

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

## Episode 122:

# Your Messy, Magnificent Life with Geneen Roth

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J: You are listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 122.

A mile-long to-do list can have us leaping from our beds and facing the day each morning with little thoughts for ourselves or for our bodies. But what happens when we show up on our own 2 feet with complete presence and groundedness? We'll learn about that in this episode. Stay tuned.

Intro: Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Woman podcast, stories of vibrant woman living happy lives. And now, your host, Jen Riday.

J: Hey, welcome back to Vibrant Happy Woman. I'm Jen Riday and I'm the host of this fun podcast where I get to interview the most amazing women every week, and today is no exception. I'll be talking to Geneen Roth all about showing up in your own skin in a way that you can adore your body, adore your life, adore your family, and it's really all about deep, mindfully presence. She has a really unique take on it, I can't wait for you to listen. I want to remind you that last week, I talked to Kristin Neff all about self-compassion. That was one of my all-time favorite interviews because self-compassion has been critical for me getting through some hard times with 2 of my teens and being able to show them deep love, even when I don't approve of their choices. Also, I want to let you know, on Thursday, I'll be back with a happy bit and I'll be sharing an update on what's happening with my 2 teens and how that's going. I can't wait to tell you because it's going well. Before I jump into the interview with Geneen Roth, I want to share our review of the week, and that comes from Behappypenguin, that's her username, and she wrote, "Jen... Jen, I found your podcast when I wanted to start exploring podcasts. Yours was one of the first ones I listened to and it's still at the top of my list. Seeing a new episode has been downloaded always adds a smile to my face. I know that I will always feel good after listening to whatever subject matter you were talking about and I especially love how you allow us to see your imperfections. Keep up the good work and I look forward to the next episode." Thank you so much Behappypenguin, I love your username, I love what you wrote and it means a lot. And for everyone else, if you want to leave a review of the week, just to go to [jenriday.com/itunes](http://jenriday.com/itunes) and the click on 'review' and leave yours, I read every single one and they make me happy; I would love to read yours. Well, I don't know about you but I'm really excited to learn about deep, mindful presence, what that feels like; I can imagine it feels amazing. Let's jump in.

Geneen Roth is the author of 10 books, including the just released, 'This Messy Magnificent Life', and the New York Times Best Sellers, 'When Food Is Love', 'Lost and Found', and 'Women Food and God', as

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well as 'The Craggy Hole in My Heart and the Cat Who Fixed It'. She has been teaching groundbreaking workshops in retreats for over 30 years and has appeared on numerous national shows including the Oprah Winfrey Show, 2020, The Today Show, Good Morning America, and The View. Wow, Geneen, that's quite the biography so far. I mean, I love that, and all those different books. So let's start of the show with your favorite quote, if you can narrow that down.

G: Oh, my favorite quote. Well, I would say my favorite quote is, "How you do anything is how you do everything. How you eat is how you live," and, "The world is on your plate." Those are 3 little quotes.

J: Ah, "The world is on your plate." What does that one mean to you?

G: That one means that, really, anything you need in your life, for instance, eat, your relationship with food, meaning what's on your plate, and/or your relationship with your kids, your partner, your colleagues, your relationship with the Internet, is an indication of how you do anything. So if you want to find out about your core beliefs, if you want to find out about what's driving you, then you can look at one thing go all the way with that. A famous Zen master was asked once, "What is enlightenment?" and he said, "Following one thing all the way through to the end."

J: Mm.

G: And so with, for instance, one's relationship with food, when you look at what you've taken on your plate, how you eat if you're standing up, if you're sitting down, if you're rushing through your meal, if you're eating in your car, if you're eating off your kid's plate, if you take more than enough because you were worried that unless you take some, it will all be gone, if you don't enjoy the bite that's in your mouth and you're always rushing on to the next bite, or if somebody said... I did an eating meditation this weekend at a large conference, 550 people. We were all examining the world that was on our plates and one person said, "Gee, I have enough carrots, but I'm still worried that once I finish these, there won't be more."

J: Mm.

