

PROFESSIONAL
TROUBLEMAKER



with **LUVVIE AJAYI JONES**

Professional Troublemaker with Luvvie Ajayi Jones

Take the Mantle (with Tarana Burke) - Episode 07

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Welcome to the Professional Troublemaker Podcast! This is the place where we help you cultivate the courage, authenticity and audacity you need to use your voice, take up space and live a life that is so bold, even your wildest dreams say #goals. I'm your host, Luvvie Ajayi Jones, New York Times bestselling author, sought after speaker and side-eye sorceress bringing you thought-provoking conversations with amazing people taken action, done scary things and rocked the boat to an audacious life. Like the late, great John Lewis said, these are the kind of people who are "Never, ever afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Before we jump into today's interview, know that this podcast is named after my second book, [Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual](#), which hits bookstore shelves on March 2, 2021.

With this book and with everything I do, and I'm on a mission to help a million people live audaciously. To do that, they must fight their fear.

Think of it! A million people who are out there, standing on the edge of something great and need that little push of encouragement. That push to be the domino. To say the hard thing. To have the hard conversation. To kick their fear to the curb and step into the life they've been dreaming of.

And that is what writing this book has done for me, what it's already done for those who have had the chance to read it early - empowered people to say yes to things they were previously saying no to. Empowered people to have tough conversations they weren't going to have before. People have asked for raises and promotions and gotten them after reading this book and finding the courage to speak up. The domino effect of what has been happening when a few people have decided not to live in the realm of fear has been amazing - think of what could happen if a million people stopped letting fear be the first factor in their decision making?

An audacious mission like this can't happen without you, so I need your help to get this book in the hands of people who need it. Buy a copy of *Professional Troublemaker* for yourself, as a gift for your friend who needs to start living audaciously. I know it will change your life like it's changed mine and I know it will change the lives of a million people who can create a domino effect that won't be stopped. Preorder Professional Troublemaker (hardcover or audiobook) now at PROFESSIONALTROUBLEMAKERBOOK.com or wherever you buy books.

On today's episode of Professional Troublemaker, I am talking to someone who is the literal walking definition of what a professional troublemaker is. She's a truth teller, she's a disruptor, she's a trailblazer and a change agent. Today, I'm talking to my friend Tarana Burke.

For more than 25 years, Tarana Burke has worked at the intersection of sexual violence and racial justice. Fueled by commitments to interrupt sexual violence and other systemic inequalities disproportionately impacting marginalized people, particularly Black women and girls, Tarana has created and led various campaigns focused on increasing access to resources and support for impacted communities, including the '[Me Too](#)' movement, which to date has galvanized millions of survivors and allies around the world.

This conversation is the one I needed to be having during Fear Fighter February. We talk about Tarana growing up and all the paths she walked down to end up on the one she's on right now, the pain of being misunderstood when you're trying to make the world a better place for everyone and how she's learned to lean into vulnerability more as she continues to do her work. You're going to love this one. Let's get into it.

Conversation with Tarana Burke

LUVVIE LUVVIE (5:20) Yo, I always start by asking people, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

TARANA You know what's so funny? My bonus baby asked me that the other day and I said, "When I was very little, I wanted to be a lawyer," because I got a Caribbean granddaddy who said that's just... you pick one; a doctor, lawyer, you got an accountant, something. I wanted to be a lawyer. He said I talked a lot and I was good at convincing people, and so I used to say that all the time. And then I switched to, I want to be a track star, because I ran track from six years old.

LUVVIE Really?

TARANA Oh yeah. I knew I was going to the Olympics. When Flo-Jo hit the world, I was like, this is all I want to be.

LUVVIE What? And you started running track at six?

TARANA I started running track at six. I ran all through middle school, high school. I was the captain of my team my senior year in high school. I ran my freshman year in college and I was like, "Well, that's the end of that."

LUVVIE Whoa, I never knew this.

TARANA Yeah, track was my sport. I just knew I was going to be a track star and then I was going to retire from that and be a coach. That's the trajectory. But I gave that up and then I wanted to be a teacher. I gave up track as of going to the Olympics around 15, because when I was about 14 or 15, I decided I wanted to be an organizer.

LUVVIE Really?

TARANA Yeah, really early. But after my first-

LUVVIE Oh my God!

TARANA The first thing I ever organized around was the Central Park Five in New York.

LUVVIE Wait, let's drill into that. I love this journey. From track to teacher to organizer. From lawyer-

TARANA And now I'm a little bit of all of it.

LUVVIE Right, exactly. You're doing all of it in some ways, because you also running around the world. One, where did you grow up?

TARANA I grew up in The Bronx, Bronx, New York, all day. People call me a Bronx Nationalist, BX all day.

LUVVIE All day. Okay, okay. And what were you like when you were growing up, besides outspoken? What was little Tarana like?

TARANA What was little Tarana like? Probably not dissimilar than big Tarana. I like to laugh, I love being around my family. I talk a lot. I think if you were to query my family, that would be the first thing they would say. Little Tarana didn't shut up. I was the little kid that I was always in grown people's conversations.

LUVVIE Mm-hmm (affirmative), and they're like, "Stop minding grown folk's business."

TARANA Exactly. "Nobody's talking to you. Go in the room."

"No, Mommy, that's not what happened, remember? The lady said-"

Then my mother would be like, "I did not ask you."

LUVVIE I asked you nothing. But see, the people who talk a lot when they were little now become speakers and they get paid for it. [crosstalk 00:08:16]-

TARANA Exactly. It was a thing. I didn't know. Loved school too, loved to read.

LUVVIE School, so you was popular, you had your friends, you were just chilling?

TARANA Yeah, yeah.

LUVVIE How old were you when Central Park Five happened, and what really made you pause and say, "I need to focus around this."?

TARANA I was, I think, 15. It might've been the summer before I turned 15 or I was 15, because that's '90, I think. Anyway, it was somewhere in there. I had joined this organization called The 21st

Century Youth Leadership Movement, because I grew up in a very Blackity Black family. My mom was very active in the '70s around Black liberation. My grandfather was a Garveyite, my uncles and everybody, I always describe it as we were the kind of Black that had the birthday cakes on Malcolm X and Martin Luther King's birthday.

LUVVIE Yes! Yes!

TARANA Black!

LUVVIE Y'all was Blackity Black.

TARANA We was Blackity Black. I took Swahili lessons in daycare when I was little. It was very head wraps and red, black and green. I had that kind of grounding around Blackness, but I loved it so much but I never had a way to utilize it. I just had information. I had started learning about grassroots organizing and about being able to change your community. Then that summer, we came home and the Central Park Five had exploded. The story had exploded everywhere.

One of the brothers, Yusef, from the Central Park Five, had been dating a girl in our program. It was Manhattan. They was from Upper Manhattan, the Bronx, it's all very close. Yusef was dating this girl who went to high school with us. She was in our program, and so it made it very much like, we know this dude. We've seen him around. We felt more invested and so we organized a rally and a protest and a press conference. These little 14, 15, 16 year old teenage kids in New York, but our point was, you can't criminalize us. That was our motto. We won't let you criminalize us.

I just felt so powerful. I don't know if there's another way to put it, but really through that process, because the one thing I loved about 21st Century was that the adults in the program would constantly tell us, "You have power now. We're developing you as leaders, but it's because you have the ability to be a leader already." They weren't like, "Oh, if you keep in this program, one day you will." They're like, "No, right now. And you can do something right now." And so we did. From that moment on, I was like, "Oh, I get to stand up and talk in front of people and say what I want and get people to... I'm doing this. I'm doing this."

LUVVIE Wow. That is incredible that you had such an early exposure to activism in such a real way.

TARANA Yeah, it feels like a blessing to know... I went to college. I tried teaching for a semester, as a major, and I was like, I don't want to do this. And so I switched to political science, because it was the closest to that kind of world, but yeah, I was a professional troublemaker from deep. From deep.

LUVVIE Usually, professional troublemakers are professional troublemakers from childhood. And the best times and the best people who are able to harness that power are the ones who were never convinced not to. A lot of us started off as professional troublemakers and somebody convinced us not to be that person. When we are told, "You have permission to make this good trouble."

