

Leesa: And so what can we do so that history remembers who we are? It's like even if we have children or not, that's something — we've done something that records our actions and so that's what informs me and that's what drives what I do is that question: How do I want history to remember me? How do I want history to record me? Is history gonna record that I spent June 10th at 10:40 AM arguing back and forth on Instagram with @magahat1948?

(Intro)

Layla: I'm Layla Saad, and my life is driven by one burning question: How can I become a good ancestor? How can I create a legacy of healing and liberation for those who are here in this lifetime and those who will come after I'm gone? In my pursuit to answer this question, I'm interviewing change-makers and culture-shapers who are also exploring that question themselves in the way that they live and lead their life. It's my intention that these conversations will help you find your own answers to that question too. Welcome to Good Ancestor Podcast.

Leesa Renée Hall is an anti-bias facilitator who has helped over 65,000 leaders with quiet, gentle, and highly sensitive personalities go on an Inner Field Trip to explore their unconscious biases so they can protect their energy, stand on the side of justice, and become better ancestors. In 2017, Leesa embarked on a personal journey of writing half a million words over 365 consecutive days. Over that year, she used questions to help her unpack her own unconscious biases around her race, gender, religion, ancestry, and nationality. This led her to the work that she does today, leading thousands of people through her signature body of work called the Inner Field Trip, a process of self-reflection using guided questions and reflective writing. Leesa is also the host of the Inner Field Trip

Podcast where she hosts conversations with those who have advice on how to stumble bravely and she is the creator of the Inner Field Trip Card Deck which includes 40 guided prompts to help people uncover their hidden stereotypes so they can be more courageously on the side of justice and create a future without bias.

(interview)

Layla: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to Good Ancestor Podcast. I'm your host, Layla Saad, and I'm here with my dear, dear friend and sister, just one of my favorite people to be in conversation with, whether on the mic or just us one on one, it's my friend, Leesa Renée Hall. Welcome, Leesa.

Leesa: Hi, Layla. I love being in conversation with you so I can't wait to see where this is gonna go.

Layla: Me too. I love being in conversation with you too and for longtime listeners of the podcast, you might remember Leesa from, I believe, episode 10, I wanna say. It was our final episode for the very first season of the podcast and I asked Leesa to come on and interview me because I wanted to be able to share a little bit of my story, and when I was thinking about who is the perfect person to interview me, it was just obvious, it was Leesa. She knows me. She's also a deep thinker, an incredible teacher, and somebody who is a wonderful interviewer herself and so it was amazing being in conversation with her for that episode but I've always wanted her to come back on to the podcast so I could interview her as well and share her magic and her wisdom with our listeners. So, welcome, Leesa.

Leesa: Oh, thank you for having me here.

Layla: All right, Leesa, before we dive in and Leesa and I, because we are longtime friends, when we do catch up, we tend to just go straight into, you know, the deepest part of the conversation but I am gonna — we do, but I am gonna ask you the conversation that I do ask every single guest: Who are some of the ancestors, living or transitioned, societal or familial, who have influenced you on your journey?

Leesa: One thing, you know, I've been working on my family tree for quite some time and I've discovered not only my West African ancestors who come from Nigeria and Cameroon but I've also been able to name my European ancestors and, right now, I've named a Scottish ancestor and a French ancestor and so, for the longest time, in terms of my familial ancestors, I didn't know how to handle my European ones because my European ancestors are in my family tree due to the violence and brutality of chattel slavery. So, where do they fit? And for the longest time, I couldn't and didn't know how to handle them so I ignored them. But to reject or ignore any parts of my identity is to ignore and reject all of me and so it was an interview with Lyla June, she's an indigenous poet, artist, musician, and I listened to an interview she did where it was called healing her European ancestors or something along those lines and I don't remember how she conceptualized it but she did so in a way that helped me to bring peace to that part of my ancestry and so now I move forward and I say that, yes, I acknowledge my West African ancestors, my maternal grandmother, my maternal great grandfather, you know, all of that, and I also acknowledge the Europeans in my bloodline because even though they were complicit in a system that dehumanized my West African ancestors, there are lessons I can learn from them so that I don't repeat the harm and the violence and so I learned from them. I learned from them. In terms of ideological ancestors, there are some that, both living and passed on, that have really influenced me and there's one

in particular, a book that you recommended by Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, and that has become more or less my bible in how he's conceptualized the ways in which, as black people, we are allowed to have an inner life, a quiet life, a reflective life, that to look at racism and to look at anti-blackness, that it doesn't need to be public and expressive, that it can be quiet and we can go into our inner selves and evaluate what that means and so that's one of my ideological ancestors that I hold close and his book is somewhere around here, but it gave me permission and I thank you for recommending his work. He gave me permission to be the quiet, sensitive person that I am and also as a black woman, that those two are real and true at the same time.

Layla: Wow, yeah. There's so many different directions that I wanna go in. Also, I will say, Leesa, when I was thinking about — when I was getting ready for this conversation and thinking about all the different things I wanted to ask you, I was like, you know what, if Leesa and I were 10 years old, 11 years old and in the same school, we would be best friends because, you know, I didn't grow up with other little black girls but I also didn't grow up with — I didn't grow up with many kids who, you know, had that sort of introverted, sensitive way of being, whose favorite place to hang out was the library, right? And who — right? Who loved to like read encyclopedias and history books and things like that and it was a sweet thought because I feel very blessed that, you know, I didn't know you when I was young but I do know you now and I just revel, I revel in the things that you get excited about because I get excited about them too and that book that you shared, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, by Kevin Quashie was a book that I just discovered it on the bookshelf in the library here, picked it up, started reading it, and was like I've never seen anything like this before and it very much spoke to me and I knew I had to recommend it to you too and I've seen it just completely transform how you

understand yourself and also how you show up in the world, both personally and in your work too, and I wanna talk — yeah, go ahead.

Leesa: And let me just add, before you recommended that work, the way I was showing up was according to how people were saying I should. I had a blog post go viral about 60 days after your blog post went viral. I was in this unknown space where people were naming me. They're like, "Oh, this is the anti-racism educator," and I was like, "Oh, okay, okay, so I guess that's what I am now," and so, therefore, I thought it was —

Layla: A certain way.

Leesa: — look a certain way and be a certain way, right? So, when you recommended that book, I was in this place where I wasn't even comfortable with the way I was showing up. I thought I had to be boisterous and loud and expressive and a little bit on the, you know, ragey side and I say this not to stereotype other anti-racist educators who may show up that way but because every way that we show up has its place, but, for me, it was incongruent with who I am and so when you recommended that book, it was gifted to me by one of my patrons, she bought it for me, shipped it to me, and I read that thing and I was just like, "This is my permission to show up just as I am because it is enough."

Layla: And you talk about, you know, so you've shared Kevin Quashie and his book is, you know, an ideological ancestor who's influenced you on your journey. Both of us talk about the ideas of being a good ancestor, being a better ancestor, and ideological ancestry is one of the types of ancestors that you have identified. Can you tell us about some of the other types of ancestors that you have identified and how, perhaps when

people hear that word, “ancestor,” they think it means a specific thing, they think it means a family line, a blood lineage, and that’s the only thing that there is, but you share that there’s many ways of showing up as an ancestor.

