

**EPISODE 189**

*“TT: I moved back to New York 10 days before I had my first daughter. A little while after that, Mama Kia died. That was really odd for me, because I never had grief that happened before. She was going to come up for the birth of my daughter and then got sick and wasn't able to and we talked the whole time. And I went to the local yoga studio and I said, I'd love to teach a class in honor of her and I don't need to take any of the proceeds. We'll donate them to Mama Kia's children who are now twice orphaned. And, they said, yes, and then it went back and forth and the class number got put on the schedule. So I said, in my head I'm going to just start teaching something in the building that I live in and gather a group of people and we'll just send money to her kids. And that's how The Class started.”*

**[INTRODUCTION]**

[00:00:43] **LW:** Hey friend, welcome back to The Light Watkins Show. I'm Light Watkins and I have conversations with ordinary folks just like you and me who've taken extraordinary leaps of faith in the direction of their path, their purpose, or what they've identified as their mission in life.

And in doing so, they've been able to positively impact and inspire the lives of many other people who've either heard about their story or who witnessed them in action or people who've directly benefited from their work.

And the goal is to expose you to as many people as possible who found their path, and I want to humanize them. Because after hearing story after story, you are going to eventually give yourself permission to move even further in the direction of whatever feels like your path and purpose, because what you'll see is that anyone who does that has had to overcome many of the same obstacles that you might be facing right now.

And my guest today is Taryn Toomey. She's the founder of a "movement" movement called the class, which is a workout class where fitness meets mindfulness. And if you lived in New York or Los Angeles over the last 10 plus years, you've probably heard of The Class. It started as a fundraiser in the basement of Terrence, New York city apartment back in 2011 and continued for almost two years without a name.

Obviously there were plenty of ups and downs and mistakes and hiccups. And of course, Taryn and I go deep into her nonlinear path to starting this movement and to growing the class to

expanding it into a global wellness brand. And we talk about how she used all of her experiences as a woman, as a mother, as a yogi, as a fashionista, as a New Yorker to inform the creation and the development of The Class.

We talk about the principles of community building, of branding, of finding others who share your vision. And we talk about how to maintain the integrity of your core values as you're expanding to new markets, and what happens when you're no longer a one woman show. And then most importantly, Taryn shares how she thinks about using your instincts to direct your growth and how you can recognize your intuition as opposed to your fears when moving in the direction of your path and purpose.

So I think you're really going to appreciate this one and you're going to get a lot of useful takeaways for those of you who are actively following your heart and you're having to navigate all of what that entails. And so without further ado, let's get into it. Here is my conversation with The Class founder, Ms. Taryn Toomey.

[00:03:46] **LW:** Taryn Toomey. It's an honor having you on the podcast.

[00:03:51] **TT:** Thank you. It's an honor being here. Truly.

[00:03:54] **LW:** So we met not long ago in, how do you say it? Ibiza? You have to like Ibiza.

[00:03:59] **TT:** Ibiza. I searched for this because I didn't want to be that person like saying the thing in the way that makes you be the person that says the thing in that way. Ibiza.

[00:04:08] **LW:** We met in Ibiza and it was a wellness conference, weekend wellness conference. You were doing the class there several times. I unfortunately did not make it because I don't do jet lag very well. And I was coming from Mexico. And I had to give a talk that I was still prepping for. So I ended up sleeping, trying to stay up till four in the morning to stay on Mexican time and sleeping through it. But your reputation precedes you. I've heard so many good things. I've actually collaborated with The Class before, back when it was called The Class by Taryn Toomey. Now it's just called The Class.

Natalie, one of your first, I believe it was one of your first teachers, right? Natalie...

[00:04:52] **TT:** Was the first person that said yes to working with me when I was like, I have this really weird idea.

Yeah.

And she was like, yeah, yeah."

[00:05:01] **LW:** She and I did something. I think it was either right before the pandemic or during the pandemic. I can't really remember now. It was a few years ago, but I've been hearing about you and wanting to talk to you. And then when I got a chance to meet you, I was like, Oh, my God, I got it. I got why people are drawn to you so much. So now I want to go and unpack your backstory and find out what makes you so special.

[00:05:27] **TT:** Thank you. I'd like to say one thing and this will be the summary of the whole class. It originally was "the class" in lowercase font with a period and underneath it, it said "peace through strength". And at one point I had hired somebody to help me with the business and that's when it became The Class by Taryn Toomey. In my heart, it was never really about me. It had birthed through me and the expression of what it is. The origin of it came out of my form, but it's now The Class again. So I say that because I think that when there's a name that is put on a movement that there is a system in there where one believes that they have to take shape or subscribe to a certain set of beliefs that are based on a human being.

And that is not what I believe The Class is. That's why we've built it out in the way to have so many teachers, because I understand that the way I speak and share doesn't resonate with everyone. So you need different voices and different textures in it. So I only bring that up because you brought up The Class by Taryn Toomey. It was a moment in time, but it is just The Class.

[00:06:32] **LW:** Well, that's how these things go. It's like the Facebook turns into Facebook after a while as it evolves and as it gets bigger and bigger, you realize it needs to really transcend me. And so I want to go back and fill in the blanks of how you got to the point where you even started this thing.

