

0:00:01.0 Nicole Antoinette: I'm Nicole Antoinette, and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. Before we get into today's episode, I wanna share a fun little announcement! Well, I think it's fun. Hopefully, you will too. Lots of you already know this, but at the end of each quarter, I create and share what has become quite a popular quarterly reflection workbook. This one is called "The Heart Compass," and it's a simple PDF that's filled with questions and journaling prompts to help you clarify what's working, what's not working, and where you wanna go in the next three months of this year.

0:00:34.9 NA: If you're craving some gentle structure to help you tune into yourself, identify your actual wants and needs, this workbook is for you. It's the perfect accompaniment to an end-of-quarter reflection date with yourself, and it's available in pay what you want format. And that honor is my strong belief in creating resources that are both useful and financially accessible. And you can buy it at [Nicoleantoinette.com/workbook](https://nicoleantoinette.com/workbook). That link is in the show notes as well. And if you're unable to pay even a small amount for any reason, but you'd really like to use this end-of-Q1 workbook just email me at hello@nicoleantoinette.com, and I will gift you a copy for free, no questions asked.

0:01:16.9 NA: If you wanna know a little bit more about it, essentially, it's a two-part work book. The first half guides you through a reflection of January, February and March, and the second half helps you to look ahead and dream and plan a bit for April, May and June. There's space for gratitude, naming your struggles and worries, for life admin and un-sexy self-care, for joy, for planning some rest, recharging, rejuvenation, for making a deeper commitment to social justice and more. There's lots of little easy bite-sized sections, you can either print out the workbook and use it, fill it in that way, or you can just use whichever prompts resonate with you the most for your own journal, whatever your own journaling practice is.

0:01:55.3 NA: So [Nicoleantoinette.com/workbook](https://nicoleantoinette.com/workbook). And like I said, the link is also in the show notes of today's episode. And speaking of today's episode, I am so excited for you to meet our guest, Margeaux Feldman. Margeaux is a writer, educator, and community builder, who has organized award-winning events within the disability community. Their work centers around the question, "In a world that works to oppress and divide us, how do we care for one another and ourselves?"

0:02:22.7 NA: It's such a beautiful question, and this conversation covers a lot. We talk about how we might choose to be soft in a culture that really romanticizes grit, rigidity and toughness. We talk about mutual aid and how we can have more proactive conversations about money, about poor trauma and about the different financial circumstances that we might have compared to our friends. Margeaux is thoughtful and generous with their honesty throughout this whole conversation, and I really hope that you enjoy listening.

[music]

0:02:58.2 NA: Alright, we are good to go. Margeaux, welcome to the show!

0:03:01.4 Margeaux Feldman: Thanks so much for having me, Nicole!

0:03:04.6 NA: Tell me how you have been soothing yourself lately. Totally selfish question, because I feel like I am... All of my soothing, coping mechanisms have been pushed to their brink, and I'm looking for new ones, so what do you have for me?

0:03:18.7 MF: Oh my gosh, that's such a beautiful note to start on as well, 'cause I feel like it allows us to center something that just feels nice and kind of squishy, is the word that's coming to me for some reason. My soothing lately has really looked like unplugging from social media quite a bit. And I recently, finally after, I don't even know, years of wanting to start a daily journaling practice have started to do that. And so in the morning, 'cause usually my MO was like, I would wake up literally put coffee on and then I'd be on Instagram immediately, I now make my coffee, and then I bring my coffee and I do some morning journaling, honestly, for maybe even just 10 minutes and it just allows me to slowly enter my day.

0:04:21.2 NA: That sounds really lovely. I feel like my coping mechanism, I have a really soft blanket that I love, and I just carry it around the house. I will have it on my lap when I'm on Zoom calls, I will wrap myself in it in bed. I feel like I have reverted to my child self with a security blanket, and I'm totally okay with that.

0:04:42.4 MF: Oh my gosh, I'm really there with you. My partner surprised me for Christmas with a weighted blanket, which I had been wanting for a really long time because I have chronic pain and complex trauma stuff, and I've heard it just feels like the most soothing thing ever. And the first time I put it on on the couch, he popped in and he was like, "Is it working? How are you feeling?" And I was like, "I don't know." And then literally a minute later, I was just crying, [laughter] and I was just like this is... Clearly, it's working. And I carry this 15-pound blanket around my apartment with me into different rooms, and it's really connecting me to some early-childhood baby swaddling situation I'm sure.

0:05:35.5 NA: My God. Adults need swaddles too.

0:05:37.6 MF: Yes! [laughter] Totally!

0:05:41.9 NA: I have never owned one of those weighted blankets. I'm definitely interested in them. I have a clear memory, of course, pre-pandemic times of being in Bed Bath & Beyond, laying on one of the display beds, which I honestly don't think you're supposed to do, but laying on one of the display beds, testing out the different weights. Some of the blankets are really heavy! [chuckle]

0:05:58.9 MF: They are, and like 15 pounds even, which is kind of... As a hot tip for anyone listening thinking about weighted blankets, they say that the weight of your blanket should be about

10% of your body weight. For me, like a 15-pound is right around. And you don't really think about how heavy that is until you are literally bringing this blanket around your apartment with you and you're like, "This is like... I'm getting a workout here!"

