

THE STORY ABOUT YOUR FAMILY ON THE BUS (AND A FOOD FIGHT)

Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of FlyingFreeNow.com, and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 197 of the Flying Free Podcast. I can't believe it. We're three episodes away from hitting 200. It's just unreal. At the time of this recording, there are over a hundred women coming into my hometown tomorrow from all over the United States and Canada, and we are going to have a thing called Butterfly Boot Camp. It's kind of like a conference. These women are just a few of the members of Flying Free, and we are getting together for two days to talk about the most important thing that we can do to find our destiny in this short life that we have on planet Earth. Because I don't believe that creator God put us here to resign ourselves to a life of oppression and abuse if there is a way for us to live otherwise.

So the way out starts with a bus. And I'm going to explain by sharing with you what I'm going to be sharing in one of the seven sessions that we're going to have during Butterfly Bootcamp. I'm going to be re-teaching five of these sessions live inside of the Flying Free program soon. So if you like what I share here, then I encourage you to get into the program if you're not already in there by going to joinflyingfree.com. You're going to get so much help and teaching and coaching, it's gonna knock your socks off and rock your world for the better.

So here is what I'm gonna be sharing with them. In June of this year, I was reading through the book "No Bad Parts" by Richard Schwartz. He's the founder of the Internal Family Systems Model of Therapy — IFS for short. And I was reading this book via Audible, which is perfect for this book because he does some exercises in this book, and it's really good if you can actually lay down and listen to him talk you through the exercise rather than trying to do it while you're reading words on a page.

So I was working through the exercises, and I would love to tell you all of the breakthroughs I got, but I am just going to share one with you right now to illustrate what I want to teach you. So in this exercise, I was supposed to think of a person in my life who really triggers me or who has triggered me in the past. So I could have picked a few different people, but I decided to pick my mom. And then he asked us to put this person that we picked in a room by themselves (in our imagination, okay?) so that they are contained, but so that we can still be able to see them through a window or whatever so that I was separate from that person. And then I was to imagine this

person doing or saying something that would typically trigger me and then notice what happens in my body and my mind as a protector jumps in.

“Now, what is a protector,” you might ask. I'll get to that in a little minute. Basically, a protector is a part of you that tries to protect your younger parts, and I'll explain all of that in a second. But anyway, I noticed this protector part was like a very angry ball of fire who caused my heart to race and my mind to spin. And I looked back at my mom in the room... He asked us to look at the person that triggers us through the eyes of this protector part. And what this protector part saw when she looked at my mother in the room is a great big rock, like a boulder, that could not be moved but that kind of stands in your way, right? And this boulder had its back to me. So it wouldn't look at me and turn around. It was just like this big rock that... That's how my protector part viewed my mother. Now, this part wanted to get into that room and pound on that boulder in frustration and rage.

And so we were supposed to ask this protector part what she wants. And so when I did that... And this is all in your imagination, right? You're trying to touch base with some of your programming that you have in your life. But what this part wanted was she wanted this boulder mom to soften into a mother and then turn toward Natalie and see me. She wanted this boulder mom to cry and hold me and rock me. And I discovered that this part of me inside of myself that is raging at my mom in the room is actually just trying to protect little Natalie. I decided to call this angry part of me Mad Mama. So this part inside of me, this Mad Mama part inside of me, is trying to get my mother to love the little girl part of me who still feels like she really needs her mother.

Now, my actual biological mother hasn't talked to me for over three years. She gets together with my ex, does Christmas with my ex and my kids when he has them for their Christmas time, but she apparently doesn't want anything to do with me. I couldn't even count the hours that I have cried over this, the bad dreams I've had about this, the nights I've laid awake ruminating over this. It's been a horrible situation for me. Now it's been over three years, so I'm feeling much better about it. But you know, the first year or two years were really, really pretty awful.

So anyways, I haven't typically really liked this part of me that feels all this rage towards my mother. I want to feel love towards my mother, and yet this angry part has all this rage towards her. But when I did this exercise, I realized that this angry part inside of me is actually not bad, it's just frantic. This frantic part inside of me loves little Natalie, wants to protect her and give her what she needs. And this part believes that little Natalie needs a mother's love.

