**Ep. 0004, RUNNING FAT CHEF PODCAST X MIRNA VALERIO**

The Pursuit of Self Care, Advocacy & Irony of Defying Stereotypes with Mirna Valerio

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**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

So hey, my name is Latoya Shauntay Snell. I'm an ultra-runner, former culinarian, multi-sport athlete, baby powerlifter, writer, content creator, Mom, wife, friend, potty-mouth expert. Did I miss a role? Anyway, all these roles have something in common, storytelling. And as a storyteller, that's what I've planned to do. My way of course. Welcome to the Running Fat Chef Podcast.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

The Running Fat Chef Podcast is primarily powered by you. Yes, you. Consider buying us a cup of coffee, maybe some dope ingredients for my next creative meal. Or show a girl some love by visiting ko-fi.com. That's ko-fi.com/runningfatchef. Bonus part y'all. Are you a business owner, entrepreneur, or have a service that you'd like to promote? Well, honey, why not here? Sponsoring episode here on the Running Fat Chef Podcast. Check out the show notes for more details.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

What's good Mirna? Welcome to the Running Fat Chef Podcast. Now, although I've known you since 2016, 2017, one of those years. All I know is I met you physically in person on January 1. And there's like a story with that in itself and we'll go into that. I'm exceptionally honored to have you on my podcast. Now, oftentimes, I remind myself in this space, that regardless of how many times that someone may have heard our stories, we are new to someone. So, with that stated, let me do this humble brag that I'm going to do on my dear friend here. Let me clear off my buttery sweet vocals for this one. Listen, listen. Y'all know I'm extra right? Can I just say I am yup, yup. I am yup. Now, Mirna Valerio is an ultra-runner, Author of the highly acclaimed incredibly dope memoir A Beautiful Work in Progress and Venture, and Chief of The Mirnavator LLC. [Unintelligible: 02:13] get that right. A multilingual black woman from Brooklyn, New York. Bushwick in the house baby, Bushwick that I proudly call big sis and often joke that we're not the same people because I don't understand y'all. Y'all just be getting us mixed up. We're two different black people. So, let's just get that straight. Now, if you see us in the street or social media, please remember, we are not the same people.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Wait, are you the cooking one? Or are you the trail running one?

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right, like hold up.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Are you the yoga one?

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right, like hold up. But no, you're not the pole dancing one though, right? No, no. I'm sick of y'all. Okay. Anywho. She was the 2018 National Geographic adventure of the year. And if y'all hear sounds in the background, y'all just really taking in the whole essence of Brooklyn, New York today, because we are recording in the busy times of the morning. And anyone that knows that if you are any type of New York City, apartment house anywhere it's always loud. So, y'all just about to get the extra sweet vocals of Brooklyn, New York. Consider yourself lucky and fortunate that you are surrounded by three layers of Brooklyn. We have Mirna Valerio, Bushwick. You got Latoya Shauntay Snell, Brooklyn, I don't know what part of Brooklyn. We're talking about East New York, Bed Stuey, Crown Heights, whatever. I've been traveling, okay. I've been traveling to different parts of Brooklyn. And then you have the sounds of a random shut the fuck up that might pop off called Brooklyn. This is not an average kind of introduction here. But shall we continue? Now I said that she was the 2018 National Geographic adventure of the year and you know someone made it when they have they own Wikipedia page, honey. Her presence is infections in so many ways. And can I tell y'all my girl can sing? My girl really really can sing. She can sing y'all. And I ain't talking about my kind of singing in the bathroom that can kill a couple of cats and maybe some city rats. I'm talking about she can sing even when school got an education off of it. Can I just introduce y'all to the wonderful Mirna Valerio? Thank you so much for coming on my show.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Thank you and wow. Wow. That was a really great intro. I appreciate that. And I also appreciate the multi-layered Brooklyness of it all right. Because nobody really ever asked me about Brooklyn, outside of the Oh, you grew up in the hood, didn't you? Did you grew up in the projects? I'm like, no. You know people make a lot of assumptions about what that means and stuff. But I feel incredibly privileged to have grown up in Brooklyn. We talk a lot about diversity and stuff, all the different languages, all the fuck you attitudes, because I definitely carry that within me everywhere I go, although I'm like you, I don't show it all the time. I hide it. And then when it's necessary, I take it out. But you live in Brooklyn, I live in Vermont. It's not always necessary to take it out. But sometimes, people be tripping up here. But I'm so glad to be here. And so glad to see your face. Today I've been up since five in the morning doing speeches that I didn't even know I was supposed to be doing to people in the UK. And we'll talk about that. Anyway, but it's all good. It's all good. Because we both do this professionally, we can just, we can riff. And yeah, I'm really happy. I just came off of doing a session with my mobility trainer, Lawrence, who is a native New Yorker. And he literally talks like this. And he's from Queens.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

