

Speaker 1: Couple four, a romantic revival.

Speaker 2: I became an instant parent when I got married to four kids who lost their birth mom to suicide.

Speaker 3: My first wife took her life on St. Patrick's Day of 2011. A year later we met and we've been picking up the pieces.

[00:00:30]

Speaker 4: This next couple has confronted death in their midst. For the past six years, this event has been at the center of their family life.

Speaker 2: Over these now six years that I've been in their lives, we have been in that survival mode. It has been the most heart wrecking yet profound experience of love in my entire life.

[00:01:00]

Speaker 4: They are now ready to live again. As a New Year's Resolution, the couple chose a word for themselves. [inaudible 00:01:09] Revive and I have a sense that they came to work with me so that together they can transition from not dead to alive and from survival to revival.

[00:01:30]

Speaker 3: She's not like anyone I've ever met, which is why I knew I needed to get a ring pretty quick, because I thought if I don't, someone else is gonna sweep her off her feet.

Speaker 4: When you say she's not like anyone you've ever met ...

Speaker 3: Well, the depth, the types of things that stir her, her heart and her soul. It's refreshing. That's what drew me to her, is her ability to go there.

[00:02:00]

Speaker 4: And to take you there.

Speaker 3: Yeah, take me there. It's caused some friction along the way because it's tough to learn when you haven't ... It doesn't come natural.

Speaker 4: To you.

Speaker 3: To me, right. So, there's been times where she has talked about wanting to connect deeper or go deeper and I'm thinking, "We already are. This is more connected than I've ever been before," and so in that sense there's some difficulties.

[00:02:30]

Speaker 4: What other important parts of your lives do I need to know?

Speaker 3: I guess one of the reasons we come is the long, arduous journey after a suicide and the impact that that's had on me and on the kids. I've been gone a lot through the years with the military, just knowing that I've missed a lot of things and ...

Speaker 2: Your family.

Speaker 3: My family history is an interesting one. Mom and Dad divorced when I was two years old and they both got remarried and had kids, and so I kind of bounced between the two families. My stepmother was not particularly a wonderful stepmother to have, was not a very nurturing person.

Speaker 4: Is that an understatement?

[00:03:30]

Speaker 3: Oh yeah.

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:03:31]

Speaker 3: Yeah, she just wasn't a good person. She was very manipulative. She was verbally abusive and a couple times physically. Then after they divorced, my dad had custody of me instead of my mom, so ...

Speaker 4: How come?

Speaker 3: The simple terms that I was told that I went with my dad was because she wasn't ready to settle down and he was. There's a lot that's probably buried in that statement and I haven't really wanted to know the why.

Speaker 4: The theme of children that are abandoned by their mother runs through generations for you.

Speaker 3: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Sure.

[00:04:30]

Speaker 4: It's a nice way of saying it. She wasn't ready to settle down, and your children, you think, were abandoned by their mother.

Speaker 3: Oh sure.

Speaker 4: When she died by suicide.

Speaker 3: Absolutely.

Speaker 4: How do you think your experience with your mom translates into what goes on between you and your kids vis a vis their mom?

[00:05:00]

Speaker 3: I don't know that there was a deep attachment with my mom. I might have got that up until the age of two but I don't remember that, and then the stories I've heard is my stepmom ... As a three year old, when she came into my life, my aunt said she remembers seeing me try to crawl up into my stepmother's lap and pushing me away. So, I had that, being pushed away from her, and then my mom just wasn't there for the first ... From age two to six probably, so there's a gap there that I don't really remember. Much time with her.

[00:05:30]

Speaker 4: Right, and we have two kinds of memory. We have explicit memory and implicit memory. Explicit memories can ... the conscious awareness of facts, but implicit awareness and implicit memory lives in our body and the body remembers ...

Speaker 3: That's the name of the book, right?

[00:06:00]

Speaker 4: The body remembers particularly when you try to get close to your wife. Have you connected those dots?

Speaker 3: You probably have.

Speaker 2: Yes. It's so clear.

Speaker 4: Say more.

Speaker 2: I think that's the root of a lot, is what happened with his mom and stepmom.

