

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Shohreh Davoodi: You are listening to episode #100 of Conjuring Up Courage. Happy 100! Happy Pride! And welcome to the first of five Pridepalooza podcast episodes. I suggest you buckle up because in this solo episode, I'm going to be telling the deeply personal story of my queer journey up to this point, including the story of my recent divorce.

To access the show notes and a full transcript of this episode, head to shohrehdavoodi.com/100. That's shohrehdavoodi.com/100.

I also want to give a content warning for this episode for queer pain, homophobia, grief, and divorce.

This episode is brought to you in part by Ample + Rooted, an inclusive therapy practice that provides an affirming and welcoming home for diverse individuals to reclaim their inherent worth. The folks at Ample + Rooted created a guided meditation on cultivating self-trust just for listeners, and it's available in the show notes for this episode.

[Music plays]

This is Conjuring Up Courage, and I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. As a self-trust coach, I help people come home to themselves, so they can be more of who they are, and less haunted by who they think they're supposed to be.

I created this podcast to celebrate what's possible when you commit to being brave. You'll hear from diverse guests who are refusing to let fear and self-doubt stop them from building fulfilling lives and creating a better world for everyone. I'll also teach you my favorite tools, strategies, and mindset shifts so you can do the same.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Consider this your invitation to stop living according to “shoulds” and to step into your motherfucking magic instead. Stay open, get curious, and let’s grow together.

[Music fades]

Today is the big 100, y’all! [Celebratory horn sound effect] Okay, that was super nerdy. I have somehow managed to put out 100 episodes of this show, episodes that, in my opinion, have only gotten better in quality and production over time. Further, in the nearly two years since the show started, I have never missed a week. Not that there would be anything wrong with taking a week off or even going on hiatus for an extended period of time, but I am impressed by my consistency.

An unfathomable amount of work goes into this podcast behind the scenes. It’s honestly rare for a day to go by where I’m not doing at least something for the show, if not a lot of things. There have also been more weeks than I can count where I had to pull something out of my ass to keep the show humming along. Attempting to string together interviews is often like herding cats; whether it’s finding guests, trying to get people to respond to my emails, nudging people to *actually* book themselves in my calendar, or managing cancellations and requests to reschedule.

But I’ve made it this far, and I am so freaking proud of myself. Especially when you throw in a global pandemic, a painful divorce, an identity crisis, and a full scale rebrand of my entire business and the podcast, I would say that I’m crushin’ it. And speaking of all those intense life

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

things I just mentioned, I've known for a while that I would be sharing more about them in episode 100 of the show.

By sheer chance, episode 100 comes out on June 1st, which is the start of Pride month and also the start of Pridepalooza. What is Pridepalooza? All month long, I am featuring queer-focused content on all of my platforms, and that includes the podcast and this solo episode. So what better time to talk more about my own journey into queerness with all of its twists and turns?

Before I start talking about my story, I want to give some background info, as well as set a few boundaries, so please listen carefully. The contents of this episode are deeply personal to me. I know that I am under no obligation to share these kinds of details about my life, and no one is entitled to know them either. I am choosing to talk about my identity and my divorce because they are both stigmatized topics. And hearing from folks who have had similar experiences to me has kept me putting one foot in front of the other through the darkest time in my life so far. If I can make a difference in even one person's life by sharing my story, then it's worth it to me.

While it's true that I'll be trusting you with some tender parts of myself, this is still a public podcast. That means you're only going to hear what I feel comfortable sharing, which won't be every detail and facet of the story. So please don't assume you know the whole story, or even that you know me, unless you actually do, just because I'm choosing to be vulnerable in this way.

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Additionally, much of what I'll be talking about today, I'm still unpacking and navigating myself, both solo and with my wonderful therapist and community. As I continue to figure things out, I may change my mind about certain things or develop different thoughts and opinions than I'm sharing today. And I reserve the right to do that.

We also need to talk about privacy. While I'll be sharing my perspective and experiences in this episode, my divorce story is not only mine. It's a story that I share with my ex-spouse, who I am still close friends with. I'll be referring to him as my ex throughout this episode instead of calling him by name, because unlike me, he has not consented to living his life out loud on the internet. So I would appreciate it if you would treat him as an anonymous person and not go looking for information about him.

That said, the rules for me are different. If you would like to reach out to me about anything I share in this episode, or really almost anything at all, my email inbox is open, and so are my DMs. Generally speaking, I'm super friendly and I love hearing from y'all. Most of the time I do respond, but for a variety of reasons, I cannot guarantee a response to everyone who contacts me. Also, note if you reach out to me to share something especially heavy or traumatic, I ask that you put a content warning at the top of your message so I can make sure I'm in the right headspace to read it.

