

Corey Andrew Powell: (00:02)

I'm joined today by inspirational speaker and bestselling author, Jennifer Kauffman, whose personal story is one of tenacity, optimism and forgiveness prior to her remarkable career success in media and entertainment. Jennifer's life took an unexpected turn on April 15th, 2013, when she became one of the injured survivors of Boston Marathon bombing Jennifer, welcome to Motivational Mondays.

Jennifer Kauffman: (00:24)

Thanks Corey. It's a pleasure being with you today.

Corey Andrew Powell: (00:26)

Well, we are so happy to have you here because your story is remarkable. And of course, we're just blessed that you are here to even tell it, considering all things that happened. But first, what I wanna ask you about is something I read while researching this for this interview, which is to give the backstory of the bombing itself, two brothers who were domestic terrorists. They planted bombs at the finish line of the Boston Marathon, and it resulted in three deaths, I believe it was the total number. And many, many severe civilian casualties and bodily harm, you among those people. And when it came time for the prosecution of one of the accused bomber, you chose a position of forgiveness. And I'm just so curious to know how you arrived at that position, because I don't know if many of us could, so please share how you arrived at the position of forgiveness.

Jennifer Kauffman: (01:14)

So, Corey, I went into forgiveness, kicking and screaming. It was not an easy journey to be candid. So the trial took place on the second year after the bombings happened. That happened to be the year that I was dealing with rage. And I was really struggling, candidly. I had a lot of rage towards those two young men and my life actually was really good before this happened. And then life, as I knew it was over. And so we had an opportunity to craft what they call a victim impact statement. And I wrestled with that because really what that means is you articulate every aspect of your life and the impact that that event had had on it. And then you had a choice whether or not to speak it out loud in court. And when it took me nearly two months to write my impact statement, and that was a very challenging yet healing process.

Jennifer Kauffman: (02:15)

And it was towards the end of that completion of the impact statement that I got to the place of forgiveness. That I got there, because truth be told my rage was literally setting me back from a physical, mental perspective. And I really just wanted to break myself free from that entire experience. And so I had heard of forgiveness in the past, but like you just commented, how do you forgive the unforgivable? How do you forgive something when life, as you knew, it is completely overed. And for me, my life was shattered. And that was something I really struggled with. But I finally came to terms and I was choosing to forgive. Because I was hoping and longing for being able to set myself free and low and behold, I was one of 27 people that spoke their impact statement out loud. And if I recall correctly, there were only two before me that actually used the word forgiveness in their in their talks.

Jennifer Kauffman: (03:16)

And, and I couldn't begrudge any of the others because I was exactly where they were just, just even like a week before. My impact statement was six pages long in the very end, I very vividly remember it. I said, despite all of the horrific things that you've done to myself, my family, my community, my fellow survivors, the parents who lost their loved ones that day, I choose to forgive you and your brother for what you did. When I spoke those words, I could not imagine what was gonna happen next, but what happened next is the surviving bomber — Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, I actually don't refer to him as a bomber anymore. I refer to him as a human being, cuz he actually is a human being. So Dzhokhar Tsarnaev would never look at any of us in court, but when I spoke those words and I authentically meant them, we exchanged eye contact for a brief moment.

Jennifer Kauffman: (04:12)

And in that brief moment, I experienced this overwhelming feeling of peace inside of me. I could never have imagined that, but that was my experience. And when I left the courtroom that day, something had changed inside of me. And that ended up my healing after that exponentially soared, I literally. Like it was a turning point in my life. And over time that led to compassion for these two young men and eventually curiosity. Like who does this? And before I was in a curious spot before this, I was actually silently contemplating, how do I take their life?

Jennifer Kauffman: (04:53)

And so now I got curious and I started to do some research on them. And I discovered that they grew up in a war torn country and that they grew up with bombs, you know, being dropped over their heads and in their neighborhoods. Now I grew up in Boston or outside of Boston. I never had that experience. I had the privilege of, you know, living in my community and living in my home in a safe scenario. And so I started to understand a little bit more about these two young men that did that. And then over time that compassion led to love for them. And, and here's what I've come to understand. I've come to understand that, you know, we live in, we live in a world that has basically polarity, right? So we have contrast and we have expansion, we have darkness and we have light, right?

Jennifer Kauffman: (05:43)

We don't have just light. We don't have just darkness and without the darkness, without the contrast in life, we don't, we don't appreciate the other side of it. We don't appreciate, you know, all that we have and we, you know, I used to take it for granted, candidly. And so now I appreciate life more. And I also have a different awareness and understanding about the so-called bad things that happen in our life. Let's be clear. I believe every single person on the planet has experienced trauma. Our stories are just different. That's it? Right? Our experiences are different, but if you put the experience aside and we sat and had a conversation about the impact and what trauma is like on the other side, I think we'd actually agree on what that feels like and what people struggle with, and all of that. And so this experience for the, for time ever helped me to understand that, well, wait a minute here.

