

NOW AVAILABLE: ALL THE SCARY LITTLE GODS

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 263 of the Flying Free Podcast. I am recording this on Christmas break, so my kids are here. You might be able to hear them in the background. I'm in a room with my door shut. I've got pillows and blankets all over the floor so the echo isn't as bad and I'm hoping that my kids will keep their voices down, but I can't guarantee it. So if you hear a little bit of noise in the background, that's what's going on today.

Today, I have an announcement. My book, *All the Scary Little Gods*, that I've been working on for over a year is finally being released on Amazon. At least, that's the idea. I'm recording this in December and I'm recording this by faith that everything will be done and it will be released on... Actually, today is the day, so February 22nd. So what I want to do on this special day to celebrate is, first of all, I want to read a chapter from Part 3 and I want to read a chapter from Part 4, I think. We'll see how long this gets.

But I want to share with you some of the endorsements that have come in. I asked several people if they wouldn't mind endorsing my book, and I did it over the holidays, which was just the worst time in the world to ask anyone to read your book and endorse it. So I wasn't really expecting very many people that would be able to do it, but I did get a few that did. So I'm going to read to you some of those endorsements, and those will be in the book as well.

But first of all, I want to say that my proofreader sent this email to me when she was done with her first round of proofreading. This is at the very, very end. It's already been through the whole editing process, and then after it's been formatted it goes to the proofreader, and she goes through it twice with a fine tooth comb and finds any residual little nitpicky things that are still wrong with it.

So anyway, she said this: "I've completed my first read-through of the book, and wow, I loved it so much. I was so emotionally invested throughout the whole book. I so appreciate your vulnerability and honesty in sharing all the parts of your story — good, bad, and ugly. I truly believe after reading this that it will be the vehicle through which many women are set free."

And I do share the good, bad, and the ugly in this book. I share things that, honestly, I'm scared to share. I'm scared to put them out there, and yet I know that I'm not the only one that has gone through some of those things. I'm not the only one who has reacted in the ways that I reacted or behaved in the ways that I behaved in trying to figure out how to navigate some of the very difficult challenges that I was faced with, and I want to

be honest with that. I want to be authentic and real with you, and that's what I tried to do in this book.

Tiffany Yecke Brooks, who is the author of *Gaslighted by God* and a new book that's coming out called *Holy Ghosted* — and I'm going to be having her on the podcast soon to talk about her new book — she was also my writing coach, and I consider her to be a friend. She wrote this in her email after we were done. All the rough draft was done, and she said this: "What a wonderful, difficult, beautiful, challenging, impactful, tremendous book this is. You've really created something extraordinary." And that really meant a lot to me. I had her write the foreword to the book, which I read a couple of weeks ago here on the podcast, and you can read that there.

I'm going to read to you some of the other endorsements that came in. This one came in from Aimee Byrd. She's the author of a new book called *The Hope in Our Scars*, and I'm going to be having her come on to the podcast and interview her about her new book as well as the book *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. And I interviewed her on the podcast in the past as well. But she said this: "I'd endorse this book for the prologue alone. Our stories are important. Natalie's story will help a lot of people who are also looking for empathetic witness, needing to find their voice, seeking to gain understanding of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse they are under, and asking who will rescue them. Others need to ask what about Natalie's story disrupts their own? Ultimately, the reader will be faced with this question: Why is the Church full of anemic lovers?"

And then Naomi Norton, PhD, LCMFT, LMFT, she wrote this: "During an epidemic of spiritual trauma and abuse, many women are noticing the impact and taking steps toward healing and growth. Natalie Hoffman offers an authentic and informative approach through her journey of trauma and working out her faith with vulnerability and genuineness. She openly and bravely sits with the pain and internal struggle while offering hope and support through the deconstruction process with the desire to come alongside other women to help them fly free in their journey with God. I recommend this book for those who are longing for camaraderie and support in the excruciating journey of healing from spiritual abuse and trauma through holding an empathetic witness to each other's experiences."