I knew he was New Yorker because I heard his voice and I was like oh, I heard that. I was like, I know that New York accent.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Let me tell you about this guy. You haven't met him but let me tell you about this guy, his name is Norman. LS Fitness New York City, but he's down in Florida now. The first time I met him, I was like, look, I'm going to learn how to power lift, and I want to learn these two lifts because these are the two last lifts I need to learn. He was like, but can you fucking move? I was like, oh, huh. Can you even move though, can you move?

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

You sure he's not from Staten Island. Because that's a Staten Island move.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Queens.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Oh, that's close enough [inaudible: 07:05].

**Mirna Valerio:**

And he was like, can you do this? Do you have ankle flexion? I don't even know what that is. Do you have this? Let me see you squat? Nope, nope, nope. And that was my introduction to him. And talk to me any way you want, I'm gonna do it. I'm not gonna get offended or whatever. And so, that was in 2000, I'm gonna say 2018. And so, we've been working together since then. And so, I just got finished a session with him virtually. And he works me just as hard virtually. So, that's why I'm up. I'm caffeinated. I'm in the midst of being re-caffeinated. And I'm feeling really good, despite having a somewhat rocky morning, not knowing I had to do a speech. And writing the speech while other people were speaking before it was my turn. But it's all good. It's for a company that I love. One of my partner companies and, and here we are, [unintelligible: 08:09] our life, and I'm not gonna ask you any question because this ain't my podcast. [Crosstalk: 08:14] about to ask you a question.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

This is her going into educated mode. Okay, listen, [unintelligible: 08:19] don't know. I can't even say that she had past life of being an educator. Even in this space, I think that we educate people in our own unique way, every single day. Every single day [crosstalk: 08:34] yes, just by showing up. One of the things that I laugh about, and I think I've said this on a couple of podcasts now. Defying stereotypes is one of those things that always follows us. And it's just like, yes, okay, thank God, that you actually gave me the side that I've been feeling inside, Because it is just like, Oh my God, why are we stereotypical for showing up when a great deal of the population is plus size? When we are not the only people out here. There's a lot of us out here, it's just that we don't get media coverage. So, it gets super exhausting from so many layers of being in the fitness and wellness space, when people throw around terms like diversity, equity inclusion, and then all they can do is spell it or when they [crosstalk: 09:25]

**Mirna Valerio:**

If that.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

If they can spell it, right. We let our troll section, handle it. Yeah, the typos are immaculate. They're glorious. You can't even get mad, just like wait, hold up. How did you spell that? Run that back again. I'm sorry. Wait, hold up. I think he was trying to insult me, but I don't know. I think that was warm hugs [inaudible: 09:51] was working in. We just can't tell. In this space, we hear terms like diversity, equity inclusion. There are terms like body positive. There's a whole conversation where we go back and forth with those things on a regular basis. And then you hear things thrown around like self-care and you have to ask yourself what exactly does that mean in the fitness and wellness space? I think that is easy to actually, you know, take today's conversation and redefining what is self-care?

**Mirna Valerio:**

[Inaudible: 10:25] self-care is. It's buying bath salts. And going to a spa or having some tea, like hibiscus tea, right. And like, yeah.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

The tea has to be a thousand dollars.

