

NEVER GIVE UP

IN COLLABORATION
WITH **FRANK BRUNO MBE**

The **Heart** of the Foundation

Kerri Fowkes-Morley

FRANK'S LATEST CHAPTER

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MORE
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SUPPORTING WELLBEING & MENTAL HEALTH



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Editor

Rany Athwall

Publisher

Ranath Media

Editor's Note



There are some people whose work will never make the headlines. People who show up every day, not for recognition or reward, but because they understand that even the smallest act of kindness can change someone's life.

At the Frank Bruno Foundation, those people are everywhere.

Behind the name, the programmes and the facilities is a team of remarkable individuals whose dedication makes an extraordinary difference to those who need it most. They are the unsung heroes: the people who listen, encourage, support and help others find their way forward when life feels overwhelming.

Through our collaboration with Frank, we have seen first-hand the commitment and compassion that run through everything the foundation does. We have seen the effort invested by everyone involved, and the genuine belief that nobody should have to face their struggles alone.

That is why supporting the foundation means so much to us.

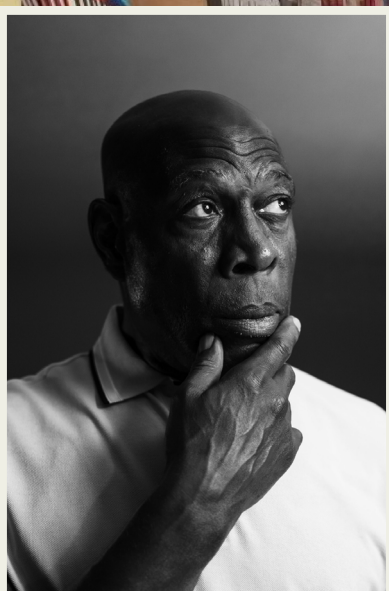
However, even the most dedicated teams cannot do this work alone. Charitable organisations depend on the generosity and involvement of people willing to stand alongside them. Whether you are an individual, a business or an organisation, your support can help ensure that the foundation continues reaching the people who need it.

That support can take many forms: sharing its message, giving your time, making a contribution, creating opportunities or simply visiting to see the incredible work taking place. Sometimes, understanding the difference a charity makes begins with stepping through its doors and meeting the people whose lives it touches.

I believe we all have a responsibility to serve, to give back and to look beyond ourselves. We cannot always know what somebody else is carrying, but we can help create a world in which they do not have to carry it alone. To Frank, the foundation team and everyone connected with this important work: thank you. The lives you change, often quietly and without recognition, are a reminder of what becomes possible when compassion is matched with action.

And to everyone reading: if you can support the Frank Bruno Foundation in any way, please do. What may feel like a small gesture to you could mean everything to somebody else.

Rany Athwall
Ranath Media



He retired from the boxing ring in 1996. But three decades on, Frank Bruno is Still Fighting. Now, in his most candid and powerful book yet, the former World Heavyweight Champion tells the extraordinary inside story of the five years that changed his life.

Following on from his bestselling 2021 memoir *Sixty Years A Fighter*, *Still Fighting* takes Frank into territory he never expected to revisit, and reveals how he found the strength to fight his way back.

In his own words, the father-of-four recounts how he almost died on a flight to the Middle East, and the harrowing story of what happened next. He also reveals the details of another terrifying battle that saw his world spiral out of control, and the life-changing decision he had to make to take back control of it.

For the first time, Frank also opens up about the death of his close friend Ricky Hatton, and their friendship that spanned almost 25 years. He reflects too on his ongoing battle with bipolar disorder, and how he continues to manage his condition and move forward.

There are stories of old friends and old rivals, as well. Frank reveals the full story behind *Four Kings*, the acclaimed Amazon/C4 documentary that reunited him with Chris Eubank, Nigel Benn and his former opponent, and arch-enemy, Lennox Lewis.

He shares the true story of his friendship with Mike Tyson and Tyson Fury, and lifts the lid on the darker side of fame, including the terrifying ordeal of a stalker who targeted him at home.

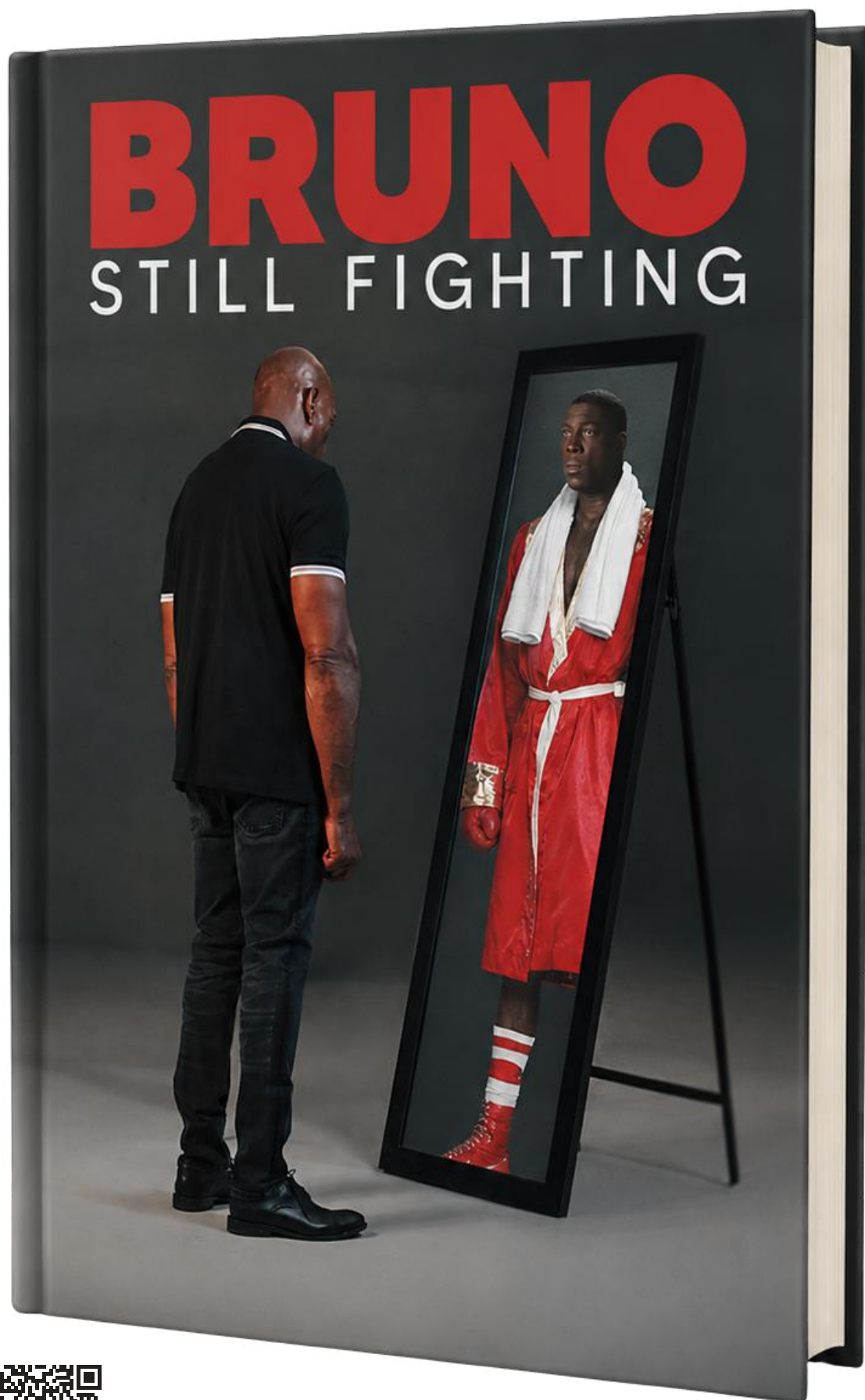
But this is Frank Bruno, and even through the darkest moments, there have been plenty of laughs. He takes readers inside some of the most extraordinary moments of his life, including the story of the most glamorous boxing dinner ever staged, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 2023.

Still Fighting also features tributes from Mike Tyson, Barry Hearn and Charlie Magri, alongside a deeply moving tribute from Ricky Hatton, written years before his tragic death.

And, of course, Frank looks back at the fights that made him a household name. He chooses his favourite bouts and reflects on every one of his 45 professional fights, including the unforgettable night in 1995 when he finally became World Heavyweight Champion.

Still Fighting is Frank Bruno as you've never heard him before: honest, funny, moving and completely unfiltered.

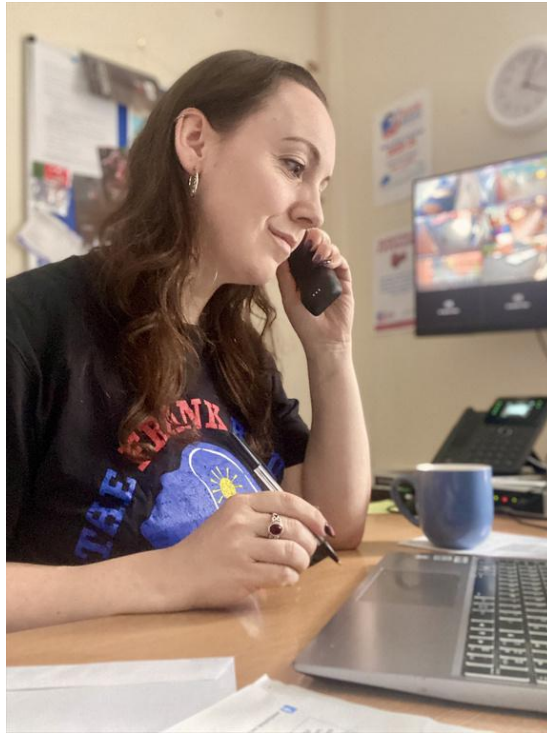
It is the book Frank Bruno never expected to write. But it may be the book his fans are most grateful he did.



