

BMO Bold(h)er: A Fate Worth Fighting For

Lina Khalifeh

They said, we want you to hold the torch in the Olympic representing SheFighter. So, for me, it was an honor because I'm not representing Taekwondo. And I'm not representing my country. I'm representing myself. You know, the Olympics did not come really fast. It's just I had to go on another path to create another destiny for me, one that is really meant for me.

Lisa Bragg

Lina Khalifeh has a long list of accomplishments I could tell you about. She's always at the top of the success ladder. She is the founder and CEO of SheFighter, an organization that teaches women to defend themselves and she's a speaker and author. But to give her a title right now might be a bit hard to land on one, as she's going through a re-invention. And she's at that very messy point that you don't hear about from highly successful people.

Hi, I'm Lisa Bragg and this is Bold(her), stories of and for women who stand out, brought to you by BMO for Women.

Lisa Bragg

Lina, you're a speaker and a lot of your talks have catchy titles like *Troublemaker to Global Changemaker*. Why those titles?

Lina Khalifeh

Well, because I believe that women are raised to not to be troublemakers, but to be more behaved in society. I always choose troublemaker because I believe women need to be bold. They need to be change-makers. They need to stand up, they need to speak. They need to change the stereotypes. That's why I always like troublemaker. They used to call me troublemaker, because I always felt like I needed to challenge people and ask them why men get to do this, but women could not do it. So, that's why they used to tell me, *Oh, you're such a troublemaker. Why don't you just follow the rules?* So, I just love being called troublemaker. At the beginning, it was annoying me, like, *I'm not a troublemaker! I'm just trying to have equality and ask questions about things.* But then I realized they are threatened by women who are bold.

Lisa Bragg

And I think we're so many of us are taught to be good girls, keep your head down, don't make a lot of ruckus and then eventually somebody will pick you. You just don't believe in that, but that instead we need to pick ourselves first. Tell me a little bit about that.

Lina Khalifeh

I believe that women should do a lot of mistakes in order to learn in order to prepare themselves for the future, for life. We are taught as women not to do mistakes because we always think that men can handle it, and that boys can handle it. But women are taught to be perfectionists. And it's something I always questioned since I was young, *Why do I have to do things perfectly? How am I going to learn?* I need to make mistakes. I never looked at mistakes as mistakes. I looked at them as an experience for me to learn again. I never even use the word failure or rejection. I use other words, like *I'm taking a break*. Even if for society I failed, I do not feel like I failed. I am just transitioning or learning or experiencing. It's part of growing and knowing your journey. Women or girls need to be taught in school that it is okay to make mistakes. It's okay to fail. It's okay to break your leg. It's okay to fall many times. You don't have to be number one all the time.

Lisa Bragg

That's so challenging in our society, because we are taught to have the mindset of a winner and you have the mindset of a winner. One day you told me you challenged yourself to say, *Well, what am I trying to prove?* Because we're all trying to prove something to someone somewhere or even within ourselves. But tell me about that realization for yourself where you said I don't have to prove anything to anyone.

Lina Khalifeh

I was in Taekwondo. I was a black belt holder, 3rd Dan, and had won 20 gold medals. I always look at winning all the time, my mind is focused on winning, I never see losing as part of the equation. And when I win too much, I feel like I'm not challenged anymore. And then I would lose interest in pursuing the same path. I thought about it when I got the gold medal. People are clapping and cheering, but what am I trying to prove really? I'm hurting someone in front of me with these championships. I am hurting someone else who is not really qualified to play against me because I want to prove that I'm the best. Why do I have to do it? And then I started questioning a lot. Even the fighting system, the winning system, (the fact) that I have to be a winner all the time, or medals, or championships. Why do we have to do it, really? Does it really feel good when we get there? Well, you do feel good. But then it's just a goal you reached and then you say, *What's next? Who am I going to challenge next? What am I going to do next?*

Then, I realized, I'm not trying to prove anything to anybody. I'm trying just to prove it to myself. And I tried to learn to not have a winning mindset all the time but to try to enjoy the journey more. Or to try to not focus a lot on the goal. While enjoying my journey, make mistakes and, it's okay to fail many times.

