

Jerry: Good morning Grace, it's great to see you again.

Grace Belangia: Good morning. Thank you for having me on your show.

Jerry: Aww, so, um, you know, before we get started with the recording, we noted it's, it'll be two years since we actually saw each other, I guess last... two years this coming January.

Grace Belangia: That's right, I went to one of your, one of your workshops in the middle of winter, in the middle of Colorado.
[00:00:30]

Jerry: Yeah, and where was--

Grace Belangia: It was life changing. (laughs)

Jerry: Aww, well thank you. Thank you. So, um, before we jump in why don't you just take a moment and introduce yourself?

Grace Belangia: Okay. Well, my name's Grace Belangia, and I live in Georgia, and I help run a collaborative workspace, it's called The Clubhouse. And my um, in my previous life I grew up in Silicon Valley in California on the west coast and moved to the southeast, um, almost 20 years ago, um, started a family, and really, um, have tried to help create sort of an ecosystem that supports, um, entrepreneurs and startups in a- in a community that, um, wants to really make a difference in terms of, um, helping people start businesses, um, mentor them, make connections for them.
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[00:01:30] A lot of what we do is, um, giving you a safe place to fail almost. So if you think about the mantra of fail fast or, um, getting a community of supporters, you know, we provide that environment for people to do that in our- in our space and in our community. And- and some of that is, it's tied to education, it's tied to classes, it's, um, workshops, it's mentoring, it's sometimes just having an ear for people to- to- to talk about what they're doing and creating this ecosystem I think is really important for communities because, you know, with- with the way our country is, and- and divided in- in so many ways, if you have somebody who's sort of there to say I hear you, you know, I hear what you're saying, whether it's, um, related to their business, to their company, you know, I think our space is really important as a catalyst for that.
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[00:02:30] And then, um, I also help consult other communities that are trying to do that as well, um... usually related to ending the cycle of poverty and economic development and really engaging in- in- in people, and saying, if that's your idea, what can I do to help you launch that?

Jerry: Mm (affirmative).

Grace Belangia: As opposed to, um, that's not a really good idea, you should do something else, so. We- we become a signing board on so many levels.

Jerry: Mm (affirmative). Thank you for that. And- and just to clarify, did you co-found, or found The Clubhouse?

Grace Belangia: So I was, I was one of the founding members. So I came on board, um, if you, um, know about coworking spaces and maker spaces and hacker spaces I was, [00:03:00] I was uh, I was working from home as a consultant and I was looking at the dog too long and hanging out in my pajamas and I needed a workplace, a professional workplace to really scale my business. And so, um, I joined The Clubhouse when it, at its inception and have been with it ever since.

Jerry: Gotcha. So- so tell me, what prompted the reaching out, um, to wanting to come on this show and- and what would be helpful to talk through this morning?

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Grace Belangia: I think that, um, the overriding arch of- of what I'm struggling with a little bit that I think would be important to talk about is- is this concept of rejection, is this concept of, um, how do, how do you handle, you know, an idea or a concept when you're sharing it with a community of- of- of people that- that could be decision makers, that- that could be the catalyst to help you make that change. And it's- and- and it's hard because you don't wanna, you don't [00:04:00] wanna take it personally, you- you know, that in the bigger ecosystem, you know, it might not be the right time or the right fit.

But I think, I think so many times when people define their successes they talk about their accomplishments, they have to sort of give credit to the people behind the scenes that- the things that happen, whether it was luck, or opportunity, or education, and- and so, at the end of the day, there are people that are, um, that can help you make- make these really big decisions and- and I'm just curious of if- if you have a calling for something, if you feel like this is what you really really want to do, and you want to share that, how do you get what you might think of as people or institutions to really sort of buy into that idea? And if they don't, how do you get over the hump of- of thinking that it's- it's a rejection or it's a failure? 'Cause at the end of the day it really isn't. It's [00:04:30] more of a keep pushing through, keep being diligent, um, again, looking at what that looks like in terms of- of not taking it so, um, personally, but- but really being vulnerable to- to sharing what you think is really a- an amazing thing for your community or for your state or your country or even this Earth, so to speak.

