

Jerry: Hey, Shanley. It's great to see you. And, um, I'm excited to have this conversation.

Jerry: [00:00:30] Before we dive in, why don't you just take a moment to introduce yourself and however feels right to you, and then we'll sort of start having conversation about the thing that you wanna talk about.

Shanley: [00:01:00] Yeah. So, um, I have been a social entrepreneur for the past 10 years. And that's really been my main kind of work and identity. And then kind of revolving around that and filling into that has also been writing, and has also been doing a lot of, um, of strategy and freelance. Um, but my work in, uh, in Haiti and then, and then mostly in East Africa in particular has very much been, um, kind of the defining work of, of who I've been, um, for the pasts, uh, kinda decade.

Jerry: And- and, uh, has it been with one organization or multiple organizations?

[00:01:30]  
Shanley: I've been with a couple. Um, I started my first company by myself and that was a small social enterprise where I ended up in the end working with 12 women who still run that company today locally. I- I ended up turning it over to them, uh, about five years in. Um, and, uh, I learned a lot. Um, they're, they're remarkable. They're still, they're still like I said running out themselves and investing a business back in local communities. Um, and then my second business I started almost five years ago.

[00:02:00]  
Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And- and what countries were these in?

Shanley: Both of them were in Uganda.

Jerry: In Uganda. And, um, what- what does the second company do?

Shanley: [00:02:30] So, it's a manufacturing company that, uh, I mean really the goal kind of coming out of my first company, um, I worked with women and, and distribute every accessories that they made internationally. And I saw that there really wasn't a place for women in mainstream manufacturing. So I decided to move into mainstream manufacturing in Uganda and try and- and kind of create more of that space. And- and, uh, create a space for, for ethical payment and people create a space with our treatment.

Um, so I've been working for the past several years with a very specific type of material that only comes out of East Africa. Um, and then distributing that to different luxury companies, or basically, uh, a custom manufacturer.

[00:03:00]

Jerry: I see. I see. And w- w- what would be helpful for you to talk through today?

Shanley: Yeah. Uh, so I'm in the midst of shutting the business down actually.

Jerry: Oh.

Shanley: Um, and I think for me, shutting the business down, um, you know it- it- it was something that occurred right before taking investment to actually scale the business. (Laughs)

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:03:30]

Shanley: Um, and I ... Uh, you had told me at the beginning of this year that I was gonna make the decision to shut it down again, I would've or shut it down instead, I would've told you then crazy.

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: Um, but through that process it just became more and more apparent that the direction it was going, it wasn't the direction that, um, really felt congruous with who I was.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:04:00]

Shanley: And that so now I'm shutting down operation as they are, um, I'm really trying to take a pause. And after you know, um, many years of this kind of work, I'm trying to think about, uh, who I really am today and, and what I want to do from here and, and really thinking about, um, how to do it from a different place than I've done it in the past.

[00:04:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So there's this, um, external transition going on? Um, and- and really, the first business in some ways kind of feels like it flowed into the second business even though they were distinct businesses, because it was all part of a, uh, a larger ark if you will of entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship with social impact. And there's this external transition occurring-

[00:05:00]

Shanley: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: ... around, um, shutting down that business coupled with or perhaps even prompted by an internal dialog that's going on, which is, which is kinda, "Who am I," if you will, independent of this identity, this externalized identity. Am I seeing that correctly?

[00:05:30]

Shanley: Yeah, definitely. Um, yeah I think there were a lot of, um, reasons that I started the second business and even started the first that, um, that aren't really resonating with me anymore.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: And I feel like I've been working off of this momentum and this story. Um, you know, I started out in the nonprofit industry and in journalism working with really impoverished women.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:06:00]

Shanley: And discovered that you know, there was, there was this reality as a nonprofit industry and a lot of people who were being served by it really weren't being listened to.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: There really wasn't a dialog around, "What do you want to do?"

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: That- that really drove, um, the start of my first business was that I was interviewing all of these different women one on one for this nonprofit. And I just started realizing, you know, because I was a similar age to them and I think I was a little less intimidating than a lot of other people, um, that they had talked to, they would kinda pull me aside and say you know, "Hey, like here's what I'm doing with the sponsorship. I think what I really wanna do is start X, Y and Z business."

[00:06:30]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: And it, um, uh, you know, I graduated from journalism school thinking I was gonna head to Washington DC and write. And then I just had this, um, you know, my whole heart was just like, "No, I wanna work with these women."

