

**Finding Home**  
**Episode #1**  
*A Girl from the South*  
**Transcript**

**HILLARY** [00:05]: It was a mysterious and unexpected journey that led Gangaji to her teacher Papaji in 1990. In episode one of this six-part audio documentary series we start at the very beginning. With Gangaji's early life in Mississippi, a time filled with childlike joy, but also marked by trauma and a sense of isolation. An incubator for unworthiness.

**[CLIP] GANGAJI** [00:34]: They had left me here, and I was furious. So I was heartbroken, and I was furious.

**HILLARY** [00:41]: And it also contained moments of realization that laid the groundwork for things to come.

**[CLIP] GANGAJI** [00:47]: I called it my guardian angel. I just felt this presence and protection seemed to descend on me.

**HILLARY** [00:54]: I'm Hillary Larson and I am thrilled to bring you episode one of Finding Home. I hosted Gangaji's very first podcast, A Conversation with Gangaji. Now, I'm directing my attention to Gangaji herself. These six episodes trace her realizations both before and after meeting Papaji, many that are likely to surprise you. Perhaps you'll recognize some of your own epiphanies by listening to hers.

[01:29]: There was a lot happening around the world in 1942. Pearl Harbor had been bombed in December of 1941 and with that the United States had officially entered WWII.

Toni Roberson was born in June of 1942. When her mother became pregnant with her, they were living in New York City. Her father, an attorney, was an agent with the FBI. While they loved life in the city, the idea that their daughter would be born in the North instead of the South seemed unthinkable. After requesting a transfer, they moved to El Paso, Texas. And that's where Toni was born. Like most of us, Gangaji's early years were informed by her surroundings. As a Southerner, that sense of place would have a huge influence on her. Especially the town where she grew up.

**HILLARY** [02:23]: For somebody who is not a Southerner, it's hard to understand the depth of that identity. Could you talk about your father's family and your mother's family and just how that is who you are?

**GANGAJI** [02:43]: It's, you know. It's about sense of place. And Southerners today have a strong sense of place where they are, it's not casual. It's like a country is your

sense of place. Especially since the south lost the Civil War, and it was even stronger. Because with whatever rationalizations happened in, in loving your sense of place, there's a denial of the horrors that were happening and a glossing over of the beauty and the gentility and the leisure and the accent, all of it in the places of some beautiful places in the south.

**HILLARY** [03:30]: Clarksdale, Mississippi, where the family moved after the war, in many ways informed how this young girl, Toni, saw the world, both socially and racially. There was a parallel universe of sorts, black people lived on one side of town, and whites lived on the other. It was normal to see signs where she grew up that said, "Whites only", or, "No coloreds served here." She wouldn't really grasp what all that meant until years down the road.

### [MUSIC]

**HILLARY** [04:02]: I feel like the backdrop of where you lived was, it's really important to this story living in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Can you describe Clarksdale?

**GANGAJI** [04:14]: Well, I didn't know Clarksdale, I only knew the white part of Clarksdale, which was the downtown. It turns out that just a few blocks away. There was a black downtown. It was really alive and vibrant. And it was like, whoa, how could I not haven't known about this? I mean, we would drive through, there's a bridge you could cross, we would drive through and that was a big scary thing to do. And you'd see the black downtown. But it was a happening downtown. I mean, Clarksdale was a center of the blues. For a long time. It's the heart of the Delta, it's county seat of Coahoma County. And so it was a thriving black town. And I guess I to me, it seemed like the white town was thriving too. It was only 20,000 people altogether.

**HILLARY** [05:13]: So was the perception that that's the bad part of town?

**GANGAJI** [05:17]: Scary, you're unprotected over there. And you knew that when black people came into the white part of town, they were on their best behavior. So I wasn't afraid of black people. Except I was afraid of the black part of town. I don't know why I don't remember Anyway, that's all was unspoken. Maybe things were spoken, but they're not in my memory.

**HILLARY** [05:44]: In other ways, though, Clarksdale was idyllic, wasn't it?

**GANGAJI** [05:49]: Well, yeah, you know, we had no supervision. You just would go play all day. It was a small town and you felt, I felt totally protected and it never came up. You know, we would just run with our friends. There was a creek nearby where I lived was scary because it could be snakes and things and we had a special call. (chanting.....) that we would call out and answer the call if somebody was around and we would get together. So yeah, it was idyllic. And then you'd be called home for supper.