[laughter]

0:06:28.2 NA: Part weight-lifting, part comfort tool, great. I feel like we just did the sales pitch together for weighted blankets. [laughter] Yeah, I think maybe I will procure a weighted blanket 'cause clearly I'm on this, this blanket train and that feels... That feels really good. Awesome. Yeah, so soothing practices, blankets and otherwise. I've also been spending a lot of time in the dark.

0:06:51.8 MF: Oh.

0:06:53.3 NA: Right, like right before we got on this call, actually, I closed my blinds or curtain in the bedroom and had the little twinkle lights on, and just laid in the dark, I did some breathing, ate some chocolate chips in bed. I'm like, "You know what, the heart and body needs what it needs these days."

0:07:09.1 MF: Oh my gosh, that sounds so soft and gentle, I hilariously, for reasons that, I don't know, maybe will be revealed to me in therapy at some point in my life, I have a really hard time being in the dark other than when I'm sleeping. Yeah, it's so funny how I can really enjoy some nice soft lamps lighting the space, but if I'm always the one in my house who's turning on more lights and then my partner who's being conscious of energy and stuff, I guess, will start to turn down the lights and we're in this hilarious back and forth throughout the evening [chuckle] with our different lighting needs.

0:07:56.2 NA: That's me and auditory stuff. I really feel bad for every roommate, partner that I've ever lived with who wants to have music on all the time, and I just cannot. I love music at the times where I want that kind of input, but I think maybe I'm quite sensitive, it's... Yeah, I have a hard time and my partner is always listening to music, and when I come downstairs and he's like, "Alright, well I guess the fun's over [laughter] this music's gotta go off."

[laughter]

0:08:26.6 NA: Oh my god, so with the blankets and all of these things, you mentioned softness, which is perhaps a great entrance point into something that I really wanted to talk to you about. There's a term that you use that I really love, "Soft magic." Will you describe what that means?

0:08:44.3 MF: Yeah. So I think for a while I was looking for the language to describe, I guess, a constellation of things for me connected to really, I guess at the core connected to what healing has looked like for me and what relationships look like for me as an adult human in the world. And I've always really connected to the word, "softness." I love softness on an aesthetic level, like pink is my favorite color, and I have this soft weighted blanket, and I love the sort of aesthetics of softness. But then I actually read an essay by someone who has now become a friend of mine through the magic

of the internet, which is like... Befriending people through the internet is one of my favorite things.

0:09:46.4 MF: Andi Schwartz, who wrote this really amazing essay on the politics of softness for GUTS Magazine, and she just articulated and put together all of these pieces in my mind around softness being this political orientation to the world that really rejects the kind of hard, gritty, tough, neo-liberal subject who's really guarded and has to be really rational, and has to dismiss all of their feelings. That sort of ended up being a kind of catalyst for me to think more about softness.

0:10:35.2 MF: And then I was thinking about, "What are the things that I had been doing at this... I would say at the start of my healing work, but honestly, I've been in therapy for over a decade. But this pivotal point for me was when I started doing somatic trauma therapy about... I guess we're coming up on four years now. And what was happening at this time was that I was just in this very constant state of dissociation, really disconnected from myself. And I started to really practice tarot in a way that I hadn't. I had a deck or two that I sometimes maybe pulled out.

0:11:27.2 MF: But suddenly, I felt very called to go and take a walk to my favorite park in Toronto where I used to live with my tarot deck and be pulling these cards. And later when I got this kind of language for understanding trauma and the nervous system, what I understood was, oh, my unconscious, or whatever we wanna call it, was drawn to tarot for self-soothing, I was drawn to this practice to help me feel connected to myself. And so when I started to conceptualize this idea of soft magic, for me, it is very much about recognizing that there's always something political about our healing, and that I sort of... My catchline is sort of like, "When we heal ourselves, we heal the world that we live in." And so soft magic for me is a way to, I guess, sort of summarize the intersections of witchiness, and healing, and a sort of femme queerness that I just...

0:13:03.3 MF: I don't know, I was joking with Andi about, "If the end of the world comes, what is my vision for that?" And I just kind of want us to all be in one giant cuddle pile consensually, of course, but that's sort of the vision that I have of just a very soft connected way of being with one another. I don't know if any of that made sense as I was articulating it. But those are some of the threads there.

0:13:37.8 NA: Yeah, I love that phrase of your friend's that you shared, the politics of softness, and just this idea that there's always something political about healing, and thinking about softness as a way to do that, it makes me think... I think it was from one of your zines called "On Softness," the quote, "In a world that feels much too hard, that romanticizes grit, rigidity and toughness, why and how might we choose to be soft?" I love that question. And I feel like it's a question, it's an invitation, it makes me wanna ask you for maybe some specific examples of how you are choosing to be soft lately.

0:14:17.3 MF: Yeah, so I have been... It's funny, I think this is the case for so many of us, where it's like we're always... Not always, but for me, I'll speak for me... It's very easy for me to extend softness to other people and very challenging for me to extend softness towards myself. So a lot of the work that I've been doing over the last year or so is really centered around connecting with these younger parts of myself that did a lot of different things to survive, and in the past, I looked back at

these versions of myself with a lot of shame, a lot of judgment, a lot of criticism. And shame and judgement and criticism tend to not really serve any of us. And it was really preventing my healing because yeah, I just couldn't connect with these very wounded, younger parts of myself.

