

## HOW TO CHANGE YOURSELF WHILE STILL STUCK IN AN EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE MARRIAGE

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [FlyingFreeNow.com](http://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 256 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I have a special guest with me, a guest that I know and love. Her name is Diane Swillinger. Did I say that right?

DIANA: No, it's "Diana." You got "Swillinger" right.

NATALIE: Oh my gosh! It even says here in my notes "Diana," plus I know your name.

DIANA: Are you going to leave this in? I love it.

NATALIE: I'm totally going to leave it in. Yeah, I don't do bloopers because I just leave them all in.

DIANA: All right, continue, continue.

NATALIE: Exactly, okay. Diana is a life and business coach. She's the host of the Renew Your Mind Podcast. So if you like this podcast, if you like hearing her voice and what she has to say, then you have to go over and check out her podcast, the Renew Your Mind Podcast. She's also the founder of the Renew Your Mind Institute Coach Training. And she's also a coach inside of the Flying Free and Flying Higher programs, and she recently spoke at our annual Butterfly Bootcamp in Minneapolis and she was a huge hit. So welcome, Diana.

DIANA: Well, thank you. It's so fun to be here. I'm just thinking, it started a few years ago where I was searching for a podcast on a certain topic — it was gaslighting — and I found one episode of your podcast, and then I just went on a deep dive and I went all in. So I've listened to every episode since then and many of them twice. So I'm just a fan. We're like fan/friend/fellow coach, all of it.

NATALIE: That is awesome. I'm surprised that you haven't been on here until now. We should have had you on here a long time ago.

DIANA: It's the perfect time. How about that?

NATALIE: It is, you're right. It's always the perfect time. Okay, so at Butterfly Bootcamp, you talked about growing while staying, so growing, self-development, while you're staying in an emotionally abusive relationship. And I think this is such an important discussion because many of the women who listen to this podcast or are in the Flying Free program actually can't fly free, right? I mean, they can't fly free from their relationship. They simply aren't able to leave their abusive relationship today or even this next year, for example. So there are situations or circumstances beyond their control that are keeping them stuck even though they might be contemplating the idea of leaving or might really want to leave.

So, I mean, what about those women? Are they doomed to hopeless destruction and devastation, then? Can they never grow or evolve into the next amazing version of themselves just because they're married to a jerk, right? So I want to continue the discussion that you opened up at Butterfly Bootcamp here just to get some insights in what it means to stay well, is it even possible, or to grow while you're staying in a destructive relationship. And I'm really excited to talk more about this with you. Okay, so you chose to stay for a long time, correct?

DIANA: I did, yes.

NATALIE: How long was it? After you kind of woke up and realized, "I think my husband is actually emotionally abusive," how long did you stay?

DIANA: Well, I wouldn't say I ever woke up and thought, "My husband is emotionally abusive." I didn't have that epiphany, but I would say at about nine years in, I was like, "Something's wrong." And I stayed and it was really painful from then on. Then at about twenty-three years in, I almost left, and then I decided to stay and I stayed for another six years.

NATALIE: Okay, so that was kind of your decision. You knew what you were dealing with, but you made a conscious, intentional decision to stay in spite of knowing that. Would you describe it like that?

DIANA: Yes, well, and I thought I had reason to stay because things were so much better for a while. So I stayed. And then other things happened too, like... Well, what I could kind of do is take a couple of pivotal moments for me, and this might pull it together. So hindsight always helps pull things together. You know, you don't know it in the middle of the journey, but looking back, there were definitely times that I thought, "Oh, that was pivotal," or "That moment was revealing."

One of them was the day I quit drinking because in the combination of what I called a “difficult marriage” — that's what I called it — and the death of my sister — she passed away from leukemia when she was thirty-three — and then, of course, a whole bunch of other factors mixed in, I was using alcohol to numb my emotions and to cope.

And so it was about thirteen years ago that it was a Friday afternoon. My husband was going to be coming home any minute, and I had a couple shots of vodka to get ready for him coming home, and something snapped. He came in and we had an argument right away. I have no idea what it was about, but I was just like, “That's it. I am done. I'm done.” So I took the whole, full bottle of vodka out to my backyard, dumped it out in the rock garden, and quit for good.

And the reason this was pivotal is because at that moment, I decided I was willing to feel pain. I knew I was going to feel physical pain coming off of that and all the emotional pain. In order to be sober I was going to have to allow all of it so I didn't keep spiraling down. I thought I would spiral down to a place that was way too far to come back from. So I quit. And that was a good pivot, and yet my marriage got worse.

So my husband continued to abuse alcohol — he had been using it — and sometimes he would go missing for hours on end or overnight. He let his business suffer, he would blame me for the changes I made — like, “I wasn't fun anymore,” and I would spend my nights googling. I even had a counselor say, “Now, let's not call it abuse,” but I was googling “verbal abuse,” trying to figure things out.