I always had this mindset, even in my business. So when, when I started my business, I said, *It's going to be successful and it's going to be huge*. And I know it, because I'm the

one leading that company. It's the same mindset as the Taekwondo championships when I was a teenager - it's the same mindset, it's a winner's mindset. And it's good! Sometimes you get addicted to winning, that you stop even seeing failure as an option in your life. But I think sometimes, you lose during the journey, because you focus too much on the goal. You stop seeing the good things in life during your journey, or the beauty of life, because you're just focused on getting to the top of the mountain or the peak. And when you get to the peak, you have a beautiful view, I'm telling you! But usually, you feel like you need to be challenged to get higher and higher.

Lisa Bragg

Tell us a little bit about bit about SheFighter.

Lina Khalifeh

Well, I decided to start the first self-defence studio for women back in 2012. Because of the idea, it's called SheFighter. Because I had enough from women being harassed, women being called that they're weak, that they cannot do things. Because I never believed that I am one of these women that they're referring to. You know, that they (women) are weak, or vulnerable. No, I felt like women are very confident and there's a lot of potential in women. But, probably they need the right training. And when I thought about it more, I looked at myself and I said, *Who's better than you in doing that? It's probably no one, you have to do it on your own.* And I was convinced 100%. I always have voices that speak to me, when I needed to listen to something. These voices will tell me that I'm the one to do it and then I would go and pursue that path, believing 100% that it will work. I never doubt that it will never work. Other people would doubt but I would not. So, the thing that made me start SheFighter is a woman, who was a friend, who was beaten up and abused by her brother and father back in college. She came to the university with bruises on her face. I was really angry about the situation of women and domestic violence in Jordan. And I said, *There has to be a solution.* That's where I thought about it and came up with SheFighter, which is training women in self-defence, and empowering them psychologically and physically.

Lisa Bragg

Tell me about those inner voices. Tell me how you actually listen to them because, I think so many of us, we don't listen to that inner calling, those signs that we don't listen to. It's almost like you talk to yourself in sometimes the second or third person.

Lina Khalifeh

I think because people like to be busy all the time. They don't like to miss one hour in the day not doing anything. But when you understand that your time is different than someone's else's time, you start working on your time, on your pace. Let's say if everybody is 100% busy in their day, getting things done, and you are kind of calm, you know, taking slower steps than or they think that they're you're taking slower steps,

you're actually reflecting and thinking and creating your life inside out. It's not just outside, there is a lot of work that has to be done inside in order for your life to be. Because I feel like your life is a mirror of who you are deep inside. If your brain and your thoughts and your emotions are all heading towards a goal, a path or, a journey, then that's what you're going to vibrate in life. That's what you are going to attract in your life. And that's what, where you're heading.

If you're not having peace with your time, because a lot of people would say, *Oh I'm always tight on time, I feel like I don't know how the day ends.* All these thoughts - it's usually true because it's about you not being in harmony with your own time. But I always felt since I was a kid - I don't know why maybe some people agree with me, or they probably don't - but I always felt that I have all the time in the world. Even when I was building my business, I had all this success, I was training all over the world, I was jumping on flights twice a week to different countries, I always felt I had all the time in the world! It's just a feeling. And then time works for me. So, I get these voices when I'm all alone, when I'm questioning things, when I'm thinking, when I'm talking to myself in front of the mirror - and I do that a lot. For example, if I feel angry, I talk to myself. *Lina why are you angry? What's wrong? Are you thinking about that situation that happened to you six years ago? Why are you even going there, it's not happening now?* I talk to myself constantly because if I don't, I would live in the past and then I would lose focus on where I'm heading, and it would become a little bit blurry. It's helping me understand why these emotions and thoughts come to my brain. As monks call it in Buddhism, it is the monkey mind. With the monkey mind, you actually jump in different events in your head and you're thinking about something that happened 10 years ago and then you wake up suddenly, it's like - *Why did this thought come to my head, now?* Now I'm living in the present moment. And then when you are aware of it, you actually can control it. But if you're not aware and you're drawn back to the same emotion you felt ten years ago, then you're back in the same circle or cycle. You feel like you cannot escape it and you're trapped in your head. So, be careful. Your mind can play tricks with you. You need to control it; your mind cannot control you.