So I asked this part what she would do if she no longer had to protect little Natalie from the boulder mom who refused to look at me. And this part inside of me answered immediately. The answer came to me immediately, and she said, "If I didn't have to get the boulder mom to love her, I would have the time and energy to love little Natalie myself. I would be little Natalie's mother." And I instantly burst into tears. I saw in that moment what was going on, because I'd always known this raging ball of fire was inside of me, and the other parts inside of me were very judgmental towards this ball of fire. They despised her and judged this part.

All right, I'm gonna come back to the story in just a minute, but some of you have maybe heard — I talk a lot about this in my program, in my coaching — but I talk a lot about how we are all driving the car of our own life, and our brain or our thoughts or our programming is like this little girl who sits in the backseat of our car and offers us her thoughts and opinions on what we are doing and where we're going. And we've actually named this little girl Myrtle. I don't know if I've shared this on the podcast or not, but we talk about it all the time in the program. And why did we pick the name Myrtle? I have no idea. I used to have a great aunt named Myrtle. We don't have anyone in the program named Myrtle, so I guess I thought that was kind of safe.

But anyway, Myrtle sits in the back seat of the car, and she has lots of thoughts. And I use this illustration... The reason why I do this is because I want my clients to see their adult selves as the driver of their car, as being separate from their thoughts, being separate from their brains' programming. So Myrtle kind of represents our default thoughts, the way we just automatically think when something happens.

So for example, a lot of my clients have programming that says that there's something fundamentally wrong with them. So when they as adults want to make a decision to drive their car in a different direction, like, for example, this is a drastic one, but just for an example, get a divorce, right? That's something a lot of the kinds of women that I work with decide to do eventually. But what happens is that Myrtle, their brain's programming, begins to have a freak-out session in the back of the car, and she screams, "You can't get a divorce. There's something wrong with you, remember? Just figure out what's wrong with you, fix it, play nice, go back to your husband, do the right thing, and stop thinking about divorce. God hates divorce and He's going to hate you if you get one." That's the programming, okay? Now, I don't actually believe any of those things, but my programming definitely believed all of that Myrtle in the back seat — 100%.

So the work we do in Flying Free is just to begin to notice Myrtle, to notice our programming, and recognize it for what it is: simply thoughts or programming that we

can actually change if we choose to do so. We are adults. Now, this kind of programming worked to protect us in some way when we were younger, but now it's no longer useful, and we need to exchange it for our own intentional thoughts so that we can control our own lives and not live in a state of sleepy oblivion, allowing our default programming to run our lives.

It's like, do we want our brain to be the boss of our lives or do we want to be the boss of our lives? But here's the thing: What I've discovered in learning IFS — Internal Family Systems — is that we're not driving a car. We are actually driving a bus. And Myrtle isn't the only one sitting back there. There is a whole family back there. There are literally dozens of young parts that are in the bus with us, and each of them is playing a role to protect us. They are all protectors. Who are they protecting? Well, they're protecting our little selves in the way-back of the bus. There might be a little baby Natalie back there, a little two-year-old Natalie, a six-year-old Natalie, and so on.

These are the young parts of ourselves that experienced some kind of trauma or adverse childhood experience that impacted our brain and body in some way. Now, some of you might be thinking, "Well, I didn't really have any trauma." If you would've asked me if I had had any trauma in my life, I would've said, "Well, maybe when I was bullied for four years in a row from fourth grade to eighth grade. That was traumatic." I could tell you lots of stories about that, and I wouldn't have even probably thought that was trauma. I thought of trauma as being like something really, really big, like you watched a car accident and a whole bunch of people died and you saw blood and guts spilled all over or you were beaten on a regular basis as a child or you were molested as a child.

That's what I would've thought of as trauma, but you need to know that trauma can be anything. It can be even what seems like the most benign thing, like your parent yelling at you when you're growing up. And it doesn't have to be ongoing, necessarily, either. Depending on the situation and your personality makeup and what was going on at the time and all the context, as well as what your brain's programming is, it could have caused some trauma. What creates trauma in one person also does not create trauma in another. So you can't say, "Well, I went through that too, and I don't have any trauma," or "There's no residual stuff going on in my life because of that," okay? So you could get trauma from being called "four-eyes" in school. Or not.

So anyway, if you google "trauma," you can look it up and read about it, but I'm not gonna get into that much of that right now. But just to know that the little parts that are in the way-back of the bus, those are our very, very young parts that experience some trauma, and they're stuck in some way. And then these parts, all these parts in the

middle of the bus, are trying to protect that little child in the back.

