The Fracturing is Necessary

BY MICHELLE POLLINO

Overview

The Fracturing is Necessary explores how the current cultural and political divide in the United States revealed our broken systems, through one woman's own journey of a past heartbreak, that surfaced after years of remaining hidden. This tenuous time in our history has shown the fragility of our beloved institutions and the tribal human nature that drives them apart. Michelle Pollino grew up in a newsroom, but it wasn’t until the grief over a loss resurfaced, did she realize the gift it left behind, she became a tenacious truth-seeker, while the world that she moved through for years, abdicated all sense of truth seeking. Starting in her hometown of Philadelphia, a working-class reporter, Michelle moved through the worlds of radio, television and film. After a move across the country to Los Angeles looking for better opportunities in the industry, she landed in the most polarizing newsroom in the country, FOX.

The Fracturing tells the story of how this Country was pulled apart by the very systems that it counted on, and most importantly its purpose. Journalism and our educational institutions have crumbled before our eyes, while new media brought in a new group of truth-seekers. The Fracturing reveals the stories of the cancelled and the people and the organizations that emerged underground to help them. Cancel culture is real, and we can no longer pretend that it’s not, our entire existence depends on this. Pretending something isn’t there only deepens the divide and keeps us stuck. The Fracturing has a purpose and we must speak it.

It’s the story of love and loss and grief and the wounds of people, of society that must be traced and traveled and unlocked, for wounds have many gifts. There is a saying, that you must know yourself, heal yourself before you can help anyone else. The same can be said of our country. We must speak the truth of our past to understand who we are, but we must also speak the truth of the present to unlock our future. But how do we speak the truth if everyone is afraid to speak.

For those who have struggled with coming to terms with their greatest fears, being ejected from your tribe, this book will introduce to you, the people that not only survived but thrived and found themselves in new adventures, with new careers and a new community that wants to include everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or religion. Readers will embark on an exploration of brokenness, fortitude, and repair that will reveal life’s greatest gift of all, love. Love of people, of humanity and open inquiry that takes you down unexpected roads.

THE FRACTURING IS NECESSARY

Leaving her destroyed me because I loved her so much. Leaving was not who I was. I was true and dedicated, persistent. Here, I was hiding, cheating, immobile, stuck and so the record skipped. I was a coward. But my entire being said to go. And so, I did.

Every day, Michelle Pollino talks to millions of listeners on SiriusXM Headlines News, reporting on the entertainment industry for Fox News. But they have never heard her like this before. In her own unique, raw, and vulnerable voice, Michelle takes readers on an intimate journey, one that cracks open during a National Gay and Lesbian journalist convention in New Orleans, when it smacks her in the face, Journalism is no longer on a truth-seeking mission. That same weekend she meets up with a friend of her first true love. The woman she will never forget and always remember in that order. She shows up in text form and says something that splits her in two, Michelle has no choice but to go inside, find the truth, follow the fracturing and set herself free. The truth will always set you free.

TO FIND THE WHY

There is a knowing in one's being, just below the surface, that appears unreachable. Until that thing that happens, that is so tragic that it makes you search your entire life for the answer. When you finally say it out loud it hurls you into space. It’s called the truth. We all know the stories of our souls even before they are told. And all will rise when needed.

The journey sets her off on a daring adventure as she searches for why she left this woman and what happened to world of journalism, media and film she once knew and loved.

Then a global pandemic shuttered the nation’s doors. Separation, indignation, loneliness. As fires raged just outside, a phantasmagoria of online reckoning and internal ciphering pushes the voice hidden inside Michelle to the surface. Trying to find out who she is, what her values are, her morality, she realizes she must tell the story that she feared. One she had held inside her for decades, and finally address the wounds like rutilated quartz buried deep in her cells.

With pen to paper and newfound freedom on the page, it unleashes within her an unrelenting drive to repair herself, and the country, now ripped at the seams, by the very media she has been a part of for decades. Here she finds the truth of her soul’s purpose and the gift hidden below the surface, that was there all this time. The drive to bring people together.

The Fracturing addresses that we are living through extraordinary times, and it is getting harder to navigate what is fact and fiction, within ourselves and the external world.

WHO TO TRUST?

The grand institutions that we’ve come to rely on are broken. Media, Journalism, education, banking, our medical institutions, and our government. Our entire society has been split in half. If we are to move forward, we cannot keep our backs turned in separate huddles. We must turn towards each other in conversation. We must reflect and debate, not mandate.

Fracturing has a purpose; it exposes where we need to go and grow.

Michelle was on the front lines of the culture wars and watched as voices emerged and were forcibly submerged. As a gay woman reporting for FOX, her network of friends in Los Angeles turn their backs on her, effectively cancelling her by association. She begins to meet others who were “cancelled” and realizes there is an underground movement working to right the ship of this country to get back to the pro human values of Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln. Trying to find out who she was in a culture that became demanding, and vicious. She was standing in the eye of the storm. Repeating patterns. Reporting on the #MeToo movement, while also knowing she was one of its victims. Michelle watched her profession decline and a class war emerge. Forcing her past up once again, for an internal reckoning. She had to again search for the truth hidden in the cracks of the lips of the people and the walls of institutions she once cherished. All as freedom slowly slipped through bumbling thumbs. Michelle realized that there is only one way to find it, by finding her courage, her compassion and her true voice, the one buried deep within. To speak the truth in a time when speaking the truth has become a crime that would wipe out your entire life.

This is the only journey that matters.

