



WE CAN DO HARD THINGS

She survived the unthinkable; now this coach
and mother is ready to help others thrive.

written by Christina Nifong

Lindsay McKinnon is hungry.

For the chance to share all she's learned over the last grueling five years. For the time to build her life coaching business, Soul Body Connect. For the opportunity to raise her beautiful surprise-of-an-almost-three-year-old girl, slung across her lap, nursing, and wearing nothing save a pink, long-sleeved T.

Not so long ago, McKinnon was living a picture-perfect life — mom to two curious, energetic elementary-school-age boys, working as a therapeutic dance leader, massage therapist and doula, frequent host with her husband, Thomas McKinnon, at their 4,000-square-foot home on the side of a mountain.

Then March 19, 2016 happened. In the middle of the night, Lindsay and Tom woke to a raging fire. Amid the confusion and destruction, the McKinnons and all four of their house guests escaped. But their sons, Patrick, 10, and Logan, 5, did not. They died in their sleep, together, as the blaze consumed every beam, every shoe, every framed photo. Everything the McKinnons held dear.

For McKinnon, the journey out of the abyss has been exhausting, terrifying, soul-crushing. Also eye-opening. And clarifying.



What she learned is that she has a purpose, to guide and to teach. And she's meant to use every life experience toward that end.

These days, she is writing her story. She and Tom have divorced. She's working two jobs on top of her coaching to make ends meet. And she is co-parenting Trinity Acadia McKinnon, the kind of child who races to the door when the bell rings, to announce through the glass, "I'm Trin!"

Most of all, McKinnon yearns to help: Those in the depths of grief and loved ones trying to reach them. Those discovering — after a year of pandemic stress — the value of self-care. Those who, like her, have survived trauma, loss, loneliness.

"I think ultimately, you come to a place where it's like, I know some things. And they're really important. And I've been called to share them."

A Second Chance McKinnon's life is starkly divided between the before and the after.

Before the fire, McKinnon was a carefree spirit, who had followed her curiosity from her family's roots in the Winston-Salem, N.C., Moravian community to the rituals of the Episcopalian church and the breathtaking mountains surrounding Roanoke. She was a competitive gymnast-turned-youth minister, who felt fed by nature's wonders.

She was a young woman who fell in love. She was a new mother who fell in love again, and again. She uncovered the healing powers of massage and the magic of accompanying women through childbirth. She discovered Qoya, a practice that guides women to let go of negative emotions through movement, and she joined a worldwide community of seekers finding wisdom in spiritual sources such as shamans, mystics and Tarot cards.

"You know, we had a beautiful life," she recalls, her blueish-grayish eyes distant. "We had it all. We had the big house, we had amazing travels. We had great jobs."

After the fire, McKinnon had no home, no identity, no voice. She coughed up soot for months. She vacillated between working to heal her body and soul, and running away. She leaned heavily on her Roanoke community, who showed up in every way they knew how, and sought the solace of out-of-town friends where she could fall apart in anonymity.

Eventually, she began her practices of self-care again, taking part in therapies of all kinds, including an equine program at Healing Strides with a group of mothers who had also known and loved Patrick and Logan.

Long-time friend and coaching colleague Melinda Cohan remembers McKinnon at that time. "Most people, when faced with tragedy, I've seen it, they abandon those tools, those practices, that community. Lindsay held tight to them.... That's what allowed her to navigate her journey of grief."

Then, in October 2016, Lindsay and Tom flew to a wildlife conservation park in Zimbabwe. They danced and meditated and



McKinnon's boys, Patrick, 10, and Logan, 5, both died when their house burned five years ago.

met the people who lived and worked there. They encountered rhinoceroses and zebras. On their final day, after a night camping under the swirl of the Milky Way, a female elephant broke from a nearby herd and walked up to McKinnon. She put her trunk on McKinnon's face, touched her head, reached across her body. McKinnon was told this elephant had also recently lost a child. The elephant mama seeking out the human mama so they could commune in their pain.

The experience was mind-bending for McKinnon. She realized she should never again feel alone, that humans are not the only creatures that suffer, that all of creation was hers to connect with.