And during the day I'm managing the kids to try to keep peace in the house so we wouldn't have blowups and people getting upset. And we had financial issues, bills not getting paid, foreclosure papers coming to our door. We were in and out of marriage counseling, marriage intensives, marriage retreats, marriage mentors at church, all of it, and I was trying to hold everything together, but now I was feeling all the pain, all of it, because I wasn't running from the pain anymore. But I didn't know what to do with it, and it was too much.

And so another pivotal moment was... I don't know how many years ago this was, maybe about eight or nine years ago. It was a summer day, beautiful summer day, and I don't know what my kids were doing, including one of them was a two-year-old toddler. And I went into my bedroom and shut the door, laid my head down in the middle of the bed, didn't even grab a pillow, stared at the blinds, which were closed. I could see the bright summer day. It was beautiful outside. People are out there enjoying their day, and I'm laying on my bed comatose, and then the phone rang, but I didn't even move. I know a lot of people who've been in these kinds of relationships, we have a lot of those

moments where we're just so overwhelmed it's like we're frozen.

And then it rang again, and then I kind of woke up. I'm like, "Oh, my mentor. I called my mentor at church this morning. I better pick up the phone." And I did. We talked, don't remember anything we said. Somewhere in the middle of the conversation felt like a really long silence. And coming out of the silence, she said, "Diana, I think you're discouraged." I didn't celebrate out loud, but something inside of me was like, "I'm discouraged. Yes, I'm discouraged." Like, it was good news because I had a name to an emotion. So I had gone on all in on feeling pain, except I didn't know what to do with it, didn't know what it was. I was just going deeper and deeper into pain. Now I knew I could name it and get relief. That's all I knew at that point, but I wanted to go figure out why this was so important.

So I had been back in school to get my college degree. I added psychology courses. I kept working with my mentor. We started reading books about things like this. I became a life coach while I was staying and went to master classes and dove all in on learning a whole bunch of tools in the life coach space, got an advanced certification, and a lot of stuff changed. I changed. I couldn't fix my circumstances, but I could fix me. And I learned to be happy right where I was at. It didn't matter what anyone else was doing. I could work on me. I worked on my emotional maturity, the stories in my head, and anything that was in my control. And I learned how to, while I was married, go from feeling discouraged to having hope every day and go from hating my life to loving it. Yes, loving it exactly as it was. And instead of feeling done, I felt like I was just getting started.

And so this is why I'm a coach in your program because I'm just out here looking for ways to help other women learn how to do the same thing. I think if we have the right tools, we can do it. It doesn't matter what's going on in our life. It's not like God's like, "Here's some joy and some hope and some peace. Sometimes you'll have it, sometimes you won't." He's always giving it abundantly, and if we know what to do in our mind and our emotional life, we can tap into that whenever we want. So that's kind of how I got to where I am now and also why you can see how I learned how to grow while I stayed. I did it all while I stayed.

NATALIE: Yeah, yeah. Okay, so I'm just curious, I know there are some other questions here that I want to get to, but I'm curious, did your husband... Because I know what's probably going through some people's minds: "Well, maybe her husband wasn't as bad as mine is." Was he still in your face criticizing you and doing all of the things that were tearing you down even while you were... Like, how did you overcome that kind of stuff?

DIANA: You know, on a public podcast, I'm a little cognizant. I have adult children, so I won't get into all the nitty gritty, but I will tell you that my husband was still abusing alcohol and all the things that come with trying to cover that up. And my marriage, when it started, I would say, when I look back in hindsight, first several years, there were covert things happening. After my second son was born, we went into the overt space and there were a lot of painful things happening, things I didn't want my kids to hear, and they heard over and over and over again. And then when I became a life coach, he went overt because he had to change. I changed the dance. I'm like, "Oh, if you raise your voice, I know what I do. I respect me. So I guess I leave the room." Or if it's on the phone, I'm like, "I'm going to hang up now." And so all of the destructive dances that had been happening, I was no longer participating in many of them.

NATALIE: Yeah, or interrupting those patterns.

DIANA: I changed the patterns, yeah. And that's how I gave myself space to grow, and I was also exercising. Every single time I did that, I exercised a muscle in me to take care of my needs in the moment. Instead of placating or people pleasing or just trying to do whatever you do to get it to calm down, I was like, "No, the most important thing right now is for me to take care of me and respect me and stand up for the things I value."

NATALIE: Yeah, that means not hooking into that shame and guilt that they want you to hook into for not being the person that they want you to be. Because whenever we set boundaries, I feel like people who don't respect other people's boundaries, people who actually are just using you for their own benefit, they're going to get upset about that.

And when they get upset that you set a boundary or that you're protecting yourself, it's easy for women in those kinds of relationships to feel guilty then, like, "Oh, I'm not a very good wife because now he's mad at me because I... And now I'm being selfish and I'm taking care of myself and I shouldn't do that. I should be meeting my husband's every beck and call need." And then the husband is in different ways, sometimes just covertly, providing that little guilt pressure or whatever. But I think a lot of times, at least for me too, I can relate to... Well, you didn't even say this, but did you have to unhook from that guilt and the shame?

