

# #46 – The Art of Being Enough with Jennifer Schelter

**Donna Ferris:** [00:00:00] Welcome to Bounce Back Stronger, the podcast that explores ways to find peace and purpose no matter what happens. I'm delighted to introduce our gifted guest today, author, actress, and teacher Jennifer Shelter. A little about Jennifer? Jennifer shared in a Tony Award for Best Regional Theater at the Denver Center Theater Company and has written and produced four captivating one-woman shows, including the powerful Love Lessons from Abu Ghraib, produced by Amnesty International and the Interact Theater Company in Philadelphia.

She has also been named Best Affiliate Yoga Instructor for Philadelphia three times and has facilitated mindfulness programs at prestigious institutions like the University of Pennsylvania Wharton Leadership and Management Program.

She has also taught at renowned centers such as Kripalu, Woodloch Lodge, and Xinalani in Mexico, and most recently has been sharing her passion for memoir writing at the Maine Media Workshop and College. Jennifer, [00:01:00] thank you for joining us on Bounce Back Stronger. I'm so thankful to have you on the podcast.

**Jennifer Schelter:** I'm so grateful to be here, Donna. So great to see you.

**Donna Ferris:** It is good to see you. We met when I assisted you at the Radiant Retreat. It's still called the Radiant Retreat, right? Yeah. I highly recommend it - in Tulum still?

**Jennifer Schelter:** Now it's on the other coast. It's near Puerto Vallarta. So, it's a gorgeous place on the Bay there in Banderas Bay.

**Donna Ferris:** And you usually do it in March, right?

**Jennifer Schelter:** No, it's in February. So it's right smack in the middle of the winter.

It's a real gift to get on a plane and get off and have it be 80 degrees and sunny and gorgeous.

**Donna Ferris:** And you get a big crowd, typically, right?

**Jennifer Schelter:** We get 15 to 20 people, but everybody becomes great friends and that's what I love about retreats. It's the [00:02:00] camaraderie and the, just the general, yay us feeling.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah. And we always used to say that there's such a drop after you leave, you're so happy, and then you have to kind of re-integrate into the world.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yes, absolutely. It's great to have a foundation of a community where you can practice mindfulness and all the things that you think are important.

Not the real world, but take them home to the real world and integrate, like you said.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, and you maintain that really in your community, right, with the ongoing events. Maybe take a minute to talk about those because I do think that that's just an amazing way to take the retreat home, too.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Mm hmm.

Thank you. Well, I love to keep everything going on retreat because I remember when I went on my first retreat and I remember my first yoga [00:03:00] class and my first writing class. And I thought, well, I want to live like this. I don't just want to like experience it in the classroom and then, you know, not experience this other time.

So, the meditation and journaling group that's on retreat, we always meet, or there's a regular practice on Monday and Friday mornings. So, we do meditation, intention setting releasing emotion, you know, letting go of emotion, being that if, you know, there's a line, you can either be above the line, which is courageous and accepting and loving and open, or you can be below the line, which is, you know, It's kind of stuck in emotion, and we really look at how do you release emotions that drag you down?

And then we're also looking at language. I think it's so important to find authentic language for what you're experiencing. And then we have a writing group that meets every Thursday evening as well. and then I also teach yoga every week too. So my life is now sort of all retreat.

**Donna Ferris:** Leading retreat all the time.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Leading a retreat all the time.

Yeah.

**Donna Ferris:** I think so many people are searching for a community like that. So it's great that you provide that.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yeah, I, I love it. I mean, I always come back to that “Little Prince” quote that it's only with the heart. I wrote it down. It's only with the heart that one can see rightly what is essential is invisible to the eye. And that's what I love about language because it brings the feeling through us to others.

So it's a shared experience.

**Donna Ferris:** And it's so amazing when you can find [00:05:00] those sentences, both reading them from someone else, but also writing them yourself. They can convey energy and feelings to somebody else, just like art does. And I do want to definitely give time to your art.

And so maybe, let's talk a little bit about how your journey in the arts began. I mean, you, you pursued a BA in visual arts and an MFA and you are just a triple threat really across all of these arts. So I definitely want to spend some time there. Like how did education shape your career, and how have the arts impacted your life?

And I guess a pretty broad question, but it's a thread for you.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Definitely. I think the challenge for me is that I didn't know I was dyslexic until I was in my 30s. So it turns out that the way I process life is through [00:06:00] doodling comics. Do you know what I mean? If I was sad, I made comics.