**Mirna Valerio:**

That's what it is. Yeah. And you can't use a teabag. It has to be in like a strainer thing because then it's not like authentic self-care. Yeah, and it's like shutting the screens off. But yet really like your Himalayan salt scrub. And like having tea at a spa. That's what I mean. Yeah.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. And you have to have all different types of seaweed from all over the world [crosstalk: 11:06]

**Mirna Valerio:**

[Crosstalk: 11:07] can afford that.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. Don't do that Vicks Vapor Rub with the plastic wrap [crosstalk: 11:14]

**Mirna Valerio:**

No, it's [unintelligible: 11:13]

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Here we go. Then to kinda really deep dive let's go into another section of self-care. What exactly does that look like for someone like us? People tend to say part of this self-care is, I go outside for a run, and I escaped my children for about 6 miles.

**Mirna Valerio:**

That's our job. That's our job.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

That's literally our job. So, in this space, if your job is fitness, and wellness, and educating people about what that looks like, what does self-care look like for us? So, pressure, no pressure? What does it look like for you as...? I mean, honestly, how many times have we reschedule this podcast?

**Mirna Valerio:**

About what four or five times maybe? Because things keep coming up. And our lives are very, very similar. And they're very unpredictable. Just by the nature of the beast. I had a shoot, all of a sudden, you were supposed to be on my podcast on Monday. And suddenly, as of Sunday night, I had a shoot because there was a good weather window. So, I had to do the all-day shoot, and so I couldn't do anything there. And then it was something else. Even today, we were supposed to talk earlier. And then I double booked myself, which is a huge part of what I'm trying to take care of because I'm extremely disorganized, not organized, disorganized, as my son would say, and agree. And so self-care, for example, I'm not very good at it. I'm not good at it. Because again, we both do a lot of different things. We have talents in many, many areas. We are the public-facing figures for many brands. We write we are doing a lot of social media, that's where a lot of our work comes from. We train. I've been injured for a while. So that's been an extra layer of anxiety and pain, like just literal pain. And we're speaking, we're doing anti-racism education or diversity education. I've been doing that for just under 16 years now, as part of my career as an educator. And so there's a lot going on. And there's some intersections and then sometimes they're things that are just in their own sort of buckets. And I've been having a hard time. I've been having a lot of anxiety and fatigue. Most of my anxiety comes from knowing that I won't be able to sleep as much as I need to, and then I won't be my best. And so actually this week, twice this week there's a cabin. You'll see it on my Instagram called the Kingdom A-Frame that I stay at. And it abuts the woods and then there's like wide-open spaces in North Vermont. I call Upstate [inaudible: 14:28]. And so I actually would work here in my apartment, and then go sleep there. Because the sleep there is very deep. I work here because the internet is better. And then I would sleep there. And even if I only slept six hours, which is not enough I would feel more rejuvenated than I would if I were here. And so that's something that I'm going to probably do as much as possible. It's like, get myself out of my apartment and go sleep somewhere where there's very little internet and no cable TV. And it's quiet, and it's extremely dark. And so that's part of what I'm doing. I'm really trying to say no to a lot of things. As far as self-care goes,

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

It's hard.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Yeah. And we're in this really unique position where we get so many requests to do so many things.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

And I will say in the last year it's really jumped up. I can't emphasize enough just in case anyone is actually listening to this podcast later on down maybe a couple of months or years and like, okay, well, what are y'all talking about? We are currently in 2021. And last year we've been going through this hell called the Covid 19 pandemic. But the other layers that came with it, is that we've lost people like Ahmad Arbury, George Floyd, Brianna Taylor so many names that there's a list like that's growing by the month. People who are probably never going to actually hit the newspaper, and it's been very dark. And in turn, people who are viewed as public figures, or influencers in this space, and we double as both, you know, we've been called on to kind of open up our figurative case.

