

Audio Title: Rawiyah Tariq
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Transcript

Rebekah Borucki: Hello, neighbor! Welcome to our third season of *The Book Stoop*.

And if you are new here, let me help you get to where you're going.

So, you're gonna go past the corner of 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 where you will find our stoop.

Our host, Amanda Lytle, will be there to welcome you to the conversation. *The Book Stoop* is the place for the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers – our favorite people.

And I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing. Now, come on in and meet Amanda.

Amanda Lytle: Thanks Bex. Hey friend. Let me be the second 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 to have you here.

Today on *The Book Stoop*, I'm speaking with Rawiyah Tariq. Rawiyah is a Black, gender non-binary, fat, disabled and neurodivergent artist and kink-aware professional.

Their roots are in queer, polyamorous, fat community. Their tone is reflective of these roots and their work is informed by how these intersect with their blackness. Magic, massage, storytelling, and performance art are tools they use to liberate, heal, and reclaim space for marginalized communities.

They believe in cohesive and somatic healing and holding practices that align body, mind, and spirit. In the conversation today, we hear about Rawiyah's entry into writing as an escape from bullying, stimulating their mind and spirit.

Rawiyah tells us about their mission with a sovereign embodiment and how their work and writing is centered around that vision. They work intentionally from a place of love to help others in remembering themselves in their totality and to live with choice and authenticity.

Rawiyah also shares some really incredible insights and projects regarding rest, specifically within their community. Before we jump in, I want to invite you to share *The Book Stoop* with your community. If you're loving this episode, grab a screenshot and tag us on Instagram, @rowhousepub.

Every share, five-star rating and written review helps us find more listeners and climb the charts. So we're super grateful for your help. We start our chats on *The Book Stoop* with a rather fitting question. So what are you reading these days?

Rawiyah Tariq: So I'm reading *Monk MT [0:02:35] [Phonetic]*, which is about this non-binary monk who's traveling with this robot. Oh, no, wait. It's called "Robot and Monk".

Amanda Lytle: OK.

Rawiyah Tariq: It's a robot and monk book. I'm also reading – this probably isn't the best book to read because like at the beginning of the pandemic, I wanted to read. What's that Stephen King novel with the virus?

Amanda Lytle: Oh, gosh.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah, right? It's right on the tip of the tongue. It's right on the tip of the tongue.

Amanda Lytle: Rather parallel, rather aligned, isn't it?

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah, yeah. That's why I wanted to read. I was like don't do that to yourself.

Amanda Lytle: No.

Rawiyah Tariq: But the time we're living in right now is like, oh, this is a great time to read "Parable of the Sower" by Octavia Butler. So I'm reading that right now and I'm also reading a manga called "I'm In Love with the Villainess". So that was a queer manga and I'm really like loving it. So ...

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. I also am very much a book lover. I feel like I always have. Just because of how my brain works, I have a bunch of different books on the go at all times depending on how I'm feeling. I just pick it up. So I can really have a few on the go. And speaking of even reading, you're a writer as well. So tell me a little bit about your background in writing and where you're at now.

Rawiyah Tariq: So my background in writing is I've been writing ever since I was a kid, and it was because – it really was because I was being bullied. So I created my own world and that's how I started writing. I started writing as like world creation, having a place where I felt safe, having a place where I felt like I had control, interacting with different ideas. It really had my mind as very stimulated.

So I wrote for – I've been writing since then. I guess I was about eight when I started writing and then I was published by Saint Mary's Press for *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul* when I was I think 14 or 15.

Amanda Lytle: That is really cool!

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah.

Amanda Lytle: Wow!

Rawiyah Tariq: And then the story I published which was called “Diamonds” was republished again. So I was published internationally twice by the age of 15. So yeah, so I’ve been writing. I write short stories. I have a whole binder full of novels that I haven’t shared with the world yet, that I’m looking forward to sharing in the future.

But writing has always been my piece, my motivation. Cathartic, I really – I stopped writing for a brief period of time, and I started writing again because I couldn’t afford therapy and Live Journal was my therapist.

Amanda Lytle: Right.

Rawiyah Tariq: Remember Live Journal?

Amanda Lytle: Well, I think that makes so much sense to me because if you don’t have an outlet, it’s literally bottled within you.

Rawiyah Tariq: Uh-huh.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah.

Rawiyah Tariq: And now I write for my blog and for the books that I’m writing but also I write for my own healing and I’m very public about it because I feel like if I’m going through something, I can’t be the only one. I can’t be the only one. So my Instagram and my Facebook, I joke that as a place when my Live Journal went to die.

