

FROM SURVIVOR TO PSYCHOTHERAPIST: INTERVIEW WITH YVETTE STONE

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of Flyingfreenow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 216 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today we're going to meet Yvette Stone. She is a former magazine publisher who changed careers midlife, and now she practices as a trauma-informed psychotherapist and is specializing in helping women recover from narcissistic abuse. So she's a good candidate to be here talking with us, right? She's worked as a Fellow at the Allender Center and as an advocate with Northwest Family Life, and she's here to tell us about her own experience in an emotionally abusive relationship and how she got out and healed.

And the other thing that you should know about her is that she's a friend of Christy Bauman, who has been on this podcast in the past, and Christy's husband, Andrew Bauman, who's also been on this podcast I think twice in the past. So Yvette is a good friend of theirs, and a good friend of theirs is a good friend of ours. So welcome, Yvette, to the Flying Free Podcast.

YVETTE: Thank you, Natalie. It's good to be here. It's fun to hear you say all that.

NATALIE: So tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you do.

YVETTE: Well, I'll start with what you said. I'm a trauma-informed therapist. I live and work in Seattle. I work with some men, but mostly women, who are in emotionally abusive relationships or marriages and looking to heal and, in some cases, get out. So everybody comes in at different stages. And so that's the work I do here now and love it, and have, as somebody who's also lived the journey of being in that kind of a marriage and getting out, the particular insight and understand the nuance and all the little ways that were impacted by that.

NATALIE: We were just talking before we got on here about how it's so wonderful if you can find a therapist who's actually experienced it, because he or she will have so much more insight, I think, into what it is that you're dealing with. Okay, so in our program we talk about emotional abuse, emotional and spiritual abuse, mainly. That's what we focus on. But what is a narcissistically abusive relationship? And tell us a little bit about how you realized that you were in one.

YVETTE: So I think it's such an interesting thing because the word "narcissist" is used quite a bit now.

NATALIE: Yeah, I want you to talk about that a little bit.

YVETTE: I think it's good, because I think that statistically it wasn't as prevalent, right? Shahida Arabi is her name, but she would give statistics saying like one in thirty for people that were over the age of sixty, but now in the younger categories, in the twenty-somethings, it's more like one in ten.

NATALIE: Oh, wow.

YVETTE: Yeah, isn't that crazy? And I think that narcissism is on a spectrum, right? So everybody has narcissism. You need healthy narcissism in order to accomplish anything in life, but there becomes a place where there's a narcissistic style of relating that is problematic. And a narcissistically abusive relationship is really a relationship where somebody is, they just don't have any empathy. They really don't have empathy for what they do. They're very self-serving. There's a lot of projection, manipulation. It's just a ton of gaslighting. And I think a lot of the time when people that are in emotionally and psychologically abusive relationships, they are narcissistically abused in many ways. And I think that there's a degree to which it gets worse.

A lot of people or women will come in and they want to know, "Is my partner, does he have NPD, Narcissistic Personality Disorder?" And I don't know. I've never met your partner. But I can tell by the way that you show up in my office and how dysregulated you are and the fact that you don't feel like you own your own mind anymore that you're probably dealing with somebody who has high levels of narcissism.

NATALIE: Yeah, I like the way that you said that. You talked about it on a spectrum and the high levels. That way the label is not as important as understanding the effect on you, the impact on you. So you said that you were in one. How did you find out? And I'm curious to know, were you a therapist when you found out, or were you still working in the magazine world?

YVETTE: Oh, that's a good question. I was still working in the magazine world. I was not a therapist. And so in my story there's a lot of jumping back and forth to different timelines. But I think when I found out I was actually still living in Florida, still running my magazine, but I was flying back and forth to Seattle, Washington, where I live now, to do some lay training at the Allender Center, which was a journey that I just felt like God had called me to and I was like, "Okay." I was in that program for a couple years,

flying back and forth. I was in the beginning of the end of my marriage at that point, but did not really fully know that because there had been some really big “come to Jesus” things with my husband that happened a couple years prior to my training at the Allender Center.

