



Conversation with Judy Rebick about her upcoming Memoir: Heroes in My Head

April 2018

Annahid: Welcome to Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging. This is Annahid Dashtgard and today I am in conversation with Judy Rebick: author, journalist, prominent feminist about her upcoming memoir, Heroes in my Head.

Annahid: Well, first of all, I want to say it's a really brave book to write. Well, let's start with that, like how are you feeling about this book going out into the world? It's different than your other books.

Judy: Yeah. It's taken me eight years to write the book, and it's my sixth book, and every other book took me two years, even with research, going to Latin America and all that, so-

Annahid: And the other books are all political, so they're about external reality.

Judy: About that external. Although I always tell my own stories, but they're always political stories, right?

Annahid: Yeah.

Judy: So, it was a personal book, so it was hard emotionally to write for lots of reasons, which we can go into if you want. But I also had to learn a new way to write, 'cause I'm trained as a journalist, and so my way of writing is to summarize. To summarize and analyze. That's the opposite of what you have to do in a book like this. You have to ... People have to be able to stay in the scene so that they can feel what's happening, not just understand the intellectual. So I really had to work on changing my writing, and that was a big part of the work.

Yeah, so, I'm scared. I'm nervous about it. People see me, people's image of me anyway isn't anything like what I'm like. People see me as this sort of tough, hard person. I don't know if that's still true after I was on TV so long. But they used to see me that way, and I think a lot of people still see me that way. So, when it comes out that I'm not at all like that, I don't know how people react. One person who read a draft she said, "Why are you giving away your powers?" I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, you're giving away your powers to the alters." And I say, "But the alters are me." They're fragmented parts of my personality, how is that giving away? In other words, you're saying, like, the things that



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

people admire most about you; your courage, your tenacity, is due to the fact that you had this disorder. But I actually think that's true in many people's cases.

Annahid: Well, it's interesting 'cause I see this as an extension of your feminism, that part of undoing patriarchy and masculine styles of leadership is honoring and situating the emotional part of our selves and being comfortable with vulnerability. And so I feel like once again, you're trail blazing. It looks like to lead from a different place.

Judy: Oh that's cool. Well, yes. I think that the #Me Too happened just as I, you know, I was finished the book. In fact, I was just about finishing the editing process of the book. And I thought, this time I'm really with the times. Sometimes I'm a little ahead of my time but this time I'm really with the times understanding that. By me telling the truth about who I am, really the whole truth. Yeah, I'm like showing that vulnerability. It's something I've been doing in my speaking in the last 10 years anyway and trying to be more vulnerable. It's hard because once I'm in performance mode, I'm in that person, you know, that person... tough.

I deliberately have to stop myself. Like when someone asks a question that I really don't know the answer to, I have to force myself to say, "Well, you know, I really don't know about that, but blah blah blah." Like it's so hard for me to say that, you have no idea. So, showing vulnerability is important, but this is like mega showing your vulnerability, right?

Annahid: Yeah, it really is. Well, do you want to, I don't know how much you want to share. What is the vulnerable part and what was the vulnerable piece for you writing this book for people that haven't read it.

Judy: Well, the first thing I reveal, which I've never talked about publicly is that I was sexually abused by my father starting at a very young age, four or five, and that no one helped me. So, as a defense mechanism, I developed what was later diagnosed as multiple personality, what's called Dissociative Identity Disorder, which is considered ... most people considered it a major mental health disease. And a lot of people confused it with schizophrenia, which is nothing like schizophrenia. So, and it's been sensationalized in the culture, like Three Faces of Eve, Sybil....

Annahid: United States of Tara.

Judy: Yes, United States of Tara, which is not as bad as the other two. It sort of sensationalizes it. What really I wanted to explain that in my view it's not a mental illness at all, that it's a defense mechanism that a child uses. It's sort of inspiring in a way a five year old who has no power at all in a situation where her father is abusing her, uses the only power she has, which is her imagination and creates these characters to take the abuse for her and



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

doesn't even know her father is abusing her. So, basically shuts it out. And in my case shut it out until I was 40, you know.

Annahid: Wow, I didn't realize you were that old.