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Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's a big topic.

Grace Belangia: (laughs) Well I think that, you know, when went to- when I went to your workshop in the- in- you know, 18 months ago or so, I think, you know, talking to people regardless of where they are, you know, in terms of their education or their wealth, or their geography, it's really important that we all have these vulnerabilities. We all have this sense of I'm failing and it doesn't matter if the public forward facing-ness makes you look like you're the rockstar or you've got it all together. And in reality, I think we're all struggling in some way, is in, I think it's- it's important to understand, you know, if- if you really set out to do something, what is it that- that- that can help make that successful without you being your own worst enemy, almost.

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Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Sure. So, um, tell me- tell me a story about rejection for you.

Grace Belangia: Oh gosh, um...

Jerry: Why is this so powerful for you right now?

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Grace Belangia: I think the rejection for me is- is- is probably based more on fear, um...

Jerry: So you're anticipating possibly being rejected, is that what it is?

Grace Belangia: I think so, um, I know a lot of it had to do with, you know, having a career, and- and- and- and growing in a career, and thinking, well, the only way I can grow in my career is if somebody else helps me to grow, as opposed to growing myself. And so I think that- that the, um, the failure that I've seen happens, is expecting something to happen professionally, and then it didn't happen. And so I'm like, oh, I probably shouldn't think that I'm good enough for that job, or I'm probably, yeah, I- I- I failed, I didn't get that interview, or I didn't get that contract, or I didn't get that return phone call. And so those failures, you know, they pile up, and they start to make you feel like you're inadequate, or that you're, um, you don't really have your shit together. That you're really, um, an imposter. The imposter syndrome kicks in really big time in terms of, um, thinking that you know what, maybe that person was having a bad day too, or maybe they didn't get the funding they needed to hire you to do the contract. Like, it could be something so far removed from who you are as a person, but yet that's not reflected in what that rejection was.

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Jerry: Mm. Mm, mm (affirmative).

Jerry: So, as you were describing yourself, and telling a little bit about your story, um, there were a couple words that I sort of jotted down, and then I- I drew boxes

[00:08:30] and circles around, because this is a way for me to sort of track what am I hearing. And I heard, uh, words, I heard the word community several times. I heard the word safe and safe place. I heard the word collaborative. And I heard the word space.

Grace Belangia: Yes.

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah.

Grace Belangia: Those are all really important words, um, for I, what I would say Grace's DNA.

[00:09:00]

Jerry: Yeah. Yeah. And what- what's the relationship with the imposter syndrome, what's the relationship with the fear of rejection, what's the relationship with, I'm looking back at my notes... and this from an email that you sent, "How can I get thought leaders and decision makers and those with influence and, here's an interesting word, power, to agree, support this idea, which is really your idea, which... and how can I do it in a way where when they don't accept that, it feels like rejection, or I don't take it personally." What's- what's this relationship between community, safe space, um... coworking, The Clubhouse, and worried about being rejected, and worried about taking it personally? What's going on there?

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Grace Belangia: In that circle? Well I think, um, a lot of it kind of goes back to how we as an organization support entrepreneurs. So- so, I'm myself as an entrepreneur, right? So helping to co-found this space, you know, putting in a lot of sweat equity, putting in a lot of grit.

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And I think that, um, what really happens is, having- having- having this space whether it's- it's- it's- it's Grace, or- or the physical place, and wanting it to be successful. Like- like, my definition of success is that I can bring a community together, and that they can collaborate on something that's- that's mutually successful, and so, for instance, if- if- if you- if you're in a- in a city, and you have a, the example that we used is, you have a storefront, you have a main street, you know, if you have a small to mid-sized city, and you have a main street that has been neglected, so the community has- has- has- has left their own downtown, you know, for various economic reasons, and- and I see a storefront, and I think, you know, that storefront could be filled with- with people. It could be filled with, it doesn't matter who they are, but the people can be there to try and create a community, and- and- and you're gonna have to go to the landlord, and you're gonna have to ask for a break, or you're gonna have to ask for, you know, I'm not asking for a hand- handout. I'm asking for a hand up.