But when I was at the Allender Center, I really started to understand the story of my entire life regarding my family, my family of origin, and what it meant for me to grow up as a child in my home with a mother who displayed very deflated narcissistic tendencies and gaslit me for as long as I can remember.

NATALIE: I'm sorry to interrupt, but what does deflated narcissistic tendencies mean?

YVETTE: A lot of the times when people think of narcissists, they think of grandiose, like more of... We have some politicians that have been very grandiose narcissists — very outspoken, confident — and then you have the deflated ones that there's so much shame, so they're kind of deflecting and “poor me” and “I'll never be good enough for you anyway.” So that's a way that they don't have to actually own or empathize. Does that make sense?

NATALIE: Yes, yes. That's really good, because that's what I've mostly dealt with in my life, too. It doesn't seem like narcissism when you're in that kind of relationship. It actually almost makes you feel like you are the bad person because they're always playing this victim role. So it's very confusing.

YVETTE: And I think that with narcissism there's this very strong relationship between shame and contempt or shame and rage. So whenever you expose a narcissist, somebody who's very high in narcissism, when you expose their shame, it's always followed by contempt, whether it's contempt directed at you or contempt directed at themselves, which it then in turn comes back at you. But there's different flavors by which that contempt will show up, but it's there. It is very palpable.

NATALIE: Okay, so you're figuring out this family of origin stuff while you were at the Allender Center, and then what?

YVETTE: So this program was a year long, so I started to make friends. And one of the friends I made was a therapist based out of Chicago, and so I would talk to her about my story and we stayed in contact in between trips to Seattle. And I'd call her about blowups that I'd have with my husband, and she just would listen and she'd say, “It sounds like narcissistic abuse, Yvette.” And I'd be like, “No, there's no way. I don't know.” And she kept saying that. And then I would research it a little bit and I'd look up

the terms of narcissism and I'd be like, "Look, if anybody's going to be the narcissist in the relationship, it's me. It's not him. I'm the person that's more like this. He's not."

But I kept going back to her with these problems, right? And she just gently would listen and she'd say, "Sounds like narcissistic abuse to me." And then eventually one day it clicked. I would go back and just read more stuff and read more stuff. And as I also was understanding the story of my life with my mother in dealing with the childhood trauma and wounds, as I was tending to that part, I had more capacity to not have to live in denial anymore but actually face what I was dealing with in my marriage.

NATALIE: Yeah, okay. What do you think is the most damaging part for you in your abusive relationship and in general for most people when they're in a relationship like that?

YVETTE: I think with narcissistic abuse, I think that the tendency to gaslight ourselves. Because with abusive relationships, we learn to do to ourselves what others have done to us, and I think that's true for all abuse. We grow up and we learn how to treat ourselves the way that others treated us. And that's why it's so important to have good people in your life, because if you have good people treating you well, then you treat yourself well. But if you have people that have gaslight you, then you'll gaslight yourself too.

NATALIE: And I think it's interesting, because a lot of the women that I work with, and even in your story already and myself too, we were swimming in that toxic pond where there were so many people surrounding us that had these characteristics and that were treating us in that way. And so when it's your own family or your own husband or your own church friends or whatever... It wasn't everyone right? We all had healthy people. But I feel like so many of us had enough people that were really significant people in our lives that we actually believed what those people were projecting onto us. And it just was a perpetual cycle of really evidence that what they were saying is true.

YVETTE: And I think it's because our human nature is like, we desire to belong to something. And I think that desire and the need to belong will trump just about anything any given day of the week. And so if you are surrounded by people that are all beholden to a system that gaslights or that believes in powering over or that you need to externalize your sense of authority, that matters, right? And it's really hard to go against that because we need to belong, and so we need to balance it out where we start to get more people that tell us the truth and challenge some of that stuff for us.