TAKE THE JOURNEY

The river forgives when the fallen tree changes its course. Because it understands accidents don’t happen for unknown reasons, they happen and change its path. Slowly over time it forges a new path because the river understands its purpose on earth. It’s the source of connection, of life itself and somewhere along this new path, new bridges will be constructed, and new seeds planted.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Pollino is an entertainment reporter for Fox News and SiriusXM Fox News Headlines Radio. Michelle grew up in the heart of Philadelphia. She launched her broadcast career while attending San Diego State University when she got an internship, which led to a job as a traffic reporter. After a year on the air and a near-death experience from an emergency landing in the middle of the I-15 freeway, her hometown of Philadelphia beckoned. There her life as a radio news reporter was born at CBS and NPR. As her broadcast career expanded, she anchored weekend news at NBC’s WGAL-TV. Finding more interest in stories of marginalized voices, Michelle ventured behind the camera to produce for WYBE TV Philadelphia, where she earned an Emmy nomination. Not stopping there, she jumped into reality television, producing and directing more than 250 episodes of both network and cable reality television for NBC, Showtime, TLC, Fox, CBS, A&E, Logo and IFC. Successful shows included Trading Spaces, Ambush Makeover, Searching For and Selling Spelling Mansion.

In the mid 2000’s, Michelle plunged into filmmaking by directing and producing. She produced three features, including G.B.F starring Megan Mullally and Natasha Lyonne and the indie family feature Mayor Cupcake, starring Lea Thompson and Judd Nelson.

In 2013, Michelle landed at Fox News, where she combined her love of the entertainment industry and news and is now a critic and entertainment reporter for FOX radio and writes for FOX.com. In her free time, she has written and directed three award winning short films as well as several poems and essays.

THE MARKET

“HIDDEN RIVER”

The title will sit very comfortably on the shelves alongside:

“Long Live the Tribe of Fatherless Girls”   
by T Kira Madden

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019)

A raw and redemptive memoir is about coming of age and reckoning with desire as a queer, biracial teenager amidst the fierce contradictions of Boca Raton, Florida.

“Stranger Care: A Memoir of Loving What Isn’t Ours”   
by Sarah Sentilles

(Random House, 2021)

The moving story of what one woman learned from fostering a newborn—about injustice, about making mistakes, about how to better love and protect people beyond our immediate kin.

“This Is The Night Our House Will Catch Fire”   
A Memoir by Nick Flynn

(W.W. Norton, 2020)

A searing memoir from critically acclaimed author Nick Flynn, on how childhood spills into parenthood.

“The Problem With Everything: My Journey Through The New Culture Wars”   
by Meghan Daum

(Gallery Books, 2019)

In this gripping work, Meghan examines our country’s most intractable problems with clear-eyed honesty instead of exaggerated outrage. With passion, humor, and personal reflection, she tries to make sense of the current landscape—from Donald Trump’s presidency to the #MeToo movement and beyond

PROMOTION AND MARKETING

In Hidden River, readers will come to understand how a single heartbreak reveals the patriarchal patterns that run deep in the soul and how love can build a bridge to connect the great divide inside oneself and perhaps those around us.

This book also offers particular relevance for women and members of the LGBTQ community and provides an honest and beautiful reflection of Michelle’s life and career as a journalist.

Michelle has connections to a vast amount of publications across all forms of media: online and print, as well as TV, radio, and in the film industry. They include The New York Times, The New York Post, Substack, and Quillette. Several TV, podcasts, and radio shows including local coverage in Philadelphia as well as FOX, CBS, PBS, and NPR are ready to discuss the book and write about Michelle.

Currently, there are 11.5 million Americans that identify as LGBT — As a current member of the National LGBT Journalist association, Pollino has exclusive access to journalists and reporters that specifically target these numbers.

The coverage here alone looks to see sales of up to 80-100 thousand books.

Michelle will simultaneously launch a podcast, titled, Hidden River, The Fracturing is necessary. The topical podcast will include an array of hosts from authors to athletes from intellectuals to spiritual leaders. From teachers to construction workers. To forge new ways of connection through conversation.

She is also a member of FAIR (Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism), which has a large contingent of intellectuals, commentators, journalist, artists and authors where she can promote the book. 100 chapters in the US and Canada. 30,000 members, some with millions of social media followers. Among them are Journalist Megyn Kelly and Bari Weiss.

A list of celebrities and noteworthy connections include;

Brett Easton Ellis; Marianne Williamson; Meghan Daum; Jill Whelan; Author Alice Dark, Author Sarah Sentilles, Diana Nyad, Russell Brand; Lisa Vanderpump; Cat Cora; Rose Mcgowen; Sharon Stone, Adam and Tamara Housley

Michelle is a seasoned speaker who has spoken at various women’s conferences and seminars. She has hosted her own podcast, Pure Pollino, and is still actively live on the air reporting on entertainment news daily.

Additionally, Michelle is actively working on producing her fourth feature film, Miriam, alongside Kevin Sorbo. Based on the Old Testament, Miriam tells the story of the women of the Exodus through the unheralded sister of Moses. The project is currently in development with actress and director Shari Rigby attached to direct.

Press & Interviews

Philadelphia Magazine

Local Lesbian filmmaker works with Oprah

Philly Voice

Filmmaker Woos Holly Bigs, But needs Your Help

The Los Angeles Blade

Queery: The Fox News Reporter Answers 20 Gay Questions

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# Manuscript Sample

The Fracturing Is Necessary, 2022, 1st draft

*The Greatness of America lies not in it being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.*

–*Alex De Toqueveille*

**Legends and Lies**

In late August 2019 I went to the National Gay and Lesbian Journalist association conference in New Orleans. I was VP of the organization’s Philadelphia chapter in the 90’s, when I was a

general assignment reporter for KYW (CBS radio in Philly). I left the news organization when I

got into producing TV and film but returned once I landed in the FOX newsroom in Los Angeles.

One afternoon at the conference I was invited to lunch at a nearby restaurant by an old friend

from the Gay Jays (the orgs nickname) with 6 other people, none of whom I knew. All but one was a good 10 to 20 years younger than me. I eagerly accepted just to get out of the air-conditioned walls of the conference hotel. When I first met Antonio, his raven-haired pompadour entered the space first. Antonio was Hispanic, in his late 20’s or early 30’s. Another of his colleagues, Diana, was a short, stout black woman. Both former journalists, now PR for the city of Philadelphia. Diana was my age maybe - married to a man, so I am guessing she’s bi? Not that I cared.

