

EPISODE 80

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I'm doing what you told me to do and that is not happening and so then it just a spiral of like what am I doing wrong? What is wrong with me? This wasn't an overnight process and I needed it to not be an overnight process because in the process, I found myself more. If there's people out there that are thinking yes, I just need to find my voice. You don't need to find your voice tonight by 9 PM, that doesn't need to happen.

The journal, bring out your voice. You don't need to necessarily buy that course, that's going to help you find your voice. Sometimes finding my voice meant getting away and spending a weekend with god and just journaling."

[INTRO]

[0:01:27.7] AS: You know battling food in your body doesn't work. You want to love and accept yourself and because you're insatiable, you want results too. You bring the same intensity in your life, wanting to maximize your time, potential and experiences you have here on our beautiful and wondrous planet earth.

Fair warning, it will be a roller coaster but for those insatiable, this is your prime time to thrive. Here's to saying yes to the hunger of wanting it all. I'm your host, Ali Shapiro, who is dedicated to pioneering a saner and more empowering approach to health and weight loss.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:02:07.8] AS: Hello insatiable listeners, welcome to episode 80, earning a PHD in body image with Sera Snyder. In today's episode, I interview one of my first clients, Sera Snyder on her wild and dramatic hailing journey that started with a battle with food and how her body looked and has transformed into her supporting patience and health care professionals to collaborate on better health experiences and outcomes the 21st century holistic health care that works.

In today's episode, Sera and I talk about how a health crisis or battle with your body can be an invitation to profound growth and power but it won't be a straight line and you can leave those simple or really positive self-help tips at the door, talking to you The Secret. How finding your voice is a key to healing and losing weight and lastly, we talk about the most progressive view of how healthcare is evolving and transforming to offer better value to you as a consumer. How to become the best advocate for yourself so you can get the best outcomes.

We cover a lot of territory as Sera is someone who walks her talk and powerfully uses her voice. Here's some more professional background about Sera. She is on a mission to use her voice, experience and passion for wellness to inspire healthy change. As a cancer survivor and woman in recovery from an eating disorder. Sera uses her life story to challenge the way we honor our personal health and overall wellness.

She is an advocate of a holistic approach to help and shares openly about how combining traditional and complimentary therapies help her thrive. Sera is the founder of Healing You, Women's Wellness and Educational Community, created to help women he offer the physical, emotional and spiritual pain that comes from living with the chronic condition like cancer or auto immune disease.

Healing You offers in person retreats and virtual retreats. Focus on mindfulness, nutrition and self-awareness. In 2009, following her first surgery to remove her tumor, Sera founded Running for Answers, a running event that brings together a community to raise money and awareness for Desmoids, the tumor Sera was diagnosed with in 2008.

The race which takes place annually in Philadelphia has raised over one and a half million dollars for Desmoid research and ignited a movement in the rare disease community. Her story

to build and grow this initiative has been featured in USA Today, Health and Wellness, Men's Fitness on the Dr. Oz Show in CBS Philadelphia.

Sera currently lives in Virginia and along with being a health advocate, provides consulting services to integrated and functional practitioners, looking to build sustainable and saleable models. You can learn more about her at seraviana.com. You guys are going to love today's episode, Sera's intensity and all the wisdom she has to offer us.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:27.7] AS: Hello insatiable listeners, we have Sera Snyder here today, Sera, it's so funny, I have been going through old files, I'm at this 10 year mark in my health coaching business. I don't know if society tells you a decade is a big deal but I've been so reflective and you were one of my first clients.

And things have come like beyond full circle right? We've kept in touch and you're on this very exciting path as your health path has unfolded and I just, it feels so sacred to have you here today. Thanks for joining us.

[0:05:23.1] SS: Yeah, thanks so much for having me, it's so ironic to hear you say that I was your first client because it's like I don't remember being a client because we're such good friends now that your approach to me became so friendly and then just so blessed to be able to get to know you better but this sacred journey that I'm on, I think partly because of a seed that you planted very long ago so I blame you, today I blame you.

[0:05:49.5] AS: We're going to cover today about functional medicine versus integrative medicine and where healthcare is going so that listeners can have a better team with them. I think it's so important for us to hear more whole stories of healing and what that really looks like versus the media dramatic example of both weight loss and healing.

Can you share with us your story which is pretty powerful, it's dramatic but it's not dramatic in the way I think often we're told that healing or weight loss has to look like. Tell us your story?

[0:06:24.2]SS: Gosh, yeah.

[0:06:25.5] AS: The health side.

[0:06:26.3]SS: It's that, the health side. Well I think that is like my whole story, I believe after walking through this journey that physical ailments and physical challenges are like our window to opening up to the deepest work of our life emotionally, spiritually. I'll start in that space where my physical ailment happened for me to just spur on this journey and that was ironically just several months after I started working with you or met you.

I had known that at that point in my life, I think I was starting to get aware that I had some distorted relationship with my body. Something wasn't right and I remember coming to your website and just being like, my gosh, what she's saying makes sense, My whole life I've been dieting and my whole life I've been trying to work out and do the physical side of getting to that perfect body.

It just seems like no matter what I did, I couldn't get there and looking back now, I was in the greatest shape of my life when I met you. It's kind of ironic. I was running marathons and half marathons and eating healthy relative to what I knew at the time, definitely not the diet that I have now which is mostly food with five or less ingredients but shortly after I met you in the fall of 2008.

I was at an exercise class at the gym in Philadelphia where we lived at the time and I felt this lump in my stomach and I thought, because I've been doing so much abdominal work recently leading up to that that I probably strained a muscle or that something had happened and there were series of just going to my PCP and having some test.

I found that I had a very rare tumor embedded in my abdominal wall called the Desmoid tumor. I was healthy, I was working a job in finance, I was working a job in the city, on the outside I looked so happy but I was unraveling the story with you that I really wasn't happy, there was like this unsettling dissatisfaction of who I was and I was seeking something greater, I was seeking happiness because I was really just doing everything I thought people thought I should do to look good and to be successful.

When this happened, I was just like, let me just get through this and I thought with our original MRI's and the original decisions that I would just get this thing taken out and it would be this life transformation. I got cancer at 26 and it's going to spear me into this great place and so I chose to do surgery very quickly after the diagnosis because my surgeon really pushed me forward to...

We had to get this thing out, it could grow really fast and if it grew, it could basically attack my organs and really be detrimental to my health. I went in for the surgery, you helped prep me, I remember great soups that you gave me and the different things that we did and I was like, I'm going to do this healthy, I'm going to do it focused, I'm going to do really well.

I would set this goals, I remember doing some imaging and stuff in the hospital of when I would be able to run again and how I'd be able to get back and really, the truth is, I was so worried about gaining weight and I was so worried about my body and what was happening in my body.

I was less worried about the tumor coming back and more worried about what was the scar going to look like and was I going to gain weight in this process and when can I run again? Where I sit today, that is bogus to me but that was my truth. The truth of what happened was I didn't run very quickly even though I was super healthy, I was young, I had a ton of pain, I ended up being off of running and out of work for several months.

When I came back, I was just a totally different person in the fact that number one, I didn't know if this tumor was going to come back and I didn't have an MRI for a while, number two, what I used to relieve my stress was running and I couldn't do that anymore because it was way too painful and number three, I was totally rocked because there was a scar and my stomach was bloated and it was just sore and painful and I just didn't recognize myself anymore.

I think that's a really important part of my story because on the outside, people started telling me how inspiring I was and how optimistic they thought I was. And I was, I was all those things and I was petrified inside and I was depressed and I was trying to figure out what the heck was going on in my life and so...

[0:10:37.3] AS: I want to stop you there for a second though because you bring up this really great point in that we want to put the healing... I just want to get through it, we want to come to the end of the hero's journey where everything's wrapped up nice and neatly where you do the visualizations and they come true and that's what you need to do and what you were saying right there is so important for people to listen, especially as you...

To get well, you have to expand your emotional capacity. You were inspiring and you were moving forward and it felt scary as hell and there were dark days and it wasn't this nicely... it was messy is my point and I want you to do that in there. You can be both.

