

Candice Schutter: [00:00:00] Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse and the 'cult'ure series.

I'm really excited to share today's episode with you. But first, I wanna give a quick shout out to Patreon donors who make this work possible. I'm deeply grateful for your support, and I just dropped a new bonus. It's a 20 page ebook and it can be accessed on the Patreon page, along with the ongoing series of deconstructing dogma videos that are rolling us into the new year.

If you're curious and not yet a patron, head over to patreon.com/thedeeperpulse and consider joining the All Access Community for as little as a dollar a month. There are no culty hierarchies, I promise. No bait and switch down the road. It's just a place for me to drop bonus material for loyal listeners of the podcast. Okay. Onto today's episode.

Candice Schutter: Content [00:01:00] warning. This episode makes brief reference to physical and sexual coercion. Listener discretion advised.

Candice Schutter: Hello and welcome to 2023.

I'm recording this intro on day two of the new year, and the holidays are now behind us. Well, sort of they are, Chris is still bringing home tasty treats from work and we still have two containers of cookies to plow through. I love me something sweet, but I gotta tell you, I can't always keep myself in check when it comes to overindulging. So if today, once again, I'm in bed with a sugar crash headache at 8:00 PM, I only have myself to blame. And him. I mean, it's obviously mostly his fault, right?

All kidding aside, even though it's a new year, nothing much has changed for me. Despite this every damn year holiday sugar withdrawal I seem to go through, I'm ever more resolved to not make any high-minded [00:02:00] resolutions this year. Because this 'cult'ure series has me looking at everything with new eyes, and the pressure to perform in 2023 is no exception.

Now, in my mid twenties, I evolved beyond resolutions. I was setting intentions instead. New Year's Day was reserved for magical thinking. It was a day of spiritual sorcery, meditating, journaling, affirming and visioning boarding, making high vibe commitments and re-authoring ever better endings to my never quite good enough life story.

But whether I called it a resolution or an intention, it was really kind of all the same when it came to taking action. My intentions were really just polished new versions of the same old, same old.

No, I'm not dieting. I'm cleansing and detoxing to make my body a pure vessel for universal light. Duh. And no, I'm not obsessing about finding the perfect partner, I'm doggedly doing my inner work to make myself worthy of his or her arrival. [00:03:00] A financial plan? That's unnecessary. I'll just vision and high vibe my way to abundance.

It all looked an awful lot like personal empowerment, but it was really just more of the same. My anxiety in disguise. It wasn't just that I wanted, I needed the ideal body, mate, and career path. Because this is what had been promised to me. My annual New Year's ritual was a

byproduct of the capitalist cult hustle. It was a function of my cultural identity, one that shakes its head and clicks its tongue at me whenever I stop moving and improving.

So every damn year, I'd spend hours scribbling promises into my journal, signing up for gym memberships, personal development workshops, detox plans, and online courses.

Speaking of online courses, I very much capitalized on the holiday hustle while working as a coach, selling courses and coaching packages at a discount for a limited time only.

It all felt a little off to me, especially when so many people would fall [00:04:00] away so soon after signing up. I'd spend the first part of the year sending reminders, extending expiration dates, all in an effort to make up for the way I'd exploited the fact that folks were under the influence of the New Year's sales trance.

Oh, and let us not forget, I taught fitness for two decades. The first few weeks of January classes are bursting at the seams. That is until people stop with all the shoulding and they start to once again choose for themselves.

My point is in the cult of self-improvement, the first month of the year is devotional time, baby. And I'm finding that it's almost superstitious. It's not easy to shake. Some part of me still feels a little anxious when I skip the pseudoscientific self-inquiry at the turn of every year.

It's a voice in my head that says things like, but if I don't take time to tally my wins and my losses won't mediocrity and lethargy just own me? How will I ever achieve anything if I become a person who settles for [00:05:00] what my life already has to offer? If I'm no longer not quite right, how will I ever become better than I am?

It's a bit of a mind fuck, which is what makes it kind of culty.

In her book, *Rest Is Resistance*, Tricia Hersey writes:

"Loving ourselves and each other deepens our disruption of the dominant systems. They want us unwell, fearful, exhausted, and without deep self-love, because you are easier to manipulate when you are distracted by what is not real or true."

Boom.

As long as we believe we are perpetually unfinished, there will always be something new to sell us.

I've done a lot of research into cult dynamics, and one of the things I've learned about the cult persona is that it's perpetually chasing after the ideal self, and it therefore becomes isolated from deeper truths and honest, authentic connection.

And also, who wins when we're all so afraid of losing?

Losing our youthful [00:06:00] figures, our firm taut skin, our thick heads of hair. Who benefits when we're obsessively investing in attracting a new lover or landing the next rung promotion? Who are we validating, really, when we continually jump through metaphysical hoops to earn spiritual street cred or our place in the social hierarchy?

Hard-earned experience has taught me that it's the charismatic gurus and savvy marketers who stand to gain the most when we spend an unwarranted amount of time taking annual, and often superficial, inventory of our lives.

But the real tragedy, one that's broken my heart again and again, is that it's not just our cosmetic objectives that get us into trouble. I've been burned in more than one psychospiritually evolved circle, where the structure itself preys upon my personal values, seducing me with a heart-centered, meaning driven promise that delivers in part, but then later reveals itself to be a bait and switch investment in a cult [00:07:00] enterprise.

It's sort of a shitty feeling. Especially waking up to the ways that I myself may have contributed to the cultiness of self-help culture.

It's a painful reckoning, made all the more so when underneath all the ethical high-minded promises, there's a pathological underbelly. When all the good work is really just a cover for deviant and abusive behavior. That's a moral injury that lingers. It cuts deep. And it's something that today's guests know all about.

Back in August, about a month into the 'cult'ure series, I dropped a message into my Insta DM chat.

"Hi, Sarah. I decided I couldn't wait any longer. I just had to reach out and let you know what an inspiration you've been to me. Back in 2006, I left the inner circle of a culty new age wellness organization, but it's only in recent years that I've come to terms with how royally effed up it was. I'm blown away by how much I relate to your story. [00:08:00] Narcissistic leader, check. Belt level progression, check. Idealistic, overachiever hitting all the marks, check. I could go on and on.

I was sending a message to NXIVM survivor and whistleblower, Sarah Edmondson. I went on to share how I'd watched her and her husband Nippy, also a NXIVM survivor, on the HBO docu-series, The Vow. I told her how I'd binged her memoir on Audible and had become a longtime regular listener of the weekly podcast that she and Nippy co-hosted together.

I want both you and Nippy to know that your work and the resources that you share so generously, they've empowered me to finally step out from the shadows. I've recently been sharing publicly about my own experiences. Your work has rippled out seismically, and I want to thank you.

Then on a whim, I added a final thought.

And if at any point in time you have the interest or bandwidth to sit down and talk about what is so problematic about group awareness trainings [00:09:00] and self-help culture, I would be so honored to have you and Nippy as guests on my podcast.

I figured it was worth a shot.

I wrapped up the message with gratitude and well wishes and well, that was that.

Much to my surprise, Sarah responded just a few hours later and she accepted my invitation without hesitancy, despite the fact that she, Nippy, and their two young kiddos were smack dab in the middle of planning an international move.

