

## THE LETTER SEASON 1, EPISODE 6: Making Peace with the Shadows

**Amy Donaldson:** Before we get started, a warning to listeners. This podcast includes descriptions of gun violence and associated trauma. And a heads up, this episode includes the sounds of gunfire and cannons.

(MUSIC)

**Reporter:** Yvette Rodier Evans has waited nearly 18 months for this day. The day a judge would sentence the man who shot and left her for dead. Evans said she can still smell the smoke from the gun and hear the shots ringing in her ears.

**Yvette Rodier:** It's a scary thing to remember. And that I remember it so clearly, is what's very painful.

**Reporter:** Will this help ease some of those fears you talked about?

**Yvette Rodier:** No, I'll always be afraid of the night. I'll always be afraid to be alone.

(MUSIC)

**Amy Donaldson:** That fear, Yvette told reporters, would stay with her even after her attacker was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. She didn't know it then, but one of her most significant challenges would be finding a way to reclaim her life in the shadow of that fear. The journey would turn out to be less of a straight and clear path, and more of a roller coaster.

[MUSIC]

From KSL Podcasts, I'm Amy Donaldson, and this is The Letter. Episode 6 - Making Peace with the Shadows.

[Sound of a car passing and dialing]

**Amy Donaldson:** It's the summer of 2021, And because of COVID, like many people, Yvette Rodier is working from home. Producer Andrea Smardon and I are visiting her there. We punch in a code that will open a security gate accessing the community where she now lives with her husband and daughter. Their home sits in the shadow of the same mountain range where her good friend, Zachary Snarr, was murdered, and where she was gravely wounded. The gate faces a noisy, busy Salt Lake County road, but once we're inside the community of neatly arranged, well-kept homes, the noise seems to disappear. We ring the bell, and Yvette's husband Dave Whitby ushers us inside.

**Dave Whitby:** How are we doin'?

**Andrea Smardon:** Good; how are you?

**Dave Whitby:** Come on in.

**Andrea Smardon:** Thank you.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette is seated at the family's dining room table in front of a laptop, finishing up a video conference. She and Dave are just back from a vacation in Mexico, and she's wearing a neatly pressed, white button-up shirt with her thick, dark hair pulled away from her face by a pearl headband. Her smile is warm. And she exudes a calm, almost unflappable quality.

**Dave Whitby:** Just bring in some chairs...

**Amy Donaldson:** As we settle into a quiet room, down the hall from where she works, Andrea asks if her past has anything to do with living in a gated neighborhood.

**Yvette Rodier:** It wasn't something we chose. But moving into this community has been outstanding for me. And it definitely has brought this safe feeling to me that I didn't know I was missing. It probably was within the first few months of living here and pushing the button for the gate and knowing that there's no cars around me. And that I go into the gate, I am now in a safe place. It just feels so good, and I know it's just a metal gate, but for some reason to have my car be protected and not be out in a parking lot where people can just be there, this is just an extra peace that is really lovely to have.

**Amy Donaldson:** The gate helps Yvette feel more secure, but it can't keep out the nightmares that she's had since the shooting more than 25 years ago.

**Yvette Rodier:** The nightmares have been me with someone that I care about another male, often Zach, and we're in random places. We can be at a restaurant, we could be at a park, we could be at somebody's house. And then someone comes in and just open fires and kills them and sometimes I die or think I'm dead in the nightmare. But it's always, for sure, the other person. Those are really hard to wake up from.

[MUSIC and sound of medical equipment]

**Amy Donaldson:** And that's been the struggle of Yvette's entire adult life since she first woke up in that hospital room, how does she escape the terror of this trauma? Among her first questions, why did she survive? Why was Zachary the one killed? And what would he do if he'd lived? She left the hospital with holes in her head and her side and a leg that dragged when she walked. She had no idea how those physical wounds would heal. But she was determined about one thing, the shooting wasn't going to stop her from living the life she'd planned. Just a couple

of weeks after leaving the hospital, she went out on a date with Dave, the man she'd eventually marry. But their path to a life together was what one might call a long and winding road.

**Yvette Rodier:** So the funny part about this, my current husband, I went on a date with him the night before the shooting. I've had a crush on him since high school. In fact, he asked me out on a date the next night, and I said no, because I had a date with Zach. So he was my, my current husband was my very first date after the shooting.

