

# Ep. 14: Second Adolescence w/ Hari Ziyad (he/they)

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they)

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### A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello, and welcome to this week's episode of the Second Adolescence podcast. I am your host Adam James Cohen. On this week's episode is with Hari Ziyad, who is a writer and screenwriter and author of the incredible memoir *Black Boy Out of Time*, which I cannot recommend enough. It is such a beautiful and painful and deeply thought provoking piece of work about Hari's path of healing from anti blackness, anti queerness and the carceral dissonance that separates black people from their childhood selves. Again, go get the book if you haven't absolutely beautiful. On this episode, we talk about the book a lot. Hari shares both about the book and their writing of it. And also about the life story they navigated growing up in this anti black anti queer world and what the continuous path to healing has been for them, they were so generous with their story, and I was so honored to be witness to it and to get to invite all of you into it as well. And as with each episode of Second Adolescence, I want to invite you as the listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are unique and different, you might hear guests share some things on this show that really differ from your experience. And you might hear other things share that really speak to what you went through or are currently going through. And I really hope that all of this happens and that together, we can continue growing and expanding our awareness of what life and queerness and healing can be for folks, if after the show you want to connect further, feel free to head on over to [secondadolescencepod.com](http://secondadolescencepod.com) for show notes and more, or you can follow the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). All right, let's get to the conversation with Harry. Thanks for being here. Hari, welcome to Second Adolescence. I'm so excited and honored to get to have this time with you and be in conversation with you. And I imagine that we'll be having some listeners who are familiar with you and your work as well as some who are new to it. And so I wanted to start today by inviting you to do what I invite each guest to do at the beginning of these conversations, which is just provide a little mini introduction to who you are just to give some context who the person is behind the voice.

### H HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 02:26

Sure. Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here. I am a writer in the past a lot of

sure. Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be here. I am a writer in the past a lot of freelance like journalism, and I created a website called RaceBaitr that ran for a couple of years where we tackle issues around blackness and anti blackness mostly about race, gender sexuality from an abolitionist perspective. And that's kind of how a lot of people started to get to know me. I recently published a book *Black boy out of time*, that was kind of an extension of the work that we were doing at race Bay. And now I'm a screenwriter, or I've been a screenwriter for a bit but now I'm a working screenwriter out here in LA, trying to translate some of those perspectives into a Hollywood format now. So yeah, people might know my work from my TV writing or the book or editing work that I did that RaceBaitr.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:23

Yeah. Awesome. Awesome. I'm curious to kind of go into all of that. And I guess, to start us Yeah, I started being familiar with your work through your book. I came across it a year ago. I think it came out a little over a year ago. Right. So yeah, and gosh, like what a beautiful memoir. It was. And I am curious. You know, I imagine in your conversations with folks about your book, I can imagine it could be almost an annoying question to get from interviewers like the general, what's your book about which I like? It's like, well, it's my story. There's so many ways to answer that. But there is also something interesting to ask the artists, the creator about how they conceptualize what their work is. So I am curious if it's not too annoying of a question like, how do you like conceptualize what *black boy out of time* is?

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 04:11

I actually really liked that question, because my answer to it has changed. And I appreciate being able to revisit what the book is. I mean, at the root of it. It's a memoir about growing up, black, queer, and Cleveland to a higher Krishna Muslim, a blended family, I have 18 siblings, and my mother converted to Hinduism when she was about 20. That was like 40 years before I was born. And my dad converted to Islam a long time ago, and they raised this really weird family and I ended up being the queer one. And so it's about that journey of growing up and you know, identity figuring out what belonging means in the context of that but it's also about how I came to my abolitionist perspective, I believe in a world without prisons and police. Now a lot of that had to do with how those two institutions were present in my life growing up in Cleveland, how different folks were criminalized, but also recognizing how a lot of the ideas behind policing, and prisons show up, when you are trying to form your identity. So especially me as a queer person in this family trying to figure out who I am the seeing how much policing that I turned down on myself or policing that my parents did of us, and also that we did a vermin that everybody does of each other. And these families and communities really limits how one might come into themselves and feel free in this world. So in the book, I'm trying to take my activism around police abolition, and turn it inward and figure out how I can do abolitionists work within my relationship to my family, and also, my relationship to my younger self, I realized a lot of the work that I was trying to heal from required inner child work. And so half of the book is written to my younger self, and trying to just like unpack all of the things that were lost over the years of policing different parts of myself away, and locking those parts up, and seeing if those things are still accessible. I believe that they are, I believe, a lot of really fantastical things like I believe that a world without police is possible. But I also believe that we can get in touch with those parts of ourselves that were told our loss to time. And so the book is me trying to explore what that process looked like for me. In the process of doing that. I started the book, my mother had just been diagnosed with cancer. And it became terminal over the

