



Lauren: Welcome to "52 Weeks of Hope". This is where you get to hear how to feel happy, balanced, and worthwhile. How to make that lonely ache vanish and feel empowered, confident, and secure. I'm Lauren Abrams, and I get to help you feel that magic again since going through my own dark night of the soul, by chatting with incredible leaders, healers, and change agents who give you their messages of hope after overcoming challenges of their own. And today, we're talking to a super change agent herself. Police officer and human rights advocate, Heather McWilliam. After putting up with intolerable sexual abuse in the workplace, Heather finally spoke up on behalf of herself and other female officers. Over six grueling years later, she's won a landmark human rights case in Toronto and is an agent for change. Now, founder of a nonprofit writing her book and creating positive change in policing. She's here to tell you that by being authentic, you too can be the hero of your own story by taking that action only you know is right for your journey. And she's gonna help you learn that path right now. Welcome to "52 Weeks of Hope" Heather McWilliam.

Heather: Thank you, Lauren. So nice to be here.

Lauren: Yeah, it's so great to finally meet you. You've had quite a run these past few years. Congratulations on your victory.

Heather: Thank you so much. I'm happy to be here and glad that I'm on the other side now, so to speak.

Lauren: Yeah. I know that these kinds of cases take quite the emotional toll on the victim and it took such a long time and they say our biggest growth comes from our darkest times. You're the founder of "Brave Inspires Brave." Do you want to explain like what that is and how that came about?

Heather: Yeah. So along my journey, I found that the braver that I became and standing in my truth and continuing to speak my truth, that other people around me, you know, people that I knew or didn't know also, you know, found their brave and were able to overcome obstacles that possibly in the past they weren't able to. So it hit me one day that it was, you know, my brave will inspire others as well as their brave will inspire me. So it was that ripple effect. And from



there, I just wanted to share my story and continue seeing other people overcome their fears. And so if I could do that, then I felt like I was giving back.

Lauren: That's really amazing. And you mean beyond just policing? You mean other people started just being vulnerable around you?

Heather: Yea, 100%. Like it was, you know, as soon as you started owning, you know, what you were going through and showing that you weren't afraid to share it and you were in that vulnerable state and that you were still standing in your power while you were being vulnerable, it was definitely something that you could see that I had such... they said almost such grace when I was doing it. But I just feel like we're all human, we're all going through things, and why do we have to be ashamed? Why is there a stigma that comes with what we're going through?

Lauren: Yeah. That's really beautiful. Did you always want to be a police officer?

Heather: Yeah. So I always wanted to be a police officer and there was like this part of me that really enjoyed psychology and human behavior. So it kind of all went hand in hand and I figured, you know, my father was a police officer and I thought that policing really was able to grasp all of the things that I wanted to explore with regards to, you know, investigations, and serving, and protecting people. So it really had all aspects that I was interested in.

Lauren: I think it's important to say, you're still a police officer now, correct?

Heather: I am still a police officer after all this time. It's hard to imagine. But I was injured like on duty, and so, I still was able to keep the status of being a police officer and, you know, and be covered by the injury that occurred within my workplace.

Lauren: That's amazing. So let's just talk a little bit about what you did overcome. I know you experienced severe sexual harassment in the workplace. Just talk briefly about that and why you reported it and just the atmosphere there.



Heather: Yeah. So when I joined policing and I started with the RCMP in British Columbia and Canada. And so I wasn't there too long, but I switched over to Toronto police. And so, that was a municipal police service and right away, I noticed for myself a big culture difference as to what I experienced in the RCMP to what Toronto was like. And it was really just normalized, the behavior, and the sexual comments about women.

And so, I could see it all the way up the chain, different ranks and position and the power and balance and how it was being used. And the more I went through my career, the more I could see the larger picture of the effects of it on myself, others around me, the community, all the dynamics that were happening because of it. And you could see the deterioration of others and how it was affecting their life, not just at work, but outside of work and their, you know, their own personal well-being. And I was feeling the effects of that too.

Lauren: How so?

Heather: So, you know, it was breaking me inside really is what it was doing. And so, as much as I tried to focus on my job and serving others, the wear and tear that it was taking on my confidence on my self-esteem was just escalating. There was more and more supervisors that were sexually harassing me. One supervisor had sexually assaulted me. So, I just felt so degraded and really just like a sex object is what it started to become is that you were only being seen for how you could, you know, help them in what they wanted with regards to their sexual needs, so to speak.

And, you know, I really tried to just focus on my job and doing what I needed to do, but eventually, after I put in a complaint when it got too much, right, I did my best to really manage this behavior. But when it became too much, I put in a complaint at one of the supervisors that was sexually harassing me and then eventually preventing me from furthering my career. So after that point, my career was basically over. And then my body started getting the effects of it. Like physically my body started getting a lot of aches and I could just see that this was headed in a very wrong direction now that it was having those effects on my body.



