

Intro Music :	00:16	[inaudible] [inaudible]
Katie Langston :	00:17	You're listening to an extra shot episode on the Project Zion podcast, a shorter episode that lets you get your Project Zion fix in between our full length episodes. It might be shorter time wise but hopefully not in content. So regardless of the temperature at which you prefer your caffeine, sit back and enjoy this extra shot.
Speaker 1:	00:59	[inaudible] [inaudible]
Karin Peter:	01:00	Hello Project Zion listeners and welcome to No Filter, a discussion thread here on Project Zion podcast where we have conversations about sex, sexuality, gender and faith. Our guest today is Janina Jones. Janina lives in the greater Phoenix area where she has a family, she has a pie baking business and she is in nursing school and I just learned today she also has a new obsession in raising houseplants, so Janina is a busy lady. Hi Janina.
Janina Jones:	01:34	Hi Karen.
Karin Peter:	01:35	How are you tonight?
Janina Jones:	01:37	I'm good, I'm good. We're kicking it.
Karin Peter:	01:40	Well, I'm so glad that you have time to spend with us here on Project Zion for a little bit because you and I have visited before and you have been through and maybe are still going through a really significant faith transition. And so I'm hoping that you can tell us a little bit about your journey.
Janina Jones:	02:01	Yes, I would love to know. Where to begin? Yes, that's question of my life. I was born in California, my parents were Mormon, they are still Mormon, super, super strong believers, extreme. And I didn't know I circled growing up but I definitely did. I had a lot of mental health issues and I was always told, Oh you're just not praying hard enough. Just fast. It's all your fault. Like, you don't have the spirit. So I developed so much shame and I developed a lot of body issues with that, a lot of eating disorders because I was told if I had the spirit with me I wouldn't have appetite, would be able to be controlled in the spirituality. Mormonism didn't control my mental health and I didn't know I struggled and I, my, my parents had a pretty hard time connecting with me and I think it's cause I didn't even know how to connect with myself cause I never was taught, I

never was taught how to be my own person or how to think, to even know that I wasn't my own person.

- Janina Jones: [03:12](#) I was following a path that I knew they wanted me to do and it didn't, that popped in and give me an option to be Janina. So I was just this little zombie of a human being trying to make my way through life. And I had right after high school, I got accepted to BYU, but I had to start for the summer program. So about a week after I graduated high school, I went to BYU and it was not the place for me. I ended up getting kicked out because of my grades weren't so great and I ran with a pretty wild crowd. Wild for.
- Karin Peter: [03:48](#) BYU wild?
- Janina Jones: [03:48](#) BYU wild! We worked at, I worked at a gas station with a good buddy and our wild nights was like going through the car wash in our clothes. Like, we were (laughing) we were, it was fun and I had these friends and we, we thought we were pretty wild.
- Janina Jones: [04:07](#) We had these matching little bikes, banana seat bikes and they had bells and we wore like tutus one day and with pants underneath and we drove our bikes around Provo. And this little lady called us and was like you guys have gumption cause we were so like crazy. Even though I looked back, we weren't even crazy. But back then a lot of people weren't friends with us cause we were, we thought we were wild and we weren't. But compared to BYU standards we were pretty crazy.
- Karin Peter: [04:36](#) Okay. I have an image in my head of now of BYU wild that has to do with banana seat bikes, tutus and going to a car wash and then wondering how many of my listeners are relating to that or not.
- Janina Jones: [04:54](#) Yeah, it was a special case. But then my life fell apart. Like it tends to do cause my mental health caught up with me and I moved away from Utah to Arizona and I worked out a wilderness therapy camp for troubled kids. Anasazi. There we did primitive surviving. I got good at making fire with sticks and we just connected with nature and learn not to consequences based on just how to deal with life by using nature as a guide. And that was a beautiful experience. Um, I don't know if many of the kids, it's really hard to change your life as a kid cause you go straight back into the situation that you were torn from, cause a lot of them were forced to go. Taken and forced into this program and then the placed right back into the situation that came from. But for me it really changed my life cause I was looking for change.