DIANA: I did. Well, and first I felt like I had to unhook in the moment. And so this is a little trick I have. You can use this in any relationship, let me just say that. If somebody is saying things — and I have with other people that I'm not even related to — when someone is saying something that is triggering you or you feel like you're going to get hooked in or you need to defend yourself, I just dial it all the way back to, "Scientifically what's happening right now? This person in front of me is a person filled with molecules

and organs and skin, and they have vocal cords and lips, and look at that. That person's using their vocal cord and lips. And when they do that, sounds come out of their mouths that we can interpret as words and make meaning of."

And right there, I get to go, "Now I'm going to choose to let it stop there. They're making words come out of their mouth, and what happens is we make meaning of them. I choose not to make any meaning of them in this moment." And in that way, I wouldn't get hooked in in the moment. I could always think back on it later and see if there were some decisions I wanted to make, but I wouldn't get hooked in in the moment. I think I was going to say something else to finish that out, but I forgot. So if I missed something, let me know.

NATALIE: That makes me think of Tina Swithin, the lemonade lady. One Mom's Battle — that's her website. She says, "If someone says something that's destructive to you, you can always just say 'Your opinion is noted.'" So if we combined her recommendation with yours, it would be like, "The words that are coming out of your mouth are noted by me."

DIANA: Yes. I had a different version. I would just say, "I hear you," because that's scientifically true.

NATALIE: Yeah, yeah. Although, I feel like they could interpret that as, "I understand you," or "I agree with you," or whatever, which is not true, you know?

DIANA: Which is fine though. They're going to think whatever they're going to think anyway.

NATALIE: That's true. You're just saying words too.

DIANA: I was doing that. I was saying, "I hear you for me," because that fit with the story I got to have in my own head about, "The scientific thing is sound is coming out of his mouth, and scientifically my eardrums are hearing it." And so it worked for me.

NATALIE: Yeah, yeah. I just noticed what I did inside of myself just there. I immediately went to what the other person is thinking, and that's exactly the opposite of what you want to do. You want to stop worrying and being concerned about what the other person is thinking and doing and be more aware, self-aware, and concerned with what you are making all of it mean. That's the key.

DIANA: Exactly, yeah.

NATALIE: Well, I'm glad we had this special podcast moment. Okay, what about people who have tried to grow? I can hear them out there going, "But I have been trying to do that. I have been reading the books. I am in the Flying Free program, but I am still feeling stuck. I just can't seem to unhook from all of this." What would you say to them? Give them some hope.

DIANA: Yeah. Well, first of all, that was me for a long, long time. And I feel like there are a few factors to being able to grow right where you're at regardless of what people are doing. I'll talk about one. And by the way, when you are trying to do this, again, it's like boundaries. We're not making a boundary to try to get the other person to change. We're also not growing like we need to become the Proverbs 31 woman and grow into that for the other person to change. That's not it either. So this isn't necessarily going to make your circumstances better, though they might change in some ways. They might be different, not better or more tolerable.

But anyway, you can be better inside and you can have less drama inside and you can have less resistance and resentment. All of that's on the inside of you, which can spill out to the outside. But the one thing I'd say that we have to grab hold of is that other people do not need to change for you to grow. I think we're stuck because we just keep waiting for them to change just enough, even a little bit. "Just give me a little relief so I can take care of me," and it's not going to happen. So we have got to let go of what's not in our control and only take responsibility for what is in our control. We never, ever control other people.

I've even thought of this, like, "Well, sometimes like we're a parent or we're a boss. We have authority over the other person. Aren't we supposed to get them to do the right thing?" And I say, no, we don't have any control over them. We can only do consequences. And if we're in a position of authority or a parent, we might need to offer some consequences or actually even in some relationships, I suppose.

Boundaries are sometimes consequences. But unless you're going to attach puppet strings to a person... I like to get really graphic with this because we've got to realize we can't control. Unless you're going to attach puppet strings and then also implant the chip into their brain where you can control their thoughts — unless you're going to do that, you'll never, never, never have control. Stop waiting for them to do anything. We've got to let go.

I'm being redundant on purpose because we need to see that every time we do this, we're depowered and we're just stuck thinking they have to participate in some way for us to grow. But whenever we think that it won't happen. So if you're feeling stuck, I bet



you anything you're still thinking that other person needs to do something. Like, if you think, "I can't have peace as long as they're doing that thing," then you're deciding in your head, no peace for you. Or if you think, "I'll work on this when they fix that," then you are deciding you will not heal and grow unless they do something. You are hinging your opportunity to heal and grow on them and their behavior. So no healing and growing for you. Or you can let go of all that. They don't need to do anything for you to grow.

