

## Gillian Kirk Pt. 2 | Discover Stories Episode 92

**Tanya Griffiths** 0:15

My next question for you is, what strategies do you find most effective for managing emotions and feelings, your feelings, particularly in the context of like, having a chronic illness?

**Gillian Kirk** 0:33

I feel like it's gonna be a really simple answer, but it's not actually all that simple. Part of what yoga is about, for me is and one of the biggest lessons that I've learned in yoga is that nothing lasts forever. Nothing good lasts forever, and nothing painful lasts forever. Everything changes at like within every single moment. And so knowing that that that nothing is going to be forever and that somehow it will always change, makes it easier to know that this is bearable in the moment. And so I don't know if that makes any sense to you, but when I'm have, for example, I've talked a lot about this. I had a 14 year old dog who who died in October, just when I was first starting grad school, and I was absolutely devastated, like I could still cry about how much I miss her, and I just let myself feel the grief as much as I needed to, because I knew that that grief wouldn't last forever, and I also felt like that grief they you label things emotions good and bad, but none of them are really good and bad. They're all just emotions. They are all just what they are. And so to me, feeling the grief and crying for the loss of this beloved dog that I had for 14 years, felt nourishing. It was painful, but it felt painful in a way that it was meant to be painful because I loved her so much and I was so sad to lose her, and then letting myself feel joy when I really feel things, letting myself feel embarrassment when I feel embarrassed, and knowing that nothing lasts forever, means that you can let yourself feel it In the moment and know it's not gonna and I've lived long enough and I've had enough experiences to know that I've handled everything that's happened to me in my life. I'm still here, you know? I'm stronger than I've ever been, I'm smarter than I've ever been, you know, yeah, and I'm wiser than I've ever been, and I think I'm a better person every year and every day that goes by, I like myself more. And so I have a resilience in me. I know that I do, but I also know that everybody else has a resilience in them too, because you're alive and you're here and you have been you have survived every single thing in your life, and you're still breathing and you're still here, and some of it is hard and some of it was hard, some of it was fantastic, but I just truly believe that I can handle, I can handle the stuff that life throws at me, and even when it's really hard and I'm frustrated and I'm stressed that stress isn't going to last

forever, the grief isn't going to last forever, the frustration isn't going to last forever, and neither is like the joy and the excitement and the happiness. But if we had joy all the time, it wouldn't feel like joy, yeah, because we have it all the time. There's a poem from Kahlil Gibran—I'm probably saying that wrong—in "The Prophet," and I don't remember the whole poem, but the part that I always quote is, "the deeper that sorrow carves into your soul, the more joy it can contain." So the idea is like a bowl, right? You have this bowl and it's the deeper, the more carving that happens to make that bowl deeper, the more you can fill it with and sometimes it will be full and sometimes it will be empty. So I think that's how I like to live my life is just knowing that if you just wait for a bit, the bad stuff's gonna pass and the good stuff will come again. And I have faith in that. I really trust that, because it's happened every single time.

**Tanya Griffiths 5:00**

Yeah, that brought tears to my eyes. I swear, Gillian, the things you do to me.

**Gillian Kirk 5:12**

Well, you know, I love you.

**Tanya Griffiths 5:15**

No, I really feel that I really do. And I mean, I'm 26 you know, like, different too.

**Gillian Kirk 5:24**

You're just starting, there's so much ahead of you, it's so exciting.

**Tanya Griffiths 5:28**

Yeah, but that's, that's the thing too, is that I remember as a teenager, like, I remember, I think, you know, maybe there was, like, some friendship drama, or, you know, some, some boy drama and it felt like the end of the world. And although I really give, you know, like 12 year old, 13 year old, Tanya, a lot of grace. Because, you know, yes, like that feeling is very valid at that state where puberty is coming, lots of things are happening

**Gillian Kirk 6:01**

It was the end of the world. It was the end of that world. What you didn't know at the time, because you hadn't survived the end of a world yet, was that when one world ends and the

one door closes and other doors opens. But like, when one world ends, yeah, there are so many other worlds that we can like, doors that we can walk through.

**Tanya Griffiths 6:22**

Yeah. I actually I love that. I will use that exact phrasing to my future children, that your world might be crumbling right now, but with those with all of that mass, there will be a rebuilding of a new one and a bigger one.

