

Rising Strong by Brene Brown

I was given a book recommended as a "must read" this week: *Rising Strong: The Reckoning. The Rumble. The Revolution.* By Brene Brown, PhD LMSW, from the University of Houston. The byline on the book cover reads, "If we are brave enough, often enough, we will fall. This a book about what it takes to get back up." Hmmm...

Introduction: Truth and Dare

The truth is that falling hurts. The dare is to keep being brave and feel your way back up.

I believe that vulnerability - the willingness to show up and be seen with no guarantees of outcome - is the only path to more love, belonging, and joy.

While vulnerability is the birthplace of many of the fulfilling experiences we long for - love, belonging, joy, creativity, and trust, to name a few - the process of regaining our emotional footing in the midst of struggle is where our courage is tested and our values forged. Rising strong after a fall is how we cultivate wholeheartedness in our lives; it's the process that teaches us the most about who we are.

I define *wholehearted living* as engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, *No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.* It's going to bed at night thinking, *'Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the truth that I am brave and worthy of love and belonging.*

If we're going to put ourselves out there and love with our whole hearts, we're going to experience heartbreak. If we're going to try new things, we're going to fail. If we're going to risk caring and engaging, we're going to experience disappointment. It doesn't matter if our hurt is caused by a painful breakup or we're struggling with something smaller. If we can learn how to feel our way through these experiences and own our own stories of struggle, we can write our own brave endings. When we own our stories, we avoid being trapped.

Arenas always conjure up grandeur, but an arena is any moment when or place where we have risked showing up and being seen. Risking being awkward. Being in love is definitely an arena.

Heartbreak knocks the wind out of you, and the feelings of loss and longing can make getting out of bed a monumental task. Learning to trust and lean in to love again can feel impossible. ... But in those moments when disappointment is washing over us and we're desperately trying to get our heads and hearts around what is or is not going to be, the death of our expectations can be painful beyond measure.

Rather than gold-plating grit and trying to make failure look fashionable [or inevitable], we'd be better off learning how to recognize the beauty in truth and tenacity.

When I see people stand fully in their truth, or when I see someone fall down, and get back up - my gut reaction is, 'What a badass.' To me the real badass is the person who says, 'Damn. That really hurt, but this is important to me and I'm going in again.'

Chapter 1: The Physics of Vulnerability

We are born makers. We move what we're learning from our heads to our hearts through our hands.

Three Truths:

1. **I want to be in the arena.** I want to be brave with my life. And when we make the choice to dare greatly, we sign up to get our asses kicked. We can choose courage or we can choose comfort, but we can't have both. Not at the same time.

2. **Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.** Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage.
3. **A lot of cheap seats in the arena are filled with people who never venture onto the floor.** They just hurl mean-spirited criticisms and put-downs from a safe distance. The problem is, when we stop caring what people think and stop feeling hurt by cruelty, we lose our ability to connect. But when we're defined by what people think, we lose our courage to be vulnerable. Therefore, we need to be selective about the feedback we let into our lives."

The Basic Laws of Emotional Physics: (Simple but powerful truths that help us understand why courage is both transformational and rare. These are the rules of engagement for rising strong.)

1. **If we are brave enough often enough, we will fall; this is the physics of vulnerability.** When we commit to showing up and *risking* falling, we are actually committing to falling. Daring is not saying, "I'm willing to risk failure." Daring is saying, "I know I will eventually fall and I'm still all in."
2. **Once we fall in the service of being brave, we can never go back.** We can rise up from failures, screwups, and falls, but we can never go back to where we stood before we were brave or before we fell. Courage transforms the emotional structure of our being. This change often brings a deep sense of loss. During the process of rising, we sometimes find ourselves homesick for a place that no longer exists. We want to go back to that moment before we walked into the arena, but there's nowhere to go back to. What makes this more difficult is that now we have a new level of awareness about what it means to be brave. We can't fake it anymore. We now know when we're showing up and when we're hiding out, when we are living our values and when we're not. Our new awareness can also be invigorating - it can reignite our sense of purpose and remind us of our commitment to wholeheartedness. Straddling the tension that lies between wanting to go back to the moment before we risked and fell and being pulled forward to even greater courage is an inescapable part of rising strong.
3. **This journey belongs to no one but you; however, no one successfully goes it alone.** All of us must make our own way, exploring some of the most universally shared experiences while also navigating a solitude that makes us feel as if we were the first to set foot in uncharted regions. For those of us who fear being alone, coping with the solitude inherent in this process is a daunting challenge. For those of us who prefer to cordon ourselves off from the world and heal alone, the requirement for connection - of asking for and receiving help - becomes the challenge.
4. **We're wired for story.** In a culture of scarcity and perfectionism, there's a surprisingly simple reason we want to own, integrate, and share our stories of struggle. We do this because we feel most alive when we're connecting with others - it's in our biology. Hearing a story - a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end - causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals trigger the uniquely human abilities to connect, empathize, and make meaning.
5. **Creativity embeds knowledge so that it can become practice. We move what we're learning from our heads to our hearts through our hands.** We are born makers, and creativity is the ultimate act of integration - it is how we fold our experiences into our being. What we understand and learn about rising strong is only rumor until we love it and integrate it through some form of creativity so that it becomes part of us.
6. **Rising strong is the same process whether you're navigating personal or professional struggles.** We have no sterile business remedy for having fallen. We still need to dig into the grit of issues like resentment, grief, and forgiveness. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio reminds us, humans are neither thinking machines nor feeling machines, but rather feeling machines that think. The most transformative and resilient leaders have three things in common: First, they recognize the central role that relationship and story play in our lives, and they

stay curious about their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Second, they understand and stay curious about how emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are connected in the people they love and lead, and how those factors affect relationships and perceptions. And, third, they have the ability and willingness to lean into discomfort and vulnerability.

7. **Comparative suffering is a function of fear and scarcity.** Falling down, screwing up, and facing hurt often lead to bouts of second-guessing our judgment, our self-trust, and even our worthiness. The opposite of scarcity isn't abundance; the opposite of scarcity is simply enough. When you practice empathy and compassion with someone, there is not less of these qualities to go around. There's more. Love is the last thing we need to ration in this world. Hurt is hurt, and every time we honor our own struggle and the struggle of others by responding with empathy and compassion, the healing that results affects all of us.
8. **You can't engineer an emotional, vulnerable, and courageous process into an easy, one-size-fits-all formula.** Rising strong is not a recipe or step-by-step guidance. It presents a theory grounded in data. While the process does seem to follow a few patterns, it presents no formula or strictly linear approach. It's a back-and-forth action - an iterative and intuitive process that takes different shapes for different people. There is not always a relationship between effort and outcome in this process. You can't game it or perfect it so it's fast and easy. You have to feel your way through most of it.
9. **Courage is contagious.** To bear witness to the human potential for transformation through vulnerability, courage, and tenacity can either be a clarion call for more daring or a painful mirror for those of us stuck in the aftermath of the fall, unwilling or unable to own our own stories.
10. **Rising strong is a spiritual practice.** Getting back on our feet does not require religion, theology, or doctrine. I crafted this definition of spirituality based on the data I've collected over the past decade: *Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to one another by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and belonging. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives.* Rising demands the foundational beliefs of connection and requires wrestling with perspective, meaning, and purpose. I think this quote sums it up perfectly: "Grace will take you places hustling can't."

Chapter Two: Civilization Stops at the Waterline

The middle is messy, but it's also where the magic happens.

That's how I was raised: Hurt them before they hurt you or, at the very least, as soon as they do. If you go in once and get hurt, consider yourself schooled. If you go in twice and get hurt, consider yourself a sucker. Love is by far my scariest arena.

I've been trying to connect with you [my husband] and you keep blowing me off. I don't get it. He just stared at me. So I had to think quick. This was all new to me. In the course of what felt like an hour but was probably thirty seconds, I went back and forth in my head. Be kind. No, get him! Be kind. No, self-protect; take him down.

Opting for kind and trusting ... the story I'm making up is ...

He was hurting. I was hurting. We were both tired and at the absolute edge of our vulnerability. We owed each other the truth. I wouldn't quote my research at him, but I've been doing that research long enough to know that as much as we'd like to blame distant or cruel fathers, bullying buddies, and overbearing coaches for the lion's share of shame that men feel, women can be the most fearful about letting men off the white horse and the most likely to be critical of their vulnerability.

I often say, "Show me a woman who can hold space for a man in real fear and vulnerability, and I'll show you a woman who's learned to embrace her own vulnerability and who doesn't derive her power or status from that man. Show me a man that can sit with a woman in real fear and vulnerability and just hear her struggle without trying to fix it or give advice, and I'll show you a man who's comfortable with his own vulnerability and doesn't derive his power from being Oz, the all-knowing and all-powerful."

I reached out for his hand. "You know what? Ten years ago this story would have scared me. I'm not sure I could have handled it. I would have screwed up. I would have hurt you and betrayed your trust. Five years ago I would have been better. I would have understood and been respectful, but probably still fearful. Today? Today I'm so grateful for you and our relationship, I don't want anything or anyone but you. You're the best man I know."

That morning was a turning point in our relationship. There we were, both of us completely engulfed in our shame stories. I was stuck in appearance and body-image fear - the most common shame trigger for women. He was afraid I would think he was weak - the most common shame trigger for men. Both of us were scared to embrace our own vulnerabilities, even knowing full well that vulnerability is the only path out of the shame storm and back to each other. Somehow we found the courage to trust ourselves and each other, avoiding both the hot sting of words we would never be able to take back and the withheld affection of a cold war. That morning revolutionized how we thought about our relationship. It wasn't a subtle evolution: it forever shifted our relationship. And that was a good thing.

For me, this became a story of great possibility, of what could be if our best selves showed up when we were angry or frustrated or hurt.