Phew! Okay, I think I've covered all of my bases now. And for the record, thus far, I haven't had a single disrespectful interaction with any of the listeners of this show, and I'm setting these boundaries so it stays that way.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

It's hard to even know where to start, but I guess I'm going to take it way back to my childhood. The most common narrative we hear about queer and trans people is that they always just knew who they were. This is what I like to call the "born this way" narrative; thank you, Lady Gaga. And this narrative has been spotlighted in the LGBTQIA+ community in the name of progress. *If we are all "born this way,"* if it's genetic and it's unchangeable, then the conservative and religious talking point that sexual orientation is a choice is moot.

And I'm not saying that narrative is wrong. Maybe queerness will eventually be traced to some specific genetic material in our brains. But what I've learned in adulthood and in my own queer journey is that not everyone's experiences are so clear-cut and can be labeled as neatly. Not everyone just knows who they are deep down and never really changes. Sexuality is extremely complex and there's more than one way to experience it.

I also believe, and science supports, that sexual fluidity exists, meaning that your sexual orientation and attraction can fluctuate to a degree. Which is not to say that people don't have an underlying sexual orientation; generally speaking, they do, but there is room for expansion.

So when I was growing up, my only conscious attraction was to boys. I had crushes on boys from kindergarten onward. As I got older, I only ever kissed, hooked up with, and dated boys/men. The one exception to this, which I've mentioned before on the podcast, is that I attempted to make out with one of my female best friends in high school after we

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

had been drinking and hanging out. She was not into it and we never spoke of it again. To this day, I have no idea what specifically made me decide to do that that day because I have no recollection of ever feeling sexual attraction to her before that moment.

I do think that experience and other smaller moments here and there were likely signs I was queer, but I was not the least bit in touch with that part of myself. I was also genuinely attracted to men. I'm going to invoke the movie "But I'm a Cheerleader" to try to explain this. And if you haven't seen it, it's hilarious and I highly recommend it. It stars a young Natasha Lyonne, a young Clea DuVall, and a young RuPaul.

Back to my point. In the movie, there's this scene at the beginning where Natasha Lyonne's character is making out with her boyfriend and it's clear that she hates it. And the whole time, she's fantasizing about other girls on her cheerleading squad. And you'll hear a lot of lesbians say that that's what it was like for them. That they forced themselves to hook up with and date men because they felt like they were supposed to and had nothing to compare it to, but they never actually liked it.

That was not my initial experience. I really loved hooking up with boys. And while I hate the term and think it's super problematic, more than a few people labeled me as "boy crazy" when I was in high school. So while I did have a mother who made very clear that she would kick us out of the house if we were gay, and I thought that was absolutely ridiculous and told her so, I didn't have any inkling at the time that I might be queer myself. I just knew that was wrong.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Even though I was very into guys in high school and I made out with plenty of them, I didn't have my first boyfriend until the summer before I started college. I graduated from high school a year early, and my whole family moved from Texas to Wisconsin that summer before I started attending UW-Madison in the fall. My summer job was working at Old Navy at the mall, and there I met some really cool girls who were my age who welcomed me into their friend group. Through them, I ended up meeting the guy who became my first love and my first boyfriend.

He and I dated long-distance for about three years; he lived in Milwaukee and I was in Madison. And our relationship was very much a young love relationship. We had no idea how to communicate well, and there was a decent amount of drama due to unresolved trauma we both carried. But we cared about each other a lot and being with him was a formative experience. He was the first person I said "I love you" to. He was the first person I really explored sex with. And I will always think of him fondly, even though we went our separate ways when he moved to, ironically, Texas for grad school.

My first boyfriend is also technically the reason that I met my ex-husband. My first boyfriend and my ex-husband had a mutual friend who thought they would get along great. And after he introduced them and they became friends, I was eventually introduced to my ex-husband, and we became instant friends.

This all happened about a year before my first boyfriend and I broke up. And for the record, there was never any cheating or anything like that.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

We definitely did have great chemistry from the get-go but our relationship was purely platonic. We ended up keeping in touch through regular emails from the time we met 'til the time we ended up dating because my ex-husband was starting law school and I wanted to go to law school. So we would talk about law school stuff, and music we liked, and life, all of which my first boyfriend knew about. And I truly saw my ex-husband as a friend and never thought anything would happen between us.