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Because my hand up might ultimately help you, and- and so if you help me I'm gonna help you, and- and- and I want so desperately for that kind of

[00:12:00] community to exist for that kind of collaboration. Um, we pride ourselves a lot in saying, you know, we're not a social service agency. This isn't a, you know, we're not just gonna write you a cheque or give you free things. Like, you have to, you have to show up for these things, you have to be present. You know, a lot of times we equate our space with going to the gym. If- if you- if you join a gym, if- if you pay them \$79 a month, and you don't go and work out, you're not gonna lose weight, right? You're not gonna- you're not gonna get fit. If- if you- if you join a space, I'm not gonna do the business for you. I'm not gonna- I'm not gonna do that work. I'm gonna make the connections for you, but you're gonna get stronger, you're gonna learn more about business and funding, and- and- and design and creativity, and- and I want that space to exist.

[00:12:30] But there are other players in this ecosystem. And- and when I think about community, you can think about your- your governments, you can think about your boards, you can think about your staff, you can think about your members, and all those people have to be on the same page for this thing to really be successful. Um, for your investors, you want them to say, like, this is a good value and I'm going to invest time or money or resources, and instead, there's been pushback about, like, well, you know, I can't help you in that space. Or that's not what I'm interested. Or I'm gonna- I'm gonna help you with this sort of token of- of support and really it's like, no, I need this to have impact.

[00:13:00] And- and I think, you know, stepping outside this for- for just one second, that's a lot of struggles with non-profits. A lot of non-profits have this- this space that- that they struggle with financially, and I'm just like, there has to be a way to impact our communities without having this, like, handout mentality. It's like, no, I really- I really want you to get an ROI in helping our community help your community.

Jerry: [00:14:00] So, so Grace, can I- I wanna reflect back something that- it feels there's this movement. It's almost a jiu-jitsu movement. Jiu-jitsu is the- is one of the martial arts where you use the energy of your- of the- of the opponent against them. And so, um, when they come at you, you flip it around. And so, for me there's a flipping around that- that perhaps is going on here, which is... um, you start to talk about Grace. You start to use the word "I". And almost within a nanosecond you start to think about the other people. You start to think about the community. Does that have any resonance? I'll show, uh, I'll- I'll share more about what I see.

[00:14:30] Grace Belangia: Okay. That's good. This is good.

Jerry: I worry about being rejected. And I wanna talk about the community. And so what- what it leads me to- I worry about my imposter syndrome, but I wanna

[00:15:00] talk about non-profits and how others are experiencing. And there's this movement where it comes in and then it goes out, and it comes in and it goes out, and so, um, and this may feel a little uncomfortable, and if it does, we'll-well, it'll be an interesting point, but, um... what does it do for you? For Grace? To know that you are helping to build community or to create safe spaces for collaboration, or places for others to not feel rejected? What does it do for Grace?

Grace Belangia: It feels like I'm breathing.

Jerry: Ahh.

Grace Belangia: I feel alive.

Jerry: Stay right there. Now, the smile that just took across- yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Grace Belangia: Yeah. That's- that is my wheelhouse.

Jerry: And in fact you used the phrase before, because as I started to pop words back at you, it was like, this is the Grace DNA. This is my wheelhouse. This is the space in which I live.

[00:16:00] Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: I being Grace.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Right?

Grace Belangia: Yeah. And the- and the- the- the- the thing that- that I have experienced over the course of my career is- is variations of what- how- what- what is the definition of community? And it's a very vague word. It can mean...

Jerry: What does it mean to Grace?