You Can't Skip Day 2:

Day two is when you're in the dark - the door has closed behind you. You're too far in to turn around and not close enough to the end to see the light. ... It's not only a dark and vulnerable time, but also one that's often turbulent. People find all kinds of creative ways to resist the dark, including taking issue with each other. Experience doesn't create even a single spark of light in the darkness. It only instills in you a little bit of faith in your ability to navigate the dark. The middle is messy, but it's also where the magic happens.

I appreciate good storytelling and I know it's not easy. Darla from Pixar helped me to get my head around the 'three acts':

- Act 1: The protagonist is called to adventure and accepts the adventure. The rules of the world are established, and the end of Act 1 is the "inciting incident."
- Act 2: The protagonist looks for every comfortable way to solve the problem. By the climax, he learns what it's really going to take to solve the problem. This act includes the "lowest of the low."
- Act 3: The protagonist needs to prove she's learned the lesson, usually showing a willingness to prove this at all costs. This is all about redemption - an enlightened character knowing what to do to resolve a conflict.

I was hurt that he had pushed me away and feeling shame over why. I then started wrestling with the payback story. I hate that ending of Steve getting his, but it's the one I do best when I'm hurt. The only way I could possibly change the ending was to tell a different story, one where Steve's intentions were not bad. I bombarded myself with questions: Could I be that generous? Do I have a part in this? Can I trust him? Do I trust myself? What's the most generous assumption that I can make about his response while still acknowledging my own feelings and needs?

The question that was the hardest to answer that day involves the most vulnerable decision I have to make when I'm afraid or angry: What are the consequences of putting down the weapons and taking off the armor? What if he was hurting me on purpose? What if he's really an insensitive person. If I give him the benefit of the doubt and I'm wrong, I'll be doubly shamed for being rejected and naive.

Comparative suffering has taught me not to discount the importance of having a process to navigate everyday hurts and disappointments. They can shape who we are and how we feel just as much as those things that we consider big events do.

The Rising Strong Process:

The goal of the process is to rise from our falls, overcome our mistakes, and face hurt in a way that brings more wisdom and wholeheartedness into our lives.

- ***The Reckoning***: Walking into Our Story. Recognize emotion, and get curious about our feelings and how they connect with the way we think and behave.
- ***The Rumbling***: Owing Our Story. Get honest about the stories we're making up about our struggle, and then challenge these confabulations and assumptions to determine what truth is, what self-protection is, and what needs to change if we want to lead more wholehearted lives.
- ***The Revolution***. Write a new ending to our story based on the key learnings from our rumble and use this new, braver story to change how we engage with the world and to ultimately transform the way we live, love, parent, and lead.

Chapter 3: Owing Our Stories

The irony is that we attempt to disown our difficult stories to appear more whole or more acceptable, but our wholeness - even our wholeheartedness - actually depends on the integration of all of our experiences, including the falls.

The Rising Strong Process: The goal of this process is to rise from our falls, overcome our mistakes, and face hurt in a way that brings more wisdom and wholeheartedness.

The Reckoning:

Men and women who rise strong are willing and able to reckon with their emotions. First, they recognize that they're feeling something - a button has been pushed, they're hooked, something is triggered, their emotions are off-kilter. Second, they get curious about what's happening and how what they're feeling is connected to their thoughts and behaviors. Engaging in this process is how we walk into our story.

The Rumble:

Men and women who rise strong are willing and able to rumble with their stories. By rumble, I mean they get honest about the stories they've made up about their struggles and they are willing to revisit, challenge, and reality-check these narratives as they dig into topics such as boundaries, shame, blame, resentment, heartbreak, generosity and forgiveness. Rumbling with these topics and moving from our first responses to a deeper understanding of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors gives birth to key learnings about who we are and how we engage with others. The rumble is where wholeheartedness is cultivated and change begins.

The Revolution:

Unlike evolutionary change, which is incremental, change fundamentally transforms our thoughts and beliefs. Rumbling with our story and owning our truth in order to write a new, more courageous ending transforms who we are and how we engage with the world. Men and women who rise strong integrate the key learnings that emerge from the rising strong process into how they live, love, lead, parent, and participate as citizens.

Integrating:

The Latin root of the word integrate is *integrare*, which means "to make whole." Integrating is the engine that moves us through the reckoning, the rumble, and the revolution, and the goal of each of these processes is to make ourselves whole.

Integration through Creativity

Creating is the act of paying attention to our experiences and connecting the dots so we can learn more about ourselves and the world around us. For our purposes we need to do just a little writing - nothing formal, just jotting down some

notes on our experiences. You can do something more elaborate if you choose. It's about devoting time and attention to our experiences that really matters.

If integrate means "to make whole," then it's opposite is to fracture, disown, disjoin, detach, unravel, or separate. I think many of us move through the world feeling this way. The irony is that we attempt to disown our difficult stories to appear more whole or more acceptable, but our wholeness - even our wholeheartedness - actually depends on the integration of all of our experiences, including the falls.

Chapter 4: The Reckoning

Curiosity is a shit-starter. But that's okay. Sometimes we have to rumble with a story to find the truth.

You may not have signed up for a hero's journey, but the second you fell down, got your butt kicked, suffered a disappointment, screwed up, or felt your heart break, it started. It doesn't matter whether we are ready for an emotional adventure - hurt happens. And it happens to every single one of us. Without exception. The only decision we get to make is what role we'll play in our own lives: Do we want to write the story or do we want to hand that power over to someone else? Choosing to write our own story means getting uncomfortable; it's choosing courage over comfort.

One of the truisms of wholehearted living is *'You either walk into your own story and own your truth, or you live outside of your story, hustling for your worthiness.'* Walking into a story about falling down can feel like being swallowed whole by emotion. Our bodies often respond before our conscious minds, and they are hard wired to protect - to run or fight. Even with small, everyday conflicts and disappointments, physical and emotional intolerance for discomfort is the primary reason we linger on the outskirts of our stories, never truly facing them or integrating them into our lives. We disengage to self-protect.

In navigating, the term reckoning is the process of calculating where you are. To do that, you have to know where you've been and what factors influenced how you got where you are. Without reckoning, you can't chart a future course. In the rising strong process, we can't chart a brave new course until we recognize exactly where we are, get curious about how we got there, and decide where we want to go. Ours is an emotional reckoning.

The rising strong reckoning has two deceptively simple parts: 1) engaging with our feelings, and 2) getting curious about the story behind the feelings - what emotions we're experiencing and how they are connected to our thoughts and behaviors.

First, rising strong requires us to recognize that we're experiencing a "facedown in the arena" moment - an emotional reaction. A button is pushed, a sense of disappointment or anger washes over us, our hearts race - something tells us that all is not well. The good news is that in our reckoning we don't have to pinpoint the emotion accurately - we just need to recognize that we're feeling something. Recognizing emotions means developing awareness about how our thinking, feeling (including our psychology), and behavior are connected.

Second, rising strong requires getting curious about our experience. This means having the willingness to open a line of inquiry into what's going on and why. Again, the good news is that you don't need to answer those questions right off the bat. You just need to want to learn more. Don't forget that our bodies respond to emotion first, and they often direct us to shut down or disengage.

The opposite of recognizing that we're feeling something is denying our emotions. The opposite of being curious is disengaging. When we deny our stories and disengage from tough emotions, they don't go away; instead they own us, they define us. Our job is not to deny the story, but to defy the ending - to rise strong, and rumble with the truth until we can get to a place where we can think. Yes, this is what happened. This is my truth. And I will choose how this story ends.

Reckoning with Emotion:

What gets in the way of reckoning with emotion is exactly what gets in the way of engaging in other courageous behaviors: fear. We don't like how difficult emotions feel and we're worried about what people might think. We don't know what to do with the discomfort and vulnerability. Emotion can feel terrible, even physically overwhelming. We can feel exposed, at risk, and uncertain in the midst of emotion. Our instinct is to run from pain. In fact, most of us were never taught how to hold discomfort, sit with it, or communicate it, only how to discharge or dump it, or to pretend that it's not happening. If you combine that with the instinctual avoidance of pain, it's easy to understand why off-loading becomes a habit. Both nature and nurture lead us to off-load emotion and discomfort, often onto other people. The irony is that at the exact same time that we are creating distance between ourselves and the people around us by off-loading onto others, we are craving deeper emotional connection and richer emotional lives.

Miriam Greenspan, a psychotherapist and author explains why she believes our culture is "emotion phobic" and that we fear and devalue emotion. She cautions:

"But despite our fear, there is something in us that wants to feel all these emotional energies, because they are the juice of life. When we suppress and diminish our emotions, we feel deprived. So we watch horror movies or so-called reality shows like 'Fear Factor.' We seek out emotional intensity, vicariously, because when we are emotionally numb, we need a great deal of stimulation to feel something, anything. So emotional pornography provides the stimulation, but it's only ersatz emotion - it doesn't teach us anything about ourselves or the world."

We don't need to be immediately precise to find our way. We just need to bring our feelings to light. We just need to be honest and curious.

Getting Curious:

Choosing to be curious is choosing to be vulnerable because it requires us to surrender to uncertainty. It wasn't always a choice; we were born curious. But over time, we learn that curiosity, like vulnerability, can lead to hurt. As a result, we turn to self-protecting - choosing certainty over curiosity, armor over vulnerability, and knowing over learning. But shutting down comes with a price - a price we rarely consider when we're focused on finding our way out of pain. For experiences and information to be integrated into our lives as true awareness, they have to be received with open hands, inquisitive minds, and wondering hearts.

Curiosity is an act of vulnerability and courage. In this stage of the rising strong process - the reckoning - we need to get curious. We need to be brave enough to want to know more. I say "brave" because getting curious about emotion isn't always an easy choice.

