

the dots

a podcast about connecting.

Monika Bhasin Transcript

Announcer: [00:00:04] Welcome to The Dots, a podcast about connecting. The Dots is a series of conversations with artists, community leaders, entrepreneurs, and change makers who talk about how they connect the dots and bring things together for their communities, companies, and themselves for a better life. And now your host: Digital Strategist, speaker, and entrepreneur Kathleen Buczko.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:32] CEO of hyper-local community GLYD, media producer and food truck pioneer Monika Bhasin. Welcome to The Dots.

Monika Bhasin: [00:00:40] Well thank you Kathleen it's a pleasure to be here. And I'm glad I'm able to share my story with with women.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:00:47] We were just talking and I find your journey amazingly enlightening and gives structure to kind of who and what you are as a CEO. So let's start. Where's the beginning of the journey?

Monika Bhasin: [00:01:04] Well, the beginning of the journey... I think it started when I was born and you know, when my own family sort of rejected me, I guess you could say that, because I was a girl and that I was not fair-skinned. And you know being in that part of India is so you know, they're very male-dominated and they think that males are more important than females. And being fair skinned, especially for a girl, is very important. And I was neither of those, so I just, you know at three months of age, I was sort of handed off to my mom's mother because I was a girl and not that important for my parents to take care of, I guess.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:01:53] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:01:54] But yeah it was-- I think it started then and, I think even though you can look at it and say that's sad or that is unfortunate, I think--I really believe it was a blessing in disguise. Because the amount of love that my grandmother instilled in me is the reason I am here today and that's the reason I'm able to love my husband. That's a reason I'm able to want to connect to people. That's the reason I'm able to be so persistent in my desires and my my goals in life.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:31] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:02:31] And I think I think that longing to connect with somebody came from being given away.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:39] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:02:40] Because I was connected with my parents and I think that is you know - that drives me that drives me to connect with other people, that drives me to connect other people to other people. And that's where GLYD came in. And that's--that's where I am today and I'm so blessed and very grateful.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:02:57] But you ended up in a small village in the middle of India.

Monika Bhasin: [00:03:02] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:02] So how do you end up--start there, and you end up in this amazing place in Los Angeles. Everything, I believe, does happen for a reason.

Monika Bhasin: [00:03:12] Absolutely. I mean I was in this small remote village. My grandparents are farmers to this day, they have a lot of land and they used to farm. My grandma used to milk the buffaloes and cows and you know, we used to cook on a stove that was made of clay and you know, we'd use to dry cow poop to burn that as fuel to cook our food.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:03:40] A lot of the world does.

Monika Bhasin: [00:03:40] Yeah and it's interesting because you know it was such--compared to where I am today. It's so like, 2000 years ago. It's so different. You know and I mean, this still exists to this day because that village is still there. When I go back to India, I still visit it because that's where my memories are. I remember running down the street... so there was a story where I constantly used to take-- my grandparents are farmers-- so they have these silos full of wheat, rice, and all that stuff. And I used to take like a fistful of wheat or rice into and go over to a shop to barter it for candy.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:04:31] The power of sugar. (Laughing)

Monika Bhasin: [00:04:32] I know! (Laughing) My grandma tells me she used to run so fast, "I would have to go over and run along with you because I don't want you to like run or get run over by these carriages that were driven by oxes..." And you know they still had those and they still do to this day. And I was so young and you know she was like, "I only used to see you're like colorful frock that you were wearing. I couldn't see you because it was so dusty..." and you know. it's just--I do have some great memories from there and but yeah, I mean that's where I come from is that village and you know being with my grandma and milking the buffaloes. I know how to do that.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:18] That's a skill.

Monika Bhasin: [00:05:18] I know, right?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:19] When the zombie apocalypse happens, I'm coming to your house. We're going to milk some buffalo and reclaim the world as cheesemakers.

Monika Bhasin: [00:05:28] Yes! (Laughing) And you know I know how to do a lot of those village things-- make bread and you know and all these all these amazing things, all these skills that I learned that I'm going to use one day.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:42] No, absolutely. I grew up in the middle. So I grew up probably not as small, but if you didn't know how to make bread and if you didn't know how to take care of a large animal...

Monika Bhasin: [00:05:55] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:05:56] I joke with my aunt and uncle at this point because, they're just completely affronted that my children, who have grown up in Los Angeles, don't ride horses.

