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TRAUMA
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Healing intergenerational trauma

Guest: Dr Arielle Schwartz

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[00:00:10] Alex Howard

Welcome everyone, to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with Dr Arielle Schwartz, and we're going to be exploring intergenerational trauma; how we are shaped and impacted by the experiences of our ancestors. We'll also talk about some of the ways we can heal those impacts and the importance of really being able to be fully ourselves in this moment with all of our capacities in this life.

To give you a little bit of Arielle's background, Dr Arielle Schwartz is a licensed Clinical Psychologist, certified Complex Trauma Professional, and Kripalu Yoga teacher with a private practice in Boulder, Colorado. As an internationally sought out teacher and leading voice in the healing of post traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, and complex trauma, she's the author of six books including *The Complex PTSD Workbook*, *Therapeutic Yoga for Trauma* and *The Posttraumatic Growth Guidebook*.

She is dedicated to offering informational, mental health and wellness updates through her writing, public speaking, social media presence, YouTube channel, and blog. As the founder of the center for Resilience Informed Therapy, she offers Integrative Mind Body Approach to therapy, including relational therapy, parts work therapy, somatic psychology, EMDR therapy, and Therapeutic Yoga for Trauma.

She believes that the journey of trauma recovery is an awakening of the spiritual heart. So, Arielle welcome back. I'm always excited to have some time to talk together, and this is a topic that you and I haven't dived into before, and I think that's also exciting. Do you want to just open up a little bit at the start, we're talking about intergenerational trauma, maybe just a little bit of what that is, but also some of your perspectives around how it can impact us and shape us.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, well, first of all, it's just lovely to be here with you, Alex. Thank you for having me back. And I want to share with you that this topic is very dear to me, and it's something that I have both kind of wrestled with and also triumphed with in my own personal journey. So for anyone that's not familiar with what transgenerational trauma, and we'll also talk a little bit about what collective trauma is, we'll speak about both of these; but basically what we're speaking about are events that happened to generations before us that are often unresolved and then kind of carry forth through generations and can impact us.

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Even though we didn't directly experience, maybe it was experienced by our parents or by our grandparents, but we feel the weight or the impact of that. And sometimes we're conscious to that, and sometimes we're unconscious to it. And it's not until something occurs in our own lives that something flushes to the surface and we can talk a little bit more about the details of how that occurs and the why.

But I wanted to share a little bit about why this is so personal to me, and it's actually a very, very relevant, here now, process for me because a week ago, I received a package in the mail, and it was from a cousin of mine, but maybe a little backstory before the package is that I have grown up in a family where my mom was an unexpected child. She was an oops baby in 1941, and her parents were 49 and 50 when they became pregnant with my mom. Oops not expected, right? In fact, my mom was often told that she was not wanted by her mom, which we, as I think many of us know, leaves a pretty significant imprint on a child.

And her siblings were 17 and 21 years older than her. And my mother was given to her sister to be raised by her for several years before then her sister was getting married, and gets returned to her mom. A lot of that's my mom's story, and it's hers to tell. But the impact that this had on me was that I didn't have any relationship with that side of my family.

Her father had died before I was born. Her mother was very elderly and I think I met her once, primarily because there was a significant cut off between my mom and her family. So to receive a package in the mail from my first cousin who's significantly older than me because her parents were older than my mom, if you get the whole picture, who I've met maybe once or twice in my life.And she and I have started to try and reconnect thanks to things like Facebook and social media that allows us to meet people that we don't live nearby and so forth.

And so the package that she sent me was a painting. The painting is right behind me. And this painting was done by my aunt, my mother's sister. And it's an archway. It's kind of an archway, a threshold perhaps, to a view that stands behind it. And it's significant to me because I have never, until a week ago, had a single physical item, not a single heirloom in my home from that side of my family.

And for those of us that have heirlooms and I, of course, have some heirlooms ,well not of course, but I have some heirlooms from the other side of my family, from my father's side. I cherish them. They bring a felt experience. I have a set of candlesticks that belonged to my great great grandparents in Bohemia, right? So we cherish these items. They're precious to us. But I had not a single item, and I also did not have a single photograph of that side of my family.