Leesa: And it came up for me in a workshop I did where a woman, you know, we’re doing the writing prompts and then we’re talking about it afterwards and she was lamenting that, “I will never have children and I’ve accepted that fact and, therefore, I don’t have anything else to offer so why am I doing this work?”

Layla: As somebody who is choicefully child free, when you heard that, how did that hit you?

Leesa: Well, because I’ve done my own work, nothing surprises me in these rooms anymore so, usually — and one of my facilitators, Miriam Hall, she was co-facilitating with me in a room and she said to me, “You know, Leesa, I noticed that when these statements come up and when these questions come up, you take a deep breath, you close your eyes,” and because, you know, I’m re-centering myself, right? Reminding myself of my energy. And so a lot of the things that come up in these rooms just don’t surprise me anymore.

Layla: Right.

Leesa: Doesn’t shock me and, instead, what I’m reaching for is the question I can ask in return and so it was in that moment, you know, I’m not there to teach anyone anything, I’m not there to convince anyone of anything and, therefore, I find that questions help me to stay in my energy of peace and joy no matter what pops up in the room, but questions — and there’s research out there, you can, you know, if you’re watching me, you can go out there and look for it, but there’s research that

shows that questions interrupt the thought pattern, that questions just cause the person to stop in whatever thought pattern they're in and interrupts and it helps them to shift and start thinking differently. So, the question I asked her was, "Is there anything else you've created that is a value to you?" and she sat there and I love, when the good questions, when the air feels like it's sucked out of the room and I could feel like the tension build so the oxygen leaves and the tension fills the room and, you know, everyone's quiet because they're like, "What's gonna happen now?" and I sit there because I love that moment, that tension that fills the room, because I know something magical is about to happen. And so, as she sat there, kind of thinking, looking, like trying her best to defend or whatever, what came up instead were tears and I love seeing the tears. I mean, I don't like — I don't make people cry but what I love is — and those are tears that — it's not fragility tears because those tears aren't meant to shut down and suppress and silence conversation, which is what fragility does, that when emotions like anger and tears show up, that shuts down conversation, that's fragility, but what was happening in that moment is this woman was — those tears were representing a loss or a reclamation of her sensitivities, a reclamation of her humanity, a way to see herself beyond what her womb can offer the world and so the tears started flowing and that's when she talked about photography, pictures that she's taken, and I asked her, "Well, how can you use that to become a better ancestor?" and, oh, Layla, Layla, I love those moments. I love those moments. And so, to your question, I came up with an acronym called FIRE to talk about the four ways that we can become better ancestors. So, the F in FIRE is "familial." We pass on DNA and cellular memories. So that's the most common method of ancestry that people think of but there's three others and you can have a combination of all four or, you know, whatever it may be. The I in FIRE is "ideological" so you leave behind ideas, inventions, writings, and so, for

someone like you, Layla, having that best-selling book, *Me and White Supremacy*, you know, not only are you a familial ancestor because you've passed on your DNA to your children, but also you're becoming an ideological an— no, you are an ideological ancestor because you left behind this work and so that's something that we can do as well, leave behind writings, photography, recipes, whatever it may be. The R in FIRE, in terms of third way we can become a better ancestor, is "relational" and this is where we leave behind affinities or memberships. So, an example I like to give is I went to a university, I graduated, I'm part of their alumni community and, as a result, I benefit from some of the deals they're able to negotiate because of the numbers of alumni that are part of this association so I get my car insurance, my house insurance through them.

Layla: So it's like being part of a community, that belonging, even if it's not through blood.

Leesa: That belonging. That's right, exactly. And then the E in FIRE is "environmental ancestor" and that's where you leave behind wisdom from nature and so there are some people who are experts in the celestial bodies and how they traverse the skies. Some of us hold wisdom with, you know, plants or nature, trees and so on, and one of the things I wanted to share is that if you're not indigenous to the lands that you're on and you want to become an environmental ancestor, then ask yourself how can you use your privilege, your settlers' privilege, your skin color privilege, in order to elevate the voices of those who are indigenous to those lands.

Layla: Thank you for sharing that. It really is important to see the many ways that we show up have influence in the world and have influence for generations to come. It's not just through family and I know that when people hear that word,

“ancestor,” it means a specific thing but it really doesn’t. It’s an understanding that whether you choose to have children or not, your being here will have an impact. The things that you do, the things that you believe, the actions you take, the relationships you make, and so on will have an impact so it’s important for us to see that and so how does, for you, seeing yourself as an ancestor, wherever on that acronym that you sit, you know, how does that inform how you show up in your personal life and also in your community, in the work that you do?

Leesa: Yes, yes, that’s an excellent question. So, one of the things I like to ask people or I like to inform them about is that their name will be forgotten within two to three generations.

Layla: Yes.

Leesa: Right? And so, now, you know, the anger starts to build in the room, I can feel the energy shift and people are, “Ugh.” I’m like, no, test it for yourself. If you still have access to your parents or grandparents, ask them the names of individuals two generations away from them and you’ll find that, of the eight names they have to remember, you know, they’ll remember maybe two or three so already someone has been forgotten in your family tree.

Layla: It’s kinda humbling, I have to say. When you said it, I was like, you know what, she’s right.

Leesa: Right. And so what can we do so that history remembers who we are? Even if we have children or not, that’s something — we’ve done something that records our actions and so that’s what informs me and that’s what drives what I do is that question: How do I want history to remember me? How do I want history to record me? Is history gonna record that I spent

June 10th at 10:40 AM arguing back and forth on Instagram with @magahat1948? Is history gonna remember that I showed up in an event like 10 minutes late and then had to cut two minutes of my speech? Like history is not that minute. It records those big events and it's those specific events that lead to that big thing, your body of work, whatever it may be, and so, knowing this and knowing how history operates means that my boundaries, and you and I had a conversation about this that we shared with our patrons which was so beautiful and lovely, but knowing this, then my boundaries have become even more solid because I know what I'm saying yes to. I'm saying yes to how history records me —

Layla: You always say, "I answer to history." That is what I've heard you say. "I answer to history." So you have this really long-term view of your existence and the impact of your existence beyond your physical body being here. What does that do to your nervous system and how is it helping you to navigate in particular the times that we're in now where everything feels so historic, you know? Everything feels, you know, like we are living in the history books that, you know, my kids are gonna be studying a few years from now.

Leesa: And then your grandchildren will come back and say, "Grandma, when you lived through that, do you remember...?" and they're gonna do it for a book report. And, you know, it wasn't always like this, right? I was in a place where everything was urgent, where everything was like now, now, now, where decisions were made, you know, now for tomorrow, you know? Ever since coming into a place where I understand history's impact, I now think in one-year increments whenever I make a decision. So, if I make a decision today, I think —

Layla: Can you give us an example of that —

Leesa: — five years from now to see the outcome. So, an example would be, yeah —

Layla: Yes.

Leesa: — okay, so this is a project —

Layla: Yes.