course of it. And so the book is also me trying to figure out my relationship with her in the midst of all of this. So it's, it's about grief, it's about loss, it's about finding yourself throughout all of that. And the ways in which policing and prisons and the culture around that impede on that work.

**A** Adam James Cohen (he/him) 07:18

Beautiful answer. And thank you for sharing all of that. And, yeah, I mean, I can't recommend this book enough. I feel like I've been telling so many people about it on so many levels, like first off just artistically like the way you put words together. It's just so beautiful to receive. So on that level, it was just breathtaking. But like, yeah, like, in my experience, I read this book twice, I read it a year ago, then again, in preparation for this conversation. And it was interesting, as a reader, I was reading it, of course, kind of with the simultaneous lenses I bring with it like as a psychotherapist, the lens as a white person, that lens as a queer person, lenses, someone socialized as male. And like, throughout all of that I just kept coming back to this being an author of such a piece about what it means to heal such a piece of like an adult on this quest of healing from these wounds that their younger, self accrued. And it was, you know, from anti blackness, anti queerness, heteronormativity, all of that you talked about carceral dissonance as well. And I'm wondering if you could speak about that concept of carceral dissonance, and then going back into your story sharing a bit about and what did it look like as a child growing up within all of that context, internalizing all of that?

**H** HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 08:29

Yes, so I use the term carceral dissonance in the book to describe the separation that black people in particular have from their childhood cell. So I'm sure that a lot of your listeners are familiar with like inner child work. But when I was introduced to that term and my own process of therapy, I was just thinking about all of the ways that it didn't really account for the the specific ways that black childhoods are made inaccessible, those specific ways that we are adults defied. And I mean, we just had this huge conversation on Twitter, because the Associated Press, use the term white teen for the shooter in Buffalo (this was a white man), and then use the same term a couple of years ago when describing Mike Brown as an adult. And so just the ways that the world influences our separation from our childhoods, I think it's a specific way that it happens when you are criminalized in a certain way. And so I call it that carceral dissonance and the process of being separated from your younger self. And I think inner child work for black people has to engage with the concepts of criminalization and ideas rooted around the carceral state carceral system. And so that's why I use that term. The second part of your question was, I'm sorry,

**A** Adam James Cohen (he/him) 09:51

no, yeah. And like, then like as a little kid, like, What do you recall it was growing up within this context? Like, what was that like in those early years? Growing up in Cleveland, and yeah, the younger years,

**H** HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 10:02

yeah, so for me, I had, like I said, a very interesting childhood. I don't know too many people who had a similar one I grew up Hari Krishna, my dad was Muslim, but we mostly grew up in the temple. It's a branch of Hinduism and but my mother also was just very interested in raising her children in the way that you wanted to like, she'd already decided to go on this spiritual path that was very unique. And she was really great at just carving out spaces to make that work for her and for us. And so a lot of my childhood was very intentionally protected because of that, like she homeschooled us. And she, you know, tried to surround us with other people in the community, black devotees in particular, which for me, I think, gave me a little more room in my childhood. I don't think anyone is completely unimpacted by these forces, but I do know like growing up, and I have memories of like, not really experiencing those things we were just talking about, in the same ways that a lot of my cousin's peers were experiencing. And so when it did start, when I did start to fill, you know, the ways that black children are policed and criminalized, a lot of that actually happened in my family directly. And so the same woman, same person who was so protective of us, being individuals and finding ourselves and going on our own path, also contributed to my first experiences of not being abused that at all, because she was working through her own anti queerness, and other ideas around gender, which just really goes to show how pervasive these ideas are, I don't think any of us are ever completely able to avoid learning to use these tools that are so destructive. And so for me, it's always going to be a process of unlearning that even though like I'm able to recognize how that impacted my life, I have to unlearn that when I'm engaging with other black children as well. And so that's when it really started when I started to, like, be more aware of my gender, when my mother and father started to, you know, refer to me more as a young man. And as a child as a boy. I mean, what that meant in terms of what I was able to do what I was able to say, who I was able to associate with, came to mimic the ways that later I will see like in the school system, and especially as I got older, the ways that all of these institutions, police, black children, but I am very grateful that there was some space for me to see, even if it wasn't like a perfect utopia. I don't think that exists. But I did see how my mother was intentional about creating that space for us in some way. And so a lot of my work is trying to like take the best parts of that, and then expand that create even more space for black children to be free. And then for us as adults to be free when in trying to reconnect with those childhood aspects of ourselves.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 13:13