Lauren: I thought it was really interesting when I was doing a lot of research on you, that it was the older officers more so than anything else. I mean, nobody was sticking up for you, I guess.

Heather: Yeah. A lot of the police officers were afraid to stand up to them. I mean, they had said to me that they were, you know, not comfortable standing up to them and they were afraid of their career if they stood up to them. So it's not that the junior officers weren't doing it as well, but the officers that weren't were afraid how it would affect their career and that, you know, eventually would affect their livelihood and their families.

Lauren: So eventually it ended up happening?

Heather: I ended up taking a leave of absence. And when I took the leave, I thought that I would take a, you know, a few months off work. I was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety. But at that time, the police service didn't like that I had left the workplace. I don't know what their exact thoughts were, but they were trying to get me to come back to work. And by then I needed time to heal. And since I wasn't abiding by their rules, they were then coming to my home and intimidating, so to speak, with regards to taking away my pay and benefits, if I didn't come back to work and so on and so forth. So they really started putting pressure on me to do what they wanted me to do to protect themselves.

Lauren: And you ended up getting a lawyer?

Heather: I did, I found a lawyer. It took a while because actually, our association, police association didn't want anything to do with this. And they've done that for years, right? They've just, you know, turned a blind eye and said that this wasn't our area and stayed out of it, so to speak. And sometimes actually helping the employer, in my case, they were helping the employer intimidate me as well.

But I found a human rights lawyer, luckily. And you know, I think she really saw what it was that was happening. And she wanted to make that change with me. You know, I called many lawyers and a lot of people have, you know,



either conflicts of interest or they, again, I think we're, you know, a little bit hesitant to wanna go against the police knowing how this would affect their lives as well, right. Moving forward on their own.

Lauren: Yeah. So it took a lot of years and here you are, you're on the other side and you get the mental health help. You've done the work, so to speak. I mean, your topics are facing humanity. You are your own hero. My story is not my identity. Like you've done a lot of work. So somebody listening to you, having gone through that, they're like, "I don't know," but you're on the other side, what would you tell somebody who's like, "I don't know if I wanna go through that."

Heather: Well, I don't recommend it, but if you do find yourself there, I mean, I was in that darkness. I was in that mud. I did not see light. I was being terrorized for six years. Intimidated by the police, you know, facing police abuse like every day of my life. I was a police officer, afraid of the police, fleeing the police. So I really eventually said, you know, I can see everyone being affected by this. And if I wasn't... I eventually just said, like, if I wasn't getting better, if I couldn't find some sort of healing, then you know, someone was gonna get really sick because you know, illness and that kind of negative mind could really affect your body, right?

And so I just decided one day to start finding things every day that I was gonna be grateful for. And, you know, if that was only those days where I said, you know, I was grateful for the sky. I was grateful for being able to wake up every day and still be alive. And I was breathing and, you know, all the little things that we miss every day, I started doing that. And eventually, you know, you ended up with a long list of things that you could be grateful for and just focusing on all the positive and switching your mind from the negative. And so that's exactly what I did is that every time there was a negative thought that appeared or a negative or a fear, I had to train my mind to fake it till I make it, right?

Lauren: Yeah, totally. I love the gratitude list. I'm big on a daily gratitude list and I'm what we focus on grows. I have an article on my website about it. It's so



true. I mean, we always have a choice. And so you have the faith in the humanity being the change you wanna see in the world. How did that come about? And what is that?

Heather: You know, I've always had a big heart for humanity my whole entire life. Like I just have so much love for us, and everything that we go through and how resilient we are. And so, that's kind of where it comes from is that, you know, even as a young person, as a teenager, I saw my friends go through so much and I always wanted just to pour back into people, right. I never wanted to see people in pain or in suffering. And so, the more that we can just give each other love instead of hate and all those things that, you know, can come into us when we're in trauma or in suffering or in pain, is that just really being able to understand where we're all at in life, because we're not all at the same points in our life. We're not all going through the same things, right?

Lauren: Goodness, right?

Heather: Yeah. So if I today, you know, can pour into someone else, then I'm happy to do that. And on the days that I'm not doing well, someone else will pour into me, right? So it's that again, that ripple effect that we all can give one another.

Lauren: Yeah. Definitely. So your "Brave is Beautiful." You talk about following your own internal compass.

Heather: Yeah. So for "Brave is Beautiful," it was at that time in my life where, you know, I felt really ashamed of my mental health. I was isolating from the world. I did that for many years and...

Lauren: So sad. So many people are doing. It's so sad. I got really sad when you said that.