[0:11:22.8] SS: It's so funny that you bring this up, I'm in the process of writing my memoir right now in my story and I was just writing about this last week and what came up for me and I knew it was like one of those things you know is there for me until I started journaling or writing, it doesn't come up.

Literally in that time of my life, I would watch The Secret, I don't know if you know that DVD that you watch it every morning while getting ready for work, I was like, what is wrong with me? They said if I do these affirmations and if I look in the mirror and if I do this and I was reading all this self-help book and I was... there was this point where I was like, I'm doing everything that people are telling me to do, I'm doing the self-help, I'm doing the affirmations, I'm connecting deeply, I'm journaling and this is not me healthy, I didn't all of a sudden manifest a perfect body or like have the perfect job. It made me feel even worse.

I'm doing what you told me to do and that is not happening and so then it just a spiral of like what am I doing wrong? What is wrong with me?

[0:12:20.1] AS: I want to bring up what you're describing because I'm going to be talking more and more about this because my clients are always surprised at how cultural conditioning influences them. In a way, they understand certain things like I shouldn't be worried about my weight but they are right? X, Y or Z. The secret and a lot of this self-help.

It doesn't look at the system or society that the individual works in right? It's within. Okay, you know, we know cancer's happening because of an environmental toxin, you cannot manifest

that away right? But you can't sell that, you're going to have to picket line or fight Monsanto and then your name get dragged to the mud. That is not sellable.

I love when people blame other people for being poor or not being able to afford coaching. If you really wanted it, you'd make it happen, you're holding yourself back, it's like, no, maybe I didn't come from the privilege you came from and I actually am making a job that I'm in a job that doesn't pay me, maybe you have grown up around in the network that you had.

I think that's a really important part in terms of healing and manifesting and the secret and thinking that you would track your illness or that it's going to go a certain way based on what you want versus what you said, it can be a window into much more deeper healing if you choose to look at it that way.

[0:13:44.0]SS: Yeah. I couldn't agree more. I think that begets to going to the next part of my story which I think is important is like you had to plan some of these seeds to question the social norms and question that in my mind. Although I was in this much more deeper healthcare journey then. The turning point for me was I'm telling you, I'm depressed, I'm doing all these things, I'm trying to figure out, I use depressed very loosely, I wasn't depressed.

I was literally dealing with what was going on and I went back to my surgeon because everything was supposed to be okay and I remember this distinctly, it was like my sixth month checkup and by this time he had told me I could be running and he basically was like, you know, you never need to see me again.

I was laying there and my stomach was still swelled out as he told me it was not going to be, I literally would wrap my stomach in these bands that I would buy and try to go out for runs down Pine street, around Pen's landing and feel like I would ramp myself up and it would be so painful alley.

I would come home and just cry and I was like, what is wrong with me? This people are telling me I'm supposed to be okay and I was telling him about that and from the seeds that you planted, I said to him, you know, I'm really in a ton of pain and I'm not digesting my food well

and what can I do? Do you have a nutritionist or someone I can work with or can you tell me something about what to do.

He looked at me and I'll never forget what he said to me, he was like gastro doctor because it was my stomach and he goes, Sera, I got a guy down the hall that I just did a band on and I'm just trying to keep him off pizza like I'm worried about what he's eating, I don't really care what you're eating because you take care of yourself and you're going to be fine...

And this moment is what changed my life, he grabs the door handle to walk out of the office and he looks back at me and he goes, Sera, you know, I think what you really need is an antidepressant. I'm willing to write the script out for you.

He walked out of there Ali and I thought, I do not need an antidepressant. Yes, I am sad but what I need is number one, for someone to listen to me and acknowledge that something is wrong here. Number two, I need somebody knowledgeable to help me to live my life going forward. Now, I say it all that with the acknowledge now, I can say backwards, that surgeon should not have given me a nutrition advice, I wish he could have made a referral to somebody that in his office, gratefully I knew you.

So you became my referral but it was like, to me, I know we'll talk about this later but to me, that's where some of the breakdown in the health system is. It wasn't his responsibility at that point necessarily to deal with some of this external stuff that was happening for me. But to acknowledge that there was pain and acknowledge that something was going on and actually there was something wrong that he should have addressed that he never did.

But those side of things, that was life changing for me because I thought, something as wrong... I knew in my heart, something is wrong and I'm going to go find it on my own and so I went on a wicked journey that day after that happened and I thought, I'm not going to take a pharmaceutical to make me feel better, something traumatic just happened in my life and I'm going to figure this out.

[0:16:38.2] AS: I remember Dr. Rosen Swag who is an integrative physician in Philly, I went to him for some post cancer recommendations and I had just seen a shaman the week before and

he asked me about it and I ended up, because I was really depressed, this was right before I started working with Bob and I didn't understand why I was depressed.

This was 2012 and it was like debilitating depression, not just like... Whatever, there's different grades of depression but he was like, tell me what happened and I started explaining to him about what the Shaman said and like having cancer and all this kind of stuff and just crying and crying. I felt so connected to him because he listened to me and he gave me a referral for Bob and as he was leaving, I said, Dr. Rosen's wife, how did you get through medical school?

He goes, that was my near death experience. I want to circle back, one question for you. Because this is so important, I think in the discussion of for us to be better advocates, better patients, better advocates. You said you know in your heart and people, sometimes we get those really strong knowing's but we dismiss them. What do you think enabled you to listen to that and go forward without saying, I'm just going to take the pill.

I don't know if you can always describe it but I like asking people so that other people can have the courage to pursue maybe the road less traveled but ultimately what they need.

[0:18:07.5]SS: Yeah, I mean, can I tell you what I knew in that exact moment? I don't think so but what I know now is there's a desperation point that patients hit or that people hit I think. I think I'd hit that. I think there is this point where I'm like, I'm 26 years old, I'm like an avid runner, I'm healthy and right now I can barely function and get through my day. I'm sorry.

When I came to you, I wasn't like this, as I'm leaving you, I'm like this. I get that there is a healing period. There was just something that was just like it's not right and I honestly think it was the seeds that you started planting in me did make the questions. What I can say now is I know that I'm an empowered patient and I'm the CEO of my healthcare.

I literally... I'm at a point now that I hire and fire, you're lucky if you make it on my team and my team is awesome. But like you, it's like the patient is ready for you, not the physician's ready for the patient. It is a consumer driven industry and it is consumer driven healthcare.

I'm the consumer and especially now with high deductible plans, et cetera. That's my money I'm paying and this is my body and it's the only one I get and so, in that moment, I think I just knew I couldn't live that way and he wasn't giving me any real hope except to say I could be on some drug and that just didn't tick for me. It just didn't fit. Then I just started seeking.

[0:19:26.4] AS: You leave there being like okay, the guy that just cut me open and left me in this position... I have to leave him and I have to move on. Where do you go from here?

[0:19:35.3] SS: Yeah, then I started getting really... I just started researching different modalities that ease pain. I was in a ton of pain and I needed to figure out how to get rid of the pain. I was just super fortunate, I mean, I think from our relationship and then from the other relationships I built. I started to learn about other practitioners.

You know, I heard really good things about acupuncture and 'd heard that acupuncture could help with pain a lot and so one thing I actually want to say that you kind of hit on and I did is we're using depression in a word very loosely and actually, I think we need to just recognize that, People have been through trauma and they get sad and they're trying to process emotions and often we label that as depression.

Do I think that either you or I were depressed? I think no, we're probably processing feelings but it's a way I think the audience can understand what we're experiencing but I think there should be some caution in using that title because just because you're sad and you're feeling low and you're processing feelings doesn't mean that you're depressed.

[0:20:32.7] AS: Yeah, I like that you said that because I'm thinking about even how... I mean, I would say, I was probably clinically DSMV, you know, from the diagnostic manual, depressed that year, 2012 but I knew from being where I was on my healing journey and I think this is an important part of what you're illustrating is the more that you become your own advocate, the more it becomes clear on what you need versus...

I knew I had tried antidepressants in the past and they never worked and I thought, I feel my gut, what's going on. I knew enough to know that this was like old stuff that I had to process. I didn't realize how old, I thought I had been through my cancer but I have never grieved it.