In his book *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It*, Ian Leslie writes, "Curiosity is unruly. It doesn't like rules, or, at least, it assumes that all rules are provisional, subject to the laceration of a smart question nobody has yet thought to ask. It disdains approved pathways, preferring diversions, unplanned excursions, and impulsive left turns. In short, curiosity is deviant."

George Loewenstein, a professor of economics and psychology at Carnegie Mellon University, proposed that curiosity is the feeling of deprivation we experience when we identify and focus on a gap in our knowledge. What's important about this perspective is that it means we have to have some level of knowledge or awareness before we can get curious.

There are numerous, complex reasons why there's so little open discussion and engagement around emotion. The research made it clear that a lot of how much or how little we value emotion comes from what we were taught or saw when we were growing up. That value usually results from a combination of several of the ideas listed below.

1. Being emotional is a sign of vulnerability, and vulnerability is weakness.
2. Don't ask. Don't tell. You can feel emotion all you want, but there's nothing to be gained by sharing it with others.
3. We don't have access to emotional language or a full emotional vocabulary, so we stay quiet about it or make fun of it.
4. Discussing emotion is frivolous, self-indulgent, and a waste of time. It's not for people like us.
5. We're so numb to feeling that there's nothing to discuss.
6. Uncertainty is too uncomfortable.
7. Engaging and asking questions invites trouble. I'll learn something I don't want to or shouldn't know.

Off-loading Hurt: Barriers to Reckoning with Emotion

Hurt doesn't go away simply because we don't acknowledge it. In fact, left unchecked, it festers, grows and leads to behaviors that are completely out of line with whom we want to be, and thinking that can sabotage our relationships and careers. What follows are five of the most common strategies for off-loading hurt that we think we have banished by refusing to admit it's there.

Chandeliering: We think we've packed the hurt so far down that it can't possibly resurface, yet all of a sudden, a seemingly innocuous comment sends us into a rage or sparks a crying fit. Chandeliering is especially common and dangerous in 'power over' situations – environments where, because of power differentials, people with a higher position or status are less likely to be held accountable for flipping out or overreacting. These are places where powerlessness and hurt get worked out. We maintain our prized stoicism in front of the people we want to impress or influence, but the second we're around people over whom we have emotional, financial, or physical power, we explode. And because it's not a side of us seen by many of the higher-ups, our version of the story is framed as truth. We can't pack down hurt, nor can we off-load it to someone else while maintaining our authenticity and integrity.

Bouncing Hurt: Our ego is the part of us that cares about our status and what people think, about always being *better than* and always being right. I think of my ego as my inner hustler. It's always telling me to compare, prove, please, perfect, outperform, and compete. Our inner hustlers have very little tolerance for discomfort or self-reflection. The ego doesn't own stories or want to write new endings; it denies emotion and hates curiosity. Instead, the ego uses stories as armor and alibis. The ego has a shame-based fear of being ordinary (which is how I define narcissism). Avoiding truth and vulnerability are critical parts of the hustle. Like all good hustlers, our egos employ crews of ruffians in case we don't comply with their demands. Anger, blame, and avoidance are the ego's bouncers. When we get too close to recognizing an experience as an emotional one, these three spring into action. The ego likes blaming, finding fault, making excuses, inflicting payback, and lashing out, all of which are ultimate forms of self-protection. The ego is also a fan of avoidance – assuring the offender that we're fine, pretending that it doesn't matter, that we're impervious. We adopt a pose of indifference or stoicism, or we deflect with humor and cynicism. When the bouncers are successful – when anger, blame and avoidance push away real hurt, disappointment or pain – our egos are free to scam all they want. Often the first hustle is putting down and shaming others for their lack of 'emotional control.' Like all hustlers, the ego is a slick, conniving, and dangerous liar.

Numbing Hurt: Numbing has been a constant in my research since the beginning. Picture emotions as having very sharp points, like thorns. When they prick us, they cause discomfort or even pain. After a while, the mere anticipation of these feelings can trigger a sense of intolerable vulnerability. For many of us, the first response is not to lean into the discomfort and feel our way through, but to make it go away. We do that by numbing the pain with whatever brings the quickest relief. We can take the edge off of emotional pain with a whole bunch of stuff, including alcohol, drugs, food, sex, relationships, money, work, caretaking, gambling, affairs, religion, chaos, shopping, planning, perfectionism,

constant change and the Internet. And just so we don't miss it in this long list of all the ways we can numb ourselves, there's always staying busy: living so hard and fast that the truths of our lives can't catch up with us. We fill every ounce of white space with something so there's no room or time for emotion to make itself known. But no matter what we use, we can't selectively numb emotions – when we numb the dark, we also numb the light. With less positive emotion in our lives, we are drawn to numbing. It's a vicious cycle. If we numb compulsively and chronically – it's addiction. We are still the most in-debt, obese, medicated, and addicted adults in human history.

Stockpiling Hurt: Stockpiling starts like chandeliering, with us firmly packing down the pain, but here, we just continue to amass hurt until the wisest part of us, our bodies, decide that enough is enough. The body's message is always clear: Shut down the stockpiling or I'll shut you down. The body wins every time.

Hurt and the Fear of High Centering: One reason we deny our feelings is our fear of high centering emotionally (I can't move forward and I can't back up). If I recognize my hurt or fear or anger, I'll get stuck. Once I engage even a little, I won't be able to move backward and pretend it doesn't matter, but moving forward might open a floodgate of emotion that I can't control. I'll be stuck. Helpless. Recognizing emotion leads to feeling it. What if I recognize the emotion and it dislodges something and I can't maintain control.

Off-Loading Versus Integrating:

The opposite of off-loading is integrating. The methods outlined above represent different ways that we fail to integrate into our lives the hurt that arises in our stories of struggle. Pretending not to hurt is choosing to become imprisoned by the dark emotion we have experienced – recognizing and feeling our way through the emotion is choosing freedom. It's seductive to think that not talking about our pain is the safest way to keep it from defining us, but ultimately the avoidance takes over our lives. There's growing empirical evidence that not owning and integrating our stories affects not just our emotional health but also our physical well-being.

The Umbridge: It's present when light and dark are not integrated at all. There's something almost foreboding about overly sweet and accommodating ways. All that niceness feels inauthentic and a little like a ticking time bomb. Being all light is as dangerous as being all dark, simply because denial of emotion is what feeds the dark.

Strategies for Reckoning with Emotion:

So how do we reckon with emotion rather than off-load it? Give yourself permission to feel emotion, get curious about it, pay attention to it, and practice. This takes practice. Awkward, uncomfortable practice.

Permission Slips: We're not going to recognize emotion if we don't feel like we have permission to feel emotion. Writing down permission becomes a powerful intention to stay aware. If you're worried that giving permission to experience and engage with emotion will turn you into something you're not or someone you don't want to become – it won't. It will, however, give you the opportunity to be your most authentic self. We are wired to be emotional beings. When that part of us shuts down, we're not whole.

Paying Attention: The next step is taking a deep breath and becoming mindful of what we're feeling. Here's Mark Miller's explanation of tactical breathing. (Mark Miller describes himself as a poet-warrior, a casual hero, and a student of science. He is also a Green Beret.)

1. Inhale deeply through your nose, expanding your stomach, for a count of four – one, two, three, four.
2. Hold in that breath for a count of four – one, two, three, four.
3. Slowly exhale all the air through your mouth, contracting your stomach, for a count of four – one, two, three, four.
4. Hold the empty breath for a count of four – one, two, three four.

Breathing is central to practicing mindfulness. The definition of mindfulness that resonates most with what I've heard research participants describe is from the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California – Berkeley:

“Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune in to what we're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.

Walking into our stories of hurt is like walking into that cave in Yoda's camp in *The Empire Strikes Back* movie. It can feel dangerous and foreboding, and what we must ultimately confront is ourselves. The most difficult part of our stories is often what we bring to them – what we make up about who we are and how we're perceived by others. What makes a story so painful is what we tell ourselves about our own self-worth and value. Owning our own stories means reckoning with our feelings and rumbling with our dark emotions – our fear, anger, aggression, shame and blame. This isn't easy, but the alternative – denying our stories and disengaging from emotion – means choosing to live our entire lives in the dark. When we decide to own our own stories and live our truth, we bring our light to the darkness.

Chapter Five: The Rumble

The most dangerous stories we make up are the narratives that diminish our inherent worthiness. We must reclaim the truth about our lovability, divinity, and creativity.

The reckoning is how we walk into our story; the rumble is where we own it. The goal of the rumble is to get honest about the stories we're making up about our struggles, to re-visit, challenge, and reality-check these narratives as we dig into topics such as boundaries, shame, blame, resentment, heartbreak, generosity, and forgiveness. Rumbling with these topics and moving from our first response to a deeper understanding of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors gives birth to key learnings about who we are and how we engage with others. The rumble is where wholeheartedness is cultivated and change begins.

Conspiracies and Confabulations:

The rumble begins with us turning up our curiosity level and becoming aware of the story we're telling ourselves about our hurt, anger, frustration or pain. The minute we find ourselves facedown on the arena floor, our minds go to work trying to make sense of what's happening. This story is driven by emotion and the immediate need to self-protect, which means it is most likely not accurate, well thought out, or even civil. The rumble starts when we have the willingness, ability, and courage to wade into the first, uncivilized story we're making up. Why is capturing this uncensored story necessary? Because embedded in this unedited narrative are the answers to three critically important questions – questions that cultivate wholeheartedness and bring deeper courage, compassion, and connection to our lives:

1. What more do I need to learn and understand about the situation?
2. What more do I need to learn and understand about the people in the story?
3. What more do I need to learn and understand about myself?

