

Matt Bowles: My guest today is Gentamu 'Jen' McKinney. She is an activist, author, film director, certified mental health coach, and the founder of [Keep Calm, Bring Your Carry On](#), a therapeutic mental wellness company that primarily serves digital nomads of color through telehealth coaching. Jen was born into politics, philanthropy, and volunteerism, being the daughter of the late Gene Allen McKinney, a Black Panther member, and civil rights activist, she began to follow in her father's footsteps by letting her voice be heard to make changes in her community and abroad. Following her mother's battle with mental illness, Jen became a mental health advocate and founded Awareness After Dark, a nonprofit organization that focuses on erasing the stigma associated with mental health in the African American community. She received the 40 under 40 award from the County of Los Angeles for her mental health awareness advocacy in the African American community. She also directed and produced an award-winning documentary film called Let's Get Mental that was featured at the Pan African Film Festival in Cannes, France. Jen is also, the author of the bestselling book, [Keep Calm, Bring Your Carry On, The Ultimate Self Care Guide for Travelers of Color](#), which is also accompanied by a workbook and journal combining her passions for mental health activism and adventure, and featuring over 50 travel influencers and experts of color.

Jen, welcome to the show.

Jen McKinney: Thank you. Thank you.

Matt Bowles: I am so excited to have you here. You and I know so many people in common. It was only a matter of time until this interview took place. And unfortunately, we're not in person today doing this, but let's just set the scene and talk about where we are both based and recording this from today.

I am actually in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina on the East Coast of the United States today. And where are you?

Jen McKinney: My home base is actually Cape Town, South Africa, but I am currently in Ghana.

Matt Bowles: I love that. I was in both Cape Town and Ghana over the last six months. I spent the end of December and New Year's in Ghana this year, which is one of the most epic parties I have ever been to in my life. I had come initially to Accra for about a month in 2019. For my first time in West Africa, I went through Nigeria, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal. And when I was in Ghana, it was amazing because Ghana is always amazing.

But people were like, you got to come back in December and see how we roll. Then. So, I did.

Jen McKinney: I was here from December as well.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. So, okay. So, for people who have never been to Ghana, and they've never been in December, what is it like?

Jen McKinney: When you get there, the vibe and the people and the joy, the happiness, the hype, and everything, just people just wanting to get to know each other, enjoy themselves, have a good time, enjoy the culture, enjoy the food, enjoy the music.

That's really what it's all about. I would say Ghana really is a vibe. Definitely a vibe. They don't sleep. You're someplace and it's not even about clubbing or anything. It's just really about enjoying the environment and enjoying meeting new people. Everyone is very open and friendly, everybody talks, and everyone has a story.

I remember meeting people on a plane and just connecting with people on a plane coming to Ghana and now we're besties now.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, it was amazing. I was there around this time. I was there in July of 2019, and it was absolutely lit at that time. I mean, I can remember just going to the Sunday party on Labadi beach and they're just being thousands of people that just came out for this beach party. It's not a festival. It's not a holiday. It's just a Sunday. And I was like, if this is July, what must December be like? And December was very interesting because, on the one hand, there are a lot of people that come from outside of Ghana. I mean, like the whole African diaspora descends on Ghana and it's a very cool vibe because the DJs at the parties know exactly who is there.

So, they're like playing a hip hop song from Atlanta and they're shouting out Atlanta or they're playing a hip hop song from New York and they're shouting out New York and they're shouting out Black fraternities and sororities. I mean, they know exactly who is there, but then they're also shouting out Nigeria, they're shouting out South Africa, they're shouting out London.

Jen McKinney: It's very multicultural when it comes to the festivals and environments and stuff like that. You would actually be really surprised. They bring a lot of tourism from everywhere.

Matt Bowles: And the people that live in Ghana, there's also a diverse range of people that live in Ghana. Like one of the most incredible gems from my first trip to Ghana that I still remember is I went to one of the best Indian restaurants I've been to anywhere in the world is in Accra. I'll give it a shout-out. It's called Heritage. If you haven't been there, Jen, you should definitely

Jen McKinney: We're actually supposed to go to an Ethiopian restaurant, I think tomorrow night or next week. And we're at the place I went to today for lunch called Sunshine Salad Bars, which actually have Indian as well. So, there's some cool, although I'm very critical about Mexican food, I do love Castillo's out here.

So that's the one thing I do like about Ghana that they do have a variety, not as much as Cape Town, but they do have a really solid variety of diverse culture, and ethnic foods.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, and the Ghanaian food is incredible in and of itself. Try the jollof rice and thank me later. It is really incredible if you haven't had Ghanaian food for sure.