Leesa: — project containing my writing prompts, so between 2018 and 2019, I wrote about 300 writing prompts that I shared with my patrons in my community. So that took a year. That took a year to do and then it took another year for me to decide what format am I going to deliver these writing prompts in so people outside my patron community can enjoy this. So, at first, it was gonna be a book, and then I became overwhelmed with the manuscript and then I said to myself, “I shouldn’t be publishing this. I should be in partnership with a publisher to bring this to market,” and then it was just like, yeah, I don’t know, like we are highly sensitive people in my community and if I’m feeling overwhelmed with the prompts in a book format, 300 prompts in a book format, I need to find another format. So that took a year. And then finally, finally, here’s the physical product. This is Volume 1. There’s 300 prompts so I can do this now for like five or six volumes and let me just add that the launch of this is taking a year. So my patrons got this first. Now, we’re gonna do a little campaign.

Layla: So you don’t rush your process, yeah. I learned that about you. So when Leesa and I first became friends, it was in 2017. We had both written articles that had gone viral within months of each other and became introduced to each other through mutual friends and just fell in love with each other and just, you know, just found a kindred spirit, essentially, but one of the things that I was really fascinated with in 2018, as you

shared, was you embarked on this one-year writing process. Every single day, you woke up at dawn and you wrote and you did not skip a single day. You didn't make excuses. You reorganized your life so that you were always sure the next day you would wake up at dawn, you wouldn't stay up late at night, you wouldn't do things that would compromise your sleep so you wouldn't get up the next day. You wrote through being tired, being sick, being angry, I'm sure as, you know, external experience and your own internal experience was going on. Tell us about that process and what is it, Leesa, within you that allows you to be that consistent for yourself? Because we both love writing, you know? Like writing for us is air. I cannot write 365 — in fact, if I set myself a goal like that, within the first week, I will break it because I have very, you know, rebel tendencies where I don't like external expectations even if they're my own, right?

Leesa: Yeah. Yeah —

Layla: So I'm in awe of you that you did that, yeah —

Leesa: Totally get it, and I'm surprised. Yeah, I'm super surprised that I completed that —

Layla: And so tell us what were you writing and what was it about making that commitment to yourself that you were able to keep it? Like why was it so important for you to keep that commitment and what were you trying to accomplish? Because this wasn't — you weren't publishing your writings, this was for you.

Leesa: No, I wasn't. This was for me. This was for me. These are interesting questions because I've never really — so I'm gonna be answering this for the first time, even for myself, so thank you for asking those questions but, yeah, so I woke before 5

AM for 365 consecutive days and I started the process on January 3rd, 2017. So I woke and I said, “Okay, I’m gonna write my first book of fiction,” because, to date, I had written all these nonfiction books and I had this idea stuck in my head so I said, “Okay, okay, I’m gonna do it, I’m gonna do it now,” and the motivation was playing the organ at a funeral for a young man who was unfortunately murdered for being a good Samaritan and his father had gone up and had, you know, he was very upset and I had never heard that type of emotion expressed. I’d played at dozens and dozens of funerals and that was the first time I heard such deep, unbridled rage at what happened to the deceased. So, the father had said something that stuck with me and he said, “The way my son died is not how he’s gonna be remembered. It’s how he lived,” and the father made a commitment to everyone sitting there that — and I’m the organist, I’m just there as a passive observer playing “Amazing Grace,” all six verses, as slowly as I can, and so the father said, “You know, I’m gonna spend the rest of my life publishing his music because that’s gonna be his legacy,” and I sat there and I asked myself, Layla, I said, “What is my legacy gonna be? Is it gonna be —” At that point, I was launching internet marketing campaigns for clients, I said, “Is that gonna be my legacy? Where am I gonna define in?” And so I started thinking to myself, you know, what’s still stuck in my head? And it was that book of fiction so I committed — I’m not even sure why that time in the morning because I — at that point, I didn’t think I was an early bird but I was convinced that, because that was the time of day that I would have all to myself and, to be honest, I knew that my days of being an internet marketer or a social media marketer was coming to an end, I just didn’t know where to go next, so I had nothing to lose. Nothing to lose. So I woke up on January 3rd, 4:30 AM, took care of my biology needs, grabbed a cup of coffee, went into my office, and I just started writing and I had plotted out

chapters so, each morning, I'd wake up and just write 2,000 words for a chapter and I did that for 59 straight mornings.

Layla: It's a — no, it's a lot.

Leesa: It's a lot. And I remember one of my friends, my really good friend, was having a birthday and he wanted to go down to see the Raptors game or something and he said, you know, "Come on down, I got great seats," but the game was at 7:30 PM and I did the calculation in my head, okay, it's 7:30 PM, that means the game won't probably let out 'til 10:30, 11 o'clock, which means I have to battle traffic, which means I get back home, which means it's gonna take me an hour before I act—and so I had to tell my friend on his birthday, "I can't attend." Like that's what I started saying no to. As you said, anything that would take me away from making that commitment. And so the first reason why I stayed committed was to get that book of fiction out of my head but then, after experiencing a professional setback, on the 60th morning, I woke up and I just started, you know, punching out angry words about that particular situation. I felt a little better so the next morning, I did that again and I kept doing that, realizing that the character I needed to develop wasn't the characters in this work of fiction but I needed to develop the character of Leesa and that became my commitment. Who is Leesa Renée Hall beyond?

Layla: And beyond, I guess, the things that you produce in the world, the things that others see of you or receive from you, yeah.

Leesa: Yes, yes. And so that became my commitment. So, every morning, I had the structure. Get up before 5 AM to write, but because I didn't know what I was going to write, that satisfied the spontaneity within me.

Layla: And what was showing up on the pages after day 60? I mean, past the initial, you know, anger and upset of the professional setback, as you delved deeper, you're getting into day 70, day 80, day 100, what was starting to emerge?

Leesa: Everything. So, I started seeing my 20-year-old self in a different light. I started seeing some patterns. I could see patterns that were showing up in multiple, like in my dating relationships, in my personal relationships, in my career relationships, there was the same pattern showing up. One of the patterns was that of being a people pleaser and I could see like how the types of clients I was attracting into my business mirrored the types of men I was dating which mirrored the types of friendships that I was, you know, the type of women I was calling friends, like it all just — and I was amazed. I was amazed at how I kept making deposits into all these relationships and getting nothing in return. I could see how destructive the people pleasing was, which explained why a lot of these relationships just didn't work out and then I started tracing it back to my family history, you know, being abandoned by my biological father and then being raised by my dad and that, even though he was giving and loving and just an amazing person, you know, I was still clinging to the deep rejection I felt from my biological father who abandoned me when I was still in the womb and how that just threaded itself through in every relationship and every project that — oh, my goodness, Layla, and then, going a step further, looking at my genealogy and my lineage and seeing how the generational patterns from my ancestors, how they fed and threaded through into who I am today and so it became this beau— like it was hard. I remember one time there was a memory that came up and I wrote about it and then I cried and I had to put it away because I couldn't deal with it. It was being rejected by a group of my peers and then I was rereading some of the e-mails and I had to put it away for a couple weeks because I'm just like — it

just brought up too much, then I wrote about everything else and I came back to it now feeling —

Layla: Yeah, thank you so much for sharing this because, you know, this is an — I mean, I love you, I wanna say that, and, obviously, I know, you know, I know the work that you do behind the scenes. I know how much depth there is to your work but I think it's so important for people to hear this because what we're gonna be talking about next is the body of work that you administer, that you host and facilitate out in the world but that I don't think could exist, would exist without exactly what you're sharing right now of the journey you chose to go on with no plan of where it would take you, no expectation of who you would become on the other side of it and what would now become your path but it just was, "I'm doing this for me," and, you know, I admire you and respect you so much for that because we do live in a world where it's so much more tempting to focus that kind of energy and consistency on things that give us external validation, where people can see the thing that you're doing and there is a nice way of packaging it and, you know, marketing it and talking about it that puts you in a very positive light, you know? Even vulnerability can be very much marketed and be very — yeah, be a tool.