She said yes because, even after everything they've been through, she and Nippy still believe in making a difference. It's what brought them together so many years back.

Sarah Edmondson and Anthony (aka Nippy) Ames are cult survivors who met and married while they were each advancing through a personal and professional success program known as NXIVM. They believed they were part of an ethical movement that was changing the world, and they devoted their lives to the work.

That is until 12 years in, Sarah was invited to join DOS, a secret sisterhood within the [00:10:00] organization. They'd soon learn that a number of women in the inner circle were being abused. Psychologically manipulated, sexually coerced, even physically branded by order of NXIVM's leader perverse conman, and all around sociopathic a-hole, Keith Rainere.

Season one of The Vow documents Sarah and Nippy's story, and how they, along with a handful of other whistleblowers, banded together and worked with the FBI to eventually take down NXIVM and Keith Raniere.

From the beginning, Sarah and Nippy have been doing their healing sort of out in the open, leveraging their visibility to become impactful advocates in the world of cult recovery.

Both Sarah and Nippy have shared the details of their stories many times over, so we will not be rehashing all of that here. See the show notes if you're interested in diving deep into the nitty gritty of their harrowing narrative.

Today is a conversation about hindsight. It's about red flags in personal development programs [00:11:00] and self-help circles. And the sadly too common instances where the helpful and the harmful coexist. We're gonna talk about how tools become weaponized and how teachings that promise to liberate us can, at times, leave us feeling more caged than ever.

I'm so grateful to Sarah and Nippy for their willingness to come onto the pod and have this conversation with me, for us. I didn't get to even half of my questions, but I'm gonna trust it turned out just right. Please keep in mind that I had my fellow former Org members in mind for the bulk of my questions. See episodes 33 to 37 if you're not sure what that is.

But it's not necessary, because it's my very sincere hope that anyone who's dabbled in wellness culture will find the content of this convo personally relatable.

Sarah Edmondson is an actor and a voiceover artist who has starred in a CBS series and more than a dozen films. However, she played her perhaps most pivotal role, when in [00:12:00] 2017 she bravely displayed the brand she'd been coerced into receiving at a DOS initiation ceremony for a New York Times cover story that paved the way for the FBI investigation into NXIVM.

Sarah shares her personal experiences in her memoir: Scarred: The True Story of How I Escaped NXIVM, The Cult That Bound My Life. I listened to the entire book on a one day road trip and have since circled back to a highlighted hard copy more than once. It's a must-read for a cult survivor, of any sort.

Anthony (aka Nippy) Ames was an aspiring actor and former college athlete when he joined NXIVM, and over the course of his 12 years in the organization, he rose through the ranks to become a trusted leader, despite his naturally non-compliant spirit. True to form, when the truth came out about Keith Rainere, he became one of the loudest voices in the mix, doing everything he could to bring him to justice and to help burn NXIVM's carefully constructed public image to the ground.

In February of 2021, [00:13:00] Sarah and Nippy launched A Little Bit Culty, a highly informative and irreverent podcast where they discuss recovery from all things a little culty through intimate interviews with experts and fellow survivors.

Their podcast has been a pivotal part of my healing journey, leading me to personal ahas and insights and to many of the resources that I've cited in earlier episodes in this series. I owe Sarah and Nippy a debt of gratitude for their work, and for sitting down with me to have this heart to heart. Let's get to it.

Please note, the stories and opinions shared here are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

Thank you so much, you two, for agreeing to do this. It, it really means so much to me to be able to sit down and talk with [00:14:00] you.

Sarah Edmondson: Pleasure.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah you're welcome.

Candice Schutter: I found The Vow about a year ago and I started watching the series and fell in love with both of you, particularly because of your courage and the way that you have so much humility and willingness to share your story.

And, I found your podcast shortly after, and I think I've listened to almost every single episode. And I just wanna say thank you for the work that you're doing, because for me, being introduced to the two of you was a turning point in my story. And you hear my voice cracking a little bit because to, to see you share.

And The Vow did such a great job of explaining and expressing why we get involved in certain kinds of organizations. And as Mark Vicente says, people don't join a cult, they join a good thing.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right.

Candice Schutter: And it was the first time I'd ever seen my experience shared. And it helped me to make sense of so much of why I was feeling really stuck [00:15:00] in my life still because there was an experience and a, a series of experiences that I had never processed and.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: Watching you two do that so visibly and then share so many resources that gave me language around it all. It just, I just mostly wanna say thank you.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Well number one, you're welcome.

Sarah Edmondson: My absolute pleasure.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And you know, we had to find that language ourselves.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And then scream it.

Candice Schutter: I mean, what a journey you have been on.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: We kinda got dragged into it publicly and then I think at various points where Sarah and I chose to embrace it.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, yeah. Well, and put yourself in the line... I mean, Sarah, that photo of you on the New York Times cover. It was just such an act of courage and it's really, I think of that sometimes when I think about the courage that I've had to be somebody who's been public about an organization I was involved in for the first time, I think of that picture and I think of your courage. And so, um, and I also read your [00:16:00] book Scarred, which is, I'm recommending it to everyone.

There's so much out there in terms of the full arc of your story and its detail and its nuance, and I don't want to drag you through the process of telling all those details all over again.

Sarah Edmondson: Thank you.

Candice Schutter: And yeah, I'm sure, I'm sure it gets, it gets tiring and cumbersome. And I wanna give you an opportunity also to introduce yourselves and if you wanna give us a nutshell version of where you are and how you landed where you are. And specifically, maybe, what drew you to NXIVM in the first place because what I'm really interested in exploring today is when a good thing becomes a little bit culty, to use your language, and what those red flags are and so if you could just tell us about what drew you into NXIVM in the first place and what that journey was like overall.

Sarah Edmondson: Sure. We'll give, give the cliff notes and, well Nippy and I got in for different reasons, so I'll let him share his after.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: But, the long and short of it is I was an actress. It was mid 2000s, looking for meaning [00:17:00] and purpose and community. And I was introduced by Mark Vicente, who had made What The Bleep Do We Know, a film that I really liked and, and respected at that time. And he told me about a workshop that I did not research in any way. I just trusted him and followed his lead and ended up in a personal and professional development program, which I ended up becoming quite an advocate for, a recruiter for, and was there for 12 years.

Had a, some fabulous experiences, some very challenging experiences, but ultimately there were many red flags along the way that I didn't know what I was looking at. And until things got unbearable and also very dark and very strange and twisted to the point where Nippy and I and a handful of other whistleblowers saw some very bad things.

We went to the, initially to the authorities who didn't know what they were looking at. Then we went to the New York Times, which led to a front page cover story, which led to the FBI getting involved, which led to a trial, which led to the [00:18:00] leadership, uh, specifically Keith Raniere being put behind bars for 120 years.

And Nippy?

Candice Schutter: The best part.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Five years probation.

Sarah Edmondson: So here we are, you know, five years out. We've got two beautiful kids. I call those our silver linings and my relationship with Nippy as well. Mm-hmm. We're focused on healing and helping people learn how to avoid the red flags in whatever they may come across and, and expose abuses of power through our podcast or my book, through other interviews and we're pretty loud about it and we probably won't stop until, until everybody's awake and out of NXIVM and these things are no longer acceptable in society. How's that for a summary?

Candice Schutter: Beautiful.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: That was good. Uh, mine's a little different.

