

Grace Bonney: 00:12 Hi and welcome to Good Company, a podcast where we take an honest look at the world of creative business. I'm your host Grace Bonney. Last month, we hit the road to celebrate the brand new issue of Good Company magazine. In honor of issue number two, The Fearless Issue, we hosted live panel discussions with local entrepreneurs to talk about things like fear, failure, self-care and the dreaded imposter syndrome. And because we know that not everyone can attend live events, we recorded all four tour stops to air here on the Good Company podcast.

Today we're starting with our event from Seattle. This event really stood out in my mind because we talked about something I realized I have not paid enough attention to, ageism. I was joined on stage by three incredible entrepreneurs, author Shauna Ahern, also known as Gluten-Free Girl, curator, educator and founder of The Oula Company, Erika Massaquoi, and designer Davora Lindner of Prairie Underground. These women generously shared their time, their insight and vulnerable moments with us, discussing everything from major health trauma and the loss of loved ones to some of their biggest fears and how they learned to better understand them or just let them go.

Today's episode also includes some deeply emotional and important questions from the audience as well. So, please stay tuned to the end of the episode for some really choice wisdom related to age, starting careers later in life and how to know when it's time to just let go and move on to something else. I also want to thank Book Larder and The Riveter for hosting our event, [Ellie Mish 00:01:46] for her help on audio and everyone who came out to support this conversation. Thank you so much from all of us at Good Company. So let's start the show.

Hi everybody. Thank you so much for being here. I know there was a lot of traffic and a protest and a lot going on. So we're so happy that you're here with us tonight. Let's introduce everybody. Shauna, you want to tell everyone who you are?

Shauna Ahern: 02:17 I'm Shauna Ahern. I still have people come up to me and yell, "You're Gluten-Free Girl." I feel for years like I needed a superhero outfit, GFG right across the chest. Then I had a mastectomy January, nothing to show anymore. So might as well worry about it. I wrote Gluten-Free Girl, a website that was actually one of the first 100 food blogs apparently. So when I started nobody had any idea what a food blog was. There was no Instagram, Twitter or Facebook. I'm a writer. And I ran that

website until last year and it's officially done. So that's part of what I will talk about, is the getting over the fear of thinking you have to continue something that's no longer working for you.

Erika Massaquoi: 02:55

Hi everyone. I'm Erika Massaquoi. I'm the CEO and founder of The Oula Company. I moved to Seattle six years ago from New York City, where I was the assistant dean of the School of Art and Design at the Fashion Institute of Technology. I have worked as a curator and an educator for, oh my God, almost 25 years now. I started my career at the Museum of the Moving Image in Long Island City. I went to the Whitney and then I was a television correspondent for Oxygen. So I worked in television covering art and design. I was a correspondent for NPR. So I am a bit of a hybrid and I've had several iterations in my career and I'll talk about that, about being the circle that doesn't fit into the square peg. I think that sums up my life story. And thank you so much Grace. It's a pleasure to be here.

Davora Lindner: 03:51

Hi everyone. My name is Davora Lindner. I am co-founder, co-designer, creative director of Prairie Underground, which is a woman's sustainable apparel company based here in Seattle, Washington. I started the company about 15 years ago with my business partner, Camilla Eckersley, and we moved to Seattle to start an apparel company and decided to fold all of our personal values into the company, and those included sustainability, those included local manufacturing. All of our garments are sewn in Seattle or are sewn within about 30 to 40 minutes from our warehouse and studio down in Georgetown.

And we produce four collections a year. It's a lot to do with like a really small staff of people and a very devoted and ethical following of shoppers who really have supported the collection for that period of time. Prior to launching Prairie I had a career as a sculptor in Minneapolis and a lot of those values and also promoting values of artistic production in Georgetown where we are manifested in our space and in our studios, while we have the gallery and we have events that are open to the public. You can go to our website and sign up for those events. It's a way for people to come ... Sort of cross through our threshold without a transaction.

I mean, we certainly have a boutique there and you can experience our products, but it isn't required. It's the one of those things that you can just come in and socialize with us. At an event like this there's not a lot of time or transparency or proximity to really ask a lot of questions that you may want to

ask and we do this quarterly in Georgetown. So you're all invited and we'd love to see you there.

Grace Bonney: 05:28 I'd like to know for each of you what does your support system look like and how did you build that? Shauna, let's start with you. What does yours look like and how did you build that?

Shauna Ahern: 05:37 I live on Vashon Island. And so most of my support system is a bunch of old hippies, which is great. When I was a girl I was also the circle in the square peg. I never fit in and I also did not understand girls. I didn't understand the mean girl stuff. I didn't understand the games. I didn't understand that the kind of like, "Oh, I'm better than you." I certainly did not want to wear dresses. I just didn't get it. Boys were my best friends. I wanted to be the first major league player in the world ... The first woman to be in major leagues. Well, it didn't work. They wouldn't let me play little league. Title IX hadn't passed yet.

Anyway, and so I just kind of kept struggling along and I always longed for women, but I never understood them. And then it wasn't actually until I gave birth to my daughter that I understood womanhood and I understood in my body what it was, what power women have and what incredible ability we have to understand pain. I did an [inaudible 00:06:30] this past summer and the women were going to take blood for an IV and they said, "Okay, we're going to talk you through it." I'm like, "It's okay, I've done this before." They said, "Well, sometimes people faint." And I said, "They faint from having their blood drawn? Who?" And they're like, "35 year old men." Because they've never experienced pain before, not on the kind of systemic level that we do.