[00:07:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: Like, um, and probably a couple years into doing that was the realization that there was this kind of idea of white saviorism I'm going on.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: That was an idea that as a white American girl, the idea that you were gonna come in and work with impoverished people and help them do what they wanted was, um, was perhaps very narrow-minded. Um, and-

[00:07:30]

Jerry: It may- It may have been altruistic, but there is a kinda neurotic ego aggrandizement that goes along with it. Is that a fair statement?

Shanley: Yes. Yeah.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: And I think, um, my ... I really got lost I would say and, and have been lost since then, um, I think around, um, what to do with my desire to work with the impoverished.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:08:00]

Shanley: And, um, and the fact that I don't wanna do that.

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: And so my first business was very much focused on working with women. And, um, trying to market their, their pieces in a way that, um, that was, that had dignity to it.

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: Um, and then moving into my second business, I very much carried that momentum and that story where it was a social enterprise out of Uganda, but I think I was really trying to prove a point. And the point was that you can manufacture and source, and, and work out of these areas. And it doesn't need to have anything to do with poverty. And it doesn't need to have anything to do with "doing good." And, um, and I think we really effectively did that. We, um, you know, we did some amazing work in luxury eyewear industries, and luxury jewelry industries and, um, uh, but, but at the end of it I, I feel a little bit like, um, like I got lost. (Laughs)

[00:09:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: And, and I don't know, um, I don't really know why I'm there anymore and I know I wanna keep doing the work that I'm doing, but thinking my effort to, um, to make sure that I stayed away from my desire to "help," um, I, I lost, um, I lost some of the direction that I had started with.

[00:09:30]

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: And, and now I'm kind of questioning, uh, what's next with that, if that makes sense.

Jerry: It does.

Jerry: So in this process, you got lost?

Shanley: Yeah.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: Yeah, I think so.

Jerry: And, um, so I'm- I'm- I'm making up a story in my mind about where you are in your life. And so I'm imagining you, you went to journalism school, um, was that a graduate school?  
[00:10:30]

Shanley: No, that was undergrad.

Jerry: Undergrad.

Shanley: Um, so I started my first business yeah on my very, very early 20s.

Jerry: Okay. So your pro- so you're in your early 30s now?

Shanley: I am 29.

Jerry: 29? Mazel tov, oh my God. Um, and you're sort of looking at the brink of your life sort of saying, "Where do I go from here?"

Shanley: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

[00:11:00]

Jerry: Um, do you know the poem by David Wagoner, "Lost?"

Shanley: I have heard that poem.

Jerry: All right. Well, we're gonna read it again, because I think it's appropriate right now. So, as you know, um, David Wagoner writes, um, about that moment in our lives when we feel lost. And we're pausing to bring it up. Wagoner writes, "Stand still.  
[00:11:30]

[00:12:00] The trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost. Wherever you are is called here, and you must treat it as a powerful stranger, must ask permission to know it and be known. The forest breathes. Listen. It answers, I have made this place

[00:12:30] around you. If you leave it, you may come back again, saying here. No two trees are the same to Raven. No two branches are the same to Wren. If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you, you are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows where you are. You must let it find you." David Wagoner, "Lost." What's he saying?

[00:13:00]  
Shanley: Um, I mean to me, he's saying that the feelings of being lost is a place in and of itself and not necessarily a place to pass through on your way to someone else.

[00:13:30]  
Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Wow. I think you're right and I haven't seen that before. I'm always struck by his admonition to stand still. And I'm seeing your desire, your-  
[00:14:00] your- your action to alter the trajectory, which you had been on for almost a decade as a kind of standing still.

Shanley: Yeah. I think that, um, particularly in my experience of being a, a "social entrepreneur" there has been this reality of the, um, the awards you're supposed to get and the places you're supposed to be featured, and the pressure of 30 under  
[00:14:30] 30 and before you're 30 and (laughs) ...

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh God.

Shanley: ... and, um, and I, I have found that, that the Fast Company articles and then, and the Forbes interviews and the, the accounts and the numbers, and the you know,  
[00:15:00] how this moment when, um, when we had an, an investor that you know said yes to us and really wanted to work with us, um, we thought, "Oh, it's finally here. Like finally, someone is giving me the moment I've been wanting, that it's going to tell me that I enough."