So with this package, I received these. And you can't see them closely. That's okay. You don't need to. But what came with this package was also a stack of photographs of my grandparents, of my great grandparents, of my mother as a child, things that I have never owned.

So I have been sitting with the kind of resonating experience of an open archway, a threshold, a view into a world that was relatively closed off for me. And up until this point I have been kind of like a mosaic, putting little pieces together, trying to understand some of the felt sense that I have had.

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One more story here and then we'll continue with our exchange. But one more story is that I didn't really know my mother's story about not being wanted until I became pregnant with my daughter. And I was profoundly sick in that pregnancy. Like something was coming through my body and the hormonal change and I threw up for eight months. It was one of those pregnancies, it was challenging. And I love my daughter very much. I don't blame her for that. It's a historical piece.

Alex Howard

You had to work hard to bring her into the world.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Exactly, very hard. And it unpacked, I was in therapy at the time, well, I've been in therapy most of my adult life, but in that process of therapy it really allowed me to unpack and through conversations with my mom unpack what was coming through the gates of my pregnancy. Because I could feel almost like these shadows of experiences of why can't I bond with this child? What is within me, that is having it so hard to be in my body during this pregnancy?

And so I would open up these conversations with my mom and it started to open up a narrative to understand more about her experience. And I would start to dream about my grandmother who I met once when I was two or something, or an infant. We sometimes really just need to trust that when these themes are emerging that sometimes we don't have the whole story but we have to start to listen to the felt sense.

Alex Howard

I really appreciate you sharing your story and I think it's also interesting around how much of our character and our nature is nurture, is shaped by the experiences we've had. And how much of it is our nature, how much of it is how we come in and how we're shaped. So, I'm curious as to your understanding and work with transgenerational trauma of how those past experiences filter their way through.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah. I've been at this point now kind of writing about and trying to understand generational trauma for almost ten years. And this question you're asking, which is really how does this get passed on? I think that there's several different ways.

One is that we can look at the research of something called epigenetics. Epigenetics basically is looking at changes at the cellular level and in particular, how our body processes cortisol or the shaping of our autonomic nervous system. And how changes, particularly with the mother, can get passed on to the child, and that we can see some of the same modifications in how the cells are processing cortisol between a mother and an infant, especially mothers with unresolved PTSD.

So we can look, for example, at the work of Rachel Yehuda, who's a researcher on epigenetics and her studies of infants who were born to second or third generation Holocaust survivors. Or we can look at infants who were born to mothers who were pregnant during 9/11, living in New York City. And that these infants, I think she also looked at the Rwanda genocide, that these children are

born with a predisposition for a higher sensitivity to stress.

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Basically, they have more colic, they have a lower birth weight and that they are harder to soothe. And I think that this is such a delicate topic because as a parent and as someone who works with parents, I think it's very quick to go, I didn't do enough to resolve my own trauma, look my child has colic or my child is hard to soothe. And the truth is that this is profoundly common and it can be something that gets passed on through generations.

And as much as we do our own work and are trying to kind of in a way stop this legacy, try and not pass that baton on, we sometimes can do some of that and some of it can still go through the gates. And so we want to be compassionate as well to ourselves for the work we do do and the work that we don't get to do. So there's epigenetics as kind of one way that trauma gets passed on. And then there's embodiment. I have a story that sometimes brings this one home.

I had gone to a family wedding, this was years ago. And in contrast to my mom's family, where I had really no relationship to that extended family, I was very close with my father's family. I grew up spending a lot of time with my grandparents. I would go stay with them for my summers. Very, very close. And especially my grandfather, Alfred, I'll give him a name here.

So we had gone to a family wedding when they were still alive. They're no longer living. And I must have been in my twenties. And we go down, this is obviously a pre-pandemic story.We're in a big hotel together. We all come down, we go into the banquet. We're going to have dinner together and my grandfather walks into the dining hall, just white as a sheet.