G: "So even though I have a more than I want, I'm already worried about what's going to happen half an hour from now," which is actually what a lot of us do.

J: Ooh.

G: So like that.

J: So if someone is always rushing, (I identify with that one, which is why I'm going to ask)...

G: (Laughs)

J: ... rushing onto the next bite, what does that really mean? How do you fix it? (Laughs)

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G: You stop doing that, you know...

J: Oh.

G: And I know that sounds...

J: Painful. (Laughs)

G: What a concept, right?

J: (Laughs)

G: We're hoping for some magical cure like, "Oh, well, I can just realized that and that will..." no, insight doesn't make a transformation. The only thing that actually leads the transformation is doing something differently. And it doing... just picking one little thing. So let's just say rushing, let's just take for instance, because many, many people rush; you're not the only one. I would say probably 95% of people are rushing through this moment, this thing they're doing, to get to the next thing, and then they get to the next thing and then they are rushing through that thing to get to the next thing. So another way of saying that, if you really want to look at the deepest possible meaning of that (and I know most people don't, but I do), you're trying to get this thing you are doing away. "Let me just get this moment out of the way so I can get on to the next better moment," that's basically what you're saying. And in the process, you are missing your life, because that moment, you keep thinking, "Well, I'll get onto... it will be better when I do that next thing," or, "I have to do that next thing," or, "Tomorrow will be better," or, "When I get the next job, I'll be happier," or, "When I lose 20 pounds, I'll be happier," or, "When I'm in a relationship, I'll be happier," or, "When my kids are getting past the age of 4 or 5, I'll be happier." There's... you know, then there's a whole group of people that feel like, "Well, gee, you know, when I get to retirement age, then I can stop working; and thank God, I can stop working." We're always waiting for that next thing, rushing through this thing to get to the next thing.

J: Mm.

G: But as I say to my retreat students a lot is, "No one has ever been to tomorrow." That next moment never comes; it never comes. Tomorrow never comes because when tomorrow comes, which is... I'm using synonymously with the next moment, then tomorrow is only today. Nobody has ever been to tomorrow. When tomorrow comes, it's today.

J: Mm.

G: And then if we are constantly rushing through all of the things we're doing today to get to a moment that never comes, we end up utterly missing our lives and sort of walking through our lives like ghosts because we're really not there. So it's sobering to realize that, and might be a little uncomfortable, but you know what? Rushing is uncomfortable. I was a profound rusher and it's been hard to stop that. It's a difficult pattern to break. And so how do you break it? You break it, you say, "For 10 minutes a day, I'm

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not going to rush."

J: Mm.

G: And it's a great time to do it during a meal. "For 10 minutes (or 5 minutes if 10 minutes is too much), I am going to be here with these bites that I eat for the next 5 minutes". Because oftentimes (and that's why eating and food is such a fabulous doorway), what happens is that people (and this is what happened at the eating meditation that I taught over the weekend)... people have a bite in their mouths, and before they can finish that, their fork has... or spoon has picked up the next bite and it's mid-way in there. And yet, they haven't let themselves have what they already have and they're already preparing for the next one. So that way, nobody ever feels satisfied because you don't let yourself get filled up either literally or figuratively with the amount of fabulousness or nourishment or abundance you already have.

J: Wow, so many nuggets of wisdom there. You know, talk more about letting ourselves get filled up, because it is almost like we're chasing after something we can't have but it's actually right there. And mindfulness is so popular right now, but I feel like as a society, we still haven't really grasped it. I think you would agree.

G: I would definitely agree with that. I... I think that mindfulness sounds good. You know, a spiritual teacher once said, "Everybody wants to wake up but nobody actually wants to change."

J: Ooh.

G: And I think that's very sobering. At least it was for me because the desire is there but then you've got to put it into practice somehow. And so like, you know, if you decide for instance, you're going to do that with food, with your relationship with food, then you have to do it with your relationship with food. And even if you say, "Okay, 5 minutes is too much, I'm going to do it for 3 bites," that's something; that is a big thing to do. Once a day, 3 bites, once a day and you'll get the experience. Because the only way to change is the signal to yourself and to your brain that something else is possible.