I don't know if this is a leap, but in Philippians 4, Paul says, "I've learned to be content whether I have little or whether I have much," and he's in jail. He's not free. He's like, "It doesn't matter that I'm in jail. It doesn't matter that I'm restricted. It doesn't matter what other people are doing around me. I am in control of what my experience is, and right here in jail, my experience can be to be content."

And we can do that. We don't control others' thoughts. We don't control their emotions. We don't control the stories in their heads. We don't control their stories about us. We don't control their personality disorders or their substance abuse or what they do or what they say. And so if you're stuck, I bet you there's something that you think they have to do. But you're wrong about that. You've got to let go if you want to grow.

NATALIE: Yeah. I just want to give a caveat, because what neither of us are saying is that you have to be content with staying in an abusive relationship. If you can get out, I think both of us would be all cheering you on and all for that. But this podcast episode is particularly geared toward helping people who actually can't get out right now. We're trying to give hope for those of you who probably, I mean, you probably are literally stuck in this relationship, but we want you to know there you're not stuck in your personal human development. You're not stuck in your ability to experience joy in your life or contentment in your life. That can still happen even if you have to stay married to your emotionally abusive partner.

DIANA: Yeah. You've talked about the shin-kicker before. I advocate if someone's kicking your shins, go somewhere where the shin kicker isn't. But I don't want anyone to stay if they're in any physical... If there's physical or sexual abuse specifically, I think you should get out. I advocate for that for you to be protected.

But sometimes our beliefs are keeping us stuck. For me, I promised, "I will never, ever get divorced. I will never get divorced. I will never do it. God hates divorce. I never will." And I needed this kind of growing to happen to strengthen myself and exercise my muscles to make choices and take care of myself, or I might not have actually been able to switch my brain to a different belief. It took a lot of strength to get to a point where I



was like, "Maybe I don't have to stay." And so growing while you're still there, if you're not in physical danger, we'll get you to a place where you can start making great decisions for yourself.

NATALIE: Yes, yes. I wrote about this in my memoir that's coming out next year, but I worked with Leslie Vernick for a year before I actually separated from my ex-husband, and during that year, I was never planning to separate or divorce. Never even crossed my mind. We were just working on staying well. But I'd learned so many things, and you talk about exercising a muscle? I exercised my boundaries muscle and I exercised tolerating his disapproval because again, the more boundaries I put in place, the angrier he got and the more amped up he got, so it got worse.

But who I was as a person was very, very different a year later, and that person, that newer version of me, was the one that said, "I think we need to get some space, physical space. I think you need to move out." And again, not thinking about divorce, just thinking, "I think we need some space. I need to be able to think through things and heal. I gotta get away from this incessant criticism and crap that you keep throwing in my direction." And it just kind of incrementally happened after that. So definitely I can vouch for the whole idea of getting stronger and learning things while you're still in the middle of that relationship. You can do that. It will change you though. You will change.

DIANA: It will, it will. And the people in your family might not... Some people or a person might not like it.

NATALIE: No, no. Even people outside of you, even people at church didn't like some of the things I was learning and sharing with them. They were like, "Ooh, you're learning some very dangerous things. These things actually make you be an adult. We can't have that. You need to hang on to your husband's hand and let him lead you. You are three years old." All right, I'm exaggerating, but kind of the concept that was there.

Okay, so, what kind of strategies do you offer to women or do you teach women either in your coaching practice or wherever who actually want to stay, they want to stay in their difficult marriage? They're like, "I want to stay here. I do not want to get divorced. I'm in."

DIANA: Yeah. And that's true there. I mean, I've talked to some of the Flying Free ladies and I know one who, they have the resources. She's like, "I'm going to buy my own house and live in a separate house and I'm not going to divorce." And she has the ability to create some space and stay. And then there are some other people that they might have been married for forty years, and it's like, "Oh, the Christmases and the grandkids

and all that." Again, if you're not physically being abused... Even the emotional abuse can be pretty severe, but it's all on a spectrum. If you can stay, you might want to, but also I would say the healthier you get, the more you might be like, "I'm so healthy — I'm not sure I want this."

Here's what I taught at Bootcamp with growing while staying. I hit three things: knowing your values, deciding ahead of time, and that we always have choices. So let me just go through all three of those things pretty quickly here, but to give you an overview. Once you let go of your desire to control anyone but yourself, that's where you're free to work on you. So many times I've coached women, I'll ask them what they value and they're like, "I don't know," or "I know a couple of things but there should be more, but I don't really know what I value." Or they do know what they value but they've been compromising it for a really long time trying to accommodate people.

And when your values are lost or compromised, you will often feel lost. Kind of like when you know your values, you can be on an intentional path that aligns with your values. When you've kind of forgotten what they are, you've compromised all of them, it's more like being in the water with waves coming at you and you're just bouncing around, and whatever wave keeps crashing at you, and you've got nothing guiding you to go anywhere. And that feels stuck or lost or you feel like your life's a rollercoaster are the kind of things I've heard. And being in that place is exhausting. I spent a lot of time there. Me crashing on my bed with my head in the middle and just being half comatose, that was me being lost and losing my values and my ability to navigate my life.

