

**Candice Schutter:** Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse and the continuation of the 'cult'ure series.

I'm back after a month long break with a whole new lineup of guests, and today I'm kicking things off with a conversation that turned out to be one of my favorites in this series.

I'll share it with you shortly, but first a brief backstory.

As some of you may remember, the 'cult'ure series came about somewhat unexpectedly. I'd been hosting this podcast for just about a year when I decided to take a long break. I began working with a therapist, trying to sort out why I felt so muzzled and bound in my expression. And it became immediately apparent in our work together that so much of why I felt stifled had to do with some spiritual wounds that I had never grappled with. Moral injuries that I'd experienced while working in new age wellness circles.

I'm not gonna go into the particulars of our work together, but just to say that a huge part of my healing process was to finally speak the truth out loud. And as a writer and creative, it made perfect sense to me that I would eventually share my story publicly on the podcast.

And so I spent about three months using my old journals as a guide, I bared my soul onto the page and eventually into the ethers, carefully and conscientiously sharing about patterns of abuse that I'd never before spoken publicly about.

The creation of episode 33 was a watershed moment for me.

Even so, after I hit publish, well, let's just say I was a bit of a live wire. In the week that followed, I kept myself busy working on new material. But at night when I'd lie in bed, terrorizing questions would run tirelessly through my head.

Is it safe to share my story? And what will be the real cost of breaking this code of silence? Will I be judged? Condemned? Gaslit? Sued?

Eventually I would fall asleep, waking up the next morning at peace again, knowing deep down that whatever happened, I'd done the right thing. Even with the unknown looming large, I felt lighter inside. My story lived outside of my body, which meant it no longer possessed me.

That sounds pretty great, doesn't it?

Well, I gotta tell you, it was uncomfortable. Freedom can be pretty fucking terrifying when all you've ever known is compliance. I'd spent most of my life going along in order to get along. Being a good girl, the perfect protege, and an ideal candidate for promotion through the ranks.

Stepping outta bounds was scary as fuck, and it wasn't just that it was social suicide in the new age circles that I had frequented. It had opened me up to one of my greatest fears. Criticism.

A couple of months prior to the series launch, a former colleague and longtime subscriber to my newsletter got wind of my plans to share intimately about my time working at the Org, the new age fitness company where we'd both spent years in service to the company's mission and its leaders. When she heard another colleague and I talking critically about Org leadership, she sent me a series of discouraging emails.

None of us are innocent, she insisted. And who was I to speak ill of our former mentors? Everyone was just doing their best at the time. We're all imperfectly human. Forgiveness is the only way forward.

Forgiveness. Love and light. Don't be a victim.

I didn't need her to recite aloud all the spiritual refrains and thought terminating cliches that I'd learned over the years. They'd already carved a well worn path in my mind.

And I should say that at first, many of these teachings had been helpful. But in time painting in broad brush strokes had just made me more silently complicit. Morally complacent. Boundaryless and weak in the face of injustice.

To be honest, I spent a few days somewhat tormented by her words. But despite these misgivings, I carried on with the project.

For a variety of reasons, which included self-preservation, I had decided to use aliases while sharing my stories. I edited each word carefully, and I'd spoken candidly and rather diplomatically about the abuse I'd suffered, as well as the way in which these dynamics extended far outside of the Org.

I'd been highly visible when I was working for that company, and I was still connected to many of my colleagues on social media. So I knew without a doubt that, aliases aside, those familiar with the practice would immediately recognize who and what I was talking about, were they to give the episode a listen. And so a few days after #33 dropped into the ethers, I scrolled through the archives of my iPhoto app in search of an image that would accompany my next post.

I settled on a photo that was rather telling. One glimpse would make it crystal clear who exactly my cautionary tales were outing. And I was in luck because this was a photo that I knew the company had no rights to. My own father had taken it during one of his visits to Portland years earlier, not long after I had taken over management at the studio.

The photo is of me standing in the doorway of the Org's internationally recognized training headquarters. It's such a bittersweet image because I recall how proud my dad and I had both been of me at the time. For years I'd been struggling to find my place in the world, and here I

was living my dream, beaming from ear to ear having finally placed my life in service to something larger than me.

Or so I thought.

I dragged the photo into my Instagram feed, and then puzzled for a moment around what I might say in the caption. A memory immediately came to mind, and I started typing.

"When I was 10 years old, we lived in Southern California. The summer days were long and hot, and I refused to wear shoes. I'd run through the asphalt roads of our trailer park on leather -skinned feet. After more than one trip to the doctor, my mother finally insisted that I start wearing my jellies while playing outside.

Exasperated, I eventually gave in, but not before defiantly announcing, 'fine, but you just wait. One day I will have a job where I don't have to wear shoes.'

I won that argument in 2003 when I started managing a holistic fitness studio in downtown Portland. My Bohemian spirit was right at home. I felt like I'd arrived.

But it wasn't the modern day utopia I imagined it would be. Turns out the culture of the new age wellness industry is just a shined up, laundered version of patriarchal norms. In episode 33, I share the story of that time and how I separated from said organization and eventually woke up from the trance of spiritual hierarchies and new age prosperity gospel. Give it a listen if you like."

After some last minute edits, I added some hashtags and made sure it was set to populate over on Facebook where I knew Org leaders and affiliates would see it. Then at the last minute before hitting the share button, I decided to add one more hashtag.

At this point, I'd been a regular listener of A Little Bit Culty, a podcast hosted by Sarah Edmondson and Nippy Ames. See episode 43 for my chat with them. On their platform, they spoke quite a bit about the # igotout movement.

Even so I'd been feeling pretty apprehensive about using the hashtag myself. Despite the undeniable work I was doing in therapy and the mountains of research that had given language to my experience, I was still very much in denial that what I was going through constituted cult recovery.

Nevertheless, I typed #igotout at the end of my post.

