

Episode 005: This Journey Is A Lifetime's Journey - Indhira Rojas

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. 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: On this episode, we're joined by Indhi Rojas. She is a designer and founder of Anxy Magazine. Anxy is a publication that shares personal stories and explores topics we can all relate to like anger and boundaries. It's beautifully and thoughtfully designed. Indhi is originally from the Dominican Republic, but she now calls Berkeley, California, her home. I'm really excited to share our conversation with you because she talks powerfully about her story, which includes abuse and trauma, and her experience moving to a new country. It's super interesting to see how Anxy was created from her own desire to speak more openly about her experiences. Anxy and TWLOHA, I think, share a pretty similar goal: We want to see people share their stories in a meaningful and beautiful and creative way.

[music playing]

Lindsay: I'm so excited to have a conversation with our friend Indhi here. She is the principal creative director at Anagraph. She's also the founder of Anxy Magazine. And before I get into a lot of the details about our conversation, I actually want you to just introduce yourself to our listeners.

Indhi Rojas: Yeah. So, hi, everyone. I'm Indhira Rojas, and people call me Indhi for short. I'm the founder of Anxy Magazine and I've been a designer in the industry for, you know, around 15 years now. Um, and I'm really passionate about, you know, helping people tell their stories.

Lindsay: One of the things that got me really, really excited to talk with you Indhi was, um, was the magazine Anxy. It is one of the most beautiful publications, so we're gonna...we don't, obviously this is a podcast and you can't see it, but we're gonna make sure that there's links to the, the publications and some of the imagery that goes along with Anxy. But we, I wanted you to just kind of explain what is Anxy and then I want to get into kind of some of your story and how this is actually birthed out of that.

Indhi: Yeah. So Anxy is a biannual publication focused on mental health through a creative lens. And what that means is that every year we pick through themes we're going to focus on

and we collect stories that really focus on how people have managed things in their lives that were difficult or that, you know, affected them in a deep way. And we do that through personal narratives, photo essays, short op-eds. Sometimes we'll also do funny things like a comic. And what we're trying to do is allow people to really express themselves in a way that they, you know, haven't been able to, um, in other, in other ways.

Lindsay: One of the ways that I love that you guys describe Anxy is “reflecting on our inner worlds” and that when you come across Anxy magazine, it's really unlike anything else I've seen, right? You, in the mental health space or in maybe psychology, there's very few publications that are going to kind of give you the truth of an individual's experience. And I feel like you guys do that so well. So I want to hear a little bit from you about how did you come up with Anxy? How did you get the inspiration to move in this direction?

Indhi: Yes so, I've been in my own journey of, you know, figuring out my own mental health, um, and navigating, you know, trauma experiences that I've had in the past. And I've found as a designer and as an artist, I found that a lot of the content that was available to me or the content I was able to get access to sometimes felt, like, over medicalized or it felt like it wasn't something that appealed to me as someone who's very visual. And I started to see the space where I wanted to find stories like mine, people who are struggling like me. And in a way that also made me feel like it was content that was inspiring. Um, and that's where I made that connection. Um, I was like, well, I want to hear other personal stories, but I also find that first, I'm not finding those stories. And second, what I find that it's not, you know, it's not aligned with the type of content that I consume on, on other topics, right?

Lindsay: Yeah.

Indhi: In terms of being design driven. Um, and that's where I found the gap.

Lindsay: Yeah. So one of the things you guys did or what you did when you were launching Anxy was you shared more of your story. I was wondering if you could maybe give us a little bit more background, like you talk about part of your story, but do you mind kind of going back to, to the early part of that and talking to that?

Indhi: I actually talk about my story very openly, and it's something that I'm trying to do more and more because I think it aligns with the mission of what we're trying to do. I'm a victim and survivor of child sexual abuse at a very early age. And that's something that obviously affected my life deeply. When you have this experience at such an early age, you don't really have a lot of choice, right? It's not something you can control. It's not something that...you don't even understand what's happening. And it's something that you have to live with from, you know, being, you know, in my case, a little girl. Um, so, I spent the whole trajectory going from my teenage years to my adulthood, figuring out what was happening to me internally.

Lindsay: Yeah so, and you grew up in the Dominican Republic, and so you are having these experiences and like you said, you're leaving maybe now the Dominican Republic and I know that you ended up moving to New York and going to Parsons and I, I was really curious about that transition, um, because a lot of what *To Write Love on Her Arms* does is identifying that story and that narrative and, and trying to make that relatable. But here you are in the middle of your story. And I was really struck by some of the things you shared when you talked about the launching of *Anxy*, about understanding yourself first. Um, and I was curious if you could speak a little bit about that.