So when we know our values and we can name them, we can make decisions in our life, which I'm going to get to in a second, that will align with that. We're not stuck. We know where we're going.

So for people listening, if you want to, you could stop the podcast right now, hit "pause" and grab a piece of paper and do this exercise, or you can do it after. It's really simple. You just need five, ten minutes. Grab a piece of paper and a pen, sit down, and write down all the things you value, like one word, characteristic type things or phrases. These aren't long sentences. And you will find out what matters to you. And just to get you started, I did this recently, and some of the things I wrote down were I value kindness, respect, sobriety, honesty, peace, cooperation, hard work, spiritual maturing, emotional maturing, and I just kept going. I filled an entire page. You can fill an entire page. And even for those of you listening who are like, "I don't know what I value anymore," all you have to do is kind of tweak the question and be like, "Let me dream about what my values could be," and start writing.

NATALIE: I like that.

DIANA: And when you do that, you're going to uncover the values that you've let kind of waste away in the background of your life for a while. And once you know your values, now you can decide ahead of time the kind of things you want in your life. And I think this is important because too often we're responding to what's going on around us, and we can decide ahead of time how we might want to handle situations.

Sometimes we don't know until we're in it and then we're like, "Okay, that situation felt bad. That didn't align with my values. What do I want to do next time something like that happens?" Or you can look at your list of values and decide, "I value this, therefore, I want to decide to do something in my life."

Sometimes when we do this, we might find out that creating a decision ahead of time of how we want to handle something will turn into a boundary. And I googled Flying Free Podcast, and it looks like you have at least six episodes with "boundary" in the title. So there's plenty — if you want to set some boundaries — plenty of podcasts on how to do that.

So I'm going to just focus on like, if we want to decide ahead of time things for our life based on our values that aren't always about boundaries, it's about creating what we want in our lives or intentional thoughts that help us make easy decisions about what we want to do in our lives.

So I know I'm talking around this. I'll just give an example. If I value kindness and I want to decide ahead of time what I will do or what I'll say because of kindness being a value when I walk into the store, when I go into a meeting, or when I see my child or an ex-spouse or whoever I want to practice this with, I can go into that encounter knowing ahead of time I've already decided I will bring kindness. What will that look like? That will look like looking them in the eye or being grateful for them, seeing them, not being short with them, smiling. That's kind of how I show kindness. So I decided ahead of time as I walk in the room with this person I bring kindness because I value that. So I'll bring it.

Or if I value honesty, I can decide ahead of time I'm going to trust my gut and not blindly believe people when something feels off. So in a real-time situation, someone's saying something to me and I'm like, "Hmm, this feels off. Oh, I know what to do here because I already decided I'm going to trust my gut and not blindly believe."

And this is growing, by the way. This is like we were talking about exercising your

muscles. You're practicing having your own back and trusting yourself, trusting your gut, empowering yourself. We could do an entire podcast episode just on deciding ahead of time, so I'll leave it there.

But the last thing I'll say is to talk about knowing your values and deciding ahead of time is that we always have choices. This was huge for me when I really needed to differentiate myself and not get sucked into what someone else around me was doing. Because when we compromise our values for a long time, we forget we have choices and we defer to other people.

So I actually grabbed pieces of paper, lined paper, just off of a notepad, and I wrote in big letters on each one, "I have choices." And I folded them up three or four times and I would stuff one in a drawer, one in my purse, one in my notebook, one in a book, wherever. And so when I'd find them, it's weird — I guess I get so busy, I forget what I wrote on there. And then I open it up, I'm like, "Oh, I have choices. Yes," and I would feel empowered. And from that place, we open up our ability to grow.

Like, "I value spiritual growth and I have so many choices. What do I want to do with this? I could join a life group at church." "Well, I don't want to go to church so I could do it on my own or listen to a podcast or meet with a few friends for coffee once a month and talk about spiritual things. So many choices to align with my values and to grow."

Or, "I value mental health. So I'm going to choose. I have choices. What do I want to do for that? I can walk three times a week and get a monthly massage." "I value cleanliness, so I choose to set aside fifteen minutes a day to clean." And when we know our values and we can make decisions ahead of time and choose from an array of choices, it's fun and we feel stronger and we feel empowered. So I think no matter what your relationship's like, actually, Natalie, whether you're still in the marriage or whether you're separated or getting divorced, or you've been out for years, all of these things apply to just growing in ourselves or how we want to pull this into the different relationships in our lives. So I use this stuff all the time. It keeps me going.

NATALIE: Yeah. When you're talking about choices, it reminds me of a book that changed my life called "The Dance of Anger" by Harriet Lerner because I was really, really angry. By the time I got to the end of my relationship with my ex, I was livid with rage. I was angry at him, I was angry at the church, I was angry at my family of origin, I was angry at everybody. And when I read that book, I realized it's because I perceived that I didn't have any choices. This is actually before I ended things. This is when I was still feeling stuck. Like, "I don't have a choice. I have to put up with this. I have to do what all these people want me to do." That's what made me angry was feeling like all of

this injustice, and I had to suck it up and be okay with it, otherwise, I was anathema to everybody.