[00:06:30]

Speaker 4: The root of a lot of what?

Speaker 2: Disconnection between us. For a while I thought it was what happened with his former wife, but then the more I learned, it was kind of like, "Oh, this really isn't ..." It just continued through her. He couldn't trust his own mother but then the mother figure in his life, his stepmother ... So he built up a wall and said, "I'm not gonna trust ..." Or be confident in pursuit of me, secure in knowing it's not gonna be a rejection.

[00:07:00]

Speaker 3: I think sometimes I struggle with coming in to the level of connection that she's desiring, not out of fear but simply out of not ... I don't know what you're talking about. It's almost like speaking a different language.

[00:07:30]

Speaker 2: I have a good example.

Speaker 3: Okay.

Speaker 2: If I'm upset, to me, the natural response is come in and hug me. Comfort me or ...

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 2: He just stands and looks at me, stares at me, and it feels like where I want connection, it's just there's no movement.

Speaker 4: You freeze?

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:08:00]
Speaker 3: I do freeze in those situations, but it's not out of fear. It's not feeling, I guess.

Speaker 4: That's what freezing is.

Speaker 3: Yeah. Okay.

Speaker 4: In tracking the brain's responses to trauma, we are often familiar with fight and flight, but we also have freeze and sometimes it seems to me that the freeze points to an even more overwhelming set of experiences, that way it's just simply too much to absorb and left the person frozen, helpless and in a state of terror. Do you know where in your body you freeze

[00:08:30]

Speaker 3: No.

Speaker 4: Is it not in your stomach? Is it a constriction in the chest? Is it a stiffening of the hands?

[00:09:00]
Speaker 3: I've never stopped to think about that.

Speaker 4: That's right.

Speaker 3: So I don't know.

Speaker 4: Feelings are embodied experiences. If you can't move, it doesn't mean you're feeling nothing. Sometimes it means you're feeling so much that the system is on overload and you shut down. Instead of going to your head, I'm going to suggest

[00:09:30]

you go to your body because the same way that you wanted a hand to reach out to you when you were upset is what she's talking about, but you didn't get that hand.

Speaker 3: I think you compounded that underlying storyline with everything that I went through with my former wife. It culminated in a suicide, but it had been at least three years of daily wondering, "Am I gonna come home from work and find her or the kids hurt?" Seeking help didn't really work. Nothing seemed to help, but I know for a fact that she had multiple affairs. It was years of rediscovering or realizing that the life that I thought I had wasn't the life that I had.

[00:10:30]

Speaker 4: What I learned from his description is that there was way more than just the series of infidelities. A month before his wife took her life, she asked for a divorce and after she died, he learned of the extensive multiple years of drug abuse, the neglect and the danger that the children were put in, and here he is, not just angry at the fact that she killed herself, but at the consequences of her behavior on her children. So he's angry at a dead woman and he's stuck and he doesn't know where to go.

[00:11:00]

Speaker 2: He's just gone through so much, so it's always been easier to just feel numb but not allow yourself to grieve. I think that's been the thing I've not really ever seen that side of him is grief. I've seen a lot of things. I've seen anger and numbness. I've seen resolve, but I haven't really seen grief at all. It's been strange because I feel like I've somehow grieved for the loss. It's like they haven't been able to access that for themselves so it's almost this place where I've grieved and just felt such heartbreak. The best way for me to describe what suicide is like, you have an earthquake. In the initial earthquake, there's damage, but there's actually more destruction that comes in the aftershock, and that's what I entered into, is the aftershock.

[00:12:00]

[00:12:30]

When we first met there was a resiliency. He wasn't that far removed from it. It was about a year removed from his former wife passing. I was such a different person and I didn't really need anything from him at the time on my own and independent, and he would initiate in all these different ways and I'd never experienced that on that level.

[00:13:00]

Speaker 4: Physically as well?

Speaker 2: Well, we were apart because we were in different states, so not really physically, no. But I was okay with that, because of my past, my history with ... I've endured rape. I have a long history of a lot of sexual trauma, of abuse, of all kinds of things, and I had done a lot of work to find healing so that when I did come to a place where I was ready to say yes to a man, I would feel like my idea of sexuality and sensuality was restored.

