

Episode 004 : Anxiety Is A Liar And A Thief - Whitney Fenimore

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

Lindsay Kolsch [over “Drift”]: 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.

[“Drift” plays]

Lindsay: You can probably relate to the idea that life doesn’t always follow the plans we make. Inevitably, there are twists and turns. On this episode, I talk with Whitney Fenimore. Whitney is a singer/songwriter, and she shared with me her story of how moving to LA to follow her dreams and pursue music took an unexpected toll on her mental health as she struggled with depression and anxiety. After moving back home to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to focus on her recovery, she had a surprising opportunity to appear on NBC’s hit TV show “The Voice,” landing a spot on Team Adam. Whitney talks about what it was like to share her story on such a public platform, how her religious upbringing colored her experience, and how her journey has shaped and changed her music. I’m excited to share this conversation with you because Whitney communicates - in a very real way - what it means to know you’re not alone and how opening up actually helped her create relationships in her own life that are important to her today.

[*“Drift” plays*]

Lindsay: A quick warning on this episode: There is some strong language used so please consider that before listening.

[*“Drift” plays*]

Lindsay: Whitney, welcome to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast. Our listeners just got the chance to hear a portion of your song “Drift” off your new EP, and I’m just so excited to talk to you today but before we do jump in, I would love for you to introduce yourself and tell us where you are.

Whitney Fenimore: Yes. Well thank you so much for having me. First off, this is super cool. But yeah, my name’s Whitney Fenimore, a singer/songwriter, and I actually as of like literally two and a half weeks ago, I moved to Nashville, Tennessee.

Lindsay: You did? Oh my gosh. Okay, that’s awesome.

Whitney: So I’m in Nashville. Loving it so far, like I feel like I’ve been to a show just about every night, like there’s always music going on and a lot of my friends from “The Voice” are out here, so we’re, it’s like a little reunion. So yeah, I’m out here and doing music and writing and hopefully becoming a better songwriter and musician by being out here. So I’m really stoked.

Lindsay: Very cool. No, that’s awesome. That’s really cool. I think the last time we got to connect was when we connected in December. You were in Arizona, I think?

Whitney: Yes.

Lindsey: Cool. Well, that’s been awhile and we can kind of circle back to that, but I wanted to just kind of get started with learning a little bit more and diving into your story. So when people ask you what’s your story? Where, where do you begin?

Whitney: Well I was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Some people call that the south, I call it the Midwest. I feel like most people from Oklahoma would say we’re from the Midwest. Even though we’re like right in the middle of America. It’s, it’s Oklahoma has a lot of uh, southern values. It’s like a very conservative red state. So I grew up in like a super Christian home, very loving, loving home...

Lindsay: Brothers and sisters? Or?

Whitney: I have two younger brothers. One is 26 and the other is 19. Just became a freshman in college. So I’m 10 years older than my youngest brother.

Whitney: So he almost feels like a kid to me. Like he's just like a baby. But, but yeah, I grew up there and in Tulsa and then I went to um, literally the same, little private Christian school from kindergarten all the way through twelfth grade. And then ended up going across the street literally across the street to Oral Roberts University.

Lindsay: Oh wow. It's very close.

Whitney: Very close. And all of that was very, like, very Christian, like very conservative. Which like there was pros and cons to that I think for me. And then like my church was right...I kind of lived in like a three mile radius or that was kinda how I lived my life. Church was right down the street. Then I had school and then across the street from there was college. And you know, it was kinda like a little bubble, which I think helped me develop some good morals and stuff growing up, but then also like hindered me in a way because I just, my worldview for the longest time was very small.

Whitney: And then after, after college I went to Focus on the Family, so it was like one conservative thing after the next. Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, which was awesome. I met some great people there. It was like a little leadership institute. So I felt like I learned a lot about myself there.

Lindsay: Well, I was just curious because I know from interviews that I've read about you music actually was also part of that journey. Where does that show up in like, kind of that I'm storyline?

Whitney: Sure. So I, I had played music like the first time I really like put a band together, I was 12. And so growing up in the church, music is a very big part of, at least the church that I went to. So I was a part of worship teams and choirs and stuff like that.

Whitney: So when I was 12 that was a, um, something that I really, really wanted to be a part of, and I was always encouraged like, hey, you should sing at church or do this or do that or... So I really started singing in church and in school because at my, my high school and junior high we had chapels every week and like it was all student-led worship. So I was a part of that. And so that kind of led me into going to ORU because I, this, I knew that they had a really good music school, a good like worship program. And at that time I was very, like, enticed by that and I thought that that would be. I didn't really want to go to college.

Lindsay: Oh, OK.

Whitney: But my parents were very, very, like much wanting me to. And I'm, I'm glad I did now, but I, I just, it was very hard for me to focus, and I had to really, really, really work hard to get through college. I just, I don't know, like, uh that just wasn't really my thing and I always knew I wanted to do music so it was really hard for me to be like, okay, why am I studying economics? And like...

Lindsay: Where, where in that mix....I assume you're still playing music, you're still doing that. When did that kind of dream to get more experience or to follow that? Where did that kind of road start or like the road toward that start?