Indhi: Yeah, so the interesting thing about trauma is that it's not, it doesn't all emerge at the same time. So something happened when I moved to New York that I was no longer in the place where the trauma event happened. I was in a place where I felt safer and a lot of the experience that I had, I was able to finally look at it from, from a distance. I found myself in this place where I was unraveling emotionally. I didn't really understand, um, why I had all these intense experiences out of, you know, what I presume were really kind of basic exchanges or dynamics with people. You know, as an immigrant coming into New York, as a student, of course New York is an awesome place to be someone who's creative and someone who likes to stay busy because it's so energetic and there's so much going on.

Indhi: At the same time, I did feel like I was in a new place and I was trying to find my footing and, and, you know, the effects of trauma in my daily lives are starting to really take a toll on me in terms of, you know, me feeling broken, me feeling misunderstood. Me feeling that no one really, you know, is paying attention to my needs and my experience. And at some point I was really feeling like I need to talk to someone about this. I remember I had a boyfriend I try to kind of open up with and I feel like he couldn't really hold that experience. And all, his main advise was like, you know, if you, if you feel that you need to talk to someone, maybe, maybe you should go try to talk to a professional.

Indhi: And it was funny because Parsons actually has this program - that's where I went for my BFA through a scholarship - they have a program where if you're an international student, they consider you to be in a period of transition, which means that they make counseling available to you.

Lindsay: Wow. That's awesome.

Indhi: Yeah. They want to make sure that you integrate properly, that you have the support that you need. You're going to be away from family for the first time, you know, all of these things. And that saved my life.

Indhi: I remember seeing the flyers around campus and I just, you know, I chose the first person that was available and she became a therapist for the next two, three, four years. Um, and when I walked into her office I just sat there and I started bawling and screaming and just, you know, just letting all of this out that I was holding for such a long time.

Lindsay: Wow.

Indhi: And you know, that's sort of was like my first, you know, glimpse into how important it is to be able to talk about these things openly and how it's difficult for us even with our closest friends to be able to share that story. Um, so that's sort of where the premise of Anxy started in terms of me connecting the dots of, you know, the value of storytelling in mental health.

Lindsay: Yeah and I want to go back a little bit to what you just said about how it's so hard for us to open up to our friends. I'm curious for you, within your family or within, um, maybe even the cultural kind of setting in the Dominican Republic, how did you, did you feel like there was a difference or did you feel more free here, or was there just some element of just the physical safety that gave you the opportunity to explore those questions?

Indhi: Well, I think that - just to give you a timeline - we're talking about when I was 23. I went to Parsons, and I and I found this therapist and I was able to share my story with her. I didn't share my story with anyone until I wrote that Medium post that was two years ago.

Lindsay: Wow, okay.

Indhi: You know, even then it just, it takes a lot of, you know, I wouldn't even know how to express it, but you just don't want people to think that you're different.

Lindsay: Right.

Indhi: Because, you know, you had this experience and in many times because we don't talk about it. I was just, for example, listening to Debbie Millman talking to Tim Ferriss where she talks about her experience with being in an abusive environment where there was also, you know, sexual abuse, and Debbie has been in the industry for years. And you know, it's something that I feel like now she's starting to open up about. So I, I do think it takes, you know, a lot of time to be able to find yourself in a place where you feel safe enough and comfortable enough to be vulnerable in a public way. And what we want to do with Anxy is to say, let's start creating the space so that gap for when you are ready to open up doesn't feel so, you know, so big.

Lindsay: No, that's awesome. I feel like when I picked up Anxy for the first time, when I got to read through it, not only is it beautiful, but it's just so compelling and so honest and transparent. And I felt with To Write Love on Her Arms and with kind of the work that we do more through social media and online, it felt like kind of like the same goal, like the kindred kind of spirits. Like we're both looking at that and really just wanting more than anything for people to know that it's okay to be honest and to know that there are safe spaces to be honest. And I think your story kind of demonstrates that in a really healthy way where for you it was a slow...finding that safe space, cultivating that safe space and then Anxy being that kind of the outward expression of

that. I would like to talk a little bit more about Anxy and just kind of how you, how you came through the process of deciding what, what topics are you covering and what...I know at one point you said they're, they're very biographical and so I'd love you to talk a little bit about that.