TARANA Yeah. My mother used to say, "You have to be respectful of adults, but they have to be respectful of you." And so if something happened in school or whatever, I would say to her, "Mommy, this is what happened." I'm a mama's girl, if you will, because I remember being, probably in my late twenties, and I had a boss, a woman I was working with, who was just awful to me all the time. I wanted to go off on her so bad, but I was also trained to be respectful. I called my mother and I was like, "Mommy, can you talk to this lady, because she's your age and I don't want to curse her out." And my mother, sure enough, was like, "I'm going to talk to her this time, Tarana, but you can't keep calling me. You're a grownup."

LUVVIE You're like, "But I still need you to talk to her."

TARANA I need you to step in, in case I go off on this woman. But yeah, my mom gave me a lot. I would say the greatest gift my mother gave me was a yes. We didn't have a lot of money and I don't have that... A lot of people, we grew up without a lot of money. My mother would work every day God gave us. We did okay, but she was frugal, of course. But when opportunities came, she said yes. 21st Century was these group of people from Alabama. She didn't know. I was like, "Mommy, can I go to a trip to DC to learn to be a leader?"

She said, "Well, how much is it going to cost?" I was like, I don't know, it was like \$25. She was like, "Okay."

LUVVIE Oh, wow. The greatest gift is a yes.

TARANA Yeah.

LUVVIE That's amazing. When you went to college, where'd you go?

TARANA I started at Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama, and then because our cousins are wild I had to transfer to Auburn University. I finished at Auburn University, also in Montgomery, the Montgomery campus, but I went to school in Alabama. I mostly claim Alabama State, because that's where I... Actually, I claim them both, but I spent the most time at State. There was a whole bunch of controversy and a bunch of students had to transfer over to Auburn so that we can get through college.

LUVVIE Wow. You got your degree in political science?

TARANA In public administration and political science, yeah.

LUVVIE At that point, what did you want to do and be next? Where did you go after you got this degree?

TARANA Oh, I was clear. By the time we got to the end of college, I was ready to go into the world. I was organizing all through college. The reason why I was in Alabama was because of 21st Century, the organization that started that I was a part of, was based there. I barely, by the hair of my chinny, chin, chin, got through college, because I was ready to go. They about hated me at my college campus, because I was just... Oh my gosh, at Auburn, not at Alabama State, but at Auburn, you had a bunch of Black kids come over there and we're looking around like, "What is this? This ain't going to stand." And they hadn't been used to Black kids pushing back. It was the

smaller campus of this huge college and it was more commuter friendly. We were on campus like, "No, this is HBCU now."

LUVVIE Let them know.

TARANA Let them know. I was leading all these protests and there was just a lot of bias happening on campus. I got my way about at Auburn, but I went right to Selma to work for 21st Century. I knew that's what I was going to do, was going to go into that work, nonprofit. I initially wanted to actually go work for a foundation, because I was on the Board of 21C, that's what we call 21st Century, I was a youth board member and I saw the struggle for raising money for these grassroots organizations and I thought, oh, I want to go work for one of these foundations so they can have a real voice in there who knows what's going on.

But my time was better, I'm glad I did. I stayed in Selma and I went to work there, raising money for the organization, instead of going to work for a Ford Foundation or something like that. And still organizing. We were running the 21st Century, the program, the leadership program, we was organizing around police brutality. We were organizing to get the first Black mayor into office in Selma. It was quite an active time.

LUVVIE You came out the gate. It's funny, people see Tarana Burke today and don't understand how you've basically lived four different lives before Me Too got on the map.

TARANA Oh, absolutely.

LUVVIE They do not understand that you used to have a fashion blog.

TARANA Yeah.

LUVVIE We taking it there.

TARANA Yeah, that feels like a whole other life. I had the fashion blog, honestly, because the life of an organizer activist movement in that world, we are obviously fighting against things, like capitalism and consumerism, but we live in America and we live in this country where we're surrounded by it, engulfed by it. Instead of examining those systems and thinking about how we dismantle them strategically, I think a lot of what we got when I was young, we were young and hungry and like 20-something year olds when they get information, we're like, "I know everything now." And so instead, it was just an indictment of us as individuals for wanting to like nice things.

I grew up socialized to want nice things and not being able to get them. Now that I have the opportunity to get them, you're condemning me as a human being, because I wanted a pair of those leather boots. I kept that part of me. I have been reading Vogue magazine since I was 12, 13 years old. I had a subscription. That was my gift one year, for my birthday, because my mother was like, "We ain't got a lot of money, so what do you want?"

And I was like, "Can you buy me this \$5 magazine?" And so that was my secret. It was like my little thing I didn't tell my activist friends, that I loved fashion and stuff. And then I was turning

40, I was in my late thirties getting ready to turn 40 and I'm like, "But I love to dress. I like nice things." So I created this blog that was about how to dress nice, enjoy your nice things and not spend a lot of money.

LUVVIE Yes, yes. I remember one of the outfits you posted that I was like, "You better," because the blog was called, She Slays. Where you wore this overcoat and these fire knee boots and these glasses and you were standing in the street. I was like, "Yo, this fire outfit." It was so bomb, but it was so cool, because again, when people think about activists and activism, they don't give people room to like nice things. They think if you're an activist, you're also so anticapitalist that you're like, "I'm just going to live in this one shirt that I have." That ain't it.

TARANA And I have some friends who have capsules. They have five pair of pants, five shirts, da, da, da, da, da. And I actually applaud that. I think that we have to start thinking about the world... we do have to have our eye on the global climate and the crisis around how our consumerism is affecting literally the world that we live in. I think people are, a lot of the fashion brands and stuff, are starting to pay attention to that more. A lot of the magazines are starting to pay attention to that more. And then we have to contend with the fact that this is the world that we live in. I know so many folks who are movement people who are like, "I don't want to say nothing, but you see these new Gucci shoes I got? I'm not going to put them on the Gram, but girl, you see these?" And I'm like, yeah, I have multitudes.

LUVVIE Multitudes. We're not saints in this world.

TARANA Not at all.

LUVVIE We pick causes that we want to speak up about, but that does not mean we are also not a part of a larger system that we will play into sometimes.

TARANA Mm-hmm (affirmative), absolutely, and I struggle with it and I think we have to continue to struggle with it and not just be like, "Oh, well, I don't care. Whatever, carbon footprint." You can't go to the other extreme. I definitely struggle with it and try to find a balance, but I do like nice things.

LUVVIE Can't help it, okay? It is what it is.

TARANA Absolutely.

LUVVIE It is what it is. I'm trying to figure out how to even get into how MeToo became... First of all, let's talk about MeToo outside of the phenomenon, MeToo. What people do not realize, as they talk about you are the founder of the movement, they're thinking about the hashtag. You are considered the founder, because you actually had an organization of this name before social media caught on. Walk me into what made you start MeToo, not the hashtag.

TARANA No, I did not start the hashtag and I think people should absolutely understand that. It's so funny, not only did I not start the hashtag, I found... I'm writing my memoir right now and I found an exchange on social media, between a friend and I, the day that MeToo went viral, where she was like, "Hey, I'm seeing MeToo. Congratulations."

And I was like, "Hey, you know what? I don't know who started that." This was literally hours after it went viral, or it was getting ready to go viral. I was like, "I'm not sure who started that, but I didn't. Let's try to contain it," I had no idea where it was going, "because I'm concerned about making something like that a hashtag, without setting up a system first for people who come forward to have to... I'm just like watching people cut and bleed on the internet, and there's nobody there with the first aid kit, right? So no, I didn't start the hashtag, but I am grateful for it for sure, and I'm grateful that we were able to connect it back to our work, which was started...

I am a survivor, a multiple times survivor of sexual violence, like many people. And in my early '20s, late teens, early '20s, I was privately struggling with coming to terms with that, right? I was still not even able to use words that other people use to describe them, right? I was just... Had a lot of challenges and really, I didn't even have words like survivor or healing.

I didn't use those words at all to describe myself or what I was trying to get. I just wanted it to feel differently, I wanted to feel better, I wanted to not have these flashbacks and these memories that would shut me down. And when I started working, this is a very short version, but when I started working with girls in the community in Selma, it became evident that they were dealing with the same things, right? For all the positive stuff I did when I was a teenager, I also have these negative memories of being angry all the time. And actually some of that organizing work was the place for me to put that anger somewhere, right? To put that-

LUVVIE

Let me ask a question real quick. How old were you when the sexual violence happened to you?