[00:06:50] **LW:** So can we start in New Jersey by way of Connecticut and just talk a little bit about your upbringing? The thing with you don't have a book yet, right? And I'm sure you're probably in the process of writing a book because why wouldn't you be in New York...

[00:07:04] **TT:** Because I'm fearless and scared as shit about talking

about anything. This is literally me. Unless I'm moving, I have a hard time with the expression of it. Which is a lot of, all of this.

[00:07:15] **LW:** Okay. Go ahead.

But if you had a book, I would probably have all these answers already. But since you don't yet, I'm going to be asking you those kinds of questions. So what do you remember growing up in terms of any ideologies or philosophies that your caregivers or parents imposed upon you? And what was your childhood like?

[00:07:33] **TT:** Born in New Jersey. Mom and dad were together. A lot of arguments and fighting and all that good stuff. I had a sister who's 18 months older than me. I remember

always being a little bit too spunky for the room and tapped on the head, go over there and that light and spunk would bring it sometimes. And then sometimes it would get me in trouble.

My mom and dad were very different people. I think, they in reflection, now knowing what I know had their own histories in their bodies that they never found the process to heal, which just got passed through the line.

My mom started practicing Buddhism, chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo every morning, every night since I was little. I remember one fight that my mom and my dad had, where my mom was chanting and my dad went up to a Gohonzon and pulled it out of her altar and threw it off the back deck. And I just remember in my head being like, Oh shit.

And that's the only little things I remember from my childhood. Moments like that, that just really imprinted as Oh, that's not a good thing. I know that there was an energy of prayer in my home in a way that was with hope to move through some of the challenges that were happening, but there was just a lot of blacked out spaces for me.

Then my house got foreclosed on. I remember that. I remember the sign on the front door. And then really, I don't remember a lot. I And about 3 years after that I moved to Connecticut in with my aunt and uncle.

I didn't see my dad much. There was a lot of tears, a lot of fighting. And I think that my kind of survival technique during that time was humor and light. And I still do remember having a certain lightheartedness to everything, but I don't remember specific chunks of time. I've done a lot of work around those. So I can go back into like, why and how, but in terms of like your question of what was my childhood like.

Then we moved out of my aunt and uncle's house about three years in. My mom and my sister and I moved into our own house down the street, same kind of energy. My mom was still chanting all the time. She was bringing groups over the house. Those are, I remember 1 of my very 1st moments where I felt like I was safe in the environment with someone was this guy, Bernie, was his name came to the top of the stairs when my mom had one of these meetings and he just hugged me and he just said, I don't even remember what he said. I just remember him hugging me and not in a, in an uncomfortable way in like, this kid needs a hug way. So I remember that the energy of this community that my mom was bringing felt connected and honest and kind, but there was never really much movement that I saw in terms of my mom's life. So the role modeling of having a practice versus taking the practices and putting them into action never really showed themselves for me, if that makes sense.

My dad was an abandoner, would come and go would come for 6 months, disappear for 6 months at a time and come back. He moved to Florida early on. So I loved my dad, my dad was my dad, but I didn't really have much of him. So the relationship that I created through that period of time was that, I did something wrong to make him go. I'm still working through that at 45 years old in terms of my engagements with humans. And then from there I went to three

different high schools. In my beginning of senior year in high school, I moved from New Jersey to Connecticut and then Connecticut to Florida a few weeks into my senior year in high school. Moved down to Florida with my dad.

So lived there for about a year and a half. And then moved out on my own, hit the school of life. Was working as a beverage cart girl on the beer cart situation. Loved that time of life going backwards on the golf course. And started teaching step aerobics.

I remember I walked into this gym when I was 18 and this trainer, whose name was Saul. I went up to a woman there and I said, are you hiring for aerobics instructors? And I had no history of any of that and this guy saw me do that and said to this woman, whose name was Holly, I think you should train her. She's got a spunk to her and she took me under her wing and trained me how to teach Step Aerobics. So I started teaching Step Aerobics. That was 18, 19. Movement's always been a huge part of my life; sports and anything where I could move my body to regulate. And then from there I went up to South Hampton to work at a store, retail store. I didn't even know what the Hamptons were at the time. I thought it was a place in New York City. And started working in that store. Ended up going to another town was trying to leave the store. I was at a woman from Ralph Lauren saw me interviewing, walked into the store and said, do you need a job? And I said, actually, I do. So she gave me a 2 month job for a summer gig up in the Hamptons. And I was like, what is this place? Oh, my gosh! you know, They dress you and all of this. Like, it was my first hit of that kind of energy of brand for lack of a better word.

And then I moved to Florida to work in their Florida store and then back up to the Hamptons. And then from there, I moved to New York city where I've been living for 22 years with a job in their corporate office as an assistant, and then worked my way up through the corporate ladder there. The whole time I was doing that, I was diving deep into yoga down here in downtown Manhattan.

[00:13:12] **LW:** I want to pause there for one second. This is all great. I just have, I actually have two questions from your childhood before we get into this phase.

Your mom seems like she identified as a spiritual person, I imagine. I wonder, while you all were going through that initial drama, moving from New Jersey to Connecticut, et cetera, did she have any spiritual rationale for all of that? Did she say anything to you and your sister about how everything happens for a reason or any of this kind of stuff?

