

# Become a Good Ancestor Podcast

EP007 Black Joy with Tracey Michael Lewis-Giggetts

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

joy, book, black, stories, dancing, grief, feel, ancestors, happen, people, trauma, read, conversation, rage, absolutely, healing, world, writer, essay, ancestor

## SPEAKERS

Tracey, Layla, Reema

### Layla 00:02

Hello everybody and welcome to episode seven of the *'Become a Good Ancestor'* podcast. I am your host, Layla Saad, and this is the place where inner work meets social change. Today I'm speaking with thought leader and 18-time published author, almost 19 times, Tracey Michael Lewis-Giggetts. Tracey works at the intersection of culture, identity and faith and spirituality at the deepest levels. In addition to being a prolific writer, she's also the host of the podcast, *Heart Talk with Tracey Michael*, and founder of Heart Space, a healing community created to serve those who have experienced trauma of any kind through the use of storytelling and the arts, and she is a real master. That you'll explore and see during this conversation and her most recent publication is the critically acclaimed book *Black Joy*, stories of resistance, resilience, and restoration. This collection of lyrical essays explores the way joy has evolved, even in the midst of trauma in Tracey's own life and by detailing these instances of joy in the context of black culture, she offers us a guide that helps us to recognise the power of *Black Joy*, as a resource to draw upon and to challenge the one-dimensional one-note narrative of black life as solely comprised of trauma and hardship. This is a book that when I saw it on Instagram, I immediately saved it to my little folder of books because I knew I wanted to read it. I knew that this had been a theme that I've been exploring in my own life for a number of years now. It just felt like yes, I want to read this book, I want to speak to this author, and you'll see exactly what I mean, during the course of this conversation. We'll be talking all about *Black Joy* today with Tracey and we'll be exploring the book with our community in the book club. To find out more about the book and to join us in the Book Club visit [www.becomeagoodancestry.com/bookclub](http://www.becomeagoodancestry.com/bookclub). And without further ado, welcome Tracey.

### Tracey 02:11

Thank you so much. I'm so glad to be here.

### Layla 02:15

I'm so glad to be in conversation with you. What a sunshine and a person person you are, while also being very honouring of trauma, of grief and of rage. I really love that about you and your work. Before we get into the conversation, can you let people know where they can find you and your work online?

### Tracey 02:41

I think the best entry point is my website, which is <https://traceymlewis.com>. That has all the things in terms of where I can be reached on social media, etc. I'm on Instagram as @tmlgwriter and Twitter as @TMLewis.

**Layla 03:02**

Perfect, perfect. So go follow her and all the things go and her website. There are lots to explore. Can you tell us who are some of the ancestors living or transitioned, societal or familial who have influenced you on your journey?

**Tracey 03:19**

If you had asked me that a couple of years ago, I probably would have focused on literary ancestors. The Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, because I felt when I thought of myself as a storyteller, in the traditions that I wanted to be a part of what came, what would come to me and I think when I think of them as witnesses to my own work, I definitely gravitate toward ancestral storytelling and writing and that kind of thing. But now I think of my grandmother, I recently did some genealogical work, and I think of my third great grandmother who was enslaved on a plantation in Wilmington, North Carolina, I think of my cousin Vicki, who we lost to racial violence a few years ago, I think about the women in my family. And I think part of my joy work has been listening and tapping into them as witnesses of what I'm doing and the work I'm trying to accomplish. So, I think it's different now. I think it's more intimate, it's closer to home. It is familial, my grandmother in particular, which I write about in the book quite a bit.

**Layla 04:58**

That's interesting to hear, I think definitely as a writer, I completely related to what you said about finding, kind of finding your sense of belonging, I guess your sense of identity and knowing that you're part of a lineage, an ideological lineage and a lineage of shared both trauma, but also resilience and creativity. And sometimes, we have the tendency to think of ancestors as having been, these public figures are these known figures, and that's what like, what that's what we should aspire to be right. And that's the only way to really be a value to future generations is to be someone who's done something great that, you know, everyone all over the world knows who you are, right? And we underplay, or we sometimes undervalue what it means to have the lineage of our grandparents and our aunts and uncles and those whose names we may know, but we may not know as well.