Leesa: Oh, I hate — I can't stand those e-mails that start with the subject line, "Can I be vulnerable with you?"

Layla: Right, right. So it's so important that you did that and you're sharing it with us because the body of work that you now host is, like I said, it wouldn't exist without you going through that journey and I think it gives you a real deep sense of empathy for the people who you lead through your body of work, because, just like you said, right? I had this one particular thing and it just — it sounded like it really — it broke you and

you had to really, you know, allow yourself the space and the time to process it and to be with yourself and to really cradle yourself and allow yourself to be human. So, tell us about that journey from — this was your inner journey, your personal journey and now the work that you do, you know, you host this body of work called the Inner Field Trip, you showed us your — you recently launched reflective journaling prompt cards. Tell us about the Inner Field Trip and making that bridge from that personal journey to now the work you host out in the world?

Leesa: Yes. Oh, wow. So much, so much, so much. We need to get to have space in a place where, just because you don't see someone doing something doesn't mean —

Layla: By the way, I say that to my family all the time. I'm like, "Don't think I'm not doing — I know I look like I'm not doing anything but a lot is happening."

Leesa: Right. So, the other day — a lot is happening. So, the other day, I went to a cottage with my sisters, my brother-in-law, and my niece who's seven, and so she was doing her Zoom school and it was still a working holiday but it was beautiful to be there and it was just so idyllic and I shared it with you and I showed you the pictures and all that. But, anyways, so, my niece, she's on her Zoom school so I wake up at 5:30 AM as usual and I do my work and then the rest — so my niece would be up by 7:30 and then she'd come down, I'd give her a hug, kiss, and then, you know, whatever. So then, she'd be on her Zoom school and then, if there's a break, she goes, "Auntie Leesa, what are you doing for work?" I said, "I write words and people, you know, finance me to write those words." She goes, "Oh, so if I write words, people will give me money too?" and I said, "Well, yeah, maybe, you have to be refined," so the next morning, she's like, "Auntie Leesa, you don't look like you do hard work." I said, "You right." I said, "You right." And then one

morning, I was on my phone checking the Discord forum where my patrons interact and so my niece turned to my brother-in-law, her dad, and she said, “What’s Auntie Leesa doing on her phone?” and then my brother-in-law says, “She’s working,” so I hear my niece, “She’s working on her phone?” So, I mean, we laugh, right? But as I reflected on what happened, you know, one, my work is reflective, right? So it’s inward and so that’s something that’s not quantifiable but, secondly, if I’m modeling this type of work for my niece, then that’s a good thing. As a little black girl, where the world expects us to be its mule, but if she can see through me that work looks like ease and grace, then I’m not only doing her a good thing but I’m also doing a good thing for my ancestors where their labor, their intellectual, physical labor, emotional labor was extracted, plundered, stolen and so if this is the reflection of what I could do for my niece, it’s a good thing. But for my patrons as well, that what we do in the Inner Field Trip is it’s something that Sonya Renee Taylor said the other day and I was like, in this space where I was saying to one of my facilitators, Miriam, again, I was saying to her, you know, “I feel like the space that I’ve created, in some ways, I don’t want people to think I’m coddling them because I’m not doing that,” because when people work, when patrons work on the writing prompts, they go to the Discord forum that’s only accessible by patrons, and they share and I don’t do anything. I don’t show up and say, “Yay, good job.” I don’t respond and give them advice. I just click a Like button and say, you know, that’s it because it’s not about the — and what I’m trying to teach my patrons is that it’s not about the, as you said before, it’s not about the external reward. It’s about how you show up as you interact with yourself, with your inner oppressor, that’s what I call that part of ourselves that pressures us to fall in line with the dominant culture, so it’s about that conversation with our inner oppressor and so it’s not about me cheerleading, as we do in the Inner Field Trip. It’s about providing what Sonya Renee

Taylor calls a soft place to land and there's white people in my community, there's black women, there are white men, white women, they're all, you know, there are many individuals that will — they have many identities that they call themselves. It's a beautiful community. And it's exactly the community I've always wanted to develop, a diverse, truly diverse, but where we are providing a soft space to land, not because we're coddling each other, not because we're comforting each other, but because if we can build our courage and stumble bravely in this community with each other, if we can be an ally to ourselves, then when we go out to the wider community, then we've built the muscles —

Layla: That's right. That's right. And I think I love that you said, "Be an ally to ourselves," because I think that's what that really taught you through that process of year-long writing was how to be my friend, right? Like be my own friend, be my own ally, and really understand like who I am, what influences why I think what I think or why I do what I do. I think that you do provide that soft place and I've shared this with you that, you know, you so inspire me with the space that you hold in your Patreon community because that's what I see. I love that terminology by Sonya Renee Taylor. It is a soft place, it is a courageous place, it is a place where it feels very welcoming and it also feels like it's a space of intention and, you know, I really look to you as a positive example as a good ancestor of how to host that kind of a space because that's what we're aspiring to do through the Good Ancestor Patreon, the book club, and so on and so forth, that, you know, it's — we wanna be in community with other people. I think it does require, if you're going to be the community space holder, that you are in your work as well. You absolutely have to be.

Leesa: How can I even speak to what they're — like I can zero in and know exactly what patrons are going to experience as they continue on this journey. I have the language.

Layla: Tell us first about the Inner Field Trip. Give us a brief overview of what it is, some of the main things that people look at within there, and, like you said, what is it that you are seeing along the way that you are able to support people with?

Leesa: Okay, so, the Inner Field Trip is a combination of guided prompts, which I've authored, and reflective journaling. Yeah, if you love journaling, then my writing prompts help to center your writings and center your inner oppressor because that's the part of us that lives within us that forces us to obey and submit to the dominant culture, to the culture of white supremacy. So what we do is we go to our inner oppressor with questions because if we're to sit down and just write, I've heard from people say, "Well, I can't unpack my unconscious biases through journaling because I don't know what to do, I don't know what to say, I don't know where to go," so the writing prompts that I've authored help us to focus. So we have some writing prompts on your relationship to the environment, of course, privilege, even around sleep. What's your relationship to sleep? So we ask those questions and what we do is we ask the questions of our inner oppressor and then we use journaling to capture its ramblings.

