

Freedom to become who we are It's a Long Story – Rebecca Walker

Edwina Throsby: From Sydney Opera House, welcome to It's a Long Story, a podcast exploring the lives behind the ideas. I'm Edwina Throsby.

Rebecca Walker: That's what we all need permission to do is to become who we are, you know.

ET: The daughter of Alice Walker, who wrote the African-American classic *The Color Purple*, and Melvyn Leventhal, a Jewish civil rights lawyer, Rebecca Walker's intersecting and sometimes jarring identities were the foundation of her career. In 1992, her article for Ms Magazine called 'I am the Third Wave' crystallised her thinking around feminism and activism. Its massive success spurred on her work: she established the Third Wave Fund to support young women from diverse backgrounds to pursue activism and leadership. Then, multiple memoirs, essay collections and a novel followed. Rebecca's work has always been a response to her personal situation, be it family, identity, becoming a mother, masculinity, race, Buddhism, or a combination of all of these, and she has developed a strong and compelling ethos about what it means to live a feminist life in an ever-changing world.

Rebecca Walker, thank you very much for coming and speaking to us on "It's a Long Story".

RW: It's my pleasure. I'm so happy to be here with you.

Chapter 1: Early life, identity, feminism.

ET: As a mixed race baby born in Mississippi to civil rights activist parents, your very existence is something of a political statement. How were your personal politics formed?

RW: My parents met in the civil rights movement. My father was a young idealistic Jewish law student who was recruited by the NAACP Legal Defence Fund to move to Mississippi and help desegregate public schools and work on several other important cases. In the mid '60s, my mother was a young aspiring African-American writer from the Deep South, who was following the call of Dr. King to register voters. And also she was someone who felt very strongly that the stories of black women needed to be told and she wanted to be a part of telling them. And they met and fell in love and faced incredible persecution as a couple before they were married and then after they married. They married in New York because they weren't allowed to marry in Mississippi where it was against the law for black people to marry white people. And so I grew up as a kind of movement child. I was born into the civil rights movement. My parents thought of my body and my being as a post-racial sort of promise. And I think their optimism and their narrative of me and of what they believed in very much underscore who I became and who I am and what I believe in. And so does the fact that they divorced when I was very young and they both went sort of back to their original communities. And I spent a lot of time moving back and forth between a kind of upper middleclass white Jewish East Coast world and a very Afro Bohemian mixed culture on the West Coast kind of counterculture. And even within those two locations I spanned many different realities. The validity that my political identity was forged in sort of the identity of my birth which was to further the understanding that difference is not as

important. It is not the signifier nor should it be used as a weapon. But also this idea of the way I moved around so much and so adaptive, you know, and had to, to wear different masks in order to belong to these different communities after the divorce.

ET: That's really interesting because I've just been rereading your autobiography "Black, White, Jewish" and one of the things that really strikes me at rereading is how so much of your childhood and adolescence was looking for a place to fit and kind of being pushed out, like always feeling like if you just did this a little different or you were inherently a little different then maybe that would be the moment where you'd sort of slot down into the space that you fit. And never quite finding that sort of smooth transition which could be said is the way that every kid grows up, but with you, you had such sort of powerful signifiers around that, that negotiating your space and way you fit in a very transient world—

RW: Yeah.

ET: It was something that was always front of mind for you, right?

RW: Yes, absolutely. You know one of the reasons I wrote "Black, White and Jewish" I wrote it when I was in my 20s and I needed to write it because I had felt so psychologically fragmented because I had to move between these different worlds and didn't really feel that I was-- that I belonged in any of them fully. And the project of holding all of the worlds and holding the person that I needed to be in each of the worlds, was leading to a kind of psychological pressure that was tremendous. And the journey of writing "Black, White and Jewish" was about finding a space, you know, where all of the different selves and all of the different experiences could actually coexist. That that really opened the door to my own integration, my own psychological integration because by the end of that book I had really come to realise that I had been performing identities and wearing different masks and taking them off and putting them on for so long. And that it was not creating the kind of ease and stability and peace that I longed for. So I was on my journey and to find the resolution I was looking for, I was forced to come to this understanding that no matter how many performances I do there is a Rebecca, there is a being that is underneath all of those performances. And that is the being that I want to know and to feed and to love and to own. And to just release myself into that as opposed to trying so desperately to figure out what was needed in any given moment in order to be accepted or approved of. And all of that just had to fall away in order for me to survive and thrive. And that was work that has served me now very well, you know, for many years. I often say that if I hadn't written that book, I would have a nervous breakdown. And now, you know, on the other side of it I realised that that's probably true and also one of the great joys is that I did get this kind of freedom and also the book has been very helpful for many others and I've heard so much from readers. The magic for me, the reason to do any of it is that moment when the person who's looking and needing what you have to give finds it. And I definitely I feel that very strongly about "Black, White and Jewish" that there was a community of mixed race people that were largely invisible at the time that I wrote that book. And so I feel very, very proud and privileged to have been able to contribute at that moment in that way.

