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Shelby Stanger: This year on *Wild Ideas Worth Living* we've been exploring how nature interacts with our lives other than just through activities like surfing and hiking. We've spoken about music inspired by nature G. Love, gardening and foraging with Rob Greenfield. We've looked into mindfulness in the outdoors with John Allcock. This week I wanted to dive into the connection between art and nature with two incredibly talented women, Loveis Wise and Lisa Congdon, and, also, get into how to make it as an artist, which is no easy feat. I'm Shelby Stanger and this is *Wild Ideas Worth Living*.

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I often come up with my best ideas when I'm out surfing or hiking. I wanted to know how other creatives are inspired by nature, what that looks like in their work, and how they've been able to make a living doing what they love.

Loveis Wise is an illustrator and designer from Maryland who's been living in Philly the last few years and soon will live in LA. She's the second black woman ever to illustrate a cover for The New Yorker magazine, and she's now been featured twice. Her art spotlights a diverse range of people and colorful lush environments all inspired by Loveis' own time outside. There's a bright pink woman reaching her hand into electric blue waters, a mother and child watering a garden, and busts enveloped by flowers and foliage. Loveis had quite the success story and she's an amazing message for inclusivity and representation through both art and the outdoors.

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We should just get right into your name because I never know how to say it right. It's the most beautiful, coolest, probably, the most badass name of anyone I've ever interviewed, Loveis Wise. How did you get that name?

Loveis Wise: Thank you. It was given to me by my dad. My great grandmother, her name is Loveis Edwards, so I inherited her name. Ironically, our last name is Wise so it just came together.

Shelby: It's beautiful. How did you discover your love of art?

Loveis: I love answering this question. I was always into art and design. I discovered recently, I guess, I hid this memory, but my dad would always- he would get the paper, we'd be on the train, and I'd be like, "I want the style section and I also want the comics." I was like really into narrative, very much so into design. He was a photographer and a painter and he would just have me into that world. I grew up in DC and there's free museums. We didn't have a lot of money so we would always just go to the museums and I was just obsessed. It was always around me for as long as I can remember. I don't remember a moment where art and design wasn't in my life.

Shelby: How do you describe your own art today? I know you're an illustrator but I'm not an artist at all so I'm really curious what sort of mediums you work in and how you describe it. I see your stuff and I just know it's beautiful and it resonates with me and it feels really good, but that's about as articulate as I can get about it.

Loveis: I recently just discover what makes my work what it is. I had a conversation with a friend and we were just talking about radical joy and like how beautiful it is to be joyous these days because there's so much just anger and upset around us. I think I found my way just by making work about just radical joy when it just means to be happy and joyful and implement that into the work that I do.

Shelby: I love that radical joy. That should be a book, a movie, your album cover, but it's mostly illustration.

Loveis: Mostly, illustration. Everything's done in a sketchbook and then painted and finalized in Photoshop. I travel a lot so a lot of the time I have to finish things up and Procreate or I might start a piece and Procreate on my iPad and that's really cool too.

Shelby: How did you get started? Did you start like doodling on a piece of paper while you were in class or at school?

Loveis: Yes, I was always into the sketchbooking and doodling on paper, doodling on my notes. I discovered digital art from undergrad. I went to art school here in Philadelphia and I just learned more about how to use those tools and I was always just sketching and doodling and just drawing things.

Shelby: What was your go-to doodle as a kid? I would draw a wave, a surfer, and the Gotcha brand logo.

Loveis: Yes. [laughs]

Shelby: Look, but I grew up in the '80s when I was a kid -- What were your doodles as a kid?

Loveis: Definitely eyes and I love-- What did I like doing a lot? I don't know if you guys would know this if I say this thing-- I don't even know what this thing is called. Do you remember that S thing? It's like the three lines on top of [crosstalk]

Shelby: Yes. I used to draw the S all the time because my name is Shelby so I would do that all the time. I can draw right now, how funny. You drew the S, what else?

Loveis: I wasn't formally trained at all but I was really trying to be good at it. I was like, "I want to draw faces. Let me just draw this face." I would try to draw from reference like old photographs. I remember I was maybe 10 and I found a

baby photo of me and then I try to draw myself. I was so upset because it wasn't good. [laughs] I've always been into drawing people, and figures, and faces.

Shelby: Did art school really help you refine your technical aspect of what you do or did you learn as you go?