Or I made funny faces. I drew Ziggy's. Do you remember Ziggy?

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah.

**Jennifer Schelter:** I used to draw Ziggy's and I draw these heads and these profiles thinking thoughts. And then I was really into theater in high school and did all the plays. And I also loved visual arts.

I had a wonderful art teacher, Denny Heck, and I just think it was natural for me to want to express through another medium. And then, when I got to college, I did a lot of oil painting, and the professor I had was Barclay Hendricks, who is a famous Philadelphia artist. He also taught at Connecticut College. In high school, I had another [00:07:00] influence, Elizabeth Osborne, another famous watercolorist who is very successful here in Philadelphia.

And I used to have her poster on my wall growing up. But it wasn't until I think after college that I said to myself, I feel like there's more in me, and I didn't know how to access it. It felt like theater was a way to get out of the box and find other selves within acting. And so then I ended up getting a master's in classical theater at the university of San Diego.

And yoga was part of the program. They thought yoga was the best education for understanding that your body is your source. When you're acting, you have to come from the embodied experience. I think I'm a natural artist, and it's something where I've always processed through a visual as well as words [00:08:00] and then through the body.

So yeah, that's just the way I process life.

**Donna Ferris:** It's interesting because a lot of the work that I've been doing is around helping people find their creativity as a way to heal.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yes.

**Donna Ferris:** Do you see that in your work, too?

**Jennifer Schelter:** Definitely. I think if everybody had a creative project or something that they could pour their energy into, it would allow you to feel a sense of freedom and agency, which is so helpful.

I think creativity gives you a sense of ease. There's no mistake. There's always the ability to get back in there and rewrite or repaint or re-replay the music.. And it's this constant play. I'm really into playfulness recently. And I think that play is how we [00:09:00] learn, and it doesn't have to be grim.

It can be playful, which is much more healing and fun.

**Donna Ferris:** Yes. Let's talk a little bit about your one-woman shows. I know we talked a little bit before recording about your latest work and maybe that

would end up in a show or something like that. So I'm just curious where that is today.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yeah, I finished a manuscript, a memoir project. And I then translated it into a 10-minute monologue. As I'm working on it, now I'm going back and revising sections of the memoir because, you know, you get into these things, and then you realize that you didn't really know what the thread of it was about until you got to the end.

And then maybe it gets revealed, like Michelangelo said, there's a block of marble, and then you have to reveal the statue in the marble. [00:10:00] We'll see where it goes. I'll probably do it, but I've turned over a new leaf where I'm really enjoying the process, less pushing for the end, simply because I feel like I want to understand best I possibly can the tools to be a great storyteller.

I feel like I'm really good at summary and setting a scene, but to create narrative tension is something that I'm also really interested in.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, and I think as an artist, maybe as a human being, it's probably helpful to not be so focused for us on the outcomes. I think if I look at the podcast, for example, for me, I'm just trying to make it a practice.

Like this is another creative practice for me, as opposed to worrying about like all the other things. And that's been really helpful for me.

Yeah, I think it's another one of those things like when I started [00:11:00] taking yoga classes, I had no idea what I was doing, you know, what is this going to mean to me, and it opened so many different doors. Does that resonate at all for you in terms of just kind of starting a practice and trying to see where it's going to go, but not worrying about where exactly it goes?

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yes, because I remember thinking, well, if I can just make something that's good. Like my mind wants to make something that's good and saleable, but that has nothing to do with the process and the ego kind of always wants it to go somewhere. It's got to produce something and it's like, dude, we're over here painting and you're already taking it to market. It takes the joy out of it.

So yeah, I'm interested in joy. I'm interested in staying in the process now. Like I've flipped it. I mean, I'm not saying I'm perfect. I'm saying it's been [00:12:00] good to flip it and be part of the process.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah.

**Jennifer Schelter:** It's much more freeing.

**Donna Ferris:** Where does the mindfulness work fit in with that?

**Jennifer Schelter:** Well, I think to be an artist. To be a writer, to be an actor, to be a painter you're constantly up against your self-judgment and self-criticism. Constantly seeking self-approval. And seeking approval from others. Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? Is this good? Is it this?