Three days later, and on my 47th birthday nonetheless, igotout reposted my image and my words on their own Instagram feed.

Now let me be clear, social media is not generally the place that I go to for validation and social reassurance. Or at least I try like hell not to.

But this was different. It was not your everyday repost. This was me being seen and validated by a community of cult survivors. It was as if a whole group of individuals were communicating to me what I needed to hear most of all.

I see you. I believe you. And your story matters.

I cannot possibly express how significant this was to me during a very isolating and vulnerable time.

Now, when this happened, I had no clue who the humans were behind it all. And it never even occurred to me to search for an answer. Instead, I started reading through other igotout posts, and I discovered tens of thousands of shares, including stories from survivors of abusive relationships, MLMs, polygamy, spiritual and sexual abuse, conspiracy theories, the list goes on. You name it, it was represented. And many of these stories were devastatingly similar.

A few months later, I cracked open a new book entitled *An Everyday Cult*. I was further validated by the stories that were shared within its pages, so I decided to dig a bit deeper. And as it turned out, Gerette Buglion, the memoir's author, is also a co-founder of the igotout movement.

I attended a couple of Gerette's Writing to Reckon events on Zoom, where she hosts small group writing sessions for cult survivors. Gerette is effortlessly loving and lovable, warm and welcoming in her presence. While attending the sessions that she facilitated, I learned a ton and I discovered a community of people who understood and could relate to so much of what I'd been through.

I invited Gerette to be a guest on the podcast, and I was absolutely thrilled when she informed me that Lisa was interested in joining us. Lisa and Gerette co-founded igotout together. And Lisa has been largely anonymous in her advocacy; nevertheless, working nonstop behind the scenes, curating content to support the movement's remarkable online presence.

Lisa and I had the opportunity to speak via Zoom prior to this chat that I'm about to share with you, and I was immediately struck by her kindness, her generous spirit, and the passion she has around giving others a platform on which to share their stories along with resources that support healing and recovery.

Honestly, I fell in love with both of these humans right away, and soon enough you're gonna understand why.

igotout.org serves as a platform for the voices of the isolated, silenced, and invisible, and as a hub and amplifier for ex-cult related advocacy. The hashtag #igotout connects survivors of all kinds of power over abuse and creates a web of support and access to resources for healing and community.

Lisa is an anonymous cult survivor and activist who co-founded igotout.org with the intention of creating a space for victims of high control environments to safely share their stories in

whatever way best supports their healing. Lisa co-manages communications and is the main point of contact for messaging on the igotout social media platforms. She is also a generator of community building initiatives within the #igotout space.

Gerette Buglion is a co-founder and spokesperson for the #igotout movement. She co-manages day-to-day operations and communications while also providing her expertise in cult recovery and education. Gerette is creator and facilitator of Writing to Reckon. She offers free classes for people to write their #igotout statements in a supportive environment. Her educational memoir *An Everyday Cult* was published in May 2021. Gerette is dedicated to helping others navigate, heal from, and avoid the complex power over dynamics involved in coercive control.

My conversation with Lisa and Gerette was one of the most organic and easy flowing conversations that I've ever had on the podcast. We spent nearly three hours together, and we could have easily spoken for three more. Needless to say, I've trimmed it down a bit and our convo's gonna roll out in two parts.

In this first episode, Lisa and Gerette share the story of igotout's conception, as well as about the importance of anonymous activism. They each give us a peek into their personal stories, taking turns sharing intimately about what they've learned as cult survivors and as leaders in anti-cult advocacy. The three of us chat like longtime friends about all sorts of topics including boundaries, grief, and how growing up in the hippie movement primed Lisa for entry into a cult at age 19.

Grab yourself a cup of tea or pop in your earbuds for a walk outside because you're in for a real treat today.

Content warning. This episode includes reference to undue influence, coercion, and sexual abuse. It may be triggering to cult survivors or to anyone who has experienced in high demand groups or emotionally coercive relationships. Please listen with care.

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

**Candice Schutter:** Hey, good morning.

**Gerette Buglion:** Good morning.

**Lisa:** Hi.

**Candice Schutter:** This is so exciting.

**Gerette Buglion:** Yay.

**Candice Schutter:** I have been looking forward to this for a while now. And to have both of you here on my screen is pretty, pretty thrilling and very cool.

And I've been touched by the conversations that I had with each of you in a really unique way. And Gerette, I've been a participant in your Writing To Reckon events, which is really a beautiful, transformative thing that we'll share more about a little bit later.

So I just can't thank you enough for showing up here with me today.

**Gerette Buglion:** Such an honor.

**Lisa:** Super excited about it.

**Gerette Buglion:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** I've

been following, or you know, when you reached out to us to be on the podcast, the first episode I listened to was the one with Sarah and Nippy, cuz that's about when I plugged in. And then after that and the mention of the whole series, I went back to the beginning and listened to all of 'em. I'm all caught up. So, um.

**Candice Schutter:** it's Amazing.

**Lisa:** In

preparation for this conversation, I took a bunch of notes. I'm working off of a page so that if I get flustered, I can go back and get centered again with the words.

Um, but there's so many threads in what you've been doing in this series that I felt like needed to be connected. And it's what's really cool about what you're doing is, and you know, in particular, this series seems to be like a real, like in real time discovery process. And it's, it's so amazing to plug into it. There's like a

point in time when people are really waking up and grappling with what they were a part of. And something that's captured in that journey. If it's, if it can happen in real time, it really sets the

stage and the, and a pathway for other people to, you know, go on that journey with you, but also start asking themselves questions.

And so, I know for me, plugging into your process, I just wanna come with more questions and connect some dots, but then open up more questions. Feel exciting.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Thank you for that. And we are what, like four minutes into this and I'm already tearing up. I was,

**Gerette Buglion:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** I really. It means a lot hearing you say that, especially coming from you and the two of you and the movement that you've created. And I really cannot stress enough how supported I feel because of what you've created and the way that it's given me courage to have this process out loud in front of people. You know, it started with me just wanting to tell an abbreviated version of my story and then all these resources that you and, and so many other folks in the cult recovery community have provided, opened things up so wide.

