

Mary-Jo Fetterly Pt. 1 | Discover Stories Episode 85

Announcement 0:06

The Strong Sessions are back. The Vancouver Adapted Music Society's flagship event celebrates musicians with disabilities, featuring performances from four talented artists and bands from our community join us on August 25 at the Roundhouse Community Centre, from 5pm to 8pm. Tickets are by donation. For more information, visit the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, at vamsociety on Instagram or on our website, www.vams.org We hope to see you there.

Tanya Griffiths 0:37

Hello and thank you for tuning in to discover stories on reimagine radio. My name is Tanya, your host and a student intern with VAMS while completing my social justice practicum. Today, I have the honor of talking with Mary-Jo Fetterly. As a certified life coach and yoga therapist, Mary-Jo helps clients achieve their personal and professional goals by providing guidance, support and accountability. Mary-Jo has many years of experience in coaching, training, teaching and facilitating individuals and groups in various settings, such as Rhodes Wellness College, where she also teaches yoga and meditation. Her healing experience includes herbology, Theta Healing, Bach flower, non violent communication, somatics, continuum and a diploma of massage therapy from the Kootenay School of Rebalancing. Hello, Mary-Jo, how are you today?

Mary-Jo Fetterly 0:47

Hi Tanya, I'm very well. It's nice to be with you.

Tanya Griffiths 1:46

It's very nice to be with you too, and to have this conversation with you. I'm very excited. Me too. Okay, I guess perhaps you can begin by sharing some stories about how your early life influenced your journey into spirituality.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 2:08

Okay, very good question. So I had an interesting experience when I was seven years old, and unlike my spinal cord injury, I didn't, I didn't sustain any injury, but I had a near death experience when I was seven, because my sisters and I, I have three sisters, we were

playing in a construction zone across the street from us, our childhood home and I we're up on the top of the roof, and it was a three story home with, you know, the concrete floor and all that kind of stuff. Anyway, it was all framed in, and the chimney was framed in. And we decided that it was on a weekend and nobody was around, and we climb up to the top, to the very top of the roof and see what it looked like from up there. Yeah, and we were out there for a while just kind of being kids, and then somebody had the great idea to go over to the chimney, and let's pretend we're Santa Claus and we look down the chimney. But I guess because there was no actual structure. It was just sort of, you know, vaguely framed in anyway. The boards gave away, and I fell through the chimney all the way down three stories onto the concrete basement floor, and my sisters dragged me out, and I was obviously unconscious. And of course, they wouldn't have known not to move the body or what you know, many years later, a spinal cord injury would have been tragic. It didn't turn out to be tragedy. I didn't have a broken bone in my body, but I ended up after the ambulance took me to hospital with three days in a coma. But in any case, when I fell and when my body was laying down on the Facebook floor, I left my body and I had a very, very distinct near death experience where I watched my sisters scramble down and drag me out. I watched the ambulance the car come and parents and people you know, all you know, hustling and bustling in the yard across the street from our home and and then I watched as the car drove off with my body, and I remember thinking, oh gosh, I better get back into my body because I don't want to, I don't want to leave my body there alone, and, you know, in a very childlike way, when I woke up three days later from the coma, there was a whole, you know, kind of hospital room of doctors around me, all looking at me, trying to figure. Why this little girl of seven didn't break a bone, didn't have a scratch, and my mom said, in a very kind of, kind of Curt way, well, guardian angel is very bruised, you can guarantee that. And so that was kind of a very interesting experience. I was raised a Roman Catholic in a very traditional way, meaning that we, you know, we went to church every week. So in any case, that experience never left me. I didn't really know how to unpack it as a seven year old, but when I was a young teenager, and, you know, more interested in sort of the things of how life works and why we're here, and who am I? That piece came back very vividly. And I would spend long hours sort of delving into my mom's and dad's library, which were rich with books by Thomas Merton, or my mom happened to be very interested in, you know, things that were not quite traditional. So she was looking at the I Ching and various different studies and writers from the east. And then right around the same time, she injured, well, she had a chronic back situation with scoliosis, and she went to a back care class and got introduced to yoga. And anyway, her teacher, long story short, Swami Rada, who started and developed the amazing Yasodhara Ashram in the Kootenay Lake region became her teacher. And Swami Rada was a classic yoga teacher, and when I mean classic, I mean she was not just about the asana, but she went all the

way back into the classic studies of the Vedas and understood the nature of the mind and reality in relation to the study in the science of yoga. So my mom became a fast student, and my mom had all her books out in the library. And so of course, I would just, you know, vicariously be learning all this stuff and on my little walks up into the mountains. And so I would take a book with me every you know week, and I would just, you know, kind of delve into those more esoteric types of rounds as a teenager, and that was the beginning.

