

Ep #72: (Part 1) Asking Yourself the Hard Questions with Nicole Whiting



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Leah Badertscher

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Nicole: I really asked myself some really hard questions when I was at moments of vulnerability. And what I mean, like, can I keep doing this? Can I take another step? Can I keep moving forward? And I kept asking myself, like, where in your life are you asking these questions too?

I really sat with myself and asked myself some hard questions. And it was really a parallel of, like, can I do this physically? Where in my life am I putting up blocks so I don't have to? I don't want to know what that's like. I know what it's like to go out and ride my bike for 100 miles and know what that finish line feels like. I want to know what that's like if I open up to all of this in my life, every part of it; in my relationships, in my marriage, in my friendships, in my work, in my creativity. What is that going to look like for me?

And I realized that the possibilities were endless and I was only going to be able to do that if I allowed myself to heal from all of the things that I was trying to protect myself from.

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That's a clip from my recent conversation with Nicole Whiting. Nicole is a colleague and a dear friend of mine. I had the opportunity to spend a year with her last year, when we were in a mastermind together. And I knew shortly after meeting her that she was someone that I wanted to share with this community.

She has an energy and this organic wisdom and earned wisdom, and the spirit that I know, even while you'll hear her talk about how she was thinking about what is her connection to what I do and what she does. And

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it flows organically from this conversation. So, I'll leave it to you listening to further understand – I know you'll understand why I had to have her on.

Not the least of which is this; she's also a coach. And in her work as a coach, she is so masterful at meeting people where they are and equipping them to cross their finish line, no matter what that is. And I know for so many of my listeners, that you have your own respective finish lines. You don't have to be an athlete. I think – I know – being an artist can be like an athlete.

You have that dream that you're working towards creating and it can feel like an endurance event. And so, I wanted to bring on Nicole because she will surely not only inspire you to cross your finish line, but even more than that, what she shares with you here will equip you to do so, to equip you to run across it, victorious, arms raised, no matter what that finish line is for you.

You are listening to *The Art School Podcast*, a show for artists and creatives who want to become the next greatest version of themselves. Learn how to cultivate an extraordinary way of being and take the mystery out of making money, and the struggle out of making art. Here is your host, master certified life coach, artist, and former lawyer, Leah Badertscher.

Hello, everyone. And welcome back. Though I feel like I need a slightly different intro this week because, welcome back, you are certainly welcome, but back, I feel like the last time I recorded a podcast for you, it was a different time and it was a different place and it was a different world.

So, for anyone listening to this in posterity, because hey, who knows how long these podcasts will be kept around, I am recording this during the time of the Coronavirus. I'm also – speaking of recording this at a certain time –

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I'm also recording this late at night because now I'm also homeschooling Blaize, Sammy, And Elijah. So, we have kindergarten, third grade, fifth grade that we're also doing here, and feeling very fortunate that figuring out homeschooling and how to work from home and all of that are the greatest of our personal immediate concerns and our hearts and prayers go out to those that are on the frontlines, caring for others who have the virus, thinking about working on how to contain it, and of course, to all of those who are ill and working, fighting, to get their health back.

I have been thinking about what I can do. This last week, if you were on my mailing list, you received a notice and I saw so many of you attended. Thank you. I offered a free group coaching call. It was a vitamin-C, call, get your vitamin-Cs; coaching, creativity, and community. Because I know an infusion of those things, that kind of energy is so helpful in a time like these. So, I thought I would offer that, see how it's received, see if it's helpful.

It was amazing, the response. So, thank you again for everyone that came. Thank you for everyone that brought your incredible questions and for everyone whose presence there just the energy was amazing and the emails, messages I received afterwards too, I'm so grateful to have done it. So, you're welcome, to the people that said thank you. And I'm also so grateful for everyone, for the overwhelming, positive response that I received afterwards and emails, texts – not texts – emails, Facebook messages.

So, I will be doing it again. I will be doing free classes again. I am also thinking of what I can offer next month. I'm going to do something really awesome and really unprecedented for me next month. It's going to make it so easy for anybody who wants an extra boost and community and a world class coaching during these times.