Whitney: Yeah, that's a good question. I was 18 so still very involved in the worship community there, so playing every week. We also had chapels at a school there, so I would, you know, there was auditions for that and was like a real big deal to like try out or whatever. And so, that was, that was a priority. So I was a part of that.

Whitney: And then, what I feel like I was 18 when I had my first coffee shop gig and it was called Agora Coffee Shop in Tulsa and I just remember inviting everybody and I'm pretty sure it was horrible. Like I had a friend playing on the djembe and like it was very like...

Lindsay: Yes. Yes, I'm there right now. I'm experiencing it with you.

[Whitney laughs]

Whitney: Yes, I think I like played barefoot, I don't know what I was doing. It was like a very, like, hippie feeling thing. But I was, I was loving it, and I was very into an artist named Bethany Dylan at the time. So like everything she did I wanted to do. So that was like my first, you know, I want to do music, uh, not just for like church stuff... I didn't want to just reach a certain group of people.

Whitney: Actually though, but for that first year, so from 18 to 19 I did do Christian music, and I released my first little EP. Do not look it up.

[Lindsay laughs]

Lindsay: We won't put it in the show notes, I promise.

Whitney: But I was like 19 and, like, thought that that's what I wanted to do. And so I would say like 20 I kind of shifted as far as like genre of music and started to do, I think I was, it was 2010. I was like a junior in college. I released my first little EP called Ready Let Go. Um, and that was like my first, I guess in the Christian world people say secular music. I don't think that's really a term in the, I don't know, regular world. So that was like my first album that was mainstream.

Whitney: So yeah, that was 2010. So it was like, yeah, October of 2010 or something. So I've been doing music ever since. I kinda took a break. I feel like when I was in Colorado, just to kind of figure myself out when I was living there going to Focus on the Family. Still played guitar and everything, but it just, I didn't really know how I was gonna accomplish it because music is such a weird road. There's not really a certain path like you can take to like make it to making it.

Lindsay: Did that season feel like strange for you to not to not be playing music?

Whitney: It did and it didn't. like I felt like I was learning a lot about myself and my faith and who I was as a person, which I felt like that...before I like went into like doing music full time maybe it was more important, like just figuring out my foundation and who I was, what I believed in, what was really important for me I think at the time before I just moved to LA because that's what happened basically after that.

Lindsay: So straight from Colorado to LA.

Whitney: Yeah. I moved home for like a little period of time and I worked for my dad and then I realized like I have to get out of Oklahoma. I loved Oklahoma, but it's a great place to come back to. And it's very comforting, but you can get stuck. And as a musician, I think you kinda gotta leave there. I don't know, there is a music scene and it's starting to really thrive, but I think you got to leave for a little bit. Um, and then you can go back if you want. But yeah, I ended up going to Oklahoma for a little bit and then I headed out to LA for a publishing deal that I got, which was crazy.

Lindsay: Yeah, tell me more about that. And so that's writing songs for people who aren't familiar, like super understanding, like, the music industry, right?

Whitney: Right, exactly. Like you, you can be writing for other artists where like, that company would pitch your song to another artist that might cut your song, which means they would record it on their cd or album, whatever their record. And then also they were pitching songs for movies. So for me it was very exciting because I have literally, I was sitting at a computer at my dad's office and I, sometimes I wouldn't even be working, I'd be like sending my music to record labels and stuff. Like that's all I'd be doing at the computer, like, supposed to be working for my dad when I'm sending my music to all these record labels and I found a tweet by Ken Caillat, which is, he produced all of Colbie Caillat's music and I had loved her stuff and that's her dad and I'd like researched him and he did like Fleetwood Mac and like all these amazing bands.

Whitney: So I literally just tweeted at him something and he...

Lindsay: Wait, really?

Whitney: Yeah and he literally messaged me back in like somehow I got his email, I sent him my music and for the next four months we were in communications of sending music back and forth. I ended up flying out to LA, met him, you know, just thinking this is all such a dream.

Lindsay: Yeah, because you go from like literally not knowing what steps you would take and you kind of like stumbled right into the steps you maybe should take.

Whitney: Exactly, yeah. It was just like, you know, it's a lot like, and it's still is - music is a lot of shot in the dark, like situations. You're just hoping something, you hit something, you're like, I

don't know if this is going to work or, or what, but you're just kind of trying all these different things.

Whitney: And so the fact that he believed in my music enough to like have me come out to LA and then I ended up signing with them, which I thought I was like, okay, that'll be, that's my break. Like, you know, everybody talks about their big break, whether it be with music or acting or whatever. So I thought that's what that was. And it did. It ended up being an amazing thing I think because it got me out to LA. I mean I was like a little Oklahoma, like Tulsa girl. Tulsa is like a sort of big city, but it's not LA, you know?

Lindsay: Yeah.

