

Mary-Jo Fetterly Pt. 2 | Discover Stories Episode 86

Announcement 0:09

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, @vamsociety on Instagram or on our website, www.vams.org, we hope to see you there.

Tanya Griffiths 0:42

Well, this actually leads me into my next question, so we can dive a bit deeper into it as well. But you describe yourself as a deeply philosophical being, how has your philosophy of life and meaning changed after your accident?

Mary-Jo Fetterly 1:05

Huh, um, I would say it hasn't changed in any dramatic way, other than it's just deepened and gotten richer. My philosophy, which is essentially that there's an incredible intelligence that holds my body together. There's an incredible intelligence that put together my body and the systems that are within my body and that also are the systems that are part of this planet and part of the universe that I belong to, and that great intelligence is benign. I don't think it has any identity other than being, you know, an incredibly benign life force energy, and we don't even need to call it anything or it doesn't even have to be an IT, or that. The fact of the matter is, is that I draw on that energy every day. We all do. And as such, I honour it, and I revere it. And so my philosophy since my injury, has really expanded in the sense that I understand perhaps more of that relationship in an intimate way than I did before, because I've had to get very, you know, up close and personal with my relationship to the life force, because I've really had to call on it and to figure out how to navigate and to navigate, but how to how to harness it, actually in a different way. So prior to my injury, I could know I could do all sorts of things. Physically, I was quite an extreme athlete, and once paralyzed as a high level quad with no arm function, I had to figure out how I could, you know, now, harness the life force energy in a very different way. And so I believe that we, we all, have the capacity to create lives that we choose in the way that we are engaged with the life force in whatever type of relationship we choose to call

that. But I think that's what's changed the most, is I've I've really noticed how my understanding of the law of the laws of the universe have become very clear to me and and on a very practical basic level. Let's just, for instance, say, you know, gravity is a very, it's a very close companion to me as a one law of the universe. But so is the law of choice. So is the law the you know, there's many laws in the universe that we don't really acknowledge, but that exist. And I think in quantum physics and in various ways, I've delved into that more deeply since my injury. Yeah,

Tanya Griffiths 4:33

I'm honestly feeling very inspired in how you really embody and harness and honour that life force. I, yeah, I really feel inspired to also like, deepen, deepen my relation to it in the everyday, because it does come up. It does come up when I express my gratitude. For, for being given another chance to to live and to play and to and to feel joy and to and to Yeah, just be, just to be in this body and and at the same time, I feel like the times in which I am also more connected with with the intelligence, as you put it. I think to me, I normally use creator or God, but for me, I feel the most loved when I'm in water or when I'm on the land, and I feel held. I feel I feel that no matter how heavy this experience and this time on Earth can be I am, I am held, and I am welcomed and I am supported as I am.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 6:09

Oh, that's just beautiful Tanya, yeah, and as you should feel that, you know, and everyone, I dearly hope everyone, can feel that, because it's really true, as I know it to be. And, you know, in my near death experience, I really, I was held there too, and I had no fear, and I didn't, I mean, I could have been dead, who knows what, but there was no fear, and it was just so beautiful to be given that insight that there's this great I love the word creator too, actually, sweetie, and I love the word God, although it's been kind of misused by religion, but religion is just man-made. So just to say I agree wholeheartedly. I just, I really love feeling like we're kind of like this, you know, like in a cloud, we're floating this beautiful place of support all around us, like there's, you know, my girl friend once said to me at the end of a yoga class. She said, you know, doing yoga makes me feel she's paralyzed from the neck down too. She said it makes me feel like I'm a camera in a camera bag, and I've got all this foam around me and also the support and like everything's holding me up. And I said, Great, that's exactly the way we should always feel like that.

Tanya Griffiths 7:45

Yeah, oh, I love that. I love that metaphor too, of just being held in a way that's comfortable and soft and yeah, you know, we can, we can be gentle. Yeah, your memoir, *Where Science Meets Spirit*, explores the intersection of resilience, energy and embodiment. Can you share a bit more about the significance behind the title?