But tell me a little bit about Cape Town and why you connected so much with that city, and chose to make it your base. What do you love about Cape Town?

Jen McKinney: Some people are probably going to be like, but what about apartheid and the racism and all that stuff? Okay. Besides that, you will have those vibes, but however, you will have a lot of Cali vibes there.

The landscaping itself. If you're a person who likes a lot of mother nature, you like wine farms, and connecting with people. Again, the restaurants and the food are amazing. Affordability. South Africa is very extremely affordable. A lot of diversity when it comes to things to do. And the vibe there is really good as well.

I actually prefer Cape Town over Johannesburg, but I like Johannesburg because they do have a vibe, but if you want a little bit more freedom, be able to do what you want to do, go where you want to go, have your cell phone out, have your purse out and just walk and run down on the Promenade beach, whatever.

Uh, Cape town is for sure. You're getting a lot of luxury for half the price. So, if you want that Cali, Miami feel, but more African vibe to it, and just the mother nature side, and just being tuned with that, the scenery itself, if you like being grounded and one with yourself. So definitely a place to just woosh.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, I tell people it is, for me, of the places that I have been, the most naturally beautiful, stunning city I have ever been to, and the only exception to that is Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, but other than Rio, it is just stunningly beautiful to be there. But yeah, you're also a California girl. So that does make sense because I tell people this, right?

Like if you're going to go to Cape Town or if you're going to go to Rio, there's definitely some of that California beach vibe. And then when you go inland and you go to Johannesburg in South Africa, or you go to South Paulo in Brazil, there's all of a sudden this more New York City style. Vibe.

Jen McKinney: Yeah. Cause when you go to the CBD part of. Cape Town, you can get that little, I would say, San Francisco, New York vibe with the restaurant, how it's just open out walking can go from here. A lot of people like to, I would say club hop or a lot of museums, a lot of art. So, you know, the African period is very artsy and the culture very diffused.

So, the vibe with the arts, they have, we call it first Thursdays. When everybody just goes out, you don't need a car. Everybody just comes out to the street and just goes to different restaurants, go to different museums, art galleries, and just wine, just-drinks flowing. If you don't drink, there's something for you.

And it's just a vibe. And it's just people just being out in the streets. It's all about community and culture. And just connecting with people, loving one another and experiencing each other. So that's one thing I really love about Cape Town. And then like them, all the open mics and the music Cape Town has a lot of local artists that probably don't get a lot of hype as they should but feel like it's coming.

I really wish there were more festivals out in Cape Town because they deserve that. There are a lot of local artists that are very, like my friend Mizzou, amazing. There are so many entrepreneurs out there doing their thing. thing. And I've made a lot of amazing friends out there. Shout out to my running group, Miss Peen, and Miss Shaw, but it's cold right now. So, I see y'all in September.

Matt Bowles: Word. Yeah. The art scene is really dope. Both in terms of the gallery art scene, like first Thursday, I was just at that in March, I think was the last time I was there in Cape Town, where they got all the art galleries open. Totally incredible. You're just walking through drinking wine, hanging out.

And then the street art scene in. communities like Salt River and spots like that up in Woodstock and some of those places. I mean, the street art scene is banging and then yeah, the music and the party scene. I mean, I tell people that the best party is Rand's party on Sunday in Khayelitsha Township. If you're looking for the best party in Cape Town, that's the best party in Cape Town.

Jen McKinney: Yeah, my area is kind of like more CBD C point area. I love Mojo's. I love open wine, going to the local acts and some other chill places that have open acts and stuff like that.

Matt Bowles: All right, Jen, at this point, I want to go back and talk a little bit about your story and your journey to becoming this digital nomad world traveler that you are today.

And I think a great place to start would just be to go all the way back and talk a little bit about your father, who was an activist with the Black Panther party, a civil rights activist, maybe tell a little bit about his story

and just for folks, for context, we have listeners in like 185 countries, and so not everyone is going to be familiar with the history of the Black Panthers and stuff.

So, if you want to share a little bit of historical context and then share a little bit about your dad's story. And then talk about where you were born and how you came up.

Jen McKinney: I am the child of Jean Ella McKinney, who is a very infamous member of the Black Panther Party, the original Black Panther Party, that started in Oakland, California at Cal Berkeley campus, actually.

So, you got to understand that Black folks were brought to America and we had to gain our rights. We had to gain rights to read, write, walk, have lots of freedoms. They didn't want Black people to have equal rights. And then you had the Ku Klux Klan, you had police officers beating not just Black people, but other ethnicities of color as well.