[00:16:30] Grace Belangia: So, it means a lot of different things, but I- but I know that- that my wheelhouse is a- is a- is a type of community, which is, again, this entrepreneurial startup community. Those people, the ones that have believed in themselves, to jump outside their comfort zone to start a company, to start an idea, to- to risk financial and relationships and education and geography, like, those people fascinate me. Um, there's- there- there's a- there's a certain personality that exists in that community, that they got grit, they got, um, passion, they got, um, persistence, and those- those things and those people and those- I don't even care really what industry it is, it's just... I- I- I feed off of

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[00:17:30] that energy of them, and that's where I thrive, is connecting entrepreneurs or that ecosystem with the thing that will help them succeed. So connecting them, whether it's a customer or real estate or an investor, or a public speaking engagement, like, I celebrate those things. I celebrate right beside them.

[00:18:00]
Jerry: And- and, um, can you tell me about, tell me more about the way it helps you breathe?

Jerry: Can you tell me a little bit more about the ways in which, um, these are my words, not yours, so reject them.

Grace Belangia: Okay.

Jerry: The way it's air for you?

Grace Belangia: [00:18:30] It's a, um... if you feel alive, if you feel, again, sort of this higher power of, like, this is why I exist on this planet, this is- this is where my talents and my- and my gifts, spiritual or otherwise, this is where I was put on this Earth to contribute. And- and again I go back to people that come through our space or those that I interact with, it's like, everybody's got a gift. Everybody's got a story. Everybody has significance on this Earth. And I don't care, you know,

[00:19:00] how old you are, what color you are, your age, your education, I think that's what's so wonderful about, again, what I do, is it- is hearing these stories and helping people solve the problems that they think are so, um, important in our community.

And I love it. I love it. I hear people's stories almost every day, and I'm like, I'm so happy that you're excited about that thing. I don't know anything about that, but I wanna help you with that thing.

[00:19:30]
Jerry: So I'm gonna reflect back what- I think that there's a- there's a- there's a two part structure at work here.

Grace Belangia: Okay.

Jerry: One is, um, in this beautiful phrase, "everybody's got a gift." And then there's a particular in this current incarnation of Grace, manifestation of working with everybody's gift, and that is entrepreneurs.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Jerry: Meaning, um, we could apply this to a classroom. We could apply it to a group of non-profit executives. But the way it's particularly manifesting is entrepreneurs. And so there's a power, there's an- there's a life-affirming power in the phrase "everybody's got a gift and my wheelhouse is to help people manifest that gift."

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). That's true.

Jerry: Okay. So I'm hearing you.

Grace Belangia: Yes.

[00:20:30]

Jerry: Take that in.

Grace Belangia: Okay.

Jerry: Because part of the languaging that I heard here, there's a wish that those people would be heard. Which, in that jiu-jitsu move that we can often do, might also be a reflection of the wish of ourselves to be heard. It's not an opposition, it's- it- I cut you off, say more.

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Grace Belangia: No no, I- I think, where I- what I- what I hear you saying is that I wanna help people with their gifts, but I too have a gift.

Jerry: Yeah.

Grace Belangia: And so my- my gift needs to be- my story needs to be told as well, so to speak.

Jerry: And heard.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Right? My story needs to be told, that little move was "I need to speak, Grace. Grace to Grace. I need to speak." And that is a truth, and there's a wish, and the wish is to be heard.

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Grace Belangia: Yes.

Jerry: And I'm gonna take us way back to the fear about rejection.

Grace Belangia: Okay.

Jerry: What happens when we're rejected? I'm gonna quote your words back to you: how can I get thought leaders, decision makers, and those with influence and power to agree and support this idea?

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Grace Belangia: So there's- there's a, um... so one- I- I- so I go back to- to the vulnerability part of this discussion, and- and- and it's- it's- it is a fear of rejection, it's a fear of sharing a story, not knowing if people with power and influence are gonna accept it, much less help it.

Jerry: Or even hear it.

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Grace Belangia: Or even hear it. And so you- you- you- you shut down. You- you- you shut up. You- you stay in your lane. And- and- and I've experienced that, I've seen other people experience it. And so, you know, understanding how to get over the hump of go through that fear, that's- that- that might be my own answer, is to keep moving.

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Jerry: Well, so, okay, um... what occurs to me- so, as soon as you said that, the intuitive word that popped into my mind was "tragic."