NATALIE: Yes. You kind of think that that's the whole world out there, and it's great to

be able to break out. Some of us had to get kicked out of things to actually break out and realize, “Oh, there's a big world of completely different perspectives out there, and what I was swimming in just was really unhealthy.” Okay, so tell us about your separation. You separated from your husband. How far into the marriage were you at that point?

YVETTE: I'm going to try to tell the story, and it's not going to be linear. I'm probably going to go back and forth. But I think it's an important part to tell, because the process of separating... I got married when I was nineteen, he was twenty-one, married for almost twenty-three years by the time we separated. The separation happened in between those two years of me traveling to Seattle. It started in the middle of that. It followed the classic, narcissistic abuse of, in the relationship, you have those cycles of idolize and devalue and the discard. The discard was so hard and so mind-blowing, but the discard came because he knew that I was, over this period of years, I was growing more and more and getting stronger with my voice and my sense of agency. I didn't know that that's necessarily what I was doing, but that's what I was doing, right?

I was growing, and part of that growth process for me when I was doing this work out here in Seattle while still living in Florida, I came to the conclusion that I actually wanted to be a therapist. I wanted to go back to school. And I started to have memories of when I was a kid, when I was in second grade, learning that kids would be sexually abused, and I'd have to go talk to the counselor at school about it. And I'm like, “How do we educate the rest of the kids?” And when I was sixteen I was obsessed with John Bradshaw, who was the first psychologist who coined the term “inner child.” I used to watch him on PBS as a sophomore in high school.

NATALIE: Oh, that's hilarious.

YVETTE: Isn't that fun? And so all those memories started coming back to me when I was doing my story work at the Allender Center. And I'm like, “You know, I actually think that I'm good at this work, and I think this is actually what I've been meant to do my whole life. I actually think this is my calling. I want to go back to school.” Well, I was terrified to tell my ex — at that time I was still married — that I wanted to go back to school because he would be threatened by that, but I knew that I was supposed to do it. And I had to finish an undergraduate degree. So I had made the decision to tell him.

And I'm going to go back into my story and tell you, when I was nineteen we were married for probably six months to a year, and we ended up in a counselor's office. I think we had gone to a counselor when we were dating, even. So our whole married life I was dragging him in to see a therapist, right? Constantly a therapist after therapist.

And so this was in the beginning. We had gone to see this man, and we'd probably been to two sessions with him. And on the third session, I don't know if I went by myself or he went by himself, but eventually I did. I was with this therapist by myself. And he looked at me and he told me three things, and he said, "You will struggle to communicate with this man your entire life if you stay married to him." He said, "You will always have a problem communicating with him." He said, "Two, you don't know your power as a woman. You have no idea the power you hold in your feminine body and who you are as a woman." And he said, "And three," he said, "people that have your level of intelligence, they should go to school."

NATALIE: Wow. Oh, that makes me want to cry. Oh my gosh. He just really tried to help you, didn't he?

YVETTE: He did, he did. And I listened to him. And so here I am at what, twenty-years-old? I'm working at the headquarters of a women's high-end national retailer in Florida, and I have some good friends at work and the marriage is not going well. And over a series of conversations with the counselor and then also with these women, I decide that I want to separate from my husband a year into the marriage. I've made the decision. I go home on a Thursday afternoon to tell him, sit down, have a very level-headed conversation. And I said, "I think we need a trial... We need to separate, we need to see what this is going to be like." I was not using the word "divorce." I was like, "I just need some space." So we had a three bedroom condo at the time, and he sat there and he listened to me and shook his head, and I don't think he had a lot to say.

The next day, we went to work, both of us, Friday morning. I go to work, do my thing at work, come back, five o'clock. Unlock my front door, open it, and the apartment is empty. He and his father emptied out the entire place while I was at work.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh. That would be so traumatic.

YVETTE: Yeah. My heart's racing even as I tell you that. I was in utter shock, as you can imagine. Traumatized, to put it lightly. We had just moved to Florida the year before, right after we got married. I really didn't know anybody except the people that I had at work there. And his dad and his stepmom were the people that we knew outside of work. So they packed up everything in the apartment, put it in this storage unit, and he moved in with them. So they thought this was a good idea too.