0:15:30.8 MF: And so one of the things that I've been doing a lot of is pulling out old photographs of myself from those years of my life, which is largely my teenage years, early adolescence into early adulthood, and making really beautiful collages with those photos and sort of having this practice where I am not just keeping those photographs locked away in a box, in a dark corner in my closet, and really wanting to look at myself from those years and be like, "Yeah. Do I love that substance use was what you chose to do to survive? No, that's obviously actually really heartbreaking." But I can look and say, "Wow, this younger version of me really did everything she could to try to survive, and I really wanna hold that and hold her with a lot of softness and care and celebration."

0:16:55.3 NA: Margeaux, I have to tell you, I have never really connected much with a lot of the narrative around inner child work or re-parenting stuff, and maybe that's a conversation for another time, but when you were just talking about these maybe early adulthood, adolescent, the different phases of yourself and essentially not demonizing our past selves for whatever the best that they could do at the time, and all of these mistakes that they made, I feel like that opened up some space for me to re-think about something that I've thought about a lot, this May will be my 10 year soberversary, which feels very wild, and so much of the demonizing of past self is something that I have worked to not do about who I was when I was drinking.

0:17:43.3 MF: Yeah.

0:17:44.4 NA: Right, and that type of stuff, and it would be... It's like when you're talking about photographs, that something that just hit me very viscerally, I'm just processing out loud to you right now, but of what would it be like to... 'Cause that was for me, the era of actual photo albums. When I was in college and stuff, you had the disposable camera, you got the photos printed out, and not everyone had the camera in their pocket type of thing with the cellphone and...

0:18:07.9 MF: Yeah.

0:18:08.9 NA: Yeah like going back and looking at some of those pictures and thinking about it in a different way, would I think feel healing, would feel like... I literally wrote that down in the corner of the paper I'm taking notes on, it's like "Homework, homework for this conversation."

[laughter]

0:18:22.4 NA: But I think it's really common to create these before and after narratives of ourselves, especially if we have healed in certain ways, or if we're really proud of some of the changes that we've made and who we have become. But I think that that's a slippery slope because as soon as we create this binary, like I was shit before and I'm great now, first of all, that's very cruel to our past selves, and then second of all, it puts our current selves on a pedestal that we can't stay

on because current me, sure, I think makes less destructive choices than past me, but I still cause harm, I still fuck up. And so there's something in that that I know that's not exactly what you said, but that's what I'm taking from what you just shared.

0:19:02.0 MF: No, I mean, 110%. I think about so much of the work that I do in terms of teaching and in my writing as well as about accountability, and how do we hold space for the fact that we are all capable of causing harm, we are all capable of fucking up, we will cause harm and we will fuck up. Those things are, I don't know, pretty inevitable, unless maybe all of that harm is just directed at yourself because you just never say or do anything because of that fear of fucking up.

0:19:48.7 MF: And honestly, through reading transformative justice and learning about the practices of transformative justice, I had to engage with that work first before I could actually start to think about how I would apply that to myself. And I started to be like, "Oh wow, it's so easy for me to look at people who have caused harm with compassion and care, and still be like, "Yeah, you did this thing, not great." But I could do that so easily, but then with myself, I still deeply struggle, especially as a human on the internet, with messing up and causing harm, and then I started to catastrophize that, which is a whole other layer, where suddenly my usually relatively small fuck-ups that happen, are not really causing harm, but I then create this really catastrophic story.

0:21:00.1 MF: And then I'm just centering myself, which is not what I want to be doing either, so trying to just hold that spaciousness for... Yeah, the fact that we aren't this before and after, we're constantly on this journey. And I am not gonna ever make those same mistakes in the sense that who I am now is not who I was then, but if I cling to this investment in perfection and never messing up, I'm actually just upholding white supremacy. And as a white person in the world, that's another thing that I'm really trying to always hold there in imagining other ways of showing up in the world.

0:22:03.8 NA: Well, this isn't a word that you used, so I don't wanna put words in your mouth, but it makes me... What you're sharing makes me think about this disposability. And obviously, one of my... Maybe not obviously, but I'll say it anyway, like one of my values is that other people are not disposable, and yet it really is heartbreaking the way that I can treat myself like that or past versions of myself like that. And so when you were talking about creating integration between what comes maybe more naturally to you in terms of how you regard other people being able to take... It makes me think about self-compassion. And maybe that's a thing that we can talk about next. I'm interested in anything tangible that has maybe helped you to foster your own capacity for self-compassion, from making that sort of jump between, "Okay, this is how I treat other people, and now I also wanna treat myself this way."

0:23:06.4 MF: Yeah, so this is maybe one that people know or have done, but I'm often doing that kind of trick of... I'm telling myself this very negative story about myself, and then I think, "Well, if my best friend came to me and said, "I'm a horrible person, I'm irredeemable, unlovable, etcetera," it's like, "Well, what would I say to her?" And this sort of started, I'll tell you about a mic drop therapy moment for me that really started me on this I think path towards self-compassion. I was doing Gestalt therapy, oh I must have been like maybe mid- 20s, so maybe, yeah almost decade ago,

and we were really working on my very acute intense anxiety, and I had to... My therapist had me play myself and then we pretended that the pillow on the couch was my anxiety, and she was like, "Okay, I want you to like tell your anxiety how you're feeling." And I was just like, "I hate you. I wish you would go away. You only cause me pain," And all of the expected things.