**Amy Donaldson:** The date was far from normal.

**Dave Whitby:** I don't think I've ever seen a more afraid mother, letting her daughter go out for the first night out again, after something like that. And she knew me. We'd dated before. And I just said, Oh, happy. I'm picking up here. Here's where we're going. Here's the time we're going to be back. And you would have just thought I was taking a newborn baby from you know, a mother born that day. I mean, she did not want you to leave her sight.

[FOOTBALL STADIUM SOUNDS]

**Dave Whitby:** We went to a Ute football game. Worst mistake of my life.

**Yvette Rodier:** The Utes have the cannon. And none of us knew how I would respond. But I did not respond well.

[CANNON SOUND]

**Dave Whitby:** they fire the cannon after every touchdown. So we had to go after maybe a second score.

**Amy Donaldson:** That was one of the first signs that reclaiming her life would involve more than healed holes and fading scars. Anyone close to her was going to have to realize the complexity of daily life.

**Yvette Rodier:** He took me home and he was in college and having a lot of fun. And and I was a bit of extra work, if you will. So we kind of just lost, lost touch for a little bit.

**Amy Donaldson:** Just a few months later, Dave was surprised to receive an invitation to Yvette's wedding. She was going to marry Jeremy Evans, a man she had met in church.

**Dave Whitby:** Oh, I thought she was out of her mind crazy. I think you got engaged in February. We had previously gone out maybe into November. I'm going we just went out like two or three months ago. Like I can hold my breath that long. Like what are you talking about you're getting married?

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Dave and Yvette):** Do you think that you sort of gravitated towards the marriage because it gave you somebody to be with all the time?

**Yvette Rodier:** Well, I had my mom. Like my mom was always with me. So I definitely had that. But he was taller and a bit thicker, broader shoulders. And I felt very protected with him. And he, he felt very safe for me, and was somebody that I liked and trusted. And so we just developed a closer relationship and I loved him. I definitely did. I think I just was caught up in a lot of things. And my emotions weren't, I thought I was in control, but I wasn't at all.

**Amy Donaldson:** Dave wasn't the only one skeptical of her plan to marry Jeremy. Yvette's mother Linda was also worried it was too soon. Linda passed away a few years ago, but her younger sister Toni remembers Yvette's mom was concerned about the timing of the marriage.

**Toni:** Linda had a long conversation with Jeremy and said you need to know what you're getting into. She's not healthy. Mentally, emotionally, and physically. There's a lot here to be dealt with. And she still has all of the court stuff she has to go through. I really think maybe you need to give this more time, and he was confident that he could handle it and things would be good.

**Amy Donaldson:** The wedding went forward in June of 1997 about 10 months after the shooting. Yvette was just 19 years old.

**Toni:** She'd had this wedding in her mind of the perfect reception, all those kinds of things. And it gave her a new focus for a little bit. It was picture perfect. It was everything that she wanted it to be. And I think that was probably the one of the silver linings in a really ugly time.

**Amy Donaldson:** The shooting became a shadow that followed her everywhere. For Yvette, it seemed impossible to escape. Nearly everyone saw her as the girl who'd been shot.

**Yvette Rodier:** It was on the news for quite a lot of time while the case was progressing. Every time there was a court hearing, there was news coverage. And I remember sitting in a restaurant once and just feeling everyone's eyes on me. And I think it was the day of the court hearing. So I was probably wearing the same clothes that were in the camera shots. And I felt like that person for so long.

[Music]

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette refused to be defined by the shooting. On her wedding day, she was just a beautiful bride. All the hope and optimism that belongs to newlyweds was hers.

**Yvette Rodier:** It was a princess dress. I used to have a gigantic bridal still around because it was such a pretty dress. I thought so. And I felt pretty and confident. And all of the bullet wounds were covered on my head. And all of the wounds on my sides were healed pretty good. I don't think I, Yeah, I wouldn't have any stitches.

**Amy Donaldson:** Dave admits that even on her wedding day, the shooting still framed how some people saw her.

**Dave Whitby:** My mother when I went, it is, it's just kind of a mechanical question. Well, how did she look? I mean, you mentioned to anybody in this world and their shot five times, or probably many times in your brain goes to a lot of strange places. And I just said, "She looked gorgeous." She looked great in her dress. And so I'm sure there was a lot of people dying to see how you'd look and you just radiated.