And so it has become my greatest joy besides my husband, whom I adore and my two kids, to fall in love with women. And I have amazing women who have gone through their hard times and they are not afraid of fear, they're not afraid of failure and we support each other and there is no pretending. And it's walks, it's talks, it is quick jam sessions over coffee. I made sure that I see one of my women every day and that has changed my life dramatically.

Grace Bonney: 07:21 Erika, what about you?

Erika Massaquoi: 07:21 I would say my support system had been the women in my family. We were talking about pain before. I've lost so many of them so crazily I'm now the matriarch of my family, but I grew up on my mother's side of the family with amazing great aunts

who had given me so much advice and encouraged my creativity. We cooked together. We talked together. I was super close to my mom and I remember when my first aunt passed away and then my mother suddenly passed away right after I finished grad school and I lost my grandmother last year and I realized that in all of those losses the space would be created in my heart to let more people and more love in.

I was so career-oriented in New York, I never really thought about getting married until my mother was gone. Then I was like, "Huh? Maybe I want to have a family." My grandma was like, "Why do you want to hold yourself back with a husband?" I remember they were trying to talk me out of it. I'm like, "No. I think I'm gonna find me a husband." And then I went out and found a husband. And then after that I was like, "Well, maybe I want to have like a baby." And my siblings were like, "Erika with a baby. Ha-ha." I mean, they just thought it was so absurd that I wanted to be this family woman now, but I was replicating these models that I've seen in my family.

And then last year when I lost my grandmother I realized that I've come to a point in my life, particularly when you're older and you move from one city to another, it's very difficult to make really close friends and I've made in Seattle some of the best friends that I could have never imagined I'd have in my life, and it's because we were all going through similar life circumstances, losing our parents, getting married maybe a little bit later, having children later. So I have a group of women, it's like a handful of women, who are like my older sisters and then on the other side of it, I have a group of older women, like in their late 70s and 80s who I just love. It's like the grand Dom's who know how to live, who can talk to you about sex and money and clothing and how to be.

So I really find in this moment that those women, these two sets of women have become my anchor, I mean, through so much pain and loss, but also with my older friends teaching me how to live and what it means to be a woman. I mean, that sort of mentorship and friendship is just invaluable.

Grace Bonney: 09:50

Davora, what about you?

Davora Lindner: 09:51

I do think that Erika makes a really brilliant point about Seattle and our region and that I feel like I have so many protectors in this area, in my community, in the arts, in music and the queer community in Seattle that have empowered me to go forward with ideas and initiatives and also support the production and

activities of other people in a way I haven't felt in another city. And that was profound when I moved to Seattle and like feeling sort of like a misfit or like I didn't quite fit in and like any other city whereas in this city I feel very much a part of a larger community, and that's a tremendous gift and that's something that I'm incredibly thankful for and that I cleave to in Seattle.

Aside from of course my mom, who I don't think I really mentioned enough in sort of talking about my business trajectory or my life. And she really lived all of those values. When we're talking about fear, I think was probably one of the most fearless people or most fearless role models I had growing up. Sort of seeing her start her own business, work for other people and then start her own company and raised me on her own. I mean, my parents were divorced when I was really young and to sort of see her sort of go to the city at that point, which was Lincoln, Nebraska, not a huge metropolis, but it was very much considered a city at that time, like on her own, and like the way that she plotted that life. It's made an imprint on me.

I mean, she was without a doubt my biggest role model and who I wanted to emulate. Erika and I, we were talking backstage and I also have the incredible privilege of working with one of my best friends that I've known since I was 16. I mean, we met when we were 12, but we've become really close friends when we were in our teenagers and I still get to see her every day. I still get to sort of guide this ship with her every day. And that's, I mean, I think that's pretty unique. I don't know that a lot of people sort of have that experience and yet, it's sort of what I know and it's our ecosystem and I think that extends she's a family of everybody that we work with. I don't really feel that we have this hierarchical structure at work.

I feel everybody at Prairie is really empowered to speak for themselves, but also in the way that, there is an expectation of support and also providing support and it's not sort of like only in that feeling from the top down or what HR is supposed to look like for a company. Our company functions really differently.

Grace Bonney: 12:33 For each of you, what are individual acts that you do to take care of yourself in moments where you are feeling stressed out, afraid, overwhelmed? What do those little everyday rituals look like? Erika, you want to start?

Erika Massaquoi: 12:46 Oh, sure. I have a lot of them. About a year ago, a year and a half ago I went ... My fear manifests itself in panic and anxiety

and I went through this horrible period of panic attacks and anxiety attacks where really I thought it was the end. First time the EMT come to the house, "Oh miss, you're having an episode." I'm like, "No, I'm really having a heart attack here." And then the second time I want, I volunteer to go to the hospital and my husband is driving in the car behind the ambulance because I just thought it was the end.

And I was doing so much at the time. I was taking care of my grandmother, flying back and forth between Seattle and Florida, Tampa. My daughter was like in second grade, starting Oula, being the only one behind it and I realized that all this energy was manifesting itself in my body and it's interesting because for the past 25 years I've gotten a high off that. If I'm not doing three or four things, I'm bored, where's the party? And all of a sudden my body stopped and I would complain a lot to my grandmother. I'd be like, "Oh grandma, I'm so tired." "Well, if you're tired Erika, take a nap." And then she would tell me, "I don't understand why you feel like you need to do so much, improve so much." She's like, "You're going to end up falling out and then another woman is going to be taken care of your husband and child."