In the absence of data, we will always make up stories. It's how we are wired. In fact, the need to make up a story, especially when we are hurt, is part of our most primitive survival wiring. Meaning making is in our biology, and our default is often to come with a story that makes sense, feels familiar, and offers us insight into how to best self-protect. What we're trying to do in the rumble – choosing to feel uncertain and vulnerable as we rumble with the truth – is a conscious choice. A brave, conscious choice.

What do we call a story that's based on limited real data and imagined data and blended into a coherent, emotionally satisfying version of reality? A conspiracy theory. Social workers always use the term *confabulate* when talking about how dementia or a brain injury sometimes causes people to replace missing information with something false they

believe to be true. The further I go into this research, the more I agree with Jonathan Gottschall's assessment about confabulation being an everyday human issue, not just the result of specific medical conditions.

Many confabulations are less the result of health or memory issues and more about the interplay of emotion, behavior, and thought. We all conspire and confabulate, and sometimes the consequences appear negligible. But I would argue that they're not. I would argue that conspiring can become a destructive pattern over time, and sometimes a single confabulation can damage our sense of self-worth and our relationships. The most dangerous stories we make up are the narratives that diminish our inherent worthiness. We must reclaim our lovability, divinity, and creativity.

Lovability: A narrative questioning if they are worth of being loved. This may be the most dangerous conspiracy theory of all. If there's one thing I've learned over the past thirteen years, it's this: Just because someone isn't willing or able to love us, it doesn't mean that we are unlovable.

Divinity: Over half of the participants who talked about experiencing shame in their faith histories also found resilience and healing through spirituality. They believed that the sources of shame arose from the earthly, man-made, human-interpreted rules or regulations and the social/community expectations of religion rather than their personal relationships with God or the divine. Our faith narratives must be protected, and we must remember that no person is ordained to judge our divinity or to write the story of our spiritual worthiness.

Creativity and Ability: Like our lovability and divinity, we must care for and nurture the stories we tell ourselves about our creativity and ability. Just because we didn't measure up to some standard of achievement doesn't mean that we don't possess gifts and talents that only we can bring to the world. Just because someone has failed to see value in what we can create or achieve doesn't change its worth or ours.

We make up hidden stories that tell us who is against us and who is with us. Whom we can trust and who is not to be trusted. Conspiracy thinking is all about fear-based protection and our intolerance for uncertainty. When we depend on self-protecting narratives often enough, they become our default stories. And we must not forget that storytelling is a powerful integration tool. We start weaving these hidden, false stories into our lives and they eventually distort who we are and how we relate to others.

When unconscious storytelling becomes our default, we often keep tripping over the same issue, staying down when we fall, and having different versions of the same problem in our relationships – we've got the story on repeat.

Capturing the Conspiracies and Confabulations:

To capture these first stories and to learn from them, we need to engage our second integration tool – creativity. The most effective way to foster awareness is by writing down our stories. Nothing fancy. What you write down doesn't have to be a sweeping narrative. It can be a bulleted list on a Post-It note or a simple paragraph in a journal. Just get it down. And because our goal is wholeheartedness, we need to consider our whole selves when we write our first drafts. The core (and sometimes the entirety) of my first draft is normally these six sentences with maybe a few notes.

The story I'm making up:
My emotions:
My body:
My thinking:
My beliefs:
My actions:

Storytelling is also a creative endeavor, so if you have a friend or someone you trust who has the skills and patience to listen, you can talk through your first draft, but writing is always more powerful. When it comes to writing our first drafts, it's important we don't filter the experience, polish our words, or worry about how our story makes us look (which is why writing is often safer than having a conversation). We can't get to our brave new ending if we start from

an inauthentic place. So give yourself permission to wade through the sometimes murky waters of whatever you're thinking and feeling.

In addition to the cautions about not polishing your first draft, watch out for the need to be certain. Uncertainty is tricky. When it comes to the process of owning our own stories, uncertainty can be so uncomfortable that we either walk away or race to the ending. So if you come across a part of your story that you don't understand or makes you feel uncertain or anxious, just jot down a question mark or write yourself a note: *What the heck happened here? Total confusion. Who knows?* The important thing is not to skip it. Stay in the story until you touch every part of it. There is no rising strong without a true accounting of the stories we make up.

Rumbling With...

It's time to rumble. Time to unleash our curiosity. Time to poke, prod, and explore the ins and outs of our story. The first questions we ask in the rumble are sometimes the simplest:

1. What more do I need to learn and understand about the situation?
 - *What do I know objectively?*
 - *What assumptions am I making?*
2. What more do I need to learn and understand about the people in the story?
 - *What additional information do I need?*
 - *What questions or clarifications might help?*
3. What more do I need to learn and understand about myself?
 - *What's underneath my response?*
 - *What am I really feeling?*
 - *What part did I play?*

How we rumble with our story and approach these questions depends on who we are and what we've experienced. As Yoda told Luke, what's in the cave depends on who walks into the cave. That said, some rumble topics worth investigating did consistently emerge in my interviews. Here's a list:

- Grief
- Vulnerability
- Failure
- Forgiveness
- Blame and Accountability
- Disappointment
- Expectations, Resentment
- Fear
- Nostalgia
- Stereotypes and Labels
- Boundaries
- Perfectionism
- Identity
- Trust
- Love, Belonging, Heartbreak
- Regret
- Need and Connection
- Criticism
- Generosity
- Shame
- Integrity

The Delta:

The difference – the delta – between what we make up about our experiences and the truth we discover through the process of rumbling is where the meaning and wisdom of this experience live. The delta holds our key learnings – we just have to be willing to walk into our stories and rumble.

I'm so much better at being angry than I am at being hurt or disappointed or scared. This why the rumble is so important – many of us have go-to emotions that mask what we're really feeling. Deltas are where rivers meet the sea. They're marshy, full of sediment, and forever changing. They are also rich and fertile areas of growth. This is where we need to do our work – our key learnings emerge from the delta.

As we start to integrate what we learn from the rising strong process into our lives, we get better at rumbling. In some cases, I can go from the "facedown" to the delta to key learnings in five minutes. Other times, it takes me months. But if you're like me, there will always be times when we experience a completely new way of falling down, and that delta will be gaping once again, requiring more learning. Having the courage to reckon with our emotions and to rumble with our stories is the path to writing our brave new ending and the path that leads to wholeheartedness. It's also the beginning.

Understanding our fall and rise, owning our story, taking responsibility for our emotions – this is where the revolution starts.

Chapter Six: Sewer Rats and Scofflaws – Rumbling with Boundaries, Integrity, and Generosity

Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them.

Two of the most common messages that trigger shame in all of us are ‘never good enough’ and ‘who do you think you are?’ After years of rumbling with self-righteousness, I have learned that no matter how right I think I am or how wrong someone else appears to be, self-righteousness is an off-limits emotion for me. Self-righteousness starts with the belief that I’m better than other people and it always ends with me being my very worst self and thinking, *I’m not good enough*. In exploring my emotions around self-righteousness, I visited my therapist and described a story where you were either a sewer rat or a scofflaw from the kid’s movie *Flushed Away*.

- A sewer rat doesn’t care about the rules and doesn’t respect other people’s stuff.
- A scofflaw is also someone who doesn’t follow the rules, but the scofflaw also makes fun of people who respect the rules.

In relating my story to my therapist, she asked me, “Do you think it’s possible that the person [a major violator in my story] was doing the best she could that weekend? *Are you kidding me?*” I was incensed. Totally and completely incensed. I answered in my most proper voice, “No. I do not believe she was doing her best. Do you believe she was doing her best?”

With every tightening move I made. Diana (therapist) seemed to unfold a little, opening her face and her body and her heart to possibility. It was making me sick. “You know I’m not sure. I do, however, think that in general people are doing the best they can. What do you think?” *What do I think? I think this conversation is total crap. That’s what I think. I think the idea that people are doing the best they can is also crap. I can’t believe I’m paying for this.* I looked Diana right in the eye and asked, “Do you really believe – in your heart – that people are doing the best they can? Or ... is that what we’re supposed to believe because we are social workers? Really? Tell me the truth.”

She smiled and looked toward the sky, then nodded her head. “Yes. Yes, I really do believe that most of us are doing the very best we can with the tools we have. I believe we can grow and get better, but I also believe that most of us are really doing our best.”

Over the next three weeks, I asked just more than forty people this question. It was a simple question: Do you think, in general, that people are doing the best they can? By the time I finished fifteen interviews, I had saturation – clear patterns and themes had emerged that would accurately predict what I would find in the remaining interviews.

First, those who said they believe that people are doing the best they can consistently qualified their answers: “I know it sounds naïve ...” or “You can’t be sure, but I think so...” or “I know it sounds weird...” They were slow to answer and seemed almost apologetic, as if they had tried to persuade themselves otherwise, but just couldn’t give up on humanity. They were also careful to explain that it didn’t mean people can’t grow or change. Still, at any given time, they figured, people are normally doing the best they can with the tools they have.

Those who believe that people are not doing the best they can were unequivocal and passionate in their responses. It was always some version of an emphatic “No! Absolutely not! No way!” Unlike their “yes” counterparts, about 80 percent of these respondents used themselves as an example. They judged their efforts in the same exacting manner that they judged the efforts of others. It was clearly important for the people answering “no” to acknowledge this parity.

I also began to see a pattern that worried me. The past research participants who answered “no” were also people who struggled with perfectionism. They were quick to point out how they’re not always doing the best they could and offered examples of situations when they weren’t their perfect selves. They were as hard on others as they were on themselves. Every participant who answered “yes” was in the group of people who I had identified as wholehearted – people who are willing to be vulnerable and who believe in their self-worth. They, too, offered examples of situations where they made mistakes or didn’t show up as their best selves, but rather than pointing out how they could and should have done better, they explained that, while falling short, their intentions were good and they were trying.

