



EP67:

Embrace the Joy in Chaos and Find Magic in the Mess

With Dr. Neeta Bhushan

Colette:

Hey, there. Welcome to Inside the Wooniverse, a podcast brought to you from the corner of Fringe and Maine. I'm your host, Colette Baron-Reid. Oh boy, do we have a great guest for you today. Joining us today is Dr. Neeta Bhushan. She's a former cosmetic dentist, turned three time international best-selling author and world renowned emotional health advocate.

Neeta is the founder of Global Grit Institute, a wellness education platform for optimizing wellbeing. She's also the co-founder of Dharma Coaching Institute, a coaching organization training coaches to become the highest versions of themselves. She's also the host of the also most awesome, The Brave Table, a podcast that features unfiltered conversations about unpredictable moments we face on our journey through life. Wow, that is going to be amazing. Anyway, welcome to the Wooniverse, Neeta.

Neeta:

Oh my gosh, Colette. It's so great to be here. Thank you for having me.

Colette:

So excited. Okay, so here's what I love doing because I really, really want to talk about your story because it is really genuinely pretty awesome and interesting. Let's go back to when you were a kid. What was your childhood like? When did you become aware of the soul and its purpose?



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Neeta:

Oh, gosh. Well, growing up to immigrant parents, my dad was from India. He was from New Delhi and born and brought up there and had his American dream story, came to the US in the '70s, and met my mother, my mother who was from the Philippines. So, we were mixed culturally, religious, beliefs, all of the things hodgepodge growing up in Chicago. There were three of us. So, I had two younger brothers, and my dad had a very spiritual upbringing, even though he grew up in part of India around the partition time. So, there was a lot of chaos and havoc around religion, and he always kept a spiritual practice. I didn't get it back then. It wasn't cool back then, and it definitely was not cool to be holding mala beads around anywhere.

So, I definitely resisted it, but there is this one memory that I have of me going back to India with my aunt at three and paying homage to all of the spiritual sites. So, went to Rishikesh, went all the way down to the South. So, those memories have been etched ever since I was a little girl. It would be years, decades later when I would go back to my roots to really find that spiritual essence for myself, but I would say that was probably the beginning of my walk with spirituality. I was raised with a Catholic mother, so we did CCD on Sundays. We also did the Hindu temple on Tuesday nights. It was Hare Krishna Temple. So, if you can imagine in Chicago growing up and going to Hare Krishna Temple, they got married at the Hare Krishna Temple.

We also grew up going to gurdwara because that was a very spiritual place for my dad. So, my dad's beliefs were always around everyone has their own and God lives within you. So, that was very much etched into us at a very young age. My dad would always meditate on Sundays, and he had his puja and his altar set up before all of that was cool and in. There was so much respect and reverence. On my mom's side, because she was very Filipino, we would go to my grandmother's house for brunch after CCD and church on Sundays.

There would be an altar as well, but it'd be all of our past relatives and offerings. So, we learned that the altars are our sacred place. So, that was a little bit about our upbringing spiritually. There was definitely a lot of this love and reverence to the mystic world that I now have such a deep love for.

Colette:

Isn't it interesting though, too, when you think back on it? I was also very resistant. I used to get really squirmy. I'll never forget, I was sitting at the feet of my dad. He was telling us all these



stories about Play-Doh and Aristotle and also spirituality and Slavic spirituality because he was Serbian. I'd be sitting there and watching my gerbil go behind him, because I'd let the gerbils go and they would wander around. I was zoning out, but now, today, I'm so grateful. Are we not grateful today for what our parents offered us, these beautiful traditions from my dad?

Neeta:

Beyond grateful. I mean, now, I'm a mom of two. With my husband, there are certain rituals because now he grew up in a very Jain religion. Jainism is the intersection of Buddhism and Hinduism, so their culture is so different. We're more spiritual as a family, but there definitely are rituals that we are now like, "What is it that we want to bring into the fold for our kids who are one and four?" But it definitely goes back to okay, we can create our own traditions now. Yes, there is a lot of respect and gratitude for that.

Colette:

Weaving the tapestry together, it's like bringing in those beautiful mystical threads. That's amazing. That's amazing. So, when did you actually become aware and interested in studying human behavior and the power of emotions? Because you have so many, I guess, layers and dimensions that all come together where we get to where we're going to get to, but I want to bring in this next thread. What brought you to that? What made you interested in that?

Neeta:

Oh, gosh. So, at a very young age, I was always the community gatherer. Maybe it's because growing up in a multicultural household, in a melting pot, grew up in the city of Chicago, where I was probably the one that stuck out the most. Most of my classmates were pretty much every color of the rainbow. There weren't very many Asians, there weren't very many. I think I was the only Filipino-Indian person in general in my class. People were either Black or Spanish, Latino, and of course White. So, while it was diverse, people didn't know really what I was. I was always ambiguous and I would always stand out.

So, this really leaned in for me to be a community gatherer at a very young age. In fact, I grew up early, because that then trajectory of my life would lead me to, at 10 years old, being a caretaker for my mom. She was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she had a very interesting journey with breast cancer. That started and stopped. She was in remission for six years. So,



right into my high school years, those lovely primitive years, I was that caretaker. So, she passed on from that and transitioned when I was 16 until I was a junior in high school.