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: And, um, and, uh, I am so tired of chasing that moment. And I think that, that is my biggest reality right now is that I'm really tired of chasing that moment. (Laughs)

[00:15:30]  
Jerry: Hmm. Hmm. Tired of chasing the wish to feel enough?

Shanley: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: Is that a fair ... ?

Shanley: Yeah. To have some kind of, um, force outside of me tell me that if we're turning off, I've pushed fast enough, I've tried eh- you know, hard enough, I'm smart enough.

[00:16:00]

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: Um, yeah.

Jerry: I'm pausing, because I want to honor the wisdom in what you've just shared. And I  
[00:16:30] see in your eyes that you're tired and you're weary. And I feel, um, respectful of  
your capacity to know that the standing still here is to kinda let the forest find you.  
[00:17:00] Um, you know for me, it's, uh, perhaps to play with the analogy a little bit. It's the  
forest of enough. Enough is not in Uganda. Enough is actually right here, right with  
you, right within you.

You know, you- you- you spoke before what- what was the phrase you used the  
white, not privilege-

Shanley: The white savior.

[00:17:30]

Jerry: The white savior complex. It's a complex feeling. It's a complicated feeling,  
complicated situation. Once I sort of lively said there's a kind of, there can be an  
ego aggrandizement behind a lot of altruism. And what I'm hearing you recognize is  
that, um, perhaps there was a link between your own impulse to save, the initial  
[00:18:00] impulse to save and the wish to feel enough.

Shanley: Hmm.

Jerry: Is that ...

Shanley: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: It's not a projection on my part? (Laughs)

Shanley: No, it's not.

Jerry: Because it could very well be in so many-

Shanley: (Laughter)

Jerry: ... like it really revels in being me hero. Um, like a very, on my own projection.

Shanley: Um, yeah. No, it's not a projection at all. And I think that there are, there for me as  
[00:18:30] so much shame in that, um, realization. And there was so much of a desire not to  
be that, but then there became kind of this chasing of you know, how do I become  
the poster girl of not that?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: Um, and so I work to integrate into Ugandan culture and then to, um, ...

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:19:00]

Shanley: ... into life there, um, to, um, to a point where I think I lived, um, miles outside my own boundaries or comfort zone for a very long time. And, um, really kind of in the, in the name of, of wanting to do it right.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:19:30]

Shanley: And it didn't really matter, um, how I paid for that as long as it was right. Um, and, uh, I think, I think I'm just only beginning to realize that.

[00:20:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I wrote, uh, on my little pad here that, uh, a question mark or a question which was does right equal enough?

Shanley: Not so far.

Jerry: (Laughs) So you were trying to do it right and somehow it, it too was not enough?

Shanley: Um, no it was not enough. It made me very, um, empty.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:20:30]

Shanley: Um, I would say I lost a lot of my own value of myself in trying to do it right.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: Um, I think I was living out kind of a grandiose apology or maybe a desire to, um, to do it differently, but, um, not in a way where I had any idea how to also take care of myself or still feel, uh, you know, it just became this, um, this kind of drudgery where I wasn't ever allowed to feel positive about anything I was doing, um, ever.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative), because you wouldn't be right and therefore would not be enough. And so-

Shanley: Um, yeah that. (Laughter)

Jerry: Oh yeah.

Shanley: Yeah.



[00:21:30]

Jerry: And so that pursuit of enough on the one hand we start off with this sort of beautiful, gorgeous enthusiasm, I'm going to ... I'm gonna save the world. And this by the way is definitely a projection, because this was me. I'm gonna save the world.

Shanley: (Laughs)

Jerry: [00:22:00] And then all of a sudden we realize, well actually, what's going on there? And we start to look at our internal systems and their intentions, and (coughs) excuse me, start to call that into question. And so then we move in the other direction ...

Shanley: Yeah.

Jerry: ... and it doesn't work.

Shanley: Yeah.

Jerry: Tell me what the tears are saying.

[00:22:30]

Shanley: [00:23:00] (Laughs) I, um, know the first year I guess we started this business, I, um, I lost my dad. And both for that, my work overseas had so much been about, um, I loved our relationship and I loved sharing what I was building with him. And I think for me, that was the only piece of it that always was pure joy.

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative), was that being able to share with dad.

