

Audio Title: The Book Stoop Chrissy King Ancestors' Wildest Dreams + Body Liberation Project

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Transcript

Rebekah Borucki: Hello, friend! I heard you were looking for our spot. I got you.

So, you're going to go past the corner bodega and down the block from the fresh cuts barbershop, and there you'll find a brick row house at the intersection of Literature Place and Social Justice Blvd. That's the stoop.

Amanda, Amanda Lytle, she will be there to welcome you to the conversation. The Book Stoop, that's the name of the spot. We got the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers, the best kinds of folks.

Oh, me? I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing, and this is our podcast. I am so glad you're here.

Now, I'm going to let you get to Amanda.

Amanda Lytle: Thanks, Bex. Hey, friend. Let me be the second one to welcome you to our spot, The Book Stoop. I feel incredibly honored to be the host of this podcast and I'm so grateful you're here. Today on The Book Stoop, I'm speaking with Chrissy King, writer, fitness and strength coach, and the creator of the Body Liberation Project. In the conversation today, Chrissy shares the story behind her book deal with Tiny Reparations and how her fitness journey has changed her life, what keeps her inspired, and what Chrissy's definition of Black Joy is.

We start out chat on The Book Stoop with a rather fitting question. So, what are you reading these days?

Chrissy King: So, I actually just finished a book of essays/memoirs by Casey Wilson called *The Wreckage of my Presence*. And it is such a beautiful book because she is talking about really deep serious things but then also she is so incredibly funny that you're laughing and crying and it's just such a good – I really highly recommend it. It's so good.

Amanda Lytle: OK. I'll put that in the notes. Thank you for that. And speaking of deals, there is a book deal story here with Tiny Reparations and I would love for you to share it.

Chrissy King: Oh, my gosh! Yes. I'm super excited about it. So interestingly, I am – OK, I'm going to make a long story kind of short or hope to.

Amanda Lytle: OK.

Chrissy King: I'm a freelance writer and so early last year, probably around this time actually last year, I ran an article about – for Shape Magazine, about what it's like to be a black body positive fitness trainer. And I was really highlighting and interviewing other black trainers and unconventional bodies according to mainstream fitness standards. And the article kind of went viral. It did really well. And I ended up being contacted by the Today's Show and they wanted me to come on and talk about my work and then also like bring one of the people that I highlighted in my article. And so obviously, this was during COVID pandemic, everyone is in their house. And so, we did it virtually, but it was a really great interview. It was such a cool opportunity.

And then fast forward like two weeks later, I had an email that was like kind of out of the blue, it was not kind of, it was totally out of the blue, from someone asking me if I ever wanted to write a book. And it has always been a goal of mine. I knew that I was going to eventually write a book. I just didn't know when it was going to happen.

And so, I was like, "Yeah, sure." But then I also thought, "This can't be real like no one is going to just email and be like, 'Do you want to write a book?'" So, I said yes. We had a call. And I was talking for like 30 minutes as far as about what I wanted to write about and the gentleman was like, "Oh, my god! This sounds amazing. Can you send me a quick paragraph about the book? I'm going to pitch that to sales meeting next week." And I was like, "This is so strange!" because I don't know anything about publishing, but I feel like this is probably not how it normally happens.

So, I reached out to Rebekah Borucki, BexLife, and I was like, "Hey, Bex! I know you work in publishing like can I pay for a call? I have some questions." I get on the phone with her and Bex says like, "Oh, my god! This is amazing. And also, you need an agent right away because this is – you need an agent." Of course, I don't have an agent. Bex recommends me to someone. I ended up getting in a call with that person and then like two days later, I have an agent. I'm like, "Oh, my god! This is great. I have an agent."

Amanda Lytle: Yeah.

Chrissy King: So anyways, I worked with my agent. I got a really decent offer from that first publisher. And my agent, because she is smart and wise, she is like, "Listen. If someone is willing to give you this much money for a paragraph, like getting into a book proposal, I feel like we could do a lot better with this book." She is like, "It's up to you. But I would turn it down." I write a book proposal and because I trust her, I was like, "I don't know anything about publishing. I hired you for a reason, so I trust you."

So, I turned that book deal down. Five or six months later, I finally get through my proposal because it took me that long to get through my proposal. And my agent sets up a ton of meetings with different publishers and I went to this meeting with Tiny Rep and also, my agent, she is so wonderful and that she didn't give me more detail than I needed to know. She was just like, "Here, are the publishers you're meeting with. These are the days. These are the times." I didn't do a lot of research in advance. I just like, I'm going to show up to the meetings. I'm going to see what happens.