Mary-Jo Fetterly 8:16

Yeah, I, I think that the title has a sort of a very, more sort of essay scientific feel to it, because I wanted to, I wanted to ensure that that I was offering those in the audience, those readers who are looking for some of the science, the opportunity to know that. You know, there are research articles in there. There's lots of citations, over 40 of really good research. And I also, I really part of my mission in writing, it was to help people to understand, perhaps, the relationship of science and spirituality and how it's it's very interrelated. I don't see them as mutually exclusive or of one another, but I think science has for many years, sort of discounted the notion of spirituality or spirit. And that really goes back to, you know, the old sort of Descartes, Newtonian model of the scientific method where everything had to be material or nothing existed unless it was physical or able to be empirically proven, and that really discounted, then anything. Could even, if you will, discount breath, because, of course, you cannot prove that breath exists just through the result of it. Well, of course, we can measure breath now through various different instruments, but back then you couldn't. So I think the most important kind of aspect of the title then is really this, you know, this kind of love, hate relationship, academically, that's existed for hundreds of years between those two attributes or aspects. And then also the the importance that science and spirit are, are they're an and they're not an either or. And then "the *Autobiography of a Paralyzed Yogi*," some people would consider, perhaps, in the writing world, autobiography, meaning someone else writes about yourself, or it could be you writing about your own life. And in this case, it is because I did include that near death experience my childhood, and it's not just a memoir, then, it really covers a lot of ground, and I I also explain kind of what I talked about earlier, when, how my philosophical and my relationship to spirit and life force was kind of established back then in that near death experience. So the other reason why I called it that is Paramahansa Yogananda, who was the original *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Title. It's quite a famous book, and it was broadly distributed. It was the best seller in the States for many years in the 60s and 70s, and it was kind of the first yoga book, really to hit North America. So it was a classic, and in many ways, but the other really important thing for me was he was one of my teachers. I actually was one of my other than my mom and Swami Radha, and that kind of influenced, um, he was one of my own first sort of reaches out into understanding the the more philosophical aspects of yoga. Because, of course, he, as a true yogi, knows that Asana, or the physical

postures, are just one of eight limbs, and there's these seven other limbs that are, you know, also equally as important in the understanding and practice of yoga.

Tanya Griffiths 12:30

Mm, hmm, yeah. Thank you. Thank you for that. And thank you too for really talking to about how science and science and spirit are an and, and if anything, perhaps science tries to make sense of the spirit or or maybe not. But yeah, I I hear the different influences too, and how that is weaved or woven into into your autobiography, and I'm wondering if there were any insights or revelations you've had while writing your book.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 13:14

Oh gosh, yeah. Lots insights, revelations, even writing the book, stuff would come to me that, you know, I feel like was, you know, very much, not not by me, but through me, if you will. And I couldn't really maybe be specific about that, because there's lots of little snippets in the book that I would just wander around my my iPhone and or often in the middle of the night, I would get these little, you know, insights, and I would just record them. I didn't even know where they were coming from. And so I would, you know, just randomly talk into my phone and record them, and so lots of those. And actually, during the book Tanya, or throughout the book, there are what's called web logs. And when I was first injured, I again, I didn't have the same type of near death experience, per se, because I was much more, perhaps physically conscious of the process when I was physically paralyzed at 47 but I did have this very distinct experience of not being physical when I woke up and, you know, Right initially, and that experience was really profound in that I felt again, like this kind of, that very similar feeling that we've talked about, where you feel totally supported, but you're also quite floaty and non like boundary, you know, you just don't have this physical limitation of feeling scrunched into a body and. And that I write about a lot at the beginning in web logs, and I didn't write at the beginning because I couldn't. And all I could do again in the early stages for the first two years was I dictated these to my daughter, who then would write them out, and then those web logs I put in the book. But I didn't even edit them. I just left them very, quite raw and quite sort of, they sound almost, you know, they're not. They don't make a lot of literal kind of, you know, they wouldn't get high marks in English grammar, or maybe, you know, sentence structure. But they're really the lived experience of what it was like. And they, they're very energetic. So there's lots of that in the book.

Tanya Griffiths 15:47

Yeah, I love that. I love, I love that inclusion of, of sort of essentially like a diary entry, and it being very unfiltered and just just how it is and the way it came up. And I really like the phrase you use, but not the not by me, but through me. Yeah, because I, I to whenever I, for example, meditate, when I sit with myself, when I sit with different plant medicines, I think that there's, there's this, this, this miracle that happens when I open myself and I let whatever needs to come To me, just, just come as is, and so, yeah, there's a lot of power in that. And I'm wondering, for folks who are tuning in, how they can read your autobiography or be engaged with it?