Shanley: [00:23:30] Yeah. And that same year I lost my dad, I, uh, I got assaulted in Uganda and it stopped being a place that felt, um, safe.

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: And I thought that if I had turned around and pushed myself to go back and continue working right away, um, that I had failed somehow.

Jerry: Hmm.

[00:24:00]

Shanley: And so I, um, I just really kept going as fast as we could.

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: As hard as we could.

[00:24:30]

Jerry: I am so moved by your heart. It, uh, it's so present and so real. And so you moved faster and faster to not feel perhaps the loss of dad and the loss of safety that Uganda may have represented at some point.  
[00:25:00]

Shanley: Yeah.

Jerry: Um, I won't read the full poem, but there's a beautiful line in, in a blessing we often use in some of our camps and our experience and it's, it's from John O'Donohue's blessing for one who is exhausted. And it's just simply this, "Be excessively gentle with yourself. Be excessively gentle with yourself." Shanley, if I, if I can step a little bit into that I'll name it paternalistic role, um, what I would say from that place is, um, here's the metaphor that occurs to me from that place.  
[00:25:30]  
[00:26:00]

I think as we move, uh, uh, through our lives seeking something, seeking to move away from something, we may in this case, we may be seeking to move towards at a feeling of enough, I am finally enough. Enough for what? Love, safety, belonging. Enough to quiet and still the voices in our heads that tell us we're not enough. You know those old voices. As we move towards enough and away from not enough, we set out with a kind of pace that says, "I'm gonna go to that mountaintop. I'm gonna go to that place. I'm gonna cut through the forest."  
[00:26:30]

But you know, and I'm mixing my metaphors now. But I think it ... The analogy that I think that is more helpful is to see ourselves as tacking across the surface of a lake. I don't sail, so I'm imagining this is true, but when we sit in the sailboat and we're moving from one shore to the other shore, we don't just set out unless we've got a power boat, unless we've got a motor. We don't just set out across the lake straight ahead. We actually turn the sails into and away from the wind.  
[00:27:00]  
[00:27:30]

And so we zigzag across the lake to get from one side to the other, to get from feeling like not enough to feeling like I'm enough. And the process of that zigzagging, that process of tacking across the lake, we do this mind fuck on ourselves where we say, "Because I'm not moving directly across the lake, there must be something wrong with me." You know, you- you- you had this beautiful reaction to David Wagoner's poem where he talks about the lost place where- right? Being lost and you called it a place. Yes, this place that you are in, this is a place, the forest knows where you are.  
[00:28:00]  
[00:28:30]

This is the place called, "Here." It's not way back there where I once was nor is it the there that I will get to. It's here. And you have been tacking across the surface of the lake of your life in the pursuit of feeling enough. And that is A-Okay. That is to use a word, enough. Tell me more of the story behind those tears.  
[00:29:00]  
[00:29:30]

Um, there's just I think been, um, I've had so much, uh, embarrassment over I don't know, this kind of idea of what I thought had meant to handle death. Well ...  
[00:30:00]

Shanley:

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: ... or to handle assault. Well, or to handle living overseas. Well, or to work well and, um, and it's been really hard. And this year has been a kind of a waking up, um, to a different reality, to the reality of, of I think creating a home. Um, ...  
[00:31:00]

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: ... I got married. Um, having a baby, um, ...

Jerry: Masel tov.

Shanley: (Laughs) Now, the baby is a big one. Um, and I, I think when I found that I was pregnant, there was this moment where I realized that I wasn't home.

Jerry: Oh.

[00:31:30]

Shanley: And, um, and, uh, and in that waking up and in that, um, kind of recognition that I could stop running you know?

Jerry: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Shanley: I mean, it has been like, um, travel, you know like eight months out of there year, last minute just like let's get this thing done kind of let's not lose this single opportunity and, and the reality that I could stop for a minute. There has been this overwhelming sense of, um, of, of just, "Oh my God, why didn't I do it better? Why have I been so messy? Why have I been so angry? Why have I, of all the moments that I could possibly be embarrassed about or have done better." And, um, what you're saying I guess really resonans- resonates, because on the way, they have I began.  
[00:32:00]

[00:32:30] To feel this inkling of an idea that, um, that I don't have to be embarrassed and, uh, everything until now. (Laughs) And I think, uh, even when you talk about being in the pursuit of being enough I'd feel, um, you know, my inclination is that I feel sh-shame in that. And the idea that there, there is no shame in that is, um, is much more, uh, gentle and I think I have been flipping out. (Laughs)  
[00:33:00]

