

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #46

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi & Jenny Bruso

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** You are listening to episode number 46 of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. My guest today is Jenny Bruso. She is the queer, plus-size founder of the inclusive Unlikely Hikers community, which aims to change the narrative of who is getting outdoors. Jenny and I discussed the many ways in which nature can inspire and ground us, different kinds of barriers that people may face when trying to enjoy the outdoors, and how to reap the benefits of nature, even if you don't want to do activities like hiking or camping. To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/46](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/46). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/46](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/46).

This episode is part of the Health & Wellness Changemakers series, sponsored by Superfit Hero. The series runs from episode number 37 to episode number 48 if you want to catch them all. The goal of this series is to highlight people making waves in the health and wellness industry and taking it in a new direction. I am so grateful to be collaborating with the body-positive brand, Superfit Hero to introduce you to these changemakers.

Superfit Hero is an inclusive activewear brand with sizes that range from XS to 5XL, and their goal is to provide clothing for ultimate confidence, no matter your size or sport. All of their clothing is also ethically made in Los Angeles, California. To get 15% off your first order, you can use the special series discount code, which is CHANGEMAKER, when you check out at [www.superfithero.com](http://www.superfithero.com). And stay tuned for the Superfit Hero Wellness Tip of the Week later in this episode.

Now let's go chat about the great outdoors with Jenny.

[Music plays]

Hey y'all! Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. I'm a certified intuitive eating counselor and a certified personal trainer. I help people improve their relationships with exercise, food, and their bodies so they can ditch diet culture for good and do what feels right for them.

Through this podcast I want to give you the tools to redefine what health and wellness mean to you by exposing myths and misconceptions, delving into all the areas of health that often get ignored, and reminding you that

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health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

Hi Jenny, thank you so much for coming on the podcast today.

**Jenny Bruso:** Hi, thank you for having me.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely. I'm really excited to talk to you about all things The Great Outdoors today, especially because with everyone in quarantine, I know our hearts are pining to get back out there.

**Jenny:** Absolutely! The longing is real.

**Shohreh:** So, let's just start by having you tell me a little bit of your story. Who you are, how you came to do the work you're doing.

**Jenny:** Yeah, well, I am a late bloomer to the outdoors. And when I say the "outdoors," I mean, you know, camping, and hiking, and all of that stuff.

I grew up going outside, and playing in the ocean,—I grew up in San Diego—and riding skateboards and bikes and things like that, but we didn't grow up going camping and doing that kind of stuff. So I'm pretty late to it. I'm 38 years old.

So I started doing it when I was 30, and it was such a revelation what happened to me when I was out on the trail. Just being in nature, being immersed. Not looking at my phone every five seconds and just that feeling of disconnection to the busyness of daily life, but also connection to what has always been—the natural world. And it had a profound effect on my mental health, and I was moving my body in a new way that brought a lot of healing and clarity to me about the joy of movement in a way that I hadn't experienced before.

So I started blogging about it. And I didn't have any friends who were doing outdoorsy stuff, and I really wanted to connect with other people and also share all of the beautiful photos I was taking. And I started my blog, [jennybruso.com](http://jennybruso.com), and just writing about my outdoor life as a queer, fat, outdoorsperson who was trying to figure out what all of that means. And also realizing that outdoor culture has a ton of blind spots about who is outdoorsy, and who's getting outside, and what that looks like.

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We tend to see a very narrow image of who is outdoorsy. They're usually a young, white, cis, athletic sort of person, climbing a mountain. We're not seeing the everyday person who is trying to get their outdoor healing in, like, a local park or whatever. I was feeling a void for not having that kind of representation. Not necessarily just wanting to see other plus-sized outdoorspeople like myself, and queer people, but also wanting to see everybody who is left out of this very narrow narrative.

And I was following all of these outdoor accounts, and I was feeling every day more and more agitated by this accepted sort of way of doing things. And I was just wondering why people were not questioning more and more why we were only seeing the same image of an outdoors person over and over. So I wanted to change that, and I started Unlikely Hikers on Instagram about four years ago. And really, at the time, it was just to change my Instagram feed. I wanted to see more representation, and I was like, okay, well, I need to create that.

And of course in doing this process I found a lot of other groups that were doing similar things, and I wasn't like the only person or I'm not the person who started this. But I started finding that community that I was really looking for. And Unlikely Hikers evolved very quickly.

In just four years it's become a hiking group. I lead hikes in Portland, Oregon and also all over the country. Once a month I travel somewhere and lead a hike, of course I'm not doing that right now. And it's also, in the last month [laughs], become a podcast. So it's a bit of a community hub for the underrepresented outdoorsperson.