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So, be on my mailing list because that's where you're going to be the first to know. And also, there usually is a week lag in when I create these podcasts, so being on my mailing list is a way to be in the immediate know and receive notices of things like free classes, or again, this awesomeness that I am dreaming up for next month.

So, that's a little bit about what's going on around here. I know all of you have your own things going on around there. So, I so appreciate you listening to this because that means you carved out precious time, and that really means a lot to me. So, thank you for being here.

Also, I another bit of very random news, but some of you have asked me, have you gotten a dog yet? We did get a dog. We adopted a dog a weekend ago. We picked her up. She needs some TLC but she is so, so loving and so, so sweet. Her name is Luna and everybody here is over the moon for her. And yes, I love that opportunity for a pun. And no, I didn't name her. People have asked me that because of the whole moon, moonshot thing. But that was how she came. And she's almost two, so she knows that as her name.

So, we are in love and it's been really good timing too because she helps the kids run their legs off. They have the run of the 40 acres and she is like their own little personal trainer. The idea was that we would tire her out at night, but she for sure is tiring the kids out. Which I greatly appreciate that little bit of extra help.

And speaking of running – hey, that's also a great segue – in today's podcast, as I said in the intro, I could not be more pleased to share Nicole with you. I just love this woman so much. And this episode is a little different because I actually included part of our conversation that I had meant to not have as part of the recording.

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We just started talking when we got on Zoom that day and I loved where the conversation was going, so I just decided to include it. And one of my favorite, favorite podcasters does this as well, Krista Tippett from the On Being Podcast. So, it's through NPR, and they always have the option, you can listen to the edited version or the unedited version. And I'm like, does anybody ever opt for the edited version? No, I want all of the back and forth that goes on between these two people.

I don't want to miss out on a single thing. And so, I just loved the way Nicole opened and how she was thinking about things. And I thought it was the perfect way to move into this conversation.

So, before I say a little bit more about why I wanted to have Nicole on the podcast, let me give you her official bio. Nicole Whiting is known as, "Your life pacer." She's a serial entrepreneur, life coach, mother of two, ironwoman, and a competitive ultrarunner. And so, yes, she is as fierce a leader as they come.

She coaches women on and off running trails, helping them to achieve their biggest and wildest goals. And she does so with tenacity, consistency, and an unshakable belief in her clients. Simply put, Nicole will meet you where you are and equip you to cross your finish line, no matter what that is.

And that says so much about Nicole and she is also one of those people who is so much bigger than – there's no definition she could fit inside, and that's why I love having this medium of a podcast through which to share her – my prepositions there, I can't get them right – that I get to share her with you and have her talk and tell her stories because she's an incredible storyteller and to me it happens naturally by virtue of her being somebody who lives from this extraordinary, authentic, deeply authentic way.

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And I so believe that people can be energetic teachers, like teach us through the energy of who they are. So, I really wanted you to not just hear the tips of what can you take, what can a creative person take from an event and an experience like an ultramarathon. An ultra-event is 50 miles or over and Nicole does those, and then also 100-mile events.

You know, there are so many applications that you can take from that world and then apply to what is also an event that requires immense strength and problem-solving and stamina and an extraordinary psychology and an extraordinary emotional strength, mastery, and spiritual resilience. Of course, there are so many crossovers.

And then there's also this x-factor Nicole has that I know you'll glean just from listening to her. So, I hope you love this conversation. I loved having it. I loved relistening to it. And I will talk to you again on the other side.

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Leah: Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today.

Nicole: Yeah, so I have been, like, digging into this whole idea, really how to weave what I do into what you do and how I can really relate. And I think a while ago – I don't remember what it was, but I've always believed that I wasn't creative. That's been a belief that I've had for a very long time. I felt like I was never good at writing, I was never really good at art. I just was like, I don't have that.