Lisa Bragg

It's so much about mindset. I just want to touch base a little bit more on SheFighter and ask you about the outcomes you've seen as you've traveled the world and brought your program to so many women. What are some of the success stories that you've had and, the things that really made you feel like you were being successful in the program?

Lina Khalifeh

Well, the journey of building SheFighter helped me and others question things. Working with women has always been amazing because you hear different stories from different backgrounds, different religions, different beliefs. And then you humble yourself and you start accepting other peoples' beliefs and other peoples' thoughts. And then you listen and you listen carefully. You do not just speak, you listen carefully to their stories. And there are a lot of stories that that would change even my day and make me

happier. There is this little girl who came with her mother to the training. She told me on the first day that she's been bullied by boys because she's standing up for herself. I can tell she's a tough girl. And you know, tough girls or like bold girls, they're probably going to face some trouble in school - even in different societies and countries. And then she told me, *I want to learn how to defend myself if they try to attack me.* I said, *Of course you're going to learn that. That's why you're here.* Because they're bullies and you cannot change bullies. You just have to learn how to deal with bullies. And the other story is about a woman who was training at SheFighter and she got attacked at the elevator in her own building by a stranger. She said, *the first thing I felt I could not breathe. I could not speak. I could not ask for help - because he was choking me and he was trying to rape me.* This was at 6PM, the sun was still up. And she said, *because I got the training, I started pushing him and hitting him with my palm, with my elbows, until he escaped and ran away from the elevator.* She said she had the courage to chase him to the street and then asked people to help her and they caught him. The police came and she placed charges against him. And he's now in jail for three years for sexual assault. So, these stories make me feel happier, because I feel like what I'm doing is actually make a difference.

Lisa Bragg

You had a dream of going to the Olympics. Tell us about that story.

Lina Khalifeh

When I was a teenager, I was focused on one goal. One mission (I had) was to get to the Olympics. I was the best in the national team, I had many gold medals, I was training to compete at the Olympics. I was training day and night, more than 12 hours a day. I was just killing myself training and training and training. But some signs started to happen. While I was training at the national team, they did not want me to represent Jordan. They started trying to get rid of me. I did not want to believe that and did not want to listen to that because I believed I was the best to represent the country in the Olympics - I was trained to do that! But, they wanted a pure Jordanian to represent the country. I was originally Palestinian. Because I am Palestinian, even though I do have the Jordanian citizenship, I was still treated as a Palestinian immigrant, because of my family name. So, I was so stubborn. I said, *No, that's my goal, that's my dream, I trained so hard for it.* I did not listen to all of the other whispers (saying), *don't follow that path, it's not yours, you have something better.* But sometimes, you don't want to listen to that voice because you worked so hard. You say, *that's my destiny, I worked hard for it, it doesn't make any sense.*

Because the voices in my head were louder and louder to not fight back, I did not listen to these voices and then I injured myself really badly. The injury was so bad in my knee that I had to do two surgeries, I was limping for about two years and could not walk straight. I was in a really bad situation. I was so angry because I thought that's what life was about - you work hard, you get results. But it's not really necessary, especially if

you're not on your path, if you're not listening. Then, I gave up the dream of going to the Olympics.

After I built SheFighter and after exactly six years of building SheFighter, the Olympics contacted me and they said, *We want you to hold the torch in the Olympic representing SheFighter.* For me, it was an honour because I'm not representing Taekwondo and I'm not representing my country - I'm representing myself, I'm representing SheFighter, something I built. So that was a very emotional time, I could not believe it. They called me, they sponsored the whole flight, they gave me the torch as a gift and they gave me a certificate of appreciation. It was like a dream, I did not believe it. So, when people listen to these voices, wait and are patient - there's something out there better if they are patient. You know, the Olympics did not come really fast. I had to go on another path to create another destiny for me, one that was really meant for me.

Lisa Bragg

But to switch gears now, you've had tremendous success and I can already see how you go on a roller coaster, up and down, and up and down – but right now, you're actually reinventing yourself. So, you've had this tremendous success and now, you're kind of walking away from things.