So, when that happened, you got the MLK, you got the Malcolm X, you got the Rosa Parks. So, during that whole civil rights movement, it was all just a fight just to have equal rights to sit at a table. So, the Black Panther Party was all about gaining access to freedom, having the same rights as our white brothers and sisters, such as health food programs, and having the right to carry arms like white people did.

It's one of those things where you just get fed up, fed up and tired. And when you have that, when you're backed up against the wall, what else is there to lose? So, at that point. It was created by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. So how he got started in the beginning of the whole Black Panther morning, where they were recruiting and doing all these things, I mean, fundraising, feeding children, because at that time there were no food programs for children, as far as going to school, they just went to school hungry or just didn't have the proper nutrition.

So, they did all these things, and they also were for women having rights as well, holding arms as well. So that's because of Angela Davis and Phoenix Shakur involved, Tupac's mother. So, with that, they inspired the people. And they wanted to give the power back to the people. Power to the people, not the government that was not being fair with everyone.

So, they're doing all these things. And they're carrying arms because they know their rights. They were very well educated. And the government tried to disassemble the Black Panther Party anyway, anyhow. And back then that was through drugs and maybe putting people against each other. Just conquer and divide.

You have got to divide them up because they're too strong. You can't handle it. And so, one day my father went out with Huey Newton after a Black Panther event. And just like any regular driver, they got pulled over by the cops. And just like today, that pullover was just supposed to be a regular check and it went way left.

So as Huey Newton is talking to the cop, they're outside and my father's on the other side about to be handcuffed as well. Of course, for no apparent reason, there was nothing. And then there was a shoving shooting match. The thing is so relevant today, how many times do we see that where it goes just supposed to be a regular pullover, stop, check, whatever, letting the person go, and then it ends up to be in a shove match, whatever, being the cop being aggressive, and then a gun goes off, Huey Newton ends up being shot, and my dad somehow assists him in that matter, gets away from the cops, and they, he drives him to the hospital.

That was a very pivotal moment in the Black Panther Party because they were always trying to take Huey Newton down, period. And he almost died because of the gunshot wounds. So, my dad ended up saving Huey Newton's life, but that also put my dad in danger as well. So, story goes, I know a lot, but I know a little for safety reasons.

I'll put it that way. My dad will never disclose certain things to me just for my safety. And that's just that. But, if you watch the movie Panther, you'll see that he pretty much went in hiding, got protection, and got lured up, and Huey Newton was on trial. The cop, he was dead. So now he has somebody on trial for murder, but you got another eyewitness, and that was my dad.

And he pretty much pleaded the fifth, which took the blame, or suspected blame, off of Huey Newton. And then, the trial was dismissed.

Matt Bowles: Yeah, super significant piece of American history, and people can go and read more about that and Google more about that. And if they're interested in the larger experience as well, there have been additional films that have come out since.

We just had recently the Judas and the Black Messiah film, which won a bunch of awards, which was about the counterintelligence program called COINTELPRO that you mentioned in terms of the FBI's attempt to destroy the Black Panther Party, which ranged from everything. thing from these disinformation campaigns all the way up to being involved with the assassination of Fred Hampton in Chicago, the Black Panther leader.

And so, there's a lot of information about this stuff. I would really highly encourage people to take a deeper dive into this and really learn about this history because it's super important. So, can you talk about how all of that context influenced you as you were growing up? How did being in an activist household who was involved in committed to all of the things that your dad was, how did that impact you growing up? What was that like?

Jen McKinney: I was definitely heavily influenced as far as community. My dad did a lot of stuff in the community and so did my grandmother as well. So, I was raised by both. So, I feel like with my dad's influence, I feel like, you know, there's a lot of heavy shoes to bear, but I felt like I took that and flipped it and I'm giving power back to the people in healthcare and mental health, helping the community in that way.

Matt Bowles: Can you talk a little bit about that path of becoming a mental health advocate, why you chose that route, and then share a little bit maybe about the founding of awareness after dark and what that does?

Jen McKinney: I was actually a healthcare executive at the time, and then my mother, out of nowhere, had a mental health breakdown.

My mother was a recovering alcoholic and drug addict, but she had been clean for like 15, or 20 years. When it comes to sobriety, you just never know. Anything could trigger sometimes. So I thought it was that, but come to find out, When I walked into her, I pretty much walked in on her almost ready to commit suicide, but at that given moment, I knew that something was not right because we were taught to assess people in like the first three, five, 10 seconds of meeting them, their behavior and structure, body language, speech.