Yeah, and you were mentioning kind of feeling policed around gender. And I'm curious, like, What do you recall, like younger you thinking in terms of kind of who they were? And kind of how they conceptualized who they were growing up? Yeah. As you're starting to get into out of childhood into adolescence, what was happening at that time, in terms of how you experienced yourself?

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 13:36

Yeah, I mean, it's so interesting, because obviously, like everything, all of our memories are shaded by current perspective. There's no like, objective view of what life was like that isn't shaded by, you know, what I know now. But what I recall from that time was just a lot of confusion. Because growing up, there was, like, probably until I was about like five or six years old, there wasn't a lot of strict gender rules around anything. And like I had really long hair and I didn't really see a difference between myself and my sisters. And obviously, like, I knew that

they were sisters and I was their brother. That's what we were called, but it didn't really impact our roles in the house as much and so when that just started to trickle in, it was really confusing. Like this worked really well for us this long, like I love that and I didn't see where it was causing any problems and then there's like, this idea that this is a problem is being like projected on to us and in such a strict way like it wasn't just you know, like this might be a better way or this might be easier for you, if you you know, this fall into is typically expected of a boy. It was this is what you need to do. And then When you didn't follow those rules, it was punishment. So that change is just really jarring. And really disorienting. But it also caused me to, I started to adapt that myself, like, I started to turn all of that inward. Because I didn't want to feel that punishment, I didn't want to upset my parents. And so I think that time was a lot of just like, letting those ideas become a part of who I was at the expense of other parts of me. And I became really good at it, I became really good at policing myself became really good at hiding the queer parts of myself. And I became really good at policing that and others. And I think those things almost always come hand in hand. Like it's not just one person or connected to our entire communities. And I reflect on that, like, even with my siblings, like the ostensibly straight siblings, what are the ways that I might have reinforced that, and that's something that I'm trying to explore in the book and still trying to explore now. Because it's so again, so pervasive, it becomes such a big part of you that it's hard to really learn it in any amount of time what to speak of, the couple of years that I've been doing this work.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 16:21

Yeah. Like what happened as you then got older, going into adolescence in high school, one of the remember in the book you talked about, almost it sounds like as a product of kind of what came before really striving for excellence. And that kind of becoming a big part of that chapter. What else do you recall about both that and just in general, what like, later adolescence looks like for you.

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 16:45

So I think part of that process of like really perfecting the policing that was done to me and turning it inward, so much of even when we're talking about gender, and the ways that like, so much of what's policed, is connected to this unacceptable version of like blackness. And so blackness, that doesn't have a gender that's easily legible as dangerous blackness, that it doesn't excel in specific ways. Academically, a black man, that's normal, like we had to separate ourselves from what was, quote, unquote, the normal black people, which is never completely possible. Because ultimately, we're always going to be black as well. And so it turns you in on this like loop, of like, trying to run away from parts of yourself that you can never fully get away from, for me, that really manifested in how I perceived myself academically, and like what I thought was possible in terms of how I could live a life that was safe from everything, like, ultimately, I was trying to run away from, I think, the punishment that I experienced. And so how do I escape that punishment is by becoming this ideal version of myself in so many different ways. That's like fitting an ideal gender presentation, but also, excelling academically, in this particular way. And just in general, being palatable to whiteness, being something that whiteness can understand. And that ultimately will reinforce whiteness, and so academically, like all we know that those standards are so rooted in whiteness, they change when it stops benefiting white people that much. And so as long as you're upholding that structure, you're doing internal damage to yourself, you're doing damage to your communities, and I didn't

really realize how much damage I was doing to myself at the time. But that was kind of probably like the culmination of all of the other damage that I was doing to myself and like really dis silencing the queer parts of myself. It's no coincidence that it came hand in hand with me trying to excel in this particular way. Because both of those things are related to just getting as far away from a blackness that is illegible to society as possible.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 19:22