0:24:41.9 MF: And then she was like, "Okay. Now I want you to pretend to be your anxiety and respond to yourself there." And what my anxiety said was like, "I'm so sorry that I'm causing you pain. I don't want to do that. I'm just trying to protect you." And after we did this exercise, she had said, "When you're a parent and you... Your child wakes up in the middle of the night and comes running into your room and says, 'You know, there's a monster under my bed,' you could theoretically choose to say to your small child, there's no such thing as monsters, go back to sleep. [chuckle] You could say that, but ideally, what you would do is get out of bed, grab your child's hand, say, 'Okay, let's go find the monster,' and you're gonna turn on the lights and look under the bed and open the closet, and you're gonna validate that fear and really show up and hold that scared child with compassion."

0:26:00.9 MF: And so I often think about that story and that exercise in these moments where my... My survival story growing up was that I must secretly be a horrible person, and that's why I didn't receive the love and care that I deserved. And as an adult, that's translated into, I'm secretly a horrible person, and one day every one in my life is gonna find out and they're going to abandon me. So in those moments, I just think about like, okay, what's a different story that I could tell myself. What's a different way I could respond to that fear, knowing that it's not rational, and I use "rational" in scare quotes 'cause I have a lot of issues with that word.

0:26:54.9 MF: But it's not necessarily rational, but it feels real. So that self-compassion is just... Looks like validation. Looks like saying, "I get why that would feel terrifying. I get that that feels very real to you." And, "Can I offer a counter-story? Can I share something that maybe feels a little bit more gentle." So that would be, I think one of the main tips that has really helped me...

0:27:31.8 NA: Yeah. I really appreciate that, especially the emphasis on validation because it's... I'm certainly not the only one, you're not the only one. I think this is a I guess almost universal thing, the way that we discount how we're actually feeling or the mental gymnastics that I often do to convince myself that I'm not feeling how I'm feeling, because those feelings are inconvenient. And that doesn't work. It's like... It works until it doesn't. You gaslight yourself until the truth comes out another way, or it comes out sideways or whatever. But when you were sharing that story about having a conversation with your anxiety, it made me think about a story that a friend of mine recently shared at a running and writing retreat some years ago that she was at that they went on a run and the exercise was when you get back that you're to write down what your inner critic, what you said to yourself on this run.

0:28:23.8 NA: And so that was like the journaling exercise, and I think it was positioned as "this is just the exercise," but then what they were called to do next was to pair up and to look the other person in the face and to say those things to them. And reading of... Hearing about that, it makes me wanna crawl out of my skin and die. 'Cause we we're always told, "Oh, you would never talk to

someone else the way you talk to yourself." Like, actually having to do it, to look another person in their eyes, "You're slow, you can't do this, you're not strong enough." Oh my God, it's so terrible. And those mic drop moments, like you're talking about, there is something about externalizing it that really does help. It has helped me as well.

0:29:03.4 MF: Yeah. One of the things I really struggled with through my teenage years and into early adulthood was this really intense fear that someone was gonna break into my home and kill me or do some variety of awful things to me. And as an adult, I would often find myself leaning into trying to trust my friends and I would call, and I'd be like, "I know that the likelihood of someone being in my apartment right now is super low, it's probably just one of the many cats that's made a noise somewhere, but I'm really terrified." And just knowing that I could verbalize that... And I find this with all of the stories that we tell ourselves that the power in saying it out loud, as you've said, actually takes away some of the power from that story and lets it live somewhere else outside of our bodies and allows that story to feel like honored because, again, dismissing it and saying, "Oh, that's irrational, that's stupid," that's not serving us. And so really recognizing like, "Okay, there's some sort of protective mechanism here, or there's some sort of story that I've internalized from the cisheteropatriarchy and I can externalize that and then just let it go where it belongs, which is not inside of me.

0:30:53.2 NA: Yeah, and I will add on to that. For me, sometimes I forget that I need another step beyond that. I'm really great at intellectualizing my feelings and living my entire life from the neck up. And while it's helpful for me to say, "Oh, the origin of this thought pattern is, like you said, cisheteropatriarchy." Those sort of things. It goes back to something else you said before. It doesn't mean that the feeling or the experience isn't real. Even if it's maybe not based in fact... Or whatever language we wanna use. It took me until actually very recently, to be like, "Oh no, no. I have to feel this feeling in my body," or the anger, the grief, the sadness, the fear, whatever it is. Like telling myself, "Oh, the root of this is X." It helps, but it doesn't complete the cycle.

0:31:41.5 MF: Yeah.

0:31:42.4 NA: Yeah. And that's my current work, I feel. Where I'm like, "Oh, okay. I have a body also. It's not all just in my head. Cute. Fun. Yeah."

0:31:51.5 MF: I know it's... I'm just remembering one of my first therapy sessions with my somatic therapist... And somatic therapy, for folks who don't know, is all about recognizing the ways in which trauma lives in our bodies. And so we need to be connecting with our bodies in order to process this trauma. And I remember... I thought I was so good at feelings. I was like, "I feel my feelings, I tell people what I'm feeling, I'm so in touch with my feelings." And in one of our first session, she was like, "Where do you feel anger in your body? And I was just like, "I'm sorry, what? What? Body? Anger in my body? No. I don't know. I don't know what you're talking about there."