I talk about a lot of healing things and being neurodivergent and being fat and being queer, being a performer and all that other stuff and also not being perfect. Like being really, really flawed. So that I have a track record of where I am in life and that other people know that it’s OK. It’s OK to be a hot mess sometimes.

Amanda Lytle: Yes.

Rawiyah Tariq: It’s OK to be a hot mess. It’s OK to produce nothing. It’s OK to simply be and it’s OK to let yourself shine. So my writing is based around creating a sovereign embodiment for people. For myself first but ...

Amanda Lytle: Right. I was actually just going to ask you. You just said a sovereign embodiment. So is that basically what your writing has become when it comes to a landing page? That's where you share the majority of your writing in an Instagram page?

Rawiyah Tariq: Uh-huh.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah.

Rawiyah Tariq: I share a majority of my writing on my Instagram page and that Instagram page is "Mammyisdead". Just "Mammyisdead" and that's where I share a lot of my writing and it bounces over to my Facebook as well.

A sovereign embodiment though is my business itself and it is a place – everyone can come but it's centered on black and brown, queer and trans folk and I used to do massage before the pandemic knocked that out. Then I almost died twice. So my body is in recovery, right? Almost – non-COVID related, non-COVID related. Almost died twice last year. That's really an initiation in itself

Amanda Lytle: Ah, yeah. What happened?

Rawiyah Tariq: Well, the first time, there was disordered eating, sent me into the hospital. I was – and I also was on a podcast for some time called "My Black Body" where we talked about like eating disorders and restrictive eating disorders and stuff like that. So that was one thing that happened to me and that sent me to the hospital. Just as I was recovering from that, four months later, I had multiple bilateral pulmonary embolisms. So I had blood clots in my lungs.

Amanda Lytle: Oh! What an experience.

Rawiyah Tariq: It was definitely an experience. I was in it. So I didn't quite feel it as much as the people around me who love me did. There are definitely whole months that I don't remember from all of that. If it hadn't been for writing these things down, I would have lost it forever. But I got to do a lot of work with my writing around dealing with death and possibility and longing and desire and it really helped focus and catalyze what I wanted to do with my life, so yeah.

Amanda Lytle: That is such a beautiful takeaway from it all. I'm stepping into the world of death work as well, end of life care consulting and one of my best friends here is one of the executive directors at the local hospice. We sat down at lunch yesterday and she said, "You know what? I am overwhelmed at how many people say to me, 'Ah, that must be really sad, that must be really hard. That must be so heavy.'"

She's like, "No! It's enriching. It's empowering. It's adding depth to my life because of the conversations that we're having." Like you just mentioned possibility. What if, you know? What, when. Like all of these things. What if and how, you know? And yes, sinking into the depths of what it is that you want to design and create and live.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah. I really have great respect for death dualism, people who work with death. As a massage therapist, I had several terminal clients that I was working with and a few of them, I was in the room giving the massage while they were making their transition over. The families, we formed a relationship with these families, and it's very much a sacred space, just like any transitional space is. So in working with those clients, there was a sadness for the loss of them. But there was also this – they were surrounded by love and being able to care for someone and they know that they are not alone. So yeah. So I honor the work they all are doing.

Amanda Lytle: Oh, thank you and back at you. I feel like this is just the realm of healing and the world needs it so much more now than ever. It has always needed it. But there is just something really pivotal about these days.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah, yeah. That's because we're – the United States specifically is in its Pluto return. So it's a time of like you can go into 250 years of darkness or 250 years of enlightenment according to astrology and I'm like, oh my god, it looks like we're picking the worst timeline ever right now.

Amanda Lytle: It's freaking dark.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah. Well, writing has been my way to bring and creating works. This stuff has been my way to bring light, like a sense of joy, ease and hope into the spaces around me and choice. Writing is a lot around choice. Yeah.

Amanda Lytle: Oh, OK. So all of this really wraps into something that I love about the simplicity and directness of your email signature. It says, “witch writer and soul stitcher.” So the soul stitching, the healing, like you've said, the joy, the ease, the hope. Tell me about where that term “soul stitcher” came from and what it means to you.

Rawiyah Tariq: The term “soul stitcher” is – it comes from what I was trying to do on my self-work. So I felt as a survivor of multiple kinds of abuse and traumatic upbringing that pieces of myself became exiled and lost. So pieces of my soul, my soul felt exiled and lost.