**HILLARY** [06:27]: There was also a social hierarchy among white people that had been constructed over generations. Gangaji's mother found herself caught in the middle of that... in not in the best of ways.

**GANGAJI** [06:40]: And, and my mother, she was not just that she didn't have the status of family, she was really a wild girl. She was very bright, very smart. And she was a party girl. And so was my father. And they really bounced off each other that way. And, and my father's family, even though they all love to drink, everybody and self love to drink, were more serious, they were more, they had a lineage that they could point to. So they in that they were more bound by that lineage.

**HILLARY** [07:07]: Love was clearly present in Gangaji's family, unmistakably so. Her father and brother were steady sources of affection, despite the torment that older siblings can sometimes dish out. When her little sister was born, Toni was just six and it came at a particularly hard time. Then there was Mammy, her maternal grandmother, a constant anchor of love from day one. Suzy, the family's maid, offered comfort when the world around her didn't seem trustworthy. And at the center of it all was Gangaji's relationship with her mother, arguably the heart of this first episode. It would become the driving force behind her longing, her seeking and her struggle to grasp what always felt just out of reach.

**HILLARY** [08:10]: Can we talk about her alcoholism?

**GANGAJI** [08:14]: Yeah, I mean I have memories of, when do they start to surface? I can remember, I must have been eight or nine, and I was playing with a friend's house, at a friend's house and she was there with the friend's mother, and they started drinking. It turned out that woman was an alcoholic too. And so that young girl now had an, interestingly enough, part of her name was Tony. So we had a connection. Not that we talked about it much. But our mothers got drunk together that afternoon so badly that I had to call my father at his work. And he had to come and get her and take her home, and he was furious. I don't know what happened between them about it. But then she was furious with me for calling him, that I had put her in the situation. And so that's the first time I remember this kind of daytime drinking. But yeah, that wasn't the last time I mean it happened a lot

**HILLARY** [09:19]: It's what's one thing when there's drinking in the home, because it's kind of behind, you know, behind closed doors, but when it gets exposed like that as a kid...

**GANGAJI** [09:30]: Oh, as a kid it was humiliating and horrible. Plus, I didn't like seeing her drunk, you know? She's slurring words and sloppy and weaving and it just, it was creepy. It's creepy to see your mother like that besides you she's not there for you and in terms of protection, or anything.

And my friend felt the same way about her mother. So we were horrified. And that's why I called my father. I never had done anything like that before. But I really told on her to my father. And, you know, they didn't ever share anything with me about that. I, just the

atmosphere in the home was charged for a while after that. Yeah, I think she didn't speak to me for a while she's furious. I told on her.

**HILLARY** [10:26]: Like most of us, the Roberson's carried their own mix of pain and joy, and everything that comes with kin. For Toni, around the age of five, a few defining events left a mark on her early years that would profoundly impact her sense of self. She experienced some events that would define her early years in some painful ways.

I don't think it's an understatement to say this, some of these things were life changing for you. And the first thing I want to talk to you about is when you burned your hand.