And in reading your book, I can really see that kind of starting in, you mean, you mentioned going to New York for university, getting part hoping to kind of be able to explore queerness more unencumbered, and it also seems like kind of I mean, it that came with its own complications as you speak about to curious if you could share about both that time period, but it also felt like there started to be a transition as you were kind of away from home kind of beginning to kind of find yourself as an adult. At what point I'm curious, like where do you see like healings started, like you were mentioned in kind of coming again, adolescence was really this culmination of Have all of this damage that was happening to you and to your selfhood. I'm curious kind of, in this next chapter, I feel like I'm just asking seven questions and one because I'm just so curious. But what comes to mind is you hear me kind of throw those curiosities towards you.

H HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 20:12

Yeah, no worries at all. I feel like I'm giving seven answers or whatever. It's,

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 20:18

It's lovely.

H HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 20:19

But I feel like, and that's kind of what I'm challenging in the book, too, right? Like the way of thinking of time in a linear way, right, is kind of reductive. Like I think there were parts of me that were at least trying to help my whole life. And I think that started with my mother, who also started to put a lot of things in my life that I was trying to heal from, like, it's not really easy to extricate the two from one another. But I think like, there definitely was a time in college where like healings began to look in a different way that's like, more connected like the journey than I am now. And that was interesting, because, like you mentioned, going to NYU initially felt like, you know, this was gonna be a safe place for me to explore my sexuality. But I wasn't thinking about it as like a space to explore my queerness. If queerness is being this thing that is challenging, normativity challenging binaries, that's challenging the same kind of policing that we're talking about, I didn't think of my sexuality in that way. I just knew, you know, there's this thing that I'm filling that I want to explore, and like, I want to go after that. And so a lot of ways my journey towards like, exploring my sexuality in New York at the beginning, reinforced a lot of the same damages that I was trying to run from. But once I found like a community of people like, at first, I was just like, stuck on campus, like, I'm in the middle of New York, what are the most diverse places in the world, and this college that's in the middle

of the city, there's no real campus, like, you should be able to explore this really, relatively small city, geographically, but I was there for such a long time. And a lot of that was the encouraging us to be there. There's all this propaganda about, like, Oh, this is can be like any other college experience, which it shouldn't be like, I think one of the great things about NYU, if there are any, is, it doesn't have to be like any other college experience. And so once I started to find a community of like other people outside of college, people that are also black and queer, who are also trying to heal from things, and we're open and actively working on that, that is when I really started to do my own healing. And to think that it was even possible to do that. And I'm really grateful for that community of people in LA now, but I think that New York always had a special place in my heart, because it showed me that you know, a black queer community, black queer family, I learned that family could look different from, you know, your biological family, through the connections I made out there. And that was really when I was like, Oh, this is what I've been looking for, like, yes, it is also, like, obviously, my sexuality is connected to my queerness. And I love my sexuality. But there's what I was really searching for. And I think the greatest part of my sexuality is that it was rejecting all of these cages that I was putting around myself. And those were always going to be connected to my blackness, they are always going to be affected my queerness. And so starting to notice where those cages were, and work against them, seeing other people do that was really when this stage of my journey began. And that also coincided with my grandmother passing, we had a really tense, that's a euphemism for a lot of things. But our relationship was really hard. She struggled with diagnosed and untreated bipolar disorder for a very long time. And a lot of that when we were kids was terrifying. And so around college time, I was able to develop a different relationship with my grandmother that I never thought was possible as a kid, and then she passed away. And so I was thinking about like, you know, what even is possible when it comes to healing relationships, and why did I preclude this version of heard that I did get the chance to experience like, why was that never something that I even thought was possible and this reshaping What possibility looks like and especially when it comes to like relationships that are difficult, that started to happen around the same time, once I started to push what was possible in my relationships, so start to think about, you know, what was possible in my relationship to myself, and pushing that a little bit further to? So yeah, those things are kind of like aligned around the same time. Wow,

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:38

what a powerful time. What's it like, in this moment, just looking back to even that chapter of your life, what comes up?