When I got home, I asked my husband the same question. He thought about it for a solid ten minutes. Finally, when he looked back at me, he said, “I don’t know. I really don’t. All I know is that my life is better when I assume that people are doing their best. It keeps me out of judgment and lets me focus on what is, and not what should or could be.” His answer felt like truth to me. Not an easy truth, but truth.

I went back to see my therapist. I explained that very early on in my work I had discovered that the most compassionate people I interviewed also have the most well-defined and well-respected boundaries. It surprised me at the time, but now I get it. They assume that other people are doing the best they can, but they also ask for what they need and they don’t put up with a lot of crap. I lived the opposite way: I assumed that people weren’t doing their best so I judged them and constantly fought being disappointed, which was easier than setting boundaries. Boundaries are hard when you want to be liked and when you are a pleaser hell-bent on being easy, fun, and flexible.

Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They’re compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment.

The Reckoning:

My “facedown” moment happened when I was standing in line thinking hateful and judgmental thoughts about every person around me and, on the surface, feeling superior. I say “on the surface” because I’ve studied judgment and I know we don’t judge people when we feel good about ourselves. Like skilled poker players assess their opponents, I’ve studied my own tells and I know I’m knee-deep in emotion or vulnerability whenever my prayers include not wanting to hurt anyone or when I’m rehearsing really mean conversations. But ultimately my curiosity about those debilitating feelings of self-righteousness led me to make an appointment with my therapist.

The Rumble:

I had to rumble with the shame of being high-maintenance, my self-worth, blame, resentment, and perfectionism – my normal haunts. But the biggest rumble was with boundaries, self-righteousness, and integrity. The delta between the confabulations in my first draft and the truth was dark, wide, and swampy. I came away with these key earnings:

- We’re all doing the best we can.
- The trick to staying out of resentment is maintaining better boundaries – blaming others less and holding myself more accountable for asking for what I need and want.
- There is no integrity in blaming and turning to “it’s not fair” and “I deserve.” I need to take responsibility for my own well-being.
- I am trying not to numb my discomfort for myself, because I think I’m worth the effort. It’s not something that happening *to me* – it’s something I’m choosing for myself.
- This rumble taught me why self-righteousness is dangerous. Most of us buy into the myth that it’s a long fall from “I’m better than you” to “I’m not good enough” – but the truth is that these are two sides of the same coin. Both are attacks on our worthiness. We don’t compare when we’re feeling good about ourselves; we look for what’s good in others. When we practice self-compassion, we are compassionate toward others. Self-righteousness is just the armor of self-loathing.

A Closer Look at Rumbling with Boundaries, Integrity and Generosity:

As miserable as resentment, disappointment, and frustration make us feel, we fool ourselves into believing that they're easier than the vulnerability of a difficult conversation. The truth is that judgment and anger take up way more emotional bandwidth for us. Beyond that, they are often shaming and disrespectful to the person who is struggling, and ultimately toxic to the entire culture. This doesn't mean that we stop helping people set goals or that we stop expecting people to grow and change. It means that we stop respecting and evaluating people based on what we think they should accomplish, and start respecting them for who they are and holding them accountable for what they're actually doing. It means we stop loving people for who they *could be* and start loving them for who they *are*. It means that sometimes when we're beating ourselves up, we need to stop and say to that harassing voice inside, "Man, I'm doing the very best that I can right now."

Loving BIG: Boundaries-Integrity-Generosity

Jean Kantambu Latting, a professor in my master's and doctoral program, was one of my most important mentors. Whenever someone would bring up a conflict with a colleague, she would ask, "What is the hypothesis of generosity? What is the most generous assumption you can make about this person's intentions or what this person said?" As I started working from the new intention that people are doing their best, I remembered Jean's question and started applying it to my life. This is incredibly effective and liberating – to a point. Generosity is not a free pass for people to take advantage of us, treat us unfairly, or be purposefully disrespectful and mean.

What I realized was that a generous assumption without boundaries is another recipe for resentment, misunderstanding, and judgment. We could all stand to be more generous, but we also need to maintain our integrity and our boundaries. I call the solution to this issue **Living BIG: Boundaries, Integrity, and Generosity**.

Setting boundaries means getting clear on what behaviors are okay and what's not okay. Integrity is key to this commitment because it's how we set those boundaries and ultimately hold ourselves and others accountable for respecting them. Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them. Living BIG is saying: "Yew, I'm going to be generous in my assumptions and intentions while standing solidly in my integrity and being very clear about what's acceptable and what's not acceptable."

A Note on Serial Killers, Terrorists, and Assassins

For the past decade, when I've said there's no convincing evidence that shame is an effective compass for moral behavior, everyone from students to journalists hit me with the question, "What about the murderers?" To which I respond, "Shame is much more likely to be the cause for the destructive behavior than the cure. Guilt and empathy are the emotions that lead us to question how our actions affect other people, and both of these are severely diminished by the presence of shame."

The Revolution:

I now recognize that people learn how to treat us based on how they see us treating ourselves. If I don't put value on my work or time, neither will the person I'm helping. Boundaries are a function of self-respect and self-love. Even on the rare occasion when Living BIG leaves me feeling vulnerable, I'm still left standing squarely in my integrity. From there, all things are possible.

Chapter Seven: The Brave and the Brokenhearted – Rumbling with Expectations, Disappointment, Resentment, Heartbreak, Connection, Grief, Forgiveness, Compassion and Empathy

We can't rise strong when we're on the run.

Rumbling with Disappointment, Expectations, and Resentment:

Often stories of falling are threaded with sadness, frustration, or anger, describing something that, for some reason, just didn't turn out the way we hoped it would. Here is what you need to know about disappointment: *Disappointment is unmet expectations and the more significant the expectations, the more significant the disappointment.*

The way to address this is to be up-front about our expectations by taking the time to reality-check what we're expecting and why. Expectations often coast along under our radar, making themselves known only after they have bombed something we had high hopes for into rubble. I call these stealth expectations.

Rumbling with disappointment, resentment, and expectations is essential. These experiences permeate every aspect of our personal and professional lives. A lifetime of unexplored disappointments can make us bitter, and stored up resentment is toxic. Nelson Mandela wrote, "Resentment is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill your enemies." Wholeheartedness requires being conscious of the litany of expectations that hum along below the surface so we can reality-check our thinking. This process can lead to stronger and deeper relationships and connections.

Rumbling with Love, Belonging, and Heartbreak:

Heartbreak is more than just a particularly hard form of disappointment or failure. It hurts in an entirely different way because heartbreak is always connected to love and belonging. Over time, the more I've thought about heartbreak and love, the more clearly I've realized how vulnerable we are when we love anyone. The brokenhearted are the bravest among us – they dared to love. From my dear friend and mentor Joe Reynolds – an Episcopal priest and one of the wisest people I know:

Heartbreak is an altogether different thing. Disappointment doesn't grow into heartbreak, nor does failure. Heartbreak comes from the loss of love or the perceived loss of love. There may be expectations, both met and unmet, in a relationship that ends in heartbreak, but disappointment is not the cause of heartbreak. There may be failures within the relationship – indeed, there certainly will be, for we are imperfect vessels to hold the love of another person – but the failures didn't cause the heartbreak. Heartbreak is what happens when love is lost.

Heartbreak can come from being rejected by the one you love. The pain is more intense when you thought the other person loved you, but the expectation of returned love isn't necessary for heartbreak. Unrequited love can be heartbreaking.

The loss of love doesn't have to be permanent to be heartbreaking. Moving away from a loved one can break your heart. Change in another person I love may be a good thing. It may be significant personal growth, and I may be happy about it and proud of it. It can also change our relationship and break my heart.

The list goes on and on. There is a plethora of ways in which a heart can be broken The common denominator is the loss of love or the perceived loss of love.

To love with any level of intensity and honesty is to become vulnerable. I used to tell couples getting married that the only thing I could tell them with certainty was that they would hurt each other. To love is to know the loss of love. Heartbreak is unavoidable unless we choose not to love at all. A lot of people do just that.

There are two reasons why most of us are slow to acknowledge that what we're feeling is heartbreak. The first is that we normally associate heartbreak with romantic love. This limiting idea keeps us from fully owning our stories. The second reason we don't acknowledge heartbreak is its association with one of the most difficult emotions in the human experience: grief. *If what I'm experiencing is heartbreak, then grieving is inevitable.*

Rumbling with Grief:

Grief is perhaps the emotion we fear most. We're afraid of the darkness it brings. As a society, we have pathologized it and turned it into something to cure or get over. Owning our stories of heartbreak is a tremendous challenge when we live in a culture that tells us to deny our grief. The three most foundational elements of grief that emerged from my studies: loss, longing, and feeling lost.

Loss: while death and separation are tangible losses associated with grief, we also experience losses that are more difficult to identify or describe. These include the loss of normality, the loss of what could be, the loss of what we thought we knew or understood about something or someone. Grief seems to create losses within us that reach beyond our awareness - we feel as if we're missing something that was invisible or unknown to us while we had it, but is now painfully gone.

Longing:

Related to loss is longing. Longing is not conscious wanting; it's an involuntary yearning for wholeness, for understanding, for meaning, for the opportunity to regain or even simply touch what we've lost. Longing is a vital and important part of grief, yet many of us feel we need to keep our longings to ourselves for fear we will be misunderstood, perceived as engaging in magical or unrealistic thinking or lacking in fortitude and resilience. I once heard a friend say that grief is like surfing. Sometimes you feel steady and you're able to ride the waves, and other times the surf comes crashing down on you, pushing you so far underwater that you're sure you'll drown. Those moments of longing can have the same effect as upwelling of grief - they come out of nowhere and can be triggered by something you didn't even know mattered.