0:32:40.3 MF: 'Cause I'd been so cut off from my body for so, so, so long. So yeah, wow, what a phenomenal moment to have in terms of just, yeah, recognizing that we can know something intellectually. But to know it emotionally, to know it somatically, those are very different things.

0:33:08.3 NA: I'm gonna put you on the spot and ask for folks listening who are interested, maybe... You said you have worked... Maybe are currently working with somatic therapists. If someone's new to that world, are there any folks whose work you wanna shout out?

0:33:22.3 MF: Oh my gosh, yeah. Some of the... Probably the most foundational for me is Staci K. Haines' book, *The Politics of Trauma*. Haines is one of the people who created a field of somatic work called generative somatics. And that came out of her own training in somatic work, which has its roots in Peter Levine and others. And she was just like, "Yeah, this is great. Being connected to our bodies is really great, but we're not talking about the political here, and we can't talk about healing without talking about the political." And so generative somatics is her response to that. So if you are a human who is politicized in any way or is thinking about the relationship between us as individuals and the traumas that exist because of the world that we live in, I cannot recommend Staci K. Haines' book enough.

0:34:33.7 NA: Okay. I will add that to my list. Thank you. Yeah. And that's can be a helpful jumping off point for folks. So pivoting a little bit, although obviously everything we're talking about is related, your work as a writer, educator, community builder, centers around what I think is such a beautiful question, which asks, "In a world that works to oppress and divide us, how do we care for one another and ourselves?" It's a very I feel like sweet question and also radical revolutionary question, and I wanna focus specifically on... I guess, one avenue for this idea of caring for each other, specifically around mutual aid, and ask you about your own experience. I think it was last December, that was right around when I found your work and started following you... Your experience of asking for mutual aid, if you could talk about what that was like and what that felt like.

0:35:25.0 MF: Oh yeah. Yeah. That's a great question. Yeah, 'cause I think it can be... I have these moments where... And that's not the first time that I've had to ask for mutual aid. It's also not the first time that I've received mutual aid through others organizing it for me. And just for some background for folks who don't know me or are familiar with me, I come from a very poor working class family. Both of my parents are deceased, I don't really have family as a safety net if I'm having a hard time with money. And I so, so, so believe in the radical politics of a mutual aid, especially when we're thinking about mutual aid outside of just offering that to people that we know, but actually offering it to people who we don't know and who maybe we'll never meet, but we recognize this interconnectedness there.

0:36:35.1 MF: So it can often look, I feel from the outside, like it's really easy for me to just show up and ask for mutual aid, but it's actually one of the most terrifying things ever... All sorts of my poor trauma narratives come up, all sorts of capitalist narratives that I've inherited come up. And I do this mental gymnastics of really trying to be like, "Well, do I actually deserve this? Am I struggling enough?" And I had a friend of mine whose also has mega-poor trauma sit down with me and help me do some budgeting just to really assess the situation, and I was sort of saying like, "Oh, well, yeah. Maybe it's not that bad, and this money is coming in down the road and maybe I don't need it."

0:37:34.0 MF: And they said, "Margeaux, if you're asking yourself if you need it, that's a good sign that you need it." And they'd use this analogy of gender. And it's like, "If you're questioning your gender, that's probably a good sign that maybe you're not cisgender," 'cause cisgender people don't really question whether they're cisgender, unless they're realizing that they're not. So anyways, so that was her a really helpful push. And so yeah, I made this public Instagram post explaining a bit about what had happened to put me in this place where essentially I had to clear out my savings account of \$2500 and needed that because that was the money I'd set aside to live for the next couple of months, and just sat with all of the... I don't deserve this, all of these narratives.

0:38:45.1 MF: And what always blows me away every time, and I experienced this one, I'm in a position to support mutual aid, is that it is actually like a profound gift to give people the opportunity to support someone else. And watching donations come in and watching people like send me messages or comment on the post saying like, "Oh my goodness, I've needed to do something like this for a while, and I've been so terrified. And seeing you do this makes me feel like I can do it," is like, "Wow, that's some really great new information for my trauma brain to take in and hold and just remember that all of us, we all deserve care. We all deserve to not just survive but to thrive. And for some of us, our financial situations are gonna be in flux a lot, and there'll be periods where I do experience financial stability for a bit, and it's amazing, and I'm able to pay some of that forward. And then there are gonna be moments potentially where I'm in need and then other folks get to offer that. And that's like the radical beautiful world that I want for all of us.

0:40:21.6 NA: Yeah. Same, very much same. Something that has really shifted for me in the last, I'd say probably two years, is unlearning a lot of what I was taught about giving and moving from a charity model to more of a mutual aid model, or like you said, giving money to strangers, people who aren't... I think that we've at least somewhat normalized a care model for certain types of intimate relationships, but being able to expand that out and say, "This stranger on the internet is asking for X, Y, Z, often money, and do I just trust that they're asking because they need it, and I can just give it to them and not..." I really had had to unpack for myself the I assume rooted-in white supremacy idea of, "I need to know how this money is gonna be used," or that I have any say over... This person needs what they need, it's up to them to use those resources how they wanna use it, whether that's an individual person or a specific community. But that's been a huge point of unlearning for me.