**Mirna Valerio:**

And the charge.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right, you know, like, hey, we know that you didn't create racism. But can you help us out so we can look like we're actually fixing something? And I know that sounds shady because it is. It adds on another layer and burden, where now I've listened to some of these suggestions and manuals that people have created, where it's just like, ask a black friend everything. Tell me your trauma. Tell me what's wrong with you. Tell me what it's like to be black. These are real questions from my inbox. We already knew it was problematic before 2020. We make the joke of we are not the same people because we literally have been placed in situations where people who hate me, have ran up to me and said, oh, my God, I just love you. And I love your amazing book A Beautiful Work in Progress. And I'm just like, wait hold up. Actually you wrote me a hate mail like about two weeks ago and said eat shit and die. I'm kind of not that person. But thank you so much. I'll pass that message on to my friend.

**Mirna Valerio:**

That is so problematic on so many levels, right. And that's that sort of blindness to the individuality of black people in general. But then fetishizing and lionizing a particular person, but then having that blindness at the same time. That is very emblematic of what white supremacist ideology is, and what it represents. There's a blindness. But you might have a relationship with a black person, and you might think that you love that black person, but they are one of, you know, everybody else is different than this one person. But then they're mixing you up because they don't see your individuality. I get mistaken for you as I was saying at the beginning. Oh, are you the yoga one? You know, you say, are you the pole dancing one? Are you the one that does the workouts in front her building? Are you the blank one? The one? Are you the one?

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

That's problematic on it's own. It's just like it says a lot of what you think of us passively. The unconscious bias is one of those terms that keep coming up. And it is very real, and I want for anyone that's listening to this. Understand that unconscious bias or any of us can have unconscious bias, even as a black woman, I can have an unconscious bias because of when we talk about intersectionality. It's a coined term from 1985. Not from 1985, from the 1980s. From Kimberly Crenshaw. So when we talk about these things it's just amazing of how since white men, I'm just gonna be split particular here, since white men can do anything. And they're acknowledged for their accomplishments, the things that they're able to do. They're allowed to be multi-layered, but when [crosstalk: 19:38]

**Mirna Valerio:**

And complex and individual.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. And when black people, particularly black woman, enter in this space, we can only be one thing. And if you dare decide that you going to be this and that and show that there's more to us, then we may be looked at as problematic. Troublemaker. All these negative [crosstalk: 20:04]

**Mirna Valerio:**

Latoya, you know you're a troublemaker, please.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Oh, I'm embracing the troublemaker now. Now, you know [crosstalk: 20:09]

**Mirna Valerio:**

You are a disrupter.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Yes. And I love it. Yes, I love it. And that was a hard thing to actually own. Because when you have someone or people a collective of people that have weaponized that term against you, you start to enter this layer of self-doubt. Do I belong in this space? We often hear the outdoors is for everyone. Well, no, historically, it hasn't been. But yes, the outdoors is for everyone, when it comes down to slavery, the outdoors [crosstalk: 20:39]

**Mirna Valerio:**

Nature is for everybody. Nature doesn't discriminate.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Yeah, no, of course not. It's just that we weren't allowed to go into whole ass swimming pools. We couldn't integrate, we couldn't go to the same schools

**Mirna Valerio:**

Or we got killed when we crossed the invisible line, you know, the black side of the beach, over the white side of the beach. I think that was in Michigan?

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Yes. We're in 2021, and things have changed, and they haven't. I feel like it's just being remixed over and over and over again. So it just makes you question like, now being celebrated in this space as the multi-layered woman that you are. Being black, being visibly plus-size, being educated. How do you prevent yourself from allowing people to box you in?

**Mirna Valerio:**

Is that a rhetorical question? Do we have a couple of hours for this dissertation? It's really hard. And what's hard harder is that you know, say you and I both work with brands, they are actually perpetuating the language of spirit, you know, this person burst through stereotypes or crushes through barriers. We're way more complex than that. And just like you said, we've always been here. It's only new to white people. Really. When it comes down to it, it is only new to people whose race and who's sort of racial culture has been normalized. Where you think that's the norm that is the only norm that exists for you. And so, when you see something outside of that norm, that your own culture has created and perpetuated, it is seen as this mind-blowing thing. Oh, my God, this lady that who is black and fat, and educated, and whatever other adjectives they ascribe to us. It runs long distances. Wow, it's mind-blowing to them. And then because our culture is so steeped in white supremacy we believe that too. We internalize that. Which is why we have trolls from all colors, all shades, all ethnicities, within our own communities, because we have been poisoned. We have been poisoned with this mindset of white supremacy. And so, I'm really tired of the assumptions that are made, the language that hasn't changed.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

It's weird. You left the physical structure of being an educator, and then you find yourself still being the educator of DEI work everywhere you go.