She worked for the Inquirer back in the day when, at its peak, it had an editorial staff of over 700. It was the third longest continuously operating daily newspaper in the nation; It became the first major newspaper in the US during the Civil War. As of 2021, it has won 20 Pulitzer Prizes, seventeen of which came in the 80’s.

Then, in the mid-90’s, a combination of bad management, the rise of cable-tv news and the dawn of the internet caused it to slowly bleed staff. Today, The Inquirer has an editorial staff of 60. They moved out of their staid, steepled art deco palace on Broad Street and are now in a former Walgreens. This displacement tells you everything that you need to know about the state of journalism today.

As we went around the circular table and found out a little bit about what we all do and where

we are from, we heard from Cara, a Rubenesque lesbian with short hair and horn-rimmed glasses. If Clark and Lois had a lesbian love child, I found her. She was sitting next to

an almost iridescent, diminutive man named Quinn, who worked at NPR. He was blonde with blue painted fingernails. Next to him was Danny, finely tapered, he was a reporter for PolitiFact, which interested us all. Steve, a genteel, mustachioed radical fairy, complete with chin divot, now working at my alma mater KYW in Philly. And my friend Tom, always the tallest in the room, unable to stave off the occasional eye roll, when speaking of those conservatives. He also worked at the Inquirer before making the move in the 90’s to a New York paper. I was curious about Danny’s job the most.

“Danny, what’s the most hair on fire fact that is bandied about recklessly in this world today,” I asked.

“Without a doubt, voter fraud.” He said.

“There really is not widespread voter fraud, to which Steve countered, “But there is voter suppression.” This seemed to set Cara off.  “There is voter suppression because you have to have ID’s to vote and so many people of color and indigenous people don’t get a chance to vote.” My immediate thought was – This is not the 90’s. I know plenty of POC that just don’t vote, and all have ID’s. It’s 2019, phones and ID’s are to humans like soil to grass. I didn’t voice these thoughts because frankly, I’m not a POC, so I pick my battles, and this wasn’t one.

“Cara, where are you from?” I asked. Cara then detailed her upbringing in Indianapolis, Indiana.

“I grew up in a poor family in a town of very rich people. I came out in the fifth grade, and was bullied relentlessly, for my weight and for being gay,” she said. She added that she started

working at 15 like it was a gruesome hardship. (I had a paper route at 11 and loved it) But overall, she was on the verge of tears speaking about an upbringing that seemed to me, normal. Actually better than normal.

Then she said, she got outta dodge.

“I finally moved to Tampa, Florida and got a job at the local paper,” she said. Tampa, Florida! I mean, if you are gay, Tampa is not on the list.

“One more thing”, she added. “I hate Mike Pence.” This seemed to ignite a fury in her that she could not contain. I understood this. We all know the story:  the one that everyone constantly repeats, much like the POC don’t have ID’S mantra. If you don’t know about Pence, let me explain: Pence hates the gays because he’s Christian and when he was governor of Indiana diverted a portion of AIDS funding to conversion therapy. However, one of the first things I started to do when I landed at FOX news was to try and understand these conservative creatures, who I had been told were the foulest to stalk the earth, these semi-fascists. In doing so I looked up many of the stories that were stated as truth in our community. That was one of them. I turned to Danny, the PolitiFact reporter. “Is this story true?”

He began nodding in unison and before he opened his mouth Cara interrupted.

“Absolutely,” she said. “Very true.”

“Yes, they hide under the umbrella of religious freedom and scream about the unborn but

walk away from children who grow up in poor and desperate households,” Steve added.

I jumped in. “I know religious people and one of my good friends growing up is evangelical. We still talk and debate and disagree, but I cherish her religious freedom to hold her beliefs, I vehemently disagree but to each his/her/their own.” I cracked a smile. They didn’t get it. But I did, I was alone, jokes were not breaking the communication barrier.

“In our schools growing up in all our sex education classes, they taught abstinence because of Pence, and would encourage behaviors supporting abstinence and to save yourself for marriage,” Cara said. “They even had reformed virgins come in to talk about saving themselves.”

I burst out laughing.

“Reformed virgins, is that a thing now? How can a person be a reformed virgin? Sorry, honey,

one and done, you can’t put that skin back,” I said. That made the group laugh and lightened up the mood. But I again pressed for an answer to my Pence question. I had read that he didn’t say he wanted to send kids to conversion therapy; it was a financial addendum added to the Ryan White law, for AIDS health services. Part of the bill funneled money away from aids health services to preventative measures, like possibly abstinence. It didn’t specify conversion therapy, or electroshock therapy. It clearly states resources should be directed toward those institutions which provide assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behavior. This could be interpreted, along the same lines as his abstinence edict in high school for straight teens. In fact, it makes the most sense. This blew my mind. It lingered in me and was one of the many misconceptions I stumbled upon when I arrived at FOX. Myths stated as facts that were a part of our LGBTQ consciousness that made me start to question everything in the ether. So, I asked again.

“Are you positive that Pence diverted money for conversion therapy? Couldn’t it be for some form of abstinence training? Although that would be difficult for anyone, let alone the gays.” Eric chortled.

But Cara pushed back.

“No, no, he surrounds himself with bad people.” They heard nothing about what I said and

went straight into a story about a friend that she said went to a camp where they used water

torture on him as a part of gay conversion therapy.

“That’s horrible,” I said.

We were months away from the 2020 election, so we started talking about the candidates

again. Someone did a good Bernie impression; I followed with my own and talk of Biden was

bandied about, but we all agreed he’s not long for the campaign trail and will be bumped off

soon. (Which is not so hilarious now.) There was general support for Warren and of course Mayor Pete. The gays love Mayor Pete because he’s gay and speaks like former President Obama. I think that was the extent of it, because to my knowledge, he was not a very good Mayor.