[00:13:30]

Speaker 4: By the time I meet this woman, she has done the initial work on her traumatic experiences and she already knows that she is ready to open up and welcome

[00:14:00] someone and connect with a man sensually, sexually, as she says. I'm beginning to understand even more what they mean when they say, "We want to revive." From where I come from, as a child of holocaust survivors, I grew up with people who talked about the horrors with flat affect. It's actually very familiar to me. I know the dissociative state and I also know those who tried so hard to not just not be dead and survive but to really reconnect with a sense of aliveness and vitality and vibrancy and risk taking and joy, and that's where she wants to place herself.

[00:14:30]

Trauma work, and especially work around sexual trauma sometimes is very good at removing the cast and dealing with the pain but stops short of helping people to actually rehabilitate that limb that is now free of a cast so that it can run and dance and be free again. It's about beating back the deadness and the loss to reclaim the sense of aliveness and vitality.

[00:15:00]

Speaker 2: I think a really key component to our marriage is when we got married, we'd been together for a year and a half and a week after our honeymoon, he left for six months for work, so we started with me basically being a single parent with four kids ...

Speaker 3: Who were all coming out of a suicide.

Speaker 2: A trauma, losing their biological mother.

Speaker 3: We were in survival mode with kids.

Speaker 2: Stopping the hemorrhaging.

Speaker 3: Yeah, and we weren't able to focus so much on ...

Speaker 2: Our marriage.

Speaker 3: ... Our marriage and establishing our relationship because we were trying to save some lives.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 3: It felt like, so ...

[00:16:00]

Speaker 4: But that's why you're here today.

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3: Right.

Speaker 4: You're here today telling me, "First we did marriage. We did family. We did children. We did surviving, and now we want to create our relationship." Do you come back with experiences from the military that compound some of this?

[00:16:30]

Speaker 3: I feel like for me it was more about just being separate from my family with all the stuff going on, and I would have to leave. My attachment was with my family and it was a war zone there, so that's where the trauma was. It wasn't ...

Speaker 4: You just saw something now. What did you just see?

Speaker 3: Visually?

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Well, I go back to the day I found her.

Speaker 4: And you see that?

[00:17:00]

Speaker 3: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. Yeah. That and my youngest was the only one that was home, thankfully, but she was in her crib, and so that image, as well, of coming home and finding my one year old who had been crying for who knows how long, waiting for someone to come find her or get her out of her crib.

[00:17:30]

Speaker 4: When you see the crib, which image is stronger, the crib or your wife?

Speaker 3: I think maybe the crib, which is weird, but my daughter is now ... She wasn't yet two and she's now just turned nine, and she still remembers that day. She remembers crying like she's never cried before. That's hard, you know? Because that's tangible. I don't know what my former wife was ... You can assume what her emotional state was. You can assume she was sad. You can assume she was depressed. She might have been happy, I don't know. I have no idea and I know exactly how my daughter was. I know that the effects linger.

[00:18:30]

Speaker 4: If you let him do this, he will cry more and you will cry less, and you'll start to feel less like you have to be the catalyst for all the denied emotions and you'll revive because he won't put the mourning on you. So, don't be scared for him.

[00:19:00]

Speaker 2: I'm grateful to see this.

Speaker 4: What else does she say, your daughter?

Speaker 3: What else does she say about that day?

Speaker 4: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3: That I came and rescued her.

[00:19:30]

Speaker 4: You did. He cries for his children but he can't cry for himself. The baby he sees crying in the crib is his child and also himself.

[00:20:00]

Speaker 3: I guess I do struggle, too, with while it was really tangible that I did rescue her, help her, with my oldest daughter and middle son, I'd not done a very good job at rescuing them because as they've struggled with their own suicidal ideations, instead of meeting them with compassion or grace, I was really more angry. How could you do this? You know what we've been through. Why would you choose to go down this path? How could you do this to me again? I'm so tired of dealing with this heaviness.