Lina Khalifeh

Every time I reach the peak, I feel like I need more of a challenge. What is the point, if I'm not even challenging myself to grow? Sometimes you can stay in this level and a lot of people would get satisfied staying there but, I wouldn't feel like I'm alive, if there is not something new for me or if there is not something for my brain to grow. Everything else will feel like I know how to do it, I'm bored doing that, I know how to do it. I could build the business from scratch all over again. It's easy, because I do have the know-how but then it's like, *What can I challenge myself in more in order to keep myself motivated and alive?* So, I'm now in that stage. Every ten years, sometimes even less like eight or five years, I feel like I need to fully change the way I look at things on the business level, on the mindset level and, on the spiritual level. I feel the need to keep going on this journey. I feel like life is all about ups and downs, ups and downs. Sometimes you go on the stable line, but sometimes you fall again. I thought, *You know what, you had a lot of falling when you were younger, like you were a teenager or you were in your 20s.* But then, that was not true because I had another major falling, or I call it major failures or shifting in my life, in my mid-30s - which was something I did not expect. And again, I felt like I was back to this time where I was injured on the bed, thinking it's just me, myself and I, saying *No, I'm back to that again?*

But at least I don't push it, I don't force it. I'm not angry about where I am at right now because I believe in myself and I believe that I'm going to rise again - it's just a matter of time. What to do next is also challenging. I'm into manufacturing our products, for SheFighter, that would have a percentage of the revenue going towards training women in Africa, in Jordan and in different places in the world. So, I also started a charity in

Mauritius with a community there so I can help them. And that's what I'm what that's what I want. I want to have a bigger impact. It's not just about the SheFighter Academy, teaching in specific places, but rather, it's about benefiting women all over the world through merchandise, through the training of trainers, through services, through academies. That's where I'm heading now.

Lisa Bragg

SheFighter still exists, but you're taking a different path with it. Are you getting any feedback from people where they're saying *Why would you do that? Why are you going that way?* Are you hearing that at all?

Lina Khalifeh

Oh, a lot, a lot. It's your journey. As I said, you don't have to give an explanation to everybody about why you're taking these decisions, because they don't understand, they don't understand your vision, they don't understand where you're heading. And it's tough. It's tough, because you have to explain that to them. You have to show them that you did not give up on them, but you actually are working on a bigger impact. But, they still don't see the bigger picture. They never even saw the success I had a long time ago, they did not even see SheFighter as successful. But I did. It's my journey. I feel like you don't have to give any explanation to anybody about why you're doing what you're doing. Sometimes it's hard to explain in words where you're headed, because they cannot see it. They're not on your path. So, you know, tell them that it's going be okay (laughs).

Lisa Bragg

Do you feel any shame about walking away from some level of success, though? Other people are still climbing and are so thirsty for it when you're like, *Yeah, I've been there, I've done that, I don't need to go for gold anymore, I don't need to prove that SheFighter can be this massive enterprise that I'm the head of?*

Lina Khalifeh

Yeah, I felt guilt the first time I wanted to expand somewhere else than Jordan. I felt this feeling of guilt as if I was giving up on a baby or something. But there's that voice again, saying that it's going to be okay. It was mid-2019, where I did not understand why I was having that voice strongly. You know - that voice probably understood that there would soon be a pandemic (laughs). That's why I'm very grateful I took that step in 2019. Imagine if I had taken it in 2020, the business would have been bankrupt. Nobody would even want to buy your gym. The location costs thousands of dollars, it would be a loss. Now, I feel like, just trust the voice. It's not just a voice, it's a feeling. It's a feeling connected to the voice (saying) *take that step, don't think about consequences, just trust it.* It's so hard, believe me, because you are not seeing fully. You are blind and you are just following a feeling.

A lot of people would not want to follow a feeling because they are so afraid of going into darkness or into a blurry path - but after the blurry path, things will start to get a little bit brighter and clearer. It is then that you will understand why you did that step one, two, three or five years ago, to be on another path for another journey, another story to tell. It's not easy. When I take any decision that is really hard, I take time and I cry a lot, I meditate a lot, I walk a lot, I scream a lot, I punch (laughs). It's not like I am very accepting - no, no! I talk to myself like, *Why did you do this? Why did you take that decision? Do you even know where you're heading?* I feel like a human being has to experience all emotions.