Grandpa, what happened? And he said, I had the strangest experience. I was walking down the hall to go to the elevator to come down for dinner and there's a man walking towards me. And as I'm walking down the hall and I'm getting closer to him, my heart starts pumping in my chest. I start sweating. I'm looking at this man and he says to himself, this is my father.My father's been dead for many, many years.So he's having this experience as he gets towards the end of the hall, he realizes he's walking toward the mirror, he's seeing himself.

So our embodiment sometimes we're not even conscious of what it is that we have embodied. But whether it's the gait or our gestures or our mannerisms or our voice tone, our facial expressions, we embody what we're around. And those unexpressed or unresolved traumas of the past are often transmitted through body language, through emotional tone, through our voice tone and so forth. And so we'll absorb that and maybe not even know what it is we're absorbing quite yet, but it's in there.

And then attachment is a big element of this as well, in terms of whether we feel bonded to or in some way cut off from or rejected or not understood. And so a lot of this is very preverbal in terms of how we carry forth or feel like these stories get passed on.

Alex Howard

I was just thinking, Arielle, you mentioned about epigenetics and having done a number of interviews over the years of people on that subject, one of the things that always feels really important to me to draw out is that understanding the genetic influences of things is not meant to be a prison to put ourselves in. It's actually, in a way, the key to get out of that prison and of

course, epigenetics helps us understand how we can change those impacts.

[00:15:13]

And I guess that's also an important point to make here, that the danger could be that one says, oh, well, I'm like this because of things that happened to my ancestors, and therefore that's how I am. As opposed to the recognition that understanding, that's helpful, but these are still things that we can learn to develop differently. Right?

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, exactly. Part of how we change that legacy is by attending to what has been handed to us. If we imagine again that this is like a baton that gets passed around the relay race, we're carrying the baton during the time that we're here on the planet. And so during this precious time, and especially in preparation for having children, if that's part of your path as a person, or even if you don't have your own biological children, we are passing something on to the generations that come after us.

And so it's in some ways our duty, it's our job to take hold of what has been handed to us and to become mindful of what it is that we're leaving behind. So indeed, we will pass the baton on. But if we can be mindful that what it is that we're passing on also has what we might call generational or a legacy of resilience, a legacy of strength, that's what I hope to be able to pass on, whether it's to my own children or to the world. Part of the question is really, how do we do this?

And some of it is personal excavation and work in our own therapy and our own embodiment. And if you're a parent, there's a really interesting study that I think is kind of fun and cool. And it was looking at children who knew more about their family history. And that the children who were better able to answer questions about their family history like where their grandparents grew up or how their parents met; or do they know about something really terrible, an illness or a loss that happened in their family? Did they know how their family coped with that?

One of the questions in the study was, do you know why a relative's face froze in a grumpy expression? Like these very real things that kids get so that, for example, if we're going off to Thanksgiving in the States or to Christmas dinner and aunt so and so or uncle so and so is always grumpy or in a bad mood. Do the children have an understanding as to what life circumstances led him to become like that? And can we have compassion for why he's like that?

So the children, going back to the study, the children that were better able to answer these questions rated higher on scores of resilience, had better test scores. Like all of these really interesting outcomes that align with knowing more about our family history.

And I put this together with the work of Dan Siegel and his understanding of coherence that when we have a coherent narrative, something in us relaxes. And I think that's what we're speaking about here about can we give that, whether it's to our children or to our spouses, to our friends, to the people around us, kind of a coherent narrative of who am I? How did I become the way that I am? What are my life circumstances that have shaped me? And how far back have those circumstances influenced me? How far back do I need to go to really better understand myself?

[00:19:12] Alex Howard

And then, of course, one of the challenges can be for those of us that are parents that we do that excavation and we understand how we've been shaped and impacted, but also we become all too aware of how we are then shaping and impacting our own children. And that can be a difficult thing to navigate right. That doesn't then turn into a lot of shaming and blaming of oneself and yeah, I'd love to hear you speak to how one takes ownership and is doing the work without feeling a sense of deep anxiety about their impacts.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, I think that whether it's anxiety or shame, that in either end, if we're going into those emotions, if we think about for a moment the window of tolerance, which I think is a relatively familiar theme right now, that there's a way in which when we're in our center, when we're in a well regulated zone, we're not in high anxiety and we're not in shame. We're really able to take hold of what am I feeling, to take ownership of that, to recognize our impact on another person.