Monika Bhasin: [00:06:05] Yeah. Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:06:06] We didn't keep one in our backyard in L.A. So they did the bike thing as opposed to a large animal. So I can appreciate that. But, you know how did your journey then... How did you get to the United States? You know, how were you brought here?

Monika Bhasin: [00:06:21] Well, I think we ran out of people to hand me off to, because after I was six years old I think-- I guess the schooling age, they had handed me off to my uncles--my dad's brothers because I was getting too spoiled living with my grandma. She was you know spoiling me with all her love and you know kindness and whatnot. So they said you know you need to be more disciplined, more stricter, so she needs to go to you know your... my home. Like, my uncles suggested that to my father. And you know, in India, men really control the household; they really do everything and make those decisions. And so that was made, and it was like pulling a child away from her mother because, my grandma was my mom you know, and I'd never gotten to know my mom until I was 11 which is when I ran out of people to hand off to. So you know and the society was like, "Where is your daughter?" and so they were sort of forced to bring me here to the United States.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:07:24] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:07:25] So was I was brought here when I was 11 and you know, here I was with all these fantasies: Wow, they're my parents. I'm going to be so happy here because for the past six years, since I was with my uncles, I was miserable. You know there was my uncle's son-- obviously he's a guy and you know he got all the attention. You know, I was somebody else's daughter. So, not really my made to--not really their main focus and I always kind of made to feel that way. You know, being in a home where you're not appreciated or you're not cared for as much as the other child where you know you're like, "Oh, you're my aunt and I love you and I love my brother--my little brother." You know, he's my brother. And I remember like, in school-- we used to go to the same school. He was a lot younger than me and he would come to my class crying sometimes because there were kids who would bully him. And so I would go down to beat up those bullies.

Monika Bhasin: [00:08:33] Love triumphs all.

Monika Bhasin: [00:08:35] Yes. (Laughing) So you know, I thought I was part of the family but, it wasn't reciprocated but, it's you know, it is what it is. That's who/that's what made me who I am and I think I still love my family no matter what happened. And I want--I want girls out there who have gone through the same thing to understand that there is an end to that. And there is that other side, where you will come off stronger. Just hold on.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:07] [Sponsorship] Speaking of people who get it done, this broadcast is brought to you by Chapelure Media: digital media, analytics, strategy, marketing, creative products, training. They do all that. Visit chapeluremedia.com to find out more. [End Sponsorship]

Kathleen Buczko: [00:09:21] Yeah. Yeah. Holding on is important. You're not the lost daughter anymore--you're a fierce CEO.

Monika Bhasin: [00:09:28] Definitely not lost, lost daughter. Yeah. Yeah. I've grown stronger because of all those turmoil and craziness that is. And I mean, (sigh) the things that a girl has to go through in my culture is horrific because you know I went through so many things like we used to live together with another one of my uncles, so my father's part of nine--eight kids. So you had five brothers and two sisters. And my mom is one of nine kids actually. So my grandma raised eight/nine kids before she raised me. So I was like her tenth child. So, um.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:09] Very Midwestern.

Monika Bhasin: [00:10:10] I know. I know. The more kids you have the more land you have. It was you know. Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:10:19] There was a time.

Monika Bhasin: [00:10:19] When I was living here you know, we had we had a--I had a very tough time because, not only was this a totally strange land, it was--it was totally two strange people as well. My parents, that I never lived with, and you know, there was a time when I absolutely hated it and I wanted to go back to India. Like, that was better than living in my parents...you know, living with my uncles and being not treated... I mean, that was better. That's how I felt at that time so I ran away. I ran away from home at 13 like in a strange land and you know, it was just very, very tough and the things that have happened you know, ever since. After I ran away, I wanted to go to Paris. It was just a city of... the city lights. Yeah. I mean I wish I knew New York, I mean The New York is the best. You literally can get lost somebody would find you. You know like I--I didn't know about New York: my next door neighbor! But yeah, I ran away and it was all so very terrifying; you know knocking on doors at night and looking for shelter and getting turned away and then eventually going back home, which was even more terrifying because, you're scared of all these things that your parents would say and do.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:40] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:11:40] I was scared of getting beat up because my parents beat me up.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:45] Sure.