**Shohreh:**

Yeah, it's such a beautiful account. I probably found it, I don't know, one or two years ago now, and just scrolling through it, it's amazing because it really does hit home for you what the "likely" hiker story is and what we're not seeing so often on social media, in advertisements, and all these other things. And I want to talk a little bit more about what you were saying about the benefits that you found in nature, because I think people generally know, they're like, okay, yeah, like nature, it's good for you to get out there, the sun, whatever. But there's such a wide variety of potential benefits that anyone can get from it. So I'd love to talk a little bit more about that too.

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**Jenny:**

Yes, definitely. And one thing I do wanna say real quick is that the name Unlikely Hikers is definitely tongue in cheek. It's not literal. It's not meant to reinforce any sort of exclusion. It's a reclamation against this narrative that I speak of. And so, there's power in claiming an Unlikely Hiker identity, if you want to.

As far as the benefits that I experience going outside, not growing up with camping, and hiking, and things like that, I didn't know what I was missing. So it didn't even occur to me to try those things. And, of course, not seeing myself represented in that kind of media, even living in Portland, Oregon, where people are so outdoorsy, it didn't even occur to me to go and give these things a try until somebody took me out hiking and taking me to outdoor activities and whatnot.

And as a person who struggles with depression, and anxiety, and being a fat person. We have this ever-shrinking world. Things are literally becoming smaller—seats in public, airplane seats, seatbelts, of course, and aisles in grocery stores. And a lot of things that I think a lot of straight-size people don't think about. In the outdoors I feel space; I feel room to move around, to be fully embodied, to not feel like I'm in the way. Of course occasionally another hiker or trail runner does like to remind me of my place in things, but that's their problem. And I get to gloriously be my entire self on the trail in a way that I feel like I don't get to do in daily life.

I feel like in daily life I'm so aware of my body that I'm moving around, making myself smaller, trying to make my body as small as it can be to not take up too much space. And sometimes I'm feeling more empowered than other times, but yeah, I definitely catch myself sometimes just trying to keep my head down, and move through things, and get through the world in a way that is kind of heartbreaking and not good for my soul. So I can go out into nature and heal that.

And aside from just being able to feel fully embodied, exercise in general has just always been a very tricky thing to me. And something that as a young, queer feminist, I think I decided [laughs] to just rebel against. And not that I wasn't getting exercise, I was. And also I want to be clear that exercise doesn't necessarily inform my body size either, or at that time.

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But exercise was just so, is so fraught with diet culture and body standards that are oppressive.

And when I started hiking and finding this joyful movement, this way in which, I felt like I was learning how my body worked in a way that I did not know before. Like just the feeling of my lungs completely expanding, and feeling myself get stronger, and just the meditateness of that kind of movement in nature is something that has just been so beneficial to me. And I, of course, want to share that with as many people as possible.

**Shohreh:**

That's such a good point that you made too, because it's so common for marginalized folks to have experienced all kinds of little and big traumas throughout their life, just trying to go through the world. And what I've seen that create is often this separation between mind and body where you're up in your head because you're just trying to get through the world and you wanna protect yourself. And so you don't wanna have to think about your body, like you said, or you're trying to shrink it.

And there's something about nature—and not that you can't get this in a gym and through other kinds of exercise, because I think you can—but I think being outside is probably the most accessible form of having that feeling of embodiment and grounding because there's something about just being in these spaces, hearing these sounds, feeling the ground under your feet, that just gets you in your body really quickly.

**Jenny:**

It's so true. And yeah, you brought up something really true that I think about all of the time. When I'm in nature I feel like I am connected to the fact that I *am* nature, that I am of nature. And a lot of times when I'm hiking, especially when I'm at a moment when a particularly tough part of the trail, I do often imagine myself kind of, like I'm rooting myself. Like as I'm stepping I'm imagining that I'm putting roots into the earth, and it really does give me a lot of power and feeling of connectedness that I definitely do not feel when I'm going through the minutiae of daily life.

You know, I don't feel, and I think a lot of us feel this way, but I don't feel very connected to daily life. A lot of the ways that we connect now are really counterintuitive. Like the ways that we do via social media. Even though I know that there's a ton of benefits to the ways we connect on

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social media too, like for a lot of people we find community for the first time in ways that we maybe can't in the towns that we're from. Or maybe we have identities that the mainstream is just so unaware of that it's really hard to find our people and that we can get that from social media.