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KERRI FOWKES-MORLEY

At the Heart of the Foundation



Kerri, could you begin by telling us a little about yourself and the journey that led you into the charity sector?

My journey into the charity sector began shortly after graduating from university, following a brief period of unemployment. What initially felt like a setback became an opportunity when I was offered a placement with a youth charity. I started as a classroom assistant and, within a year, progressed to tutor and then area manager.

In that role, I developed and delivered programmes for young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). I supported them to set realistic goals, build confidence, develop employability and life skills, gain work experience, prepare for interviews and access opportunities such as apprenticeships, further education and employment. What stood out to me was the difference that the right support, encouragement and opportunities could make to a young person's life.

Since then, I've been fortunate to work across a variety of charities, including organisations supporting disabled people, LGBTQ+ mental health, older people and community sport. Throughout my career, I've managed programmes focused on health, wellbeing, skills development, and social inclusion,

while also leading volunteer programmes, developing staff wellbeing initiatives, overseeing HR functions, and creating in-house training and professional development opportunities for staff and volunteers.

I believe my own lived experiences, including managing my health and growing up as a young carer, have influenced my decision to work within the voluntary sector. They have given me a strong appreciation of the challenges people can face and the importance of having access to the right support. However, what has kept me in the sector throughout my career is the people. The privilege of supporting individuals and communities, seeing the impact of that work firsthand, and knowing that you've helped make a positive difference in someone's life is incredibly rewarding and continues to inspire me every day.

What first inspired your passion for helping others, and was there a particular moment that made you realise this was the path you wanted to follow?

I've always gained a great deal of fulfilment from supporting others, but what truly inspired my passion was seeing firsthand the impact that kindness, compassion and community-based support can have on someone's life.

"I've always gained a great deal of fulfilment from supporting others, but what truly inspired my passion was seeing firsthand the impact that kindness, compassion and community-based support can have on someone's life."

There wasn't one specific moment that made me realise this was the path I wanted to follow. Instead, it was something I saw repeatedly throughout my career. Working with people from different backgrounds and facing a wide range of challenges taught me that it's often the seemingly small things that make the biggest difference. Taking the time to listen, showing genuine empathy, treating someone as a whole person rather than a diagnosis, and offering encouragement when they are struggling to believe in themselves can be incredibly powerful.

I've seen people who felt isolated, overwhelmed or powerless begin to move forward simply because someone gave them their time, helped them recognise the choices available to them, or believed in them until they were ready to take that first step themselves. Those moments have shown me that meaningful change doesn't always come from grand gestures. Often, it starts with human connection, understanding and support.

Seeing how impactful these acts can be, and witnessing the positive changes that follow, is what inspired me to work in this sector and what continues to inspire me every day. It reinforces my belief that everyone deserves to feel valued, heard and supported, regardless of the challenges they may be facing.

Tell us a little about your role at the Frank Bruno Foundation and what your responsibilities involve.

As Charity Centre Manager, I oversee the day-to-day operation of our flagship Round-by-Round programmes and the wider activities that support our members every week. My role involves ensuring that participants receive the best possible experience, managing the centre environment, supporting staff and volunteers, building relationships with partners and stakeholders, and helping to develop services that meet the needs of our members.

Working for a small charity, no two days are the same. Some days I'll be at a business networking event, promoting our work and recruiting donors and supporters, or out and about engaging with the wider community. Some days I'll be mainly office-based, preparing funding applications and reports, overseeing social media and marketing activity, chairing meetings with staff and volunteers, or checking in with our partners and other stakeholders.

Other days, I'll be covering a staff absence or helping out the team during busy periods - cooking lunch for participants (which for some will be the only hot meal they get that week), serving refreshments during a drop-in, cleaning, shopping, gardening, or general maintenance tasks - there's always something to keep me busy!

What do you enjoy most about your work, and which aspects of your role give you the greatest sense of fulfilment?

Without question, it's seeing the positive changes in our participants. Mental health challenges can often leave people feeling isolated or lacking confidence, so witnessing individuals reconnect with others, develop new skills, improve their wellbeing and rediscover a sense of purpose is incredibly rewarding.

The greatest sense of fulfilment comes from seeing someone who may have arrived feeling uncertain leave with renewed confidence, stronger





coping strategies and optimism for the future. Sometimes it's the small milestones that mean the most, such as someone joining a group for the first time, sharing their experiences with others, or feeling able to take the next step in their recovery journey.

I also genuinely enjoy the variety that my role offers - being able to contribute across different areas of the organisation and staying connected to the day-to-day experience of both our staff, volunteers and participants. That variety keeps the role interesting and allows me to see the impact of our work from many different perspectives.

For me, it is the combination of meaningful impact, strong relationships and the opportunity to make a practical difference every day that makes the role so fulfilling.

The Foundation supports people facing a range of mental health challenges. What do you believe makes its approach so effective and meaningful?

I believe one of the Foundation's greatest strengths is that our approach is genuinely person-centred and rooted in understanding, compassion and community. We don't see people as a diagnosis or a set of challenges. We see individuals with unique experiences, strengths and aspirations, and we work hard to create an environment where they feel valued, respected and supported.

Another key factor is the wealth of experience within our team. The staff and volunteers who support the Foundation bring a diverse range of professional and lived experiences, whether that's through their own mental health journeys, supporting family members, working within health and social care, or being actively involved in their communities. That lived experience helps us connect with people in an authentic way and creates a culture of empathy, understanding and hope.

We also place a strong emphasis on listening. By seeking feedback from our members, stakeholders and partners, and by actively looking for opportunities to collaborate, we can ensure our services remain relevant, responsive and shaped by the needs of the people we support.

Partnership working is another vital part of our approach. Mental health challenges rarely exist in isolation and can affect many different areas of a person's life, including relationships, employment, education, physical health and financial wellbeing. While the Foundation works hard to provide meaningful support, we recognise that we can't do everything ourselves. That's why we actively develop relationships with other services and community organisations, enabling us to offer more holistic support and effective signposting when people need it.

I have seen time and time again that when organisations, communities and individuals work together, we can achieve so much more than we can alone. By taking that collaborative approach, we help create stronger support networks, more resilient communities and greater awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing. Ultimately, it's about ensuring that people feel connected, empowered and supported to move forward in a way that works for them.

Without identifying anyone personally, is there a particular story or moment that has stayed with you and reminded you why the Foundation's work is so important?

There have been many moments, and I love seeing members who initially struggled to engage with others gradually develop friendships, confidence and a sense of belonging. You don't need to wait for a feedback form to be completed to be able to see it - that gradual shift over the weeks in their body language, how their smile reaches their eyes, the way they engage in activities, how they interact with others and even the words they use to describe themselves.

When someone tells you that they feel hopeful again, that they're leaving the house more, reconnecting with family, or feeling part of a community for the first time in years, it reminds you how powerful support and human connection can be. Those moments stay with you because they demonstrate the real impact of what we do. One recent example that has stayed with me involved a young man who had been receiving long-term mental health treatment as an inpatient, and who was experiencing significant social isolation and anxiety.



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When he first joined the Foundation, attending sessions felt completely outside of his comfort zone. He lacked confidence, worried about being judged and needed considerable support just to access the programme. Through regular one-to-one non-contact boxing and wellbeing sessions tailored to his individual needs, he gradually began to build confidence, develop positive relationships and engage more fully in his own recovery.

Over time, the transformation was remarkable. He became more independent, more socially engaged and more willing to try new things. His physical health improved significantly, but what stood out most was the change in his self-belief and outlook. Staff supporting him spoke about how much more positive and engaged he had become, and it was clear that he was beginning to see possibilities for himself that he hadn't seen before.

Meaningful change often starts with creating a safe, supportive and non-judgemental environment where people feel valued and understood. Sometimes it's not about making dramatic interventions; it's about consistently showing up, building trust and helping someone recognise their own strengths and potential.

Seeing someone move from a place of anxiety and isolation to one of greater confidence, connection and hope is incredibly powerful. Moments like that remind me why the Foundation's work matters and why supporting people to believe in themselves can have a lasting impact on their lives and future wellbeing.

Frank has spoken very openly about his own mental health journey. How does his honesty and personal experience influence the spirit and values of the Foundation?

Frank's openness is at the heart of the Foundation. His willingness to share his own experiences has helped challenge stigma and encourage conversations around mental health. It sends a powerful message that mental health challenges can affect anyone, regardless of background or success. That honesty creates a culture of acceptance, understanding and hope throughout the organisation. It reassures people that they are not alone, and that seeking support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Our work focuses on building healthy bodies and healthy minds - a whole person approach that Frank has championed, because he understood how interlinked these two aspects are. Poor mental health will usually have an impact on an individual's physical wellbeing - exacerbating existing conditions, provoking physical symptoms, or impacting your motivation and stamina when engaging in exercise and healthy behaviours. Likewise, poor physical health - whether that's challenges around a disability or long term health condition, or even a bout of illness - can cause considerable stress and distress, affecting someone's ability to engage with or even access support, and can negatively affect mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Our vision is a future where mental health is valued equally with physical health, stigma is challenged, and no one faces their wellbeing journey alone. Frank's experiences inspire us to use the power of boxing and physical activity to support mental wellbeing - by delivering structured, inclusive programmes that empower individuals, reduce isolation, and strengthen communities.

What are some of the achievements or areas of work at the Frank Bruno Foundation that you feel particularly proud of?

I'm incredibly proud of the positive impact we've had on the lives of so many individuals. Seeing participants progress through our programmes and make meaningful improvements in their wellbeing is an achievement we never take for granted. Some have progressed onto other programmes, accessed other support services, gained placements and work, and some have even gone on to volunteer and even work for us.

I'm also proud of the supportive community we've built, where people feel safe, valued and empowered. The growing awareness around mental health, the partnerships we've developed and the continued expansion of our services all reflect the dedication of our team, volunteers and supporters.