“None of them float my boat. I like Marianne Williamson, Tulsi Gabbard and Andrew Yang. They are different and unique and bring a fresh new perspective to the tired old political debate,” I said.

“Marianne Williamson told gay men they should stop taking drugs and that they could pray the

gay away during the AIDS crisis,” Cara said.

“Wait, what? Where did you hear that?”

“Marianne wrote about it in her book,” she said.

“No, she never wrote that in her books, I’ve read most of Marianne’s books and I’ve never read

that passage.” I continued, “One of my dearest friends is living with AIDS, he used to see her

speak at that time of the AIDS epidemic and she never said stop your meds ever.”

Then, her body started to shake, like she was sitting on a lawn mower. Slow at first, then as I

continued to press her for this information, she became almost hazy.

It was uncomfortable, but this was the hill that I would die on, so I sat, chest tightening, and pushed further. “What she did say was that there was an epidemic, and it literally stymied the

medical community and gay men were alive one day and the next, their body was filled with

sores and soon they were dying,” I said.

I watched her blurring into the New Orleans soup.

I continued, “She said at the time there was no cure and she began to give lectures on the

course in Miracles and she spoke about the only thing she knew: love. She didn’t say she was

going to pray the gay away. She said she will speak to them about love in a time when all these

men were dying and that’s just what she did.” I looked at her, she was still in one piece, but her

head tilted and focused on her plate.

I was waiting, for questions perhaps? Truth doesn’t always feel good. It’s not supposed to.

Anyone who tells you differently is lying. The table was quiet. No questions. Plenty of queers, but no queries. I had shut the gays up; this has never happened, ever. Antonio, sensing the tension quickly changed the subject and spoke about dessert and Diana followed.

Challenging conversations are a journalist’s dream. A good journalist follows the story to find the truth, even if the truth shakes them to their core and challenges long held beliefs. Gal Beckerman writes in his most recent book, *The Quiet Before, On the Unexpected Origins of Radical Ideas,* that conversations are conduits of learning, of knowledge of growth. In it he writes on the history of revolutions and the underground media that helped forge them. And while great announcements are often celebrated, it’s the soft whispers of these ideas and the challenging of them that gave wind to the change. Unfortunately, our new technology has allowed a nihilism to foment, carrying the myths to the surface, forcing honest inquiry deep below the surface. One cancellation after another. But we forget, as humans do, an entire period of history was born out of critical re-examination of our previously held beliefs. It was called the Enlightenment.

But those soft whispers are happening just below the surface in this country, and other parts of the world. On podcasts and zooms and it’s happening to me, now in every possible way. I was shaking off the fumes of a groupthink steeped in division, the fracturing was a necessary wound to see what was broken and the road I needed to travel to find my way back to truth, back home to me.

I started to question everything yet, I kept those thoughts hidden, just below the surface. While in New Orleans, there was another conversation I needed to have, a fracture, that lived inside me for 22 years.

**Anagnorisis**

New Orleans and June, these are synonymous in my head. I could visit here a thousand times, and she will always be here with me. Chicory coffee, sweet magnolia buds glistening in the sun, thrusting my body back 28 years. She is now a ghost living inside me, taking up acreage, the seeds sprout every visit. She was my greatest love and greatest heartbreak. She is the one I will never forget and always remember, in that order; she has remained inside me since the day I left her. I was never the same and will never be.

Carol is a food writer and June’s friend and, although I avoided seeing her in the many times, I visited NOLA before. Her brother lives in LA and she contacted me once before to get together, but I was out of town. This time, I went for it: I reached out and we decided to meet at one of her favorite local bars. I always liked her, and frankly missed her. When June and I were together, we all traveled to NOLA together. Memories flooded my eyes at the thought. I can still smell June’s skin, see her mousey tresses tossed in the wind as we traveled the I-210 onto the 182 heading to Houma, singing Rusted Root at the top of our lungs.

The bar where I met Carol was a perfect, dank, musty NOLA hole. It was a Sunday, the Saints game echoed in the background, the whistle blew, the crowd cheered, it filled the cracks in the wood planked walls. Big smiles. She looked the same, with some extra character lines etched in her nose that arrived in a smile.

“What’s it been, 20 years maybe?” she asked.

“22, I think,” I said. She handled the circular stool, with one hand the other holding tight to her iPhone, while balancing a purse. As soon as we sat: Ding. She looks.

“Oh, wow,” she turns the phone towards me, and I lean in. It reads June Grace in big bold letters.

That struck me as both odd, and not. The minute we sit down together, the very second. I

didn’t even order a drink yet. And she arrived.

“Oh,” I said, watching her, “Tell her hi.” Her eyes cut to the phone and back to me. I wanted to ask did you tell her you were meeting me, but could already feel my insides burning, and chose to steady myself.

“It’s been 20 years.  It should be fine, right?”

“22, I think, yeah,” I said, although it was never fine.

“Do you talk to her at all?” she asked.

“No, I don’t,” I said. Wouldn’t she know this, I thought? She’s one of her closest

friends.

“Would you like to be friends?” she asked. Molecules started to shift inside my body, I

didn’t know what to say. I wasn’t ready for this, because I knew that grief was about to take a wooden plank off the wall and hit me.

“Sure,” I answered. “Let’s take a pic and send it,” I said. Carol cut her gaze to the ceiling

and back at the phone. Her lips swung like a crescent-moon.

“Or not,” I said. I could feel the skin tighten in the center of my chest. Here it comes again.

The room seemed to darken. The noise of the Saints game began to hollow and echo through the walls of my skin.

“It was so long ago, but let me ask first,” she said. She looked at me, lines like an

arrows tail form on her nose. She stopped.