And I, and I had other folks that I wanted to talk to and I thought, what if we just do this process out loud? And I appreciate you underscoring that. Cause I feel like it's the perfect lead in to what igotout's purpose is and why we're here today.

**Gerette Buglion:** What's coming up for me in terms of tuning into the deeper pulse and also having my own pulse on the, the cult recovery space in kind of the big world as well as obviously through igotout, but also through my personal work. My sense, Candice, is that there is something that The Deeper Pulse is bringing, that your podcast is bringing to the conversation that is really important. And I think perhaps it's part of this, this like next layer of what's needed.

And I love the title of your podcast,

the Deeper Pulse, you know. It's,

um, and, and I

think that's part of it. It's like, it's one thing for a whole lot of us in the world today, and I mean a whole hell of a lot of us in the world today are recognizing what cultic abuse is. We're recognizing what undue influence and coercive control actually are and how it's impacted all of us. And so it's, like I said, it's like one thing for us to recognize it. And it's a whole nother thing for us to reckon with it, which is what's needed. That's what we need to

be doing in order to be the kinds of human beings that we want to usher into the world today.

I, I'm a grandmother now, and it does change reality like to have a 19 month old baby whose life is unfolding. Like what, what is the world that this beautiful being is inheriting and how can we

bring our understanding as people who have been impacted by undue influence and coercion, how can we bring that forward into the wider world and bring a, bring a deeper pulse, a deeper beat into the conversation?

So I am just thrilled to be here in relationship with you two beautiful women. Thank you so much for doing this.

**Candice Schutter:** Thank you, Gerette. I love that distinction between recognizing and reckoning with. That is so beautifully, beautifully stated. And I definitely feel like these larger conversations around not just what is a cult, that thing over there, but like what puts the cult in culture and, you know, Gerette specifically your book *An Everyday Cult* was again, yet another permission slip for me to say. Oh yes, an everyday cult. That's language that I recognize. Because I didn't see my story anywhere. I just didn't see it reflected in anything that I saw. And so what you just articulated really underscores, I think, sort of this premise in your book and how so many of us, the majority of us who are involved, I would say in cultic indoctrination are in quote unquote everyday cults.

And we do have to reckon with the fact that it doesn't look like this sensationalized image that we've been fed over time. And we have to have difficult conversations because often there's a lot of good right next to some really effed up stuff. It's all happening simultaneously. Yeah. So thank you for, for that reflection and, and for the work that you're doing as well.

**Gerette Buglion:** It's an honor.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**Gerette Buglion:** Total honor.

**Candice Schutter:** This is gonna I good.

**Lisa:** I know.

**Candice Schutter:** I'm so excited.

**Lisa:** I'm on the edge my seat.

**Candice Schutter:** I, I know.

**Gerette Buglion:** What

next?

Where do we go next? Oh my gosh.

**Lisa:** Oh. Well I, I'm gonna put a, I'm gonna plug a little thread that we can pick up later. But I too was in an everyday cult, like as in one that wasn't on the radar and hasn't had publicity and doesn't, you know, mine was tiny. It didn't have the reach of some of these others that we hear about.

But I think there is what I, I like to refer to as a life cycle of a cult. And depending on how deep the leadership goes and how much power goes to their head, that determines the damage and the reach of the destruction.



And, you know, I wanna get into that later. But, yeah, we hear about the ones that go really bad. But

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** the thread throughout it all are the dynamics, means control, the mechanisms. And you know, as, as you're exploring your journey, you can see the mechanisms that were in place in your group that just express themselves, you know, in similar ways.

But I don't know the, there's a turning point I think, for some, where the power goes to their head and they get sloppy, and that's when we get hear about 'em. And that's when we get to say, that's that other group. I would never do anything like that. That's not me.

**Gerette Buglion:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Right. And I would say as quote unquote followers, as people who are involved in the cult, I think that this, like narcissistic power players aside, these conversations are so important to understand what's happening internally. Like what are the psychic forces that I don't even see that are operating, like disorganized detachment and how love bombing works and all these things. Like if I have a language, then I understand when I have that knot in my gut. Something doesn't feel quite right. Yet all the language on the outside lines up, per the dogma. What is that exactly? And that's been so pivotal and key for me.

And I think if we continue to support the work of igotout and, and people sharing their stories, then there's just so many relatable examples to say, oh, I know what that feeling is, even though the narrative's totally different. I've been there. I've surrendered my personal power and abandoned myself per that feeling. That's what that is. Oh! I wasn't crazy. Right. It's huge. I mean it's, I can't stress enough why it's so important and why I keep featuring stories. You know, cuz they're, they're what illustrate and that's why I love what you're doing so much. I really think that that's how we humans learn is through story and through narrative that we find those common threads. The more specific it is, the more universal it is somehow.

**Gerette Buglion:** Exactly. The stories do the healing. You know, like our individual, highly specific, like the details of our own experience when they're expressed in whatever way, you know, mostly, of course, I am mostly around the written word, but our stories get to be expressed in whatever way works for any individual.

You know, be it through music, be it through visual art, be it through performance art, what, whatever it is. However, the story is told, that does the education and that provides like a template, like an environment where healing can actually take place in both the listener or the receiver of the story, as well as very much that process, that integrative process of creating an expression, that's also such a healing.

**Lisa:** And that external expression, that putting what's on the inside into a tangible, physical form that can be viewed and seen by other people. That process is, there's some kind of alchemical thing that happens inside a survivor when you can do that. When you can, you

know, start to speak, start to express in some way, cuz not, not ex, the, the lack of expression is what being in a cult is all about.