**Mirna Valerio:**

And it's cool. I mean, it's cool though, right? Because what we're doing is unprecedented. There is literally no precedent what we're doing in the space that we're doing obviously, as far as the work, as far as diversity equity inclusion... Jedi, whatever you want to call it. ENIDNI idea... white people love them some acronyms, y'all love some acronyms. And so, we get to do that work in public and people get to see. It's important work that we do just by virtue of showing up, by virtue of putting a photo up on Instagram because that helps people to broaden their perspective of who a runner is, who an athlete is, who somebody who gets to work with amazing brands is. And so, it is part of our education that we're doing. And so, I remember when I left teaching, a couple of months before I left teaching, I'm going say boss or supervisor... this feels weird in my mouth because I work for myself now. Anyway, so he said, a guy named Tom Bendel. I said, well it's gonna be weird not being a teacher anymore. I've been at it for 18 years. It's my identity. It's what I do. It's who I am. And he goes, oh, you're still a teacher, you'd have a different platform. You are still a teacher. You just have a different platform.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

 Wow.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Frankly, it probably will be a much more impactful platform. And then I say, oh, you're trying to say I didn't do my job? No, I didn't say that, that's what I thought though. Anyway, but it's true. It's cool, I'm always honored to be in the position that I am in but it's really stressful because we're constantly pushing up against people who don't even know, and you have to kind of start where they are. It's tiring, it's exhausting. I'm exhausted. I'm really, really, and truly exhausted and I'm on the edge of burnout.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

That's a term that I hear a lot of white people are actually tired of hearing from us. What do you mean by exhausted?

**Mirna Valerio:**

I'm tired of teaching you basic shit. That is what I'm tired of. That's what I'm tired about. Teaching you basic shit that you could google that you can look deeply. I know you don't have the practice, not everybody. I ain't saying all white people so don't at me. But the basic decency to look within yourself to see what is wrong. What is wrong with the way that people are being treated? Why are so many black people dying? Not just at the hands of law enforcement, but from health reasons, from chronic illnesses. If you cannot notice that, realize it, acknowledge it, and then look deeply within yourself and your own culture for those answers and I have to reveal that to you, that makes me fucking tired and angry. I know it's my job and frankly, I make a lot of money doing equity work, I'm putting myself out there every single time, I am re-traumatizing myself, every single time I tell stories, but it's the only way that they'll listen. And so, I've actually decided to pull back on my diversity work this year. I am a diversity professional, I am skilled at it, I have some expertise. I've gotten to work with incredible companies that are really trying to do the work, but it is Goddammit, it's so exhausting. I'm fatigued. And when people talk, especially when our white friends talk about compassion fatigue, I get very angry. I get very angry when I talk about ally ship fatigue, very angry. You know, I've been carrying this fatigue since I was born? Always at the ready to defend myself because somebody has a thought that I'm dangerous to them, or that I am not smart, or that I am not prepared, or that I don't belong somewhere. I am always on the defensive, always. And so I was thinking about you and I said, you are a disrupter, but you have to always be on the defensive as a disrupter. And so, that raises blood pressure, it raises the incidences of chronic illnesses. Racial battle fatigue is a real thing. A lot of people like to attribute high blood pressure to oh, well it's a lifestyle disease, it's from lifestyle. Oh, yeah, it is a lifestyle, my lifestyle includes me being defensive all the time and me always being at the ready to be on the receiving end of racism.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Right, an ism.