“Would you like to be friends?” she asked again. Fuck! I was not ready for this, not at all.

“I mean, yeah. I guess I would. She is the love of my life,” I said. It escaped me, without me knowing. The bar seemed to swallow me whole, everything goes dark. Did I just say that? Yes, I did, out loud, to her best friend. I said the thing hidden, inside my seams, that are starting to split open.

I am fucked.

“I mean yes, of course I would like to be friends; I just don’t think..whatever.” My skin

beads, like on a crawfish shell ready to drop in boiling water. My legs are dangling. I want to crawl away but feel pulled in the opposite direction. Being pulled apart. The fracturing begins again as it did so many years ago. But I know I must stay; I must be broken open, again. This time I cannot avoid this any longer, I must go inside.

The two continued to text as Carol and I caught up. I had no idea what they were texting. I tried

not to notice, to appear calm, unbothered. I chucked the straw and went straight for the guzzle; I should’ve ordered a bourbon. My shell hardening, as my organs began to melt

inside over the boiling text waters.

Which continued.

After our drink she told me she had a house guest and wanted to check in on her because she

was going through a breakup. We hop in her red Mini Cooper and arrive instantly. Her home was cozy, eclectic, just like I remembered her. She was particularly proud of the art she just picked up, former plantation shutters, painted with jazz musicians blaring their horns. It reminded me of my first Jazz Fest with June, we stayed across the street from Louis Armstrong Park. Carol also had an extra room out back that she would air b and b. I imagined June and her partner Brenda there. The partner that I literally pushed over her threshold after I left. Her best partner.

I created a lifetime of stories of them in my head.

We sat on her back porch, amid wicker and cushions and rust colored metal chairs. Her westie cuddled, her kitty purred. Nearby gardenia smacked my nose. She brought shelled pistachios in a clear bowl, and we made another Tito’s and soda and sat. Their texting continued, as I just sat there waiting for the noose to drop. I’m shelling pistachios like a squirrel, my stomach organs swirling. I heard its murmur of help. Pistachio ash fell on my orange shirt. Suddenly, I became this ruffled grouse regaling her of the celebrities I’ve met and my life in Los Angeles, with my lovely partner, to drown out the noise.

A limped attempt. My eyes glance down as she and June’s texting continued. Her heartbroken

friend joins us for a moment. I begin to talk about the state of the country and how I’ve got this

window seat as a gay liberal progressive working at FOX and that I’m working on book about my experience of trying to bridge a divide, find the nuance in the complexity of being human.  They both glance at one another and moan, shaking their heads and seem to shy away from that.

Their texting continued.

And then I told her about my partner Val, and our great, open relationship. I had to catch myself. I am vomiting information that really is not necessary. Trying to still the voices in my head,

contain the organs melting. My mouth no longer a part of my body.

“Do you have any pictures of her,” she asked. I pulled out my phone and found the

most recent. And showed her.

“She looks like June.”

“Yes, I clearly have a type.”

“You are nothing like Brenda, she’s a pit pull,” she said. I thought about this. I will think

about this again. And again. I will write a poem about this very moment. She looks at her

phone, another text.

Carol then steadies the phone up in front of her face. It’s literally blocking her face. Is she taking

a photo of me, without asking? SHE IS taking a photo. I say nothing. I am the melting clock in a Salvador Dali painting.

“June texted back,” Carol said. “She said, ‘Tell her I’m living my best life.’” There it was, the noose, swift, uncompromising.

Carol saw it, in my eyes, that blank stare of unending grief, which is nothing more than transformation into another state of mind. I will never forget June’s words to me after I left her all those years ago. “I don’t want to wait until our lives are over,” she said and I instinctively understood this. I didn’t want too either. But the pain was so intense, the grief so overwhelming, it would have to wait at least several decades until I could unpack what occurred, to make sense of this brokenness. To try and find out what the hell would make me leave someone I was madly in love with for someone I wasn’t.

That Fracturing had a purpose and it was a soul’s purpose. That love and subsequent heartbreak set us both on the road to find our soul’s purpose in this lifetime. Unfortunately, we had different roads to travel. For me, the disconnect from her pushes me out of my comfort zone. Not just to search for the truth but to understand the fundamental human condition is a plus sum game. I never want to be disconnected with anyone, like that ever again. That blanket of shame that hung over me for years, was now coming off. Curiosity helped me pull it off, compassion let me do this slowly as I cried, and courage gets me up the next day to do it all over again. Some people say they do hard things like, answering the front door or text messages. But the bravest thing we can do right now is to speak up and say what we know to be true, even if that goes against the rising tide of political correctness. We must learn to free our minds from the tribal traps that have been set and find a way to connect with those with whom we differ. Politically, socially, intellectually. Sometimes the truth hurts. I know Brenda was her better partner, and it destroyed me. But it also pushes me to do things I would not normally do. Like keep moving away from her, because I know somehow, she is always with me, she became the best inner partner I’ve ever had, yes, she haunts my dreams, but this has a purpose. Each connection in our life helps us grow, both loving ones and those filled with heartbreak. Right now, we as a country are facing a great heartbreak of separation. We must face our past, reconcile with our ghosts, find the gifts they left behind and use them to move towards a future together. We humans are each other’s soul partners. Separation is not the way forward.

Some of our greatest loves may leave us physically but they will live inside and guide us in astounding ways. Some will live side by side. Some will have a mixture of both. We must find a way to come together, to relearn, reconfigure and restructure how we use our new systems of information, and we must find new ways to speak to one another. To fix our broken country, our broken systems together, there is nobody but you and me, because our politicians will not bring us together. It works to their benefit to keep us separated. These people should not be celebrated like gods. On t-shirts and bumper stickers. Where are they now, are they helping bring us together or are they still stoking the flames of division, while sipping cocktails with celebrities in their private jets.

This is not a burden, but a truth. So, there is something to say, and I will say it, even though I am scared, I am equally compelled.