[00:21:00]

The scary part, too, when someone is ... From my perspective, when someone is at the point of being suicidal, there's nothing you can do about it. I mean, the day that my former with committed suicide, she was at her psychiatrist's office. We're doing all the things you're supposed to do to get help and it didn't help. It leaves you in a weird place of feeling that you're powerless to do anything, because at the end of the day, they have their own agency and they can choose to do that. It led me down a path of not compassion and I didn't like it. I didn't like that I responded that way.

[00:21:30]

It's impacted my relationship with my middle son. He was really struggling and I responded really out of anger. I wasn't able to rescue him. I wasn't able to meet him. I was-

Speaker 4: Does he know that you're here?

Speaker 2: He does.

Speaker 3: Oh, he does? You've talked to him.

[00:22:00]

Speaker 4: Can you imagine ... You know, we went to talk to this woman and I was telling her how bad I feel in the way that I reacted to you, and I was so scared and felt so powerless that I got angry because it's the flip side of helplessness. I want to have the opportunity to do it differently if ever you need me again.

[00:22:30]

Speaker 3: I've had that conversation with my oldest. I've not had that with my son.

Speaker 4: Yeah, but the son is the [crosstalk 00:22:35].

Speaker 3: He needs that. There's no reservations in me about doing that. I just don't think I've taken the time to think that he needs that from me and that I need that.

Speaker 4: No, no, you need it.

Speaker 3: I need that for myself.

Speaker 4: Right, because if you don't clear some of these clogged parts of you, you don't feel like you are entitled to pleasure.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

[00:23:00]

Speaker 4: Your partner here wants to feel alive and you say, "I'm still making sure that nobody's dead."

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 4: When you say "revive," what's your dream? What's your dream for the two of you?

Speaker 2: Delight.

Speaker 4: Say more.

Speaker 2: Just feeling a freedom, a security.

[00:23:30]

Speaker 4: But dreams are very vivid.

Speaker 2: Yes.

Speaker 4: And they're very, very detailed.

Speaker 2: Yes. I'm coming home from work and I'm home with the kids. His connection to me is one of instant delight and being present.

Speaker 4: What is he doing? So he comes home and what?

[00:24:00]

Speaker 2: He's physical. Pulling me close, looking at me, holding my gaze, kissing me. Feeling like I'm the only person that exists, where all of his attention is just on me in that moment. It's nothing profound or big but ...

Speaker 4: [00:24:30] It actually is. The gesture is small, the meaning is big. I have been here for everybody and now that everyone seems to be more okay, I would like to have your attention on me, and not because you want to rescue me, but because you delight in me.

Speaker 2: [00:25:00] When we met, I was flourishing and I had the bandwidth when I came in. I was full, and now I feel deflated, exhausted. It's just been one thing after another. When we got married, he left and that first month I get a phone call from the high school saying our oldest had overdosed. In that moment, I remember thinking, "I need to teach these kids how to suffer well and fight for life.

[00:25:30]
Speaker 4: It's interesting, how you just put it. To suffer well and to fight for life. To me what helps the most is to have meaning.

Speaker 2: Absolutely.

Speaker 4: [00:26:00] The meaning is what allows us to tolerate the pain, which is what you have done in your relation to him. It's your love for him, it's your connection to him. That's what has allowed you to tolerate all of this.

Speaker 2: Well, and when we met, I thought, "Here's a man who's gone through unbelievable circumstances and he's got his act together and he's taking care of his kids. In the face of adversity, in the face of trauma, he's rising up and that's the kind of person I want to be connected to, because it's not if we will suffer, it's when and how do we move through it. I want to choose life, and to choose life with him."
[00:26:30]

Speaker 4: [00:27:00] When you have a glimpse of that, what does it look like? I know that she has told in utter details the traumatic experiences that she went through. I don't know that she's ever had the opportunity to talk in equal details what an experience of reclaiming and awakening and delight would look like to you, and this is what she's invited to do. When he thinks "acute pain," he sees the crib. When you see intense joy, what do you see?

