

WHAT A CAR ACCIDENT TAUGHT ME ABOUT PAIN

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 304 of the Flying Free Podcast. This podcast is going to be a little bit different because I was in a car accident five days ago at the time of this recording and I broke my right arm, which is my dominant arm, and I can't use it for anything right now. I'm going to have surgery next week. But in the meantime, I am unable to use it, and it's very difficult—well, it's impossible for me to type. I can't drive. There are a lot of things I can't do anymore because my right arm is incapacitated.

So usually with these podcast episodes, I will script them out in advance, the ones that I do on my own. Even the interviews, I script out the questions in advance. Now, sometimes when I'm interviewing someone, questions will come to my mind in the moment which I ask, but for the most part, I really know where I'm going to steer an interview.

And when I'm doing one of these by myself, I know exactly what I'm going to say and I say it because it's all scripted out in advance. I feel like that keeps me on track, it keeps people listening, it keeps me from going off on tangents that are unnecessary, which I very much tend to do when I'm just left to my own devices, and that's the way I like to do things.

However, I can't do that now because I can't type. I suppose I could dictate into my phone—I have been doing some dictating—but dictating is the same thing as just talking off the cuff. And if I'm going to dictate, I'm not going to dictate and then go and read my dictation. I'm just going to talk off the cuff.

So that's what this episode is going to be. It's just going to be me. I'm going to share with you about what happened with my car accident, I'm going to pull out an amazing metaphor that I got out of it because if you can't get a great metaphor out of a car accident, then what's the point of having one, right?

So I'm going to share with you a really good metaphor about pain and about resisting pain, and that's all I'm going to do. I'm just going to riff for a few minutes here, and that will be this episode, Episode 304, whatever it's worth for you.

So on Monday, I was going to the post office. That's right. Most car accidents happen within a few miles of your home, and this one was less than a mile away from my house. I was just driving to the post office to drop off some knives that needed to be sharpened. I had ten knives, never, ever been sharpened before, and last week I was

trying to cut a pork butt roast to cut the fat off of it so I can make pulled pork, and it took me twenty minutes. And I wrestled with that pork. I tried every single knife in my drawer and none of them worked. I was sawing and poking and prodding and it was absolutely ridiculous. And I'm like, "What am I doing? I need to get my knife sharpened." You guys, kitchen knives need to be sharp. It just makes all the difference in the world.

So I packed them all up to this mail order thing that does... I think I paid \$100 to have ten knives sharpened, and then you just send them in the mail and they sharpen them and then they send them back. It's got good reviews. I can't remember the name of the company right off the top of my head, and I don't even know if they work very well or not so we'll see. The jury's still out. The knives are still en route.

But anyway, I was bringing those to the post office... This is what I mean by going off on tangents. Is that necessary for you to know all of that? Probably not. But anyway, I'm driving to the post office, and our little downtown area where I live, it's on a highway that is usually 55 miles per hour. But you know how when you get to those small towns, it slows down to 35 miles per hour? So that's where I was. I had just gotten to the slow-down part, and I was going about 35 to 40 miles per hour. It was literally in that transition section. This is where I was coming up to the high school on my right.

And I was traveling south, and a car on my right, a car full of teenagers, was sitting there waiting for me. They want to turn left. So they want to go north on the highway. And instead of waiting for me to pass them, because I was almost there where they were, they just decided to come out in front of me. I think they weren't paying attention. I think they were probably laughing and talking and listening to music or doing whatever teenagers do, and they did not look. The driver, who was an 18-year-old girl, did not look to see that there was a car coming.

And so it could not have timed it better. It was like we were on a movie set and someone said, "Go, now, go," and then they were supposed to go in order to get perfectly hit on the side by me.

Now, as soon as I saw them pull out, it was interesting because it was about two seconds before impact, but I had so many thoughts running through my head. It's amazing how quickly our brains work. My first thought was, "Whoever you are, you are really stupid right now because I'm going to hit you." The second thought that went through my head was, "I really hope this doesn't hurt." And the third thought that went through my head was, "I have a new car."