And for instance, I recently painted a goldfinch for a friend. They wanted a goldfinch and it took me a while. I painted one and I didn't like it. I wouldn't let it out of my house. I had to take a breath, step back and start again. And what was wrong was the canvas was forcing my creativity to make it a [00:13:00] certain way. And so once I sat with it, I thought that canvas is too big. I need a canvas that looks this size, not that size. Cause this amount of space is going to create a different type of project. Do you know what I mean? Yeah. So I went back to the store and bought a slightly smaller canvas.

I resized it. I redrew it. And then I worked on it, I worked on it and worked on it and I would sit with it week after week and work and sit and drink my coffee and look at the beak, and look at the eyes, and look at the feathers and does it feel alive? And by golly, by the time it went out the door, it felt alive and I loved it.

And then she sent me a picture of it hanging over her bed and it just looks like it's singing so I say that's mindful because I didn't want to beat myself up. Like, you can't beat yourself up into producing something [00:14:00] beautiful. At least I can't. I have to, as Elizabeth Osborne said to me once, she said,

“Everyone can see the mind frame of the artist on the canvas. And to paint with delight is a very different experience than painting with like a gauntlet over your head.”

And so for me, mindfulness is that experience of being a beginner and giving yourself that loving-kindness. To breathe and give yourself some space so you can create from a sense of more ease, rather than gripping the pen or having a gun to your head as you're trying to create art.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, yeah, it makes a huge difference. My mind kind of drifted to Andrew Wyeth's paintings. Some of the paintings he did are dark. It's the same space, but sometimes the paintings are dark and sometimes incredibly light.

And you can see the energy of [00:15:00] the artist in the exact same space,

**Jennifer Schelter:** I think the light of the artist, the soul of the artist, whatever you want to call the life force will show up on that canvas or show up on that page or show up in the classroom.

So to make sure that the energy is coming from a place of purity. It's a practice. Mindfulness helps me come back to the courage Just the courage to do that over and over and over again. It's not easy.

**Donna Ferris:** It's really putting yourself out there every time.

**Jennifer Schelter:** And also, you know, I deal with the voices like, I wish I were further along.

I wish I'd...you know what I mean? Like there's always that voice, like, "You should be doing more." And, I think mindfulness, at least for me also is saying I'm enough how I am what I'm doing. I'm enough. And that feels very good to finally get to [00:16:00] a place to constantly talk to myself.

If I bring out the measuring stick and I start comparing and contrasting my art to other people's art, it's. That is not friendly. No, I have to come back to, like, okay, Jennifer, just stay in your lane.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, it's a practice.

**Jennifer Schelter:** It's a practice.

**Donna Ferris:** It's a practice. Do you have any art close by that you want to show?

**Jennifer Schelter:** Well, I have two things. I don't know if you can see it. It's a tiny little watercolor.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, it's beautiful.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Those are the mountains, and this is the bay.

**Donna Ferris:** I love it.

**Jennifer Schelter:** It's at sunrise. It's a watercolor from Mexico.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, I love that. Did you do that when you were there last?

**Jennifer Schelter:** I did it, yeah, when I was there last. Then I made little greeting cards for all the participants.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, that's so fun.

**Jennifer Schelter:** This is it'll come into focus.

**Donna Ferris:** It it, it hit it there. Right there.

Aw, that's [00:17:00] beautiful. Now that's, that's your, which cat?

**Jennifer Schelter:** This was my dear cat Enzo, who unfortunately died prematurely. But I love to paint animals, and I love to paint landscapes and birds.

I have a practice where I'll paint and then write in the morning.

**Donna Ferris:** I love that so much.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Thank you. Yeah. Or I'll just paint something like, this is just a funny thing. My cat on the chair.

**Donna Ferris:** Oh, that's so great. These are so good.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yeah, so I just love looking at the patterns of daily life.

Looking at where you live, looking at who's around you. Yeah, trying to capture those things.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, I love that so much. And it's interesting because you're teaching memoir writing [00:18:00] and there's patterns there. I mean, memoir writing is all about finding the pattern. That's interesting.

Does that resonate with you as a thought?



**Jennifer Schelter:** Absolutely. Especially like last night's memoir class. We're looking at the hundred-word stories and everybody was so moved by the experience of place. To start in place and ground the writing in a place.

And it's the same thing with watercolor. You ground the viewer in a place and it's a tiny little vignette. I just am such a believer that all you have to write is a tiny little, like Anne Lamont said, just a tiny window, just a tiny little window in which to just say, I'm just going to focus on [00:19:00] that moment.