Speaker 2: [00:27:30] I can remember actually the weekend we got engaged and we were in some little, tiny town. We were waiting for the fog to lift and we had your iPad out and we were looking at houses, making plans. In my mind I'm like, "This is our future. He has my heart and I know I have his. Finally, this is the part of my life that I've been longing for." We're just sitting in some little coffee shop in an old train station looking at houses and talking about our future and our dreams. I felt like he was seeing parts of me that I hadn't even been able to share yet, [inaudible 00:28:04]. We didn't talk about kids or anything like that.
[00:28:00]

Speaker 3: I do have a tendency to get into a "manage the project" kind of a mindset. You know, I'm sure that talking about logistics is not that romantic, right? It doesn't evoke the erotic when you're talking about logistics, so ...
[00:28:30]

Speaker 4: But, you know, a conversation where someone is deeply focused on you and attentive and curious is erotic in the sense of you feel alive and awakened.

Speaker 3: Right.

Speaker 4: It doesn't have to be sexual.

Speaker 3: Right. Someone's focused on you.

Speaker 4: Yeah.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

[00:29:00]

Speaker 4: You enter through the eyes. You enter thorough the curiosity. You enter into her universe. All of that is erotic. Can you say it in your own words? What you're asking from him. Actually, let me reframe that. What you're offering him.

Speaker 2: My world. My inner world. There's no one else I would rather give that to than you, but I want you to desire that and not be intimidated but to take me places that I haven't even allowed myself. I think that was the only thing I could protect. My past experiences with abuse, I remember thinking, "I can protect this part," and opening myself and saying, "Here I am. I'm open. You have everything. I'm not gonna withhold," and wanting to feel his desire, excitement to do that.
[00:29:30]
[00:30:00]

Speaker 4: Tell him why this is so important. Not that you haven't already, but there's something about why this is so important that I don't know he really gets yet.

[00:30:30]

Speaker 2: I think it's to feel fully safe, to feel that ... To be cherished but to feel safe. To kind of feel myself unfurl. I feel like it's almost like a release. We've only barely crossed the threshold of what we can experience together. We're just standing there.

[00:31:00]

Speaker 3: I'm not afraid of it and I'm not resistant to it. Sometimes I just genuinely don't know what it means, because I feel a deeper connection with her that I've ever felt with anybody. I'm thinking that we're there and she's saying, "We're not there."

[00:31:30]

Speaker 4: At this moment I am so glad that I reframed what she's asking from him to what she's offering him. She's offering him an experience he's never had, that

[00:32:00] somewhere he longs for but doesn't even know he does. She comes with the perfect natural healing ingredients, which is not only to make sure after her traumatic experiences to be safe and not to be hurt again, but also to actually be able to be safe so that she can open herself up again, and with delight and with surrender. So, every time you think you've gotten there, you're gonna think, "I've just begun." I want you to put your hand on her lower back, the way she likes it. What she's also told you is that she wants you to look at her.

[00:32:30]

Speaker 3: Just linger. Does that help?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3: Really?

Speaker 2: Yeah, we're talking.

Speaker 4: Don't talk. Whenever you want to pull back, just notice it. Take a deep breath and reengage. Lingering means that the other person is not too much, which is what she lives with. The fear that it's too much. She's too much, and what your wife here [00:33:00] wants is to step out of the ER, to stop just thinking, "I can do the suffering." She wants to feel that she, too, deserves to feel good, cherished. Not just not damaged, not just not in pain. Adored. Sensual. She told the rapist, "There's a part of me you'll never have," but now she wants that part of her to be shared with someone.

[00:33:30]

[00:34:00] Speaker 3: It's hard to know, for me, how to lead in that direction.

Speaker 4: Do you know that when you were just looking at her and smiling, you were doing it?

Speaker 3: I didn't know that. I definitely don't give this to you. I get distracted quickly with other things and my mind lingering is 10 seconds and that's not lingering. This is easy. It's easy to sit with you. This isn't difficult. I'm actually a little embarrassed. This is a way to you and I've been struggling with all these other more complicated things and more words or more action and it's just ... Just kind of sit and be.