We teach people a lot of anger management but I don't think they need anger management, they need to let anger out. It's so toxic to keep it in your body. There are many ways (to let anger out); either you scream, you cry, you punch something, you talk about it. Everybody has their own way - but don't let anger in. It's very toxic.

Lisa Bragg

I can already feel some of our listeners saying *But I can't get angry, especially if I'm in with my staff. As a leader, I can't get angry.* So, what's your advice to people who are leaders, when things aren't going well with work? You know, we want to be angry, but as women often we can't demonstrate anger to our staff. Can you talk to us about that?

Lina Khalifeh

You know what I realized is one important thing about being a female manager versus being a male manager? They do accept men to be angry, but they do not accept women to be angry or behave in a way that they're angry. They feel like a woman should behave all the time. I always had that problem where if I'm angry, and let's say, I don't like (how) one of my employees did not do a certain task. I'm not angry at them, but I want the task to be done. They would take it personally. They would even say, *You're not allowed to be angry at us.* Then, I thought to myself, *How come my father always screams at his staff, but they never say a word? Why (is it that) if I open my mouth and try to be a little bit angry, it is not accepted and lot of employees would just quit work.* It's a problem. It's a really big problem in different societies, in different cultures. In Jordan, they do not accept a woman being angry at the team while they accept it fully from a man - they understand that he's just doing his job. While a woman would be judged directly. They would say, *Oh, she would probably do that at her house too, I feel sorry for her husband, she's probably always angry at home.* Unfortunately, it's a stereotype about women and, we have to change it. We have to change that mindset.

Lisa Bragg

You know, I think we all try to bring our strongest emotional intelligence to everything we do and anger is one of the things that we have to deal with. But, I think in North

America, it's exactly how it is in Jordan, where people don't accept a female leader being angry, and telling and expressing that. You said that at home alone, you scream, yell and punch. What are some anger management techniques that you would suggest to people who are dealing with anger? How not to keep it bottled up?

Lina Khalifeh

One of the best techniques is to talk to yourself in the mirror, talk to yourself as if you're another person and then, get to conclusions. When I'm very, very angry, and I feel like I want to explode from inside, I have to let it out in any way. I just close the door, I cry a lot, I cry for hours. And then sometimes I'm like, *I don't know why I'm even crying*. But it feels good.

When I had the studio in Jordan, in Amman, I had a lot of punching bags. So, when I'm angry at the government, or the tax department, or, you know, some idiots (laughs) I put the gloves on, and I just punch the bag for like, two or three hours, I scream, I close the door, nobody's there. It's just my safe space, I can be who I am. A lot of people would want you to be that intellectual person who is behaving wisely. But inside, you're a roller coaster of different emotions. Life hits you hard and it's okay to a human. Don't judge yourself. Don't say, *I'm not allowed to cry, it's not acceptable*.

Even for men, men should cry, men must cry. Because (or else) it would be toxic and they would not know how to deal with what is going on in their bodies and then they will let it out at someone. We call it letting the trash out, letting the negative energy out. And let's say, when you're in peace and you're walking and someone throws all of their trash on you, you have to protect yourself from that too. Do not absorb their negative energy. The way to defend yourself against negative energy, I always give two techniques during the training. One technique is to not look into someone's eyes directly. When you want to have a conversation, do not look into their eyes - look at the nose and the mouth. They will not know the difference and you will not absorb their energy. It's really important.

(Another technique) is when they start screaming and shouting at you to let it out, do not answer back. Just walk away. That way, you did not take their energy. If you feel some kind of bad energy on your body, do not talk about it, try to clean it out. For example, I would take a shower to clean all the energy out. I would meditate but water definitely helps. Take a shower, spend some time in the shower and you will feel how everything leaves your system. It's important to protect yourself from other people's energy as well.

Lisa Bragg

That's great advice. Now, your father is a big part of your story. Tell us about what you've observed in the last little while and tell us about how he doesn't take permission - I want to know about those things.