And then number two, what was your work ethic as a child, as a teenager, as a young adult? Did people have to force you to work or were you self motivated or what was that like?

[00:13:54] **TT:** Thank you for interrupting this stream of consciousness. Cause I will just keep going. I'm like, let me get all of this over with. I like that. Thank you.

I do not recall my mom ever giving me any words of wisdom in that way. I don't think that she had the access to really pause and look at the impact that, or the capacity, I should say. That perhaps the environment was having on her children, not for lack of care, just overwhelm. So I don't recall much of that.

I do know that my mom felt and still is quite psychic in a way, she would have dreams about things and express them and then things would happen. That's when she was called things like crazy and all of that. So the downloading of like the visions versus the reality of the way people would speak to her, I think created a schism for her to not know how to be in her truth. That's in my adulthood I can see that. But back then I felt, that my mom didn't probably have the capacity to parent in that way.

She did work really hard. She was always just hustling in terms of waking up in the morning, trying to drop us off at school, would have to get somebody else to pick us up to drop us off. Would always pick us up an hour late. So there's always this not really there, but really trying energy, hard worker.

My work ethic from as far back as I can remember, I've always had a drive. When I spent a summer with my dad the middle of fourth and fifth grade, there was a farm down the street. And Joe, the farmer, I asked him if he needed any help and he paid me \$3 an hour and I would ride my bike there every morning at 5:30 am and just vegetables and then swim after and be so excited about the \$3 an hour and go and try to buy a magazine and say this took me 1 hour.

It's been there since then. I've loved working. I've loved being in the field of all of that.

And then one other thing, what was your idea of success like? Having seen your mom have to, the foreclosure and were you thinking I need to own my own stuff. I can't be in this situation. I need to be a business owner. What were you thinking in terms of, as you were now becoming a young adult, working in Ralph Lauren, what was your aspiration?

I wasn't really thinking anything. I was more in fear a lot, but I didn't know what I was scared of because I was learning by doing that I could take care of myself. I didn't know that then, but I think that I still, it's still a part of me, this mindset in terms of just success. What does success mean?

To me, I think that when people hear that word, which is obviously just a series of symbols over an energy to give it meaning, success it feels like it has this monetary energy to it, but I think that success is the ability, and it's not even back then I'm having a hard time articulating it, but the ability to get myself back to where I am quicker. Not going into the loop of what next. And I think that had to do a little bit with the way that I would drive myself in to moving energy through work.

I remember the summer I was with my dad, I set up a stepstool in the corner of his office and another box on top of it and put a little, one of those old typewriters and would type labels out

for him for a business that he was trying to create. So I was always trying to do to keep the energy moving. And I think that was the way that I was able to feel like I was adding value. There was something I was doing. And it's interesting because my sister has a very different relationship to work. And I'm just saying that feeling that as I'm saying it now, she still doesn't work. And it's just a different energy that one can move through the expression of how you're focusing your energy, right? Sitting in self loathing or complaining. Or like how do I use this experience that I'm in right now and get some new resources and some new tools? I'm going to learn how to type out labels or I'm going to...

[00:18:06] **LW:** Did you learn anything from Joe, the farmer that helped you in your Ralph Lauren and Christian Dior career as an account executive?

[00:18:14] **TT:** Yeah. How much is it to put that tomato seed in the ground and how much is it to sell it? I wouldn't say really, I'm sure that I could sit and think about the way that there were tentacles that connect. But Joe, the farmer had a stand that was beautiful and he would wear this Speedo, he had long gray hair. He was tan as can be in energy that was, I'm a farmer, I'm growing this, I'm putting this incredibly beautiful farm truck in front of my house, and it was all the honor system. So people would come up and the pickling cucumbers and, all of that delicious stuff, which I was always tasked with the cucumbers, pickling cucumbers with the thorns. And it was just the honor system. I think he probably made a lot more money in the honor system than he would have had he put a dollar on the tomato. So I don't know the direct relationship to that and my kind of corporate career, but that certainly was the embodiment of someone that was showing what they were passionate about and being in just complete truth around the way that they expressed it, Joe, the farmer was Joe, the farmer, Joe, the farmer wasn't trying to succeed or make more money. This was his art, so I love Joe. He died a few years ago I found out.

[00:19:33] **LW:** I love that. And so while you're at Ralph Lauren, you started dabbling in yoga and shamanism, or are you studying with a shaman?

Yeah. So I always moved; sports, aerobics. And then when I moved to the city, actually it was a little bit before the city, I started doing some yoga classes that I remember the first yoga class I went into and when they did the alms at the beginning, I couldn't stop laughing.