NATALIE: Unreal. So all of your stuff was gone.

YVETTE: Yeah. He left our bed, he left my clothes, he left my blow dryer, he left a piece

of furniture in the bedroom, but he took everything. I didn't have anything to sit on. Took all the pots, the pans, the vacuum cleaner. Everything. And put it in storage.

NATALIE: Wow. So what happened after that, then?

YVETTE: Oh, I forgot to tell you. I had enrolled in college, so I was back in school. So at this point when I had told him I wanted to separate, I was in college. And so I came home that day that happened. I called my boss at work because I didn't know who else to call. And he gets in his car and drives over to my apartment and sits with me on the floor. He's like, "Where are your credit cards?" and he calls the numbers and cancels them all because he's smart. He's just like, "We've got to protect you, and who do you know?" And I had a friend who lived in Orlando, which was a three hour drive. He said, "Call her and see if you can come stay with her for the weekend." And so I drove there by the grace of God — I don't know how I got there safely in one piece, but I did. Came back, went to work, and just tried to function.

And so I think I dropped fifteen pounds within a couple weeks. I just was a mess and doing what I could. And at some point in that past year I had tried to go back to church. So I grew up in a Christian home with my dad taking us to church. My mother is Jewish, so she never went to church, but my dad did. I had stepped away from the church, and in that year prior to this happening, I was kind of having panic attacks. I mean, now I know it's because I was living with an abusive person. But I was having these panic attacks, so I'm like, "I'm going to go to church."

And so there was this church I had visited a little bit and there was a woman that had kind of befriended me, and so she had found out what happened with my husband leaving like this, and she had called the pastor of that church. So mind you, I'm not really a member there. I had popped in and out, but they're kind of like, "We're going to try to bring her into the fold." And so she had called this pastor and he reached out to me and he reached out to my ex. And so he started to try to help us get back together, right? Like, "Bring this couple back together."

So I think we were separated for about a month, and then he had us come into his office and we sat at this really long six-foot table at opposite ends from each other. And I'll never forget, I was so mad and hurt I could not look at his face. The pastor basically sat in the middle and just did all the talking, and he said, "Well, can you start to try to figure out how to maybe come back together, or why don't you try to come to church on a Sunday and just meet at church?" And so I think it was six or eight weeks in and we said "Fine" and we decided to do that.

So we show up and meet at church on a Sunday and we sit in this pew together, and my husband just has a complete breakdown sitting there, absolutely pouring tears, huge “come to Jesus” kind of moment in this very uptight Lutheran church. And so there was a lot that I think that was authentic to something that was in him in that moment, right? Something that was exposed and something that needed forgiveness or whatever he needed. But basically from that point forward, it was just kind of like, “Oh, he's so sorry, too,” and we ended up back together. And it was basically like sin leveling everybody here like churches do with abusive relationships, like, “We're just going to sin level everything. Everybody's equally guilty, and your problem is you just need Jesus and you just need to confess your sins and everything will be okay.”

And so basically we moved back in together and never talked about what happened. Ever. I had to drop out of school during that time, that month that I was by myself, because I had to go get a second job to pay for the rent of this apartment and because I was so traumatized. I just was not functioning at all. And so I dropped out of school and never went back, either. That's a big part of the story.

So for me to then fast forward twenty-some years into this program and want to reclaim that for myself, I now know why I was so scared to tell him I wanted to go back to school, because my body held the memory of, “Well, last time you were in school, remember what happened. You started to get a sense of agency and power for yourself. You went to school and you were discarded.”

NATALIE: So what did happen then later on, twenty-some years later? And this was after having children too. You had kids with him.