[00:34:30]

Speaker 2: Be present.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

[00:35:00] Speaker 2: It's the not having to think everyone else but someone thinking of me. I can handle hard, but being alone, it's like the image that always comes to my mind is a house that's been incinerated and there's like a brick column or wall left and everyone's

[00:35:30] scattered and I'm the only one left holding it up. I'm thinking, "I want to let go. I want to leave," but there's no one to help me.

Speaker 4: When she says all of this, the way she knows that she can feel alone but not be alone is by the strength of your grip. That's all you need to do, because if you hold tight, she can let go.

Speaker 2: In these moments, I want him to hold me.

[00:36:00]
Speaker 4: Okay, then ask him.

Speaker 2: I will say, I feel like I have been good at asking.

Speaker 4: And he doesn't do it?

Speaker 2: Mm-mm (negative).

Speaker 4: What does he do, then he freezes?

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative), or explains.

Speaker 4: What happens to you then? You do the same as you did with your boy?

[00:36:30]
Speaker 3: Well, maybe that, but I think maybe more so prepping myself that she's gonna leave, because

Speaker 4: That's what all women have done in my life.

Speaker 3: Right, I'm just standing by, not an active participant in her emotions because I can't be a part of it, because I've been invested so many years trying to be a part of other people's emotional state and it having no impact, that it then shuts me down to say it's outside my scope, and you would think that someone who had gone through this, I wouldn't respond that way, and I don't know why I do.

[00:37:00]

Speaker 4: No, no, you make perfect sense.

Speaker 3: Really?

[00:37:30]
Speaker 4: Of course, of course. I feel so helpless. You can leave, you can kill yourself, you can reject me. That's what all the important women in my life have done. When you feel bad, the best thing I can do is brace myself.

Speaker 3: That's probably a good way to put it, just bracing ...

Speaker 4: Bracing.

Speaker 3: ... Myself for what's gonna come and I don't know what's coming.

Speaker 4: Right.

Speaker 2: I'm not going anywhere.

Speaker 3: I know you're not. Neither am I.

[00:38:00]

Speaker 2: I want these other women to get out of the way.

Speaker 3: How do we retrain the body, I guess?

Speaker 4: So the first thing you do is breathe. When you tighten, breathe. You can also joke with her and just say, "I've just had a visit of unwanted women," so everybody

[00:38:30] knows what's happening. The only thing you cannot do is explain to her why life is gonna remain lifeless for her for much longer, and for you. Enough talk, and this is a moment where I seek for an experience, and I've known that she's a deeply musical person from their intake form, and so I suggest, do you sing to him?

[00:39:00]

Speaker 2: I haven't in a long time. I haven't felt the inspiration. I haven't felt the desire, and I don't like that. I don't like that that part of myself has gone dormant.

Speaker 4: The reason I want you to sing is because voice is crucial. Every baby recognizes a

[00:39:30] voice. Every kid who is left misses the voice. You can still see the person. You can't hear them. When you sing to him, it does to him what it does to you when he touches you. It will help him with the freezing. That's gonna fill him up. Is there a song you know you love?

[00:40:00]

Speaker 2: Yes. (Singing)

Speaker 4: Let it go.

[00:40:30]

Speaker 2: (Singing) I'm nervous, so my voice [inaudible 00:40:35] ...

Speaker 3: [inaudible 00:40:40]

Speaker 4: [00:41:00] There is no greater victory against a rapist than to experience full sexual and erotic intimacy with somebody else. That's when you can say to someone, "You have not taken the best of me." You can give that to her.

Speaker 3: I want to give that to her. As much as she wants to come alive, I do too. I've been at a loss sometimes for how to get there.

[00:41:30]

Speaker 4: As long as you tell her, "I do too," rather than just, "I don't know how," we're good.

Speaker 3: Yeah.

Speaker 4: That will take her out of the ER.

Speaker 3: Yeah. I will do that. I'm looking forward to this.

Speaker 2: I am too.

Speaker 3: She's got a good voice, doesn't she?

[00:42:00]

Speaker 4: As much as this session reverberated around a theme of the absent mother, the next session will bring together a mother and her child in a unique conversation.