**Tracey 06:09**

Absolutely and you know, I think what's interesting about that, is we undervalue, but I also think we're just unaware, because like you said, when I thought about what it what an ancestor is, I always thought about these people that everyone, all of us as people are revered. And me being a writer, I would veer toward the literary ancestors. But what I soon learned was that I had storytellers in my family. Most of what I do comes from them. My education is Baldwin, my reading, my teaching, all of that is Morrison, etc. And I can honour that and appreciate that, but who I am, at my core is my nanny who would have people laughing and falling out as we're eating her greens in her fourth-floor apartment in Louisville, Kentucky, it was my grandmother, who had travelled the world, and would tell me stories from Italy and the richness of what I do, and the way that I tell stories, comes from those traditions. And so, I just don't think I was aware of it until I actually had to sit with them, sit with my grandmother and listen.

**Layla 07:48**

Yeah, and do you feel I'm loving that, I want to get into the book, but I'm so interested in this discussion because I wonder does that in any way gives you the freedom to almost be more authentic or more, just not trying to aspire to be this great person. But just to be who you are, and actually get into the nitty-gritty of the greys, like these are my strengths, these are my vulnerabilities. These are my fears, like all of that humanity really.

**Tracey 08:24**

Absolutely 100% I always say writing *Black Joy*, I'm tearing up a little bit, I'm sorry. But writing *Black Joy* was the most liberating experience. And it's for the very reason that you mentioned, which is that I felt free because I was at the same time exploring my ancestors, my family, and what I gleaned from them over the years, even as just a little girl. There was a kind of release that I could be Tracey Michae'l Lewis-Giggetts and all that those names entail and be myself on the page. And not necessarily spend a lot of mind, share or time aspiring to the people that we call great, which is I think it's hard because I think I'm a teacher too, I'm like no, the greats provide a path, they're greats for a reason, but I think they became great by finding authentically who they were. And so there can never be another Toni Morrison because Toni Morrison was distinctly and uniquely who she is. And so, once you are able to be comfortable and settled and just have compassion for who you are, whether you're a writer or whatever, whatever the field happens to be, I think you show up. You know, greater, right? If we're talking about greatness, I think you show up greater, and then your work is received in the way that those ancestors are received because you've shown up as yourself. And I think I'm a work in progress. So, I think *Black Joy* was like a starting point for that. For me, it was like, I'd written all of these other books, but I think it was the first time that I just said, we just going to tell the stories hold the truly sacred and let the chips fall where they may.

**Layla 10:39**

I love that because I have to say as a writer, I'm always reading books as both a reader and a writer. I'm reading it to enjoy the experience of what the story is about, what are these words about, but I'm also thinking about myself as a writer, I'm thinking about the writer, what was their processes as they were writing it. And I have to say, Tracey, I think this was one of the first books that I read, actually, I listened to it. I didn't read it, I have it on audiobook and I highly recommend the audiobook, because you have such a rich voice. But I listened to you on audiobook and it's the first book in a really long time that I read, and I felt permission, I felt a greater sense of permission to be myself more as a writer. Because your stories were your stories. You were not trying to make them these epic events that had happened. But also, you took ordinary things, and you made them miraculous, you made them joyful, you made them true. And I heard you in an interview saying you would love if people would receive *Black Joy*, the book, almost like in the way that many of us receive *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde, which is for me, one of my Bibles that I turn to when I need guidance. When literally just flip to any essay inside and there will always be something that I need to read. And I felt that but I do feel like with *Sister Outsider*, it's almost like I'm looking to someone who is way ahead of me because they're not really in the sense that they're not here anymore. This is when I read your book, I was like it is like that. But it's also just really real. Like this is a real person just telling their real-life experiences. And I really appreciated that. And where I want to take this conversation next is really about talking about how we

hear about Black Joy all the time, especially on social media, and the hashtag, one of my favourites is Black Joy, Instagram accounts are embracing black culture. That is like the epitome you post a lot of Black Joy posts as well. But sometimes I think it can be mistaken as a performance like we're performing *Black Joy*. What do you see as the difference between performing *Black Joy* versus like authentically experiencing it?