**GANGAJI** [10:55]: Yeah, that's the first.

**HILL** [10:57]: Yeah.

**GANGAJI** [10:58]: Trauma.

**HILLARY** [10:59]: And you're five years old.

**GANGAJI** [11:00]: Yeah.

**HILLARY** [11:00]: Was this Susie that was?

**GANGAJI** [11:03]: No, no this was a young girl 13,14, probably helping her mother who was a maid in my grandmother's house. So my mother and I were visiting my father's mother, Biggie, Mama, in her house, it's just kind of in the country. And they were talking and I just, you know, was five years old and wandering around, and I went into the next room, and this young girl was ironing. And that was his huge thing. It wasn't just pushing an iron across an ironing board, there's this thing I've since learned was called a mangle iron, and this what you'd iron sheets with. Of course, everything was ironed on every bed, you know, sheets and pillowcases. And I was fascinated. And I said, "Show me how to do it" or something, and she showed me, you know. You push this button and it takes it up, you push this button. And then Then she saw me put it in and she left the room. She was she was a kid, she blew it, you know. She just walked out of the room to go get some water or who knows where. I don't remember. And my hand went into the iron and was caught and I was screaming and I didn't know what button would release it. And my mother and grandmother raced in and released it. And I remember putting, like, put butter on it, you know, to oil it, but it was it was horrible experience. It was a really bad burn. I mean, I still have the scar, and it deformed my nails. And I had to have multiple operations on it. Because my skin forms keloids, which means the scar tissue gets too thick. And so they would have to operate again to move that. And it was terrifying. I was five years old, I would be put under with ether and have these operations. And, and it was horrible. It was ugly. And as it started to heal, but my grandmother, mammy, source of love in my life, would put Vaseline on it every night and put it in a little glove and said, you know, we just, it'll, by the time you're 11 the scar will be all gone. Because I guess that's what somebody told her the scar probably be gone. But one day when I waked up and I was 11 and the scar was not all gone, it was totally there, just like it had always been, and so I'm surprised at 11 that I still you know,

believed and it's myth that if I put Vaseline on my hand, put it in the glove fix, fix the scar. Because this is in the south, you know, and maybe it's true everywhere, but it's in the south hands are a really big deal. And you know, I had big sturdy hands actually, but then this one was scarred. It was just a source of shame. And it was a big trauma. It was painful and multiple operations. So it was....Yeah.

**HILLARY** [13:58]: That must have been terrifying.

**GANGAJI** [14:01]: It was terrifying. Absolutely.

**HILLARY** [14:02]: And did you make a decision about yourself because of this scar on your hand?

**GANGAJI** [14:07]: Well, ugly, you know, it was sort of I don't know if I made a decision about myself but I clearly saw the scar was ugly, and so I knew ugly was not good. So I would try to hide the scar, you know, just cover it or inevitably it would be seen in kids you know would say oh, what is that? What is that? You know?

**HILLARY** [14:30]: Kids....

**Gangaji** [14:30]: Reality

**HILLARY** [14:31]: So brutal.

**GANGAJI** [14:34]: Honest.

**HILLARY** [14:34]: Yeah, yeah, you even actually had to have a skin graft right from your thigh?

**GANGAJI** [14:39]: Oh yeah. I had a scar on my leg. It's sort of just almost totally disappeared. They had to take skin from my leg and grafted on. But I'm very lucky and my fingers are mobile. I mean, it could have really damaged the nerves and everything I could have not had used it that hand.

**HILLARY** [15:00]: I'm also just imagining that moment, and especially this young black woman, this girl

**GANGAJI** [15:09]: She's a girl, young girl...

**HILLARY** [15:12]: And to be in that position where you have potentially caused this little white girl harm. That must have been terrifying for her

**GANGAJI** [15:22]: She disappeared. I didn't see her. She ran. You know, I don't know what happened to her.

**HILLARY** [15:30]: I mean, I think about the scar on your hand and whatever happened internally and whatever happened to her...

**GANGAJI** [15:36]: I have no idea. You know, it's possible her mother got fired or her sister or whoever she was there with. I had no idea.

**HILLARY** [15:52]: By the time Toni was six, the surgeries on her hand were over. That same year her sister was born, which felt like another form of displacement. The reality was that Toni's mother was much fonder of babies, and unfortunately for her, she no longer fit into that category. Externally, there was a particular kind of fear taking hold in the country that put just about everyone on edge.

**[NEWS CLIP----polio epidemic]** [16:19]

This year, poliomyelitis struck with such impact and fury that it shook the entire nation. It spread its crippling tentacles from ocean to ocean and border to border. There has been no escape, no immunity, for this is epidemic.

**HILLARY** [16:38]: Polio, known as "infantile paralysis" was terrifying. It mostly struck children but no one felt immune. From 1942 to 1946, there were 10,000 cases each year. In 1947, that jumped to 25,000. The worst came in 1952 when thousands were left with varying degrees of paralysis. Parents were panic-stricken. Some even sent their children to preventoriums, former TB hospital repurposed in the hope of keeping polio at bay.