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 25:44

it's so weird, because there's so much going on around that time. Like, I don't think I realized how tramatic a lot of experiences I was having them were, even though I was like starting to recognize and name things like that was also around the time when I came out to my parents. And that was also a part of me trying to, you know, be more active in my healing. But even in doing all have that, like it was just so much trauma, like, my memories are so fragmented. I don't remember a lot of like specifics from around that time. And I'm able to recognize that now is like, Oh, this was just like a really like stressful time. So in a lot of ways, like I had to do that healing, because it wouldn't have been sustainable. Otherwise. But yeah, I was struggling in college and needed a community like my, my relationship with my parents was very strained. I

was broke, I was working a lot trying to get through the last part. So school, and I was trying to figure out who I was in the world. And then like, not too long after that Trayvon Martin was murdered. And so yeah, it was just like a bunch of just like, it was like, either you deal with this now or like you don't, and you regret it. And so I guess, in a lot of ways, I was just, I had to deal with what was happening to me in a different way. And that's really what that time was just a bunch of like, necessary steps. I just had to keep taking one after another, to get out on the other side of whatever that was.

**A** Adam James Cohen (he/him) 27:30

I mean, in that I hear, like, kind of being in this cycle of like, yes, like a lot of growth and healing was happening. But also, trauma was occurring growth and healing trauma, like there was just kind of this cycle, did it feel? Does that feel true? Does that feel right? Or say that?

**H** HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 27:45

Oh, yeah, that feels and that goes back to what we were saying earlier about, you know, like things not being linear. That's how I still feel, again, we just were in the middle of this devastating pandemic, and my mother just passed, I just got my first job in TV, which is what I went to school for, and I just got married, and my best friend died, like all of these things happen at the same time. And it's never just like, it's never just like, all healing, right? You're constantly healing from things that are happening in real time. And realize that that's what healing was always going to be like, it made me realize that healing was possible. Because for a while, I was like, oh, like, if things don't ever start letting up. And I guess I just wouldn't ever do this work, because it's not ever gonna start lighting up. But it doesn't have to, you can heal and you can make mistakes at the same time. And that doesn't mean that the healing is not happening. And that's, yeah, something I still have to remind myself constantly, but it's something I know it's true.

**A** Adam James Cohen (he/him) 28:56

Yeah, and on the topic of healing, and kind of going back to your book, I'm thinking about, as you mentioned, kind of a component of your book. And both like our constructor are these interjected chapters of you, writing letters to your younger self. And you mentioned kind of starting this inner child work in therapy in your 20s. And I'm just curious to hear you speak about kind of, what was that like to start that work of kind of more focused, invitations to kind of commune with and be with your younger self, I feel like I talk with queer people often about the healing potential of doing just out of finding a way to be in connection with the younger selves who were there before, whatever out in the world tried to kind of pull that away and curious for you, kind of what was it like to start that work and then to write those letters and to decide to put them in the book, like, what was that like?

**H** HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 29:46

It was it was it was interesting, it was easier because growing up Hindu, we have a practice of like doing altar work and like a big part of ritual is like disciplic succession which can include family and but it's usually like gurus that you still communicate with. And for me, I was able to



family and but it's usually like guards that you still communicate with. And for me, I was able to like see a lot of the parallels between that and like, in a child work like, in a lot of ways it's this like esoteric, somewhat spiritual concept of connecting to something that's out here and the physical ways that we know the material world to be. And so having that background made, the idea of easier to like wrap my head around, still isn't easy, especially like when I first was introduced to it, like I said, I was, you know, thinking of it in terms of how I read about it, which wasn't really engaging with all of the structural issues that might impede black or queer people from connecting with their inner child, like, the book that I read was written by a cisgender, straight white woman who acknowledged those things, but never really wrestled with them. And so a lot of what we had to do in therapy was bring that to the NHL where and once I got my therapist on board with that, it became a lot easier. As a writer, it just made sense to start writing these letters first, that at first, I did expect to include them in the book at all. But while I was writing about the process, and like writing about healing, and I was like, why not just include what this actually looks like in the book. So I actually finished a whole draft of the book before we did the letters. And the book did not feel complete at all until we did that. And I was like, oh, like, I can't just talk about what this process is, like, I want to actually include the reader in this process, which was really hard, for a lot of reasons. But the main one being like a lot of the things that, you know, I was writing about and trying to back with my younger self were just even more sensitive, I guess is the word are harder to process than the things that I was already writing about in the book. But in the process of doing that, in that at a certain point, I just had to not think about the reader. While I was doing that, like the reader was my younger self. And people were asking me, who are you writing this book for? I was like, it's to myself, I hope that other people can engage with it and get something from it. But this is for me. And once I just really committed to that. And I was like, What do I need to write right now? What do I need to read right now? That's when the book became what it is. So yeah, that that process was pretty intense times. But the odd thing is the letters to my younger self, like I wrote those faster than any of the other chapters like it's just came out. And I guess it's because these were things that I always wanted to say to myself and the questions that I always had just gone, allowing myself to just open up and receive that or open up and put that down. It just started flowing out of me. So even though the some of those are the hardest, like emotionally to write, they were the easiest to actually get on the page in terms of like time, and they also were the most healing parts of the book. And so and like I said, that's what I wanted to get from the book was to heal. So, yeah.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 33:47