**Gillian Kirk 6:44**

And you're allowed to feel sad and like just distressed and sorrowful, and you're allowed to feel all those feelings you are 100% allowed when you're a teenager, when you're a grown up, when you're whatever, yeah, to feel like your world is ending. That's and I think the more we try, we tell ourselves that we're not allowed to feel the things that we feel, especially the so called bad emotions like anger and grief and sadness, the ones that don't feel wonderful and lovely, the more we tell ourselves not to feel that, the longer they stay. What was it that one of our teachers says, "What you resist persists?"

**Tanya Griffiths 7:22**

Yeah, yeah, yeah, oh, yeah. I had to write that down Glen shout out to Glen, what a great instructor. And I really appreciate that you talk to the impermanence of things too, whether it be things that are more that are easier to process, such as joy, or more difficult to process such as grief, and to really see it as creating a safe container within ourselves to let us feel and to let us be with those emotions and to see them as visitors.

**Gillian Kirk 8:03**

Yeah, I love that, as visitors, they're not necessarily going to be taking up residence, even if they're roommates. Yeah, still. They can be our roommates in there, but they, you know, things will come and go. I like to think of life as a wheel, too. You know, there's that time, like ancient metaphor or analogy of of the wheel of life, and sometimes you're at the top and sometimes you're at the bottom. Yeah, I used to have this recurring nightmare when I was a kid, a child, young, about a Ferris wheel. I'm scared of heights and I'm scared of Ferris wheels because of that, but I also really think that they are really apt metaphor for what life is like. Sometimes you're on the way up, sometimes you're right at the top, but whenever you're right at the top, you're going to come down for a little while, yeah. And the way down sucks sometimes, and then when you hit the bottom. That kind of sucks sometimes, but eventually it's going to come back up around.

**Tanya Griffiths 9:05**

Yeah. And what I'm getting from that metaphor too is that, like, if we were to anticipate, you know, because it because I do know people, I do know friends, that they're like, Oh, my life is going perfectly right now. Like, I'm just waiting, just waiting for everything to go to to crap, essentially, like to complete shit and I mean, I think what I'm also getting is that it's important to be present to and to be with whatever it is that's coming up. And that can definitely be difficult for folks who are still new to emotion regulation or talking about their feelings and really being able to name them too as they come up.

**Gillian Kirk 9:51**

I think there's two things I want to say. I think Brené Brown calls that foreboding joy, so the idea that you can't feel any like and. Also the idea that if you feel that joy too much, it's going to be taken away that much harder. But I think if you, if you approach it, that to feel it and experiencing it while you're feeling it, knowing that 100% it will not last forever, and that's okay, because it will come back in a different form. So there's that, and then there was something else I was going to say that I forgot, but foreboding joy. And what was the other thing? I can't remember.

**Tanya Griffiths 10:30**

Well, I'm sure it'll come up. While you were talking about it too, especially in terms of the idea of emotions as like roommates. Did you remember what you wanted to say?

**Gillian Kirk 10:43**

I remembered what it was. Yeah, I remembered what it was. It's that we are raised and like, I don't know all cultures, but I know for sure I was raised that you don't feel the bad emotions. You don't express the bad emotions, because the bad emotions, quote "bad" are bad, and so we have learned to label them as bad, so that when we feel angry, that we have to push it down, that when we feel frustrated or sad or grief or or any of the so called negative emotions, we need to not feel them, or we need to, like only feel them for a short period of time and then go, Get over it. Get over it. Get over it. You don't have to cry. Don't cry. It's okay. It's okay. And sometimes it's not okay, you know, and sometimes it's okay, and most of the time when it's not okay, it's okay that it's not okay, because eventually it will be okay again. Yeah, this that whole wheel of of knowing that emotions and everything comes and goes in life, yeah, and we have to relearn, and I think that's going to be what our job is in in therapy as counselors, to teach people who have been told their whole lives that they're not allowed to be sad, they're not allowed to be depressed, they're not allowed to

be angry, that those are all bad, teaching them that those aren't bad. They're just emotions and they're messages from your spirit and your mind that something isn't right or something is lost, and teaching people that that's okay to feel those feelings and to know that they're not going to get stuck in it, that they can just be roommates, you know.

**Tanya Griffiths** 12:26

Yeah, yeah, that these, that there are these sensations in our bodies that, you know, if we sit with them, they'll let us know whatever it is that they have to bring us, you know, like these, these little messages, these directions, these guides, and sometimes it just is what it is like. Sometimes I'll wake up and I'll just feel sad and low energy for no apparent reason other than it's just one of those days. So we can give things a great story, and we could also give things like a simple story, and it really is whatever is coming up for us at that time.