- Janina Jones: [05:48](#) So I grew up super duper Mormon and didn't learn or how to think for myself or I didn't learn how to be Janina. So fast forward about 15 years, I ended up finding myself in Arizona, a school bus driver, cause that's where all the cool kids got a job, and I followed some guy there of course that seemed to rule my life back then. And then I ended up in the summer hating Arizona. So I went to Alaska. I got a job driving tour buses or a couple of years in the summertimes and I met my husband there, which was super cool. It was a quick Mormon marriage. We knew each other for two months in Alaska. And then we did long distance or three months he was in Utah, was in Arizona. And then we got married as complete strangers, which at that point in my life, I was taught explicitly that any marriage could work as long as the two people are righteous, which I'm like, Oh, I could do this.
- Janina Jones: [06:56](#) And he was three and a half years younger than me and I'm under an impression I could change him to what I wanted. I'm like, great! A younger man, I can mold him. And that's how I got married.
- Karin Peter: [07:06](#) Okay. So a Mormon marriage, Mormon expectations. And yet at some point that a life of what, what you were living in the, what you felt was the expectation of typical Mormon experience that didn't work for you. So what happened?
- Janina Jones: [07:29](#) I had my third kid and around the same time I was pregnant with him. I had a friend who had started in the question the church, and I've always been an amazing listener, amazing friend. So I would just listen to her talk and I didn't really think anything of it because at that point I still didn't know how to critically think for myself what to do, kind of it planted seeds in the back of my mind.
- Janina Jones: [07:55](#) And then when I was pretty pregnant, I just was having trouble with church. My oldest is on the autism spectrum and he has ADHD, so he was a trouble at church and I'd complain to his child development specialist, like, I can't do this. Church is so hard. He needs to be this. And she's like, why are you taking your kid to church? It is not a developmentally appropriate place for a kid like him. You need to set your kid up for success. That's not fair to him. And I'm like, you're right this point, I was still pretty believing and I'm like, so when I was pregnant, and so I had the baby and I gave myself a, God you understand if I don't go to church, he knows my situation. And I also wanted to kind of figure things out because well, my friends had been telling me what's starting to bother me and I'm like, I need to start teaching my kids what I believe.

- Janina Jones: [08:52](#) But I honestly didn't know what I believe. I did years of seminary growing up. We did early morning and my parents didn't give us a lot of money growing up, but if we had perfect attendance, we've got like 100 bucks. So I had four years of perfect attendance, early morning seminary. But I didn't learn because I was this there, I just floated by. I got the stuff I did, guy was how to judge myself, how to judge other people and how not to be worthy and that I wasn't worthy. That's pretty much what I learned, that I was never good enough. So then I decided that I had to look into it and at that time I had found the LDS gospel essays.
- Karin Peter: [09:31](#) Yes,
- Janina Jones: [09:32](#) Which are damning of themselves. But I had remembered this one time in my Sunday school class probably when I was 16 the teacher was talking about the Book of Abraham and how Joseph Smith was able to translate Egyptian and that means he was a prophet and the church was true.
- Janina Jones: [09:50](#) And I was like, okay, if that happens, then I don't have to think about it. And I just got to think about it. So I had remembered this, or the very first essay that I read with the book of Abraham, and this was all lds.org like credible sources. It totally broke apart that he translated it and he was like, they talked about how he was, he just usually has a like revelation. It wasn't really translated, just all the stuff that I was like, if this isn't true, that church is not true like this can like I've been lied to. So then I dove in really hardcore to church history, listened to The Year of Polygamy podcast, Mormon stories, just found my way through all of these really dark, deep parts of church history that you're not taught. And I then I just couldn't do it. And in that I realized that I don't believe in the traditional God. I realized, I believe there some sort of human connection, but I don't know if I could believe in God and definitely not a Mormon God. He was not as loving as I would want someone to be my eternal father. The treatment of LGBT is people that don't believe anyone that's different. It just wasn't true accepting. And to me that's not, that's not Christianity.
- Karin Peter: [11:10](#) So this was a really dark period for you when you took this kind of dive off into, um, all of this new information and more reputable sources for church history and talking to other people and of course listening to a lot of different podcasts. So as you began to process through this and dismantled some of these beliefs that you've grown up with, you have said in the past that one of the things that began to happen with you, you began to