Judy: Yeah, yeah. Well, 1980 is when I first went through a clinical depression, which to me was the beginning of the healing. So I was 35. And then when I started having the memories I was almost 45. And they had been almost completely buried. I'd had the odd sort of flash, but nothing that I really paid attention to. And the way that I did that was through keeping busy and keeping engaged. So, in the writing I explored therapy sessions where the alters ... well, they're called alters, alter personalities come out and my connection with them. One way I communicated with them, which was lucky for me as a writer, as I communicated them in a journal. So I have all the writing, and so I didn't have to remember what they were like. I had it in the paper.

Annahid: That was incredible to see the different personalities and their ways of communicating.

Judy: Yeah, so, yeah.

Annahid: Well, we're in time where there's all this buzz around these words like vulnerability and authenticity and be yourself, and be a whole person, and I think there is not a lot of people that actually have the courage to step into what that means. And what struck me, when I call this book brave I think it's kind of easier to work for change in the world outside. 'Cause that's what we think about when we're just ... in a way to do the organizing, the public speaking, because that's recognized as courageous and there's a space for it and there's a place to be affirmed in doing that work. I think doing the inner work and confronting parts of ourselves that we've pushed away or don't want to ... and particularly for you, like these are not just parts of yourself, they were separate personalities. And I was struck in your story, how from the beginning you were curious about these alter personalities.

Judy: Wouldn't you be?

Annahid: Well, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. No, I don't know if I would. The sense of compassion that you had for these other parts of yourself. 'Cause I think a lot of us especially, like for something that could go into the category of mental illness, we can kind of judge ourselves for those aspects of ourself and it can be harder then to integrate those pieces. And I was struck how-

Judy: Well, my thing was-

Annahid: ... you really leaned into them somehow.



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Judy: Yeah. Like I think it was more like I just had to keep on going on, like that was my way of survival. I think you see that right through the book. Like no matter what happened when I was traveling overland to India, I should have gone home a long time before I did, but I just had to keep going on. I had that thing, and I think it was in part because of the injury and in part it was because of the family I grew up in.

My mother was like that, my father was kind of like that. And I just had to keep going and keep doing what I'm supposed to do. And so when this hit me, the memories of the abuse and then the realization that I had something seriously weird about me or wrong with me, I just kept going. I just deal with it in therapy at first. Like I say in the book, I didn't read anything about it, I didn't research it, nothing. I just kept doing it and then trying to keep myself on track while I was doing it.

So, I don't know that it was admirable particularly. I mean now, of course, when I write about it, I might have some compassion. At the time, I'm not sure I really did. I think I was more like I just trusted my therapist who said I had to listen to these voices, and I did. And so, yeah.

Annahid: Well, it's really powerful to hear you say that because you describe your different alters, and the different personalities, and then at one point, you actually talk about the alters as coping strategies. That you tried these different coping strategies to get the abuse to stop. And it struck me how the one that was kind of the most effective in a way, was it Porsche?

Judy: Yeah, Porsche, yeah.

Annahid: Who just started to scream, and screamed and screamed and screamed. I wonder if somehow that that was the one that disrupted your father's kind of abusive behavior. It struck me that that kind of is what you continued to do-

Judy: To do.

Annahid: ... right? And then you're out in the-

Judy: Yeah, that's a good observation.

Annahid: ... world and you're screaming and screaming and on behalf of others and pushing forward and-

Judy: Oh that's cool.