Loveis: Definitely, art school is great in a way that it creates a community and I'm able to bounce ideas off of my peers and learn from them and grow and really realize like what it is I appreciate about design, where illustration was going. Seeing them play in a different way and come with different perspectives like my peers, I soon developed my own lane and started to realize what are the narratives that I wanted to cover or what imagery made me be happy, or the things that I enjoy drawing. Just hearing feedback and constantly being critiques really helped to groom me as an illustrator.

Shelby: What are those themes that really bring you radical joy that you'd love to draw and create?

Loveis: Representation. I love drawing people of color, I love drawing people that I grew up with, people that I know and love. I appreciate drawing and creating affirmations, dreams, plants, nature because I grew up with these things in my life. To bring that into the world, in my artistic world, and explore that in my voice really makes me happy.

Shelby: Let's just dig into that: nature. You grew up in an urban environment but you said you, also, grew up with nature?

Loveis: Yes, Maryland has a lot of it.

Shelby: Yes, you're right, Maryland does have a lot of it. We went hiking and Johnny was like, "Well, there's ticks." He got a hold of his bug spray and I was like, "What?" I had no idea that I was supposed to bug spray it. Nature is such a theme of your work, what role did that play in your life as a kid growing up?

Loveis: A really big one, actually. I have so many memories of just going on hikes with my dad, camping, or just being outside and like rolling around in the dirt and grass, and those things really brought me happiness. I'm realizing I'm an earth sign so a lot of these things really do connect. I love being grounded, I love being in nature and putting my feet in soil to just connect back with the earth. Also, gardening is a huge thing in my work growing. Growth is very important to me. My grandmother would always have me out in her garden and we just-- It was quality time that I would spend with her, really, helpful quality time that I would spend with her.

Shelby: I don't think there's a better time you could spend with your grandparents than helping them grow food that they're going to prepare to make a meal with you.

Loveis: Exactly.

Shelby: Now I understand this radical joy concept. To me, that's radical. You actually grew up hiking and just being in nature and gardening?

Loveis: Yes.

Shelby: When you hike what does that look like?

Loveis: It's just going to-- There was this wild amazing trail in my neighborhood that we would go to and then we would just discover new things all the time in different ways around this huge park that was just like in our backyard essentially. It just looked like discovering new things and seeing where we could go, and how far along we can get.

Shelby: I think that you grew up hiking the same way I did hiking right out our backyards and the trails but there was no ever desire to do, for me, Everest, or anything like that.

Loveis: Yes, exactly.

Shelby: It was just as beautiful like tree hikes, for me, out of the more desert terrain. I know those trails you're talking about in Maryland and they're just so beautiful and so luscious, and now it completely makes sense when I look at your art.

Loveis: There are also like vines where we will just hang of [chuckles] lines and swing from. It's crazy.

Shelby: That sounds so fun.

Loveis: It was beautiful.

[music]

Shelby: What I really want to ask you is how the outdoors can impact art for you?

Loveis: Inspiration. I get a lot of inspiration from being near-earth and being outside and grounding myself because I, as an illustrator, I'm always working from my desk or my bed or in my house and it can get a little draining and then always being on my computer. It snaps you back to reality being outside and taking inspiration from plants that I see or different gardens that I might see in my neighborhood or around. It's very grounding for me. I love being able to step away from my desk or step away from my bed, and my computer, and just be out in nature, then bring all of those elements back into the pieces that I make.

Shelby: Have you studied a little bit of the science of grounding because I hear you say that?

Loveis: Yes.

Shelby: Okay, good. Tell me a little bit about what you know.

Loveis: I'm very much so into spiritual tools.

Shelby: Great, me too.

Loveis: I'm very much so into connecting with my ancestors to make-- That's a huge part of the work that I do.

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As a black person who has lineage-- I come from slaves so a lot of my history is wrapped up in the outdoors. A lot of my history is wrapped up into natures and being out there. To be able to bring that back into the work and then into a more loving and joyous state is just very important to me.

Shelby: Can we dive into that? I think that's so interesting. It sounds like what you're doing is you're just trying to take your relationship of your ancestors, who had to spend time outdoors, the slaves, and transform it into a different type of relationship with the outdoors.

Loveis: Exactly. For a while, even though I spent a lot of time outdoors, there came a point in my life, as I got older, that I was like, "Uhh--" staying away from it, and didn't really feel called to be out in nature as much. I know a lot of people feel that reluctance to it that I know from my community that-- I don't know. There's just something taboo about it, I feel, but then it came- I think it's coming back into realization. I think just using different ancestral tools and connecting with the earth as a way to just love yourself and get that love back into the earth, and also to others.