I mean, she would say these things to me and I would just ... I mean, she would say this to me and I would just sort of laugh it off, what is it that you want? But there was something in me driving me and that particular type of energy. And when I went through this really, really dark time where my body just said no, I realized, "Oh my God, I haven't really taken care of myself." And so a good friend of mine was like, "Erika, you're doing a lot but you really have to carve time out in your day to take care of yourself." And then it's like, "Oh, I'm so busy." She's like, "That's just an excuse. You owe it to your family, you owe it to yourself to take care of you."

So I do like heated Vinyasa yoga maybe like six times a week, usually every day. If I don't, I'm in crisis. And it's interesting how stress can accumulate in the body. I mean, I'll be in yoga one day and I'll come out and I'm one of these people who's like doing the yoga with the smile on her face and I'm like totally high off of it, but it's interesting to me how 24 hours later I'm in the same class and that stress and anxiety of life has built itself up in my body again. It's almost shocking to me. If I don't have it, I'm just lost. I'm always smudging the house. I really believe in like clearing the energy and good energy so I'm smudging and I have incense going. I pray all the time.

My friends think that that's funny about me, but I'm really multi-faith. I was born Catholic. My father converted to Islam when I was a little girl and then I converted back to Catholicism so me and my husband could share the same faith. And then in the summers I grew up in the Baptist Church, then I got my meditative Buddhism thing going. I'm like all-faith, multi-faith. I wouldn't be able to do all the things that I'm doing if I didn't create that balance in my life. Does it take away from something's not get done at the end of the day as a result? Absolutely. There's always like four or five things I didn't get to, but you know what? If I didn't take care of myself, I wouldn't be able to scratch anything off the list.

Grace Bonney: 16:06

Davora, what does that look like for you?

Davora Lindner: 16:09

You know, I wrote a lot of different things down, but I think that list-making is always great, but then I also ... I mean, this sort of made me think about that because I don't really keep a lot of lists right now and so sort of want to get back into that practice. I think technology has sort of taken away like pragmatic list-making and checking things off. I used to be a really big Filofax person and like write everything down and that's still a culture that we have at work, but I do a lot of that on the computer now, but I think there's a real value to doing it on paper with pen.

We're also manufacturers. So we have tasks unlimited so I can spend an entire afternoon ironing or steaming. Those two are my favorites. I love doing two things and I also love cleaning. That's sort of like me going to the spa or exercising. People know my level of fear or anxiety when they see me cleaning.

Grace Bonney: 17:08

We get a lot of feedback from the community about when we take care of ourselves. Everybody likes to read the articles about self-care. They like to talk about all of these things. But then watch how quickly they turn if you say like, "Oh, no, I can't do that. I'm taking a day for myself." And you get a lot of, "Oh, that's nice for you." And it's a very dangerous thing that happens in our community a lot and I've noticed that particularly happen in the community of female entrepreneurs. There's a lot of guilt that comes with that or a lot of isn't that indulgent, isn't that like look how fancy you are taking a day off or going to get a massage or whatever it is. And there is privilege there, but there's also a very real need to take care of yourself. Shauna, how do you manage some of the guilt that comes back from that?

Shauna Ahern:

17:50

Well, it's interesting. I think if you've asked me this question a year ago, I would have had my pad list. I would have had, okay, well I do yoga, which I never do enough. I have a very serious meditation practice and that keeps me grounded. I write. I mean, writing is what I'm meant to do. And so when I do the thing I love to do, I don't feel stressed out. It's actually kind of hard to remember that. We all start with something we absolutely love to do and then we build a business around it and then we find ourselves doing the 343,000 things that we're required to keep that business going and we never get to do the thing we love to do.

And that is actually what led me to quit Gluten-Free Girl and start particularly the flour business we started, which we had no business starting. That was a terrible idea. I mean, really it just fell flat on her face and I'm really glad for it. And I can talk about that later, but I will say that one of the reasons I struggle with the idea of self-care is it is that list and that list still doesn't get to it. You can do yoga, you can smudge, you can clean, you can iron, but if you're not addressing the deep, deep thing that's happening in your body that requires that self-care in the first place, it doesn't matter what you do.

I mentioned that I had a mastectomy in January and it was one of the most profound experiences of my life. I was lucky enough I did not have breast cancer. My mom and all three of her sisters had breast cancer and I had genetic testing done at Swedish and I came out with a 93% chance of developing breast cancer. And I saw my oncologist and she said, "Look ...". Because I said, "Look, when I get breast cancer, I'll get them off." And she said, "No, don't get breast cancer." I have seen so many patients 10 years ago that are back with brain cancer, that are back with liver cancer. We understand three to five cells to go in the bloodstream. We don't know which people are the people who develop cancer again in a different place. Don't get cancer.

And I had spent an entire life having been raised by a very difficult mother of being passive for years and years and years. So making the decision to get this mastectomy in order to protect my health and be alive for my kids was what the active choice I'd ever made, most active choice I ever made. So I went into with all the self-care that I could. I took of all my vitamins and I ate lots of protein and I rested and I prepared all the things and I had an actually pretty easy experience at first. I didn't have any pain. I chose not to reconstruct, which I love, not having to wear a bra again, it's fantastic. And so I was like did it.

And then about two weeks later I saw an incision spit up out of my ... A little thread spit out of my incision. I'm like, "What's that?" Another one. Another one. Called my surgeon's office and they said, "This happens sometimes. It's spitting incisions." Well, the next day there were 10, and the next day there were 20, and the next day there were 40 and all of a sudden I was all really awful and I sped into the office at that point I was just really sick. And they looked at me and said, "Have you eaten anything today?" I said, "No, I just have been too sick." They're like, "Great." And they had me on the table and an hour.