0:41:25.4 MF: Yeah. It was so interesting. I don't know if you saw Sonya Renee Taylor, who someone had organized a payback, black debt...

0:41:35.1 NA: Yup.

0:41:37.1 MF: GoFundMe fundraiser for her essentially. And I think over \$100000 of student debt got paid off by people on the internet who were like, "Sonya Renee Taylor deserves to not have this debt hanging over her, and we learned so much from her. And so we're gonna pay this off." And because she was able to now no longer have to worry about this \$100000-plus in student debt, she went and bought a car, and she posted photos of herself with this car in this moment of black joy,

and then started to receive messages from white people being like, "I made a contribution to your student debt, and now I see that you're out buying a car." And her response to it was fucking amazing as with everything, and recognizing the racialized politics of who's watching over who spends their money and who gets to spend their money in what ways? But it was this fascinating moment for me as someone who's poor. I'm just like, "Well, of course, she went and bought a car. She no longer has to worry about \$100000 of debt. This makes sense to me." But to these white people who were clearly working in this very charity model mindset, which really strips the person on the receiving end of any sense of autonomy, that was not sanctioned by them. And yeah, watching that unfold was wild.

0:43:28.0 NA: Yeah. It's like that the giving is conditional. You can have this as long as you behave in the way... And obviously that happens in lots of relationships and not just with money. So that makes me... So I wanna come back to your experience that you were just sharing about asking for that mutual aid, because afterward on Instagram you shared some conversation templates for folks to have more proactive conversations about money, about poor trauma, like you mentioned, and about addressing financial access needs within their own relationships that honestly was so helpful for me. It was a perspective that I had not thought about before, and I was hoping you could share some of that with folks, maybe about how someone might share their own access needs with the more financially stable humans in their life or about how to receive those needs if you're the one that's more financially stable.

0:44:13.4 NA: Because, again, it has only been in the last however many years that I've started really talking about money within my friendships so much and what does it look like if people are in completely different circumstances or really have different class backgrounds, have different class privilege. I know that was just a big topic that I opened, but anything in there specifically that you think could be useful...

0:44:36.7 MF: I love talking about this. Capitalism is so fascinating to me for all of its paradoxes, because we live in a world that's obsessed with money, and then we're told we should never talk about it.

0:44:49.5 NA: Oh my God. Talking about money is my favorite... Anyone who's been listening to this podcast and is part of my Patreon community. I feel like all we do is talk about money. So I'm with you. Yeah.

0:44:57.8 MF: Yeah. Yeah. It's just like... Yeah, we've been... It's like, "You don't ask someone how much money they make at their job, or how much they pay in rent at their apartment." We just... Everything is very hush-hush, and yet we're supposed to be obsessed with money and making money and having money. And so I think that there's... It's so powerful when... And so, in a way, anti-capitalists to be like, "I'm gonna ask you these questions about money and your financial situation that I've been taught is taboo or impolite." So in my friendships, we just always know for the most part where... How other people are doing financially just because that is an open topic.

0:45:47.8 MF: So one of my best friends has a really great stable full-time salaried job and we

know that she has that financial stability and access and makes more income than me and my other best friend in this little group. And so what that can sometimes look like is one of us will get an idea, usually this is in pre-pandemic times, of an event we wanted to go to and recognizing that that event costs money and that depending on the day, week, month, that some of us might not have the same access to even spending that \$20 to go to an event. And so there's always a check-in that looks like, "Hey, I saw this event. It looks like something I think we would really enjoy. I'm not sure where you are at financially this month but I would be really happy to pay for part or all of your ticket if money is an access barrier." And it's just as simple as that, really.

0:47:07.2 MF: And then that person can choose to accept it or not accept it depending on what their situation is. And it's really important to respect the autonomy of that person and the decision that they make, which might be like, "I don't have the money to afford it and I also am thinking that this maybe is not the thing I would wanna do and have you pay for." And just being like, "Alright. Cool. Great. Is there something else that we would wanna do that I could support us in doing so that we're spending time together and maybe I can go with someone else to this event that I want to go to?" So, yeah, really letting that person have their autonomy there even if their choice to say no is rooted in their own poor shame and just honoring that as being real and valid also. So that would be one way that I would talk about it from the angle of the person who potentially has more financial stability or access.

0:48:25.1 MF: I've also been in conversations with people where I've had to name with them like, "Hey, the last month, every time we've hung out, it's always been somewhere where we've had to spend money and this is like... I'd like us to be a little bit more thoughtful around having low-cost or free hang-outs together. I'm just happy to hang out in the park with you. I don't need to go out for dinner or do X thing." And so just naming it as something that you're seeing. There doesn't have to be any judgment there but just like a, "Hey, I'm noticing this pattern and I want to articulate my own boundary around this pattern and see what we can do to collaborate on a different choice."

0:49:26.9 NA: Yeah. I feel like there's a larger topic, potentially, that you're speaking to here of how to hear other people's boundaries without feeling shame or judgement, which I think... I definitely struggle with that. Again, the universal struggles. I don't necessarily even know what my question is but if there's somewhere deeper that you wanted to take that specifically, I would be very interested in hearing your thoughts.