YVETTE: Yeah, so we were married six years before we had kids. And so we have three children together. At this point my boys are in middle school and my daughter's in high school. And when I came back and just said I wanted to go back to school, he was not happy. I remember sitting outside of Bonefish Grill. We had just had dinner and I was in the car, and I'm like, “One, two, three, just go. Just say it,” you know, and “Just say it. Say you want to go back to school.” And I did. And I remember I could feel the brooding inside of him, but he couldn't tell me “No,” right? But this was a dynamic of our marriage. So he wasn't this grandiose type of narcissist, either. It was more of that, “I will always smile and agree, but you can see the glint in the eye.” There's a particular type of abuse where you feel the brooding and your body is just like, “Ugh.”

And so I had enrolled in the school there to finish my undergrad. At some point there were some blowups and, and I'm healthier at this point too. His drinking and drug use was a problem from the day we got together, but he was never explicit about it. It was

never out in the open. It was always a very secretive thing he did by himself that I was always trying to keep him clean. I was always trying to make him good. But at this point in my life, I'd also said, "I'm so done. I'm so done with that in my life." And there had been an episode where he came home and he gave me a kiss and I could smell beer on his breath. I'm like, "Were you drinking?" He's like, "No," you know?

And I was like, "But I've done so much work to finally know. I'm going to believe what my body's telling me. For years everybody has told me I can't believe it, but I actually have done enough work now to know that I need to believe what my body is telling me. But I have this person who wants to lie to me." And I just sat with it, and I think three hours later I looked at him and said, "Why are you lying to me?" I no longer gave him the opportunity to ask him and then let him decide if he was going to tell me. I'm just like, "Why are you lying to me?" He said, "Because I didn't want to have to deal with your shit." He was very explicit, and I said, "Well, as I told you before, we need to figure out what's going to happen." I can't tell you how many times we had been at that particular crossroad with his drinking and drug use, and I said, "I told you I will not tolerate this anymore."

He ended up leaving that night and wanted to stay with some friends, and then ten days later he came back in and it just didn't feel quite right, and something else had happened. And then, you know, the cycle of abuse where there's tension building. And in the tension building, my pattern would be eventually I couldn't take anymore. So then I would go and I'd force a conversation. "We need to figure out what's going on. Do we need to go back to the therapist?" And then it'd be that circular conversation where you never really feel like anything gets resolved. You're both pretty exhausted, but you just kind of do the thing over again and it gets a little quiet, there's some makeup period, and it's just over and over and over again.

Well, this particular tension building phase I was like, "I am not going to do what I've always done, so I'm not going to do it. And it is taking everything I have to not do it." And I'm just vibrating everywhere — I walk through the house, right? And I'm parenting my kids and running my business and he's running his business. So it's a Friday afternoon and I'm at the dentist getting a crown put on my tooth and I come home. And I just think it's so crazy, because it was a Friday afternoon twenty-some years before. This time he didn't empty the house, but he had a suitcase packed and he said, "I'm leaving." And he left. He had an apartment rented. He just left. My boys were playing video games. My daughter was at work. There was no conversation, there was nothing. He just left.

NATALIE: That's tough. The people that I work with, I feel like most of them have to be

the ones that leave, but then it sort of makes the ones that get discarded like that feel like, "What's wrong with me? Why did I get discarded?" Because that's just the natural response, I think, when someone just walks out on you like that and doesn't seem to care. It's like they didn't seem to value this relationship that you poured your life-blood into and really suffered through, but you thought it was valuable enough to keep working at it, and they just walk away.

YVETTE: And they just walk away.

NATALIE: How did you get over that?

YVETTE: You know, there was never a conversation about divorce, ever. I was served with divorce papers exactly three weeks later. I found out from some friends that he had called out of state that I had had to separate myself from years ago because of her drug use, and he knew that she and I were on the outs. He called her, she called another friend that knew, she called me and said, "I think that he's going to serve you with divorce papers." And I'm like, "What?" Three weeks. Never had a conversation. And so it was just very mind-blowing.