I had an old girlfriend approach me about it and she had known that I was interested in just being better. I mean, when we dated I had books on how to be better and leaders and stuff like that, and she kind of [00:19:00] knew that would be her in with me. And it took her about a year, year and a half for me to finally agree to do it.

And it just, cuz I was busy and I was pursuing acting and I, that's something that requires, you know, full-time you have to be in town, et cetera. And that's what I was doing. And then she made kind of a parallel how it could help me with that. And I was interested, and I was involved with the organization for about a year and a half, two years, initially. And then I left and I didn't leave under bad terms. I got cast in something in LA and then roughly around, I guess two, three years after that, uh, Mark Vicente, who I had met in one of a training, came out and said he had work for me, um, back in New York. And I make that distinction because, I had the, the proverbial carrot dangled to me as, as a lure to come back.

So I wasn't really coming back because of Keith and the organization, I had left because it had seemed kind of ragtag and not really going anywhere, particularly in New York City. And when I returned, it had, [00:20:00] it had prospered quite well. It, it had spread so, I was kind of eating my words a little bit and the organization seemed more credible.

So I came back and then slowly the film didn't happen. And then it led to where we are today. And then I ended up teaching the trainings and here we are. you are after the, uh, scandalous aspect of it.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: So.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

What did you think it was? And perhaps there's a kernel of truth in this and I'll let you speak to that, but like, what did you think you were a part of?

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: At, at first I just thought I was, just taking a goals program, and I actually liked the goals aspect of it for the first part before I left. And then it just didn't feel like, didn't feel like it had anyone in the organization that had really done anything with their lives that was gonna tell me what to do. That's really kind of how I felt. Except maybe for like a couple other people that were always in Albany and, and I felt like I wasn't being coached by someone who had any real life experience.

So it, it wasn't, [00:21:00] the product wasn't worth what, what I was paying. So that's one of the reasons I left. And then when I got back, it seemed bigger and it felt like I was part of, it really felt like I was part of a movement, you know? Cuz it had gotten to really credible people and it felt like we were actually making it dent.

It turns out we were really throwing rocks at tanks in the proverbial fight, but it felt like we were actually making headway in changing things. And it felt like, you know, I was a beacon for that, if you will, and someone who was teaching and helping people become more ethical. So that's where, you know, my meat hooks got hooked a little bit and I felt like that's where I was able to help people and I, and at the time it felt like we were.

You know, and people were saying that we were, and you know, maybe we were. You know, when you have conversations, a lot of conversations, a lot of people are able to identify and hear things in people and pointing out to 'em and they can walk away if you don't like, Hey, that was a valuable conversation. So I still think that we were in a lot of ways, but I don't think it was anything proprietary to the organization and what Keith Ranieri [00:22:00] came up with.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: I think that's key. We, I agree with everything Nippy said and we, you know, we were righteous about this tool set that we thought we had. Which is one of the reasons, and not a lot of people know this, but most of the time, any coach or consultant or therapist, psychiatrist, psychologists, they weren't allowed to take the training. And we were told it was because they would take the trainings and undoubtedly and inadvertently even take the tools and put them into their own work, which they shouldn't do because they haven't been trained. And our tools are unique and, you know, industry secrets and all those things. But really what I think it was now is that they would've come in and been like, wait, this is just cognitive behavioral therapy and this is neurolinguistic programming, and this is like the main tenants of Buddhism. You can't claim this as Keith's genius.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Or even worse is you have 20 year old kids with sashes around their neck acting like asking [00:23:00] cognitive behavior therapy questions and not knowing what they're doing and how to do it and how to handle people.

Candice Schutter: Right. Right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: So it's kind of like opening up the hood of a car, playing with it and shutting it and not knowing what you did to the car.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah. Keith literally said that this is paint by numbers therapy.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: And if you just ask these questions. But I, I mean, I countered things early on. I mean, a lot of the things I felt like Nippy said, I was helping people and it was, we were doing good work. But there's other people that would come across my, in my group and I'd be like, I don't know how to help this person. Like, this is really intense stuff. You know, people being abused as kids, you know, darker things or more heavy things. I'm, I'm not just helping with goals, I'm getting into the deep tra, Like we weren't trauma informed or trauma trained or anything like that.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right. And you know, we've had, obviously we've had a lot of conversations with a lot of people about what we went through. And I can say for sure Sarah and I, and I think I speak for Sarah when I [00:24:00] say this. We spoke with thousands of people over the course of 10 plus years asking them the same questions and the same process over and over. So we got good at that. Now, whatever that was is, you can debate all day long, but what I can say is after sitting down with so many people, and having all these conversations is that human beings aren't as mysterious as we think. And it got to the point sometimes where I could sit down with someone and ask 'em the questions and I could predict almost verbatim what they would say and even like how they would say it.

So there were some skill sets and some interesting things that we did develop over doing it for many, many years and thousands of times to the point where, you know, I could even look at someone and predict like, they're probably gonna answer it this way. So based on that, I think we were able to, kind of, talk to people in a certain way that was helpful to them and [00:25:00] beneficial to them in certain ways.

But we didn't go through any sort of official training to know what we were looking at, how we were looking at it, and elicit from them really what probably should have been done in one-on-one therapy, if they were coming in with a specific thing. As opposed to this blanket curriculum that ultimately ended up getting them obedient to a process that a guy who was abusive had come up with.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And that's ultimately what we were doing, unwittingly.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Which is also part of like what we had to go through to reconcile our delusion and how we did it and forgive ourselves and, and, and that sort of thing. So.

Candice Schutter: In the aftermath of the sharing of my story, I have a group of folks that have also since left the organization and we're all together, there's about almost 50 of us in a kind of a recovery group where we share our stories.

And some of the individuals in the organization were trainers and they had roles similar to yours. And one of the questions that's come up when I mentioned I was gonna speak with you [00:26:00] was really how you reconciled that, like Nippy, what you're speaking about, the role that you played and the use of the quote technology.

And also, Sarah, you recruiting. I know that you were like one of the number one recruiters bringing people into the organization, and I know some of the trainers that I speak with related to the organization that I'm was affiliated with, have some shame and guilt and feelings.

And so is there anything that, Sarah, you would say to these folks? So what, like, what helped you to navigate all of the emotions.

Sarah Edmondson: Sure.

Candice Schutter: That came up around recruiting.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah. Quick question. Did you have a component that was like personal responsibility similar to NXIVM, that you take responsibility for things?

Candice Schutter: Yes. And I a hundred percent wanna talk about that, so.

Sarah Edmondson: Right. Well the reason I bring it up is because, I see it in a lot of large group awareness trainings or anything where there's a personal development aspect to it? Um, other big groups that people think are cults that are [00:27:00] science-based, for example,

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Are they, are they, are they tology-based as well?

Sarah Edmondson: Tology-based and science-based.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Okay.

Sarah Edmondson: Or things that rhyme with Schmandmark.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Sarah Edmondson: Things like that.

Um, there's allegations that allegedly it's been said that, and it's only my opinion, and of course we're laughing because all these places are so litigious, which is a huge red flag for me now.

Candice Schutter: Yep.