**Gillian Kirk** 13:05

Yeah, the one thing I will say about the whole emotions, so called negative emotions, as roommates, is that there is a time when you can get stuck in them, and that's when something is definitely wrong, that needs to change, and you feel trapped. Or for me, a huge change in my life was getting on medication for my anxiety and depression. I think I started taking meds in 2010 and it's been literally a lifesaver. And I don't think it's perfect, I don't think it's right for every person, but I am completely open with how much it has helped me and has changed my life, because I couldn't get out of I couldn't get out of that. And I do notice if I do forget to take my pills a couple days in a row, I'm just like, something is not right, like I am not able to regulate myself. Yeah. So I think that's one of the things that that's a caveat that I wanted to say on that sometimes you need help, and sometimes it's temporary help to get you through to the other side when feeling the feelings is too much. And sometimes for me, like I am fine with the idea that I will be on meds for the rest of my life, that's there's no downside of that for me.

**Tanya Griffiths** 14:19

Yeah, yeah, no, I honestly, I also have to, like to kind of owe my life or my health too to medication, because when I was diagnosed with Graves' in 2022, I was, I was just super unwell and very sick, and my heart rate was around 130 beats a minute, and I had I couldn't move much. I was constantly just like exhausted and fatigued and medication has helped me. Medication has brought me to where I am right now, and I'm still on it and, oh, I actually need to take it today. Sorry, I just remembered, but yeah. And also I meant to know, like with that, in the heaviness of our of our emotions, like we also don't have to go

through that alone too. Like there is there is community, there is practices that we can do to share whatever it is with others.

**Gillian Kirk 15:31**

I think that's such an important point, and it's so like when we go going back again to that feeling, that grief that I had, and still, and still am feeling I let myself be absolutely cradled by my friends. They knew how much I loved Skeena, my dog, and they knew how devastated I was, and I didn't pretend I wasn't. And when they wanted to help me, I accepted their help. When they wanted to give me things, I accepted it with love, and I am so grateful to myself for being able to do that, grateful to my friends for being there. And I also, you know, I look back on that time, and I think, you know, I give my friends so much credit for being there for me, but I also know that I curated that for myself in my life by being a good friend to my friends before, and I genuinely love them, and I let them love me when I needed it. So that's another thing, is being able to ask for help when you need help there, you know, even it's hard to talk about financial stuff, but it's such a huge stress on people, especially when you have, you know, student loans and debt from school or a mortgage and interest rates go up and all of these things. You know, my parents have been extremely generous with helping me, and they've been I've been lucky enough that I've had that from them at times when I've needed it, but some people wouldn't, don't have that, and it makes it harder, so much harder. So again, the luck in my in my situation, but then sometimes people make it harder in their themselves, where they know that they need a friend, but they don't want to be like a burden to somebody, so they don't reach out, or they're not clear, because they have never considered what they actually need, so they don't know how to ask for it, because they don't even know themselves what they need. Yeah, and that's that just those are things like, you know that there are times when you need to go out into the forest and just connect with nature. I know for myself, there's times when I have to, you know, invite friends over and cook them dinner and hang out with them, or go for a walk with my friends, or whatever it is you need to do to just reconnect. Sometimes, for me, it's as much as traveling, like I have to book a flight somewhere and go, try put a backpack on and travel somewhere by myself, like, you know, yeah, I can do that. I won't be doing that for a while with our student debt. But, yeah.

**Tanya Griffiths 18:07**

Yeah no, I totally get that. And I think there's also a cultural aspect to that too, because I come from the very collective community and culture, and there's a lot of things that there's a lot of beautiful things to that I experienced because of that, for example, in in times of grief, in times of loss, it we're very good at coming together and giving each other

the kind of help that's normally quote easy, such as taking care of ourselves, which can be very difficult for some folks, of course, but like taking care of ourselves, taking care of the house or taking care of our home, and so we give each other the gift of our time and the gift of our presence to clean up and to cook food and whatever it is. And with that being said, because of that there was, there's also, I noticed this sort of unspoken expectation as well, of oh, you should understand too what people need without them having to tell you, without have, without having them explicitly name what it is they need. And what I've learned a lot in the you know, being like living here now in Canada and also through my relationships, is that sometimes you need to explicitly state that you need help, that that I like, like even the phrase, do you have 10 minutes? Do you have one hour to to to show up for me, or to express your love in this in this manner? Yeah, and, like, when I have used that phrasing, like, 100% so far, people have been open to that. People have said, like, yes, like, yes, please let me. Let me love you. Let me show up for you. Yeah, and people like love that opportunity too, because people also like to be of use to those that they love. And if they can't because they don't have the capacity for it, then they will, they will communicate that too. But regardless of that, it's all like rooted in love. It's all rooted in support and care for each other and also for ourselves to and being honest with where we're at right now.