**Mirna Valerio:**

That's it. I'm sorry, I'm didn't me to be taking over your podcast with my rand.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

No, this podcast is about you. I am just a storyteller and a narrator in this. Did you know that your girl is selling merch? Yep, you damn skippy I am. If you're looking for a dope crop top, a hoodie that can dilute the salt from all of your haters, or a mug that will make you feel just as good as your morning group; check out runningfatchef.com. That's right runningfatchef.com. Don't whisper it, baby. One more time, runningfatchef.com. Rep your favorite fit, fat athlete gear today. The whole point is to celebrate you and to talk about the layers of you. Now, if you came on this podcast looking for some fastest known time, or tell me about [crosstalk: 30:40-30:41] we both [crosstalk: 30:44] Mine is 28 hours 27 minutes, 25 seconds.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Oh, I thought I had you beat. Mine was 26 [crosstalk: 30:52]. I had 20, 25, 59.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Yes, you do. 52. I think.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Something like that.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

[Crosstalk: 31:02], you know why I remember that. We [inaudible: 31:06] go into this first chapter of her book, A Beautiful Work in Progress. Okay, now listen, The Enabler. Because she became my enabler.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Was that the name of the first chapter? The Enabler.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Remember I reviewed this damn book. First off, she hands me this book. [Crosstalk: 31:26]

**Mirna Valerio:**

She was like, I don't know if I can be honest. Well, I'm gonna need to be honest. I'm like, go ahead be honest.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. I was like, okay, she's like, listen, I'm sensitive about my shit. Anybody don't know where that quote came from that's the glorious Erykah Badu. So, she drops me off in front of my house, and she gives me this book out of her car. And I'm like, no way. I'm like, my girl officially got a book. I'm like, you got to sign it. So I made her sign it. And she's like, okay, now, tell me about this book. I read the first chapter and I had anxiety. That, literally, I was just like, wait, hold up. I'm like one when does she sit down? When did she sit down, when does Mirna Valerio take a break? Two, what race did she say she [unintelligible: 32:14] Wait, hold up. She's doing who and what? And who talked her into this? Why would she do this? And dare I embark on the stereotype of black people don't. That was in my book. The black people don't do this. And the reason why that stereotype thrives and a lot of people, not even just black people, maybe you can actually insert fat people, you can insert, Puerto Rican people, people of whatever category of marginalized communities we say that we don't is because we fear what we don't know. Or we do not think that we can actually entertain. And that's what that chapter taught me. Because the first thing that I did after reading that first chapter, I said, no let me give my girl a text, call, a SOS. And I was just like, girl you crazy. You trippin. 100k and then she's describing like, she's visually. What helped me during my experience with the [unintelligible: 33:08] 100k in 2018. Something that she didn't show up to that she said she was gonna come to. But she was working. She was actually working, okay. That's the reason. I remember the reason why you weren't able to show up. And I was just like, damn. I'm like, this girl is booked, like, hell. And I was like, oh, I do not want part of that insanity. And we are part of this insanity, heavily relating, heavily engulfed, and drenched in it. But it's beautiful insanity. Because I would rather work super hard for myself than to do all of this work for someone else and not even get so much of a thank you. That's something that a lot of us experience in this space. But yeah, she talked me into this damn race. And I was just like, first off I'm not about to run with no rattlesnakes. No spiders that's gonna cut me on a trail. Scorpions, [unintelligible: 34:10]. I had to look up what [unintelligible: 34:11] was, okay. First off, I was like, okay, I know that's the name of the race. But what the hell is a [unintelligible: 34:15]? And I had a stupid moment. I'm like, oh, wow, hey, wait, hold up. Wait, hold up. If I see a female, she might beat my ass because she got her kids with her. Like, why do you got your kids out in public?