Annahid: ... the other alters are very different. Yeah, it's kind of-



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

- Judy: That's a cool insight, I didn't think of that. That's a cool insight, yeah. Maybe. I guess that is what I'm known for, is screaming, so ... What do we want?
- Annahid: Are you kidding? Well, we need more of that. I was relieved when I heard that part because I could feel in the book and in the writing, and so it was cathartic as a reader to get to that point and to be with these different parts of yourself, but to get to this place of just finally ...
- Judy: Enough.
- Annahid: I think this is where a lot of people want to be, and this is why we're in the middle of #Me Too moment, right? A lot of people want to have room to scream. You know?
- Judy: Yeah.
- Annahid: No more. I am really sorry, I have to say, I just want to make space as well to say that I am really sorry that this happened to you.
- Judy: Thank you.
- Annahid: I think when anyone shares their story and I know you as well, it can be moving, but this story was really ... I'm sorry that there wasn't somebody there for you.
- Judy: Yeah, people say when you write things and you should say, "This could be triggering." You know, how people say, "Be careful, you could be triggered by this." For me, I think it's better to say what CBC says, "This could be disturbing." Because a trigger is a funny thing. The stories that trigger me most are rescue stories, they're rescue. When children are rescued, I'm just inconsolable. Okay, I just start to cry, and cry, and cry. Because it reminds me that I wasn't rescued. So, even though there were all kinds of people around me who loved me, it was a different ...
- Well, I don't know, I say it was a different time, but would it be that different now if it was happening? I don't know. I like to think it would be. But I think there's a lot more abuse in families than we recognize. And it's been medicalized in a way like it's not talked about when we talk about ending patriarchy, and that's something I say in the book that I think that we have to think about what happens in families. I think nuclear family is like the worst possible way to organize society, and I think women and children have suffered mightily for this method of organization. And so ...
- Annahid: I think the thing that you experienced where your mother is not able to support you, your mother isn't able to support you happens also in a lot of cases. Where you'd expect the mother to be an ally but that's not ... often the mother will align with the father.



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Judy: Align with the father.

Annahid: And how devastating that is. There was a sentence here where you're describing the abuse and, "Nobody came to help me, my mother never came either." As a mother, it's hard to even be able to relate to that. But I think that-

Judy: Well, I think my mother knew something was going on with my father and with me. Well, she did know. I say it in the book. She even told me she knew. When I was five years old she said you dissociate you. When you-

Annahid: Left me?

Judy: Yeah, you cut me off.

Annahid: You cut me off, yeah.

Judy: And later she said-

Annahid: You think that meant that she knew?

Judy: No, I don't think she knew my father was abusing me, but I think she knew that something was wrong, okay. She knew something was wrong with me and she knew something was wrong with my father, but she didn't put it together because to put it together would be she'd have to give up her life. My mother's a very intelligent person, and she wasn't in a position where she was financially dependent. She was an accountant, she could have made a living, she was close to her family, but she loved him and she didn't want to fail. 'Cause when a marriage broke up in those days, it was always the woman's fault.

And later I talked to my aunts. I didn't talk to my aunts about the abuse, but I did talk to them about the emotional abuse of my brother, and they were both very well aware of it. And I said, "Well, why didn't you do something?" "Oh, it's private, family." That was the culture then. I don't know that it's all ... I think it's different now. I know if I saw one of my nieces or nephews or one of their partners being emotionally abusive to a kid, I would step in and say something. But yeah, that was what I grew up with. For my mother to be my ally, she would have had to leave my father, because he never would have accepted responsibility for what he did, so."

Annahid: Yeah. Wow. I wonder if times have changed enough that it would be different today.

Judy: I certainly hope so. I think it depends-



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Annahid: On the context.

Judy: Yeah, it depends on the context, on the family. There's no question that ... And I talked to women who worked in anti-violence work and to therapists that childhood sexual abuse is way, way more common than we think.

Annahid: Typically, in a lot of closed cultures where sexuality is really closed, I think about South Asian culture and how rampant it is and the secrecy that even you know. And all the dynamics you're describing how women protect the males: uncles and husbands and grandfathers. It is rampant.

I have to say, as a younger feminist, generation of feminists, the innocuousness of the violence surrounding women's lives in your book, not just what happened to you in your own personal life, but just in the culture, the violence you experienced traveling and how it wasn't just verbal harassment, but these physical attacks. Not in one location but multiple locations. And nobody is stepping in and doing anything, and the activist movement, the kind of ... right? Lack of support for women and the ways women got marginalized.

Judy: And you know, I was like one of the boys. In the movement I was treated better than most women because I was like a man. I constructed myself politically to be like a man and so men tended to treat me with more respect than other women.

But on the street, which was true in New York, when I lived in New York and also traveling. And the main thing was, "Well, what are you doing?" Like it's my fault for wanting to do what men could do and that was basically my feminism at that time was, I wanna do whatever men could do. And so men could walk in the street at night, so why couldn't I walk in the street at night in New York, for example. Or men could travel over land to India, why couldn't I? And sometimes I was right, I could. Like traveling in Europe, it was a bit of a hassle but no more of a hassle than New York, and less of a hassle than New York actually, and I could handle it.