Actually, I would say, I'm glad you said it, I think I was actually grieving for a year rather than depressed.

[0:21:18.5]SS: Yes. I think that's just a clear distinction, I totally agree and I can talk about that on my journey later too. Yeah, I went seeking, I started seeing an acupuncturist that was really starting to help me with my pain and helping me with the digestion. And then I started seeing a chiropractor in a natural path that helped me with supplements, different times in my journey, I would hire and move from these people as they would serve their purpose and kind of move on.

[0:21:42.8] AS: How do you know they were serving their purpose? You were getting better or...

[0:21:49.4]SS: Either I was or I wasn't. When I say serving their purpose, it was maybe teaching me a greater lesson in my life which I think that process actually was teaching me a greater lesson for my personal and professional life which is now a part of my work is really helping people find integrative practitioners and elevating integrative practitioners that are the best I think in the business.

Or the best for people to go to. I think I had to go through some of the ones that didn't really work for me. I knew when I wasn't getting better, I was ill and I was like look, I need to get better. I knew when their personalities didn't match with me. Here's what I have learned from that time of being with the surgeon to where I am now, when I'm with a physician, I want to make sure that they're listening to me, that they're looking at me, there's an intuitive part of me that knows if they deeply care about me and if they care about my success or if they're just in it for the money or they're just in it for whatever it might be, that they're in it for.

I could tell when that was happening and sometimes that takes more than just one visit or one appointment so that's how I would know. Some of them did serve their purpose. I did work with Bob and Bob is just amazing and that was a grieving deep spiritual work that I did with Bob and there is a season and a reason for that.

There is time that you can do that kind of deep imagery work and that going in to childhood traumas and going into that kind of stuff and doing that work. There is times when those

practitioners, I would pull them in, release them and then go back and pull them in again. It would really be that ebb and flow.

You know, that was probably a good four and a half years of my life that I was trying to find someone to figure out what was going on with my gut and why was this... my stomach is still suspended and why was it swelled up then. I will say that I had some relief from meeting with those practitioners and I had some... a lot of personal and spiritual growth from working there and what I think is true about that period of time of working with a lot of different practitioners is that...

Functional and integrative practitioners gave me hope. I was not getting hope anywhere else, they were listening to me, they were believing me, yes. Sera, something is wrong, we're going to try to do everything we can to figure out what is going wrong and we're going to exhaust ourselves doing the research to figure out what's going on and we also don't believe it's just your belly.

We think that your body is a whole system and let's talk about all of it. I transform in that process and I'll never regret those four and a half years of that. I was still in chronic pain physically and chronic pain but there was this incredible growth period that happened for me and why I condense that into four and a half years is because after four and a half years, I did find that there was some challenges with the surgery and where they removed the tumor.

There was actually a tear in the mesh that they had laid and a huge hole in my stomach and basically, not to be too gruesome but basically my organs were popping out of that hole and that's where all this pain was coming from.

You can imagine from a functional standpoint where the gut is the seat of your whole being, my gut was in a terrible mess. It took me four and a half years to finally actually... I did end up having to find another surgeon that realized that I had this major tear in here and in 2013 I had to have complete abdominal reconstruction.

I was going through all this and wrapping my belly and running and living my life and you know, I worked in like development and sales and so traveling around all the time and I had a hole in

my stomach which is going to make... it's making a brilliant story for a book. Literally, my stomach.

[0:25:25.0] AS: That is so...

[0:25:26.4]SS: Yeah.

[0:25:27.8] AS: I think you also, I just want to rewind, you have so much wisdom but one of the things that I think is such an important healing tool is being witnessed for where you are, not where the surgeon wants you to be or thinks its happening or any practitioner but finding someone who you can really just be yourself.

That's not probably something you learn. I know I've actually written about this. Empathy is becoming, they're starting to measure it, that you realize it's so effective. It takes a while for this to trickle down to traditional medicine or even sometimes functional medicine practitioners who think it's all about the supplements and the gut healing and not that emotional spiritual side that you're talking about.

I obviously believe in as well. I think for everyone listening, go somewhere where you can really be seen and listened to. Where I think the practitioner views you as an equal. Not as someone that they're trying to stuff their formula into you and negate your own experience.

I think we live in a patriarchal society so there is this unconscious pyramid power structure. Doctors know more than nurses. Experts know more than patients and we all have domain knowledge yet I like to think of it more as a counsel right? Everyone has something to offer and what you were describing is that ebb and flow, none of them are better than the other.

It's just, where am I in that ebb and flow that I need to circle back with this people, right? I just want to kind of call out that structure that makes us think that it's the experts should be talking and giving directions and telling us versus this back and forth.

[0:26:58.8]SS: Yeah. I think it's a really important point because, it's where there's a lot of breakdown in the medical system right? I understand now better, that day for example with the surgeon when I needed to talk to him about those things that are going in my life.

I'm not trying to say what I said about him to say that he was a jerk, it was the system that he was in. First of all, he had no training on nutrition, he probably had none of it in his schooling. Second of all, he probably had no time or no part of the hospital is teaching him how to refer to a nutritionist and third, he probably had five more patients after me before his lunch because he had 10 minute slots for each patient.

He didn't have time to listen to me and understand that yeah, something is really going on here, his job was to check a couple of boxes and I don't know how you fix that in a system but that's... I think what we're talking about right now is super important about when people say that integrative practitioners are too expensive or why do they take cash or why...

They can't fit in the typical system right now because of this core quality that we're talking about is that they need time with the patient, they need time to look you in the eyes and there is something about that that is so healing because not only am I feeling seen and witnessed but they're seeing me as a person and they're able to put the pieces together right?

It's not just like, she has got problems. There's so much other stuff going on in my life and it's able to give me a full, complete overview of what I need to do. Some of the times leaving my practitioners, my treatments were like... you need to sit and be quiet 10 minutes a day because I can tell, that's going to actually help your gut, you slowing down. You need to go for a walk or you need to connect deeply with your girlfriends and go for like a cup of coffee regularly and a practitioner wouldn't be able to make that recommendation by seeing me for 10 minutes.

[0:28:46.1] AS: I think you bring up another great point is often, it's cheaper upfront right? To only pay the copay or what not but then the solution is often pretty expensive if it's drugs or surgery or depending on your plan. Again, sometimes that stuff is totally necessary. However, I think it's always kind of like if you invest upfront, you know, you end up avoiding spending money down the road.

I understand, I mean, that also depends on what you can afford and what not. That gets into how we subsidize unhealthy crops and this tangential thing. I mean, the foundations of prevention are free, Well, clean air is not... within Pittsburg, some of the worst air. You know, going to parks like you don't have to go to the expensive gym but being outside of nature, we know, it's so effective or being with your friend and showing up as you are, not as the person who has to go out and buy 10 drinks.

It's so simple yet it's a complex process.

[0:29:41.9]SS: So complex. Once you get the masks off, I feel like I had to go through this health journey to get the masks off and to heal all that stuff.

[0:29:52.7] AS: Yeah, take us back. Sorry, I kind of took off here in a tangent but four and a half years, you finally realize the issue is there was something wrong with the surgery and I love to rewind that you brought up that... Because I have so many clients who are physicians or physical therapist or nurses.

They are amazing people doing the best they can in a really shitty system. It's really easy to want to blame the doctor or the integrative center or whatever but it's like. No, this is again, it's part of the structure and the system and the culture. It's not any one person.

[0:30:26.6]SS: Yeah. I think that's really important, I think it's important from my approach, both professionally and personally, we need traditional medicine and we need these other modalities. We need both and my story is a great story to showcase that. So four and a half years later, I have done all the functional medicine and integrative medicine practitioners and they really helped heal me and got me to a great place but I had a hole in my stomach.

I needed a surgeon to fix that. I needed a surgeon to come in and do that. What I did was I had a natural path to help me lead up to do pre surgical work leading into that, making sure I was on the right supplements, making sure I was doing the right lifestyle stuff.