TARANA

The first time I was six. It started at six years old. You're talking about years, and years, and years, and years, and years of holding these feelings. And when you're that young and you know enough to keep it a secret, because there's something about the shame that we heap upon girls very early on. And we put the onus on girls really to protect themselves.

Even though you'll hear all these girls, and I know boys get some degree of it, but mostly it's girls. It's 99% of the time we tell our little girls, you close your legs, don't sit on nobody's lap, go put some clothes on, right? When the men come, you can be fully dressed and an adult woman will deem what you have on inappropriate in some way, and then you got to go run and put some clothes on.

You get these messages early on as a little girl that there's something wrong with nakedness in your body, and there's something wrong about men and women, like there's something that they don't balance that with what's right a lot of times, right? Especially another generation of our parents, right? I think parents are doing a much better job of it now.

As a little kid, when somebody violates you and violates your body, you know that's wrong, because you've heard these messages, but you don't know that you're not responsible. And so if you think that you are complicit in your own abuse, then your first inclination is to hide it, right? When you think about little kids who spill something on when they're little goes, "Oh, my God, I spill something on a blanket, or I wet the bed or whatever."

They try to hide it, because they don't want to get in trouble. And so then I grew up like many, many, many people who experienced child sexual abuse. You grow up with this notion that you did something wrong and you're not a good person. I just want to be a good person in the world and put that behind me. That [crosstalk 00:27:03] into anger eventually.

LUVVIE What you just said reminded me of Chimamanda Adichie's quote, we teach girls shame. Close your legs; cover yourself. We make them feel as though being born female, they're already guilty of something.

TARANA That's right.

LUVVIE And so, girls grow up to be women who silence themselves. They grow up to be women who cannot say what they truly think. And they grow up... And this is the worst thing we do to girls, they grow up to be women who have turned pretense into an art form.

TARANA Oh, I have not heard that quote, but it is so dead on. It is so dead on. That's exactly what I'm saying, right? It's ingrained almost into your body, right? That this, you should be ashamed that somebody else did something to you. And then you have parents who will, particularly in the black communities, you'll have parents who will be like, "If somebody's touching you, you tell me, because I'm going to kill him." Which again-

LUVVIE Which then puts the onus on you.

TARANA Exactly, exactly. Now, I'm responsible-

LUVVIE If somebody dies.

TARANA If somebody dies. In my case, I knew already about the idea of consequences, I knew about jail, and I had an opportunity right after it happened tell my stepfather, who was this hawking six foot three, gruff, west Indian man, who I knew had a pistol, who referenced it all the time. Don't let me get my pistol. I had a choice of, I knew... No, I didn't fear not being believed, I feared getting in trouble and getting somebody killed. And then my father going to jail and it would all be my fault.

LUVVIE And it just be this rolling consequence, so you said the best thing I can do is just be quiet.

TARANA Just be quiet, and be quiet, and be better. And so I made a mistake, I'm a bad girl, I just got to be better. This is six, imagine holding that at six to seven years old, and there's so many of us.

LUVVIE You brought this up, actually, let's drill into that a little bit more, because that is real, and I never thought about the idea that we have two choices. Is tell and you're not believed, tell and somebody gets hurt and you take it on. For you at six, just looking back, what would the thing that you would have wanted to hear that would have told you it's okay for you to say something, we need you to say something. What is the thing that would also take the responsibility off your back?

TARANA I think that if I had heard prior to it happening, like those same rules, right? But if anybody was to ever touch you or bother you, it's not your fault. Just come and tell mommy, come and tell daddy, and we'll take care of it. Not, we're going to kill him, we're going to whatever, whatever, but we're always... It's like home base. You can always come back here because it's always safe here, right? I felt the sense of safety in my home, but it was the safety that was wrapped in fear, right?

There's a fear that you're going to get beaten, you're going to get a whooping because you did something wrong, there's a fear that somebody going to die, there's a fear that you're going to get in trouble, there's a fear you're going to get... There's all this fear that eventually then made it safe, so to speak, but not safe in a way that would allow me to feel like I can say.

And I was very much allowed to speak my mind as a child, but even that was kind of curated, and you get a sense of what you can and can't say. I couldn't tell my mother she was lying, you know when you're a little kid in you hear your parents tell a fib about something like, "Oh, yeah, I watched that yesterday." And you're like, "No, you didn't."

LUVVIE Sorry, but what?

TARANA You got it.

LUVVIE You got it, I was that kid too. You need to run and Luvvie, would have been terrible together because I was that kid too. Who's like, "But I saw you-

TARANA That's not-

LUVVIE That's not what happened.

TARANA I saw that, but you knew better than to say that.

LUVVIE Right.

TARANA What I would have needed was a different upbringing really up until that point around those kinds of things. And I think when I talk to parents about their children and safety, these are the things that I try to try to impress upon them. You have to have open communication, we know that, we hear that all the time, but it's the quality of the communication.

It's not just openness for the sex, some parents are real raw and they talk about sex, and dah, dah, dah, to their kid, that's their choice. I'm not here to say, because I'm really open with my child, right? But also I remember with Kaia, I would say... I was such a crazy parent too, because I was so busy to get it right. But let's say I would yell at them, right? My child uses they/them pronouns.

And I would yell at them, and then I would say, "I'm sorry for yelling at you, I was yelling at you out of anger." And then Kaia would say, "Oh, it's okay, mommy." And I would say, "Okay, I know you said it's okay, but I also want you to know that it's not okay for somebody to harm you, and then apologize. If you don't feel good about that it's... And my poor baby would be like, I mean-

LUVVIE She'd be like [crosstalk 00:32:23].

TARANA It's okay, we crack up laughing now because Kaia is like, "I would have much rather gotten spankings when I was little than all that damn talk.

LUVVIE Oh, that talking. She was like, "Man, I get it, all the feelings." That's amazing.

TARANA I was doing the most [inaudible 00:32:42].

LUVVIE But that's because you were trying your best to raise a healthy child up who grew up to be somebody who could tell you, "Hey mom, I go by they and them now." And you honor that. That's the type of safety that people don't have. People do not have that type of safe space.

Y'all. It's FEAR-FIGHTER FEBRUARY!

Our mission is to empower 1 million people to fight their fear, in order to achieve their wildest dreams. So during the month of February, we're inviting you to join me and the rest of [LuvvNation](#) for the Fear-Fighter Challenge.

Each day in the month of February, when you sign up for daily emails at [FEARFIGHTERCHALLENGE.com](#), you will get a call to action that will help you fight fear that day. Simple things that get you closer to tackling fear - that everlasting hater.

And you don't have to fight fear alone! Join us each day in #LuvvNation (my online community and app that is a safe space in a dumpster fire world), where you can link up with other Fear-Fighters to gas each other up.

Sign up now at [FEARFIGHTERCHALLENGE.com](#)! Join us!

LUVVIE So when you started [Me Too](#), and thank God you had receipts.

TARANA Thank God.

LUVVIE You've had photos from rallies, what year was that photo that's been going around where you're holding the pink Me Too sign? What year was that?

TARANA I had the shirt on, it says Me Too, that's 2013 or 2014. I think.

LUVVIE 2013.

TARANA Yeah, somewhere in there, because that's in Philadelphia. And there's also another picture, I'm at this table with a bunch of Me Too shirts, that one was sort from 2006 sort of 2007.

LUVVIE Wow, wow.

TARANA We've been at it for a long time. You remember, you were part of that crew that I initially... That day like, "Hey, y'all."

LUVVIE We said, "Say less." So what happened? I remember that day, I remember that day so much because me and Tarana, had been a part of a crew of dope women who just are each other's support. Who just tell each other stories, who are all amazing as writers, as just black women showing up in this world then who are seen as leaders for years. At this point, I can't remember how many years it's been.

TARANA It's a minute.