**Yvette Rodier:** Especially before social media. Like it wasn't like I was posting that I looked okay, like the last people had seen me probably was coming out of the courthouse for the preliminary hearing, and that's just different than your wedding day.

**Dave Whitby:** Yvette poured her energy into chasing her dreams. She earned a degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Utah. She pursued her ambition of being a TV reporter, landing a job with the sports department at KSL TV, just as Salt Lake City prepared to host the 2002 Olympics.

**Yvette Rodier:** I got to do a lot of writing behind the scenes, and then some editing.

**Amy Donaldson:** But she says, the realities of working in front of the camera were not exactly what she expected.

**Yvette Rodier:** They let me try camera once, and I was horrible. It was hard to realize that my goal of becoming a journalist was just not for me. I did not have the skill set for it.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette was disappointed, but she still couldn't shake the feeling that she'd survived that shooting for a reason.

**Yvette Rodier:** I've wondered, like, "There must be a reason I'm here, right? I still, I need to do something. There's got to be some sort of purpose." And I didn't feel it for a long, long time. And that was really hard. I kept thinking like, something's gonna show up in my life, and it's just gonna work.

**Amy Donaldson:** As it turned out, the purpose she was searching for came in the form of a little girl named Romney Rae.

**Yvette Rodier:** The moment my daughter was born, it just hit me. [Crying] So, now, I just have to make sure she stays alive.

**Amy Donaldson:** Motherhood gave her the answers to questions that gnawed at her since she crawled to safety that fateful night.

**Yvette Rodier:** Since the shooting, I had felt like I just didn't know why I was saved. And I just didn't really have kind of purpose moving forward. I had jobs, I was going to school, I did all the things you're supposed to do. But until Romney, that day, she was born, I was like yes, this is what I was here to do.

**Amy Donaldson:** After the break, Yvette finds another purpose... in a new career.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

[MUSIC]

**Amy Donaldson:** When Yvette was in college, she worked at a law firm to cover expenses. Then when journalism didn't work out, she decided to put that experience to use. She applied to be the assistant for a newly appointed federal court judge Paul Cassell.

**Paul Cassell:** We got about 150 applications for the job. And she sort of rose to the top of the pile.

**Amy Donaldson:** Judge Cassell says Yvette's application was distinctive because of her unique personal experience with the criminal justice system. Suddenly the shadow she'd tried to escape became the reason she stood out. She had more than the required credentials.

**Paul Cassell:** I saw that she had this extraordinary personal story, as well, which I viewed as a positive in terms of hiring her.

**Amy Donaldson:** In addition to his post as a judge, Cassell was a professor of law, with a particular interest in victims' rights.

**Paul Cassell:** In my view, all too often we view the criminal justice process as just involving the state and the defendant and making sure their interests are protected. But I think we have compelling interests that need to be protected from crime victims. So I've done a lot of work with crime victims and, and I've come to appreciate their sort of resiliency, and their trust in the system that sometimes lets them down. And so when I was thinking about bringing somebody in to work for me as a judicial assistant, somebody who had, had been through the system, I thought might have a leg up.

**Amy Donaldson:** And Yvette's attitude made that decision even easier.

**Paul Cassell:** She just walked in the room and immediately lit up the room, she had such a love of life and was so outgoing and enthusiastic and cheerful. You know, I know it seems a lot when you think about the victimization that she suffered, but in addition to all her other, you know, professional credentials, just the sort of personal side of things was the real, you know, the clincher.

**Yvette Rodier:** And that's how I got the job and got to be around the federal court all the time, see great defense attorneys, great prosecutors, not good prosecutors.

**Amy Donaldson:** Working for Judge Cassell, Yvette discovered she had a passion for the law.

**Yvette Rodier:** And one day, I just thought, "I like this, like I like this work, why not try?"

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette's decision to go to law school began an emotional shift in her life. She started to feel like she was putting distance between herself and that terrible night.

**Yvette Rodier:** Maybe just some extra independent thinking and realizing I can make decisions for me. I chose to go to law school. That was a really, really hard decision. So I think maybe starting life decisions like that gave me a little bit of confidence.