With you injuring your hand, then your sister coming on the scene and how that's just a big displacement and

**GANGAJI** [17:23]: Big displacement. And very soon after that they sent me to the preventorium.

**HILLARY** [17:27]: Yeah.

**GANGAJI** [17:27]: Because I wouldn't drink my milk, I wouldn't eat my peas, I, you know, and I was very skinny. and polio was all around. and I had a cousin who had been stricken with polio the night after we'd all been playing together in the street. And she was ended up being in an iron lung for 50 years, next 50 years of her life. So that was this sort of benchmark thing. And they didn't know about polio. And it was just, it was everywhere. And there was a place and McGee, Mississippi where you could send kids. It used to be a tuberculosis sanatorium. But in this era in the 50s, it was for, for kids to not get polio. So they, they were really worried about me because I wouldn't eat. And they sent me they and they make you eat there we had and drink my milk. That was the big deal. I didn't like milk at all. And I had to drink my milk there. But I was too skinny. I could see pictures and I gathered they worried about me.

**HILLARY** [18:33]: And I'm just wondering how you receive that the day, you're gonna go to this mysterious place. Did you know where you were gonna go?

**GANGAJI** [18:43]: No. It was totally abstract. And then they drive me there. It's in. It's near Jackson, Mississippi, that's in half. Clarksdale was the northern part of the state and this was the mid part of the state. So it was three or four hour drive. And then they

left me there. And I'm with all these kids and my parents had left me with their new baby. I don't know where my brother was. I don't remember him.

But, oh, it was horrifying. I did not want to be there. I was furious that they left me. They were headed away these little bloomers and these little white bloomers and, and then the word was when it got warm enough they you had to take your top off and I'd want to take my top off that was a girl take my top off and

I didn't make I didn't have any friends didn't make any friends that I recall. And then these horrible meals of milk peas and things that you couldn't get up from the table till you ate it. But the worst was at night, we would sleep in a dormitory. And we had these iron railing beds that you know you see for kids. And I guess so we wouldn't roll out if we're having a dream. But it was, Oh, I couldn't go to sleep and I never had good sleep habits. And I couldn't go to sleep at night and I was just miserable. And I was too young to have, you know, an understanding of anything except that they had left me here and I was furious. So I was heartbroken, and I was furious.

**HILLARY [2027:]** And there's something you describe where you're in bed with the little bars one night, and you're desperately unhappy. And something happens in the midst of that, can you describe it?

**GANGAJI [20:42]:** Well, I called it my guardian angel. I just felt his presence and protection seemed to descend on me. I mean, I hadn't had a strong religious education, but I knew about guardian angels. And so it seemed like that this smiling, kind of comforter. I mean, there are so many ways, you can explain that, but it was really, it was an ally, a protective ally. And so I was able to rest I got to sleep that night. And I would just, I don't know if I actually prayed to her. But I, I knew it was there. And so it was a shift.

**HILLARY [21:35]:** It sounded to me like what preceded it was a moment of utter despair.

**GANGAJI [21:40]:** Yeah. Trauma.

**HILLARY [21:42]:** Yeah.

**Gangaji [21:43]:** Internal mental, emotional anguish.

**HILLARY:** And when you're in that place when you're six, and you're in this deep, dark despair, and you feel so alone. Was it the thought of an angel? Or was it something opened?

**GANGAJI [22:05]:** I think something opened. I can't, I don't honestly, remember, if I thought, where's my guardian angel, or do I have a guardian angel? Maybe I did. Or maybe I was even prayed to? I don't I don't remember it like that. Because it was so it felt so real. Because it was like, Oh, it was a rest and being held and being protected. It's all going to be alright. It's going to be okay.

**HILLARY [22:39]:** Not long after you got back from the preventorium there's something that happens to you which was going to follow you for years to come, which was this sensation that your body was disappearing.

**GANGAJI [22:54]:** Oh, yeah. Maybe that even now that we're talking I could have had started at the preventorium. And that could have actually precipitated the experience with this angelic force. Because it was like, whoa, if things would get really big, my body would get really big and porous and transparent and then it would just go into this like razor thin thing and then just begin to disappear. I have since heard from people who have had similar experiences and it's recognized as, as an anxiety attack. A disillusion of, of the world. That was all around my sister's birthday. And my first incident of that I had been sick with chickenpox or something. And I was sleeping upstairs and I heard my baby sister screaming, screaming, like really loud, like a bomb screaming and I ran into the closet. I was asleep on my parent's bed and they had this big closet and I ran into the closet and hid behind the clothes. And then after a while, I realized it was safe. I came out and I came downstairs and they're all having a great time, you know, rocking the baby, having some drinks. And I said she was screaming so loud. So no, she was like just regular, she cried. So I'm just reading it because that's another part of it. auditorily, everything gets distorted. So I didn't begin to know how to describe to them and what had happened until it kept happening. And I described it to my mother and father. And finally they took me to a psychiatrist in Memphis, and he gave me the little pills that made it disappear. I did an inkblot test and he told my mother if she told me this, he told her, she should hug me more. But she didn't. Just wasn't her.