And I knew that something was wrong. So, she had like, five different personalities going all at once. And that was definitely not her. And she was definitely scared of me, which was weird because she was always kissing me, and hugging on me. And so, at that point, I saw knives on a counter and the room was dark and it was just really eerie.

And at that time, I knew I had a decision to make, and she had the personality of someone crying and then someone being scared. And then one minute she was angry. And I knew I wasn't going to be able to be in the house with her by myself, like trying to calm her down, like there wasn't going to be a wise decision.

So, I called the ambulance and let them know we have a psych issue, which is very important when you talk to the ambulance or police or whatever, to let them know it's a psych issue. It was not anything else so that they could change their attitude when they came to the door, just in case your loved one acts a little bit belligerent; they're not going to proceed with force.

After that, got her checked out and everything to the emergency room and had all types of drug tests, scan tests, then everything came back clean as a whistle. She was like, I said I didn't use any drugs. And I had to put her in a lockdown facility for like two, three months and kind of find out she was having a manic depression episode, and she was diagnosed bipolar and manic depression.

So that kind of catapulted me. And once I started talking about it, other people started chiming in saying, yeah, my brother does, or my aunt, my uncle, my mom, or yeah, my son has this. And so, my will get to turn in like, whoa, cause at first, I was heavily in the HIV stuff when I was working with the Magic Johnson Foundation.

So, my will start turning like, okay, well, everybody got these issues, didn't nobody tell me about. So, everybody got somebody that, but nobody was talking about it. So, at that given moment, there weren't really a lot of activists, not a lot of activists of color, and it really wasn't a lot of stuff out there for mental health, honestly.

And so, when I was working with the Magic Johnson Foundation to get those HIV test numbers up, I added entertainment to it because I learned that it's called edutainment. As adults, we don't like to be preached to like we're in a collegiate classroom. We like to be educated through entertainment. So, I just called it edutainment.

And I was just like, it came with a crazy idea. No fun intended. To have some type of event where I can have people talking, but enjoying drinks and food or whatever movies or whatever the case may be, but have it be more fun and lighter. It doesn't have to be depressing. It can be a conversation piece. So, while I was just, I guess in some boring meeting, just came up with the thing like awareness after dark.

I wanted something for adults. I didn't want anything cheesy. And so, I came up with the thing. thing where awareness at the dark where education and entertainment collide. And I just put a ribbon on it, a green ribbon for mental health. And that was my first thing. Got some people who believed in me. I was always doing something in the community.

So, I was already doing that. I was doing things with my sorority anyway, with the city of Inglewood doing their hundredth centennial celebration. So, I was already well-known in the community for my health advocacy. And so, it was kind of like an easy transition and it was easy because once I mentioned it, so many people just came with the influx and I was like, well, where have y'all been?

Like well, where do y'all go? And so, it really was about connecting mental health professionals, whether they're a counselor, mental health coach, or LCSW, people weren't connecting with their providers. And so, I created an event called Let's Get Mental where we had a DJ or live band music playing throughout, and then we had different sections, we would have like mental health and relationships, mental health and on the job, resilience.

Then we had a man cave and people came in, they received the goodies, the man cave. No woman can go in there, but maybe me and another person, but it was all men talking to licensed clinical social workers, counselors, advocates, talking, discussing, and going through different workshops. And they had mental health and holistic type stuff.

And then I created my suffering and silence wall, which was a wall of celebrities or well-known people of color who either committed suicide or suffering from anxiety, depression, et cetera so that they can see that there are plenty of other people out here suffering just like them, or that the loved ones and that there's a way to get help.

And then from that, I think before the first event, I knew I would need to do something more. And so, I did a video, a short film, it was really bootleg, but it was nominated for an award, the Cannes Film Festival, at the top awards, actually, which I was really surprised because I had no film experience. And I was up there with some really big ones that have been in the industry, like forever, I was really shocked.

And it was really just a lot of my colleagues, people that I admired. Talking about mental health and the African American community. And when I submitted it, or when the people called me from the festival to let me know, it was like three o'clock in the morning or two o'clock in the morning. Cause time difference didn't told me that they thought it was amazing and beautiful in that they hadn't had a film like that at all, addressing mental health period, especially in the African American people of color community.

And so, in the video. I'm actually questioning other people, but the last person is me and you have another colleague questioning me. And it gets a little bit emotional because I go through the whole scene of my mother about to commit suicide and me catching her before, you know, that actually even transpires and how I actually came in.