**Gerette Buglion:** Right.

**Lisa:** Right?

**Candice Schutter:** Yes.

That's the compression, the control, the bounds And just the little bit of it coming out allows for more of yourself to come forward. You get to see who you are as you bring that out into the world.

**Gerette Buglion:** Which is why the model, Lisa, that you have created for anonymous activism. Anonymous telling of one's story is critically important. Because it's one thing for someone to tell their story who has just very little potential impact. And it's a whole nother thing, you know, to be really public.

Um, and what I mean by impact, I mean like, where it may or may not be safe to tell one's stories. Our stories of coercion are by nature, there's abuse taking place and there's a power differential. And wherever there's a power differential, there's the potential for further harm in one way or another, you know, unless the individual truly feels safe.

So it is one of the things that we do really try to underscore in the telling of a #igotout statement is just to make sure that you're at a point where you feel safe sharing your story. And if, if it's not safe for you to do so, you don't have to stay quiet. There are other ways that you can speak.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**Gerette Buglion:** Thanks in large part to Lisa's modeling.

**Lisa:** Well, I wasn't the first person to ever do this, but.

**Gerette Buglion:** Yes. That's true.

**Lisa:** It it has been my issue of, uh, you know, my champion.

**Gerette Buglion:** Yes.

**Lisa:** My championing point.

I think one of the things that we kind of wrestled with in the very beginning of this project is, I mean, that question, what is igotout.

When I decided to enter into this space and got the domain, igotout.org, my vision was to create the resource that I would've needed on my exit. A few weeks into my process of, playing with this, I met Gerette. Gerette was working on a concept of a hashtag movement. And it just so happened that our words were the same.

#igotout and igotout.org.

was synchronistic.

And, you know, in the process, one of the things that shifted for me was that we put all of our effort into promoting a hashtag movement. And igotout.org was, yes about providing, you know, some resources, some books. We've got books. We've got podcasts. We've got films that are listed on the website so people can kind of, you know, make a start into some education.

But it also became about defining the hashtag. In the early days of our conversations, mark Laxer, who was part of this process was pretty adamant to define it before somebody defines it for you. And so I got out, the website became a thing that was, you know, a platform for people that have their stories on the website. Stories page gets more hits than any other page on the website, cuz everybody wants to read these personal accounts.

But it was about the hashtag movement and that's where the focus of our work and our entrance into the cult recovery space on social media was about moving this hashtag and allowing this hashtag to connect all survivors of undue influence and power over abuse, to connect our stories. Because what we observed, as we were coming into the space is that survivors were often siloed into their own group. You know, there was ex JWs for instance, they had a community that were focused on recovering from Jehovah's Witnesses, or there were, you know, all these little Facebook groups that were specific to the groups that people left.

But there is a key element that was missing, which was the cross pollination of people's stories and being able to recognize their own story in somebody else's. Which, if you're from an everyday cult, and there's not a support group for the people that left your group because it's too small and you don't really know what it was that you left, you're missing out on this information because the dynamics are the same.

So by using a hashtag, like #igotout, you're entering into all kinds of information from all different types of groups and people and your ability to, number one, find community. Because that's one of the hardest things on leaving a group is that you lose all your friends and connections, right?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** So you can connect with other people. And it's also maybe a little bit easier to, to make a friend or a connection with somebody that wasn't in your system of control. Cuz maybe the games are a little bit different, right?

**Gerette Buglion:** Diversity. We need diversity of friendship. We need diversity of, you know, organisms in the universe. We need, like, it's a foundation stone of healthy living actually, of sustainable living is to have, you know, diversity. And within, uh, the word we, you know, the cultiverse this word that we have been using in this space right now, which is a beautiful word, you know, in the cultiverse.

**Lisa:** Yes, but wait Gerette, we must give Jess Tardy, her

due

**Gerette Buglion:** sure.

**Lisa:** Credit. Jess Tardy, producer of A Little Bit Culty, came up with that word. She is master of the cultiverse.

**Candice Schutter:** Excellent. I love it.

**Gerette Buglion:** Absolutely. It's a fantastic word. And, thanks for giving credit where credit is due, because it is important. Um, because of course in our, in the spheres of coercion and manipulation, it's the stripping of identity, and we don't get to actually have our strengths and our contributions recognized because so often they're just being demeaned or shunned. Co-opted, shamed, dismissed.

But I was saying something, oh, was the diversity part which is something that I feel really, um, strongly about. For me, there's a lot of, a lot of juice there because it's in the diversity of our experiences, in the complexity of each one of our lived experiences that we get to kind of tease out and be able to really identify how these cultic dynamics manifest in different environments.

And, and like Lisa said a minute ago, it's the dynamics that we need to understand and be able to apply them to all environments. Because if we're not, if we're not recognizing how these dynamics might be manifesting in our women's group, you know, or they, how they might be manifesting in, you know, the town council or your volunteer work at your Unitarian church or, you know, whatever it is.

When we can better understand how humans work universally, we can actually create a stronger and healthier culture and society where we can actually be at each other's back

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**Gerette Buglion:** Without competing.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Gerette Buglion:** I mean, not that, not that competition is all bad. You know, I don't mean that. Yeah, sure, some healthy competition can be a really good thing. Um, does that make sense?

**Candice Schutter:** It makes perfect sense. And it makes me, again, because as you named in the beginning, Lisa, I am in this process, like actively in this process of recovery. What came to mind immediately was how useful it is to me to hear about a diversity of stories and experiences in different environments. It actually helps me to find the indoctrinating dogma within myself because there's, if I stay within my silo, I believe certain things are true. Like that, that blurry line between belief and fact in a cult is really screwy.