ET: It's like you're proud of being able to use your own experience to kind of guide other people or give other people some sort of shape for their own experiences. And it-- funny thinking about your own childhood how many people there were that came in to your life and had their influence and their impact on your life right through growing up. I mean, moving between-- moving houses on the East Coast, moving around on the West Coast, moving

between the two, moving schools, moving friendship groups. It just feels like at various points in your life, there were these beacon people or these important people that shaped you and moulded you. Who in your life had the really profound influence, were there several people?

RW: It's interesting that my grandmother, actually my paternal grandmother was very, very important to me. Even though-- and I didn't realise this until much later, but my-- this was the grandmother who disowned my father for marrying my mother and was deeply racist and rejected my own mother. And yet, when I was born, she rushed to our home in Mississippi and brought my mother a washing machine. And, you know, in the Jewish tradition, the first grandchild is kind of a big deal and I was the first grandchild and then she proceeded to spoil me and love me unconditionally until she died. And we had a very potent relationship. I think it was fortunate that I did not know about what was happening between her and my mum for as long as I didn't know. That was good because it allowed us to actually bond. But she was stable. She was loving, she-- You know, I was brown and she was obviously not. And everywhere we went, she would make sure to announce that I was hers, you know, this is Rebecca. This is my grand daughter. Isn't she beautiful? Doesn't she look just like me, you know. And she just constantly just embraced me and was proud and so she was an early supporter. And so, anyway, my grandmother. Obviously, you know, one's parents are crucial and mine are no different. My mother taught me how to be an artist. She taught me how to be a powerful woman, able to tell my truth. My father is very much about justice, and being an advocate for people who need advocacy including one's self. You know, Gloria Steinem was my godmother. She was a very important figure. And she taught me a lot about negotiating power and specifically, manoeuvring through white male supremacy basically and figuring out different ways to extract what one needed from it and also affect it and propel it forward in a better direction. She's really masterful at that. And she was deeply pivotal in my evolution.

ET: How did those lessons take place? Did she-- like sit you down and say so, Rebecca, patriarchy. Here we go.

RW: When I was first starting Third Wave, the organisation, she was our first supporter. And she taught me how to be a fundraiser, you know, for our organisation. And that involved teaching me how to attract, you know, to speak in the language that would be appealing to donors and how to create parties and events that they would come to and they would pay to be at. And, you know, I mean, it was just-- she's a genius-- she's a politician, you know, and she is brilliant of it, you know. And so, just-- and she also would stay up with me writing some of my earliest essays and my earliest, you know, real strong political strident pieces. And so she taught me, you know, about deadlines and about crafting sentences and paragraphs and ideas in certain ways. So she was very, very important in that realm. And I've learnt from so many different people. I think I started out after college being very involved in visual arts as well. And so many artists were a part of my journey, many writers. I'm trying to think I mean, you know, they're just so many, it's hard to-- everyone from Jean-Michel Basquiat to Ana Mendieta to Eva Hesse to, you know, Kerry James Marshall to-- I mean, you know, there-- Robert Mapplethorpe. You know, when I was coming of age in New York after college, a lot of visual artists were doing things that were similar to what third wave was about. You know, they were challenging a kind of heteronormative white privileged art space and trying to make sure the different aesthetic principles and communities and points of view were present and canonised. And they were deeply inspiring.

[Music]

Chapter 2: College, Third Wave, activism.

ET: When you are part of that, you know, at the age you were in New York City, which was one of your hometowns. Did you have a sense that you are all building something together?

RW: I had that sense when I graduated from college and I was with my group. When I was in college, I became very politicised and I was really active. But by the time I graduated, my cohort, my close friends were dancers and painters and sculptors and activists and filmmakers. And we definitely all did have a sense that we wanted to shatter a kind of white heteronormative space. You know, whether it was in film or dance or, you know, any of the mediums. I think we were very conscious that we were not represented and our aesthetic was important. And we did have something to say and we were going to say it.

ET: And this was also pre-internet, right?