But, also, there's some negative effects to it too, and in nature I feel a little more connected to what has always been. Some would call it the universe or like a higher power. And I feel like I actually see my place in things, whereas in daily life I don't.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, for sure, because as you're saying, what you are connecting to out in the world, what comes up for me too is what you're disconnecting from. So the phone, for sure, of course we're all out there taking our awesome waterfall photos, videos, and stuff like that -

**Jenny:** Oh, I'm taking pictures—trust.

**Shohreh:** Oh yeah [laughs], you gotta! But you know, most people, especially if you're doing hikes and things like that, you don't have your face glued to your phone 'cause you're gonna trip and fall on your ass! [Laughs]

**Jenny:** I will fall definitely, yes. [Laughter]

**Shohreh:** You gotta put that away and only take it out when you're at a nice stopping point. So that's one thing you're disconnected from. The other thing too, is you're not surrounded by mirrors, reflective surfaces, things that you often would see in fitness spaces. And so it's much easier not to get caught up in like, oh, there's my cellulite, there's my roll, or anything like that because you can't see it, right?

**Jenny:** Right.

**Shohreh:** It's not top of mind as much. And so I think from a body image healing perspective, it can be really beautiful in that way too.

**Jenny:** Definitely, and you know, you brought up earlier about how you *can* get that kind of embodiment and connection in other movement spaces. And it's true, it's like the outdoors is a little more of an equalizer. And if you are working out in gyms and whatnot, like, there are a lot of really great gyms to join, but I think there is still a lot of like mental hurdle to knowing

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everything you've ever been taught about fitness culture, entering a space like that, and learning how to actually find that embodiment, that is so powerful and amazing. I hope someday [laughs] I can develop a thick enough skin to be able to do that.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely! And I think, of course, one thing that helps is we're starting to get more inclusive gym spaces, inclusive coaches, and things like that. So if you're lucky enough to have one who you can work with, I think the process is much easier than, you know, walking into a standard commercial gym that's just filled with diet culture nonsense.

**Jenny:** Absolutely. And I have been in those spaces, and they're so precious. So I know they exist, I wish everybody could have access to that, and I think, and like you said, it's becoming more and more common. So I know that I, as a teenager, a young adult, I tortured myself in the gym, trying to be some other type of way and change my body, and it was never about the benefits of how exercise helps me sleep better, or helps me think better, or makes me actually feel in my body. It was purely a place to sort of like punish and torture myself. It's a very deeply ingrained association with the gym [laughs] you know?

**Shohreh:** Yeah.

**Jenny:** So yeah, I am working on growing out of that. And, of course, living in Portland, Oregon, there are a lot of those small, body-liberated gym spaces, and I'm definitely checking them out [laughs]. It's awesome.

**Shohreh:** Yeah. So we've talked about how there are many different folks who are being left out of the narrative around the outdoors. But in addition to just being left out of the narrative, this is also translating to real barriers that I'm sure you and the Unlikely Hikers crew have found when you are trying to get into the outdoors. So I'd like to talk about what some of those barriers are.

**Jenny:** Yes, well, there are a lot of barriers to access. I mean even living in Portland, Oregon, access is pretty easy because we have actual forest parks here in the city, so even with public transportation you can go out and get on a trail and get that kind of nature escape, but it's not like that most places. And, you know, having the privilege of being able to lead

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hikes in other parts of the country, I am so aware of how different it is compared to, most places are to Portland where we can so simply get on a bus and go to a trail or whatever, or take a Lyft [laughs]. But yeah, in many other parts of the country, in probably most parts of the country that's not possible.

And there's also some really obvious things that I think a lot of people don't think about too, is just that it takes transportation to get to a trail. You know, you have to have a car, a reliable car, and outdoor gear, you know, if you want to get, outfit yourself, not that you have to get every last thing to feel good on a trail, but you do wanna have good footwear and things like that. Outdoor gear and outfitting is really expensive. So there are a number of financial barriers and things like that.

And just literal access barriers, but there's also, of course, the reality that when you are of marginalized identities and you're going into a place that is, and this could be any place, but any place that largely contains people with the most social privilege—so people who are white, and cis, and maybe have a sense of entitlement to the places that they're in, like the outdoors is a perfect example—it creates an inherently hostile environment. You have to kind of watch your back if you're a person who doesn't quite fit into that narrative. You have to be kind of on guard.

Or worse, you just don't go into places like that because the variables are too much to fathom. And, of course, for the most people, and of course it's tricky for me saying this as like a white cis person, but for the most people who are going to go hiking are not going to have a bad experience, but still the unknown, and just the cultural attitudes about who is outdoorsy and who does not, do, of course, create a barrier.

