



**Coach Carla:** When we get broken, however that looks, whether that's physical, mental, emotional, spirit, or in all four areas of our life, it can be in one area or at a time, or it could be in all at the same. There's no other way, you're so far down, you're so heartbroken that there's, there's only one way it's to pick yourself up and dust yourself off every single moment of every single day and put one foot in front of the other.

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**Lily Cornell:** Hi, I'm Lily Cornell Silver, and welcome to *Mind Wide Open* my mental health-focused interview series. Today I'm talking to coach Carla Wilcox, who is an incredible professional boxer, speaker, and the founder of the Seattle Boxing Gym. I have personally worked with Coach Carla for several years. She's been a really important part of my grief journey and my healing journey. I'm really excited to talk to her today about processing and externalizing through movement, the importance of processing grief, and her relationship with spirituality. Thank you so much for watching, and I hope you enjoy.

Hi, coach, thank you so much for being here.

**Carla:** Thank you so much for having me. This is incredible. It's such an honor to sit here with you and be like, "Look at you, look at how much your heart has opened and how much you've blossomed." It's just like you just have stayed next to your heartbeat and that's what it's all about. We want to be next to our heartbeat so that we can hopefully start to vibrate at some point and when we do that we can connect to something that's fair outside of us. Right?

**Lily:** Absolutely. In talking about the importance of physical movement and stuff, and the importance of being with your physical body, you've also experienced severe physical trauma, and I'm wondering if you're comfortable sharing that story, it's so intense, but it's so inspiring, and seeing what you've made from that and seeing how you recovered from that is so huge.

**Carla:** Yes. I always love to talk story and share my experiences. I was at the top of my game when I got into a car accident and I had done a TED talk in 2010. That was in, October of 2010, then in January 2011, I was at a stop sign, turning right after a session early in the morning with some fog, and I was in a car accident. I was in a serious accident, and it completely changed my life in that everything that I had built and everything that I had put all of my time and energy into was gone. Life as I knew it was not the same.

Aside from the fact that I had severe PTSD from the experience for the trauma was overwhelming and I ended up having to close my business. My partner had to handle everything. I tried for months to go back, I tried to get physical, I tried to be in that gym, I tried to just be the person that I knew how to be and get in there and share my heartbeat, but it wasn't going to happen. Through that journey, through that loss, through that grief, through that trauma, through that hardship was an incredible opportunity for me to heal. A three-year, healing sabbatical.

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I was able to go deeper into some of those fears and some of those traumas and some of those old stories, and memories of my past and start to forge a way into my future that was a vision. I had to stay next to my heartbeat that whole time. Sometimes crying, sometimes laughing, sometimes like just feeling, "Agh," but I wasn't stuck in my pain pattern. I wasn't stuck in my pain cycle. I was out of my suffering and moving into something that was a vision of where I wanted to go, where I wanted to be.

When we get broken, however that looks, whether it's physical, mental, emotional, spirit, or in all four areas of our life. It can be in one area at a time or it could be in all of them at the same. There's no other way. You're so far down, you're so heartbroken that there's only one way it's to pick yourself up and dust yourself off every single moment of every single day and put one foot in front of the other to heal and to mend that broken heart and to open yourself up to something bigger, right?

**Lily:** A big part of that for me has been learning how to talk about things and how to be vulnerable and how to talk about how I'm feeling and that's something that, I talk about on this series so much, but I want to commend you and say that, like I gained so much of that knowledge and so much of that insight about the power of talking about things from you and from working with you because we will be hitting, we'll be punching, we'll be doing physical activity. And we're also talking about what's going on in my life and what it is that's driving that fire, what it is that's causing me heartache that day. That taught me so much of the importance of being open and honest and speaking your truth and talking about what's on your heart.

**Carla:** I'm actually learning from you guys. That's what I always say. I've got everybody fooled, you're coaching me. You're coaching me. Because I show up every day.

**Lily:** Sure. Totally and it's hearing you talk about PTSD as well like that's something that I've struggled with and still struggle with because it can be a lifelong extended thing, and I'm curious, it's really amazing to hear you speak to that's not something you deal with as much anymore. Now you're able to talk about your trauma, think about your trauma, and like you said, not flinch, not shut down and that's the point that I'm getting to now and there's so much hope in that.

I think, especially for people where the trauma is fresh and the PTSD is new, it just feels like, "This is how it's going to be forever." It's really amazing to hear you talk about that and I'm wondering if you have any practices now that it's been years down the line, like if any of that ever still comes up, how do you deal with that? How do you deal with that PTSD?

**Carla:** It's not gone. What I'm saying is, I can sit here and I can have a conversation about it, and it's a memory of my past and I've got my feet moving forward. I'm right here now and every time I have trauma in my life, it brings up every trauma. The traumas that I've had in my life have allowed me to then look into some of those traumas from my past and be with them and feel into them in a good medicine way



and then move forward and so then when the trauma happens again, I'm able to be a little bit more present, "Hey, I can be a mess. I can be completely in my trauma."