Monika Bhasin: [00:11:45] You know and I mean there are--I mean, my uncles beat me up, too. It's just a very--that's just in the culture, I guess.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:11:55] It's corporal punishment, right? I mean--that was-- that was the way of the world and what I think is informative or frightening is that in other parts of the world that still happens every day. That's expected.

Monika Bhasin: [00:12:08] Exactly.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:09] That's how you manage it. Absolutely to this day. Yeah. And so to harness that energy and harness that blessing and harness that ability, you've come a long way. You were.

Monika Bhasin: [00:12:27] Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:27] ...A biochemistry major if I remember correctly.

Monika Bhasin: [00:12:30] Yes.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:30] How did that happen?

Monika Bhasin: [00:12:32] Well you know, after... my parents wanted me to be a doctor, so I was.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:12:41] That was fulfilling a great stereotype.

Monika Bhasin: [00:12:43] Absolutely. So my mom actually had gone to school to be a doctor. My father, being the guy and the man of the household, decided she is not going to go practice. She can study all she wants but, she's not going to work.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:00] So your mom completed medical school and didn't practice?

Monika Bhasin: [00:13:03] Yeah. Yeah.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:05] Wow.

Monika Bhasin: [00:13:05] So she made sure that, or she tried to make sure that her kids will be doctors. But that didn't happen.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:13:15] Wow. Yeah. Well your mom had you pretty young...

Monika Bhasin: [00:13:19] Yeah. She got married at 15. And she had me when she was 16 so I have a very young mom and yeah it's sad to see that you know, she's she tried to really live her dream through us when she could have just lived her dream on her own by standing up for herself, and all those years I spent resenting her, you know? Very recently, I have become sympathetic towards her because, I can't imagine being bound like that--feeling bound, like you know, because it was all in her head that she can't do it. She could have stood up for herself but, it's so hard in India, especially for women because, once you get married it's like they own you, and you know I can tell you stories. I can talk your ear off about how my mom was treated and...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:14:16] Well, that's a story for another time. I want to talk about you.

Monika Bhasin: [00:14:19] Yeah and you know, and it's so sad how women are treated in India to this day. But it's-- it's very fulfilling that I've come so far and I'm able to talk to my mom about standing up for herself. And you know, we're kind of able to close that bridge of resentment and onto a bridge a more connection and really building that bond that I never got to build. And I may never get to build it because she also envisions--I mean she even visions women to be not as important as guys--so she has a better bond with my brothers but I could try. (Tears) You know?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:04] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:15:04] I can try.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:05] So from this, how do you find your voice to be an entrepreneur? Because you've been an entrepreneur more than once. This isn't the first time. It's not a new thing for you.

Monika Bhasin: [00:15:22] Absolutely not.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:23] How did you find that voice? How did you?

Monika Bhasin: [00:15:25] Well,I-- you know, ever since I was little...

Kathleen Buczko: [00:15:29] Recognize the fact that you are 13 and you've left your home and a new country and you have this incredible internal drive. But how do you how do you find that voice?

Monika Bhasin: [00:15:48] I don't--I mean, I think you just have to keep... keep at it, keep doing what you want to do. And in my family they called it rebellion and all that, but I think I just couldn't find the happiness where I was, so I kept trying to be happy and be accepted in some way or form whether it be trying to venture out into new business or trying to do something that makes me happy. I feel like it's really important to find that, but I didn't know that back then--that that's what I was trying to do. You know, now I see that I was just trying to be happy.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:31] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:16:32] Back then I didn't know what I was--like, it's so hard to be so conscious of your feelings and yourself back then. You're just basically you know, like, if you're in a pool and don't know how to swim, you're just doing something to kind of like, stay afloat.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:16:48] Right.

Monika Bhasin: [00:16:50] But I didn't know was that all I needed to stay afloat was to let go and that's what you do. And...but, I kept trying. I kept trying one thing after the other you know, when I was a junior scientist, I was sort of in a lab stuck solid, like in total solitude, working on my research projects and whatnot. And what I did after that was you know, based on some suggestions from friends that you should really go out and do something totally opposite. And I did. I took up classes as an actress New York Film Academy. I started taking classes in New York. I said I can't do this, I can't stay antisocial all my life. And I started taking classes and I kind of took the upside down route because I was at a steady job as a junior scientist. I quit.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:17:49] Paycheck every two weeks...

