



Venessa Perry: Welcome to The Love Write Unplugged Podcast. This week we're talking to Monica Cost, author of "*The Things I Used to Do to Sneeze: How to Live an Authentic Life*". Monica is a motivational speaker and author and a pathfinder, helping people to define their personal truth and live an authentic life.

Welcome to The Love Write Podcast. Hey, Monica.

Monica Cost: Hi, Venessa.

Venessa Perry: How are you?

Monica Cost: I'm good. Thank you for having me on.

Venessa Perry: No, thank you. This is going to be fantastic. I'm so excited to talk about your book and just everything that the book means. First of all, this book is incredible. I love the title.

Monica Cost: Thank you. Thank you.

Venessa Perry: How did you come up with this title? I know you talked about it a little bit in the preview in the book, but how did you come up with the title of this book, Things I Used [crosstalk 00:01:38]?

Monica Cost: The title of the book is "*The Things I Used to Do to Sneeze*". I have always loved the physical sensation of sneezing since I can remember. When I was younger, I accidentally found out that pepper would make you sneeze, and so I actually started sniffing pepper so that I could get that physical sensation. There were other things that I used to make myself sneeze.

When I was thinking about writing a book about authentic living, it led me to the reasons why people might be disingenuous, and one of the things that I talk about in the book is this hunt for an emotional sensation, because there's a way that we all like to feel. I was paralleling the false things I did to get a physical sensation with the false things that people do to get emotional sensations. The reason why it's "*The Things I Used to Do to Sneeze*" is that my hope is that after people read the book that they will no longer embark on those false journeys to get to those sensations.

Venessa Perry: Got it. The work that you do and even the book is really about authentic living and value-aligned living. I really like just so many things that you said in the book. There are so many nuggets. I'm going to hone in on a couple of them in a minute, but talk a little bit about the whole idea of how we are searching for emotional sensations.

Monica Cost: From the time we're born, our parents and the adults in our lives are able to figure out what makes us feel best. Parents might talk about their children's currency, meaning one child might ... You might be able to punish one child by taking that child out of the mix, because the sensation they need is to be included. The currency for another child might be you don't consider that child when you're making family plans, because they like to be in the know.

We all have these natural sensations that we crave, and over time, because we're not ever taught how to utilize our value system in order to achieve those sensations, we get them by any means necessary. It starts when we're young, whether it be crying, being manipulative. As we get older, it could be loving the wrong person. It could be being a part of a group of friends that you don't really like. There's all these things. We're chasing this feeling versus this value alignment.

Venessa Perry: Yeah, I really appreciate that, particularly as it relates to relationships, any type of relationship but particularly romantic relationships. I think we as people and as a society, we are chasing the feeling that love gives us, that connectedness gives us. When that is not aligned with our value system, we have some challenges, a lot of challenges.

Monica Cost: Oh, yeah. It's a hard thing, because when you've decided that you're romantically connected or I'm attracted to someone, it's difficult then to say, "Oh, well, let's pause, because we have to wait for the values to show up." In reality, that is what we have to do in order to see if the relationship's sustainable.

A lot of times we connect on vision. We have the same destination. We want to get to the same places. We're both taking care of aging parents, so there's these bonds, these things that bring you together, but if your processes aren't aligned or similar, then that's when things start to go away, and that's where values show up. Values have to do with your personal protocol or how you process the world, how you make decisions and how you think about things.

Venessa Perry: Right. A lot of people just jump into romantic relationships without really being clear about whether or not they do have the same values with that individual, because they make them feel good, they look good, they're attracted to them, the sex is great. I think it's really a challenge for people to dig deep and get to that place where they have the same values. I want you to talk about what it means to live a value-aligned life.

Monica Cost:

Probably the best way to talk about this is to talk about the journey to how I even started talking about it at all. I was living a life that on paper looked amazing, I guess, to some. That's relative. Some people might say it didn't. Other people might say it did. But I was married to a gorgeous man. I had two children. I had lived in a house that I loved. We went on great vacations. I had a high-paying, high-profile job.