Like, I am the science brain, I am the math brain. Like, I was given that gift. And so, it's been really interesting because what I realized was that at the end of the day, art is our way that we express our emotions and give it to the world. And I felt like my art is actually in my running. Like, that's where I

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access emotion. And that's where I access the things that I don't access in normal life, especially in ultrarunning.

Like, I really thought about this whole idea of creativity and how often even creativity can sometimes get put in a box. Like, it's art or it's music or it's all of these things that we have been taught are, you know, the arts. And I feel like a race in ultrarunning is each person there is their own brushstroke. Each person in the whole thing creates that experience. And that's like such a beautiful piece of art.

Leah: I love that.

Nicole: So, anyhow, I've been thinking about how it would really relate to your listeners.

Leah: Yes, and did you see – I didn't have a chance to send it until this morning. Did you see the email I sent you?

Nicole: Yes.

Leah: I think, to me too, art is in creativity, when you're in that space, you're essentially flowing, I think, who you really are. And I feel like when you are an athlete in flow and you're in the zone and the experiences that you've had where you shed so much, you get to that place where what's left is you. And I feel like getting in touch with that, that's what creativity gives too.

It's an opportunity. That's my definition of creativity, that opportunity to flow that authentic original essence that's you. And I love what you said about in a race, everyone's this individual brushstroke. Because too, I have been, long ago, in these beginner painter classes where it is amazing how you can see people who've never created art before, and by the end of just

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eight weeks or a six-month community art class, you can see. You can line up people's canvasses and you can be like, "Oh, that's Mary-Ann, that's Bob, that's Nicole." Like people have this unique fingerprint that flows through them.

And I feel like for me, athletic sports was my original art training because it's what I felt there that I then wanted, like that, and now I want to express it in these other ways too. And also, just sort of that feeling of when you're really in a competitive sport and you're really unleashed, I wanted that feeling and to be able to do that in art. And I feel like you are – when you are talking in your zone, you are like that unleashed kind of energy and there's that wildness, pure authentic wildness.

Nicole: Right, so I think what you had asked in there about being in nature. There's something really, really special about being in nature, like the most organic place where there's nothing manmade. It's just organic. And being in that place and then stripping – like when you go through an ultra, you strip away every ounce of emotional armor that you have and all you're left with. And that's really what you're doing.

And so, for me, that ultrarunning, putting yourself in your most organic place and then stripping away all the emotional armor that you've used in your regular life, and then you share that experience with other people. Talk about building empathy. When you choose to go into an experience and suffer with another human being, that's most likely a stranger, we don't get that in real life. And how I used that vulnerability, like, in my life is showing up in empathy. That has taught me the ultimate level of empathy and how I can use that to help other people or endure what they're going through.

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Leah: Man, we've already started. This is the way I like to do podcast interviews, is just like the conversations that I love to have. Because people can hear canned media snippets anywhere else. And I know I always love it when I come across an interview that just goes deeper and you're not having to feel like you're punchy or sticking to your points, but you feel something happening in the conversation. So, if that's alright with you.

Nicole: It's that organicness, right? Like a thing that just happens that is just created by sharing space with another human being.

Leah: Absolutely. So, welcome, everyone. You just started the podcast right there, being in that organic space where we strip away and what it is that we're left with is who we really are. So, who I am talking to today is my dear friend and colleague Nicole Whiting, welcome to the podcast.

Nicole: Thank you so much. I'm so excited to be here.

Leah: So we will probably have to backtrack and do all the official things. Well, I will have given your bio in my intro. And we will cover all the official podcasting things that one ought to cover. And I also too already love the energy and flow of the conversation we've started. But I'm thrilled to have Nicole here today.

And we started, before we started recording, Nicole was saying she'd been thinking about the relationship between creativity, what I do, and what she does. Why don't you tell us a little bit about what it is that you do?

Nicole: So, I probably wear many hats, but what we're particularly talking about is my journey through being an ultrarunner. And I say my journey of being an ultrarunner because ultrarunning has taught me so much about really who I am and where I'm going in my life and so much about what it

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means to heal from the past and how I can use that experience to share my life with somebody else and help them get to find all these same questions about themselves; who they are at their core, who they are after they strip everything away, where they want to go in their life, and how they're going to get there.