Grace Belangia: Mm (affirmative). Wow.

Jerry: And then the image I had, because there was a- there was a quick little phrase you used which was "shut down, shut up."

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Jerry: Shut up, and shut down. And the question I held was, when was Grace told to shut up and so therefore she shut down? And that's when that word "tragic" popped in.

Grace Belangia: Okay. That's- that's interesting. That's eye-opening.

Jerry: Because here's the thing, the wish I think you have is, how can I find a way to steel myself, s-t-e-e-l, such that the pain of not being heard, shut up, shut down, doesn't hurt?
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Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I'm writing this down. Okay (laughs).

Jerry: How can I steel myself so that that doesn't hurt?

Grace Belangia: I don't know. I- I almost feel like the answer is to keep talking.

Jerry: Oh. There's something in there.

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Grace Belangia: It's- it's- it's- it's to- it's the- okay, so brave, bravery? Strength, um... resilience, it- it is- it is an internal sense of empowerment that- that needs to continue to blossom and to almost dismiss the feeling of being an imposter.

[25:00 -]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. So I- I have a feeling that the answer to the question that you're holding, which is how can I deal with rejection, and not take it personally, the answer is gonna be a little non-intuitive, and it's not to get tougher.

Grace Belangia: Okay.

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Jerry: Okay, hang out with me here, it's not to get tougher. It's actually to allow your heart to be broken.

Grace Belangia: Okay. That's interesting.

Jerry: You said... you used the word "resilience," and you talked about, um, bravery as a strength. And bravery is a strength. But so is the ability to have your heart broken.
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Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: It hurts. But the ability to have your heart broken implies an ability to feel empathetic connection. Empathetic meaning I can touch into the pain that I have experienced so that I can compassionately be with someone else's pain. Compassion means to be with feelings.
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Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And so sometimes the messages that we get, which is, "Grace, don't take it so personally." Well, you know what? You're talking about your DNA. Your wish to- to be community. To- to- to foster community, to belong, to create a space of belonging, is part- is- is like air, it's like water to you. It feeds you.
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Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And how else can you take that rejection of that except personally?

Grace Belangia: You're amazing.

Jerry: (laughs) Why?

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Grace Belangia: So one of- so you're- you're- you're catching words that I say, and I just caught a word that you said.

Jerry: Yeah.

Grace Belangia: And it's "feed."

Jerry: Mm.

Grace Belangia: And so one of the things when I tell my story, or I tell the story about how me and my organization can help people, is I ask the question, what feeds your soul? And so, I- I know what feeds my soul, and what I hear you saying to me, is that I hear from other people sometimes, don't feed your soul. And that's where that rejection and that fear bubble up to the surface.

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Jerry: I- I- I am definitely saying that, and- and I'm saying more. I'm saying something that I think can be, as I said, can feel a little counter-intuitive, which is you- you- you held up your mug before, your Sheryl Sandberg mug, "Lean In" okay, so I'm gonna use that phrase back to you. I want you to lean into having your heart broken in those moments.

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Grace Belangia: That's so painful.

Jerry: Yes!

Grace Belangia: (laughs)

Jerry: Yes.

Grace Belangia: That's gonna hurt, Jerry.

Jerry: Yes.

Grace Belangia: You just said yes.

Jerry: Yes.

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Grace Belangia: Tell me why. Tell me how.

Jerry: The impulse is understandable. If you stick your hand in a flame, and it hurts, the impulse is to stay away from that. And I understand that. And I'm not suggesting by any stretch of the imagination that we should put ourselves into

[00:29:30] situations of abuse or gratuitous pain. But you've asked of yourself, you know of yourself, that the grace of Grace lies in the space of belonging and community. It is what feeds your soul, and you know it's what feeds other souls. And you're- you're- what you've shared with me is that your DNA is to constantly create spaces where human beings get to grow and thrive as human beings, whether they're launching a non-profit, whether they're launching a for-profit entrepreneurial endeavor, some crypto-blah blah blah, block chain- I don't care.