**Gillian Kirk** 20:43

Yeah and I think I could also segue that whole conversation into how it is so important to have boundaries, because it gives people permission to ask you for things. So most of the time, like a lot of people, will be able to say "yes" or "no," some people wouldn't feel like they're able, like my mother, isn't she has a very hard time—her "no" is broken, I like to say. So her "no" is kind of a circular thing. And I, you know, even with my clients, sometimes when I ask them about doing this or that or something, and they seem like a lot of times, they'll say "that yes, sounded a lot like a no. Do you want to talk about that a little bit more, because it's okay to say no to things." But that's another thing that we've learned, especially in the West. I don't know how it is in collectivist cultures, but you know saying no is a sign of weakness, or not generous, or something like that. But I think saying being able to say no when you when you really feel no, is actually a generous place to come from, because your no is truth, and your yes can be full truth. So people can ask me, I say to my clients all the time, "If you're desperate for a massage, if you're in pain or something, you can text me and tell me that you hurt yourself. And if I have space for you, and I'm able to do it without like, overextending myself, I will find a way to get you in, or I'll put you at the very top of the list when somebody cancels." But if I can't, then I won't and I don't feel responsible for their pain. Yeah, and I'm able to own my "yes" and own my "no," which is basically what boundaries are.

**Tanya Griffiths 22:19**

Yes, yeah. I think that's a very beautiful and almost simple way of talking about boundaries, of owning the "yes" and owning the "no."

**Gillian Kirk 22:29**

And it gives people permission to ask if you're not somebody who's going to say no when you mean no, then somebody doesn't they, they'll have to guess whether they can ask you for something or not.

**Tanya Griffiths 22:39**

Yeah, but just being able to practice our own truth and and also be like, really model that for others too. I think, as you said, like, it gives us the permission to, what did you say? It gives us the permission to?

**Gillian Kirk 23:02**

To make your "yes," your "yes," and your "no," your "no."

**Tanya Griffiths 23:04**

Yeah, exactly.

**Gillian Kirk 23:06**

And it gives other people the permission to ask you, "Can you do this for me?" Like, my good friend, Kirsten, who just lives a couple doors down, she knows that I love cooking dinner, and my mother has dementia, and she's over here quite often, because if I don't feed her, she doesn't really eat very well. So it's very win, win. She'll come over here to my house, and I'll make her dinner, and if I'm making her dinner, it's nothing for me to make dinner for her and for Kirsten and her son. And there have been times where she has said to me, "This week is going to be crazy, so anytime you're making dinner, can I join in?" And I love it, because I'm like, "Absolutely." And I will make go out of my way to make sure that I'm making a couple of really good dinners if I can. And then if I didn't have the capacity for it, I would say no, and she would be okay with that. Yeah, she also takes my garbage out every Thursday morning so I can sleep in. So it's a good system.

**Tanya Griffiths 24:09**



Yeah, oh I love that. I love that. Like really being in relationships where there's that reciprocity.

**Gillian Kirk 24:20**

Yeah, yeah. And that's we were talking to about relationships and about being able to, you know, feeling your emotions, and not having to feel them alone. And it's that whole next semester you haven't taken, I just finished the trauma course. Next semester you're going to take the trauma course, and it's really a lot, based on Bessel van der Kolk's "The Body Keeps the Score," and it's about, how do we regulate our nervous systems? And we do that by co-regulating with other people. And I can't wait for you to learn all of that. Yeah, something. I want to teach a course like that at the massage therapy school. I want to teach them they have a pain and stress course there that I was a T.A. for about a year, and I want to go back and rewrite the curriculum and to make it all trauma-informed.

**Tanya Griffiths 25:06**

Yeah, yeah. Oh, that's so exciting. No, I feel like I'm going to have a little head start and read that before, before the actual term starts, just so that I can really enjoy it on my own pace.