discover who you were rather than who others expected. So can you tell us a little bit about that?

Janina Jones: [11:51](#)

Yes. I began to realize that I, I always was like a free spirited, happy go lucky like accept anybody person. And I had to dial that back a million times because in Mormonism you can't just, you can't love everybody cause you're supposed to judge them. Every friend you have, you're supposed to have with idea that you're going to eventually teach them the gospel. Tha'ts your mission. Like in your patriarchal blessing, you're taught, you're told that you're going to share the gospel with your friends and they're gonna meet you up. And having to be so grateful that you shared the gospel with them and the friends that you don't will be devastated. You're holding them back. So I had all these expectations and my friendships and I was embarrassed about the church and I never shared that kind of stuff. And it was such a relief just to be able to not have that guilt of not wanting to share religion with people and just loving them, loving myself for being perfect and beautiful.

Janina Jones: [12:52](#)

And Brene Brown was a very big part of my faith transition. And her whole idea is just the gifts of imperfection. You are beautiful the way you are. Be vulnerable. Just be empathetic and learn how to be empathetic towards other people and especially yourself. So I just began to reach out with myself and just, I've changed how I've treated everybody in my life and it's kind of cool.

Karin Peter: [13:24](#)

So this new Janina begins to emerge and the shell casing is kind of peeled away that was hiding you or holding you in a certain way. And out came this really empowered, vibrant, outspoken woman that had been there all along. How did that affect your relationships with others, your family, your friends, your spouse? How did, how did that work?

Janina Jones: [13:56](#)

We'll start with my family. My family was devastated. I kind of also planned my transition for when my parents were on a Mormon mission. They were in Spain for two years and so I did a lot of my exploring then because I knew I didn't have to answer cause they'd always call me Sundays and notice that I wasn't at church so they were so busy. I was able to kind of spread that out. And then when they found out they were devastated. This makes, there's four kids in my family and this is three out of four of us are out now and my mom prays for my soul everyday still. She thinks she's a failure. We're not going to be with her for eternity even though I'm completely better person today. So that really is affected that it's really hard when you leave Mormonism cause the Mormonism, you're taught

that if you're being righteous, if anything goes wrong at the test and if you're not, if you've left the church its attribution like a punishment.

- Janina Jones: [14:57](#) So everything that I, any problem I have in life, I'm told like, Oh you just need to come back to church. Just pay your tithing, just do this and God will take care of it. And like, no, this is just like, it's like, it makes you feel like you want to put up a false sense of like perfection for your Mormon family. Cause you don't want to be judged on like just knowing that someone's not really taking your problem seriously and thinking it's God way of telling you you need to get your act together. It doesn't feel good. So that really affects that. My friendships, they have blossomed. I have the best connections with my friends now, like really heart to heart. One of the cool things I do is I'm in a mom's club and I started when I was a true believer and they've watched this whole transition and I've talked, been able to talk to them about how it was and they were like, yeah, Janina, you are so uptight. You are not any fun and they've watched it all. They've watched my dark sides like I've, I've been, during all this, I had also postpartum depression, all this stuff. Like I was deep and dark and now I'm come out completely different. I swear like a sailor now.
- Karin Peter: [16:15](#) Some of us do too, Janina. It's fine.
- Janina Jones: [16:19](#) To me. It's fun and beautiful and just all these things like I'm so much more carefully and they'd talk about, they laugh at me sometimes. It's fun.
- Karin Peter: [16:29](#) So when you described yourself and this transition, it's a lot of joy. It's a lot of deep joy that happens out of you now. But also I found it interesting that you said you gave up being judgmental in order to live a life that was compassionate and loving. And that's been an interesting way to describe your change and your transition to become a person who you called to be, which is a person who is loving and compassionate and connect authentically with others. So how has this kind of new way of being Janina, this joyful, compassionate Janina, how have you, or have you maybe I should ask, noticed what strengthens you and gives you competence now and in this part of your journey?
- Janina Jones: [17:23](#) That is definitely, it's a work in progress trying to find confidence, but I think it's having real friends that could really, they see that beauty in my soul and just like they tell me this all the time. Janina you're amazing. And that's our conversation sometimes. Just that reminder of just how beautiful I am. It started off as a joke, me talking like that just to convince myself