So my work in this world at this time was bringing those pieces of my soul together, like my child self, my toddler, my brat, my ambitious side. All these sides and parts of myself, even the sides that I don't like, to bring them together and stitch them together and to make my soul, my being – when I speak of my soul, I mean myself. A cohesive union because sometimes I feel like I get so split on something that I'm like I have to pull out the jury in my head. I'm like OK. Anxiety, what are you feeling, right?

Amanda Lytle: Yeah, I [0:12:05] [*Indiscernible*].

Rawiyah Tariq: Ambition, what are you feeling right now? Child self, what are you feeling right now? So talked about calling in and summoning myself and all the powers of myself together. So I call myself a soul stitcher because I want to hold space and assist people in bringing back those exiled parts of themselves and seeing how worthy they are and not from

doing things. Just from existing. Like really from a place of just existing. You are magnificent whether you are in movement or not.

I want to assist people through my practice of sovereign embodiment in coming to that wholeness or remembering that wholeness and a remembering of themselves and their totality and a remembering that yes, they may be struggling right now but look at what's happening in the world. Like can you really make time to take care of yourself on all these fronts when all this stuff is going on in the world?

So it's kind of a remembering of self and I'm holding that space and pulling together the edges and helping them stitch those pieces of themselves back together so that they can live with choice and authenticity.

Amanda Lytle: OK. I'm going to use choice and authenticity as a segue in because I think that the choice and authenticity flow so beautifully into your name change. Can you tell me about that?

Rawiyah Tariq: Oh, yeah. My name used to be *Irene Solange McAlfin [0:13:31] [Phonetic]* and I was named after my grandmother, my mom's mother, who passed away when she was young and there has been a lot of pain around that name and there was a lot of trauma and sadness in that name for me. I needed to – especially after I died. I'm like I need to move differently.

So I've been calling myself Rawiyah within spiritual circles for years and I'm like, OK, this is my name. This is my name and Rawiyah is Arabic and North African word for storyteller and it's feminine and my last name Tariq because I changed them both, means morning star and it's also he who knocks and the name of a warrior who drove colonizers out of parts of Africa.

So I was like, oh, this is the perfect last name, and it has been this masculine soul. I'm non-binary. So I have storyteller or translator of divine text, which is the other meaning of the word "Rawiyah" and morning star together or warrior together.

Amanda Lytle: Amazing and beautiful and I can feel that name. I can feel the power in that name. What a claiming.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah. It really was a – now you're picking up. The name reflects who I am and what I do and my work in the world. Yeah. Warrior *bar [0:15:06] [Phonetic]*, that's what's up.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. OK. So just continuing on with that, just even what you've got in the email signature because I noticed and I had written down "witch, writer, performer, healer, speaker, neurodiverse, disabled, queer". Like this is what you had written down on your profile. So I was like, oh wow, this is incredible. I actually am really interested in knowing more about the witchy side. Tell me more.

Rawiyah Tariq: Oh, yeah. So I was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. There's a lot of voodoo and stuff and I was raised Roman Catholic which just makes me – sets me up to be the perfect ritualist and I came into witchcraft when I was 13. Went back and forth with it because of fear of hell, realized that we create our own hell and then moved into doing witchcraft.

I studied old Anderson Feri for about five years, but I leaned into my own practice that I've created, which is definitely an alignment with liberation craft or work that is not just liberating us from capitalism or white supremacy and all the other stuff, patriarchy and stuff. But also liberating the self from all these tapes that we've recorded from society that have caused harm to us. So I do this through divination. I do this through cathartic ritual creation. I do this through heart-holding and coaching from a space that is spirit-led and very somatic.

So it's not just spirit. It's spirit and body and trying to help people become embodied, which is why my practice is called a "sovereign embodiment". So you know that my witch work is about having ownership of oneself in such a way that you cannot be bought and by not be bought, I mean like for example there was a time when I realized because of my upbringing that I could be swayed easily if someone made a promise to love me.

So that's where my scarcity was, and people could buy me for affection even if it wasn't real affection. I just had to believe that it was real, and I desperately wanted to believe that it was real.

So that was my purchase price and when I started engaging in my spiritual practices and creating the spiritual practices around my own sovereignty, I not only could tell when people were messing me over, but I could also lean into a space of "Am I agreeing with this because I'm longing for something? What am I longing for? What is my actual goal?"

So it's all about empowerment and becoming sovereign within yourself, so that you don't have to try to wield your sovereignty over other people because I believe that's a part of what happens with us in this world and that cause damage and harm.