And I've experienced this where I've been on the trail, and this happened many times actually, where someone has just seemed totally unbelieving of why I'm there and questioning why I would be doing what I'm doing. Or there's assumption that I don't know where I am, that I don't know where I'm going, and people will very freely give me directions. And even on trails that I've done literally dozens of times.

**Shohreh:**

They just assume you're lost out in the woods by yourself.

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**Jenny:** Yeah, just like wandering around, like how'd I get here? [Laughs] No, it happens all of the time, and when I am alone in those situations, I have to really think about how I'm going to respond. Of course, for me, my first thought is rage; I hate you. [laughs]

**Shohreh:** Fair.

**Jenny:** Yeah, exactly, but it's like, I can't actually espouse anything like that, and not that I necessarily would, but I have to question my safety. Like, if I tell this person who is making all of these assumptions about me that they, you know, let's be real, *he* is doing is unfair, or if I assert my knowledge in any kind of way, it can be bizarrely seen as a disrespect. And people can get even more agitated about, I don't know, being called in in a moment or whatever.

So a lot of times I just nod and carry on and don't respond. Or I'm just like, "Alright, thanks!" and just keep going, but don't really engage. And it's pretty terrible that there has to be a fear of engaging or like a fear of asserting your own power and knowledge. And I've been on the trail so many times where someone has asked me for directions to something, and then somebody nearby, usually a man, will just speak up and answer the question that was asked to me. And it's just so uncomfortable.

So those are times where it's like, I'm very much reminded that I am not the person that [laughs] people expect to see on the trail. But I think that a lot of people with the efforts of Unlikely Hikers and with so many groups, I do see this changing a little bit.

**Shohreh:** And I think what's so great about groups like Unlikely Hikers too is it is providing a bit of a safety in numbers aspect, right? When you are all going out on the trail and there's a group of you, it is less likely that someone is gonna assume you're lost, you don't know what you're doing, why are you here. Or if they are, they're more likely to at least keep it to them fucking selves instead of saying it out loud to you.

**Jenny:** Yes. When I am with my group, I don't feel that I have to measure what I say and how I react to things. When I'm with my group, I always speak up, because we do sometimes tend to be a little bit of a larger group. I'm working on making our group smaller, for so many reasons, but sometimes

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people are annoyed, immediately, by seeing a bigger group and by seeing all of these “unlikely hikers” or whatever.

And they’re just like; people will ask us, “What are you doing here?” It’s like; we’re hiking [laughter] -

**Shohreh:** Same thing you’re doing.

**Jenny:** We’re doing the exact same thing you’re doing, [laughs] but people just are impatient. And will even make comments that are unkind. And so I do speak up in those situations, and I kind of love it because I get to let go of some of that built up agitation from those other times that I’m alone and feel less safe to do so.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and that’s such a common hiking thing that I see in general too, is sometimes there are bottlenecks, and you get stuck somewhere, and it doesn’t matter who you are, I know it’s way worse, especially if you have any kind of marginalized identity of how people are going to treat you, but even, for me, who fits into a lot of the more typical what you’d expect on a trail person, if I get stuck in a bottleneck and someone is behind me, you start hearing the, [grunting exasperated sounds].

**Jenny:** Yes!

**Shohreh:** Sounds of people just so frustrated. I’m like, I cannot move, there’s a ledge to my right, what would you like me to do in this situation [laughs].

**Jenny:** It’s so true. There’s often a safety element, and I’m always so surprised by that too because it’s like, aren’t we all doing the same thing? Aren’t we all out here trying to get the nature healing that... It always surprises me the way that some people think that their experience is more important than somebody else’s. And of course that could be said for so many parts of life, but yeah, we’re all out there. There should already be this sort of inherent connection between us because we understand the importance of having these experiences. But I experience it all of the time.

**Shohreh:** Yeah it’s so frustrating. Something else that I was thinking about too when we were talking about barriers is, of course, the barriers to access to trails for disabled folx too. And there’s an Instagram account, it’s @dietitiananna,

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and she had a hashtag that she was having people to use for a while, which was #inaccessibleviews, in places where it might be difficult to get to with a wheelchair or another assistive device, just to bring more awareness to the fact that there's a lot of spaces where that is the case.

**Jenny:**

Yeah, well, and there's also a lot of outdoors folk who think that creating more accessible trails disturbs their idea of pristine wilderness, which as we should understand by now, is not real. It's definitely sort of a white colonizer view of the outdoors that there's these places that only a select few can enter and that we need to leave things untouched. But it's like, we also created national parks, which very much have affected all of these landscapes, and national parks, of course, have displaced so many native folk from their lands. The just pristine wilderness doesn't really exist from the perspective of like a white settler.