And I showed to meeting with Tiny Reparations and there was like probably 4 or 5 people in the call, which is like more than I was used to for the meeting. And then they are like, “We have a special guest for you.” And I’m like, “A special guest for me? Who would be a special guest for me?” And then Phoebe Robinson pops on the call and I of course have zero chill. I’m not cool. I don’t have any chill whatsoever. I have like a total fangirl moment, and she was so gracious, and she didn’t stay for the whole call but even when like the part she was on, she was like so encouraging. It was amazing.

So anyways, all said and done, I ended up signing a deal with Tiny Reparations, a figure than I could have ever asked for or expected and it has been so great so far. And so, I’m really excited that my first book will be coming out with them and yeah, it’s going to be really amazing.

Amanda Lytle: Congratulations!

Chrissy King: Thank you. Thank you so much.

Amanda Lytle: Yes, like soak that in and up. That is just so beautiful. So, when is it coming out?

Chrissy King: It will be out in spring of 2023. So, it seems like so far away, but time goes fast.

Amanda Lytle: And you have a title and everything too?

Chrissy King: Yes. So, the title, The Body Liberation Project, the subtitle is still up for – we’re still working that out. But the book is largely about obviously, body liberation but it’s also intersections of identity around race and gender and body size and body politics and all these really important topics in my mind.

Amanda Lytle: I have a question about a journey that you started roughly eight and a half years ago. Can you just kind of jump into that for us?

Chrissy King: Yeah. I got into fitness actually. So, I consider myself a writer now, but I got into this work really through the gateway of fitness. And I joined a gym for the first time for a reason that I think a lot of people join the gym. Literally, I was just like, “I need to be skinny.” That was it. I had no other motivation.

And so, I got into fitness for that reason. And through a long series of events that were – that got me into like strength training and power lifting and getting really strong and like dealing with my own relationship with body and body image and excessive eating like so many things. Just like all these years later, got me to where I am now but it was becoming a coach and a trainer first. And then when I was a coach and a trainer, I started writing about things that at the time people weren’t talking about. Like now, it’s very commonplace where people would be talking about the intersections of like racism and fitness and diversity inclusion and fitness and wellness spaces. But when I was talking about this work five years ago, it really wasn’t the thing that people were talking about yet.

And I have a justice background. I went to school for social welfare and justice. And so, I really started putting my – merging those two worlds of fitness which I feel deeply in love with and then social justice. And then because of my own journey with body image and all of that, that's what led to my body liberation work.

And so, it's so interesting because I think when I got into fitness eight and a half years ago, I was working a corporate job, had no plans of changing careers, and I really think that strength training was such a big part of my life but it also completely changed the trajectory of my career and my life and ultimately, led me back to the things that I originally said I wanted to do in life when I was young. I would spend all of my time reading books and writing and I was like, "I'm going to be a writer when I grow up." And then I went to high school and went to college, and I was like, "Uh, people aren't writers for a living." I mean obviously, there are people but in my mind, that wasn't like a feasible thing.

And so, I just got a corporate job and I started doing that. So, fitness really brought me back to the thing that I always wanted to be doing and so it's very full circle for me to be writing a book now and to be a full-time writer. It seems very fitting and also, I'm just so grateful for the journey.

Amanda Lytle: I literally just wrote down full circle because as you're telling the story, I'm just going, "OK, wow!" And also, even just with the writing and the creation aspect of it, you've got some really powerful courses on the go. Can you share a bit about those?

Chrissy King: Yes. Thank you. So yeah, like I said, I remember this very specific moment. It's probably like four or five years ago now, when I was in fitness and building an online business. I was working with a coach at the time and I at the time was like not talking about the things that I was talking about in my everyday life online because I was like – again, it wasn't – people weren't talking about racism and fitness at the time, and I didn't want to be seen as like this angry black woman. Who are you to be talking about this? We don't talk about this in the fitness space.

But I remember very specifically that I have written this article and it was entitled Is Fitness Only for Thin White Women? And it was because I just didn't see representation in fitness spaces, and I was terrified to publish this article. And also, I should point out that at the time, no one was reading my work anyways, but I was so terrified. And so, I remember my coach at the time really encouraged me to publish the article and I did, and it was like the first article that I remember people actually read and shared and led to me writing my – getting my first offer to write for a major platform.