Sarah Edmondson: But yeah, there's this element of that, you know, you cause your life, and there's always good in that. Like something happens to you and you don't, you know, just complain about it. You go, well, how did? You know, what were my expectations that I got myself here and what were my choices? And you can take responsibility to a degree.

And the flip side of that is that if you take that to an unhealthy level, you can always be blamed for anything in your life. And it's always your fault. And certain science-based organizations make it always your fault. There's, the leadership is never at fault. It's always your fault.

Anyway, [00:28:00] the reason I say that is because when I left, definitely I had a great deal of shame and regret and embarrassment and all sorts of things. And I feel like, I've been out for five years and I've gone through different stages. I'm no longer in that stage. And one of

my therapists, cult specialists helped me see that, you know, beating myself up about what I had done was also, like a method from the group, from the cult.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Sarah Edmondson: You know, that's, you know, you, how bad are you? You're a piece of sh, you know, like feeling really unworthy. Or like, you know, bad internally that I had done these things. Versus recognizing that, and I know this of myself to be true. And I think people who know me know this to be true, that I have a good heart and I've always wanted to help people.

Obviously we bet on the wrong horse and this was not the thing to help people. But I know that when we saw what was bad and we could see it, we did the right thing and brought it to the authorities and helped take it down. But of course, like, you know, I still [00:29:00] see there's one particular person who's still involved in NXIVM and I, I recruited her. I brought her in.

So it, it's not that I feel guilt, necessarily, cuz I didn't move to Albany. I didn't start a sexual relationship with Keith. I didn't do the things that she did. She did make choices based on her wants and needs and desires. And I can't take, I can't take responsibility for that. I can take responsibility for telling her about it and bringing her.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And your participation.

Sarah Edmondson: I participated. That's the NXIVM question, what's your participation? And Keith would always take that to the nth degree saying like, how did you even participate in the Holocaust, which happened years ago? Like, that's, that's the craziness of how that would be taken too, too far. And, and his answer would be your participation in his, in what you know and think about it now, and how you make sure that the, you know, the history is told accurately. That's your participation in it, even though you weren't alive when it happened. So did I participate in them joining? [00:30:00] Yes. Did I, did I participate in trying to help get them out? Yes.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Um.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: But you also weren't participated in how they were targeted and, and how.

Sarah Edmondson: Right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: How they were abused.

Sarah Edmondson: I never lied to them. I never lied to anybody. I never recruited anybody under false means. I truly thought that I was recruiting people into something really good.

And, you know, if anything, I'm guilty of being naive about Keith and his sex life and people's, um, Nippy always says this. Like we were naive about people's ability to lie.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: We underestimated people's ability to lie to us. I, I'll add one caveat to it as well, like, shame and, and those emotions are normal.

And I think allow yourself to have 'em because I think they, they're informative in a lot of ways. But if you allow them to cripple you, you let it win in a lot of ways. And if you know your character, and shame is the only thing that you kind of have to overcome to fortify your character, then [00:31:00] it's, you're kind of lucky in a sense, um, that that's the only thing because shame is something that you can actually overcome by doing things and being active and proactive.

And what I mean by that is if the perpetrator, in our case it was Keith, understands the tool of shame and humiliation. They understand that leaving and holding him accountable will require you to go through a lot of shame and humiliation and embarrassment. Right?

And the closer you were to him, the more humiliated and shamed and embarrassed you were. And this is, there's evidence of this in all the way he treated people close to him. And I think when he understood that people were leaving, you know, it was his MO to embarrass and humiliate them as much.

In fact, there's a scene in The Vow where he actually says, shame on Sarah for doing this, right? See he was trying to amp up the heat of [00:32:00] shame on Sarah to silence her and get other people after her.

And when he had his harem down there to Mexico. He had that ceremony where they all had to perform fellatio on him.

Now, if you're scared of people leaving under duress, and you know that shame and humiliation will keep them loyal because if they.

Candice Schutter: Mm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: If they turn against you, they have to say, yeah, there was a fellatio, blowjob cerem, they have to come out and say all these things that incriminate themselves to hold him accountable.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: He knows that that's the way to do it, and that's the tool. And that's the level of psychopathy you were dealing with, with these people. So.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: For Sarah and I, it was different. For me it was, you know, eating my humble pie that other people were right about this guy, and I was wrong. And I had to kind of look at my friends and peers and, you know, I had the proverbial egg on my face. And I decided, you know, that's not gonna be so bad for me to hold this guy accountable.

I think I'm gonna go, I, I can handle that. And that's different than [00:33:00] anything else that was done to the women that were close to him. And the women that were close to him were the ones that could really take him down. And that's, you know, I think what Lauren Salzman did, for those of you don't know, she's the one that really put the nail in the coffin on the testimony and, and admitted all this stuff.

And she went through, I think, you know, I don't see her this way, but I think that's what she had to go through to totally humiliate herself and, like, what she'd been doing for 20 years to make what she had done right. And I think that's the mechanism of how shame can be used proactively. And it's up to you to figure out how you're gonna transcend it.

If that helps.

Candice Schutter: Tremendously. It's brilliant. And it, it moved me on a really deep level when you spoke to the, how heightened that shame is the closer you are to the leader. Yeah, it, it makes me a little emotional, frankly. Um, because I was [00:34:00] in the innermost innermost circle in the organization that I was in. And it was 16 years ago that I left.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Wow.

Candice Schutter: 16 years. It took me that long to even understand what had happened.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: And then to speak out. And, and I love, I just love what both of you're saying and this, this sense that shame is really the great silencer.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: And that we can play into that or we can sort of use it almost like fuel to reorient our perspective around it and to speak up despite the humiliation, despite the regret.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And to recognize that it's common.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: It's common on a small level. It's common on a big level. You know, one of the biggest inspirations for me was Mike Rinder from Scientology. You know, that guy was an actual perpetrator for that, that religion.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Had all the blood on his hands and then did an about face.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah. We thought of him and Leah Remini.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: I was like, if you,

Sarah Edmondson: Those were, [00:35:00] yeah, we could do it too.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: And keep in mind like, and actually this is why we're so passionate about like the #igotout movement similar to #metoo, where all of these people are coming out and sharing their stories, like you, who sat on things for many years not knowing how, actually not alone they are.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: And that's honestly why I think so many of these things still exist is if people wake up or start to recognize they're bad, they slip away quietly. Cuz who wants to be attacked legally, emotionally, physically.

And I know for us, before we were decided that we were gonna go public, we were, you know, our part of our plan was like just slipping away quietly. And everything's great and thank you. You know, we can just part ways amicably.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Until we really saw how many women had been brought into DOS and how many women were getting branded and how many women had ended over nude photos and people were being treated way worse than I [00:36:00] was.

And we knew that, we couldn't be quiet. But, um, the shame keeps those things in place. And the more united people are, the more people can speak freely about their experience and not feel ashamed. And I do think that that's happening. Like so many people are coming forward and saying, yes, I was a part of this, or I participated in that, or I was in this group or that group.

And yes, it's correct, it's bad. And this is why. And I think that's largely because of, I mean I think the #igotout is still very small, But just generally in the zeitgeist, there's more of an acceptance. It's like kind of a surprise now if people weren't in some cult of some kind.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Sarah Edmondson: To me.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. It's

Sarah Edmondson: Or abusive relationship.