After my first boyfriend and I broke up the summer before my final semester of college, I was single for all of four months before my ex-husband and I started dating. He came to Madison for a wedding and we ended up spending a bunch of time together. After the wedding, we went to a party at my friend's house, got really drunk, confessed that we were both attracted to each other, started making out, and that night he slept in my bed back at my studio apartment.

And I tell you all of this because I want to be clear that I was completely and totally enamored with my ex when we got together, which happened when I was a couple of months shy of turning 21. I thought he was as sexy as hell. I thought he was funny. I thought he was smart. I couldn't believe a guy like him would want to date someone like me. Yeah, I had shit self-worth at the time.

I was so in love with him. And six months after we started dating, I moved to Chicago so we could live in the same city. And I think very fondly about that time in my life.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

I'm not going to detail our entire relationship, but we got engaged after having been together four years, got married a month before it would have been five, and were married for five years before we decided to get divorced. So we were together for an entire decade during the most developmental years of my life, from the time I was 20 'til the time I was 30. My ex is three-and-a-half years older than me, and we quite literally grew up together in a lot of ways.

And our relationship was not without its problems. The same communication issues and unresolved trauma that were a part of my first serious relationship became a part of my second one. We stopped being on the same page sexually after a few years of being together. But we kept trying to make it work because the rest of our relationship was so great and we figured it was fixable. Through the entire thing, we loved each other, we respected the hell out of each other, we cheered each other on, and we took great care of each other.

We had an amazing partnership that many people envied over the years, and we were really great at solving problems together. But it turned out we could not solve the problem of my sexual orientation.

A couple of years into the relationship, I think the signs were there, but I was so disconnected from the queer part of me that I had no idea how to read them. There were multiple points in our relationship where I felt like maybe I should end it because my body was telling me something was wrong. But I never actually did end it because it seemed completely illogical to me.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

I would reason with myself that I loved this person and we had a great relationship and you can't just go around ending relationships you've invested so much into without a good reason. One of those times was right after we got engaged. I remember feeling panicked and freaking out about how I could possibly break off this engagement, and what would people think? But once wedding planning got underway and I was able to throw myself into that, it was easy to convince myself that my feelings were the result of being afraid of such a big commitment instead of something deeper.

One of the reasons I was able to write off my recurring feeling of being trapped somewhere I shouldn't be was because of the culture we live in. We exalt marriage as the most important accomplishment of a woman, and divorce is seen as a sinful failure. We teach people that the relationship escalator is the one and only path for them. People are supposed to date, move in together, get engaged, get married, buy a house, have a family. And the further you go, the more difficult it is to get off the ride.

I've also been chronically stressed and overscheduled essentially since I started law school two years into our relationship. I went to law school, took the bar exam, started working as a lawyer, then started running my own business, all without any breaks. I've been grinding for a long time; definitely for too long. And it's not that hard to ignore what your body is trying to tell you when you're not giving yourself any space to feel.

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

And what you have to remember is I loved and cared about my ex so much; I still do. I never wanted to do anything to hurt him. And I didn't yet have the tools to understand how pushing down whatever kept popping up in my body was hurting both of us. Plus, at the time, I didn't know that having a bad gut feeling is absolutely a good enough reason to walk away from something.

I also had the added layer of truly having no idea that I might be queer until I was 27 years old. Both because I had always felt genuine attraction to men and likely thanks to things like compulsory heterosexuality and growing up in a very religious family as part of a religion that espoused purity culture.

The first time I felt recognizable attraction to a woman was so recent that I can still remember it. It was here in Austin during my first year as a business owner, which would have been spring of 2017. A local women's business group was putting on a networking event at a bar that I attended alone, and while I was there, I spotted this gorgeous, tattooed woman and I did a double-take and wished that I could go talk to her. I remember thinking that was interesting, since prior to that, I had only ever been consciously attracted to men, but I didn't think much about it after that night.

Fast forward several months, and I had the next unexpected foray into peeling back the layers of my sexuality. My ex and I had taken a road trip and we were out on a hike, and I asked him where he thought he registered on the Kinsey Scale. I was curious because he had this gay

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

friend who he was kind of flirty with when they texted or talked on the phone.

I think I asked him where he would rate himself on a scale of one-to-ten, where one was gay, and ten was straight. He told me that he was probably a ten, or maybe a nine, so heavily in straight territory. Like he could tell when men were attractive, but he didn't feel attracted to them or have any fantasies about being with them.

Then he asked me where I thought I registered on the scale, and I came out somewhere around a six or a seven, maybe. I specifically said that I thought if we weren't together, I wouldn't be opposed to dating women. And I said this very nonchalantly without really thinking it meant much of anything. Probably because I saw it as some kind of alternate reality, not an actual possibility. Once again, I put it out of my mind and didn't question it any further.