Having worked within the charity sector for much of your career, what have those experiences taught you about people, resilience and the importance of community?

Working across the charity sector has taught me that people are often far more resilient than they realise. I've worked with individuals facing a wide range of challenges, including poor mental health, disability, social isolation, unemployment, caring responsibilities and significant life changes. Time and again, I've seen people find the strength to keep moving forward, often in circumstances that many of us would find difficult to imagine.

What I've learned is that resilience doesn't mean facing challenges alone. In fact, some of the strongest people I've met are those who have been willing to ask for support when they needed it. Having the right people around you, whether that's family, friends, peers, community groups or professional services, can make an enormous difference. Community provides connection, belonging and hope, particularly during difficult times.

At the same time, I've also seen how challenging things have become, not just for the individuals accessing support but for the organisations providing it. Many of the people we work alongside are navigating increasingly complex issues, influenced by factors such as the cost of living, housing pressures, employment uncertainty, social isolation and wider pressures on health and social care services. These challenges rarely exist in isolation and can have a significant impact on people's wellbeing and opportunities.

For charities and community organisations, the reality is that demand for services often outweighs available capacity. We are seeing more people needing support, while funding opportunities have become increasingly competitive and resources are often stretched. Despite this, charities continue to innovate, adapt and work collaboratively to meet the needs of their communities.

Perhaps the biggest lesson I've learned is that no single organisation can address every challenge on its own. The most effective support happens when charities, public services, community groups, businesses and local residents work together towards a shared goal. When we invest in people, listen to their experiences and strengthen our communities, we create environments where individuals can thrive rather than simply cope.

Even during some of the toughest periods, I've been continually inspired by the kindness, determination and generosity of the people I meet. It's that collective resilience and willingness to support one another that gives me hope for the future and reinforces the vital role that communities play in helping people overcome challenges and reach their potential.

"I love opportunities to learn more about the world we live in and find opportunities for new experiences, to connect with nature, to engage in creative activities and also to carve out time for myself for relaxation and reflection. These moments help me stay grounded and provide an important balance to a busy professional life."





Charity work can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also be emotionally demanding. How do you remain motivated and protect your own wellbeing?

I'm incredibly fortunate to be in a position to see the difference our work at the Foundation makes. The stories of resilience, growth and progress that we witness every day are a constant reminder of why this work matters. Whether it's someone taking a step they never thought possible, building confidence, or simply feeling less alone, those moments make even the most challenging days worthwhile.

I'm not superhuman, though! I've learned through my own mental health journey that protecting our wellbeing is just as important as supporting the wellbeing of others. For me, that means investing time and energy in my life outside of work. Catching up with friends, spending as much time in nature as I can, and making space for learning, creativity and trying new things all help. I make an effort to maintain healthy boundaries and to be realistic about my expectations of myself also - we all know we can't pour from an empty cup, but it's not always easy to follow that advice when we're busy with everyday responsibilities.

One of the lessons I took from the challenging period we all experienced during the COVID pandemic was the importance of noticing the beauty in everyday life and making a conscious effort to seek out and celebrate the positives. Finding moments of joy helps me to create balance, so you'll often see me taking photographs on my phone of a beautiful sunset, an interesting flower or bug, or something that simply makes me smile.

I also enjoy walking and find that being outdoors helps me clear my mind and recharge. At the Foundation, we run weekly wellbeing walks in a local park every Monday morning. They're open to staff, volunteers and participants, and they're a fantastic way to start the week. There's something incredibly powerful about walking side by side, connecting with nature and each other, and taking an hour away from our screens and usual work environments to create space for conversation, reflection and wellbeing.

Ultimately, I've learned that looking after your own wellbeing isn't a luxury; it's a necessity - but one that takes a little work to achieve; otherwise, it's too easy to neglect or dismiss. By taking care of ourselves, we're better able to support others and continue doing the work we're passionate about.

What does success mean to you personally, both in your professional life and away from work?

Professionally, success means securing a stable future for our charity in an incredibly tough climate, so that we can continue making a positive difference in people's lives and helping create opportunities for others to flourish. Success isn't necessarily

measured by numbers alone but by the lasting impact we have on individuals and communities. To achieve this, we can't escape the need for financial and practical support.

Personally, success is about living with purpose, maintaining meaningful relationships and finding balance. It's living a life without regret, knowing that I've contributed positively while also making time for the people and experiences that matter most.

When you are not working, how do you like to spend your time, and what helps you relax and recharge?

Outside of work, I enjoy a combination of recharging in my own space and spending quality time with loved ones or exploring the local area with my dog. I love opportunities to learn more about the world we live in and find opportunities for new experiences, to connect with nature, to engage in creative activities and also to carve out time for myself for relaxation and reflection. These moments help me stay grounded and provide an important balance to a busy professional life.

Looking ahead, what would you most like to see the Frank Bruno Foundation achieve, and what positive change would you personally like to continue helping create?

I'd love to see the Foundation continue to grow its reach so that even more people can access the support they need. Mental health remains one of the most important challenges facing society, and there is still much work to be done in breaking down stigma and improving access to support. We're lucky to be able to operate out of our own Centre in Northampton, but I'd love the opportunity to offer our programmes in other locations, so that more people can access our support.

We're also seeking funding and sponsorship to enable us to deliver more health and wellbeing programmes tailored to specific demographics and needs - this includes, but is certainly not limited to, care experienced young people, SEND and disability groups, college/university students, men's peer support sessions, women and girls, managing menopause and health conditions, older people and those approaching retirement, and other groups who find accessing traditional mental health support or exercise classes challenging - so that we can amplify the voices of our community and continue to achieve meaningful change.

On a personal level, I want to continue helping create environments where people feel valued, supported and empowered to reach their full potential. Through developing effective, meaningful community connections, raising awareness of mental health and wellbeing matters, challenging stigma and breaking down barriers to help individuals regain confidence, improve their wellbeing and realise they are not alone, we can create lasting positive change that extends far beyond the Foundation itself.



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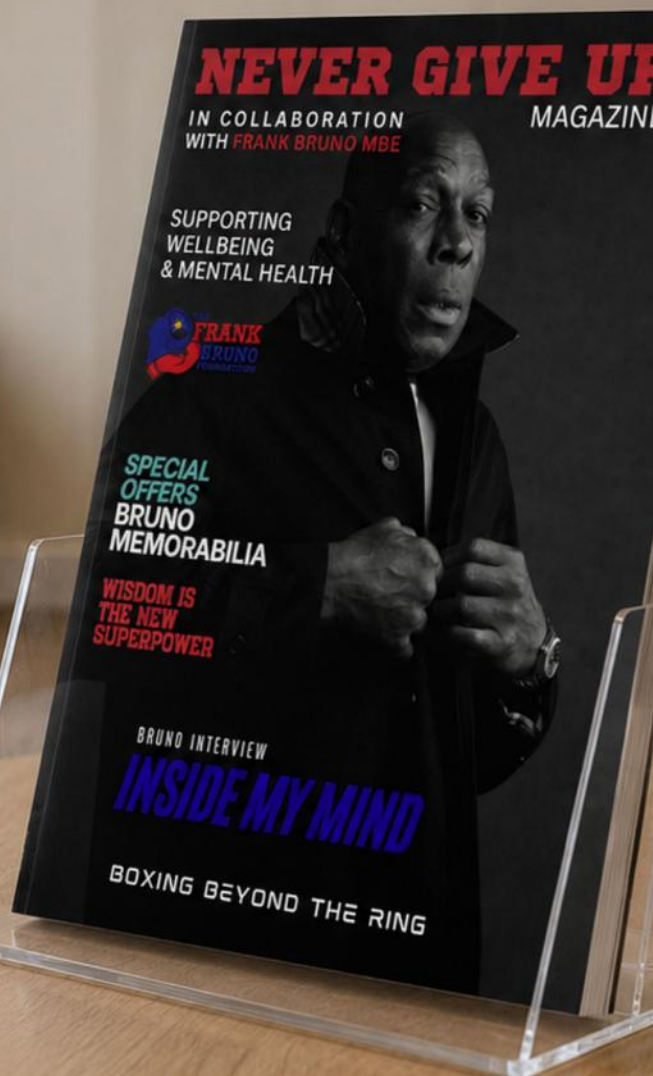
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Rany Athwall -



rany@ranathmedia.com



+44 (0)7880 731893



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More Than Surviving

By Lady Anne Welsh

Building a Life of Purpose Through Every Challenge

People often ask me what inspired me to create Painless Universal.

My answer is always the same: it was never born out of comfort. It was born out of lived experience.

Living with Sickle Cell Disease has taught me lessons that no classroom ever could. It has taught me resilience when life felt uncertain, courage when fear seemed easier, and hope when circumstances suggested otherwise. There have been moments of pain, setbacks and questions without immediate answers. But through every challenge, I discovered something incredibly important: our greatest struggles can become the foundation of our greatest purpose.

For many years, I made a conscious decision not to allow my diagnosis to define my future. I wanted people to see possibility rather than limitation. More importantly, I wanted every person living with Sickle Cell Disease, chronic pain or any life-altering condition to understand that a diagnosis may be part of your story, but it does not have to determine the ending.

You can still dream. You can still lead. You can still build, contribute, love, travel, create and achieve extraordinary things.

That belief became the foundation upon which Painless Universal was built.

Turning Pain Into Purpose

Today, Painless Universal has grown into an international organisation dedicated to improving lives through health awareness, education, advocacy, leadership, community engagement and wellbeing.

But our mission has always extended beyond simply raising awareness.

We want to change the way people understand pain in all its forms — physical, mental, emotional, financial and social. We want to create opportunities, challenge perceptions, inspire important conversations and empower people to live fuller, healthier and more purposeful lives.

At the heart of everything we do is one simple question:

How do we leave people better than we found them?