**Amy Donaldson:** It wasn't the career path anyone expected for her. It was, after all, a job that would immerse her in the criminal justice system where her first and only experience was associated with such a traumatic time in her life. But once she made the decision, a change came over her.

**Toni:** It changed her whole trajectory.

**Amy Donaldson:** Her aunt Toni says it gave her life a sense of direction.

**Toni:** That's when we started seeing more glimpses and the reality of the girl that we'd known all of our life up to the date of shooting, the one who said, 'I can make this happen.' And, 'Yeah, this isn't going to be an easy road, but I'm going to get on this road, because I'm going to help to make a change.' This justice system is, you know, it has so many good things about it, but it has a lot of problems.

**Amy Donaldson:** From the outside, Yvette seemed to be effectively juggling her life's demands. Working part time for Judge Cassell, raising a young child and succeeding in law school. But privately, she was struggling. She still had short term memory issues from the brain injury. She struggled with fear, her nightmares were not going away. And her marriage was suffering. Yvette says her husband tried to be understanding, but he was reaching his limit.

**Yvette Rodier:** He absolutely had extra sensitivity for a lot of years. It gets draining. And I wasn't working on it yet, or working on moving forward as he would want me to. So it did become hard, harder for him to be a bit more patient with it. But he was never rude about it or angry about it.

My husband and I had a really good friendship, good relationship. We tried for several years to have a baby. And she was three when I went to law school. And it just, law school was a lot.

And being married young is a lot. And so after law school a little bit after we separated and then about a year later got a divorce. And that has been extremely hard.

**Amy Donaldson:** And this is one of the ways in which Yvette's survivor's guilt comes back to haunt her. Throughout her life, she often asks herself what would Zachary do. What would he think of her decisions?

**Yvette Rodier:** And a lot of times I think of Zach in that he wouldn't have gotten a divorce.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** You do think you think he would have stuck it out?

**Yvette Rodier:** Maybe stuck it out or had a different picker?

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** Do you feel like you're measuring yourself sometimes against an impossible ruler, though? I mean, he didn't live a life. It's easy not to get divorced when you never got married? You know what I mean? So, I mean, are you sometimes feeling like maybe you're idealizing him too much?

**Yvette Rodier:** He was just so good. Like, I can't imagine that he would have done anything less than amazing things.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette's mother Linda and aunt Toni worried that her expectations for herself were impossibly high.

**Toni:** I don't know how many different times Linda and I talked about it. And we literally could not speak about it together without crying. It happened many, many times that we would talk about. She's incredible, I don't know how she's doing it. There were some times that Linda even said, as her mom, "I really want her to be able to do this because she's earned it and she's working so hard. There's part of me that just wants to say, 'It's okay, you don't have to. You can quit; you don't have to keep going.'" Linda was no quitter herself. So it was interesting to hear her say that, but I so understood and felt the same way. I was like, has she set her bar too high? Can surely do this? Not because we didn't believe in her, but because we knew what obstacles she had to overcome.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette graduated law school in 2008. She became a staff attorney for a non-profit legal clinic that represented and advocated for victims. It was a chance to help people in ways she'd yearn for when she was navigating those first few months and years after the shooting. She began to use what happened to her to help educate others. This led to being a sought after speaker. She could address victim's rights, the issues surrounding them, in a way that not many people could. Her legal training combined with her own survival story became a powerful educational tool. It gave her a chance to let people know what life as a survivor really looked like.

**Toni:** When you listen to her talk, it's like there's no way you can't come away inspired.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette's aunt Toni was in the audience for some of her appearances. She says her niece turned tragedy into triumph. She refused to let the man who victimized her take any more of her life.

**Toni:** She says that that's the only way that I win is if I acknowledge that I can't let him have any more than he took. He took my dearest friend, he took much of my health, he took my safety being alone, he took my love for the mountains. He took my, the night stuff that now I don't like to be out at night. He took all of those things from me, but he can't take my spirit. There was not a dry eye in the place. Because she was saying, I am who I am because I overcame.