**Tracey 13:28**

I think that their Black Joy shows up in a myriad of ways. And yes, it's a cultural expression. But I think what I was trying to do on this, even in this book even on social media when I post things about Black Joy it might be a spades game, or the cookout or all of these kinds of things. But it's also that feeling that a person has when they get into the school that they want to get into or the image of the grandmother rocking back and forth not knowing that her Gen Z great-grandchild is recording her. It's an essence. It is an undercurrent. It's not when you talk about performing Black Joy, I think that there is an absolutely outward component like how it's received. But I think you know; that authentic Black Joy is an experience that happens on the inside. It is a sense, I always say that. You know, Black Joy is resistance, it is like the catchphrase and like we are hearing Black Joy more, I didn't make it up. It's not my word. But it's something our ancestors have always known. It is different from happiness. Happiness is more sort of that performative outward experience, like, hey, I'm going to go on this roller coaster ride. And that's it, I'm happy. And I'm excited about that. Whereas joy exists underneath even pain, and trauma, it's an undercurrent that's always present despite what's going on in the world. It's one of the examples that I use in the book when George Floyd was murdered, in the protests, and when the uprisings happened, in addition to the confrontation, and the righteous anger, and the chanting, and those kinds of things that were happening, there was dancing. And there was this singing and this and that, that existed in the civil rights movement, we see some of that also it's this undercurrent, it's this defiance, that a demonstration of humanity, and that's what makes Black Joy, Black Joy, is this idea that it exists in the midst of, in the presence of, it's held simultaneously with rage and grief, and trauma, and all those other things. So, you can't perform it. If those other things if it's not standing in the presence of those other things. So, if I'm dancing, and I'm doing whatever the backstory could be that I'm dancing, because this is the only way that I can move, physiologically move the pain and the rage through my body. That's what makes it not performative and I'm dancing, just to be seen on a TikTok video. I mean there's value to that, I guess because nobody knows what's going on with you. And so, they may find joy, they may tap into their own joy because of that. I think there's value in it. But when I think about the meaningful parts of Black Joy, it really is about it standing in the midst of all that other stuff, as a kind of defiance. And then also it shows up after we've overcome after we've survived, so it's on both ends, right? It's within the rage, grief, and sorrow and it's also on the outside, as you know, that's where our resilience comes in. It's the way we innovate the way we create, in spite of those things. I feel like I went around in circles.

**Layla 17:44**

Because I shared in the intro, that Black Joy and joy, peace, all of those things have been things that I've been exploring for myself, for a number of years now. And joy was a word that if you'd asked me, five years ago, I had a real revulsion for that word, it was almost triggering word for me, the words joy and pleasure, those were two words that I had physical reactions to, that I just didn't know how to tap into. I didn't see it as anything except frivolity and having done a lot of healing work and personal

development and self-growth work, I really understand a lot of the roots of where that comes from, and the intergenerational passing on of survival tactics. What it means to survive as a black person in predominantly white spaces, how to keep yourself safe, but also how to strive so that you're always perfect, there's not a reason why you get left behind. And so that leaves little room for joy and for pleasure. They don't have a function, I hadn't been taught the function, the strategy as you talk about in the book. Ways that joy and pleasure actually are very powerful tools. And so, it was interesting reading about your own coming to your own journey with joy that tells us about the conversation you had with your therapist and really stemmed from...

**Tracey 19:41**

I, like you five or six years ago, if you told me I'd write a whole book about Black Joy and look for what, why and I don't know if it triggered me negatively. I just didn't know what it was. And like you, I didn't think I had permission to experience joy, I've had happy moments and of course, I've been happy. But I don't think I really knew what joy was, I mean I think I was afraid of joy because joy felt like it was a precursor to something when the other shoe dropped. There's this Brene Brown talks about foreboding joy, like this idea that if I'm too happy, if I settle and just sit in this joy, something bad is going to happen, something terrible. I've resisted it because I'm like something going to catch me off guard and because you mentioned just kind of doing the work. I was doing this deep trauma work, where I was uncovering why I needed to be in control of everything. I entered the conversation and thought about joy from grief, and I was experiencing overwhelming grief. That was affecting me physically. I was doing deep trauma work about my childhood. And I sat in my therapist's office, and just out of the blue, she just kind of asked me, well, what does joy feel like in your body? And I was like, say what now? I don't know, what does that even mean? And I'm well over 40 years old. I don't know what joy feels like in my body and that feels not that great to me. I began to play and I always come at it from a somatic standpoint, because I think that's our first point of reference for any emotion. If you ask me, what is anger, I know what memory I can call up, that's going to generate anger, I know what memory that I can call up, that's going to generate sorrow and grief, immediately, I know I can access it, I can tap into it. Those are easy for me. Joy was like, I don't know and so that began with me paying close attention to what joy felt like in my body. As I talked about in the book, it is watching a television show, being a writer and a storyteller and being so excited that these characters were amazing. Then having the presence of mine, to stop and say, oh, wait a minute. Like I feel tingly. I felt like, oh, I'm joyful. I'm happy, right? This is what joy feels like, ah, I have a snapshot now. It feels weird that it's watching This Is Us and that's how it comes. But I'll take it. And I began to call it up when I needed it when grief felt like it was going to overwhelm me or rage, I was so angry that I could call up that memory. And it would somehow it wouldn't take the rage away. But it was somehow right size me or keep me from going over the edge, or even just acting out of my rage, yelling at my husband for no reason, because I'm angry, and I don't have an outlet for it. That led to me thinking about how black folks have used joy and doing research and talking to my ancestors talking to those who have gone by and asking for their guidance.

