break it down. And when we do that we can still live in today. And we may even enjoy moments of today, even the really rough seasons like what we're going through in 2020. I go for a walk most days and I see the birds and I see the sun and I'm like, "Oh, great. That's me living for today." But surviving for tomorrow is me believing that COVID is going to get under control at some point. That my friends are going to be okay. That anxiety isn't gonna overtake my life tomorrow or the day afterwards. It's having a hope for the future. So I think, essentially, for me, you have to hold both of them in your hands, and you take whatever you need for that day and use that to get you through it.

**CHAD:** Yeah, it's not just Carpe Diem, it's sometimes "Carpe Need-A-Minute," you know? Let's pump the brakes and figure out what comes next. Now, Jess, when your relationship with To Write Love on a literary level and on a professional level started about seven years ago. So, we're going to hop back in that time machine. Seven years ago, that was the era of Fears vs Dreams. Whenever we set up a booth, we were asking people day after day, conversation after conversation, what's your biggest fear and what's your greatest dream? So to close this out, we love for you to share yours. What is that that tug of war, that biggest fear and that greatest dream that kind of makes Jess Morris who Jess Morris is?

**JESS:** I love that you're asking this because I've answered it so many times over the last seven years that I've been able to track the change and the progress. But I think what it comes down to, on this day in July 2020, my biggest fear is that I will be alone and what I will do won't make a difference in the world. And I know that, because I'm going through therapy, I know that's not true. My fear... Well, fear is a liar, right? My fear is that I will be alone. My greatest dream is that I will be loved, and that I will be able to set up a life where that love really is expressed through my words and through actions and where I'll be able to raise a family. And a lot of that's unknown at the moment, but I know that love is certainly part of my future. So whatever that ends up looking like, I know it will be good.

**CHAD:** That's awesome. Jess thank you so much for this time. Not just for the past several minutes, but for the years that you've been a friend of the organization. I can speak on behalf of the entire team that it's been an honor to see your story unfold, to see your words fall fresh on so many people. We can't wait to see how the conversation continues. We can't wait to catch up with you down the road to see these fears and these dreams, how they take on different roles. Again, thank you for the grace and allowing us to be alongside you in this journey.

**JESS:** It's my pleasure.

[music playing]

**CHAD:** A big thank you to our guest Jessica Morris for joining us today to share her story and explore the theme of fear. We invite you to read her words in their original form, and the stories of so many others, by visiting [twloha.com/blog](http://twloha.com/blog). You can find a link to her blog in the show notes as well. If you've been inspired by these stories and are interested in writing for our blog, you can send a 500-900 word submission to us by emailing [blog@twloha.com](mailto:blog@twloha.com).

And if you or someone you know is struggling, remember that help exists and it's okay to reach out. By going to [twloha.com/findhelp](http://twloha.com/findhelp), you'll find local, affordable mental health resources that are available within your community.

As always, thank you for tuning in and listening. We're glad you're here.

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**LINDSAY:** We hope this episode has been a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it is okay to reach out and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website [twloha.com](http://twloha.com). That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

Or, if you need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line.

Simply text the word TWLOHA—that's T W L O H A—to 741741. And you'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

Finally, if you've enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we really hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get this podcast. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really like for you to write us a review.

It'll help more people find this podcast and the mission of TWLOHA. If you have any feedback or questions, please send us an email to [podcast@twloha.com](mailto:podcast@twloha.com).

A big thank you to our friends at Copeland for the original music on this episode. The To Write Love on Her Arms podcast is produced by Lindsay Kolsch, with editorial support by Rebecca Ebert. 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 non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. TWLOHA exists to encourage, inform, inspire, and also to invest directly into treatment and recovery.