

Episode BW01: Black And White

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

CHAD MOSES: There's no way to deny it—this year is different. As we welcome May and Mental Health Month, we're not only addressing the very thing our work centers on, but there's also talk about a pandemic, an uncertain future, and physical distancing. Questions of what's important to share, remind, instill, or revisit are more complex.

As the weeks have gone by, we couldn't help but wonder if the Black and White campaign that we've done the past 3 years would happen as planned or if we should switch gears—just as we have with cancelations, postponements, and calendar shuffles. Why would this be any different? Shouldn't our focus be on other conversations and efforts?

The thing is, we've realized a significant piece of that doubt was a manifestation of stigma and guilt. The false notion that silence would be an appropriate response rather than striving to push this conversation forward. Times of crisis—whether personal or global—make for a rather difficult terrain to navigate.

But what they do present us with is a chance to lean hard into deep truths—an opportunity to reflect on what is non-negotiable and undebatable during unexpected shifts. The loss and struggle we face are capable of bringing unwavering, foundational beliefs into focus especially when we allow other people into the journey.

Today, in this episode, we're revealing our Black and White campaign statements. We're inviting you to stand with us and join us in holding them, letting them shape and reshape our everyday.

[music playing]

CHAD: Hi everyone, this is Chad Moses, TWLOHA's Director of Outreach. We're excited to share a bit more about the Black and White campaign that we launched just a few days ago in honor of Mental Health Month. Later in this episode I'll be joined by TWLOHA's Editor, Becky Ebert, but before we get there, we want to share with you the three statements we believe are Black and White:

“We need your presence, not your perfection.”

“Hope remains.”

And, “No one else can play your part.”

And it's with deep gratitude to a few of our Spring 2020 interns, that we invite you to now listen to excerpts from this year's blog read by Kartika Ladwal, Yentl Reynders, and Ffion Edwards. Thank you so much for adding your voices to this special moment.

[music playing]

KARTIKA LADWAL: We Need Your Presence, Not Your Perfection

Achievements, accolades, days sober or free from self-harm. Unblemished attendance and straight A's. We've been conditioned to place value on personal achievement, to highlight and boast about our successes while masking our "slip-ups" and "failures." We've been taught to aim for perfection—at work, at school, as parents or siblings, as people. Imperfect in nature, in design, we're still expected to strive for nothing but the best from ourselves and others.

To put it quite plainly: we disagree. You are not here for the sake of a perfect existence. You do not exist to impress or appease or meet standards. Even in your faults, your mistakes, your mishaps, you have made this world more beautiful. Through your struggles, your heartache, your pain, you have brought humility and encouraged grace to grow in spaces that craved honesty. The magic of your soul is not contingent upon flawlessness. Just by being here, you are giving someone a reason to be thankful, you are proving that it is possible for good and light to coexist with the past and in the midst of struggle. You are living proof that every part of us is worthy of being known and valued.

Today and always, we need your presence, not your perfection.

[music playing]

YENTL REYNDERS: Hope Remains

Hope is many things: it's universal. It's real. It's life-saving. Hope, in the face of fear, is defiant. Since our earliest days, hope has been the most central virtue. Back when TWLOHA was just [a story](#), it was the one thing Renee asked us to remember.

"Remember hope," she said. Renee likened it to the stars, saying that while our view may be obscured by dust and clouds and storms, they're still there. Surrounded by dark, empty space, these pinpoints of light have been our guides, our legends, and our inspiration to keep going.

If hope, like the stars, falls out of focus, you needn't feel shame. It's not your fault if it feels distant. But know that it is never truly gone. Hope remains in the embrace of family and friends. Hope remains in the voices of those on the other end of a helpline, guiding you through scheduling counseling appointments, and leading support groups. Hope remains in the ebb and flow of recovery, the patient expectation of the day your story encourages another. Despite circumstance, despite distance, despite doubt—hope remains."

[music playing]

FFION EDWARDS: No One Else Can Play Your Part

You are irreplaceable.

Before you ever opened your eyes, raised your voice, or shared your heart, you brought something so intrinsically you to the world. And any pain you've felt since has not changed that. Even after witnessing your first lie, singing your first wrong note, feeling your first heartache, you continued to add a distinct and welcoming beauty.

To this day, with all the ways you've learned to bloom and grow, you continue to bring a certain energy that we, and this entire planet, are grateful for. A world where you don't exist is not one we care to imagine. Your absence would not go unnoticed or unfelt. After all, no one can see the world quite like you. Nothing can break through silence quite like your voice. And no one else can play your part.