And so when I, for example, watch *The Vow* and I hear about the NXIVM curriculum and I see how many things are common and then I realize, wait a second, what are they doing with that? Like I can see it more clearly if it's outside of my own experience, it's outside of everything that I know. It's so obvious to me. And then I can come back and reflect on the experience I had and say, oh wow, that's the same mechanism at work. And that thing that I was taught to just accept at face value is now in question, and I can question it because I stepped outside. And really, that's what I mean diversity in every way does for us, right?

Is like why I'm a different person after traveling abroad. Like when we see and experience different cultures, and I'm putting that culture word in quotes like I do, like that word culture is so, has so many meanings, but however we define it, when we experience something that's different than the culture that we know, it transforms us and it wakes us up in certain ways.

And then just to underscore what you're saying, Gerette, it brings us back to ourselves like who we really are outside of the cultural definitions and the dogma. Like who am I really? And we can connect that part of us that we know to be ourselves with someone else who has a totally different cultural experience than us.

It affirms us in the right way, I guess is what I'm saying.

**Gerette Buglion:** It affirms us. And also think that there's a unique contribution that those of us who have experienced, who have been through the ringer of coercion, of cultic coercion, that we have a unique perspective and voice to bring out into the world today. And, and I think that for me, that's why using #igotout and, you know, standing behind our lived experiences truly has the potential to shift the narrative and to make life healthier, you know, for our societies.

Because not only are we recognizing what, what the heck happened in our own psyches, in our own bodies, when we were in that environment. We also know what's happening when we're coming out. And in that coming out time, of course, everybody has a different experience of coming out. Sometimes it can be incredibly devastating because of how destabilizing it can be. And when we can come out in a place where there is support, that lived experience can eventually, hopefully be expressed as a way of saying, I see that shit. I'm gonna call it out. I've lived it. I see it out in the world, and I'm not going to be involved in that. I'm going to say no.

And that's where that place of finding, I think the process you were just talking about, Candice, where we understand ourselves better, is also a place where we can actually create some boundaries, healthy boundaries for ourself.

Because every, every controlling environment there is a blurring of boundaries. And when we can strengthen ourselves in that way, you know, we can decide more clearly what we wanna be involved in and whatnot. And, you know, we also, in what you're doing here today, what all three of us are doing today is speaking about our experiences with a clear voice that says, this is what I want to see in the world. This is what I wanna create. This is the world I wanna live in.

### [00:41:18] transition

**Lisa:** And I think that one thing that has to be acknowledged in this particular conversation is our ability to step out into a space where we do have choices. That's not the way it is for a lot of cultures. I've been watching the Iranian protests, and we have women and men reaching for a different life without that kind of control, and they're risking their lives for that. Literally.

And so, yeah, when we talk about exiting a high control group, you know, in my mind, if we don't take that journey as individuals, we could be destined to have that as, you know, this thing that we're doing right now has to happen. That's my point. .Is that if we who are free, Ooh, I'm getting emotional. If we're, if we who are free and able to, um, claim that and be that, we need to do that for everyone who can't.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**Lisa:** And by us doing that and, and creating this language and making the dynamics that we're talking about known. Like somebody out there, hello, if you're in school and can make a curriculum that we can enter into all of our public school systems kids.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh my gosh.

**Lisa:** can understand this stuff. Because the most vulnerable age for cult involvement is this time between 18 and 30.

**Gerette Buglion:** I tend to think more, younger than 18. I would say starting fourteen.

**Lisa:** Younger than that, but I mean 30, 30 at the outset. I think the military doesn't take newbie people past the age of 29, because they can't indoctrinate them or control them as well.

So there's this like window. And with the right education, we can change things. but it's so critical that those of us who can make

**Candice Schutter:** It's so true, and I think that's the thing that, you know, it's, it's sort of un indoctrinating itself just speaking out and claiming our right to take up space when we've

been in sort of group think. And I really love that you're underscoring how, especially, and I, I know Lisa, you wanted to speak to this, it's like one of those things that brings us in is our idealism and our desire to be of service and to genuinely make the world a better place. That's like the number one hook.

And so when we're coming out, to be able to understand that it's by retrieving ourselves and reclaiming our own lives, we are actually doing exactly that.

**Lisa:** No, I, I, I, uh, one of the burning thoughts in my mind as I was making my exit is that I could never become the person I joined to become if I stayed.

**Gerette Buglion:** Say it again, Lisa. Say it again.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** I could never become the person who I joined my group to become if I stayed.

**Candice Schutter:** Whew. Yeah. That lands deep. Talk about the deeper pulse. I mean that's.

And I'm glad that you repeated that. I feel like that's something that I have a lot of listeners who are sort of on the fringe of one of the everyday cults I was involved in. And I think that's really an important thing to underscore.

And it seems, you know, why there's a, there's a level of emotional maturity that's required to do this work and the ability to reckon with contradictions like that and the paradox that we end up facing when we step away. And the grief, the devastation that the path we thought we were on to become that thing is actually the thing keeping us from it.

**Lisa:** That I can talk about the grief.

**Gerette Buglion:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** I mean, losing 30 years. 30 years, from 19 to 50 years old in a group.

And you know, the, the, interesting thing, and I learned this listening to Will Allen.

Will Allen produced Holy Hell, which was a documentary about a cult that was actually functioning in the same city at the same time as my cult. So it was a particularly resonant story for me.

But Will, in a recent interview says, and he, he joined his cult at 19 as well. He said the whole thing was a process of infantilizing.

Yeah. And it was particularly resonant for me in my group, because our Bible, so to speak, our like go-to workbook was the red Rebirthing book that was later renamed Vivation. And this book was basically about dealing with birth traumas or early childhood wounds. And so



whenever we had an issue, that was designated an issue by the leader, we would go back and work on a birth issue or a early childhood issue.

So that process for 30 years, over and over again of working on our issues through that lens and doing the rebirthing, it was literally keeping us trapped inside of that framework. Not to mention the leader always having, you know, the say-so and always being held in a position of subordinate.