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Shelby: I'm interested in learning more about what you mean by these ancestral tools.

Loveis: Just different recipes and herbs and different things, or traditions, that we cultivated over the years.

Shelby: Could you give me an example.

Loveis: [chuckles] To go in a little bit further-- [chuckles]

Shelby: Sorry. I think it's really fascinating stuff.

Loveis: No, it's cool. I've been really into learning more about different spiritual tools like Hoodoo, which is very prevalent in African American History as well. These are different spiritual tools that our ancestors used to heal themselves. They used the earth, they used different herbs, they used different natural resources to be able to heal themselves and take care of each other.

Shelby: I read that one thing you want to do is more art with people who are from underrepresented communities, whether they're minorities, or they have disabilities. I think that's so interesting.

Loveis: It's definitely something that I've been focusing on more in my work. Representation is so important to me. To be able to share stories from not even just from my own perspective but from other perspectives is very important to me. I feel like, as an illustrator, we're visual communicators, you have to. It's law. [chuckles] You need to be able to show different perspectives, share different stories.

Shelby: Art, like music, sport too, is really a great unifier. If we can show people of all different races, sexes, abilities in art, I think then it just makes it so much more inclusive.

Loveis: Exactly.

Shelby: It's such a beautiful medium to showcase people in.

Loveis: Yes, exactly.

Shelby: What do you like about it? Why do you think that art works so well?

Loveis: The first tool that you learn as a child in how to communicate is visually, I think. You're mark making. Even though you're communicating through your voice, and action, but the first thing we learn is art. The first thing we learn is to draw or mark make to be able to tell stories and talk. When you're that kid that's drawing on the walls or creating comics in the best way that you can. Kids really connect to that. People really connect to that. I think what really got me into just wanting to create stories from different perspectives was not really seeing many pieces, or being told of different black artists and designers, or being shown many pieces that look like me or my family or people that I know.

I hear that so much from the LGBTQIA community or folks with disabilities that come from different backgrounds. There are so many different things that we aren't being shown in art and design. I feel like now, we're definitely being shown that there are so many different perspectives that are coming out of just- not out of nowhere, but they're just coming out.

Shelby: Have you gotten any feedback?

Loveis: All the time, yes. [laughs]

Shelby: What sort of feedback is most common?

Loveis: Mainly people that see themselves in the work and they connect with it, and they remember certain parts of their childhood, where they-- For example, like the Nurture cover for The New Yorker, which was my first, I got so many people just showing me photos of them as children with their grandparents or their moms or a parent or a guardian in their life or someone that was in their life that introduced them to nature, and how important it was for them to see themselves in that space.

Shelby: That New Yorker cover was huge. First of all, it was stunning, beautiful,-

Loveis: Thank you.

Shelby: -and it really is that radical joy brings up that emotion. You're the first black woman to be asked to do a cover in The New Yorker in 93 years.

Loveis: Yes, because Kara Walker did the first.

Shelby: That's wild. I'm glad they're getting on it but-- To be pretty young, out of your career, to get a New Yorker cover is awesome.

Loveis: It came out of nowhere. I was literally in, I think, my senior semester of school, my last year, and that email came through, and I thought it was not real. I was like, "This can't possibly be real."

Shelby: How did that happen? You were at school and somebody randomly contacted you? Did you submit first?

Loveis: No, I didn't submit at all. I just wrote down in my sketchbook a few months ago before that, that I wanted to work with them, but I didn't know to what capacity what that will look like. The art director Françoise Mouly, she had emailed me and was like, "I've seen your work, and I think you'd be perfect to do a cover." She sent me the calendar and was like, "Check out the calendar to see which works best for you. I think you'd be really good for Mother's Day."

Shelby: Wow, I just got goosebumps. What work had she seen of yours before?

Loveis: I am not even sure. I feel like-- I did do a cover that circulated a lot for this other publication called Got a Girl Crush and it was circulating around Brooklyn and around the country, honestly, because they were stocked in a lot of different spaces around the country, but mainly in Brooklyn. I think her assistant knew someone who also was in the magazine. I feel like maybe she saw the magazine and was like, "Oh, cool," or maybe she just saw my work around because I was doing a ton of editorial pieces at the time.