with positive affirmations and I think come slowly believing it. Some days I do more than others, but I'm really starting to feel it when I just, I look at, I look at my life, I have pretty cool. I am like, I look at all this stuff going for me pie business. I have really healthy green house plants that are so fun. Like I, anything I do, I do really well. Even mental health. I do with passion all around everything I excel at.

Janina Jones:

[18:22](#)

So yeah, so it's just, I think it's just finally being okay with just being the way you are and just having that figuring out true love for yourself. And it doesn't have to be all at once. And be okay. I think it's more of being comfortable as sit in your own darkness and then you can feel the light. You know what? That's I think what it really is like I'm, I'm comfortable in darkness. I'm comfortable in pain. Like everyone that knows me, you've seen me cry. Like I cry if I'm happy or sad or just in between. And to me that's, that's okay. And because of that, but people are also open up to me a lot easier cause they know they could cry and will cry right with them. And that, that relationships connecting with other people in real manners, I think that feeds my soul, that feeds my need for human connection, high spirituality and makes me happy.

Karin Peter:

[19:23](#)

So earlier you said that when you, when you realized you were transitioning out of Mormonism, you left that kind of a traditional God behind. That you didn't have a need for that in your life. When you talk about your journey now you talk in spiritual terms, you talk about that a journey, you talked about connection, to whatever it is that is in you and in others or that you see in others. You talk about light and dark. So what about your spiritual journey now has surprised you?

Janina Jones:

[20:00](#)

That I'm so comfortable not believing in a God and so comfortable with not knowing the fact that I don't feel like I really need to know because to me that knowledge isn't going to help me because it's never going to be proven to me. So why worry about something that is not gonna be like, I'm not going to know if it's true or not in this life and I'm okay with that. But I, what I do know is that helping people makes me happy, makes them happy and smiles. I think our why is important in life and that anything that helps me smile or someone else smile, that's, that's what I don't want to say worship. But that's what I strive for. Like just happiness and at the same time sadness because sadness could be really almost uplifting when you're okay to express that sadness cause without the sadness you don't have the happiness.