**Gerette Buglion:** You know, I love how you have in your experience, the specificity of the rebirthing being this thing that brings us back into this infantile kind of reality. And it would be a really interesting exploration for each one of us who've been in a controlled environment to identify, to reflect on what were the ways, what were the processes that kept our natural healthy adult development hindered? Like what hindered our development?

Because that, that has been, for me, a really interesting and humbling aspect of my recovery journey is actually recognizing the places where my development was like snipped off. And I stayed in a kind of almost juvenile, you know, mindset.

I, and I guess in a certain way that's kind of like magical thinking. I think most controlling groups had some version of magical thinking. You know, like for me it was like, I, I literally thought if I could conjure up the moments of my dreams. I was in a, a dream therapy group, um, controlling group for 18 years. And we had to do this thing called homework where I was supposed to take the moment from my dream that my teacher had said, this is your moment, this is the action that you have to bring into your daily life. And not only do you do it, you know, multiple times a day, we would be challenged to do it multiple times an hour. And literally like there were times, periods where I was trying to do it like every five minutes I had a timer on to try to ground me in my, my moment that was going to send me through.

**Lisa:** And first, look, the framework of your group, as in doing homework and having a teacher that again, is keeping you, that framework is keeping you in an arrested state.

**Gerette Buglion:** Right. Exactly.

I started as a 33 year old. You know, so that structure is keeping me in, you know, is arresting my development. I have these activities that are keeping like, like what could my mind, my heart, my psyche, my interest, my curiosity in the world, what could have been unleashed had I not been trying to devote so much of my life energy to like doing this absurd thing of conj, remembering that moment from my dream, multiple times an hour.

**Lisa:** And then if you didn't do it right or you didn't do your homework, or you had some kind of quote unquote mistake, then we get to have that cognitive dissonance moment of shame and being called out, not being good enough, not performing to our highest potential.

So like in my situation, you know, I was the cooker, the cleaner, the house manager. I had all these responsibilities. I was a mother who had been convinced that I was not capable of mothering my child. So it was the older people's job to do that, you know? So I had all of



these crosscurrents going and while being infantilized and being on the hot seat for when I don't do something right.

**Gerette Buglion:** mm-hmm.

I hear you. I think there's, there's multiple ways. And, and, I think it can manifest differently too for people who are involved in a, a religious group, you know. But, but there's very similar, again, very similar dynamics.

Um, for whatever reason, I'm having this image of this fantastic book that's called I'm Perfect, You're Doomed. And the cover of this book is a picture of a girl maybe, you know, 11 years old or something like that with perfect shiny shoes and pretty little tidy skirt and dress and top and holding an umbrella. And under her umbrella, life is perfect. It's golden light and there's, you know, green grass. And outside of her umbrella, there are fireballs and catastrophic, you know, the world is coming to an end, you know, it's an apocalyptic kind of scene outside.

So imagine like for those who are involved in a religious group, where very often I, I mean there's lots of apocalyptic groups that are not religious as well, but very often there can be a kind of fear of some great disaster that's holding us hostage. So that's like another way.

**Lisa:** Completely.

**Gerette Buglion:** That just arrests our development, our growth.

**Lisa:** Absolutely the what, what I saw in my group is that any time there was some kind of big event, world event, it solidified the need to stay attached. It was used, that world event was used as leverage. We, it was actually a pink bubble filled with golden light.

**Gerette Buglion:** Oh, good to know. Oh, how I would just love to hang out there. You didn't have the umbrella? Just a pink bubble.

**Lisa:** No, it was, it was a bubble. It was a bubble. And yeah, this idea that you step outside that bubble, you are in the with the sharks. You are gonna get chewed up.

So, you know, in my experience, I had 30 years to go through all of these different kinds of phases and things shifted dramatically in the time period between 98 and 2001. We had a hurricane that some of the people in my group survived, Y2K, and 9-11. And those three events, along with all of our, you know, personal machinations that happened inside our group created, you know, super glue for a, pretty much all of us. You know, some people left along the way. But, um, yeah.

**Gerette Buglion:** Interesting.

**Lisa:** You know, we got into doomsday prepping and canning and saving, storing up food and getting emergency supplies and having, you know, a bug out plan and all these things and

that, those things that, um, it's leverage. It keeps people bound. And I think, you know, that happens not just in religious groups like you were talking about. I think it's, I mean, we were not religious. We were spiritual. So-called spiritual. I kind take issue with all that, but anyways.

Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Well, you see it even in the political landscapes now, people doubling down, whether they're on the right or the left, it's a really similar dynamic, you know. Religion, asi. It's that need to cling to something that is certain when things become more and increasingly ambiguous and increasingly uncertain.

And, you know, it's why one of my favorite writers of all time is Ernest Becker. You know, he wrote the book, the Denial of Death. And then, um,

**Lisa:** Oh, we read that. Was that the, uh, the contrast between

**Candice Schutter:** He, he speaks a little bit, I guess, about both of them. He speaks about dozens and dozens of philosophers and psychologists and analysts, and it's a really dense book. It's like, read four pages at time and set it aside for a week, kind of book.

But he wrote another one, um, Escape From Evil. And he really talks about like what are the origins of this idea of evil and that so much evil is done in the name of good, in the name of doubling down, like in what we're describing, like this need to self-protect and this fear of death, which we all have of course how it unconsciously manifests in sort of these, these ways that we band together and the dynamics that result and the us versus them, all of that. So, total tangent there, but just to say, I think it really just sort of underscores how this larger mechanism, when things get hard, how people become more vulnerable. It sort of explains it.

**Lisa:** Yeah, check a pandemic.

Right

**Gerette Buglion:** beautiful to hear you bring this in, It's a piece that, that I actually had not really put together in my own recovery journey. where the reckoning, where the grappling with death, the reality of death, for me it was, um, that was very much tied into my exit. And which is something that I do share in my book. The sudden death of my brother, and also the, the suicide of a member of the group were huge, huge parts of my, um, and.