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Grace Belangia: (laughs) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: You're talking about creating a space for their soul to thrive and manifest.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Jerry: And what you're saying is, "but I don't want to be hurt. I want to be heard, but I don't wanna be hurt."

Grace Belangia: Is that not what everybody in the universe thinks and feels?

Jerry: Of course.

Grace Belangia: (laughs) I know it's just- I know it's me. I know it's me. I know that's part of me.

Jerry: So the four noble truths that the Buddha taught begin with "life is filled with suffering." And the suffering that he spoke about is existential dukkha. It's the soul hurting. The second noble truth is "that which we do to push away the suffering makes the suffering worse." In effect, long before Sheryl Sandberg, the Buddha was teaching lean into the suffering. Don't seek it out.

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Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: But when it shows up, don't recoil from it. It's like, are you fucking kidding me?

[00:31:30] (laughs) That hurts!

Grace Belangia: Yeah, yeah, the flame, Jerry, the flame.

Jerry: The flame hurts.

Grace Belangia: Yeah, stay away from the fire.

Jerry: Right. But you asked the question, how is it that I can- I can experience rejection, because you- you- you're- you're wise enough, and self-aware enough to know that rejection is not something you can make go away.

Grace Belangia: Correct.

[00:32:00]

Jerry: Right? It is a part and parcel of the process of trying to become ourselves. The world as- as David White says in a poem, the world and its harsh need to change you is always at play. And we experience that as a rejection of who we are in this moment.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Jerry: And the way to be with that is to meet that. Like a warrior. And it doesn't mean seek it out, get into relationships where people are constantly rejecting you, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the fact that we cannot stop the world and its harsh need to change us. And so we are really faced with only one choice, one life-affirming, soul-feeding choice, which is to take it personally.

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Grace Belangia: Okay.

Jerry: And to realize that we're taking it personally because it matters to us. If it didn't matter to you, you wouldn't take it personally.

Grace Belangia: I know. Yeah.

Jerry: But the problem, now here's the little trick, the little hack, the problem is not that they're rejecting you and that it hurts. The problem is that your own self-definition of worthiness is linked still to whether or not the people of power and influence agree and support the idea.

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Grace Belangia: It's tied. It is tied.

Jerry: It's totally tied.

Grace Belangia: And that's--

Jerry: See, you know for sure that this is your calling.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Jerry: The little doubt that exists in Grace's mind is, "but what if I'm wrong?" And then when they, those with power and influence, refuse to accept, hear, accept, agree, support, see? Maybe they're right.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Maybe I'm wrong.

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Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: And if I'm wrong about this, then I'm wrong, and I have no place that I belong and I have no space for Grace.

Grace Belangia: Yeah.

Jerry: I said before that the way to meet this is as a warrior. Where's the warrior piece of this? The strength piece of this? I am worthy, whether or not my idea gets accepted. I am lovable and worthy of belonging whether or not I succeed in creating space for others. Does that make any sense?

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Grace Belangia: Yeah. Yeah, it does- it- it does make sense. I feel... yeah. It does. It- the- the image that comes into my mind is a little bit of... I know- I know what I'm good at. I know what I'm supposed to be doing. I have- I have gotten stronger, I have- I don't know that I've gotten tougher. The- the- the going- going through the pain and seeing the fear and acknowledging a broken heart, that's still a big mountain for me. Um...

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Jerry: What's the threat?

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Grace Belangia: Oh, abandonment. Boom. That's easy. That- that- I've gone through therapy for that (laughs).

Jerry: So- so the threat is, remember, my big three are love, safety, and belonging.

Grace Belangia: Okay.

Jerry: These are the things that we all strive for. The fear of abandonment is a fear that we will not find a place where we belong. We don't have a place in the tribe. We don't have a place in the family. We're thrust out. We're bereft, we're cold, we're sitting naked in the forest by ourselves, and not in a good way (laughs).

[00:36:30]

Grace Belangia: (laughs) Right.