You are more than a character whose lines can be studied and rehearsed. You are more than a passing thought or a backdrop. You are central to this story in more ways than you've allowed yourself to believe. You are a gift. Incomparable and coveted. And for all you've given, we are certain there is more to be received, in a way utterly unique to you.

No one else can play your part.

[music playing]

CHAD: The black and white campaign is about speaking truth to things that are unmoved by circumstance. This year we are continuing the tradition of focusing on statements that, to us, are black and white. We're honored to share them with you, and to help me do that, I'm joined by TWLOHA's Editor, Becky Ebert.

BECKY EBERT: Hi, Chad! Super grateful to be here.

CHAD: So, for those of you that aren't familiar, Becky has been our Editor for many years now. She's had a hand in every single campaign that we've carried out, and that includes all three Black and White campaigns to date. I often joke, but I'm actually quite serious, that Becky makes us all sound way smarter than we are. Without her guidance, without her wisdom, without her discernment and without her love of words, To Write Love on Her Arms simply would not be as impactful as we are. So, thank you so, so much. With Becky's help, we narrowed down to three statements that we're using this year for the Black and White campaign. Those statements are, "We need your presence, not your perfection," "Hope remains," and, "No one

else can play your part.” So, I don't think we've ever discussed this on the super foundational level besides some intro paragraphs to the blogs, but, Becky, let's kind of introduce people why we feel it's important to make things black and white.

BECKY: Right. I think oftentimes mental health can be a gray area, even in terms of diagnosis and treatment. Sometimes our experiences don't align with the symptoms we see listed. Sometimes our path toward recovery or treatment looks wildly different from someone else's. Experiencing and even navigating mental health struggles isn't a one size fits all situation. So I think our hope is to find a space where things can be just that—they can be specific and unwavering and foundational, as you said, these words and the meaning behind them are not applicable to just a select few. We believe they're all encompassing. There's no room or need to argue against them from our perspective.

CHAD: For sure. Yeah. I think that's one thing that a lot of people have been drawn to To Write Love over the years is our use of poetry. We kind of, in our early days, stood alone in the world of nonprofits, in that we would use blogs. We would use poetic language to describe what so many people were grasping at. Like you mentioned, mental health does often feel like a gray area. Just take a look at our name. “To Write Love on Her Arms” does not give people an instant foothold onto what we do, how we do it, why we do it. I remember Mark, our director of marketing, brought up this idea several years back saying, what if we cut right to the chase? What if we didn't make shirts that take an entire paragraph to spell out? What if we get right to the things that can't be debated. And Becky, you and I, we've joked over the years like, “Man, at what point do we run out of these phrases?” But that's yet to happen. And I think that that's a testament to the ongoing conversation of mental health that we are, even now, three years into this program, 14 years into To Write Love's existence, finding more things that we are so comfortable standing on firmly.

BECKY: Right. Absolutely. Someone's going to hear these phrases and it might kind of stop them in their tracks, which is a good thing in this sense. We really want people to hear these words, to feel them, and not to feel as though, like you said, that we're dancing around them. This pertains to each and every person that is reading, that is listening, that sees us on social media. This pertains to each and every person.

CHAD: So kind of riding on that ethos, the idea that this pertains to each and every person, what are ways that collectively as people, they can interact with the campaign.

BECKY: Such a big part of what TWLOHA does is centered around conversation and connection. So that's really at the heart of this, I would say. We want people to read and talk and share and contemplate all three of these statements in addition to the overall theme of the month. Obviously the overall theme is to highlight mental health on a grand scale, even beyond the TWLOHA corner of the world. But in terms of getting involved, in terms of specifics of the campaign, people are able to invest in the designs, and a big part of that is wearing those shirts as daily reminders to themselves and then say, whoever, obviously, right now, is in your home

with you, whoever you have a video chat with, those can act as reminders to them as well, create conversations. They can also watch for specific content across our social media channels throughout the entire month. And, they can also check out my area of expertise, which is the blog, for new pieces every week.