Now, I like the bus analogy because if you think about a bus, it's got two sides to it — a left and a right side. And I like to think of these two sides of the bus containing two different kinds of protector parts. So on one side of the bus we have all of our manager parts. And these are the parts of us that protect us from experiencing emotional pain or difficulty. They try to manage our lives and arrange our lives and even manage our circumstances outside of us, like all the people and all the things going on outside of us, in such a way so that we will not experience emotional pain or so we can avoid it. They believe and are invested in prevention of emotional pain.

So here's an example of a manager. A manager might be a bossy part who tells us and everyone else what to do and gets angry when we don't do it. Tell me if you can relate to this: "Okay, everyone get in the car now, kids, or we're gonna be late to church and then people are going to judge and reject little Natalie, and we can't have that," or "Why can't you just stop fidgeting and read the words in our reading book, my child? If you don't learn how to read before the end of the school year, everyone is going to say that little Natalie is a failure and a loser, and she'll be unloved and rejected." This is how the manager parts are thinking. Now, we're not thinking that way, but the little parts inside of us are thinking this way, okay? But we can see it on the outside in the ways that we're reacting to things.

Now, on the other side of the bus are our firefighter parts, and these are the parts of us that put out the fire of pain after it's already started, okay? So if the managers didn't do their job of preventing the pain very well — this is what the firefighters think — then the firefighters will come in to put out the fire of pain. And these parts do this in all kinds of ways. For example, when I was told that I was a rebellious child because I argued with my mom, one of my firefighters thought the best way to put out the pain was to kill myself. "Just drive the whole dang bus off the road and be done with it all." Do any of you guys have that firefighter living inside of you?

Now, this is one of my extreme firefighters. I have other firefighters inside of me that try to put out the pain by eating or watching TV. I have one who is a very big one inside of me who is a workaholic. Just go to my room, lock the door, and work. Get my mind on something other than the pain.

So can you guys picture this? There's all these little small, exiled parts of us in the back of the bus, and they're hiding due to trauma and not understanding what happened to them. And they stay stuck in emotional trauma because nobody has taken the time to go back there and heal them. And then on both sides of the bus are all these protector

parts. We've got the managers on one side and we've got the firefighters on the other side. And each of these parts has a role that they believe they need to play in order to keep the little exiles safe.

Okay, now we're going to look at who is driving the bus. And by the way, I am not trained in IFS, all right? I'm not an IFS coach or therapist or anything like that. I am explaining it as best that I can based on some books that I've read, the most recent one being the one that I told you about earlier, "No Bad Parts" by Richard Schwartz. So there's a lot of amazing books out there. In fact, I've got an interview coming up soon with someone who actually has written a book, and that's coming up... I can't remember if it's next week or the week after, but that's coming up very soon, and I think you'll really enjoy that interview. I haven't actually done it yet as of the time of this recording, but I know it's gonna be amazing.

All right, so now we're going to look at the person who's driving the bus, because that's you. This is the adult you. This is the you that I believe God created whole and complete and full of wisdom. You are aligned like an umbilical cord — this is kind of how I imagine it — an umbilical cord is going from creator God all the way through your core. This is a part of you that is aligned with your Creator.

Now, you know when you're operating out of your core self because your body will feel full of love; it will feel a lot of compassion; it will feel warmth and a sense of safety and well-being. That's how you know that you're operating out of that core self, and we all have that core self inside of us. We don't always necessarily access it, especially if our parts are very activated on a regular basis — I like to think of it as food fights in the back of our bus — we're gonna be dysregulated and we're not gonna be able to access that core self.

But that adult you that has been given this power and ability, if you will accept it and believe it, it is able to go back and get to know everybody on your bus. And getting to know those parts on your bus is going to heal them and set them free. So then the protector parts will be freed up to play the roles that they actually want to play in your life so that overall in general, you'll have more peace and rest on your bus instead of this constant chaos.

So the adult you is like the leader of the bus, and in fact, Richard Schwartz calls it "self-leadership." So have you ever felt like your brain is on fire with chatter, like, so many mixed thoughts? Each of those thoughts is creating a different feeling. So you've got all these mixed thoughts, you've got all these mixed emotions. Now, using the bus illustration, this is like each protector part holding a sign with its own thought or core

belief written in one sentence on the sign.