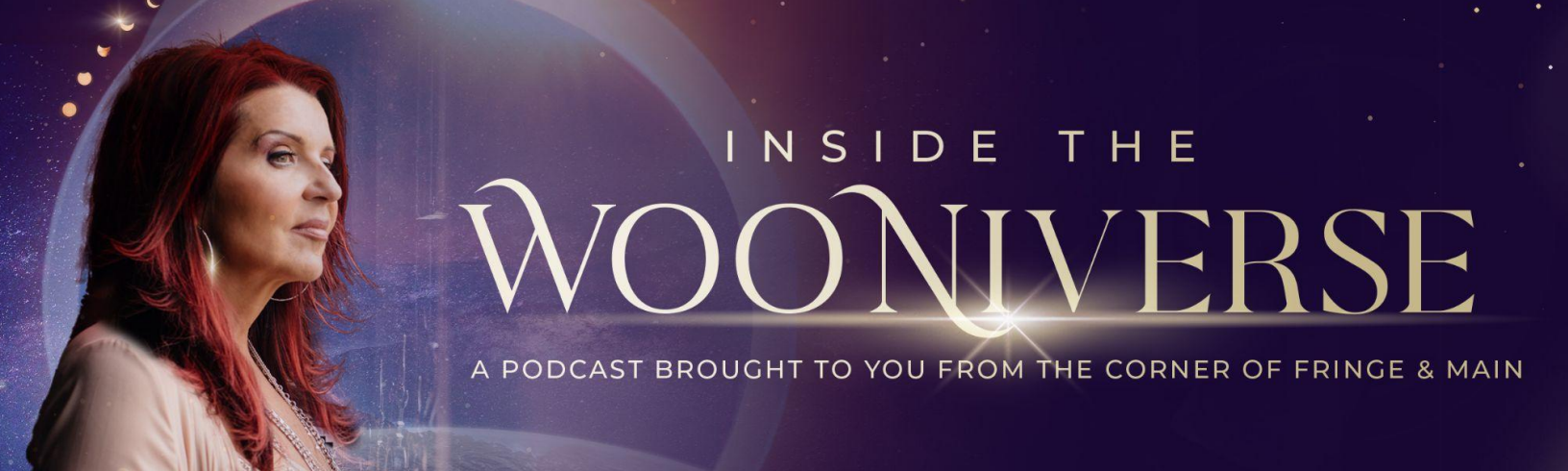
Colette:

That's a big deal.

Neeta:

So that would be that first initiation. During that time, because at 14, that cancer came back and it started spreading everywhere. So, for almost two years, she was actually in and out of the ICU. So, most of that teenage time and that early adolescent time, I was in and out of hospital settings. That's when I started learning and becoming really... I would not know then, but I needed to know how to make her happy because she was connected to a ventilator certain times because her cancer had spread to her lungs and things had gotten pretty bad. So, I remember my brothers and I, we would come after our piano lessons because we're Asian, we had to go through all of those things, but then perform. We were performing for the nursing staff and just to see a smile on her face.

So, that's where I started to get a sense of really knowing, "Wow, okay, I can't explain it because we're living through it, but this is hard time right now." I was also working a few jobs when I was 16 towards the end of her time with us. I remember that first job that I got, I was 15 years old and you'll never guess this, Colette, but I worked for a dentist. You'll never guess what his name was. His name was Dr. Horrible, and I'm not making this up. This is a very true story. I don't know if you want to go see a doctor named Dr. Horrible. So, I remember, and he took a chance on this kid. He had a daughter himself, but he took a chance on me. I would work there Saturday mornings while my mom was sick in the hospital, and I would answer phones. But that's when I started knowing, "Oh, people don't really like coming to the dentist." I was a teenager going through my own stuff. I didn't really know the humor of his name at the time, but I knew every single patient that would come through those doors, they were also surprised to see a young kid, a teenager answering phones. So, that put a smile on their face. I learned very early on that I could then start to alchemize and shift the pain that I was feeling or the uncertainty or this dark cloud that I did not know what actually that looked like until I would then transform them before they would sit and get their root canal or their crown done by Dr. Horrible.



So, that would probably be the starting point, because then a year after that, we would go through another really big traumatic event. My brother, who was 15 months younger than me, it was homecoming day and we were set to meet for after homecoming. He actually went to the high school that was across the street from me, but he would never make it that day because he had a severe asthma attack. This was almost a year later my mom died. He unfortunately passed and transitioned on my youngest brother's 12th birthday.

Colette:

Oh, my God. That is unbelievable. That is so painful.

Neeta:

We definitely know the spiritual energetics now, at least that has given me so much solace in his transition, but he was the closest to my mom. So, for him to transition just a year after my mom and this is sudden death, he was not very sick. He wasn't even an athlete. This was before all of those studies were coming out that athletes were having these asthma attacks and their lungs would collapse over their heart and have a heart attack.

Colette:

Oh, no. I know. I have asthma, so I had to be rushed to the hospital. They take you right away too.

Neeta:

They take you right away.

Colette:

I can imagine.

Neeta:

So, you would appreciate this, Colette.

Colette:

I know what he went through.



Neeta:

They could not revive him. They tried three times in the ambulance and he just right away was transition.

Colette:

Wow.

Neeta:

Yeah, it was a very dark place. It was horrendous, painful, awful, heart-wrenching. It took my dad into severe depression. I was a senior in high school, and he had been a sophomore. So, for me, senior year meant okay, I'm applying to all these colleges. This would be my chance to leave, to actually live life for me for once and not be in this thick cloud of grief and sadness and uncertainty and just overwhelm. I mean, I didn't know any of those words back at that time. I just knew it's grim and dark. When are we going to get out of this? For my dad, he was in such severe depression. So, for me, I picked up another job. So, I was working three jobs to support our family, and we leaned on I call them the matriarchs.

There were three women who stepped in fully, my grandmother, my mom's mom, my mom's aunt, my grandmother's sister, my mamachi, and my bua, my dad's sister. So, they were the matriarchs. They were pretty much the wolves who helped raise us. It takes a village, and I'm just beyond grateful that our entire extended family stepped in. But two years after that, my dad was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. So, when they gave that diagnosis, I was like, "Okay. God, do you even exist? All of this faith that we had grown up with." Especially around the time that my brother transitioned, we had a whole group of my friends who I was in high school with.

The Christian evangelist, they came. I remember my dad, even in the hospital settings, a lot of my friends who were in band and we were just chorale. Literally, I call this my soul support posse, your SSP. They can look different in different ways, but for me, at 16, 17, 18 years old, we weren't really going out to the clubs. We weren't really doing those things. They were around. It was just a different way of being, but that shared grief and that shared crisis brought us together in such an impactful way. That would then lead me to my dad transitioned when I was 19 years old. I would be an orphan and taking care of my youngest brother at this point.



Colette:

Oh, wow. I mean, wow. Yeah. Now I know why you founded the word global grit and that book that you have, Emotional GRIT, which we'll get to in a second. Okay, so you are 19 years old. You have literally had since the time you were 14 really or 14 was when she really, really got sick. Is that right, 14 to 16, she died? Your entire adolescence, all those formative years were basically stripped away from you. So, you didn't have a choice in all of this, and there's so much loss and so much death. Then what sparked you to move into the career of dentistry from there? How did you pull yourself up together? Because I know it leads us back into the global grit conversation, but there is a piece in between that we should talk about because you just took the world by its horns and just went for it. So, tell me about that.