Where was it? I was in New York during that time. It was

[00:20:02] **TT:** In Sag Harbor. It's a gym now at the very end of the pier down there, I don't know, I don't go out there much anymore, but in a gym and I couldn't remember, I couldn't stop laughing. I felt so embarrassed. I couldn't stop laughing, but clearly was an energy of something. And then I moved to the city. I didn't ask Tonga class and then. I found a yoga studio down the street from where I am now that I just dove into. It was Vinyasa, but it was all alignment based. I was leaving my office or Ralph Lauren every day, like on the nose at 6 PM because the yoga class started at 6:30. And if I was late a couple of times, the door would be shut. It'd be full. And I would. So it was a core part of my life at that time. And slowly, I started

realizing how much of my day I spent thinking about getting to class at the end of the day. It wasn't even why, why am I here? Like, wow, I'm Taryn that is now living in New York city, working at this place that has all of this beautiful things. And I can't wait to go move my body, and sweat. So I remember that being a feeling that. At after a while just became such a message to me that it was, for lack of a better word, a call to something that was bigger than I could see at the time.

The shaman thing, when people use that word, it's interesting because what happened is that the yoga studio I was at brought a retreat down to Peru and a woman by the name of Mama Kia, I met her on that first retreat and she had this children's home, 25 children she had adopted and she created a retreat center, Casa de Milagros, to fund the children's home to be able to bring more children in And that she was an American woman, but I met her down there on this first retreat. And there was just something about her. I always feel uncomfortable saying this because I'm sure she was like this with everyone that just, she felt like the first pass of a mother to me. She said things to me that I had never heard from a female figure that, and I respected her so much. She was pure love this woman. Everything that she did Was out of that and you could feel the honesty in her mission and the truth. And that's when I first started working with plant medicine, sat in my first ceremony. And then after that, I started going back and spending more time with her.

And so when people say that I studied with a shaman, I would sit in ceremony with shamans that would be down there, but it was really the study of being, in my own ceremony space that was held. So it was never sat down and studied with but Mama Kia was the core kind of driver of me returning down, down to Peru.

[00:22:48] **LW:** What sort of wisdom did you glean from your relationship with Mama Kia? Did she give you life advice ever, or was it just observing her or what was that like?

[00:22:57] **TT:** Yeah. I remember I've always had this really deep note of self hatred that just shows up in a specific cadence of voices that I hear. I've now given those voices a specific name and I'm like, okay I hear you. They were just so ever present during that time. And I was talking to mama Kia in the kitchen and I was crying. I don't know why, but I remember the moment and I said, I just hate myself.

And she just as honest as you could feel somebody with you. She was just present. She in her funny little voice said, honey, and I won't say in the same iteration, she said, you have to understand how beautiful you are. And I'm not talking about what you look like.

And it was just one of those things where it just pierces the heart cause it's just a sentence that it was like a summer a summary and I still remember that moment. I just felt safe with her, and she loved unconditionally and it showed. So she slowly just by being who she was started helping me change my relationship to higher spaces to spirit to opening up to moving out of some of the kind of constructs of the third dimensional spaces of like matter and form and who has what and who doesn't. I was living in New York. I was dating somebody that was in



finance. I worked at Ralph Lauren and none of it felt like me. And I didn't know, I do remember after the 3rd time that I'd left. I got a little freaked out when I came home because I started thinking I was going to run away and move to Peru and not talk to anyone anymore. Yeah. Could have been a choice, could have been a different path, but I stayed in the city and I got married and had children. And it's just, it's interesting because I reflect back to that time and I have this response even talking about her where I feel like I don't want to say that my relationship with her was what it was. I don't want to feel special in a way where she and I had this thing because she was so important to me. That's my own work around it. But I have her ashes. So this is something, with my phone number and in a Sharpie on the bottom, cause I, I travel with her. Um, some things you just can't explain with words you know?

[00:25:07] **LW:** Right. So when you did these retreats in Peru, was this the yoga teacher training you ultimately did, or is this separate from the yoga teacher training?

[00:25:15] **TT:** Separate. So the first retreat I went down with a woman who was one of my first teachers, Alison Noby at the time, Alison Sinatra now is who introduced me to Mama Kia. And then I started going separately with just other groups and on my own. And I was just in touch with Mama Kia all the time. So I would travel down there and do, participate in different types of work, depending on what the group facilitation was, but it was never the training down there.

I ended up doing the training Akula yoga through a woman named Alison West who didn't have her own studio at the time. And that happened because I decided to leave Ralph Lauren. I thought I was just unhappy at the company I was at, which it was a wonderful company to go to Dior mostly because...

[00:26:02] **LW:** Question, what were the signs of your unhappiness? Like, how did you know you were unhappy? And I know that sounds like a silly question, but were you feeling anxious? Were you dreading going to work? Because I know people out there listening to this may be feeling something similar and I just want them to be able to relate to what you felt because that could be a calling to something else.

[00:26:22] **TT:** It's a really good question. There was something in me that was unsettled where I didn't feel like myself. I felt like I was doing the things that on textbook, it's like what do you have to be unhappy about, and I wanted to believe that, and it wasn't true. I wasn't fulfilling the part of me that felt like I was offering something that could potentially lend a hand. If that makes sense, and I wasn't there in my own practice yet to be in the space that I'm at how I've matured in my own processes to be able to embody it and then others feel the embodiment of that and then perhaps, it resonates with them. And then there's a way they're not by telling somebody how to do it, but by being it, and now there was just something that was dysregulated where I was going out a lot. It was like, New York City life, late nights, drinking a lot, just feeling like, oh, this is what you do in your 20s. And then I would go down to Peru and have all of these really profound openings in myself that felt more settled. I felt more settled, you know, it wasn't this like, um, because I feel like you'll know because it being is much easier, right? Being yourself is much easier. It's not this like rush or the energy of what next? It's just, there's a settling. There's a faith in the alignment of things that to me, when you are in

the process of finding what fulfills you, not by trying to find out what fulfilled someone else and then carbon copying that.