Leah: And another of the reasons I wanted to have Nicole on is because first of all, I believe so deeply in the person as a whole, that wholeness and healing for someone is necessary to be able to harness your full creative potential, and your ability to be strong enough to experience all aspects of what it is to be human. And once you've done that, now when you're ready to experience any of that, then you're really ready to be creative because now you're no longer subconsciously holding back because you fear you might not be equal to the challenge.

And I know that I was just talking to Nicole earlier about how for me, sports and athletics were my unofficial precursor to my artistic career and training because what I felt as an athlete was, in flow, I felt like I touched who I really was and then I wanted more of that and I had this innate desire to express it through art and through writing. And not only do I know that Nicole is an expert in what it is to be an ultra-athlete, I knew because she is also a coach and a life-pacer for others, that she can speak that language too and we can talk about the metaphor, but also the literal application of taking that elite extraordinary caliber of athlete mentality and applying that to living a very meaningful extraordinary life and creating, like, what is the finish line for you, if you're listening.

You may or may not consider yourself an athlete, but you have some finish line you want to cross. You want to write a book. You want to publish a book. You want to breakthrough in the music industry. You want to take your work and ascend to the next level. And I know that Nicole can talk to you about her philosophy of relentless progress, like, one step at a time.

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I know she can speak to the mindset and I also know that you will just gain so much from her energetically as a teacher because she just exudes this spirit that it is so inspiring, in a way too that's instructive and when you're around her something in you lights up and is like, oh yeah I want to be that too. It reminds you that you can do that wild and strong and free and unique.

So, for you, because I think of you as a very strong resilient person, and then it might seem surprising to some people to hear you talk about then how the endurance sport, one of the reasons you do it is because it strips away an armor. So, can you talk a little bit about what that is, like, you get stripped down but you are still, maybe even more so, stronger because of it?

Nicole: Yeah, so I think you touched on something earlier when you were talking about the human experience. And I think what's really – and this ties into the ultrarunning – what's really the equalizer for all of us within the human experience is that we all experience emotion. None of us are above that. None of us get to escape that.

That's the ultimate equalizer between all the humans and the human experience. And what I believe that ultrarunning has done, it has stripped away all of the emotional armor, because we all have it on some level, some shape, some form, and we all use it to really protect us from the emotions that we don't want to feel.

In ultrarunning, I feel like it has been this pathway to be able to drop all that emotional armor and really access those emotions that we don't always access in real life. We don't always access, in the things that are happening, because there's this element of the ultrarunning, like we were talking about, you're out in the most organic space. You're out in the woods

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where there's nothing manmade. It's simply just a space that just is. It's just the way it's supposed to be. We don't second-guess that, it just is. And we put ourselves in there and with the ultrarunning, we break down ourselves physically.

We break down ourselves emotionally. We breakdown ourselves spiritually and all we have left is the ultimate raw emotion of who we are. We meet parts of ourselves out there that we've probably never met before because it's not really common in real life to take all that away and bring us down to that very organic just being of who we are. And that's something really, really special.

And I hope that everybody can find that. It may not be in ultrarunning, but if you can find your pathway to drop the armor and access parts of yourself that maybe you've been afraid to access, like who am I going to be when that comes up? What am I going to do when I feel that? Those pieces allow you to be vulnerable and allow you to experience the full human experience.

Leah: And so, when people listening, when they hear about you break down this and you break down that. They might think, not for me. And then, what I hear you also saying though, and tell me where I'm wrong, is that a lot of life will not take you there. So, you could just be kept on the surface of who you are and what your life is really like, your whole life, without this opportunity to know, but who am I really? And to me, that's innately appealing, to know who I am really.

But can you speak to why it's been important to you personally and maybe other people that you've known, how this has shifted their life or changed them?

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Nicole: I believe that it healed me from trauma, from hard experiences. I think it was when I started getting into endurance races, my endurance journey started actually with an ironman. And then it moved into trail running, which I really feel like it was a coming home for me when I started experiencing life on the trail. But there was so much, when I decided to do an ironman, that the piece of it was really spending time with myself.