Anyways, when I did that article, I was like, "Wow! That was really freeing because now I'm talking about the things I want to be talking about." And also, it's totally fine. And so, from there, I started just going deeper into like again, why we need to be talking about racism and fitness, why we need to be talking about diversity and inclusion. And so, I created my first course around these things several years ago and I was just doing them virtually in website – my own platform for people who were interested. And then I started doing about a couple of universities and have been doing these courses for a long time.

But then last year, June of 2020, when people were suddenly like, “Oh, my gosh! Racism is a thing!” I think that was the first time where I felt like the fitness and wellness industry was really, really open to listening to these conversations in ways that they haven’t been before. And so, I offered the courses again and they did really, really well last year. And because of that and just how widespread the courses – I mean how widespread it was, like so many people took them, I started doing consultations for companies like Google and Nike and Under Armour around these big important topics making the industry more inclusive and actual steps that we can take to do this.

Because one of the things I also realized is that as wonderful as it was like how many people started listening, I do recognize that a lot of it unfortunately was performative in some ways and so I think for me what’s really important with this work is that I’m working with organizations and with people who are really interested in taking actual steps and not just having the conversations because it really needs to go beyond just conversations. I don’t want to be doing work that I feel like it’s just have people check the box like, “OK, we did the thing.” We brought the person in to have this conversation, it’s like, no, what are the steps that you are going to take? How are you going to put these things into actionable practices in your everyday lives?

Amanda Lytle: Is there an accountability factor too? Do you continue the conversation after these courses and workshops have happened?

Chrissy King: So, for the workshops and courses I did on my platform that anybody could join publicly, no, there’s no follow-up. I thought about doing additional courses but to be completely honest, having these conversations every day all the time is kind of exhausting. So, for me, it’s like I do it when I can and when I need to take a step back, I take a step back. However, with companies and organizations, I have worked with some companies in a more long-term capacity. Again, I’m not doing that at the time right now for similar reasons. It’s just like I had to take a break for my own mental health and well-being. But yes, I have done that.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. OK. I love that you’re bringing up the mental health and well-being stuff because I know that the fitness aspect of this is such a part of regulating yourself and keeping yourself regulated. But what are some other practices that you have to maintain some sort of regulation in your own life?

Chrissy King: Yeah. So, I think one of the things that I really realized especially over the last year because I have been doing some mental work and I have been so busy is that when I’m talking about body liberation like the keyword is liberation, right? And so, I really start to think about not only yes, I’m talking about body liberation for the masses, and I also want to think of my own personal life about what is my own liberation as a black woman look like and what does that mean.

And so, a big part of that for me is rest. That yes, I want to be doing this big and important work in the world and I hope I’m having an impact and also, I need to be taking time away to rest, to take care of myself, and to also recognize that I don’t want my personal life to be a life of just surviving. I want to be thriving. And that I’m always putting that as a forefront of my own liberation so that yes, I can continue doing this work but also, because I think that is my gift to

myself as my personal liberation and to live and to thrive and then to enjoy this time that I have here. And so, for me, that's like taking more time off, taking more vacation, doing things to honor myself and feel well.

And also, not being ashamed or embarrassed about doing those things because I think for a while, I started to feel like, "Oh, I don't want people to think I'm doing too much or enjoying myself too much or taking too many trips or being concerned what other people think." And I had to also reframe my narrative that like as a black woman in America or in this world, I want to be a source of inspiration to people in such that other black women or other black little girls recognize that we all deserve a life of luxury and that's going to look different for all of us but that's nothing to be ashamed of and that we are deserving of all the best things in this life just like anybody else is.

Rebekah Borucki: Hey, friend, we are coming straight back to The Book Stoop after a quick break.

Amanda Lytle: Chrissy, I love this. And I also love it. That was such a beautiful segue into one of the things that I wrote down, one of my favorite quotes now is, "Stop shrinking and start taking up space and use your energy to create your specific magic in the world." Uh! Huh!

Chrissy King: Oh, yes, I love that quote so much because – and I love not just that quote, I love the idea of talking about taking up space because again, regardless of whatever our identities are, I think that – I will say particularly I think for women but I think regardless of your identity, in so many ways, we've been asked to shrink and to take up less space and to make ourselves more palatable for people. And I'm just done with that, and I want us all to be done with that. If we are – I just have this quote from Instagram. I would not take credit for this. But it was like, "If I'm too much, go find someone less." And that's how I feel about the way that I show up in the world. I can't be too much for someone. I'm going to be one hundred percent myself. I'm going to show up to every space fully myself. And if that is too much for someone then I'm just not for them and I'm totally OK with that.