When I read that book and realized I actually don't have to. I am making a choice to stay in this relationship. I'm making a choice to go to this church. I'm making a choice even to just believe what these people are saying. I don't have to give them credibility at all, but instead, I am choosing to give them credibility, that's when I started realizing, "Whoa. I could make a different choice if I wanted to. Do I want to? Yes, I do." And I started making different choices, and it was like the world opened up to me. I was no longer behaving and acting like I was three years old having to do what all my mommies and daddies wanted me to do, and I was actually acting my age and making my own decisions about my life. And yes, it was pissing everybody off around me because they didn't like that.

DIANA: "You're not doing what we expect you to do, Natalie."

NATALIE: Exactly. But I found out what it was like to actually be an adult. Did you ever feel like... I always had this feeling like, "I just feel like I never grew up. I feel like I'm just pretending. What am I doing in this grown-up house, having this grown-up life? I still feel like I'm a kid."

DIANA: Yeah, I didn't have that feeling like a kid thing, but I definitely felt like I was living a life of pretense, and I had many moments that I was reaching out to a whole bunch of different people trying to get them to intervene in my life and fix it. And so that took away all my autonomy. And I want to articulate something that I think was probably happening in the background for you with the choices that would be valuable for the listeners to know. And I see this all the time in my coaching where people are like, "Well, but I don't want to stay here in this thing, but I can't do the other thing because that would be terrible," and they are thinking they only have two choices.

So I bet you anything, when you noticed you had choices, you weren't just seeing, "I have this one choice here or one other choice." You probably had a whole host of choices open up in front of you, like, "I actually have dozens of choices here. What do I want to do?" And so if anyone listening thinks you only have two choices, you're still going to feel stuck. So I would challenge you if you want to practice the "I have choices," is anytime you think you're stuck with two choices, force yourself to come up with five different choices every time, and the world's going to open up to you.

NATALIE: Yes, yes. That's a really good point. Okay, so how can women grow even when their husband keeps — and I kind of touched on this a little bit before — when their

husband keeps doing things that are undermining that they feel like, "He's just keeps undermining my process of personal growth"?

DIANA: You know what, we did touch on this before, but I'm really glad that you rephrased it this way because this is what I think is talking about what probably happens in people's minds because I know what happened in mine and the women I coach. But we started off today talking about letting go of control and then we moved into talking about strategies to grow. And I know by the time we got to the end of talking about strategies to grow in the short conversation, a lot of people's brains went right back to, "But he's still doing this or that, so this won't work for me."

And so I've got to reiterate it again, but let me do it in this way. This is what my beautiful sister who died of leukemia, one of the pieces of wisdom she told me that stuck with me always is, "Let them." Let the other person be the other person. They're going to do whatever they're going to do. You can't stop them.

I like analogies like you, and I appreciate that sometimes your analogies break down because my analogies sometimes break down too. And so this one might, but let me just play with it for a little bit. But let's say you growing, you're a potted rose plant. And so you augment the soil, you put it in a nice favorable spot so it gets the right amount of sun, and you water it and fertilize it and deadhead it and do all the things you need to do to let it grow and thrive. Great.

But what if somebody comes along every day and does something that interferes with it? Like one day they come by and they just hold an umbrella up all day and so it doesn't get any sun? Oh, well. It doesn't get any sun that day. Now what are you going to do? And then another day, the person tosses some plant-eating beetles. My mom's always scooping these Japanese beetles off her roses. And then you have to spend all day just trying to get the beetles off and then you don't have any time to fertilize it or water it. Or another day, the person comes by and kicks over your watering can and then the plant gets no water.

That's kind of what it feels like when we're trying to grow while we're still in a relationship with somebody who's either purposely sabotaging it and being destructive... And I say "purposely," like, they know what they're doing and they don't want you to grow. But sometimes they don't know what they're doing. They're just stuck in their own autopilot dysfunction, but they're still throwing insults your way or calling you names or shifting the blame to you for the problems, gaslighting you, manipulating you. It's still happening. It might look a little different as you're growing, but it's still happening.



But now, not just this podcast episode, but Natalie's entire podcast, ladies, gives you tools. You have tools to take care of you. You recognize you have choices. And so you let them be them. He's going to kick over your watering can. Can't do anything about it. All right, go fill it back up and then water your plant or go put it in a different spot. He holds up the umbrella and the plant gets no sun? Pick up that pot and move it to a different location, you know? Whatever that looks like for you in real life — going to a different room or separating or something. Use the tools you have to make choices. That person is still going to try to sabotage what you're trying to grow, but you have choices.