Candice Schutter: Exactly. It's, it's everywhere. And that's, the series that I'm doing, I call it the culture series and the word cult sort of in quotes. Cause it's like what puts the cult in culture, because as I started to explore and educate myself, it was like, wow, this is everywhere. Like, it's just a spectrum in terms of how it's [00:37:00] showing up, right? Like my experience might have been a six and yours might have been a nine and there's somebody over here who's having a two. But it's, it's everywhere. And these dynamics need to be outed. And I love, the I got out hashtag I use it frequently and it's really helped me.

And, and I was actually talking with Gerette, one of the founders of I got out, she and Lisa are gonna be on the podcast, which I'm really excited about. And I was speaking with her and I told her I got really emotional when I told her I shared my story. And one of the posts on Instagram with a photo of me standing in the studio that I was running where all the shit was going down, and had posted part of my story and I tagged, I got out and they shared it. And it was so meaningful and validating that they shared it. Like the impact that that tiny act had.

Sarah Edmondson: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: On, on making me feel safer and more courageous, it just can't be overstated. And same with you showing up here to validate my [00:38:00] experience and the experience of the folks that I represent. So, yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: We had someone do it for us so, it only seems natural to

Sarah Edmondson: Pay it forward.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Pay it forward. Yeah.

So I wanna talk about the curriculum cuz there's a commonality with the organization that I was involved in and others, quite frankly, in the whole new age wellness community, all of these pieces sort of overlap.

You did something called EMs as a part of NXIVM and the exploration of meaning. That's what it stood for, correct?

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: So when you speak about sitting down with people and talking with them and having these sort of experiences where things were being like there was a replication of experience and you could kind of predict what was gonna happen.

Are you speaking about EMs specifically or other sorts of work that you did?

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: No. That, that was mostly [00:39:00] with the curriculum.

Sarah Edmondson: EMs are similar.

I mean, both the curriculum and EMs were this set of questions around certain things. So people would bring in, you know, something that they were unhappy about or something that they were angry about.

Like the intake forms were questions like that. Like what's something in your life that you're not okay with or something, a time that you were angry, or somebody that you react to. And then we had like a sheet of questions to answer regarding that thing that we would hopefully unearth what was the root cause.

So that's sort of the through line, whether it was an EM or one of the exercises in the five day training itself, or an ethos, which is the ongoing goals lab program. Each one of those things had a different set of questions depending on what the thing was that we were discussing.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: So, and it was very paint by numbers in a way, but I feel like probably Nippy and I both went off those numbers, those numbers a little bit, just using our own intuition and humanity.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Sarah Edmondson: That, you know, wasn't always present with

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah. The EM [00:40:00] process to me was always vague.

Sarah Edmondson: It was supposed to be measurable and specific, and it.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And it wasn't. And if I, and there's.. Like, Sarah and I were called EM practitioners. If you were to come to me with, you know, you react to someone not cleaning the dishes when they said they should have. And I help you work that issue and Sarah helps you work that issue, there's no way we would do it the same way.

But if we're doctors and it's a heart surgery, there's a protocol to like how we have to go about doing it, maybe there's a little bit of nuance to how I do it and Sarah do it, but it's pretty much you have to do the same thing. And so to me, I never, I never liked it. I never liked how they measured it, and it was always impossible to get evaluated. And it became something that I stopped pursuing after a while because I just lost belief in it.

And some people, that's all they did was EMs. So I imagine they got good at hearing what was going on with someone and then just kind of regurgitating it back [00:41:00] to them. That's really what, like, I felt like the good ones did. They could hear what you were saying well.

But I didn't feel, sometimes they felt like the first couple, four or five felt profound. And then after that they were kind of like, it was a stretch.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: You know, and I wasn't motivated to get them or give them.

Candice Schutter: So the meaning that's being explored, there's like theoretically what's happening, and then there's what's actually happening.

And what I'm curious about was, did it pretty much always or often circle back to sort of being at cause like.

Sarah Edmondson: Sometimes.

Candice Schutter: If, if I'm upset about something, is it my work to do? Like, I guess what I'm wondering about is I noticed in my experience and in a lot of what I see is there's the real sense of putting it back on, on you. Right? Like it, it's your work to do.

Sarah Edmondson: It is your work to do cuz it's always your meaning.

Candice Schutter: Oh, okay. Say more.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: But, but it wasn't put back on you in a gaslighty sort of way.

Sarah Edmondson: It could be. It could be.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: It, it depends [00:42:00] on the practitioner. But like, if Sarah and I were exploring something, I would always be like, I would get her to find safety. You know, cuz a lot of 'em came down to safe and unloved and you get 'em to define the word love.

Oh, it's when, you know, the person gives you attention. Well, can they give you attention and not love you? Like it's finding the inconsistencies in your definition and it gets you to start thinking your head about stuff. And then you could come away and be like, yeah, I think attention is love. Maybe it's not. And that's kind of a, you could read that in a book.

Sarah Edmondson: A lot of the things were things that were linked inappropriately. Like the dishes example that Nippy just brought up, and I think I talked about this in my book. Um, that one of the, my first EM that was really profound for me, or at least I thought it was, was I was reacting to my boyfriend at the time leaving dishes in the sink and making a mess, like really angry.

And when you drill down on what are dishes in the sink, what does it mean? What does that mean? What does that mean to you? A memory? So if you did it well, and this is psychology 101. [00:43:00] Truly. This is not that profound. But for me it was at the time, because I'd never worked on it in therapy, is the memory that came up was my parents fighting.

One of my earliest memories before they split up when I was two and a half of them fighting about domestic stuff, specifically whose turn it was to do the dishes. And so all the practitioner had to say was, what if the dishes didn't cause them to divorce?

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: And for me that was a profound thing because in my little brain, whenever I saw dishes, I felt like the bad thing was gonna happen and that me and my boyfriend at the time were gonna break up.

That's not reality. People break up because I of a whole bunch of things, not just dishes.

So now, post EM, I'd see the dishes and I wouldn't get upset. I might be like, Hey, can you do the dishes? But I'm not gonna, you know, freak out at him. So that would be an example of how an EM could be useful, changing the meaning on the dishes based on what I made the dishes mean for my early childhood experience, if that makes sense.[00:44:00]

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: But I would, I would add something else to that. First off, that's something you can just grow out of in life.

Sarah Edmondson: Sure.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right?

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And and number two, Sarah, who has a pretty agreeable personality, right? If someone sits down to her to do an exercise and you've paid money to do the exercise and they say, do you remember a time in your life where you felt this? You're gonna go back and you're gonna find one.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: To make the exercise work.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: Yes.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: So to suggest,

Sarah Edmondson: I want a change.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah. To suggest that it was this EM process that linked to this memory through dishes, to me is total bullshit.

Sarah Edmondson: See, this is where I think Nippy and I disagree. I actually think there's elements to it that were,

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Well, I'm not, I don't think it, I'm not saying that they're not related. I just think the EM process had someone who was willing to go through the process.

Sarah Edmondson: That's true.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Who had buy-in and then came out and was an easier person to go back, find a situation and link it to the dishes. And then go, the EMs are amazing. We set the conditions for you to have an awareness that that doesn't mean this. [00:45:00] And to me, you know, for me, my first one, my arms were folded. I was difficult. So I wasn't chosen as someone, as an example. You know, they had to bring someone in who was a little bit, because I just didn't know what you were doing. Why are you looking underneath my hood? And why are you asking me these questions? I don't know you. And then I had to, you know, get someone you know, who I trusted.