But then, I got into a situation where I was in real danger, which was traveling over land to India by myself. It was insane to do that. But I had no way to know that one ... 'Cause everybody said, "Girls can't do that." That was like all I ever heard when I wanted to do anything. So, I just ignored it. Also, because I could dissociate, which was this sort of highly tuned skill that I had, I don't think I have it quite as strongly now, although I still have it. Because I could dissociate from my feelings, I could carry on. I wouldn't get paralyzed and I didn't feel the fear after a while. I just stopped feeling it, yeah.

Which is like I say in the book, it's kind of like a super power, right?



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Annahid: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Judy: Because I could dissociate from fear, from could dissociate from fatigue, even pain. I tell a story in the book about how I broke all my ribs in a bike accident, and went to the hospital, and they told me my ribs weren't broken, and then for a week I walked around with broken ribs, and I completely dissociated from the pain. I could barely walk but I didn't feel. I felt it was a little sore, but that was it until the doctor told me I had broken ribs and then it became unbearable, right? That's how crazy it was.

Annahid: This is getting a bit academic here, but do you think ... Structures of oppression like patriarchy being one of them, don't you think on some level it requires a certain amount of dissociation? Like patriarchy privileges a certain kind of spectrum of the human experience... be fearless, be independent, be strong, like the Marlboro Man image. And even men within patriarchy, I feel like are so dissociated, right?

Judy: Totally, well not just that. There's actually tension, like riot cops are trained to dissociate. Snipers and armies they're trained to dissociate. That's why they get PTSD.

Annahid: CEO's right?

Judy: Yeah.

Annahid: Look who rises into leadership positions in our society.

Judy: That's right.

Annahid: I think so many of them are dissociated individuals.

Judy: Yeah, you know what? That's why it is part of the reason for my success. Because unlike most women, I could dissociate from my feelings, so that's being like a man, right?

Annahid: Yeah.

Judy: People would say to me, "How do you debate right-wingers?" When I was on CBC, you know, "How do you debate right-wingers every night of the week and keep your cool?" Well, that's the answer. I was still dissociative.

I didn't turn into another personality, but I totally could keep my feelings away from my conscious mind. And it's like multiple personality syndrome is. I think it's way more common than we think also. I don't think it's common, but the psychiatric association calls it rare. I don't think it's rare, I just think that it helps you to be more functional in our society, not less functional. Therefore, nobody talks about it. Nobody who has it talks



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

about it because everybody will think you're crazy and otherwise, everybody thinks your confident and good at what you do. So, why would you ever talk about it?

There's other mental disorders that make you more functional, not less functional. So, it depends on what society you live in. If you lived in a mystical society, a society that believed in mysticism, people with schizophrenia would be Shaman's, they wouldn't be considered mentally ill, they'd be considered talking to the spirits, right?

I think one of the things I hope the book will help with is thinking about mental illness in a different way. I think I have a mental injury, not a mental illness. And now there's evidence, now there's literature coming out that children who have been abused have a different sized brains than other people. Like there's parts of their brains that are different size.

So, I think it's a mental injury to be abused as a child and that this is a symptom of an injury. And I think that's different than an illness. Because an illness suggests that it's something you have all the time, and an injury is something you can get over it. I think we have to think of mental illness on a spectrum.

Annahid: Absolutely.

Judy: Some people have it as an illness. It's genetic, their grandparents had it, they have it, it's a chemical imbalance, drugs help them, or other forms of extreme therapy. But for a lot of people it's like me, it's because of something that happened to them, it's because of trauma, and I think most people it's because of trauma. I don't have any evidence for that, but that's my sense of it. And so therefore, you have to heal from the trauma to get better.

Annahid: Well, I think that's why your story is so hopeful, because you are on an extreme end of the spectrum in terms of trauma, mental injury, and yet you found a way to integrate those very hard, hard, hard deep emotions that are some of the hardest to kind of encounter, and I guess my question is like thinking about leadership and the moment we're in, and do you think it's possible to be connected to our emotional selves and still be effective in the world? Still be impactful in the world?

Judy: Yeah, that's a really good question. Because now I have the opposite problem. I had a concussion two years ago and I'm hyper emotional now. What they call labile, it's a symptom of the concussion. It's sort of like poetic justice.

Annahid: The word sounds like part of the female anatomy there.