By all accounts, people would make comments about my life: "Oh, you're doing so well, and you are so successful and so fortunate." But there was something unfulfilling in my belly that I couldn't quite put my finger on it, because when I went through my life to repeat it to myself, I said, "All right, Monica, there's no problems." I'd have to go home and try to reconcile that un-fulfillment with what my life looked like.

What I realized, the short of it, is that I was living a value-misaligned life, meaning the way I was spending my money, even the way I looked — I had long hair that I'd spend way too much time doing by my account, because efficiency is one of my values — the relationship that I was in, some of the friendships that I had. I realized that I was having what I call these "value confrontations" on a regular basis. That happens when you encounter circumstances or people that come up against your process.

If consideration is also another one of my values, then if you are in situations where you're not being considered regularly or the people around you or the encounters you're having with people are being inconsiderate by your definition, then you experience these value confrontations. I realized that in pretty much all seven areas of my life, I wasn't living according to my value system. It's just that simple.

There's no right value system, but once we identify and figure out our value system, it means it makes so much sense to us that we think everybody else should also live that way and think that way.

Venessa Perry:

Right. I appreciate the book so much, because I realized as I was reading through it that I thought about my own value system and how I realized probably pretty early on in my life what some of my values were. If I were to think about just my career path initially, the idea that my initial piece was, "Oh, I want to be a doctor," but that was something that my parents pushed upon me, that I was going to go to medical school. But subsequently my value had to do with freedom, and so entrepreneurship is what ultimately came as a result of that.

Many times the values that society has and that we get as we grow up, they really show up in just really interesting ways. I can relate to your story of feeling like you had this life that everyone thought was incredible, and you were just unfulfilled at the end of the day.

Monica Cost: Yeah, and so many are there.

Venessa Perry: Absolutely.

Monica Cost: Which was the point for the book, really, was having spoken to so many people as I was being transparent about my evolution and saying, "This is a problem right there, and it doesn't have to be."

Venessa Perry: You're right. You're absolutely right. I think about just the whole idea of ... Even when I got married, my whole thing was I wanted to marry a certain type of person, and he had to look a certain way and have a certain type of job and come from a certain background, but at the end of the day, our values were not aligned. I felt like dependability was key to me, respect was key to me, and we just did not align. At the end of the day, when I realized I should have gotten out much sooner, I didn't because of the societal pressures that I had.

Monica Cost: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. It's always a tricky conversation when marriage is involved, because there's a spiritual, religious part to it ...

Venessa Perry: Yup.

Monica Cost: ... where people assume that, some people say, "Oh, it's the devil trying to break up your marriage," and this and that. It leaves you not digging sometimes and you're just like, "This is normal," when it's not necessarily normal, and not everybody who joined together was supposed to in the first place. I think until we have a different conversation before marriage, we're going to stay around the 50% mark, because it's a crapshoot. The reason why it's 50/50 is because you luck up. We're not ever really taught how to be in relationship.

Venessa Perry: True. Very true. Oh my God, that's so true.

Monica Cost: And what that looks like when it's healthy.

Venessa Perry: Absolutely.

Monica Cost: We stumble upon it.

Venessa Perry: Oh, yeah. We have so many people who stay in relationships and they are unfulfilled and they are unhappy or they stay for the kids or they stay because it's financially in their best interest, and they end up miserable at the end of the day. I think you're right about the 50% mark. We've got some work to do as it relates to that.

Monica Cost: Absolutely.

Venessa Perry: One of the other things that you talked about, I'm going to take a quote from your book, is you said, "We determine the value of each relationship by value alignment." I thought that that was such a poignant statement and so critical. Why is it that it takes us so long to get to that place where we understand values, particularly as it relates to relationships?

Monica Cost: Because nobody ever talks about it in that regard. It sounds so simple once you read it. It feels like, "Oh, yes, of course," but there is no "of course." And not everybody gets there. That is the other thing, is that some people continue on with the external values that they've adopted because they're "right", whether they came from a source that they respected or whether they have heard it so many times that it has to be true, that this is how you're supposed to behave or live. Until that raging fire of un-fulfillment gets painful enough do you have a pivotal moment enough to take a deeper dive. Sometimes by then the damage is so great to your soul and to those around you that you don't want to look, because even now it's painful to go back and have regrets.