Layla: What made you realize that we need to ask that question of our inner oppressor and not our highest self? Why go to the thing that we're told, "That's the thing you have to shut out, ignore it, you know, that voice is a liar, don't listen to it," and you're saying, "No, actually, I'm gonna go get the wisdom from it," right.

Leesa: Yeah, right. So it's a form of therapy. I'm not a therapist nor do I play one online but I do study a lot of therapy tools and so it's called narrative therapy where you kind of distance yourself from that ugly part of yourself in order to get to know it as a way to bring wholeness to yourself. Otherwise, when people sit down — because what I noticed is when people sit down, they start to have those conversations around race, racism, like to ask yourself a question, you're new to this stuff, you woke up yesterday because you saw something horrific happening to a black person, now you sit down with yourself, "When was the first time I learned of white supremacy?" like that, aah, and all of a sudden the guilt shows up, the shame, and then they disengage. It's like, "No, no, no, that makes me ugly and I'm beautiful and I don't — no. No, absolutely not." So instead, I've conceptualize that part of ourselves as this inner oppressor and we actually do drawings and stuff to see what it looks like but we do this so that now we have kind of like a distancing but we know this is a part of ourselves that's always there because, as you said, we can't fight that part of ourselves. We can't defeat it. As long as systems of oppression exists, so too does the inner oppressor.

Layla: And I just wanna make this connection real clear, tell me if I'm right here, it's trying to keep us safe and secure so that we continue to be safe within dominant culture, not safe and secure outside of dominant culture, but safe and secure within dominant culture, right?

Leesa: Right, within it, and so, if our bodies don't align with the traits of the dominant culture, if it's not able-bodied, if it's not neurotypical, if it's not white, if it's not male, and, you know, even within maleness, you know, if you're thin, then, oh, that's wrong, right? We're gonna do whatever it takes to contort our bodies to fit in with the traits of the dominant culture because, like you said, and you're right, it's because we're trying to be

safe within it and so that's what our inner oppressor is designed to do, to keep us safe within the structure. Keep us secure. And so what we do is we ask it questions because, you know, what are you thinking? Are we really secure within the system? If not, then just be honest with me. And then we capture those ramblings and then what those ramblings do is that it connects us back to our body because what my patrons do is they fill out a little survey that says, "Okay, before writing, what were you feeling? Where in your body did you feel it? And then, after you write, did that feeling change?" So, often, patrons will say that, "I read the question and I felt a pounding headache," or, "My heart started to beat really quickly."

Layla: Stomach issues, yeah.

Leesa: One of the most common, which I also found during your challenge that you did back in — it's the stomach. Stomach. That's number one. Digestion issues, butterflies in the stomach, explosive diarrhea, all of that's coming up. And because you and I have been through that ourselves going through our own inner journey, I know it's coming so I can speak to it. And so the topic on the fourth day is did you have experience explosive diarrhea?

Layla: Right. So what is the link there with the body and why is in — because, you know, the process that you're using is one that engages the mind, right? And we could just really stay there in the mind, journal, ask ourselves questions, and think and reflect. Why is it so important to engage with what's going on in our body pre question, after question, throughout the process?

Leesa: So, you know the saying that people say that the body doesn't lie? And because the culture of white supremacy cuts us off from our bodies, it says that facts are more important

than feelings. Objectivity is more important than subjectivity. And so we're taught to only use this to be up here and that's why you can do mindset training and it doesn't work because if mindset training doesn't also include what's happening in the body, then your mind or your inner oppressor can convince you that everything's okay. So when we connect back to the body, it helps us to build that literacy around our emotions but, more importantly, it helps center us in our intuition. It helps remind us that our — and I call that inner guidance, inner wisdom our inner tour guide, which fits with the Inner Field Trip so, and so our inner tour guide is there to remind us that, you know, we are sensitive beings. We're also flawed, but if you tap back into your heart, your body, then you trust that to tell you which projects to get involved in, which forms of activism align with you. You now strengthen your boundaries so that you understand which justice-led movements to join and which ones to sit out. Because we can't do it all. Even if you've skin color privilege, we can't do it all. And I would prefer that people focus on one or two justice-led movements and do that over the long haul —

Layla: That's right.

Leesa: — than to spread themselves, "Oh, this is the issue today. Oh, this is the issue," and then to collapse and say, "I'm tired, I'm exhausted." I hate seeing that. "I'm exhausted."

Layla: Yeah, because we — I mean, we understand that all of these issues are interconnected with each other, right? They're all interconnected with each other but we are finite beings with finite energy and time and capacity and so we do have to kind of narrow it down so we don't get overwhelmed and become exhausted, become burnt out, something that I've certainly experienced on this journey and I've had to learn to kind of unpack that as well. So, the process that you're talking about

really is about looking at all of these unconscious biases, right? Because that's what our inner oppressor is showing us, the spaces in which, you know, we have privilege and power and how that then influences our unconscious biases. As you've been facilitating this work for some time now and seen many people going through the process, what are you seeing, not so much because we both understand it, there's not like a before and after picture, right? There's not like...right? There's not a, "Before, I had no idea and now I know everything," right? Instead, I imagine that people are coming through the work and as they're continuing on the journey, having more layers reveal to them of themselves and how they interact with people but also building that, like you said, that literacy of their own feelings and a greater sense of themselves. So, what are the shifts that you are seeing over that longer period of time as opposed to the short, you know, Field Trip process itself that people are exhibiting? Like what are you actually seeing and how it's shifting how they show up in the world?

Leesa: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Yeah, so one thing I will say is that the Inner Field Trip process is not for everyone. It tends to resonate best with those who are deep thinkers, deep feelers, highly sensitive, highly perceptive, people who have a rich —

Layla: People who like writing as well.

Leesa: Yeah, and journaling and have a rich inner life and so some of the things that I've seen from patrons, especially those who have been with me for quite some time, is I see an acceptance of the in-between stage, that, "Here I am, I knew this, and I'm moving towards what I don't know," and so that's the in-between stage, the void, the liminal space and so what I see is that some people sit there and they're like, "But I'm supposed to be doing something, but, you know, I just revealed

this unconscious bias, it's now conscious so I'm supposed to do something. Something."

Layla: I have to fix it now.

Leesa: I have to fix it.

Layla: Right.