Judy: Right? That's the-



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Annahid: Did you say labile or labia? (laughter)

Judy: Labile.

Annahid: okay?

Judy: Exactly, exactly, I'm sure it's the same root. Anyway, so I overreact to everything. Not everything, but I overreact to things, so-

Annahid: Well that's interesting, do you feel it's an overreaction or do you feel it's another way-

Judy: When I first got hurt, I had to cancel my subscription to the newspaper because I'd read the newspaper and I'd start to weep like my cat just died.

Annahid: Well, maybe that's how we should be reacting though, right?

Judy: Maybe yeah, maybe.

Annahid: I don't know, I don't know.

Judy: Maybe. But anyway, and I still, my feelings are very on the surface. So it's really hard for me to go to a demonstration for example, because it's a real demonstration, not like a rogue demonstration. The kind of demonstrations I used to love, which were a real demonstration where people are really upset and they're coming to protest. I can't stand it, I can't stand the energy, the noise, the anger. I can't handle it, it's too much for me, right?

Annahid: Well, you're raising a really interesting point because it makes me think if we really are connected to our feelings, and we're kind of present in our experiences particularly in the world we live in now, maybe part of authentic leadership is that we do less, because we have to be able to ... being connected to emotion means being able to process the emotions in relation to experiences. And that means that we can't go at the speed that so many of us are going at because ... I find myself that sometimes I'm desensitizing just to kind of get through and I don't wanna live that way.

Judy: Well, I think that's totally true. I think that we have to slow down. I don't know how that's gonna happen because we live in a society, in a culture where people admire you for working 20 hours a day or whatever it is you do. And if anything, and this has been a problem with feminism, instead of ... you know, my generation of feminists wanted women to do what men did, but they also wanted men to do what women did. Gloria Steinem often pointed out that we succeeded in getting women to do what men do not



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

100%, but by and large in terms of doctor, lawyer, et cetera. But we haven't succeeded very far in getting men to do what women do, nurturing work and so on.

There is a much bigger proportion of men doing parenting and domestic work and so on-

Annahid: But nowhere near.

Judy: ... but nowhere near 50% or even close.

Annahid: No.

Judy: And even the men who do it, I often find the women are still in charge of the household, and they don't want to let go of it. That is where women used to find their power, was being in charge of the household. But now-

Annahid: Now a lot of women are working double time.

Judy: They're working double time. And so it's even worse in terms of keeping in touch with your feelings. And especially if you do suffer any trauma as a child. So, yeah, to create a society where people are healthy, we have to slow down and it's hard. It's so-

Annahid: How has it been for you to slow down?

Judy: Oh, well.

Annahid: Are you comfortable with the pace that you're-

Judy: No, not at all. No, I'm not. I start to get blue, I start to get down, I start to fear. Like even at this point where the book ... I'm finished the book and now I'm waiting for the book launch. Now it's only two weeks away, but it's been about a month and a half between the time I was finished that I couldn't change the book anymore and the time the book comes out, which launches a whole ... And I like think, "What am I gonna do?" Like I have nothing to do.

You know, like I have lots to do. I could reorganize my house or ... but I feel like that. Like I had nothing to do. I'm very uncomfortable with that, and I'm 72 years old. Like 72 years and I've worked hard all my life so if I have nothing to do, so what? But I feel like, "Oh I should do something, I should be involved in something." It's crazy, right?

So yeah, I think work's very important and obviously I think being engaged politically is really important, especially right now because we're in a time of such change. But I also



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

think that we have to have what people want to call a balanced life or take care of ourselves.

Annahid: And I think perhaps it's ... you talk about this in the book. It's about listening to our own intuition, about what things to take on, what pace we can go at so that we're not outstripping our capacity to kind of be present in what we're doing. We need to manage our own lives at a pace that makes sense. And you talk about that, I thought that was really ... even when you were exhausted and overwhelmed and when you were making the decision to whether or not to take the presidency of NAC, you talk about how you listen to that voice that you know-

Judy: That thing, yeah the gut feel.

Annahid: ... the gut thing, that that was always there as-

Judy: I always had that, yeah. It also helped me with avoiding danger or at least ... not avoiding danger but avoiding it before it was too late. Yeah, the gut feeling. I still get that.