At that moment, it was just about getting the awareness out so people can talk and connect the community to the people who actually service. Because one of the biggest issues that people of color face is getting help, knowing where to go, and then also getting the right treatment because not everybody needs meds.

And so, it's getting the proper diagnosis, talking to a provider who can actually listen to you, relate to you. And I think now there's a lot more of that. If you're an Indian and you want to speak to an Indian therapist, you got that. You know what I'm saying? If you're Asian and you want to speak to an Asian therapist, counselor, or whatever, okay, we got that now.

Before that community, that linkage, whatever, was not there. And then also you got the stigma of mental health. So, to me, in the beginning, it was all about breaking the silence. And breaking that stigma so that it can be discussed, and people can feel comfortable getting help or getting being comfortable talking about their loved one with an issue because the big thing is that people feel mental health is all the way to the left.

No, mental health is a day full of stress. So, you have anxiety about a test, you know what I'm saying? And maybe hyperventilating or just me going, but not too far. It doesn't mean you need medication. It doesn't mean you talk to somebody, but mental health is every day, just like your regular health.

Matt Bowles: Well, you have created this incredible blend of mental health advocacy and world travel, and you've merged those two passions together in some really incredible ways.

And I want to ask you now just a little bit about the travel side of that. Can you share a little bit just about how your interest in world travel developed? How did you start traveling and then how did these two things merge together for you?

Jen McKinney: So, I have been traveling ever since I was young due to my biological grandfather taking us traveling, my grandmother taking us traveling throughout the States, and stuff like that.

So, I always traveled across the country. So, I have always been into travel, but I think after graduation, college, finally getting a real job. I really wanted to do certain things that I hadn't done before. Going to a ski weekend, all those types of different things. So, in college, I've traveled going to different states and things like that.

But I think after college and getting that real paycheck, that's when I really wanted to do certain things. And then I think once the internet started really booming, I saw travel groups, but certain travel groups were too expensive and I was still a service servant, so I wasn't making that kind of money.

And I also wasn't a backpacker either. But I also wanted to make a difference as well. So especially, I think after going to Mexico or Playa del Carmen, seeing kids beg for money or going to the trash, traveling as a tourist, this didn't feel right to me. So, although I wanted to have fun, I also felt I needed to do something.

So, at that moment I created work and play, whereas half work, half play. So, you're pretty much given back to whatever country we're visiting, where it's coping out different legitimate organizations, vetting them out and giving back to them. Like Bali, I think it was Bali Kids, went to Bali. It's an orphanage.

A lot of them are affected by HIV and some other things. Parents gave them away or whatever the case may be. So, we did a lot of art therapy, play therapy, and gave a lot of toiletries and clothes to them. Did a lot of stuff in Thailand. And still, like, it's the same method. And I think that for me, I was featured in sort of, I think uh, Gorgeous Republic for that.

With that, they gave me a lot of pride. It made people feel good that they were giving back, and it gave them a sense of pride, but the humility of being able to travel is a luxury, plain and simple. Not everybody's better at doing it. And then it also puts things in perspective when you get back home. If you lift my trip would have changed, mine changed hard by the way you operate things.

When you come back home, I feel like I made a difference. A lot of people from my trips, I no longer do group trips anymore, just because I'm in a different space, but a lot of my people that were on my trips became family and they changed their lives to change the way they did things once they got back.

Matt Bowles: I also want to ask you about your bestselling book, [Keep Calm, Bring Your Carry On, The Ultimate Self-Care Guide for Travelers of Color](#). I love it for a lot of reasons. I travel the world with carry-on luggage only, so that particularly jumped out to me

Jen McKinney: Right

Matt Bowles: When I saw that was the title.

Jen McKinney: And people love it.

Matt Bowles: But can you talk a little bit about how that [book](#) came about and then what people can expect from the book?

Jen McKinney:, so it came about because although I was doing Let's Get Mental, I knew that the event was just happening in California.

I kind of wanted to be a little bit more global and how could I do that? So, my whole thing was I went to interview well known and up and coming travel influencers that were making headway. And, but I want to ask the question, what's in your carry-on? What's in your carry-on that's going to help you with your mental health as far as travel is concerned and ask the questions about how does travel assist them with their mental health.

The reason why I called it [Keep Calm, Bring a Carry On](#) because I felt it was pretty much an analogy for when you travel, your carry-on is the most important thing that you have with you. Right? Because everything you need, you really, really need that you can't lose is in your carry on. Those are your immediate things that you need immediately.