RW: Yes. It was pre-internet. Oh, my gosh, was it pre-internet. It's incredible to think about how much we actually got done. And I worry about that now, actually, I mean there's so much more connectivity, but at the same time, you know, that we go from one thing to another so quickly that we've lost the deep moments of contemplation.

ET: Right.

RW: And I think a lot of our art that came out of that time and our activism was the result or was the outcome or the product of some deep thinking. And so I'm concerned about that and I wonder about what kinds of movements are going to come from this new mind. I do deeply appreciate the ways in which it has helped our connectivity and the global politics. And we're so much more adept and nimble and able to respond. And thank goodness for it. But it also needs, you know, constant critical interrogation, you know, because it is literally remapping our minds, you know.

ET: No, it's true.

RW: And I like being a human being, you know.

ET: Lots of advantages! I mean, I think that it's absolutely true that in terms of mobilisation and global connectivity, the internet has brought about a sort of unforeseen changes and the most, but keeping that sort of eye on the ethics of that I guess is something people get so caught up in how cool it all is and the possibilities which are of course enormous and potentially amazing and have already changed the world but some--

RW: But they are potentially, you know, destructive, I mean that, you know, annihilation and I feel it's right around the corner. And, you know, the internet doesn't seem to have brought us any closer to world peace, you know. And I think that's really the question, you know, what at every moment, is this bringing us closer to being able to survive peacefully with one another? And if we-- if the answer to that is no, then the entire project needs to be reevaluated. And I think that's something that's true about feminism as well. You know, I've always said that feminism is an experiment, you know. And it needs to constantly be assessed for what, you know, what it's actually doing. And I think we forget that. You know, we forget

that, but one of the-- I think the great things about the evolution of feminism and I feel again, very happy to have been a part of a third wave and now hearing fourth wave and fifth-- I mean there are hundred thousand waves. I'm so happy about that because what that means to me is that young women and men and transgender people are understanding that feminism is an experiment and they are going in and revisioning it again and again and rejiggering to get the outcome that we want.

ET: Right, evolve and adapt to—

RW: Yes. All of that.

ET: -- in the same way that technology has—

RW: Yes.

ET: -- to I guess, right? Well, let's see what happens with that.

RW: Yes. That's [laughs].

ET: So, I want to take it back a little. One of the big moments for you in your very early career was that you said that you write for Ms. magazine in 1993, in which you coined the phrase third wave feminism and in that you wrote-- and I'm going to quote, "I have uncovered and unleashed more repressed anger than I thought possible. For the umpteenth time in my 22 years, I've been radicalised, politicised, shaken awake. I have come to voice again and this time my voice is not conciliatory."

RW: Wow. Did I write that?

ET: You did.

RW: I did. OK. Yes. I did.

ET: I mean that's an angry screed right there. Where did that anger come from?

RW: Well, I think I wrote that in response to the Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas debacle. And what was happening at that point with George Bush our-- our then president and his destruction of reproductive freedoms. It was right after the Rodney King verdict and the beating of Rodney King. And also it was-- I felt very much at that moment that my peers, a lot of my peers who were not in my close group of friends were very alienated from social change movement of all kind. And they were not wanting to be active and they were not wanting to engage with these issues. And I felt that it wasn't because they there-- they didn't believe. It was because they didn't really have a voice. They didn't have someone or many people sort of opening the door and explaining how a new movement could be built using their-- slash our energy. And so that was very frustrating. And so, out all of that came that piece and the response was really beautiful. Many, many, many, many, many, many, many people wrote and said that they too felt that they were the third wave. And which started, you know, Third Wave Direct Action Corporation which was the first iteration of third wave that I started with a great woman who's now an incredible attorney, who's doing a lot of class action suits, very important ones, her name is Shannon Liss. And we founded Third Wave and our vision was to do direct action projects all over the country supporting

young women aged 15 to 30 who wanted to work for social justice. And it was my idea and our belief that we needed to build a bridge between the second wave and our generation. And we wanted to both differentiate ourselves, hence third wave, and claim, you know, connection.

[Music]

Chapter 3: Motherhood and writing

ET: So I mean you were raised by an extremely prominent Second Waver, godmothered by one of the most famous second wavers in the world. Schooled in that tradition, in 'Becoming the third wave', how much was that a continuum or how much was that a moving apart?

RW: This process of moving into third wave was about individuating from people and ideas that I had grown up with and that I felt were limiting in some ways. But it was also a real sort of bow to the women who raised me. And a real beat of gratitude and of saying I'm not going to walk away. I want to continue to invest. I see what you've given me and I want to make sure that more people can have that, you know.