Like, I had to spend hours alone, moving my body and navigating where my thoughts went. And that, in itself, it almost put me in a position where I got to see what my beliefs were, and sort of from a different perspective. And I think that came with the silence. I think that came with the movement. I think that came with being outside.

And I really asked myself some really hard questions when I was at moments of vulnerability and, I mean, like, can I keep doing this? Can I take another step? Can I keep moving forward? And I kept asking myself, where in your life are you asking these questions too? I really sat with myself and asked myself some hard questions and it was really a parallel of can I do this physically. Like, where in my life am I putting up blocks so I don't have to?

I don't want to know what that's like. I know what it's like to go out and ride my bike for 100 miles and know what that finish line feels like. I want to know what that's like if I open up to all of this in my life, every part of it; in my relationships, in my marriage, in my friendships, in my work, in my creativity. What is that going to look like for me? And I realized that the possibilities were endless and I was only going to be able to do that if I allowed myself to heal from all of the things that I was trying to protect myself from.

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Leah: And so, how did that begin? The things that you were protecting yourself from, what did that look like when you decided to no longer protect yourself?

Nicole: What did that look like? Messy, right? It's messy. It was taking one step and deciding I was going to choose to feel differently. I was going to choose to show up differently. I was going to choose to act differently. And I was going to choose to honor myself and part of honoring myself was feeling some of the things I didn't want to feel in life up to that point.

Leah: And giving yourself the space to feel that.

Nicole: And myself the space to feel what I had ran from.

Leah: Were you doing this on your own?

Nicole: Yes, which was one of the reasons – this is actually what spurred me also going through life coaching because I realized that there were a lot of people like me out in the world and what a difference I could make if I could help somebody else endure their journey the same way that I had mine.

Leah: Because when I hear you talking about choose to feel differently, these I know in retrospect, that's how we sum it up. And I know, when you're in that place, it's like your own personal hell. It's like you're sitting in your own persona manmade prison or hell. And you're like, I know I need to choose something different.

You get to the point where you're, like, radical responsibility, I know I'm creating this, I don't want this, then why am I creating this? And you intellectually get that it's up to you to choose differently, and then I think the

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thing that it can be daunting, it absolutely can be overcome, but what I would love for you to speak to – because I know for so many people what comes up then is so much self-loathing and so much shame that keeps you in a cycle that keeps you down, that prevents you from the healing, from taking the next step. So, how did you navigate those kinds of intense emotions?

Nicole: So, I think this bears a story because I don't know if I can express the very first steps of what I did. So, I experienced a trauma early on when I was about 13. I had had a boy in junior high school ask me to be his girlfriend. And I didn't really know him. And in that moment, I had told him no, that I couldn't be his girlfriend, but maybe you can give me a call sometimes. That boy went home and he took his life. And that was – I think we have these moments in life where one moment we're one person and the next moment we step through and we're somebody else.

And I think that was one of those moments that something happened to me and I was just never quite the same person again. And I carry this belief that something that I could say or do could affect someone to the point that they would take their own life. And that was I began living from a place of fear, as a 13-year-old. And so, I believe that it actually was probably around 20 years later that I really decided to navigate this.

Throughout those 20 years, I had a ton of emotional armor. I had all of these coping skills to try to manipulate the world around me, to try to, in essence, manipulate the people around me because I came from this belief that I could handle anything. I can handle this, but what can that other person handle? And I just didn't know. And that was really, really frightening for me. And so, I just kind of put it away. I pretended that it didn't really happen. I pretended that I was okay and I just went on in this massive manipulation way of living.

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Leah: And so, for people listening who aren't – because I know you and I have some overlapping background where we understand people-pleasing to be a form of manipulation. So, I want to parse out what you said about coming from a belief that you, Nicole, can handle anything, but other people can't because of the trauma you experienced with the boy at 13. So, therefore, your manipulation was essentially trying to make yourself pleasing to everyone so that they would never be upset by who you are or what you do.