Whitney: So to get me out there was going to take a lot and I ended up moving out there without really knowing a lot about the city and moved straight to Hollywood Boulevard, which was insane. And yeah, I started writing for Ken's company, they're called Sleeping Giant Music Group. And I remember, I'm not kidding, the day I was at, like the first time I had visited the studios, all this gear was in the lobby, and I'm like looking at it and sometimes like the gear will have like the artist's name, like, spray painted on it and I'm like holy -

Whitney: And it says like John Mayer and I was like freaking out, like trying to be cool.

Lindsay: Stay cool. Stay cool. Be cool.

Whitney: I was like realizing I'm like, Oh my God, I'm in the presence of greatness. Like freaking out, just freaking out. Like I don't know, I think it hit me right then, like *Whit, do not screw this up*. You know? So I got really excited.

Lindsay: That's a lot of pressure.

Whitney: It was a lot of pressure and then, you know, what I realized like after that had gone by that like it was an amazing step in the right direction, but just because you're at like a studio that like so and so's recorded at doesn't necessarily mean anything. Like you still have, I don't know, like you still got to grind it out, make things happen for yourself.

Whitney: And it ended up, it ended up being a cool thing, but it wasn't like the end all be all. So I was out in LA for about three years and just ended up not being able. This kind of ties into, I think what we're going to talk about, the mental health thing, but like that was a really tough city to live in. I just was constantly bogged down with how am I going to make it, am I good enough, should I be playing this show or that show? What should I look like? Like all these crazy thoughts. Good thoughts, bad thoughts. Just so many thoughts. And it's a cool place, but it can be a really hard place and I know a lot of people love LA. It's just for me it got really, really tough and I ended up like just getting so overwhelmed with the city.

Lindsay: Yeah. Maybe when in that process did you realize like, oh, this is like, this is really taking a toll, like I'm, I'm recognizing something different? Or did you? Were you able to recognize it?

Whitney: it was the slowest like process like...because yeah, so it didn't really. The depression and anxiety didn't start really creeping in until like year two and a half. It was like, oh, I'm having panic attacks now, like when I try to sing. Whereas like before, like singing and like, you know, playing shows would kind of be like, oh, like this is my outlet, you know, from stress and from anxiety. And then I remember one night like, playing a show and I like, had to grab my friends and I went to my car. I was like, I can't breathe and I was having a panic attack, but to me, like I was telling my friend, I was like, call 911, like I'm dying.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Whitney: Like, yeah, I wasn't, but my, like I was just, I was so stressed. I had so much going on inside me that I think it was just manifesting into panic attacks and I eventually had to move home. Like I couldn't do anything anymore. I like, I tried to like, keep my job, couldn't. Tried to do music, couldn't. I couldn't even think straight. It was the weirdest...Even now thinking back on it, it's hard to even think about because... It was just so bad. I think my mind is blocked out so much of it.

Lindsay: Yeah. There's like a lot of fog, kind of?

Whitney: Yeah, it's a lot of fog. I just didn't know what was going on. I legitimately thought I was gonna die.

Lindsay: Yeah, no that's a, a panic attack. That's a very physical, visceral experience. So if you have not experienced that, you know, it kind of hijacks your nervous system.

Whitney: Yeah, a very out of body experience.

Lindsay: I've actually been sitting next to someone experiencing one and he couldn't even speak. He couldn't, couldn't like cue to me what was going on and then I kind of put some pieces together.

Lindsay: So in that experience you're like call 911 and then it passes. But where does that leave you in? Like what are you thinking? Like the fear of having another panic attack can sometimes induce another one. So I was curious just like that experience in that cycle for you.

Whitney: Well I forget what it's called, but there's a term for like the fear of having another one and then you end up, maybe it's agoraphobia, like you stay in your house and you don't go anywhere because it's the fear of having another and then in that you get depressed because you're not, you know, you're not doing anything.

Lindsay: Yeah, you're restricted.

Whitney: Yeah. So it was scary. There was a lot of things going on though that led to that. It was struggling with my faith, who I really was like deep down inside, right? Like, and I think like telling the whole, you know, my whole background growing up, very conservative, very Christian, and then moving to LA. It was a shock.

Lindsay: A big cultural change for you.

Whitney: Yeah. Yeah. And I had slowly, like, you know, I had a lot of friends from different walks of life but, and I'd slowly kind of expanded my world view, but LA really hit me hard where like, you know, I had friends that were atheists and friends that were Jewish and friends that were whatever. And I'm like, oh, we all believe something different, but, struggling with my beliefs going, wait, well, what? You know, my whole world was turned upside down, as well as trying to be this musician or whatever I thought I needed to be. And I felt like I just wasn't being true to myself: who I was, what I believed. I was really just walking out this life that I thought people expected me to be. In turn I just ended up crumbling because I was just basically living a lie.

[music plays before an ad break]

Lindsay: *At TWLOHA, we're big fans of birthdays and celebrating what matters. Facebook has made it easy for you to turn your birthday into a celebration of hope. You can now donate your birthday on Facebook to a nonprofit you care about. When you choose TWLOHA, you'll be helping us continue sharing the message of hope and connecting people to the help they need and deserve. For example, when you raise \$200, 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](https://www.twloha.com/birthday). You can find the link to both of those things in the show notes.*

[music plays leading back into the interview]

Lindsay: When you were growing up, I want to touch on that a little bit more because I think a lot of people listening may kind of identify with you as far as being in an, you know, whether it's going to college or in a season of transition and you're just learning a lot about yourself and -

Whitney: Yeah.