I rose from my chair following Carol’s statement from June.

“It’s probably not about you. It’s probably Brenda,” she said.

“Listen, it’s all good, Carol. It hurts but that’s life, right?” I smiled. “I think I must go get ready and meet some friends. It was great catching up and seeing you. Thank you for the drinks and hospitality.”

“You are so welcome. It was great to see you,” she said.

“The next time you are in LA, please don’t hesitate,” I said, we hugged, and I took off,

organs dripping sinking into the marsh.

I got back to that hotel in NOLA, turned myself upside down, and opened myself up on the

blank page and shook myself over its clean white pages. Everything spilled out, my melting

organs, my unkept dreams. Thoughts, hopes, heartache and shame. The culture wars, the

state of journalism today. The changes that unfolded in me in the last few years politically and

personally. I pressed it onto the page. Bound it with chicken wire and took off.

The truth is, I had no idea who June was any longer. And she had no idea who I was. Yet we do,

we both know everything; an invisible line will always connect us. And we both know we are enshrined, intertwined. Everything unsaid, unspoken, the silence between us forced me to dig tunnels through my own soul, to seek out answers within myself. To seek out meaning and hope and most of all to make sure I keep the love and let it drive me and let all else fade to black.

Because the love was the truth. And the truth is love.

Fracturing is the signal, something must be unearthed, spoken, addressed. It shows us what is broken and it shows us the road to redemption. This is ours to tell, as a people of a country that has been ripped apart. This is ours to repair.

Salmon Rushdie wrote, “A poet’s work is to name the unnamable, to point out frauds. To take

sides. Start arguments. Shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.”

There are simply just two journeys we must make in this lifetime, and one informs the other. There is the inner journey, and as any spiritual warrior can attest to, it is the most difficult. Because it’s riddled with ghosts and it’s your job to contend with them. But without it, your exterior journey remains flat, ill-informed by outside voices and opinions. The robotic noise of a twitter verse of instant likes. We are embarking on a new age, where influence peddlers and algorithms want to capture your story and make it mainstream. Don’t let them.

The nation’s fracturing had a purpose: it revealed the hurts and the history of this country and

the belief systems that are no longer serving us as a nation. It revealed leaders that have misled us both with genuine earnestness, but also with a toxic disingenuousness. The more I engaged with those with the difficult and nuanced and complicated goal of finding the truth, the more I realized that I was a part of this incredible underground movement towards a new enlightenment era.

Nothing true should remain underground, even if it makes some, even myself, uncomfortable.

And she did it again, broke me open and I had no other choice. I had to go in with curiosity, compassion and courage. So I started writing my memoir, and as that spilled onto the page, I uncovered another world; the underground movement of intellectuals, writers, poets, artists and academia who were working to bring people together, to fix the broken institutions that were revealed following the fracturing. And I joined them.

**Final chapters**

**You Survived**

You survived because she was the one. You survived because she wasn’t the one. Because there was no other way forward, no way back. Because it was what all who came before you did.

You survived because of the scabbed knee, the honking horn, the laughing stepmother. The sparks that flew 1800 feet above the river, and then bounced off the rail. The supple sweet body that was used as a Kleenex. The iron fence that almost took out your eye. The fathers betrayal. The taxi ride. The blood-soaked rag. The mother’s duty. The cheating that killed your spirit, and the love that you rallied to save.

You survived because this life is what you expected and now what do you do with the worn-out shoes, the socks with holes. The octopus pot. The left-over ache. The trustworthy soul. You tell the truth. You seek guidance. You ask questions and you offer hope. Because you learned love. You learned love and this is beautiful.

Because of past mistakes, because of the present and because of the future.

**Letter to June**

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,

And nodding by the fire, take down this book,

And slowly read, and dream of the soft look

Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

W.B. Yeats

I was not sure how to start this letter. I can only tell you how I feel without hesitation writing it. A mix of joy, that I’m able to talk to you again, vulnerability and repair. I am about to publish my memoir. You, of course, play a significant role.

All the names are changed, but the love remains.

You told me once being in a relationship teaches us everything we need to know about ourselves, and what we need to do in this life, and that this, was very important to you. This was a guiding light for me, you ended up being my inner Sirius. The Dog Star, the brightest light in the universe.

The catalyst for this began one warm August Sunday afternoon in New Orleans, of all places. Pre-pandemic. In a dark, beer-drenched bar when I sat down with your friend Carol, and you entered the room, immediately. I was not expecting you, but then again I was.

That’s twice now.

She looked at her text and asked if we were friends and I said no. She asked if I’d like to be friends and I became unsteady. Bats entered the cave. Sediment rose. I blurted out “Of course, she is the love of my life.” The room swallowed me whole, I did not expect that. Years of therapy slipped into a knot. The noose fell. For two hours I watched it swing in anticipation and bloviated uncomfortably as the two of you texted. I said things blindly, my mind unreachable. Watching her hands holding her phone and you on the other side. I was in the dark, alone again. You, somewhere unknown. A tightness fixed itself in the center of my chest and rose up to my throat. Texting continued. Then she said it, in a second-hand text “Tell her I’m living my best life.” and the floor dropped out from under me. My feet, wiper blades.

I went back to the hotel. trembling, chastising myself. No “tell her, hello, or I hope she’s well nothing.” I poured it out on paper, a tangled mess of roots and leaves, dreams, seeds and soil, fishing and guitar wire onto a page. It ended up as the beginning of my first really shitty draft. (Thanks, Anne Lamott)

And now it’s being published.

It’s one of the most beautiful things I’ve ever created, except for the times that I spent with you. The ones that are forever etched in the bones that line the inside of my chest. I took great care and compassion writing you. I did the same for Brenda. I wrote this with great love, I had to. Then I didn’t have to.

There is a knowing in one's being, just below the surface, that appears unreachable. Until that thing that happens, that is so tragic that it makes you search your entire life for the answer. When you finally say it out loud it hurls you into space.