Making sure I knew the right foods to eat pre and post and what a beautiful fascinating process. I feel like it was this redemption for me because the first surgery I was so anxious and I didn't know. Actually, I think the second surgery was so spiritual for me and such a book ended pillar.

They journey, I ended up having to fly to Texas to have this surgery, the journey to Texas, being in Texas, the people that I was around, the experience I have with the surgeon by the way was like, the most loving, kind, sat with me and looked me in the face. At the time, this is just to give an example of how gentle and sweet he is at the time, they thought, if they did the reconstruction, I'd never be able to carry children and so I was 30 then and that's a really hard thing to tell a 30 year old woman and he had to sit there and look me in the face.

Ali, it was like everything left the room, he didn't care how much time he was spending, this physician, I spent so much time with me which is just such a different paradigm from my first experience and he looked me in the eye and he wheeled his chair right in front of me and I'll never forget that moment when he looked me in the eye and he said Sera, if you do this, I need you to know that you're never going to be able to carry a child.

I would completely understand if you would leave here today and tell me that we're not going to do this surgery. Meanwhile, I have back end experience at healthcare, working as a nutrition. I know how much surgery that... how much revenue that surgery was going to produce for him right? For him walking out of there, not a good... I hate to think about it that way but I'm sorry. Healthcare is also... there is revenue tied to all of this.

I'm probably opening a whole another can of worms by saying that but in any case.

[0:32:33.2] AS: We'll have you back for another for profit health care behind the scenes. How much of you are a cash grab, I'm kidding.

[0:32:41.0] SS: It's such a disgusting... I know too much now I think, it's kind of interesting how in 2008 when I didn't know and what I know now. Anyway, I just think that... there's an example of how I was seeing in the traditional medical model, it's so possible and there's really great doctors out there and he was amazing and that connection and then having these pillars of integrative health if you will around me.

It was such a profound physical and spiritual journey for me in 2013 when I went through that reconstruction. Literally, I feel like I was reconstructing my spirit. It was just like, God was like, you have gone in this journey and we're reconstructing your abdomen and we're reconstructing where you are in life.

I healed really well coming out of that surgery as you can imagine. The funny thing is, about a week, it's almost comical, I was in the hospital after the reconstruction, seven days later, they sent me home and I'd sent my mom to the farmers market to get all my good stuff and whole foods and we still don't know what happened but somehow, seven days post abdominal surgery, I got food poisoning.

Talk about the worst timing, we think that's what it was or there was a flu going around Dallas. Here I am like getting sick and having all this and I couldn't... I had no control of my abdominal. I got placed back in the hospital but I say that to say, still challenges came up but I was able to push through them in a new way because mentally, physically, emotionally, I was a completely different patient. I was able to call my natural path, okay, what do we do with this?

Right before I even left the hospital, I had a pelvic floor physical therapist to work with, which are, for any women that are having babies or anybody having abdominal stuff, they're wonderful physical therapists to work with.

I took my time this time coming back, I took the max amount of time I could off of work, I spiritually connected with God who I choose to call my higher power and really, the whole time was just totally connected. I didn't have a connection like that the first time.

My body wasn't ready to run in the week timeframe. The weeks timeframe that I thought it would. That was okay for me, I knew I was going to run again someday and so instead, I walked. I ran walked then and I did different things and you know, I just started to do things that I really loved and my body just responded in such an incredibly different way.

And, three months after surgery, as can be expected and a lot of functional integrative doctors would say, this makes total and complete sense. My thyroid and adrenal got rocked. I was

exhausted, I was in bed, I couldn't sleep, I was lethargic, I was so excited to go back to work again and my hair started falling out and my skin was dry.

I was like, all right, what's this? Now my belly's okay and it was like... my belly started healing, its my thyroid and adrenals were just like okay, this has been too much. Then that started another new journey for me which really you know, always helpful to have those and that was trying to heal my thyroid from the trauma and the drama.

My adrenals were being taxed from all of this which was on a spin of another multiyear journey but just so grateful for all of it, it's strongly deeper spiritually and more connected and to understand that this whole thing called life is a healing journey I think.

[0:35:55.0] AS: Or a destructive one if you ignore it. What struck me too is the first time you wanted to push through and when I met you, I remember, you still talk fast, I talk fast so I get it. Again, I think this idea of The Secret and I have my goals and like it was like, I have my agenda and the second time around, it was like a surrendering, what's life's secrets whispering to me right?

What is life asking of me? It takes a lot of growth and I think rock bottom to have this humbleness of maybe I don't know and maybe life is much more complex and nuanced and unorganized and so maybe... let me slow down and get my bearings rather than speed up.

I think that's being able to slow down is a huge health metric that I know I look for in clients. When they don't want, like you said, the drama and trauma is a big sign. You work with it, an integrative practitioner to heal your adrenals and thyroid and you just came out of that didn't you?

[0:37:01.7] SS: Yeah, I'm coming to of there, I found a really incredible practitioner who I'll just shout out, who is Dr. Ann Beer in New Hampshire who I travel there to see him because he's just incredible, he's post cancer, it's his main focus but he also does a lot of work in this space and yeah, I just came through that and that was a crazy journey and I want to say again, because we talked about the messiness at first so I was complete connected in a new way and

going through this stick and surgery more intentional but I was still crazy a little bit in some things.

I still was like, am I going to gain weight? How is this... you can still be intentional and growing and healing and still... not be perfect, it's like practice not perfection, I still was practicing getting to where I needed to be and I was much better but I still had so much to learn. Go ahead.

[0:37:50.6] AS: I was going to say, I'm glad you brought that up because I always tell my clients, that drive and that worry about weight, it wears away because they're like, my God, I'm thinking about food last night, I feel better and some people can let that weight loss thing go away right away because they see they're losing slowly and surely and then other people, it's still this imaginary finish line and I really think that there's the fantasy wrapped up in weight loss right?

That my life is going to be perfect and until you can live with a certain level of imperfection, it's almost like, the degree of imperfection that you're willing to deal with, then the level... That whole weight loss has on you goes away. Because after that year, after I spend a year working with Bob and I just... a big part of my healing was going back into the mess of how messy that emotional experience of having cancer was.

I came out of there being completely unattached to my weight. I know it was the emotional, it had nothing to do... I actually have gained 10 pounds and I was like wow, this just tells me how far I've come. I gained 10 pounds from not exercising and not eating enough and yet I'm okay with that.

I just not try and get anywhere anymore. I just want to be with what it is. Maybe it's also an ability to be present, it doesn't mean I'm great at being present but I can be more present enough that that's really what ended that... am I going to lose weight, am I going to gain weight for me?

It doesn't mean it will be gone forever right? If a huge ton of uncertainty and... because to me, imperfection and perfection isn't about, it's safety versus lack of... like how much uncertainty versus safety do you need right?

Certainty is play it safe. I just want to put that there as kind of yeah, you were healing but yet you still had this... there was more imperfection, lack of safety or uncertainty or mystery. That's a more poetic mystery to deal with.

[0:39:36.9]SS: Yes. Yeah, well I think it's an important thing. If I can share, in that journey with my thyroid and adrenals, what ended up happening was, if anybody's ever been through surgery and major surgery, you lose a ton of weight afterwards because your body's healing. It's so much energy to heal.

I lost a ton of weight and then I started gaining weight and I think this is a really important to your listeners, especially with those truce with food and that are attracted at that side of your work. After all this that my body had done, my body isn't miraculous. It is a healing miracle. The things that I have been through are healing miracles but still, I was looking in the mirror. What was my weight and how was I looking.

I gained about 10, I think at the top I gained about 12 pounds in that time with my thyroid because my metabolism was just totally shot and I eat a whole foods, very clean diet and no matter what, I was gaining and it was super frustrating but gosh, if we allow these things allow us to grow.

I started to really surrender that to God during that time and just get down and pray regularly like I would... what do you want me to learn from this and you know, what do I need to do and you know, sometimes I was screaming, God, take this weight off of me and I remember one day when I was doing that, when I was like, take this weight off of me.