Now for those who've been hanging around me for a while, you know that I teach the model. It's a cognitive behavioral therapy model that I learned and was trained in through The Life Coach School. And that's a model that I use in all of my coaching. So I've kind of tried to integrate the model in with IFS a little bit when I coach. In the model, you look at your thoughts, the things that you're thinking about the circumstances that are happening in your life. And so I've just decided that it's kind of like a protector part coming forward to the front of the bus and saying, "Hey Natalie, look at this thought." And they have it written down on a sign — their belief, what they believe, okay? It might say, "You're bossy" or "There's something wrong with you" or "I'm confused." And each of these parts kind of has their own little role that they play and their own belief system that they have.

Now try to imagine dozens of these parts scrambling towards the front of the bus at the same time trying to get your attention when they're triggered and trying to share their thoughts. It can get very, very dramatic on the bus — food fights, okay? That's what I'm saying. And they don't always agree with each other. Some parts are going, "We need to do it this way," and some parts are going, "We can't do it that way because this is what's going on."

You've probably heard the idea of having one foot on the gas pedal and one foot on the brake. So that's like our core self wants to put the foot on the gas pedal and get going, but all of our parts are putting their foot on the brake because they're afraid.

And so here's the key, you guys. The key is to listen to one at a time. Do the model. We use the model to pull down one thought at a time. I'll see a lot of people come into the forum, our private forum, and we have this section in the private forum called "Let's Run Models," and so they'll practice running models. It's great. We have some really amazing coaching moments there. But some of them will come in and they'll have four or five models, and they'll be like, "Natalie, look at all these models. Help me with them." And I say, "No. That's like having five of our parts come down to the front of our bus and we're gonna listen to all of them at the same time? Really? Can you do that with your kids? I can't do that with my kids. When my kids want to talk to me, I have to say, 'Okay, one at a time. The rest of you guys have to go to another room or something. I'm just going to talk to one person at a time and we'll figure things out.'"

So we run one model at a time. We look at one thought at a time. And then once we dig into that thought, we can figure out where that thought came from, why this part believes that — like I told you about at the very beginning with this one Mad Mama part

inside of me who believes that she's very, very angry at my mother, and her thought is, "My mom needs to see. My mom needs to know me and love me and listen to me, otherwise I can't be happy."

All right, so let's go back to that. I want to finish that story, because that wasn't all that happened. Once I met this part of me and listened to her and found out what she's really concerned about, which is that little Natalie has a mother... And once I found out what her job inside of me had been for so long, I felt so much compassion and gratefulness for the painful role that she had been forced to play in my life for so many years.

And so I told this part that she was released from her duty to protect little Natalie from the boulder mom who wouldn't look at little Natalie. Instead, she could be little Natalie's mother. Essentially what I did in that moment is I made this decision deep inside of my core to be the mother that I needed. I was the one who needed to be that person in my life, not my mom. Me.

Now, suddenly this big ball of fire that I had thought looked like a big ball of fire before, it didn't look like that anymore. You know what she looked like? I realized she looks like a star. And if you think about it, a star actually is a big ball of fire. But I knew that my star needed a new name. I couldn't call her Mad Mama anymore. I just decided to call her Star. This part inside of me, I now think of her as a star. And you know what? She is now little Natalie's mother. She is a warm, bright star, and this part inside of me was deeply healed.

The exercise went on, though. And so what he had us do is look at the person that we had put inside of the room and see what we see now. And I no longer saw a big rock. Instead what I saw... It broke my heart. I saw a small, disfigured, withered little lady looking angrily at her small world with blind, sad eyes, and all I felt was sadness for her. No more anger — just sadness. And I realized in that moment, that little woman has a bus too. And she has never found her exiled parts or healed them, which is why she's shriveled and hardened into a small lump of angry sadness. She does not have the ability or the capacity to look at little Natalie. She's still trying to protect her little self inside, and it's taking all of her internal energy to do so.

Do you see this? When our own bus is full of chaos and fear and anger and judgment and hatred from all of these parts trying to protect our unhealed child-parts, we are not able to love anyone else or hold space for anyone else or truly see anyone else. We have to use all of our internal energy just to keep our own bus on the road. But if we will do this work of learning to know and love our self — and that includes all of our

parts — then we will be able to truly fly free in peace and love. And this is what brings meaning to our own lives and ultimately, I believe, brings meaning to the world.