Neeta:

Oh, yeah. I do make fun of tiger parenting because I definitely am a product of tiger parenting, but I would say in this case, it definitely left an imprint on me and the way and the season of life that I was in, because at 19, while I was completely devastated, I was lost. Looking back now, I definitely had very dark thoughts and the only thing that helped me really get out of those thoughts and really it's why I wrote my newest book, "That Sucked. Now What?" It's an amalgamation of all of the tools that I've really put together from such a dark place and time. But to have the language, the vernacular to actually understand and to give people tools to say, "All right, that sucked. Now what?" That was actually one of the phrases that I would say back then. So, to appreciate such a big contrast back then in my growing up to the life that I've been able to build, it had to start there. It was a very dark place. I think the mantra that I kept hearing in my head, this was where I started to think back at my dad's roots. I wanted to keep them alive. I wanted to keep their spirits alive. This is where going to temple, going to even church, and whatever that meant, the sanctity of just having that sacred essence and keeping that energy for us, for my brother and I was a very sacred practice for us. So, that was one. Two, I wanted to make them proud. Doctor, dentist, lawyer, engineer sounded like pretty good stone for that.

Meanwhile, shout out to Dr. Horrible wherever you are. He was that godfather for me in that way, because I did keep that job for a very long time every Saturday morning. That was that discipline, that routine, that I had a responsibility to these patients to make them feel a certain way, to help them transform. I started to really notice that even through my grief and my pain, wow, this person does not want to be here right now, but I can make a funny joke. I can make



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them laugh, and then things are lighter. So, that's where I fell in love with dentistry. I was really good with my hands because I also played the piano, and that was that time of my life that I was going to pour everything in. My coping mechanism was overworking.

My coping mechanism was success, achievement, accolades. That was really what brought me through my twenties. There's a chapter that I write about in "That Sucked. Now What?" on that transition time when my dad had passed and I was 19. All I was craving for myself was just space, freedom, the ability to just leave and do me. I was in the bathroom of the college that I went to was Loyola University. It was 15 minutes from my house back in Chicago where I grew up, and I remember seeing a flyer for study abroad program in Rome because Loyola had a Jesuit... We had a school in Roma, Italy, and I said, "I'm going there and I'm going there no matter what. I'm going there." Literally, this was probably a month after my dad died. You see this and you're like, "This is for you."

Colette:

Right, yup, you're going.

Neeta:

I had to literally beg my aunt and my grandmother to say, "Hey, can you take care of my youngest brother while I do this thing?" Of course, it was all around school. I need to be there for school. It's going to look good for med school, dental school. It's going to look good for that path. Of course, I had to beg because they're like, "How could you do this? What? You're leaving your family. What is this?" But I ended up getting there. I didn't know a lick of Italian, didn't know anybody there, but that was the first time in my life that I would actually be able to sit in, understand the grief that I had been in, but I could also see, "Oh, wow, this is what joy actually looks like when I'm not under that cloud."

Because I had changed my environment so much so that in this new place, nobody knew who I was. There was no pity. There was no, "Oh, that's the girl who lost three members of her family in high school." There was none of that. I could recreate an identity if I wanted to and actually choose the things that I could actually share with someone else, because as a young person and I empathize with young people today, we want to belong. Our soul essence is we want to belong. We want to be seen. We want to be accepted. We don't want to talk about sometimes the hard stuff because young people don't have the language for that.



Colette:
The context.

Neeta:
There's no context.

Colette:
They don't have the experience.

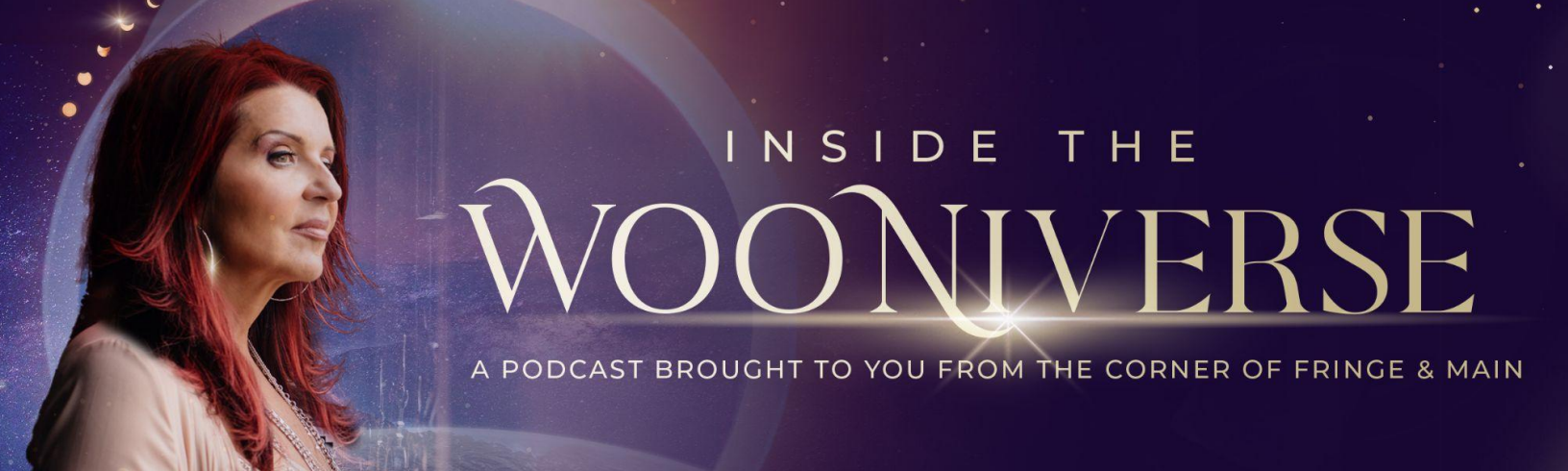
Neeta:
You're invincible as a teenager, right? So that particular trip, now, I have such a deep reverence for Italy, because forever at 20 years old, that fully changed my life. It introduced me to one of the spiritual philosophies because I took an Italian philosophies class while I was there, and that was we were learning about Marcus Aurelius. We were learning about stoicism. That's where I was really introduced to the concept of amor fati, love of one's fate.

Because at this point, I started to meet people from all over the world who either they didn't have relationships with their parents, one parent had left, they had different traumas. So, I started to get really this experience of, "Oh, wow, maybe I don't have it as bad as I thought," or "Wow, my depth of my trauma is relatable. Maybe I can share a little bit." That was, again, the hallmarks of being able to let people in and build community.

