

Transcript for Episode 409: "Black & White Miniseries - Nothing Can Take Away How Far You've Come"

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

BIANCA MUJICA: Nothing can take away how far you've come.

Distance and time. They so often go hand-in-hand. Where are you coming from? Where are you going? How long have you been here? How long did it take? Your ETA is principally determined by where you start and where you hope to wind up. Any traveler will remind you of nuance, of tail speed, detours, and sudden traffic jams. The only guarantee is that the you that arrives will be different from the you that started the journey. Even if you have to make a U-turn, reroute, or return to Point A and travel the most familiar route imaginable for the hundredth time—you trek forward with more experience, more memory, and less tread on your shoes than the time before. And the most important thing about experience is that nothing can take it away.

Nothing can undo what you've learned about the world or discovered about yourself. You can tend to your skinned knees, sore muscles, and tired heart with a bit more ease, a bit more faith. Potholes and pitfalls of relapse and backslides can never undo the you that you are. A you that we believe in. A you that we proudly cheer on and celebrate every step (and misstep) of the way. A you that has come so far. Nothing can take away how far you've come.

Each day is new—and yet an accumulation of experiences, an ongoing, real-time story where moments happen, challenges arise, and you are ever-growing. And the journey, it continues—but only with you present. You are a story still going. A story we are grateful to bear witness to.

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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 everyone, this is your host, Chad Moses, TWLOHA's Director of Outreach. The voice you heard at the beginning of today's episode was no other than Bianca Mujica. Bianca is TWLOHA's Community Care Coordinator, so her work focuses on finding intersectional and creative ways to connect with people like you. She is a Mexican-American queer woman from Texas with a background in journalism and a love for language. Outside of work, she can be found experimenting with new art supplies, eating pasta, or making plans for her future animal sanctuary.

The words Bianca just read come from this year's Black & White 4.0 campaign blog in honor of Mental Health Month in the US. While the month may be coming to a close soon, we're continuing to challenge the stigma that keeps far too many silent, we're highlighting stories of

lesser-known challenges, and we're declaring a few statements we believe to be **Black and White**.

Those statements include: Stop apologizing for existing. I am not broken. Who I am is whole. And nothing can take away how far you've come.

To us, these statements are not up for debate when it comes to you and your mental well-being. These statements are truths that we believe apply to you despite what society or your mental illness might try to convince you of. And if you find yourself unable to hold these beliefs on your own, know that we are and will always carry them on your behalf.

Today, with the help of Bianca, we'll be exploring the final statement, "Nothing can take away how far you come," which also serves as the focal point for our 2021 Run For It 5k. During our conversation, we'll discuss themes like progress and growth, and how things like relapse and challenging chapters can't erase either.

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CHAD: So this week, we have a special guest to round out our Communications tour. We have Bianca Mujica. She serves as our Community Coordinator for the TWLOHA team. You've heard her voice on the podcast before and it's always a pleasure to have her here. Bianca, how are you doing today?

BIANCA MUJICA: I'm doing good. I'm talking to you from Dallas. It's a nice day here and I'm excited to be on the podcast.

CHAD: As I mentioned earlier this week, we're discussing the statement, "Nothing can take away how far you've come." And originally this statement appeared as a Late Night Encouragement. Let's kind of go through the history of this, maybe even taking a step back. What are Late Night Encouragements? What's your role in communicating Late Night Encouragements? And then we can step into where this particular statement came from.