And it turns out that my body had rejected every single suture and it had spit them out and because there were openings I had developed a staph infection. So I was this close and I was very and am very lucky to be alive. And I was in the hospital for five days. They don't keep you in the hospital for five days anymore so it was bad. And I was actually very copacetic, like "Okay, here it is. I'm lucky. I'm great. No problem." But then I went home so glad to be alive and the only thing I could do was think, "Why did this happen? Why did this happen? Why did this happen? Why did this happen? Why me? Why did my body?" I mean, they were like, "Well, this has happened to like 1% of people."

And I asked my regular doctor and she said, "Well, you have Celiac," which I do, "your body is used to fighting." That's true. And she said, "Your body, you, you just, you're a fighter." And I went home. I never talked about this in public so we'll see. And it hit me like a ton of bricks because like I said, I grew up in a very, very difficult family and there was fighting, really active, ugly fighting every day and my job as a seven-year-old was to get between my parents and try to talk sense into them. I've always been very considerate, passive. So I never thought in the fight or flight or freeze response that I had any of them. Like, I don't fight.

My doctor said, "Well, maybe you should look at this Nadine Burke Harris, who is a pediatrician who works with A-scores, adverse childhood experiences." So I watched her Ted Talk and I burst into tears because I realized for the first time my fight, and it has been in my body coiled since the moment I was seven years old. My fight has been to understand. My fight has been to solve. My fight is to figure it out. So I became a teacher and it became Gluten-Free Girl who answered everyone's problems including, how do I make this without butter? I don't know how to make without butter, but I had to figure it out.

I became a parent. I became the person who understands. I became the speaker. I, all these things and it was still in me all the time. And so after this experience, I realized the most radical thing I could ever do was to simply lie down and not Google anything and let my body go and say, "I still don't know why my body rejected those sutures, but I'm here." And I learned the physical experience in my body of what a trauma, reinventing itself feels like. It's tight in the chest. It's hard to breathe. I got a headache, but inside my head is figured out. It's this, "I'm smart. I've got all the answers." I could read medical journals in a spat and figure out, oh, it's must be this. And the most radical act of self-care I can do is to not know anything.

- Grace Bonney: 23:51 How do you each feel and then move on the difference between a fear that could lead to something good and that's growth versus a fear that is dangerous, that means you're not going in the right direction. How do you feel that and how do you listen to that?
- Davora Lindner: 24:05 Well, I mean about two years ago I stopped wearing deodorant. And that's usually ... It's kind of helpful for me at work because I got into those positions where I'd be in meetings that would be very tense or something wouldn't go right and we needed to begin problem solving and that's honestly just like a way for me to sort of gauge what's going on in my body, if there's like an incredible fear response. I also stopped drinking coffee as a result of that too, but it's an indicator of sort of like this panic as opposed to being able to work through something.
- And also at that level it's a time when I know it's time to step back and get a longer range view on what is happening. But so yeah, that's fun for the podcast. I mean, honestly, it's just I require a lot of time alone and a lot of time to regroup. I get on overload and I shut down. It's just one of those things for me. It's not that I'm not present. Well actually, it is that I'm not present. I can still be present, but it just becomes really clear when I need that time for myself to sort of think through problem or also just have some space to build something else or rebuild before I can sort of give back anything more.
- I don't know if that is a dividing between what is healthy or not, but I don't think when there's a healthy challenge that I go to that space. Usually a healthy challenge for me is a lot about asking for assistance and other resources and bringing other people in and then also delegating, because then it's sort of like, I want to actually move through something and get to a point

when I realize there's things that I can bite off and there's things that I need help with.

Grace Bonney: 25:53 I would love to know from each of you if you would share a time with us when something went wrong or it didn't go as planned, whether you define that as a failure or not, and tell us what you learned from that, that you're glad that you learned from that.

Shauna Ahern: 26:06 I really should never have started Gluten-Free Flour Company. I'm a writer and so what happened was I started Gluten-Free Girl and it was me writing and then people started reading. I think, "Who are these crazy people who are not my friends leaving comments?" Nobody ever made a living off of it. Nobody got a book deal at that point. It was just like a bunch of weirdos who wanted to take pictures of their food. And now that's all of Instagram. It's bizarre. So it just became this incredibly genuine, pure place for me that I was finding an audience and people actually cared about my writing and I just kept going and going.

Then I met my husband a year later, he's a chef and we just started writing cookbooks because somebody asked us to. We were like, "Wait, what?" And I think for about six or seven years we just couldn't believe our luck. We just could not believe how excited we were to have found each other. I was 39. He was 37. To have a kid. I was two weeks shy of 42 when my daughter was born. To have a James Beard Award-Winning Cookbook. Like, what the heck? All of it was this marvelous surprise, which is how I like to live. Let it all arrive as a surprise because think about what in your life that is incredible did you actually plan? Has anyone arrived in your life that you love deeply that you were like, "In 22 months I will be meeting this person. Here are the 17 steps I need to take to meet this person." No.

So the more that I can actually live with, let me just keep stumbling along and trust in my gut and what feels good. So it was marvelous. And then Twitter started and Facebook started and Instagram started and sponsored posts started and it wasn't enough to have ads anymore. All of a sudden you had to have things, you had to have a presence, you had to do Facebook live, you have to do Snapchat. No, don't do Snapchat anymore. If you do Instagram, it was like ... It all just felt really juvenile to me, but I also really loved ... I love watching and being part of how people talk with each other. So I loved being part of these communications, but then all of a sudden this is how we earned our living and we have our son, whom we adopted and adoption is very, very expensive.