It's when we try to control other people and as long as you're not doing stuff like kicking puppies, like I don't need to control you at all. So yeah, that is – that's the witch part of me. Like rituals, healings. I do house blessings. Yeah, basic like – I'm like your witch for hire.

Amanda Lytle: I love it and I love that there's so much creation but there's so much intentional building up and designing of what you are doing with your days.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah.

Amanda Lytle: I wanted to just acknowledge that where you're at now with self-awareness and you've touched on your past with trauma, with grief, with death, a lot of darkness, right? That the healing work to figure out and to determine and to understand where and how we cling our self-worth to, like you've set a price, whether that's an energetic price or spiritual price, a physical price, you know.

Rawiyah Tariq: Yeah.

Amanda Lytle: That's monumental.

Rawiyah Tariq: Oh!

Amanda Lytle: And I feel like also in the work that you're doing, it's – I say this often but it's like if you don't see it, how do you know that you can be it?

Rawiyah Tariq: Oh my god. That's how I started all of my work. There was someone who – I was like you don't have to be in this relationship. Like this person is hurting you. Like da-da-da. You get to be happy, and she looked at me and she said, "You? Not you talking about being happy," and I was like, "Ah!" I was like, "That's right. I can't tell people that they deserve more or should have more if I'm not living my life in that space." Like I can't tell people to have a delicious life if I'm not living deliciously. So ...

Amanda Lytle: I love that.

Rawiyah Tariq: So that's how a lot of it – like that's where the basis of my work started and one of the first things I did that was like the gateway was doing theater and then I moved into – through theater, got connected into kink, BDSM, and through kink got connected to burlesque and that's when things really took off for me finding joy and happiness and pleasure.

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. And again, that is by design. You are exploring things that feel good to you, not worrying about anyone else in the process.

Rawiyah Tariq: Uh-huh.

Amanda Lytle: That's like self-expression to the max.

Rawiyah Tariq: Uh-huh, yeah.

Amanda Lytle: Oh, I love that. I see you in that. It takes courage. I say it takes courage and I know a lot of people are like, "But does it?" It's like yeah, it does because I just believe that we are so surrounded by these structures that are intentionally trying to make us small all the freaking time. So it takes courage to be like no, stuff this. I am going to do things differently and more authentically.

Rawiyah Tariq: It was a case of am I going to live or am I going to die and having the courage to live because I knew if I was living a half-life, that I would just – I would bottom out. So it was the courage to choose life, to have a life that I could live and be proud of because that's what I was terrified of. Like I'm terrified of being on my deathbed and having nothing to say, right?

Like I want to be able to be – I want to go out with people playing my greatest hits. Like remember when you did this thing, that we didn't think you should actually do it and then you did it and it was great. I'm like, yeah, that was loud. Yeah, that's what I want and also I'm defiant.

I am so defiant, and a lot of my stuff was done in defiance. Like dancing burlesque in a body that's 350 pounds and queer and doing this on mainstream stages in San Francisco and Oakland, right? And getting to a point where I can walk into a bar and being like, "I want to perform in your show," and they're like, "Of course."

Like that was pure defiance and that was also talking backwards to my younger child saying, "Yeah, you're fat and you're still fabulous. You can still – you don't have to wait to lose fat in order to live your life a certain way."

By doing that, I reached and touched so many people who did not really love themselves or see themselves as viable physically or sexually and all other stuff and they're looking at me like, "Oh, OK. I can, I can and everything I do is about uplifting and bringing other people with me too at the same time, which is why I'm out loud with what I do."

Amanda Lytle: Yeah. You're modeling it out loud. Oh, OK. That segues into my next brainwave question which is, "When do you feel most like yourself?"

Rawiyah Tariq: Oh my god. I feel most like myself I think – oh my god. It's so weird. OK. So there's a mask that we wear I feel in order to get along with society and that's our talking self which is our spiritual self and our like, what do we – like what's for our higher good and then what's for – like what do we actually want in this talking self, communicating to the world, right?

Then sometimes I felt this through several masks of I'm worried about what people will think. I'm worried that I want too much. I'm worried that I'm not asking for enough. All these fears and stuff. But over the past few years, especially the past two or three, I haven't been wearing those masks. So I feel like myself all of the time or like I feel like myself unless I'm like disassociated from something because I've been triggered. I feel like myself. I'm not putting on a show for anyone. I'm not putting up a front.