Whether we are organising awareness campaigns, hosting international events, collaborating with healthcare professionals, engaging with communities or building partnerships with organisations that share our vision, our objective remains the same: to create meaningful and lasting impact.

The Power of Storytelling

One of the projects closest to my heart is Painless Magazine.

When we first imagined the magazine, I never wanted it to become just another publication. I wanted it to become a platform where stories could change lives.

A place where healthcare professionals, business leaders, advocates, entrepreneurs, policymakers, creatives and people with lived experience could come together to educate, inspire and empower others.

Every edition reflects that vision.

Within its pages, our readers discover conversations that go beyond the headlines. We explore health and wellbeing while celebrating resilience, leadership, business, travel, fashion, beauty and culture. Most importantly, we amplify voices and experiences that deserve to be heard.

Our special editions have demonstrated just how powerful authentic storytelling can be. Bringing together contributors from different countries, professions and backgrounds has reinforced something I have long believed: meaningful conversations create meaningful change.

Sometimes, simply knowing that another person has walked a similar road can give someone the courage to keep walking theirs.

Collaboration Creates Impact

None of what we have achieved would have been possible without collaboration.

One of the greatest lessons I have learned throughout my journey is that no meaningful vision is ever built alone.



Strong partnerships have the ability to transform ideas into action and, ultimately, movements. That is why our collaboration with Ranath Media represents such an exciting milestone for us.

Publishing is about far more than producing a beautiful magazine. It is about understanding audiences, identifying the stories that matter and creating platforms capable of connecting people through ideas, experiences and shared humanity.

Working alongside Ranath Media has enabled us to continue elevating Painless Magazine while remaining true to the principles that have guided us from the beginning: credibility, excellence, authenticity and purpose.

Together, we share a belief that storytelling has the power not only to inform and entertain, but also to educate, inspire and influence positive change.

As Editor-in-Chief, I have the privilege of working with remarkable contributors whose expertise, experiences and perspectives continue to enrich every edition.

Watching those stories come together reminds me why this work matters.

Every article has the potential to encourage someone.

Every interview has the potential to inspire someone.

Every edition has the potential to reach someone exactly when they need it most.

That is a responsibility I never take for granted.

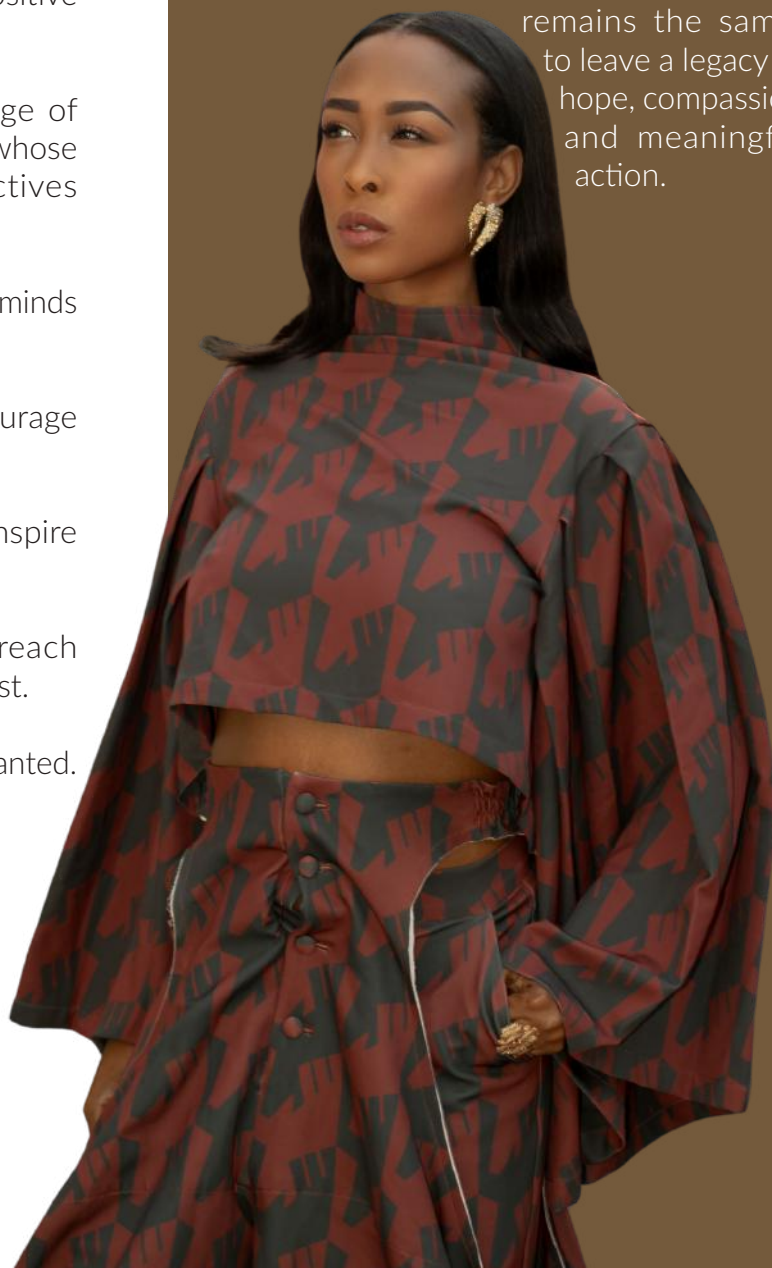
Leadership Is About People

Beyond publishing, my greatest passion remains people.

I believe leadership is not simply about occupying a position or achieving personal success. Leadership is about creating opportunities for others to grow, ensuring that more voices are heard and using whatever platform we have to make life better for someone else.

For me, success cannot be measured by personal achievement alone. It must also be measured by the lives we positively impact along the way.

Whether I am mentoring young leaders, advocating for people living with Sickle Cell Disease, speaking on international platforms or developing new initiatives through Painless Universal, my goal remains the same: to leave a legacy of hope, compassion and meaningful action.



There Is Still Work to Do

Healthcare inequalities continue to exist. Communities still need better access to trusted information and support. Too many people living with chronic and life-altering conditions continue to feel unseen, misunderstood or unheard.

And beyond healthcare, we live in a world where many people carry forms of pain that are not immediately visible.

This is why our work must continue. But I remain optimistic, because change often begins with something small.

Every conversation can change understanding. Every partnership can create opportunity.

Every story shared has the potential to change a life.

As we continue expanding the reach of Painless Universal and Painless Magazine, my hope is that we will bring together even more organisations, leaders,

innovators, healthcare professionals and communities who believe, as we do, that purpose and collaboration can transform lives.



More Than Surviving

If there is one message I hope readers take away from my journey, it is this:

Your circumstances do not determine your potential. Life will present challenges, sometimes far greater than we could ever have imagined. There will be moments when the road ahead is uncertain and moments when simply continuing requires enormous courage.

But I have learned that we are capable of being more than survivors.

We can take what has challenged us and use it to serve others. We can transform adversity into understanding, experience into advocacy and pain into purpose.

And sometimes, the very thing we once believed would limit our lives becomes the reason we discover what we were put here to do.

My journey began with pain.

It continues with purpose.

And I believe the most meaningful chapters are still ahead.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

“Working alongside Ranath Media has enabled us to continue elevating Painless Magazine while remaining true to the principles that have guided us from the beginning: credibility, excellence, authenticity and purpose.”

www.painlessuniversal.com

Frank's Memorabilia

Please Note: These items are NOT connected with the Frank Bruno Foundation



2026 Frank Bruno boxing red glove -
Signed by Frank Bruno in person!

Original price was: £75.00

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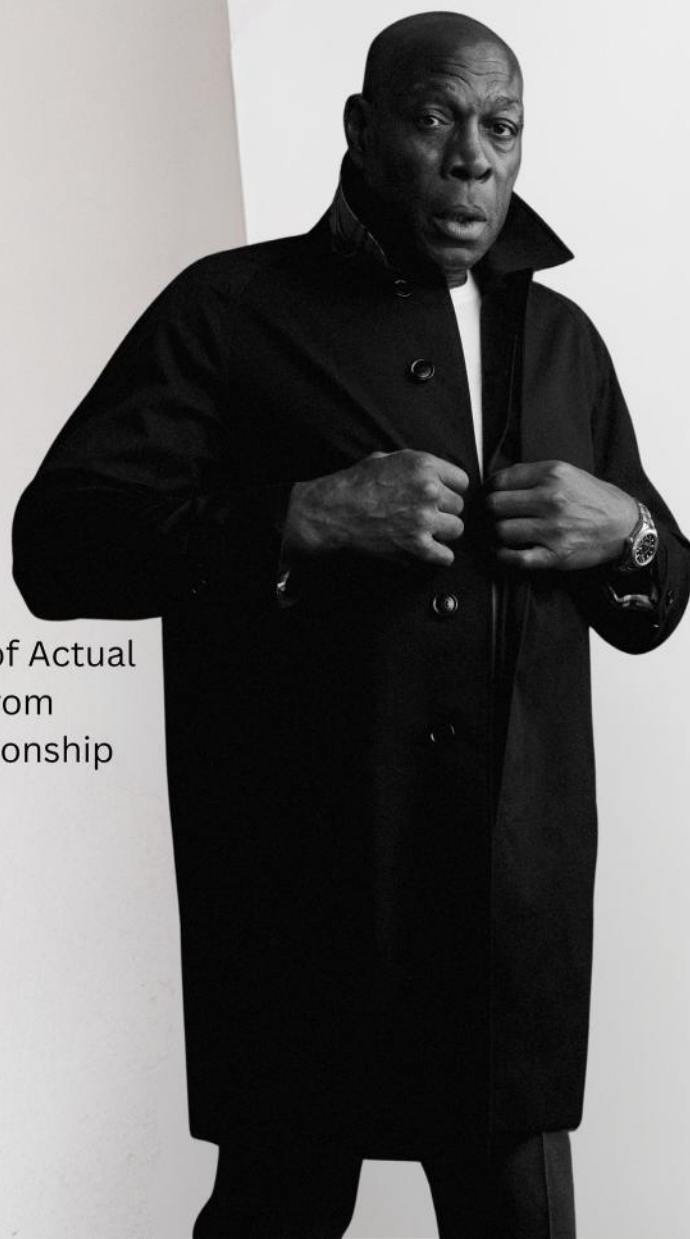
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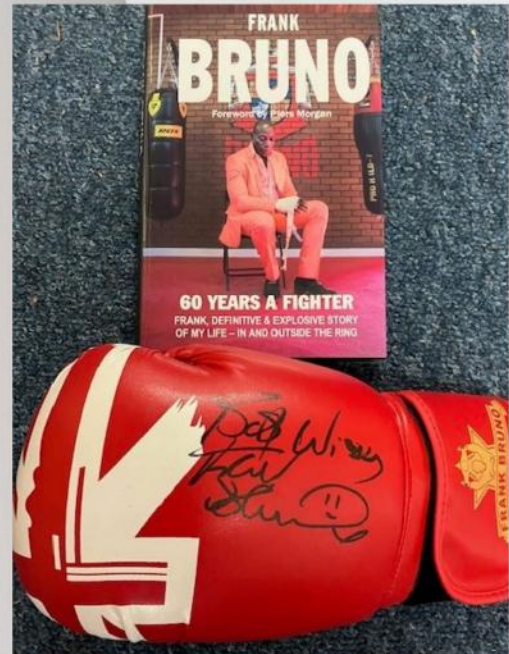
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Signed Frank Bruno glove and
 book, 60 years a fighter