It was funny. After I wrote the book, it was for Gen-Xers originally because that's my generation, but as I was having my book signings I remember people even in their 60s and 70s saying, "Oh my God, young person, keep talking. When I'm looking back in the rear-view mirror of my life, I would've done it completely different." But then people in their 40s would say, "I wish I had known this in my 30s." People in their 30s said, "I wish I had known this in my 20s." Now I'm talking to high school students.

Venessa Perry: Wonderful.

Monica Cost: Because it's not a hard concept. My boys are now 12 and 14, and they have identified their values when they were six and eight. We continued ... Now, we had to refine them over time. At six and eight I was still paying attention, they were paying attention to what their value confrontations are. But it's not a mature concept. It's a natural human state that we get snatched out of by the noise of society.

The reason why I think it takes so long for those who ever stumble upon it is that the un-fulfillment becomes so great that you decide there's a better way. Until we start having the conversations from the beginning, we'll stay here, or some will.

Venessa Perry: Right. You said something else that was key that relates directly to that, and you were talking about it in the context of families. You said that if you started out with people not expecting much of you, it may be more difficult for you to turn things around, and that the problem with this is that because people don't expect much from you, they don't count on you for much either, and so therefore you have very few chances to turn their opinions around and you never really fully grow or realize your true purpose or potential.

Monica Cost: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Venessa Perry: That was so profound.

Monica Cost: It goes both ways, expectations do. It was interesting, because I was talking to someone the other day about their child and just wanting them to let their child know to not feel like they have to continue to live into this picture of perfection and how dangerous it is to have those ... You want to have high expectations, but you want the person to decide what those expectations are, not to place them upon them. I also have a friend who just has not been able to build her confidence because the expectations of her have been low her whole life. She's almost afraid of success, because then the expectations are then going to grow, and because the expectations have been so low, she's afraid she's going to fall right back into not being enough.

Venessa Perry: That's really key. I think you have a lot of people that fall particularly in that latter category, not feeling like they're enough, feeling like they ... Even if you do have everything on the outside, there's something within that ultimately needs to drive you. A lot of it is upbringing, our family and the things that we believe.

You alluded to something or you spoke about something in your book when you talked about the whole idea of how you've lived your life not realizing that you still had some pain from the fact that your father had left. I think a lot of people, they carry this and they don't realize how it shows up in their life, particularly as it relates to relationships. As a woman, and particularly as a young girl, if the first person in your life who

you loved was a man and he left you, that's going to leave you with a void, and it's going to show up in all of your relationships.

Monica Cost: Yes. I won't say my story's unique, but I'll say it wasn't common to what I was hearing about daddy issues, in that my father left because he had schizophrenia, and he left thinking that our lives would actually be better off without him. I always had a compassion and a love for him and an understanding that I felt like he made the ultimate sacrifice. In that regard, I didn't have the daddy issues of, "Why doesn't my father love me?" or feeling like I don't deserve love. I didn't think I had any issues. Then I had uncles and family friends who stepped right in and [took 00:18:56] the plate, so I always felt deserving of love. That was not a question.

But, as I wrote in the book, what I did realize was that what the emotional baggage was that I was carrying was that the five-year-old never quite reconciled that someone can love you a whole bunch and still have to make the choice to leave, and so then, if that's true, then why really love, truly love anyone? I feel like until about 35 I was going through my life with a bunch of disposable people who didn't know they were disposable, and it wasn't that I didn't love them, it was just the debt.

Venessa Perry: Exactly.

Monica Cost: [crosstalk 00:19:37].

Venessa Perry: My story and my background is very similar to yours. My father, they said he had schizophrenia. We now know that it was bipolar disorder. The choice that my mother made to leave for the safety of our family, as a child I understood that because I was older. I was 16, so I understood what was happening, and the fact that he just had fits of rage. However, my brother, who was nine at the time and who was three, and my sister who was three, did not and to a fair extent still do not understand that you are still nine and you are still three because you do not understand the impact of the fact that somebody that you loved and loved you has been snatched from you, and so when you look at your romantic relationships subsequently, you choose people who make you feel a certain way, or you've selected someone who literally has all of the same characteristics of our father, and trying to figure out, well, why?