And I just – I so wholeheartedly believe that we all have a very specific magic that we bring to this world and it's going to be different for each and every one of us, but I think for far too long we've been dimming our light, trying to make other people feel comfortable. And I'm like, "No, we are meant to shine and the people who appreciate and embrace that are the people that are supposed to be in our lives and the people who don't resonate with it, they were never meant to be with us." And I don't want those people in my life anyways. I want to live a life of relationships with people who we encourage and embrace and nourish each other in ways that are so compassionate and loving and healing, and that's the kind of energy that I want in my life.

Amanda Lytle: Definitely. I have a question about what Black Joy means for you.

Chrissy King: Yeah. Oh, my gosh! I love that question so much. So, when I think about Black Joy, again, I think about – the thing that I have been focusing on the most or thinking the most about lately is that again, this idea of thriving and not just survival. When I think about I'm a definitive *child of slave [0:16:42] [Phonetic]* and slave to people and I think about the fact all the

time that my ancestors didn't go through all this so that I can sit here and feel bad about what I have or burn myself out for the consumption of other people. And so, that's why I go back to this idea of rest and having the ability – and I can recognize the privilege in my life, and I always talk about privilege and the privileges that I have. I can recognize those things and also at the same time, recognize that like I truly believe at my core that I am my ancestor's wildest dreams.

And so, when I think about Black Joy, I think about what are things that make me feel energized, that make me feel nourished, that make me feel whole. And again, it's this idea especially as a black woman that like I am deserving of luxury, I am deserving of nice things, I'm deserving of love. I'm deserving of care. I'm deserving of softness. And this idea of this strong black woman, I don't want anybody to ever call me a strong black woman again. That is not what I aspire to be. I know I'm resilient and I know I have strength, but I want softness and care and ease in my life. And when I think about Black Joy for myself, those are the things I think of.

Amanda Lytle: So, what is the message that you would offer to young black creatives regardless of gender identity?

Chrissy King: Yes. I think the thing that I would offer, and this is the same thing I offer to myself, I'm reminding myself of this all the time, that in an age where we are creatives in social media and we are constantly putting out content for the consumption of others, I remind myself and I will remind others that our culture, our blackness, our joy is not for sale. And I say that to mean like I'm never going to again, burn myself out for other people – for the consumption of other people.

And so, I think when I think of other black creatives and I think of myself, I think of how are we doing this work in a way that we actually feel joy when we are doing it? Not that it's a source of like angst or we are burning ourselves out or we are feeling overwhelmed, and we are no longer feeling joy because we are so worried about the metrics and so worried about like what the people want to see from us.

I always want to create from the space of like this is what feels good for me. And I truly wholeheartedly believe that when I work from that place, it's going to resonate with the right people. And in a world where we can get so caught up on numbers and so caught up in all this stuff, I can remind myself, I'm not here for the numbers. I'm not here for the likes, shares, or retweets. I'm here because again, I believe that I have very specific magic to put in the world. I'm going to put that out in ways that feel good to me, and I one hundred percent that it's going to land with people it is supposed to land with.

Amanda Lytle: What specific life experience that you've had that has really boosted you into this place and confidence and self-worth where you feel fully equipped to just keep smashing these goals and just bringing that presence to the world?

Chrissy King: Yes. I think what – it's always – I think when I think about how – people ask me especially me like, "Why do you seem so confident." And like I always remind people that I first do a lot of things scared all the time. The idea that we will ever get to a place where nothing feels

uncertain, or nothing feels scary is just to me not realistic. But when I think about my trajectory with my work, it was always about the next small thing, right?

So, it's like that first article that I was really scared to publish, and I did it afraid, and I was like, "Oh, it was OK. That was fine." And that gave me the confidence to do the next little thing, right? And I just feel like little by little that confidence builds on each other. And more confidence we have, the more confident we feel. And so, I think those are just the things that have really helped me along the way.

And also, going back to this idea of always staying true to myself, I've seen over the last few years like you think all these things will happen, social media trends and everybody is like shifting gears to do what they think the algorithm wants them to do. And I think the thing that I've always done is just stay true to what I do, which is like I write words and that I hope that they resonate with people. And so, I'm always like I'm going to stay true to myself. And then history has shown me in my own life that when I stay true to myself and that the next thing that's supposed to happen happens the way it's supposed to happen. And I've seen that time and time again. And so, I just been like I trust that whatever is supposed to happen is going to happen in the way it's supposed to happen as long as I'm listening to my own intuition and again, staying true to myself and doing work that I feel good about.

Any time I notice myself trying to work from a place of what do I think other people want to hear or other people want to see, it doesn't feel good. And so again, going back to this idea of like being a creative and putting work out into the world, if it doesn't feel good to me and I don't have joy in it then I don't want to do it anymore. And so, it's like I do this work for myself, and I hope that it resonates with other people.