[00:28:15] **LW:** There's also that subtle identity shift. Like you talked about, you would be thinking about the yoga class that started at 6:30, pretty much all day. I used to live in New York and I was, that's when I got into yoga. I was working and I was a model, I was a fashion model and there was a point where I stopped being a fashion model who occasionally did yoga to becoming the Yogi who occasionally went on castings, but didn't really look forward to them anymore. And then I knew that's when it was time for me to take that leap of faith.

Your leap of faith got imposed upon you though, when you went to Boston because your husband got assigned a job in Boston, right?

[00:28:53] **TT:** Yes, so that is the piece that I was transitioning into and I appreciate the way that you slow me down. So Ralph Lauren, the question around there was something unsettled. Of course, I wanted to like, put it on that it's this thing happening as opposed to this thing that I'm not listening to or I'm on my way to finding or hearing. I went to Dior and after six months, I was like, whoa, like that's when I decided to leave Dior. Did a teacher training because one just unfolded at the timing that I was leaving. It was a 1 month long and I said, okay, great. I'm going to go and do that. And then I'm going to go and re engage with the world of corporate everything and I did the month long training. And then, when I finished, I said, I'm just going to give this thing a little bit of a run. It's a conundrum with yoga or any teaching. You have to teach to learn to teach to find your authentic voice, you know, at first you're just going to classes you love and say the same thing. And, so I tried for a couple of months and then, it was maybe 2 or 3 months in my husband at the time got transferred to Boston for work and there wasn't a corporate office of any of the places up there that I wanted to work with. So I started teaching yoga up there.

And that is when then I went down to Peru again. And it was great because it was a community that didn't know me. So I felt like I could be myself without any sort of preconceived Oh, this girl came from the fashion world and she's trying to be in yoga now. Like all these things, which could have been my own projection of what they felt about me. Who knows? I know people have their stories they tell and we have our own. But I felt good up there in terms of just being natural on the way I taught. Then I

the first almost two years, three times a week. I'd gather a group of people. It was like 10 and then it grew from there.

[00:30:39] **LW:** Wait, it was the basement of your apartment building? Is that the gym or something like this?

[00:30:42] **TT:** There's a gym. It's a basement. It was on like the 5th floor, but it was the gym floor of the building. There was this big storage closet that had the bathrooms in it. And I just took over that closet. It was big enough to put like 10 people, you know, 10 mats in and this

person that was in the building said, let's put some mirrors up in here and let's put some squishy mats on the floor. And this little community just started building out of there.

[00:31:08] **LW:** So New York can be really strict about these kinds of things. Did you have to get all kinds of permits and permission to start doing this? And especially if you were charging money, I imagine you're charging money to do this. Like what kind of hoops did you have to jump through?

[00:31:20] **TT:** I'm sure that I broke a lot of rules. It's like a doorman building. I would get people's names. I would put them on the doorman list, they would come upstairs. Seventy percent of the group was building residents. I would go into the gym and pluck somebody off the treadmill, this is true story. And the only, I never took any money for it because I would say at the end of every month, now it's time to donate, please send a PayPal donation to Mama Kia's kids who it went direct. So that's how it started.

[00:31:51] **LW:** It was fully for Mama Kia. It wasn't for you at all. You were just raising money for her kids.

[00:31:56] **TT:** And actually the way it first started is that I wanted to, it wasn't intentional. I wasn't like, I'm going to create this new method and we're going to donate the money to Mama Kia's kids. And it was more organic. It was that I was so crushed that I wanted to teach this class. I was crushed when I tell you, if somebody said just let it go, figure something else out. It took me weeks to get over the fact that I couldn't teach this class there. And then I just gathered two people and three people, and then they were like, how can we pay you? And I would say just send money to this PayPal link. So it organically happened. It wasn't like a, a formula and then it just grew from there.

And then after two years, I couldn't think of what to name it. So I named it The Class. And then...

[00:32:43] **LW:** But talk, okay. Talk about the, how you developed the format of The Class. Like, where were you drawing this inspiration from for this really interesting way you were teaching? Because in my experience, when you back in those days, when you learn yoga, there was a tradition and you were supposed to teach in accordance to this tradition. And if you veered away from the tradition, you were watering it down. You were adding stuff that was unnecessary to it. So there's all this pressure that new yoga teachers feel when they're starting off teaching that I need to sound and honor this and sound like this person and make sure you check all the boxes. And you really developed this unique style of movement and flow and affirmations and all these things. So talk about how did you give yourself permission to do that? Where did you test things out and people lost interest in you? Like, I can't do that anymore. Or, you know, people found people engaging it to give people permission. Like, I know that was a process.