Annahid: I think more people could benefit by knowing that A; that that's there and B; listening to it. And I think that's part of the antidote to patriarchy.

Judy: That's right, yeah.

Annahid: Patriarchy is kind of all about ... you know, and-

Judy: Well, if you think about patriarchy, capitalism, and European ... whatever you want to call it, European dominance. No, it's white dominance, but it's really European. I mean, if you think of it culturally, white doesn't really tell you anything.

Annahid: It's like enlightenment, yeah.

Judy: It's the Europeans that created white as a concept. Like it didn't even exist before. So ...

Annahid: It's like always the head, rationality...

Judy: Yeah, all head, everything's rational and enlightenment, the whole enlightenment thing, which, it's true. That contributed a lot of knowledge and wisdom and everything else to society. We don't want to wipe that out. But it also eliminated a lot of the knowledge that comes from a different place in your head.

Annahid: That's right.



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Judy: And there's a lot of knowledge like that. You learn that from your indigenous people, other cultures rely more on those other knowledges, right?

Annahid: Yeah.

Judy: Religions, even though I'm not a religious person, but there's a lot of wisdom in religions that comes from other places.

Annahid: I agree, I think that head of the pack is part of the oppression.

Judy: That's right.

Annahid: And then cultures, people that come from cultures as you were saying that prioritize a different way of knowing, it becomes a further brick in the wall of their oppression.

Judy: Yeah. And it's very, very challenging. Like I went to an event at Ryerson recently, Social Justice Week, this year. Christi Belcourt, who is an indigenous artist, she had them turn out the lights, this is in a big sterile auditorium, University auditorium. She had them turn out the lights and she had everybody close their eyes and breathe. Okay, they breathe. And then she said, "I want you to put aside who you are, what you do, you're a student, you're a faculty, you're staff, unemployed, you're an artist, just put it aside, and then I want you to think about ..." and this is what she said, "How lucky you are to have been born at this time." Which was like the exact opposite of what everybody in the room was thinking about. So she totally shifted your ground, right?

And what she's talking about is it's a time of change, fundamental change, and profound change. And then she got us to think about what could we do to promote the kind of change that we wanted to see. And the impact was amazing. You could feel it in the room, the change and the power of it. I mean, I've never seen anybody do anything like that before. And so, you think, "Okay, like this is really different."

And then I notice at demonstrations now like say at the #Me Too demonstration, it's very different than the old-style rah, rah, rah. They're more like just people telling their stories, women and trans-people telling their stories. And it's a very different energy. I still kind of like the rah, rah, but I thought, "Okay, well this is a different way, a different way of doing things."

Annahid: Perhaps a more connected way.

Judy: Maybe.



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Annahid: But again, I don't think it's about one way being better than others. I think the dogma is a problem. I think it's about making space for different ways. One way is not better than others. I agree with you. I think the rah, rah, rah, the screaming, is needed. It has its place, right?

Judy: Yeah. So, I have a question for you. I don't know if you will really put this in the podcast. You've known me a long time, so did the book change your way of thinking about me?

Annahid: Well, I've always seen your heart beyond the tough exterior. I don't know, you know, I orient things on quite an emotional level. I think what struck me, I felt like I really was acquainted with the five year old, and maybe it's because my daughter is also five. But I felt very connected to your five year old self, and as I was reading I was really protective, very moved by your journey.

It didn't change the way I see you, but it made me appreciate just how brave you are, and it made me really wanna protect you because that five year old is still in there and she's part of the story going out in the world too. Yeah, I think it's going to ... I don't know, I think you're telling the story for a bunch of different reasons, but I think-

Judy: The main reason I did it was for myself. I wrote it for myself to understand my life, and it really helped me to understand my life better.

Annahid: But I think you're also ... One of your primary demographics are the many five year olds still out there. There are the too many five year olds and their mothers and their aunts and their fathers and their uncles and ... anyone, not just people that suffer sexual abuse, but all the ways in which people get really hurt and damaged and feel like they're completely alone in that circle.

Judy: That's right. And that's the thing about secrets, right?

Annahid: Yeah.

Judy: Like, one of the things is, my parents' generation ... like for example, I grew up in a Jewish family. Nobody ever talked to me about the Holocaust, ever. Okay? Ever. I learned about the Holocaust, I don't even know when. Maybe at school, I don't know. And even my grandparents, who fled from Cossack almost didn't talk to me about it till I was an adult. The way they survived was, "We don't talk about bad things." We don't talk about bad things and we don't talk about anything in the family outside the family.