Colette:
After that, I know that we can fast forward to a number of years because after you came back from Rome, you actually ended up building a multi-million dollar dentistry practice.

Neeta:
Yes.

Colette:
That's true.



Neeta:

Yes, I did go off to dental school. Rome did lead me to dental school. Thank you, Rome. I did. I was actually one of the few women and even folks in my classroom. I didn't have an MBA. Again, it was that overachievement, overworking, the coping mechanism that I had. I think the other coping mechanism was some toxic positivity that I can obviously give reverence to now and talk about the other side of that and we'll get to that in a moment, but I did go on to not just become a general dentist because that wouldn't be enough. I went on to have a cosmetic practice in the Western suburbs of Chicago. Honestly, I did pour my heart and soul into that. I also fell in love in dental school. I got married and I had a big fancy wedding. I would come to probably my big, saturn return and my big, huge world rocking fall on your face moment in my independent awakening at the end of my twenties. That would be literally, figuratively, metaphorically waking up December 31st and being in such fear and fear of my life and fear of the person that I had married that I would have to leave haphazardly on New Year's Eve in the middle of the night, leave this big home that I created, and I was so ashamed. That shame and that guilt, when it's real, it's real. That would be what I needed to really step foot into my courage.

Because for that decade, yes, I went to Rome and had this beautiful expanse, but what I really didn't fully sit in is my grief. I was so busy trying to get out of that darkness, and I did that really well. Yet the universe was like, "Well, nope, we're not done yet." I had to take matters into my own hands and really build this courage and the bravery up to say, "No more, not this time."

Colette:

Because it is true that Carl Jung says that famously, that if we don't bring our shadow to the light, it will seemingly come to us as fate. So, although Marcus Aurelius teaches us that we should love our fate, we love our fate by looking at it squarely and then taking responsibility and accountability for also why that's there. So, it's really common that we could attract partners that would stimulate the abandonment and all of those things and the sense of betrayal and a number of things, because we don't deal with the losses, et cetera. We try to run faster than they can catch us, but they always catch us.



Neeta:

I was running so fast, and I thought the world didn't have to know that I was this little girl who just needed to love herself. So, this partner really would bring up all of the edges, all of that bubbling up to the surface. So, that day, December 31st, I finally let people in and I said those three words, "I need help." I need help to the people that were the closest to me, that suspected that I was in an abusive relationship. It was my brother and one of my dearest friends. It was in those moments that my life would not be the same. January 1st, 2012 was when I got a restraining order. I remember even I write about this in my latest book, but coming before the judge to even say, "This is where I'm at." Even for her to even test me and say, "Why did you wait so long?"

Colette:

She obviously hasn't been in an abusive relationship.

Neeta:

Clearly not. That was her job.

Colette:

That's not the question. No, no, no, no. Yeah. We know the answer to that.

Neeta:

I think that growing up in a family that many cultures, even Filipino-Indian cultures, you don't talk about divorce. It's so taboo. I think being this perfectionist, even in my profession as a cosmetic dentist, you work in millimeters, but having the upbringing of perfectionism, even in my life. I talk about even emotional perfectionism. There were times in my grief in growing up, I didn't have those tools. It wasn't okay for me to say, "I am sad. I'm struggling," because I had to be strong. I had to be the resilient one in the face of my dad when he was going through all of his losses that I couldn't really sit in my own suck. That's really-

Colette:

I get it.



Neeta:

... what started to unfold beautifully messily chaotically in those years to come. So, I started my thirties embracing that saddened return and also diving into, for the very, very first time my own healing. Mind you, I did do the therapies and this was traditional talk therapy as a teenager. The teachers had a mandate. They needed to make sure we were safe. But I think also after you go through such a pivotal world rocking upset, I dove in. I dove into all of the ancient practices. That's really when I started to immerse myself in all different kinds of meditation and deep somatic work, and just allowing myself to feel that rage that I didn't get to feel during those diagnoses, during the deaths, especially even my brother.

Diving more into even plant medicine and just studying from different gurus and different folks that the angels started to come in and they started to appear in different ways. You start to say yes. One retreat led to another retreat. Another retreat ended up being 45 different countries around the world and then saying goodbye to a lot of the things that I had learned, what success was, and unlearning a lot of those things for me to start stepping into that full light for myself for the very first time.

Colette:

You sold your wildly successful multimillion dollar dentistry practice and decided to transform your career. Was that around that time when you said, "I got to give this up"?

Neeta:

Oh, yes. I would begin to formulate my leadership. So, that when we're at a very rock bottom place, I was asking for help in all the ways, in my business, because when we have these things happen, it affects personal, it affects business. I remember very vividly for the first time going into my practice that was on the door, even though I had still had imposter syndrome, I had 10 people working under me. I wasn't even 30. Most of the people in the room were older than myself. I barely looked like I was 18. I was so ashamed and so much fear to just say, "Hey." I remember this. I still had my gown on, my glasses on, my mask on. Patients were staying still, had suction in their throat, in their mouth. They're in their chairs.

I got up and I said, "I can't do this anymore. I have to speak truth." So, I got on the intercom, and I said, "Everyone come to the break room right now." Everyone's like, "What is so important that



everybody needs to come right now?" I just blurted out, "I need help. I'm going through a divorce. I literally took everything that I could from my house. It's packed in my very nice SUV and I don't know where to go. I don't know if I'm going to be able to keep this open." That's how in fear I was.

Some people left me that day, but majority said, "You can stay on my couch. You can stay as long as you want. I can cover for you. You do whatever you need." Because I started to let people in because I wasn't stoic anymore, because I was finally able to lead with vulnerability and authenticity and just the messiness of the full moment that I was in to say, "Yeah, I need help and I'm definitely not perfect." Here we are.

Colette:

Okay. So, imposter syndrome actually has perfectionism at its root and perfectionism has fear at its root and so on and so on, because we just don't think we're ever going to be enough or there isn't enough, et cetera. That's why we work so hard. We keep running and we keep going. When you think about it, it really is the statement that we are not broken because we think we're broken. Our society tells us that we're broken if we're not constantly producing and moving, et cetera.

I think that that's what you're describing is a beautiful, beautiful way to show us in your story that this is what happens when we let that lead us and that when we don't let people in, that stoicism, which is I'm fine, I'm going to keep going. I'm going to pull up my bootstraps. I'm just going to keep going. It's so destructive to our spirit, our soul, and just our basic humanity. We do need each other. Back into that kid that you were saying, we want to belong. We still want to belong, right?