Lindsay: And I'm curious how like your early part of your story colored you handling the mental health experience? Like do you recall a time when you felt like mental health was talked about in your community or like in the church setting for you?

Whitney: So it is now.

Lindsay: Yeah, ok.

Whitney: I have seen that now and I'm so proud of - I had a pastor back home who talked about it - and I was like in tears, like I would listen to his podcast. You know, there's a couple of things that he said that I was like, oh, I don't know. But most of it was like, I mean, he goes, if you, if you need medicine, you take medicine, if you need to see a counselor. He had like every counselor stand up at the church and this was like a huge mega church. And he was like, look around, all these people want to help you if you're going, you know, the whole sermon was on mental health. And all that to say is, I think in the Christian community, we're taught to just look to Jesus if you're ever having a problem, right? Pray it away. That does not always work. A lot of guilt I think came with being depressed and having anxiety. I thought it was something wrong in my life. I thought, oh, do I have sin in my life?

Whitney: What's in my life that, that's keeping me from, you know, experiencing joy? So I thought I was being punished. So that was really, really scary.

Lindsay: Yeah. Does that keep you from reaching out or do you feel like you can ask for help or support? Like what are the consequences of that belief?

Whitney: Yeah so I've come to a place I, my faith is very different than it was when I was in college. Um, and I struggle with doubts and, and things like that and I don't always agree with everything that, you know, I don't fully understand the, you know, the Bible and everything that's in there. But I will say that when I was walking through this, I felt very alone. People told me to read scriptures. I would read them and when you're in a depressed state, everything's negative. So I would read these scriptures, but I would - the way they would be translated in my mind was so negative and I just felt so guilty. Like I felt like I was legit being punished. And when you feel like you're being punished by God or so you're like, okay, well I'm like completely fucked.

Whitney: Like I don't know what's going on. So I ended up, um, I ended up flying home. I couldn't even get on a plane, I was trying to take Xanax, um, to like help with the anxiety and I don't recommend Xanax for everybody. I actually don't, I tried to never take that just because it can be an addictive thing, but I was about to fly and I don't love flying.

Lindsay: So travel anxiety on top of everything else.

Whitney: Yeah. Yeah. And I was about to get on the flight and I started crying and I was like, on the phone with my dad, I was like I can't. And I was, this was me trying to get out of LA. Like I was supposed to like to go home.

Lindsay: You had already decided. You're like, I gotta get outta here. I'm going and you couldn't.

Whitney: Right. And it was the biggest...For some people a flight is nothing. Some people enjoy it, like they're gonna, like it's a cool thing for them to fly. Like for me, I don't know what it was. So I'm, you know, bawling like a baby and mind you, I was like 26 or 27, so not a baby. And my dad literally came and got me like the next day, like had to fly to Burbank and I got on a plane with him and I went back to Tulsa and then started my recovery process.

Lindsay: Yeah. Was there anybody in LA, like friends or a support system that was helping you kind of make that decision? Or did you feel like it was kind of only your decision to make at that point?

Whitney: There were definitely people there that were like, like helping me as much as they could and then I think just realize in it and it was hard for them to be like, yeah, you should leave, you know,

Lindsay: That's a hard thing to tell somebody it is.

Whitney: It is. But that's, I remember having, I was recording with a friend and um, he said he was like, I started kind of getting really panicky and, and just kind of talking to him about some things. He's like, listen Whit. He was like, LA is always going to be here. Like the city is not going anywhere. Music is always going to be here, but you need to always be here and you need to go take care of yourself. And it was like a really hard thing to hear, but I knew that he was right. And so that's when I really, I think, started pivoting toward like I need to go home. And so I did and it was a long...what seemed like a long, a really long recovery process. But, um, so I was able to have the strength to want to like read books and self-help books.

Whitney: Like how to start getting out of depression and like I wanted to learn about what it was because I had never been, like, depressed or I never had OCD, compulsive thoughts where all my thoughts were negative, right? Where it's just, and sorry, I'm going to be kind of all over the place. You can kind of bring me back. But the thing that sucks so much about depression, anxiety, OCD, at least for me with the compulsive thoughts...My OCD wasn't like, oh, I need to like turn this doorknob eight times, then I can leave the house. It wasn't that. It was like I would have the same negative thought over and over and over and over and over and I was just a prisoner in my own head and I wanted just so badly to do anything to just stop it. And I think that's where I knew like, okay, this is, this is like danger zone like I need to get help.