**HILLARY [24:59]:** Here, take this pill.

**GANGAJI [25:00]:** Take this pill.

**HILLARY [25:03]:** It's funny, because when you describe that, your body expanding and then kind of going away. And then it it also could sound like somebody who's on spiritual retreat, because of just the phenomenon of like,

**GANGAJI [25:19]:** Yeah, it's can be framed in all kinds of ways.

**HILLARY [25:25]:** Actually, if I could don't frame it in any particular way, then it's like it could be this and it could be that.

**GANGAJI [25:32]:** Yeah, who knows?

**HILLARY [25:34]:** When Gangaji felt her body was disappearing, her mother would give her a sliver of phenobarbital. A common anxiety drug at the time. By 19, she rarely needed it and eventually, not at all,

Amid everything, there was religion. Not so much the doctrine, but the sense of something deeper. A container, perhaps one of her first experiences of pure love. And when it came to that, the opening was effortless.

Can we talk about Jesus?



**GANGAJI** [26:08]: Sure....! (laughing)

**HILLARY** [26:11]: So after the preventorium, you had to go really straight to this Catholic school after that.

**GANGAJI** [26:19]: Because I had missed some of the first grade. And so there was a Catholic school around the block from me. And they thought I would get more attention. If I went there. And I could make up whatever I had missed. Wow, that was something.

**HILLARY** [26:36]: Was it in that Catholic school? Cuz it sounds so stark, and

**GANGAJI**: It was strict, strict. The nuns, you know, when big habits and they were mean, and it was an era, this is the 50s, you know, had been no liberation in the church since medieval times. And so they had hit us with rulers, you know, on our hands. And, oh, and since I wasn't Catholic, I was Episcopalian, and there were some Jewish kids in the class too, for whatever reason. And they would say, "there are Catholics, and there are Jews," and then they would point to me and say, "and you're neither fish nor fowl."

**HILLARY** [27:25]: You're not there that long, but something happens, where you're doing catechism and you're doing Bible studies. And you, was there a moment when all of a sudden you went, "Who is this Jesus guy?"

**GANGAJI** [27:39]: Well, I don't think I ever questioned it because it was always that was the central guy in all of it. I just felt, yes, I love Jesus. but really, my before Jesus that had been Mary. I loved Mary and the statues of Mary are beautiful. And they're blue, you know, beneficent. And she's the mother I always was looking for. (laughing) So I loved Mary, I loved Jesus. You know, I didn't think about this phenomenon of my guardian angel, but I, I saw that as all part of the same thing. That was the reality of it.

**HILLARY** [28:18]: When you think about this really strong connection to Mary, and to Jesus, in particular, what was the longing in the midst of all of that?

**GANGAJI** [28:29]: Oh, I think for goodness and kindness and love. That was the teaching really, I mean, the nuns didn't show that or teach that. But he statues did. You know, these beautiful expressions on their faces and this welcoming, Jesus is gonna, you know? Yeah. The Lord's Prayer. I said the Lord's Prayer every night through college easily and beyond, just because it was a soothing thing.

**HILLARY** [29:12]: Gangaji's life had been a combination of idyllic times....running free in the neighborhood and all the struggles at home, they were part of it too. There had been transcendent moments, like her experience with the guardian angel. But what happened next could be defined as the conscious beginning of her search. There was a thing that happened when you were 11 and you're sitting on the curb. Were you sitting in front of your house?

**GANGAJI** [29:43]: Yeah. Curb in front of my house. Yeah. It was hot. It's Mississippi night. Summer. there were a lot of bugs, flying bugs and all kinds of bugs, especially in the summer in Mississippi, and I was unhappy, and I recognize I'm unhappy. I'm really

not happy. I'm not a happy person. So I guess by then I've recognized that there are happy people in the world. And my little attempts, the Catholic Church the different things. I wasn't happy, it wasn't working.