Jerry: We're cold and we're lonely. We're devalued. Which of course is beautiful for you because what is it that defines you so much, is the ability, is the wish and the ability to create spaces of belonging for other people.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:37:00]

Jerry: What gives that wish the power to execute in a superpower way is the fact that you actually fear being abandoned.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: That fear is the power.

Grace Belangia: Yeah. That's true.

Jerry: Because you know what it feels like.

Grace Belangia: Yep.

Jerry: You know- you know what a safe space of belonging feels like, because you know what the opposite feels like.

[00:37:30]

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Safe space. Yeah.

Jerry: Safe space to collaborate, safe space to dream new ideas, safe space to be in community, safe space to be heard, safe space to not be told "shut up and shut down", but speak up, open up.

Grace Belangia: Show up.

[00:38:00]

Jerry: And show up. There you go, there you go.

Grace Belangia: (laughs) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's amazing.

Jerry: So what are you taking from this notion of the- your- your own question, how do I handle rejection?

Grace Belangia: It's almost like, um... bring it on. You know?

Jerry: Bring it on, without- without a kind of false kind of, um, "I'll fight you."

[00:38:30]

Grace Belangia: No. Yeah. There- that- that's not it. I mean, again, this sort of cliché, um, things out there, I'm a- I'm a lover, I'm not a fighter, you know. A competitive nature, you know, if you ask me about my childhood, I'd be like, I was always on the team sport where nobody got cut, because I didn't want to have to compete with my friends (laughs).

Jerry: And everybody belonged.

[00:39:00]

Grace Belangia: Yeah, and everybody belonged, so I'm like, we're good. Um, so, so the rejection, I think what I- what I- what I hear you saying to me is a little bit of, like, maybe my hand is right by that fire and it's okay. There might be some pain, there might be a little bit of angst, but it's like, I can do this.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Grace Belangia: Or maybe I can be like, I can move through it. I can move around it. It's not...
[00:39:30] there's a- I- what I wanna say that there's other opportunities or there's other, like, eventually the fire's gonna die, or it's gonna- I'm gonna find some water and put it out, like, there might be other tools to...

Jerry: Well, the essence of who you are is unchanged by the fire.

Grace Belangia: Oh. Okay.

Jerry: Because the threat, right, the threat that you envision is, this pain, hand in the
[00:40:00] fire, means I am abandoned. This pain, hand in the fire, means the essence of who I am has been rejected. The only person who has such profound, persistent capacity to reject the essence of you is you. The only person who can put you in a position where your DNA is fundamentally, completely and
[00:40:30] totally annihilated is you. So the powers that be, as you referenced, those with influence and power to decide whether or not you are worthy or you belong, is you.

Grace Belangia: Mm.

[00:41:00]

Jerry: You can circle that (laughs). The only person that can cut you from the team is you.

Grace Belangia: That's interesting. I hadn't really thought about it like that.

Jerry: I forget, Grace, do you have children?

Grace Belangia: I do, I have two.

Jerry: So what is it that they can do that can make them completely and totally unworthy of love?

Grace Belangia: Oh, gosh.

Jerry: Is there anything?

Grace Belangia: No.

[00:41:30]

Jerry: So why is that good enough for them but not good enough for you? And this statement that I made about their essence being guaranteed by their own sense of self, why is that good for them? I mean, I- I'm a parent. The wish that I have for my children is that they will always be able to tap in to know that they belong to themselves.

[00:42:00]

Grace Belangia: It's interesting, 'cause I- I- my- so my kids are both in college right now, and there's a lot of the soul searching of, what do I do with my life and career? And I've- I think the thing that I have repeatedly affirmed for them in a few ways as a parent is, one, you know, make smart choices, you know, don't- don't- don't hurt others, in- in- in- in whatever it is that you wanna do, you know, lead an honorable profession, I guess I would say. And then other than that it's kind of wide open, um... they- they- they sort of are always like, well you're my mother, of course you're gonna love me, and I'm like, well, I'm- I'm also trying to give you advice. That's what I do for a living (laughs). Um, but yeah, they- they- they think in some ways like I do about their own vulnerabilities and their own rejection. And- and- and I try and empower them, but it's- it's hard.