Whitney: So luckily I was in a good enough...I wasn't good by any means, but a good enough space to ask somebody for help. And we had a family doctor who was a believer, like Christian dude, who actually helped me so much just to...He just said, I want you to understand there are so many pastors and preachers that I have that come into my office that are on antidepressants. It's not like a bad thing. He was like, people take insulin for diabetes. People take advil when they have a headache. Like your brain is an organ like it needs, if, if it's like low on something, it's got a deficiency in serotonin or something like we can help that. So that was really important for me to hear and so he thank God like helped me walk through that. And I like totally. I'm not ashamed to say that I did, like I took antidepressants.

Whitney: I still, that was like two years over, two years ago. I still will take a tiny bit of an antidepressant. It's not for everyone. I'm not here saying like, Hey, you have to, but I am here to say, like, it's nothing to be ashamed about. And the more that I, you know, talk to people about this, the more that I realize a lot of people are on antidepressants or have been or whatever. And I tried to go the all natural route. It just didn't work for me because I wanted to, I wanted, I wanted to see if I could do it the all natural way, but it just did not. Um, that didn't work. And I did. I incorporated a lot of like, um, it wasn't just medicine for me. I did like yoga and I would go on little walks, like I turned into an 85 year old woman for six months.

Whitney: Seriously though, like I would have -

Lindsay: Self-care can sometimes look like slowing down and not doing not a lot.

Whitney: You have to slow down and you're totally resetting. So I would take walks around the block and I like weirdly lost a lot of weight. I was super stressed out, but I would just go on little nature walks. I would have my nighttime tea. I would write in my gratitude journal. I would do yoga, I would meditate. There's an app called Headspace. Um, that's not a plug for that, but, but seriously, it's such a great app. I would do it every night for ten minutes. I'd like light a candle, sit in my room. And, like, the thing about this is none of this stuff is like super spiritual or like this is Christian.

Whitney: Like I had to do some things that weren't, had nothing to do with like, okay, read this scripture and you're going to be fine.

Lindsay: Sure, yeah.

Whitney: I had a normal human things to become a normal human again, I couldn't just sit in church actually during that time, like, and I don't even go to church all the time now, but like during that time I felt like, well maybe I need to go back to church. Like actually church made me panic. I would have panic attacks about it.

Lindsay: Yeah. Did you during that season, I have two questions about that.

Whitney: Yeah.

Lindsay: So you got to go to a doctor, you got medication, did you end up sitting with a counselor at any point or did you have people counseling you?

Whitney: I did have a counselor and I still will go to her whenever because I think that even when you're doing great, that's the time to still go see a counselor.

Lindsay: How did you find her?

Whitney: Um, I found her through another friend that had gone to her and let me say this. I someone very, very close and dear to me right now has been trying to find counselors or mental health people and it is not always easy. It, and I'm actually really...it made me upset because I was like, this should not be that difficult for somebody because like insurance was an issue and they didn't...

Lindsay: It's challenging just to like navigate what, how to get the help that you're, you know, people say let's get help, let's get you help. And I think that's one thing To Write Love, we're very aware how hard it is to know where even to start.

Whitney: Oh my gosh, yeah.

Lindsay: So it's maybe not the steps, but it's like where do you even begin? And so it's really cool to me that you had a friend that could recommend it. I think we often point folks to, you know, like it's okay to talk about it, so it's okay to ask for a recommendation. If you can ask where you can get your haircut, you probably can also ask, hey, do you know anybody who's like a good counselor you might recommend? Good experiences.

Whitney: Yeah my counselor helped me, uh, just kinda come back to my center and helped me believe that, like, hey, you're not crazy. Other people go through this. That is the biggest thing that helped me as well is that I've ended up making like a best friend out of all this too, is one of my brother's friends ended up...This is, this is why it's so important to talk about mental health is that my brother's friend had put a post on his Facebook and he was like a D1 athlete at the college I went to talking about how he struggled with anxiety attacks and OCD and how it would cripple him when he was playing basketball and almost steal...anxiety is a thief, whether it steals your time, your friendships, your relationships, your thoughts. It's a liar and it's a thief.

Whitney: And it was stealing his joy from playing basketball. And I remember reaching out to him and I was like, can we please meet up when I get back to Tulsa? Like I just need to talk to anybody who's gone through what I'm going through, like because I don't understand it. And he said yes. And we kept, we like met up once a week and then we became like workout buddies. He was on the other side of his anxiety, depression. So I saw him as kind of the light at the end of the tunnel. I was like, Oh, if he can get through it, I can get through it. It helps to know that it's

going to be...It can be okay. And sometimes it looks like it's not going to. Sometimes you see the light at the end of the tunnel and other days it goes away for some reason.

Whitney: But then it always comes back. You just have to keep walking towards it. So like one, one step at a time and you're going to have bad days. You might like kind of walk backwards some days, you have to keep, like it's an upward spiral. You're trying to get out of that really dark place you're in and it's going to take a little bit.

[music playing]

Lindsay: How did music show up in that season? Or did it?