0:49:49.3 MF: Yeah. It's funny. So I have a workshop that I run periodically called Boundary Work for Trauma BBS, BB being shorthand for baby. And one part of that workshop is about understanding what our boundaries are and then moving from knowing our boundaries to actually articulating them. And then the other part of the workshop is how to hear someone else's boundaries because...

0:50:18.5 NA: I will be taking this workshop. Yes, continue. Yes. I will see you there, Margeaux.

[laughter]

0:50:24.5 MF: Yeah, because it's so funny. I think, as I was starting to actually understand what boundaries were for the first time, 'cause I certainly did not have any whatsoever in my house growing up or at least I did not get to have any. Other people did but not me. Getting more practiced in naming my own boundaries was revolutionary but then it's like you think like... I'm doing this gesture of wiping my hands, just being like, "Yeah. Alright. Boundaries, done. I'm good." And then, having these moments where people I love articulated a boundary that maybe was in conflict with my own boundary, 'cause I think that's often when it becomes harder to hear, and really getting reactive there and having to, wow, have this moment of profound realization like, "Oh, I'm taking this person's boundary really, really personally."

0:51:32.5 NA: Can you give an example to ground this in?

0:51:35.1 MF: Yeah, yeah. I'll give you this one example that I have talked about before where I had this horrible conflict with my roommate and I had planned to have this fun hang-out with my best friend that evening. And I came over to her house and I was just really activated and I had warned her. I said like, "Hey, I had this fight. I'm feeling not super great. I might need some space to process that," and showed up there. She gave me all of the space to process because she is an angel. And then we were settling in to do the activity we were planning to work on. And she said to me, "Margeaux, I'm recognizing that it didn't feel great to hold this space for you and then not have you ask me how I'm doing. And I would really love it if you could just be more conscious of that, in the future."

0:52:51.2 MF: And every fiber of my being was defense, go on the defense, like, you normally always ask her how she's doing, so therefore, this shouldn't be a big deal, and I was really having this moment of recognizing that defensive response and trying to do the boundary work that I believe in, which is, to express gratitude to the person for articulating that need, because it's fucking terrifying to articulate our boundaries, even with people that we feel really safe with, and it was like this internal battle was waging within me, and it got messy for a little bit.

0:53:35.9 MF: And she just had to hold her ground and be like, "I don't feel like what I'm asking for is unreasonable, and I get that it's feeling a bit activating for you because maybe you're still a bit activated right now, but I just needed to name that or else it was really gonna fester in me," and we moved through it. It's not always perfect, but it's like the commitment to doing the hard, scary thing, knowing that it might get messy, knowing that maybe you might not show up as well as you would want to, and that you can move through that, that I think, to me, is more transformational and healing than anything, when it comes to you working through boundary stuff with other people.

0:54:30.8 NA: Yeah, and one of the things for me is, really having to slow down and let myself... If I'm talking with someone that I have trust with and we have this mutually respectful relationship, where I trust that what they are saying to me is what they actually mean, I'm not trying to read between any lines, I'm not trying to, "Okay, well, what's the... What are they actually saying?" like that, I'm not interested in any of that. So being able to slow down and actually hear what's being said and not what my scared little ego brain... Because I think there's a very easy jump in the story you just told of, "They're saying I'm a bad friend," right, or, "They're saying that I don't listen to

them," or, "They're saying that I take up all of the space," that I am this, this is my identity that they're criticizing or whatever, and to actually be like, "No, no, that's not what's being said, and that's not what's being asked for." And sometimes, that's where I have to just, "Oh, pull back, pull back. Do you actually even hear what's being said, or are you making it mean something that the other person didn't even bring up?"

0:55:37.1 MF: Yeah, well, exactly. And this is where that vocalizing piece can come really in handy, 'cause often, with that same friend, I'll recognize the trauma response, the story, whatever it is coming up, and I'll say, the story I'm telling myself is, that I'm a bad friend. And I share that and I frame it in that way, so that I'm accountable, because my best friend asking for that, is not accountable, it's not their fault that I'm having this response. That's my own trauma, my own stuff coming up. And I don't need to hide that or push that down, but I wanna bring it up in a way that is responsible and that... Take ownership of that, and then that person can just be like, "Yeah, thank you for sharing that with me. I know that it can feel hard to hear another person's boundary."

0:56:46.1 MF: And so there's space for all of us to exist in this moment and not in this, "Oh, you made me feel bad because you asked for X," but just to recognize that sometimes, it feels really hard, and often, another thing I'll do, whether it's in conflict or whatever, is just be like, "I'm recognizing that I'm having a trauma response to you asking for this, and I'm just going to put a pin in this and pause, so that I can just figure out what's happening here. And then because I really wanna show up and hold space for what you've asked for here, in a way that makes you feel seen and we're so... I don't even know where this need for speed comes from in so many different places, but when there's conflict, the hardest thing for people to really hold space for, is that we don't need to resolve this immediately."

0:57:56.6 NA: Right, right. Yeah, that it can be given more space, it's not like do we have to...

0:58:01.1 MF: Yes.

0:58:01.8 NA: Well, we wanna rush through the uncomfortable feeling 'cause it feels uncomfortable.