J: Mm!

G: And so 3 bites, when you realize, "Wow, this feels kind of good," then you can go to 5 bites, and then maybe you can go to, you know, 5 minutes, but you've got to start somewhere.

J: So you wrote many, many books; when we read that bio, there were so many great books. Tell us how you've developed your interest in so many topics and how they connect, because we're talking about food, but we're also talking about mindfulness. How did you realize all of those things connect so well?

G: You know, they're all about the same thing, which is our experience of being alive; what it's like to live inside our own skin and what we could do to stop the constant low level and anxiety and discontent, so they're all about that. Some of them focus much more on the relationship with food and because of that, for me, was my main entree or doorway or gateway (however you want to say that) into under-

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standing that it wasn't really about food, it was about the self I was bringing to food. It was about why I chose the foods I ate, why I chose to eat the way I did. And a lot of, for me, was about the self-loathing that I had, the ongoing judgment I had about myself that expressed itself through my relationship with food. And so once I really healed that and alleviated, stopped the suffering, got to my natural way around food and weight and body, I realized that what had been driving me or what was at the core of it were some basic beliefs...

J: Mm.

G: ... that I had about myself, "I wasn't worth it. I wasn't loveable. No matter what I did, it wasn't good enough. I had to achieve in order to take up space on this Earth." I see that with my students as well that we all have, I call it, 3 main tunes, 3 main topics...

J: Hmm.

G: ... that we keep playing over and over, like playing the same record over and over and over again. And they're triggers and they are put in place most likely at an early age from our conditioning, from our family, from what we've internalized, from what we've learned; from the people we grew up with, because theirs were put in place by the people they grew up with and so on. As well as the culture we live in; we live in a rather insane culture. What's considered normal these days, I would consider insane. Having people walk around, bumping into other people because they were looking down at their phone all the time, not the making contact, being utterly engrossed in this device and not focusing on the connections that could actually nourish them. This is what I see a lot...

J: Mm-hmm.

G: ... going on. And this emphasis on achieving and doing; and there's nothing wrong with that. You know, on one level, we really do all need to do that. We want to utilize the gifts we've been given because nobody else has our gifts. There is not one other person like us in the entire world.

J: Mm-hmm.

G: And if we don't utilize those, we've missed it. So that's really important too, and then being comfortable in our own skin is also really important; so I worked on both those levels. And as the food issue was got cleared up for me, I started looking at the... the things that had been driving it and also drove, you know, what happened when I woke up in the morning and I didn't like this or low level anxiety and discontent that I just mentioned. I started wanting to use many of the tools that I used with food to deal with the core issues of my life.

J: Ooh, yeah, that's great. Let's say someone that's listening to us having this conversation and they're wondering where to start, if you had to narrow it down to 3 or 4 steps... (Laughs)

G: Yeah.

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J: If you could do it, what would it look like, this idea of, you know, fixing the food issues, but then taking it further?

G: You know, at the back of my book, just in case somebody can't take all this in as we're talking, because it's sometimes it's hard to take it all in and listening, there's a set of touchstones. And those are the touchstones that I would recommend, and I'll go through some of them, 3 or 4 of them with you now.

J: Okay.

G: The first one is, standing in your own two 2. This is particularly important for women to show up in your body, because the body is a battleground for many women; the judgment of, "I'm too fat. I'm too thin. My thighs, the cellulite, my chin, my face, my skin." There's some point at which your body is the only place and the most reliable place from which you get messages about who to be close to, who not to be close to, what to eat, when to eat, when to stop, what to do, what feels good, what makes your heart sing. All of those questions come from actually being in living in your body. So the first step is standing in your own 2 shoes, owning the space you've been giving; which is your body. Your body is a piece of the universe you have been given.

J: Mm.