And that all I knew is I wanted to be happy. I didn't want to be miserable. I didn't want it to continue like this. So it was like a prayer, but I didn't think of it as a prayer. It's like, what I need to do, what how can I? How can I change this? How can I be happy? And I don't know exactly what happened that night. But in retrospect, it was like, a kind of, oh, yes, I can be nice to people.

I can say, "Hi, Hillary, how you doing?" I somehow I knew if you call somebody's name, I must have read it in the newspaper or something, they like that. And I realized I got it, I stopped being victimized by it. In that moment, I was the victim. And it was no good being a victim. And so okay, how can I not be victimized by that, and I became proactive. And I started the next day in school calling people by name, I knew their names, of course. And they did like it. And they started to like me, and I became very popular, And I loved it, it felt great, it worked.

**HILLARY** [31:50]: I think about the different kinds of epiphanies, and I kind of have two different categories. And one of them is the kind where it's mysterious and out of the blue. And maybe it's in a moment of deep, deep suffering. Or maybe it's in a moment of bliss. But you don't have control over it. It just something happens. And then nothing is really ever the same after that. And then there's this other kind of epiphany, and I think it's the one that you're describing where you there's a moment of truth telling where there's just like this, is the truth of the matter. Without making it something else. Without making it better without making it worse. This is the truth of the matter, I'm unhappy. And then on the heels of that there's a decision that's made. But in that other kind of epiphany, what I'm talking about is really, it's there's a strategy, here's the truth of the matter. Okay, what do I need to do?

**GANGAJI** [32:46]: What do I need to do?

**HILLARY** [32:47]: What do I need to do?

**GANGAJI** [32:48]: Yeah, I think up until that very point, I definitely was experiencing unhappy happiness, but I was kind of wallowing in it. And that just made me much less attractive to my mother, or probably to anybody else. I was mokey. And I was you know, oh...why don't you love me enough? And what doesn't anybody like me? And it was like, whoa, this doesn't work you know, stop it.

And the other works and it works very quickly. And it feels better. It's more natural. You're, it's a socialization process I think. Rather than being alone by myself in my misery, you know, actually joined the people in looked at people and call their name and so yeah, I don't remember friends before that. Played with kids, you know, regularly, but friends where you really bonded and I had several in high school.

**HILLARY** [33:51]: What a moment.

**GANGAJI** [33:48]: Yeah, it's a big moment. Think my search started then because I was willing to, I had known I was going to happen happy, but that was okay, what I need to do? Nobody's going to rescue me is really what it was. I've waited. I've tried to get them to rescue me. Mammy rescues me, but she's not here all the time. And I was 11 so, you know...preteen. Yeah, it was a great moment.

**HILLARY** [34:22]: And like how you frame that is the really the beginning of your search.

**GANGAJI** [34:26]: Yeah, cuz I had you know took years to see through that to see through actually making yourself popular. It's pretty hollow too, like, whoa, well then, what else? What do I want? Now I've had.....I've been unpopular and I've been popular and popular feels much better not like it but Is that satisfied what I want? And that's been a deeper question.

**HILLARY** [35:00]: It's ironic to consider that had it not been for Gangaji's fraught relationship with her mother, she may not have started a spiritual journey in the first place. After her mother's death, she also came to see her in a different light, just as a person, not even as a mother.

Later when you found her diaries after she had died, you discovered an aspect of her that you didn't know was even there.

**GANGAJI** [35:28]: Yeah, she was a young woman then, just married and coming to this town and meeting people and going to these little teas, Coca Cola parties they would have. She was so excited and she was always brilliant, so she was very articulate in these diaries, but there was this fresh young person, I would say, in looking at that now that alcoholism hadn't started doing its destruction on the personality. It was a surprise, yeah, because I didn't know her young like that.

**HILLARY** [36:05]: Would you have described that as innocence?

**GANGAJI** [36:08]: Would I have? When I found them I did because it was, I was already, I was already, I had cut through my desire that she'd be something different or that our history be different so I could just read him and, and really read him and just be so surprised. It was tender, it was tender to see her as a young woman, excited about her new life. Before any babies. Before the reality of living in Clarksdale, Mississippi for her.