That's more than enough.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, it's so funny you mentioned her because I've just started reading her book, the love book that she just wrote, and I read the first chapter and was sobbing. I mean, it's so beautiful. It's so beautiful because that's her whole idea, and I'll probably tear up.

But her whole idea is that love is exactly what we're missing in this world, and you would love it because she's talking about her neighborhood. She describes each thing, like the bench and the park itself and all these different areas, and she puts scenes of people who love each other and, you know, rely on each other, and not all of it's positive.

There have certainly been negative, less happy things that have happened, but it's exactly what you're saying. It's the simple beat of a life. But it's filled with love, and it's just really beautiful. It was just so well done.

There's one line, and I don't have it, but I will have to post it at some point. It basically says [00:20:00] that what the world needs is love, and we are aching from a lack of love as a society.

And I just started crying because I do think that's true.

**Jennifer Schelter:** I think so too. I mean, that's what I experience. So much of what you just talked about. You remind me of my friend Laura Munson, who often talks about the wholly mundane, everyday life is the extraordinary.

It's the simplicity that is extraordinary. My cat's paws are extraordinary. Seeing my mother is extraordinary. You know, everybody I know is alive. That's extraordinary. Just this feeling that you have everything, that you don't lack anything, and to infuse yourself with that remembrance every day.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah, I think that is the goal. Maybe it's the ultimate enlightenment, maybe. I don't know if you read the book about Dipa Ma? She [00:21:00] was a famous meditation teacher, I don't want to say the word guru because it's not the right word at all. But she was pretty famous in India around the time when Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, and all those folks were there.

And, you know, she didn't live a very elaborate life. She was really deprived of being a meditation teacher for most of her life, I think into her 40s, because of the way things were done then. She just lived a completely simple life but found joy in every moment. And she has touched so many lives.

People would come from miles to this small apartment she had with her family just to be in her presence. There's not a lot written about women in meditation circles. It was just so fascinating, but it was exactly that. And everything she said - there was no reason to be unhappy.

Every moment is a gift. That's what was her whole message. I'm actually having the woman that [00:22:00] wrote the book about her on in about a month. And she had never met her either. But she was so fascinated by how everybody talked about this woman, she wanted to find out about her.

The book is just full of all of her wisdom and all those things. It's, you know, life is a gift. Every minute is a gift. We are enough as we are. What are we driving and scraping for? For me, it was really helpful. And I don't think we don't know these things.

I think it's just all these different ways of being reminded.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Absolutely. Cause I think the number one thing we talk about in meditation is that feeling like, thank God, somebody else said something, or we learn the skill to access it in ourselves to approach our suffering with some ease. Like, if we wrestle ourselves, or if we're at war with ourselves, it's just the worst experience.

And I go there a lot, but I'm [00:23:00] getting better at saying, we're not going to buy what the ego is trying to sell. Like it's black Friday. But I don't have to buy. It's like a discount on low self-esteem. Well, I don't need to buy that, I don't need to buy comparison.

I don't need to buy what the ego is selling. I can step back and choose. What do I want to buy? Okay, I'm gonna buy courage. Okay, good. I'll stay over there.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah and it feels like like meditation is one of those things that does get better with age the more you do it.

Don't you think?

**Jennifer Schelter:** Yes, and I think there are many different types of dance and meditation. And oftentimes, people say to me, I feel like I'm failing at it. And I just say, well, find another teacher or find [00:24:00] somebody that can help you feel that you're succeeding at it.

Because I think it's such an incredible gift to have self-reflection.

**Donna Ferris:** And if you can catch when it's not. I think that the big thing, too. When I hear myself spinning out. I had a thing yesterday where I got put in a situation that wasn't in my best interest, and that person put me there, and I knew it.

And I knew that I wasn't able to do the thing that they wanted me to do. And the old me would have still be spinning out over it. Why didn't I do that? Dummy me, blah, blah, blah. But that person knew that I couldn't do that. So it's just like, wait a minute, I'm going to own the fact that I don't.

And I did in the meeting. I said I don't know how to do that. That's growth because the old me would have tried or spun out or [00:25:00] whatever, and you know, I owned who I am now. There's going to be things where I'm not going to be able to do it and I'm going to try to be okay with that most of the time.

And that's the impact of meditation. For sure.

**Jennifer Schelter:** I always say, I'm all for meditation on the spot. I call it catch and release. It's like, you just catch it. It's happening. Like for you, you caught it right in the moment. And then you said, excuse me, I don't know how to do that. Like you said, you could have been derailed for a week over that instead of, you know, or two months.