Whitney: So it was hard. It was because like I mentioned before, I would have panic attacks and I didn't...I had to force myself for that season I like had joined a church and was singing at it, but I would have panic attacks where like, I had to walk off stage like quick, like right after I'd like lead a song. I'd be like, I gotta get outta here and I'd like run outside and try to get some. I forced myself through the most uncomfortable situations and then it, you know, it ended up getting better and better. Um, and then actually after I had, like, I felt like I got like to a really good place. Um, that's when I got an email from "The Voice" to audition and it was weird because it was like music was coming around again, full circle.

Lindsay: How did they, how did you get an email? Like, I'm just curious. That sounds very ominous. Like "The Voice" found you.

Whitney: Apparently they do, like, have like different, like, casting people that will go out.

Lindsay: Oh, got it.

Whitney: I think someone mentioned to their casting people, you know Whitney does music, and they just reached out. I don't know if they saw like a video or Youtube or whatever. I got that and at the time I was working as a barista at a coffee shop in Tulsa and just getting back to normal and um, I was like dating someone at the time and, and, and things were like good.

Whitney: So yeah. And then this kind of came into my lap and I was like, what? Because I wasn't, I wasn't really focusing on music so much. I was really focusing on getting better. But I knew and everyone around me knew too, you, you need to do music. Like that's what makes you happy. So when that happened I was like, I was freaking out, but I was so scared because I was going to have to go back to LA and I thought that would be a trigger for me. But it wasn't. Like during, it was crazy because you'd think the pressures of that show, because there definitely were pressures, you know, having to, like, you want to look your best sound your best. All of these pressures, right?

Lindsay: You're competing. It's a competition.

Whitney: I didn't have one panic attack and I didn't even ever take Xanax once. I didn't want to. I was like, I want to feel every. Everything. I know it sounds weird, but like I didn't even take Xanax, but I mean like I didn't. I wanted to see how my body would respond and if all the little tricks and essential oils and meditating and being with friends and family and significant others, like if all of that stuff that I was doing helped and paid off and it really did which is crazy. And so I was able to share my story a little bit also through that show, which I think was so great because I always, when I was going through the depression and anxiety, as I said, like I always said I hopefully one day can like help someone else that's gone through this.

Lindsay: I was really curious actually about that one piece because um, I think like it's in your bio, kind of that little storyline about, um, that you had gone home and this was your second chance and they kind of like, that's like kind of your descriptor or the way they kind of pitch you. I guess. I'm not sure if that's even the correct way to say that.

Whitney: Yeah, they package that.

Lindsay: I was curious how much you contributed to that, like how much you brought to that versus them kind of fishing to find the angle and that sets everybody apart. But I was, one, it was really amazing and I thought it was really cool. Like I think that's actually how we ended up getting connected. Our editor saw that was kind of part of your story and then reached out. And so -

Whitney: I knew that I wanted it to be. Of course, I mean they sit you down, you have to do a lot behind the scenes. They find out a lot about you. But that was the main thing I wanted to share. I would have gone into way more depth if they would've let me. And sometimes I did, sometimes the interviews they have with your like 45 minutes long and they cut it down to like two minutes.

Lindsay: Yeah, yeah.

Whitney: So there was way more than I would, would have wanted to have air on there. But yeah, no, I fully like wanted all of that, you know, info to be out there. And I wanted that to be my thing and not, not just to be like, oh, what's your story? Oh, that'll be a great one. You know, like I didn't want it to be like, oh she's got this great story. Like maybe she'll win because she's got a story. You know, all those shows have like if you have like a tear-jerker story, you move further along. Like I, that's not what I was doing, like I think that's bs. I wanted to use the platform that I was on for something bigger than just like me.

Lindsay: And it was pretty fresh, right? Like you were kind of in a place of recovery and so this is just timeline wise, this catches us up to the beginning of 2017.

Whitney: Yep, exactly. I had really been doing well for maybe like eight months, maybe six, eight months maybe if that's right. I can't remember fully. But like I feel like when I had cause I

had my initial um, try out January 2017. Um, so I had just started to get, like, started to do, like I felt like that was feeling really, really good. Um, but I was very scared of like, I don't know if the right word is relapsing but just like going back into another panic attack or, or like getting depressed. I don't know, I just didn't to be in LA and like get like in my head again and I and I didn't. And I think that it's because I started like not only like recognizing that mental health is just as important as physical health, right? Like it's good to go running, it's good to eat healthy. It's also good to like strengthen your mind. Um, and to pay attention to that and to kind of get in touch with your, your mind, your feelings, your emotions. It's good. It's good to be in touch with that side of yourself.

Lindsay: So you're like clearly in a competition and you want to take care of yourself. Like I was actually wanted to ask you, what of the things you were doing before you moved back to LA. Like what kind of self-care habits or routines that you feel like really stuck and really like became part of that routine for you?

Whitney: Yeah, it's stuff that I still even do now because I will have like still like even this last week, like even like in the winter I have to watch myself because it's kind of a little gloomy and I'll kind of get a little down. I'm like okay, I'm going to go for a walk. So like going for walks or runs every day. Like still doing yoga. I went to yoga yesterday, like trying to get back in, into that again. Eating healthy. A lot of people say that serotonin is made up in your gut as well. So like it's good to be like food conscious. Like okay, what am I putting in my body?