I felt very spiritually in my heart, God was saying, this is not about weight, this is about a weight on your shoulders, you're carrying weight that you don't need to carry, it's not yours to carry. That really shifted something for me and so then I started getting curious about what is the weight that needs to be lifted and I started realizing the things in my life that I was carrying that I didn't need to carry anymore and how did I release that.

The next beautiful thing was, when I started praying about it again, wait also means to be

waiting on something. There was this idea then of like, what are you waiting on Sera, what can't you be present in your life. What are you waiting on? Then I started like, thinking about all the things that I thought, when this happens or when this happens, then my life is going to be good.

I just felt like God was saying, you don't need to wait anymore. You're here and just be present with your life and stop waiting. What are you waiting for? To me, those were just very spiritual questions that came out of this and I just surrendered to stop trying to get to this place because I didn't need to carry a weight and I wasn't waiting for anything. I always am a goal setter, I love to move forward, I love to achieve, it's one of my top traits.

I can't appreciate what I'm achieving, what's happening in my life today and it probably, some people might just think it's totally crazy and do not understand how it's related to your weight but for me, it really was.

I daily have to surrender that. It wasn't like a one time, like I had this aha, I hate when people say they tell you on books, they had an aha or whatever. Yes, I had a moment when that thought came to me but I have to keep praying about it and being curious and journaling and you know, the weight came off and my life was still the same life that I had when the weight was on,

It wasn't this magical sky opening and everything got better. Yeah, I lost weight and the size of my clothes went down but I was still the same Sera, I was still the same Sera that was, in the different sized pants and when the scale said a different thing, it was really like, who am I and who do I want to be and like can I be present in this life? It was such a different way to look at life and just so much more freeing and this idea that I was waiting for something to happen for my life to get better is so untrue.

[0:43:16.2] AS: So I'm curious before we move into creative function when I said that in healing moving forward, what were you waiting on? I love that you picked up on that because I hear a lot of times from my clients, "Oh I know I shouldn't wait to date" or I know I shouldn't wait find my dream job or I shouldn't wait to make these changes but I never thought of that as waiting weight like the double entandre there, is that a double entandre? It sounds like it is a double entandre. I don't know if that's the real definition of everything.

[0:43:48.1] SS: Well I think what I was waiting on which is such a perfect question in this conversation was I was waiting to speak my truth which is what I am talking about today was telling my story, talking about what really happened in all facets of it because my story is not about integrative medicine or functional medicine or body image, it's all of that and the tough and the good that happened and it was about being blessed to see both sides of it.

So not only did I go through this experience I am sharing today but I have also worked in the health care industry for multiple years and saw the backend and there is this marriage of both of them that I knew could help move forward with what my passion is to bring more integrative and functional medicine in the traditional stream and I didn't know how to do that and I have been trying so hard to figure out where is my place there and how do I help do this.

I just had to start get moving into action. As Stephen Pressfield says, "I just had to turn pro, I had to do it," and one of the integrative practitioners who's a dear friend of mine we were talking one day and she goes, "Sera you know the thyroid is in your throat, what do you have to say?" and I remember that day thinking I don't know but I am going to start thinking about it and I think once I realized all these stuff I am saying is what I have to say.

It had to come out and so that was what I was waiting on to give myself permission. I thought the outside world is going to give me permission to share this but I have to give myself permission to walk into that and then ultimately for me, that meant starting my own business and doing consulting in the space and sharing my story and creating space for other women to have this opportunity to heal.

[0:45:22.5] AS: I love that you said that because a lot of my clients start to realize that the core of their food issues is finding their truth and speaking that and I always said that weight is this tension between being invisible and visible but it being safe to be visible and I find that we're in this era where women especially and some of the more evolved men that I work with are putting together these disciplines that should have never been separated.

And so we have these profound experiences beyond what we could ever hope for and yet society, you know you're going to look different because it's on the edge and in 30 years they're

going to look back and say, “Of course weight loss had to do with this emotional weight” or maybe they won’t. I don’t know, it keeps women in the patriarch corset but finding our voice and doing it our way is so important in that weight loss journey and it doesn’t have to be a literal voice for everyone.

It can be at their job of how they do the things they do or it’s in their art work or in the business that they run or whatever but it’s finding your life force and how that is expressed and that takes time. Again like you said you think self-help will tell you one “aha moment” but finding your truth is an integrative process. It’s like, “I got it, I thought that was true” and now it’s just being willing to live with that imperfection too of knowing what’s true.

I am muddling the waters but you can know what’s true for you right now and also hold that, say it in a way that’s like, “I am also learning” you know what I mean? That’s what I am saying, you don’t have to put you are absolutely right is my point.

[0:47:03.8] SS: Yeah and I think it’s really important to just reiterate home what you just said and I think I have been saying it too. This wasn’t an overnight process and I needed it to not be an overnight process because in the process I found myself more and so if there’s people out there that are thinking yes I just need to find my voice, you don’t need to find your voice tonight by 9 PM. That doesn’t need to happen.

[0:47:27.3] AS: You ought to find the do it all that’s going to bring out your voice.

[0:47:31.1] SS: Yeah and you don’t need to necessarily buy that course that’s going to help you find your voice. Sometimes finding your voice meant getting away and spending a weekend with God and just journaling. Recently I have been loving the coloring books and just doing something mindless like some kind of mindful activity to stop actually thinking about all of this and then when I do that my creativity taps and just naturally comes out.

So that resting and slowing down that I learned going into the third surgery, I’ve learned that into a whole new level now like resting and I believe that the Sabbath is a part of our life and it’s something we should do regularly and I still have questions to be answered and so when I get

really busy or I have a lot of questions instead of pushing into them, now my reaction is to pull out of them and to go into rest and to spend quiet time.

I guess what I am trying to say is don't do-do-do if you think you need to find your voice or find yourself right now. I'd actually encourage you to do less because that could help a lot.

[0:48:31.7] AS: Yeah, in Truce with Food, every week I have my clients write a journal like what are they discovering, what are they learning and one client wrote that she's finding this desire not to listen to anyone else for nutrition or health advice right now and she doesn't want to share what she is doing and I'm like, "that is such a great sign that you want to listen to your own wisdom as much as what someone else might tell you if not more right now".

That's a huge turning point when you want to protect that spaciousness and that silence in your own experience. Yeah, I love that and I had another client last week she said to me, "You're the first person, nutritionist, trainer, weight loss thing I've ever worked with that I actually don't think I am going to need you for the rest of my life" and I was like, "That's the best compliment you can give me because I don't want to".

[0:49:22.3] SS: Yeah, it's the most beautiful thing so I do a lot of work with integrative and functional practitioners now and we're like, "We hope we can put ourselves out of business because the traditional model is not to get people well to leave them thereafter" the traditional model is to keep them coming back but really the integrative model and function at the core is that hopefully we'll put ourselves out of business because you won't need us anymore. That is just brilliant.

[0:49:41.8] AS: I would love to put myself out of business, so come through and what I love about your story in which I think a lot of my clients start to realize is there is these invisible tools that people don't know to look for or they are invisible on the surface. I love that you said you pull out the questions, it reminds me of Reina Marie Weltgay when she says live the questions because you can't know the answers yet, you have to live into them.

But as you see health care transitioning and right now we are at this stage where we know what isn't working, we have this patch work version. Like you said you have to go to an acupuncturist,

a nutritionist, a natural path, a different surgeon so it's a different patchwork right now. So what do you see as the foundation moving forward? If tomorrow you wake up and someone said, "Sera Snyder I want you to redesign the health care system starting with the client experience".

No one could see it but her eyes just lit up like she won the billion dollar lottery, that's a priceless lottery, how would you set that up?

[0:50:42.8] SS: Yeah, oh my gosh what a dream right? If we could live the dream if somebody would open up their pocket book, yeah. I think first the most important thing that you just said, I would go out and talk to a whole bunch of patients because we know what we need, we know what we want and I would just go out and gather that data from what I know today about where we need to go. I would have all the practitioners that I had at my disposal and under one roof.

Figuring out a way to funnel them through so the patient can see them all. It's tricky because I don't think, I am saying this and I think every approach is personalized. Every patient needs something totally different so it's not the stamped marked like, "I would build this hospital and I would replicate it all over the US". No I don't really think that that is exactly how it's going to work because we need to pull in different people at different times.