So if we're out of our window, we're in a trauma state, we're still in the unresolved experience, and it may not be the best time to try and talk to your kids about who you are or what may have shaped them. We want to be in a pretty regulated zone. So if we're still caught in high anxiety, I've been this terrible parent, or shame, I've been this terrible parent, that's a place to go. And again, continue to do your own work to unpack actually what is still fueling that narrative. The truth is that we are all going to do things that at some point hurt our children, it's just inevitable.

And one of my favorite researchers on this is Ed Tronick, and he was actually one of my professors in my graduate school. And Ed Tronick is the person behind the "Still Face" experiment. So he's the one that really wanted to understand the impact of, especially, maternal depression on a child. And the "Still Face" experiment, if you're not familiar with it, is basically a parent and child, he has cameras on both of them, he asks the mother, who's interacting playfully with her child, to go into a still face, basically remove all of the expression from her face and become still.

And it has an impact, inevitably, on the child, right? Of course it does. The child is trying to continue to get expressiveness back from the mom and will initially maybe look cute or be playful and then begins to cry and then eventually shuts down. There's nothing I can do that can restore a sense of connection. But what Ed Tronick's primary work contribution is around the role of repair. That these ruptures, he says, we're in rupture, as a parent, with our kids about 30% of the time. There's a lot of ruptures that happen.

We're going to miss a tune, we're going to not hear something. It's our willingness to take accountability for those ruptures without shame, without anxiety, just pure accountability and repair. And the repair process is profound. I can think about this in my own life of the ruptures that went on sometimes for many, many years and never got repaired.

Had, I'll say, my father, only once had he come forward and said, I'm really sorry I did this for years and I never tracked the impact on you, that would be so meaningful. But that's not who he is. And I've grieved that I'm not going to receive that. But I do know that I can take charge of recognizing that, sure, I will miss a tune or have ruptures with my kids, I will not get it. I came into the world with plenty of my own trauma. There's going to be stuff that I'm going to miss, but I can repair that. I can take accountability for that. I can track the impact on them, I can receive their experience. And that's profound.

[00:23:43] Alex Howard

It's also something around that repair that sets, I think, children up for living in a world where their sense of safety is not tied to everything always being okay or everything always going the way that they want it to go, that somehow it's really building resilience. And I think sometimes as parents, we can be very quick to think we've got everything right. We never want our children to suffer, we never want them to struggle. But in a sense, then they don't get the chance to grow and develop the capacities that are most going to support them in life.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Exactly. And that's exactly what Ed Tronick says. He says that the rupture repair cycle actually strengthens us to handle the inevitable stresses of life. Beautiful.

Alex Howard

Yeah. Great. I'd love to explore a little bit also the difference between this legacy trauma we're talking about and collective trauma. And obviously there's a fair bit of crossover there, so maybe we can unpack that a little bit.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, so collective trauma is really like the large scale events that impact often an entire generation or an entire group of people. So we can think about the impact of World War II as a collective trauma event. We can think about Holocaust as a collective trauma event. We can think about a genocide of any group of people, whether it's the Native peoples in North America, whether it is the Native peoples around the world, in Australia. We can think of genocides in Rwanda or around the world.

And so when we look at an impact on a group of people, these kinds of events are often remembered by those group members and sometimes people outside of that group for generations and for hundreds and hundreds of years.

So even a personal story around that, I'm Jewish. My whole family left Europe before the Holocaust. And yet even prior to then, in the mid to late 1800s, we know that there was a significant rise of antisemitism that was already present. And so, even though this is an interesting story, going back to my mom's family, even though I haven't had an heirloom, photographs, I have been trying to piece together elements of that story for years, again over a decade.

And the one thing that I'm very grateful for is that, again, a cousin on that side of the family did a family tree. Started to put together where family lived at different times, birth dates, dates of death, dates of where they lived, and so forth. And so I was able to track back to my great grandmother. Now, I can go a bit further than that. A great grandmother is actually not that far back in our generational history. It's my mother's grandmother. If we just hold it, it's just a few generations back.