[00:33:38] **TT:** Yeah. I mean, that time that I had with no name, that was the marination tank. And I didn't even know I was never going to be anything. I was never going to do anything beyond this. So I felt the freedom and I wasn't saying to people, sign up for 9.99 a month kind of thing. So I have to show up in a certain way, but I did probably because of my work ethic. I would show up at 9 AM Monday, Wednesday, Friday, I would have a plan. I know that for me, repetition of movement without choreography allowed me to access my thought process. And I know that when you repeat a movement for a really long time, it's going to turn your muscle group on fire. And then if you add your breath, which has always been the tool for me, and I think biggest one for many, and close your eyes and then add music. You have access to yourself. So that was there. It's interesting that you say that about yoga because trust me, there was a lot of pushback and still is. I lost a lot of people that I really respected when I first started teaching the class that would just shame me and be like, what the fuck is she doing? And in me, I was never like, oh I'm like taking this thing and I'm going to plagiarize it and change the words and not honor something that where I learned it from because I, I have a lot of reverence for these practices and teachings that people hold and share and move forward in the space, but that wasn't the energy that was moving through me. It was rogue. It was like, very. I needed to use sound because that's how I was able to get energy out. So the combination of repetition of movement, we start on, one beat per song squats on the beat, close your eyes, use the breath. So you're synchronizing the movements in the room. And then when the going gets tough, great.

Now we're in practice, right? Keep going. Keep going. What else? And instead of, I heard you say affirmations earlier. There's not actually in my my share of offering of The Class. There's no real affirmation, so to say. It's more what else? All right. What else? What sound would that make? Okay. What else? So you're encouraging or holding a space for people to vocalize the feeling in the body. So there's no narrative around it. It's not like, this is why you feel this way. And when I reflect, I think that's why I was teaching that way because I was having my own kind of schism around feeling like I wanted to get something out and being met with pushback around why I shouldn't feel that way, around why I had what I needed around why it wasn't okay that I didn't feel, so the use of sound is. For me, one of the more important parts of The Class. And it's not really, let's move the body. And then let me give you my advice about how you feel. It says, move the body make sound, go into practice, repeat it. And then you add the freestyle, right? Then you flush it from the cells.

So to answer your question, it marinated for about two years. It started at first as just like a really gnarly workout. And, that's because I've always been very physical. And that was like the word on the street like, Oh my God, that's so hard. It's like, yeah, right. let's practice. You know, let's practice. Because if you can practice, then when that other thing comes up, that other obstacle, other hurdle, you're like, you lean into the tools that you've learned. And for me, it's the embodiment. It's to learn by doing, showing yourself. So I don't know if that answered your question.

[00:37:11] **LW:** Yeah. At what point did it transition from being like a passion project for Mama Kia to becoming like a thing? This is what I'm doing now. This is a brand. We're going to make some money potential, not, just, we're going to just make it a legitimate business.

[00:37:26] **TT:** I mean, I'm still waiting for that. I feel that sometimes I just, I really do sometimes think Oh it, there was never like a moment where it was like, because it's all been this kind of, it never totally made sense when I would make a choice. I would feel it in my body. Like it's the next step and I have to do it as opposed to like, oh, this is what I have to do because I'm subscribing to the way you build a business for the brand. It was like a more of a, it's time. So after those 2 years, kids dance studio, I did not know what to do because if I charged for it in my head and in my heart, it was going to lose...

[00:38:07] **LW:** The essence behind why it even started in the first place.

[00:38:11] **TT:** Yeah. So I had a really hard time with that one. And I remember I was nursing my second daughter and I was talking to mama Kia, she'd passed away and I was crying. And I said, I don't know what to do. I'm so sorry. I feel like I need to give this a container and clear as day. She said, honey, I'm so sorry. You have to look at what you're doing and then kind of laughed. And that was lost on me that this movement that was expressing out of me wasn't just about what it gave to her children, but that it was helping other people, right? That offering of it. And it was in my own warp. Right? Like, oh, if I'm not just giving everything, then who am I? I'm like, you know.

So we created a structure where we donated a portion of the proceeds to Mama Kia every month, and we still continue to do so. I actually just got an email the other day that the mission of her foundation is it's close and that they've completed their task of getting all the children through college with the resources and everything and that they will close the home. So it's interesting. I never really thought that would happen. But regardless when it transitioned from this offering into business is that I realized that first month that this 60 a month room that I was renting at the kids dance studio. And then the like, 25, I don't remember how much it was a mat at the time was like really creating some revenue. I didn't understand like cogs and all that stuff at the time because I wasn't really diving in that way. But that's when I met Natalie a little bit before that she was working at the Lululemon store and she had taken a class when it was pre Class name, and I was like, who are you? You were in my class. And she said, yeah, it's do you want to work with me? And it was just that, it's that like spark of when somebody else sees that the heart driving out of you and it's like, yeah, let me... And that's honestly how the class has been built. Just people coming on board that were like, yeah, let's do this. We are out of our mind. Great. Let's go. So it was that and then JC Gossett, who was my, so that was JC Natalie and I JC now runs training. And we just started building and building the community, training other teachers. And then after a couple of years I finally opened my own studio. That's a whole other story which wasn't really me making ends meet. We'd never turned a profit. So I decided that we had to either scale through brick and mortars or do a digital product. Sat with that one for a while, because I didn't want to bring cameras in the room with a practice that we're asking people to be vulnerable and let themselves go and sat with it and it just kept coming through, like do it, do it, do it. And I was like, so I built ready to do a small round to raise some funds for the digital product. And then I hired the team with that music rights, tested, iterated, hard launched at January of 2020. And now we stream to 73 countries all around the world.