ET: Like you were saying, feminism evolves.

RW: Yes it does. And I felt that I really wanted to be a part of it evolving. And I wanted to make-- so I wanted to make more space for myself and for others and-- But I didn't want to lose anyone, you know, that was not the intention.

ET: I mean, it seems that one of the things that your writing through the 90s did was bring into the fore the notion of identity as something that was important in feminism and in politics more broadly. And your book "To Be Real" which was published later in the 1990s is very much, very explicitly about identity. But it's also about a kind of quest to become-- but it's also a grapple with the idea of what is a good feminist.

RW: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I mean. That was really about opening the door for "Third Wave". That was my sort of primer text. And it's a collection of pieces by young women and men who are really grappling with what it means to be a feminist at that particular moment in time. And they are kind of discarding or questioning old feminist beliefs and saying that they don't want to adhere to them, they want to be-- I mean there's everything from pieces dealing with race, with sexual pleasure that could be seen as taboo. With men wanting to be a part of feminist movement with-- I mean, it was just-- it was this question of, you know, what does it mean to be feminist? I think I'm always trying to make space for contradiction, complexity and a kind of freedom, you know, to try to make space for people to transgress, to claim a self and an identity based on what they believe and what they know to be true as opposed to what the culture is telling them is true.

ET: As part of the sort of evolution, that the evolution of this conversation, bringing the individual into the frame I suppose. And also critiquing some of the kind of rigid expectations that had sprung up around feminism particularly sort of throughout the 1990s but still persist, you know, a lot of the clichés about how feminists should be. A lot of which are, you know, have been propagated by feminist themselves. I wonder whether at some point every political, ideological movement is doomed to falling into some sort of dogma, some sort of prescriptive notions of how to behave.

RW: Oh yes. Absolutely, I'm-- and I think that that initially, those things are important, you know, because you're actually setting a standard for how to be in opposition to oppression. And so it makes perfect sense, as the target evolves, you know, as the problem changes in response, and as you sort of strategically keep an eye on your numbers, on the people that you need to have involved in this movement, there is always the need to adjust and make more space for people to respond in ways that feel authentic to them. And I think that is key. Because what I was seeing with feminism was that because those spaces had not been made, women were just opting out completely and men were completely turning against. So yes, I absolutely agree with you. There is that trap. And one of the things that I think has been so successful about feminism is that we do keep asking the question. Because once it becomes fixed in a way-- once if it becomes too myopic, it doesn't respond and it doesn't adapt and it doesn't break down barriers and it doesn't expand to the realities of the world, then it loses its potency. I feel very-- I'm still invested in feminism because it has shown itself to have that kind of vision, you know.

ET: So, one of the things that happened to you when you decided you wanted to become a mother is that you have to grapple with the way that you've been taught by your own mother about what that meant as a feminist. How did you get through that?

RW: I really thought about following this call that I felt to have a child and how I did not want to deny myself that experience, I did not want to miss it. And yet I felt this incredible conflict between the expectations that my feminist foremothers had sort of established, you know, not always explicitly but sometimes, you know, the idea that children enslave women and that we are-- that our reproduction systems are controlled on behalf of the ruling class, you know. And that all of our creativity, all of our selfhood is sucked away when we succumb and give everything to children. So I was really-- and yet I longed for one. So, I got through that really by writing about that and it created, you know, some tension between myself and people close to me and people in the feminist community.

ET: What were they objecting to? Was it the essentialism of you claiming a biological need? Was it--

RW: Yes. That was one big upset. And really I think that moment, you know, I write in the book that at the time I was co-parenting with my then partner, but when I became pregnant that it was different, you know, that I felt that there was a biological intensity that I felt for this child that was going to come out of my body that I did not feel for the child I was co-parenting. People were very angry, you know. The queer community was angry because of course there's been so much adopting and especially at that time. You know, there was this idea that how dare I, privileged biology, over, you know, chosen family and that I was sort of doing this essentialist vision. But I was really telling the truth and-- for myself, not for everyone else. And I was really asking us to look at why we can't face the truth that there are many different kinds of attachment, you know, and many different kinds of love when it comes to having a child. That there's biological love, there is, you know, stepmother love. There is co-parenting love, there is-- you know, I mean there-- That the biological imperative is not the best one but I was saying that it does feel like a very strong one. And I'm very interested in it and it's very different than this other one. Not better, not, you know, but different. And I think that the narrative of everything being the same really robs us of the texture of our lives. So there was a lot of resistance, yeah, to that essentialist idea.