It's a little over a year old. I got it in May of 2023 and I bought it brand new. I feel so

much shame when I say that because I've always purchased... Well, for one thing, I've only ever purchased one other car. Well, that's not true at all. So, when I was in college, my very first car was brand new. It was a brand new Dodge Colt. And it was the cheapest car in the market at the time, and my dad just helped me pick it out. It had nothing in it. No stereo. It was like the bare bones hull of a car. So that was my first car.

And I actually got that brand-new car in an accident too. It wasn't my fault. I was on the freeway, there was a slowdown, and a car—another young girl, actually—hit me from behind. She rear-ended me. She told me, “Yeah, I was coming up and I knew that you guys were all stopped, but I thought I could get over and I was looking to see if I could get over. And then, whoops, I guess I didn't have enough time.”

And so she hit me, totaled my car, totaled the car in front of me, totaled her car, and totaled the car in front of that one. So there was a four-car crash up. None of that was my fault. The car I ended up getting to replace that one was also a new car, but it was worth a little bit less because you never get back what you lost when you have an accident like that.

So anyway, after that, I got married and then my husband bought our cars. And he was really big into buying used cars and paying cash for used cars. And my ex, for all of his problems, one thing he's very, very gifted at is finding great deals on cars and just getting a great deal on it. He also loves to work on cars. And so we always had a very well-running, used vehicle that we got a great deal for, and he would always only pay cash for it.

Anyway, the next car that I bought by myself was a used minivan. This is years ago. We were separated, and I needed a car to drive the kids around. So I bought a used minivan, and that's what I've been driving ever since. And it's old and it stinks and it's gross.

So last year I bought my first new car, my first new car where I was the one who... Before, I was with my dad—my dad helped me pick it out. He basically said, “This is the cheapest car on the market, so this is the one you're going to get.” He was the one who was paying everything up front for me. I paid him back eventually. Actually, no, I didn't pay him back for those first few car payments. He let me off the hook for those.

Anyway, I bought a brand new car and I knew that when I drove it off the lot that it was going to depreciate by quite a bit because that's what happens when you buy a new car. And it did, and now it's not worth as much. And I just lost it in an accident. So that was one of my thoughts. That was a very long, roundabout way of saying that one of

the third thoughts that I had was, "There goes my car." And indeed, there went my car, and their car went too. Both of our cars were totaled.

I actually started crying later because I was thinking, "Why didn't I think about what was going to happen to those kids when I hit them?" But I was thinking about it. I realized later I was thinking about it, but when I lifted my head up after... I don't know how long my head was down, but when I lifted it up to look around me and see what was going on, their car was nowhere to be seen.

And when the officer got there, I was like, "They pulled out in front of me and I hit them and they drove away. They just drove away. They left me here with a broken arm. They didn't even try to see if I was okay. They just drove away." I was just dumbfounded by that. So that's why I didn't think about what happened to them. I figured if they were driving away, they were probably fine—you know, like a hit-and-run kind of thing.

But what happened was they didn't drive away. I'm not really sure because I haven't read the crash report yet as of the time of this podcast, but I think their car might have spun a little bit and it ended up behind me because later on when someone opened my passenger door—state troopers came on the scene because it was a state highway—I could see out of the corner of my eye, if I turned my head, I could see that their car was kind of to the side of me, but behind me a little bit. So I'm guessing that's what happened, but I really don't know. I'll have to read the crash report to find out.

But anyhow, my arm was broken. Did I mention that? So here's where the metaphor comes in. I resisted this accident in two ways. One way was very helpful and productive, and the other way that I resisted this accident was not productive or helpful, nor was it ever going to be helpful or productive. And because I resisted in that way, my wrist was broken in several places with little fragments all over the place. I have to have surgery next week.

So the way that I resisted that was productive was that I immediately slammed on my brakes and I had about two seconds of being able to slow down my car somewhat—not a whole lot, but as much as could possibly be slowed down in those two seconds before I made impact against the side of their car.