**Tracey 23:39**

Then trying to recreate joy, and being intentional about how do I take this feeling that I am now aware of? And how do I intentionally recreate it in my life? That's where I am now. Like it's a work in progress. What do I need at this moment to recreate those feelings of joy so that I can calm my central nervous system? Because again, it's somatic, calm, my anxiety, I can calm a panic attack or whatever that's

hitting me at this moment. What do I need to do? And that might be? You know what, let me take my daughter to the park and let's get on the swings. Because my inner child, my 10-year-old needs to swing right now. And she doesn't know that the bilateral stimulation of rocking back and forth is a soothing act that's calming her central nervous system. But I'm 47 and I know what joy feels like. So let me recreate that and it sounds very strategic and technical, but I feel like, for those of us who have no concept of what joy might be and can be, I think we have to almost be that like okay, today I'm writing in my joy. Today I'm going to listen to Beyonce five times because that's my song. And that's going to make me feel really happy and really joyful at this moment. So, church girl or heat it is, and we all have different things. But I think that's how we get to it.

**Layla 25:17**

I love that your book is called *Black Joy*. It's not just a book about joy. It's not about the universal experience of joy that we all have as human beings that is very specifically about Black Joy. It is very specifically for a black readership and I truly believe this is a book that everyone can read and get something from while also not trying to place themselves in a black person's body or a black person's experience. Can you talk about what that process was like when you're writing knowing that I'm being very clear on who my audience is for this book. And joy isn't something only that black people can experience or have permission to or can intentionally create?

**Tracey 26:08**

Absolutely. When I wrote an essay for *The Washington Post* that kind of sparked and spiraled into what we now have as the book but when I wrote about *Black Joy*, I got a lot of wonderful responses. I got responses once again we're dividing by race, joy is a human experience. And absolutely it's a physiological response to pleasure it is absolutely an emotion that we all have it's universal, and we all have access to it. And *Black Joy* is all of that wrapped in this melanin wrapped into the historical and present-day situation that this melanin finds itself in. It's a cultural expression that's unique to us, because of what this skin means in this world and I had to be very clear about that. When I got the book deal, and I started writing these essays, I was just very intentional when I'm talking to black folks, I feel like I'm writing to us. And I want us to really dig in and explore all the myriad and wonderful ways that our joy has shown up had we have used it as strategically wielded it as a demonstration of our humanity, of how we have been resilient in the face of all of this stuff. And our joy has shown up in that resilience. The last leg of the race, I think is how do we use it to heal whether or not we solve the issue of white supremacy, whether we solved the issue of misogyny and patriarchy, whether we solve all of those problems or not, how do we heal? How do we use joy as a way to access healing? That's the reason why the book has the three movements that it does. And that's when my literary ancestor, Toni Morrison popped up and says we're not worried about the gaze. We're not interested in the white gaze. However, as well as I do that, publishing wants to reach the widest audience possible, and they want the book to sell. And unfortunately, a lot of times they think that can't happen with a target audience of just black folks. And I actually had a wonderful experience with my publisher and editor where they understood where I was coming from. But when I got into talking to people after the book was out, I got a lot of questions; well how do white folks engage this text. I'm going to share a story and it is going to be really quick. This is how I think white folks can or anyone that's non-Black can engage this text.

**Layla 28:56**

And when you go into this, I want to highlight this for our book club members who are listening to this who are not black, who are thinking: how do I approach reading this and discussing this book? Please go, Tracey.