Then, fast forward another few months to the eve of my 28th birthday in December of 2017. That night, I found myself sobbing in my closet while my ex was asleep in our bedroom. The sense that something was wrong in our relationship and that I was unhappy had gotten so overwhelming that I could no longer push it down. I still couldn't really articulate *what* was wrong, but I had reached a point where I knew if something didn't change, we were headed for a divorce.

Later that week, I ended up talking to my ex about how I was feeling and told him that I really wanted to go to couples' therapy. This surprised and confused him because he had no idea I'd been feeling

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

unhappy. My internal world was not reflected in his experience of me or the relationship, so he struggled to understand how I reached that point. And it sure didn't help that I couldn't understand it either. It took us nearly six months to find a couples' therapist we liked and start seeing her, and we ended up seeing her for over two years, through the eventual end of our relationship.

Around the time of my birthday meltdown, I became friends with Ally, and by the spring of 2018, I was also friends with Tiffany. You may know them better as members of The Girl Gang. My ex and I started therapy in summer of 2018 and it was going well. And then in the fall, there was a dinner I attended with Ally and Tiff that ended up being a turning point in the discovery of my queerness.

I believe by this point I had already known Ally was bisexual for a while, but it was at this dinner that I found out Tiffy identified as bisexual too. So I asked them a bunch of questions about it, which they graciously answered. And they ended up busting a bunch of bisexuality myths that I had internalized without even realizing I had done so.

After dinner, I went home and started covertly Googling, as one does—I am sure I typed in the question, "Am I bisexual?"—and I did a bunch of reading and unpacking. And within a week, I came out to Ally, then my ex, and then my other close friends.

If you're interested in more of the details about my bisexual coming out, I recommend listening to The Girl Gang episode about bisexuality myths and misconceptions. I will link to it in the show notes.

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

The one thing I will mention is that I was convinced this wasn't going to change anything in my relationship with my ex. That's what I told my ex at the time, and I truly believed it. In fact, in our next couples' therapy session, we talked about me coming out as bisexual and our therapist asked us some questions about it. And we were both adamant nothing would change, even though she was clearly skeptical. Looking back, a part of me feels really naïve. But at the same time, there was no way for me to know that claiming the label of bisexual was just the tip of the iceberg of starting to better understand my queerness.

In March of 2019, six months after privately coming out to my loved ones as bisexual and queer, I finally came out to my parents, which I had been putting off, and then I came out publically. I didn't want to hide such a big part of myself, and I also felt it was important for there to be more representation of bisexual folks in straight-passing marriages.

Once I was out publically, I started following more queer folks online, learning about queer history, and consuming queer media. I began to feel more comfortable with my queerness, and I shed a lot of the self-doubt and impostor syndrome I was initially feeling. Everything was going along mostly okay until my ex and I took a vacation to Jamaica in 2019, during Pride Month, ironically.

Well, on that trip I experienced an overwhelming feeling of being stifled in my relationship and like I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I never got the chance to date and sleep with women. I had been feeling waves of grief over the fact that I came out so late, and I'd been thinking a lot about how my life might look different if I had known earlier. It was

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

extremely distressing to me that I had committed to being with someone for the rest of my life without knowing about a huge, critical part of myself.

If you're wondering why those feelings were bubbling up while I was on a gorgeous, tropical vacation, I think I know the answer. That was my first non-working vacation since I had started my business two-and-a-half years prior. Remember that whole chronically stressed and overscheduled thing I mentioned? It makes a lot of sense that when I finally gave myself time to rest that I had nothing to keep my thoughts and feelings at bay. And, it also totally sucked that when I finally had time off, I wasn't even able to enjoy it due to a world-shattering identity crisis.

The entire week we were in Jamaica, I was battling a sense of dread and a feeling of impending doom. And since I didn't want to ruin the vacation for him, and I had no idea how to talk about what I was feeling, I pretended everything was totally fine. Like, I literally remember silently crying during a couple of our afternoon naps when he was asleep because I was so distraught. I barely made it through the trip. And when we got back home, I scheduled a solo appointment with our couples' therapist because I knew I needed to talk to someone about what was going on.

So I told our couples' therapist everything. And by this point, I was convinced we were going to have to get divorced. I saw my options as either: end my marriage so I could be true to myself and honor the part

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

of me that was interested in women, or stay with my ex and wonder “what if?” for the rest of my life.