Indhi: So when I would say that as a trauma survivor, my relationship with anger is very complex and that is what inspired the theme for the first issue. I was just curious to learn more, you know, how do, how do people manage anger? And when is, you know, anger appropriate? And, and when does anger start crossing a line? And how do we talk about anger as a community and a society? And for me that, that's where that autobiographical element comes in, that there's these themes that kind of bubble up in my own journey, that then become things that I get curious about. That then I share with the Anxy team as a potential theme and then we get to, you know, explore it more. So the second theme for our issues was the Workaholism issue and this is something that is something that I struggle with as well. Work became and still sort of is a coping mechanism for me, um, in which, you know, if you're busy, if you're distracted, if you're occupied all the time, it really helps you, you know, regulate what folks might feel as a deep sense of emptiness or loneliness and, and I, and that's something that I also wanted to explore. What does workaholism mean, when are we working hard versus working compulsively, um, and what are people's relationships to work in general.

Lindsay: So I want to go back real quick about the anger and then maybe even for the workaholism, what, what has this process taught you? Like what has combining all of these stories and essays and like you had mentioned that there, some are established voices and some are up-and-coming voices and it's kind of a very dynamic mix. But what have you learned from these...like putting these issues together?

Indhi: The biggest thing I've learned is that we are all in some type of journey that, you know, sometimes when I think of my story being very unique and you know, having been really affected by it. I'm still, you know, also affected by the stories that people send us and the stories that we publish and realizing that, you know, this idea that we're, we're not alone. I, I kinda, I witness it every time we publish an issue because the things that people are navigating in their lives are so complex and even in, you know, even in my experience that I consider it very dark and difficult....there are other people that are experiencing things that I also feel are, you know, have a deep impact on their lives. And every time we release an issue I just feel a sense of, you know, connectedness to those stories and, and realizing that there is complexity and hoping that through us sort of like threading our stories together, we can start to express what it's really like to be a human in the world.

Lindsay: I love that. I think what's really cool is that your publication, it's physical, right? It's tangible. So what was it about the physicality of it, though? Why was that so important? Like why not just a blog or are, you know, not to minimize it. Like, I think it's really wonderful, but I'm

just curious what that process was like for you in deciding what does this become and where does it live?

Indhi: Well, so the ethos of Anxy is really art, right? Like we, for me, art is the vehicle through which we connect with people emotionally and allow them to, in a way, connect with all their senses, not just what they're reading, but also what they're seeing and how they're seeing it. And there's just more control that you can have on that experience if it's in print. Um, and you know, outside of that, I also believe that something happens when you read something digitally where you're already distracted. You're probably already multitasking. You're in the middle of going from one place to another.

Lindsay: I know nothing about this, Indhi, I know nothing about that experience.

Indhi: You know, you start reading a thing and then you get interrupted and you know, it's, it's you, you're really can't...How are you going to connect with like a really vulnerable story when that's the context in which you're reading it? So we really wanted to control that a little bit and say, Hey, if you have it at home and if it's in print, you probably hold it in your hands, um, and you, you, you focus on it in a way that you wouldn't otherwise. And also it doesn't go into this vacuum of content online that just disappears. Like we want you to come back to the stories later, like a lot of the stuff that we write, we consider evergreen and it has a shelf life of at least six months, which means that you can read and reread the stories, you know, months and weeks ahead and, and it's still relevant and it can still be of influence to you.

[music playing, leading into ad]

Lindsay: At TWLOHA, we're big fans of birthdays and celebrating what matters. Facebook made it easy for you to turn your birthday into a celebration of hope. You can now donate your birthday to a nonprofit you care about. When you chose TWLOHA, you'll be helping us share the message of hope and connecting people to the help they need and deserve. For example, when you raise \$250, you'll help us connect 600 people to local mental health resources in their community. So if your birthday is coming up soon, you can create your page today using the Fundraiser shortcut when you're logged into Facebook. Or, if you want to learn more, you can simply go to twloha.com/birthday. You can find the link to both of those things in our Show Notes.

[music playing, leading back to interview]

Lindsay: I'm curious for you in this process of putting so much of yourself and learning so much...How has it been working in a team setting? And then maybe talking a little bit about, um, the, the fun buzzword, self-care and what that looks like for you in this process?

Indhi: So to talk a little bit about the team first, I feel really lucky that Anxy started as a Kickstarter project that was something I shared with friends I had from the editorial industry that

I made through, you know, working at Medium and working at The Bold Italic and they believed in the idea of what I was making. That translates to a team that, we don't work on Anxy full time. We all, we all sort of trickle in and out depending on the stage at which the magazine is in. So there's a lot of asynchronous and synchronous communication about the issue - slack, emails, you know, in-person brainstorms, and then everyone back to doing their own thing. What I love about, you know, what we're doing with Anxy is that the people that came together to create this magazine are bringing their own stories.