Original price was: £75.00
Current price is: £70.00



Lonsdale Red Glove
 Signed by Frank Bruno

Now: £55.00



A 41cm x 30.5 cm
 glossy photo
 called Great Brit
 signed by Frank

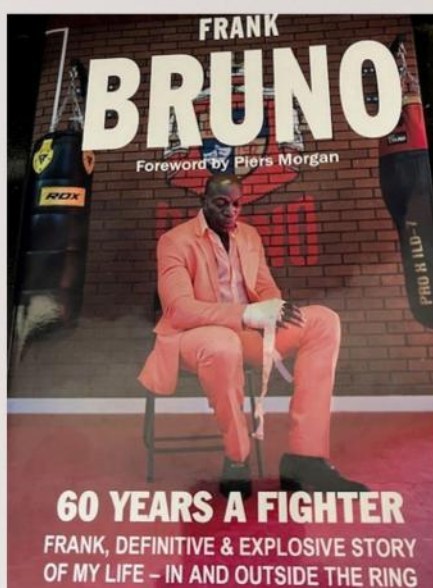


Now: £50.00

Frank Bruno official replica
boxing trunks

Original price was: £75.00.

Now: £55.00



Frank Bruno: 60 Years a Fighter

Price range: £25.00 - £55.00

At times harrowing, at times hilarious, but always 100 per cent honest, **Frank Bruno: 60 Years A Fighter** is the sporting memoir of the year which pulls no punches. In it Frank opens up on his journey to becoming a World Champion and the fight which has come after retirement with mental ill health.



Frank Bruno signed
Undisputed computer
game available in PS5 or
Xbox series X

**Price range: £35.00 –
£50.00**



Scan QR code for more info





Strong Enough to Recover

Why Self-Care Is Part of Strength



By Beverly Johnson

We celebrate the fighter who gets back up. This is the person who gets knocked down, wipes away the blood, and stands up for another round. Many of the best boxing stories are about fighters who faced the impossible and still found a way to keep going. We admire their resilience, their discipline, and their refusal to quit. But we don't often talk about what happens after the fight pauses.

The fighter returns to the corner.

In boxing, the corner isn't a sign of weakness. Between rounds, the fighter sits, takes a breath, drinks some water, and gets help from their team. Someone checks their injuries, gives advice, and helps them get ready for what's next.

No one looks at the fighter sitting in the corner and thinks, "They must not be strong enough." We understand that the pause is part of the fight. But in daily life, many of us have a hard time giving ourselves that same kindness. We've been taught that rest is a luxury, as if we have to earn the recovery we already need.

We Have Learned to Glorify the Push

For many of us, strength means pushing through. We're taught to keep going, even when we're tired, stressed, or facing change. People often praise us for sacrificing comfort to reach our goals. We keep showing up for

our families, jobs, and communities, even when our bodies and minds are telling us to slow down. There is certainly value in perseverance. Muhammad Ali famously said: "I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.'" That mindset shows discipline, sacrifice, and determination. But even champions need time to recover.

Years later, we remember the fight that amazed us. We celebrate the win and the knockout. But we rarely mention the weeks or months a fighter spends recovering between matches. That recovery is what helps them come back strong. The real lesson is knowing the difference between discomfort that helps us grow and exhaustion that wears us down. That distinction matters.

Your Corner Matters

Imagine a boxer refusing to sit between rounds.

No water.

No coaching.

No opportunity to catch their breath.

No one checks the cut above their eye.

Just bell after bell after bell.

After a while, what seemed like toughness would actually become risky. Even as onlookers, we'd worry about the boxer. The same thing can happen in our own lives.



Our “bells” may be deadlines, caregiving responsibilities, financial pressures, leadership expectations, family needs, or the endless notifications demanding our attention. Over time, we can get so used to living under pressure that being tired feels normal. Without noticing, we start living in survival mode.

Your version of a corner might be getting enough sleep, taking a walk without your phone, planning a day with nothing to do, going to therapy, moving your body, eating a good meal, or just saying, “I don't have the capacity for that today.”

Sometimes your corner is another person, like a trusted friend, coach, partner, or family member who can remind you of things you might miss when you're in the middle of a struggle. And sometimes, your corner is just a quiet moment.

I Had to Learn to Return to My Own Corner

For a long time, I thought that was what strength meant. But I learned that just because I could carry something didn't mean I had to keep carrying it.

Sometimes I didn't need a new goal or more discipline. I didn't need to prove I could keep going. I just needed to go back to my corner and rest. That realization changed how I saw self-care. Recovery didn't mean I couldn't handle my life. It meant I wanted to be fully present for it.

Recovery Is Not Something You Have to Earn

One of the most harmful beliefs about self-care is that we have to earn rest. How often have you told yourself to finish the project before bed, take care of everyone else first, or just keep going? Then you promise, “I'll rest eventually.”

Rest isn't a reward for pushing ourselves to exhaustion. It helps us stay able to take part in our lives and be there for the people and things that matter.



Our bodies understand this naturally. Muscles require recovery after training. Sleep restores the brain and body. Even our nervous systems need periods of safety and calm after prolonged stress.

Self-Care Isn't Always Pretty

Today's wellness culture often shows self-care as candles, massages, spa days, or fancy vacations. Those things can help, but real self-care is usually less

glamorous. It means standing up for what we need, setting boundaries, or just asking for help.

Sometimes, it's realizing that the version of you who once carried everything can't, and shouldn't, keep carrying it all forever.

Self-care asks us to pay attention.

Return to Your Corner

Life will keep asking things of us. Goals will be worth pursuing, people will be worth showing up for, and moments will require perseverance.

There will be times when we have to dig deep, trust what we've learned, and keep moving forward. But we also need time to recover.

So, when you start to feel tired, try not to doubt your strength right away. Strength isn't just about knowing when to push; it's also about knowing when to rest and recover.

The bell will ring again soon enough.

Sometimes, the strongest thing a fighter can do is go back to the corner, take a breath, get what they need, and get ready to rise again when the time comes.

www.beverlykjohnson.com



HYPNOTHERAPY AND MIND COACHING

Rewire Your Mind. Rewrite Your Story

What if the life you want is not waiting for you to become someone else — but waiting for you to finally believe in the person you already are?

There comes a point when we have to stop asking, “What is wrong with me?” and start asking, “What happened to me, what did I learn from it, and what am I ready to change?” Because you are not broken. You are human.

You have experienced things. You have developed coping mechanisms. You have absorbed beliefs. You have created patterns to survive, protect yourself and navigate life. But here is the empowering truth: A pattern is not a life sentence. And this is where the extraordinary power of our mind — and particularly our subconscious mind — comes into focus.

YOUR MIND IS LISTENING

Every thought you repeatedly think, every belief you repeatedly reinforce and every story you repeatedly tell yourself can influence the way you experience your life. Your conscious mind reasons, analyses and makes decisions. Your subconscious mind is where many of your deeply learned beliefs, emotional associations, habits and automatic responses live. That is why you can consciously say, “I know I am worthy,” while somewhere inside you still feel that you are not.

You can consciously want success while subconsciously fearing what success might mean. You can desperately want change while another part of you is still trying to keep you safe by holding on to the familiar.

The mind will often choose what is familiar over what is empowering — until we consciously teach it something new. And that is where transformation begins.

HYPNOTHERAPY: GOING BEYOND THE SURFACE AND THE RECODING PROCESS

Hypnotherapy allows us to work with the subconscious mind through a heightened state of awareness and focused attention.

It is not about losing control.

It is about gaining a deeper understanding of yourself.

It can help uncover and work with the beliefs, emotional responses and patterns that may have been operating beneath conscious awareness.

Sometimes we know exactly what we want to change, but we cannot understand why we keep repeating the same cycle and the same pattern.

“Why do I keep choosing the same type of relationship?”

“Why do I sabotage myself when things start going well?”

“Why do I constantly doubt myself?”

“Why do I know I am capable, yet still feel terrified of failing?”

The answer is often not simply about willpower. Sometimes, the conscious mind wants change while the subconscious mind is still trying to protect you.

Understanding that can be totally life changing.

MIND COACHING: CHANGE THE CONVERSATION, CHANGE THE DIRECTION

Now let us talk about the voice you hear every single day. Your own.

The voice that says:

“I cannot.”

“I am not good enough.”

“It is too late.”

“What if I fail?”