Like, like I was still in a group at the time for both of those deaths. And, and yet there was only months after my brother's death that I exited.

And I think there is a way for me that coming together with, with the, with the reality of death. And it was, I really took it on as a, as a kind of study and a focus in my life. like, I became a, a hospice volunteer even while I was still, I tried to do it the year before my brother died. It was something I was interested in, but I was so involved in the group, I couldn't ever quite figure out how to make the time to do it. So I, you know, it, it, it waited

until after my brother died. And then there was a, an even bigger reason for me to, to create space in my life and in my psyche.

Because I think there's a way that when we're in a controlled environment, we have some kind of narrative that, that removes us from reality that keeps us, um, like there's a way that we're supposed to process death. There's a way that everything has some other meaning.

But death, you know, the, the, the, the permanence, the irreversibility of death is something that even a cult can't fuck with, even though they try to all time.

You know, so it would, oh, I'm just so excited. Like, I feel like this would be an amazing study actually, to really look at how each controlling group, what their narrative is about death and how that actually becomes a, you know, an anchor, a form of manipulation. Be a really interesting study. Sorry, total tangent, but one that,

**Candice Schutter:** An important one. Yeah. I mean, I will say, just to, add just a tidbit to that when my stepbrother died. It was after I left. Well, I'll say this, it was after I left the organization that I was involved in that was a cult. Yet I was still in the larger cult of New Age Wellness. Very much. I was very, much still in it, and that, his death was the turning point for me.

So, very similar to you. It was a turning point that it was like all the, the magic potions I had been given. I drank them all and none of them worked.

**Gerette Buglion:** Wouldn't that be such an interesting study, I didn't realize that for your loss. It's, they're big losses. Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Yours as well.

**Gerette Buglion:** Hmm.

**[01:01:45] transition**

**Candice Schutter:**

So speaking to that new age wellness aspect, Lisa, I don't know a lot about your story. Um, and I do know that based on some of what we've talked about and some of the notes that you sent in preparation for this, that there's a lot in aspects of your story that really are gonna speak to listeners specifically who are involved in new age wellness circles and whatnot.

So I'm wondering if you would be willing to speak a little bit about your experience and some of your insights.

**Lisa:** Well, I have a thread that I think I can pick up with what we were just talking about, about death. So Denial of Death, Candice, that book I'm fairly certain is the one that we read

in my group and it talked about the Casa sui, the meaning of life and you know, it was kind of leveraged to make people want to do work, everlasting work rather than have children.

I was the only person that had a child in the group.

**Gerette Buglion:** Fascinating.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**Gerette Buglion:** Wow.

**Lisa:** So it was kind of, it was kind of a hook to say, you know, we've given up this idea that we're going to have kids and.

One of the things I really loved early on in this series was this, in this conversation with Janja, she talked about like, beginning of the wellness wave and having grown up the child, you know, for a while I was the only child of a very young hippie couple exploring all that stuff. Both my parents were into psychedelics and having alternative lifestyles. We lived in teepees. We had a commune that was mostly family. It wasn't any kind of spiritual thing at all.

But, one of my dad's biggest influences was Carlos Castaneda.

And the interesting thing about that connection is that when I came into contact with my group that was also one of my you know, spiritual leader, spiritual teacher, whatever his influences. And it was one of the things that made the space familiar and comfortable to me.

Right. and when we talk about Carlos Castaneda's work, you know, he's highly revered in the early seventies as being, you know, this exploratory anthropologist and out seeking answers and rubbing elbows with shamans and witches and all of this. Right?

And he has this framework of the Naguals and doing, searching through the peyote. So it influenced, that piece right there influenced the culture, because he was an academic. And most of the people that were involved in, you know, the hippie wave were a lot of them academics. cuz we're on the cusp of the grand finale of the Vietnam War and there's all these people seeking, but they were maybe avoiding the draft because they were in college, as my dad did.

And so, You know, that's kind of the framework of how I think a lot of this wellness stuff got started. And one of the things that I hadn't heard before from Janja was about how after the Vietnam War was finished, a few years later, they opened immigration for Eastern countries, which allowed the Beatles to bring in the Maharishi.

We had all, you know, the Hari Krishna, everything started coming and American society was hungry for something that was different, that made sense to them. Or I don't even know if it made sense. Just something else that they could explore other than their, you know.

**Gerette Buglion:** It was sexy. It was sexy. It was different. It was new.

**Lisa:** It was sexy.

I mean, that wave I myself got caught up in as child. When moved to my town, we lived across the street from a woman who was a Hare Krishna. And at that point in time, my dad was into Gu Maharaji, who was the young child guru that came in that wave. And, you know, I would go to Temple with her and do my Hari Krishnas and loved food and the texture of the pages of the Bhagavad Gita with the beautiful pictures.

So I was immersed in this stuff and also very familiar with alternative states being as I was the child who was also passing the joint from my parent to the other parent to the other friends. First time I ever did hallucinogens when I was 11 at one of my parents parties. So I was very familiar with different states of reality. Right?

Which is also one of reasons why when I walked into the living room of my cult, it was a rebirthing class, and it was about laying down the floor and breathing and getting into this hyperventilated, hyper arousal state. It wasn't weird to me. I was comfortable. It felt like home, right?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**Lisa:** When you talk about death, Carlos Castaneda's work was a lot about being ready die. And there's this idea of recapitulation, of capturing all of the moments and the people and the connections that made in your life and owning your whole history before the leap. Right. And being 30 years in a cult kind of makes that easy cause I only had a few people I was connected to. Tangent.

But, uh, you know, the funniest thing, and this is something that maybe your listeners will really appreciate is the first book that I read after I left was by a woman who was part of Carlos Castaneda's Inner circle. Her name is Amy Wallace. Her memoir is called The Sorcerer's Apprentice. And what was incredibly impactful about her story is that I saw my cult in Carlos Castaneda's inner circle cult.