I think it's so important to resist. It's important to resist abuse whenever we can. You guys, when you are fawning with your abuser, that is a form of resistance. You might think, "Oh, that's so shameful. I'm just fawning. I'm just catering to him and doing whatever he says." No, you're not. You are resisting abuse when you do that because you're trying to stay away from abuse. You're trying to protect yourself. That is one of

our human ways of protecting ourselves, our ways of resisting being hurt. Or if you fight, that is resistance to abuse. If you run away or go hide or shut down, when your body shuts down, you are resisting abuse in that way.

Now, are these ways always productive or helpful? Not always, but they are forms of resistance, and in many ways, they do protect us. And so I think it's important to notice that and to just be thankful for the ways that our bodies and our brains automatically kick into gear just like my foot automatically kicked into gear to step on the brakes to resist that impact.

Now, there are other ways that we resist painful things that actually cause us to do what happened to my arm. So the way that I resisted that was not productive in this accident was that I put my hands straight out on the steering wheel, almost pushing the steering wheel away from me as if I could stop my car by doing that.

I mean, when you look back on it, it's like, "Why would I think that?" but it's just kind of a knee-jerk reaction that I think probably more people than I have. If I had just realized, "All right, putting my foot on the brakes is going to help, nothing else will help. So lean your head back, get your hands down by your side, and get ready for impact," if I would have done that, nothing would have happened to me. Now, my seatbelt did deploy, and so I do have some bruising in my chest, but other than that, nothing else happened to me.

It's interesting because in that first accident I was telling you about in college, I was in a very small car, and the front part of the cab went into my knees, and so my legs really hurt. My knees were damaged. But in this car, nothing about the cab collapsed at all. Only the front nose of my car—which, cars are designed so much better, and the car that I was driving has a long front nose—it just collapsed in on itself like an accordion and the cab was completely untouched. And so I could have gotten out of that unscathed.

By the way, all of the other teenagers were fine. The trooper on call said everyone is walking around and nobody is hurt in the other car, so that was really good news. But my wrist was broken in several places because I resisted in a way that was not helpful, and this is what we sometimes do with pain.

Tonight, at the time of this recording, in my programs, Flying Free and Flying Higher, we have an annual Butterfly Bootcamp. And the only people that can come to Butterfly Bootcamp are people who are members of Flying Free or Flying Higher or alumni. We did invite alumni to come if they wanted to. There was an extra charge.

Usually, Butterfly Bootcamp is live. We actually meet in person and we have a conference. But this year we decided to do it online because a lot of people can't come to those live things. The cost just is so astronomical because it involves sometimes flying in an airplane, renting a car, renting a hotel, blah, blah, blah. It's great fun if you can do it and if you can share costs and stuff, but it can be very costly. So every other year we're going to do it online. And this year, it is our first online Butterfly Bootcamp, and it's tonight and tomorrow.

And like I said, there's a cost to it simply because I have to pay the people who are speaking, I have to pay other people who are doing all of the work that obviously they need to get paid. They all have children and mouths to feed, and they all need to make a living just like everyone does. And so there's a cost. That cost gets passed on to the people who are going to buy a ticket. Their ticket cost pays for these people to do these things.

But tonight, my talk, interestingly enough, I'm going to open Butterfly Bootcamp tonight with a talk about pain. Part of me, I sat down and I was like, "Why am I talking about pain?" But it's because everyone has pain. Everyone has pain, everyone's fighting pain, especially if you're in this world and you're living in this kind of dynamic, you're experiencing a lot of emotional pain. Some of you are experiencing a lot of physical pain as a result of years and years of covert abuse. And there's a handful of you—I only work with emotional and spiritual abuse survivors—but there's a handful of you that are also physical abuse survivors as well. And so you experience pain in your body at times because of physical abuse that you're experiencing.