Shelby: You're getting your work out there. That's what it took. One of the things you did in your career is you did, and why I got to meet you, is you did

illustrations for the REI Force of Nature zine and they're beautiful. You've also worked with two New Yorker covers, Eileen Fisher, Refinery29. You're not that long out of art school, and it's impressive. A lot of people listening are like, "I want to make a living as an artist." How did you learn to do it?

Loveis: I definitely learned while I was in art school. I just graduated last year. It was just trial and error. I just learned that putting myself out there is definitely key, and to not fear anything. You have to be completely shameless to do this work or to do anything that you want to do. To make any dream possible, you have to be shameless, you have to be able to get past your doubts and your fears or just the idea that-- I mean, there's a million people doing what you're trying to do but there's no one that's going to look like you, and there's no one else that's going to make the work that you do.

Shelby: I think it's scary putting yourself out there though.

Loveis: A lot of people are like, "Oh, but if I try to reach out to this person, am I being annoying?" You just got to do it.

Shelby: I see what you mean by that. I've dealt with that pitching my whole life and it's so scary. I think as a creative there's self-doubt and fear, and perfectionism. How do you deal with all that, your fear, perfectionism, self-doubt that sometimes creeps in when you're creative?

Loveis: Affirmations for sure. When I first started two years ago, I was like really suffering from impostor syndrome because I was this kid that just jumped right into illustration design. I was just figuring out what my work was going to look like and just what the industry looked like as a whole. I doubted myself and I almost let my doubts rule my life but-- I know this is going to sound simple but just trusting yourself insane- it just takes you saying, "Hey, fear doesn't live here. I'm in control. I got this, and dumb fear doesn't live in me. I can do anything." I just stuck with that mantra and it's just been so helpful, like I fear nothing.

Shelby: The mantra's "fear doesn't live in me".

Loveis: Fear does not live here.

Shelby: "Fear doesn't live here".

Loveis: It has no place here. It does not serve me.

Shelby: I think I might have to borrow that. I think we can all borrow that. I think as artists and creators and people living wild ideas, that's just part of it. You're going to be scared.

Loveis: You're going to be but it's up to you. I was just talking about this thing with a friend the other day but we're our own enemies and no one else out to get you, no one is literally closing the door on you but you. You just have to piece

together the lessons and know how to maneuver around things. If they don't work out, another opportunity comes along. There's always something else but it's up to you to just really say to yourself, "I'm going to keep pushing past this. I'm going to keep moving forward. I'm not going to let anything hold me back," or, "I'm not going to allow myself to see this as the end."

[music]

Shelby: If you could paint anything right now, what would you paint? If you could just do a giant mural that was on an airplane that flew all over the world, what is that image that you want people to see?

Loveis: Oh, my gosh.

Loveis: Sorry to put you on the spot.

Loveis: No, that's great because we're on the same page. I definitely want to do something figure-based, something with community but also, of course, lots of plants, and something nature-filled. I've been trying to get back into patterning and seeing what that looks like. It's just like surface design kind of pieces, something that's not super narrative-based because those are really fun for me and they're very meditative, maybe something along those lines. This is why I'm taking that month-long break, just to gain new inspiration and see where my work is headed.

Shelby: Do you meditate? What were a couple of the routines you do before you make art? I know you do grounding, you get outside, say your affirmations.

Loveis: Yes. I love washing my hair and showering because [chuckles] I feel like the water is bringing in information constantly. Whenever I'm stuck, I'll just be like, "Alright, let me just take a shower or wash my hair," and the information kind of just flows in. I'm like super hippie if you didn't know but, yes.

Shelby: I really want to take you surfing.

Loveis: We need to do it.

Shelby: I really, really like that. You shower, what else you do?

Loveis: I'll step away from the environment that I'm in. Lately, I've been going to this really cool park, I'll take a nice long walk with my dog and then we go to this park and we just sit outside and we chill in the grass, and that helps a lot with just coming up with ideas or decompressing and getting away because this is tough work. It's a lot, constantly making ideas.

Shelby: Creating out of nothing is really hard. I completely understand.

Loveis: It really is. It's like you're playing God all the time. [chuckles]

Shelby: How can people turn to art to be inspired to get outside, especially people who maybe don't think of the outside as a place where they really want to go?

Loveis: Yes, I mean just by putting it into the work that I do, literally taking these worlds and creating these magical places, that's like nature-filled, and putting different people in those spaces, like putting people of color and these beautiful lush green spaces and having them connect with it. It basically, shows like, "Hey, like you can exist here too."