Tanya Griffiths 7:30

Wow. Thank you for sharing all of that. I can see how it was not only this near death experience that really catapulted you into this, this way of integrating all different forms of knowledge and wisdom, but also being around your parents and being around what they like learning and what a gift it would have been to be a student of Swami Rada as well during that time.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 8:07

Oh, and amazing, yeah, I just a truly beautiful beginning to my yoga story, really,

Tanya Griffiths 8:19

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and you had shared how, or you had shared, in our previous conversation, how the Ujjayi breathing was crucial in keeping you alive during your skiing accident in 2004 and I was wondering if you can explain a little bit more about this technique and how it really supported you during that crucial time.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 8:49

Yeah, of course, you know, it's, it's a beautiful breath, the Ujjayi breath. And Ujjayi means in Sanskrit, victorious or, you know, abundant life giving. And of course, when I became injured on the top of the mountain in 2004 at Whitewater, I was alone for one thing. And I was, you know, quite badly injured. And when someone breaks their neck, for the most part, if it's you know, above you know, the survival the thoracic spine and in the cervical spine, in the neck, you're going to knock out your breathing muscles, or the axis of those muscles, muscular, you know, through their nervous system. So you really only have your diaphragm left, which is still a very major breathing muscle, but it's not governed by the central nervous system. And so it took a while for all that to kick in and of course, the muscles that you know you normally would recruit weren't there to recruit. Root. And so the ujjayi breath was really, as you say, my lifesaver, and I think probably also kept my brain, you know, sound and, you know, from any danger of becoming brain injured during

that crucial time, because it took about 45 minutes from the time that I fell until the ski patrol could even get to me, and then getting the oxygen on me and whatnot. So the ugi breath kept me alive, and then I used it again honestly, because I was intubated, of course, and put on events later right away, and after two days of surgery and whatnot in recovery, I really did not want to be on the ventilator anymore, although it had, you know, saved my life and was essential at the time, I loved breathing, and I wanted to get back to my own conscious breathing, and it was quite a shock for me, actually, to kind of go through the stage of being ventilated. So I remember, you know, begging the nurses and the recovery room nurses to help me take the tubes out and whatnot. They were like, no, no, it is. They're going to be in for a while. Anyway. Long story short, I actually, literally just ran into a woman who was in ICU, a nurse who was in ICU and had been my nurse at the time, and she commented on how quickly I had gotten off the ventilator, and how quickly I had gotten off being intubated. And it reminded me that it was really also there that I utilize the the, you know, the pranayama and the gift of yoga breathing to speed up that process and to make it just one day, as opposed to a few weeks.

Tanya Griffiths 11:56

I have yet to explore breathing as as much as you have, but based off of what I've learned so far is that breathing is really what is able to ground ourselves and and to connect with, with with life and and especially during a moment where where the body is in shock, I can totally imagine how really honing in on the breath and and controlling it or or like being With it, can bring some ease to the nervous system, for example, when everything else is a little bit more heightened.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 12:47

Yes, it's, you know, I mean, there, there's a saying in yoga, when you can control the breath, you can control the mind, and then you have control over everything. And it's really quite true. You know, the breath actually governs, you know, which nervous system will be predominantly functioning. So we have two systems in our body, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. And of course, the sympathetic system is responsible for running the body in the day to day, waking consciousness, and also is, like you said, You know what we will utilize when we go into shock, or that's also called fight or flight, and and then the parasympathetic system, quite alternately, is your relax and restore system, and that is, you know, a really important system, obviously. And one that we can access through the breath. And basically you can basically control both through the breath. And so isn't it, you know, really, honestly, quite a health you know liberty to to know that you can, you can monitor, you can also regulate your your body through breathing.