And I know that there's a lot of layers to that, but no one is saying that all trails should be paved or whatever. But we do need more paved trails. We do need more accessible trails. People with movement disabilities should not have to wonder if they can go to, say, one of the most popular outdoor spaces, like a national park, for example, and worry about whether or not they're gonna be able to see anything or be able to have the same experiences as other people.

And there should just already be, for these kinds of places especially, but even in our local parks and whatnot, there should be options for all bodies and all needs. And that doesn't mean that every trail has to be the same. And I think that a lot of able-bodied people just feel offended that they even have to think about how to make the outdoors more inclusive to folk who have disabilities.

**Shohreh:**

Right, which is ridiculous, because you're thinking about some of these parks that have hundreds of trails, giant spaces, thousands of acres, and it's like, if you don't have a single trail option that is accessible to a wider group of people, that is a you problem. You need to fix that.

**Jenny:**

Yes, absolutely, and, you know, a lot of the times these accessible trails are just in like lunch areas or picnic areas and you just don't get to go as deeply into the park.

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One park I can think of that is doing a really good job, of course there's a lot of improvements that still need to be made, but Mount Rainier National Park has a lot of accessible trails that are in the middle of some of the most popular viewpoints. Like, you can go do these trails, and you can have those amazing glacial views, and be in wildflower meadows, and see things that generally are only accessible to people who can literally climb mountains, which a lot of us cannot.

That's a place that I can think of that's doing a really good job. They definitely have some parking issues. It's like, if you are a disabled person and you still have to park like many hundreds of feet away from the trailhead that presents another barrier, but they actually have done a really good job creating those sorts of accessible trails in ways that I haven't seen in a lot of places.

But what I would love to just see, that we could get to a place where a lot of our beautiful outdoor spaces, people don't have to wonder if they're going to be accessible to them or not. People with disabilities are not asking for anything but more access, and I think that able-bodied people don't get to decide whether or not that's important.

**Shohreh:** And I think in general with all of these barriers that we've talked about, like if you are someone who isn't affected by these barriers, it's important for you to keep these things in mind and think about how you feel in the outdoors. And don't you think that everybody should be able to experience that, and get those benefits, and enjoy that, and have those wonderful feelings that you have? And if you don't think that everybody should be able to enjoy that, then you need to take time and unpack that shit, because it's messed up! [Laughs]

**Jenny:** Yes. That's the problem right there, you know?

**Shohreh:** Yeah.

[Music plays]

Welcome to our Superfit Hero Wellness Tip of the Week featuring trainers and coaches from Superfit Hero's Body Positive Fitness Finder. Let's listen to what wisdom is being shared with us today.

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**Kim Gould:**

Hi! My name is Kim Gould, and I'm a therapist, barre instructor, certified personal trainer, and founder of Autonomy Movement. It's incredibly common in our society—thank you diet culture—that we pressured ourselves to create structure around exercise or feel like we're not working out "right" if we don't follow a specific, oftentimes rigid workout routine. I've found that this can lead to more burnout, self-criticism, and exhaustion than actual inspiration, pleasure, or joy around movement.

To folks listening, the best advice that I have to avoid feeling discouraged is to find ways of moving that are fun, flexible, and dynamic. Play with different types of movement like dance, jogging, spinning, weightlifting, Pilates, walking your dog—you name it, you try it. And then allow yourself to not necessarily need to define yourself with just one type of exercise or put a label on how often or how long you need to do that during the week.

Our bodies crave all sorts of movement, and the more that we can nourish them with variety in type, frequency, length of time, the more that we'll actually want to move as opposed to feeling like we have to.

**Shohreh:**

I hope you enjoyed this week's wellness tip. You can find out more information about the dozens of amazing trainers and coaches included in Superfit Hero's Body Positive Fitness Finder at [www.superfithero.com](http://www.superfithero.com). And don't forget to use the series code CHANGEMAKER for 15% off your first purchase. And now, let's get back to the show.

So I want to go back a little bit to what you were saying about colonization too, because for me, for amazing as the outdoors is, I know I also do feel a certain sadness in these grand, breathtaking spaces knowing one, how colonization led to all of this land being stolen from indigenous people, particularly here in the United States, and then also thinking about the effects of climate change on our world. And these are big issues, of course, but I'm wondering if you have recommendations for people, for just how they can partake in the great outdoors and still honor these other truths too?