Monika Bhasin: [00:17:50] I quit and I started looking for a job--a different job. I waited tables, did odd jobs, you know cocktail waitress. I didn't know any of these things, so I learned on the job. I had a lot of research skills. (Laughing)

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:09] Construct the thesis. (Laughing)

Monika Bhasin: [00:18:09] Exactly!

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:10] Like a good junior scientist.

Monika Bhasin: [00:18:15] So I did a lot of research on the Internet on what these people do. And you know he even got a job as a bartender and I didn't even drink back then!

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:25] (Laughing)

Monika Bhasin: [00:18:25] Can you believe that? (Laughing)

Kathleen Buczko: [00:18:27] You can Google anything, I guess.

Monika Bhasin: [00:18:29] You could and I know that's what I did. I Googled how to make drinks and I did. I made this drink that I called...I named it "Silky Panties" it was just the most outrageous... I'm going to be totally opposite of what I used to be in terms of my personality which was not outgoing at that time but, I think it's--it's really just doing it and understanding going to have to deal with the consequences no matter what. And I was ready to do that. And I said, "I don't care. Anything is better than this." And I did that and I think every time I tried something new, it's always been that mindset. I don't know. I want to do I want to try something different. And I am

ready to face the consequences whether they're good or bad. And I think you know having...Sometimes I think because I was so sheltered I didn't know about the world too much, kind of helped me because, I didn't know what the bad consequences could be.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:19:31] Oh yeah. I can see that.

Monika Bhasin: [00:19:32] Nowadays--but I think people need to dive into things with sort of that mentality I think because, there's so much to be fearful of nowadays. I think we should be more courageous, not fearless. Courageous because I think we shouldn't let fear drive anything. We should really be courageous enough to deal with the consequences and face them and face our fears. And whatever scares you, try it and understand it's going to teach you something. You're going to come out the other end with some new knowledge or some new experience and that's really what's driven me. Like, I've always gotten some new experience or some new knowledge and not afraid to learn. I've made a lot of a lot of mistakes in my life.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:20:33] But I don't think the "Silky Panties" are a mistake. We'll have to cook some of those up soon. (Laughing)

Monika Bhasin: [00:20:37] I know. I know. (Laughing) But I think it's. Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I think none of the things that some people may call mistakes are mistakes. I think they were--they drove me to who I am today and I'm so happy and content and I'm very excited to keep moving forward.

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Kathleen Buczko: [00:21:51] You talk about consequences, you talk about kind of trying things fearlessly. I think we tend to do memes around failures. It's a great thing. Go ahead! You can do it. You can fail, yet culturally, failure is not celebrated. Failure is not really recognized, right? We can see it on the Internet and great memes right? But it's not-- where is that bravery? How did you muster that bravery from being the junior scientist to being the inventor of the "Silky Panties?"

Monika Bhasin: [00:22:27] I think it has...I think because I was very young I was pulled away from a lot of circumstances and they were not in my hands. I couldn't control anything. I think I learned that it's not the end. And I think, I think it had helped me grow stronger in some way or form like, you know, being given away to my grandmother and then being pulled away from her after I've created this mother-daughter bond, and then being at my uncle/aunt's house and you know my uncles was very, very cruel to me. And that's another story for another day. Yeah, how you know you should not treat a young girl like that. And I think going from situation to situation and moving in with my parents and then running away and then you know after I came back from that runaway day, I actually told my father after a few days that I cannot live there. So I moved back to India for a year, thinking I'm going to move back for good. I don't want to leave my parents and I moved in with...He would not allow me to move in with my grandma, who I wanted to move in with. So I decided I would move in with his sister who had four kids. I thought I would fit in. That's a better chance than moving in with his other brother who treated me badly. And I thought, this

would be different and better. She has three girls and a son and you know, she has three girls. Why would you treat me differently or badly?

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:13] You were not her girl.

Monika Bhasin: [00:24:14] Yes. So you know, I stayed there for a year because, there were--that was a very, very tough time too because--and that's when I, I think that's when I became a little bit more, I don't know, kind of stopped having big dreams... or I don't know. No, because... that was a very difficult time for me. I mean they were--I had attempted to kill myself.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:24:56] Yeah. No I can understand that.