Yesterday I read an article about secrets, about someone who grew up Catholic and how central secrets were to Catholicism, something about Jesus keeping secrets, I don't know,



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

I can't remember the theology of it. So there's a way in which the keeping of secrets is central to our culture, and of course, what-

Annahid: Part of patriarchy again, right?

Judy: Yeah, exactly. And so then the thing is, so what does a secret do? It makes you feel ashamed. That's what secrets do. It makes you feel ashamed. And then the shame is the most terrible feeling for me for sure. It's the most terrible feeling. And so, as long as we keep the secrets, we keep the shame, and as long as we have the shame, we're disabled by it in some ways.

And so, I think that the ... Ann-Marie MacDonald wrote a piece, unfortunately, she wrote it in the same, it was in the same issue of the globe that that Margaret Atwood piece that everybody got mad about, so nobody paid attention to the Ann-Marie MacDonald's piece. But she wrote a piece saying we shouldn't talk about breaking silence, as there's no silence. We should talk about telling secrets. We have to tell secrets. Tell our secret. Because we have to release the shame. That's the only way to release the shame or the anger or the fear or whatever it is, or the sadness or the grief. And so I think telling secrets is really ... not everybody has to do it in a book but is really important and it doesn't help anybody to keep secrets. I don't think it helps anybody

Annahid: Well it goes back to what we were saying at the beginning. You're not giving away your power in writing this book, you're doing the opposite. You're modeling power and vulnerability. The power in the secret. I think it's a power that is most needed right now.

Judy: Oh, okay good.

Annahid: Thank you for trail blazing again. Is there anything else that you want to say? I did have a question here. Maybe this is a way to end. When you hear the word belonging, what words most immediately come to mind for you?

Judy: Not me. I never feel like I belong. I always feel like the outsider.

Annahid: Still?

Judy: Yeah, I still feel that way a bit. Not as much as I used to, but yeah. It's different now because I'm not really part of a group now. Like, I'm semi-retired and I'm a writer and you know, I'm not ... but yeah, like I'm in the Writer's Union and I don't feel like I belong there. Like I always feel like I have to watch myself. I can't be my full self there. Yeah, but I'm not part of a group really. But every group I've ever been in, I've never felt like I belonged.



Breaking the Ocean Podcast: Soundwaves of Belonging

Annahid: And do you think that's because of the abuse?

Judy: Yeah, I think it's because of the abuse and I think it's because, you know, I'm culturally quite different. Like even though I'm white and have all the privilege of being white and middle-class, I'm a Brooklyn girl. So, I've got a big mouth and I always say what I think. Now I'm even worse doing that. Like I have even less filters than I used to have. I don't know if it's the concussion or getting older, but I have no filters now.

Like, I was at a dinner party a couple of month ago, and it was a friend of mind in Montreal that made this dinner party for me. It was actually mostly men there, not women. There was only one other woman. We were talking about the #Me Too stuff and at a certain point I said, "Well, you know, some of my best friends are men, but still, after I listen to all of this stuff, I think maybe we should just eliminate them. Eliminate males off the face of the earth." I thought it was really funny but nobody laughed.

Annahid: Lysistrata society...

Judy: Nobody laughed. Anyway, yeah. So, I tend to ... so, I don't know.

Annahid: But you're saying that you think it was partly because of the abuse, that feeling of not belonging, but also-

Judy: Yeah. But also my personality, like I've been always ... I've always been an outsider. It's like a personality trait. So belonging, I guess you'd say belonging, I don't know, I think it's something I wanted, like I say in the book that when I came to Canada, I had a really thick Brooklyn accent and kids made fun of me. And I changed it like in a week or two weeks. I just listened and imitated how they talked and that's because I wanted to belong.

And on the outside I always belonged, I was always popular, all that. I always had friends, but on the inside no, I was always lonely. And I say in the book, I don't feel alone very much anymore, that's true. So maybe that is that I feel more like I belong. I don't know, not sure. Yeah.

Annahid: I guess the journey's not over.

Judy: Oh, that's for sure. That's for sure. It's never over.