BIANCA: Yeah, so Late Night Encouragement, which on the Comms team, we call them LNE's. It's basically a small quote or phrase that we post every night on Facebook and Twitter just encouraging people to keep going and providing that little sense of hope. We know that a lot of people do their social media binges at night. I like to call it doom scrolling, because, you know, like, before I go to bed, I can't sleep, so I'm just scrolling through social media. And we know that's a pretty common thing, because that's when we get the bulk of the interactions. When I started as a part time staff member, I became the person that was in charge of scheduling and choosing them, and then I would post them. But over time, as I was also responding to comments, I would save the ones that I thought were really good and save the phrases that I felt like this applies to the person I'm responding to, but also to the wider community. So I would save them and then I would reuse them as LNE's. And that's what happened with this phrase. It was a comment to somebody talking about how they had relapsed on self injury, and I was just

trying to let them know that it's okay to have bad days, it's okay to struggle, it doesn't mean that the progress you've made doesn't exist anymore. And when I wrote that I felt like oh, yeah, other people could relate to that as well. So later, I used it as an LNE. It was brought up as one for the calendar phrase, and then got suggested for the 5k. And now Black and White, and here we are.

CHAD: This has undergone quite a bit of evolution. And I think that's really poignant as you consider the entire story of To Write Love On Her Arms, which was originally written about a person to a specific community responding to a specific point in time. Now here we are using To Write Love On Her Arms, saying TWLOHA, shortening it to To Write Love, and using every bit of our essence to continue to point people in the direction of hope and help. So we just kind of played around with how even this phrase, you know, weeks, months, over a year down the line is still good and effective at meeting people where they are. I think that that points to something else that's really profound, that this can be taken in a number of ways. Kind of just playing with those two campaigns, Black and White and Run For It, how do you feel that these words lend themselves to adequate use in both of those campaigns?

BIANCA: So for the Black and White campaign, the whole thing is, these statements are black and white, non negotiable. And when I think about this phrase, I think that literally nothing can take away the time that you spent in recovery, healing. Like, even if you have a relapse, even if you have a really bad day, the years or days or months or however long you spent working to go forward, that is a fact that just is. There's truly nothing that can change the fact that that happened. So I think it really does speak to the core of what Black and White is. And then as far as the 5k goes, I think it's kind of the same thing. Like when you do any sort of movement, you're moving your body, you're keeping your mind active. It doesn't necessarily have to go a certain distance or be a certain pace or speed to be important, to be enough, to be good for you. So I think it's important that people acknowledge that whatever they do, whatever they can do is enough, and the fact that they did it is non-negotiable. They deserve to give themselves that credit. I think this phrase really just serves as a reminder that the progress you've made, is there, it's concrete, it's clear. No matter where you go from here, no matter what happens in the future, the strides that you made in the past will always be there for you to look back on.

CHAD: People often say that you can't rewrite the past and that can often be interpreted as something that's pretty heavy hearted. There are specific traumas, there's specific dark points in our story that we can't change even though we would probably love to. But I think that's also true for the good parts. You can't just waive your right to progress, you can't waive your right to seeing the steps that you've made, the distance that you've covered, the lessons that you've learned, the experience that you've gathered. All of that is super important. And it strikes me that this statement, "Nothing can take away how far you've come." I can hear this play out in conversation where, say, well, nothing can take away how far you've come. And I can hear people pushing back saying, 'well, you know, you don't know the mistakes I've made, you don't know what I'm currently going through.' But that doesn't change the fact that nothing can take it away. That's just how physics and time and distance all work. But Bianca, to the person who is

questioning how applicable this statement is to their life, what would you kind of counter that? How would you further that conversation?

BIANCA: I've also had a lot of experience doing that exact thing, discounting my own progress. And something that my partner told me during a particularly difficult night, I was talking about how the bad days, the struggles always seem to come back. Like no matter how good I'm doing, I always seem to end up in a low place. And he said, 'sure, yeah, that is true. But at the same time, you always find your way back to the good things. You always find your way back to the joy, and the happiness, and the love. And even though it hurts to be back in those dark places, the fact that you find your way back to them means you weren't always in them. You didn't stay there.' And he just always knows exactly what to say, for me to be like, 'damn, you're right.' But I think that is the same thing. You know, when people say, you don't know what I've been through, you don't know my mistakes. You're right, I don't, and you don't know mine. And that's okay. That doesn't mean that there's no redemption for you, or that there's no opportunity for you to still find the good things or to find the light. I think everybody has some burdens that they carry, everybody has their trauma and their struggles. But no matter what they're carrying, that doesn't mean they aren't worthy of still finding the good things. And so I would tell somebody that regardless of where you came from, where you may find yourself in the future, where you are right now, you are still deserving of reminding yourself that you have made so much progress. Or that you're just here, that you just made it to this day, and that you're alive and nobody can take away the fact that you survived to this point. You made it through whatever came at you.