Lina Khalifeh

My father always called me troublemaker because I'm similar to him. He is a troublemaker. He was expelled from university because he hit some man in the face because he told him that he was a Palestinian immigrant and should go back home. He has always been a fighter but as I said men do not know how to express their emotions. And they feel it's to show weakness to talk about it. So, we had a lot of problems because I am similar to him and he doesn't want anybody to be similar to him. He wants everybody else to obey what he is doing. I would say he's the only successful person in the family with a lot of money, and he's providing for the whole family. He has different factories, different enterprises, he started everything from scratch. For him, how I did not go and work with his company, he felt threatened. He was like, *All the men work in my company, who do you think you are?* And I said, *I'm different, I don't have to follow, it's not my dream, it's your dream, you build it.*

He takes risks, that's what I noticed. He doesn't care about people's opinion. He just goes and does things without asking anybody for permission. During the pandemic, he bought another factory. Everybody was going crazy, saying, *How would you do that? We barely have any revenue during the pandemic.* But he said, *Nobody interfere, it's my money.*

I want to reach to that level, I want to do things without taking any permission from anybody. I look at him as I learned from him, what I can learn from him, but I always tell myself, I'm not him. So I say, *Lina, you are not your father, you are just similar in some ways, but you are not your father.* I'm doing that talk with myself now.

Lisa Bragg

I think it's also the risk though. You've seen the risk that he takes, the bold steps to do things and that has imprinted on you. Any advice for people who are hesitant to take some big risks?

Lina Khalifeh

Risks are hard to take – that's why it's called taking risks. Risk is like a muscle. How you deal with risk, with time, it becomes easier, you start taking more and more risks. That's why it's important to start taking risks at a younger age. If you take a risk in your early 20s, then you're going to take another risk and another and maybe you'll take about ten risks before you reach your 30s. Then, risk would be so easy for you to take later on. You overcome the feeling of failure and rejection, and failing again, and then rising again, and then failing again, and then rising again. Because I took a risk at a really young age, I was 23 or 24, I put all my savings in the business. For me, it was a big risk. Now I see it as a very small risk, but at that time, it looked like a very big risk. I always remind myself, *Lina, remember when that time you felt that it was a big risk, and it wasn't?* You're in the same time now where you're going to take another risk, where it's not going to be as big in your 40s. So, take it.

Lisa Bragg

But if you do, if you're at your 40s, 50s and 60s, like some of our listeners, it's starting with some comfortable ones, baby steps and then, building up to it. So, when you're 80, maybe you can take that bigger risk for yourself!

Lina Khalifeh

Maybe then they can climb Mount Everest!

Lisa Bragg

You know, you keep coming back to the voices, but it's also the beginner's mindset. How do you keep training yourself to have that beginner's mindset when you already know so much and the path is so easy to take the one that you've already trotted on? How do you come back to that beginner's mindset and allow yourself to be there?

Lina Khalifeh

The beginner's mindset is not easy to go back to, especially if you build something for so many years, 20 years let's say, or 10 years, or 15 years or 30 years. That's why it's important to humble yourself and just ask questions and say, *Tell me more, I really don't know.*

Let's talk about ego for a bit. Ego, I feel is one of the darkest powers in human bodies. But at the same time, it's there to help us keep going with life. But we have to really control our ego, because our ego will start saying that *you know too much, you're a professor, you're a PhD student, you know better than anybody on that topic, don't listen to them.* That's where your mind will start getting very closed and that's where your mind will shrink because you're not listening to anybody's opinion. Having an open mindset is just accepting and allowing thoughts to pass through your brain and sometimes to let these thoughts get into your head and think about it. It's about being hungry for knowledge all the time.

I'm always hungry for knowledge. I'm always interested to know more about how philosophers lived 2000 years ago, or 4000 years ago. You would be surprised that it wasn't a big difference from our lives, and the things that they were thinking about. It wasn't any difference from our time. And that's how I keep my mindset, I stay humble. And again, when the ego rises, because the ego will rise at some point and say *You know what Lina, you worked so hard for this, you deserve this, don't try to give a free workshop to refugee women again.* I would speak to myself and say, *What's that for? Who's that person? That's not you? I don't know you anymore.*

Lisa Bragg

So much of what you've talked about is owning your own power ...