**Amy Donaldson:** News organizations also turned to Yvette for help and insight as random shootings became commonplace. In 2011, Arizona Representative Gabby Giffords and 18 other people were shot at an event she was holding with constituents outside of a grocery store. 22-year-old Jared Lee Loughner shot Giffords in the head at point blank range. Then fired randomly at other members of the crowd. KSL asked Yvette to help viewers understand what was to come.

**Reporter:** "When she heard about the Arizona shootings, she immediately thought of the wounded survivors, especially those who may not get as much public attention as the Congresswoman.

**Yvette Rodier (talking to reporter):** It's those other people that are going to be the behind the scenes victims, that's who I'm really thinking about.

**Amy Donaldson:** After the shock wears off, and the physical injuries are treated, Yvette told viewers, it's the psychological wounds that take time to heal.

**Yvette Rodier (talking to reporter):** Emotionally, I think I'm still doing it, I think I'm still in the process.

**Amy Donaldson:** What once seemed an irrational nightmare for Yvette has become this country's reality.

**Yvette Rodier:** The unfortunate part is that now, we all have these places that are not safe. So, you know, 20 years ago, me thinking I wasn't safe at a grocery store, people would probably laugh at me. And it would take me a minute to go back to a grocery store.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Evette Rodier):** But somebody could say to you, 'Oh, come on. It's just a movie theater and just, you know, What's going to happen at the Walmart. Right?' And you could be like, 'Okay, you're right I'm being silly. This is a nightmare.' You could put it in perspective. But you don't have that luxury anymore.

**Yvette Rodier:** No. And I just feel bad for other people. Like, I'm kind of used to it now. Which is horrible, but it's my life. But for all these people that every day, it just changes for them. I just ache. It's just a different world they're entering in.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette knows firsthand that the repercussions of incidents like this stretch far beyond the lives lost.

**Yvette Rodier:** So many lives are changed when someone does these horrible random acts of violence. The ripple that goes out is so big. But we're not really addressing that. We're, we're not even really addressing any of it.

**Amy Donaldson:** Around that time, Yvette sought some psychological help. She had seen a counselor immediately after the shooting, but she says back then, she wasn't ready.

**Yvette Rodier:** That's the interesting part. I think we all think 'Oh, you need to go right now. Fix this right now.' And that for me wasn't, wasn't helpful. It made it feel like I wasn't doing what people thought I needed to do.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette Rodier):** Was it just that you're just not ready to be not in pain from it or what? What was it about? What was it about the experience that required time?

**Yvette Rodier:** It was entirely me keeping myself stuck. I think a lot of it is survivor's guilt; that if I'm not stuck, then I'm not being aware of Zach, and him being gone. If by staying stuck, that means I'm acknowledging every day that I'm alive and Zach's not. But I don't think I felt like I had value that would let me be me without the shooting as part of me. Like I think it...

**Amy Donaldson (Interrupts Yvette Rodier):** You didn't have any inherent value. It's that you're a survivor. That was what it was.

**Yvette Rodier:** Yes.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette Rodier):** Wow. That makes me so sad.

**Yvette Rodier:** saying it out loud makes it sound much worse than it kind of feels in my head. In my head, it doesn't feel as extreme. But saying those words is pretty intense.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette Rodier):** I'm sure you've run into victims though that feel that same way?

**Yvette Rodier:** Yeah, they do. And that's when I am working with victims. I never tell them, they don't know my story. But when they do say things like that, hopefully they can just feel a bit more understanding, maybe from my eyes, or hopefully I have a response that's useful. So it's a common thing. I'm not unique in these feelings.

**Amy Donaldson:** Through therapy, Yvette was learning to let herself off the hook a little. She was going to make mistakes and maybe that was OK. It was also ok to have fun, to feel happiness. And one of the things that made her happy was karaoke.

[MUSIC]

Yvette Rodier: Thursday Night karaoke was really big. You know you find fun friends and they push you out of your comfort zone and then you're happy as could be.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette Rodier):** Do you sing?

**Yvette Rodier:** No? Well, well, yes. Is it good? [LAUGHTER] No. Like, when I started singing for Romney when she was born, she would cry. She hates my singing. And I understand what she's saying.