LUVVIE It's been a minute. And I remember that day you came in and you were like, "Y'all what's happening on Twitter right now? Alyssa Milano tweeted Me Too." Talking about sexual violence and now everyone is talking about Me Too, but our work is being lost in it. We was like, "What? No." And all you need is black women, a whole high band.

TARANA Oh, listen, activate the thread. There was the level of activation that took place that day. And it is the thing to your point about having all these different lives support for that moment. From every area of my life, black woman stood up and were like, "Oh, not today." I don't know that a human being could feel more enveloped, enveloped in love than I did in those first few days. It was, you try to be a good person in the world, you try to do right about people.

We fail sometimes, but for the most part, that's just kind of like living up and up, right? And not for anything in return necessarily, but just because that's what feels good to do. And on those first couple of days, particularly at first day, our crew was like, "Okay, that thread is still there, right?"

LUVVIE That thread is still there.

TARANA It's like, first of all, I remember Patrice saying, "We got to ride the wave, right? Ride the wave, calm down. And you and Luvvie goes... For those who don't know by now Luvvie goes into strategic mode whenever there's an issue. All right first, boom, this is what we going to do. One, two, we're going to get everybody to and tweet about it. We're going to repost.

The women just started converging and planning on the opposite end I had Yaba, and my other crew of girlfriends who were like, "Girl, you got receipts, I don't understand? You've been talking about Me Too forever."

LUVVIE Forever.

TARANA And I went in my phone and I'm like, "This is the grace of God, because I went in my phone that I had just got my new iPhone." And you know how sometimes all your stuff doesn't transfer. I go into the phone and flip back and my 2013, or whatever that year was, the one you're talking about that rally, I had a video from that rally in my phone.

LUVVIE In your phone.

TARANA I was like, "Okay, God." And then I posted that video on Facebook and Instagram. No, I didn't even think I had [inaudible 00:36:40]-

LUVVIE Twitter.

TARANA Twitter and I think Instagram. I posted whenever I had a social media and I was a terrible social media person at the time, I still am pretty terrible. And folks just went at it, and the other beautiful thing about that was, it wasn't just people in my crew, my people activated their crews. And as black women in general, kind of got a sense of what was happening. And they were like, "What [inaudible 00:37:03]. Oh, no." Pam is a shit. She DM me the next day. "Hi, I just wanted to say hi."

LUVVIE You got the wrath of a million black women.

TARANA Black women were like-

LUVVIE Excuse me, excuse me, moves like ah, ah.

TARANA You got that name wrong.

LUVVIE Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, no, no, that belongs to her. And it was such an important thing to even watch because oftentimes our voices are drowned out, but it reminded me that we have such strength in numbers. Our voices will not be drowned out when we all come together on one thing.

TARANA That's right. When we make up our mind, I mean, it's exactly what we saw with the survivors, right? It was that could have... There have been other hashtags and I really thought about #WhyIStayed, remember that hashtag?

LUVVIE Yeah, why I stayed.

TARANA It had gone viral when the football player was caught on video hitting his wife. And I forget the sister's name, she does work around domestic violence, but she started that hashtag. I remember it was such an amazing thing to watch and to see people coming forward and it made a really big impact, right?

But maybe a year later, domestic violence then all of a sudden become the order of the day. And we didn't have all these people and like people in sports, it just we didn't have the same impact. So I did not expect for Me Too have staying power, right? Because my experience is people don't want to talk about sexual violence in this life.

LUVVIE They don't. What year was this by the way, was this 2018?

TARANA 2017.

LUVVIE 2017, so that was four years ago. I remember just sliding into your DMs and being like, "What do you need? Is this getting overwhelming for you?" Because I started seeing everybody pulling at you because all of a sudden Me Too became-

TARANA The thing.

LUVVIE The thing to attach themselves to like, "Okay, I too know Tarana. Oh, my God, we also want to feature Tarana. Oh, my God, we love Tarana Burke. And I was seeing all of that coming at you. How was that especially in those first few months?

TARANA Oh, God, those first few months. It's funny, I literally just wrote about this. Those first few months were incredibly overwhelming, I was going through one, trying to ground myself and like, Tarana, take this moment, get the message out, talk about sexual violence, talk about this, and go back into your cocoon, right?

Don't get caught up in this hype, and I was on that wave for a minute, and then in November... It's very interesting because I think we talked this day too. In November, the Time Magazine released their nominations for the person of the year, and Me Too was in it. And so everybody come, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God." And I was like, "But they don't need me." I still don't know that the world will acknowledge that the movement that is Me Too, is my brain child, right?

I was just like top person of the year? Ain't no way in the world. Time Magazine is associating me with. This is not going to happen. That was like, "Okay, this is going to be the start of the life, let me take my seat." It was hard for me because just in May or June of that year, I had joined this collective of organizers who organize around child sexual abuse and sexual violence.

And they were another big support group for me, and this was like, Aishah Shaeda Simmons [inaudible 00:40:44], these folks who had been in this work for years, and years, and years, and I was so excited to be in community with them. And I was sharing with them, all these plans I had for Me Too, the following like fall and spring.

And so when, when all of the hype happened, I was like, "I'm never going to be able to do my work under this moniker again, because nobody's going to believe that a 44 year old black woman from the Bronx started this in this way." The story will get convoluted over time and it'll be like, "Oh, you're just trying to ride on the wave." And I'm like, "No, I started the wave."

LUVVIE You started the wave, the wave was yours.

TARANA Yeah, and I really do, when I say the grace of God, I really mean that, because I feel like sometime a thing has its time. And I think there's no real reason that I should have been... According to the laws of what we've seen in Hollywood, in pop culture, and all the rest of that. There's no real reason why I should have been elevated to prominence in this moment, none.

LUVVIE God's grace.

TARANA It's nothing but God's grace, because I could have easily been like, "Oh, yeah, that's great, she started that in 2006, but now it's the dah, dah, dah, right? They could have easily done that. I

think that when a moment has come, it has come. And not just for me personally, I mean, the moment to put sexual violence at the forefront. And I think that also... And I don't mean to say this to be controversial at all, but I think that the field of people who are doing the work around sexual violence also needed a shake up.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA Listen, there's more that can happen here. Survivors have to be at the forefront. We have to listen to the people who've experienced this. If we can talk about gun violence, and police violence, and climate justice, and all of these other things, this is also a social justice issue that needs its moment. And so I think that would have happened with or without me, I'm just grateful that I was able to be in there.

And I think what my role has been, since Me Too went viral, is to try to keep... I don't want to say moral compass. It's like to keep it centered on what's most important. The hashtag is not what's the most important, because the people who put the hashtag up are most important. Every hashtag is a human being, and we tend to forget that, when we just see it over and over and over and over again. Every time you see somebody put hashtag Me Too, there's a human being behind a keyboard who made a decision to put out into the world some of the darkest things they've ever experienced.

We have a responsibility to meet them at that place and say, "What do you need? Or here I am, what do you need? You've done this hard work, this is the labor, that's all you have to do. How can I come in and help support you moving forward?" That's our job, that's my job.

LUVVIE I think God's grace, black women's loudness, and refusal to let your name be erased. And just the fact that this was destined somewhere, because like you said, the fact that this has been for years and you still retain your prominence is significant and extraordinary. I should have remembered it was 2017 because one of the things that I did with my TED Talk, the night before I get to the TED Talk-

TARANA I remember that.

LUVVIE And I scrapped half of it, and I rewrote it, and I made sure to invoke your name in there. Because I wanted to also make sure for somebody who was listening, who has heard it, and it was very relevant to what I was saying, because your courage in coming out and being vulnerable about your sexual assault experiences, and this really deeply traumatic thing. For me, I'm like, "That's what it looks like to be the Domino." So it was important for me to invoke your name, and it's funny, one of the members of my team actually said, "I didn't realize Tarana was behind Me Too, until I heard your TED Talk."

TARANA A lot of people didn't. You said that in the TED Talk, and then the people from TED called me. That's how-

LUVVIE Oh, wow.

TARANA There's another lesson in here about something else that I've heard you say before, about who you bring in the room with you, and that is... You've definitely, I just appreciate you without getting mushy. I have a tendency in my old age to just-

LUVVIE There's nothing wrong with being mushy. Listen, I'm mushy too.