Sarah Edmondson: A lot of my EMs where I did help people, because I, I agree with Nippy, like they kept changing the standards. It was really hard to get evaluated. I like barely passed. But I knew that I could help people and often it was things where people would share something that had happened, and I could imagine them as a little kid based on what they told me. And it was kind of questions like, what if you knew then that you were okay? Or what if you knew then that you were lovable? Which is not what you're supposed to do in an EM. You're supposed to be like, and what if your mother never loved? You know that typical like what? Like, and, and helping people feel okay without the love. Cause they wanted people to feel that they were okay without the attachment.

That was like, [00:46:00] one of the reasons why I didn't get very far is because they're like, you're not getting to the fear. You're not getting to the root of it and you're, but like, that's just how some people did it.

But just to answer your other question in terms of meaning. I think that's how it was done in a way that was helpful. But like, for example, cut to 12 years later, and I don't wanna get a tattoo and Lauren EMs me saying, what does a tattoo mean to you? I'm like, well it's a mark on my body and it's something permanent.

And, and she's like, what if it means a commitment to your growth?

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: And so she's changing the meaning for me so that I agree to do it. That's where the manipulation can happen.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Sarah Edmondson: And I think that that happened a lot to people who were closer to Keith under the premise of, we agree in this curriculum that we have limiting beliefs and we have things about ourselves that are not true based on our early childhood belief system. Which I still believe. I still believe that there's things that we believe about ourselves that are not true.

So if you believe that and you go into a system where you're in a rank and people above you [00:47:00] know better and they can see those beliefs in a way that you can't because they're more evolved on this system that you've agreed to, that's supposed to be measurable.

They can always say, what if it doesn't mean that? Or, if I wanna express something that I'm upset about, they can always say, you seem reactive. Go get an EM. Or go journal on that. Or go sit with that. But cuz you're not, you can't be upset cuz that points to, they call it a disintegration, which is another way of saying there's something wrong with your thinking.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah. And really the subtext is you're not being compliant enough.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Any sort of reactivity, which is just normal human reactivity, having a feeling about something is sort of reframed that way.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. I appreciate Nippy, you said people who have buy-in that, that phrase really jumped out at me. I want you to share a little bit about the Stripe Path and these levels that Sarah, you just, you just mentioned this idea that people who are further ahead. And in the, I should say in the organization I was in, there are [00:48:00] literally belt levels like the martial arts. I mean, it's so similar.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: To NXIVM. It is in the way that it's set up. And I always thought the people who were ahead of me on the path, they knew they had more information than I did, and it was all kept really hush hush, like what was in each training. So, if you could tell us what the stripe path is and then just how it functioned.

Sarah Edmondson: So with everything in NXIVM there's what we were told something was, and then what it actually is. And what we were told it was, is it was a martial arts system of growth. And that there was nothing else in introspection field, in therapy or personal development that had any measurability. So people could say, oh, I'm happier. I'm achieving my goals. But how do you know? How do you measure it? And so we believed that we had the first introspective science that was measurable. Made it a science. It was measurable, duplicatable, verifiable. And it was measured by these sashes, just like in martial arts that you wore around your neck that everybody hated when they first got there. And then if you stayed, you'd grow to [00:49:00] love. Uh, I know, I sure did.

And you start with a white, you're a student. Then you become coach, which is yellow. Orange, which is Proctor. Green, senior Proctor. Blue, counselor. Purple, senior counselor. And there were more after that, but nobody ever reached those levels. And you had to do certain things to get to the next rank that measured three things, your ability to recruit, how many classes you taken, and then your personal development, your own personal growth.

So the first two things were actually very measurable, but the third thing was not measurable. So I could set a goal, like I wanna be less controlling or I wanna not react to the dishes and things like that, and think that I was working through it, but my coach or the upper ranks could say, no, you're still being controlling.

Even to be like, oh, I've worked through this issue. I feel so much more relaxed. I think I'm ready for my next stripe or my next sash. And then being like, well, even, even the fact that you just asked for it means you're trying to control things. So no, you're not ready.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Meanwhile, a lot of the people that outranked you, [00:50:00] you would run laps around out in the real world, in any other profession, or in any other job, or anything like that, and, and actually achieve more than the external world than within the organization. So there's always that caveat.

Sarah Edmondson: Yes, thank you. And that is something that I start to see is that like people were telling me above me that I hadn't worked through X, Y, and Z. And I'm looking at them, internally, cause you'd never say this cuz it would be sacrilegious.

You know, they're not, they haven't worked through those issues. Like, how could she be telling me this when she's clearly got, like, for example, an eating disorder.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And they can't pay their rent.

Sarah Edmondson: Like this was a supposed to be a success program.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right.

Sarah Edmondson: And they're telling me to leave Vancouver where I'm so successful to go live in Albany. So I like, because I'm being too materialistic. I'm like, wait a second, I thought this was a success program. I'm achieving my goals and now I'm being too

materialistic. Like, these are the kind of things that started to not make sense towards the end. But,

Candice Schutter: yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: Um, I think that what we know now, and this is a chapter in [00:51:00] my book, is, and I'm sure you've experienced this with the ranking system in your organization, is that the ranks are there as a motivation, to keep paying money, to keep going, to stay in, to keep working on yourself.

And Keith even told me it's the illusion of hope. And this is the same thing with MLMs, like getting to Diamond, getting to Sapphire, getting to gold, bronze, whatever the next thing is, you need to have that motivation to sell more, to be more, to create more. Mostly so the company has fresh blood.

Keith's words, not mine.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Yeah. And then they keep adding levels.

Sarah Edmondson: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: Because it feeds the bottom line.

Sarah Edmondson: Yes.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: Well the, the thing that they keep changing the most, and this is the same with Scientology, is that they kept changing the standards. So at one point I did qualify to be an EM practitioner, which is when you can make money as in doing EMs. And then I got to that level and then they sent everybody back to [00:52:00] level one, and I never passed level two again. I got to level five the first time, and then everybody went back, and I was so mad.

I was so mad.

Candice Schutter: I'm gonna jump on that, the anger piece.

So there's this moral injury that occurs and there's sort of waking up to that and reckoning with that. And Nippy, you said, it was either on a podcast or somewhere, you said, "if this isn't true, then what's real?" Like having that,

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: That moment where the ground that you were standing on just falls out from under you. There's sort of navigating that moral injury and all the emotions that come from that. We already spoke about shame a little bit.

I'm curious, like what role did anger play in this journey of waking up, of taking down NXIVM and in your recovery? Like, what's been your experience around how to navigate the anger and, what, what use you can make of it?

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: You know, I mean, the initial anger, I'll go through my process and what I felt like [00:53:00] anger, how the anger was for me during the whole thing.

This man felt like he could do something to my wife physically in a very private area. Right? And this is a guy that I knew. I didn't know him well. I met with him when we went to Albany. We didn't spend a whole lot of time together.

I can't imagine anyone else that I know doing anything like that. And if they did, sorry, but I would've showed up at their apartment or house and I would've dragged them out and I would've dragged them down the stairs and I would've beat the fucking shit out of 'em. That's just me being honest with my primal instincts and that's what I'd do.