Lina Khalifeh

Yes. Well, I discovered my own voice, it's a very interesting story, when I was when I was in that phase of healing from my knee injury. I was still young, I was a teenager. And nobody ever told me that I knew how to speak or that when Lina speaks, she will probably talk wisdom. Nobody tells me anything, you know! So, one day, we had a visitor that was a neighbor living next to us. They told me that she was mentally sick, that's what they said. *She's mentally sick. She's crazy. But she's coming with her sister.* I did not understand why they referred to her as mentally sick, I did not see anything wrong with her. And then, I went, sat down between the adults. And of course, the adults spoke and the kids listened - that's kind of the rule in in the society, kids cannot share their opinion, and I was a teenager. So, I shared my opinion about something that day and everybody just kept looking at me, opening their eyes and looking at me. And then she spoke and said something to me. She said, *Oh God, when Lina speaks, everybody goes silent.* And I had never heard that before! Nobody had ever told me that when I speak, I have a powerful voice. So, I thought about it all night when she was gone. I thought about this "crazy woman" who said that to me. And from that day, I discovered my own voice. I discovered something else unique in me that I never used. It's communication, it's my throat, it's the way I use words and storytelling. And of course, with a lot of practice and a lot of bravery standing on different stages, while I never had done that before, I learned and I practiced. I fell in love with it. I fell in love with sharing stories to the world.

Lisa Bragg

Lina, at Bold(her) we always ask these three questions. What's the boldest thing you've ever done?

Lina Khalifeh

That's a good question, I think I've done a lot of bold things (laughs)! I did something bold recently. SheFighter never shared anything about Pride Month, or homosexuality. This month, I decided that I'm going to post on our Instagram page, where we do have a lot of followers from the Middle East, that we support and accept 100% diversity, homosexuality, gender, all kinds of religions and backgrounds.

Everybody went crazy, just because I put a post with the rainbow flag. My team in Jordan had a huge fight with me. And now they're thinking about whether to continuing working with SheFighter or not. But I wanted to do it, I wanted to do a long time ago. As I said, I'm the founder of this company, and this company has values. And I would never be against people who need the self-defence in their lives. So, that was a recent bold move, because all my friends also called me and they're like, *You're not ready to do this, why didn't you do this while you're in Jordan?* And I said, I just fear nothing. I have nothing to lose and I fear nothing. So, you know, I just do whatever I do.

Lisa Bragg

When do you wish you were bolder?

Lina Khalifeh

I was six years old and the school principal gathered all the kids to get your grade in front of each other. She had the ritual of slapping on the face anybody who failed a subject. So that day, there is this girl I will never forget, she got she failed six subjects. And she got six slaps on the face. Her face was injured and blood came out of her cheek. That day, I felt rage. Until now, I don't forget the experience, because I felt like I could have done something. I could have screamed or told her to stop. How could I let that happen? And then I would say, *Lina, you were six years old*. But, I feel like I would have done something to stop it. Even if she wanted to slap me. Instead, I would have done something to stop it. So that was that moment.

Lisa Bragg

That's part of your red thread. That's a pivotal moment for you, isn't it?

Lina Khalifeh

Yeah.

Lisa Bragg

What would you say to your 12-year-old self?

Lina Khalifeh

That's a *really* interesting question, I actually had a dream few years ago that I saw myself when I was 12, when I was 18 and, when I was 30. And I felt the different feelings of each version of me in the different timelines. I looked at myself being 12 sitting down, feeling insecure and vulnerable. I put my hand on 12-year-old Lina and told her, *It's going to be okay, you're going to be very confident one day, just hang in there*. And then I felt the feeling of the 30-year-old, who was more confident. It was amazing how I felt all the feelings in one dream. So, I would say to myself, just hang in there. Keep going. It's so worth it.

Lisa Bragg

Thanks to our guest, Lina Khalifeh. You have been listening to Bold(her), brought to you by BMO for Women. I'm Lisa Bragg. If you like the show, please share it with others so they can hear inspiring stories of and for women who stand out. Thank you to our team at MediaFace. Thanks for listening.