Shelby: Loveis I love talking to you. Any advice to people who want to make it as an artist.

Loveis: Claim it, do it, write down your intentions, write down what it is that you want to do and take yourself seriously about it. Just say what it is that you want and speak it as if it already happened because it has.

Shelby: Yes, girl, you're speaking my language. I love this.

[music]

I love that, claim it, claim your goals, claim your space. Loveis' message of belonging and grounding yourself in nature, it's something that really hit me to the core. I love that she's creating beautiful art that represents all kinds of people. She's creating the world she wants to see.

We'll be right back.

[music]

Summer is the best time to get out and try something new or different. For me, I enjoy being near the water or in the mountains. Did you know that REI offers classes and guided trips all over the country from paddling to climbing, hiking, and campouts, there's something for everyone. What better way to spend a weekend than rock climbing in Colorado at sunset or taking a moonlight hike in the Smoky Mountains or even going stand up paddling on a camping trip in San Diego. REI will provide the guides and connect you with the gear you need to create an epic summer moment. Experience more with REI and register at rei.com/events.

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Lisa Congdon is a visual artist based in Portland, Oregon, who's known for colorful paintings and hand lettering. She didn't start out as early in life as Loveis though. In fact, she didn't start until after she took an art class in her 30s. She became addicted, and eventually, she made art her full-time career. Her work is full of bright patterns, plants, animals, an inspirational and often humorous, bold messages that really resonate with me.

[music]

So you actually know Loveis Wise?

Lisa Congdon: Yes. It's kind of a fairly recent story, I want to say, around two years ago, I was following her on Instagram and she was either still in school or she had just graduated and she made a t-shirt with this print company in Philadelphia that she posted and I was like, "This is such a cool t-shirt." I ordered one and then it came and I put it in the wash and the ink ran. I was emailing the print company and they didn't email me back because I was like, "I need a new shirt."

Then I messaged her and I was like, "By the way, huge fan of your work. I bought this t-shirt," and she apparently was like, "Oh, my God," because she had followed me for years and read my business book. She was like, "Let me take care of this for you." She emailed them, they got back to me, I got a new t-shirt, and then our friendship started basically. I've sort of been watching her career grow over the last couple of years and it's pretty astonishing.

I talk a lot as somebody who's been a working artist for a long time that there's often this perception that people experience overnight success. I'm not saying that's necessarily what happened to Loveis but if there's-- She's about as close as you can get. We've just sort of forged friendship. She came to Portland for a conference where she was speaking. I introduced her at the conference. We hung out. She was back here again. Recently I was in Philly, so I got to hang out with her. We're actually having, in real-life, friendship, which is really awesome.

Shelby: What's so interesting about you-- Loveis is young and she's 25 and just crushing it but you said you got into art in your 30s.

Lisa: I did. I was working in education and at the time, I was working at an education nonprofit. I was sort of in this world where I was working for things that I believed in but I was in this soul-sucking grind of getting up and going to an office every day and working for eight hours and coming home. I was finding it really depressing. Athletics has always been, and the outdoors, has always been a big part of my life and so that was already part of my way of dealing with office life but I also started taking art classes and I started diving into creativity as another antidote to how I was feeling.

Shelby: What did that look like? When you just started you took a classical kind of art class. What stuff did you start drawing, painting, sculpting?

Lisa: I've always been a creative person. I come from a family of creative people, and I never imagined that could be someone's career. It was just part of like my DNA in a way. I had made stuff and been creative and always been in relationships with artists, but I never considered myself artistic oddly. In about 2001 or 2002, my brother, who's two years older than I am, he was actually in school at the time to get his landscape design degree at UC Berkeley, and he

needed to take an elective, and he was like, "I found this painting class. It's at the San Francisco campus on Friday nights. Do you want to take it with me?" So I said, "Sure."

And I had just gone through a breakup with somebody I had been with for almost 10 years, and I was like, struggling a little bit. I thought, "You know what, taking a painting class with my brother could be a really fun way to kill a Friday night." We ended up taking this class together. We mostly sat in the back of the class and goofed off. It was really fun to hang out with my brother. The sort of long-shot thing that happened was that my brother- we got through the class, my brother never picked up a paintbrush again but I was like, "Whoa, I don't want to stop doing this."

I ended up signing up for another painting class with the same teacher in his private studio in San Francisco, and I started taking painting classes. Then I took a live drawing class at the LGBTQ center in San Francisco. Then I set up a little studio at my kitchen table. Again, this is before Facebook, or Instagram or social media, so I was just making stuff in the privacy of my own apartment. There was no audience for it. There was no likes or comments. This was just my own sort of personal journey. I would make things for people and give them away.