**Tracey 29:13**

Here's the story. When we were living outside of Philadelphia, me, my husband and my daughter, she was really little at the time, there was this Greek Festival that we loved to go to, and it was in our neighbourhood and we'd go bring our daughter, the food was amazing. The entertainment, the dancing, all of that was amazing. And we, with our brown selves, lil brown speck would go and everyone was really kind, and we just had a really great time at this Greek Festival. What we did not do is say maybe you need a little more honey in your baklava. What we did not do is jump on the stage and tried to do the dances with the dancers, even though they probably would have welcomed it or probably thought it was funny or whatever. We did not centre ourselves on that experience. We appreciated it, we observed it, we learned from it, and we now know a little bit more about Greek culture that we did not know, prior to attending, we had a great time without having to be the centre, even as brown specks as the different people in the space. And when I think about how white and non-black people can engage in this, that's what I think about it's like, how do you read this, appreciate, observed, learn from? Maybe if it provides a bridge to you and your black co-worker or your black neighbour or whatever? Like, how do you maybe not call the cops on the kids that are double-dutching and dancing, because you now recognise it as Black Joy, you recognise it? Because you've read the book. And you're like, oh, no, that's not disruptive. That's actually just them having a really great time in their particular culture expression, and I can go in my business. I feel like the decentring because you may not recognise some of what I'm talking about on the page is what has to happen. And just the appreciation without having to understand it fully but just to appreciate the lyricism that I attempted the language that I use to try to capture this feeling, the stories that I'm telling as if you would, any other text, any other book. And so that's hopefully how and I think I've had white readers who have come to me and said, yes you heard us tell the Greek celebration story. And then I read the book, and I get it, yes, I can now, see, there's an essay called '*Smells like Blackness*', where I am just kind of playing with form and all of that, but it's all of these myriad, myriad of ways that blackness might show up cultural and cultural expression that you have, some white folks are just not going to get, but that's okay. You can be okay with that. In your everyday life, having read this book, when you see your co-worker with the braids, you now have a context for what that means and all of that.

**Layla 32:32**

I think you just give us a masterclass in how to, first of all, appreciate not appropriate. But also, in how to read both *Black Joy* and any other book by an author of colour, black indigenous, that does not centre a white gaze. And how to, I love what you said about there may be some things where you can understand, but there may be some things where you just have no context for what's going on. Because it's cultural references that just don't apply in your culture. And you don't have to see it as wrong or right you can just appreciate it for whatever it is that art form. I love that.

**Tracey 33:14**

Here's the really beautiful thing about that, when one is able to open themselves up in a way where they can embrace those cultural things that they don't understand or just really appreciate them, then the universal themes come even stronger. Because there are tonnes of universal themes about joy and trauma, and how we hold rage that is universal to all of us as human beings. But some of that universal stuff gets lost if you're stuck at me talking about something that you don't understand because it's not part of your culture. If you're stuck there, then you can't get to the sweetness and the tender and the universal messages that you that are waiting for you in this book, because we're all human beings, and I couldn't help but have it in there. You're not going to get to that if you are stuck with the cultural pieces. I would just venture to say that being open-minded and appreciative and not needing to be centred on your benefit is a blessing waiting for you on the other side of that.

**Layla 34:27**

100% I love that. I also love that it's an explanation like the story of the Greek Festival is an explanation that works just as well for adults as it does for kids. We can't talk about joy and Black Joy in the context of social change, and change-making without also talking about what so often we run up against which is feelings of guilt and feelings of if I tap into joy and really give myself permission to allow it into my life and to intentionally create it, that I'm somehow betraying social justice, I'm somehow the story that you said if there was in the book that you didn't mention it here. But in the book, you tell the story of a couple of weeks after the murder of George Floyd, that you and your daughter ended up having a dance battle, and that was tapping into that joy. And I know, that part of my journey, was learning that me doing that is not me. Not saying that his death wasn't important, or that I'm not honouring him. That actually, if I'm staying in a constant state of sorrow, grief, rage, that isn't me bringing my full self, but I think we I think we struggle with that.

**Tracey 36:03**

We absolutely do. I remember I had a conversation with Kiese Laymon about the book when it first came out, and he was sharing how he sometimes feels guilty as if he's not struggling and constantly in the struggle of this work, that he's somehow doing a disservice to, or dishonouring his ancestors. I think for me, having racial violence kind of hit close to home in 2018, I lost my cousin, a white man walked into a Kroger and shot two black people in Louisville, Kentucky, and one of those was a family member. I think for a good while after that I held so much grief, that even if I wanted to experience joy, I felt like it would somehow say that I'm not grieving enough, or I'm not holding enough rage and sorrow for what happened. I'd go and I'd write something or try to stay at work if you will. But then what I soon figured out was that, and this is what I share with KSA was that our ancestors don't want that for us. Like, we got it. We got it.

**Layla 37:24**

I didn't want that for my children.