Nicole: Exactly. It was very much people-pleasing, you know, always saying yes, you want me to jump? How high? Like, I am going to make life the most comfortable for everyone around me, even if that means it's going to be suffering for myself. That's okay because I know that I can handle.

I felt like I had already handled the worst and I was still standing. And so, I was like, okay, I can just keep piling it on. I know that I can handle this. And so, that's really what I did for years was I just made sure that everybody was okay.

Leah: But you weren't okay.

Nicole: I think there was moments that I thought I was okay. Like, there was a whole belief, like this is definitely the best way to be living my life because if that happened again maybe I wouldn't be okay. so I had this façade that it was all working. And I think there's that saying, it all works until it doesn't. Like, that's working great for me until it all of a sudden doesn't work anymore.

Well, all of a sudden, it didn't work anymore and I was in a wonderful marriage. We had just adopted – we were in the process. We were foster parents. We were adopting my daughter and she had a lot of behavioral

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issues. She had a lot of stuff going on too and I kept trying to make my family okay, our other son okay, my marriage okay, my daughter okay. and it really kind of put me back into this place of trying to, for lack of a better term, quote unquote save somebody else, as in my daughter.

And there was a little bit of redemption for me because I couldn't save that boy at 13. I was going through life trying to save people. And I was at my breaking point. I was saving everybody. I was throwing everybody a lifeline but myself. And I realized that I was going to be drowning soon. I was already sucking for air and absolutely head under water, and it was working until it didn't.

And it just wasn't working for me anymore and I just decided one day that I was done. I can't do this anymore. And so, I decided that I was going to try something that I had never done before, and that was just me stepping out. And so, I did something that was really, really inconvenient for a lot of people around me.

Leah: That's interesting, right?

Nicole: Yeah, and it was scary. It was scary. So, you know, what if my husband and I get in an argument? What if I disappoint somebody? What if I don't meet someone's expectations? What if, what if, what if?

And I just had to say, what if you don't change? And then what happens? I went back to this thing, like, keep asking myself the hard questions. And I decided I wasn't going to play that out anymore because I had played it out for 20 years.

Leah: What if you don't change?

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Nicole: What if I don't change? It was the first time – I'm getting a little emotional. It was the first time I didn't know the answer. And that was scary. That was a different kind of fear. And so, I think we have to keep asking ourselves the hard questions; to get vulnerable, to strip yourself down, to have access to the things.

That was me accessing the piece of myself that I had never let myself access before. And maybe that's why ultrarunning is so important to me. Because I keep putting myself in that position, choosing to commit to the grievances, choosing to commit to the hard places, and that's created a whole new world for myself. I know now I can handle any emotion that comes my way.

Leah: And I will say, knowing you, there is an extraordinary energy about you that I have experienced in some people who have gone there, like to the hard places.

Nicole: And it just creates, not only for yourself, but like this self-compassion piece you can create yourself, that doesn't just stay with you. Once you can cultivate that and once you can cultivate your ability to feel things, to think things, to believe things, you get to share that with other people too. You get to be the person that can show people, you can do this.

Leah: Yeah, and I think that rolls off of you, not only through your words, but through your presence. And I think it creates this very deep sense of safety. Because I think when you have gone to those places – again, it's the paradox, when you go to the hardest places but you're willing to feel it all, there is a deep sense of safety. And too, I know that's what you bring into spaces that allows other people to then really go to the hard places for them.

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And also, what I think we are really hungry for, and something that maybe we're conditioned to be scared of – because of the many stunning, amazing things I have heard you say, one was when we were at a retreat and you talked about how you continue to go into these situations that are very challenging, to find your breaking point. And there's nothing like masochistic or self-loathing and not an ounce of that in you when you talk about it.

And I think it's so extraordinary because we are conditioned to avoid the places where we might be fragile, to avoid the things that – but it comes from this implicit unconscious belief that we are fragile and that we are breakable, rather than someone who's gone there. And looking at this Cheryl Strayed quote I have on my bulletin board where she says, "Fear, to a great extent, is born of a story we tell ourselves. And so I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I decided I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me."