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CHAD: At TWLOHA, it's been a dream of ours to create another, more personal and portable space for hope, healing, and help to happen. That's why we launched The Hopeful app. The Hopeful lets you track your mood, journal daily, discover and bookmark encouraging blogs and podcast episodes, like this one, and so much more. It was made by TWLOHA with you and your well-being in mind.

Speaking personally, my favorite part of the app is the ability to track your mood and see a calendar view of what the current month looks like. As someone who lives with seasonal affective disorder, it's going to be so valuable to look back and see if I can draw a line between my mood and what was or is happening in the world around me.

So if you haven't already—you can download it for free by going to twloha.com/thehopeful or by searching for The Hopeful in the Apple App and Google Play Stores. And after you've added the app to your phone, be sure to leave a review in the app store of your choice so we can find out what you think!

[music playing]

CHAD: We're recording this now, just on the heels of a huge sports event, which in the United States was the NFL Draft. It's really heartwarming to see these stories play out. You see these

athletes who, in first grade, are doing an art project of ‘one day, I’m gonna grow up and be a professional football player.’ And you now see, you know, 15 years later that they are actualizing that dream. The reality is not everyone gets to be the top 1% of their field of their sport, of their hobby, of their profession. At the same time, there are people who have learned so much about themselves just through the journey of continuing to hone, through the mistakes that were made along the way. I remember I was listening to an audio book, and I had to replay this one chapter like three times to fully get what was being said. But a character said, “if you think about it, mistakes are way more important than masterpieces.” Because a masterpiece, you’re only going to have one, maybe two, maybe a handful of these things. But it’s the mistakes that lead you to these masterpieces. So don’t discount the pieces that people will never read, that people will never see, that people will never hear. There is still value in what you learned along the way. Nothing is garbage, nothing is just straight rubbish, to the extent that you are still growing through it, still learning through it, still enveloping yourself around whatever that mistake would be. Knowing that you’re someone that loves art, you’re someone that loves literature, where do you see real life parallels outside of your own anecdotes outside of your own personal experience? Where have you seen this truth of “Nothing can take away how far you’ve come” play out in a world that feeds your soul?

BIANCA: I think with art, writing, anything, any sort of hobby, really, we tend to have this idea that it’s only worth doing if we’re the best at it, or if we can make money off it or if we can be at the top. And I think it’s important that people know that if it brings you joy, if it makes you happy, if it gets your mind off of whatever you’re struggling with, if it brings some sort of fulfilment or positivity to your life, then those things are worth doing. It doesn’t matter where you stand, or how you compare to the people around you, or to the rest of the industry, or whatever. As long as you are getting something out of it, then those things are worth pursuing. Also, the more you do them, the better you’re going to get at it. The more you’re going to find what you like and don’t like, the more you’re going to learn about yourself along the way. All that time you spend learning and doing it and trying new things is valuable. I see a lot of people being like, ‘oh, I’m not the best. This isn’t the greatest thing I’ve ever done, but I just wanted to post it anyway,’ and I feel like it may not be like the best technical show of ability. But like you still did it, and it’s the best version of this that you’ve done. And if it’s not, then we don’t know that. So you know, give yourself a little bit of a little bit of credit, a little bit of compassion, and just say like, whatever it looks like, that’s okay. Whatever the result is, that’s okay. It was still a journey. It was still an experience. It doesn’t have to meet certain requirements to merit sharing with other people. And it reminds me that, like, I don’t like everything I create, but I still keep creating. Because it’s the process, it’s the act, it’s the experience, that makes me happy. It’s not necessarily the result, which is part of it too. But it’s sometimes just like, the act of sitting down and having a paintbrush in my hand, or a pen and a notebook open, that, like brings me comfort. It’s not what I have at the end of it. It’s the journey along the way. It’s the steps that I’m making during that process that bring me a sense of peace that I don’t find elsewhere. And I think that speaks to the phrase as well. Regardless of where you end up, you made it there, you went on that journey. And even if you stopped to rest, even if you faced obstacles, nothing was able to stop you from getting to where you went. Even if you go back, even if you change your path. You still made it there. So I hope that this phrase and this campaign reminds people that it’s okay to stop and think about