But I was able to track that my great grandmother was born in Kiev so, family mostly in Eastern-Europe. So was born in Kiev, and I'm not going to remember the year, in the early 1800s, and I was able to track the date that she got married. So I see her birth date and I see that she was married when she was eleven.

[00:27:42] Alex Howard

Wow.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, I know, like, we have a moment there. And that her husband, now, again, my great grandfather was 27. So we can just hold without knowing any of the specific narrative. There's a story there. There's something curious. And she had her first child at the age of twelve.

Was it an arranged marriage? Was that common back then? Was she sold into marriage, which was common back then. How did she feel about being married off at the age of eleven? Having a child at the age of twelve? In my mind, she's a child herself.

Alex Howard

My eldest daughter is eleven. This is quite visceral for me.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Exactly. It was quite visceral for me to sit there holding the family tree. I didn't know this until last year. And it came to my mind to pull out this family tree because Russia had just begun to invade Ukraine. I see on the news, as we all did, a convoy of tanks heading into Kiev, and I have a visceral felt experience. And I'm sitting in meditation. It was literally three days into this invasion, war, we'll call it war, and I'm sitting in meditation, and in meditation I start to weep and the word motherland lands in my heart.

I didn't know, I knew loosely that my family was from Kiev. I didn't really know all that much. Motherland. And I start to weep, and I come out of meditation, I was like, I need to go look at this family tree. So I pull it out. I'm looking at it, I see eleven, twenty-seven, I see the year. And there was a narrative that this cousin had written up with the family tree. And the narrative said that the Jews were being, I don't think he put this, the narrative said that they moved from Ukraine to the UK.

So they left in late 1800s, again, I'm not going to pull the exact year. At the year that they moved, so again, he had the year that they moved. At the year that they moved, my great grandmother was pregnant with my grandmother. The same grandmother who had the oops pregnancy with my mother and said she wasn't wanted. Third child, both cases. Okay, so she was, she was my great grandmother's third. My mother was my grandmother's third.

And again, total goosebumps. Like this realization that at the time of the pregnancy, she's pregnant with my grandmother. She has to flee her motherland, her mother tongue, and literally her mother.

She doesn't speak English, as far as I can imagine. And they land in the UK, they land in Manchester, and that was where my grandmother was born. Now, her mother at this point was 17 with three children in a country where she no longer has her family and no longer knows the language. Can you imagine the legacy?

[00:31:15]

So in my body, the felt experience is one of flee. And you mentioned before we started the interview that you've talked on this topic with Thomas Hübl, who's someone that I've also deeply appreciated his contribution in this work and the understanding that sometimes what gets passed on is this flight state that can be carried for generations. The feeling in my body of anxiety, of jumpiness, of restlessness. Even when I revisit this story, I can feel an element of that.

Alex Howard

And there's something about how this history lives in us that I guess in the same way as the experiences we have in our own childhood, that we're so normalized to something that we don't realize is there. And then somehow we put a spotlight or we get a taste of something without it and then it's like a whole kind of chains of things suddenly start to make sense. That's part of what I'm hearing in your story that something that had always been a certain way suddenly was seen with truth because of this understanding.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Exactly. And we don't always get those stories or those family trees. In fact, all he said was the years that they moved. What I went and did, thanks to the Internet, was looked up what was happening, I think it was around 1890, what was happening at that time in Kiev and the Jews were being placed in pilgrims.

So that was the connection of the flee. Why did they have to flee their country? It was becoming unsafe already then, the same thing with the other side of my family. My grandmother did a whole lot of genealogical research and tracked that our family left, that side of the family, left Bohemia, pre-Czechoslovakia, so forth, in the 1860s for the same reason. So again, I got it from both sides.

Alex Howard

For people that are watching that have maybe had their own experiences or perhaps this has hopefully led them curious to understand more about part of their history. Because as an aside, I think sometimes, certainly part of my response to doing inner work in my late teens and early 20s was just to want to burn my past and I changed my surname and I just wanted to leave it in the past.