And so we had no money. I mean, we just had no money and two kids. So I'm a geek and I started combining flours together to make a flour blend and people said, "Yay, this is great." And I'd print the recipe and I'd publish the recipe and I'd videos of me putting three flours into a Cambro and like shaking it and be like, "There's the flour." And people would still say, "When can we buy it from you?" I'm like, "Can't you just shake three flours in a Cambro? It's not hard." But we're out of money. So all of a sudden we had people are life saying like, "You really should do a flour. Why don't you do a Kickstarter and people will buy it and then you can get in every grocery store in America and you've got the name." And we were like, "I guess. Sure. Sure. Why not?"

I'm an entrepreneur. I love this. Throw it out there. We'll try it. Don't start at Kickstarter. Don't do a Kickstarter unless you really, really, really want to Kickstarter. They're the most terrifying thing I've ever had happen to me. For me personally, unless you love promoting yourself and good for you if you do. I would wake up at 4 o'clock, every morning, every single morning of that October and think, "Oh my God, I have to go online and promote myself tomorrow again or else we're going to go broke." And it was hilarious and it was terrifying and I was in a cold sweat every morning.

And I thought, oh God, we raised \$92,000 in four weeks. It was insane. Except that the person who was helping us was like, "We're not going to make it. Add another incentive." So all of a sudden we had like 3,822 prizes to send out. So we get to the end of it and our son crawls for the first time. The night is done. We're like, "This is just meant to be." And then we had to start a flour company and we had 10,000 boxes of flour in our garage and we'd sell them through our website and we had to go to the post office every day with 42 boxes of flour that we have put in boxes and put on tape and labeled. And I just keep thinking, "But when am I going to write?" Oh, well, you know, in a few years because this is ...

And then we had brokers calling us and distributors calling us. Of course, you're Gluten-Free Girl, James Beard. We want to get this in grocery stores. And we're like, "Yes." And about the middle of the road I thought, "I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this," because to get it bigger, we're of course going to have to hire sales team and I'm going to have to go to trade shows and I'm going to have to make appearances and it's going to be, Gluten-Free Girl says, "Use this to make your cookies."

And stand there like Vanna White with my box of flour that I've redesigned three times.

And I was sitting in a meeting with two friends were helping us with the business and the left side of my face was starting to tingle and like, what was that? Then the whole left side of my face started to tingle and I'm just weirded out, but I don't say anything because I realize if I start saying anything, it won't come out right. So I start practicing every sentence in my head three times before I say it. And it took me about 25 minutes to ask my friend Ken, who was a volunteer firefighter, "Ken, is it weird that the entire left side of my body is numb?" And he says, "Yes, it is."

So I'm having a mini stroke it turns out and they rushed me to the fire department and they rushed me the ambulance and they rushed me to the hospital and I'm lucky it was a TIA, which means that the clot dissolved itself. I'm healthy enough, it went away. And then 24 hours later, I'm fine. And I remember that two days before this happened I had stood after another one of these meetings and stood looking out the window and thought, "I guess I'm not a writer anymore. All my creativity is going to have to go on his entrepreneurial. So it's going to be okay. It's creativity I need, right? Not writing. I just need creativity." And then I have a stroke and I think, "Okay body, I understand."

And so I say, after a lot of conversations with my husband I say, "You know what, I don't want to get in every grocery store in America." We don't want to have trade shows. We want to live in our small town. I want to write. He wants to cook. We have our community, we want to have our kids and that's enough. So we sell all the rest of the flour and then there's this terrible election and Donald Trump becomes president and we're all like walking around in a bleary-eyed state and then it's almost Thanksgiving. So we sell like a 1,000 boxes of flour in three, four weeks and it's just a nightmare, but we do it and then I go to the website and I look, why did that say pending? I'm deep in the like WooCommerce part.

It turns out that every single order we had sent out from the 1st of November to the 1st to December had not been charged. So we had sent out every ... There was some glitch in the WooCommerce site. So we had sent out all of the last of our flour essentially and we'd paid for all of the shipping out of our own pocket. We'd lost all of that and I started to want to cry and I started laughing because I'm like, "This is so fucking clear. I am so done. It's just money. Whatever." And then we joyfully

announced end of the sale. We're never doing this again. And I'd also been thinking like after Trump gets elected I'm like, how am I going to help the world by creating more gluten-free muffin recipes. I don't get it. That seems really dumb.

So it was the best thing that's ever happened to me because I was such a failure at it. I mean, I was really bad at it. Bad, bad, bad at it, and it was such a gift to be spectacularly terrible at something and still be okay. And afterwards we did, we closed up shop. I put a few posts out that year up on Gluten-Free Girl. They're still there. I've been posted since May of 2017 and I got this book deal for a book of essays called Enough and it is exactly what I've wanted to do all of my life is to write this book. And if I hadn't been on the floor in a fetal position crying over yet another box of flour, I would never have written this book.

Grace Bonney: 33:43

Davora, can you tell us about a time when something didn't work out that you learned something important?

Davora Lindner: 33:54

We have that opportunity also as manufacturers to have things not work out on a quarterly basis. If not, yeah. I mean, every season we're manufacturing upwards of 30 different styles, and there are times when one of them usually won't work and it's heartbreaking because it goes against everything that we believe in as manufacturers of sort of like eliminating waste and like a made-to-order company and it's just ... I don't feel like I have feeling for that in my body any longer. It's one of those things that we just sort of always will anticipate will happen and you learn to navigate that and you learn to sort of other avenues for that product, but also other ways to sort of compartmentalize.