**Tracey 37:26**

Exactly, exactly. I think we got it twisted. I think that they said, you know, they understood that for many of our ancestors the joy had to be hidden, it had to be strategic or whatever. But now that we have an opportunity where we can hold both outwardly sent simultaneously, I can go to the protests, and I can dance with my daughter. I can write a scathing op-ed, and I can dance to Beyonce in my bedroom, I get

whatever, whatever, however joy, whatever joy looks like, I can do both. I think that's part of the healing. I feel like our ancestors are like, no, baby, you got it wrong, I want you. It's healing that we're after, right? And if we're healing you can't stay in this perpetual state of rage and grief, because it is going to enter it for me. I was on my back in my bed for nine months because I could not unleash, my muscles literally contracted and would not release themselves. I could not relax, I could not. There was so much pent-up grief, frustration and anger and rage. I seriously don't think that our ancestors, the next baton pass is not about, yes. Take this pain and rage and keep passing it down. Guess there's work to do? Yes. There's policy to change. Yes, absolutely. Let's continue to stay on the necks of the people that are trying to oppress us. Absolutely. And also, breathe, drink your water. Enjoy your children, dance, and create because that's how they survived actually. And that's how we will thrive like that's the next step. In spite of what Black Joy means. But I think there's a space that I'm even trying to figure out that goes beyond just survival, is beyond just the work of managing our rage and grief. It's about our joy and the embracing of self-compassion and peace and empathy and all those things that are now kind of catchphrases, actually make the oppressor even mad. More mad. I think there's an understanding that if we can't physically break you by enslavement, we can break you by turning your mental health and your emotional health and your psychological health inside out, like breaking you that way. So that all you have is rage and all you have is grief. Rage and grief are necessary because it's the way that we act and it's the way that we move but it's not the only thing. And I think I'm encountering so many more people like yourself who are saying, I need these other pieces here to right size myself.

**Layla 40:46**

I'm really grateful for a mentor I had a mentor a few years ago who taught me that, things like that. So I love Audrey Lorde, but the one phrase that stuck with me from working with this mentor is Audrey Lorde's phrase about self-care as being resistance and so she would teach me if your self-care. If the root of how you're approaching self-care is from a place of resistance, as opposed to it being your birthright. Then the outcome is going to be different. It's always having to be against something rather than something that you just deserve because you are here. And I find that joy in the same way.

**Tracey 41:32**

That's the reason why *Black Joy* is resistance. It's only a third of the book, resilience and restoration are the bigger two-thirds of the book is the biggest portion, because it is absolutely strategic and resistance and rebellion and all those kinds of things. But I'm afraid that if that's all it is, then we are centering the gaze. If I'm extreme even while I was dancing with my daughter in our backyard and hitting her with the cabbage patch, and she hit me with whatever Gen Z'ers do. I was hyper-aware of the guy down the street, who I know wasn't too happy about us dancing in the yard, there's that duality that's present. And I was actually centering his gaze, instead of being fully immersed at the moment, I was thinking about the perception of us as two black girls dancing in the yard and what that might meant. There's some of that which is part of our experience, and we can't shake it. But if we solely look at our joy, our peace as just resistance, then you're right. It centres the gaze that we're fighting against solely and it doesn't leave room for all of the healing components of joy, all of the ways that joy is a pathway to just even greater self-actualisation aside from all of the systems that we live in. Absolutely. I'm with your mentor.

**Layla 43:03**

Yes, I love that. I think that the mind switch for me of joy, self-care, peace, and whatever abundance all of these things as being inherently I'm inherently deserving of them.

**Tracey 43:14**

It's our birthright. Absolutely.

**Layla 43:15**

Because I'm human not even because I'm black and because all of these things have happened. We need to rebalance things. No, I'm a human being. I deserve it just as much as anybody else has really shifted. Like you said that self-perception and that and how we relate to the white gaze as well. Perfect place to land. Let's bring on Reema Zaman our book club facilitator, who's going to be leading discussions of *Black Joy* the book in our book club this month.

**Reema 43:46**

Hello, hi. Hi, Tracey. Hi, Layla. Thank you so much for being on this interview with us and thank you for inviting me in. I love your book so much and I've been loving your conversation the two of you have been having. It reminds me of so many interactions, to put it nicely I've had throughout my life with very well-meaning white people who have tried to school me on my joy and my confidence, telling me that my joy is naivete and my confidence is arrogance. I remember we weren't even dating, we were speaking, this guy and I years ago, years, years, years ago and he said you know the way you speak about your work, and it was just as I had just started writing. I hadn't been published yet. My book hadn't been published yet and I was so excited about thinking I can have a voice I think I can make something of myself. I think I can have a contribution to something and make an imprint on this world and I was so excited to share this. My joy, my confidence. Newly birthed confidence. He said you have this Pollyanna outlook and you're speaking in a very arrogant way, who are you to think you can get published. And I just kind of I was like, first of all, this is the last conversation we're ever having, and I said my joy is not naivete in my confidence. It's not arrogance to be joyful, and confidence in the face of all the systems and characters that have entered and tried to quash my spirit, in the course of my life thus far. My joy is my revolution, and my confidence is my resilience. And when I found your book, I have just been thinking of those things over and over again and thank you for being a living teacher and a reminder of exactly those messages, and so much more.