And it wasn't until I had my own kids that I actually wanted to, like you're describing, go back and understand and make sense of. But when those things that have shaped us are in the past and they're in our past, they're not in our lifetime past. They're in that of our ancestors. How do we work with that? Because we can't change what happened.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

We cannot change what happened. And that's true, actually, regardless of whether the trauma was directly impacting us or not. We can't change what happened in the past. What we can do is develop understanding, whether it's personal narrative understanding, or going back to the research on children and resilience and having more of an understanding of their family history.

And blending that a bit with Dan Siegel, I really feel that when we can cultivate some cohesive

narrative, some coherency of a narrative of an understanding of, who am I? What happened to the generations before us, before me, how did it shape them, how did it shape that generation? Even if I don't know personally exactly what happened to my family. I know as a Jewish person with family in Eastern Europe, that that shaped the world, right? So inevitably, to some degree, it's shaped me.

[00:35:28]

And you said something earlier, Alex, that really struck me, which is that sometimes we're just growing up, a fish in the water that we're swimming in, we can't necessarily define it. And I just felt, growing up through much of my childhood, that I never quite fit in. I didn't feel like I belonged, and I didn't know why that feeling was so predominant in me.

Now I can look back at myself at twelve or fifteen or seven and go, oh, honey. I have a lot of compassion for the awkwardness that I carried in myself and that kind of deep lack of belonging that informed my sense of self. I didn't know then, but I can certainly go back and attend to that younger part of me now, right, if we use that language. But I also think that as we're looking at how we heal these kinds of losses, that we're also cultivating a form of generational compassion that as I look back and sometimes it's easy to turn with compassion towards the quote unquote victim of the story, right?

Like, I can have compassion for maybe the eleven year old that was sent off to be married, right, my eleven-year-old great grandmother. But I also need to hold with compassion the twenty-seven year old great grandfather. What was it like to walk in his shoes at that time in the world? And I named that because it's delicate. Sometimes when we go back and look at our generation, the generations that came before us, and we realized that we have perpetrators in our history. That's a hard one, right?

Even if all we need to hold at this moment is an understanding, maybe not compassion yet, maybe we can't go there yet, but an understanding of what it was like to walk in the world in their shoes, from their perspective at that time. We can bring curiosity to that.

Alex Howard

It's also interesting, you say, around that journey to acceptance and understanding. Because I think sometimes what can be difficult is to know that particularly if there are people in our history that have done some objectively really bad things, and to know that we have them in our genetics, they're part of us, that could be difficult. And also to have, even in this lifetime, to have parents that have done things that we may feel deeply ashamed of or that are not in line with our values and then how we, beyond our relationship with them, how we accept those aspects that are also within us.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, well said. And part of it may be reclaiming a sense of dignity that I can live in alignment with my values even if they didn't. Part of it may be kind of setting to rest, even finding some kind of ritual that lets us set down the past so that we don't feel that we have to continue to bear that burden. Sometimes we need to make amends. Right? It wasn't me, but my ancestors did such and such. How do I make amends to that group of people, so that I can finally set this down to rest? The reparations that we see around the world that are starting to come to light and we need so much more.

[00:39:28] Alex Howard

It feels like it's work that obviously takes a lot of courage, but also takes a lot of sensitivity or softness to really understand and unpack these different pieces. I'm curious as to therapeutically what you find helps people really uncover and I guess create the space for this work.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Yeah, I'm going to say that therapeutically, much of the work when I'm attending to these kinds of themes is really listening both to the embodiment story and the energetics of what's present in the room.

That there is something different energetically when we're working with these kinds of generational losses. And I'm thinking about times of... I work a lot with Gestalt, with empty chair type work. So sometimes what we put in the empty chair is the ancestor and the energy shows up in the room. It's present, it's powerful, and it will show up in the body. I know this from my own work of doing this as a client and I know this as a therapist.

That experience of the embodiment, of the profound feeling of like, I don't even want to look at that, or the vile repulsion that can come up, or the depth of sorrow that can come up. It can be almost surprising at how much we're able to feel when we're relating to a generation. And we can get very creative with this kind of work. I think also of Bert Hellinger's work, if you're familiar with his work, and that process of sometimes doing a whole family constellation in the room. Where you might take maybe chairs or pillows, but you can set around the room the grandparents, the great grandparents, you know, however far back you need to go.