And so what do we do with our pain? I wanted our little Butterfly Bootcamp to be exciting, and I wanted it to be motivating and to be visionary, and to give people some inspiration. But I think we needed to talk about pain first because that's a reality in our lives. It's a big elephant in the room. And if we don't address it, then those of us who are experiencing pain, we can feel like, "Maybe this kind of thing is not for me. Maybe the rest of it is not for me because I'm in so much pain."

And so my first talk at Butterfly Bootcamp tonight is we're going to address the elephant in the room, the elephant of pain. And one of the things we're going to talk about—I'm going to give them five ways to deal with their pain—but one of the things is to accept it, to actually run towards it. And this analogy of the car, that doesn't mean I press on the gas pedal and try to crash into people. No, no, no, no, no. We're always going to keep our foot on the brakes when it comes to dealing with pain. We're always going to be in a protective stance and a protective mode. That's God-given. We should.

But here's where we deal with pain, where it gets to the point where we are breaking all of our little bones inside our bodies, is when we resist pain that we cannot control. And when we resist pain, we can't control, it shows up often like, "This is not fair. This should not be happening to me. God doesn't love me anymore because now He's doing this to me, and God shouldn't do these kinds of things to me."

By the way, I don't believe God does do these kinds of things to us, but He did put us in a world where these kinds of things do happen to everybody, not just to us. They happen to everyone. In some way, shape, or form, everyone who lives on planet Earth is going to go through pain multiple times in their life. So if we expect that a normal life is a life that's pain-free, well, we're in for so many disappointments in those expectations, because this life is not meant to be pain-free.

Jesus didn't come to this planet anticipating that He was going to be born into poverty, into a working-class family. He was going to be born in a situation where His mother would be accused of adultery. I guess it's not adultery if you... What would that be? Fornication? Because people didn't buy the story. If you think that people bought the story that Mary was a virgin, think again. Would you buy that story? No, people did not buy that story, you guys. People thought that Jesus was what we would call a "bastard child." That was the reputation that He was born into, and it just continued from there.

During His ministry, people told stories about Him, lied about Him, tried to kill Him, plotted against Him, gnashed their teeth against Him, and eventually, they succeeded in killing Him. So He walked on this earth as God in order to show us what God is like, that God is not turning His face away from our pain—God is willing to enter into our pain with us.

Here's what He modeled, you guys: "Who do I want to be in the middle of this pain? The pain is there. Who do I want to be?" When I was younger, I loved reading *The Hiding Place* about the Holocaust, and there was a movie called *Holocaust* about the Holocaust. I was very fascinated. And then since then, as I've grown up, there've been more movies that have been made about the Holocaust like *Schindler's List*, things like that. Viktor Frank wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning*.

He was a psychologist, I believe, or a Jewish psychologist, and he was in the concentration camps. And he watched the Jewish people being slaughtered and because he was a psychologist, he was fascinated by watching both the Jewish people and the Gestapo and the people that were the German soldiers and even the Germans, watching their behaviors and how they reacted and responded to the various things that were happening in those situations, and it was very fascinating to him. And he

ended up writing a book that's also very, very interesting.

But one of my takeaways that I've always thought of when I think about the Holocaust and different people like Corie Ten Boom is that the people that ended up coming out and writing books and talking about their stories—or maybe they didn't write their story, but someone else wrote their story—those were people who were in the middle of horrible situations, and somewhere deep within them, they made a conscious decision to take power over what they could take power over. They had power over so little, but what they could take power over was who they decided to be in that situation.

Were they going to be the person who stole food from another starving person, who ate their food that they got and then grabbed food from someone who couldn't hold on to it because they were so weak? Or who was going to bring food to someone who was bedridden but instead ate the food instead? I'm just giving you some examples. Who were they going to be in this horrible, horrible situation? That is where our power is, and that is where we change the world. That's how the world changes. It's in those little decisions.