Now, when I was writing this session for Butterfly Bootcamp, I was sitting in a beautiful hotel in St. Paul. It's the only way that I could actually concentrate on writing. At the time, I had five kids living at home and a lot of chaos. There's not just chaos in my bus — there's a lot of chaos in my house. Anyway, I was in this hotel in St. Paul, writing, writing, writing, writing, and I invited my husband Tom to come and have dinner with me that night. I knew that I would need a break, and I thought it would be a nice date night, and he said he wasn't feeling it. Now, I know Tom loves me, and he shows me in a million ways and also tells me that he loves me all the time, but I felt a little jab of rejection.

And then I thought about my parts on my bus and I remembered that I am not alone. My Creator is here with me, and I've got all of these beautiful parts of me inside of me, and I made a conscious choice to have a great night. I ordered in room service. I watched a show on Netflix for my break. The food was amazing. The only thing I felt bad about at that point was that Tom had to miss that. But I didn't feel one bit bad for Natalie. It is my job to meet Natalie's needs and take care of Natalie, and nobody else's.

And same with you. When we accept our mission of getting to know and care for all of our protector parts, we settle. We land into love, and this is a powerful force that's going to ultimately spill over into the lives of the people who draw near to us. We're not going to be able to have influence in the lives of anyone who is running away from us for whatever reason. They have their reasons. That's not our business. But we can have influence on those who are drawing near to us.

So remember, always remember, chasing people down is not the answer. Letting them go is. But people will be more apt... And I'm thinking of kids too — adult kids. We do a lot of coaching in both of my programs... Because I feel like we have a lot of middle-aged moms in there who have older children, and a lot of these children have grown up in abusive homes and they are rejecting their mom in a lot of cases, because when the mom stands up and says “No more” to abuse, it upsets the whole apple cart. And because she's the one that appears to be upsetting the apple cart, she's an easy target. Plus, she's the safer parent. They know that she's always going to love them. Even if they don't know it consciously, they know it instinctively.

Whereas dad, if you're living in a family where the dad is the abuser, then, “He's the one that we have to be very careful around. We want dad to love us. We want dad to accept us, so we're going to be more careful about him, but then we're going to let loose on

mom." I mean, it's sad, but that's just the way it is.

So this is often a thing that women are feeling really hurt by, and they kind of try to chase after their children and try to get their children to turn and look — kind of like me trying to get my mom to turn and look at me — and it's very painful when these children don't want to, but the best thing to do is to let them go, alright? Because again, people will be more apt to draw near to us as we become more internally regulated and self-led, because then we'll be able to hold space for them to be who they are — to make their life decisions.

Because we can tend to be judgemental and want them to do this, that, or the other thing — ask me how I know — and when we do that and we don't hold space for them to live their own lives and make their own choices about how much time they wanna spend with us, when they wanna spend it and all of that, when we try to control those things to make ourselves happy, see how we're relying on other people and external circumstances to regulate us on the bus? That never works. The job of regulating all of our parts on our bus belongs to the one that's sitting in the driver's seat, and that is you and me, okay?

Now, I go into a lot more detail about all of this stuff at Butterfly Bootcamp. This is just one of the sessions that I did. But again, I am going to teach those Butterfly Bootcamp sessions live inside of the Flying Free membership group, probably before the end of the year. So if you're interested in getting in on that, go to joinflyingfreenow.com and apply. Once you fill out an application, there is a short waiting period and we send you some goodies while you're waiting, and then we'll send you an invitation to join when we open up the doors again and you can hop on in and take advantage of coaching every week and classes and all kinds of good stuff. We have a private forum. You can talk to me every day if you want to. I'm in there every single day visiting with people in the private forum, and I don't do that outside of the program because I simply don't have time. But I pour all of my life, blood, and guts into the people in that program and I love it, and I love watching them change and grow and transform and fly, eventually. I'm like a butterfly doula. I help birth butterflies.

All right, you guys, that is all I have for you for this week. Thank you so much for listening, and if you are enjoying this podcast, be sure to leave a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. We're so grateful for those. And until next time, fly free.