Heather: It was sad. When I look back like I was done with the world. I was absolutely done with the world. I wanted nothing to do with anyone, except for those who were closest to me. And, you know, I had to start saying the mantra to myself that 'brave is beautiful' because I felt so ashamed that I couldn't get up and do my hair. I didn't wanna put on makeup. I didn't wanna put on clothes





that I enjoyed. I didn't wanna do all the things that made me who I was. And so, I started with, well, you're being really brave right now. So that is what is beautiful, right? And so being authentic went along with that, brave is beautiful, was that as long as I was who I needed to be, then that was truly all I needed.

Lauren: Yeah. Showing up where we're really at, instead of some like social media BS. I mean, I like my kid's explanation of what social media really is. They told me that Instagram is like the picture-perfect. And TikTok, I'm not on TikTok, but I'm gonna go look at it. They said, TikTok is what really is going on. Which I don't know that that's true. I have no idea. But that was their explanation to me. It's was probably a year or two ago. I have no idea if that's true. If I go on social media suddenly, like it's a rabbit hole and suddenly like 20 minutes has gone, and I'm like, what? So I try not to like go down that rabbit hole.

Heather: I don't even know about TikTok, I'm not on it. But I know that when I was going through all those years of pain, I actually, you know, the silver lining was because I was being hacked so much by the police and I was being terrorized and they were changing my passwords. They were basically taking away my voice to be able to connect with people, right. But it actually helped me because I didn't get to see, you know, all the things that maybe could have made me, you know, unfocused where I needed to focus on, right? So actually, I feel like it helped me not being able to be on social media, right? I really had to go inward and really listen all the time to what was happening. I wasn't distracted by everyone else's life. I had to really focus on what was happening with me.

Lauren: That's fabulous. So what did you do? What kind of work did you do? I mean, gratitude list, what you focus on. I love the "Brave is Beautiful." That's fabulous.

Heather: Yeah. I wrote a lot, you know, I've always enjoyed writing and I'd lost that as a police officer. So I went back to writing a lot. I learned how to meditate and really be able to understand what meditation was because when I started, I had no clue. And, you know, it's a matter of just having patience with



yourself and realizing it's not gonna happen overnight. And so it was that perseverance of, I don't have anything else better to do right now so I might as well just self care to the max and see what happens, right? Because I know I don't have children so I had that time to be able to spend, to be able to do that for myself. And I know not everyone has that time, but if you can, every time that you do have free time, if you can get back into yourself, I found that to be the best thing when we're in that state, right. Is to give back to ourselves.

Lauren: Even if you have kids, meditation's key. I find that to be the gratitude or the number one things for me personally, I love those. And do people see you and go, "Oh, you're the Toronto police officer, you know, who fights for our right and everything." Or do you, you're like, my story is not who I am. I'm an evolving person. And then I mean, what do you say to people?

Heather: Yeah. I think, I guess everyone has their expectation of, you know, what someone's like or what would they be like after they'd gone through such experience, but I'm really just like everyone else, you know, I evolve day to day, just like you said, and you know, I have good days and I have bad days still. It's never gonna be perfect, right? When you have gone through those steps, but you know how to manage them now, right? And so, some days, you know, you're fighting the war again and you're pushing on and you're advocating, is what I'm still doing. And other days you're just trying... I try and live in everyday life where I'm just, you know, I really enjoy the atmosphere of a small town and just enjoying life as it is. So I really like to meet people, I guess you could say where they are and where I am. And that's what's important to me.

Lauren: What's the most common question you're asked when people meet you?

Heather: How did I do it? How did I survive? Like how did you survive? You know? And sometimes I'm like, I really don't know by the grace of the universe, I survived really. There was obviously some force that was guiding me through this. You know, it took me out of policing and totally completely changed my path in life. Like I felt like I had just turned in a 360 completely. And so I do feel that, you know, I was, this is my path, this is my purpose.





And how I survived was so many things every day is just pouring back into myself, to heal myself. Like I did a lot of acupuncture and Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine. I became a Reiki practitioner. So a lot of energy healing, a lot of energy clearing, you know, aligning your chakras and healing what's inside of you. And so I learned all about those things. And so it was just, you know, growing your mind and knowing there's so much out there that we can do to help ourselves became that next thing for me. It became what life was all about.

Lauren: Did you start attracting all new people into your life after that? You must have, I mean. There you were working police officer with that kind of energy and you're aligning your chakras after that. And that must've attracted a different tribe.

Heather: You got it. Once I came out from my cave and was like, okay, I'm ready to venture into the new world and see what it's like now that I've completely sort of transformed from where I was. And once I did that, you know, the doors just started opening to all those people in that energy field. And so, I do feel like I have a whole new life. I do feel like that other part of me was another life, but it was a really quick transformation as much as it was a long time. I still feel it was, you know, it was a big shift.