TARANA Listen, I've been crying at Cheerios commercials, I don't understand, I'm losing my toughness there. But I do appreciate that the one thing that I know, and I've said this to people without you even being in this space, is that the thing I know about Luvvie Ajayi Jones, is that if she thinks that you are ready, right? Because I think this is another point that people miss, it's not just bringing everybody in the room, because sometimes you'll bring a person in a room and they'll embarrass you.

LUVVIE Correct, correct, correct.

TARANA And you'll be looking around like, "What a brainless fool in this room?"

LUVVIE Word.

TARANA There's so many people that we're surrounded by. There are so many people in our ecosystem and our small little universes that we are watching. We're watching them hustle. We're watching them struggle. We're watching them... But they are buttoned up and they are ready and they just need somebody to invoke their name in the right room.

They needed somebody to hold a door open and say, "Listen, I've been in here, I think you belong in here too." And I've seen you do that over and over and over again. You've certainly done it for me. The amount of times I've called you and be like, "Hey, Luvvie... Should I use this one or that one?" And you're always like, "Oh yeah, use this one." And we keep it moving. And it's not... We're not like gab on the phones. Or gossip girlfriends, right. But we are certainly support system. I count you in my support system. I hope you count me in the same way.

LUVVIE Absolutely.

TARANA Yeah, that was another one of those moments. It's just...

LUVVIE Wow.

TARANA And you have to... This is why I always wonder why people talk about black women not supporting each other and black people-

LUVVIE I don't understand it.

TARANA Y'all need to change crews. That's not my experience.

LUVVIE I don't understand it. I can't relate. I cannot relate when people say like... But I'm like, "Listen..." Literally, I would text Tarana on some like, "Okay, I want to do this thing." And she'll be like, "All right, bet." Just being able to know that the village is just a text message away.

TARANA It's just there. I have had... I write this all the time. Black women save my life on a regular basis.

LUVVIE Facts. Facts.

TARANA Regular basis. From the elders in my life who pulled my coat and be like, "Now, listen."

LUVVIE Now listen.

TARANA I've had elders who seen me on TV and be like, "Don't wear that shirt no more." And, "Change that lipstick."

LUVVIE For real?

TARANA You know elders, they don't care.

LUVVIE [crosstalk 00:48:03] You know they ain't got no type of couth.

TARANA They'll also call me and say, "I'm just so proud of you. I just want you to hold that." And the girlfriends who you can call and cry with and laugh with and grind with. I just... I would not be here. Here as, Tarana Burke, blah, blah, blah. But I wouldn't be here on this earth without the love, support and encouragement, upliftment of black women and just women. I just wouldn't.

LUVVIE For real.

TARANA And black men ain't no... And black men are right behind them, right?

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA One of the most painful things about this experience over the last four years has been this notion somehow that I don't love black men or that I don't support black men. Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because our community is not ready to deal with sexual violence, really. And it's going to take... And because our community has a very painful history with sexual violence.

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA I don't want to just say it's like, "Oh, black people just won't deal with it." It's just like any other trauma. Our community has been traumatized by sexual violence. From the days of enslavement. And so it's really difficult. It's like an onion, it's many, many layers. And what happens a lot of time when you bring up something that's painful, when you bring up memories of pain, people lash out. And so there's this... And every time I bring up something around black survivors that comes out... We just put out something around black survivors and I got all of these folks on my social media. "Why do you hate black men so much?" I'm like, "Wow, that's..."

LUVVIE Wow.

TARANA Could not be further from the truth.

LUVVIE That's crazy. And actually that brings me to what are... So you've become besties with some of Hollywood's finest. You have access in ways that's crazy. Yeah, what are the tough parts of this prominence? You and I talk about it often.

TARANA Yeah, I mean that whole part about the... The funny thing about becoming friends with folks who... The actresses and the people who are prominent, is that they're human beings too.

LUVVIE Humans.

TARANA And... Very much human, literally just like us. And meaning that the same kind of struggles, the same kind of insecurities. And I think some of those friendships forged because they need to be connected to people outside of those spaces that are willing to talk openly about these challenges, right. Some of the challenges for me obviously have been dealing with the hatred and the violence and the vitriol. That's been... It was very scary. It's died down now more so than it was in the right. 2018 was really bad. Yeah, getting death threats. So we had to move at one point because when Me Too first went viral, I just... I lived in Harlem. I wasn't...

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA I wasn't trying to hide.

LUVVIE Right.

TARANA And it was a really... And people could look at my address and they did. And they came to my house and they sent packages and it was like, "Okay yeah, we got to go." So we had to move from an apartment that I really loved. So that kind of stuff was hard. And It's also hard being misunderstood. I know you get this. You have to fight the urge to be like, "That's not what I meant."

LUVVIE "That's not who I am."

TARANA "That's not me!"

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA I have people in my team all the time and be like, "Just let it go." And some of it is also my just... Yo, you wouldn't say this shit to my face. Some of it I'll just be looking at these trolls like, "Can you just meet me on the corner of 125th and [crosstalk 00:52:01]? Let's chat, let's [inaudible 00:52:04] because you wouldn't say none of this shit to my face. You talking all this good, good, good shit on the internet. I'm not a internet... I don't do Twitter beef. I don't do none of that.

LUVVIE Keyboard thugs. Keyboard courage.

TARANA That's not who I am. Even fighting that urge to be like, "Fuck all of y'all!" [inaudible 00:52:20]

LUVVIE Don't get the Me Too twisted. Don't get the Tarana Burke on the TED stage twisted.

TARANA Don't do that because I'm going to tell you... Like my daughter always says, "Mommy..." "My mother would throw it all away." [inaudible 00:52:31] I be ready to throw it all away. But it's not... I also realized that it's one, those... If I was to throw this all away for those idiot people-

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA I would be the idiot, right?

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA It's like the Jay-Z verse when he was like, "Don't argue with fools because from a distance people can't tell who's who."

LUVVIE Yep.

TARANA I swallow a lot of stuff and I also feel very... I feel sad. This is going to sound... After what I just said, I do want to punch people in the face sometimes. But I also feel really sad for people whose existence is bolstered by bullying people on the internet or who are willfully ignorant. Right? You are mad at me because I want to call attention to something that is ruining our community and you want to... And it ravaging our community. And the thing is, you want to die on this hill about somebody like R. Kelly, right?

Or somebody like Bill Cosby, who wouldn't piss on you if you was on fire. Right? This is the part that really bothers me. It's not about the celebrities because for every R. Kelly, Russell Simmons, T.I. and Tiny, whoever the heck it is, there's somebody who doesn't have that label in our community doing the same thing to our children, to our aunts and our sisters and our cousins and our little brothers. And we have to at some point take a step back and examine what's happening in our community. Away from all of the celebrity and the this and that and away from that. And say none of that stuff actually matters except that if we don't address it, that it gives permission for the people who we don't know to keep doing what they're doing. And that's it, but it's challenging. Challenging to get some of this messages across.

And I'm not by far the only one. There's so many... Lots of black women mostly who are ringing the alarm. We've been ringing the alarm before Me Too. Before Me Too went viral. Before all of that we've been ringing this. Every single time there's another celebrity, somebody in the news, you got the same group of black feminist women who come forward and say, "Hey y'all, this is a problem." And then there's always the debate. And it goes back to... It goes back to what we were talking about earlier about the messages we give girls at an early age.

LUVVIE Yep.

TARANA You want to debate whether these girls are fast or not because somebody put this notion of fast in our minds back when we were three and four and five years old, six years old, just doing cheerleading dances and stuff. Somebody said, "Stop acting all fast."

LUVVIE Crazy.

TARANA It's crazy.

LUVVIE It's an interesting world but honestly I think being able to have... Yeah, a crew of folks where you can exchange war stories.

TARANA Yeah.

LUVVIE Because nobody gives you... Nobody gives a manual for prominence. How do you handle when the world stop seeing you as the underdog? How do you handle when the thing that is your purpose now gets you a lot of attention when you weren't necessarily seeking the attention because some people are seeking the attention.

TARANA Oh yeah.

LUVVIE But those who were just head down trying to do the work who find themselves on massive stages. [crosstalk 00:55:50] Huh?