I know it takes effort. It's tiring. But it's worth it if you're going to grow and get stronger and take care of yourself and your soul. Otherwise, you're going to just end up comatose in the bed, not able to do anything. He's going to keep doing all the things. You have no control over that. Just let him be.

NATALIE: Yep. It's kind of like if you're running a race. It's nice to run a race where you don't have any hurdles, but some races actually purposefully put hurdles in the path. I'm not a racer. I don't run.

DIANA: Or hurdle.

NATALIE: But I'm imagining when I see people running and then also doing hurdles — they run, they hurdle, they run, they hurdle — those people know, they know at the beginning of the race, "I'm a hurdler, so I'm going to go over some hurdles on my race." And if you know that, if you're going to stay, then you know, "Okay, my race is going to have some hurdles in it. But I know that that's what's going to happen, and I'm prepared for it," like we talked about at the beginning. "I'm prepared for that, I can expect that, and here's how I'm going to show up for this race. I'm going to show up and I'm going to go over the hurdle."

DIANA: You know what I was thinking? It might be running a nice race in the track versus doing one of those tough-mudder races where they have to get in the trenches and climb over the walls and go through the mud.

NATALIE: Yes.

DIANA: It does feel like that sometimes.

NATALIE: It totally feels like that sometimes, yeah. So both Diana and I, we have a lot of empathy and a lot of, yes, we can relate to everything that you guys are going through.



Even though I'm several years out, I still get little reminders sometimes because there are people in your life that come up that trigger you or you might get triggered by your ex even when you're out or you might get triggered by your kids. So things come up and remind you of how painful living that way really was. So I don't want us to make you think that we're thinking light of this or that your life is just, "That's just a few hurdles. Why can't you go over the hurdles?" We're not saying that at all.

DIANA: So it's both. It's understanding the deep, difficult journey and the exhaustion and the pain and also having some analogies that help us figure it out. And then sometimes also just making fun. The whole thing is a little ridiculous. We need to be able to laugh here and there. Or like you, be sarcastic. I honestly appreciate that. And I know some people don't, but a lot of us need it. We need to be able to just go, "That was ridiculous. That's just ridiculous," so that we can stay sane. And so all of it, all of it.

But yeah, I have tons of empathy. It's really rough. All those thoughts about how hard this is, and "Can I even go another day?" and getting into the deep, deep pit — I've been there and it sucks. But also there is growing you can do and there is hope. And as much as I say you can learn to feel joy, hope, and peace no matter what your circumstances are, it is different when you're still in it than when you're out.

Honestly, I didn't plan to say this, and I don't know how this fits in, but maybe I'm just going to throw away everything I just said. I grew and grew and grew and grew and I got so healthy, I did hit a point where I was like, "I'm at the end of the line. There's no more growing to do here," because there was still destructive things happening. And then I needed to do something different. And that doesn't mean that's going to happen for everybody. You know, some people honestly want to stay, but you could change your mind one day. That's what I decided every day. I'm like, "I'm staying today, I'm staying today, I'm staying today." And one day I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I'm not staying. I just changed my mind. I don't think I can grow anymore here."

NATALIE: I describe it like being pregnant. "I'm pregnant today, I'm pregnant today." And then one day you wake up and you're like, "I think by the end of this day, I am not going to be pregnant anymore." The baby just comes.

DIANA: Yeah, it is kind of like that.

NATALIE: You have to go into labor. Your body just pushes it out and that's the end of it.

DIANA: Yeah, I rode the wave.

NATALIE: Okay, do you have any final thoughts that you want to share with us before we close that we didn't cover?

DIANA: People do ask me all the time, "How can I have more peace regardless of what's going on?" And that's possible. It's not like you're like nirvana, but you can have more peace. And I think for me what was missing for so long was practical ways to renew my mind. Romans 12 says, "You'll be transformed by the renewing of your mind," and I'm like, "But how God, how? I don't know how to do this."

And after I got into life coaching, I was like, "I have practical tools now. When I examine my thoughts and see how they relate to my feelings and then see how I show up in my life and get in there and play with that and see if I can change it — how practical is this — I put it on paper and I play around with it, this is changing me and changing the way I think. I'm being transformed." I needed practical tools. And so I encourage everyone to, if you find a tool that will help you renew your mind and make that actually happen, it is what I talk about every week on the Renew Your Mind Podcast. So I invite everyone to join me there.

And if you're really serious about growing and being your best self, this is for the serious people, I'd be happy to give you a free coaching call. I don't know how long I'm going to keep offering them, but I am doing those still. Do we have time? Can I do a two-minute little analogy?

NATALIE: Absolutely, sure.

DIANA: Great.

NATALIE: We're already way over. Why not just go way, way over?

DIANA: Oh, good. I love going over. People don't know we talked for half an hour before we even started.

NATALIE: Exactly.