And then Bob Hamp, who is an LMFT therapist, author, and the teacher at Think Differently Counseling and Think Differently Academy and a good friend of mine who I've had on the podcast a few times, he said this: "Natalie's story is not for the critics; it is for the prisoners. Sadly, the critics don't know that they are also prisoners. So, for those who know they are prisoners, please, please read her book! Natalie has one of

the clearest and powerful voices in the world of helping people find freedom. While many people who have labored under spiritual abuse turn away from the trappings of religion, Natalie ran toward the Life-Giver in His ways of giving life. In the process, she has made a way for so many others to do the same. I met Natalie because of her voice, her integrity, and her love for finding life and truth in the Scriptures. She has become a colleague and an ally for all those same reasons. If you have lived in fear, shame, or the pressure to perform to make a mad God happy, you will find a new way to think and live in these pages!"

And then Sheila Wray Gregoire, author of *The Great Sex Rescue* and founder of baremarriage.com wrote this: "For every woman whose voice has been silenced, Natalie Hoffman wants to let them ROAR! In this poignant memoir, Natalie gives voice to the little girl who was told again and again that she had to be smaller, less than, and not take up so much space. She gives voice to the young woman desperately trying to follow Jesus and do the right thing, yet at the same time feeling used, neglected, and abused by those who were supposed to be her protectors and advocates. For those hurt by parents or spouses and having that hurt compounded by churches and counselors, Natalie shows how you can rise above your programming and learn that you have a voice. That you matter. And, most of all, that you are truly, deeply loved by the One who sees every time you are silenced — and who wants to give you back your voice."

And then finally, Beth Lottig, editor and founder of Inspire Books, wrote this. She's the one who is my proofreader and wrote the thing that I said at the very beginning of the podcast, but this is her official endorsement: "As a fellow survivor of legalism and false narratives in the Church, I found *All the Scary Little Gods* to be wholly relatable, compelling, and full of truth. Natalie's prose is both powerful and vulnerable, weaving her past experience of emotional and spiritual abuse with her current hard-won wisdom and insight in a captivating chronicle of inner strength, redemption, and love. Fellow victims and survivors of covert abuse, as well as those who struggle with reconciling a good God with marital and parenting struggles, will find an empathetic witness and sound assurance in Natalie's words. If you read one memoir this year, make it this one."

When I read that, I almost cried. So anyway, that's what's come so far. Hopefully we'll get a few more in before the book is published. I also wanted to read you some of my thoughts. I was just brainstorming on a page trying to come up with like, how would I describe this book to someone who didn't know me, who didn't know anything about me or anything about this book? What would I say? And here are some of my thoughts. So some of these will resonate with you, and maybe some of them won't, but I am

hoping that some of these thoughts will pique your interest enough to get you to be interested in reading my book.

“What do you do when you don't belong anywhere? Your church doesn't want you, your family doesn't want you, your husband only wants to use you. Find out how a religiously programmed good girl grows up to confront her husband, her church, her childhood programming, and a few scary little gods in order to break free. Join Natalie on her journey of trying to be loved by being as good as possible, failing to measure up, and finally letting go, only to discover she would never be perfect, but she would always be perfectly loved.”

Here's another thing I wrote: “What is this project, exactly? According to Good Faith Media, there are an estimated 2.5 billion Christians in the world, and about 55% of those are female. The Institute for Family Studies reports that one in four highly religious U.S. marriages have intimate partner violence. Now, if we accounted for emotional, spiritual, and financial abuse, coercion, and manipulation, I believe the numbers would be much higher.

We can conservatively guess that about one-third of a billion Christian women on this planet are living silent lives under the belief that they are only good for giving men sex, babies, meals, and clean homes. They believe this is not just what Christian men want — it's what God mandates for their lives. Their emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical survival depends on their lifelong cooperation. Those who break free are often excommunicated, ostracized, and marginalized. They lose their homes, their families, their religious communities, their financial stability, and more. These are powerful reasons to keep their heads down. Millions of Christian women look normal and even pretend to be happy on the outside while silently suffering in their minds, spirits, and bodies, and nobody sees them.