“Who am I to think I can do this?”

We rarely question these thoughts because repetition makes them feel like truth.

But a thought is not a fact. A belief is not necessarily reality. And your inner critic does not deserve the final word.

Mind Coaching helps you become more conscious of the stories you are telling yourself and, importantly, gives you the opportunity to choose a different story and make a difference between the facts and the stories your mind has created along the way to keep you safe.

Instead of:

“I cannot do this.”

Try:

“I do not know how yet — but I can learn.”

Instead of:



"It is too late for me."

Try:

"My next chapter can begin today."

Instead of:

"What if I fail?"

Ask:

"What if I succeed?"

That shift may look small. But learning to reframe is key!

But small shifts repeated consistently can create enormous change, because by doing that, you create a new programme in the subconscious mind.

YOUR NEVER GIVE UP MINDSET

You do not need to completely reinvent yourself tomorrow.

Start here:

1. CATCH THE THOUGHT.

Notice the negative thought instead of automatically believing it.

2. QUESTION THE STORY.

Ask: "Is this fact, fear or an old belief?"

3. CHANGE THE LANGUAGE.

Replace "I cannot" with "I am learning how."

4. GIVE YOURSELF EVIDENCE.

Every evening, write down three things you handled, achieved, survived or did well.

5. TAKE ONE BRAVE ACTION.

Not ten. Not twenty. One. Momentum begins with movement.

And perhaps most importantly:

Stop waiting to feel confident before you take action.

Confidence is often created because we take action.

YOU ARE ALLOWED TO BECOME

Supporting our mental and emotional wellbeing does not mean pretending that life is always beautiful.

It means learning how to meet life without abandoning ourselves in the process.

It means developing greater self-awareness.

It means learning healthier ways of responding.

It means understanding our patterns rather than being controlled by them.

And sometimes, it means having the courage to ask for professional support. Hypnotherapy and Mind Coaching can be powerful complementary approaches for personal growth and emotional wellbeing, while professional medical or psychological support remains important when clinically indicated.

But above everything else, I want you to remember this:

Your past may explain you.

It does not have to imprison you.

Your trauma may have shaped you.

Your disappointments may have changed you.

Your failures may have humbled you.

But none of them gets to decide what happens next.

There is still more within you.

More courage.

More strength.

More possibility.

More life.

So when that voice inside you whispers, "Give up," I want you to answer:

"Not today."

When fear says, "You can't," answer:

"Watch me learn."

When your past says, "This is who you are," answer:

"This is where I came from. It is not where I am going."

Because sometimes, the most powerful breakthrough does not begin with changing your circumstances. It begins with changing the conversation inside your mind. And that is why I will always say:

NEVER GIVE UP ON THE PERSON YOU ARE BECOMING.

Your next chapter may be closer than you think.

Remember that you are not an unfortunate victim of your past circumstances but an ingenious survivor! So, keep going and keep becoming the person you were always supposed to be... You owe it to yourself!

By Nadija Bajrami

www.nbhypnotherapy-mindcoaching.com





FIGHTING FOR BETTER FUTURES

THE STORY BEHIND THE FRANK BRUNO FOUNDATION

The Frank Bruno Foundation was born from Frank's determination to create meaningful, lasting change within communities. Having spoken openly about the crucial role exercise has played in his own journey with mental ill health, Frank set out to build a place where others could find the same sense of support, motivation and hope. The Foundation exists to empower people who are facing, or recovering from, mental health challenges by offering encouragement, structure and a pathway to personal growth.

At the heart of the Foundation's mission is a simple but powerful belief: that a healthy body and a healthy mind work best together. By combining physical activity with emotional wellbeing support, the charity offers a holistic, enjoyable and accessible approach for all clients.

Established in 2017 and based at the Round by Round Centre in Northampton, the Foundation has worked tirelessly to create positive change. Its structured non-contact boxing sessions and wellbeing programmes are open to anyone aged 10 and above with lived experience of mental ill health, providing a safe and supportive environment to build confidence, resilience and connection.

What sets the Frank Bruno Foundation apart is the uniqueness of its programmes. This distinctive blend of physical training, mental health support and community connection allows the charity to reach a wide range of people who may be struggling, offering a service that truly stands out in its ability to make a difference.





The Round-by-Round Programmes

From the moment clients step into the Round by Round Centre, they're welcomed into an environment built on safety, support, and encouragement. The team fosters a warm, inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels able to participate, and each programme is thoughtfully tailored to the needs of the group.

There are three age categories for the charity's flagship Round by Round programme: 10-13 years, 14-17 years, and 18+ years, all led and supported by Mental Health Nurses and trained coaches who bring their own professional and lived experience of supporting or managing mental health and wellbeing issues to their roles.

The programmes have become a lifeline for many who have experienced social isolation; clients often form strong friendships that continue long after the programme ends, creating lasting networks of support and connection.

Adults

The adult Round by Round Programme is open to anyone over the age of 18, with no upper age limit. This creates a vibrant mix of men and women of all ages who come together once a week over an eight-week period to learn the fundamentals of boxing through non-contact sessions.

In response to the rising cost of living, the Foundation now provides a light lunch to ensure clients have access to a nutritious meal during the day. Each session also includes a Mental Health and Wellbeing Workshop, offering practical tools and techniques to help clients manage their mental health long after the programme concludes.

At the end of the eight weeks, clients are invited to a celebration event where their achievements are recognised. Certificates are awarded, and whenever possible, Frank Bruno attends in person to congratulate participants. He takes time to listen to their stories, and clients deeply value his genuine interest in their journeys.





Children and Young People

As the charity has grown, so too has its ability to reach those who need support at an earlier stage in life. In the wake of the Covid pandemic, it became clear that young people were facing unprecedented challenges to their mental health and wellbeing. In response, the Frank Bruno Foundation developed its Children and Young People's Round by Round Programmes to help bridge the widening gap in support created by the increasing demand on mental health services.

These weekly after-school sessions are designed specifically for younger age groups, with one hour dedicated to children followed by a separate hour for young people. Each session is supported by a Mental Health Nurse and delivered by trained coaches who understand the needs, pressures, and communication styles of the age group they're working with.

The programme blends condensed non-contact boxing sessions with age-appropriate wellbeing workshops. This combination gives participants a positive outlet for energy, a structured space to build confidence, and practical tools to help them understand and manage their emotions. Every element is tailored to the developmental stage of the group, ensuring that children and young people feel safe, supported, and empowered.

Beyond the physical activity, the programme creates a sense of belonging. Participants often form friendships, build trust, and develop resilience – skills that extend far beyond the boxing ring. For many, it becomes a place where they can express themselves freely, learn coping strategies, and feel genuinely heard.

By investing in early intervention and providing a supportive environment at a crucial time in their lives, the Frank Bruno Foundation is helping young people build stronger foundations for their future wellbeing.





Other Programmes

As demand for support has grown, the Foundation has continued to expand its reach, developing tailored programmes for the SEND community with weekly sessions delivered by our coaching team and supported by a Mental Health Nurse. This builds on our previous specialist provision for disability groups, older people, care leavers, and young people through the Police Community Initiative to Reduce Violence Team.

The Centre has also become a hub for wider community support. Each week, it hosts a Welcoming Space — a warm, trusted environment where people can socialise, access services, and find relief from social isolation and cost-of-living pressures. Alongside this, we run open-to-all non-contact boxing sessions for adults, offering a natural progression for those who have completed the Round by Round Programme or who simply want to develop more advanced boxing skills.

Facilities are also available to local businesses and community groups, with team-building days, workshops, gym hire and meeting spaces providing opportunities for connection and collaboration.

For individuals who may not feel comfortable in group settings, one-to-one sessions are available. The team also travels out into the community — visiting schools, health and social care settings, and local venues — to deliver classes, workshops and taster sessions. This outreach ensures we can connect with people where they are, promoting social inclusion and helping individuals build both physical and emotional resilience.



Keen to strengthen its links with the community, the Foundation offers regular placement opportunities to the University of Northampton for students studying Mental Health Nursing, Children's and Young People's Nursing, and Occupational Therapy.

These placements give students valuable hands-on experience in a supportive, real-world setting, while also bringing fresh perspectives, new ideas and up-to-date learning into the Foundation. It's a mutually enriching partnership that helps develop the next generation of professionals and enhances the work delivered at the Round by Round Centre.

The Frank Bruno Foundation is now recognised and signposted to by more than 80 professions and organisations, reflecting the trust placed in its work across the community. The charity has been formally acknowledged by the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner through the MY:BK: YD Certificate, and by the Mayor of Northampton with the Outstanding Community Contribution Award. In 2023, the team proudly received the University of Northampton's Community Changemaker of the Year Award.





More recently, the Foundation has welcomed visits from Maria Caulfield, who praised the impact of its programmes, and in 2024, HRH The Duke of Gloucester spent time at the Centre, meeting the team, learning about the charity's work, and presenting certificates to volunteers whose dedication helps make the Foundation what it is today.

The Frank Bruno Foundation is a non-profit charity that relies on the generosity of the public. Every donation, sponsorship and fundraising effort directly supports the programmes that change lives, helping people build confidence, resilience and hope. With demand for mental health support continuing to rise, the Foundation is committed to reaching even more individuals and families — but it cannot do this alone.

“If you believe in the power of community, in early intervention, and in giving people the tools to rebuild their lives, we invite you to stand with us.

Your support

- whether through donating, sponsoring a programme, or organising a fundraiser
- helps ensure that the Foundation can continue its vital work and extend its reach to those who need it most. Together, we can create stronger, healthier futures for our community.”





The Power of Discipline

That doesn't mean relying on endless willpower either. In fact, some of the most disciplined people I know simply create routines that make taking action easier. If you want to train first thing in the morning, put your gym kit out the night before.

Have a programme so that when you arrive at the gym you know exactly what you are doing.