**Amy Donaldson:** So what was your go-to karaoke song, I'm curious.

**Yvette Rodier:** Hold on. Wilson Phillips.

**Amy Donaldson:** And this was when Dave came back into Yvette's life. He reached out to her on Facebook, just to see how she was doing, not knowing that she was divorced. Soon, he found himself singing karaoke too.

**Dave Whitby:** I did get dumped into it because Yvette did have a strong, I think also, in Utah, when you're a single female, you tend to group with others and go out. They were addicted to karaoke. So I had never really done karaoke until I met them and just, they got to know the DJ and the bar owner and they would make full signs for them on their birthday. So it was their night and baptism by fire of a lot of Bon Jovi.

**Amy Donaldson:** Their rekindled relationship continued to blossom, even as Yvette shared all the ways the terror of that night still haunted her life. By the time Dave decided to ask Yvette to be his wife, he was going into the union with his eyes wide open. But even the proposal wasn't free from the trauma of her past.

**Dave Whitby:** I took her on a hike one day and got down on a knee and proposed, she graciously said yes, but I kid, I mean, it was just like the gods were just laughing in irony. Literally, within 30 seconds. Yeah, right bunch of campers a half mile up, just started blasting rifles, just target practicing. And I was just like, you've got to be kidding me. We both just laughed, because it was like, of course, after everything happened. Like that's the thing that you know.

**Yvette Rodier:** It was definitely a quick kiss. And then I think I started crying more because of the gunshot, not because of the proposal. Sorry.

[LAUGHTER]

**Dave Whitby:** We're not going to just sit and enjoy the moment? Let's get back to the cabin.

**Yvette Rodier:** Yeah, I remember crying but I am sorry. It wasn't because it was so beautiful. It was beautiful.

**Dave Whitby:** We're big on irony and laughing in life. It was just like OK back to reality.

**Amy Donaldson:** Dave and Yvette were finally married in 2012, 16 years after cannon fire forced an early end to their date at a football game. Dave likes to joke that he's been to all of Yvette's weddings. He just hopes he doesn't get an invitation to another one. Humor is one of the ways they keep the shadows at bay.

[MUSIC]

**Amy Donaldson:** It was smooth sailing for a while, but there are more unexpected twists and turns to come. That's after the break.

[COMMERCIAL BREAK]

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette created a fulfilling and stable life for herself. She found purpose working as a Victim Witness coordinator for the US Attorney's Office. But In 2014, her life was, once again, upended by violence.

**KSL News announcer:** Good morning to you, it is just before 10 o'clock and we have some breaking news right from Salt Lake City, where police have just confirmed a shooting at the new federal courthouse in downtown Salt Lake City.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette was in the federal courthouse when a defendant charged the witness as he testified. The defendant, Siale Angilau, was shot four times by a U.S. Marshal [SHOOTING] ...and was killed.

**KSL News reporter:** The courthouse was put on lockdown for about 45 minutes before people were slowly escorted out. All of the witnesses I spoke to today were extremely anxious and ready to leave the courthouse.

**Yvette Rodier:** It was so scary for me, and it was probably the most anxious and fearful I have been since we were shot.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette was consumed with fear - fear that violence could find her anywhere; and fear that if people found out she was in the courthouse, she'd fall back into the shadows of an identity she'd worked so hard to escape.

**Yvette Rodier:** And I don't think I wanted people to really know or feel bad for me or ...I think I was hoping I could just do it all on my own. And I couldn't. I was a mess for months after being in that room. The noise, the smells, it just, I hadn't experienced anything like that since we were shot and it brought so much back; I was shocked that I reacted so strongly. I thought I was way past the shooting, and that this would just be a weird thing for me. But it, I couldn't be alone. Dave walked me to and from work. I was never by myself at the office.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette soon realized that her strategy of just 'pushing through' like she'd done after she was shot wasn't going to work as well this time.

**Yvette Rodier:** I think I was extra terrified that, because I was responding so negatively and then I was so crushed, that I wasn't going to be able to get past it. I thought if I made it through so many years, and I did okay, but if this, if this is the way I'm responding to this shooting, maybe this is going to be my new normal because I can't do it. I can't push through it. I really, I was stuck for quite a while.

**Amy Donaldson:**The setback was profound and it blindsided Yvette. She was terrified that this time, she'd never be able to find her way back to peace and safety.