I want to change that by telling a story. My story. But this isn't just my story. I've worked closely with thousands of Christian women, helping them discover their identities, their voices, and the lives they have been gifted by a very different God than the one they have previously believed in. I know these women well, and now it's time for them to know themselves. Those who are still stuck in a religious maze of beliefs that marginalize women will condemn this book and all the things I'm communicating in it.”

Honestly, it terrifies me a little bit, but every author puts something out there and is a little bit terrified of... I've heard this before. Other authors have said this. They're like, “I look at the reviews of my book and I could have seven-hundred amazing reviews, and then one review comes in and it stinks, and I just feel terrible about what I just did.” I

can relate to that.

But anyway, "This book isn't for them anyway. I didn't write it to try to convince anybody of anything. I wrote it for the ones who are done spending their lives dying. This book is for women who are ready to live the life God gave them. This book will bring to the surface all of the thoughts and feelings that they have grown skilled at pushing down and under, and the pain of that reality will open the door for them to consider another way of thinking about themselves and God, what I believe is a more life-giving way."

"All the Scary Little Gods is a coming-of-age memoir about what happens when a child is indoctrinated to believe that God loves her while simultaneously being programmed to believe that same God desires to destroy the rest of the human race, the wicked, sinful, Satan's children" — that's what I was told — "and He does not value her reality, her voice, or her personhood unless it aligns with those in authority over her. As she moves into young adulthood she has points of opportunity to change her thinking, but her programming is strong, and she doggedly hangs onto it out of fear and shame. She marries an emotionally and spiritually abusive man and raises nine children with him, fearfully choosing to indoctrinate those children in the same ways she was indoctrinated.

As her life and her marriage unravels regardless of how hard she works to please her husband and her religious community, she begins to wake up to a view of God that is far different from the one she has always known. As her view of God changes, she makes a decision to separate from and eventually divorce her husband in spite of knowing she will be excommunicated from her church and ostracized by her family of origin. She becomes a pariah to her community even as she discovers what real love and healing are all about.

There's another idea running throughout the book about listening to ourself and all of our parts, the idea of ourself being interwoven into the Creator and the Creator being interwoven into us, how not listening and not seeing and not knowing ourself equates to not seeing and knowing the Creator of the self. But both are there to explore in abundance whenever we are ready and want to, and my story will show you how I do that, how I did that, how I continue to do that.

"Women of faith are increasingly disillusioned with the religious beliefs that gaslight them into subservient roles where they must play small. They are taught that God is an entity that sides with men in their desire to power over women and that men are justified in mistreating women because God approves. This flavor of religion is just another control tactic or propaganda delivery system to brainwash women. We are

now hearing from the collective rising of female voices speaking out against misogyny. Now is the time to talk because the world is beginning to listen. The children who were raised in these kinds of homes are now coming of age and deconstructing and we are hearing from them, as we should.

But what about the parents of these children? Some of them are still stuck, but others are finding their way out. And still others would come out if they only had someone to show them how. This book does that.

I don't know that anyone has explored this deconstruction process from the perspective of a child and a parent and a grandparent — which is what I was and am — from the perspective of the different parts within us, including the parts of us who cower in fear, the parts who are drowning in grief, the parts of us who look down on others in judgment, the parts of us who cover up in shame, and the parts of us who try their darndest to put a nice spin on the ugliness of abuse. We are all of these parts, and they are all precious and deserve to be heard. They all need to tell their side of the story.

This book shows us how to offer these parts a safe place to do that. This book is for women of faith who have found that their faith is lacking the robust ability to authentically engage with the realities of life on planet Earth. It's for women who have lost their faith, possibly. It's for a lot of people, but some of you have lost your faith and you want something powerful, compassionate, and authentic to take its place.”

“All the Scary Little Gods is divided into four parts. Part One is a series of vignettes told from the perspective of my younger self. Each vignette reveals a different way my environment systematically programmed and prepared me for a life of dying to myself, which is the ultimate goal for a godly woman. Little Natalie wants to be seen, heard, and loved. She wants to have a meaningful existence in community with others, but she learns that the way to achieve this goal is to let go of her own curious thoughts, hopes, and human rights in order to please those in authority over her.