But back to what you said about being discarded, it's interesting, because for me, being discarded, actually, I look at it and I'm like, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt I did everything I could to make our marriage work. My own work, I worked for the marriage — I did every possible thing I could. And the beauty of it is I continued to build a sense of self and agency so much to the point that he finally discarded me because I was no longer useful to him. That make sense? And so I look at that and I'm like, it's actually more data that just kind of confirmed what I was dealing with in my story.

NATALIE: So do you feel like because you had done so much of that personal work that by the time it got to the discard, you were more able to weather that storm than someone who maybe hasn't gotten to the place where they understand what's really going on in the relationship, and they raise their voice and make a little peep, and then they get discarded at the first... Because I feel like there's different personalities. You're probably more like me: Speak out, we try to get help, we do all things, we know we can solve the problem if we just work hard enough at it.

And then there's other women who, their personality is quieter, they don't want to rock the boat, they're not really speaking out, and then when they start to figure out what's going on, they're afraid to speak out. And then if they do, their kind of partner has the personality that's like, "Well fine, then. I'm just going to leave you." I think it's the most devastating for that combination of people, the woman who's quieter and afraid to

speak out and doesn't really know what her identity quite is, and the man who's like, "I could take you or leave you. As long as you're going to service me, then we're good together. But if you're going to say anything, I'm out of here. I'll just go find someone else."

It blows me away that we can be in these relationships with people who care that little. I don't think I'm ever going to get used to hearing these stories, honestly. I think I'm going to continue to be just baffled by how this dynamic can happen.

YVETTE: The question you asked, do you think it was easier for me because of either who I was or the work I had done, and like you're saying, I don't think anything ever prepares you for the amount of devastation that comes on your discard. The amount of bewilderment to think I laid in bed next to somebody for almost twenty-five years and I didn't know that they were capable of this, you know what I mean? It doesn't matter who you are, it is so painful.

And I think the difference is because of the work I had been doing, because I had been building a community of people who saw me and who could handle the truth of my life and actually wanted good for me instead of bad for me. It helped me to not go back. It helped me to say "No more." I think women that haven't done that work, it's easier to get sucked back into, "Well then, I'm going to go try harder," because they need to still work out their own story, and there's no shame to that. It takes what it takes.

NATALIE: Yeah, I totally agree.

YVETTE: It just takes what it takes.

NATALIE: Yep, yep. Okay, so you've been working with the Allender Center, and you worked on your life story. You looked at the whole thing so you could see the bigger picture and understand how all the pieces fit together. Do you think that doing that kind of work is important when you're healing from narcissistic abuse? And what about people who maybe haven't done that work yet, but they do know that there's a big problem and there's a big elephant in the room and they have to address it, but they don't really even know, like, where do they even begin? I guess that's a lot of questions all at once.

YVETTE: I always have a lot of answers, too. You and I were talking before this about the complexity of being a therapist versus a coach like you, right? I have more like boundaries over what I can do with the client, but having been somebody who sat with therapists and is in a DV marriage understands that we sometimes need more advice

than the therapeutic setting offers, right? So I say that to say yes, I think that it's so important to understand story work, because what it does is these places where we get triggered in our body, where all of a sudden we get reactive, if we don't know where that's coming from, we will continue to repeat cycles and get sucked back into stuff, right?

But when you do work and you understand that you actually get to be the parent you needed to those younger places where you're wounded or you actually make the unconscious more conscious... Does that mean that you're not going to feel wobbly and terrified when you have to take action in steps? Nope. I wish I could tell you that goes away, but it doesn't. What it does is it makes it conscious so you can actually then soothe that part as best you can and say, "That was then — the past is trying to show up in the present. It doesn't have to be the same outcome. It makes so much sense, body, that you're terrified of this. But I'm with you. And you have people that are for you too. And so therefore, you can then do the hard thing that you need to do next."

And it will get easier each time you choose to do that. It will. And so I say all that because survivors, people, wherever they're at, whether they're still in the marriage, they need to get out, they're in the healing process, you're going to have these moments where you just need to do things and you don't know why you need to do it. And you're going to be all reactive but you still need to do it, and that's okay. And sometimes you're going to have the luxury of being able to work on your story a little bit before you need to do something, and that's okay too. Take what you can while you can. Get the support you can while you can.