After asking a lot of insightful questions, our couples’ therapist told me that divorce wasn’t the only option and that an alternative possibility would be to open up our relationship in some capacity so I could explore that side of myself. I think I literally laughed at the idea and told her there was no way in hell my ex would ever go for that. Which prompted her to ask how I knew that, and I explained that just based on his personality and his beliefs about monogamy that I was sure he would be completely against the idea. She encouraged me to talk to him about it anyway and share with him how I had been feeling.

And a couple weeks after that, I finally conjured up enough courage to broach the subject. And...it was a total disaster. We had one of the biggest fights of our entire relationship. Some not so nice things were said by both of us. And I walked away from that conversation, which lasted several hours, thinking we were definitely getting divorced. I remember I went for a walk by myself afterward to clear my head, and I called Ally on the phone, freaking out. And I said to her that I was sure we were getting divorced.

Miraculously, we didn’t get divorced at that time, though I know in hindsight, we both think maybe we should have. Instead, we ended up having several more fights/conversations, my ex went to see our couples’ therapist by himself, and then the two of us went to see her together several times. And after airing everything out, we decided to explore the possibility of opening up the relationship.

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

[Music plays]

[Ad break]

Hey y'all. Let me take a moment to tell you a little bit more about Ample + Rooted, an inclusive therapy practice that is directed by my dear friend and colleague, Neathery Falchuk.

The awesome practitioners at Ample + Rooted not only serve folks locally here in Austin, they also serve folks online all over the globe. Through therapy, mindfulness practices, courses, trainings, and events, they support, guide, and hold space for folks to feel valued and nourished.

We talk a lot about systems of oppression on the show and how they can disconnect you from your inner knowing. And the Ample + Rooted group believes it is your birthright to both inhabit and trust your physical and emotional self without shame.

Luckily for y'all, the kind folks at Ample + Rooted created an exclusive guided meditation on cultivating self-trust for listeners of Conjuring Up Courage. You can access the free guided meditation and learn more about Ample + Rooted in the show notes for this episode.

[Music fades]

Our couples' therapist suggested we each go to therapists of our own in addition to seeing her, so I specifically looked for a queer therapist who specialized in therapists for queer folks and was poly-friendly. I found someone really wonderful, and I've been seeing her ever since.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

We also both started reading different books about open relationships, like “The Ethical Slut” and “Opening Up.” I listened to a bunch of episodes of the “Multiamory” podcast, and we continued to have difficult conversations about potential parameters for opening the relationship and what that might look like.

By the start of 2020, we were finally on the verge of opening up the relationship. But I was going through a really difficult time mental health-wise and I was also at a frustrating place with my business where I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to keep it going. So we decided to shelve the matter for a little while until I could get back to baseline.

Except, as you may have seen coming, the coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S. just two months later. Like everyone else, we went into survival mode. We completely put the thought of opening up the relationship out of our minds as we adapted to the new normal of being home together all the time, only seeing other people virtually, and completely changing our routines.

Around this time, two other important things were happening pretty much simultaneously. One, my ex and I had started the process of preparing to look for a new house with our realtor. And two, I started listening to the audiobook of “Untamed” by Glennon Doyle.

My ex and I owned our home but we had nearly outgrown it. We were ready for a new neighborhood, more space, and a real backyard for our dogs. We pictured our next house as being our dream home and a place we could ideally stay for a decade or longer. And we expected to

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

need to do some significant remodeling of whatever house we ended up buying. So we were getting finances in order, viewing properties, and talking to contractors.

Then came my reading of "Untamed." Caveat: the book has its fair share of critiques for being written from a pretty privileged perspective and there's also some fatphobia in it due to Glennon being in eating disorder recovery. But, it has some really beautiful writing about self-trust, and it also details the story of how Glennon met her now wife, Abby Wambach, and left her marriage with her husband to be with her.

And it's safe to say that it completely wrecked me. Here was this book about Glennon and Abby's love story that was also about listening to the knowing within you. And all of the sudden, my insides were screaming at me once again.

In the book, Glennon talks about turning inward to make decisions based on what feels the most true and beautiful. And I could not shake the feeling that what felt the most true and beautiful to me was not being married to a man but being with a woman. It was like I had this deep, intuitive sense that my marriage was all wrong and everything was supposed to look and feel different. But I was terrified about what that would mean in reality.

I struggled to reconcile this gut punch from my body that I shouldn't be with my husband with the fact that I loved and cared about him and I was in the process of furthering our commitment through the purchase of an expensive new house. While it hadn't fully surfaced yet,

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

somewhere deep down, I knew I was looking at two very different futures.