Neeta:

Decades later, we still want to belong.

Colette:

Decades later, good that some of those people left you because they weren't meant for you. Let the people go that are having the expectation at this, because they all still have to work that out. I love what you're talking about because I think it's so important for so many people who are



going to listen to this today that see success as constant working so hard and proving yourselves, et cetera, it can really kill you and prevent you from dealing with what you really need to be dealing with, because it's going to come and hit you.

Neeta:

Or that same thing, trigger, person, circumstance, situation, challenge is going to come up in different ways, whether it's in a business setting or a personal setting or your own fall as a medical diagnosis or trip or accident. That's just the universe screaming at you to say, "Let's pay attention." Many times, it's paying attention to the feelings that we want to suppress. We want to numb. We don't want to lean into the discomfort. We don't want to sit in the suck. Really, I became really good at sitting in the suck for those five years. Not that I was stuck in this suck.

Colette:

No, it didn't sound like. You're not identified with it.

Neeta:

No. That's why the book is not called This Sucks. The book is called That Sucks. The book is called, "That Sucked. Now What?" because we are giving reverence, we are acknowledging what we couldn't control, what happened, what was out of this world, yet now we are actually choosing to move forward. There is that vulnerability piece in the middle to actually say out loud and to acknowledge, "Okay, that sucked." So yeah, which is why we're here.

Colette:

This is such a profound conversation, but we need to take a little break. More with Dr. Neeta when we return. We'll be right back.

We're back with Dr. Neeta Bhushan. Now, Dr. Neeta, my next question is, when did you go on to found Global Grit? We're moving this whole conversation into this extraordinary foundation that you have and I want to know how you met your husband, because really you're changing lives. You're really changing lives right now. You've written a few books, and I want to dive into that next part of your story. I think it's key.



Neeta:

Oh, wow. I feel like we're unlocking a movie here, Colette.

Colette:

That's great.

Neeta:

So, this next chapter, I call the Full Awakening, because I did tap into many... When I said yes, I not only said yes to spiritual endeavors and my spiritual pursuits for all different kinds of healing, energetics to all different types of therapies, EMDR, traditional talk therapy, all of the different modalities, and alternative ways of healing. I was able to connect back with my parents and my brother in many different ways. Once I started to then know and really trust that, wow, they've always been angels in my life. Even saying yes to creating community, because as I shared, that was one of the through lines for me, has always been relationships.

I think, of course, it's because of my wounds of abandonment, my wounds that I had to really heal on just self-reliance and also self-love, but also knowing the breadth and the depth of sometimes our human connection and how losses part of life. But for me, to celebrate the slivers of joy in between, the moments of chaos and it would arrive myself to say yes to different communities. It would allow me to start while I had my leadership then down, because I led from a place of vulnerability. It got people asking, "How are you not in your office? How are you growing this and you're not even there?" Colleagues wanted to know so that they could be there for their families. I didn't have any children yet.

So, I didn't know how valuable that was to teach freedom at that particular juncture and stage of my career as a cosmetic dentist. I started a foundation. I started Independent Awakening, which was a nonprofit, where we began to champion self-love and confidence in women and girls mostly coming from Asian backgrounds and started this whole movement. It led me to the Bay Area. It led me to Stanford Nonprofit Management. I was the smallest fish in the room, but I started to learn from people as a dentist on what it takes to really create an organization, a nonprofit that can be global. Once I started to learn that, once they started to learn that I was also beginning to invest in female-led startups, they were like, "Wait, what is going on? What are you doing?"



So it got me back and forth to the Bay Area quite a bit, because then I started to coach and not just coach at this point, but fully mentor other startup founders. I didn't consider myself a startup founder at this stage, but a lot of the issues that they were going through in their lives, breakdowns with founders, breakdowns with themselves, breakdowns with just losses and grief in their life, I knew a thing or two about that. So, that's when it really opened my eyes to the world of coaching. It really opened my eyes to, "Okay, wow, we're on this." I started to get asked to speak around just my story outside of Independent Awakening, the nonprofit I had. I really thought, "Wow, I could do this at a bigger scale, but I really am so curious about how do we then move that conversation forward?"

That led me to, "Wow, I'm at this intersection. I'm at this crossroads and I need to say no to a few things in order to say yes to more of these opportunities," which kept leading me back to California. So, I sold my practice and I actually think this was a whole manifestation time for me, because I would then go to quite a few of these different conferences around the world. It led me to a place called Afest. This was about 10 years ago. At this particular Afest, I would then meet one of now really great friends and his co-founder of this company. It's called Mindvalley. So, a year after that, I would then go to Burning Man, which would fully shift my life with quite a few of the friends that I met at this very global organization.

For the first time, I'm like, "Wow, people are like me, but they're just living globally." We're so like-minded. I wasn't the one anymore leading the pack in my tiny little town of Chicago that I could be led in this way. It just opened my eyes to the world of growth, development, even coaching. So, many of the people that I met there knew a thing or two about creating organizations, and I would then meet my now husband, Ajit, at that particular place. So, I did find love again, but it would not be for another three years for us to get together. We would cross each other's paths, and I would then go to Burning Man a year later with our friends from that particular community.

Then a year after that, I would have the courage to sell my practice, because I was again, around like-minded community that was already selling companies and doing things and letting things go to make room for other opportunities to grow. That would then lead me back to Kuala Lumpur to do some leadership coaching and then to speak on this particular stage that my now



husband Ajit would also be speaking at in India. So, I had met Ajit three times in three different places in three different parts of the world before we actually said yes to an adventure of love. Here we are six years later and two kids.

Colette:

Oh, it's such a great story. You wrote the book, Emotional GRIT: Eight Steps to Master Your Emotions, Transform Your Thoughts, and Change Your World. What inspired you to write that? I know we can get that on your website. That's where I downloaded it. I got it from your website, and I really love how you teach. So, again, with that, why you wrote that, but also what do you think stands in the way of most people when it comes to following their passion and realizing the life of their dreams? Those two questions are really intertwined. Love you to speak on those two things.

Neeta:

Yes. So, with Emotional GRIT, the biggest thing that was calling at my heart when I was getting exposed to all of these new different communities and just saying yes. Of course, it's that Buddha proverb. When you're ready, the teacher appears, right? I was definitely ready, and I was just committed to saying yes to whatever came in my path. Whereas most of my colleagues who were in medicine, who were in law, who were in dentistry, they had blinders on. It was only talk about medicine, dentistry, or law. So, for myself, being and leading with curiosity, and that's one of the pillars of Emotional GRIT, is these characteristics. I was so fascinated by human dynamics that I literally set... This was a project for myself. I was a researcher in college before I went to dental school.