Feeling Lost:

Grief requires us to reorient ourselves to every part of our physical, emotional, and social worlds. When we imagine the need to do this, most of us picture the painful struggle to adjust to tangible things, such as someone dying or moving away. This is a very limited view of grief.

The more difficult it is for us to articulate our experiences of loss, longing, and feeling lost to the people around us, the more disconnected and alone we feel. Of the coping strategies my research participants have shared with me, writing down experiences of heartbreak and grief have emerged as the most helpful in making clear to themselves what they were feeling so they could articulate it to others. Some did this as part of their work with helping professionals; others did it on their own.

Rambling with Forgiveness:

'In order for forgiveness to happen, something has to die. If you make a choice to forgive, you have to face into the pain. You simply have to hurt.' That was the piece that was missing. Forgiveness is so difficult because it involves death and grief. I had been looking for patterns in people extending generosity and love, but not in people feeling grief. At that moment it struck me: Given the dark fears we feel when we experience loss, nothing is more generous and loving than the willingness to embrace grief in order to forgive. To be forgiven is to be loved.

The death or ending that forgiveness necessitates comes in many shapes and forms. We may need to bury our expectations or dreams. We may need to relinquish the power that comes with 'being right' or put to rest the idea that we can do what's in our hearts and still retain the approval of others. This is a high price, indeed.

In his book *The Book of Forgiving* Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes:

"To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. It is also a process that does not exclude hatred or anger. These emotions are all part of being human. You should never hate yourself for hating others who do terrible things: the depth of your love is shown by the extent of your anger.

However, when I talk of forgiveness, I mean the belief that you can come out on the other side a better person. A better person than the one being consumed by anger and hatred. Remaining in that state locks you in a state of victimhood, making you almost dependent on the perpetrator. If you can find it in yourself to forgive, then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too.'

So, forgiveness is not forgetting or walking away from the accountability or condoning a hurtful act; it's the process of taking back and healing our lives so we can truly live.

The death of the idealized versions of our parents, teachers and mentors is always scary because it means that we're now responsible for our own learning and growth. That death is also beautiful because it makes room for more honest connections between authentic adults who are doing the best they can. Of course, these new connections require emotional, and physical safety. We can't be open and vulnerable with people that are hurting us.

Rambling with Compassion and Empathy:

The definition of compassion that most accurately describes what I've learned from the research is from American Buddhist nun Pema Chodron. In her book *The Places That Scare You*, Chodron writes:

“When we practice generating compassion, we can expect to experience our fear of pain. Compassion practice is daring. It involves learning to relax and allow ourselves to move gently toward what scares us. ... In cultivating compassion we draw from the wholeness of our experience - our suffering, our empathy, as well as our cruelty and terror. It has to be this way. Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion is real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

There are many debates about the differences between compassion, empathy, and sympathy. Relying on my data, this is what I've come to believe.

Compassion: Recognizing the light and dark in our shared humanity, we commit to practicing loving-kindness with ourselves and others in the face of suffering.

Empathy: The most powerful tool of compassion, empathy is an emotional skill that allows us to respond to others in a meaningful, caring way. Empathy is the ability to understand what someone is experiencing and to reflect back that understanding. It's important to note here that empathy is understanding what someone is feeling, not feeling it for them. If someone is feeling lonely, empathy doesn't require us to feel lonely too, only to reach back into our own experience with loneliness so we can understand and connect. We can fake empathy, but when we do, it's not healing or connecting. The prerequisite for real empathy is compassion. We can only respond empathically if we are willing to be present to someone's pain. Empathy is the antidote to shame and it is at the heart of connection.

Sympathy: Rather than being a tool for connection, sympathy emerged in the data as a form of disconnection. Sympathy is removed: When someone says, 'I feel sorry for you' or 'That must be terrible,' they are standing at a safe distance. Rather than conveying the powerful 'me too' of empathy, it communicates 'not me,' and then adds 'But I do feel for you.' Sympathy is more likely to be a shame trigger than something that heals shame.

The Revolution:

The broken-hearted are indeed the bravest among us - they dared to love, and they dared to forgive. C.S. Lewis captured this so beautifully in one of my favorite quotes of all time:

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

Chapter Eight: Easy Mark - Rumbling with Need, Connection, Judgment, Self-worth, Privilege, and Asking for Help

Connection doesn't exist without giving and receiving. We need to give and we need to need.

As a researcher who has spent years studying the power of connection, I should understand better than anyone the human need to be seen. Yet, I look away. My curiosity showed up, as it often does, in a prayer. Specifically, I prayed for help in understanding why I turn away so predictably. Rather than a single moment of insight, I experienced a collection of holy and unholy moments that would eventually bring me face-to-face with one of my greatest fears and, in the process, teach me exactly what Saint Teresa of Avila meant when she said, "There are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers."

- Maybe I could look people in the eye if I didn't feel so much shame about not helping.
- Maybe I wasn't looking folks in the eye because I'm uncomfortable with my own privilege. I've learned enough about privilege to know that we are at our most dangerous when we think we've learned everything we need to know about it. That's when you stop paying attention to injustice. And make no mistake, not paying attention because you're not the one being harassed or fired or pulled over or underpaid is the definition of privilege.
- [Maybe] I was so afraid of my own need that I couldn't look need in the eye. In Harriet Lerner's book *The Dance of Connection*, she explains that we all have patterned ways of managing anxiety - some of us over-function and others under-function. Over-functioners tend to move quickly to advise, rescue, take over, micromanage, and basically get in other people's business rather than looking inward. Under-functioners tend to get less competent under stress. They invite others to take over and often become the focus of worry or concern. On the outside, over-functioners appear to be tough and in control, and under-functioners can seem irresponsible and fragile. Many of these behaviors are learned and line up with the role we play in our families. It's not uncommon for firstborns to be over-functioners, as is certainly the case with me.

The Reckoning:

My facedown moment was hearing Father Murray articulate so powerfully how the choice to see someone fundamentally diminishes our shared humanity.

The Rumble:

After six months and three powerful experiences in which I had to confront my discomfort, I realized that the real reason I look away is not my fear of helping other, but my fear of needing help. My rumbles with shame, judgment, privilege, connection, need, fear, and self-worth taught me it wasn't the pain or the hurt that made me look away. It was my own need. When I look back at this rising strong example now, I think about how often we all try to solve problems by doing more of what's not working - just doing it harder, grinding it out longer. We'll do anything to avoid the lowest of the low - self-examination.

And, as it turns out, I'm not so sure I was great at giving. How can we be truly comfortable and generous in the face of someone's need when we're repelled by our own. Wholeheartedness is as much about receiving as it is about giving.

From a young age, I learned how to earn love, gold stars, and praise by being a helper. After a while, helping became less about gold stars and more about my identity. Helping was the most value I brought to a relationship. If I couldn't help or if I had to ask for help, what value did I bring?

The key learnings from this rumble totally changed this value system:

- When you judge yourself for needing help, you judge those you are helping. When you attach value to giving help, you attach value to needing help.
- The danger of tying your self-worth to being a helper is feeling shame when you have to ask for help.
- Offering help is courageous and compassionate, and so is asking for help.

The Revolution:

Giving help can occasionally feel vulnerable; asking for help always means risking vulnerability. This is critical to understand because we can't make it through the rising strong process without help and support.

How many times do we implore the people who work for us to ask for help when they need it? But experience shows that simply asking them to do this won't correlate strongly with how often that actually ask for help. We found a better correlation between the number of times we modeled what asking for help looks like and how comfortable folks are with asking for help. Both giving and receiving help must be part of the culture, and we as leaders need to model both if we are committed to innovation and growth.

In my book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, I define connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they can derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." In a culture of scarcity and perfectionism, asking for help can be shaming if we're not raised to understand how seeking help is human and foundational to connection.

The bottom line is that we need each other. Not one of us gets through life without expressing desperate, messy, and uncivilized need. The kind we are reminded of when we come face to face with someone who is in a deep struggle. Dependence starts when we're born and lasts until we die. But in the middle of our lives, we mistakenly fall prey to the myth that successful people are those who help rather than need, and broken people need rather than help. But the truth is that no amount of money, influence, resources, or determination will change our physical, emotional, and spiritual dependence on others.

Chapter Nine: Composting Failure - Rumbling with Fear, Shame, Perfectionism, Blame, Accountability, Trust, Failure, and Regret

Regret is a tough but fair teacher. To live without regret is to believe you have nothing to learn, no amends to make, and no opportunity to be braver with your life.

Sinkholes:

The real key is knowing yourself. You have to know where the quicksand is - everyone has their own sinkholes. In working with an advertising agency executive, he gave me his five most common ones:

1. Emotional blinders - I'm so emotionally invested in working with this client that I'm blind to the fact that our bid is too low for this work.
2. The loss leader - I'm convinced that a big discount on the project, even if we lose money, will lead to future work that will be more profitable and eventually offset this loss.
3. Uncharted territory - I'm going after business in a category I have no experience in. I don't know what I don't know.
4. Win at any cost - I'm addicted to the thrill of the win. Another variation: My self-worth is tied to how much business I bring in.
5. Defensive pricing - I have to protect my turf with an existing client by making it difficult for a competitor to match my price, even if we take a loss.

As I wrote these down, I couldn't help but notice their application to everyday life. I'd spent plenty of time in similar sinkholes, like getting sucked in emotionally, living in the future, thinking in the short term, wanting to win, and being defensive.

Rumbling with Shame and Perfection:

The difference between shame and guilt lies in the ways we talk to ourselves. Shame is a focus on self, while guilt is a focus on behavior. This is not just semantics. There's a huge difference between 'I screwed up' (guilt) and 'I'm a screw-up' (shame). The former is acceptance of our imperfect humanity. The latter is basically an indictment of our very existence.