Indhi: And I love that I was able to in a way find my people, you know? Like, like what the biggest benefit that I see of Anxy now is that it has allowed me to connect with people that care deeply about the things that I care about and to see myself in them. So I really love the fact that, you know, we're indie, we're trying to keep it scrappy.

Lindsay: I can appreciate that.

Indhi: And like, you know, break apart when, when we need to and you know, and how that plays into self-care is that, of course, because we're trying to tackle other things, sometimes working with Anxy is what we do at off hours or we might work on Anxy, um, you know, after we've completed our eight-hour, eight-hour day or, you know, and it's definitely, it's been a struggle to find that balance and I think finding the way to just close everything down and focus on myself is definitely one of the things that I'm, you know, working on. And like I said, I'm basically a chronic workaholic so that's even more difficult for me to do, but it's definitely where, you know, I think I'm gonna have, you know, personally my next opportunity for growth is to, is to find a way to undo or unwind this busy, busy, busy all the time.

Lindsay: Yeah. What does that look like? I mean if you, if you are working full time and you've got this other kind of really important part of your life, right? Anxy as an expression, what things work for you? What, what do you turn to when things are hard and when things don't feel right or you're just kind of stressed?

Indhi: Yeah. I think, you know, I'm still in therapy, which to me is what gives me, what keeps grounding me. And every time I go back to speak with my therapist, it helps me check in, um, and remember oh right, like I, I'm still working on this and I can observe how I, you know, my own behavior and I can reflect on, you know, if I were to have a spectrum of working crazy busy or it's finding balance, where am I today and what can I do tomorrow? Um, and, you know, talk and think about, you know, why have I been avoiding certain things or why I have this tendency to, you know, behave in a certain way. So I find that the, for me, what helps me keep the most in check with my self-care is to work with others who, you know, allow me to create that space where, where I can reflect. And so almost like a forcing function - I also do some body work.

Lindsay: Can you tell me a little bit more about that for people who may or maybe not familiar with body work?

Indhi: Yes. It's sort of interesting because I kind of learned, I learned about it almost by accident.

Lindsay: OK. Good accident, right?

Indhi: Yes. Body work looks like almost like a massage, but it goes deeper than that. When we experience trauma that trauma is, you know, coded into our bodies basically and a lot of people who experience chronic pain and don't know where this pain is coming from, sometimes it could be related to a stressful event in their lives of stress of, you know, all these things that we keep collecting every day. So through, through the work that I do in body work, the person that works with me...She really gets into, you know, sort of like tissue and kind of like deep pockets of, you know, pain. And what starts to happen is, you know, depending on how, you know, that work is evolving, that you can start to release, you know, some of these things. Like in my case, I realized that body work also allows me to have a positive experience with physical touch. Um, and that's something that I didn't understand until, you know, had been doing it for quite some time.

Lindsay: No, that's really powerful. I know that for a lot of the people that we talk with, a lot of supporters that we get to interact with, they do talk about, you know, trauma really taking a home in your body and there's a lot of support and evidence where trauma actually rewires your brain. And so it's so important to understand, to have really, the word I think you were kind of getting at was just self awareness, and kind of being at home and in that space, which is your body. And I think that's so powerful. I'm curious how that awareness trickles into the rest of your life. Is that something that you would say you're now more comfortable sharing your insight or is it still sort of the internal journey for you?

Indhi: You know, for me, I think this, this journey is, you know, a lifetime's journey. I definitely feel that I'm more aware and more attuned to, you know, my emotions and what's activating and, you know, when I feel that I'm in a place where emotionally, I'm going through a route that I want to avoid. I think that I'm able to do that now in ways than when I was in my 20s was impossible to do. Um, so my level of self awareness is definitely higher and yet I still find myself in situations in which I feel like I could benefit for even, even more self awareness. Um, so the way that behaviors codafided um, especially in, in a journey like mine where there's been a lot of trauma, um, it's just, you know, more difficult sometimes to, you know, create those new behaviors where you are attuned to your experience.

Lindsay: Yeah, for sure. So outside of like Anxy Magazine, have there been other publications or books...I know that psychoeducation is kind of a, one of the legs of Anxy. Like you wouldn't look at the, you wouldn't look at the publication and think, okay, I'm going to read 20 clinical journals about these issues, you know? You know, that's not on the radar whatsoever. But yet you find in there some really amazing information and understanding just about the issues. So I'm curious how, how you kind of balance that and then what things you used to kind of help inform that process.