Lauren: So what are you doing now?

Heather: So now we're just starting a nonprofit. So we're gonna still champion policewomen and make all those changes in policing with some other policewomen. I have "Brave inspires Brave" and I'm still doing, you know, speaking and recruiting workshops for other people for mental health resources. And I'm writing a book. So I'm really enjoying the writing aspect. And I hope that everyone can, you know, I can inspire a few people with my story and that's really what it's all about.

Lauren: Yeah. Always is. Do you have a message of hope if you wanna give?

Heather: There's so many messages of hope. I think the one that, you know, still comes to me most is your brave will inspire other people's brave. And when



you find that you are the hero of your own journey and you have all that light within you, it arrives when you least expect it. When you're in that darkness and you're still trying to find the light, the more that you can envision and manifest, you know, what your life could look like, to me, that was the hope that I had. I would just think about what my life could be and what I dreamed of is when I got out of this, what could it possibly feel like. And for me, that's what gave me the hope, right? Was that this can't be the answer to what life was. There has to be more. And so manifesting is that light.

Lauren: That was good. I was thinking it's a domino effect. It just starts there and then it all kind of happens. I don't know. You're an example of that. You're a great example. What do you think is the commonly held belief in your industry that you passionately disagree with?

Heather: I think it's just the environment that's been created. From my workplace is what you're speaking about?

Lauren: Yeah.

Heather: I think that in policing being seen as strong is, holding your feelings in and being able to manage all of the things that are happening and not opening up and being, not a superhero, but just a human being. Well, we have emotions and, you know, we can feel them and that's okay. You know, it's really taking away that stigma about mental health. I think mental health and policing is still has a long way to go.

You know, I think the bravest people are the ones that are vulnerable because that's where that ripple effect happens, right? And you know, there's a big problem with suicide in police officers, and military. And just to be able to them to know that they are not less of a person and they are not defined by their uniform and they're not defined by the position that they hold that it's okay to say you're not okay.

Lauren: Yeah, definitely. We learned that as an undergrad, the number one rate of suicide were single military men, older single military men because they don't talk about anything. That's real. I just read a good book. I just finished it. I



think a lot of people reading it. "Anxious People" it's fiction, but the characters are so well-drawn and there's father, son, police officers. And that's all I'll say it's so good. It's funny. It's witty. It ties in well with the subject. Is there a question that I should have asked you and I didn't know enough to ask and you were gonna get off and be like, "Oh, Lauren, didn't ask me this."

Heather: You know, I think for me, it's just civic community really. I think for me, how people have been affected by police abuse. I think that the community needs a lot of hope in that area and that we do care and that we don't want to see them in pain. Like I don't want to see the community being affected by the things that I've seen from the police. And so, I really want to give hope to the community that there is a lot of officers out there trying to speak their truth to create change. And it's really creating hope.

So when you see them out there and they're speaking their truth, it's not necessarily about them. It's about wanting to create hope for everyone that we're not all, you know, out there. There's a lot of good police officers out there that wanna create peace in the community and love. And that's the only piece I think that I could offer extra is that that means a lot to me and a lot of others as well.

Lauren: Yeah. There's no professional, we're all bad seeds. That's always true. That doesn't make the news. The good ones don't make the news in many things.

Heather: Right? And that's the ripple effect we need. We need sometimes the news, you know, to give out those messages of hope because that actually, you know, will create a lot of impact of wellness within us.

Lauren: Right. I quit watching it. I read the paper I kind of need to, but news just, it's not good energy. It was so good to finally meet you. Thank you for being a guest today on "52 weeks of Hope."

Heather: Thanks so much, Lauren, take care.

Lauren: You too. I hope you enjoyed this week's episode and take with you Heather's messages of vulnerability, speaking your truth and bravery. Such great messages to take into your week ahead. Join us in our Facebook group,



where we talk about gratitude and healing, and it's a safe space for achieving your clarity. We're also having a monthly meetup in the Facebook group, at "52 Weeks of Hope" with one of the guests leading each month in a healing modality. If you want to be in the know, get on the email list at the website at [52weeksofhope.com](http://52weeksofhope.com). And that way you always know what's happening each month and from week to week.

Be sure to tune in next week for another amazing episode when I share what's been gleaned from interviewing amazing healers, change agents, and leaders for the past 52 weeks. I now know the meaning of life and I'm sharing it with you next week. That is an episode not to be missed. And I do know how ballsy that sounds to say, I now know the meaning of life, but I do. So be sure to listen next week. It's an episode definitely not to be missed. Thank you so much for listening. If you're enjoying the podcast, please tell two of your friends. I have a link where you can just follow and review right there on the website. Just click very easy now. I'm Lauren Abrams. Thanks again for listening.