- Karin Peter: [21:02](#) So you have kind of found a place in this group of individuals called Community of Christ at the congregation near where you live, where um, you have been accepted for who you are and you kids or who are in that experience to the point where I'm pretty sure you were at pride in the Community of Christ booth inviting people into community. So tell me about that.
- Janina Jones: [21:32](#) That was, that was pretty cool. I've always had a soft spot for the LGBTQ community just because there are people like I always, I wasn't sure why but it's actually been something that has been pretty pivotal in kind of maybe my faith transition a little or discovering that I'm comfortable in my shoes but I've always had crushes on girls my whole life. But I just call it a girl crush, laughed it off. But now I realize I'm, I'm bisexual. And so it was pretty cool to be able to be with a faith community who was accepting for, for me, if I liked the girl, if I like boobs, if I like whatever it's OK. like it's, it's a beautiful thing and I was really, really happy to be with Community of Christ. That I think is truly where Christ would be. I think most people, most Mormons don't understand Christianity cause he was with those people.
- Janina Jones: [22:31](#) He was with the harlots, the sinners, the sick. That's who he loved. And LGBT people are none of those. They're like the awesome cause they're humans. Everyone's awesome. Just kind of cool to just connect with real people who are drugging to live their lives. And there are the people that really know themselves and have the confidence and the courage to be themselves even though some people might kind of not treat them equally. And so those are the coolest people I think to talk to him cause I'm kind of one of them too.
- Karin Peter: [23:05](#) Well it's been a really wonderful experience to get to know you a little bit and walk with you for part of your journey over the past year or so since we've known each other. When you think about your journey here, your transition and how we speak about gender and faith, sexuality and faith, what are some things that would be helpful for, would have been helpful for you and would be helpful for others in the conversations about gender, gender identity and sexuality?
- Janina Jones: [23:46](#) That's a really good question. I think the fact that it just doesn't matter as long as you love, you can, sexuality, does it matter as long as you have a true connection like this, you can love whoever you want and it's beautiful and it could change too. That's the best part about it. I don't think those parts are so just there like it doesn't matter. There's so many ways things could be different and you can love different people for different matters.

Karin Peter: [24:16](#) And so let me ask it this way. Your boys get older. What are you going to say to them about gender identity and faith?

Janina Jones: [24:24](#) I think I'm gonna just tell them they can just be Hunter. Like he doesn't even have to worry about the gender. Like you're just Hunter, whoever you are. Or Zander or Cooper. Three boys. I don't think I said that. I have three boys ages four, six and eight.

Janina Jones: [24:40](#) They're crazy and awesome. I live in a zoo. And I will just tell them it doesn't matter like gender doesn't matter. It's, it's beautiful because cause who they are and it's fluid and it's just beautiful. It's their, it's their brains and their souls and their smile is, that's what matters in life. As long as I have those will care to love whoever they want, whenever they want.

Karin Peter: [25:08](#) That's lovely, Janina. So you go to school. In school you are a pie baker extraordinaire. Having tasted your pies many times, I can attest to that for our listeners. What's next for Janina? I'm actually starting with another fellow Community of Christ member. We're starting an interfaith connections group here in our area of Surprise. We're having our first meetup in a couple weeks or just providing an area for families to get together and experience spirituality without religion. So that's kind of cool being able to head that up.

Janina Jones: [25:50](#) One story that I, I feel like I need to share. When I started college, I went to community college right here in Arizona and I had a friend who was into diversity with the multicultural student union and they invited me to a diversity camp and I went since pretty cool camp and just you learned about all these other religions and cultures and it was just beautiful. Just connecting with humans for who they are and learning about all this other stuff I'd never been exposed to. And then two years ago I was invited to reunion out in Prescott, Arizona and I show up at.

Karin Peter: [26:28](#) Oh at Whispering Pines,

Janina Jones: [26:29](#) Yeah, Whispering Pines, and I drove up and I was like, I've been here before. This was the same location where I went to that diversity camp and it was just a really cool circle of like me, one of the first places where I understood other people's beauty and religions too, where I kind of ended up with my current spiritual community. Yeah, that's pretty cool.

Karin Peter: [26:52](#) That is pretty cool. Coming full circle. Yeah, it's a little bit like coming home.

Janina Jones: [26:57](#) Yes, it really is.

Karin Peter: [27:00](#) Well, I appreciate you taking the time tonight away from your family and your studies and everything else so that you could visit with us and we look forward to seeing where your journey takes you in the future. And we'll check in with you and see. Thanks Karen. Thanks to Janina. So for our listeners here on Project Zion, this has been No Filter where we have conversations about sex, sexuality, gender, and faith.

Music: [27:37](#) [inaudible]

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