**Tracey 45:57**

Thank you, thank you so much. Everything you just said resonates because I think our systems are designed to limit, and place boundaries, on our joy, and our expression of confidence as a black person. I know there are people who believe that high acidity or getting too big or that kind of thing when I say, I'm a damn good writer, like, that's not acceptable. I feel that I feel what you're saying.

**Reema 46:32**

Completely and to come off as joyful to it's as though we are, it's from an ignorance around the world as opposed to like the opposite.

**Tracey 46:44**

It's the extreme awareness.

**Reema 46:45**

It's the extreme awareness that the devastation we are in and choosing joy, as an act of healing as an act of everything revolution, resistance, resilience, but like you said, also the deeper sweeter things, the tenderness of our spirit, the connection with our children, and our lovers and our sweethearts and our families.

**Tracey 47:10**

That's the reason why I opened the book, talking about self-compassion because I think in empathy and that tenderness because I think in a conversation we just kind of kind of covered that with Layla is conversations about Black Joy, it leans about resistance and defiance. And that's important, but I also say, but it's rooted in this self-compassion and this confidence and this empathy that we have for ourselves in us as a people. And so that at least that's what I was trying to do in opening that way.

**Reema 47:48**

Thank you. Thank you so much. And your analogy about the Greek Festival, your wisdom about that. You're also speaking on mansplaining as well it's a great, great teaching when male teachers or self-proclaimed teachers come in to tell us about how to improve our work, or our sentences or our speech?

**Tracey 48:14**

Yes, yeah. I've had that happen many times and I just try to hold you know there's something sacred about truth and there's a truth that I have that unless our identities intersect, or unless there's like, you're not supposed to get it, and that's going to be okay. I think the biggest thing is whether it's a man mansplaining or a white person, or whatever, it's like, how can you, this is the question that I turned back on to those individuals, how can you be okay? With me, knowing what I know, expressing what I'm expressing, and not feeling that you need to add to? Or interject? How can you be okay with that? Because you need to be okay with that.

**Reema 49:05**

That is between them and whoever they call God or their therapist. It's basically not your problem. Yeah, I wanted to actually ask you, how did writing this book transform you?

**Tracey 49:30**

Honestly, it was that whole gaze piece, I did feel free. I did feel the most free writing this book that I've ever felt with any of the other books that I'd written. There was a liberation, liberating quality to actually telling these stories. And as someone who needs to be in control, oh, and struggles with the kind of allowing herself to be that free. It was so healing for me. It was also healing to tell stories that I know were intimate and personal. And be okay with, however, they landed in the world beautiful. And that's a work in progress. Like I was sharing that when the book first came out. There was this kind of intimacy hangover. Like there was talking about that. We were just talking about that, where I had shared so much of myself, and there was this fear of how it would be received in the world. But also, there was

this kind of it's going to be okay. It was there, it was freedom. I don't think that I'll ever write the former way. Again, I think I always will have that as my approach to any of my future work, which is like this free liberating approach to what I put down on the page. And the stories that I tell.

**Reema 51:12**

Beautiful, beautiful, and because we were saying that there is a subtle difference, Brene Brown talks about a vulnerability hangover. But especially with the love and the earnestness of your voice, there had to be an intimacy of a hangover from the sheer sharing of so much and then receiving everyone else's stories in response. I'm sure you must get so many emails and DM's, from people saying thank you, this is how your work inspired me, and then they'll share their hearts with you.

**Tracey 51:46**

Yeah, I think it's an amazing gift, is surreal for me, because I don't think as I was writing that I was just telling my story and using it as an entry point to look at this concept called Black Joy. And I didn't realise there were so many people that will read it and connect to the stories that I was telling and say, wow, you gave language and words too, my experience as a child or my experience, in relationship with my first love or whatever. I hold that is so sacred, but it can become heavy, it can, because I want everyone on the healing path, whether that's therapy, or whether it's writing, journaling, or whatever it is, whatever it looks like, I want everybody doing this work, and everybody is at different places, some people are just at reading the book and kind of realising that there's some work to do and I don't want to overstep by considering myself an expert like I say all the time, I'm not a joy expert, I am a storyteller, a person with lived experience. And I am trying, I'm a work in progress. And I just happen to have this particular skill set that I can share with you. My stories. It can be heavy to hold all of those stories. And my own. Some of that work for me lately, has just been trying to listen and hold space for individuals, without internalising it and taking it all the way in, and that's a challenge because I'm not built that way. I'm built to take everybody's stuff. That's just who I am, so it's work.