[00:42:30]

[00:43:00]

Jerry: I'm gonna reflect back. "They think like I do." Well, no surprise, because they're our kids, this is what they do. And so the work that we do for ourselves has this corollary benefit for them.

Grace Belangia: Mm.

[00:43:30]

Jerry: Imagine if you shared collaboratively the journey with them and you created space for this process. Because, as a parent of 20 year olds, I too can relate to the fact that, um, our adult children worry about being rejected by the world.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: They worry about being put into a harsh situation where who they are is either morphed or changed or boxed in or told or made wrong.

[00:44:00]

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Is this- is this a universal thing, Jerry?

Jerry: I think it's a universal human thing.

Grace Belangia: It is? Okay. There's actually some sort of--

Jerry: And- and to me, the evidence that it's a universal human thing is that when you look at all the different wisdom traditions, they all speak to the same

[00:44:30] thing. I was talking to my Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg last night and I was talking about the existence of the one dharma concept, and the one dharma concept is essentially that Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Christianity, broadly speaking, stoicism, Aristotelian philosophy, they're all leaning towards the same thing: who are we as humans- human beings? How it manifests and the answers to the questions, yeah, there's a wide variety there, but the same question exists. Am I worth of love?

[00:45:00]

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry: Will I be safe? And do I belong?

Grace Belangia: Yeah.

Jerry: Apply that to Silicon Valley, apply it to Augusta, Georgia, apply it to Boulder, Colorado, apply it to Midtown, Manhattan, apply it to Tokyo, apply it to Tibet. Am I worthy of love? Can I love someone else? Will I be safe existentially, emotionally, physically? And do I belong? Or, more specifically, where do I belong?

[00:46:00]

Grace Belangia: Yeah. I mean, where- where is a- where is a huge thing for me right now in my life. Where do I belong?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And isn't that the same that your children are going through?

Grace Belangia: Yeah, for sure.

Jerry: Where do I belong?

Grace Belangia: It's these little...

Jerry: What's my tribe?

Grace Belangia: Pinnacles of bridges. Yeah, but, it's funny because, you know, I know this isn't a parenting show, per se, but there's a part of me that's like, okay, as a parent you have to let you, you know, you have to sort of cut the apron strings a little bit and you have to let them figure this out, you know. I pride in myself as a parent raising them that they made a lot of their own decisions in a lot of ways, so--

[00:46:30]

Jerry: And skinned their knees along the way.

Grace Belangia: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And some things, you know, I caught them (laughs).

Jerry: So it was a skin, it wasn't a tear.

Grace Belangia: Right. No. Only one broken bone in 18 years.

Jerry: That's not bad. It did good.

[00:47:00]

Grace Belangia: Yeah. Yeah. It did. And I- and I- and I- and I wouldn't say that what I do now is a- is a parenting thing either, because I don't- I have two kids. I don't need more kids to parent. I just, um... but- but I think that the connections that you have enlightened me to has been really very thoughtful. I just wanna go and like, meditate about all this right now.

Jerry: Well that sounds like a beautiful experience. And so maybe- maybe we can start to wrap with our- with regard to that. You know, the last thing I would say is that I think that, just like parenting is a journey of letting go, I think our process of working with all sorts of issues like this is a process of us becoming adults we were born to be. And it's a practice, and that word practice is always important to me because it does not imply attainment.

[00:48:00]

Grace Belangia: Right.

Jerry: It implies- it- it- it implies a movement towards. And if we can hold that, it allows us to accept our foibles, it allows us to accept our imperfections, it allows us to accept the ways in which we are not living up to our aspirations.

Grace Belangia: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:48:30]

Jerry: And we begin again the next day to try again.

Grace Belangia: Yeah.

Jerry: So... I wanna thank you for coming on the show and asking such thought-provoking questions and really challenging me to sort of understand what I- what I believe to be true about these things, um... It's such a growth experience for me.

Jerry: Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Grace Belangia: Thank you, Jerry. I appreciate it.

Jerry: Alright. Be well.