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# Therapeutic Parenting Journal

A Resource for Parents and Professionals

**Focus of  
this Issue:**  
The Power of Stories



# What's Worth Doing, Even if You Fail?

Tif Junker

My husband randomly stumbled across Brené Brown's first Tedx Houston talk just before *My Name Is Faith*, a documentary I produced about our experiences raising a child with attachment and trauma, made its world premiere at the HotDocs Film Festival in Toronto. We both instantly fell in love with the message shared through her research. She perfectly framed what we set out to do with our film and even more so, how we had evolved as parents since making it. She was funny, a little irreverent and a Texan, what's not to love!?

Brené's *Whole Hearted Parenting Manifesto* is plastered all over our house; her work is an active part of our lives. We used to go to sleep listening to her audiobooks; even our 12 year old son loves them. We are total Brené GEEKS.

Her work started bubbling to the mainstream just as *My Name is Faith* was building an audience, and I remember feeling this sense of cosmic affirmation that we were doing the right thing. There was a giant wave of validation within her words... "When we deny our story, it defines us. When we own our story, we can write a brave new ending."

It was almost like she was speaking for us, preparing audiences for what they were about to see in *My Name Is Faith*; conveying eloquently, EXACTLY our intension in allowing the film to focus predominantly on our daughter, Faith's early journey. Here was an opportunity for us to stand in her truth, release shame, inspire others, and allow something good to come from her pain.

We knew it was risky... we knew the potential to be judged. And what if our struggling child actually felt more shame after sharing instead of less? It all came back to this sentiment, before ever even heard of Brené Brown: **What's worth doing even if you fail?** As a family, the idea of our child being able to move through shame and feel empowered by her experiences and ability to help others through them was worth the risk.

Everything felt like it was lining up perfectly... except for one little snag. Brené Brown's work also talks about the intention in sharing ... and presents the concept of oversharing, which is not about vulnerability at all, and



is more about ego. Uh-oh.

Specifically Brown says, "Vulnerability is based on mutuality, it requires boundaries and trust. It's not oversharing, it's not purging, it's not indiscriminate disclosure, and it's not celebrity-style social media information dumps. Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them."

Those words made me second guess everything the instant I heard them. Were we oversharing? My empowered, strong mother vibe came to a screeching halt, and I had to look at it through a new lens. Panic set in... Who puts their kids out there?! Who allows their child to be exposed in that way?! Even celebrities go to great lengths to shelter their kids from the spotlight, so who do I think I am?!

Of course, we had given careful consideration to all of this before we even started filming... but were my new guru's words frowning on the risk we took in shedding light on the shadowy parts of our lives. Could this actually be a bad thing?! Are audiences not worthy of, or capable of giving us the understanding and acceptance we were seeking for our children, our family, and other families sharing this journey?

After a lot of soul searching, and struggle with the idea of oversharing, we've come to realize the truth, for us, is this: our families live in extremes. Extreme circumstances, extreme behavior, extreme pain, extreme loss, extreme neurology, extreme challenge, extreme adversity. The only choice any of us have is to remain silent or potentially "overshare" by the standards of others.

"The intention and outcome of vulnerability is trust,





intimacy and connection. The outcome of oversharing is distrust, disconnection, and usually a little judgment.” were Brown’s words we leaned into. We’re all struggling to help our kids connect; to re-wire ingrained fear, doubt, and mistrust for humanity. I felt in my bones that we had a rare opportunity to show our daughter that for the most part, people are good. The vast majority of people that see our film do leave with a sense of connection and understanding for what we’re going through, and they are grateful to be allowed “in.”

There have been a few moments in which someone has misunderstood our motives, and that makes Faith furious. Also, in middle school, she didn’t want peers to see the film, so we held off on promoting it in our area, in respect for her feelings. She had two incidents, in which a peer in a residential setting where she lived for a period used the film to hurt her. When that happens, our go-to is another favorite Brené quote, “Don’t try to win over the haters, you’re not the jackass whisperer.” Now Faith insists that anyone responsible for her care and her close peers see it.