Like for me, it may be my crystals, my prayer beads, my aroma dough, Play-Doh type things. I maybe get jittery. These are things that you need that keep you mentally sane or keep you mentally grounded so you can get to your next destination. So that's how I got to [Keep Calm, Bring Your Carry On](#). And the whole concept of the first book, [Keep Calm, Bring Your Carry On, The Ultimate Self Care Guide for Travelers of Color](#) is each chapter focus on a different traveler influencer, asking them, "Hey, what's in your carry on and what's on your carry on that helps you maintain".

A lot of people have a lot of different things. Got to have their beats by Dre, their music, some snacks, food. It can be intimate type. things, whatever it is, especially, you know, being a woman, I need this, this, I need to make sure it's there because I don't know if it's going to be there and that's going to make me spaz out if I don't get there and I don't have it.

It can be anything that's near you carries on looking back. So, as it relates to everyday life, when you're not traveling, what are the things that you need to keep beside you or with you? Whether you're at work, whether you're at home to help you maintain. Mine is incense candles. Like I have travel candles. I have this little lead light, a small rock light. I have various things that help me maintain my sanity.

Matt Bowles: Well, you have interviewed amazing people in this [book](#), many of which Maverick Show listeners know because they have. And guests on this podcast. So, you interviewed [Evita Robinson](#), you interviewed [Martinique Lewis](#), you interviewed [Jeff Jenkins](#) and a whole bunch of really incredible people. So super incredible resource. And then talk a little bit about the journal that came out as a companion to this, along with the workbook.

Jen McKinney: Okay. So, the biggest thing it was, I even came out with a book period is because I've as a person of color traveler, that African Americans or people of color have way different experiences than our white brothers and sisters when we travel.

To be honest, I don't feel like there's anywhere that I don't see a monument, a memory of slavery. Because of how Atlantic Slave Trade went and that, when traveling, all they're excited to be there is also a reminder. Traveling, I feel, for people of color is like more of an emotional roller coaster. And it's a lot to process, especially when you're coming back to the motherland.

Because there's so much to digest, especially when you think you're coming back to open arms. And you may not be. And that's just the honest truth. So, in the beginning of the [book](#), I actually have a safety plan, regardless of if you have a mental health issue or not, just in case for any reason. And then it goes over a list of emotions you may be feeling and stuff like that.

And then it goes to the first page, trip one is your pre anxiety trip. What are some of the emotions that you feel about this trip? I mean, just face it, every trip you may be excited about, every trip has a lot of anxiety. My trip going to Ghana, because you can get sick, you can get sick out here. Sometimes there's no hot water.

And then I got your daily trip breakdown, how I'm feeling, to do list, hydration, the root of your emotion, how the environment was. Cause let's face it, certain environments can be very triggering depending on what it is. It may trigger an emotion. It could trigger maybe a love in the past or maybe something toxic.

Or it could trigger something happy. So, and then also being a digital nomad, I also went through some feelings that I went through. And speaking on it, I saw that other digital nomad, expat travelers were going through some of the same thing. And so, at that given time, it just clicked. Let's take it further.

Let me focus on these people. Traveling has its ups and downs. You know, you have the good and the bad. Sometimes it can be a lonely space, you know what I'm saying? It's not all cookies and cream are what you see on Instagram. If they really showed you behind the scenes, you'd be like, Oh, really?

That's what it's like living? Yeah, I don't know about that. They don't show you all the pitfalls and downfalls of traveling. Being a nomad has a lot of perks, but it's a lot that comes with it as well. So, to me, like I said, I see everybody, but my specialty, what I key in on our digital nomads, expats and travelers, and on top of that, those who are of color, but I see everybody, every race and nationality,

Matt Bowles: You mentioned that sometimes, returning to the continent isn't going to give you the experience that you hope that it will give you. Do you want to share a little bit more about that or share any of your personal reflections?

Jen McKinney: Well, there's a lot of good, but you also got to come prepared for some unpleasant experiences.

And I'm just speaking from a black woman's perspective. I'm also speaking from observing situations too. Even if I'm talking to another Black person or somebody in South Africa or somebody in Ghana, because I am Black, that doesn't mean I'm going to be treated like I am one of them.

Number one, because I guess we automatically have what they say, an American accent, but for example, Cape Town. Cape Town still has whispers of apartheid, meaning that when people see me, depending on who they are, they're going to treat me different because they think I'm a Black South African. Now, once they hear my voice, they may treat me differently because, Ooh, I'm American.

You're not Black. You're American. Oh, and you have a U.S. passport, so you're special. For some odd reason, there's this thing that they just think the U.S. is just, I don't know, Hollywood. Like glitz and glam. They don't understand the civil rights movement. They don't understand that everyone's still different, going through different things.