So Part One ends with the newly married little Natalie asking her pastors for help with her emotionally abusive marriage. She discovers there is nothing anyone can do, and since she believes that divorce is not an option, she makes a decision to figuratively die in order to bring God glory through her living death in a loveless marriage. That's how Part One ends.

Now, Part Two is inspired by Internal Family Systems Theory. It's another series of vignettes told from the perspective of the different parts of my psyche. You'll meet

Freaked, Melancholy, Rosie, and Rude. And I believe we read a little bit about them last summer and then again, last week or two weeks ago, I gave you a little taste of those adorable little people.

In this part of the story, the reader watches the author dig herself deeper into her abusive faith and all of its rules and regulations while also trying to make sense of the reality of life around her, a life riddled with emotional and spiritual abuse and sabotaging forces on every side. In spite of her religious beliefs, there is still a part of her deep inside who hangs on to common sense and knows there is something terribly wrong with her life.

When this part dares to peek through, she bashes it down and spiritualizes the abuse. Her fatal flaw is looking outside of herself for the love she needs, and she believes God is like everyone else in her life who must be appeased and pleased if she wants to get her needs met. Part Two ends in a hotel room where she contemplates suicide while in her last month of pregnancy with her ninth child. When she wakes up the next morning, we find that she is now also awake to the truth of her reality.

In Part Three, she begins the grueling process of learning about and embracing the painful truth of her circumstances. But, deprogramming takes time. The reader will watch her begin to pick up on destructive patterns within herself and her relationships, and as she recognizes the patterns, she also begins to experiment with interrupting them, sometimes with good and sometimes with bad results. But she is now willing to take risks and make mistakes. She learns how to tolerate the disapproval of others as she finds her own voice and her own autonomy.

Her biggest mistake in Part Three is still believing that her rescue will come from people outside of herself. The reader will watch her dogged determination to try to force others to see the truth, believing that she can be set free only if others give her permission, but this is just her fatal flaw controlling her from a different angle.

At the end of Part 3, after being shredded by every attempt to get help outside of herself, she finally has the epiphany she needs. She is the one God has appointed to rescue Natalie. She goes from searching for a rescuer, someone outside of herself to give her love and meaning, to finding that she was always destined to be the catalyst of her own transformation.

And Part Four is how she turns her focus from people outside to God within and aligns herself with God's true nature of love. She's still a hot mess, but now she has a true North, and her healing is exponential at this point. The reader will see how she

deconstructs various lies and replaces them with love that seeps into every painful corner of her life and relationships like a healing balm.

All the Scary Little Gods begins with a little girl surrounded by confusion, shame, and fear, but it ends with a woman who is held in the great heart of a living God of love. And what I want every reader to discover is that she was there all along, and so are they. We all just need eyes to see.”

Okay, I'm going to actually end this episode there. I was going to read another little part, but I think I've read enough. I read several little vignettes over the summer, although some of those have changed quite a bit because that was a vomit draft, but you get the drift anyway. And then I read a couple a couple of weeks ago, but I think that's enough of a teaser for what this book is. Even though I haven't gotten endorsements from everyone, I have heard back from a lot of people who have just started reading it at this point in time, and they are loving it.

So I'm very hopeful that this book will be a lot of things. I'm hopeful that it will be entertaining, for one thing, and I'm also, more importantly, hoping that it will be life-changing. I mean, really, really deep down, life-changing. I hope that this book is a catalyst for your transformation just as much as the things that I went through were a catalyst for mine.

So where can you get All the Scary Little Gods? You can get it on amazon.com right now. It comes in Kindle, paperback and Audible formats. At the time of this recording, I am also recording the Audible version of All the Scary Little Gods. I like to read my own books and for sure I'm reading this one because it's my story. So if you like listening to Audible books — I listen to Audible books every single day — then you can get my book on Audible as well. And that's it for this week.