**HILLARY** [36:40]: There's something that's so beautiful about decades as they go by and, and how perceptions change. So I've heard you say that many times, they just kind of magically changed the memory of something where you are in your life right now. Your perception of your mom is way different than it was when you were in the fourth grade.

**GANGAJI** [37:01]: Well, you know, I mean, that's so. So, primarily, fundamentally based on the fact that I don't need her. I don't need her to be different for that to have been different. For me not to have suffered in that, I don't need for any of that to be other than it was. I mean, certainly Papaji, but even before Papaji I had really worked on that. And I knew that was an issue and it was a way that was. Arresting my development that I would just spin in this kind of cycle of wanting it to have been different and mourning the fact that it wasn't different and that just, it really just was what it was. I still had to discover how I was like that, you know, and how I could be cold and, and cut people off. And the fact that she was dying, too. I mean, it had happened before she was dying. I had written her, you know, I had, just, I said, I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to get anything from her. And she said, good, it's about time. She was witty to the end, you know. Just this little bit, she'd shrunk up to this little thing in the bed. And so I felt we reconciled and I know that the suffering that I went through really finally served me.

**HILLARY** [38:36]: At the end of my time with Gangaji for this first episode I referred back to a biography that was written about her in 2002 called *Just Like You*.

You said that. You said underneath all those experiences was a desperation to escape the void, empty of hope and life and spirit that what I secretly feared was my own face. What did you think your own face would show you?

**GANGAJI** [39:05]: Ugliness. Tortured-ness. I mean when you say it, I see a really dark, tortured, like burned face, but ugliness, unlovability.

**HILLARY** [39:24]: That, to me, is in some way what your epiphany story is about, and I think I might be bold in saying that perhaps that's true for all of us, our epiphany story is the revelation, whether it's decades or a moment of, we get to see the truth of that.

**GANGAJI** [39:42]: Yeah, that's right.

### **[CLIP—Gangaji on Self-Hatred]**

**GANGAJI** [39:55]: I know when I would look into myself, I didn't like what I saw. But really what I was looking into was my personality.

And it was a mess. And you know there were wounds, and concrete blocks, there was just all kinds of stuff there. It was like, oh my God, and so the thrust was for an escape plan, or fix it, and get help to fix it in. I spent years in both escaping it in many different ways, and, fixing it. And I thought if I could make enough friends, make enough allies, make enough people love me, then I wouldn't, then that would cleanse this. I would be rescued, I would be saved. Jesus would save me, or a teacher would save me. But have I fixed it, -there would always be something, sort of bubbling up, from the depths that would destroy it, and I had to recognize it was my own self hatred. But like fear of death or nonexistence, is self-hatred. It's a horrific gift. And it seems to come with most humans who were raised by most parents. It just gets inbred in there. Bad girl, wicked

girl, stupid girl, mean girl, selfish girl. And it's like, oh, that's right, you have the proof of all of that. And so the trust, when you trust yourself, is actually willing to penetrate that to discover what's underneath it. And the byproduct of that penetration is the liberation of this bad seed, throwback, however we formulated it and whatever support we've gotten for that formulation, that's what gets liberated.

**HILLARY** [42:12]: One of the reasons Gangaji's life, like ours, is a teaching story, is that what is woven through was the simple desire to transcend the human experience, to beat the tangle of suffering in an ordinary life. And for some of us, even if we weren't aware of it at the time, it is that longing that drives a journey to find what is really true, relative and absolute.

For Gangaji, that journey continues in episode two as a young woman off to college. She was about to wake up from one of the biggest social constructs that had surrounded her young life.

**GANGAJI** [42:51]: You know, like, any being with any good teacher, they pin you up against the wall. And it was like, Oh, I got it, I get it. So that was the beginning of a moment. He was the catalyst for the moment. Because before that Emmett Till had been killed, I was in high school. That was Emmett Till and I was in college. And so I've seen the horror, but I don't know where I fit in it.

**HILLARY** [43:24]: Thanks to you all for listening to this special six-part series all about Gangaji's life. Being able to witness her awakening evolve over decades is really quite something. And there's more. Lots more. I'm Hillary Larson. I'm looking forward to next time, for episode two: *A Longing for Freedom*.

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