Leesa: "What am I supposed to be doing? Why is my inner tour guide not saying anything? Like what —" And, as patrons continue going on the Inner Field Trip, they realized that void is such a beautiful place. Asha Frost, she's an indigenous medicine woman, she says it's medicine. The emptiness is medicine. And so what I find is that there's a deep comfort that builds being in this place because the answer is coming, we just don't wanna rush it. I've seen some patrons become more vocal towards their own community around anti-blackness. So, one of my patrons, she's been with me for, I think since 2018, she's a Jewish woman, Orthodox Jew, and, over the months and years, her posts have become even more courageous in calling out anti-blackness within her community, that, yes, we identify as Orthodox Jews as an oppressed group and yet, this is how anti-blackness shows up. Her voice has become stronger and stronger and stronger and it's been a beauty to witness and she's calling out behavior and she's also calling out those who have anti-Semitic views as well so she's going towards — and so it's just been beautiful because, three years ago, four years ago, that was not the place she was. She was afraid of conflict and, you know, being highly — and then having that language around being highly sensitive, now she's doing interviews. Oh, it's so beautiful. People have improved their relationships I've seen, especially if they're individuals from different races, different ethnicities, and I've seen how they've shared how their relationship with their spouse, their partner has improved

because there's now a shared understanding. Between parents and children as well and just opening up conversations around harm that may have been done between parent and child and it's just been like —

Layla: And I imagine the conversations that are happening in this space, whether it's the example you shared of the person who is sharing their voice more to call out, you know, certain things or whether it's personal relationships, that whoever that communication is with, it's probably very rich, nuanced. There's a great balance of understanding. "I have empathy for myself and you at the same time. There's space for both of us here." I imagine that there's less binary thinking of you are a bad person because you did this or you're a good person because he did that, and probably more space for compassion and space for, like you said, like you answer to history, you have this long-term view and I imagine you pass that on to the people who engage with your work and so they're not just thinking of the quick fix, the thing, I need this, this, and this done by this date or, otherwise, it's over, right? It's like...it's a process.

Leesa: It's a process, and anyone that does come into my community, even into my space on Instagram, where it's like, "Can you tell me how to show up as an ally?" then I'm just like, yeah, you're not suited for my space. Yeah, this is not for you. I'm not for you. Go away.

Layla: Because what is it that you're interested in? What is it — what question would someone ask you that you would say, "I think you would find great value in engaging with my community"?

Leesa: So, yes, so a question would be, you know, how do I make my unconscious biases conscious? So that's telling me

that there's, first of all, you acknowledge you have unconscious biases and, secondly, you're looking for a way to, you know, do that and so I tell people, you know, start with my free prompts, which is in my viral post. Start there. And if you find a connection, if you're finding that it's working for you, then join the community on Patreon because the community on Patreon isn't transactional. You're not gonna join and then you're gonna get like two or four posts every Friday at 2 PM that says, "Spirit inspires," and that's where we have the Discord forum which allows our patrons to participate in fireside chats so that, as things are popping up, so, you know, there was an incident of plagiarism in the autistic community where a large organization plagiarized the content from an indigenous woman and so one of my patrons came in and said, "You know, I need to do something, I have to do something, I wanna help, what should I do?" and so then other patrons contributed and then one patron came up and said, "Leesa, I know this might be triggering to you because this actually happened to you too —

Layla: Right.

Leesa: — and I wanna acknowledge this for you and I hope you're taking care of yourself." Like this is what —

Layla: That's beautiful.

Leesa: I love my patrons.

Layla: That's beautiful, Leesa. I know you do. I know you love them. Leesa, I wanna talk then a little more about, so, okay, we've known each other for some time. We've both watched each other and supported each other in formulating, listening for, and then building our own individual bodies of work and, you know, really been there on that journey with each other and something that I've seen from you which I really resonate

with and on that same path myself is wanting to separate your body of work as this legacy, that story that you told about playing the organ at the funeral, like, “What is my legacy?” This legacy of this body of work and you, Leesa, the person, and really resisting a cult of personality, really resisting — and I say this not to be disparaging or to put this body of work down, but really resisting influencer-ship, that that’s not really where you see yourself, it’s not really where I see myself either, but we are in a time where, if you do have a large following and people are familiar with your work, you can really get put into that box, even though you don’t self identify as such, right? And so I’ve seen you really try and put separately, “My body of work is Inner Field Trip, me, Leesa, I am the person but I’m not that,” right? Why is that important for you? Where are you in that journey? And in trying to separate the two, what are the risks really? And how are maybe people, whether they realize it or not, you know what I’m talking about, right?

Leesa: I do, I do. As a woman of African descent, I know that people love to erase our voice. They love to erase our innovation. They want to remove us. It’s just something they’re trained to do. As soon as they see that it’s brown- or black-skinned, they just won’t recognize, won’t attribute our creations back to ourselves. So one of the fears with the Inner Field Trip and making the separation between Inner Field Trip, a purpose-driven movement, versus Inner Field Trip, a personality-driven entity, is that there could be erasure of Leesa Renée Hall as the founder of this movement and the person who actually coined the term for this process and so I weighed that with, “But, if it’s a movement, it needs the freedom to fly and to go out into this world to influence communities,” because I don’t need to travel to Vancouver, and I did —

Layla: Yes, you did.

Leesa: I don't need to travel to Portland, which I did. I don't need to travel to New York, which I did. Or London, England, or other points in the world, in order to spark a movement in that community around Inner Field Trip because people who live there are more familiar with the issues that are happening there and so if they're given the tools on how to spark action, bring their community together to start working through their unconscious biases, then it doesn't have to wait for Leesa Renée Hall to say, "Okay, in December 2023, I'm gonna fly to London to lead a workshop." No, people are there on the ground already doing it. So, I weighed that. I weighed that heavily, you know? But because people who come into my community are working through their unconscious biases, one of the things they're working through is also ensuring that attribution is given. You know, in the years I've had my writing prompts published through Patreon, not once have they been compromised external to Patreon. I mean, my free writing prompts were lifted by a psychologist with a large platform, she tried to pass them off as her own, but the ones that people access behind the paid, walled garden of Patreon have not been compromised. And a lot of that has to do with the fact that those who joined the community are doing their inner work and recognize that one way to combat the system of oppression is to give attribution to marginalized voices, because, in doing so, it means that people — they're modeling what people should do with their own body of work —

Layla: Right, right. Yes. Yes.

Leesa: Right?

Layla: Absolutely.

Leesa: So, the separation has to be made, because Inner Field Trip is a movement and the danger of trying to hang on to this and making it personality driven is that people will then fall in love with the personality and I cease being a person.

Layla: And this is something you and I both feel very strongly about. It's something that we both resist very strongly as well and that's what I was saying around perhaps you wanna make that separation but perhaps people unconsciously don't want you to make that separation because of the, you know, the pedestal or the prison that they've put you in in their mind, right?

Leesa: Yes, and I've lost some people in my, you know, some of my strongest supporters, just all of a sudden disappeared and when I look back at the timeline, it happened right around the point when I said that I had registered Inner Field Trip as a trademark and then, you know, I changed the name of my Patreon community from Leesa Renée Hall to Inner Field Trip and making it very clear that separation is happening and some of my strongest supporters just suddenly disappeared —

Layla: Just fell off, right.

Leesa: Fell off, said nothing, and so, in conversation with Miriam, she said to me that, you know, "We have to recognize that some people were more committed to the old paradigm and so now that you're shifting it a little bit, those individuals may not be able to move on with you," and I said to myself, "Mind blown," because that didn't occur to me. It didn't occur to me.