Sometimes you don't need to see your practitioner in a medical setting if you will because I think that allows you to actually open up more. So while I think most things should be under one roof and I would love it if all things could be under one roof. I actually think there is some benefit and when I say this you know who I think of? I think of Cara, Cara was an acupuncturist and affiliate that we went to and I had seen Cara in a hospital, yes, she was in the podcast.

Whatever episode it was go back and listen because she's brilliant and she's such a healer, someone like Cara has so much impact and so much help with her patients, if I would have saw her in a medical system would that impact been as great? I don't know the answer to that today so that's why I hesitate to say it needs to be all under one roof but we need to look at every aspect of the individuals. We need to look at the spiritual, we need to look at the physical and we need to look at the emotional.

We need to understand that they all feed each other and so there are so many different ways I could pivot with that and there are so many ideas I have but just for the sake of this podcast I will say that we need to bring those together and I think the primary care aspect, I think the primary care arm of health care really needs to look at how all of these are feeding into the care of patients and wouldn't it be so beautiful if one of our girlfriends was having a really hard time and sad and unhappy and she went to her practitioner and instead of given an antidepressant, she was given a script for meditation?

And changing her diet and maybe a visit with you and a script to take a week off of work or longer, that's what I think is a beautiful health care system. Really that's going to cost a lot less than somebody being on an antidepressant for the rest of their lives or having to go through a surgery, etcetera. I think that meets what the health care system is trying to do right now which is increase value and increase quality that meets the needs there. I don't think there's a perfect model that's fitted yet but I think we are getting closer.

[0:53:39.7] AS: Yeah, you said a couple of really important things I want to circle back on. I always thought that if the health care system is redesigned, you wouldn't even meet with the doctor at first. You would meet with a well-trained health coach who is a generalist like myself. I'm good at what I'm do. Are women allowed to own that yet, is it 2017 or without being concerned?

[0:54:01.5] SS: You are good at what you do. Well I think you brought up an important thing and that is that physicians get more training and coaching and behavioral questions and understanding the importance. It's just driven in such a way that they don't have the time to actually do that kind of stuff. I know there's some training but yeah and I think that health coaches are a huge part of the system. I think it's really important to bring health coaches in. I don't think all these responsibility should lie on the shoulders of physicians.

[0:54:25.1] AS: I also think that physicians have really valuable type of training that health coaches don't need. If everyone was healthy in America, which they're not but if they were, everyone would start with a health coach and work on prevention only but I think a lot of this stuff that people go to their doctors for, depression, Hashimoto's, all of these stuff their doctors

actually aren't equipped to handle but the doctors are equipped to handle a lot of that stuff that isn't lifestyle and nutrition intervention.

So that's what I am saying, it's almost like you can take a quiz and say like, "Who do you start with?" and also a big part of this is what do you believe will help you? Almost starting with the patient and what are you most attracted to try like what you are doing with your own practitioners, right? First you came to see me and then you have that entire side swipe of a desmoid tumor and so then it's like, "Where do I go from there?"

[0:55:21.9] SS: Something I need to say, sorry to talk over you but I think is really important here is when you asked me that question that's what I would do on the physician side and patients need to continue to be educated and know that this is your responsibility. Your health is your responsibility and there's not a quick fix always. I chose to not take a pill to fix me or not try to do something that is a quick fix and sometimes that is the answer.

I want to be very careful. Sometimes taking a pill or doing something is the answer but as patients, we need to realize that taking good care of ourselves is hard work and it is our responsibility. So this doesn't all fall into the health care system. It also falls on our responsibility as individuals to take being empowered and to take care of ourselves.

[0:56:06.0] AS: I'm glad you said that because that is actually why I went back to grad school and really studied adult development because I was so confused because I had cancer, all these stuff, how did I not know how much agency I had in my own health? Yes I was obsessed with weight loss information and no one was talking about physiology connected to weight but how did I not know? I realized that a lot of it is our identity, the type of information we seek out.

But people need to know that they have the agency and I think through more stories like yours and the clients that I work with every day, people start to realize that there is other choices but if you don't have that story to hear, you think you are choosing between medications right? Like, "Oh I am making a choice between if I want to do natural thyroid or synthroid" that is important to realize that there is completely...

[0:56:58.3] SS: I think this is an important thing I didn't say in my story. This could be the cap episode of my story is they told me I'd never carry children, they told me that I didn't have any problems and then they told me that I would probably be on thyroid medicine for the rest of my life. Well as of today, I had a re-exam with my surgeon probably a year and a half, two years ago now and he now tells me, "Sera you could have kids, what are you talking about? I never said that to you".

I was like, "Dr. Hucksworth you did" and he remembered that he did say that but because I've taken these approaches to healing, I have taken good care of my body now he's like, "You can carry a baby. You're fine, you're strong, you are way stronger than I ever thought you were going to be" and I also take care of myself in the physical side like working with a pelvic and physical therapist and then working with personal trainers and people that try to help me get back to it.

But then on the thyroid side, the physician Dr. Bear who I ended up seeing, I left there and he gave me supplement recommendations, lifestyle changes, nutrition changes and I followed them diligently for two years and it was painful because even in the midst of doing that and this is important, when you choose a walk in integrative medicine it was hard because the weight wasn't coming off, I wasn't feeling miraculously better right away because when we take a pill or do something we think is going to change just like that.

It was two years and if there is a woman out there fighting with your thyroid right now you need to hear that. It was two years. It's a long time to be on that protocol and do it and now I am completely off all thyroid medicine and I heal myself through my diet and through the supplements I'm taking within and through my regular runs and my regular workouts and my meditation. They told me that all of these things that I am doing now, I would never be doing for the rest of my life.

From my original surgery, I am only eight years out so let's talk about somebody who is saving the health care system's money.

[0:58:48.4] AS: Yeah and you bring up this great point, science looks at data that it has and if we really take the lens that the doctors are great and they're really smart and science is up only

to a certain point. It can only explain certain things and every hundred years we look back, I don't know if it's a hundred years exactly but we can look back at all the science and be like, "Can you believe they believed that?" they used to electrocute people or take out half their brain in lobotomies.

So I always think what are we going to look back on in 50 years or maybe because information is speeding up and think that that was crazy and I often think like Dr. Raquel who is our mutual friend and just an integrative physician and she refers some clients to me and when I lived in Philly she was my doctor but she was like, "Ali I love working with you. I learn so much from you" and I'm like, "and I learn so much from you" and again if you take out that, this is council and we're all influencing each other.

You can be a great data point for your doctor or for the medical system of what happens and again, not everyone are as compliant as you. Not everyone is going to wait patiently for two years but I think the more we have stories like yours to say, "Hey here's what's possible. Stick through it" and you really approach the physical, emotional and spiritual levels the more we're going to have doctors who are going to have revised expectations and be able to give people more hope.

So I really think healing ourselves even if it's coming from a weight loss place but sensing there's a deeper spiritual emotional thing which there always is, it just depends on if you want to look at it, it can be one of those radical things and I think contributions you can give to society and medicine.

[1:00:27.4] SS: That's good.

[1:00:29.2] AS: Okay, so you can have children, you're off your meds, the weight came off and now you know it can stay off because you've healed the root cause so you are this badass. Okay I want to circle back, you talked about not everything has to be done in a traditional medical setting and I think that's important too when we think about what's really healing again it's circling back to it's nature, it's relationships, it's things that happen outside of the medical system.

I want people to really expand on their idea of healing spaces. It can be in your journaling, it can be outside, I don't know I am just really into the trees and the parks near my place right now so I keep referring to the trees but any kind of nature and this is an odd insert but integrative and functional medicine and how that plays into this bigger health care conversation or foundations of how you would design it. Let me rephrase the question, rather than asking...

Although the answer was helpful, rather than thinking about how would it be physically designed what areas of concentration do you think if you are a patient now and you have a high deductible and you get to choose where your money goes, what do you think are the areas of focus that you would encourage people so they get the most value? I think that's also an important thing that you said, it's not focusing on who's going to do what test for you or whatever, what outcome do you want?