G: It's yours. And how do you do that? You... very simply, you become aware of your feet touching the ground. You feel the soles of your feet and the contact they're making with the ground. You feel your butt; if you're sitting in a chair, you feel your butt in your chair. You wiggle your arms, you remember you have hands. Most of us feel like we exist from the neck up and we don't come down into these loyal, steadfast companions that are our bodies that have kept our heads around for a long time without getting a lot of kindness. So one thing is, show up, own your body, stand in your own 2 shoes, show it some kindness. When it's tired, rest. When it's hungry, eat.

J: Mm.

G: When it's thirsty, drink. And all throughout the day, maybe 5 times a day, take 1 conscious breath. Eckhart Tolle talks about this, 1 conscious breath; following a breath all the way through. Because when you follow your breath, you have to be in the present moment with your body.

J: Mm-hmm.

G: That's the first step. Second step is, disengage from what I call in 'This Messy Magnificent Life', the Crazy Aunt in the Attic ...

J: (Laughs)

G: ... which is the ongoing voice of shame and the judgment and comparative judgment. The voice... so

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judgment of one's self, but also comparative judgment; always comparing your inside to somebody else's outside and the coming up with, "You are not good enough."

J: Mm-hmm.

G: So that's voice, everybody's got one, they've had it since they were 4 years old; realize that that voice is not your friend. And there's a couple of steps you take to disengage from that voice. I'm not going to go through those now, but... because I'd like to get to the other 2 steps; but just know, that voice is not your friend. And the most of us take that voice as ourselves and it's not ourselves. The main difference between us and that voice, that voice always has a moral judgment. The difference between... you know, sometimes I'll ask people in a lecture, "Write down the 10 judgments you made of yourself in the last 15 minutes."

J: Mm-hmm.

G: And most people will have 45 judgments. And as from, "I can't believe you wore those socks. What were you thinking?" And that voice is the biggest obstacle to any kind of change.

J: Wow.

G: That voice will not let you change because the purpose of that voice is to keep you the same, to keep you safe; and the change happens on the edge of discomfort. So disengage from that voice. Third step is to develop the voice of kindness toward yourself; fierce kindness. So when you're feeling sad, lonely, rejected, abandoned, bored, angry, hateful, that you begin to treat yourself as you would have wanted to be treated as a child. You begin to cherish yourself. So if I was lonely as a child, I would have wanted somebody, an adult, to come to me, put their arms around me, and say, "Oh, tell me all about it, sweetheart."

J: Mm-hmm.

G: "Tell me what's going on. I'm so sorry you were feeling lonely." I would have wanted to feel as if I belonged and that my feelings belonged and that were welcomed and were part of the whole (unclear) [19:21] of me, and I didn't feel that. And most people treat themselves with viciousness. "You're lonely? Get over it!"

J: (Laughs)

G: "You're sad? Too bad!" you know, like that. "You're bored? Go knock your head against the wall, and when you stop, you'll feel better," you know, That kind of crazy Aunt in the Attic or sometimes I call it the GPS from the (unclear) [19:41]...

J: (Laughs)

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G: ... gets ahold of those feelings and basically says, "Tough, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, honey." But what that voice needs is kindness. And finally the last step would be to ask yourself a couple of times a day, "What's not wrong right now?"

J: Mm.

G: "What's not wrong right now?" I learned this from Thich Nhat Hanh when I did a month-long retreat with him and he asked everybody at the retreat center, "Who here has a toothache?" 1 or 2 people out of 100 had a toothache, "Who here is appreciating the fact that you don't have a toothache?" of course, nobody was.

J: Mm.

G: And then he taught... we did the 'not a toothache' meditation, which was really appreciate that you don't have a toothache. I changed that to, "Tell me (and I do this with my students all the time and with myself every single morning when I wake up) 5 things that aren't wrong right now." And what that does is, that switches the brain from its usual 'looking for what's wrong mode'; that's how the brain developed, that's how we survived as human beings when there were lions and, you know, big animals or other trikes that would have killed or eaten us, we're always looking out for what was wrong, but that has become maladaptive. Now, what's much more adaptive is to come to a relaxation mode or a parasympathetic nervous system mode where you're relaxed. And you... you relax when you ask yourself... because in any given moment, there's 95% of things that are not wrong and they may be 5%, but usually 1% of something that is challenging, not necessarily wrong, but challenging, but we never pay attention. When you start paying attention to that, your nervous system relaxes, you start being aware of the goodness that's already in your life. And from there, you can make objective decisions about any changes that you need to make, but those won't be out of fear or anxiety or tension. And so that changes everything. When I ask my students to do that or even in a lecture, as I did over the weekend when, during that eating medication that I told you about, it changes the energy in the room immediately. It's like, you know, little sparks of light start flying off everybody because they suddenly realize, "Oh, it's not so bad; I'm okay."