**Reema 53:54**

It's work. And it's a continual self-care journey for yourself. Hmm, learning that...

**Tracey 54:01**

Absolutely and self-care and soul care, which for me are very different. Because for me self-care feels I know, like a buzzword but it feels like I love a good massage. I love a good and I think there's somatically some things that happen when your central nervous system when you get the message, or you do movement and all of that. But then there's some soul stuff. Like there are some boundaries that I have to set. There are some conversations that I have to have. There are some conversations I don't have to have. There are some guesses and some no's and all of that is like speaking to the inner work that I have to do. That makes me able to receive stories without them weighing me down.

**Reema 54:53**

Yes, yeah, it's not everyone else's stories are not necessarily your responsibility to carry, it can't be.

**Tracey 55:02**

I'm learning that I'm learning that.

**Reema 55:06**

It's a testament to how deeply you care and how deeply you love not only the message but the community that you have built and how deeply they trust you. So of course, like navigating all of those pieces and holding all of those elements carefully. I think an amazing essay from you one day would be wisdom on that because I think a lot of people can even without being a writer to understand what it would mean. Everyone in some capacity understands that and actually, my other question was how did writing this book transform your relationships? I do know that we're heading towards the end we have like six minutes left.

**Tracey 55:59**

No, I'll just be really quick because of the intimate stories that I told there was one person in particular that I was concerned about, which was my mother. I had sent her an advanced copy earlier, and just kind of let her know this is the book, and I need you to kind of sit with it because this is what's going out into the world. And what's interesting was the emotional kind of upheaval that I had, knowing that there were going to be things that she learned and things that I was going to express that she did not want me to share with the world or that she would be learning for the first time. And so much of that emotional upheaval comes from knowing that I wasn't going to change it. That's freedom. That's liberation. I knew I wasn't going to change it no matter her response. And so our relationship is good. But we are at a different place because of it. I think that she's actually sharing more with me now. I'm getting the stories that I'd hoped that I'd have beforehand, right. Because I think that I took care and sharing those stories. I wanted to share those stories from my POV only, and also to hold them with some grace and I think she saw that even if it would make her uncomfortable. And so that right there, I think was the relationship that was most concerned about, but the one that ended up being on a healing path. That wasn't necessarily present prior to right.

**Reema 57:38**

You know what, that just made me think that joy is brave. And bravery is contagious. You gave her permission to be more open with her stories.

**Tracey 57:48**

I receive that. I do. I hope that is the case that I receive that. Thank you.

**Layla 57:59**

I love that Reema, can we tweet that, can we put that on a quote somewhere?

**Reema 58:04**

We should build like a platform. We should have a platform, Layla. Let's talk about that.

**Layla 58:16**

That was wonderful. Thank you so much, Tracey. I above all, I think what I got from the book and just being having the pleasure of having this conversation with you, and even listening to your conversation with Reema, the one thing that I'm taking away is actually the power of us telling our stories and the

ways that it can free us and heal us and heal other people. So as both a reader and a writer, I just want to say thank you, your book has been transformational for me. I think it's going to take me in a really interesting and deeper direction, as a writer and as a human being. And I truly feel that this is healing work that you're doing and I'm so grateful for you. Thank you.

**Tracey 59:07**

Thank you. Thank you so much. That means the world to me. It really does.

**Tracey 59:12**

Okay, our last question. What does becoming a good ancestor mean to you?

**Tracey 59:19**

Hmm, I think it is holding the truth sacred. I say that a lot. But that means the world to me. I think it is telling good stories. I think that my mother in that previous conversation is preparing herself to become a good ancestor. And when I say good, I don't necessarily mean like saccharine or happy or even on the other extreme trauma field right, I just mean whatever stories are meant for the next generation, whatever is necessary and needed. I talk about like my grandmother, and there were stories that I feel are lost in the ether now because she took them with her. That was before I knew that I could commune with her now. But still, there were specifics of things that I would have loved to have known more about. And so becoming a good ancestor means telling those good stories, those meaningful stories, those necessary stories, and telling them with a truth that you've held sacred because when you hold a truly sacred, then you can couch that truth in love and self-compassion and grace and empathy. It's not a nasty harsh truth. It is just it's real. And it's holy.

**Tracey 1:01:00**

Thank you. Thank you so much.

**Reema 1:01:03**

Thank you. Thank you, Tracey Thank you.