**Jenny:**

Absolutely. Well, wherever we are in the U.S., we are on stolen land. Despite what our history might try to tell us, treaties and things like that were signed, because people had to do what they could to ultimately save

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their people. And yeah, a lot of our national parks and most beautiful landscapes are in places where indigenous people have been displaced. And it's something that we really need to be thinking about as we engage with the outdoors; we need to be thinking about who the land belongs to, who are the stewards of the land, present and past. We do tend to talk about indigenous people in a historical sense and not in a present day tense, and I think that's because of the way that we were taught in school about "this happened and then everything was okay."

For me it's very important to know whose land I'm on, and also, to not just know whose land I'm on, but also educate myself about the people. So what I do is wherever I go, even on my trails around Portland, because in Oregon we have the ninth highest indigenous population, I think, in the country. So there are so many tribes here, there's so much native history, and it's really important for me to educate myself on that and understand that. So I always look up the stewards of the land that I'm on, and I will use what a lot of people use, which is the Native Land app.

And then I do further research from there. And I always try to find out what the indigenous peoples that come up, what they actually call themselves, because a lot of times what we know of certain tribes' names is actually like the colonizer name for them. So I always try to find out their actual name, how to say the name. And I always, of course, share this in my posts on Unlikely Hikers and on my personal account.

And just having that understanding of the land and who it belongs to, and also just doing my very best to conduct myself as a grateful guest. It's flawed thinking, of course, but I try to keep in mind that while I have to fight for the land, I am not entitled to the land. And I give a talk that's very much like this at the beginning of all of our group hikes too. And just the conducting ourselves like grateful guests, doing our research, acknowledging the people that the land belongs to, and also centering indigenous voices in all conversations about the environment, and conservation, and access.

I think Indigenous Women Hike on Instagram posted something the other day about, it was very tongue in cheek, but also right on, about something like how does it feel to not have access to all of these beautiful places

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right now, of course in the COVID-19 pandemic. And there's so many white Americans who are feeling like their freedom is being taken away, [laughs] and that this isn't about a virus and the betterment of all humans. But there's this attitude that with all of our parks and trails closing that somehow they are being oppressed. And obviously that's just very flawed, incorrect thinking, but it is a good time to be thinking about any of our white people, but everyone's entitlement ideas about the land.

Also, our parks and forest services, there's a big push to talk about shared stewardship and that to protect our lands or the lands belong to us, there's a lot of this owning narrative or whatever. It does sort of come from like a colonized view of the land, like, that we are entitled to it, that it belongs to us, even though it was taken from indigenous people.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and I'll for sure find that post and link to it in the show notes as well so people can check that out.

**Jenny:** It's really good, yes.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, that sounds like a really good one. And I love that you have that conversation at the beginning of all your hikes with Unlikely Hikers, because I do feel like that really sets the tone for where you are and what you're about to do. And I just like what you suggested because those are things that anybody going into the outdoors can do very easily to just understand where they are a little better, make sure they're taking care of the land, you know, the usual, like if you bring it with you, make sure you bring it back out, all that kind of stuff. That's all wonderful ways to respect this beautiful world that we've been given.

**Jenny:** Yes. It's also just very connecting, you know? Even more, it's like, not only am I getting the nature connection, healing, and all of that, but I'm actually educating myself on the land.

**Shohreh:** So there are definitely gonna be people listening for whom, maybe they can overcome these barriers, get up the courage to go outside, and they still are just gonna decide, "You know what? I am not outdoorsy. I hate hiking, I hate camping," etc. So, for those people, are there other ways that they can get the benefit of nature, without necessarily doing these, kind of, well-known outdoorsy activities?

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**Jenny:**

I think it's really understandable that people would not immediately connect to the idea of going on a hike, or joining a group hike, or camping and whatnot. But I do really wish that everybody could understand what is to be gained from connecting to the natural world. And I think there are a number of ways of doing that.

Sometimes I say just get a blanket, go to the park, lay on it under some trees, and just see what might happen to you. Like put your phone away for a little bit and think about your breathing. Think about what's happening in your head as you just focus on greenery and just living things that are not humans. And for me, I know that even when I'm just standing under some trees, I just feel like my body kind of unclench. I feel like my breathing becomes more rhythmic. You know, sometimes when I walk through life I'm just sort of like holding my breath and I'll realize I'm not even breathing? And I just feel like I find the rhythm of my breathing, and yeah, just, I let go of a lot of anxiety.

So I would say wherever you are, whatever feels good for your body, you know, if laying on a blanket doesn't feel good, like sitting in a chair, like if you have a folding chair and can just put it in some grass, just kind of see what might happen

But also, just, a green space can be anything, human-built or not, that has plants. So, like, if you spend more time with your house plants, if you have some, or get some, and tend to them, watch how they grow, think about how they grow, and just study them and learn all about them. There's studies that say that just putting our hands in dirt for like five minutes is like getting 20 minutes of exercise. Which is wild, but there's something that happens in our brains, like chemically, when we are working with the earth. So that's something that could be done too.