And there's a lot of my friends that know me, like from my past that I've met with and like I played sports with and was competitive with, and they were like, dude, how did you not, I was like. How did you not, like, like I know you and I'm like, I know.

And ultimately what the decision was. And I told Sarah [00:54:00] this months after I went up and did what was documented in the documentary of yelling at Lauren and Jim and a few other people that we strategically did. But there was a moment where I was gonna go rogue.

And just to set the scene, where he plays volleyball is at like the sports barn. And right in the sports barn is a batting cage for baseball players. And there's like three of them and there's bats just laying out.

Candice Schutter: Oh God.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: In this thing. And I thought, I'm gonna go up there, I'm gonna grab one of those bats and I'm gonna go to volleyball. And there was a moment where like we had a whole plan set and then I was literally like in the choice point of like, I'm gonna fucking do this. This dude can't get away with this. And like I caught an image of myself in the reflection of the window. And like, I snap myself out of it.

Cuz ultimately, if I get in trouble, my wife and [00:55:00] child who need me right now don't have me. I'm in jail or whatever. Whatever happens. You start handling your problems with violence, you put yourself in a totally different category of culture and society that I wasn't interested in being a part of.

And I knew, and I bet large, that when this thing's resolved and all the cards are on the table, right, this guy's in trouble. This can't exist. Like, whatever you can say that my wife did and

the narrative that they were gonna say that she did it on her own. And she's an adult, a consenting adult. Like, if it came out that that's how it was gonna be, I still knew where he lived. I still have the option to go do it. And I just didn't want to handle my problems with violence for all those reasons I cited.

And also like, I was probably gonna have to hit a couple friends on the way out the door.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And I didn't feel like, I didn't feel like doing that [00:56:00] either. And you know, that's not how I was raised. And I didn't wanna be a part of that demographic of society. And ultimately, you know, it was the right decision.

And when I think about it, I still want to beat his ass.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: You know, I still have that primal impulse, that itch to scratch of, I didn't get to defend my wife and my family. And he's, he's over there still playing the card of he's this moral person who's misunderstood and all that, but he's doing it in jail where he belongs.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And he's in 23 outta 24 hours of the day in his special housing unit. He doesn't get sunlight, but one hour a day and he's right where he belongs, and I think a lot of that is because I didn't go do that.

Candice Schutter: Right. Right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: So, universe is always right, you know.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. It gets it eventually, right? If you're just patient enough. Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah, it does. Well, there's a great quote my dad, my dad's an architect, and there's a famous architect called Le [00:57:00] Corbusier. My dad's quote that he says is, "life is always right."

So I kind of, I keep that in mind.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: So, you know, in terms of anger, you know, anger was one of the many emotions that I was handling at the time.

Candice Schutter: Sarah, when I think about anger, I think about the moment when you looked in the mirror and realized that it was Keith's initials on your body, which is not what you had agreed to by any means. I think about a moment like that and I think about the way that, you know, and I, I don't mean to like generalize in terms of gender, but like, I know as a woman I tend to internalize my anger more than externalize it. More than wanna lash out and cause harm to people. And sometimes the thing that I need to do is, is move that energy out through action. And I feel like you, you did that.

So tell us how, how that was for you, like feeling all of those feelings and how you channeled it into such constructive behavior.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah, I appreciate that you say that. Sometimes I didn't feel [00:58:00] so constructive. Um, I don't even know. I don't really remember, to be honest, that particular moment. What it, the, the moment that I remember the most was just before that when I spoke, frankly, with Mark Vicente and he shared with me what he knew, which was that women were being given assignments to have sex with Keith. And I knew about the group, but I didn't know about the sex component, and he didn't know about the branding.

So basically he told me what he knew and I told him what I knew. And, and also he shared his opinion, which is that Keith is a sociopath and a conman. And it just made everything make sense. All the things that never made sense over the years. And that in and of itself wasn't even, I don't even remember feeling angry right then.

I just remember feeling like the rug got ripped out from underneath me. Anger came out at different times. And inappropriate times. Like, I remember when there was one moment when my mother was trying to console me and she was trying to just like, put her arms around me, and I just like, was so, I just, it was a moment where I, [00:59:00] I needed space and I just wanted to be left alone, and I took it out on her.

That's something that I still have to, I feel like I haven't quite fixed with her yet because I just didn't know, like my boundaries had been so crossed, you know?

Um, or just like, you know, lashing out at Nippy or my family, like,

Candice Schutter: mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: Like, there's moments when Troy, my eldest will like, jump on me to play. And if it surprises me, I get it really angry. And that's just, that's like a leftover, it's like a PTSD.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: Response. So yeah, I feel like I've, I channeled it initially with being an advocate, with going public with gathering everybody. And, you know, in our early days, we got everyone together and got people to talk and share and express. And that was really healing.

And, you know, using that anger to take action, calling various [01:00:00] organizations in Albany, the authorities, the local health board to let them know that there was over capacity at their local clubhouse, anything we could do to stir shit up. Not just sitting back.

And a lot of people did just sit back. A lot of people woke up and thought, well, that was shitty. I better move on with my life. And I, I couldn't do that. I, you know, partly for all the reasons we've talked about before. Because we'd been such advocates. Um, and I don't really feel angry anymore.

Actually, no, that's not true. I get angry when I see my former friends shit talking, shit, talking me. Actually, I don't know if it's anger. It's more just like irritate, maybe it is anger. It's like irritation. It's like,

Candice Schutter: mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: And sadness too, cuz I want them to wake up.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, for sure.

Sarah Edmondson: Yep.

Candice Schutter: It sort of circles to my final question for you [01:01:00] two.

There's a moment in The Vow Season 2 where Nancy Salzman says, "17,000 people lives were changed and made better by this. Where are they?"

And that moment was like a record scratch for me, in so many ways.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right?

Candice Schutter: Um, because I think about the people who are still involved in the Org, who, cuz there's a lot of people, quite honestly, on the fringes of the movement that are benefiting.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: And then there's all these people in the center and that center keeps growing and growing and growing exponentially who are being harmed. What would you say to the people who are saying, well there's so many people who are being helped by this, though.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: It's a straw man's argument because you can help people and abuse people at the same time. Right? Like, Hitler built the youth camps. He built the Audubon. He got Germany out of the economy. That's how he

Sarah Edmondson: That's kan, Kanye's thing right now, [01:02:00] right?

Candice Schutter: Is it? God.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: No, but that's how he got power. He had to give them something good in order to get people in a position believing him so that, that he could then abuse them and accelerate his own clandestine agenda. So you can say, yes, that's true. Some people are being helped, but that's how the abuser gets power. They don't do it by abusing you right away.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right?

Sarah Edmondson: It's like the Autobon was Hitler love bombing people. It's like I'm gonna do good things for you.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Yeah. No, I mean, well, he promised them. He promised them.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: He, he identified a perpetrator. Made them the problems of Germany. And then he promised to get them out of the economy and get rid of the perpetrator.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: It's, it's an age old equation. You see it actually going right now in our political realms. Political extremes. Like, you know, it's, it's the whole thing's abusive. Go on Twitter.