It’s called the truth.

We all know the stories of our souls even before they are told. And after the great fall, we will rise to meet them.

I chose you to be that one unforgettable love for me. And I gave you my all, everything in me and you met me there. I also knew I had a different journey. I was a creature of habit, baptized in betrayal and sentenced to the solitude of longing, of pushing a voice inside me so deep that it penetrated the core of the earth. Secreted away in the still of the night. Invasion of the body snatchers. The care the circumstances called for, didn’t arrive in me soon enough. I knew I had to go find it. And I picked the worst exit possible. I thought I could return though. I thought love can do that. And it can, but it takes many forms and different lives.

And when she came, I knew I had to let you go. I knew it, like it was my job, because it was.

Knowing one thing and wanting something different is truly the darkest night of the soul. Every woman who has lost a child understands this.

This much I know is true.

How does one transform heartbreak into joy. How does one forgive the loss. This happens to be one and the same.

Forgiveness comes when you find yourself in an empty room with a thousand doors and you’ve opened all but one. That one door that you’ve turned away from again and again, you slathered it with mud. Blocked it with furniture, beautiful impressionist paintings. A photo from an old newspaper your ex had framed for you. But still it beckons. And finally, you step forward and turn the knob. A gust of wind knocks you over. You shimmy on your elbows and look down to see that you’ve written the last page in your journal upside down. You turn it around and it reads, “Get up, get up and walk out the door and look at the beauty of life.

Love always remains, because it’s the one thing that is true.

I am truly happy you are living your best life, I know you are. You’ve always uttered the most perfect sentences. The structure, the brilliance of your honest thought escaping your lips, seems a magical art form that you do with ease. I used to love to watch you talk, the sheer wind-blown scarf, the red poppy pedal in the wind. I know exactly what you said to me is perfect. I know you are living the life you’re meant to live; With the person you are supposed to. This makes my skin smile.

But also slices at parts of my soul like the winter wind through an old, ill-shaped cabin, deep in the woods. A place once warm and inhabited with friends around a table in front of a fire, now long gone, forgotten.

Both of those can happen all at once and separately. A muesli.

I wanted the farm, the pigs, the goats, the dogs, and you. Yet I had a different path. I looked in your eyes, then across the slope of your right shoulder, he appeared. I saw the devil in my own barn, pacing. I knew I had to go and open those heavy doors, and fight for my life. To become the warrior I knew I was meant to be, the one that my father failed to be. I just didn’t want to accept that you had a different path, with a different person. I needed 23 years and 3000 miles to understand. Because the hurt ran deep under the rocks in the hidden river, behind the cabin.

Because.

It’s complicated when the soul tells you to turn right and you want to desperately turn left with every fiber. I know you know this, I do. In case you are wondering, I am living a pretty good life. It’s not my best yet but it’s pretty damn close. I’m pretty sure this book has brought a healing that I still haven’t comprehended. At times I had to take months away from the world, because the fermented coils rose effortlessly to the surface and were again so powerful and raw, they flowed easily downstream. The hardest part was finding my way back to solid ground, without drowning, hands grabbing rocks, branches, gnarled roots, clumps of St. Augustine grass.

Searching for my breath.

The pandemic was perfect timing.

I shuttered myself along the California coast as the colors dripped from the sky, then under a desert moon and stars, waiting for them to fall. I re-read books, googled pictures of you, which are hard to come by I might add, I know this is purposeful. I still love your heart-shaped smile. I am sorry about your parents. I still see your dad’s kind eyes, toothy grin, and love how he added a Y to the end of your name. I cried in my partner's arms more than once, more than I’m comfortable ever admitting to anyone, ever. And I’m grateful, for everything she has pushed me to accomplish, which would’ve never been possible with anyone else. I know this to be true. I belong here.

It’s where I get to kiss a sunset pig.

It’s these moments I’ve realized are the lessons that we all come for. The truly life altering moments of deep profound brokenness and forgiveness that connects us all, it brings to us a humility we can see in another, regardless of skin color or gender or ideology. Finding our truth and standing by it, despite the sacrifice. This is what breaks us and re-makes us. Stare deeply into another person’s eyes and you will see a reflection of yourself. You are supposed to. Repair is our work as humans. Both together and alone, but always connected, and always in conversation. Its finding beauty and grace on your way through, picking up the seeds after the storm, even when you are the storm. Planting in your octopus pot and standing waiting for the sun.

Knowing it will arrive again one day.

I had to learn to separate the love from the pain, to divorce myself from one part and covet the other. To know even a broke neck bird can fly. To dig up the past, understand the dirt underneath my fingernails was not my father but me. I was just looking for my shattered pieces to put together a better more loving future for myself and my partner, and the world.

I am that digger, that excavator of one’s soul. That’s what I am, a writer. A seeker and a truth-teller. Reconciler of words and wounds. A soul plumber and my words are my weeping. I’m a master class on humans. One that actively and with purpose chooses to sit in the middle of the bridge anchored by the roots of 500-year-old trees and balance both love and pain, paradox, and ambiguity, past and present and then look to the future. And I will rise and walk towards the love, against the wind with our ancestors. To a better place.

A shift of perception and I find that place. Heartbreak is just love forcing hearts to open wider than you ever thought possible, so more people can fit in. And now you live there and so does Brenda, separately and then together in that order. Another shift, and I reach for my pen. But, there is trade-off, I have to leave ego behind.

Because it’s Ego that holds you back, it holds onto the pain, justifies victimhood like a guard, a keeper of a dark covenant. A talisman. It fuels resentment and anger and lies as a cover-up to what is true.

But without the pain we are never aware of what we need to examine and what is a life unexamined, but a blank page.

What I have uncovered is a love letter to you. To me, to my grandmother to my mother to Marissa to Val, and yes to Brenda. To nature, to this country, and to the greatest Mother of all, earth.