[00:41:23] **LW:** When I met you in Ibiza and I didn't know about your backstory at Ralph Lauren and all of the, you know, the fashion days, but I looked at you and I said, Oh, this woman is a fashionista. And then, looking at your brand and your social media presence, it's clear that something translated from the fashion days to what you're doing now with the muted tones and everything is in sync. So just talk a little bit about that. What was that thing that translated? What did you learn working in fashion that you now incorporate? Because the book, people do judge books by their cover actually. And you're communicating a message from the way that you present your palette, your photography and all that. There's nothing that's arbitrary, I believe at least. So can you talk a little bit about that? That influence?

[00:42:08] **TT:** Yeah, I think that when I was at Ralph Lauren being in that space of understanding just ethos of a brand. Right? People, there was a very specific energy at that company in the corporate office in the stores and it wasn't that I was intentionally picking it up. I just lived in it. So I do think that likely influenced what touchpoints of a brand feel like. That said, I have always been into style and I feel a lot through my eyes. I see little things since I can remember if there's a thing that's off on the corner of a photo, I can't get my eye off of it. So there's an attention to detail because for me, which has slowed a lot of things down my relationship inside my company. People call me the CDO, the Chief Distraction Officer. because I'm like, wait no, no, no.

[00:43:07] **LW:** The OCDO.

[00:43:09] **TT:** There we go. I like that one more. That's the funny thing. I'm the opposite of OCD. Everything's just, if you were to look behind the scenes right here, like my apartment has exploded. I'm able to live in complete disaster because that's how I grew up. But I can get organized when I need to use precision and say, okay, sit down and focus your attention. It's really just the expression of what moved me through visual storytelling is the brand I think that's what probably skipped people up at first right? And maybe still does they look at the brand and they're like, what is this packaged spirituality or something along those lines. But the truth of it is that it was just the honest expression of how I was able to storytell and share a feeling through visual and copy and all that. It wasn't made in a boardroom, the expression of my inner world out which is probably why I still take things personally when people criticize it. People have reactions to things. I get it now. I've separated myself from that.

Talk about community building. Seventy something countries is no small feat going from a basement with two or three people that you pulled off the treadmill so you probably have made every mistake in the book when it comes to building your community. What are some of the main maybe two or three takeaways that you would give maybe advice you would give to your younger self and the very start of that part of the journey.

Just to trust your instincts, and to...

[00:44:34] **LW:** What is an instinct though? Let's break that down because you mentioned, you heard these voices and you're praying to Mama Kia and is that your instinct you're talking about? Like how can people identify their instinct?

[00:44:45] **TT:** I love that question because that's where I was just about to go and to understand your own tendencies around instinct versus projecting your fear into the field and making it happen. So it's either that you have a feeling about something and then you put it into the world. And because the essence of it was honest and aligned call it with whatever you will. I use the word divine. I use the word God. It's not in a religious way that it will likely show up by bringing you what it is that you need, whether that's community, whether that's the resources, whether whatever it is, and it doesn't have to be tangible things. It could be the conversation media mentor, but that's the pay attention thing. So that's how you can differentiate I had an instinct. I put it into action and then I'm going to reflect, oh, that was my instinct versus. I had a feeling about something and I'm going to override it and I'm going to say, Oh, that's, I had a feeling. And then you do something and shit hits the fan, right? Like it was imbalanced. It wasn't feeling integrated, but you did it anyway because you believed in somebody's opinion or whatever it was.

So for me, it's really learned by doing, do the thing, reflect. Where does the instinct come from? And also, I believe, this entire thing would not have ever been anything without the community of people that have worked with me. I can have an instinct and then I have people around me that believe in The Class and the method that can challenge those instincts and allow for you to feel like you can separate out is that me just saying like, oh, that's my instinct and we're going to do that because that's my feeling. And it's actually a control thing this is what I want. And I'm going to override you and say, it's my instinct versus like a feeling.

The instinct to me actually feels somewhat settling. Not reactive, but I think that acting on the instinct and then noticing what that feeling felt like when you felt it is what helps you to start to trust your instincts, right?

Because there's instincts and then there's like activation of old wounds and like all these other things we can go into, and getting slow with those things, that's a self inquiry.

[00:47:06] **LW:** Yeah. I find that instincts also are nudging you to expand beyond what you feel your potential is. So you have to like you said, get out of the basement and start making this into a real thing and start bringing on other teachers because I can't do it all myself. And each one of those stages in the evolution of your movement requires deep inner listening and not just hearing what's being communicated but.

Taking action and it's almost always going to require some sort of leap of faith has that been your experience as well?

[00:47:42] **TT:** That's it. That's it right there.

[00:47:44] **LW:** If someone's voice is saying play small, that's not your that's not your intuition as much as it's some voice is saying, not necessarily go bigger, but keep adapting. Keep expanding. Just keep expanding.