Because of my life story, the memory of my life story, I have that experience, and that I have that knowledge to seek some wisdom of the future and not live there, but keep moving towards something else. Something bigger, something expansive, something that's vibrating. Universal, global, and I have to do that every day.

**Lily:** You've been such an integral part of that journey for me in finding that groundedness and in finding that connectedness to myself, to my body, to the earth, to my heartbeat and so that's something that I've learned so much from you. I think is something that everyone, if you're struggling with mental health can be a hard thing to achieve. It's like that feeling of connectedness and that feeling of groundedness. I'm wondering what practices you use that help you feel that centeredness, that help you feel connected to yourself and to the earth?

**Carla:** I grew up on the Spokane Indian reservation, I'm also Irish and English. I'm an enrolled Snohomish tribal member, but I just, the land has always been a grounding force in my life. It's always been a place where I've gone when I have had uncomfortable situations in my life, or I've just been living in discomfort. I have gone there and found comfort.

For me it's been a practice that has been a part of me since I was a little girl. It was in my blood to honor grandfather sky to honor grandmother earth to know that the earth could support me and hold me through trying times. I've always loved to be extremely physical and I've loved to do that in the earth. I do it in other ways too, but I do believe that the earth is a huge healer.

**Lily:** How did you end up getting into boxing? That's a whole- [laughs] we could talk about that for hours

**Carla:** I've just always been physical and I was always an athlete and I had incredible coaches, incredible mentors. I took that place of being comfortable with my physical body and I just started doing that and being in that and working in gyms and then I opened my first gym in the Broadway market actually. There was a girl that was coming in to train, workout and she was a boxer and she just invited me to the boxing gym. I didn't really go for a while and then one day I went and honestly, I went to the gym and I never left. It was like, my heartbeat was there. I just was home.

There was something about that, being able to fight and then the sound of the speed bag and then these incredible powerful men that, and it was really mostly men that were just like fighting for their lives, but has so much heart, so much integrity and so much discipline to show up every single day.

**Lily:** When you talk about mental health, when you talk about wellness, that's something that most people will say is the importance of exercising, the importance of moving your body. That's something I've touched on a little bit as I've been doing



this series, but I haven't had someone on that's really been able to speak to that. That's their thing. I'm so, so excited to have you here and talk about that, like the importance of moving your physical body and how it can literally change your life and change your mental health.

**Carla:** I know that our heart is the most important muscle in our body and that if you can get next to your heartbeat and feel into it and know it and be with it, you can go there every day and you can do that through bathing. You can do that through movement, yoga, you can do it through boxing, you can do it through running. You can do it through song. You can do it through instrumental play.

If you are elevating your heartbeat, if you are giving yourself and nurturing your being with the things that you're passionate about and that you're excited about, and that bring you from suffering to creativity and source and something bigger than your heart is going to start pumping.

**Lily:** Right. That's like so much of my journey with grief and with mental health issues has been learning, finding those ways like you're talking about, like with that vibrating and with boxing, which is something that you were drawn to, how to process my emotions, how to sit with the really nasty, really uncomfortable, really heartbreaking things that I'm experiencing, or that I've been through and continue to walk through life and continue to be a person every day.

That's where our work together has been so enlightening for me and something that I hope everyone can find their thing that helps them get through each day and helps them sit with that discomfort and get as comfortable as you can in the uncomfortable and continue to heal, continue to process, continue to just move through each day. It's so much easier said than done, but that's such a key thing about mental health is finding that thing that helps you get there.

**Carla:** I think that anytime anybody can find that for themselves in anything that they do through their heartbeat, it's an amazing gift.

**Lily:** I would love to know in the same vein, what is something that's giving you hope right now?

**Carla:** My hope is that we can all find the power to take this heartbreak of our global family, the way that you've taken your heartbreak and step into it. Step into it, open ourselves wider, bigger, beyond what we thought was possible, beyond what has been happening, what has been possible. We all need hope and it's all coming, hope is coming behind me because I'm here right now. The hope is the younger ones are those of you behind my time here taking me from my suffering roots and my places of disbelief and moving into something that I can believe in, you know what I mean? Thank you. I'm honored. I'm honored.

**Lily:** Of course, thank you so much for being here. As I've already said, you're somebody who had such a huge impact and continues to have such a huge impact on my mental health journey and my vulnerability, and my ability to process and



move forward. It's super, super meaningful to have you on the series, and thank you so much for being here.

**Carla:** It's super meaningful to be here and I can't wait to tear it up with you.

**Lily:** We need to get back to it. [chuckles]

**Carla:** Yes. I'm ready, girl. I'm ready.

[music]

**[00:16:54] [END OF AUDIO]**