CHAD: Yeah. And then, we're also going to be touching on this a little bit later, but, this is part one of four of a podcast series that we'll be releasing throughout this month. So certainly be sure to check out this very podcast each and every week. We're going to have some new guests that are going to help us unpack what these statements mean to them. While we have crafted these phrases to be things that we see as undebatable, things that we see as clearly defined, they do certainly warrant a sense of personal nuance, right? Like they, they welcome your spin on it. Why is this unique to you? Why is this black and white to you? I have a friend, Chris, he's out in Arizona, and I get to see him each and every year for some music festivals out there. Fortunately, I was able to connect with him right before the pandemic started postponing and canceling a bunch of events. He mentioned looking at our shirts like, "Man, I really liked the ones that just kinda slap you, the ones that kind of dare you to, to confront it, dare you to prove me wrong." And that's one thing that I love about all these phrases that we picked over the years and particularly this year, is that there's not a lot of room for people to say, "That's not true." There certainly is room for to say, "That feels a bit foreign to me right now," or "That's hard for me to grasp." And, yet, there's still space in all these phrases for people to say on the other end of that conversation, "Yes, but I can believe this for you," or "Despite your disbelief, I can still hold onto this for you until you catch up." So, we do hope that people interact with this on a personal level, on a microscopic level, but then we hope it grows from there. We hope that this encourages conversation. We hope that this doesn't just live on our website or our web store or our podcast or blog, but we hope that you can find some courage through these phrases to engage the people around you. At the end of the day, this is not just our attempt to create new phrases. This is our attempt to lend our voice to the greater scope of conversation that is Mental Health Month.

BECKY: Right. Going off of that, I would also say, while we label these statements as black and white, as non-negotiable, the thing is, that doesn't mean we're closed off to discussion. And as you said, there might be someone who doesn't feel as though it applies to them, or might have another perspective on what we're trying to say, and that's okay. We're completely open to those conversations. The purpose behind that is really for us to say to you, "We believe this to be true, and we are here to hear, obviously, your perspective, your side of it to help you understand whether it's your worthiness, whether it's the validity of the pain you're experiencing. Any part of that, we're welcome and open to hearing that side of your story, that discussion. But as you said, they apply to you and we'll carry that for you if you're unable to.

CHAD: Yeah. Let's lean into that conversational piece of it, as well. So, we're starting the conversation, we're asking the questions, and we're laying the statements out there. What are ways that people can engage in that conversation? Say they are living at home alone in an

apartment, or maybe they are living with friends or family that aren't as open to mental health conversation. What options still exist for them to continue the conversation?

BECKY: Social media is a very interactive space for us. Our entire team is always online and focused on that. If you're home and you're surrounded by people that aren't particularly interested in having this conversation, we have the ability to connect with everyone in a variety of different ways. So I would say my hope is that people don't hesitate to be on the other end of this and just to reach out. And like I said, even if that includes a discussion of disbelief, the questioning of whether or not you do actually think what we're saying applies to you, to your experience and to your story. That's something where I think, in this season, we're seeing quite a few people who may not have been as vocal about their mental health, are now finding that the internet is now pretty wide open with people being honest about their struggles with isolation, with grief, with situational depression, anything like that. So I do think in a way we kind of entered an area where there's a bit more openness, even if it's closed off in terms of physical. As you mentioned, May is Mental Health Month in the U.S., and I think if people are uncomfortable talking about these types of topics, or they're unaware, now is a solid time to delve in, to learn, and hopefully even share your own experience. I think as we've mentioned before, connection is such an important part of what we do, of what we strive to do, and in this situation it's realizing that our struggles aren't necessarily an anomaly. Yes, they're your struggles, but they are just yours to carry or understand.

CHAD: I love that. I think that there is so much space within this month, within the season, and within the campaign that we're beginning for your voice to really bloom. So as you are going through this month, as you are tracking with us on the blog and on the podcast, as you read our thoughts on these statements, we certainly welcome you, the listener, to respond as well. Becky nor I are going to pretend that we wrote everything there is to write about these phrases. We'd love to see how you are carrying these phrases forward. That includes doubts and that includes glimmers of hope and—it runs the whole spectrum. I think that plays in so well with the conversation of mental health. It doesn't work on a binary. You're not broken or complete. You're not totally ill or totally well. We are all kind of navigating this on a spectrum. Some days, our health makes more sense than others. But at no point are you expected to go through this alone. The hope is certainly to close the gap, to make you feel, despite the physical distancing, a bit more proximal, a bit closer to us. Perhaps even a little bit closer to other people that are fighting very similar journeys or navigating very similar journeys to you.

BECKY: When you and I sat down to write the blog this year, it's a very collaborative effort, but one of my favorite things is watching you take a phrase in a completely different direction than where my brain was going. That's something I wholeheartedly enjoy. Because then I get to witness what you're thinking, how you see the phrase, and then we find a way to meld the two together. And for me, that's a great example of connection, of collaboration. I think that can embrace everyone listening, all of our supporters. I would love to hear what they think about the phrases, and how it applies to their story or to someone they know who's struggling.