Tanya Griffiths 14:10

Yes, yes. I like the the word you used regulate, yeah, it is a, it is a form of of, of regulation and really bridging, um, like our body, our sense of weight with perhaps our mind, or, yeah, whatever, whatever is coming up in that moment. And and you've mentioned some of the various healing modalities that you've explored such as somatic practices as well as bowl bath therapy, and I'm wondering how these practices have enriched and complemented your understanding of healing, especially during your rehabilitation journey.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 14:58

Yeah. Well, I think, you know, we'll, we'll kind of step into that trajectory with the breath. Means we could use it to segue into this notion of healing. And I think that, you know, the beauty of the breath is, everybody has their own breath. Everybody can control their own breath. And so it's really the most intimate connection we have to our body, and it's also the most auspicious connection, in my view, because the breath is non physical. So in many ways, it helps us to understand how we bring something non physical into the physical, ie, in this case, breath, but in those other examples of different energy healing things, we may be using her, but we also might be using a thought or a meditation or a mantra or something somatic. And so I think you know to know that. You know the breath is the best example we could give someone who doesn't really understand energy and how it works in the body. Because breath is, of course, energy. It gives us energy, just like the sun gives us energy through food. So I love all the different ways that we can then kind of expand on that notion through these various different healing modalities, such as somatics, which really looks at, you know, the sensory body and how we can use feedback from the sensory body to regulate our system, and that's all of our senses, sight, touch, smell, hearing and taste and sound, and in many cases, this also would relate to, I think, most importantly, the mind. Where are my thoughts right now? What am I feeling? What am I noticing with my mood? You know, how is my state of mind right now? Am I, you know, excited? Am I calm? And so those ways of tuning in are offering us the ability to not only be empowered to make choice, but we're also then empowered to make change and to to find things that could help if we need help in regulation of those various different aspects. And so we could use, you know, massage or many different forms of healing, herbs, touch, sound, not just, you know, the medical approach, which is very allopathic and and quite diagnostic and somewhat fragmented, yeah. So the beauty of the other more alternative healing modalities they do, you know, in a sense, look at the whole system because it's important that they do because they it incorporates aspects, often of the whole system into understanding what might be the best option.

Tanya Griffiths 18:23

Yeah, yeah. The way that I'm I'm thinking about it is really looking at a person and seeing them as a as a whole being, and allowing them to integrate the parts of their physicality into their spirituality.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 18:45

Yes, because we are a whole being, you know, we are a body, a mind, spirit, and people get kind of tripped up often with that ideas that we're a spirit. But if we we just look at that from a very practical perspective, you know, we call alcohol spirits. We call a team spirited. We know that when someone doesn't have a lot of energy, we say, well, you know, they don't seem to be themselves. Or, you know, or we look at a team like the Canucks, and we say, you know, oh, their spirit's not there. We need to get their energy up. So, we're all energy, which is really all spirit is referring to. Spirit just means something without form. And so I think that knowing that we're a body of mind and the spirit and understanding that we have to have all three of those in balance is really important,

Tanya Griffiths 19:52

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I really like the way you said that, and I'm, I personally am such a fan of somatics, because of how it has impacted my life and the way it's deepened my understanding of of the stories that I before have unconsciously held on to in my own body, and how they really manifest too, whether that be feeling like I don't have a voice, or feeling like this tightness in my chest I feel like sometimes my body knows before my mind does, always, yeah, yeah, and it's Yeah, and leaning into These different somatic practices, I think you know when, when people are open, can really deepen our relationships to ourselves and to those around us, in retrospect.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 20:54

I would agree. I think we deepen our relationship to life and that's how we become more spirited then, because when we when we really, you know, it's like when you have a good friend and you really understand them, you really it. There's nothing better like that, that relationship just becomes so wonderful. And I would say that with my relationship to the life force too, you know, or my spirituality, I just, you know, I I couldn't spend a day not spending time honoring and, you know, taking time to to to make sure that's in good order and in balance, just as much as my body and my mind. Yeah,

Announcement 21:52

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