Then, in around 2004, I decided to start a blog, and that was right at the beginning of the DIY movement. I joined Flickr and started a blog, and I started just increasingly sharing what I was making with a very, very small audience. I got intrigued by this idea of making work and putting it out into the world. Again, totally, not at all thinking about, "Oh, can I make a living at this?" That never even occurred to me.

Then within a couple of years, around 2006, I got invited to have my first show in Seattle, at a little shop, and I was like, "Okay, it's official. I guess I'm an artist now." Even though that made me cringe because I didn't feel like I deserved it as a sort of self-taught person, but I was starting to build a body of work that people wanted to buy, super cheap. Then the next year I opened an Etsy shop.

Then I thought, "Maybe I could actually find other income streams through my art, and eventually, maybe I could even leave my job. I started having shows, and then one thing after another started to happen. In around 2008, I hit my first tipping point, it wasn't the tipping point that made it possible to do it full time, but it was the tipping point that made me realize like, "If I put enough effort into this, and I dive into this adventure, I think I could make something happen."

Shelby: What was that tipping point?

Lisa: The tipping point for me in 2008, a big one was I signed with a fairly prestigious illustration agent, and I had a very small portfolio at the time. She must have seen something in me, like she must have seen my potential because I had one line of stationery that I had produced with Chronicle Books, who's now

my longest-running client. I did this one really small product with them, and I had maybe done some illustrations for another small client, and this agent just swooped me under her wing.

I'm no longer with her because, at some point, I was able to go out on my own, and I didn't necessarily need representation, but that was a huge break for me. I opened an Etsy shop and I started selling my work. Again, not a ton at first. That didn't really happen until a few years later but there was enough happening, that I could visualize that if I kept doing it, and I kept putting myself out there that eventually I could make a decent living. I never imagined that I could do what I do now, but I thought, "I could do this. I could pay my mortgage, and I could make my car payments, and I could eat and have a little bit of social life." I kept working at it until that happened. Then somewhere in there, I quit my job. For a while, I was doing both.

Shelby: You're an outdoorsy person. You've always been an outdoorsy person. Tell me a little bit about kind of what you do outside when you live in Portland. Portlandia, I have this great vision of what you might be doing outside?

Lisa: A little background, I grew up camping. I was from your typical white, upper-middle-class family with hippie parents. I did a lot of camping. I grew up in California. So we were always going to the Sierra Nevadas and spending a lot of time outdoors. My parents loved hiking, and that was a big part of my childhood. I was probably complaining 50% of the time that my feet hurt or whatever, but I was also simultaneously growing an appreciation for the beauty of the California landscape.

Then as I went out on my own and graduated from college, I explored lots of things. Since high school, I was also a competitive swimmer for a really long time. I swam Masters until I was 40, and I was a coach on a Master's team in San Francisco. Then my art career started taking off and I had to scale back swimming. The thing that I've really fallen in love with over the last 10 or, actually, it's probably been 20 years, but really, in the last 10 years, I have just become a road cyclist. I ride on a women's cycling team here in Portland called Sorella Forte, and it's a huge part of my life. Almost every Saturday, I go out with my team and ride out in Portland, out in the countryside and beautiful areas outside of Portland. I feel very lucky to have that. And of course, like everyone else, I love to go hiking and walking and any kind of land adventure.

Shelby: You're in an all women's team? How cool is that?

Lisa: Yes, it's pretty cool. [chuckles]

Shelby: I love this. Obviously, Portland has a really big cycle culture. It's probably a great place to be a cyclist.

Lisa: Yes. In fact, it's interesting, I used to ride in the Bay Area in California when I lived there, and that was also amazing. I got really sort of attached to all of my

routes, and then moved to Portland and was extremely intimidated about getting lost and not knowing where I was going. It wasn't until I joined this team where other people-- I lead rides now, but where other people were leading the rides that I got comfortable because-- I think, especially on a bike, you don't want to get lost. You don't want to get to a place where you're in some sort of having to climb a hill or something that is out of your range or whatever.