Because of my upbringing, I had three of my case studies. It was my parents, my brother. Seeing them and their journeys in the hospital setting, seeing how the doctors treated them, the nurses treated them, the nurses treating us, I mean, we practically lived there for a good portion of my adolescence. Then fast forward to later even understanding how leaders make decisions, I was very curious at, "Do we have to go through tough things in order to build grit and resilience?" Resiliency is obviously now what I talk about in this new book "That Sucked. Now What?", but it started with grit. I was fascinated with the word grit, because yes, it's a masculine word, yet there can be grace. I've always been told, "Neeta, you have so much grace for the amount of grit that you have."



I'm like, "Okay, well, I guess I'm the queen of grit and grace. I guess I can own that." But I use grit as an acronym. After I ended up interviewing close to 500 leaders for this project of mine, and this was around the time when I sold my dental practice. Of course, it led me to all over the world because I then was able to sit with different leaders, community organizers, community builders, because I was so curious about community as well, how and what they did. There were about 10 characteristics and I list them all in the book, but I define grit as an acronym, to grow, reveal, innovate, and transform. I've even extrapolated that now into my next book because a lot of what grit is looking back in your past.

That's where it started, because I think what pulls people back usually is that uncertainty and that uncertainty is the fear of sitting in the discomfort. I think we see it so much now, especially even with young people. We swipe so fast. We get a result so fast. We have instant gratification that we cannot wait. We cannot sit in the stillness. We can't sit in that discomfort of somebody rejecting us or the difficult conversation that we need to have or the painful conversation or even acknowledgement of somebody else going through a tough time that we ghost somebody or we pretend we're busy or we're just own in our own stuff, that we just can't even hold space for somebody else, but these are the fundamental skills that I think are lacking today's world and economy of young people entering this space.

It's no wonder we're having a mental health crisis. It's no wonder we can't even grapple with these tough emotions. Well, because we weren't really taught that. It's embracing the duality of both. I think Emotional GRIT laid a foundation of really being able to be the narrator of your new stories, because you can. Every day is a new opportunity for that, grow, reveal, innovate, and transform. Well, now, if we fast forward, one thing that I had left out and not fully formed in Emotional GRIT, which now I have written in my newest book, That Sucked. Now What?: How to Embrace the Joy in Chaos and Find Magic in the Mess is to find magic in your mess. That yes, it's not just your past and it's not just rewriting the stories of your past, but there is a cyclical moment of that suck.

If we're not taking that personal responsibility, if we aren't cultivating that muscle of self-awareness to say, "Oh, wow, I see this pattern here. I have been attracting these emotionally unavailable men. Do I have something to do with that?" No. Or maybe, yes, I do.



Now it's time that I have to sit with it and deeply sit in that suck to pull out the gems that next version of myself, that future version of myself has been waiting for. So, that was the gap that I was trying to bridge, but really Emotional GRIT was a research project. It turned into a book, which then literally began my career as a leadership coach. I mean, it started my path on speaking at all of these different places. I ended up at Google. I was like, "How do you want me to speak here?"

Okay. It landed me to speak in places like Dubai and different parts of the world where I was actually starting to normalize what it could look like to be somebody that looked like me to talk about something as taboo as divorce. Those conversations led people to be very vulnerable and to actually lead with empathy. They realized that that was also affecting their bottom line in their company, because they were grappling with just the most shameful secret, whether they were hiding something or they didn't want to no longer be a marriage or they had cheated or whatever, but that was keeping them from really actualizing-

Colette:
Success too.

Neeta:
... into their business.

Colette:
Because I actually think too that there is a very little distance between us and the business. I have a course called The Spirit of Your Business, where literally, I teach people the relationship with the business. You are in this relationship. You can't look at it as an inanimate vehicle that you're somehow separate from. We're actually learning about ourselves and growing and evolving through the vehicle of the business. It is a living thing. You really actually beautifully illustrate that in your book. Also, one of the parts that I thought was really important was when you were talking about the 'Both And'. I think the first book, Emotional GRIT, it really is a great book. So, it really does give you that sense of the pearl that comes. I mean, really, that's the end.



If you look at it in a different way, you can't have a pearl without the grit. That would irritate the inside the mollusk shell. There's grit and there's sand in there that irritates it until there's this beautiful pearl that has great value. Then what do you do beyond that? Then you evolve beyond that, like you're saying here, that now there's the magic and the mess, because you don't say, "There is no mess. I've cleaned it up," because mess continues. Chaos continues. Look at the world we live in. It doesn't look like it's getting less chaotic, does it?

Neeta:

No, not right now, but yeah, gone are the days and even the decades where we used to lead where business is so separate from personal. I think now we can see even in leadership, when things are not in alignment, things are not integrated. Even I think when people are introducing certain aspects of themselves that have not been worked through or fully integrated, I think it can be witnessed. It can be noticed. I think that it's really to appreciate, and this is what I wanted to bring in for this new book, *That Sucked. Now What?* Yes, Emotional GRIT gives that beautiful foundation, but I actually go deeper in the reasons why we need to embrace the duality. Because yes, we can feel insecure and confident at the same time. If we didn't, we wouldn't be human. We can feel reserved in saying yes to a new love relationship, but actually even open at the same time because you are curious. We can still live in grief, but find slivers of joy when moving through loss. That's what "That Sucked. Now What?" allows us to bring in tying the two. It wouldn't come through unless we had that foundation with Emotional GRIT.

Colette:

So, across the board, your work brings together the best of spirituality, soul, and strategy. Could you share an example of a time when you helped a client or an organization integrate spirituality and soul into their business? How do you see the role of spirituality and soul evolving in the business world in the years to come? Because you can't have it without it. I really believe that. I believe everything that you're teaching is essential, right? Everybody needs to sign up.

Neeta:

Oh, absolutely. I think that for anybody and this is what I tell my students and clients all the time in whatever capacity that I'm teaching, let's even think back to when we were a little boy or girl and your earliest memory of doing something fun and so playful. You can even do this with your eyes closed if you want or looking down. This is what I lead people to just outside of the coats



INSIDE THE WOONIVERSE

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and the fancy dresses and all of the accouterments that we may have in our life, but to put that aside. My earliest memory was I remember dancing and I was five or six, but it was after ballet dance, my mom put me in ballet and I was introduced to Hawaiian dancing. In Filipino culture, you're doing a lot of these Hawaiian dancing.