DIANA: Good thing we didn't record that. Everyone would be asleep by now. So there was a moment when I made a big mistake. I had a MacBook Air. MacBook Airs don't have a lot of storage space on them, so I love my MacBook, but I had to get an external hard drive to store all my family photos because everything's digital, right? So I had the external hard drive, and I would have to plug it into my laptop every time I wanted to load photos onto it and store them there.

And one day I picked up my computer to go work. I was going to work in the living room instead of the office, and I picked up my computer and I started walking through the dining room over the hardwood floors and I heard a crash. I had forgotten to unhook my external hard drive and it hit the ground, and I was like, "Oh my God, please be okay, please be okay." So I plugged it into the computer and it would not open. Error messages.

So I spent probably sixteen hours over two days searching the web and trying everything I could find on how to fix it. I had to fix it. It had all of my family photos. I tried everything I could find. I was frustrated beyond belief. Nothing I tried was working. And so finally it hit me: I know an IT guy. So I called him, I told him what happened, and he said, "I don't know what I can do, but maybe I can fix it. Just bring it down." So I brought it down to him a few minutes away from my house, went back, grabbed a book, a glass of lemonade, sat on my front porch, and two hours later, he called me and said he was able to restore all my photos and everything was fine.

And so the reason I'm telling you all this is because a lot of people listen to the podcast, your podcast, my podcast, and they just listen and they're hoping that they're going to change. And they search the internet for all the solutions that could help them in their relationship and in their life. And they're trying everything but still feeling frustrated like me and my hard drive. I kept trying and trying and nothing was working until finally I called my IT guy, somebody who works with this stuff every day, and he knew exactly what to do to help me.

I get emotional because I remember all those days I was so frustrated and I felt like I tried everything and I'm like, "I have to fix this. There has to be a way," and nothing was working. And I want to tell you guys, forget my podcast. This is often where I tell people, "Come join me at my podcast," because I would love to be a part of your journey and help you.

But you guys, Natalie helps people every day. She helped me. I was a life coach who was already growing and fixing myself, and I needed more help. Natalie has so many good resources. You don't have to figure this out on your own and be frustrated. Natalie's here to help. And I show up and coach in the Flying Free Sisterhood too. So I would be happy to meet you all there. Hey, I'll plug the Flying Free Sisterhood. I needed it so bad. I still need it. And I invite you guys all to join me and Natalie over there and let us help make this easier for you and lighten your load.

NATALIE: Well, this is the part where I was going to actually tell them about some of your best episodes that we're going to be linking to in the show notes on your podcast,

like “When People Are Right About You,” “When People Are Wrong About You.” This next one is perfect for the holidays, although by the time this one airs, it's going to be the new year and the holidays will be passed. But you could listen to it and sort of retroactively think about what you just went through, the hell you just went through during the holidays. But it's called “Staying Out of Family Drama.” Maybe you've got some family drama coming up in the new year, but that one would be a great one to listen to. These are all on Diana's Renew Your Mind Podcast, and you have over two hundred episodes.

DIANA: I think I'm around, with my bonus episodes, we're almost at two hundred, yeah.

NATALIE: That is unbelievable. I mean, that's almost as much as what I have. So you've been doing this for four years then probably. One weekly?

DIANA: Yes.

NATALIE: Yeah. That's a long time. So there's some quality content over there. So like Diana said, she's inside of the Flying Free program as well doing coaching. Sometimes she group coaches, we do weekly group coaching, and she's in the private forum. We have a private forum, and Diana, along with some other coaches, is in there answering questions and helping people. Every single day, we, myself and the coaches, are in there helping people with their questions. So that's just one of the other benefits.

Now, Butterfly Bootcamp that we just had, we met in Minneapolis this year and last year, but we're actually going to do Butterfly Bootcamp virtually in 2024, and we're going to be opening it up to people outside of the Flying Free private group. So, those of you who are listening to the podcast and maybe you can't join the private group, you could still come to Butterfly Bootcamp.

However, there are going to be special perks, like swag in the mail and stuff, if you are a Flying Free member. And also, as a Flying Free member, you have access to the replays from all the Butterfly Bootcamps, along with over two hundred training videos, over three hundred live coaching and Q&A videos. It's thousands of dollars worth of content and training, and it's only \$29 a month. And we keep it that low price so that as many people as possible can access it. Plus you get to participate in live events that we do every single month, as well as our private forum, again, with all the coaches and hundreds of women just like you.

So you don't have to wait for Butterfly Bootcamp 2024 to join. You can go head over to [joinflyingfree.com](https://joinflyingfree.com) and complete an application to join Diana and I on the inside of that

program, and we will see you over there. Thank you so much, Diana, for being on the Flying Free Podcast with me.

DIANA: Thanks for having me and thanks for all you do. Don't stop. We need you.

*Hey, beautiful butterfly. Thank you so much for listening. If you liked this episode, be sure to subscribe, and then consider leaving a rating and review so others can find us. To connect with me and get a free chapter of my book, head over to [flyingfreenow.com](http://flyingfreenow.com), and until next time, fly free.*