They feel like everyone in the U.S. is born with a silver spoon in their mouth. And they feel that nobody in the U.S. goes through hard times and struggles. Like, if I told someone that like, yeah, when I was with my mother and her drug addiction, I was homeless, without food, no clothes, whatever. They'd be, they'd be like, no.

They just feel like you have this glamorous life. And don't get me wrong, we do have a lot more opportunities, but we go through a lot of things as well. Go through a lot of suffering, sometimes maybe even worse, because of the laws that are in place that are supposed to protect us. They don't see any of that.

They just see American dollar sign. And so that's the treatment that you receive.

Matt Bowles: Jen, what tips do you have for Black travelers that are at the very early stage of their nomad journey in terms of navigating anti-Blackness globally as they start to move around different continents, different countries, and all of that kind of stuff. If they're at the early stage of their travel journey, what should they know or be aware of, or what advice do you have for starting that nomad journey?

Jen McKinney: Don't be scared. Go see stuff for yourself. There's a lot of travel groups. There's a lot of influencers on Instagram. There are a lot of people that have guidebooks.

There's a lot of information out there for you from people that actually are real and authentic. Look for that. Don't look for people that are just trying to sell you a pipe dream. Do your research for yourself. Go see other countries, safe countries for yourself. See if you know somebody there. You don't have to do the hotels.

You don't have to use the expensive Airbnbs. There are trusted house sitters. I do trusted house sitters. That's how I'm able to travel parts of the world. There are different ways to travel for free. Let's say your credit's not good. You can stay at somebody's house, do an exchange. That's what Chester house is.

There are so many ways to travel right now. You don't have to travel like how you see some of these influencers. Champagne, high rise or whatever, you can still have a beautiful trip. And there's, they have nice hostels now. I'm not a hostile person, but I have done two and one in Costa Rica. And I think another one, I think in Mexico, but they were beautiful.

And you can have your own room, have your own bathroom, just share a kitchen or they have where they do food for you. There are so many different ways to travel right now. You don't have to break the bank.

Matt Bowles: Jen, let me ask you one more question and then we'll wrap this up and move into the lightning round.

When you think back, about all of the travel that you've done up to this point. What impact has all of that travel had on you as a person? What does travel mean to you?

Jen McKinney: Travel means freedom, education, being educated about cultures, being educated by myself, learning about myself, and being able to help. My whole thing with work and play, my whole slogan was Don't just see the world, give back to it.

That's my thing. I want to be able to set my mark on the world, give it weight, give back to it somewhere, somewhere, somehow before I leave this earth and my way is through healthcare and mental health.

Matt Bowles: That's amazing. I think that's a great place to end the main portion of this interview. And at this point, Jen, are you ready to move in to the lightning round?

Jen McKinney: I am.

Matt Bowles: Let's do it. Alright, what is one book that has significantly impacted you over the years you'd most recommend people should read, other than your own?

Jen McKinney: Right now, I'm reading Bell Hook's Love.

Matt Bowles: Bell Hooks is a really good pick. I actually got to meet her on two different occasions. Unfortunately, she passed away recently, but she was incredibly prolific. I think she has published over 40 books. So, if folks do not know Bell Hooks, they should definitely look her up and start going through her catalog. We will link that up in [the show notes](#) as well.

Jen, if you could have dinner with any one person who's currently alive today that you've never met, just you and that person for an evening of dinner and conversation, who would you pick?

Jen McKinney: Probably Oprah.

Matt Bowles: That's a good one. All right, Jen, knowing everything you know now, if you could go back in time and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Jen?

Jen McKinney: You don't have to live that way. I think the biggest issue for me is that people always try to pray for college, prepare you for the next thing, prepare you for the next thing.

It's just a traditional way of living life, right? High school, college, marriage. I just talked about somebody this morning, marriage, children, duh, duh, duh, duh. That good job right after college. You have got to do this. You got to do that. That was really instilled. It didn't mean I'm thankful for it because it got me stable in the 401k that I needed, but it still didn't make me happy.

That's what you see, the huge pivot. And the way I live my life and sometimes I get to catch myself when I complain about certain things because a lot of my friends like, you know, you're living a life right now, bet on yourself, fly, jump. I wanted the traditional thing so much and to where it was blocking things.

So, you don't have to live that way. There are so many different ways to live, to still accomplish the thing that everybody wants. And that's overall true, authentic happiness.