J: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

G: And that's beautiful, but you've got to do one of these things. You know, I said that before, Jen, and I want to say it again, "Pick 1 thing; anything. It's not so much what you practice, it's that you practice, that you do something of these 4 things.

(Advertisement) [22:21]

(Interview resumes) [23:37]

J: You know, when you were talking, I had this image in my mind that was new to me, so I guess you brought me a shift; thank you.

G: (Laughs)

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J: But, you know, you kept talking about how you would have like to be treated as a child, and I thought, "You know, if we treated a child the way we often treat our bodies, ignoring feelings and sensations and emotions, that child would rebel." And essentially, so many of our bodies are revealing. And I thought...

G: Yes, right

J: ... in contrast, you know, what if we flipped it around and really did just nurture and listen? And like you said, "When our body is thirsty, drink. When it's tired, rest," to actually give ourselves what we need; totally foreign concept but then, again, it's completely logical. I don't know how we got so far from doing that. (Laughs)

G: Right. We wandered really far from what's natural, what's calming, what gives us peace, what creates safety, what's reassuring, what creates connections. We have wandered very far from home, so to speak, but we're lonely for that, is what I would say.

J: Mm-hmm, It's interesting. I was just in a Drive-Thru with my kids and we saw a Mennonite family getting out of their car, and my son who is 13 said, "Why would they want to live like that?" and I thought, "I wish I could live like that." (Laughs)

G: Yeah, exactly! Yeah.

J: So funny; so funny.

G: Yeah.

J: Well so this is in your book 'This Messy Magnificent Life', is that right?

G: Yeah.

J: In the touchstone section at the back you said; ooh.

G: Yes. And each of the chapters in the book is an example, it's taken from my personal life and also the lives of the people that I've worked with, but is an example of how to live on a day-to-day level with the ongoing amount of challenges that each of us faces. Sickness, breaking bones, comparative judgment, being with friends who are sick or have cancer; so our own sickness. All of those kinds of daily things that many of us feel like we couldn't deal with are covered in the book, and how to work with them is covered in the book as well. Much of that is through personal story but also through very practical things as well.

J: Mm, it sounds fantastic. And I have that book and I've read a lot of it, but now I'm going to get all the way to the end and get to the touchstones.

[Laughter]

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G: Yeah, good idea.

J: You hide the gold in the back; smart of you.

[Laughter]

J: Okay. So we always like to talk about our guest's favorite things, and I was curious, what does your morning routine look like, Geneen?

G: My morning routine looks like me opening my eyes and becoming very aware that... this is going to sound quite radical, but, "Wow, I made it through the night! I didn't die during the night; isn't that great? So being incredibly appreciative that I have another day on Earth. And so the first thing I do is just appreciate that, being grateful for that. And then I meditate and... but my meditation is laying down still in bed where I will go through my body. I will start sensing my feet and my legs, my knees, my thighs, butt and back, I'll just go all the way up through my body, and in many ways, waking up my body from a night of sleep and becoming aware of the life force in my body. And then I will watch my thoughts and become aware of how quickly my mind is going, because it's usually just really going fast. And then I'll end that. That takes, you know, anywhere, depending on the morning and what time I've woken up, anywhere from 5 minutes to 25 minutes.

J: Mm-hmm.

G: I ask myself, "What's not wrong?"

J: Mm.

G: And I'll go through that. And so that's my morning routine. And then I get out of bed and I try to be as aware as I can of my feet touching the floor and the fact that my legs are moving, my arms are moving, I have a body, and staying in my body, which is, you know, showing up in my own 2 shoes.