We recognized long ago, that Faith lived every moment in incomprehensible shame. She still struggles with it. Making a film didn’t change that, and we didn’t expect it to. And we aren’t perfect parents. Indeed, learning to parent children with unique and misunderstood special needs is harder than most people know. We all follow an ever-changing labyrinth full of milestones, setbacks, and the things we celebrate can seem small and less significant to those on a more typical journey.

Yet, growing together “out loud” is what’s right for our family. We know it’s not for everyone, and that is ok. Of all we’ve experienced in making *My Name is Faith*, our first public screening sums it up best: We spent the better part of two years submitting the film to festivals, so when we learned it was selected for one of the 3 largest documentary festivals in the world, I thought I might pee my pants. There was suddenly a HUGE list of things to do, and we became instantly swept up in the whirlwind of finalizing the festival edit and preparing for Toronto.

Everything about this process was new to us. First film, first festival and a lot of “unknowns” to navigate. Managing the kids’ needs well was key. We had to come up with answers to many complex questions: Do they



attend screenings? Do we do interviews with or without them? What happens if we have a bad day? In the end, we invited our dear family friend Shannon to come along as a support system. She’s a therapist who works with traumatized children, and she’d be our “wingman” to help navigate and meet my kids’ special needs as we went through our first public screening.

On the night of the premiere, we planned that Faith and our son Jonah would be in the audience, but Dad would take them to the lobby before the film concluded. I had no idea how audiences were going to receive the film, and in the event it wasn’t positive, I did not want them harmed emotionally.

Except for some sniffing, there was silent, pregnant pause as the last credit rolled... and then a huge eruption of applause and a standing ovation. The Q&A session we held afterwards was filled with insightful, compassionate questions, and an overwhelming sense of reverence, empathy, and gratitude for the film.

Then Faith begged to be part of the next evening’s Q&A session. It was her story, so who was I to tell her she couldn’t do that?! SO, time for a safety plan. Signals for her to use if a question was uncomfortable... a way to jump in to protect her from inappropriate questions... a quick get-away if she became overwhelmed.

Shannon was incredible and had our back.

Night two was packed. Both nights were sold out, but there was an eerie anticipation in the air on the second night. The festival was buzzing about the intensity of the film. As the credits rolled, our entire family made it to the stage, and the audience stood clapping for quite a while. There was a palpable level of respect from the crowd. Questions started delicately and after the ice was broken, the first question directed specifically to Faith



came from another HotDocs director. “How does it feel having a film about you out in the world?” He asked.

Without missing a beat, Faith took the mic and said “Sometimes I like it and sometimes not so much...” He asked her to explain what she meant, and what followed was one of my daughter’s famous “Oprah moments.” “I think it is important for people to know what kids go through, but sometimes I’m really worried people may think I’m a bad person, and that I still do some of the awful things I talk about in the film.”

As if he was trained in trauma informed care, the director delivered the most amazing response... “I think I’m speaking for this whole audience when I say, we DO NOT think you are a bad person, we think you’re a HERO for being brave enough to share your story...” The entire audience rose, and clapped righteously in agreement, for what felt like hours and I burst into tears. In that moment I knew, my gut was right, sharing would help her heal.

The validation on my daughter’s face spoke volumes and for a few minutes, on that stage, I saw satisfaction, acceptance, validation and belonging in my daughter’s eyes. As a mother, for the first time since adopting my beautiful children, I did not feel judged, I felt heard.



**Tif Junker** filmmaker and Board member at ATN, is a mother of two. She and her husband currently call the Northwest their home. Since forming their family by adoption

and discovering the significant effects that early life trauma can have on the young, they have championed for awareness of attachment trauma and the rights of families raising these children to be heard and understood.



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