How do you want this to end and then move backwards from there because that would guide what kind of practitioner is that are on your same wavelength and what kind of areas do you think people should be looking at that you think are the most foundational for everything from health to weight loss?

[1:02:13.9] SS: Yeah, let's do something that maybe we should have done earlier but it sounds like a good time to do it now. Let's define integrative versus functional because we keep throwing those words around.

[1:02:23.6] AS: Sera you are at heart a coach's dream, define the term.

[1:02:28.2] SS: I think that this is my version and it's based on both my professional and personal experience. When I started I was circling in the integrative realm. What integrative means to me from a patient perspective is I had a variety of doctors that I would pull in and release at certain times that supported my care physically, emotionally and spiritually. Those are the modalities were acupuncture, chiropractic care, naturopathic care, massage, physical therapy.

You could even throw in some of the physical stuff I did like personal training and then also my primary care physician or my physicians. So integrative team you could pull in and release

different integrative healing modalities when you need them and letting them go. Integration is integrating those different modalities.

[1:03:20.5] AS: I want to stop you there because I want to clarify some things for people because different practitioners, some people might call themselves integrative but that might mean a billing system together. If you really want integrative care, when you start interviewing these practitioners see if they are willing to work with other people and get on the phone with them.

[1:03:44.3] SS: I think it is and I think you have a great point. I have worked with some real doozies like that would put that slapped integrative medicine on their website and said they were integrative and I am still scratching my head about what that really meant. So there's some really great accredited organizations out there too like The Institute of Functional Medicine and for me, I was really interested in ecology care. It's like the fab no-certification for ND's.

Looking at where an ND best year is a really quality institution for ND's to go through like knowing where the quality practitioners come from is really important. Dr. While's program, The Arizona Fellowship for Integrative Medicine out of Arizona is a great program. So when you are actually looking at the practitioners, those are great programs to look at and see. So that's one thing, make sure they are accredited and what does integrative really mean.

Because I have definitely spent my money I places where integrative didn't mean what I thought integrative meant so I think that's really important and then also that they want to get in the phone with other practitioners and talk. I keep bringing up Dr. Bere because he's my physician now and I think he will be my physician for a really long time and he's wonderful but he gets jazzed when he gets on the phone and talks to somebody else about this stuff.

Because there's something about us in this space that I think physicians and people like us in the integrative functional space where lifelong learners were super innovative and we want to keep learning and so when you find these really good practitioners, they are so jazzed to work with you and to talk to other people. Now granted many of them are very busy because people with chronic disease are finding them and realizing they can help but I would say that's important for them to talk to each other.

And that bounces back to your previous question, the perfect health care setting it would be practitioners that talk to each other too. There is so much power in practitioners talking to each other and being able to see things and I have seen the power of some models that do that and it's just incredible how it impacts the patient's health so yeah. A functional medicine doctor can be a part of an integrative team. Functional medicine doctors are really trained to look at root cause of symptoms.

For example, when I went and started having all these symptoms like fatigue and dry skin and my hair falling out and my nails being really brittle, they were like, "That's probably your thyroid and let's look at how your gut is doing and let's look at your adrenals and let's look at you as a whole person" so they look at root cause and they healed my thyroid and looked at my thyroid but also we had to do a lot of work in my gut and we had to do a lot of work on my adrenals.

So functional physicians are trained to look at the body that way so I still consider them a part of my team if you will and I think a functional medicine practitioner can be part of an integrative team but that's how I see the difference between integrative and functional medicine.

[1:06:28.2] AS: I love that you showed that because what you are saying is when I first learned functional medicine which is this root cause resolution which uses nutrition as the first line of medicine I was like, "Oh my god this is amazing" it felt like a silver bullet because I was getting such great results and now I see it as a tool. It's one piece and I also want everyone to realize in functional medicine Sera referenced doctors and then practitioners.

There is no doctor of functional medicine okay? It's an emerging field and different people have different levels of expertise. So again if someone comes in and they just want to give you a bunch of supplements and powders and not work with you as a bio individual, I recommend steering clear from those people because I think they are recreating often the same model just on the "natural side" like a factory model and again, all functional just like dieticians, coaches they range in quality.

And expertise and whatnot but find someone that you feel comfortable within that and that is willing to look at you as an individual not just put you on a paleo diet and then recommend a

bunch of supplements. It really has to be customized so I just want to point that out. The functional medicine is one tool and I find also again, granted it's the client population I have but not addressing the emotional side of autoimmune issues or depression only gets you halfway.

If you are only focusing on the food, it only gets you halfway versus you need to focus on the emotional and the spiritual stuff which is why I like my Truce with Food model because we do it all but just for people listening, I think functional medicine has become really popular. Well I don't know if it has become, it's become more mainstream and so I think now people are always looking for that silver bullet like that overnight play. I will go to this person and they'll tell me everything that's wrong and that's going to be my ticket. It's one piece of it which I think is really people.

[1:08:27.0] SS: Yes and it's a tough piece. I admire the functional medicine doctors who are doing so much because remember what I said earlier in the podcast, I have been working with that practitioner for over two years to be able to see some results and he had to constantly remind me, "Sera you want to be in for the long haul with me or you want a short term solution?" so if you choose to go that route you might see results very quickly and many patients have that but also it's so hard, it's not an easy path to take but here I am sitting on the other side of it and I feel like a two or three year investment for the rest of my life, I'll do that.

[1:09:04.2] AS: I think when you keep saying hard because I know for me from my own journey of healing my gut and losing weight and calling it a truce with food, I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I had no map but it took eight years and so looking back it wasn't hard. I started to feel better incrementally so that part was easy. I think the hard part is the trust and the faith. You're getting better like if you take a pill often you think it's gone away but it starts giving you other symptoms.

Sometimes we need medication, I'm glad you said let's be clear about that. I'm one of those people whose like "I don't know the answer for you" I don't have a view. I just feel that every person is an individual but I think the hard part is the faith and that this is new territory. Spiritual and emotional stuff, there isn't a lot of evidence based because how do you measure the intangible right? We could have anecdotal stories and I use a lot of models in my own model of adult development.

I know I can measure things, I know how things are progressing however no one has tied that sense of agency that people develop from working with me with spiritual enlightenment.

Spirituality is a day to day practice but you know what I mean. No one is connecting all of that and so I think that I just wanted to bring that up.

[1:10:28.4] SS: I think if there would be a point in my story that I think is the most important is going to the integrative and functional doctors and doing the acupuncture and everything but really what I believe has healed me most in the past couple of years is my belief in this greater power for me. This belief in God and this faith that God's got me and no matter what happens, no matter if I have to be on the thyroid medicine or no matter if I gain weight or I lose weight.

No matter if something happens to my belly, I know that I am deeply loved and I am in the hands of the creator of the world and that it's okay. Just having faith that I am seen. Yes it was great by being seen by the doctors but I am seen by this power that is so much bigger than me and that I can connect into that source at any time and any moment in my life. That is what heals, it's surrendering because now I have a place to surrender and to let go and to say "I don't know what's going on here but I know you're my best friend and you've got my back and so I am surrendering it at your feet".

I am letting it go and that is what is healing and I don't know if I had fully got there without going on this journey of all of this other stuff. I think I needed to do what I did and it was the practitioners that I ran into that helped me get into that place but that faith that you talk about, that's the game changer. The belief that first of all, I don't have to have all the answers. I don't have to do everything perfectly and I can trust that it's all leading me into this place and I can screw up. It's okay to mess up, I am still deeply loved. I'm still okay.

[1:12:10.8] AS: I love that you said that because I think of it as you used the term God, I think of surrendering to the wonder and having enough trust in myself that I can handle what arises. Not that I am 100% around that but you said it much more beautifully of we're loved and that we're enough in this messy human experience.

[1:12:30.7] SS: It is a messy human experience and we all have that stuff and this is just our challenge. Everybody has challenges, it's just the ones that we got to thought out and it's been the greatest personal transformation of my entire life. I have been able to go back from this experience and heal childhood traumas and relationship issues from my teenage years and friendships and stuff with myself. Who gets that opportunity? I think we're all invited in but what an awesome opportunity to evolve myself and I believe evolve my lineage and I'll evolve those that come after me.