the accomplishments, even if they're not where they want to be. They still deserve to think about whatever it is that they achieved.

CHAD: And I think that's a great segue into conversation of the second use of this statement that we're employing, which is a rallying cry for the 5k. So often when I introduce the idea of the Run For It 5k to people, they're like, 'oh, I am in no shape to do that,' or, 'I don't run.' We're like, 'that's great. What do you do?' I think this year we've done the best job to date of highlighting all the ways in which one can move for something that matters. Our Instagram had roller skaters and people doing yoga and dancers and people who rely on mobility devices. Like, for us, it's really not about the time, it's not about the performance. It's really about just linking the body and the mind, kind of the heart and where the heart resides, which is in your body. So often I find that I am negating one for the other, or I'm forgetting one, neglecting one, in order to care for the other. This is really, I think, our attempt at celebrating the entirety of you. That means the emotional and that means the physical. That means the bad days and that means the good days. That means the stumbles and that means crossing the finish line. Where do you see this truth of "Nothing can take away how far you've come" transitioning away from Mental Health Month and into the 5k chatter?

BIANCA: Yeah, I love the fact that we are taking a more diverse and accessible approach to the 5k this year. I have a lot of people in Community, our text platform, who say, you know, I don't run. Is it okay if I walk? Or if I don't do this, is it okay if I do that? And I've made sure to say, yeah, it is more than okay. We welcome you, however you want to show up. We welcome your presence, whatever that looks like. You don't have to meet any sort of qualifications for participation in this. It's really just about showing up for yourself, for your story, for the progress that you've made for your mental health. And I think, especially when it comes to physical movement or to health in general, even if you find yourself struggling, even if you find yourself in chronic pain or with some sort of disorder, you're still making it through every day. You're still living your story and showing that it's possible to do that. And especially when we talk about moving for our story, it's really cool to see all of the ways that people have done that. Whether it's rollerskating, or dancing, like you said, or whether it's simply like weightlifting as a way to reclaim their body after an eating disorder. Or whether it's, like, running after maybe they had a leg injury or simply moving forward as a way to say like, I'm still here, and I'm not going anywhere. I think that is a super, super cool thing. Last year's 5k, I went hiking around a nature trail. In fact, we took our time, it wasn't a quick thing by any means. But it was also like, you know, taking time out in nature, to just be present, to be still, to be one with my surroundings and to explore my environment. I think that also just reminded me that even during my most stressful days, even during the times that I feel at my lowest, there's still so much good that can pull me out of that. And there's so much to remind me that I have a reason to keep going.

CHAD: I think it really draws you back to the individual nature of this statement, or at least what we intended this statement to convey. Obviously, you know, with 7 billion people on the planet, we can't create 7 billion different individualized mantras. But we do want to invite you here now to make this individual. So the statement says "Nothing can take away how far you've come." 'Nothing' is big, right? Nothing is a large umbrella to fit under. But just take a second, take a

minute, take some time to rest. And let's kind of turn that statement on its head. Blank, can't take away how far you've come. What is that thing that you think is standing between you and what you hope to be, what you hope to become, what you hope to feel, what you hope to experience? I am steadfast in my belief that with a sense of community, with a sense of support around you, that blank can't take away how far you've come. Your individualized description and definition of ability can't take away how far you've come. That relapse that you were just waking up from can't take away how far you've come. Your rejection letters to your favorite college can't take away how far you've come. The applications you've sent out to that dream job that have gone unresponded to, that can't take away how far you've come. So we want to invite you to lean into that. Bianca if you have any hypotheticals that you want to offer.