There was the one I had always imagined where my husband and I stayed together until death do us part, bought and lived in our dream home, had financial security and a great partnership, but something felt like it was missing despite having everything I'd ever been told to want. And then there was the path where I blew up my entire life, ended a ten-year relationship, devastated my husband, willingly took on huge financial insecurity and the failed title of divorcee, all to live a life I had no experience with and wouldn't be able to confirm I really wanted without actually doing it.

Thankfully, for this particular episode of panic, I had a therapist I could talk to about it. I'm pretty sure I wasn't completely forthcoming with her about what I was feeling, so she read the situation as the book sort of triggering a fantasy of an alternative life. We ended up talking about finding a way to safely open the relationship even with the reality of the pandemic. And she also suggested to me that I try reading "Mating in Captivity" by Esther Perel to see if that would help rekindle the spark in my marriage.

I also mentioned to my therapist that I wondered if my feelings were simply the result of internalized biphobia and not feeling queer enough unless I was with a woman. Armed with enough alternative explanations, I tried not to think about it. Unfortunately for me and my denial, it seemed like the circumstances were finally just right that my body was not going to let me keep these feelings at bay any longer.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Maybe a month later, as the house hunt continued, I decided to open up a conversation with my ex about kids. Throughout our relationship, I had mostly leaned towards not having them and he had mostly leaned towards having them. Every time we talked about it, we would table the discussion to come back to later because it wasn't yet a pressing concern. However, I recognized that buying and remodeling a new house would be a huge commitment, so I figured we had better talk about it.

In hindsight, I can now also see I was looking for reasons to not move forward with the house because I knew that if we bought a house, I would throw myself into the project and I would find a way to keep pretending my feelings did not exist for several more years. My busyness had already kept me in denial for too long, and I feared for my sense of self if I let it happen again.

At this point, I already knew I didn't want kids, so it was really a matter of my ex doing some soul searching to figure out if he wanted them. We talked about it several times and initially he decided that while he loved the idea of being a dad, he cared more about our relationship than starting a family, so he wouldn't be willing to start over just for the chance of having kids.

Our couples' therapist encouraged my ex to do some more exploration to really make sure. So he eventually reached a point where he was thinking about joining a group program to help him decide. This group program would take several months and it meant putting an official pause on house hunting.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

I knew I was in trouble when we decided to pause the house hunt and I was immediately flooded with relief. There was a part of me that wanted my ex to decide he wanted kids because it meant I wouldn't have to hurt him and I wouldn't be the villain in the story.

I also just want to say quickly that I'm not proud of many of the choices that I made in our marriage. There were times I did not choose courage that I wish I had. The ways I tried to hide from and cope with hard things were born out of my own trauma and upbringing, but I take responsibility for the fact that my decisions didn't only hurt me, they also hurt someone I love very much.

After we decided to pause house hunting in early August of 2020, it was all downhill from there. I had a week-long trip planned to stay at my parents' house because trouble brewing aside, my ex and I had been spending so much time together during the pandemic that we needed a break from each other. My parents were also moving soon so I wanted to go up and go through all of my stuff that they had.

While I was there, I had a socially distanced hang with a really close friend on her outdoor patio. And this happened to be a friend who had decided to get divorced about six months prior. I ended up sobbing and spilling my guts to her about how I was feeling, and I believe she was the first person to say to me, "Do you think you might be gay?" and I said, "Maybe," but I wasn't sure.

Gay and lesbian were not terms I had been using to think about my predicament. I had been telling myself that my attraction had simply

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

changed over time, and at this point in my life, I just preferred the thought of dating and sleeping with women. In that moment, claiming the label of gay felt so unruly and impossible.

The week prior, I had set up a solo appointment with our couples' therapist during the time that I would be at my parents' place, and it was scheduled for the following morning. Even though it was one of the hardest therapy sessions I've ever had, our couples' therapist was extremely kind and affirming. I ended our session finally understanding that I was going to have to ask for a divorce and that it wasn't fair to my ex to expect him to be in a relationship with someone who no longer felt romantic and sexual attraction to him. I still had five days left at my parents' place, and I spent the entire time filled with nervous energy and dread, trying to take my mind off of what was coming.

I got home on a Sunday and I had a session scheduled with my own therapist for the Tuesday that followed. I don't remember much about that session, but I know I talked with her about everything I had talked about with our couples' therapist. By the time Saturday rolled around, I thought I might explode if I didn't start the hardest conversation of my life, and I knew it was time to rip the Band-Aid off. I told my ex that I wanted to talk to him, and then I told him what I needed to: that I thought we should end our relationship because I couldn't love him the way he deserved to be loved anymore.

