



Praise for
RAW: My Journey from Anxiety to Joy
by Bella Mahaya Carter

“Carter’s decade-spanning quest covers countless forms of therapy and self-help. Her relentless unease is palpable throughout, deftly portrayed through effective dialogue and memorable recollections.”

— **KIRKUS REVIEWS**

“An Indie Groundbreaking Book”

— **INDEPENDENT PUBLISHER**

“**Informative and heartwarming**, Bella Mahaya Carter’s story is about what we carry inside of us, not just physically, but spiritually. I came away from this book feeling nourished in all the right ways.”

— **CLAIRE BIDWELL SMITH**, author of

After This: When Life is Over Where Do We Go?

Bella Mahaya Carter’s book RAW: My Journey from Anxiety to Joy takes a deep dive into human consciousness and exposes an emotional tale about inner healing.

On May 22, 2018, She Writes Press releases Bella Mahaya Carter’s memoir, *RAW*, about navigating her journey from agony to inner peace. This book examines her relationships with family, friends, and career, but most of all, her relationship with herself. She lays bare complex thought processes while attempting to heal her body, mind and spirit, creating an energetic flow that has each page turning itself.

Her journey begins in a cold, sterile doctor’s office where she hopes to discover what is causing her unbearable stomach pains and desperate struggle for breath. On receiving a diagnosis of mild gastro reflux, Bella has a choice: blindly take medication and undergo an endoscopy, or listen to her body and try to figure it out on her own. She chooses the latter, thus launching what becomes a long path of self-discovery and spiritual awakening.

Bella began her journey by reading extensively about healthy eating, and eventually settled on a raw-food diet. The notion that eating live food—her studies revealed that cooking food actually killed it—appealed to her and she hoped the change would lead to a healthier, more energetic life. Making this shift wasn't easy—she details challenges big and small—but this nourishing lifestyle gradually healed her body.

While her new diet calmed her stomach issues and provided unexpected perks, her anxieties and chest pains continued. Negative voices in her head (gremlins, as she calls them) whispered shortcomings such as, “I'm not good enough. I'm a failure.”

The promise of salvation came at a party she attended with a yogi friend, where she met graduates of the spiritual psychology program at the University of Santa Monica (USM). They all seemed to “glow.” Bella had attended Juilliard but took medical leave because of chronic back pain. She later earned a BA in dance and literature from Scripps College and an MFA in film production from USC. Now she decided it was time to go back to school.

After receiving an MA in spiritual psychology from USM, Bella was awarded an alumnae residency at Scripps, and began coaching students in creative writing, while having a writing and life coach herself. She continued to explore holistic healing opportunities so that she could heal others, as well as herself.

Then tragedy struck. Within the span of three years, Bella experienced five family deaths, including that of her mother who had been a strong supporter and source of encouragement. The ensuing stress led to a full-blown anxiety disorder. Bella was, for the first time in her life, afraid to leave her house. This loosened her resistance to medication. Her doctor prescribed Xanax for anxiety and Protonix for gastritis, but after a while she again sought holistic remedies. She filtered through healers of all sorts until she found one who gave her a new perspective on managing her anxiety, which, she learned, was the root of her stomach and chest pains.

After a ten-year quest for health and happiness, Bella found what she'd been searching for and experienced relief, along with an awakening into what she calls “spiritual adulthood.”

A Conversation with Bella Mahaya Carter

author of *RAW: My Journey from Anxiety to Joy*

Of all your adventures throughout the book, like going raw, going back to school, etc., which do you think taught you the most and why?

The masters degree program in spiritual psychology taught me the most because it completely reframed the way I view and experience life. I came to understand, first intellectually, and later viscerally, that we are all spiritual beings having a human experience. Under this paradigm, the question, “who am I?” plunges us into much deeper territory than what you do for a living or what you study in school or what car you drive or how much money you have or where you live. These things don’t define us. Neither do our bodies or our minds. When it comes to our own thinking we’re like fish in water. In the same way fish aren’t aware of the water they swim in, we are oblivious to our thinking. Understanding this creates freedom from suffering and has profoundly changed my life.

Did you feel like you were seeking something by writing this book? What was it that first compelled you to write your memoir?

The only thing I knew for sure, when starting to write my memoir, was that I had to write. It didn’t matter what. I knew something needed to be expressed through me—that I had something to say. When I outlined *Raw*, I thought I was writing a book about how raw food cured my chronic stomach problems. But over the five years it took me to write the book, it began to write me. My life unfolded in ways I couldn’t have predicted. By listening to the call to write, which I knew was sacred, I acted on inner wisdom. My ego would have preferred that I knew exactly where I was going and had everything figured out. It did its best to try to control things. But writing a book—and living a life—is a journey. I outlined my three sections: body, mind, and spirit. I was clear about the first two, but fuzzy about the third. Thankfully, I understood that an outline is a living document and it would change—though I had no idea how much. Unbeknownst to me, I hadn’t yet lived the spiritual part of my story. I was in for a wild ride.