Amanda Lytle: I'm excited about your book, *The Body Liberation Project* now and just even knowing what kind of personal practices or what opinions and beliefs and perspectives you have going into that space because writing can be super exhausting, it can be an emotional rollercoaster, right?

Chrissy King: Yes.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah! Big time! So, I love that you have this chunk of time spread out to take that time to write and to sink into that, and what a beautiful opportunity to put all of this into one love heart-forward project.

Chrissy King: Yeah, and that's what excites me too. And to your point about writing a book, I think one of the things that have been an eye-opener for me is that I definitely romanticize the idea of writing a book in my head. I probably watched too many movies and seen too many TV shows and all like I thought, this could be me sitting me by the beach writing all these words and it was just like a beautiful thing every day. It's hard work. And it is an emotional rollercoaster. In some days, you're like, "Oh, my god! This is the best." And the next day you're like, "I can't write a book! What was I thinking?" And so, there are all these emotions. And it's a labor of love no doubt.

But again, now that I've come to reality and recognize that it's not going to be as like romantic as I thought it was going to be, the thing I am so grateful for is that I do have a time and the space to do this and really make it a labor of love. And I feel really grateful for that. And having not known – knowing much about the publishing process going into it, I do also just feel really grateful and really fortunate that I have the ability to really take the time because I can see for a lot of people that wouldn't be a possibility for a whole lot of reasons that we don't have to get into here. And so again, I recognize the privilege in that and I'm just really, really grateful that I get to have this time to do it in this way.

Amanda Lytle: As a creative, when do you feel most inspired?

Chrissy King: You know what? Again, I feel—and I know this about myself and then I still fall into this little like a cycle—but I feel the most creative honestly when I am giving myself the most space and taking the most down time. When I'm rushing and I'm just doing a thousand things, I don't feel like I have the mental space to really be as creative as I like. And I think back to like a lot of the work I've done, I have always had the best idea, the best writing sessions or the best whatever when I'm really just like taking it slow and taking it easy, which is like counterintuitive to the world we live sometime because I live in Brooklyn. It's like rush, rush, rush, go, go, go.

And so, I have to intentionally like, “No, I'm not rushing, rushing, rushing, going, going, going. I'm going to slow down. I'm going to take my time.” And even though when you're in that time sometimes or you're like intentionally being slow and taking thing slow, it feels counterproductive because you're like, “I'm not doing enough.” But I really find the less I do, the more creative I am and the easier my work flows.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. I feel that too.

Chrissy King: Yeah.

Amanda Lytle: Chrissy, this is amazing. I have a question about an account or people, an organization, a disruptor, an activist, or a change agent that you would love to give a shout-out to.

Chrissy King: Oh, my gosh! This is such a hard question. Oh my goodness! There are so many people when I think about people that I'm inspired by. Oh, gosh! OK. So I think when I think of the fitness space, there's a wonderful account, Decolonizing Fitness, that is doing such amazing work around making the industry more inclusive. We've done work together and also, I learned so much from them. So I love Decolonizing Fitness for so many reasons.

And then when I think about body liberation work and body stuff, I think of Sonya Renee Taylor, *The Body is Not an Apology*. It's one of the first books I read several years ago about body stuff that I was like mind-blowing for me and also because I was like at that point in my life, I was working through so many things that I felt like she was putting into words things I was thinking and I was like, “Oh, wow! Someone else gets it.” So, I would say Sonya's work as well.

I probably think a lot, but I think I'll have those two right now but there's honestly so many accounts that I learned from and that have been really influential and are just doing such great work, important work.

Amanda Lytle: This is amazing. And where can people find you online?

Chrissy King: Yes. So, my website is ChrissyKing.com and social media wise, I'm most active on Instagram, and that is @iamchrissyking.

Amanda Lytle: I could talk to you all day about this stuff. Thank you so much. That was incredible. I really appreciate you and your time.

Chrissy King: Oh, my gosh! Thank you for having me on. Again, wonderful conversation and I can't believe – I feel like we just started talking so I agree, I can talk to you all day about this.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah.

Chrissy King: But thank you so much for having me.

Amanda Lytle: Thank you so much for being with us. We hope you loved the conversation, and we will be back again soon. Please be sure to follow us on your podcast app and leave a rating where you're able to do so. Writing a written review helps reach more listeners too. Check out all of the show notes for the links and share The Book Stoop with your friends. Talk soon.

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