Layla: It didn't occur that in you shifting to a new way of being for yourself that people who had been very vocal, very present supporters wouldn't be ready to move on with you to that next,

you know, to that next part of your journey and, you know, we're talking about a very specific situation here with you but we've all experienced that in some way in our lives where we choose to make decisions for ourselves that are best for us to protect us, that serve us better, that are stronger boundaries for us, and people who love us very dearly love our work, whatever it is, are not there for that. They want you to be the old you. What was your inner oppressor saying when you had that realization of tour guides, say?

Leesa: So, yeah, my inner oppressor got all whiny, right? Like whine, it's like, you know, "I did all this stuff for these people, we did all these things for these people, how dare they leave us," but then my inner tour guide reminded me that there is power in being misunderstood —

Layla: Wow. Talk about that.

Leesa: Because rejection had been such — had been a thing for me for so long that I was willing to compromise me in order to receive the acceptance and approval and, like I said, it showed up in all areas of my life and so when I went through my own personal Inner Field Trip and went through that journey and realize where it was rooted in, where that feeling of avoiding rejection was rooted in, I realized, and this is something that you and I conversed about, I realized that part of the rejection, that part — that what came out of that writing process and the continuation of my Inner Field Trip, even with my patrons over the years, is that rejection is a natural part of accepting myself.

Layla: Rejection of others is a natural part of you —

Leesa: Yes.

Layla: Okay, yes.

Leesa: And if I was willing to reject the white gaze as I went through my writing process, in seeing my social, ethnic, and biological identities beyond whiteness, then I am okay with all forms of rejection.

Layla: That's a powerful place to be.

Leesa: I'd rather be at peace with myself than to be accepted as a counterfeit.

Layla: Wow. Wow, Leesa, you just dropped a million wisdom bombs there, okay. That's a really powerful place to be within yourself and I think rejection, I really resonate very deeply with that grip that rejection can have on us. It's definitely a story of my inner oppressor, even while I am fiercely independent and actually much prefer my own company than anyone else's, right?

Leesa: Me too.

Layla: But, you know, at the same time, because I'm human, you know, rejection is something that has a grip on me and that grip has loosened certainly over time because of the same realizations that you've just shared there. I would rather be at peace with myself than be a counterfeit for other people, you know, in order to be accepted by them. It requires doing the inner work to get to that place authentically. It's easy to say it and it's very Instagrammable as well —

Leesa: So Instagrammable.

Layla: — but the reality of what it looks like when you're in a moment of rejection, when you're actually experiencing the rejection and that's where the practice is so important because,

like you said, you know, you stop, you take a deep breath, you reconnect to yourself, to your own body, you remind yourself of the work that you've engaged in, the truths that you've found through the process, and, from that place, you can respond and that's a skill that we have to learn. It's not something that you can just read about and that's why, you know, I really, just a plug here, Leesa's community, if you are somebody who is a deep thinker, highly sensitive person, somebody who enjoys or finds that they're able to really connect with themselves through journaling, the process that you're describing is one that can really teach you that skill for yourself. Because it is a skill and you have to be able to call on it in a time of crisis.

Leesa: Absolutely. And added to this is part of the process that I went through with the Inner Field Trip is this building of contempt and that's language that James-Olivia Chu Hillman gave me that what I started noticing is that as part of the process of the Inner Field Trip, there's this feeling of disgust that builds and sometimes that disgust can be directed at me and so I name it for patrons, I say, okay, by this day, you're gonna start feeling your heart beating and anger rising because, oh, here's yet another writing prompt from Leesa, leave me alone. And I've experienced that, you know, even personally amongst my relationships. I go to the workshop and then there's this anger that starts building and directed —

Layla: Yes.

Leesa: — and so contempt builds because you're seeing a part of yourself that's stinky and nasty. I call it stumbler funk. And that comes from the hiking community, which I do a lot of hiking, right? And so it's called hiker's funk where when you're on the trail for too long, without showering or laundry, then your clothing, your body starts to smell a mixture of sweat and

dirt and it's so gross. So they call that hiker funk. So I said to myself, well, that's kind of like the stench that fills us as we're going on this Inner Field Trip and we're starting to, you know, the stench of our unconscious biases become conscious, the ramblings of our inner oppressor becomes noxious, and so stumbler funk starts to set in and so this will happen no matter who you're working with, whether you're working through your book, Layla, whether it's another anti-racist or anti-bias facilitator, that at one point, you're gonna feel disgust towards this person because they're changing. You blame them for changing your thought process. You blame them for ruining your holiday gathering because you confronted Uncle Racist and it just fell apart and so now you're blaming this person, but realize that this is just part of the process and that's where the power to be misunderstood comes in for me because I know that contempt is gonna rise.

Layla: And, again, that's why it's important to be able to have that separation for yourself so that you can host that work because if your sense of self, your sense of like, "Am I valuable? Am I seen? Am I loved?" comes from what the attendees in your programs are directing towards you while they're going through their own process, projecting on to you because you're the one that is the deliverer of the message, not because of anything that has to do with Leesa intrinsically. If your sense of self rests on that, you'll never have peace. You'll never have a real sense of understanding of who you are.

Leesa: That's right. So, yeah, so I recognize all this. Again, as you pointed out, I can't do this work and sit with others in guiding them along if I haven't done it for myself. So I can't understand all these wellness people that are out there that talk about the shadow, confront the shadow, some of them don't even talk about the shadow. It's like oh, it's light, light, light, light, light. Yeah, well, no wonder you're attracting

unhealed people who turn around and blame you for every — of course, because if you haven't gone through the war with yourself, the battle with yourself, if you haven't sat down and gone through that inner crap, whether you travel, I don't know, to, like Elizabeth Gilbert did and travel to the East and find yourself or some people now I've seen articles coming out of the pandemic where people went to the Arctic or went to the northern parts of our world and have sat there for a year or, like me or my patrons going through this Inner Field Trip, unless you've gone through that yourself, how the hell are you gonna hold space for others, especially when it comes to justice? How are you gonna able to hold space for a black person who is lamenting about the effects of racism on their family if you haven't gone through the darkness yourself deep within? It's impossible, and no wonder these so-called allies, who have to self-declare that they're allies, are causing so much harm because they're not willing to sit with themselves and ask, "What is the crap that I still have to acknowledge within me?" Anytime there's a situation like, for example, here in the province of Ontario where I live in, where I was born, a few weeks ago, there was a tragedy, a hate crime that was committed against a Muslim family out for an evening walk. This young man with his truck plowed them over. It was horrific. And the police chief went on TV and said, "This is not us." The police chief of London said, "This is not us." And I said, "It is. It is. This is us." The same culture and society that raised him to lead him to do this is the same one that raised us as Canadians. It is us. So we need to start to acknowledge not only the inner work that we need to do so that when something like this happens, white parents turn to their white kids and tell them, "This is not right, you need to use your privilege responsibly." Instead of putting it on the victims to continue to —

Layla: Right.

Leesa: It's exhausting.

Layla: You know, that's the part, the work that you and I do is very much about the personal because we understand, first of all, that, you know, like you said, we have to find our place in our work, you know, where we are able to best be of service but also that individuals are what make up institution.