Your final project during your 2nd year at USM was to accomplish a heartfelt dream, and by the end of it, you did! You published a book. What do you think it was about being in the program that enabled you to conquer such a significant task?

The first thing I learned was that my dreams didn't need to be "conquered." I'd done enough fighting and striving in my life, and both came from a place of fear, rather than love. The program taught me how to shift where I was coming from, and it also taught me the value of surrender. I learned to slow down, turn inward, and come into closer alignment with my authentic self. Prior to USM I'd been focused on what I perceived as my failures. But early into the program, one of my teachers announced, "There's no such thing as failure—only opportunities for growth." It turned out that I—and most of my classmates—had bought into the universal lie: "I'm not good enough." I learned this was a misunderstanding based in fear, and recognized it as noise or static, rather than a "source" signal. By "source" I'm referring to universal intelligence, divine energy, inner wisdom, your higher power, your wise self, your intuition, your gut response, or inner knowing. That quiet voice within. It has many names. Whatever you call it, it's reliable, and learning to distinguish it from inner ruckus is an empowering and liberating skill, which can help anyone manifest a heartfelt dream.

In the book, during your first years of eating raw, you talk about the anxieties and hardships you faced, particularly surrounding your in-laws. Do you feel you ever were able to regain the closeness you had with them prior to going raw?

The relationship changed. It was less carefree, less like the honeymoon stage of a relationship and more like the day-to-day commitment and compromises of a marriage. But the love remained and even deepened over the years. I know they loved me, and I loved them. I also understood that what I was doing made no sense to them. I learned to accept them for who they were and also to accept myself, and my own choices. This is part of what it means to finally grow up.

Where do you think your sense of self-discipline came from? Your knack for being a perfectionist?

I've been self-disciplined for as long as I can remember. I don't know if it was hardwired into me, or if it stems from growing up in ballet classes. Probably both. As for my "knack" for perfectionism, there's a fine line between aspiring to do things well and striving for perfection. The former is healthy, but the latter is not, because perfection is an impossible, fear-driven goal. It stems from feeling "less than," from the need to control, from fearing that you're not good enough—or even unloveable. You unconsciously believe that you need to prove yourself and think, "If I could just do this one thing perfectly I'll be okay." I operated like that for years without having a clue. These days I refer to myself as a "recovering" perfectionist. I'm learning to accept things as they are, and let that be enough. Voltaire once said that "Better is the enemy of good," which over the years has morphed into "Perfect is the enemy of good." I also love Henry Van Dyke's quote: "Use what talents you possess; the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best." If

I'd been seriously attached and committed to my perfectionism, I never would have finished writing this book. It—and I—will never be “perfect.” But then again, another way to look at it is that everything is perfect exactly as it is—even when it appears otherwise!

What message would you want to tell someone who also suffers from debilitating anxiety?

You do not have to suffer! Your mind is playing tricks on you. You can heal this by becoming a neutral observer of your thinking. When you create space between you and your thoughts, when you realize where your anxiety is coming from (your thinking) the nature of your thoughts will change and your anxiety will dissipate. It takes time and insight, but you can absolutely cure—and create a new relationship with—anxiety, which is a human emotion we all experience. But it does not have to run your life! Reach out for help if you need it. I did. I was ashamed of what I was going through, which I realize now was unnecessary and unhelpful. When I was going through my anxiety disorder I tried many therapies and holistic healing modalities, which I describe in my memoir. Many of them were helpful, but it wasn't until after I'd completed my book that I encountered the Three Principles, an understanding of how our human experience is created, which took the healing of my anxiety to a whole new level. Google Dr. Bill Petit and the Global 3P community to learn about these principles!

About the Author

Bella Mahaya Carter is the author of *Secrets of My Sex*. Her poems, essays, articles, and short fiction have appeared in *The Sun*, *mindbodygreen*, *Lilith*, *Literary Mama*, and elsewhere. Her work has been anthologized in *The Magic of Memoir: Inspiration for the Writing Journey*; *Grandmothers' Necklace*; and *Writing Our Way Out of the Dark: An Anthology of Literary Acts of Bravery*. Carter,

who studied dance at The Juilliard School, practices creative movement and writing as vehicles for personal transformation and spiritual connection. She is a writing teacher, developmental editor, and empowerment coach, with a lifelong passion for creativity, health, and healing. She is a featured columnist on SheWrites.com. Her new book is [Raw: My Journey from Anxiety to Joy](#). You can connect with Bella on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and learn more about her at www.bellamahayacarter.com.

To book an interview with Bella Mahaya Carter, or to request additional review copies of *RAW: MY JOURNEY FROM ANXIETY TO JOY*, please contact:

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