ET: And a lot of that was from your own mother as well?

RW: Yes. I mean, I think she.. We had a period of estrangement and now, we're much, much closer and as I-- as we spend more time together, I'm not as sure, I'm not sure that her-- I'm not sure that she was explicitly rejecting my choices as much as I was reading into-- I anticipated her rejection based on a lot of the work that she had done, a lot of the writing she had done, but I would say that it was more complicated than just the motherhood question. You know, I mean, I think she felt also a bit confused by "Black, White and Jewish" because in that book, I talked about, you know, feeling abandoned in many ways. And you know, she had some feelings of feeling hurt that I had written about that. But I feel that we've really worked it through to the best of our ability and we continue to. And the period of estrangement I think was very important for both of us and I think the period of reconciliation and healing is deeply important.

[Music]

Chapter 4: Masculinity, Buddhism, a happy death

ET: Was there something that catalysed the reconciliation?

RW: Well, I felt very strongly when my son turned about seven that he should know his grandmother. For many reasons, not just because it's his right and he is of her in a certain way.

ET: And you had a great relationship with your grandmother?

RW: Yeah, and I had-- There you go. But also she is an incredible being. I mean, she's really-- she's really miraculous in so many ways. And I wanted him to have the experience of her. So that was the biggest thing, and also I missed her.

ET: Right.

RW: You know, I just-- I missed having a mother. And it was time, you know.

ET: It's interesting too there because when you become a mother, that makes you more aware of the way that you are parented. You know, becoming a parent makes you critical of your parents in a way that you hadn't been before. I wonder how much of that was bound up in the—

RW: Yes. Well, absolutely, I mean, I felt very much like I never wanted to raise my son in the way that I was raised. You know, with my odd two-year custody agreement between my parents, I was two years here, I was two years there. This also happens I think when you become a parent, you become so sort of appreciative of everything they did do for you because you see how hard it is. I mean my God. I mean having a child is just-- it is a tremendous-- obviously this is I'm saying stuff that many of you listening know. But it's something you don't really know until you're doing it. And parenting is so demanding and now I feel a kind of awe that my mother was able to give me as much as she did. Because I see how hard it is to give my son what I feel he needs. That has been very helpful, you know, to have that kind of appreciation and understanding.

ET: So what has being the mother of a son taught you about masculinity?

RW: Well, two sons, you know, I co-parented a son and now my biological son. I, you know, I once again, I did a book. You know, "What Makes a Man" was a result of that journey of thinking about that. I interviewed 200 men about the different points in their lives that they were forced to become "men". And they-- And I realised that really what I write in the book is there's a war being waged against boys. And feminist-- And feminism needs to really take that on as we champion girls and we make them more physical and we take our daughters to work and we do all this. You know that boys are being either verbally assaulted, physically assaulted, psychologically manipulated into being the men that we see. You know, they are asked to be stoic emotionally, to be sort of ready to fight, you know, to be warriors. To be workaholics, providers in a certain way that really robs them of a lot of their humanity. And so, at the end of all that, I integrated this understanding into my motherhood of boys and always try to make a lot of space for their feelings, their, you know, ability to communicate. You know, to feel nurtured, to know how to nurture, to know how to respond to the messaging that they're getting. To really help them understand like that, you're being sold that idea. You know the message for you to be this is that's not real. And you have to find out what it means to be who you are, you know, separate from that. And I think I've been, you know, successful so far.

ET: I mean how did they respond to that?

RW: Well. I mean, you know, Tenzin, my son, my biological son, you know, gets it completely. I mean he doesn't, he doesn't-- He's like, "I know mum." You know, you're-- you know, I mean he's around me and he hears me talking about these things so much. I just point out, you know, that's-- that model of masculinity, that way of being a man, you see what's happening to that person, how unhappy they are or what they're doing. That's because someone told them that to be a man they had to do that. And that's not what I'm telling you. I'm telling you that, you know, your job in becoming a human being and being a decent one is to find out, you know, what you love and how you can-- how you can express your love to other people in ways that are healthy. To be, you know, attentive to the needs of other people. To, you know, to have compassion, to claim for yourself a kind of sovereignty, a freedom to become the person that you want to be. Not the person that you are told you should be. Once again, I mean that's really always my work.

ET: You're sending him on the journey that you went on—

RW: Yeah.

ET: -- or you're trying to shape him for that journey.