I was looking at that this morning during my morning meditation and thinking of you because you seek those things that could take you to that place where you could feel broken, and yet you have this very unvanquishable energy about you. And I think that's part of one of the many things that makes you an extraordinary healer and teacher.

I think, for me, those places, kind of life exploring, surfing the edges of what we think we're capable of, and finding that – I've talked about like I'm looking for that breaking point. I feel like there have been things in my life that have happened that would have broke somebody. And I'm curious. It evokes extreme curiosity in myself. Like, what is that point for me? Because I haven't hit it.

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Maybe I never will. I don't know. But there's a curiosity and a drive to explore that. And I also believe that I've become the most authentic self, like my most authentic self, by not necessarily experiencing joy, but like experiencing hardship. It has allowed me to experience joy on a different level than I thought was possible. But it's also allowed me perspective, which I think is something that, one, is different for everybody, but two is such a gift, to see the world through a different lens. It's life-changing.

And so, for me, I realize that there's a lesson. I realize that there's a value. I probably actually tend towards the – there's that greater value in the hardship and the grievances than there probably is in the joy for me. And the joy is just the celebration. The joy is the appreciation of the waves of life.

I think we often fear the uncomfortable. We live in a world that is very much focused on being happy and life should be joyful. Well it's just not true. It's just not the reality. And I think we do ourselves a disservice by believing that. There's so much, a different kind of joy and experience when we allow ourselves the hard parts and open our hearts to them.

Leah: So, do you feel like then the ultra-races is then this microcosm metaphorical experience for life then where you go through that journey and it has that emotional range of the human experience?

Nicole: Absolutely. I feel like especially in a 100-mile race, I think you live a lifetime over the span of 100 miles. You have the highest of highs. You have the lowest of lows. You have connection with strangers that you would never believe is possible. There's a humility to it. There's an honesty to it. And there's a cultivation of so many things, belief in yourself, belief in humanity, belief in others when you choose to suffer with strangers and come alongside them like you've known them your whole life. There's

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something magical about that, to see yourself in somebody else's pain and share that experience with them. I mean, I don't know if there's anything more powerful than empathy at its rawest form.

Leah: So, I'm thinking of one story that you've told in particular about this, about a race in the last year that you did where you were not well.

Nicole: I was not well at all. No, far from well.

Leah: Can you tell that story including the part where – you're talking about empathy and humility – where people ran by you, right?

Nicole: Yes, so in the last 100-mile race that I ran, I'm just going to blanketly call this GI issues, for those of you...

Leah: Who are eating while listening...

Nicole: Yeah, when I say GI issues, think of the worst and that's pretty much what was happening to me. And it happened about mile-26. And I was literally diving off the trail, maybe getting a foot off the trail, like one step before it was going to be a problem. And all in all, this happened for almost 40 miles. It was like 13 hours of I don't even know what. It was really unbelievable.

But there was this one point early on where I was really struggling and I was barely getting off the trail. And I remember thinking, like, no, no, no... it was like a nightmare. I could see these two people running towards me and I am fully exposed, out there like in your most vulnerable position. I am squatting on the side of the road and this woman and this man run by.

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And I am like, I mean, I probably wasn't, I probably couldn't make eye-contact, but just now, I envision myself with my hands up like, "Don't look, don't look, don't look, turn away. You can't unsee this." And I remember being so humiliated and the guy runs by. And of course, it has to be a man too.

This guy runs by and he's like, "Happens to everybody." And I was like, thank you. But yeah, it was like a moment of true humility for me. Like wow, this is it, a stranger, very organic position, very organic things happening to me. And he didn't bat an eye. And it was actually a woman and a man, and to just be okay.

And I was like, you know what, I can still do this. I can still handle this. This does happen to everyone. This in itself is just part of the human experience and this is part of my story. And I have this ultimate belief that everyone's story's good, even the parts that you leave on the mountain.