You realized it at 35. I probably realized it at 20, so that I wouldn't make those choices. But as I look at my siblings and how they are evolving in their lives, and they are just getting to the point where they are now 35 and 40, and come to a place of acceptance about the role that

abandonment has in the decisions that you make, how that relates to the values that you have in your life and how you choose a life mate.

Monica Cost: Sure. I think the acknowledgement is what freed me. I talk about that book, "*The Drama of the Gifted Child*", and that it was, I guess for some it's more simple than others, but it was ... All I needed was an understanding. Now I can love fully and purely, but still with the understanding that anybody can make the choice to leave, but that doesn't mean that you don't love in the moment.

Venessa Perry: Right. Absolutely. One of the other things that you said that I thought was really critical, you quoted Steve Covey and you talked about seeking first to be understood, to understand, and then to be understood. When you think about how that relates to our romantic relationships, how does that play out when we don't understand our values?

Monica Cost: I guess when you don't understand ... Now, that's a concept that you can apply whether you understand your values or not. I think that is just, if you're trying to advance a human connection, going into it trying to understand the other person's point of view first is always a great way to start. Now, to the extent that you don't have an understanding of this value system, then even when you're trying to understand, how you will be processing it will be simply through your own value system, negating theirs.

If they're talking about ... Let's say if it's a couple and the wife wants to go to counseling and the husband doesn't. Let's say one of her values is knowledge, and so the reason why she wants to go is because she knows, between the two of them, they just don't have enough information to know how to fix it. Let's say he values privacy. Now, if there's not a true understanding of each other's values, then when he says, "I don't want to go talk to anybody, I don't want anybody knowing my business," if she's not seeking to understand, then she's not processing it through, "But we don't know this."

That's her argument: "But we don't know everything. We don't have enough information." He's saying, "I don't want to tell anybody my business." They're stuck. They're at an impasse because each of them is having a value confrontation and not stepping into the other's world to say, "Oh, I understand. You value privacy and you would not like to lay all of our life bare before this person. Can we talk about some subjects that will be off limits and things that ... "

Because that's what you do when you want to try to find a way to work within someone's value system. Ultimately it may not work, but at least you have the opportunity to see if you can find space and place to connect on that. That understanding is not just understanding the words of value that they have, but how do they define it? What does that mean to them? Because maybe they'd be willing to tell someone their salary but not tell anybody they're having problems at home. It's not just a word. It is how they understand the word.

Venessa Perry: You talked about the idea that people can have different core values, and you gave a really good example about different definitions. You can have the same or different value, but then a different definition. An example that you gave, you talked about dependability. In terms of the same value, if you're sharing that dependability, you say that you're going to do what you say that you're going to do, when you're going to do it, versus eventually doing what you say you're going to do when you get to it. How do you reconcile that type of different definition in the value, and then also get to a place where it doesn't cause stress in a relationship?

Monica Cost: I think going back to the "seek first to understand" piece, and then picking our battles within our value system. If dependability means to you that you're going to agree on a time and that's that, I can depend on you to do it when you say you're going to do it. Now, if every time that person misses the deadline or doesn't do what they say they're going to do it causes you a value confrontation and then you have an emotional reaction to it, then eventually the respect in the relationship is going to erode.

There's not much you can do about it if the other person isn't willing to change to doing it when they say they're going to do it, or saying, "I can't do it," or, "I'm not sure if I can do it," so that it sets an expectation for the person that maybe they don't have to depend on you much, if that makes sense, because you can't come through with that thing. There are times where you just don't get to display that particular value with that person because the way it displays for you doesn't work for the other person.

Now, in the dependability thing, that might work, but if you value communication in a way that is timely and the other person doesn't, that might not be something you can work through. That's the part where the pulling apart of this value system has to happen without judgment.