TARANA I think about that a lot because it's a very small sorority too, right. It's not like it happens all the time, but thank God that Patrice and Alicia had this experience from Black Lives Matter.

LUVVIE Black Lives Matter.

TARANA Beforehand, Patrice and Alicia in particular have been such friends to me and such guide... [inaudible 00:56:17] Have provided so much guidance because they had a very similar experience. Right?

LUVVIE Yeah. Yep. Yep.

TARANA Thrown into prominence, just trying to help your community, just trying to be a voice for your community. And all of a sudden it becomes a thing. And I think for black folks, we definitely not used to because we're not used to people listening to us in that way. And so there needs to be a manual because why do I need a PR person and a manager and a this and a that. It feels pretentious and it feels like, "Wait, I'm supposed to be in the movement."

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA But also who's going to answer these calls and also who is going to help me guide my way through... I need a tax attorney.

LUVVIE Right, right. Right.

TARANA What is happening? It is... And I had quite a few people, from different walks of life, folks like Marc. Marc Lamont Hill. He wasn't necessarily thrust to prominence, but he's a professor and an academic and a regular dude who became. It was put on CNN and all the rest of these other shows and it became prominent. So folks like that, or... Or even Ava. I knew Ava DuVernay before all of this.

LUVVIE Right.

TARANA Because of... When she was starting out as a director, I was running a black arts organization and we connected through that. And then I was a consultant on *Selma* when she did the movie.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA Yeah, so we was cool for a while. Similar to you, it was another one who will be like, "Hey sis, let me holler at you. Is this going all right?" And shout out to the black women who are not afraid to... She would talk numbers.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA And be straight up and down. "Do you have a lawyer?"

LUVVIE Yep.

TARANA "Do you have this and that?" I told a story in my book about... It was Ava on the red carpet. I don't even know if I've ever talked to her about this, but when I went to the Golden Globes...

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA As shiny and as fancy and as whatever that was, it was all black women who got me through that. This is how I'm telling you about the regularness of these actresses.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA Gabrielle Union was the first one I reached out to like, "I don't know what's going on. I don't know what we're supposed to do." And she was like, "Say less." She activated a whole network of folks in Hollywood. All black women who... Because she wasn't going to be there that weekend. All converged to make sure that everything down to my nails were done. Because I'm telling you, they was not... And then on the red carpet I was struggling because my feet were hurting. It was hot. You have to become... Those women, all of them, all of the women that you see, I'll just bow down to y'all because pulling that all together, walking in four inch heels, talking to different people, stopping every two seconds. It's a lot.

LUVVIE It's a lot.

TARANA And by the time I got almost to the end of the carpet my feet felt like... I wanted to saw them off at the ankle, okay. And Ava saw me. I'm talking about little tears was forming inside. And Ava saw me and she pulled me to the side. She pulled me to the side and got your girl together. She was like, "All right, you only got literally 10 more minutes. Just hold it for 10 more..." I wanted to... If I didn't think I was going to get makeup on her dress, I probably put my head on her shoulder like...

LUVVIE And cry.

TARANA I don't want to do this no more. I'm telling you that... It's harder than it looks.

LUVVIE No for real. But, yeah... One of my favorite prayers is let my helpers find me. Your helpers be finding you.

TARANA Absolutely-

LUVVIE In moments when you need it. And you've showed up for me also in so many ways. And I remember even texting you about Share The Mic Now. It's like, "We're doing this random thing." And you was like, "All right." And then you was like, "I'll get details later." Basically. On some like... You say yes first and you were like, "I'll just figure it out later."

TARANA [crosstalk 01:00:22] It was always about trust.

LUVVIE Yeah. Yeah.

TARANA When you create a circle of trust... I know you ain't going to have me in nothing crazy.

LUVVIE Exactly.

TARANA You're not going to pull me into something, I be like, "Luvvie..."

LUVVIE Luvvie, what happen?

TARANA "Why am I here?"

LUVVIE Yo, I was just like, "That's what I'm talking about." I say black women are my Patronus. Black women are like my magical star.

TARANA Yes.

LUVVIE We... Man, black women are my favorite just across the board. We just show up in ways that's just so dope. And I'm just like, as long as I have a crew of black women, I'm going to be good.

TARANA I'm good. And my crew has now expanded to have non-black women in it.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA And it has been a very interesting evolution, I'm telling you. I mean, that's my cause, I stick with my folks, but it has also been really interesting and nice. I've learned so much because we have also had to be guarded, right?

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA In our interactions with non-black people.

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA I've had experiences in the last few years where I've had to depend on white women. And quite frankly, right. And just... And have been, not just pleasantly surprised, but also have learned some lessons about life. And it's the kind of messed up... One of the messed up things, not just kind of, but one of the terrible things about racism and living in a country that's plagued with racism and white supremacy is that, that distrust that we have to have for our own wellbeing and... To live you have to have your guard up, you have to... You can't be vulnerable like that. It robs us of relationships and it robs us of experiences that could be life-affirming and... I've had to let my guard down in some ways where I'm just like, "Oh. [crosstalk 01:02:11]

LUVVIE And let me tell you when we were matching up everybody for Share The Mic Now.

TARANA Oh you remember what I said, right?

LUVVIE Listen, I remember what you said. And I said, "Got you." And... First of all, the matching process was like an art. And I'm actually really proud of how we matched everybody because a lot of people who did Share The Mic Now are now really good friends with their partners. Like really good friends. I'm talking some of them are like, "Yeah, we talk every day. We FaceTime every day now." I'm like, "That makes my whole heart good." And why... I was like, "You got to be matched with Glennon," is because I wanted you to be matched with a real one who you can be in actual community with.

TARANA Yeah.

LUVVIE Because to your point of, "Yes, black women are who I depend on." But there's a challenge of opening up the sisterhood to other people. But we have to still be very selective.

TARANA Oh yeah.

LUVVIE So I was like, "Whoever we get to Tarana... Got to be somebody who I can trust with Tarana." And that's why I was like, "Yeah, Glennon." [crosstalk 01:03:14] Glennon was the only option or Brene.

TARANA Brene. That was it for me. I was like, "Listen..."

LUVVIE [inaudible 01:03:20] And I was like, "Glennon, easily." And when I told... We were like, "Glennon..." So as we were doing the matches, we didn't match each other. We didn't match ourselves. So I literally was like, "Y'all tell me who I should have." Glennon was like, "You tell me who." I didn't tell her who I was going to match her with. And then when I was like, "Tarana." She was like, "Oh my God, I was hoping you said that. Oh my God, I love her so much." Literally Glennon's on the Zoom like, "Oh my God, I was hoping you said that. Oh my God, I'm obsessed. I'm obsessed. Thank you so much." She geeked out.

TARANA Yo, Glennon and Abby are... Yaba got Abby, so that was perfect.

LUVVIE Also again, planned. I was like, "Let's just give because that's make sense."

TARANA We are a coven now, right. We have our little coven meetings.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA Glennon and Abby are literally the truth. I love them and have had such a good experience. And that was such a... Of course we knew of each other, but hadn't had any time to connect. But Abby got us running around talking about, "I'm the wolf. We can do hard things." It's a beautiful thing and I really appreciate it. And that's an example, right, of people in the tribe that I would not have been imagined that five years ago.

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA And Brene is another one. That's just... To be like... To say this is my sister about a white woman. I've not had that experience. And I mean that from every part of my... I mean that 100%, right.

LUVVIE Same.

TARANA And I had admired... And not just in my... Loved her work prior to, but when I came to her about this book, it was... I mean, again, I knew we was close, we talked. I mean, we talked, we... Brené actually was my space. We were each other's space to not talk about work.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA We very rarely got on the phone. It was like, "Shame and vulnerability, I was thinking about this today." That wasn't our thing. It was like, "Girl, did you see this wallpaper?" Because we were both doing stuff in our homes at the same time. So we'd be on the phone talking about wallpaper and paint and this and that and whatever.

When George Floyd was murdered last summer and then Breonna Taylor happened around the same time, just like everybody else, I was so blown. And so... It's kind of like, you get weary too, right? We haven't actually gotten over Trayvon Martin. We haven't actually gotten over all of these different murders that we've seen and all the impunity that we've seen. And so when this happened, it was just like a tiredness I felt really, just so, so weary. But then there was this flood online. And I know you got it too. All of these black leader, influencer, public figure type folks, we got this wave of white people following us.

