

BE FREE, LIVE FULLY

w/ Jessica Sandhu

BY CAMILLE ARAGON

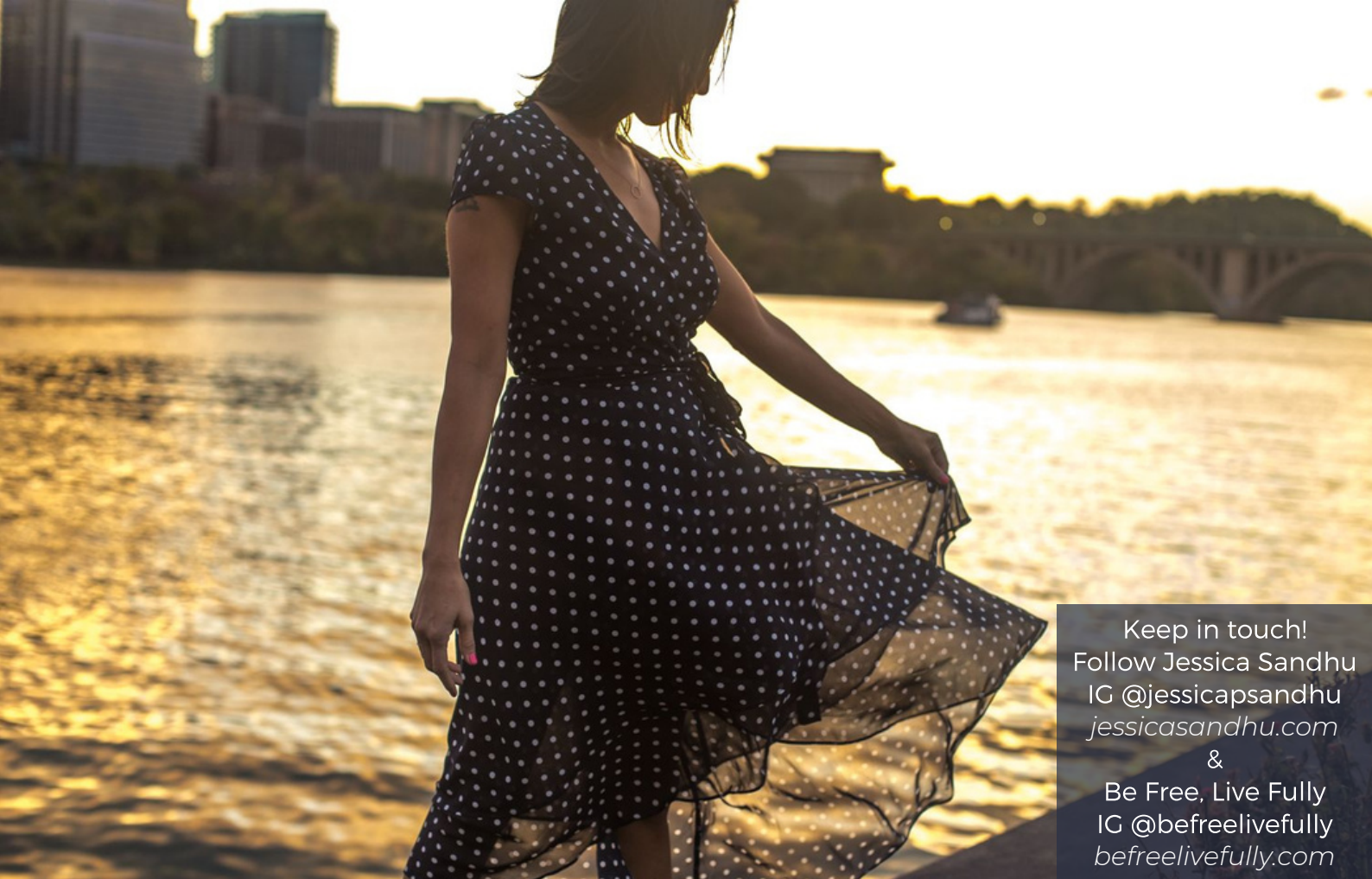
"I don't want to keep up with the Joneses. I just want to be myself."

Resilient and magnetic, Jessica Sandhu is a health coach, yoga instructor and writer based in Washington, D.C. Whether teaching nutritious smoothie recipes on Instagram, meeting with private clients or leading corporate wellness sessions, this well-being maven has found that her work not only facilitates healing in her clients and students, but also within herself. She's learned how to create a life that honors who she truly is and is unapologetic in her strategy of building her personal brand and business as a wellness entrepreneur.

Born and raised in the small town of Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada, Sandhu was raised by a single mother who led by example in teaching her children the importance of giving back to their community, despite being on welfare.

"I was always giving up my room," she shared during our Zoom call. Being raised in a home environment that welcomed and cared for foster children and people in need was a central part of Sandhu's upbringing, to which she credits her ability to relate to so many different types of people and walks of life.





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It was also during those formative years that the first in a bookend pair of experiences awakened her to the idea of non-attachment, or *aparigraha*, as the yogis call it.

For a few months, the Sandhu family had offered their limited extra space to a woman who had recently left her husband. Admiring their houseguest's sophistication and style, Jessica learned that the woman, with little in tow but her son and few personal belongings, had walked away from a life of luxury, means and very nice furniture.

"I remember thinking, 'Why would you ever give up any of that stuff? You had this life, and you just let it go?'"

That the woman fearlessly walked away from a situation in which she was unhappy, but materially well-cared for, had a profound and lasting impression on Sandhu. The lesson, however, would lay dormant for a while.

Years later, she found herself living in an Adams Morgan condo with her then-fiancee, their life full of items and vacations representing the wealth and success Sandhu had so longed to have in her youth. She had all the things she thought she wanted, but was unhappy.

"I remember just feeling really empty. And I remember thinking about what that woman said. She was like, 'I wasn't happy so I just let it go.' And I was like, 'Wow. I think I need to let this go. As beautiful as this is, this is not my path.'"

In the years since, Sandhu's path has been one focused on health and wellness. She is quick to admit that the journey has not been easy, and shared that she has had to overcome depression, anxiety, financial debt and self-doubt to get to where she is now.

The place she occupies currently, is one in which she is supporting others and showing up as her full Self. Sandhu recently opened up on social media about the challenges of being a Brown yoga teacher living in the United States capital and the need for representation in the wellness industry.

"It's really been important to me to be inclusive in all my languaging," Sandhu said of her approach to teaching. She offers all of her students and clients the same care and attention, and recognizes that Black and Brown people often have a much harder time showing up to invest in self care because of feelings of unworthiness rooted in colonialism.

Sandhu's newest venture, a virtual wellness community called *Be Free, Live Fully*, seeks to disrupt the status quo. The recently launched platform is teacher and student driven, with a donation-based payment system for public classes to ensure their offerings remain accessible to a wide range of the community it seeks to serve.

Her inspiration for the community goes back to her roots. Sandhu realized that growing up on welfare with a single mom, as a Native person dealing with racism, affected her; "I wanted to be free. I wanted to live fully." Yoga was a powerful tool in helping her to realize liberation, or *moksha*, and she wanted to share it with others. "People just want to be free," she concluded. And with Jessica Sandhu's help, a lot of people will also be living more fully.