And looking at generations sometimes of these transgressions or these injuries or trauma themes that have repeated. And what Hellinger often says in his constellation work is that sometimes we need to go further back to see if we can find a well ancestor.

I often have this image, and I've written about this, of this image of like a train. And that if we, the current generation or in my family, it would be my children, is the front of the train that sometimes it feels like the front of the train is pulling the entire train behind it. Like we're doing all of this effort. But in reality, what we really want is the caboose with an engine in the back that's helping to push the train forward. And that then it becomes easier for the front of the train to propel into their life, to feel free to roam and explore.

I'm not pulling behind me the weight of all of this unfinished business. So this idea of a well ancestor is basically handing back the burden of these traumas to someone in that ancestral lineage who can actually carry that weight, rather than you needing to carry all of that.

Alex Howard

I guess also, sometimes just the realization that we're carrying that weight in the first place is liberating. Going back to what we were saying earlier, that we get so normalized to how things are; that just to really make sense of those connections and to realize that some of these ways we've learnt to relate to ourselves in the world and other people is just not our share. It's not something that we have to be carrying.

[00:43:35] Dr Arielle Schwartz

That's right. I'll share a personal moment of realizing that I was carrying that weight and I honestly had no recognition of the degree of what I had been carrying at this point. This was many years ago. I was in therapy with a therapist who was trained in Hellinger's work, in this constellation work, and we didn't have a whole group of people, so it was just me and her and these basically little mats that we put on the floor to represent the generations of the family members.

And at one point, and she must have picked up on what I was carrying before I was conscious of it, she invited me to go to this bowl that she had of these big heavy rocks. Heavy rocks. And she said, pick out one or two of these, I don't remember exactly, and hand them back to your ancestors. It was in this case, to my great grandmother. And I picked up this heavy rock so I could feel the weight of it. And when I placed it down on the mat, the whole room began to spin. I got immediately nauseous, I fell to my knees, I wept from this unbelievable place, until that whole episode passed.

It was so visceral and deep, but I didn't see it coming. And something released out of me. It was an absolute purge. That, again, I don't know if she saw it coming either, but wow. It taught me about what we might be carrying in us that we might not even realize. After that session, she sent me home with a task, which was to write a poem.

That poem, which I won't read now, but that poem sits at the beginning of *The Posttraumatic Growth Guidebook* and it's what basically launched the writing of that book. And the way that these transformational events, when we're willing to engage and to release that weight what it can do is free us up to really, finally allow ourselves to give our gifts to the world or to just simply live our own lives.

Alex Howard

Yeah, just sharing about Hellinger workshop experiences for a moment. I did a family constellations workshop when I was, I think I was eighteen, nineteen and had never even considered up until that point that my father leaving soon after I was born, and I didn't actually meet until my early 30s, had had an impact. And how that unfolded and came out in the workshop was a very emotional experience. But I remember the facilitator saying at the end, fathers are not optional.

And it's, of course, such an obvious statement in some ways, but to realize that I'd never even considered the impact of not having that presence, and yet it was so there in my body and the intensity of the emotional release and the emotion of just that truth and the impact of that. And so it strikes me just as you're talking, just that sometimes it's not about what we know intellectually, it's that visceral, embodied experience of how these experiences shape us.

Well, I'm mindful we're out of time. So I'm going to ask you, Arielle, for people that want to find out more about you and your work, what's the best place to go and what some of what they can find?

Dr Arielle Schwartz

So you can find me on my website, which is drarielleschwartz.com you can find me on Facebook at Dr Arielle Schwartz. You can find me on YouTube at Dr Arielle Schwartz. So I make it pretty easy for you, and those are the best places to stay in touch and just really hope to be able just to continue to support all of us. Our world in a way, to continue to heal and better itself. It's a pretty wild time

on the planet, let's say that.

[00:48:12] Alex Howard

It's exciting.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

We live in interesting times. Yeah. So I hope we stay in touch.

Alex Howard

Wonderful, Arielle, thank you so much. I really appreciate your time, as always.

Dr Arielle Schwartz

Thank you, Alex.