But when we say, “This shouldn't be happening,” is it true that it shouldn't be happening? Absolutely. Is it unfair? It's absolutely unfair. What you're saying is true. And I think there's a place to acknowledge that. In fact, tonight we're going to be doing a lament exercise where we actually lean into lament and we lament the realities of our life that are so painful, and we need to do that. It's very, very important. I don't believe in toxic positivity at all. I don't believe in that.

But even in our lament, at the end of the day, we have a choice to make. “This thing is happening to me. It hurts. It's painful. I am experiencing a lot of losses because of this thing, whatever it is.” And name those losses. That's what lament is: naming your losses. Acknowledging them. Going there. Being in that reality. Feeling those feelings. Feeling those feelings of, “This is unjust. This is not fair.” Go there and acknowledge it.

And then the next question is, “Nevertheless, this is what is happening to me right now. Who do I want to be in this situation? Who do I want to be? Not necessarily what do I want to do, but who do I want to be?”

And this was a question I had to ask myself when I was separating from my husband for almost two years and then going through a divorce that took almost two years. “Who do I want to be when my son cuts me off? Who do I want to be when my daughter has BPD and she's being violent in the home?” That was a hard one. “Who do I want to be when I'm in a car accident and I lose the use of my right hand? Who do I want to be?” I

get to choose.

I don't get to choose the fact that I can't do anything anymore. I can't make dinner. I can't drive. I can't type. I can't take my kids to school and pick them up again. I can't get myself to the doctor's office. I can't put my own bra on. I mean, I can put the front on, but I can't do the back one handed. I can't, I've tried. I can do a lot of things, though. I can take a shower by myself. I've actually been quite amazed at what I can do with my left hand. I can put on all my makeup with my left hand. It was really hard to blow dry my hair, though.

But I get to decide who I want to be in this situation. Now, I have cried this week. I have felt the feelings. I've also focused on just staying in this moment. When I realized, "Okay, I've obviously broken my arm. I'm in a lot of pain," immediately my brain goes to, "Oh my gosh, I've got Butterfly Bootcamp this weekend. After I was done dropping the knives off, I was going to pick up my kids from school. Are they going to get picked up? Who's going to know about this? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

My brain was going to all the places, but because I've practiced this, because I have a lot of experience practicing this in a lot of different painful situations—and you can get this experience too. You have to start somewhere—I was able to go, "Okay, stop. Let's stay right here. We are in our car waiting for the ambulance to come," and it took a long time, you guys. I think it was over 15 minutes. Even the police officer was like, "I don't know why the ambulance is taking so long." And I was in a ton of pain the whole time. So I'm in my car waiting for an ambulance to come.

"Stay here. I'm alive. The only thing that's really injured is my arm. That's fixable. Is it going to be fixed completely? I don't know, but it's more than likely fixable. Everyone is alive. Everyone in that other car is alive. My kids are alive. I'm here. I'm breathing. I can breathe. I've got people around me. There are troopers. There are a ton of cop cars that came. They're directing traffic. Everything is under control, and all I have to think about is what's happening right now. Let's just get through this moment."

Then when I got into the ambulance, then I just focused on being in the ambulance. They gave me some fentanyl that kicked in and I was able to have a conversation with the EMT, and we had a great talk about his family and his two little kids and his wife—his wife is a nurse—and their lives. And I just asked him questions and I focused on him and I just focused on getting to know him and his little world. It's a little hard to concentrate because of the fentanyl, but I remember things he said, and I remember just enjoying who he was and that I got to be in his orbit for just a little bit of time.

And then when I got to the hospital, I stayed focused on... And the amazing thing about going to the hospital is that my son-in-law, who is doing his residency for a PA, physician's assistant residency, his residency, his four weeks or whatever, happens to be at this hospital that I got taken to. It's a trauma hospital in St. Paul, and he was there. And it was just a blessing just to see him there, and my husband had gotten there by that time as well and they were waiting for me, and they were there with me when I went through the resetting my arm and all of that. And I just stayed there. And I have chosen to stay present each day of this week.