Book your training sessions into your diary. Treat them in the same way you would a meeting at work. You probably wouldn't wake up and cancel an important meeting because you didn't feel motivated enough to attend it, so why should an appointment you have made for your own health be completely different? These sound like incredibly simple things, but that is the point. Discipline doesn't have to mean doing something extraordinary. More often, it is about repeatedly doing the ordinary things that move you in the right direction.

When Training Becomes Something You Do

One of the most powerful things that can happen with exercise is when it stops becoming something you constantly have to convince yourself to do. It simply becomes part of your week. You know that Monday morning is your training session. Wednesday evening you run. Saturday morning you go to the gym. Of course, there will still be days when you don't particularly feel like doing it. But you have removed some of the decision-making.

That consistency is ultimately where results come from.

We can have an incredible training session once every few weeks, but it is unlikely to make a significant difference.

The person who continues to turn up week after

Motivation is a great feeling.

It's that moment when you decide you are going to make a change.

You join the gym, buy some new training kit, set yourself a goal and suddenly you can't wait to get started.

And when motivation is high, everything feels that little bit easier.

Think about training during the summer. The mornings are brighter, the evenings are longer and perhaps you have a summer holiday or an event you want to feel your best for. Getting yourself to the gym might not feel like such a challenge. But what happens when summer finishes?

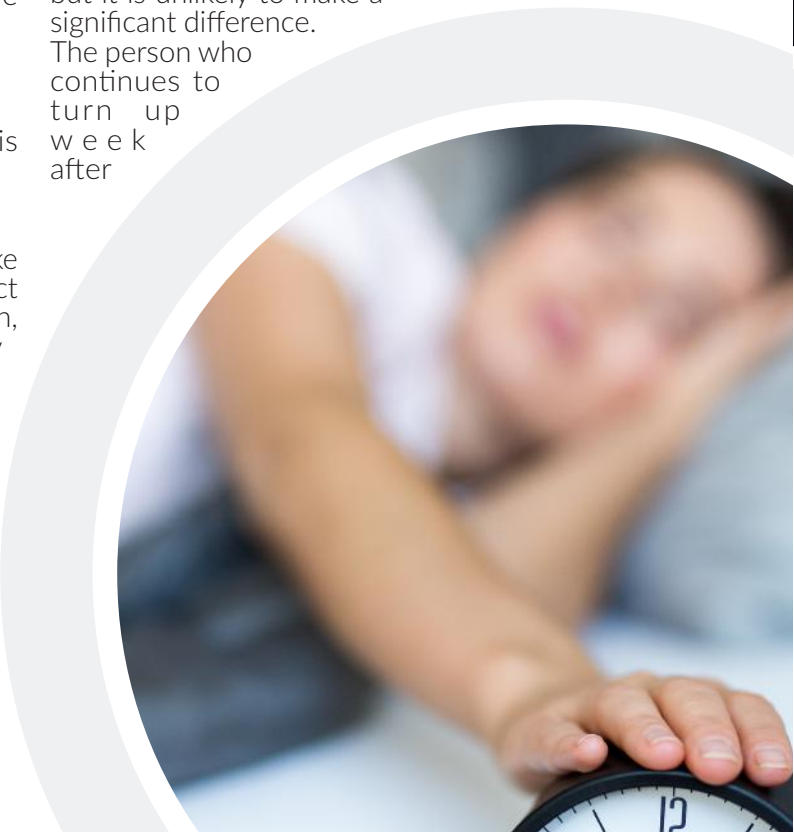
The mornings become darker. The evenings get colder. The holiday has been and gone. The alarm goes off and suddenly staying in bed seems far more appealing than getting up and training. Your goal may not have changed. Your motivation has. And that is where discipline becomes far more powerful.

Motivation Gets You Started

We often talk about motivation as though it is something we need in order to take action. "I just need to get motivated."

The problem is that motivation is an emotion, and like any emotion, it comes and goes. We cannot expect to wake up every morning feeling motivated to train, just as we cannot expect to feel motivated every day to go to work, complete a difficult task or deal with all the responsibilities that come with everyday life.

If our actions are always dependent on how we feel at that particular moment, consistency becomes incredibly difficult. Discipline is different. Discipline is doing what you said you were going to do even when the motivation to do it isn't necessarily there.



week, even when every session isn't perfect, will generally make far greater progress. Motivation may get you started, but discipline is what gives you the opportunity to achieve long-term results. And I think this goes much further than the gym.

Discipline Outside the Gym

The discipline we develop through training can start to transfer into other areas of our lives. At work, there will always be tasks we enjoy more than others.

If we wait until we feel motivated to complete the difficult ones, they often get pushed further and further down the list until a deadline eventually forces us into action.

Discipline means recognising what needs to be done and getting on with it. But I also think there is another side to this that we sometimes overlook. Being disciplined at work doesn't have to mean working longer. It can mean becoming more efficient with the time you have.

It can mean having the discipline to finish when you said you would rather than answering one more email, starting another job or allowing work to continually creep into your personal life.

Because perhaps finishing on time means getting home to put your children to bed. Maybe it means having dinner with your partner, meeting a friend or simply being present with the people who matter to you. We often associate discipline with doing more. Sometimes discipline is knowing when to stop.

Discipline Doesn't Mean Perfection

There is also a danger that discipline becomes confused with never missing a session, never having a rest day and never allowing life to get in the way. That isn't realistic, and I don't believe it is particularly healthy either. Life happens.

We get ill. Children don't sleep. Work becomes busy. Holidays come around. There are birthdays, meals out and occasions where training simply isn't going to be the most important thing that day. This is where I like the idea of an 80:20 approach. If you can be disciplined and consistent 80% of the time, there is room for the other 20%. You can enjoy the meal out. Take the holiday. Have a rest day. Spend time with your family. Then you return to your routine.

One missed training session doesn't undo months of work, just as one productive day doesn't create long-term success.

It is what we repeatedly do that matters.

And perhaps that is one of the biggest differences between discipline and motivation.

Motivation makes us want to do something when conditions are right.

Discipline helps us continue when they aren't.

Keep Showing Up

There will always be periods when motivation is high, and we should make the most of them. Sometimes we need that initial spark to make a change, set a new goal or take the first step.

But we shouldn't expect that feeling to last forever.

Instead, use it to create the routines that will still be there when motivation fades.

Prepare the night before.

Put it in the diary.

Have a plan.

Keep showing up.

And when life inevitably gets in the way, don't see that as failure. Give yourself some flexibility and then get back to the things you know are important.

Because the real power of discipline isn't about being perfect.

It is about continuing to move forward.

Motivation might get you through the door. Discipline is what keeps bringing you back.

By Craig Alexander

www.anatomygyms.com



STRONGER BY AGE

BY MARSHA PARCOU

“Why staying active is about far more than fitness — it is a lifelong investment in strength, resilience, wellbeing and the freedom to keep living fully.”

At 47, I feel healthier, stronger and more grounded than I did in many of my younger years — and that is not by accident. It is the result of more than a decade of consistently investing in my health through movement, discipline and self-care. What began as a fitness journey has become something much deeper: a way of life that has transformed me mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically.

That is why I feel so strongly about the importance of staying fit and healthy as we get older. Ageing is something we all experience, but how we experience it is shaped, in part, by the way we care for ourselves. For me, maintaining an active lifestyle is not about trying to look younger. It is about preserving my strength, protecting my wellbeing and giving myself the best possible chance to live a long, full and independent life.

Over the past ten years, exercise has taught me lessons that reach far beyond physical fitness. My training combines strength and resistance work, walking, cardio and boxing — and each has played a different role in my growth. Strength training has shown me the importance

of building and maintaining muscle, especially as we age. Walking gives me clarity, calm and space to reset. Boxing has strengthened not only my body but also my mindset, teaching me focus, resilience and self-belief.

Most importantly, this journey has taught me consistency, perseverance and discipline in every area of my life. Fitness has a way of showing you who you are. It teaches you that progress does not come from doing something once in a while, but from showing up again and again. It reminds you that growth often happens quietly, through daily habits that may seem small in the moment but become life-changing over time.

As we get older, those habits become even more valuable. One of the most important benefits of staying active is that it helps us maintain strength and mobility. With age, our bodies naturally begin to lose muscle mass, bone density and flexibility. If we do not actively work to support them, simple tasks can become more difficult over time. That is why movement matters so much. It helps us stay capable, steady and physically independent.



Strength and resistance training are especially important because they help protect muscle and bone health, both of which are essential as we age. Walking is one of the simplest and most effective ways to support cardiovascular health, improve circulation and boost overall energy levels. Together, these forms of exercise help create a body that is not only fit but functional.

And that, perhaps, is one of the greatest goals of healthy ageing: functionality. Staying active allows us to continue doing the everyday things that give us freedom and confidence – carrying shopping, climbing stairs, travelling, playing with children or grandchildren and simply moving through life with ease. These are not small things. They are the foundation of independence, and independence is one of the greatest gifts we can preserve over time.

The benefits, however, are not only physical. For me, the mental and emotional impact of exercise has been just as powerful. Staying active has helped me manage stress, clear my head and stay emotionally balanced through life's challenges. Exercise can be a form of release, reflection and restoration. It gives us time to reconnect with ourselves and build the kind of inner strength that carries us through difficult moments.

There is also increasing awareness of the connection between movement and brain health. Regular physical activity can help improve concentration, support memory and reduce the risk of cognitive decline. In other words, staying active supports not just how we live in our bodies, but how we function in our minds. As the years go by, that becomes incredibly important. Most of us are not simply hoping to live longer; we want to stay mentally present, engaged and able to enjoy the life we have built.



“As we get older, staying active is one of the most positive and empowering choices we can make. It supports longevity physically by protecting our strength, heart health, mobility and independence. It supports us mentally by improving our mood, reducing stress.”