We were able to just break out and dance, and it was fun. It was celebrated, it was freeing, it was liberating. That's something that's been the through line for me. I've always done coordinated choreographed dance, but what does that look like for you? Because so often, we take ourselves, our careers, what we're doing so seriously. When I get asked to go into a boardroom many times, usually, and this is probably not kosher, many times, I'll just say, "Everyone, stand up, close your eyes." Some of the executives in the room are like, "What? I don't trust you yet. What are you doing?"

But to get them out of their comfort zone and I think also to give people permission to access what brought them joy when they were young, what brought them joy before all the accolades, what brought them joy and juiciness and liveliness before the stress and the meetings, the payroll, all of those things. Not that you have to go back to that place where we're forgetting everything, but can you integrate that part of yourself into your business? I know when I listen to Hawaiian music and there's a particular song even for Indian dancing that I have a playlist for that I'll put on in between my calls just to get the energy flowing. Do you have something that you can connect yourself back to? Some people, most often, we can connect to that little giddy child in us again. That is the magic.

Because if we bring that awe and wonder and fun and playfulness into some of the heaviness that we have to deal with in work, the decisions that we have to make, that's the spiritual element that I'm talking about. Let's infuse more of that. I pay attention to, I think, our inner child work, our little boy and our little girl, because I think for me especially, that was something that I had to bury and I had to say goodbye to her for decades. Now I make it a point every day to be in touch with her.

Now it's even easier because now I have my kids. But even for those who have children who are grown, we can still tap into that inner childlike joy that makes us come alive. Because that's really, and I'm sure that's what you talk about too, Colette, is the intersection of that business



and our spiritual essence, because at our core essence, who are we tapping back into? It's like that metaphor. My parents, they had these Russian dolls.

Colette:

Yeah, little Russian dolls, the nesting dolls.

Neeta:

The nesting dolls.

Colette:

They go inside. We had them too.

Neeta:

When we get to a certain age, we're that largest doll, but if we can go back and open back up the tinier dolls that live in that doll to get to that tiniest first doll, that's our core essence. That's that little girl.

Colette:

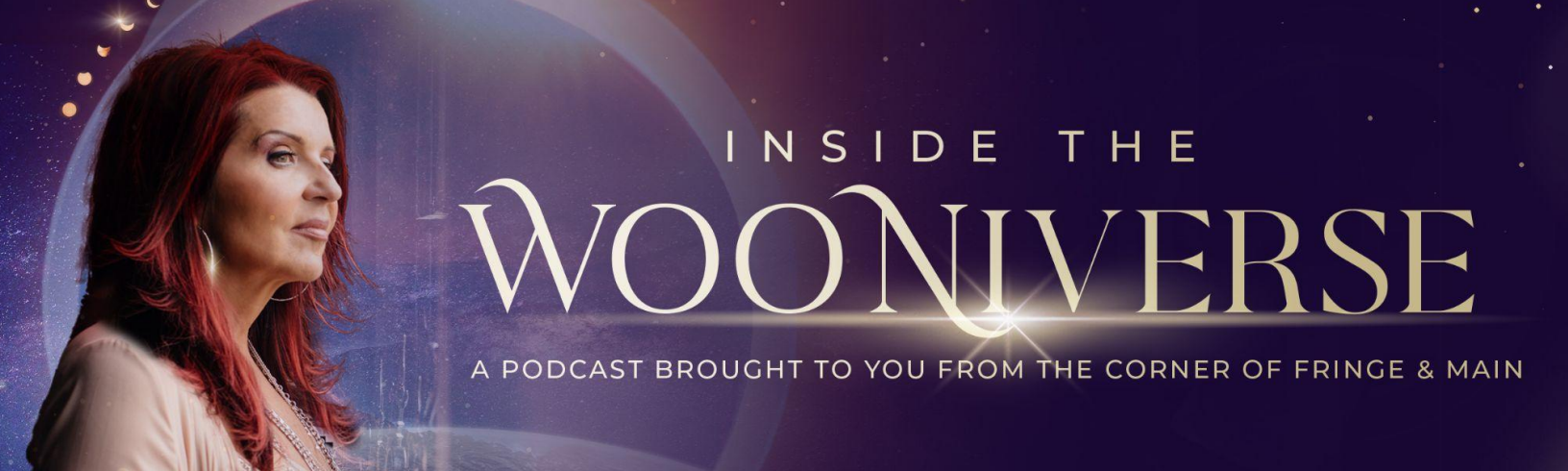
Didn't Jesus say be as little children, right? I mean, that always struck me, that line. I mean, I'm not a practicing Christian. I'm more of a spiritual person. I'm a smorgasbord person.

Neeta:

Same.

Colette:

But there's certain things that really never left me. That's so true. So, for me, it is that same, that playfulness, that joy, that release that is not constricted by conditioning and rules and regulations. Where is that childlike quality? Because children see spirit, they just know there is a seamlessness between soul and child. There's just this seamlessness of curiosity, which I think is really our superpowers, curiosity. So, if you were to give somebody advice who's looking to integrate spirituality and soul into their work or business strategy, for example, what would just one thing you would tell them? Would you tell them to be playful or what would you tell them?



Neeta:

Absolutely. It starts by accessing what makes you come alive. Even if you can make a list and this is a very quick one, I have several different, many of these exercises. When you actually order the book, it actually comes with a 44-page free guide that goes through a lot of the self-healing journey and self-healing questions. But one of the first things that I really love is in our season and spirit of playfulness is make a list of all of the things that you would do with reckless abandon, just as a playful young in without any care or reverence of what the world thinks.

We have this saying in Hindi, Log Kya Kahenge, which means, "What will people think?" It's so huge because it really stops people from moving forward and taking that risk and taking that step. So, my invitation and my permission slip for everybody who's listening is to make that list of one or two or maybe three things that you could even do today that can get you into that playfulness. Whether it's a song love, whether it's dancing, whether it's singing in the shower, whether it's singing in your car, you can even set a timer for 30 seconds and see how you feel after that.

Colette:

It's so funny, I got this immediate mind of running through a sprinkler. I mean, I can't do that now. It's like winter here, but I just think about that reckless abandon. Yes, running to the sprinkler on the neighbor's lawn. I don't know that I would do that today, but there's that feeling. I know exactly what you're talking about. We're going to take a little break now. When we come back, we're going to switch gears and enter into another dimension of the Wooniverse, the teatime after party. So, please stay with us.