Jerry: Yeah, the, uh, the- the- the- the strong impulse I had was to, was to reinforce the notion of the power of being excessively gentle with oneself. And to see that the wish, the powerful wish to be enough, the powerful wish to be right, the powerful wish for a home, um, is a human condition. And the kind of crazy perverse not particularly gentle treatment that we put upon ourselves is that when we have the capacity to be aware that we're pursuing enough to then label ourselves as broken for pursuing enough, thinking that somehow it's gonna drive us closer to enough.  
[00:33:30]  
[00:34:00]

Shanley: (Laughter)

Jerry: And we, and we both laugh, right? Because it's- it's- it's the logic. It's not the logic ... It's not the logic of an adult. It's the logic of a five-year old.

Shanley: Hmm.

[00:34:30]

Jerry: And the reason I bring that in is because these kinds of beliefs- belief system set root in our earliest ages, in our formation. When we're- When we're just a kinda bundle of protoplasm trying to make sense of the world. It's like, "What? I cry and I get sad? Huh? How does, how ... What happens there, right?"

Shanley: (Laughs)

Jerry: We're, we're like trying to make sense. We're just this like babbling thing that's trying to, trying to stay alive, and feel warm, and feel safe, loved. And then- and then we, we construct meaning out of all of this and, and we construct these relationships between feelings. And so, I have to be harsh on myself so that I can feel gentle with myself. You're, you're smiling, because, right? (Laughter) You recognize this, right? All right, uh, eh, you know, um, and then there's this awareness that's happened with your marriage and what's your partner's first name?

[00:35:30]

Shanley: Oshin.

Jerry: Oshin. So, Oshin and, and the player to be named later, the baby to be named later, um, there's something that's happening in this, in this family that's unfolding. And it's related to that word "home" isn't it?

[00:36:00]

Shanley: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Jerry: What does home mean to Shanley?

[00:36:30]

Shanley: Well, I think it means, um, the ability to stop and be in a place where you, um, you don't have to strive, you can just breathe.

Jerry: Hmm.

Shanley: And the idea of safety.

Jerry: Hmm. I often say love, safety, and belonging. Give me love, safety, and belonging, and I will have enough.

Shanley: Hmm.

[00:37:00]

Jerry: And I will be enough for home is love, safety and belonging. Home is where you know you are enough.

Shanley: Hmm.

[00:37:30]

Jerry: I know that there is pain and I know that there are tears in this place, but, um, from this vantage point and it's just from my vantage point, it's not a truth, it feels like you're exactly where you need to be. How does that sound to you? It sounds right.

[00:38:00]

Shanley: Hmm. And little, uh, I think it feels very safe and a little bit scary at the same time.

Jerry: Hmm. Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think a hard question to hold onto is what, what will it feel like when I am no longer striving? What will it feel like when I no longer need to pursue, but can just be.

[00:38:30]

Shanley: Right. So, this is in a break to go right back to (laughs) to pursuing and striving. (Laughter) Caught it.

[00:39:00]

Jerry: What does David Wagoner say? What is the first line of his poems? ( Laughter) It's not stand still, catch your breath so that you can run fast again. (Laughter)

Shanley: So it was like an Airbnb summation. (Laughter)

[00:39:30]

Jerry: Now, that capacity, the laughing? Oh, what a great gift to give yourself that. Yeah. I was saying to somebody this morning that we were talking about meditation and he say, he said to me, "Jerry, what do you know, what are some of the ... ?" I said, "Meditation for me is a- is a- is an opportunity to stand still, to sit still and watch my crazy mind do its thing." And that's kinda what I just saw you do was this funny little like, "Oh." (Laughter) I'm about to start running again. I'm about to start pursuing again. I may pursue not pursuing. ( Laughter) Yeah. Yeah.

[00:40:00]

Shanley: Yeah. Yup.

[00:41:00]

Jerry: Well, thank you for taking the time and thank you for opening your heart like this. And, uh, I know that, that folks will be moved by your story and- and- and there are a lot of folks who will really relate to what you are going through, and you know, you're living out when- when- when we share like this, we live out that sense of

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what community can do for each other. So we get to be each other from that experience.

Shanley: Thank you.

Jerry: Oh, thank you. Really an honor.