The next day, yeah, I was blue. I felt depressed. The loss was kicking in. The medication had been wearing off. I did not want to bring home any prescription medications. I wanted to just do Tylenol and Ibuprofen. And so I was feeling really tired, my body hurt, I was feeling down, really down. And this was on Tuesday, and I was like, "You know what? Today's a down day. Today, I am going to feel down. This is the part in this story of my life where I feel really down. I have a down day. That's okay. I'm going to have a down day." And I just felt it. Sometimes I felt like crying—I would cry. Sometimes I would feel like not doing anything, so I would just sit there on the chair and just stare into the abyss. And sometimes I would be like, "I really need to do this one little thing," so I would go and do that one little thing. And I made it through that day.

And then the next day was just a little bit better. Saw the doctor the next day, had a CT scan. And then the day after that was a little bit better. Saw the hand surgeon the following day. That was yesterday. Got my surgery set up. And then today is a little bit better. Each day is just getting a little bit better.

But my point is that I'm not going to think about all the things that I have to do that I can't do anymore. I'm not going to think about that. I was talking to my husband about this. I'm like, "I feel so bad for you. You're going to have to..." He works a long, long way away from our house. He has a long commute. It's almost an hour. Sometimes it takes an hour and a half in rush hour. There have been times it's taken up to two hours when there's an accident during rush hour.

And he has had to, this week, skip some work but also go in because they're in the middle of moving a warehouse from one warehouse to another one and he's in charge of the whole thing. And so he said to go in, he's had to go in at night after I'm all ready for bed, he's had to come back and pick up the kids from school. So it's just been a very interesting week, and I said, "How are we going to do this?"

Plus he takes care of his mom, who is all by herself in the next city over, and he goes there every day and has to take care of her. So how is he going to do all of that? We still

have four kids living with us, and then his mother, and then we've got three dogs and two cats. And now I, who chip in for half of all of this, usually chip in 100% for my kids, now I'm gone. And now he not only has to take care of me, but he has to take care of all of them too.

And he said, "Natalie, It's one day at a time." This is why I'm with him. He's amazing this way, but it's like, "I'm not going to think about next week or the week after. I'm not even going to think about tomorrow. Let's just get through today. It's just like the Bible says: 'Today has enough trouble of its own.' Let's just get through today. We're going to have grace for today and we can do this. We can do this." And we are, we are doing this.

So I think that's really all I wanted to share with you. Probably everybody listening, you can probably think about something in your life that feels either physically painful or emotionally painful. And the only lesson here then is in some ways you will need to resist, and in some ways, it will break you in a million pieces to resist. So the ways that it breaks you in a million pieces are the ways that you can't control anyway. You have no control over it.

So when you fight against it and say, "It shouldn't be this way. I can't stand this. I'm not going to do this. I can't do it," that is when you fall apart. Tell me if I'm wrong. That's when I fall apart. So the best thing to do is to just stay present and tell yourself, "This really hurts, and also, I can do this for the next five minutes. I can do it for the next five minutes. I'm going to do the next thing."

Now, in Butterfly Bootcamp, in my talk, I'm going to talk about other strategies. I'm not going to give that away here right now because that is saved for Butterfly Bootcamp ticket holders. But if you are interested in being part of Flying Free or Flying Higher, these are the kinds of workshops that we do on a regular basis.

We have a brand new app. It's called the Kaleidoscope. And when you become a member, you can download that app, and all of your courses and classes and workshops and live events and our community forum, asking a coach questions—you can ask a coach a question any day of the week and we will come in and answer you and help you out—you have full access to that in our app, right on your phone, it's so convenient, for \$29 a month. It's more than worth it. People who are who are members will tell us all the time, "It's more than worth it," and it really is. So we want to make this help for you as accessible as possible.

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to go register. We are not requiring an application process for anyone when they register at this time. However, we do have a safety form that you will need to fill out once you're a member. And we do require all members to complete that safety form before we give them access to the Kaleidoscope. So that is it for today. Until next time.