

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 45 – Amanda Pagiliarini Howard – One Clear Voice

Release from Fear

And now a personal word,

This was a brave conversation for Amanda Howard to have and I'm grateful to her for sharing it. I met Amanda many years ago and was aware of her story. We recently reconnected after being out of touch. The life she is living now as a wife and mom is different than the one she was living when she and I first met. I asked her if she would be open to telling the story I knew on this podcast. She said yes.

Amanda and I met shortly after she arrived in Charlotte. I was the publisher of Charlotte Viewpoint. Amanda was a freelance writer. I'm not sure how we were introduced. I do remember a few long conversations we had. Amanda wrote the first of several columns for Charlotte Viewpoint in March 2009. Her column was entitled 'Release from Fear,' connecting the sniper shootings that took place in Washington DC with the Great Recession that had taken hold of Charlotte. We were always excited to showcase new writers at Charlotte Viewpoint, and Amanda brought a fresh new voice. But in talking with Amanda personally, what became clear in retrospect, was that the title of her first column, 'Release from Fear,' might as well have been the title of her move to Charlotte and her beginning a new life.

Amanda had a certain toughness about her. A certain experience below the surface. I sensed that she had encountered a range of personalities, had learned to read people to survive, and she was both older and younger than she appeared. I also sensed that she was someone breathing for the first time, calming down from emotional adventures, ready to explore her writing to come to terms with the life she had led and wanted to live. She was starting again.

She shared with me a memoir she was writing called 'One Clear Voice.' Only a few people knew what was in her memoir and she trusted me to read it. In page after page she detailed being raped, the death of her best friend, her suicide attempts, and being part of a cult-like group that took hold of her life for over seven years. She wrote about her life after leaving the group, her relationships and affairs and drug-use, crossing boundaries that had long been transgressed. She was unrelenting in detail, writing down scene after scene, taking herself apart to piece herself back together. I was gripped by her writing and by her self-examination. Every page was an act of catharsis and self-creation.

In turn I shared with her a manuscript I had written. Twenty-five years ago, just after I had graduated law school, I wrote the first draft of a novel. I wrote the novel after a particularly all-consuming and defining relationship had come to an end. The writing was an act of therapy for me as I worked out tensions and impulses in characters that were wrestling with right and wrong in their lives, friendships, marriages and careers. Writing the novel was a turning point for me.

Amanda and I shared our work as writers, and I carry the memory of that exchange with me.

Around 2010 Amanda and I fell out of touch. I saw later on Facebook that she got married. She became editor of Nfocus magazine. I wrote a piece for her in 2013. She had a daughter and then a son. She became editor of Society Charlotte magazine before launching The Society Guide. In the last few months I saw that Amanda had liked episodes of this podcast on LinkedIn. I reached out to her and here we are.

The Amanda I know is the writer who was staring down truth. Who was excavating all parts of her soul. Who was re-building boundaries that had been shattered. Who was the doing the work that artists and poets and writers do.

Each of us have our secrets and demons and desires. We can see in Amanda freedom from her share.

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