**Donna Ferris:** Yeah. So I think that's the benefit. And I had Steven Copeland, I guess a month or so ago, and he said, you know, everybody should start meditating if they haven't meditated now. Cause he's like, this is the best meditation in my life, and it only gets better.

And he's facing some cancer now. And his whole practice is built around kind of supporting himself through this time. And he said, I'm still, [00:26:00] having really amazing days despite this stuff. And that's what you can get to. I think, is pretty amazing.

**Jennifer Schelter:** When you get to the beingness, Yes, the thinking, just the being watching, observing, bearing witness to the beauty and the dappled light.

It's an extraordinary miracle that we get to be here. And so I love beingness. I love practicing being. And I catch myself going to the future, trying to plan and like, bring it back here. Right. Let's just be here.

**Donna Ferris:** So what if there's somebody out there who's not sure how they could ever get over whatever barrier that they see in front of themselves, to this life that we're talking about. Where you are creative and you are more mindful or whatever it is that they are wanting, what would you [00:27:00] say to them?

**Jennifer Schelter:** First of all, I would say to trust their longing to experience what they have a hunch about, to trust the calling that's coming from within. And then I would say, just because the appearance of your life isn't where you want it to be, it doesn't mean that it's not possible because if you have the seed inside of yourself.

In yoga, it's called the bija. It's the focal point, an internal seed or intention, like a Sankalpa, a feeling that's arising in you. It's there for a reason. And if you have your eye on it, it will grow, but it does take intentionality. So, I would say if that person is intentionally [00:28:00] wanting to grow a creative life or a mindful practice, which simply means that they want to grow the side of themselves that believes in joy and peace and love, or do you want to feed anxiety and fear?

Because you can release fear and you can release anxiety. It just takes practice. And then you come back to what are you practicing? Are you practicing love? Are you practicing your writing? Are you practicing self-reflection? And are you around a community that's really supportive? As I only want to be around those people that are like, yes, you can do it.

And they help me, and so I would just say, get around somebody that you genuinely feel has your back because you need not do this alone. I would never say do it alone. I think that any of these mindful practices are team [00:29:00] sports.

**Donna Ferris:** It's a method of connection. I think that's what we're doing, right? I'm a pretty real introvert, which is hard to believe. Here I am with a podcast, but it is a quiet sport that I'm doing.

Writing too is a quiet sport. You're doing it by yourself, but for me, the benefit has always been sharing it. I will say things in writing that I can't bring myself to say, otherwise. I will talk to people about subjects in writing that I would be scared to talk about in real life.

It's a way to express yourself and connect with others without taking an undue toll on your own psyche. At least for me, that's how it is. I don't know if that resonates for you?

**Jennifer Schelter:** It does, because I think writing with pen or pencil, writing in a notebook, it's not talking, it's writing.

And it's slightly slower than talking. And so I think there's a wondrous thing. It's like calligraphy. It's a Zen practice where it slows you down. [00:30:00] And it slows the mind down, and I think there's a lot of gold in that. What we're talking about is really self-mastery. It's the freedom to be who you know you truly are. And to bring out all of the self and not be afraid of yourself is very benevolent. I think that there's this misconception and I remember feeling that sitting with myself felt scary.

And I was recently with a student who said that this is, it's too scary. And I said, but if you can simply sit still for a moment and breathe, Are you afraid of sitting there? And she said, of course not. And I said, well, that's meditation, and that's self-reflection. You don't have to be [00:31:00] afraid.

I'm saying that creating an experience where you're friendly with yourself is of huge benefit. And so I think creativity is building that bridge to how can I be kind to how I process life.

**Donna Ferris:** That's amazing and a good place to tie it up. Thank you so, so much, Jennifer. I really appreciate this time with you.

**Jennifer Schelter:** Thank you. I'm so grateful to know you.

**Donna Ferris:** Thank you. Back at you.

That's all for [00:32:00] today. If you want to learn more about Jennifer's books or her events, those links will be in the show notes. Thank you for listening. I hope this episode was helpful.

And if it was, please subscribe, drop a review, or share it with your friends. That's the best way to get it in the hands of those who may benefit. And if my daughters Sienna and Sylvie are listening, I just want you to know how much I admire you and I'm proud of you, and I love you so much. Bye now.