It's always helpful to remember that when perfectionism is driving, shame is riding shotgun. Perfectionism is not healthy striving. It is not asking, How can I be my best self? Instead, it's asking, What will people think? For those of us who struggle with perfectionism, we might contemplate, I got sucked into proving I could, rather than stepping back and asking if I should - or if I really even wanted to.

Another one of shame's sidekicks is comparison. If our story includes shame, perfectionism, or comparison and we're left feeling isolated or "less than," we need to employ two completely counterintuitive strategies. We need to:

1. Talk to ourselves in the same way we'd talk to someone we love.
 - Yes, you made a mistake. You're human.
 - You don't have to do it like anyone else.
 - Fixing it and making amends will help. Self-loathing will not.
2. Reach out to someone we trust - a person who has earned the right to hear our story and who has the capacity to respond with empathy.

The second strategy is especially effective because shame can't survive being spoken. It thrives on secrecy, silence, and judgment. If we can share our experience of shame with someone who responds with empathy, shame can't survive.

Rumbling with Blame and Accountability:

In research terms, we think about blame as a form of anger used to discharge discomfort or pain. The shame-blame combo is so common because we're desperate to get out from underneath the pain of shame, and we see blame as a quick fix. For most of us who rely on blaming and finding fault, the need for control is so strong that we'd rather have something be our fault than succumb to the belief that 'stuff happens.' If stuff happens, how do I control that? Fault-finding fools us into believing that someone is always to blame, hence, controlling the outcome is possible. But blame is as corrosive as it is unproductive.

The difference between accountability and blame is very similar to the difference between guilt and shame. Guilt gets a bad rap, but the emotional discomfort of guilt can be a powerful and healthy motivator for change. Of course, feeling guilty about something over which we have no control or something that isn't our responsibility is not helpful, and more times than not it's what we think is guilt is really shame and the fear of not being enough.

Like guilt, accountability is often motivated by wanting to live in alignment with our values. Accountability is holding ourselves or someone else responsible for specific actions and their specific consequences. Blame, on the other hand, is simply a quick, broad-brush way to off-load anger, fear, shame, or discomfort. We think we'll feel better after pointing a finger at someone or something but nothing changes. Instead, blame kills relationships and organizational cultures. It's toxic. It's also a go-to reaction for many of us.

Accountability is a prerequisite for strong relationships and cultures. It requires authenticity, action, and the courage to apologize and make amends. Rumbling with accountability is a hard and time-consuming process. It also requires vulnerability. We have to own our feelings and reconcile our behaviors and choices with our values.

Rumbling with Trust:

Trust - in ourselves and in others - is often the first casualty in a fall, and stories of shattered trust can render us speechless with hurt or send us into a defensive silence. If I've learned anything in my research, it's that trust can't be hot-wired; it's grown in a process that takes place over the course of a relationship.

I was referred to Charles Feltman's *The Thin Book of Trust*. I found Feltman's definitions of trust and distrust to fit powerfully with my own findings. Feltman's describes trust as "choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable

to another person's actions," and he describes distrust as deciding that "what is important to me is not safe with this person in this situation (or any situation)."

In my research, seven elements of trust emerged as useful in both trusting others and ourselves. I came up with an acronym - BRAVING - for the elements. I love the BRAVING checklist because it reminds me that trusting myself or other people is a vulnerable and courageous process.

Boundaries - You respect my boundaries, and when you're not clear about what's okay and not okay, you ask. You're willing to say no.

Reliability - You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't overpromise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

Accountability - You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

Vault - You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

Integrity - You choose courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them.

Nonjudgment - I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment.

Generosity - You extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

Mistakes don't bankrupt trust in the way that violations of personal accountability, integrity, or, values can. Trust and mistakes can co-exist, and often do, as long as we make amends, stay aligned with our values, and confront shame and blame head on.

Rumbling with Failure:

Failure is a slippery word because we use it to describe a wide range of experiences - from risky efforts that didn't pan out or ideas that were never launched to painful, life-altering losses. Whatever the experience, failure feels like a lost opportunity, like something that can't be redone or undone. Regardless of the context or magnitude, failure brings with it the sense that we've lost some of our personal power.

Experiencing failure often leads to feeling powerless simply because we didn't achieve our purpose and/or effect the change we wanted to see. The connection between failure and powerlessness is important, because all of my years of research lead me to argue that we are most dangerous to ourselves and to the people around us when we feel powerless. Powerlessness leads to fear and desperation. Pervasive feelings of powerlessness eventually lead to despair. Despair is a spiritual condition. It's the belief that tomorrow will be just like today.

In my work, I've found that moving out of powerlessness, and even despair, requires hope. Hope is not an emotion; it's a cognitive process - a thought process made up of what researcher C.R. Snyder called the trilogy of "goals, pathways, and agencies." Hope happens when we can set goals and have the tenacity and perseverance to pursue those goals, and believe in our own abilities to act. Snyder also found that hope is learned. When boundaries, consistency, and support are in place, children learn it from their parents. But even if we didn't get it as kids, we can still learn hope as adults.

Hope is a function of struggle. If we're never allowed to fall or face adversity as children, we are denied the opportunity to develop the tenacity and sense of agency we need to be hopeful.

I've rumbled with failure and shame enough over the past decade to know this: You can do everything right and still fail. But if you can look back during your rumble and see that you didn't hold back - that you were all in - you will feel very different than someone who didn't fully show up. You may have to deal with the failure, but you won't have to wrestle with the same level of shame that we experience when our efforts are halfhearted.

And, in addition to assessing the level of our effort, our experience of failure is also shaped by how well we live out our values. When you're rumbling with failure and it's clear that the choices you made along the way were not in alignment with your values, you have to grapple not only with the fallout of failing but also with the feeling that you betrayed yourself.

Rumbling with Regret:

If there is one thing failure has taught me, it is the value of regret. Regret is one of the most powerful emotional reminders that change and growth are necessary. In fact, I've come to believe that regret is kind of a package deal: A function of empathy; it's a call to courage and a path toward wisdom. Like all emotions, regret can be used constructively or destructively; but the whole dismissal of regrets is wrongheaded and dangerous. No regrets doesn't mean living with courage, it means living without reflection. To live without regret is to believe you have nothing to learn, no amends to make, and no opportunity to be braver with your life.

I believe that what we regret most are our failures of courage, whether it's the courage to be kinder, to show up, to say how we feel, to set boundaries, to be good to ourselves. For this reason, regret can be the birthplace of empathy. When I think of the times when I wasn't being kind or generous - when I chose being liked over defending someone or something that deserved defending - I feel deep regret, but I've also learned something: Regret is what taught me that living outside of my values is not tenable for me. Regrets about not taking chances have made me braver, regrets about shaming or blaming people I care about have made me more thoughtful. Sometimes the most uncomfortable learning is the most powerful.

The Revolution:

Failure can become nourishment if we are willing to get curious, show up vulnerable and human, and put rising strong into practice.

Chapter Ten: You Got to Dance with Them that Brung You - Rumbling with Shame, Identity, Criticism, and Nostalgia

We can't be brave in the big world without at least one small space to work through fears and falls.

The Rumble:

To get to the delta and the key learnings, I have to rumble with shame, identity, criticism and nostalgia. One reason for this is the complexity of shame resilience. In my earlier books, I talk about the four elements of shame resilience that had emerged in my research. Men and women with high levels of shame resilience:

1. Understand shame and recognize what messages and expectations trigger shame for them.
2. Practice critical awareness by reality-checking the messages and expectations that tell us that being imperfect means being inadequate.
3. Reach out and share their stories with people they trust.
4. Speak shame – they use the word *shame*, they talk about how they're feeling, and they ask for what they need.

In the process of reality-checking the messages that fuel shame, we often have to dig into identity, labels, and stereotypes. We also have to explore whether the expectations are rooted, as they often are, in nostalgia or the perilous practice of comparing a current struggle with an edited version of "the way things used to be."

Integration is the soul of rising strong. We have to be whole to be wholehearted. To embrace and love who we are, we have to reclaim and reconnect with the parts of ourselves we've orphaned over the years. We have to call back home all of those parts of ourselves that we have abandoned. Carl Jung called this individuation.

In his book *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, Jungian analyst James Hollis writes, “Perhaps Jung’s most compelling contribution is the idea of *individuation*, that is, the lifelong project of becoming more nearly the whole person we were meant to be – what the gods intended, not the parents, or the tribe, or, especially, the easily intimidated or the inflated ego. While revering the mystery of others, our individuation summons each of us to stand in the presence of our own mystery, and become more fully responsible for who we are in this journey we call our life.”

Nostalgia sounds relatively harmless, even like something to indulge in with a modicum of comfort, until we examine the two Greek words that form *nostalgia*: *nostos*, meaning “returning home,” and *algos*, meaning “pain.” Romanticizing our history to relieve pain is seductive. But it’s also dangerous.

Over the past two decades, I’ve learned that what I really need is a Vulnerability Anonymous meeting – a gathering place for people who like to numb the feelings that come with not having control, swimming in uncertainty, or cringing from emotional exposure. When I wiped the nostalgia off my history to uncover the real trauma behind many of those family stories, I began to understand why we didn’t talk about emotions growing up. **Of all the things trauma takes away from us, the worst is our willingness, or even our ability, to be vulnerable. There’s a reclaiming that has to happen.**

We know that genetics load the gun and environment pulls the trigger. Stephanie Coontz, author of *The Way We Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, suggests that the best way to reality-check our nostalgic ideas is to uncover and examine the tradeoffs and contradictions that are often deeply buried in all of our memories. Coontz is careful to point out that the people who rumbled with their nostalgia didn’t feel shame or guilt about their good memories – instead, their digging made them more adaptable to change.