And also, I do wanna say that it's really okay to not [laughs] want to get out into nature. There's a lot of reasons why people don't. If it's never been presented to you as an option, like for myself, growing up, I never thought about hiking and camping. I didn't know what I was missing. It didn't occur to me. But, of course, if I can have anything to do with getting folks outside who have never thought about it before, that's really important to me.

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But also, another thing to do is, another possibility is to join a community event. Maybe you don't wanna hike or camp, but maybe you have gardens in the places that you live. Maybe there's like a Japanese garden, or some kind of lilac garden, or something like that. I know that that kind of access isn't available to everybody. I mean, allow yourself the possibility of what might happen when you are smelling beautiful flowers, and just really pay attention to what happens in your body and in your mind.

**Shohreh:** Can I just say that the Portland Rose Gardens is like one of the most epic places that I have ever been to?

**Jenny:** Oh yeah, it truly is. It blows my mind. I go every year, and every year I'm just like blown away.

**Shohreh:** It's incredible there.

**Jenny:** The colors and like the shape -

**Shohreh:** Yes, the smells!

**Jenny:** Yeah, I mean you think you know what a rose is, and then you go to a place like that. And that's something I love about nature too is you think you know what a tree is, you think you know what green is, and then you go into these places and it's like everything that you know is just an idea. It's just endless, the varieties, and it's just like, for me, the noticing, and the paying attention to details, and stuff like that is just so soothing to me.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, there's definitely this wonderful mind/body combination element in doing anything outdoorsy. Like, I know for me, I was working from home already before COVID-19 shutdowns, all this stuff came down, and one of the things that I like to do is my dogs are really into sunbathing on our back patio. And when I get restless inside, sometimes I just go out there and lay on the patio and just like, I'm in Texas, and just like let the sun just beat down on me.

**Jenny:** Yes!

**Shohreh:** And it just feels so good and so restorative, especially if you've been inside for a while, you're in the air conditioning, it just feels so different to

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be out there. And during the pandemic I actually bought a hammock now, so I can enjoy even more and kind of swing in the backyard.

And the other thing I have in my backyard too is a vegetable garden that I like to plant every year. And that has been such a wonderful—frustrating—but wonderful activity. Where it's like, I'm learning things all the time. Like just yesterday there was some weird little caterpillar on my zucchini plant, and I was like, what is this? So I had to take a picture, I had to go do research, find out what it is—turns out it's a pest, gotta get rid of that guy—but it's just like this fun learning experience. It's like, when you get to eat food that you grew, it feels amazing!

**Jenny:** It truly is.

**Shohreh:** A lot of stuff even tastes better, like from your own garden, than from a store because it's just like, you get it really fresh, you get to have it, you get to try new things. So there are so many different ways to take advantage of the outdoors that don't involve necessarily going to a trail or camping, if that's not what you're into. I mean, even literally opening a window and just feeling the breeze, listening to the birds, I feel like that can be a huge grounder and mood booster for people.

**Jenny:** Absolutely, yes, just breathing fresh air. And you actually brought up something that was really important—our animals can teach us a lot about getting some sun and fresh air. So it's like if you have a yard, which I do not have a yard and a lot of people do not have yards, but, you know, that apartment life [laughs], but if you have a yard, maybe when you let your dog out, or whatever, to go to the bathroom, maybe that's your time to stand outside for five minutes too and just feel the sun on your face. And that vitamin D is essential for so many things, but it is really, really beneficial to our mental health.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, one of my clients just got a cat stroller during the pandemic. [laughter] And she said that her cats are obsessed with taking walks outside, that one of them is even sleeping in the stroller when they're not outside because they're so happy in there. And I was like, we really can learn a lot from our animals, you know? They're just so curious and open to the outside world.

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**Jenny:** Yeah, my two cats would not be into that, but... [laughs] I will say that usually, I have a dog too and I've only had her for about six months. So we're still getting to know each other, and, I mean, we know each other, but she's also only a year and a half, so she's like changing and whatnot. And this, walking her in my neighborhood, because in the past I would take her either to the dog park or I would take her hiking with me, but just walking in our neighborhood, I feel like my world has opened up in a way that I was missing.