I was like, I'm just expelling some non-belief in myself. Any bad stuff that I had in me, any not great positive thoughts, like, I just physically and mentally, emotionally left them all on that mountain.

Leah: Left that shit behind.

Nicole: Yeah, left that shit behind, no joke. But bringing this up to it, and you think this is part of art too, because I really believe that ultrarunning is my art, we give a piece of ourselves to every piece of art that we create. There's a piece of that. And I've done a handful of races on Mount Hood. That's where my 100-mile races have been. I've done 50-mile races up there. And I always believe, like, it just holds something special to me because I feel like part of myself was found and also left on the mountain there.

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And I think that's also such a piece of art and creativity. Like, part of that is who we are. I wouldn't be the same person without Mount Hood. It's just part of who I am and I left part of myself out there. In this spirit world and years down the road, we all leave a piece of ourselves.

Leah: Yeah, and I, to reiterate that line, in everyone's story, everyone's art, is good, including those parts where you are instinctively throwing your hands up and you feel humiliated and you're like, "No, don't look. Don't see this." Because what a powerful metaphor is that for our personal lives, whatever it is we're wanting to create in the world and offer to the world, like. It's who we are and yet that thing we do, where' we're like don't look at me and my organic humanity. Don't look at me in my most vulnerable moment. And yet, that too is our story and that too is our art. You don't want to cut out that part of yourself. Because not only is it funny in retrospect...

Nicole: It gives you something to laugh at, right?

Leah: But it also then is like – because what I want to go back to is, like, amazing stories are what's not said explicitly but what you read between the words. And the thing that I want to pull out though to my listeners, what was between your words, like, why did you not quit?

Nicole: Why did I not quit? I have a hard rule...

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So, that's part one of my conversation with Nicole Whiting. And this brings me to the part of the podcast where I want you to do more than just listen. I want you to really lean in and work with me and coach with me. Here's what I have for you today. And it's really what Nicole shared with us today.

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Where in life do you need to ask yourself the hard questions and where do you need an answer them? And again, I love having her be the person sharing this because we share this ethos, this belief, that you can do these hard things from great love, from a place of great love. And in fact, doing the hard things from a place of great love actually makes you braver and have an ability to be more vulnerable and be able to strip off layers, and like she says, access things that sometimes you can't otherwise access.

So, are there hard questions you should be asking yourself? If so, what are they? And I thought she offered an amazing one as well. So, for whatever in life you may be contemplating, whatever decision, whatever next move, whatever commitment, whatever dream you really want to commit to and get moving on but you find yourself holding back, coming up with excuses, it's now not the right time – that time never comes by the way – ask yourself this question; what happens if you don't change?

Thank you for listening to another episode of *The Art School Podcast*. If you've enjoyed this episode, the best thing you can do to pay it forward is to share, subscribe, and then to go to iTunes and leave a review. And when you're ready to take this work deeper, when you are ready to cross that finish line, whatever that might be for you, I truly deeply believe that coaching is an unparalleled way to get you there. And to have that entire process be so deeply meaningful.

So first, there's the Art School. There might be a pop-up Art School as of this recording, so the best way to stay in the know about that for this spring is to be on my mailing list, www.leahcb.com, and then there will also be a full Art School in the fall of 2020. And I also have a few remaining spots for 2020 for private clients, so message us at support@leahcb.com and we will get the application to you and take care of you, answer any questions you have and respond with anything you need to get that process started.

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To close today, I just wanted to leave you with this reflection. I thought it was kind of uncanny that I recorded this podcast weeks ago, I had this conversation with Nicole weeks ago before things really hit and unleashed Corona-wise stateside, in this part of the world.

And so, of the many things she offered today, what I thought has become very timely too is this community effort of how we run the race together, not only when we're victorious, but also how we see one another and in our vulnerability and our most organic and humble states, how we also in community suffer together.

And I thought this was just such an apt message to receive at a time like this. So, I am sending all of my very best to this community, which has become a global community. And globally, we are all in this together, wishing you a beautiful week, so much health and restoration, and I look forward to talking to you next time.