It was actually, he had a center in California that's still operational today. The witches that he wrote about in his books were people in his circle, and the kind of sexual abuse that I had experienced, and a lot of different mind fuckery that happened inside that group tracked to what I had been experiencing.

**Candice Schutter:** Wow.

**Lisa:** So, you know, we have this romanticized, and I don't think that it's been talked about enough, the impact and influence of his work on the hippie culture. But all you gotta do is read her story and it's like mind blowing, you know? And a lot of the women, of course, Carlos Castaneda died decades ago. The women that were in his inner circle, most, if not all, have died. And they died tragically. Some walked out to the desert and never were seen again. Just like the stories prescribed.

**Candice Schutter:** mm-hmm. Wow.

Thank you for that recommendation. And for just laying that foundation so beautifully. And I will say, and I'm in part sharing this because of who my listeners are, Carlos Castaneda had a tremendous amount of influence on the organization, 'the Org' as I referred to it that I was involved in. And I have a feeling that this book's gonna be pretty pivotal for me in terms of understanding the degree to which that was the case. Um, but even just in a couple of the things that you said in terms of recapitulation and also this, I remember we did this exercise, it was called Creating the Ultimate Experience, and we would essentially be tasked with teaching a movement class as if we were about to die. Like how would you teach it if it was the last class you ever taught.

Like, that sort of intensity and like this idea that we could create this transcendent experience while embodied like, I mean I just feel like so much of that came from his influence, who I know he was very influential on the male founder of this practice, so, I really look forward to diving to that book, and I, I am underscoring it in case some listeners out there wanna

**Lisa:** Did you guys

**Candice Schutter:** So that we can explore it together.

**Lisa:** with the concept of the petty tyrant? Have you heard that term?

**Candice Schutter:** Oh, no, I'm not familiar with that, no.

**Lisa:** Yeah. from one of his books too. And, uh, the petty tyrant, that idea is that you have people in your life that, um, annoy the fuck out of you, and they're there to be your teacher. So you welcome those petty tyrants into your.

**Gerette Buglion:** Aye.

**Lisa:** sphere.

**Candice Schutter:** yeah.

**Lisa:** And so, in my group, there were people that I had just really didn't, like, didn't get along with, but the coercion was to bring that person in closer, to give you your material work on.

**Gerette Buglion:** That is a, a dagger through my heart. I just, that I've never heard that concept before, but it is just so horrifically familiar to so many of the experiences, the stories that I've heard people tell. You know, that you have to accept, you have to become stronger and welcome this into your life. Rather than say, no, this is toxic.

And at like, when the, I'm guessing when the petty tyrant comes in, it's already after. It's not, it's not the first thing you learn about that comes after many other layers.

And wow, so powerful.

It makes me, and like this whole conversation about death, I want to just like bring a little, lighter note to it, which is what helped me the most as I was, you know, grappling with and reeling from both, um, John, the man who, who took his life who was in my group and my brother's death, and later my father's, and my uncle. So I had four men in a very short period of time who were very, very beloved to me.

And like what actually helped me the most was this very simple, beautiful human thing to do, which actually is a kind of a social movement that's called Death Cafe. So, Death Cafe. Have either of you heard of it?

**Gerette Buglion:** Now I am totally sure that there are death cafes out there that have become controlling and cultic. I'm sure that that has happened, and I, that kind of breaks my heart because it's something that helped me so much. What I got to experience was just this healthy group of people that would come together once a month and eat cake and talk about death.

You know, where there was like, there was no advice giving, there was no, no doctrine, there were no books. It was just people coming into the same space, having tea or coffee and some yummy food and talking about death. And we had a very simple structure. And in fact, part of that structure is something that, I'm just realizing this right now, Candice, from what you said earlier, I learned from that structure and I've brought some of that into my Writing To Reckon classes that I facilitate today.

You know, that, that it's just this simple container of holding space for a particular topic, for a taboo topic. You know, like, we're not supposed to talk about death, but everyone, we're all gonna die. So like, let's talk about it. And it helped me so much, you know?

So I think wherever we can have, like in the, in the world of racism, and today there's a model of these living room conversations, you know, where you can actually sit down with others and bring these really difficult topics into the same room, either a Zoom room or literally the same room, and have a kind of a structure that creates some safety and talk about, talk about different things, and just be a frigging human being.

We don't have to be enlightened. We don't have to know anything. We just get to be real.

**[01:16:47] next time...**

**Candice Schutter:** Here's a quick preview of next week's episode and part two with Lisa and Gerette.

**Lisa:** Our experiences as cult survivors often span years, if not decades, and we can make one statement that's a broad brushstroke and that is certainly like un popping the cork. But there's a whole lot that will come up that needs expression and you can do it however you want, or not at all.

It's, it's a journey. And one of the things that I will tell you from publishing all of these stories is that oftentimes it's really the specificity and the little nuggets that speak volumes.

The details.

**Candice Schutter:** I hope you'll join us next week when Gerette and Lisa share more about the igotout movement and offer helpful tips for survivors who are interested in sharing their stories

And of course more heart to heart discussions. We discuss what a new, less culty paradigm of leadership might look and feel like, and then share how you can support the groundbreaking work of igotout. You won't wanna miss it.

If you're hungry for more between now and then, hop on over to Patreon for access to bonus episodes, eBooks, and a growing community of listeners who are joining me to actively deconstruct new age dogma. There are no hierarchies and there's lots to explore if you're interested in going deeper.

In fact, just a couple of days ago, I posted a video walking patrons through the 50+ resources that I've used in the creation of this podcast series. To support a space of confidentiality and safety, everything is behind a paywall, but you can subscribe for as little as a dollar a month. Learn more at [patreon.com/thedeeperpulse](https://patreon.com/thedeeperpulse).

Until next time.

Caio.