What I've really learned from it is that it's generally not worth going back and trying to redo it. That's the big takeaway for me because sometimes it can happen twice and sometimes there's just like a feeling that it wasn't meant to be and you need to walk away and not produce it again, but also, yeah, sort of count your losses earlier rather than sort of like doubling on that at different times. That's sort of what I've learned from it. But that's one experience. I don't know.

I mean, sort of charting any number of humiliations like both personally and professionally is something again that we can all talk about. I think it's like people within ambition, that's something you're going to face all of the time. I mean, it's the human condition, part of the beauty of it and like being able to laugh with other people in your life about it is the reward.

Grace Bonney: 35:37 Erika, what about you?

Erika Massaquoi: 35:39 That's a really good question. I mean, I failed at so many things, but I think the one thing that I'm trying not to fail at is The Oula Company. I think I'm course correcting because I've done everything in that company on my own because in my mind I'm like superwoman and I've become now the bottleneck to the growth of the company. And I didn't realize that in the beginning because I had had so many people say, "Erika, just do it." When I moved out here I had a great career in academic administration. I thought that I would just keep on that career and end up being like a dean at an art school. There was nothing for me to do there. So I was like, "Why we moved to Seattle? That was like the dumbest thing I've ever done in my life. It's June and I'm in like a down coat."

And I was so depressed. Oh my God. I was like, "What have I done?" I've never felt that way in my life. I've totally left the city I always wanted to be in to follow my husband for his work and what am I doing, following a guy for his work? I mean, it was like so many things. So I went to curating and it was a friend who read an article about me who said, "Oh, well you're in Seattle now, you should be an entrepreneur because that's what everybody does." I'm like, "Well, you know."

Grace Bonney: 36:55 Because it's so easy.

Erika Massaquoi: 36:57 Yeah. Because it's easy. That's what everybody does, but for me that was like catnip because I'm like, "What? It's hard? Sure, I can start a company." And at the beginning it was really easy. I will say everybody took a meeting with me. No one said no. It's one thing ... And I've always in academia been a practice theory person. If I'm going to talk about art I really want to know how to do it. And I was really lucky when I was a dean to actually work on curriculum and instruction in 17 majors. Of course, at FIT fashion was the signature, but it was everything from computer animation to graphic design, interior design, photography, accessories, printing and surface design, toy design, you name it.

So I really had the breadth and depth of experience, and from my work as a curator and also as a media maker, I'd either done the job or worked with artists who've done all those jobs. So I really said, "I can do this." I didn't borrow any money. I didn't write a business plan. I figured out where I could source fabric. It was really important for me to use art and design as a catalyst for economic development. I really wanted to walk the walk. I

had taught that class for years, art as a catalyst for public policy, art as a catalyst for art and design, but I really was like, "You know what? I'm going to put my own theories to the test and see if I could do it."

And it's been really great to be able to say, "Yeah, I did it." I wanted to be a sustainable company. I wanted to be handcrafted and hand-sewn. I wanted to be not only made in the USA, but made in Ghana and made in Sierra Leone. Let's do that too, and it kept adding and adding, but what I didn't realize was how much physical labor was involved. It's one thing when you get fabric, Davora [inaudible 00:38:49] is like on a roll with Ankara fabric. They cut the roll into six to twelve yards. So literally I get boxes of fabric. I iron every piece of fabric. I have to inspect every piece of fabric. I have to stack that fabric, take it to the factory or my home source, stretch it, cut it. Stretch it, cut it, on my own.

But I'm getting like a high from this and doing it I didn't ... I saw it as an art project and my husband saw this, he's like, "It's a real business, Erika. It's not like some cool show you're curating as a business." So then people become interested in my art project. He's like, "Stop calling it that," it's killing him, "it's a business." And I knew it was a business and I was so blessed. [Perkins Coie 00:39:36], he took me on as one of their emerging clients. We'd start our business and a foundation and I'm just like every day going through the motions. I'm doing what I can 19 hours a day, resting for five and waking up and do it again.

And then what happened is that there was so much interest in the company it's become difficult for me to keep up with its growth. So then I had to take a step back. I had to go back to school. And so I'm finally riding that business plan that my husband told me that I needed to write three years ago, but there was no other way for me to do it. I realized like this was my path and I'm so grateful that I was able to do it in a space like Seattle where everybody has been so supportive with feedback. I don't think I could have ever done this in New York. There's just too much pressure, too many people on you and I know so many artists, particularly fashion designers who've like burned out within that first year and it was really important for me to take it at my pace, which has really been a blessing for the company, that I can build it at my pace.

I do a collection when the whole collection is sold out, but that's been good for my customer because everything is unique. It's small batch. Once it's gone, it's gone. So now I did the University

of Washington Business Certificate Program. And now I'm in the Accelerator Program and there are bright MBA students who're going to write that business plan for me, and then I'm going to have to find a partner or do a raise because that's where the company is organically going. I'm not just working it as like an art project or a cottage industry anymore. So yeah, I mean, it's worked out, but it really could have gone the other way and I could have failed spectacularly.