Leesa: And vice versa — now, people are acknowledging, “Oh, yeah, racism exists, but there's no such thing as systemic racism.” Okay, now, are we gonna spend next 400 years now trying to fight and convince you that there's systemic racism? Like Britain just came out with a study saying there's no systemic racism. It's just like, oh, my goodness, are you serious?

Layla: Both and, exactly. So, Leesa, obviously I could talk to you forever and actually, like you'd said earlier, Leesa and I did host two-part conversation for both our Patreon communities a couple of months ago on boundaries and that was a lot of fun. There's always so much that I feel I learn from you when I hear you speak but also I'm able to reflect afterwards and I'm like, “Oh, yeah, you know, that really links to this thing that I've been thinking about.” So I know that this has been a rich conversation. Before I ask you our final question, I wanna end on a really joyful note to speak about something that I know is very close to your heart which you have mentioned in this conversation, organ playing, and your goal for this year as it relates to organ playing. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Leesa: Yeah, so I've played the organ, I mean, the story of how I even started was by accident. I was trained to play the piano and then my mom was at a very tiny church when I was about 16, 17, and I was recounting the story to my mom the other day and so it was like a small congregation, maybe 20 people, and

the woman that used to play the organ could no longer play because she was getting old and she was like shaking. So, my mom went to the music coordinator and said, “You know, my daughter plays hymns,” and so he said, “Oh, so can you play?” but the only instrument in the church was the organ, I was like, “No, I play the piano,” and my mom goes, “But you play hymns.” So I said, “Yeah, but I only play the piano,” and my mom goes, “But you play hymns.” So there started my journey on playing the organ and there was no YouTube at the time, I wasn’t taking lessons so I taught myself how to play the manuals, the different manuals, the keys and the foot pedals and so I’ve been playing the organ since I was 16 so I think it’s over 30 years now. How old am I? Yeah, yeah, it’s been almost — I just crossed — anyways, so I’ve played at church services, funerals, weddings, and I decided that one way that I could contribute and give back is to use the instrument that gives me such solace and peace to help bring solace and peace to others during such a horrible year for so many people, a horrible two years, almost, for so many people. So, my plan is to do an organ marathon to raise funds for charities focused on mental wellness so I’m gonna identify them and then also to try to break the Guinness World Record for the number of consecutive hours playing hymns on the organ so right now it stands at 61 hours and 20 minutes —

Layla: And, I’m sorry, are you gonna take breaks or is it — what?

Leesa: Yeah, well, yes. Once I signed up and I got approved by Guinness and then they gave like this document with guidelines, “Oh, I can take a 20-minute break for every four hours of play, oh, okay. Okay,” and then there’s other rules so, yeah.

Layla: That's like training for an actual marathon, though. I mean —

Leesa: Right? Right? So —

Layla: That's incredible.

Leesa: Yeah, and when I brought this to the church where I play for their church services, one of the questions, because these are Caribbean people, right? They're like, you know, so the board is like made up of people of Jamaican descent, Trinidadian descent, and all that. So the questions weren't like, okay, like, you know, how are you gonna raise the funds? It was like, "When are you gonna bathe?"

Layla: Right. I mean, I had two thoughts, toilet and food. Those are the two thoughts I had.

Leesa: So that's the other question was like, "So, when are you gonna eat?" So this is what Caribbean people are concerned about, right? Your freshness in terms of your body and your nutrition so that was funny, you know? And I was so nervous bringing it towards the board because I thought, oh, my gosh, I have to have all the answers but they're only concerned about my personal wellness and so, yeah, so that's the plan. It will be done — the plan is to do it during Mental Wellness Awareness Week in October —

Layla: I can't wait to see it. I know that you're gonna — I mean, you wrote every day for a year like —

Leesa: Yes.

Layla: — you know, I know you can do it and I think it's incredible that you're doing so in order to raise awareness and

funds and support. It's just such a beautiful and important reminder that we are so much more than the body of work that we carry out into the world. We can really honor the body of work that we do and be grateful for it and really take it seriously but we're also much, much more than that too and so when you told me about it, it made me feel so joyful and it was just like, yes, you know, it's random, but I love it, you know? It's Leesa, right? Like my organ-playing friend.

Leesa: Right. You know, me, and I think this is something you pointed out is that I need to experience the thing for it to be whatever it is. I need to be part of that experience for it to cement and, you know, it can't just be some abstract thing.

Layla: Right, and I also think it's an important reminder to be saying yes to things that put us outside of our comfort zone, you know, that are interesting to us, right? And it doesn't have to be linked directly to your work in any way but it's part of the story of Leesa, right? It's part of the story of who you are and I think that's just — it's an important reminder so thank you. Leesa, I wanna ask you our final question. We actually went over time but that's because I can talk to you forever.

Leesa: Oh, yeah?

Layla: We did, but —

Leesa: And it's over?

Layla: — before I ask you, I know, before I ask you our final question, I just — you know how much I respect and admire you. I love your heart. I love the thoughtfulness with which you show up for yourself, for your loved ones, for your community, for me, and I'm always grateful you are, you know, somebody who's in my inner circle whose opinion I trust, whose advice I

seek. Yeah, just example I look to for how to show up with integrity. Just everyone who's in your community adores you as well but also that you've really taught them to see you in your full humanity by teaching them to also see their own humanity as well and that's a beautiful thing, Leesa, so thank you for everything that you bring to the world. Where can people — obviously we'll link to your Patreon, to your blog posts that we've mentioned in this episode. We'll also link — I was on your podcast, we'll link that episode as well but where can people buy your cards?

Leesa: So, if you go to innerfieldtrip.com, yeah, there is a link called "Card Deck" —

Layla: And we'll link to that as well. Yeah.

Leesa: Yes. And if they're not on sale, you can add your name to the waitlist and be able to learn when pre-orders open. So, depending on when you're listening to this, it's either not ready yet but you can join the waitlist or, if they are ready, of course you can order. So, yeah, just go to innerfieldtrip.com for more.

Layla: Amazing. Thank you, Leesa. Our final question, my dear: What does it mean to you to be a good ancestor?

Leesa: It comes back to something that I had said earlier in the interview that history is my muse, my mentor, my medicine, and so everything I do in terms of becoming a good ancestor is to ask of myself, "Is history going to record these actions?" If 150 years ago, people are looking back on the life of Leesa Renée Hall, will this action benefit them? Will reading about this particular thing that I did, will that inspire them? And if it doesn't, if in my estimation, history is not gonna record this particular thing, then I just don't engage. I don't participate and instead I look forward, as the Iroquois Nation says, look

forward seven generations in hope that my descendants, biological or not, will look back and say that, yes, she was indeed a good ancestor.

Layla: It's beautiful. Thank you, Leesa.

Leesa: Thank you, Layla.

(Outro)

This is Layla Saad and you've been listening to Good Ancestor Podcast. I hope this episode has helped you find deeper answers on what being a good ancestor means to you. We'd love to have you join the Good Ancestor Podcast family over on Patreon where subscribers get early access to new episodes, Patreon-only content and discussions, and special bonuses. Join us now at Patreon.com/GoodAncestorPodcast. Thank you for listening and thank you for being a Good Ancestor.