Another important benefit of an active lifestyle is confidence. There is something deeply empowering about knowing that you are taking care of yourself. Every walk, every workout and every decision to move your body is a reminder that your wellbeing matters. Over time, that creates a stronger relationship with yourself. You begin to trust in your ability to keep going, adapt and face challenges with resilience. That confidence often carries into every other part of life.

If I were to offer any advice, it would be this: do not wait for the perfect moment to start, and do not assume that staying active has to look extreme to be effective. The best form of movement is the one you can remain consistent with. It might be walking, swimming, Pilates, dancing, strength work or simply being more conscious about moving every day. What matters is making it part of your life in a way that feels realistic and sustainable.

It is also important to approach health with patience and self-respect. There will be seasons when energy is lower, routines are disrupted or life feels heavier. That is normal. Staying active is not about being perfect; it is about staying committed. Even small efforts matter. A short walk, a few stretches or a brief workout can still make a difference. The key is to keep returning to yourself and to the habits that support your wellbeing.



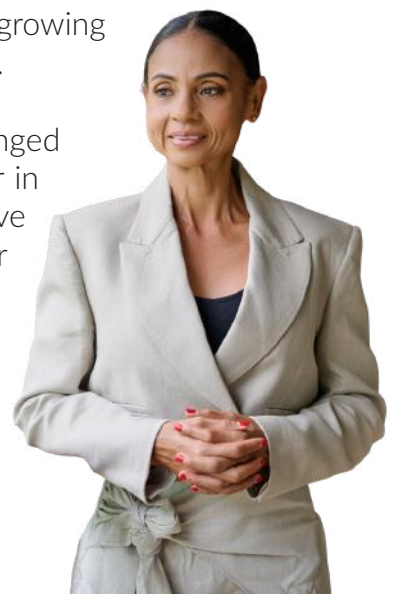
“If I were to offer any advice, it would be this: do not wait for the perfect moment to start, and do not assume that staying active has to look extreme to be effective.”



This journey has been about far more than fitness. It has been about becoming stronger in every sense of the word. It has taught me to be disciplined, to persevere and to value the quiet power of consistency. It has shown me that taking care of my health is not superficial — it is foundational. It affects how I think, how I feel, how I cope and how I live.

As we get older, staying active is one of the most positive and empowering choices we can make. It supports longevity physically by protecting our strength, heart health, mobility and independence. It supports us mentally by improving our mood, reducing stress and helping us stay sharp and engaged. Most importantly, it reminds us that ageing does not have to mean giving up. It can mean growing stronger, wiser and more intentional with the life we have.

I can honestly say that committing to my health has changed me completely. It has made me stronger in body, steadier in mind and more resilient in spirit. If there is one thing I have learned, it is that the effort we put into ourselves is never wasted. The rewards are lasting, and they reach far beyond the physical. Staying active as we get older is not just about adding years to our lives — it is about adding life to our years.



The pressure to belong

When fitting in means losing yourself



How much of who you are is actually you?

Please sit with that question for a moment. Not the version of you that your family knows. Not the version your friends are comfortable with. Not the version you have learnt to present at work, online or within your community. I mean you. The person underneath the expectations, the roles, the labels and the things you learnt you had to be to be accepted. How much of what you believe, how you behave, and the choices you make genuinely comes from you, and how much was shaped by the environment you grew up in? Most of us don't stop to examine this. We learn very early what gets approval and what doesn't. We learn what makes our families proud, what is considered respectable, what our communities value and what society rewards. We learn which parts of ourselves are welcomed and which parts make people uncomfortable. And because those lessons often come from the people we love, we don't necessarily experience them as pressure. We experience them as normal.

The need to belong is not a weakness. It is part of being human. We need relationships, connection and a sense that we are part of something. Research supports the importance of social identity and belonging to psychological wellbeing. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 74 studies found that stronger social identification was associated with lower symptoms of depression and anxiety among ethnic minority and migrant populations. However, the effects were small (Brance, Chatzimpyros and Bentall, 2023). (PubMed) That distinction matters. Belonging can be protective. Our relationships, communities and identities can give us meaning, connection and support. The World Health Organisation's Commission on Social Connection similarly recognises social connection as an important part of health and wellbeing, while highlighting the significant consequences of loneliness and social isolation (World Health Organisation, 2025). (World Health Organisation) So this isn't an argument against belonging. It is a question about

What happens when belonging comes with conditions.

Because fitting in and belonging are not the same thing. You can fit in by becoming whoever the environment requires you to be. You can learn what to say and what not to say. You can learn which ambitions are acceptable, which opinions are better kept to yourself and which parts of your personality receive the most approval. You can become very good at reading the room and adjusting yourself accordingly. And

people might even praise you for it. They might call you respectful, sensible, loyal, easy-going or "one of us". But I want you to ask yourself something uncomfortable: Are you being accepted for who you are, or for how well you have learnt to become who other people expect you to be? This becomes even more complicated when we talk about family and culture, because these are not things most of us simply walk away from. They are part of our story. Our families often give us our first understanding of love, responsibility, success, relationships and identity.

Culture can give us history, tradition, language, values and a sense of where we come from. There is beauty in that, and I think we should be careful not to confuse questioning with rejection. You can love where you come from and still have questions about it. You can respect your elders and still disagree with them. You can appreciate what previous generations survived and built while recognising that their experiences were not the same as yours. But how comfortable are we really with that idea? How often are younger generations permitted to examine what they have inherited without being accused of disrespecting the people who handed it to them?

Sometimes the pressure to belong doesn't sound like, "You are not welcome here." Sometimes it sounds like, "Don't change." It sounds like, "That's just how we do things." It sounds like, "Remember where you came from." It sounds like, "Who do you think you are?" Sometimes it is said directly, and sometimes it is communicated through disappointment, silence, judgement or withdrawal. It can even come from a place of love. Parents and elders may be trying to protect what they understand, based on the world they had to navigate themselves. That deserves compassion. But understanding why a belief exists doesn't mean we have to carry it forever. Sometimes what one generation experienced as protection can be experienced by another as limitation.

Think about how powerful that is. If you grow up learning that certain versions of you receive approval while other versions create conflict, eventually you don't need anyone else to tell you what to do. You start policing yourself. You edit your opinions before you speak. You question whether your ambition is too much. You make choices based on how they will be received rather than whether they are right for you. You become careful. You become agreeable. You become good at maintaining the peace. From the outside,

everything can look perfectly fine. But internally, you may be moving further and further away from yourself, and this is where I think we need to be honest about the relationship between belonging, identity and wellbeing. If your sense of worth becomes heavily dependent on approval, disagreement can become more than disagreement. Being misunderstood can feel threatening. Rejection can feel deeply personal. You may begin to question your own judgement because the people around you don't recognise the person you are becoming.

Eventually, you can find yourself asking, "Am I actually making this decision because I want it, or because I don't want to disappoint somebody?" That question is worth sitting with. Because sometimes we call something a choice when really it is a response to pressure. There is also a form of loneliness that isn't always obvious. You can be surrounded by people and still feel alone. You can have family, friends, colleagues and a community and still feel that nobody really knows you because you have become so accustomed to showing people the version of yourself they are most comfortable with.

The latest Health Survey for England found that in 2024, 22% of adults felt lonely at least some of the time, including 6% who felt lonely often or always (NHS England, 2026). (NHS England Digital) Those figures tell us something important about connection, but there is another kind of loneliness that statistics cannot fully capture: the loneliness of not feeling able to be fully seen. Have you ever been in a room where you technically belonged, but you were monitoring yourself the entire time? Watching what you said. How you said it. What you revealed. What you kept back. You weren't necessarily lacking people. You were lacking the freedom to show up as yourself.

So I want you to think about your own life. What are you doing because you genuinely believe in it, and what are you doing because it keeps you accepted? Whose definition of success are you chasing? Whose approval are you still trying to earn? Which parts of yourself have you made smaller because they didn't fit comfortably into the environment you came from? Perhaps the most uncomfortable question: If nobody could judge you, would you still choose the life you are currently living?

These questions aren't an invitation to reject your family, your culture or your community. They are an invitation to become conscious. There is a difference. We don't need to become so individualistic that we stop caring about the people around us. We need relationships where connection and individuality can exist together, where disagreement doesn't automatically mean disrespect.

Where setting a boundary isn't interpreted as rejection. Where growing into yourself isn't treated as abandoning everyone else. The answer isn't to stop belonging. The answer is to create forms of belonging that don't require people to disappear inside them.

Perhaps we also need to stop treating every challenge to tradition as an attack on tradition. Some things deserve to be preserved. Some things deserve to be questioned. Some things have served one generation well but no longer serve the next. That doesn't make the people who came before us foolish. It makes us human. Every generation inherits a world shaped by the one before it, and every generation has a responsibility to decide what it will carry forward.

Culture should be able to evolve without being erased, and people should be able to evolve without being exiled.

This is where compassion matters. You are not required to hate your past to change your future. You don't have to make your parents wrong to make a different choice. You don't have to reject your culture to challenge something within it. And you don't have to have all the answers before you start asking better questions. Sometimes growth begins with simply admitting, "I don't know if I believe this anymore." That can be frightening, particularly when your identity has been built around belonging to a particular family, culture, community or social group. But uncertainty isn't always a crisis. Sometimes it is the space in which something more authentic can develop, and perhaps that is the part of belonging we need to rethink.

Belonging should not require self-abandonment. Your family can shape you without owning your identity. Your culture can be part of you without defining every part of you. Your past can explain you without determining your future. You can remain connected to people who matter to you while still becoming someone they didn't expect. That may require difficult conversations. It may mean disappointing people. It may mean being misunderstood for a while. But if the only way to keep your place is to keep performing a version of yourself that no longer feels true, what exactly are you preserving?

So ask yourself again: How much of who you are is actually you? If that question makes you uncomfortable, don't rush to answer it.

Sit with it. Because sometimes the journey towards belonging isn't about finding somewhere that will accept you.

By Shardia O'Connor

www.shadesofreality.co.uk

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