That's why I'm really – like I'm really adamant about the stuff that I share on my social media doesn't just include "Look at me. I'm in this play," or "Look at my. I'm writing this thing," or "Look at me. I'm doing this." But it also includes today was hard. You know, today was hard. Getting out of bed was hard. I mean maybe I will take a shower today. Like – but I feel like I'm myself all of the time.

Amanda Lytle: I can't stop smiling. That is so beautiful and that is the true liberation. That is true freedom to just be you unapologetically all the time.

Rawiyah Tariq: And there are consequences. I'm not going to say there's not – there are most definitely consequences to living your life in this way. But I would rather take those – I do a risk assessment when I do stuff. It's like – and I think of everything in terms of consequences, which may sound negative but it's like everything has a consequence. It could be a good turnout. It could be a bad turnout. It could be different. But it's all about what can I live with. It comes down to what can I live with and if I can't live with it, I can't do it and that even comes out of conversations. Everything – I've tried to live my life consciously. So it's a conscious choice whether or not I'm going to put up a mask or not. It's a conscious choice of whether or not I'm going to show up to this as myself. Yeah. Consciously, just trying to live consciously.

Amanda Lytle: I am loving this conversation. I have one more question to wrap us up. I really appreciate your time. I have a question about a shoutout, which is if there was an account, a person, an organization, disruptor, activist or change agent that you would like to give a shoutout to, who would it be?

Rawiyah Tariq: Actually I'm going to lead it right back to myself and my organizations. So Sovereign Embodiment, my own practice which is doing work and creating community care for people, which means people can afford things.

You could donate and I will give them directly back out to the community and also the project that I cofounded with my partner Ella Ofori and it's called Project Ete Sen and it is for Black, queer and trans and non-binary, licensed and pre-licensed therapists to have \$2000 love offering to get rest because these therapists are holding our communities and all this other stuff up together and we're in a time of crisis and assault.

They're holding – they are taking on clients like pro bono because they know that these clients aren't going to make it if they don't have some kind of holding. So they're suffering. They can't take time off. They're getting – if they hear this, they're going to be, “You used that word.”

They're getting crunchy. They are exhausted and so we create a love offering around rest with Project Ete Sen and we're working on expanding it more and into the future. So we need to be able to pay ourselves too. So if you donate, you can donate to Project Ete Sen directly to the therapist or you could donate to general funds to help us continue to do joy, rest, liberation, and work around supporting all those types of healers that support black, queer and trans community.

Amanda Lytle: I will link that in the show notes.

Rawiyah Tariq: Thank you.

Amanda Lytle: Rawiyah, that is beautiful and now I've got to ask you one more question. Like how did that idea come to be? You know, like sowing seeds for something like that to see it into fruition. What started that conversation?

Rawiyah Tariq: Love, love did. My partner is a therapist, and I was watching in 2020 especially with George Floyd and all these other things that were happening. How much they were holding

and I'm like you need to rest and they're like, "There are bills to pay," and I'm like, "Oh," and they were like, "I need to rest for more than a week."

So I came up with the idea to raise \$100,000 and started building a website and found us a physical sponsor and Ella pulled together all of the language around it, the contracts around it and everything. So within 48 hours, I believe, maybe it was 72 hours, from concept to completion, we had our project started and it launched on Juneteenth . So this year is our third year and we've raised over \$70,000. We're still hoping to reach that \$100,000 mark before the end of this year and yeah, and it has been changing people's lives.

Amanda Lytle: Of course.

Rawiyah Tariq: It has been changing people's lives.

Amanda Lytle: Yes. Rest is so important, and I also love that that was one of the seeds of this is just understanding that if you're showing up as a fraction or a fragment of what you can deliver, it's not doing anyone a service.

Rawiyah Tariq: It's not doing anyone, and I don't want our healers to be harmed in order to do their work.

Amanda Lytle: Exactly.

Rawiyah Tariq: That makes it unsustainable. We're not dying – well, my partner Ella says like, "We're not dying for this. We're not dying over this," and in order to not die over this, we have to really create – not even create. We need to burn down the old structures and create structures that are centered around our humanity and our need to rest and our need to actually have a life instead of what capitalism is doing to us. So this project was all about creating a world which we wanted to see, even while this world has continued to hurt us.

Amanda Lytle: Oh, amazing! Thank you. All of that will be linked in the show notes. Rawiyah, thank you so much for being a guest on *The Book Stoop*.

Rawiyah Tariq: Thank you for having me.

Amanda Lytle: Thank you so much for being with us. Please be sure to check out rowhousepublishing.com/podcast for full episode transcriptions and guest image descriptions and the show notes for all the links. Talk soon.

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