Mary-Jo Fetterly 16:56

Yeah, well, I have a website. It's www.mary-jo.com, which is my name, so the Mary dash Joe still exists, so it's M, A, R, Y, dash, J, O, dot com, and there's all the ways to kind of order purchase, or, you know, read snippets of the book. There you can get the Kindle version or the paperback version through the regular book suppliers like Apple, Amazon and Google, I think, yeah, and and it also, it can be carried in bookstores, although I think it's slow to get out into the bookstores right now. We haven't seen it on many of the shelves just yet. It just got released a week and a half ago, so it's coming, you know, and I think I would suggest, for anyone that's interested, I do write a blog, and I'll also be doing a blog about the book and about these concepts, because I've already had people ask me, but what do I do if, you know, if I want to work with energy this way, or how would I look at this? And so I thought, well, you know, I should really support all the readers of my book by writing a blog that's really specific to what I talk about in the book. So I'm going to be doing that as well. And so if they go and sign up for my newsletter, they'll get those bi-weekly, and those will be, you know, a nice sort of 300 word essay on on a piece of the book that I unpack a bit deeper and maybe add, you know, a practice and a practical application for people, so they can really put these ideas to work and find how they can be useful.

Tanya Griffiths 18:47

Yeah, absolutely. That's like a it's like a reading guide. It's yeah, yeah, a way to apply, like, the teachings and the wisdom that the book carries, and you know, which is an extension of you into their own everyday living, yes, oh, that sounds wonderful. And, and well, as we, as we come to like, the end of our talk today, I also wanted to name that you are currently a Chair for the Disability Foundation, and you've also been more involved in Vancouver Adapted Music Society. So I'm just wondering, how did you first come to work with the Disability Foundation, and what has your experience been like so far?

Mary-Jo Fetterly 19:36

Oh, that's great organization. I just love the Disability Foundation, and I've honestly been involved with them as a client for the whole time I've been disabled. And the first introduction, I suppose, way back then, was to ASABC, which was back then, the Disabled Sailing Association. And I love sailing, and I absolutely adore getting out on the water every week. And I just think that whole offering is just, you know, top notch using the sailing term. And so then, you know, over the years, I got into gardening, and then DIGA provided me with some great raised beds, and I have, still these days, it's just a beautiful garden. And then when Steve was still alive, and he was this amazing manager of Connectra, and I was quite involved in teaching yoga out in the community. In those days, I used to do the Abilities Expo every year with Trinity Yoga, my company, and we would do yoga classes and stuff for the Disability Foundation. So over the years, I've been involved in very many ways, volunteering and also as a recipient of all the great services. And then I was asked in 2019 was it, or maybe 21 to to join on the Board by Maureen DeLandreville, the the Chair at that time. And I was thrilled to be on the Board. And I served on the Board for a couple terms, and then I was asked to I was nominated to be the Chair last year, year and a half ago, and it's been a great experience. I had no idea what it involved, and it's been a steep learning curve for me, and a great one. And I just, yeah, I'm, I'm thrilled to be able to do it this year. A lot of work, because we're, we've got lots of big initiatives, as you know, and we also are, you know, doing a couple big, big changes. So I won't mention those here. But any case, it's been very rich and enriching and rewarding. And I just recently, although I kind of started this a while back, but I've just recently been involved as a client with VAMS, and that's exciting. And I've got a really great project that I'm working on there, so a music project, because I used to when I was younger, play the guitar and sing a lot, and I really lost that, and I kind of got back into it when I was very first injured, but it just wasn't the right timing for whatever reasons, and my hands couldn't do the guitar to any degree then, and since then, equipment and stuff that evolved so now I can and I am.

Tanya Griffiths 22:44

Wow, I just love how it's just, just gonna use this the word spirit again, but there really is just so much spirit in you. Well, thank you so much, Mary-Jo, for your time, your presence and for bringing your spirit into this conversation today. Bye, for now.

Mary-Jo Fetterly 23:06

Okay. Bye.

Announcement 23:10

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, @vamsociety on Instagram, the Vancouver Adapted Music Society on Facebook, or email us at info@vams.org Thanks for listening.