And what is it been like being on the other side of all of that work on the other side of all that writing on the other side of constructing this book, for your younger self, what's happened like,

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 33:57

that's, it's really incense because I mean, so much has happened since then. And I was very grateful that we were able to finish the book before my mother passed away. But the book was published before, but she was able to, like read. And so engaging with that, and the loss of my mother, which is what a lot I think the book, I was like trying to prepare myself for that. And so it was just like, I needed to keep reusing the skills that I gained in the book, and just like, double down on that, but without having this without it being my job to do that, to figure out how to stay committed to that. But I think in the process of writing the book, it just became a practice. Yeah, it's been my practice has also evolved. I don't do as much like direct inner child

work now as I do. Like now I have my own otter and I am not Hari Krishna or Hindu But I use that to talk to my mother and my grandmother and people that I've lost. And sometimes that does include inner child work, like I use that to just curate a space for me to connect with the things that I've lost. But it's kind of grown from that just being you know, me. I mean, there are parts of the people that I've lost, there are parts of me too. And so just expanding that has been really interesting and helpful, especially in the grieving process. And it's going to continue to expand, I hope, like, I don't think that it just stay stagnant. I think what my experience of doing inner child work is that it was different almost every time and giving myself space to experience that differently. While also just giving that part of myself what I need is the ultimate goal.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 35:55

Yeah, you created such an offering by deciding to share this publicly to do this work. And to let people into this work letting you know, I'm a stranger, I wasn't who you wrote the book for, like other people, like letting people into this work to kind of be witness to your own healing is guaranteed, inspiring, more healing to occur. And I just feel so much appreciation for you. Deciding Yeah, to let others into this experience, which I can imagine from a year end being the person who is kind of opening up your story for folks, both those who are within your immediate community, those strangers you don't know like, that has got to be an interesting and complex experience, too. So but yeah, what is that part of being on the other side of the release a year out with, like, this book very much out in the world, like, how has that been knowing, and maybe even experiencing other people's reactions to your story, knowing people are getting to be witness to your story in this way, how has happened,

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 36:57

I think I'm still figuring that out. I am, like, so much less online now. And I don't know, I think maybe part of it has to do with you know, like just feeling raw after that. I think the other part is like, I just feel like a different person after my mother passed. And then there's COVID. So I'm trying to figure out what all of these things contribute to that. But I know that I'm like, there's a part of me that's like, I've been trying to express these parts of myself to certain people or to the world, even for such a long time. And, like, I feel like that's complete in a lot of ways. Like, I don't feel this urge to, like, speak to the world. I don't feel this urge to like, be as public anymore. And I think that's because, you know, that did its job in a lot of ways. But I also think it's because in doing that, I realized how much protection my younger self needs like and how much privacy I don't know if that's the right word, but there is a part of me, that needs to just be with myself, and needs to not have everyone have access to the that needs to have different boundaries that I wasn't necessarily always respecting. And so I'm just much more sensitive to what those boundaries are and how to keep that little Howery safe. In a lot of times, that's just like, I'm just not. I'm not out there anymore.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 38:41

Totally. Yeah, yeah. And I'm also thinking about kind of this other component of healing for our younger selves is also creating the space to let them expand and play and experience joy. So I'm curious, like, what that part of your story has been of kind of the expansive Joy part of

healing of kind of letting your younger self kind of take up space and move and be seen, and what does that look like?