RW: Yeah. Yeah. I mean I think that's-- that's what we all need permission to do is to become who we are, you know. And so I think that that is not only what I'm always excavating in my work whether it's you know, whatever medium but it's something I'm always cultivating with my child you know, how can I support you in being free, you know?

ET: And that's a-- that's a lovely thing to be doing. He is also facing the realities of being a black boy in America.

RW: Yes. And we have to negotiate those conversations and those are some of the hardest conversations that I have ever had to have. And that I-- That they're the ones that make me weep and, you know, when you have to tell your son that a police officer may want to protect you and may want to injure you. And when you have to tell him about the legacy and the history in America of police officers shooting and mauling and incarcerating black men, brown boys just like him. To see his face, you know, the tremendous just disbelief and fear and confusion. And to know that I can protect him by talking to him about it and preparing him for what could happen, but there would be a moment when I can't protect him and I have to hope that he will be OK. I mean no child-- no human being should have to have those kinds of conversations. And you know, to balance wanting to give him freedom to become who he needs to be and to feel hopeful and powerful and self-determining, and to also have to tell him this sort of gruesome other historical reality is literally one of the most difficult experiences of my life.

ET: Well, you're having to explain to somebody who you've always nurtured and protected that the world isn't safe and there's nothing you can do about it.

RW: Yeah. Yeah. And I think this is what we've-- you know, mothers have been dealing with with girls, you know, forever as well. I mean, you know, how do we prepare our children for the brutality of this culture and at the same time give them a sense of hope and possibility. You know, this is a very tricky area and that's where activism comes in.

ET: Right.

RW: You know, and advocacy. And I'm always talking to him about how important it is to respond to injustice, to respond to things that make you feel bad, that make you feel less, that make you-- that, you know, things that you see that are not right, that harm other people. And to draw on your ability to intervene on behalf of someone else or yourself as a place of power that will help you to mature and realise yourself, you know, in the face of all these madness.

ET: So as a child that was born almost sort of infused with the symbolism of hope and looking forward and what could be, having had such a political life in which you've found space for yourself as an individual and a whole lot of peoples and individuals to work and make change, there's been a lot of anger throughout your life as a result of all of these and now, you're a Buddhist.

RW: Yes. I became a Buddhist when I was in college actually.

ET: Oh, really?

RW: Yeah. But I'm now a 20 something year Buddhist. And I think Buddhism provided a way for me to see myself as whole, as one and not fragmented and I was working through a lot of that with "Black, White and Jewish" but the sort of-- a sense of oneness, I mean, this is a kind of simplification of the dharma that I study, but of emptiness, you know, that none of this that we are surrounded with is permanent in any way. And none of it is essentially or inherently real, you know, that, you know, this table is made up of different elements and so it's not in itself-- it's only a table in our mind because we imbue it with the idea of table. And when you're able to kind of think about all of the world in that way, there's an ease that comes with that and not a detachment, but a detachment, you know, a sense that, you know, I can move in and out of these worlds that people believe are real and try to make things better on

behalf of myself and others. But fundamentally, it's all impermanent and changing. And so the best hope that I have is to show up and tame my own mind, tame my own anger, tame my own jealousy, and to try as best I can to become a Buddha myself, you know. And that means someone who is cultivating peace first and foremost, you know, and myself.

ET: When you look to the future-- when you look to the future, what do you think is the most important thing?

RW: I think a lot about what it means to have a happy death. I want to have a good death. And that means that when I die, I want to feel that I have done the work here that I could do. And that has changed in different periods, but now, you know, it's important to me that I use my voice and my experience in whatever way I can to support other people, to try to change this world for the best. I feel very strongly that I need to support my son in becoming a beautiful human being that I know he will become. There are a couple of work projects-- of writing projects that I feel I must do. And I want to make sure that my mother and I are completely at peace and fully united and resolved in every level. And if I can do all those things, I feel I will die a good death. And so that is my now, that it's my present, my past and my future. And I'm grateful that I know that that's important to me, and I'm able to understand, you know, what things. I don't want to be on my death bed or to die, you know, tomorrow, having been working on the wrong things.

ET: Well, Rebecca Walker, very good luck with that.

RW: Thank you. I'll need it [laughs].

ET: Yeah, only a few little things, that you need to attend to.

RW Thank you so much for having me. This is a very interesting and important conversation. It helped me.

ET: Oh, good, I'm pleased to hear that. Well, that was a great pleasure for me to be talking to you. So thank you so much.

RW: Thank you.