[00:47:57] **TT:** I just got goosebumps. That's always a sign for me. . That's it. It's the leap of faith is the perfect way to say it, because it is a leap and it's in faith. And it doesn't mean, the thing has to work out the way that your mind is saying it needs to, but you're allowing yourself to move the energy and move into more creative spaces so we're not in these archaic structures that have us in these like really cemented, old styles of thinking that are breeding control and greed. It's like we have to continue to expand our awareness and allow for the creative visions to come through that's actually what I use The Class for.

I go to other people's class because I move my body. That's when I get most of the downloads and I'm able to express some of the energy and then get quiet and listen and hear through the breath. That's when I've had 99 percent of my revelations happen is when I'm moving, breathing, and then getting quiet.

And that's the other thing for me is like instinct. It's not like, you know, the feeling when you meet somebody and you're like, something's off here. And then you go in any way. People call them red flags or, you know, it's just variety of words they use. Yes. You kind of know, and then you did it anyway. And then he got hurt, right? It's even in a physical practice. You knew your knee wasn't feeling good, but you listened to someone else and you broke your knee, whatever. You get hurt, mentally, emotionally, spiritually.

[00:49:13] **LW:** That's okay because that's how you learn to like you going to Christian Dior, you knew instantly, this is not a good fit for me. It took me 10 years to figure this out with Ralph Lauren. Now it only takes me six months to figure it out. So that's progress, you know?

[00:49:26] **TT:** A hundred percent! Yeah. I've skinned my knees so many times. It's just you gotta always say that. Like you skin your knees. Hey, great. Don't pick at the scab for a bit. Let the blood congeal. Let's learn. Let's get quiet. Let's find some resources and learn and see if we can self evolve from the experience. That's happened, I don't know, 60 billion times in this evolution of The Class.

But what I was going to say about instinct is for me, I know, and actually I shouldn't say no, because I think if somebody says they know something, it's like, okay well, there's a ceiling to how you can expand with that. But I sense that putting yourself into a practice, this is your practice, right? Your meditation practice and likely a variety of other things that you're consistent about and you know, that you have that space to bring your heart and your opening that it's so nourishing, you know. I'll go in and I'll say like, all right, I'm going to move. Sometimes it doesn't show up. Sometimes it does, but having a space where you can go to get those like creative and to tune into those instincts, I think is a very powerful thing.



[00:50:31] **LW:** If people listening to this want to have the experience of The Class, what's a way they can do that IRL or digitally?

[00:50:39] **TT:** Yeah, thank you for asking. This is the piece I always miss The Class.com. We have a digital platform you could subscribe to that. There's live stream classes that are in and out of our New York and LA studios. You can live stream into our studio in Tribeca and we have one in Los Angeles. And then there's just tons of digital content on there from meditations to breath work, to this series we have, that's called There's A Class for that.

[00:51:05] **LW:** And if they want to study with you specifically I know you have a bunch of wonderful teachers, but let's say they just want to have one experience with you. Can they do that digitally mainly or in New York?

[00:51:15] **TT:** Yeah. New York. I'm in New York. I teach on Mondays at 11 AM eastern time and Wednesdays at 9. And then I just record content too, that lives on the platform every week. But that's in real life. And then we do retreats all over the world. We're coming to Mexico actually, February.

Amazing.

[00:51:32] **LW:** Yeah. Come join. Thank you so much for sharing your story. And it's an honor again, just getting to know you a little bit better. And I'm looking forward to the next time I get to see you in person and give you one of those nice long hugs that we were sharing in Spain.

[00:51:45] **TT:** Very good. Thank you, Light..

[00:51:48] **LW:** Alright.

**[END]**

Thank you for tuning into my interview with Taryn Toomey. You can follow Taryn on the socials @taryntoomey. That's T A R Y N T O O M E Y. And of course I'll put links to everything that Taryn and I discussed in the show notes, which you can find at [lightwatkins.com/podcast](https://lightwatkins.com/podcast).

And if you've enjoyed our conversation and you found it inspiring and you're now thinking to yourself, wow, I'd love to hear light interview someone like Richard Branson or whoever, shoot me an email with your guest recommendations at [slight@lightwatkins.com](mailto:slight@lightwatkins.com). And then in addition to that, one really simple and easy way that you can directly help me get that particular guest onto my show is to go to my show's page on Apple podcast app and leave a review.

That's one of the reasons why you always hear podcasters like me asking listeners like you to rate and review the show. That's because a lot of guests use ratings and reviews to determine

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And if you feel inspired to go the extra mile while you're there, just write one line about what you appreciate in this podcast, and that's it. It goes a long way to help me get all of the guests that you all recommend for this show.

Oh, and don't forget, you can watch these interviews on my YouTube channel. If you ever want to put a face to a story, but make sure you subscribe there as well. And I also post the raw unedited version of every podcast in my Happiness Insiders online community on Tuesdays, so a day early. And if you like hearing all the mistakes and the false starts and you want to get a head start on these episodes, you can do that by joining my online community at [thehappinessinsiders.com](http://thehappinessinsiders.com) and you'll also get access to my 108-Day Meditation Challenge, which has an 80 percent completion rate along with other challenges and masterclasses for becoming the best version of you.

Alright, I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like me, just like you taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. And until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of faith. And if no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you.

Thank you so much. Sending you lots of love and have a great day.