0:58:04.8 MF: Yeah, exactly, of course. And for me, it's all about fear of rapture, if we don't resolve this right now, you're going to abandon me, is literally the story, that... Or there's gonna be some sort of punishment that I'm going to incur. So slowing that down and naming it, because I think, as someone who tends to be with humans who are more on the avoidant side of the attachment spectrum, and I'm more on the anxious side, just totally getting up and leaving the room, is not maybe the way to create that space, but to just say, "I'm recognizing that I'm not able to be present with what you've asked right now. I am just gonna go take a walk and I will be back in 20 minutes and then we can continue this conversation."

0:59:04.7 MF: And if you're me, that, at first, is gonna feel really, really, really hard, but then you sort of start to recognize, "Oh wow, I'm really activated right now too. I'm not feeling great," and then you can both come back together after that 20 minutes, both of you are feeling a little bit more

regulated, and that's the space where compassion and self-compassion and connection and curiosity can happen, and then you move through it.

0:59:37.4 NA: Yes. Yeah, yeah. I'm the person who... The far end of my spectrum is we are gonna sit in this room and not sleep for three days until we fucking fix this. I'm not gonna be okay until this is fixed... And I, again, have to give myself the grace and compassion for the part of me that just wants it to be better. But so much of what you have shared in this conversation, one of the through-lines that I'm taking is just the really radical and transformative benefit of normalizing so much of this stuff on the daily, almost, whether it's talking about money or being able to name boundaries or integrating softness, that all of these things so often we let things build up, build up, build up, and then we have the boundary conversation when it's so far past the breach of the boundary, as opposed to what I want is to be in relationships where these things, it doesn't make them easy, but where they're more normalized. And if I look at the friendships, relationships, and partnerships, business collaborations that I'm really trying to build in this phase of my life that's at the heart of it, and I feel like everything you just shared is the pep talk that I did not know I needed. So thank you.

[laughter]

1:00:52.8 MF: Yay. Yeah. The annoying thing about making a hard thing easier is that you have to do it.

1:01:00.5 NA: Yeah, it's exposure, right, exactly.

1:01:01.9 MF: Yeah. It's just like... You have to show your brain that the responses that you were used to and that were normal, either in your family or culturally or all of the above, they don't have to be how we continue to operate. I'm a Sagittarius rising and Aries moon. My fire energy just wants us to get creative and imagine other possibilities outside of what we've been given, 'cause that's like... I don't know it's like the magic world, transformative, self-transformative shit that I just... That keeps me going, to be honest, yeah.

1:01:53.9 NA: Yes. I think that is a fantastic place for us to start to wrap up. If you could leave folks with one call to action based on this conversation, what would that be? Maybe a question to ask themselves or a tiny action to take.

1:02:09.6 MF: I guess my prompt would be to pay attention to the moments where the idea of doing something or saying something brings up feelings of resistance, whether that looks like judgment, criticism, shame, this feeling of like, "Well, that will never be possible," and to get curious about those moments and just try to ask yourself, "Why does that feel impossible? Who has told me that that is impossible? Do I want to believe that?" 'cause I think it's so easy when we feel resistance to something, and this comes back to your full disclosure moment about inner child stuff, it's like those are the moments that excite me. I'm just like, "Oh, there's something there for me to poke at and to get curious about," as opposed to just being like, "Well, I don't like this, and so therefore I'm closing the door on that." That might still be your choice even after you've gotten

curious and poked at it a bit more. But yeah, I just... Those are the moments that excite me, those are the moments that produce massive amounts of change and healing in me. So just notice the resistance and get curious about it.

1:03:41.7 NA: Yeah. That's an awesome invitation. What is the best place for people to find you and say hi or check out your work? Or do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks, basically?

1:03:51.7 MF: Yeah. So I mean... Well it's funny. I would have given a different answer to this a while ago. I used to say come find me on Instagram, but I'm actually going to be leaving Instagram very imminently for I'm not sure how long. So I would say come to my website which is margeauxfeldman.com. And there are just a bunch of different ways that you can connect with me, a couple of different community platforms that I run where we can get to engage with each other in just more intentional ways than what social media now allows me to do. So yeah, come find me there. You can send me an email. We can chat. Yeah.

1:04:40.3 NA: Yeah. I was just gonna say email, very old school. But not that old school. I will put a link to your website in the show notes. Margeaux, thank you so much.

1:04:48.6 MF: Thank you so much, Nicole. This was such a nourishing conversation.

[music.]

1:04:57.5 NA: And that's our show for today. Our music is by Adam Day, who also handles our sound editing. Thanks Adam, you're the best. And huge thanks as well to every single member of our Patreon community for making this honest conversation, this entire podcast, and so much of my other work, like my twice weekly personal essay newsletter called Good Question, possible. Your monthly funding allows me to keep creating resources and gatherings for folks who crave honest conversations, both with themselves and others.

1:05:26.7 NA: And I fully believe that these conversations can change our lives, our relationships and our world. To join us, just come on over to patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. Our community operates on a shame-free sliding scale, so you can feel good about supporting this work from within your own means. So I'll see you over in the Patreon community, yeah? And until next time I want you to know three things, first that you are enough, second that you are not alone, and third that I'm totally rooting for you.

[music]

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