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INSIDE

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Finding purpose in life's love

■ Author Brianna Wiest details journey in mental wellness talk

BY JOEY WALDINGER

Author Brianna Wiest, 30, has spoken to audiences all across the world, from Italy to New York. However, on Friday, Nov. 4, she appeared in front of a City Hall for the first time in her career.

Wiest was the fourth guest in Beverly Hills Mayor Lili Bosse's Mental Wellness Series, which launched in July and has included author and Holocaust survivor Dr. Edith Eger, her daughter Dr. Marianne Engle, and Dr. Deepak Chopra, a pioneer of integrative medicine and a professor of family medicine and public health at the University of California, San Diego.

"I'm really grateful to be given

the chance to come and speak here," Wiest said. "Grateful, surprised, that's kind of my perma-state of my whole life and career."

Wiest struggled with mental health issues as a teenager, and turned to writing when a therapist recommended she keep a journal, she said.

The habit stuck, and after years of cataloguing her days and her thoughts, Wiest realized that, while painful, articulating life's challenges allowed her to grow and learn more about herself.

"Our obstacles can become opportunities if we have the intention to see them that way," Wiest said.

It never occurred to Wiest to pursue writing professionally until a hiking trip in Upstate New York when she was 19, during a period of extreme mental distress. Sitting beside a lake in the Adirondacks, Wiest opened up a meditation app,

focused her breathing and practiced the self-interrogation she had honed over years of journaling.

It was an epiphanic experience, she said.

Now, with eight books that have sold one million copies, Wiest had found her calling.

"I felt this moment of surrender in my heart when I just felt so uncomfortable, and in so much constant, wall-to-wall pain. I thought, ... something has to happen for me here. I can't suffer like this forever," she said. "Truly, a voice that was not my own told me 'you're going to be a writer.'"

Wiest was initially dubious, and unsure of what she would even write about.

"I was like, 'Can I pick anything else,'" she said.

She decided write whatever made her feel better, a strategy that would prove to resonate with readers across the world.

Though she was at first nervous that people wouldn't relate to writing that was so personal, Wiest found that the more authentic she



photo by Joey Waldinger

In the fourth installment of the Mayor's Mental Wellness Series, author Brianna Wiest, left, explained how she cultivated a thriving writing career by sharing her mental health journey. She was joined by Mayor Lili Bosse.

was in her work, the more people were able to see their struggles reflected in hers.

"For all the differences we have on the outside, there's something in us that is all the same," Wiest said. "If we can remember that, if we can focus on that, it becomes a lot easier to forgive, and to have compassion and to have empathy."

Bosse said that she is frequently moved by the excerpts that Wiest posts on social media to her more than 450,000 Instagram followers, and she finds that when she reposts them, other people comment on how strongly they relate to the struggles Wiest describes. Opening up conversations about such difficult topics is why Bosse began her mental wellness series in the first place, she said.

"My goal is to be willing to talk

about our mental wellbeing. And on days that are hard days, ... to take the pause, and allow us to deal with our feelings," Bosse said.

The COVID-19 era has forced the entire world to take a pause, Wiest said, and though she acknowledged how discomfoting the past few years have been, she encouraged the audience to embrace the way their lives may have changed, just as she embraced her calling to become a writer at one of her life's lowest points.

"Those moments of discomfort are also portals into a greater vision that life is trying to move you into," Wiest said. "I wouldn't be here now, in any way, if I didn't accept that invitation, and say I'm going to transform this mental low into something powerful."