Venessa Perry: Exactly. Conversely, what about a relationship in which two people have very different core values? How does an individual or two people survive

when they are just very different? I'll give you an example. I know a woman, a really good friend of mine, recently engaged. I know that her core value is spirituality, and she is with someone who does not believe. Now, the caveat is that I know people who believe, and to a great extent I believe this as well, that you can witness to people and eventually you just [be in prayer 00:28:02] that they move along, and I've seen that happen, been there in the same place.

But when you are starting out, what does that look like? How can you survive when you know that maybe you're getting up to go to church every day or you're a prayer every day or something like that, and the person that you are with is not?

Monica Cost: I guess I'd look at this a little differently, in that I think that you can value spirituality, but the way ... This question feels like their spiritual process is a priority, so that it is something that they believe in, but ... Here's the thing with spirituality. You can be a spiritual person, but how you display that spirituality is where your values come in. Does that make sense?

Venessa Perry: Oh, yes.

Monica Cost: I can say I'm spiritual and so spirituality is a priority for me, but how I ... If consideration is a value of mine and spirituality is a priority, is important to me, then if I say to you, "Venessa, oh my God, I can't believe you believe in x," that is not being very considerate of you, but I'm prioritizing something. If spirituality is that important to you, and it needs to match for you to move forward, then it doesn't move forward, then that is always a very ... It's kind of cut and dry. It's how much you believe and how important is it to you. There is no reconciling when you firmly believe that there is only one right way, which is so anti my value, but if you believe there is only one right way and you cannot respect somebody who doesn't believe that way, then it is not going to work. There's no getting around that.

Now, when you have very different values in general ... I talk about my former husband and I in that he values stability and routine and I value options and variety. Those cornerstone values can't operate together really well, but we didn't know that because we had the same vision for life. But I am fly by the seat of your pants. I am less regimented and routine. It was irritating. I get it. Sometimes his level of routine, I'm like, "Can't we just break that? Do we have to do it that way?" There's this constant ...

Sometimes it comes out as a joke, but when over time you're chipping away at how someone processes the world, it gets frustrating. Again, it starts to erode the foundation of the relationship because you no longer feel stable in the foundation that this person has you and understands you when they are really constantly trying to make you different.

Venessa Perry: You're so right about that. That's a really good point. I was just going to make a joke and say did we marry the same person?

Monica Cost: Yes, and a phenomenal human being.

Venessa Perry: Exactly.

Monica Cost: I love that guy.

Venessa Perry: Yeah. You have to know what your values are at the end of the day. I know that I value open-mindedness, I value freedom and flexibility, and if you're with somebody who doesn't understand that and you feel like, "Well, why can't you just get a nine to five and come home?" that's not going to work for the long haul. That's going to truly be temporary. I totally get it.

Monica Cost: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thank you.

Venessa Perry: This has been fantastic. I've got a couple closing questions for you. I think you shed so much light on the importance of understanding your values and the values that your other person that you're in a partnership with or that you're interested in dating and how that ultimately will lead to a long-term, healthy relationship. I think this is a conversation that people need to have on the front end instead of the back end.

Here's what I've got. I ask this to all of my guests. Top five things that attract you to a mate.

Monica Cost: Humor. Consideration. Open-mindedness. Connectedness to humankind. Honesty.

Venessa Perry: I like it. It's so funny. When men answer this question, it's usually very different, but as I have guests that are a little bit more mature and emotionally evolved, I don't hear what I used to hear, like, "Oh, she has to be fine. She has to have a great body." I like those. I like all of those.

Then, lastly, where can people contact you if they want to follow you or if they want to work with you?

Monica Cost: Everything about me and where to find me is at monicacost.com, M-O-N-I-C-A-C-O-S as in Sally, T as in Tom, dot-com. I'm on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), every now and again [Twitter](#).

Venessa Perry: Fantastic. Monica.

Monica Cost: Thank you. This was awesome.

Venessa Perry: This has been great. So glad that you could take the time out of your writing retreat and just your busy schedule and [crosstalk 00:34:13] that we could just chat. Again, check her out at monicacost.com. As always, you can check us out on [The LoveWrite Unplugged Podcast on iTunes](#) and [iHeartRadio](#). We look forward to talking with you soon. Ciao.