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA And all of these... I would get messages every day, follow Tarana Burke for more...

LUVVIE Yes. We were all tagged to the the same story.

TARANA To the same stories, right. It's like people like, "This is the list of the black people to follow on Instagram." And I get it. A lot of us were posting out of, we don't have anything else to do, right. All I can do is put this information out. Express myself in ways that make me feel a little more seen or heard. I wasn't trying to educate or teach. I was just trying to release. And I'm just glad that some people picked up what they needed in the process, right. I wasn't also trying to not teach. I just wanted to put information out. But what started growing on me was this idea that it became... Anti-racism became the order of the day. So all of the books about anti-racism shot

up on the Times bestseller list. And all of the... There was all these new people who hadn't talked about race before on their Instagram that suddenly have become experts in race and anti-racism, right?

LUVVIE Yep.

TARANA And got all these 100's of thousands of followers. And I'm watching all of this happen. And what I'm seeing very little of, is space for black people to process. So we are the ones... We are the community under attack. We are the community that has to watch people that look like us, be murdered over and over again in the public sphere. Have those videos go viral. Have people at our jobs ask, "Are you okay? Oh my God, I saw the George Floyd thing." And act like it's our cousin as opposed to our community member. A citizen of this country that we all should feel equally pain about, right? We are the ones who have to endure that. And it brings up memories of our own endurance and our own experiences. And where do we process that?

LUVVIE Yep.

TARANA And so I love Brene's work and her work has informed a lot of my work and it validated a lot of my work. And I kept thinking... The thing about her work that I love is that, that is so... To me it's so valuable to dealing with a lot of the black experience around shame and really shame resilience. Except that it's not often presented in a way that black people will see themselves in it.

LUVVIE That part.

TARANA And so we don't see ourselves, and we won't realize that this is also a tool for us to use. And I had never had that conversation because I couldn't figure out how to say it without... I didn't want to offend her and make her think that I was saying anything sinister about her, because I think the work is fine. And I know that she tries. I know that in her best effort, she is trying to make sure that she's incredibly inclusive and her samples are diversified and all the rest of that. And so I was like, "Brené, would you ever want to write a book with me?" She's like, "Absolutely."

LUVVIE Say less, fam.

TARANA I was like, "Okay, about the Black experience," and duh, duh, duh. She was like, "Absolutely." And then we talked about... She talked to me candidly about her own struggles around that, and that being a blind spot for her, and her trying to remedy that in the things that she had been doing, and that this would be just a great opportunity to do that. And I was like, "Yeah." And then the rest was history. You actually were one of the first people I told before we even had paperwork signed. Luvvie was like, "Oh, word." You talk about, say less.

LUVVIE Listen. I said, "Put me in the game coach." Because I told you, I was like, "You know I just finished my book, and it's talking about fear and resilience and vulnerability." And you were like, "Oh shoot." Sure enough, a month later, you send me a text like, "Here we are. We moving forward." It was like the perfect full circle moment because Brene is somebody who I've looked up to for a long time. In my therapy sessions with my late therapist, she would be assigning me

homework to go watch Brene's videos. So when my therapist died last month, I messaged Brene. And I said, "I just wanted to say, I know you're hearing this a thousand times, but your work matters so much. My therapist that just passed, she loved you. Send me homework, go watch this Brene Brown video on empathy. Go watch this Brene Brown video on braving, what that means." And she replied back, and I was just like, "Yo." And then to have you be at the forefront of this, I was like, put me in the... What do I have to do? I will figure it out.

TARANA Listen. And that was the response from people across the board. This book could be five volumes with the number of people that I really wanted to have in here. And it's hard decisions. It came down to really hard decisions, but we really wanted to have a well-rounded representation of Blackness, first of all. Right? And there's some folks in Brene's life, Black women and a couple of men, who she had been working with and who know her work and had the same sentiments that I did. And we even have an essay in the book, this woman, Jessica, was her last name Williams?

LUVVIE Jessica Williams.

TARANA Yeah. Jessica Williams. Sorry, Jessica. The sister who, not confronted, that sounds too confrontational. But she tweeted at Brene on Twitter and said, "I would love to have a public conversation with Brene about Blackness and vulnerability, because we come at this differently. And Brene responded to her, and they had this exchange. And so when we started putting a list together, she was like, "Yeah, I want her in the book. I want the people who have challenged me on this to have this discussion, to talk about it openly." So we talk about everything from the world of academia, to parenting, to health, to mental health, to relationships, to... It's so beautiful. Jason Reynolds has this essay, just cracks me open like this. I don't want to just keep talking about pulling individual people out, but it's so good. And I'm saying that, not as the editor, but as a reader.

LUVVIE As a person who's reading it.

TARANA Yeah. It's so good. I'm so excited for people to read it. And I look at it, both of us, as an offering.

LUVVIE Yeah.

TARANA Right? This is an offering. I want to create a soft place to land for Black folks.

LUVVIE Soft place to land. And so, y'all it's called [*You Are Your Best Thing*](#).

TARANA Yes.

LUVVIE And what made y'all call it that? Toni Morrison.

TARANA Child, the timing of the story-

LUVVIE Mother Toni.

TARANA Mother Toni. We actually had another title. True story, we had another title, and thank God for your Black scholarly friends, because it was a quote from her Zora Neale Hurston book, that we thought was a quote. And the quote was actually wrong. And so we were like, "We can not put that out in the world." Even though it was very, very close, you don't want to mess with Mama Zora either.

LUVVIE Mother Zora. Okay, the ancestors. We don't want to do it.

TARANA I'm not trying to do that. And so we scrapped that. And true story, obviously from before, we come up with all these different titles. We got on the phone, and Brene does this thing that I love. She's like, "All right, 10 minutes, let's go. We going to come up with a title." And I had written down... I had pulled up the list from before, and it was the first one on there. Obviously, like many other people, I love Toni Morrison so much.

LUVVIE Love her.

TARANA And *Beloved* is one of my favorite books. I've read it probably four times, starting at 12 years old, and I didn't understand it. And that scene in the book is Paul D talking to Sethe, and says, "You are your best thing." It's such a deep encouragement.

LUVVIE An affirmation.

TARANA An affirmation.

LUVVIE A declaration.

TARANA And this book is really about Black humanity. And it's really about people. I said this in the intro, and I really mean it. If you cannot engage with Black humanity, that I don't believe your anti-racism. It invalidates it to me. It's just a study of something like you study anything else. But in order to really be anti-racist, you have to engage with Black humanity. And that's really what this book is about. And [*You Are Your Best Thing*](#) was, it just was, as soon as we said it out loud, we were like-

LUVVIE That's it.

TARANA ... that's it. Oh, and let me tell you, Toyin, My, god.

LUVVIE That painting is gorgeous.

TARANA Talk about a Black woman saving the day again. That sister came in, and I just adore her. I didn't know her well. Actually, I wish that I... It's not up because I'm having it framed. One of my first fine art piece is one of her pieces. I hunted down and found this piece she did in 2012, and I was able to buy it. And I reached out to her to tell her that I purchased it because, she was trying to help me at first. And so the only exchange we ever had was about framing the piece and my thanking her for just being such an amazing artist.

And so I reached out to her when we had another piece that we couldn't use. And I said, "Sis, this is where we are. I want a beautiful piece of Black art on this cover." And I showed her the picture I'd found online. And again, talk about the grace of God. Things just fall into place when they're meant to be. What's meant to happen will happen. She was like, "I have that. Not only is that piece like you can use it, but I have it in my archives." Blah, blah, blah. And it just all fell together just like that. And so, yeah, the cover just came today. I just got the cover in the mail today. I'm so excited.

LUVVIE I want that as a print.

TARANA Yes.

LUVVIE Is she offering it as a print?

TARANA I don't know. I don't know. We can figure that out because it is-

LUVVIE I want that as a print-

TARANA ... so gorgeous.