Nostalgia can be a dangerous distraction, and it can underpin a feeling of resignation or hopelessness after a fall. In the rising strong process, looking back is done in the service of moving forward with an integrated and whole heart.

Rumbling with Criticism:

All criticism is not created equal and certainly doesn’t have the same intention behind it. When I think about Aristotle, I picture a group of philosophers gathered in a grove of olive trees for discussions about knowledge and meaning. I think of criticism as reasoned, logical, and respectful challenges among men and women with a shared passion for expanding thought and discovering truth. Strictly emotional and personal arguments were seen as the antithesis of knowledge-building. Criticism was a social conversation between people who all risked owning and sharing their ideas for the sake of building knowledge. For criticism to be useful, you have to have some skin in the game.

Today when we think about criticism, we picture mean-spirited, hurtful personal jabs made by anonymous users on Twitter. Persona emotional attacks made by people not engaged in problem solving have zero value in building or creating anything – they’re only an attempt to tear down and invalidate what others are attempting to build, with no meaningful contribution to replace what has been destroyed. This pervasive type of criticism is why Roosevelt’s quote “It is not the critic who counts” resonates so strongly with people. For those of us trying to live in the arena – trying to show up and be seen when there’s no guaranteed outcome – cheap-seat criticism is dangerous. Here’s why:

1. It hurts. The really cruel things people say about us are painful. This is dangerous because after a few hits, we start playing smaller and smaller, making ourselves harder targets. We’re more difficult to hit when we’re small, but we’re also less likely to make a contribution.

2. It doesn't hurt. We stop caring or, at the very least, we start pretending we don't care. This is also dangerous. Not caring what people think is its own hustle. The armor we have to wear to make not caring a reality is heavy, uncomfortable, and quickly obsolete.
3. When cheap-seat criticism becomes the loudest, most prevalent type of criticism we encounter, it pushes out the idea that thoughtful criticism and feedback can be and often are useful. We stop teaching people how to offer constructive, helpful feedback and critiques, and, in order to save ourselves, we shut down all incoming data. We start to exist in echo chambers where nothing we do or say is challenged. This is also dangerous.

When we stop caring what people think, we lose our capacity for connection. But when we are defined by what people think, we lose the courage to be vulnerable. The solution is getting clear on the people whose opinions really matter.

The Revolution:

Our histories are never all good or all bad, and running from the past is the surest way to be defined by it. That's when it owns us. The key is bringing light to the darkness – developing awareness and understanding.

And just because we know and understand something in our heads doesn't mean that we won't slip up when we're overwhelmed by emotion. I can't tell you how many times I have stood on a stage and said, "While it's hard to look at the areas in our lives where we feel shame, it's often much more painful to acknowledge that we've all used shame and caused others significant pain." Yet it took experiences and my work with my therapist to fully understand how dangerous I can be when I'm backed into a corner.

Some of us, when backed into emotional corners, put our hands over our faces and slide down the wall onto the floor. We just want to hide. Some of us try to people-please our way out of that corner. Some of us come out swinging. What is important is to know who we are and how we tend to respond in these situations.

I'm slowly learning how to straddle the tension that comes with understanding that I am tough and tender, brave and afraid, strong and struggling – all of these things, all the time. I'm working on letting go of having to be one or the other and embracing the wholeness of wholeheartedness.

On the complexity of our many diverse and sometimes contradictory parts, Walt Whitman wrote, "I am large ... I contain multitudes." On the importance of understanding ourselves, Carl Jung wrote, "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes." On the importance of understanding your past, loving yourself, and owning your shit so you can move forward in life, my dad wisely says, "You got to dance with them that brung you."

Chapter Eleven: The Revolution

There is no greater threat to the critics and cynics and fearmongers than those of us who are willing to fall because we have learned how to rise.

I don't use the term revolution lightly. I've learned a lot about the difference between incremental, evolutionary change and thundering, revolutionary upheaval from community and organization leaders who often differentiate between these two types of change. What's become clear to me in the research captured in this book is that the rising strong process can lead to deep, tumultuous, groundbreaking, no-turning-back transformation. The process may be a series of

incremental changes, but when the process becomes a practice – a way of engaging in the world – there’s no doubt that it ignites revolutionary change. It changes us and it changes the people around us.

Let the Revolution Begin: When Process Becomes Practice

All revolutions start with a new version of what’s possible. Our vision is that we can rise from our experiences of hurt and struggle in a way that allows us to live more wholehearted lives. However, transforming the way we live, love, parent, and work requires us to act on our vision: The rising strong *process* is nowhere near as powerful as the rising strong *practice*. The revolution starts when we own and embody what lives at the heart of rising strong – the story rumble – in our everyday lives.

The Story Rumble at Work:

We’ve found these questions are helpful in an organizational setting:

1. How do we engage in this process with an open heart and an open mind?
2. What emotions are people experiencing?
3. How do we listen with empathy?
4. What do we need to get curious about?
5. What are the stories that people are making up?
6. What do our first drafts tell us about our relationships? About our communication? About leadership? About the culture? About what’s working and what’s not working?
7. Where do we need to rumble? What lines of inquiry do we need to open to better understand what’s really happening and to reality-check our conspiracies and confabulations?
8. What’s the delta between those first drafts and the new information we’re gathering in the rumble?
9. What are the key learnings?
10. How do we act on the key learnings?
11. How do we integrate these key learnings into the culture and leverage them as we work on new strategies?

At The Daring Way – the company I lead – the story rumble is central to the culture. These are the guiding principles for our organization, summarized in what we call the 5Rs.

- **Respect** for self, for others, for story, for the process
- **Rumble** on ideas, on strategies, on decisions, on creativity, on falls, on conflicts, on misunderstandings, on disappointments, on hurt feelings, on failures
- **Rally** together to own our decisions, own our successes, own our falls, own and integrate our key learnings into our cultures and strategies, and practice gratitude
- **Recover** with family, friends, rest, and play
- **Reach out** to each other and the community with empathy, compassion, and love

Our willingness and ability to rumble during big conflicts have kept us from cratering during crisis moments that are extremely scary for all new and growing businesses – those moments that cause you to question if the endeavor is even worth it. But just as important, our rumbling skills have allowed us to keep our focus and ‘stay clear’ with one another.

The Story Rumble at Home:

As you can imagine after reading this book, Steve and I rumble all the time. Even with as much as I understand about the power of emotion and as many years as we’ve been together, I’m still surprised by how many of our arguments are

intensified by the fabrications we tell ourselves. What starts as a small disagreement about an unimportant issue becomes a fight over wrongly assigned intentions and hurt feelings.

The story rumble also permeates our family culture. We're doing our best to model and teach our children the rising strong process and help them to integrate it as a practice in their lives. When we ask our kids about their conspiracies and confabulations, it opens a discussion that otherwise we might not have.

There's another important parenting takeaway from this research. As we've discovered, we're wired for story and in the absence of data we will rely on conspiracies and confabulations. When our children sense something is wrong they quickly jump to fill in the missing pieces of the story. And because our well-being is directly tied to their sense of safety, fear sets in and often dictates the story. It's important that we give them as much information as is appropriate for their developmental and emotional capacity, and that we provide a safe place for them to ask questions. Emotions are contagious and when we're stressed or anxious or afraid, our children can be quickly engulfed in the same emotions. More information means less fear-based story-making.

The Story Rumble in Our Communities:

So much of who I am and what I believe was forged in my bones by what I have experienced in the classroom. And although classrooms are a specific kind of community, the conversations we have mirror the exact conflicts that can unravel all communities – differences, fears, competing priorities, and conflicts of perspectives. It doesn't matter if your community is a parent-teacher organization or a Boy Scout troop or a neighborhood coalition, using our ability to navigate uncomfortable conversations, our own emotions, and rumble with our stories is how we build connection.

I chose to use my social work classroom as a living example of a community story rumble because there is so much pain and trauma surrounding these same issues in our country and across the globe. Racism, sexism, homophobia, classism – they're all real and pervasive. Unraveling stereotypes requires the reckoning and the rumble – we have to acknowledge that emotion is at play, get curious, and rumble. What kind of revolution will change this reality? A revolution fueled by thousands of conversations like the ones my amazing, brave students have every semester. Each of the stories we tell and hear is like a small flicker of light – when we have enough of them, we will set the world on fire. But I don't think we can do it without story. It doesn't matter what community is in question or what the conflict appears to be on the surface, resolution and change will require people to own, share, and rumble with stories.

Every part of the rising strong process points to these questions:

- *Can we lean into the vulnerability of emotion and stand in our truth?*
- *Are we willing to lean into the initial discomfort of curiosity and creativity so we can be braver in our lives?*
- *Do we have the courage to rumble with our story?*

Imagine if people gathered to talk about the real issues that fuel disconnection and asked the eleven rising strong questions. What if we were willing to acknowledge our own hurt and pain, and in doing so made sure not to diminish the hurt and pain of others? We could rise strong together.

Manifesto of the Brave and Brokenhearted

*There is no greater threat to the critics and cynics and fearmongers
Than those of us who are willing to fall
Because we have learned how to rise*

*With skinned knees and bruised hearts;
We choose owning our stories of struggle,
Over hiding, over hustling, over pretending.*

*When we deny our stories, they define us.
When we run from struggle, we are never free.
So we turn toward truth and look it in the eye.*

*We will not be characters in our stories.
Not villains, not victims, not even heroes.*

*We are the authors of our lives.
We write our own daring endings.*

*We craft love from heartbreak,
Compassion from shame,
Grace from disappointment,
Courage from failure.*

*Showing up is our power.
Story is our way home.
Truth is our song.
We are the brave and the brokenhearted.
We are rising strong.*