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 39:07

I mean, it looks like some of it is that not feeling compelled to be in spaces or to like, give everyone access to me, and to just be able to sit and enjoy my own thoughts, my own presence, I family on a different level, like I'm much, much closer to my family now, since writing this book, and I would get much much closer to my mother since writing the book. And a lot of it also like, this might be a theme of this whole conversation but it's connected to like I felt joy on such a deeper level since writing this but but I've also felt like such intense sadness and such intense loss and such intense grief. And I think those things they go hand and especially in the world that we live in. And so a lot of me leaving into joy has also been me giving myself space to grieve, especially with the loss of my mother, like I feel. It's so weird. Like, I couldn't just like sit for my otter and cry, I'd like I'll be feeling really sad about I also feel like this intense joy that I'm even able to do that. And so that's what a lot of it looks like. Now, it's like, it's not a cliché, like, it's not the hashtag black boy Joy right in the streets with the flower crowd on it's my joy is in being able to like really sit with myself and not get overwhelmed by everything that's going on. Because otherwise it would be overwhelming. And I think it's okay to name that it's overwhelming. And so being able to like sit with it, and still survive and still not just survive, but still have a lovely relationship with my partner and have deep relationships with my family. That's been what joy is to me. And I'm like, really excited to see how much deeper those relationships can go in a deeper relationship with myself. It's been an interesting, interesting.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:19

Yeah. I feel so appreciative of getting to have this time with you and getting to kind of be witness to your story. In this way. I've, of course, read your book, which also sidebar might be a weird experience for someone in your shoes, knowing that someone's read your whole story coming in to talk with you. I'm just curious what that's like. But I feel Yeah, just so appreciative that you took the time to come the conversation and talk about these things and share your story. And before we wind down, I want to give you and be sensitive to your time. Was there anything else that wanted to be a part of this conversation before we look at closing things out?

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 41:53

Well, I can respond to your last question. Yeah. And I don't think that many people have asked me that question, which is interesting. I guess there's so many different things. There are people who engage with this story. On a very surface level, a lot of times, it's like white folks that are like, Oh, this is very traumatic, and like, and that's not the story that I wrote. And so it feels weird. And there are people who like, get what I was trying to say more than that feels great. But I felt like it had to be like, you have to know the whole story to like, really get it. And so I'm always grateful when people respond in the latter way. Because that also can be kind of terrifying that people know your whole story. But when they take that story, and like have really set with all of the corners that you've explored in that story, it's just really gratifying to like I put myself out there and this really vulnerable way, like you know, everything, you know,

all these things about me. And you could do that you could just take all of that direction on the ground. And then to like see that that's not everybody's response. And that's not even most people's response to this book, gives me a lot of faith that people can be vulnerable, I still really believe that. And you know, what, we were just talking about keeping some spaces to yourself, and, but it gives me a lot of hope and power of vulnerability. And I consider myself a very, like honest person, like, I don't have a lot of secrets. And this just kind of reinforce my desire to continue being that kind of person, even though it can be terrifying, and it can backfire sometimes and so I guess as to your question that's like, now I feel like I haven't much more of a balance. Like I just tell everybody everything about my life. But there's also a lot of stuff that people can just look up in the book in Google. And there's that that wasn't in the book, too. So yeah, it's so weird experience. But it taught me a lot of balance and taught me about the importance of being vulnerable, as well as the importance of like, keeping some parts of yourself sacred.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 44:22

Then K on that piece, I'm also thinking about for listeners who are new to you and your work in addition to getting your book. I'm curious, like, what are your boundaries in terms of what's your relationship with being online right now? Like if folks wanted to follow us around to learn more about what you're up to, like? Do you invite that or?

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 44:41

Yeah, no, I mean, because I just I won't really post on like Twitter and Facebook. But you can follow me if you are posted a lot more on Instagram for whatever reason. You can also follow me there. I don't mind following I'm not gonna engage in ways that I don't want to engage with. If no matter whose. Finally if I wanted to go private, I'd go private. So if you want to follow me, Harry Ziyad on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and I welcome that I love building community, especially if it's a good supportive loving community. Yeah.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 45:19

Awesome. Awesome. Well, Hari, thank you again, so much. This has been such a treat. And I just feel so appreciative that you took some time to talk about your story, talk about your work, and be here with us. Really appreciate it.

H

HarÄ± Ziyad (he/they) 45:33

Thank you.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 45:42

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