**Yvette Rodier:** I did go back to therapy, which I think was very helpful. And I'm glad that I did. But I hadn't wanted to be in therapy for a long time, I'd felt pretty solid. I think what I missed most was that I had gotten to this really lovely place of safety. And I felt safe everywhere I was, especially in the courthouse. And it took away that safety for a long, long time. And that was really hard for me.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette did find her way back to solid ground once again. With patience, support, and professional guidance, she not only found a feeling of safety in her life, but also in the courtroom. And, in fact, she decided she wanted to advocate in a different way. She took a job as a prosecutor for one of Utah's largest cities - West Valley City.

**Judge:** Go ahead Ms. Rodier, did you want to go first on the motion for pretrial detention?

**Yvette Rodier:** Yes, your honor, thank you.

**Amy Donaldson:** When the courts shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hearings moved online. Yvette's office is now her dining room table. She addresses the judge from a laptop surrounded by file folders and books, as her faithful lab sleeps on a fluffy dog bed nearby.

**Yvette Rodier:** But there is substantial evidence to support the charge. That's why we have charged, with the threats where the defendant threatened to slit the victims throat if she called the police....(sound fades)

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** So what made you decide to go from the US Attorney's office to prosecuting?

**Yvette Rodier:** I really missed the courtroom. I mean I was in the courtroom, but I missed the advocacy that can be there. So when I was doing victims rights, I was in the courtroom in front of the bar arguing, and prosecution just always seemed like something I could do. I wasn't sure. So I'm grateful West Valley gave me a chance to try it. And I love it.

**Amy Donaldson:** Her work as a prosecutor still allows her to interact with victims. In this case, she invites a woman to speak in court, instructing her on what might be helpful for the judge.

**Yvette Rodier:** Maybe Ms. Spears, would you please tell the court how you feel about, we're talking about only his detention status right now; so how do you feel about him being in custody and potential release? Maybe we just focus on those two things.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette prosecutes misdemeanors for the city, and she is content in the role. While many attorneys can't wait to move on to felonies, she sees real value in working misdemeanor cases. Offenses like assault, shoplifting, drunk driving, domestic violence.

**Yvette Rodier:** Misdemeanors - I feel like there's still a chance. I feel like these are offenders who made mistakes. And hopefully they can fix it. I think at some point, I will prosecute felonies. As of right now I'm really comfortable with misdemeanors, felonies are a lot more life changing. And there's bigger consequences. So I feel like right now I can do, or try to do some good with with the misdemeanor work.

**Amy Donaldson:** After all these years, Yvette's younger sister Danielle is still in awe of her big sister.

**Danielle:** She sees the world in this unique light, where she has every opportunity to pay attention to the darkness or the hard things that are going on. Even in her job, she sees a lot of blech. And she still wants to share love and light with everyone. She's not a victim in her story. She was a victim in her circumstance. But she has not carried that story with her as the victim, which is so beautiful. She's used it to empower herself and others.

**Amy Donaldson:** At first glance, Yvette and Dave live a remarkably normal life. But the reality is they live with the shadows of grief and trauma that still stalk Yvette. To gain the upperhand, they have some rules they employ to keep peace with the shadows. As Yvette decided in those first few days after the shooting, they never say the name of the man who shot her and Zach. They avoid fireworks. And they mute shows or movies with gunfire.

For years, Yvette did not feel safe in the mountains, a place that was once a refuge. But recently she and Dave bought a trailer, and that has given her a way back into the wild

**Yvette Rodier:** And once we got a trailer, the mountains have opened up for me. Sometimes when we camp in it's just we just find a lone spot. I feel a bit more anxious, but he knows, and

so he watches, and just a few extra hand holding or rubbing my shoulder and that he's aware that I'm aware we're out in the middle of nowhere by ourselves, but we're safe. It's fine.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette has figured out how to manage the triggers, and that's allowed her to reclaim the things that bring her joy. Like escaping life distractions with a trip to the backcountry. But no matter where she is or what she's doing, Zach is always with her.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** Do you think about Zack every day?

**Yvette Rodier:** Absolutely.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** And in what way?

**Yvette Rodier:** Most of the time, it's really happy. It's fun memories. When I mess up or feel like I've made mistakes, then it's Oh goodness, how much have I disappointed him? And then there's just the aching, the missing, what would he be? How would he be doing? What would be going on in his life right now.