LUVVIE It's stunning. It's stunning. But y'all, I need you to go pre-order the anthology, [*You Are Your Best Thing*](#). I have essay in there, Jason Reynolds, Kia Marie-

TARANA Kiese Laymon, Imani Perry, Marc Lamont Hill, my daughter.

LUVVIE Your daughter, Kaia's in that, published author.

TARANA Yes. Kaia is in the book as a... And that was one of the other things that I love, that we have a range of people in different walks of life. Some people are very well known, best-selling authors, namely yourself, and others, this is their first published work.

LUVVIE Yes, yes.

TARANA It's a beautiful range of everything. And I love it.

LUVVIE And they deserve the space.

TARANA Definitely.

LUVVIE So exciting. So I have three books coming out this year so far.

TARANA That's crazy.

LUVVIE I'm in three books. The one that I wrote myself and two anthologies. February, March, April, there's a book with my name inside at least.

TARANA Come on, Luvvie. Come on, writer.

LUVVIE Come on. Come on. Okay. The writer's back.

TARANA Okay. I just pressed send on my memoir yesterday.

LUVVIE How you feel?

TARANA People keep asking me that. And I'm like, "I'm somewhere in between." I was bawling when I pressed it. It was two o'clock in the morning. And I was just like [inaudible 01:18:40]. It feels like I finally crossed the finish line of the longest marathon. And then as soon as I did it, I was like, "Uh oh, I done told all my business."

LUVVIE All your business. Listen. Listen. This book's about to be good. And that's what actually really begins the work. You just sent the first draft. You've done the hardest part. Now, by the time-

TARANA Yeah, that's editing.

LUVVIE ... draft two, draft three, oh, this thing going to sing.

TARANA Yeah, boy. I can't wait. I'm really excited. That'll be out in October.

LUVVIE Come on. Look at Jesus. Look at God doing all the work, getting all the stories out there.

TARANA Amen.

LUVVIE So as you doing all this stuff, so what are you doing to take care of yourself? What is your self-care looking like?

TARANA I always love this question. I said the other night to a group of students, I was giving a talk. And I said, "When people ask me this question, often I lie." Because it's the quickest and easiest way to say that in five minutes like, "Oh, I try to rest and relax, and I take some me time." And that's not true.

LUVVIE It's not.

TARANA It's not. It's not true. I'm terrible at self-care in this moment. And so what I have resolved is that I will, you know how you count it all joy? The times and moments that I'm able to indulge, I do. My biggest form of self-care is boundaries. I will cut you out in a minute. I'm sorry. We can't. I try to keep people at bay that are either negative or those ones who pretend to be positive, and you can feel the negative energy jumping off of them. I don't have time or space for it. So that part, I do try to regularly practice my boundaries. And other than that, staying off the internet as much as possible.

LUVVIE Staying off the internet is a form of self-care. Amen?

TARANA It is. Social media is draining for me. I'm a extrovert introvert. I'm an extrovert in moments. And so I think it fools people, they're like, "Come here. We had a good time. I'm going call you." Don't call me.

LUVVIE Don't call me. I ain't going to pick up the phone.

TARANA I'm not going to pick up the phone. Right? And making sure I'm surrounded. I talk to my friends as much as possible. My friend [inaudible 01:21:00] like, "She lying."

LUVVIE Listen, folks know your heart. They know your heart.

TARANA They know I try. It's just been this last month or so has been really hard because I was trying to get the book finished. But my friends really are my self-care in a lot of ways. They take care of me, and I don't even deserve it a lot of times. Whitney Morose, who has the-

LUVVIE Whit. I love me some Whitney.

TARANA Don't you? She's just the best human being. We usually go on vacation every year, our little auntie tour. We haven't been able to travel.

LUVVIE The auntie tour. Listen, I be living for y'all auntie tours.

TARANA Yeah. We haven't been able to do any of that. But she will send me a little care packet with some masks in it. My friends take care of me in ways that I don't even deserve. So they are part of my self-care. And I'm just trying. I'm trying to eat better. Trying to exercise. I didn't buy a Peloton.

LUVVIE Oh, girl, we got one. We got one. We fell into the... Yeah.

TARANA But I bought a Mirror.

LUVVIE Something got you. Yes. Yes. Yes.

TARANA I'm trying. I'm going to try. I'm going to try.

LUVVIE That's it. I think self-care is oftentimes creating strong boundaries.

TARANA It is.

LUVVIE And that's real, and that's valid true. [crosstalk 01:22:19].

TARANA Oh, my gosh.

LUVVIE I miss the spa.

TARANA I do. I do. I miss that pampering. I was going to say my partner, he's such a wonderful person. And also, he's good for self-care, because if you tell him two or three things like, "Baby, remind me, I need to do this." He's going to, like a sergeant, "Did you do it?"

LUVVIE Have you done it?

TARANA "Did you do it? Did you do it? Have you done it? Did you do it?" I'm like, "I could choke you, but I know you mean well." So that's been wonderful too, not be in this moment alone is really...

LUVVIE Yeah. Yeah. No, that's amazing. So my final question for you is, what do you consider a professional troublemaker? What does it mean to make good trouble?

TARANA I think to make good trouble means that we know what's right and wrong in the world. We inherently know. And I think some folks make choices to go one way or the other. But you have to be more than just an observer of the world. You have to be more than just somebody who says, "Wow, that's bad," or, "That's good." When you see something that is not right and not good, we have to be active and do something about it. We created a platform called [Act Too](#), which is an accompaniment to our website. And part of the reason, part of the impetus for that is because we want to give people less excuses for not being active. You can do something. So there are those of us who just insert ourselves and try to do a little something. And then there are those who take that mantle and run with it. Those are the professionals. It's kind of like being a professional Black girl. Right?

LUVVIE Yes.

TARANA I do this Black girl thing for a living. And I create good trouble for a living. And those people who think that it's trouble, though, are exactly the ones who I'm trying to transform, who need to hear a message, who need see the activity and know that you're calling this trouble, but it's not, actually. This is life-affirming, life-changing, a necessity for us to live amongst each other. Right? At the end of the day, again, our humanity, it's the highest order. We should be doing things to make sure that we are able to live amongst each other with our dignity intact, with our humanity intact. And if it takes making some trouble, then I'll be a professional troublemaker.

LUVVIE That's it.

TARANA Because I think that's what's necessary, is, I want that for myself. I want it for my community. I want it for my family. I want it for my child. And want it for my neighbors. And when you look around and there's not enough people doing it, sometimes you got to make it your profession.

LUVVIE Come on. Sometimes you got to make it your profession and get paid to make good trouble. And that is what you're doing.

TARANA Okay.

LUVVIE I am always, always in your corner. And I am so honored to have you in my village of people who I can count on and you're just amazing.

TARANA Same, sis. Same, same, same. Thank you, Luvvie. I appreciate you having me on, and I'll be back in October when I have [crosstalk 01:25:36]-

LUVVIE Come on. When this memoir drops, okay, let's go [crosstalk 01:25:39]. This is a New York Times best selling memoir you were about to drop. I'm here for that.

TARANA Claim it. Yes. We claim it.

LUVVIE It's done. It's done.

TARANA It's done. Done, done, done.

LUVVIE Love you, sis.

TARANA Love you too, Luv.

LUVVIE We'll talk.

TARANA Bye.

LUVVIE Bye.

So many moments that have me thinking – the greatest gift her mother gave her was the gift of a yes. My year of fighting fear was a year filled with saying yes to myself. That was such a life changing year for me, and to have the chance to be that change maker for other people by giving the gift of yes?! That's amazing.

And talking through with Tarana how she navigates all of this, how she can show up and do her work and keep a hold on her boundaries while still trying to disrupt for the greater good – it's just a huge lesson for me on how I can continue to do the same. Because this world is so much better when it's safe and good for all of us and that takes speaking up.

Be sure to follow Tarana on social media. She's [@taranajaneen](#) on Instagram and [@taranaburke](#) on Twitter, and be sure to check out the new anthology she just released with Brené Brown (that I also have an essay in!) called [You Are Your Best Thing](#). It's so dope.

Much love to Chicago Recording Company, who I've been partnering with from the start of this podcast and they've been such a huge help putting my recordings from home together and making the sound on point.

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Until next time, have the courage to speak your truth and show up as yourself. Create good trouble.