Lindsay: So you were on "The Voice" and you let me get this straight because I was reading this and I was like, I'm not, I wasn't following that season. But you were with team Adam and then transitioned to Team Miley, is that correct?

Whitney: That's correct.

Lindsay: OK.

Whitney: And so actually, I thought I was off the show and then they brought me back, like surprise.

Lindsay: Whoa. Surprise!

Whitney: They like literally watched me like bawl my eyes out and like hugging all the producers, like saying my goodbyes and then they're like, jk, you're coming back. And Adam brought you back.

Lindsay: Wait, really? It happened just like that? They're like, just kidding. Come back.

Whitney: Okay. So you have to like go see a therapist. Literally 10 minutes after you lose you go see a therapist.

Lindsay: Interesting.

Whitney: It's actually part of the contract, which is actually a good thing.

Lindsay: That's really cool. So everybody does that?

Whitney: Everybody. No, no, I mean it was not just me.

Lindsay: No, I mean if it was just you, that would be great too. But I think that's really cool.

Whitney: It is cool. But I think they were really worried about me, but whatever. I'm crying my eyes out and they're like, oh my God, should we follow up with you next week? I'm like, look, I'm fine. Like I just am like, this has been really -

Lindsay: I've got to feel this like a little bit.

Whitney: So anyway, I go back to the hotel and typically you pack your bags and leave the next morning. They give your flight info like that fast.

Lindsay: Wow.

Whitney: And they're like, yeah, hold on one second. We need to do an interview with you tomorrow. I was like, what?

Lindsay: Oh so you had seen the therapist, you went to the hotel, packed your bags, and you're just waiting to figure out when you're getting to the airport.

Whitney: And they're...yeah. And they're like, actually we need you to go to wardrobe in the morning. I was like, so that I can do an exit interview? Weird. And then like I'm doing this interview and Adam Levine comes up behind me and hugs me. He's like, you're not going anywhere. And I was like, oh hey, awesome. And it like, it was just, yeah, it was crazy. But still I've been, it was awesome. I'm glad they brought me back. It was super fun, but then I lost it my next round, but whatever.

Lindsay: Ok.

Whitney: Yeah, so it got to the playoffs, which is, there's a million rounds I don't expect anyone to keep up with - because I was on the show and I still don't quite understand.

Lindsay: That's really cool. What would you say would be like your favorite memory or kind of like the thing you enjoyed the most about that experience?

Whitney: I think I have two answers for you as far as the relational, like just being around everybody. I made so many incredible friends that like I just hung out with one of my friends from that show last night in Nashville. Like you make these friends that you're gonna keep for a lifetime and that is so cool to me.

Lindsay: That's interesting. I didn't expect you to say you made friends because it's a competition. So I was like, wait a minute.

Whitney: Yeah, you don't care. You're like, oh, like the girl who won was my roommate, and I adored her, adored her. So, no, it's, it's, yeah, it's a competition but it's not like it's, yeah. I don't know, you make incredible friends. But on the um, on the side of like, just the show part, my favorite memory and like thing ever was, I was rehearsing with Adam and he was like giving me tips and I was rehearsing for the song I actually lost with, but it was "If It Makes You Happy" by Sheryl Crow. And he was like, so you're practicing with the band or whatever, they're all behind you. And Adam's like a sitting in front of me and he's like, wait a second, can I jump on the drums? And so he like starts playing the drums. The other drummer sits somewhere else. Like, uh, Adam starts playing the drums, we run through the song and I'm singing, I turned to face the band. It was like we were like old, like garage band or something. Like I literally got to jam out with Adam Levine.

Lindsay: That's cool. Awesome. So you, so you ended up finally going home and you have to make a trend making a transition. I'm curious like that sounds like such a, um, what do you say? Like a mountain top experience -

Whitney: Oh, yeah.

Lindsay: For someone who, you know, who music and being in front of people performing. Like that's the dream, right? And you were doing it. I'm curious what was the transition like because that, that can be like, that's a big jump, you know?

Whitney: Yeah. You know, that transition was really hard. I'm going from, like you said, it was, it's, I forget it was talking to you the other day too. It was, think it was another one of my friends from "The Voice" going from it is a mountain top. I think this is exactly what we said, mountain top to even lower than a valley. You're like, oh my God, that was such a tease, like you feel you had this feeling of like, okay, so I did that. Now I'm supposed to be doing stuff that's that same kind of tier, but you can't, like, you're not going to be on a TV show like that again. I mean, unless you don't know, it's just. zit's a very weird experience. So I had to put things into perspective and just realize that was an amazing experience, like a step in the right direction.

Whitney: Again, it wasn't the end all be all like. It's just musical journeys and everybody's journey is, is crazy and different and weird, but it's definitely weird with music. And so I just realized I'm going to take this, this momentum. It's a short wave to ride, but I'm going to try to ride it out as long as I can. And I did get a little depressed. I totally did, just sad. I was more like

gloomy. I don't want to just throw the word depressed around, but I was just kind of down in the dumps. But because those are not, not the same thing. I was sad for a little bit and then, uh, I was like, you know what I'm going to write, like I'm going to do a new record and I'm just going to like freaking go for this thing. So yeah.