**Amy Donaldson:** Even more than 25 years later, Yvette can't seem to forgive herself for surviving the attack. When she sinks into the pain, she swims through a river of regrets.

**Yvette Rodier:** I definitely feel so bad that I did leave him. I often wonder why I didn't just stay and hold him. Why I didn't try to put pressure on his wounds.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** Do you know if he was alive when you left him?

**Yvette Rodier:** I'm fairly certain he was dead when I left him. And since all of the things happen, I did learn in court, the very first bullet that hit him killed him. So he was dead. But I didn't know and why wouldn't I have just stayed with him and just held him. He would have done that for me.

[CRYING]

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** Do you feel like you have to live for both of you?

**Yvette Rodier:** I used to but that was really hard. That was... just more than I could do. Just because I'm human. I make all sorts of mistakes. And I know Zack would have too, but I just felt like I was disappointing him so much that it was finally at some point I had to stop thinking that way.

**Amy Donaldson (Talking with Yvette):** And just live for you.

**Yvette Rodier:** Uh huh, yeah.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette knows she will never escape or forget what happened, and she's made peace with that. It cannot be erased. It has to be redefined.

**Yvette Rodier:** I've figured out where it belongs in my life, that it is a part of my life. It's a part of my story. And why would you move on or get rid of a part of your story? It's what made me who I am today. And I'm really finally at a place that I like who I am. And who I am is because of the shooting and because of knowing Zach and people that have been good examples for me. So it's not moving on. It's just, I've got a little compartment for it - for the shooting - and it's there. It's in my brain, it's in my heart. And I'm okay with it when it chooses to manifest itself. It doesn't scare me anymore.

**Amy Donaldson:** Yvette has refused to let the shadows from that moonlit night at Little Dell Reservoir devour her life. She has created a life where the man who tried to kill her has no place.

But after all these years the man she never names is going to make an attempt to come back into the lives of his victims and Yvette will have to decide if she wants to open the gate that has given her peace.

Next time on the Letter, the Snarrs receive an unexpected delivery.

**Sydney:** She finished the letter, and it was just silent for a minute. And I said to my mom, I'm like, "I needed to hear that. I can breathe for the first time in 24 years. Like, I could take a deep breath and not feel that crack in my heart."

## CREDITS

**Andrea Smardon:** What's it like to have your personal, heartbreaking story told in a podcast for all the world to hear? I'm producer Andrea Smardon, and on this week's bonus episode, Amy talks with Zachary Snarr's sister Sydney about what it's like for her to revisit her brother's murder and about the surprising conversations it's bringing up among friends and neighbors. We also bring in one of Sydney's friends to talk about how listening to the podcast has changed their relationship.

You can get all the bonus content and some great things we couldn't fit in the main story by subscribing to Lemonada Premium. You can subscribe right now in the apple podcast app by clicking on our podcast logo and then click the subscribe button.

**Amy Donaldson:** The Letter is researched and reported by me, Amy Donaldson. It's written by myself and Andrea Smardon, who is also responsible for production and sound design. Mixing by Trent Sell.

**Andrea Smardon:** Special thanks to Nina Earnest, Becky Bruce, KellieAnn Halverson, Ryan Meeks, Josh Tilton, Ben Kuebrich, and Dave Cawley.

**Amy Donaldson:** Main musical score composed by Allison Leyton-Brown.

**Andrea Smardon:** With KSL Podcasts, executive producer Sheryl Worsley, for Lemonada Media, executive producers Jessica Cordova Kramer and Stephanie Wittels Wachs and executive producers Paul Anderson and Nick Panella with Workhouse Media.

**Amy Donaldson:** If you like our show, please give us a rating and a review. It helps people find us. Follow us at [theletterpodcast.com](http://theletterpodcast.com) and on social @theletterpodcast.

**Amy Donaldson:** We've been hearing from some of you about your experience with the podcast. And we would love to hear more. If you have a comment or question for us, please leave us a voicemail at (801) 575-4398. That's (801) 575-4398. We may play it on the show or in a bonus episode.

*The Letter is produced by KSL Podcasts and Lemonada Media, in association with Workhouse Media.*