Monika Bhasin: [00:24:58] And because living in that home and his sister it was absolutely insane. I don't know what I was thinking. And nobody sort of helped me navigate-- you know and I didn't-- I didn't get to live with my grandma. And it was just a very tough time.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:16] You didn't get to go home.

Monika Bhasin: [00:25:18] I didn't get to go home and then and then after a year I moved back to the States and there was just I said, "You know I just have to deal with this once I go to college I'll be away from here."

Kathleen Buczko: [00:25:32] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:25:33] So I started counting days, and I started really loving school and I said this is my sanctuary. My school was my sanctuary and I was very thankful for that, at least. And then you know, I just waited to get out of college and I think I kept trying to be happy. I kept trying to find that connection and that authenticity in life.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:09] GLYD brings people home.

Monika Bhasin: [00:26:11] Yes.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:12] It brings people to an amazing local community. And gives them guides through incredible cities like Los Angeles.

Monika Bhasin: [00:26:22] Yeah and that's--that's what-- I think that is like a home run right? I want people to travel the world, yet have a feeling of home with them.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:34] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:26:35] And I think, I think connecting with locals of a particular city helps travelers feel like they're home and have that authentic connection to a place.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:26:48] Yeah. Yeah, it's an amazing tribute to your grandmother. It's an amazing tribute to your story. What I find so incredible is something that I could never pull off, is that you work with your husband.

Monika Bhasin: [00:27:03] Oh, oh my god. That is like... (Laughing) Yeah. I mean it took time to learn to work with each other, right? Because you know each other as husband and wife and you never worked with each other and then all of a sudden there's a different dynamic introduced. Right? So that was that was a journey, and I think like everything else in my life that's made us

stronger because we understand now, a different part of ourselves or each other, and how we interact with each other. And I think it's introduced more respect for each other because we now have different... We now have, I think, a different angle on our spouse... or on each other. Yeah. You know how he works, how I work. And yet we haven't lost any enthusiasm, is just a very different type of work situation.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:28:06] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:28:07] So, but yeah I mean that was not easy though. It took two years to really get down to really understanding each other in our working environment. But we did it. We're doing it, you know. So I'm happy.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:28:25] So what's next for the incredible, fierce Monica Bhasin?

Monika Bhasin: [00:28:32] I think it's a constant growing. We're looking to grow GLYD globally, and it is global right now, we have so many users all across the world. I recently saw one of our users post something about the cherry blossoms in Japan and it was amazing. Like yeah it's like, having that experience on my phone as well and really getting inspired to actually go there and that's really also another part of GLYD. It's to have the world come to you and get inspired to go travel different parts of the world because you're actually seeing it through the locals' eyes.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:20] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:29:21] And you know what they do and the local events and festivals and really get integrated into their culture. People are what make the culture of a city.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:31] Yeah.

Monika Bhasin: [00:29:32] And you know what we're trying to connect people with those people.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:29:37] Right. Exactly. I just-- I find it so empowering to be able to do that because, especially here as Americans, and I grew up in the middle where everybody is very happy to stay in the middle. You know I've been here for well over 20 years and my family still ask me, when am I moving home? I shudder to think that I would ever be able to shovel snow again. So, I don't think I'm moving home any time soon. So, by having that world opened up to you and not being afraid and not being disconnected when you get there but, someone who really brings you that sense of home and that connection I think can really change the world.

Monika Bhasin: [00:30:19] Absolutely. I think we're, as human beings, we're constantly--we constantly have this need to connect. You know, every being of this earth whether it's an animal or us humans, we are always looking to connect. You know there's a lot of--whether it be connecting with each other or ourselves. I think it's an important aspect to kind of highlight with GLYD because, I want the world to be a better place. I want to leave it a better place for my kids. And I think creating the awareness of connection with each other and when you travel and opening her eyes to different cultures and different people and learning about them is very important. And I think I'm very privileged and I feel very blessed to be able to provide GLYD to people.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:20] I think it's been an incredible journey that's really beginning.

Monika Bhasin: [00:31:23] Yes.

Kathleen Buczko: [00:31:24] And I want to thank you so much for coming and connecting with us

and connecting with The Dots. And there will be many more dots to connect.

Monika Bhasin: [00:31:33] Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure being here.

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