- Grace Bonney: 41:34 I want to open it up for audience questions, but I want to ask you all one quick short question before we hand it over, which is about what is the skill that you've gained from these experiences that you are most proud of in yourself? I have learned through my many, many failures that I'm a very resilient person and that is something that means a lot to me and has helped me gain confidence to try things that just may not work out and it makes me feel okay to get through them because I know I've gotten through them before. What is one thing that you are most proud of yourself that you've learned from going through these things? Erika, let's start with you.
- Erika Massaquoi: 42:08 It's resilience. I tell people that all the time. I'm able to bounce back and I'm able to just heal really quickly and get back to it. I mean, I really am. I can take lemons and turn it into lemonade and it's almost my pleasure to do it. So yeah, I feel like that's the gift that I've been given.
- Grace Bonney: 42:27 Yeah. Davora, what about you?
- Davora Lindner: 42:30 I think that sort of moving from studio practice and sculpture to applied design and the cycle that is required of that, that I feel really proud of like of our creativity and what I've been able to do. I mean, we're like upwards of 1,400 unique styles. Each one I've named. Each one I've written all of the copy for. Half of them I've designed. And that's like that type of like output that what that ... I didn't really think about when I went in just sort of built and that's something that that I'm proud of, definitely.
- Grace Bonney: 43:07 Shauna, what about you?
- Shauna Ahern: 43:09 When I took refuge as a Buddhist, I was given a Buddhist name [foreign 00:43:12] which means ever blossoming lotus flour. And I didn't understand at the time. Like, "Okay. Sure. That sounds great." And I feel like that is absolutely what I have learned is that the society tells you that there is one very clear definition of success and it's very narrow. It usually involves money and it always involves status and it also involves

exhaustion, it involves pretending that you're doing great when you're absolutely crying in the middle of the night. It involves a lot of things that are not healthy. And for me the ever blossoming lotus flour that I've become is to constantly redefine my own definition of success, to not rely on any outward sign of it and for me right now, that definition of success is to have enough.

- Grace Bonney: 44:04 So let's open it up. If anybody has any questions right here.
- Speaker 5: 44:09 Perfect. Yeah. So something that I've noticed a lot of the creative fields is that there's an undercurrent of ageism. It feels like if you're not like this blossoming 18-year-old like your life has completely gone to waste and I feel a lot of pain because I've seen a lot of my creative sisters say like, "Well, I'm too old to do this kind of stuff so I'm not gonna do it anymore." And I wanted to ask if we can have one takeaway for ageism and what it has meant for you and your career and somebody here like my friend included could benefit from it, what would it be?
- Shauna Ahern: 44:54 It gets so much better as you get older. Oh my God, you could not pay me to be 22 again. I would not take a million dollars for it. Seriously. And when I was 22, I was painfully aware, like people were getting book deals that I'm not. I sent off this sheaf of terrible short stories to the New Yorker. I'm glad they never responded. Oh, they were painful. I'm 52 and I feel like I am just starting getting the edges of completely accepting this body, this being. I don't know if anyone else, but raise your hand if after 40 you're like, "I got no more fucks to give. Thank you very much."
- After 50, triple. And I ran into a ... Seriously. And actually a very good friend of mine. I was writing this essay about falling in love with women. I'm like, why do I love women more in my 40s and 50s than I did in my 20s. And my dear friend [Tina 00:45:54], who's in her mid-60s said, "Oh, that's easy. Biologically we're primed to compete with each other. We are bred to make more people." And so we are always competing with other women without even realizing it and be like, "I want to bring forth the progeny of that man." Guess what? When you hit perimenopause you're like, "I don't want to bring forth the progeny of that man. I love my women."
- So I ran into a friend of mine who's in her 70s and we were talking about this. She's like, "Honey. Wait till you hit 75." So the only thing you have to do is just like essentially say that ageism

is wrong. There are a lot of really shallow parts of this culture. Don't be shallow. Just keep creating.

Erika Massaquoi: 46:39

What I can say is that people are always surprised. They're like, "You look so young." I'm like, "No. I'm like 50 is around the corner." But I still feel 22 inside and I look at that girl at 22 and I still have that same energy and in many respects I was a late bloomer, like in a lot of things I feel like I finally have come into my own. When I was 25 I would be like, "Gosh, I don't want to be 50 wondering what if." And I'm really, I'm going to be 50 and I'm never going to be wondering what if. I did everything that I wanted to do. There's no magic pill to it. It was a lot of hard work and it was a lot of sacrifice, particularly in the creative fields.

And I think that that's just part of accepting the way that it's going to be. I remember I was sharing backstage with the girls that next year is going to be my 25th college reunion. And there was an article in the New Yorker about a woman who had gone to her 30th college reunion and she said, "The happiest people were those who were working in education, who have become doctors. The unhappiest people were of course, the lawyers. Anybody who'd gone into finance was hell-bent on retiring as fast as they could and usually thinking about their last act, which would probably be philanthropy driven and all of the artists had struggle, even if they've come to a space where they were finally successful, they struggled financially, they struggled emotionally. Many of them have struggled physically."

And I just really feel like in many respects you have to live your life and feel ... And it comes with the territory. I mean as creatives, we're strong, we're resilient, we're risk-averse, we're open. That's what makes us who we are. We're like sponges. I think about ageism, but I'm always really, really surprised when like a 22-year-old or an 18-year-old wants to know how I did it and then I tell them my story and they're like, "Oh my God." Yeah, it was freaking hard and it still is hard to walk the walk every day, to do it with intention and to do it with grace.

Davora Lindner: 48:55

I started praying when I was 34 and never really thought about my age. After 15 years in business, of course, we think about it all the time. I mean, that's the other side of sort of success, is that you have to sort of keep sort of defending that success or sort of like working at not being sort of like the new kid on the block, but I also feel like our relationship with technology, right now we're in an era that is obsessed with youth. That's a blip in

time. I mean, I think in a longer perspective that will look differently.