NATALIE: So what do you think is the hardest part about healing and doing this work for people? Or what was it for you?

YVETTE: I think the hardest part is it does expose where you left off developmentally. I met my ex when I was fourteen-years-old. There was an instance of date rape that happened around that age with him. I will say that in many ways when I came out of the marriage, I was still a fourteen-year-old girl. So when you look back at your life and you have to deal with the grief over all that you've lost, and you have to develop certain areas of your life in ways that other people may have had the opportunity that you can't, that's hard sometimes just to accept that, if that makes sense.

NATALIE: It makes total sense. I've shared with people and I've talked to women who've said the same thing, that when I was getting out of my relationship I still felt like, "Why do I feel like I'm still a teenager, still a young person? I'm in my forties — will I ever..." I'm in my fifties now, but I was in my forties back then. "Will I ever feel like an adult?" I

would talk to other people who I thought were normal. They had a normal life and they were normal people, and I would think, "They show up for their lives as if being an adult is just a given. 'I'm an adult. I make decisions. I present myself as an adult,' and I feel like I'm faking it. I'm walking through my life pretending to be an adult, when deep down inside I know, 'I'm just a child and I'm terrified.'"

YVETTE: I think that's the hardest thing for me still sometimes. And then I know that we say that, but I think in all honesty, every human being has these moments where they feel young, right? I do think that an area of abuse where you've had so much power and control exerted over you, it's a little different and it's harder, but I think that's been the hardest part.

NATALIE: So what's the best part about healing for you in your life?

YVETTE: I remember this one moment in the throes of the fallout of the separation as we were going through this divorce, which, by the way, took eighteen months to get through, which is pretty typical for abusive relationships to take that long, if not longer. I remember standing in my kitchen, and I don't know if you had this, but you know how your circle gets really small, and it needs to get really small really quick, especially if there's a church community? You find out who's for you and who's against you really fast. Anything that you ever felt in your body that might have been off or weird about certain people, places, or things?

NATALIE: Oh my gosh — yes!

YVETTE: The stuff falls out, and then all of a sudden everything that was implicit becomes explicit and you're like, "I knew it."

NATALIE: Yes! It's so true!

YVETTE: That feeling of, "My gut is good. My gut is good and my gut knew the whole time, and I finally now know." I will never forget the realization I had of that and go, "That is worth it. If it took all of this in my life to get to this point today, standing in my kitchen where I can say, 'My gut is good. My body knows...'"

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that. I totally agree. I love that. Okay, so what do you think is the greatest tool in healing? I mean, there's so many different tools in healing and there's so many amazing tools. So tell me one that's really been helpful for you or that you teach other people.

YVETTE: I mean, a lot of different ones. But I think to say that our bodies are North Star, kind of on the heels of that answer — that what is it that you feel in your body, given permission to know? Because I think in a Christian culture, in our very masculine Western culture, we've been taught to not trust our bodies and to externalize our sense of authority. I have a lot of hope for the younger women that are in their twenties and thirties, because they seem to know this more, but the women that are older, this is still really counterintuitive to us. And so we have to work to sit there and go, "No, I give myself permission to trust my body and to prioritize that feeling and sense of knowing." I think that is our greatest tool. And to follow it.

NATALIE: That's interesting and also kind of tragic for Christian women, because we're actually taught, as Christians, that "Your heart is deceitful above all things — who can know it? You can't trust your body. Your body is evil. Your body wants to do wicked things," so you're constantly having to repress yourself. And it's really hard to come out of that kind of programming and deprogram from that, especially when it's tied into God and holiness and being godly and having a relationship with your Creator.