Jennifer Kauffman: (06:43)

What if these so-called bad experiences are meant to help us grow, meant to help us get us on our path? Now I wanna be really clear. I never wanna wish any ill will or harm on anyone. And I candidly would never wanna go through that experience ever, ever again. And I wouldn't wish that on anyone. All I'm trying to say here is that things happen in our lives and we can choose to have the mentality of what I would call the victim mentality where, you know, it's like, you know, why did this happen to me, poor me. You know? And it's, it's, it's in a very disempowering context. And frankly, I found myself there after the bombings, why did this happen to me? I don't understand. I'm a good person. I don't get it. And so I did go down that path, even though I never viewed myself as a victim, if that makes sense, I always called myself a survivor. But the truth is I had an internal victim mentality and it was, it was just disempowering. So it took me several years to get to this place. Well, what if, what if these things happen in our life meant to wake us up, meant to bring us back home, to who we really are and meant to help us to find the love within ourselves and have that deep love, not only for ourselves, but for our fellow human being, regardless of the color of their skin, the regardless of their religious background, regardless of their political stance.

Corey Andrew Powell: (08:20)

It's fascinating to me that you, I guess anyone would have that. I guess, depth, if you will, to really look at a situation like that and come through it the way you have, because I think most of us probably, well, I wanna believe maybe we all could find that in ourselves to do it, but I think most of us might get stuck in a rut.

Jennifer Kauffman: (08:41)

I actually say now that was the most horrific experience of my life. And yet it was the biggest gift of my life.

Jennifer Kauffman: (08:51)

And they're both true. I remember about six months after the bombings happened, I had started to return back to a meditation class. And my meditation teacher, who I had been working with for years said to me, as I was leaving that night someday, you're gonna see this as the greatest gift of your life. And I remember being very upset with her. I was like the greatest gift of your life? Are you serious? Do you see me? Do you see my physical, mental, and emotional state of being? I'm a mess. And yet I had such respect for this woman. And I had, and I knew this woman would never want to say anything to hurt me. And then she only spoke her truth. So even though I was upset that day, she planted a seed and that seed germinated over time. And that's what got me curious.

Jennifer Kauffman: (09:38)

And that's what got me going. Hmm. What if? What if these things that happen in our life are meant for us instead of happening to us? Mm. And if you actually just pause for a second and you think, you know, when you, when you come from the lens of what's happening to me, you automatically feel disempowered. It's like, you know, you even, even like, for me, when I, I even say those words, I shrink back. I'm like, it's, you know, like happening to me, like I'm trying to

push it away, trying to resist it. Right. A lot of these things are not in our control. They just happen. But when you shift the perspective and you say, well, hold on. Even as horrific as it is, what if this was happening for me? And what if there is some good that is to come from this?

Jennifer Kauffman: (10:29)

Now I enlightened it like this. And I, and I talk about it in my book. I speak about the fact that it's like going on a treasure hunt. We live in a society. At least how I grew up is that we tend to look for, you know we automatically go to this place of looking for what's wrong, but what if we condition our minds and condition, you know, condition ourselves to look for what's good. Now, when I first started this little game with myself, well, what good came from the situation? Do you know what I got? Nothing. All I got was an influx of all of the things that I perceived as bad. I had to sit with that and be with that question. And I liken it, it's like going on a treasure hunt, right? It's rare to find the gold and the gems at the surface, you actually need to trudge through some muck, trudge through some, you know, debris and rocks and stuff to get to the golden nuggets.

Jennifer Kauffman: (11:35)

And that's what I, I enlighten this experience is like, it's like, you know, looking for the silver lining and that situation. Looking for the good in that situation. When you do that, you literally change your neuro pathways in your brain. You literally start to rewire your brain and your body. And you start to put yourself on a new path and a new trajectory. Now, listen, we either, we have a choice. We can survive life, or we can live life in a thriving state. Every single person on the planet has the God-given ability to thrive, but we're not taught that. A lot of us grow up learning struggle, learning, you know, learning, you know, barely surviving. You know, I grew up in a single family home, you know. We didn't have very little money. I'm fortunate. We had a roof overhead. I'm fortunate that, you know, we had food on the table, but there was really not much left for anything else.

Jennifer Kauffman: (12:37)

And I didn't have it worse. I don't know what your situation is, you know, was like, but here's, Here's the reality is that even in those situations, we have an opportunity to shift from a state of survival, to a state of thriving. Now, how do we do that? The first way to do that is to start to look at, you know, what's life like? How is life for you? If life isn't fulfilling, isn't, you know, uplifting, isn't fun and playful and joyful, you better go look in the mirror pretty quickly and ask yourself, what do I need to do to shift this? I've now come to understand that we're meant to experience happiness. We're meant to experience peace. We're meant to experience joy and all of these things. It doesn't mean that we don't have challenges. It doesn't mean that we're not gonna have things that we need to rise above. We do, but that's part of our growth journey.

Corey Andrew Powell: (13:36)

Thank you for listening to Motivational Mondays, presented by the national society of leadership and success and available wherever you listen to your favorite podcast. I'm Corey Andrew Powell, and I'll see you again here next week.