Like I was not paying attention to my neighborhood at all, and now it's like I have these places on our walks that I check, like plants that I check and other dogs that I check, and I personally am finding a lot of healing in that and a lot of clarity. And my brain freeing up space that in a way that I do get from my hikes too. So, that could be a way too, like if you've never felt moved to walk in your own neighborhood, if you can walk in your neighborhood, if it's safe to do so, I really, really recommend it. You just don't know what kind of little surprises you might find that exist all around you.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, that is so true. Right now the jasmine is blooming here in Austin, so my whole neighborhood is just like that fragrant smell at dusk, and it's heavenly. I love it every single year.

**Jenny:** That's one of my favorites, yes.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, for sure. Alright, well we have come to our final question, which I ask all of my guests, and that is, how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

**Jenny:** I like that part about "this moment in your life" because right now I would say that I'm in a different place than I was even a month and a half ago when I was able to go out and hike any time, and I was able to have that sort of understanding that I could go get my physical and mental health, wellness from a trail.

Right now I can't really do that, so I've had to kind of think about things in a different way. And also, I don't feel motivated right now, and I think a lot of people are dealing with that lack of inspiration and motivation to get movement. Right now I'm just really trying to accept the fact that I don't

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feel motivated. That I feel kind of stunned and shook by what's going on in the world, and even though I know that movement will make me feel better, I'm just being really, really loving with myself about the fact that I don't want to go do the things that I normally want to do. And I also know that I'm not always going to feel this way.

And also, right now I'm not as intentional with my cooking and eating, and right now the intent is to just be taken care of. And I never like to moralize food, or movement, or bodies at all. Right now feeling comforted, feels more important than making my body feel as best as possible, and I just don't have the motivation to do it.

**Shohreh:**

That is a really beautiful framing, I think, of the current situation, because it brings up a really important point, which is that sometimes the healthy choice for you in this moment isn't movement and it isn't, like you said, the most healthful, nutritious foods. Like, right now, maybe what you need is to be able to sit still, and right now, maybe what you need is to be able to have that comfort food, and that can also be healthy and contribute to your health and wellness, which people need to realize.

**Jenny:**

Yeah, and there's also a lot of freedom in just deciding to do the thing that you want to do and to not hem and haw over whether or not it's like the morally right thing to do. Because most of the time those values that we put on these things don't matter anyway. A lot of us, if we have the privilege of being able to intuitively drop into what makes our brains work better, what makes our bodies feel better and work better, we will do those things. Like we'll get the exercise, we'll eat the thing that makes our joints feel the best and whatnot.

But also just right now we're going through a cultural trauma, and it's a really normal reaction to not be super embodied. It's really normal to feel a sense of disassociation. And also you can have these cloudy, disconnected feelings and also know that it's not always going to be like this.

Maybe this disconnection that one might be feeling, it's going to change because everything changes. And I know that a lot of people are suffering from a lack of routine, and when we get back into our more routinized live—

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and maybe they'll change a little bit, maybe we'll get some perspective from all of this—we'll probably get right back into doing the things that make us feel good. And yeah, just things are different right now, so our attitudes about things and our bodies, and ourselves can be different too.

**Shohreh:** Yeah, and we don't have to immediately jump to, "Oh no, these things are lost forever." Unless there are things we want to be lost forever, which is a fair conclusion to draw [laughter] coming out of this.

**Jenny:** If it's not serving you...

**Shohreh:** Yeah, exactly. For many of the things that were serving you, I think we'll naturally work our way back to them as the situation continues to change, so I really like that.

And thank you so much again for being here, Jenny, this was an awesome conversation. How can people find you?

**Jenny:** People can find me at [jennybruso.com](http://jennybruso.com) for my blog and my podcast, and you can also find Unlikely Hikers at [@unlikelyhikers](https://www.instagram.com/unlikelyhikers) on Instagram. On all of our social media there are links to our events which will be popping on the other side of this and there's ways to connect with folx in person, and yeah, come be a part of the conversation and the representation.

**Shohreh:** And there's the podcast now too, right?

**Jenny:** Yes, the podcast, which I started because of the COVID-19 pandemic and my inability to lead group hikes. I wanted to create a place for us to connect and for folx to be able to see me in real life. What we do is a live show every Tuesday at 5:00 PM and then that live show is available to stream on Thursday on all of the podcast platforms. But yeah, it's a way of connecting with other awesome outdoors folx who are leading fascinating, vibrant lives that deserve a spotlight. So yeah, it's a fun time.

**Shohreh:** Perfect. Well, I will link to the podcast and everything else that you mentioned in the show notes. Y'all, go follow Jenny and Unlikely Hikers, you will not regret it.

**Jenny:** Thank you.

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**Shohreh:**

And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean so much to me if you would subscribe and leave a review with your podcast provider of choice. It will really help other people who might benefit from the podcast to find it more easily.

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