J: Mm.

G: So that's my routine.

J: That's fantastic. You've totally cracked my mind open on something I've never thought of before, but I've noticed that when I'm connecting with another person on a really deep level, I'm completely in their face, so to speak, looking in their eyes, my body is turned towards them, all my energy is there and that connection feels so good. But essentially, you are taking that same thinking and applying it to your body to give you your body your full attention, being aware of your feet touching the floor and noting what it feels like to move, that's just radical to me, but I can't wait to try this, you know?

G: (Laughs). Good. And then taking it one step further, Jen, because I'm giving... right, it's that kind of attention because what you pay attention to grows; attention is everything. What I say in 'This Messy

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Magnificent Life' is, "Attention is the way you bless yourself with love."

J: Mm.

G: And so it... so you're paying attention to your body, but you're also paying attention to your moods and the different thoughts you have, and you are somehow holding them. So rather than getting lost in them the way I talked about with the crazy Aunt in the Attic, most most of us getting swallowed up by it instead of being aware of the voice, a lot of times we get lost in our thoughts, we get lost in our beliefs, we get lost in the particular things that trigger us, and we, the spaciousness, the awareness, the brightness, the clarity, the luminosity that we are gets utterly, utterly covered over. And so I'm talking about, not only giving your body the kind of attention you give someone else when you're really engaged with them, but giving yourself that kind of attention on every level.

J: Mm-hmm, uh-huh.

G: But starting with your body is a great place to start.

J: So we start our day with this attention on body, mind, spirit, and then we find another person we need to interact with (Laughs). What then? How do we mix mindfulness and self-awareness with awareness for the other?

G: Well, when you are aware of yourself, grounded... we're talking about being grounded in yourself, you are much more available for another person because you are not utterly lost in your own thoughts, you are present. And to being present is the biggest gift you can give anybody.

J: Yes, that's brilliant.

G: Yes, yes.

J: Well, this has been fantastic. I want to thank you so much for being on the show. And, you know, we do have to go our final question that I ask every guest. Geneen, what does it mean for you to be a vibrant happy woman?

G: It means being where I am actually, not wanting anything to be different than it is, but being willing to be right here with all of its challenges (if there are in fact challenges) and being in a little at that... what I was calling about that lightness, that spaciousness, becoming aware that that's part of me too.

J: Mm.

G: So always being, as much as I can. And I can't do it all the time. I just... you know, sometimes I get triggered, reactive, swallowed up by my thoughts, but when I'm happiest, when I'm most vibrant, it's when I'm grounded in my body, when I am being kind to myself and therefor somebody else, when I'm not wanting to change somebody else or the situation but I'm relaxed inside myself.

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J: Mm, mm, that's so beautiful. Everyone, you will love 'This Messy Magnificent Life', definitely go and get it. It's filled with amazing stuff like Geneen just talked about. Thank you so much for being on the show, I loved every minute of it.

G: Ah, thanks, Jen, I did too.

J: Take care, Geneen.

G: Alright.

J: Great advice from Geneen, right? And that's my challenge for you this week. Are you going to listen to your body when it says you need to drink or you need to rest or you need a time in nature or you need something calming or maybe you need more connection with someone you love? Putting that to-do list down and focusing on what really matters, what helps you to be deeply mindful and present. And I think that will feel so good, so take the challenge. And if you're a member of the Vibrant Happy Woman club, we will be discussing this in our small groups this week. And if you are not a member of the club, it opens twice a year and you can get on the waitlist at [vibrant happywomenclub.com](http://vibranthappywomenclub.com). Thank you so much for listening today, and again, I'll be back on Thursday with a happy bit, sharing an update with what's happening with my teens, for those of you who have been asking; many of you have been asking you. And I'm excited to be able to report some good news. So I will talk about that on Thursday, and until then, make it a fantastic week. Take care.

Outro: Thanks for listening to the Vibrant Happy Woman podcast at [www.jenriday.com](http://www.jenriday.com).



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