Woo [crying], I'm going to try to get through this, but it's going to be really hard. There's no amount of money in the world you could pay me to relive that conversation or to relive seeing the look on his face as he

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

realized I was asking for a divorce. Some hopeful part of my brain thought maybe it wouldn't be as terrible as I had made it out to be, but it was worse. Nothing could have prepared me for how awful it felt to shatter someone else's heart and the way that it would shatter mine.

I think that was the worst day of my life, and it's only been rivaled by another day about three weeks after that. My ex's initial reaction was disbelief and anger. The first thing he did after we stopped talking was leave the house for a while to return a double bike rack he had recently bought for us to make going on bike rides easier because immediately doing something practical with the news was the only way he could think to cope in that moment. And I literally just sobbed while he was gone. I was crying so hard that Pepp got really worried about me and kept coming up to me to lick the tears off of my face.

After asking for a divorce, I didn't feel better or like a weight had been lifted; I felt worse. I felt a deep sense of regret and despair. I couldn't eat. I couldn't concentrate. Most of the time I felt like I couldn't breathe. And we went for a lot of walks to get fresh air and to try to take our minds off of the situation. We were both crying a lot, and my ex was never a crier.

And all of those feelings and all of that pain opened up the door for us to walk the divorce back a little bit. We were both utterly devastated and our bodies so desperately wanted to protect us that we went into a state of denial and did what we always did best in our relationship: started trying to come up with ways we might be able to fix this.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

In that first week, I had a therapy session with my therapist, we each had solo therapy sessions with our couples' therapist, and then we had a session together with our couples' therapist. We tried to convince ourselves that the decision was premature and maybe I was just feeling trapped because we had never actually opened the relationship. And what if we went ahead and did that and saw how things went? We kind of barricaded ourselves in this alternate reality because it was far less scary than what it would mean to get divorced.

The whole time we were having a lot of deep discussions about our relationship, trying to pick it apart and see it from new angles. It also didn't help that our five-year wedding anniversary was two weeks after I initially asked for a divorce and the ten-year anniversary of getting together was the following month. So all of that context brought up a lot of painful feelings.

In the end, it took just under three weeks to decide we were, in fact, going to get a divorce. The catalyst conversation was when my ex started asking me a bunch of questions about my sexual and romantic attraction to him and other men. In that conversation, based on my answers, he said to me, "It sounds like you're a lesbian." I was still not ready to claim that word, but once he had said it out loud, I think it hit him that we couldn't stay married because neither of us would ever be able to give the other what they needed.

Near the end of the third week, we had another couples' therapy session, and prior to the session we had a talk about what we were going to say. We decided that we were going to tell our therapist we

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

were going to get divorced after all. During that couples' therapy session my ex completely broke down and it ripped my heart out of my chest all over again.

The days that followed felt exactly like the days that followed after I had initially asked for a divorce, except this time, we had no choice but to just sit in the muck. No one was coming to rescue us and we were going to have to learn to grapple with this horrible, awful thing.

As of this recording, it's been just under nine months since we officially decided to get divorced and these nine months have been the most challenging of my life. I do feel like I'm finally on an upward trajectory but I'm not yet completely out of the woods.

Divorce is an emotional and logistical nightmare when you're not living through a global pandemic, so you can imagine just how fun it was with that added element. Divorce also touches every part of a person's life. Because my ex and I are both lawyers and our split was amicable, we didn't hire lawyers and we submitted all of our own paperwork. But tensions were still high as we decided how to split money and property and move forward with our lives.

We didn't want to split up the dogs, so we share custody of them: one week on followed by one week off. Thanks to the pandemic, the holidays, and a ridiculous housing market here in Austin, my ex and I continued to live together until he moved out a month ago. Sharing space all of that time felt like being stuck in limbo and it was really hard for both of us. And because we shared space for so long, when he did

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

finally move out, I felt completely deflated. Thankfully, I'm finally moving myself in two weeks, and then we'll sell the house we own together, which will help us to close this chapter of our lives.

It's been painful to watch myself become someone I barely recognize in a lot of ways. I already struggle with executive dysfunction due to my ADHD, and navigating our divorce sent my executive functioning skills into a nosedive and rendered my ADHD medication far less effective. It was only by sheer force of will that I was able to launch a new membership program at the end of 2020 and reorganize and rebrand my business and the podcast at the beginning of 2021. I knew I had to make those changes if I wanted to continue being a business owner going forward. But it took almost everything I had to give to make it happen.

Eating was a struggle for a long time and I dropped to my lowest weight in my adult life. Emails and text messages have piled up and often been forgotten. My energy has been completely zapped and it's been hard to motivate myself to get work done or create content. Keeping my household in order has been challenging as I'm adjusting to no longer having a partner to share all the household tasks with, and I'm constantly worrying about dropping the ball and disappointing people.