Matt Bowles: Awesome. All right, Jen, of all the places you have now traveled, what are three of your top favorite destinations you'd most recommend other people should definitely check out?

Jen McKinney: Cape Town, Ghana, Bali.

Matt Bowles: All right, what are your top three bucket list destinations? These are places you have not yet been.

Jen McKinney: Oh.

Matt Bowles: Highest on your list. You most want to see

Jen McKinney: Singapore,

Matt Bowles: Singapore. Okay.

Jen McKinney: I'm going to Dubai. So that's about let's do that. And I want to go to Tanzania.

Matt Bowles: All right. Amazing. I was just in Tanzania this past year. So, when you're ready to do that chip, feel free to hit me up. I've hung out in Dubai and Singapore too. So those are both really good picks as well. So, feel free to hit me up for tips on those spots.

All right, Jen, we have now come to the most important question of this interview, I am about to ask you to name your top five hip-hop emcees of all time. But before I do that, can you just share a little bit about what you love about hip-hop and what it means to you?

Jen McKinney: Well, hip-hop being from California and actually my dad, I remember officially being from Oakland when the whole beat box and break dancers. I remember him seeing these kids. So, people don't know about break dancing.

In order to break dance, you had to breakdance on a smooth, gliding, like, fake floor mat. They would get room size or half a room size laminated floor and roll it up and take it wherever they go so they can do all the breakdancing. So, one of the things that I did really admire about my dad, he saw that thing was old beat.

It wasn't enough for the break dancers to do what they wanted to do. And so, he's like, all right, get in the car. We're about to go to the hardware store. I'm like, what are we going in there for? And he went and got a big old, laminated flooring, rolled it up, had the people put it in the car and he brought it back to where the break dancers and hip-hop people were break dancing in.

And also, I guess battle rapping or whatever. And so, he was the king of the community and it just like really warmed my heart that my dad did that for them, but he brought that back so they can just have good old-fashioned fun and enjoy themselves. So not only that, but that was a big part of hip hop and how hip-hop to me changed my life as far as going through a lot of things as a child.

It helped me also in sports. I'm definitely ex athlete. I'm still an athlete, but it helps you with adrenaline, going through things, poverty, things at work, and this helps you get through a lot of things, and you can definitely relate and also get you hype, especially if you're in sports and things, or just trying to conquer things in your life. Period. Day-to-day things. And you can relate. And sometimes they use words or lyrics that you cannot formulate or come up with, but they're saying exactly how you're feeling and what you want to say.

Matt Bowles: Alright, Jen, who are your top five?

Jen McKinney: Snoop Dogg, Tupac, Nas. I did like Biggie. I do, uh, I like Kendrick Lamar though. That's fine.

Matt Bowles: That is.

Jen McKinney: Okay. I was going to put Jay Z in there, but I wanted to put some new school in there too.

Matt Bowles: No, you wanted to get a more California rappers than East coast rappers. And you did that with Kendrick. So, represent for the West coast. I love that.

Jen McKinney: West side.

Matt Bowles: Absolutely. Throw the doves up. We're going to close it out just like that.

All right, Jen, I want you to let folks know how they can connect with you, how they can follow you on social media, how they can buy your [book](#), and if they're interested in your telehealth coaching services, how they can work with you.

Jen McKinney: I'm on [Instagram](#) as *jenjen_mckinneyofficial*. It's easy to find me on Instagram.

Also, the website, [Keep Calm, Bring A Carry On](#). And if you're on Instagram, it also lists all my podcasts, articles and stuff to my featured and it has a booking link and on the [Keep Calm, Bring A Carry On](#), you can call me or send me an email, keepcalmbringacarryon@gmail.com. And there's a thing at the website as well to get a booking.

Your initial discovery session is actually free for 15 minutes to see what you would like to do, if it's a great fit or not, and what the plan would be to go further.

Matt Bowles: Amazing. We are going to link all of that up in [the show notes](#). So, folks can just go to one place at themaverickshow.com. There, you're going to find all of the ways to contact.

Jen and connect with her and everything else we have discussed on this episode.

Jen McKinney: And the books are on the Amazon. All of my books are on [Amazon](#).

Matt Bowles: We are going to link up the books as well in [the show notes](#). So just go to one place. You're going to find everything that we have talked about there. Jen, this was amazing. Thank you so much for coming on the show.

Jen McKinney: Thank you for having me. I'm glad we connected. I'm glad you was great talking to you is definitely, I could talk to you all day.

Matt Bowles: We could go on for four more hours, but we're going to let everybody else take off and call it a night. Thanks, everybody. Good night