Everybody is sort of like attacking youth culture right now and sort of co-opting that and having that be at the forefront of sort of all discussion. I think with that creative people and I mean ... Really have to resist biography in that way, the way that like biography is demanded from you and also something that then is a marketable product to sell, I think is sham. And I really believe that we can sort of tell a false story in that too and actually completely redirect and have different tactics that can lead to survival, but that also sort of circumvent this idea of like we have to be a walking spokesperson that especially as women, we have to embody our ideas as opposed to men who can create ideas generally.

So I really do think that that's super important and it's a politicized act. So you can withhold. You don't have to participate in that way. It's not required. A lot of you can choose to do that or not do it and there's power and mystery in like not doing it too.

Speaker 6: 50:34 So I've always lived my life realizing that the limitations we put on ourselves is what limits us, not what others put on us and I think that kind of relates to your question because any time I find myself doing that, but when I find myself doing that the most is when I'm comparing myself to someone else and what they're doing and I think as women we do that and as creatives we do that. I'm just wondering how in your own journey, how you've overcome that and what kind of circumstances do you find yourself doing that the most in?

Grace Bonney: 51:07 I have to share this one thing. I read it on the internet yesterday and my brain exploded. And someone said, "Every time I compare myself to someone I have to remind myself who is benefiting from this questioning." And I immediately was like, the patriarchy, the beauty industry, like all the things that I am a part of, but hate. And it completely changed the way. That thought process is probably never going to end. I will always look at the blogger who has X sponsorship and be like, "Oh, why couldn't we get." But then I'm like, "Well, why do I care so much? Why am I so attached to that?" And then who is benefiting from that? Who is going to win when I say, okay, that means I need to do this X, Y, Z thing to do that if I don't feel skinny enough or pretty enough or young enough or whatever it is, what systems are benefiting from that fear and that doubt?

And then when I think about like, well, fuck that, I don't want to benefit that dude that runs that company that's going to get my money because I feel insecure. It just squashed it immediately and it was such a powerful thing to think about and I feel like the last two weeks that's all I've been thinking and it's been so helpful when those comparisons start because like, just let the comparisons go. They're going to happen. Don't judge them. They're just part of being a human being, but remember, who's benefiting from them?

Shauna Ahern: 52:23

Yeah. I mean, comparison is the thief of joy, there's no question about it, but it's also human. So I think what has helped me Because I spent my entire life like, "Oh, if only I looked like that person. If only I talked like that person. If only I had that person's money." And then of course, being a blogger and all the media just intensified it. Or what I came to was the same idea. I think actually it was profit off of your comparison, not even benefit, but profit, like that the consummate. Yeah, you would add. Where they were like heads exploded. But it really is.

I wrote this in an essay recently. If you wanted to have some alien force come and take over the world and say, "How are we going to control all women?" You would create a system where they would worry about what their bodies look are like, because it is a multi-billion dollar industry to make us think, "If only our stomachs were flatter. If only my hair look better, I would be a more worthwhile person." Who the hell started thinking that if only there were less of me, I would be contributing more to the world. Why? And it is yeah, sure. It's patriarchy. Of course, it's pat ... What does that mean?

Is that we are by our nature, human beings compare. So instead of saying, "Don't compare. Don't compare." Just go, "There I go again." I've always loved the idea that like ... And I wrote about this in an essay recently too. But I did a lot of years of making beautiful photographs on table and like dishes and steam coming off of it, but I wish that I'd done the that's the left hand side of the table. On the right hand side of the table is everything I smashed over here, the sippy cup, the unwashed plate, bills unpaid. That side of the table is the stuff that interests me now, because we don't show that enough and we show this perfect, perfected, lovely image and that's what we're comparing ourselves to.

So whenever I see an image, I think, what's the other side of your table look like? And then I also try my very hardest to

think, what is that person afraid of that they're not showing that side of the table? Because what they're putting out is this perfected, Barbie doll version of themselves right instead of, "Hi. My name is Shauna and I don't have money for rent next month." I do now. Yeah, but there have been times. There was one time we had \$85 in our bank account and we have lousy credit. We had no credit cards. We were like, how are we going to pay the bills? That's not being shared.

So what people do is they go into hyperdrive and then like, "If only I show the perfect ..." And there was that whole three or four year period where every food blogger had to have marble countertops. So we went to Home Depot and bought four squares and like stuck them together. So I just have to pretend that I have marble countertops. The whole damn thing is pretending. If you imagine, what would be the system that would create so that women in particular would make themselves feel anxious and small, it would be, okay, great. Now I have to have a perfect body and I have to have marble countertops for my food. How did food blogging become another system the patriarchy? So the more that you can just say to yourself, "That's not true. There's the other side of the table." It's just not showing you the other side of the table.

When I was a high school teacher and I love teaching high school. It's such a hard, lovely, wonderful age. I one day had a student come in, kids would come in all the time and bring papers and then they'd want to talk about their lives. So there's one girl came in and she want to talk about her paper and she said, "Everything is hard," and she broke down, "if only I were," and a named another kid, "because she has it perfect. She's soccer captain and she's getting straight A's and she's got this boyfriend and everything is perfect."

You know, I bet not everything is perfect and you're okay and who you are and I calmed her down and she left and literally, exactly 30 seconds later the girl she just named came in. I'm not making this up. This is true, and that girl came in, asked about her paper, broke down in tears and said, "If only I were the one who just left the room." And I'm like, "Could I just get you two together?" And when I think about comparisons I actually think of that moment so often because the most outrageous thing we can do to smash the patriarchy is just tell our truths and stop with the freaking marble countertops.

Grace Bonney: 56:57

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