Our roots are twisted, touch them they recoil and sometimes they bleed. It’s clear when I write about you, how you changed me, the molecules in my body shifted under your touch. You are seen in the reflection of my cells. Your love forged me, and that break-up shattered me. You saw me, and I saw you. And then we had to set each other on our paths, separately, but forever entwined.

But the fracturing was necessary, purposeful, it’s what was supposed to happen because it was my way in, it is our way in as humans. It shows us what we must examine, because we are not perfect, but we are constantly striving towards it.

I used to think your loss would be the death of me, but it was meant for so much more. For so many years I was fearful of letting my love for you shine, because of its immense power, ever since I was a child I felt my love was a burden, a cross to bear. One to put into a container and hang on a windowsill. I am saddened we do not know each other today. I wish we could, but I kept running away because I knew I had to. This is why I left and stayed away, and it was every minute that I was away that felt like a sledgehammer against my chest. And yet I kept swinging the sledgehammer until I couldn’t lift it any longer. And here is where I am.

Everything you did fit my soul's purpose. Where I was supposed to go and what I was supposed to do. We are all just working out patterns, narratives forged early on in our heads. Pathways in the brain like rivers. Souls crossing thresholds.

There is freedom that comes with distance, both physical and mental. It was always uncomfortable trying to contain my love for you. Suppressing something that beautiful, pushing it down is what created the trauma. But now as I examine this fracture, I stroke it with my pen and I find the love remains and it emanates from my being, shining like gold, free to roam the earth.

Love without any attachments is where it does the most good. In its’ purest form it exists as an offering. And that’s called gratitude.

I do hope I get to see you again before I die, just once. Both of us set each other off on our journeys and have honored them, knowing they would be different, with different people, this is the greatest gift, one that is both beauty and beast

But if I don’t see you, I am content knowing you are living your best life, and as you might suspect, that means everything to me. Of course, parts of you remain inside. You have found lodging beneath my pen, and it has filled me with astonishment and joy. This is the gift and legacy of love. That all-consuming love, where new language and worlds are created. Right before I left, you told me this kind of love is too much, but I have to disagree, its exactly what I needed, it’s exactly what you needed, and what the world needs more of. I think it is the greatest gift you are given and the greatest gift to offer the world. And that’s what this is, an offering.

I will be forever grateful that you were born in that beautiful small Pennsylvania town. That you entered me and never really left.

This is what I meant to say to Carol. But I got distracted. By all that texting. And I had to write a book And now that it’s done I hope you don’t mind that I put down in words. How wonderful life is that you were in my world.

You reached beneath my denim shirt touched my soul and made it sing and this book is just the beginning of its song.

All we can give to the world is our story. Thank you for being such a significant part of mine. When they dig up my bones they will find your name on several, and they should.

I’ve learned if we look at something long enough with love, you will be forever changed. You have changed me, J. But I know you change everyone you look at, Brenda knows this to be true.

With All My Octopus pot heart, that has tripled in size and then some. I’ll see you both again I have no doubt, if not in this life in the next.

**The Schukyll River (Hidden River)**

“Take me to your river I wanna know, Take me to your river I wanna go” Leon Bridges

A river cannot keep secrets, it provides testimony. Although it cannot see, it reflects. It knows who peers across its lips, what kind of person they are, what deeds they are constructing. It smiles at the fisherman and woman who tosses back its shad and perch. It answers back the slap of the oars, soon after it’s silky morning blanket lifts. It separates and comes back together after The hull of the boat slices its’ fresh skin. It giggles at the touch of the fox’s tongue on its bank. It is the source for every living thing.

Scientists say the Schukyll was started after a giant glacial melted, its formation beginning as a trickle in the Appalachian mountains. The water-carrying tons of Anthracite rushed in fast and furious, the force of the water cracking the ground open. The fracturing, a necessary wound. The water settled and what a gift that river became to the burgeoning communities all the way from Pottsville to Philadelphia. It formed a pattern. That pattern became entrenched and solidified until something came along to disturb it. A tree falling from a storm. A beavers dam. Man. Woman. Another split. From there it takes time but slowly the river will begin to change its shape, but it will continue to flow because it always remembers.

We can never hide from our destiny, we cannot reconcile it, bend it so it fits some twisted narrative. We must take responsibility for every step and that includes missteps. Misdeeds. Hurts, disappointments, betrayals. It always rises to the surface as beautiful lessons that have gifts once a person offers testimony through self-reflection. The same can be said about this country and its current fracturing.

The grand institutions that we’ve come to rely on are now splintering apart. Media, Journalism, education, banking, our medical institutions, and our government. Our entire society has been split in half. If we are to move forward we cannot keep our backs turned in separate huddles. We must turn towards each other in conversation. We must reflect and debate, not mandate solutions and expect people to goose-step in line. Fracturing has a purpose; it exposes where we need to grow.

Society moves forward when the rules of the game are clear, true progress only comes when people are accountable for their behaviors. No one should get a pass because they are on the right team or the right color. And no one should be penalized for words. Books should not be banned to teach us where we came from, we must learn from our mistakes, write them down, say them out loud, and be humbled by the lesson. Where does humility or forgiveness enter if the door is constantly moved, meanings of words constantly changed?

If we cannot see our differences and celebrate them. If we cannot agree to disagree, but always return to the table to break bread.

We are exiting the technological age and entering the Information age. Information cannot be hidden, it must exist above the surface. It must be debated openly and honestly and then transformed into useful dialogue to take our kids into the next unfolding chapter in our globe.

That is true progress.

The river forgives when the fallen tree changes its course. Because it understands accidents don’t happen for unknown reasons, they happen for a reason. Slowly over time, it forges a new path because the river understands its purpose on earth. It’s the source of connection, of life itself and somewhere along this new path, new bridges will be constructed, and new seeds planted.