BIANCA: Yeah, when I think about the statement, and I think about what can't take away how far I've come, I think fear is a really, really big one. Whether that's fear of not being enough, fear of always struggling, a fear of my trauma kind of taking over certain aspects of my life, fear of not reaching my goals, whatever it is, like, I've had those fears. I also think about the things that I struggle with, like depression, anxiety, OCD. Those things, they can't take away the fact that I get to laugh on a daily basis. That I get to experience some really, really cool friendships and that I get to show my parents how much I'm growing and see how proud they are of me. Or just like, you know, going out to eat, going out to, like, my favorite store, whatever it is. Being able to do all those little things just reminds me that whatever I'm struggling with, that didn't stop me from getting these little joys out of my day.

CHAD: I love that. So looking back through this journey of Mental Health Month in the year 2021, two weeks ago we were chatting with Tori about "Stop apologizing for existing." The central theme we kept coming back to was one of self compassion. Moving on to the next week, "I'm not broken. Who I am is whole." Becky and I talked a lot about perspective and how maybe we aren't always the best narrators of our own journey. Sometimes we need people to come alongside us and remind us of things that are true. As I was reaching for what the central theme is to this week, I was trying to find the right word. And actually, I think, Bianca, what you're illuminating of this statement is that it's really just a 50/50 mix of self compassion and perspective. That as you are relaying this truth to other people, you're allowed to accept it for yourself. This is an invitation to be where you are in this moment. You don't need to take another step forward if you're not ready to yet, but you can't move backwards in time either. Take some time to rest, rest is productive, and admire and give yourself credit. But Bianca, thank you for being here. Anything else on your mind or your heart that you want to express, to get out there to the world?

BIANCA: Yeah, when you were talking about how there was self compassion and perspective, one thing that came to mind was that one of the ideas at the intersection of those is growth. When we're talking about how far you've come, about your journey, there's growth happening every single step of the way. Even when you don't realize it, even when you feel like it's the opposite. I think we're always growing, we're always learning, we're always becoming new versions of ourselves. For me, that's kind of the heart of this phrase is nothing can take away how far you've come, because nothing can take away the experiences that you've had. Nothing

can take away the growth that you've experienced. Nothing can take away who you are, who you're becoming, and who you will become. I just think that it's important to give ourselves credit for the growth that is always happening, even when we feel like it's not. When we talk about nothing can take away how far you've come, that's because nothing was able to stop you from moving forward. Nothing was able to stop you from going on this journey. And there's this phrase that I hope resonates with people as much as it did with me. But the phrase is, "I am a force of nature, alive and breathing and blooming every day." So that's something that I've clung to a lot. I hope that other people can remind themselves that you're a force of nature, you're unstoppable, you're here, and you're gonna keep going. You're gonna keep blooming and growing and breathing and living your story. And we are so grateful that there's nothing that has been able to stop you.

[music playing]

CHAD: So there you have it. The final episode of this years Black and White miniseries. If you care to revisit this conversation in the greater context of Mental Health Month, then you can check out the Black and White 4.0 blog in its entirety or learn more about the campaign by going to TWLOHA.com/blog, that's T-W-L-O-H-A.com/blog. You can also find the Black and White collection, which includes T-shirts featuring this year's statements, available for purchase, at store.twloha.com.

We want to thank you for joining us throughout Mental Health Month. While this month of awareness may be ending, we recognize that the conversation surrounding and the focus on our mental well-being does not and should not stop with it. So our efforts continue, your stories continue, and our gratitude for your presence continues. As always, thank you so much for being here, thank you for listening, and thank you for caring about this movement. We exist because of and for you. We're glad you're here.

[music playing]

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. That's T-W-L-O-H-A.com. And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

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. 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.

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 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.