Indhi: I definitely feel that psychoeducation is really important, especially because it gives language to something that sometimes you have a hard, a hard time communicating about. One book that was really helpful for me, um, is *Complex PTSD* by Pete Walker, and the reason why that book was instrumental is because, um, he does a really good job of explaining what it is like to experience being in a neglectful environment and how that translates into behavior and, you know, toxic inner talk and, uh, trigger events and flashbacks. And these are all words that I didn't know. So being able to get the language, understand the definitions, then be able to connect, oh, that's what I'm doing, right? That was really instrumental for me.

Lindsay: So I'm curious for people listening who might identify or find kind of pieces of their story aligning with your story, what would you tell them? Like what would you say to them? If you could tell them one thing,

Indhi: I would tell them that repair is possible. When I think about myself, I felt very isolated and this idea that I was damaged goods...and I'll always going to be in conflict with people, always going to have these difficult, this difficult personality. And not realizing that that was a direct consequence of the experiences I've had. So if I were to tell them a second thing would be to say: it is absolutely natural that you would behave and act this way if you had such a traumatic experience. And you know what, that helps us like depersonalize it a little more, that it's really not, you know, you, that's broken. It's more that this experience is what codified certain behaviors in your life and that you can work towards trying to cope with some of them, trying to curve some of them, trying to repair some of them.

Lindsay: I think that's super powerful. Thank you for sharing that. I love how much you've been able to share part of your story. I mean, when you look at the Anxy Magazines, I know that there's so much of yourself kind of represented there, but it really also gives you many stories and many perspectives. And I love that your kind of journey and your story has birthed this beautiful kind of community, this project that allows stories to be, to present it in the, in the dignity and the beauty that they, they represent. You know, it's heavy and it's light and it's...and it's just so awesome. I'm excited for us to share Anxy with the TWLOHA audience and to kind of connect people with the work you're doing. I would love it if you could tell us, Indhi, what's coming up for Anxy? And if there's anything cool on the horizon you want to share with us.

Indhi: Yes. So first of all, thank you for that. It's, you know, the things that are happening with Anxy are things that I never expected and you know, it's, it's now growing into a community bigger than I imagined it would be. And that's, you know, exciting for me. A little nerve wracking too. Um, but I just feel so thankful that people are responding to and willing to be open in this way with me and with our magazine and everyone in our team. So just to say that I just wanted to express some gratitude for everyone, you know, who might know Anxy already and who might be reading our stories and just, you know, acknowledge their contribution and participation in what we're making. So what's next for us is that we've identified the theme for the fourth issue, and it's going to be the Masculinity issue.

Lindsay: Awesome, very exciting.

Indhi: And this is something, oh thank you. We're really just interested in continuing to grow the conversation that's happening nationally and globally about how we define masculinity. And that's what we're going to tackle next.

Lindsay: So where would people find the next issue?

Indhi: So, um, we always do a Kickstarter. So that's going to be the first wave of opportunity to preorder an issue. And then, you know, in the stockist, that I mentioned before, you can find the list of all our stockists is online at AnxyMag.com. You can go to our stockist section and depending on where you are, you can see, you know, what stockists are available near you. And then online of course, once the issue has been funded and printed, um, we'll have it for sale on our website at AnxyMag.com.

Lindsay: That's so awesome. I'm very excited to have that in my hands. I can't wait to order it.

Indhi: Thank you.

Lindsay: So Indhi, thank you so much for sharing everything you have today. Everything about your personal story and the genesis of Anxy. It's been really cool to hear more about the origin of it and I'm just kind of the things that we can learn from you and what you're learning about your own story. So thank you so much for spending this time talking with me.

[music playing]

Lindsay: I want to thank Indhi Rojas for joining us on this episode of the TWLOHA podcast. I was super inspired by her conversation, her courage, and all the work she's doing with Anxy Mag. If you want to learn more about Anxy Magazine, you can actually check out their website. It's AnxyMag.com. We'll also list that information in our Show Notes and on our website: twloha.com/podcast.

Lindsay: 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 we've been talking about. We believe that help exists. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help that they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources at our website: [T-W-L-O-H-A dot com](http://T-W-L-O-H-A.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 with our friends at Crisis Text Line. Just simply text the word TWLOHA - that's 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.

Lindsay: If you enjoyed this episode and you want to hear more, we hope you'll subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And if you can do us a favor, we'd really love for you to write us a review. It will 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.

Lindsay: 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. And music assistance provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor. I'm Lindsay Kolsch. Thank you so much for listening.

Lindsay: To Write Love on Her Arms is a nonprofit 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.

Lindsay: You can find more information about TWLOHA at twloha.com.