CHAD: When we started this year's campaign, I was solidly in the midst of a depressive episode and I could not... We started these meetings back in January, and I could not get out of my own head to think, "All right, is May gonna happen?" This is before current events took place. I was just in a tough spot. But having a team to lean on, to believe in not just a better tomorrow, but a better campaign that was coming down the pipe. I think that meant a lot to me. That at this point, three years into it, this wasn't figuring it out as we go. There was some muscle memory there. I think that that's something that we hope for this campaign—even if these phrases that we're offering to you, whether they're the phrases from two years ago or last year or maybe even this year, that if they don't roll off the tongue, if you can't maintain eye contact in the mirror while you say it the first time, give it another go. We're not saying fake it till you make it, but I think there is a piece of me that's saying, "Repeat it until you believe it." It doesn't have to all click instantly. Truth can be gradual in how it reveals itself and the degree that you let it take root in your life. I've said for years—these issues that we deal with, depression, addiction, self-injury, suicide, diagnosed mental illness, anxiety, eating disorders, you name it—they don't play favorites. They don't care where you call home or the color of your skin or what music you listen to. Mental health is an equal opportunity realm. Depression can affect everyone. Mental illness can possibly affect everyone, just as this pandemic has affected everyone. You haven't had to be diagnosed in order for this to affect you, and yet, your response, your actions, your attitude will still affect the global conversation.

BECKY: This pandemic obviously is impacting everyone on a different scale in a different way, but there's no doubt that everyone is being impacted. I think that can relate to mental health in the way that, maybe you don't deal with a mental health struggle, but there are certainly people in your life who do. So you can relate from the perspective of a caregiver, of just a loved one. My hope is that this pause, some people are calling it a pause, but that it gives us space to almost contemplate things like that. That there is a sense of comradery, that someone else who's struggling also has an impact on you. In the other sense that you have an effect on them, that you can influence them, whether that's to get help, to be open about what they're going through, anything like that.

CHAD: So, Becky, we've talked a little bit about the consistency of this campaign over the past three years. What in your mind is a little bit different about this go around?

BECKY: There's something I personally am pretty excited about. That's new to this year's campaign and that's a month long blog series. Throughout this month, we decided to share a total of eight pieces that focus on eight different mental health struggles. The perspectives come from people with varying perspectives and experiences, and some of the topics we'll be highlighting include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and addiction. Our hope with this is to expand on the awareness side, and even the connection side, of the campaign. It's to introduce those who might be unfamiliar with say, addiction. It's to introduce someone to another's firsthand experience, or to perhaps even comfort someone who is struggling with a similar

mental health struggle, depression, feeling lost or hopeless. So these are all personal pieces from eight different individuals, and they will roll out every Monday and Tuesday on the blog.

CHAD: That's awesome. I can't wait to read these stories. I can't wait to see how you, the listeners, interact with these stories. I'm so excited to see the conversations that will certainly take off thanks to the work that you've poured into this, Becky, and all the efforts of everyone helping us spread the word. Becky, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. Is this your first podcast? Is this the debut?

BECKY: This is my first podcast, yeah, as a guest. I'm usually on the other side.

CHAD: That's right. Becky, thank you so much for lending your voice to this conversation in a number of ways.

Once again, throughout the month of May, we'll be centering some of our conversations around the statements that we introduced: "We need your presence, not your perfection," "Hope remains," and "No one else can play your part." Throughout the weeks we are going to be inviting some guests onto the podcast to explore how they interpret and how they embody these phrases. Thank you so much for joining us, and we'll see you next week.

[music playing]

Thanks again to our amazing interns. This was their last week with TWLOHA, and they graciously lent their voices from Florida, Wales, and Belgium. A big thanks also to Becky Ebert for her work in helping bring this campaign and this episode together.

Throughout the month, we'll be sharing new content in honor of Mental Health Month across our social media channels. You can follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#) to stay up to date! We'll also be exploring the statements we introduced today and premiering mini episodes inspired by the statements.

If you want to read the Black and White 3.0 blog or learn more about the campaign, we invite you to visit TWLOHA.com/blog, that's T-W-L-O-H-A.com/blog. You can also find the Black and White collection, available for purchase, at store.twloha.com.

[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 Lindsay Kolsch, with editorial support by Rebecca Ebert. Music assistance was provided by James Likeness and Ben Tichenor.

I'm Lindsay Kolsch, thank you so much for listening.

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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. You can find more information about To Write Love on Her Arms at twloha.com.