YVETTE: Yeah, exactly. I think there's something too I want to point out, because I have seen women that are in their twenties, in their thirties, in their forties, in their fifties, sixties, seventies — I've seen women in all these age brackets dealing with abusive relationships — narcissistic, abusive relationships — and getting out of them. Nobody in their eighties yet, but the fact that they come into my office in the decade of their seventies is cool. How cool is that, right? You have not been beaten down so much that you haven't given up. I love it.

I think that when you're in your forties, fifties, and the stuff that you have to grieve over all that you've lost, sometimes you can feel really heavy, like, "What's the point?" And I think women that are in their twenties and thirties, they don't have as much stuff that they have to overcome, right? So when they get that truth and they make those changes, they kind of get to live free without all the baggage. Older women, there's a lot more grief.

But there's also so much more grace, and I think I want to say that because what older women have is life experience. Even though your life experience may happen in an abusive relationship, what happens when you do get truth, whenever you get that truth, it becomes this watershed thing that you get to apply to everything, and so there's a sense of wisdom and depth that you get that the younger people don't get. So you want everybody to get out sooner, and I wish I would've got out when I was in my twenties, but I wouldn't have had my kids, right? I wish I would've, but there's also so much beauty because I can look back because I have life experience. I understand

some of this stuff, whereas people that are younger still have to live life. They just live it without the baggage. Does that make sense?

NATALIE: Yeah, it does. So you are out now and you're working in Seattle. And where do you see yourself ten, twenty years from now?

YVETTE: Ooh.

NATALIE: I know. This wasn't a question we talked about. I'm just popping it on you.

YVETTE: Oh, let's see, where do I see myself ten, twenty years from now? Hopefully somewhere where it's sunnier. Anybody that knows me knows that that's the first thing that's going to come out of my mouth.

NATALIE: I love Seattle, though. Seattle's a beautiful city.

YVETTE: It is a beautiful city, and I love the culture and I love the people of the city. It is a very, very special place. So one of the beautiful things about this season of my life, too, so I've always been an artist my whole life but haven't been able to do a lot of it. And that's having to do with childhood story of I was kind of the favorite child of my dad and I was a smart one and the pretty one and the athletic one and all these things, and my sister just had the art thing and so I couldn't be good at art too, so it never got to be addressed.

And so now in this season of my life, I've started to paint and do the portraits and the things that I love to do and getting to tap into more of this creative part of me. So I'm hoping that that's even a bigger part where I would love to have a gallery show one day in ten years and display my work and supplement my life and express, because I think there's a part of my little mystic heart that loves that too. And so I'm discovering who I am in that area of my life. But I don't know, because if you would've told me ten years ago, which is what? What is ten years ago from today? 2013?

NATALIE: Yep.

YVETTE: That I'd be living in Seattle as a therapist, I would've been like, "What drugs are you on?"

NATALIE: Isn't that crazy what ten years can do?

YVETTE: Yeah. So I have no idea, Natalie.

NATALIE: So those dreams though, they are totally possible. And art, to me, art goes hand-in-hand with therapy too, when you think about it. Art taps into something really deep inside of you and is very healing, not just for the artist, but it's healing for people who are looking at the art and making it mean something for them too. Have you ever thought about art as therapy, like even bringing that into your practice at all? I mean, that's another possibility.

YVETTE: Yeah, yeah. At times. I have some friends that are doing that, and I think the idea of doing that and not having it just be something I do that I love at the moment and it becomes something that's more part of my business, I could see it, but I'm not ready to jump to that yet. I think I'm still understanding for myself how much it helps me discover my own voice. And there's something in the act of creating that is just nerve wracking too, like actually getting over this hump of starting to create and then seeing what's going to come out and, "Am I okay when it's messy? Am I okay when it's not perfect every time?" I'm still discovering that and probably need to keep that.

NATALIE: That's your own thing for now, yep. That's amazing. Well, I really appreciate you coming on here and sharing a little bit about your life story with us and your work with us, and I think that's it. I think we're just going to wrap it up here. So thank you. And for those of you who are listening, thank you so much for listening this week, and until next time, fly free.