It's always nice to have other people kind of help you along, and that's the great thing about a team. If some members of my team race, then I might race at some point, but right now because of my career so busy, I just ride for fun, and a lot of people on the team just ride for fun. It's such a supportive way to go on a bike ride like your with anywhere from 4 to 18 other women, depending on how many people show up on a Saturday. There's a range of speeds. It's a no-drop ride, which means that if something happens people wait for you, if you have a flat. It's really amazing. I've made some incredible friends on the team. It really has just been wonderful. It's taken the place of what swimming was for me in my 20s and 30s. My wife is on the team too so it's kind of a family affair at that.

Shelby: It is awesome to be able to do what you love with your partner. Yes, I surf with my partner every day, but I'm a little competitive with him. When he gets more waves, I get a little bummed, but that's just how it is, and I have to get over that. I've been working on that for a while.

Lisa: I would definitely say there's probably things that we are competitive about, but cycling just happens to not be one of them.

[music]

Shelby: I love your art. It's bold. It's bright. It's just audacious. You talk about conquering your fear and doing things anywhere, going all in. There's this painting you have of a girl leaping into a pool and it's like, "Go all in," and you have one about laundry. Laundry is my superpower and this is something else.

Lisa: It says laundry is my actual superpower.

Shelby: Laundry is my actual superpower.

Lisa: My actual superpower, yes.

Shelby: You have this painting, laundry is my actual superpower. You have so many great illustrations, paintings, that are really bold and colorful. What inspires you to create like this?

Lisa: Art really saved my life in a way. I think I mentioned earlier that I was caught in a spiral in my late 20s and early to mid-30s of a lot of just working and looking for stuff outside of myself to make me happy so that I could feel some sense of fulfillment or satisfaction. The first thing I did before I started, as I was making art, I also started going to therapy. One of the things I learned from my

therapist, or one of the things I worked through, was that I had always thought of myself as a victim or somebody who was a victim of fate or bad luck. That's why I wasn't in a fulfilling relationship. That's why I was in a job that felt boring. That was the reason for everything.

I learned in this relationship with my therapist that I actually had agency in my life and that I could actually find something that I could wake up and do every day with joy and intention, and I could make a difference in the world, and I could make a difference in my own life. Everything was up to me, everything was my choice and my responsibility. Once I changed my mindset, I had already been making art at that point, but my art really took on a new direction.

I've always been really attracted to art that is really bold and colorful and graphic. Increasingly over the years, my work has become more bold and more colorful and graphic. I think that's definitely a reflection of the joy that I started to feel in my life. We think of art often as dark or depressing for a lot of people or that only real art is actually just really dark and depressing. I had to get over that because I was making stuff that actually made people feel happiness and that expressed positivity.

Some of my work is darker and edgier, especially some of my older work, but I feel like what I do now is just an extension of how I feel about life. Oftentimes, that's asking and answering the same questions that a lot of people ask like, "What is the meaning of life? Why am I here? What is my responsibility to myself and others? What can I do to make a difference in the world, and all of those things?" My art often reflects that.

[music]

Shelby: How does that show up in your work? How does your inspiration from nature and your relationship to cycling, and the outdoors and swimming in the outside, all that, how does that show up in your work or inspire your work?

Lisa: I think we often think of artists as being unathletic. There are a special category of us that are both athletes and artists. I've learned, because I talk about both things a lot, that I'm not alone. There's a lot of other folks out there. For as many artists who don't move their bodies very often as there are in the world, there are plenty who do. Part of that is that I think making art and becoming really good at art or a decent artist or a creative person requires the same amount of discipline that becoming a better athlete requires. Literally, they draw from the same part of you.

A lot of my art isn't specifically about getting outside or moving your body or athletics, but it is about going out into the world and taking risks, and doing things that are joyful for you or empowering for you, and making choices that support your well-being and health versus making choices that don't. I think for me, my

art is often motivational for people, whether it's about getting outside or whether it's about kicking themselves in the butt to do the next thing in their career.

Shelby: Or reminding someone there's nothing wrong with them. They're okay right now as they are. I love that. I've seen a lot of those from you. I feel like just that reminder like, "Hey, you're okay," but the way you present it is beautiful.

Lisa: Well, thank you very much. I want to say too that when it comes to-- For a lot of people, this idea of even getting out into nature and taking a hike, because they didn't grow up with it or it's not part of how they've lived their life so far, or maybe they haven't been a very active person, so that they think something's wrong with them, and they can't go do the thing until that thing isn't wrong with them anymore. They might say, "Well, I'm too heavy," or, "I'm too this," or, "I'm too that. I need to conquer those things before I go outside."