Throughout this process, I have reminded myself over and over that the only way out is through. I've reminded myself that if I don't surf the waves of grief now, they'll come crashing down even worse later. I've reminded myself that no one ever said choosing myself would be easy.

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

Because at the end of the day, I chose myself over my marriage. I flung myself off of a cliff because I decided that the possibility of a more beautiful and true life was worth the risk to get there.

And that's fucking terrifying! It's scary as hell to leave a life you know for a life you hope will be better when there are no guarantees of what the future holds.

I'd love to wrap this story up in a neat little bow and tell you that I'm thriving and living my best queer life. Or that I met the woman of my dreams, and it was all worth it, and we're going to live happily ever after. But what comes next is still unwritten for now.

What I can tell you is that I'm in a place where I'm okay with that. The initial sting of my divorce is far enough in the rearview that I can finally feel curiosity and excitement about whatever is ahead for me.

In March, I wrote an Instagram post where I came out again. In that post, I explained how I was no longer using the bisexual label and that I would be identifying as only queer. I also said that while people might hear me use other words to describe myself, unless they had my express permission to use those words, I wanted them to stick with queer. The truth is: in addition to identifying as queer, I do identify as gay and I do identify as a lesbian. But those labels are still very new to me. I'm not totally comfortable with strangers using them to describe me yet even though I am okay with friends doing so.

I know there's probably some internalized homophobia wrapped up in those feelings. Because I haven't started dating yet, part of me feels

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

like I haven't proven to myself that I'm actually a lesbian. I'm also coming to terms with the fact that calling myself a lesbian doesn't automatically invalidate my past relationships with men and the love that I've felt for them.

I'm starting to accept that I may never have answers to the questions I have about my sexuality. I'll probably never know what shifted in me and why. I'll likely never have a neat and tidy explanation for my attraction and interest over the course of my life, and that's okay.

Too often, I've seen members of the queer community get so rigid about labels that it turns into gatekeeping and makes people feel like they're not welcome. And that kind of behavior is super harmful. Each person's experiences are unique to them. We can't name other people's experiences for them or force labels on folks that they have not claimed for themselves. We also can't be so married to narrowly defining labels that members of the queer community feel unsafe to claim, shed, or change labels as desired and needed.

Labels are a tool of understanding. So it makes sense that as people go deeper in their understanding of themselves, that labels might change.

I also think it's important to say that the fact that I now identify as a lesbian doesn't invalidate bisexuality as a sexual orientation. The assumption that bisexuality doesn't exist on its own and is just a stop on the way to being gay is a really harmful stereotype. That shit is bi-phobic and further marginalizes bisexual folks. It is the case that some people, including me, identify as bisexual first before moving onto

Conjuring Up Courage

#100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

other labels, and there are many reasons why that is. But my story is my own.

If you take anything away from this, let it be that sexuality is complicated and that you're allowed to grow, and change, and settle into new versions of yourself. I may not always identify as a lesbian. I may not always use she/her pronouns. All I know is that this is the current iteration of myself and it's what feels good to me in this moment.

Right now, I'm looking forward to transitioning out of a place of surviving so I can get to a place of thriving. I'm excited to move into the new house that I'm renting and finally have a big backyard for the dogs. I have just added a wonderful new virtual assistant to the Shohreh Davoodi Coaching team so I can get my business to a more secure place and hopefully start working less hours. I'm also cautiously optimistic about embarking on the adventure of casual sex and dating. I'm sure there will be many stories to come on that front.

And that's where I'm at. It's certainly not a glamorous story, but it is a real one. And I hope it reminds you that we're all flawed humans who are just trying to do our best.

Thank you for listening and thank you for witnessing me as I was, as I am, and as I will be.

Happy Pride y'all!

[Music plays]

Conjuring Up Courage #100

Featured this episode: Shohreh Davoodi

And that's our show for today. If you're enjoying Conjuring Up Courage, don't forget to subscribe through your podcast provider of choice so you never miss an episode. Additionally, if you haven't left a rating and review in the Apple Podcasts app yet, you can do so from any Apple device to help more people find and benefit from the show. I also love hearing from listeners, so feel free to take a screenshot from your podcast player, post on social media, and tag me. My username is @ShohrehDavoodi on all platforms. Finally, you can sign up for my email newsletter, The Sunday Share, and get more details about how to work with me by going to ShohrehDavoodi.com. Thank you so much for listening, and I hope you'll join me for the next episode.

[Music fades]