"When I have one of those days where I'm overwhelmed ... all I have to do is go back to that moment. All I have to do is call out her name. And it's like I have the strength of this elephant," she says in her quiet, confident voice.

She spent the next year traveling the world, exploring cultural perspectives and values she had never known.

Her quest might have continued, but in the fall of 2017, she learned she was pregnant with Trinity. It was time to make a new home.

LAUREN COLLIVER



10 Things to do to Feel Better

1. Breathe.

"Because of how quickly that grounds you and shifts everything within you," McKinnon says.

2. Lean in

to other cultures and practices, and their understandings of pain, grief and joy.

3. Hike in nature, by yourself.

Ask: What does nature have to show me about what I'm feeling?

4. Ask for help.

Keep a running list on your phone or fridge for tasks to delegate.

She and Tom settled into a cozy brick two-story in the Raleigh Court neighborhood. Trinity was born in the dining room. Three months later, McKinnon birthed her new business. She would lead Qoya classes and take massage clients, yes, but she was ready for more. She added the roles of motivational speaker and holistic healer and embodiment coach. On her website, she calls herself “a midwife of souls and a vessel for holistic healing.”

The fire and her recovery destroyed her, reshaped her, created a new her.

“Sometimes you are given a second chance on earth,” she says, her eyes welling up with tears. “And you really have to figure out how you want to live it.”

Truth Seeker McKinnon’s living room is filled with angels. And rainbows cast from window crystals. And printed cards with inspiring messages. (“You’ve got a new story to write and it looks nothing like your past.”) And glitter and books and seashells and photos of Patrick and Logan and Trinity’s toys. And light.

So are McKinnon’s days.

Her self-care regime includes meditation and breaking glass and fortifying her energy bubble and sitting next to flowing rivers and talk therapy and feng shui and making soup and gratitude journals and epsom salt baths. And so much more.

For McKinnon, everything is on the table. Every experience can hold beauty. Every spiritual practice can be a guide. Every writer can inspire. Every way of understanding has value. Every emotion can be a teacher.

Nothing is wrong. Or right. There are no rules. Take it in. Try it on. If it fits, wear it.

“Because those rigid edges need to soften. The rigid edges tell us things have to be a certain way. And our lived experiences — like a pandemic — say no, it doesn’t have to be a certain way,” she says. “I want you to soften and create space within yourself for more compassion than you even knew was possible.”

That wide range of therapies, that ability to listen deeply, that talent for seeing the divine in everyone she encounters, that is what makes her such a valuable coach, says Ashley Quick, a coaching and massage client.

“Lindsay has the most unique and beautiful avenues to explore,”



Trinity, who turns 3 in April, sparked McKinnon to create a new home in Roanoke.

Quick says. “She just shows up as this shaman, wise woman, sage, angel healer.”

One of the places she seeks truth is from her boys.

“You know, we disembodied when we die. But my boys’ spirits live on,” she explains. “I have incredibly strong relationships with them. And inside jokes and longing

and aching and memories and also ideas. They have inspired me and given me so many ideas.”

McKinnon has become something of an expert on grief, appearing on national podcasts and the daytime talk show “Tamron Hall,” sharing her story and what she’s learned from her journey.

That’s her purpose now.

“We’re not here to live life just for ourselves. We’re here for others,” she says. “Our experiences impact other people. So, would you like that ripple effect to be in a positive direction? One that’s life giving? Or do you want to live in a bitter-rage direction that steals the life force from someone?”

Five years of pain and loss and sifting and starting over have made McKinnon’s answer clear: She wants to love the world to a better place.

“I truly believe this. We can do hard things with massive compassion.” ☆

5. Listen to music.

Find a playlist for your current mood. Move. Dance. Then, find a playlist to match the way you want to feel. Move some more.

6. Repeat

mantras. Say them throughout the day. Write them on sticky notes to keep in the house or car.

7. Get a massage.

8. Take a bath — or float in a salt water tank.

9. Nap in the sunshine.

10. Flower bomb a friend. Anonymously leave flowers at someone’s doorstep. It makes you both feel good!

Find more suggestions at Lindsay McKinnon’s website: soulbodyconnect.com.