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"...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?*

Raw

My Journey from Anxiety to Joy

a memoir
Bella Mahaya Carter

When Bella Mahaya Carter went to doctors because of chronic stomach problems, the only solution she was offered by impersonal professionals was an invasive surgical procedure and prescription medication. Instead, she decided to heal herself.

She adopted a 100% raw-vegan diet and while that helped in many ways it didn't completely heal her. "What would a raw-food diet for the *mind* look like?" She wondered.

Carter's story, chronicled in her memoir ***Raw: My Journey from Anxiety to Joy*** (She Writes Press; May 2018; \$16.95), offers an honest and absorbing tale that shows how listening to your own body, mind, and spirit leads to inner peace and a healthier, more authentic and vibrant life.

Carter takes readers through her quest for health and happiness as she navigates negative thinking, perfectionism, fears of failure, control issues, and self-worth—despite being an accomplished, multi-dimensional woman, wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend.

Carter's story is a holistic healing odyssey with surprising discoveries that deliver unimagined joy. It is written in three sections: body, mind, and spirit.

Body

"I desperately wanted to feel better so I could *do* something with my life," she writes.

Carter's family and friends did plenty of eye-rolling at her raw-vegan diet, even when she shared robust and delicious recipes like raw zucchini fettuccini with marinara sauce.

"Food brought people together—and, I learned, had the power to tear them apart. But what was I supposed to do? My body was saying no. It was rejecting the foods I'd grown up eating, the foods everyone around me ate, the foods I was being served. I knew I couldn't eat like that anymore. When I did, I suffered painful consequences," she says.

As she continued eating raw foods, pounds melted away, and Carter faced a new challenge: detox. She developed skin rashes and felt shaky and weak.

But she persevered, and eventually, the nourishment she received from her raw-food diet, combined with physical practices, such as yoga and dance, helped her become flexible and strong. Carter danced late at night and early in the morning.

"I used that sacred, creative time not only to explore new movement, but also to reconnect to my heart and mind through my body, which I knew was a wise teacher," she recalls. "The more I moved my body, the more it wanted to move. It felt as if it were waking up after a long sleep, but instead of feeling stiff, it felt lubricated, like the Tin Man after a good oiling."

Mind

During a yoga class her teacher noticed red blotches on Carter's belly, an indication of underlying tension, and recommended a form of Native American energy medicine called "The Four Winds."

"I realized I'd focused entirely on my body, using food and yoga as medicine, and that even though my journal was filled with my fears and neurotic obsessions, I'd compartmentalized my healing process by focusing exclusively on my body," Carter writes

During her Four Winds (shamanic) healing session, Carter began to talk about her feelings of failure as a writer, and how "I hated not making a financial contribution to our family...[M]y disappointment about my career was tremendous."

"I was a writer who couldn't write and a teacher and coach who couldn't teach or coach. I longed to make a contribution in my world but thought that impossible. I believed I'd wasted my life, and that whatever gifts I'd been given, I'd squandered. I carried so much shame that I could hardly stand," she writes.

Yet, Carter came to understand that she had discounted ways in "which I *was* showing up in the world," such as publishing in literary journals and starting an after-school dance program at her daughter's school. She began to see that she had been self-medicating with the wrong things:

alcohol, pot, and nutritionally depleted foods. She had also been allowing self-doubt and criticism to cripple her—and bought into negative self-talk, which convinced her that no matter what she did it wasn't good enough—and neither was she. She grew up believing if she wasn't outstanding she didn't deserve to exist—and came to realize this was a terrible misunderstanding. We all deserve to exist.

Carter's "raw-food for the *mind*" showed up in the form of a masters degree program in spiritual psychology, which led to deeper personal and professional transformation. She began writing with confidence and joy and was soon coaching other writers.

"My dreams were coming true. I was living them, and life was sweeter than sweet for two glorious years—until I crash-landed on my bare ass in a deep and terrifying ditch," she writes.

Spirit

Carter experienced five family deaths in three years. As executor of her mother's estate, she dealt with the emotional fallout from her mom's passing, but also the prolonged stress of a contentious settlement agreement among family members. Her anxiety became so pronounced that, "I thought it capable of killing me. I believed I'd pass out or stop breathing."

She began to practice self-forgiveness. "I forgive myself for the judgment that I have no right to be who I am and that I should die for being who I am. The truth is I deserve this life, which God has given me. The best way to serve others is by being myself. This is why I'm here. It's my opportunity and my gift," she writes.

Still, Carter, diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, realized, she needed to relax the rigidity of her belief system and try medication. *This is not my path*, she thought after only one week on medication, and worked with a couple of therapists. Her journey and her healing continued.

"Accepting life on its own terms, is terrifying—and it's also the key to health and happiness," she writes. "Surrender isn't about giving up; it's about giving in—to what is beyond your control. It's about letting go of the *illusion* of control. It's about letting go of the ego and switching from an ego-driven life to one guided by Spirit."

Raw is an intimate look into one woman's struggle with anxiety—even before she knew she was anxious. For years Carter had no idea her physical maladies stemmed from anxiety. Many people suffering from anxiety go from doctor to doctor trying to figure out what's wrong with them. Physical symptoms are common and scary. And women are twice as likely as men to suffer with anxiety. Carter's book is a path of discovery and relief. Anxiety is a rampant emotion

in the world right now, with countless people unaware, as Carter was, of the role it plays in their lives and health.

Readers will feel the full spectrum of emotions as they read Carter’s journey. They may also unearth their own hidden anxiety and feel inspired to make wiser choices—physically, mentally, and emotionally—that lead to a happier, healthier life.

About the Author:

Bella Mahaya Carter is the author of *Secrets of My Sex*. Her poems, essays, and short fiction have appeared in *The Sun Magazine*, *mindbodygreen*, *Lilith*, *Literary Mama* and elsewhere. Her work has been anthologized in *The Magic of Memoir: Inspiration for the Writing Journey*; *Grand-mothers’ Necklace*; and *Writing Our Way Out of the Dark: An Anthology of Literary Acts of Bravery*. Carter studied dance at The Juilliard School and practices creative movement and writing as vehicles for personal transformation and spiritual connection. She is a writing teacher, developmental editor, and coach, with a lifelong passion for creativity, health, and healing. A featured columnist on SheWrites.com, Carter also maintains her own blog, “Body, Mind, Spirit: Inspiration for Writers, Dreamers, and Seekers of Health & Happiness.” Her new book is **Raw: My Journey from Anxiety to Joy**. www.bellamahayacarter.com

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