Everyone's abusing each other, it's not, you know, those things can coexist. [01:03:00] And it doesn't necessarily mean if the person's helping people, he's an abuser. He might have a bad day. But if it's, if it's coming out decades and the accusations are identical.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Over time, there's a pattern there that cannot be ignored. And if you're choosing to ignore it, you're gonna deal with the consequences of that. And that's, you know, the universe responds to who you are, not who you pretend who you are.

You know, and that's what's going on with those loyalists. You know, no one's buying it and all they're doing is going to echo chambers and they're aligning themselves with alt-right stuff. Who, who buy into the no victim mentality. And they lie when they tell the story. They don't tell the whole thing. They lie to the people interviewing them and show them the good stuff. You can show people the good stuff. It doesn't mean someone's not abusing you.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: There's a moment in my book that, um, was one of the cracks in my personal, the dam that eventually broke. It didn't break then, but it was when I was sitting down with somebody who, it was one of my best friend's husband who didn't like that she was taking courses cuz he'd gone [01:04:00] online and I thought he had just, you know, believed the media campaign, the smear campaign.

So I was, I sat down with him and I, and he showed me all these things that had been said about NXIVM over the years. All these terrible things. And a lot of it I hadn't read because we'd been taught not to. And that would change our "internal representation" of Keith. And that would be dishonorable and that would be violent, and that's what the media seeks to do.

So you know, when he was sharing these things, I'd heard about some of them and I basically said, no, Pepe, that's all a smear campaign. That's a smear campaign. And you know, he said to me, that's not... Sarah, do you know that's not how the media works? They can't make stuff up entirely. I mean, they can embellish and they can slant and things like that, but like, what if just 10% of what's being said here is true? How would you feel about that? And that was one thing he said.

And then I tried to show him the Tourette's video, which you've seen in The Vow.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: And the film that had been made. And I thought this was gonna change everything cuz it would prove how incredible we are and how it works and blah, blah, blah.

And he wouldn't even watch the trailer. He shut my computer and I said, see, you're not willing to look at how good [01:05:00] this is. He's like, I believe you that there's good. You are not willing to look at the bad.

Candice Schutter: Mm.

Sarah Edmondson: And that really stuck with me. And I think that when you look at anyone in your case and ours, people saying, but look at all the good. Look at all the good. Of course there's good.

There has to be honey on the outside of the rotten apple for people to come and do things in this group, there has to be something of value.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: It doesn't negate the bad.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Sarah Edmondson: And I, I know there's a lot of people struggling with a lot of organizations specifically, like Kundalini. People who've practiced for many, many years a yoga practice, finding out that the leadership was corrupt and, you know, abusing all sorts of people and children and heinous things.

And they're like, well, but like I love my Kundalini practice. I'm not, I don't bow down to that guy anymore, and I think he needs to be in jail. But what do I do with my practice?

And this is something that we all have to figure out for ourselves. I know, I know for us, and not everyone post-NXIVM agrees, a lot of people did throw the baby out with the bathwater.

But we have spent a lot of [01:06:00] time looking at what tenets were helpful and where they came from originally. Like, Keith literally had people go to like spiritual bookstores and highlight things and make curriculum out of it.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Sarah Edmondson: It's literally plagiarized. We just have to find the sources.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: There's another thing to consider too about willful ignorance. And I'll share a story.

I read a book probably 15, 16 years ago called Stalin's Follies. I think it was this book or something, I read about Stalin for like solid few months there.

In 1990 or 1991, there was a survey done to the Russian people and 52% of the Russian populace still looked at Stalin favorably. And this is a guy whose body count was close to 48, 58 million people. Right?

So there's something to be said about people's unwillingness to consider who they've deified.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: As someone who can be a perpetrator. And it's [01:07:00] willful in a lot of ways. You can show them the gulags, you can show them the body count, and they'll just go, yeah, but.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And that's Stalin. He's like, you know, he's top two villains in human history. So if that can still exist in a country that he abused consciously, you know, you can only imagine if your yoga practice guy who doesn't have that body count and maybe has a couple rumors going around, can get away with it.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

And I don't know if you know this, the parallel with the yoga community is perfect cuz this is a mind body fitness company. So it's just ding, ding, ding all around.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: So,

Sarah Edmondson: And it's still going, right? Like it's still teaching classes and.

Candice Schutter: It's, it's still going. Yeah. There's tens of thousands of students around the world. There's probably, I wanna guess 2,500 teachers, 50 trainers. It's going strong. Yeah.

And they, you know, they are aware of the podcast and, uh, reached out to us. We aren't [01:08:00] communicating. We, I say we cuz a colleague of mine came onto the podcast to tell her story with me.

Yeah, it's still going strong. And, this question, and I was asking selfishly more than anything, cuz the idea of naming the company and figuring out how and when to do that, it helps me a lot because there's a lot of people that are really gonna be like, how could you destroy this wonderful thing?

And I'm not trying to destroy anything. I want accountability, right.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: That's it.

Candice Schutter: That's it.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: That's it.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: You're stopping abuse.

Candice Schutter: Exactly.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: And, you know, a couple people gave us shit, and I said, you're not gonna tell me how I'm gonna protect my family, number one. And number two, you're not gonna tell me how I'm gonna hold this guy accountable. So your feedback, you can take it

and shove it up your ass was really in the subtext. No, it is. It doesn't, you don't get to tell me how to hold people account. I'm doing the right thing.

Candice Schutter: Exactly.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: You're afraid.

Sarah Edmondson: And I bet, Candice, you in that regime, you had to take [01:09:00] all feedback. Am I right?

Candice Schutter: Oh, a hundred percent.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: A hundred percent.

Sarah Edmondson: And that you can't get defensive.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Sarah Edmondson: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: It was always an issue of personal power. That was the phrase that was thrown around, like if you're not able to suffer abuse, you don't have enough personal power. Or if you question authority, then they gaslight you with all the tools to show you how it's something that you're not seeing clearly. And, um, yeah. So I mean, the whole, the whole framework is that, and talking with you is really helping me to understand and see how I am doing these same things to myself.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Right.

Sarah Edmondson: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: And keeping me from taking certain kinds of actions and being brave with my life and my story.

Sarah Edmondson: You know, strength in numbers is what we've always said. You know, the more people that can, one person's easy to discredit.

Keep it up. Don't give up. You have allies in us. And I'm so glad you've connected with I got out because lots of resources there and you'll feel less alone for sure.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. I appreciate it. Thank you.

Anthony 'Nippy' Ames: Thank you, Candice.

Sarah Edmondson: Keep in [01:10:00] touch.

Candice Schutter: Okay. Take care.

Sarah Edmondson: Bye.

Candice Schutter: Well, that was a real treat.

Mad love to Sarah and Nippy for being so generous with their time and so honest about their experiences. I could've spent a day talking with these two, and still we would've hardly scratched the surface.

Lucky for you, there's a lot more for you to explore when it comes to their work. See the show notes for links to the A Little Bit Culty podcast, Sarah's book, and Season 1 of The Vow. You can also follow them and A Little Bit Culty on Instagram. All the links are in the show notes.

I'll be back next week, and Tracy Stamper will be joining me for a special interview with a new guest. It's a two-parter and you won't wanna miss it. So I'll see you then. And be sure to rate, review, and subscribe to the podcast in the meantime.

Until next time. Thanks for listening.

Caio.

[01:11:00]