Lindsay: So you start writing again and you're making new music and I'm actually really curious how, like if you look back over those couple of years, um, and then just post "Voice" like your experience with mental health, how do you think it has impacted or changed your relationship to music or your, your writing of music or, or has it, you know, maybe it hasn't.

Whitney: Yeah, no, I think it totally has changed it, uh, the, the way that I write and I think it's made me want to be more honest, real, and transparent in my lyrics and - because I think people don't need fake or like a facade. They need to be able to relate to something that's real. And so that's what I want. And I think, why are you doing music if it's, I don't know, I think music is such an interesting, like beautiful tool that can be used to like connect all sorts of people and it's like the one language that everyone understands, you know, around the world, is music. And I think that if you're going to be in a position to do music and you're gonna play music and you're going to be touring and whatever, then you should like have like some sort of a message that you're, you know, taking with you to each show. So I feel like I'm trying my best to write, you know, sincerely and from a place of experience and, and, and stuff like that. So going through everything is totally affected my music and it's made me want to, I think a fire was literally like lit under my ass to just really like go for it and to not take anything for granted because for awhile I wasn't able to do it and that really sucked, you know?

Lindsay: Yeah, I'm curious if you think back to just that season that you were in, um, when you were back home and, and working through to, to have healing and recovery. Like what would you say to yourself if you could say something in that season to like future you saying something to you back then?

Whitney: Oh, I would just say like it's going to be okay. Like it eventually is going to be okay and to not lose hope. There have been, I don't know why, like so many stories recently from people in my hometown that have gotten lost and just buried in depression and anxiety and it didn't end up good. They ended up taking their life and that has, that has for some reason these past few months has been happening. Like a very, very close family friend - out of nowhere. And you're like, holy shit, I didn't know that person was struggling or battling these demons and all I'd want to say to them too is like, it's gonna be okay. Like I know that I, I don't know how many people are going to hear me and be like, oh, I mean she seems like a privileged white girl that grew up like conservative Christian.

Whitney: Like how was she depressed about anything? It's like depression...anxiety is not a respecter of people. You know?

Lindsay: Yeah, yeah.

Whitney: One of my family friends was a doctor. Like, you know, people would think, oh, they're making great money. Like, yeah, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter how much money you're making, how little money you're making, where you're at. We see this like celebrities as well, like ended up like getting really depressed. So, to answer your question, I would just want to say like it's going to be okay, but you have to try to take it like there were days I couldn't even get off the couch and I would like, like be so proud of myself if I took a shower or like did laundry that because that's all I could do. So you have to celebrate the little victories. That's what I would say too is like celebrate the little things.

Whitney: And we're talking, this is probably more for people like going through like um, what do they call it? Like chronic depression, a depression that has settled in for like months, maybe years...you have got to take, I know it's hard, but like the tiniest little steps in, into a, a positive direction and sometimes it feels like it's pointless but it totally isn't. And just like seasons change and you can, you barely notice them. That's how depression creeps in and creeps out. Like I was out of my depression and I was like, holy shit, I'm, I'm not depressed anymore. It wasn't like that happened.

Lindsay: You're like huh? How did that happen?

Whitney: It was because of those little decisions and it also though I became depressed just as it was just as like slowly like it crept into. So you have to be aware watch those things. So I would just tell people to not lose hope and there are so many days where you want to, but know that you are needed and you're loved and you're valuable. People need you more than you think. And you affect more people than you think.

Lindsay: That's awesome. I appreciate you sharing that, for sure.

Whitney: Of course.

Lindsay: I'm wondering as we're kind of wrapping up here, um, if you wanted to share a little bit of what you're working on and what's kind of next for you? You're in Nashville now.

Whitney: Yes, I'm in Nashville. I'm doing a lot of writing, still promoting my EP Battle Within that we did at the beginning of the summer. And then I just got off tour with Lori McKenna, who was an incredible singer/songwriter. That was so much, so much fun. So just getting off of that and now just really focusing on, I think we've got a music video in the works and then more music, um, at the beginning of next year.

Lindsay: We'll be sharing those links to that in the show notes and anything where you can connect with you, Whitney, but I'm just super grateful that you had the time to kind of talk about this and share your story -

Whitney: Of course. Thank you for asking!

Lindsay: It's always been really cool. Yeah, it's always been really cool to connect with you.

Whitney: Thank you so, so much. I'm really honored that you guys would ask me to be a part of this and I love what you guys do and what you stand for. I hope that somehow, some way, if this even affects one person, then you know in a positive way that was totally worth it.

[music plays]

Lindsay: I want to thank our guest, Whitney Fenimore. Whitney's new EP, *Battle Within*, is out now. You can find ways to listen at her website: whitneyfenimore.com. We'll also provide that link in our show notes.

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 that 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 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 with our friends at Crisis Text Line. You simply text the word TWLOHA - that's TWLOHA - 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.

[music playing]

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.