**Gillian Kirk 25:22**

It's a good and easy read too. It's not like, super textbooky.

**Tanya Griffiths 25:27**

Yeah, yeah. I think we're coming to the end of our conversation here.

**Gillian Kirk 25:34**

No! [Laughs] See, everything comes to an end.

**Tanya Griffiths 25:40**

Yeah. And that doesn't take away from how beautiful this conversation was.

**Gillian Kirk 25:46**

Yeah, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity. I'm always happy to have the opportunity to talk about myself. [Laughs] Thank you so much. I love talking about these things on such a soulful level, and I'm really passionate about the things that I do and and,

you know, I absolutely adored you from the very first day that I saw you in class. So it's so nice to have something extra special to do together.

**Tanya Griffiths 26:20**

Yeah no, I mean also, when I started this, when I started this practicum, I was just thinking and I was looking at because I was very new to the to the disability community here in Vancouver, and I was trying to figure it all out. Like, who do I want to talk to, and I really want to be intentional with the guests that I have. And then I think it just like dawned on me one day, I was like, Gillian, like she has so many things to share with us, and and also just your journey to to to get to where you are now, and reclaiming those narratives and and all of that, I was like, yes, like, so I'm really happy that we got this chance, that that it got that we got to do this, because I know it was just one heck of a semester.

**Gillian Kirk 27:16**

Yeah, it really was really condensed and really, really intense, yeah. And we didn't really talk too much about, like, the whole massage therapy thing, but I think all of the all of the talk about, you know, feeling your emotions and treating yourself as a whole human being, where every aspect your relationships and your stress management and your connections with other people, all of those things, all are interconnected and involve the body.

**Tanya Griffiths 27:45**

Yeah, yeah. And when we zoom out of that like we also see the web of interconnections too, between us and others and other species and other and sorry, I'm just looking at this beautiful, majestic tree outside the window right now, and yeah, all of it, like all the elements to around us, like they, I like to think that all of them have a way of calling my name and inviting me to remember that I'm not alone.

**Gillian Kirk 28:17**

Oh yeah, that's the tree calling your name, yeah,

**Tanya Griffiths 28:24**

Yeah, literally, like, the wind going through it. And I'm just like, oh, so beautiful.

**Gillian Kirk 28:29**

I don't know if you can hear it right now, but my dog is slurping the water, so he's calling your name by slurping the water.

**Tanya Griffiths 28:37**

Yeah, oh god, it's so funny. But yeah. I mean, like, sorry. I know we're like, going on again, but, that's just also, like the stories we tell ourselves too, right? Like, like all these little things, they can mean nothing, and they can mean everything. And I tend to make the stories a little bit more flamboyant.

**Gillian Kirk 29:03**

Where we get meaning is where we get meaning. You would have been a good English major. [Laughs]

**Tanya Griffiths 29:10**

Yeah. I mean, I mean, that's why, that's what I did. I mean, I did Hispanic studies, which was just, I guess, yeah, just Spanish major, yeah, but that, but I love literature, and I just love it when I love prose. Well, thank you, Gillian, is there any way that folks who are tuning in can connect with you?

**Gillian Kirk 29:36**

Yeah? I mean, I'm on I'm on social media. I don't post very often anymore, but mainly Instagram. It's just @gilliankirk. Mainly you'll see photos of my dog and my kittens. I have another dog. His name is Bowen. I got him right after Skeena died. But yeah, I'm not taking any new clients or patients right now, just because I'm only working part time but I'm always happy to chat with people, if they want to reach out to me, or if they really have something that I want to ask, they can just get in touch with me through, through you, I would assume.

**Tanya Griffiths 30:10**

Amazing. Well, yeah, thank you for your time. Thank you for showing up, Gillian, and for letting yourself be seen.

**Gillian Kirk 30:17**

Absolutely my pleasure. Thank you so much for asking me and having me.

**Announcement 30:23**

This podcast is brought to you by the Vancouver Adapted Music Society. Since 1988, VAMS has been supporting and promoting musicians with disabilities in Metro Vancouver through various programs, including music lessons, recording projects and live performance opportunities. To learn more about us, visit our website at [www.vams.org](http://www.vams.org), @vamsociety on Instagram, the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, or email us at [info@vams.org](mailto:info@vams.org). Thanks for listening.