**Mirna Valerio:**

It's not like Brooklyn.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. So, it's like a completely different territory. But what I realized is that every time that we say things like black people don't, you know, when they say, oh, you know that stuff this is not for X, Y and Z. It either stems from some type of systemic oppression, or it thrives from a stereotype that lived in your head from God knows when

**Mirna Valerio:**

It's collective memory. It's that. There's a lot of research on it now. There's at a Sacramento State University where they break down the reasons why black families didn't visit Rocky Mountain, National Park. And one of them was there's this collective memory of people being lynched in the forest. And so they have this association, and that's brought down through generations. Or because of that, your family didn't go hiking or camping or whatever is perceived to be the great outdoors, when we know that the outdoors is greater than that, if you don't do that in your childhood, that's not something that you will likely do unless you're introduced to it in a meaningful way as an adult. And there's this whole other thing, I'm not going out to the country because there's this whole perception of country people and how country people are uneducated and this and that. Or the country was associated with farming, and like, we are urban people now. There all these reasons that I have actually been researched as to why black people, not all black people don't at me, in general, don't visit national parks, for example, at the 70% rate that white people. So, it's very interesting. They're all these things, they're all these reasons. And what's really neat about us is that we get to role model that. Even though they're all of these narratives, there are all of these reasons why people don't or why they maybe never had the access to it, or why they have some fears around that. We get to show people that we might have some fears. You have some fears about them damn snakes.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Girl, listen.

**Mirna Valerio:**

But once we can get more people like you and me in the public guy saying, okay, we're going to visit this national park. We're going to have a good time. We're gonna try skiing even though it's nobody else that's black on this whole mountain. That belongs to us too. We belong, it belongs to us. We are part of nature just as much as anything. And also, just broadening people's perspectives about what it means to be an outdoorist or I don't like saying outdoorsy or outdoorsman or whatever.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Adventurer.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Right, an adventure. Just being in your backyard spending time outside, that's being outdoors. When I went to your neighborhood park, I go to Maria Hernandez Park. That's what I grew up going to. Right there on Irving Amsterdam. [Crosstalk: 37:43] Bushwick, right. That's where I grew up. That's where I learned how to dig up worms.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

That was [crosstalk: 37:49] park for me.

**Mirna Valerio:**

That's where we had picnics. And that is the outdoors. So, the push to broaden that perspective is really important. Because people think, oh, I don't know how to do that. Well, you didn't you grew up going to the park, you do know how to do that. You can be outside for 15 hours because I sure as hell was right. They had to call me, they had to come and get me.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

This generation may not know about that.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Get in the house. You all dirty. Take a shower. That was me. And so, they're all of these things and all of this work that we still need to do to get more people comfortable with the idea of not being in the house.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Yeah.

**Mirna Valerio:**

And also feeling that they're safe when they are outside. They're safe not just physically, but emotionally that somebody ain't going to do our racism on them or sexism or some sort of transphobia laden behavior. So, we have a lot of work to do, we're doing it. And there are lots of people doing it. We need more, we need people out there. A lot more. And I'm going on a risk.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

No, I'm going to tell you off the bat, like I tell everybody. Do not apologize for your voice, your voice is powerful, and it's needed. It's a needed contribution to the isms that we are trying to change. I think a lot of us actually censor ourselves to a degree. Even I still as much of a loudmouth as I can be. Even I have moments where I censor myself in this space where I am very cautious of who's in the room.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Because you have to be. It's a survival strategy.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. And we've been conditioned to do that for a number of years. Our entire lives we've been conditioned. When I hear stereotypes, like when I walked through the hood I felt nervous and I clutched my person. I was like, what's the equivalent of that when you're black. I walk through this neighborhood and...

**Mirna Valerio:**

And wonder if somebody is going to lock their doors when I walk by their car, or ask me if I'm lost or why I'm there,

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right. Which has happened to me. We're women who travel alone a lot of times. Don't get me wrong, we're both moms because I cringe sometimes when I get interviews of what does your husband feel about you traveling alone? Well, how are you a parent if your child is not there with you? We are women who travel alone.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Like I leave his ass home.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Don't feel bad about it. Like he's fed and watered.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

 It's, okay. Don't want to worry about him. What are you doing? Okay, why are you here? How does your family feel about you traveling and talking to this black woman that you ain't never met a day in your life asking questions like this? I dare for any person who is part of a marginalized community, I hope that you not only remind yourself that you do belong in the outdoor space, but I hope you understand that it's necessary for us to be out there. Because you are going to inspire whether you like it or not, you are going to inspire the next generation of people to continuously show up. So much so that they will have to look us up in a history book to actually remember a moment in time where we did not feel like we belong.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Uber is outside.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