I think it's a huge responsibility, a huge awesome responsibility this physical and emotional healing stuff and I could go on a soap box about that but I won't even go there but I think it's a huge awesome responsibility we're invited into.

[1:13:21.4] AS: I love thinking of that as an invitation. So I want to wrap up but I do want to get into this, we talked about when you're choosing your practitioners how do you want this to end, look at the value not like if they are going to take your blood pressure or your temperature but not the test that they're willing to give but the path that you want to follow with them which is again as I talked about in last week's episode about diet and drama, we use the term journey.

But it's much more outer space, it's a non-linear process where you're just bouncing from clarity to healing to sick again instead of all of these different things and we talked about having this emotional and spiritual components as part of your medical and help client moving forward. Can you really make that practical with sharing about the retreat that you just told with some other desmoid patients and what you felt the magic is there and I see this every day with my own truce with food group but I want you to share it.

[1:14:20.9] SS: Yeah, so one of the things that I shared earlier was when I was starting to find my voice. I was praying and asking what the right next thing for me is so it was put on my heart to create this healing space for women especially women with desmoid tumors who had had the same type of experience as me, who have the same diagnosis and so I recently put on a retreat for women where I brought together integrative practitioners.

I had an integrative physician, an integrative health coach and then we did some yoga, some restorative yoga and yoga knee work and really just created a place of community and so these

women from all walks of life, all ages, all areas of the US. They flew in from everywhere. I just couldn't believe it, God will transpire to make things happen if you are working in a flow and what happened was I thought it was so funny especially after having this conversation with you and showing my journey I thought it would be great.

They'll get exposure to integrative physicians and they'll see how important functional medicine is and they'll also be able to see how they can change their food and empower themselves. I just wanted to educate them but let me tell you, I've created this space for these women and they came in and I think in retrospect they were yearning for a place to be authentic and be real and be heard and be seen and we talked. There is this common understanding that we all had desmoids.

But that's not what we spent the weekend talking about. We spent the weekend talking about how stressed we were in our lives and how sad we were about what happened and how hard it was to look in the mirror with the scars on our body and how difficult our lives was for the first spouse and it was an incredible spiritual experience of people being seen and released. I was talking to somebody the other day and I said, "I think about 60% of the time we cried and then 40% of the time we were exuberantly happy".

It's this pendulum of I finally got to release that and now here I am and these women are really seen for their real selves and it was just so impactful. It wasn't about the desmoid, it was about trauma that was happening in their life and the fact that they just didn't feel like they were good enough and one of the things they've surprised me is how women talked about how they isolate and the isolation came from the fact that they thought they weren't good enough or that they thought that what they were feeling wasn't valid.

That the fact that they were sad or that they were low or that they couldn't figure this out something was wrong with them and so therefore they couldn't be seen and it was just easier to be by themselves and let me tell you, when those women were leaving we did some video clips and stuff and the things that they were saying like they were made new, that they felt like they were new people that they were completely refreshed and they had hope.

Let me tell you vitamin H, vitamin Hope, if we can give that to everyone that pushes people forward. It was so transformational and definitely a seed planted in me. I know that women with chronic disease need this and I consider cancer a chronic disease because there is so much we could do in medicine now to allow people to live longer with that so it was transformational and it was like my story. I don't think I'm unique. I think when we start digging into this stuff and we allow ourselves to be seen, it's so transformative. It was incredible.

[1:17:21.6] AS: I love that you put that together and I love that you were able to see what was really happening because you hadn't lived your own journey and your own experience. You would have been so pushing through to just get the education, get the facts more information but that transformation that happened wasn't because they learned anymore it's because they emotionally released and spiritually connected.

[1:17:43.8] SS: Yeah, it was funny. Some of the women when they're doing their testimonials I said what were you expecting when you signed up for healing, when you were coming? And they said, "Well I was expecting to come to lectures by medical doctors and I thought I was going to get a whole bunch of education about how to change my nutrition" and I said, "Did you use functional medicine?" and they did get good education but we did it in a very bit by bit.

I was like, "so what really happened at healing you?" and the majority of the answers, they vary but they were like, "My life was transformed" I was totally changed. They thought they needed information but what they needed was the release and so we've got to get curious about what we really need and what we're told that we really need. Maybe we don't need to fix so much maybe we just need to be heard.

[1:18:23.2] AS: Yeah, I am actually writing. I'm going to do a podcast episode on this but writing about this for some of my new web copy about even just setting up the idea that there is an expert and a patient, the client is broken but it's this hierarchy that we have in our mind of weight loss and silver bullets, supplements, one kind of diet, those are all dressed up as magic bullets. We think they're not but it's going to be the one thing because we're broken and we need it to be fixed.

We need to explore and we need to be curious and what we think is the problem is never the problem, right? Anyone who's been to therapy or coached or anything knows but I think the cool thing is and this is what I work on with my clients is those same feelings that used to make them want to eat or feel powerless, the feeling is so calm but now they mean, "what does this mean?" they start getting curious rather than, "shit what's this going to be about?" you know?

Yeah you may be getting your butt kicked in the process sometimes but if you have that capacity to handle those feelings, you also have that capacity for that deep joy that in gratitude and wonder that are healing emotions. So it sets up a nice upward trajectory so Sera thank you so much. You gave us so much to think about. Your story is amazing, we'll have to have you back on when your book has been published and where can people find you and about your work and every amazing things that you're doing to really change the system of health care and not which will change the individual experience as well?

[1:20:00.2] SS: Yeah, well thank you so much for having me. I could talk to you forever all day so I am glad that we get to record this and share this with our friends. So you can find me, I blog regularly on health care and my journey at serafiana.com. You can find me on Twitter @serafiana, on Instagram @serafiana and on Facebook, Sera Snyder and if you go to Sera Fiana, you can learn more about healing you which is the educational online community and retreats that I have recently started. We're just amazing.

[1:20:44.6] AS: I remember when we first started working together and I sense this drive and this go-go-go and I'm like, "You realize in Spanish your name means to be" and you're like, "Yeah, that's the goal" I don't know if you remember that.

[1:20:56.6] SS: Yes, it hilarious. It does mean to be so I am learning. I think it will be a lifelong journey. I think healing is a lifelong journey and I am on a long ride for it.

[1:21:06.1] AS: Because it is interesting and it keeps you engaged, you know?

[1:21:10.4] SS: But the beautiful thing is and I think we can leave with this but I recently went on a longer term rest than my regular rest and I was writing a letter to myself before I went and I said, "I am taking this rest because I am well not because I am sick. I am resting because I am

well” and I hope that that’s my healing journey going forward. I am healing because I am well. My body doesn’t need to think it needs to get sick to be able to heal. I wanted to heal and be healthy because it’s well and that comes from such a different place and it’s really a powerful place.

[1:21:46.3] AS: I love that. Thanks for staying the course and come back to tell us about it what’s up ahead for the rest of us.

[1:21:51.2] SS: Yes, well thanks for being a trail blazer girl. You are such a trail blazer and I love the work that you are still continuing to do. It’s just amazing, thanks for being you and being willing to step out decades ago when this was not as trendy and cool as it is now.

[1:22:06.9] AS: You are so right but you were willing to come along that’s why I love my clients. Even to this day now they are doing this trail blazing emotional work of like these are the people I want to hang out with though. Once it becomes mainstream, let’s move onto something else but everyone has their place. We need those traditionalist as well because we’re all circling back to traditional wisdom so we’re all going to meet up anyways.

[1:22:32.4] SS: Yes, it’s true.

[1:22:33.7] AS: Thank you Sera.

[1:22:35.9] SS: Yeah, thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:22:40.7] AS: Have questions or reactions about the episode? Reach out to me on Instagram and Twitter @alimshapiro or Facebook @facebook/alimarieshapiro and if you love the show, please leave an iTunes review and tell one friend this week about how to get the Insatiable Podcast on their phone. See you on social media.

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