None of that matters. Anybody can stand up and take a walk and go outside. It might be harder for some people than others, but the idea is to remember there's nothing wrong with you. There's no reason to hold yourself back from going out and being physical or finding joy in the outdoors. You may think it's not part of your story, you may think you don't deserve it, whatever, but there's nothing wrong with you. Go do it. Go do the thing.

Shelby: We talk a lot about on the podcast, that the trees do not discriminate. They do not care what you look like, how much you weigh, how much money you got.

[music]

Shelby: How can art be inspiration to get people outside?

Lisa: If you were to walk into an REI or a Patagonia store or a North Face, I bet 80% of what you're going to be drawn to are the t-shirts and products that have amazing graphic art on them. So much of that is on purpose. I think people who understand or companies that understand the importance of getting outside also understand that people are inspired by visual imagery. I think that's why more and more, we're seeing a lot of big outdoor companies and athletic companies, even companies like Adidas and Nike, adopt these visual identities.

If you think about even just the Nike campaign, which was really the first big one around "Just Do It", and so much of that, it wasn't necessarily at the time visual art in the way I draw or illustration, but it was capturing a moment on film or in a photograph that would inspire someone to go try something. I think we all, I wouldn't say everyone, but there's a certain percentage of the population who knows what it feels like to do something challenging outdoors, whether it's an athletic activity or just hiking or pushing yourself past what you thought you were capable of.

Even in the moment while you're cursing-- [chuckles] Half the time on my bike rides on Saturday, I'm literally like, "Why am I doing this? This is horrible." Then I'm done, and guess what? You've been there. It's the most amazing feeling ever because you did it. That's what we're all trying to capture. That's what I'm trying to inspire in people, and that's what other artists who encourage other people to get outside and do things are trying to evoke, like, "Push yourself past. Don't just go do it. Go do it and then some."

Shelby: One thing you've done so well that I really would like to talk about it, advice you can give to aspiring artists who want to make a living doing it today.

Lisa: I think the number one thing to remember is that it is not going to happen necessarily quickly. Patience is your best friend in the endeavor.

Shelby: That's a hard one.

Lisa: It's especially hard now because if you are an aspiring artist, more likely than not, you're on a place like Instagram, and you're looking at people who--

Shelby: Have overnight success.

Lisa: Either you perceive that they do or they've just happened to be really successful, but 95% of the people out there who you're looking at are-- Biz Stone, who founded Twitter, he's got this great quote, and I'm going to butcher it, but it's something like, "15 years of really hard work will make you look like an overnight success" or something. He says it much more eloquently than that.

It's true that for those of us who now are experiencing having amazing careers, I could tell you 10 years worth of stories about struggle and getting up and showing up every day, even though I wasn't making any money and getting the work that I wanted to get, and just showing up and continuing to push forward. That sort of perseverance and patience with yourself, and not comparing yourself to other people because everyone's journey is totally different.

There were people, five or six years ago, who seemed so much further ahead of me in their careers than I felt. Now, at this point, I'm on this completely different path than they're on and doing my own amazing things, and I realized if I had let comparing myself to those people, at the time, stop me, I never would have gotten where I am, which is exactly where I need to be. That's another thing I like to say, you're exactly where you need to be. You may feel it's not happening fast enough, but you're where you need to be. You're learning what you need to learn, as long as you're showing up every day and putting your best effort forward.

[music]

Shelby: Pursuing creative endeavors can be frustrating, but also exhilarating, peaceful, and fulfilling. It's in the outdoors where I believe some of the best ideas

for these creative endeavors generate. Next time you're outside, listen to the rustle of the leaves, the sound of the waves hitting the shore, or take a closer look at the brightly colored wildflowers, just take in all the amazing sights and sounds all around. It's such a wild, wild world.

I love listening to these two women talk about the success they've found in pursuing their passions and sharing their heart and soul through art with all of us. You can check out loveiswiseillustration.myportfolio.com, and lisacongdon.com to see their work or follow them on Instagram @loveiswiseillu or @lisacongdon.

[music]

This podcast is produced by REI with the help from Annie Fassler and Chelsea Davis. Thank you so much to Loveis and Lisa for taking the time to share your stories and inspirations with us. You both are welcome to San Diego to serve anytime. The sooner, the better because it's warm right now. Tune in week after next as I speak with people who've done an extreme adventure and what doing something really extreme like paddling from Alaska to Mexico can teach us.

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Remember, some of the best adventures often happen when you follow your wildest idea.

[music]

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