I'm telling you, you hear all these wonderful sounds of Brooklyn. I might even tell like don't even edit this out. Don't take [crosstalk: 41:23]

**Mirna Valerio:**

Because I live on a very, very busy street and my town is actually really quiet for some reason, usually, because there's a lot of trucks and it sounds like Brooklyn. And I also live by the police station and the fire station. They're a quarter of a mile away. And it's very quiet. And sometimes people are like, where are you? I'm like in Vermont. It's quiet right now. But it's usually very noisy at this time of the day. I go from one city to another, but this ain't no city. This is a Hamlet. I don't think it's a city. It's a city from Vermont.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Now, as we come to a close, I have to ask you, let's kind of circle back to the beginning of the conversation. If we take away all of these roles because we do this for a living and I think this is going to be an easy and a hard question. If we take away the roles that we are educators, adventurers in this space, how would you define, who is Mirna Valerio?

**Mirna Valerio:**

Why you gotta ask me this hard ask question.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

I know. I can't hit you with no soft shit.

**Mirna Valerio:**

Geez. You know, I'm a... as Madea would say, I'm a black woman. I'm a black LatinX woman, who is a mom. And who is just trying to live? I'm trying to contribute to society, but I'm also trying to take care of myself and my family. That's who I am when it boils down to it. If I were to strip all that away. All of that is infused with who I am as a black woman and a mother. Oh, I'm also a wife. I keep forgetting that.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

A better question would be, who are you to you? Because I think that sometimes, we get so caught up in who we are to other people. We don't save space for ourselves. If we really gonna talk about the arts and the essence of what real self-care is, it's really self-care for you. So, some people like me, I lock myself into the bathroom sometimes willingly, unwillingly because I might be in there writing a post, and I'm like, I'm gonna be here for a long time because of my health conditions. I realized that when I describe myself, I'll say, it's like a script. My name is Latoya Shauntay Snell, and I'm the food and fitness blogger of Running Fat Chef. And I'm a mom, I'm a wife, I'm a this like, this is actually part of my intro. And I tell you about all these roles that I have. But then I have to ask myself, who am I to me? What do I hold sacred for me? How do I view myself when I look at that reflection when I take away the role of being this in this space, in this community, to my family, who am I to me. So who exactly are you, to you?

**Mirna Valerio:**

You know when I think about it from the perspective of self-care. I am most myself when I'm by myself and I am creating music. That's a part of myself that I forget to share all the time or even sometimes I don't forget, I don't share on purpose. Because I feel like it's uniquely mine. And when I'm creating music, I am my best self. I feel at home, I don't feel stressed, I don't feel the anxiety that I feel from day to day. And it is a really intimate connection to my own body when I'm singing when I'm playing piano. So, I'm a black woman who is a classical musician who needs music to deal with all of the external stuff. So that I can get back to the internal, the essence of who I am.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

I love that. And I think that's a great way to actually closeout. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Beyond just doing this interview, I thank you for being a dynamic force and a necessary force in the space. But I thank you for being the whole ass human that you are. And being my dear friend. I don't care about what y'all hearing on here. Listen, this is my friend. This is my real-life friend y'all. We gonna link up. I'm about to go to her hood. Whatever kinda hood it actually is. I'm going to her hood.

**Mirna Valerio:**

We got churches and sandwich shops and people who don't know how to park.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Listen, we gonna mess it up. Because I got to go up there. I know it's gonna be about, let me see, because you know I don't drive yet 8 hours on the train.

**Mirna Valerio:**

On the Greyhound.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Right on the Greyhound, oh no. Now that's another podcast. I got Greyhound horror stories. And I hope that [crosstalk: 46:56]

**Mirna Valerio:**

It's not the mega bus. Come on.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

Oh, oh, Lord. On that note, thank you so much guys for tuning in to the Running Fat Chef Podcast.

**Latoya Shauntay Snell:**

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