We'll be right back. Thanks for joining us today, and welcome back. With us today is Dr. Neeta Bhushan. Okay, so we are going to switch gears and travel into another dimension of the Wooniverse called the teatime after party. We're going to bring our fabulous executive producer, Connie Diletti, here. Are you ready, Neeta and Connie?

Neeta:

Yes.



Connie:
Ready.

Colette:
Okay.
Woo! Let's do it.

Connie:
Okay. Your studying in Rome story got me thinking, Neeta, parli Italiano.

Neeta:
Un poco.

Connie:
Okay, so I just asked to anyone listening if she asks Italian.

Neeta:
I didn't remember most of it. Yes, I would only say prego.

Connie:
Prego, grazie, prego.

Neeta:
Prego, prego, parmigiana, parmigiana. Off to you, Colette.

Colette:
Okay. So, you have had a few professions. If you were to choose another profession to be and you would be wildly successful, what other profession would you choose?

Neeta:
Oh, wow. I was actually just thinking about this recently. Connie, I don't know. You're definitely in my sphere. I would say producer. I think there's elements of what we do now that produce, but film producer, documentary producer. Yeah.



Connie:
I'll hook you up if you ever want to-

Colette:
The psychic part of me thinks you might actually yet do that.

Neeta:
Yes. Yes.

Colette:
I think you just made your own prediction.

Neeta:
Absolutely. Or screenplay, but yeah.

Colette:
This is hysterical. All right. How do you feel about clowns? Connie sends me these questions. I don't get to read them, right?

Neeta:
Yeah. My goodness.

Colette:
How do you feel about clowns?

Neeta:
You guys probably remember this, It. Yeah, the movie It? Yes, no, clown. Bozo the Clown was a thing growing up. So, it was a big thing in Chicago, but Bozo the Clown. You could go in and be the guest and win the prizes. So, that was a thing growing up. Not my cup of tea anymore, especially after you watch the movie It.

Colette:
Did you go to a Bozo?



Neeta:

Never, but I mean, I remember it was on channel nine, WGN.

Colette:

I was raised on Bozo.

Connie:

I lived in Chicago for a few years. So, WGN and Bozo the Clown.

Neeta:

Oh, you know.

Colette:

Yeah. So, I want to ask another one. You are banned from the library. Why? What did you do?

Neeta:

Probably making out with a guy in the back in the nonfiction aisle, all the way in the back. More like romantic fiction.

Colette:

Romantic fiction. Oh, my God. That's amazing.

Neeta:

These are great questions. Oh, my goodness.

Connie:

If you could either be a dragon or have a pet dragon, which one would you choose?

Neeta:

Oh, I would be a dragon. I would be a dragon.

Connie:

What kind of dragon? Talk to us, wearing a beautiful velvet jacket.



Neeta:

Oh, yes. No, it's reminding me of a movie that I saw recently. I don't know if it was Wakanda. Was it Shang-Chi? It was one of those Marvel movies, I swear. Because I was contemplating whether or not to take my son to it. When I saw it, I was like, "No, these dragons are so scary." But the dragon that I would be, this would go well with the Wooniverse, because it would be a unicorn dragon and it'd be purple and white and shimmers of gold. The fire coming out of its breath would be purple and blue and waterfall.

Colette:

Sparkly.

Connie:

Beautiful.

Neeta:

Yes. Sparkly. Yeah.

Connie:

Well, that's a grand dragon. Yeah.

Colette:

You can always show your son How To Train Your Dragon, the movie. How to Train Your Dragon is my favorite movie on the whole wide world. Okay. I've seen that 18 times. How to Train Your Dragon. Yes, it's Dreamworks. It's an animation. I've seen all three of them. Literally, I have added up. It's disgusting. It's 18 times.

Connie:

Really?

Neeta:

You've seen it 18 times, Colette.



Colette:

When I am bored, I watch How to Train Your Dragon. Yeah. I just love it. I know everybody but me wants to be a dragon. I want Toothless.

Neeta:

I'm going to add a movie to your mix though, Colette. When you're bored, turn on Turning Red. Turning Red's a Pixar movie.

Connie:

I love that. I love that too.

Colette:

I love that. Wasn't that the best?

Neeta:

That was so good.

Colette:

Oh, my gosh. She was so cute.

Neeta:

Oh, my gosh. So, good.

Colette:

Connie, last but not least, let's give her one more.

Connie:

Okay, one more. One more. If you could have either a rewind button or a pause button on your life, which one would you prefer?

Neeta:

Oh, pause.



Connie:

Let's sit in that for a second. That's awesome.

Colette:

Yeah, let's just pause.

Connie:

Get it marinated then.

Colette:

Let's marinate.

Neeta:

Let it wash over us. Yes, that pause.

Connie:

That's a good one.

Colette:

I think I would pause in my first kiss with my husband.

Connie:

Aww. That's sweet.

Colette:

Like just pause right there.

Neeta:

That is sweet.

Colette:

Seriously I'm crazy about my husband 21 years later. I really am, but that moment, that changed my life. That was an accidental kiss. My boot got caught in a carpet. I was going in to hug him. It



was a blind date. It was our first date. He thought I was coming in for a kiss and he literally swept me off my feet because I was about to fall and planted one on me and I was like, "Oh, my God. Where did you learn how to do that?"

Connie:

Wow, Hollywood moment right there.

Colette:

Yes. That was the beginning of the end for me.

Neeta:

Oh, my God.

Colette:

Thank you, Neeta, for joining us today. I have so enjoyed this conversation with you. To learn more about Neeta and all of her offerings, including her fabulous podcast, you can visit her at neetabhushan.com. Also, everything about her book, you're going to check out our show notes. There'll be links in a transcript of the conversation. You just come and visit us by clicking on our link, itwpodcast.com, and we'll give you all the info that you need to get in touch with Neeta, see her book and other offerings, and see how fantastic she is, because you are all going to want to learn lots more about Neeta.

So, what did we learn today? Well, I think we learned about resilience and grit. That grace comes from the grit and the resilience comes from having the courage and the bravery to meet life on life's terms and to move forward in spite of all the challenges that one might have. She was quite an amazing guest. Anyway, thank you for listening. Until next time, I'm Colette Baron-Reid. Be well.