

HOPE AND HEALING AFTER TRAUMA

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 59 of the Flying Free Podcast! Today I have a new friend, Polly Hamp. I got to meet her in person in Hurst, Texas, where she and her husband, Bob Hamp, have a counseling center. It's called Think Differently Counseling, Consulting, and Coaching. (I thought I was going to get that wrong.)

POLLY: But you got through it.

NATALIE: They have a thriving ministry/counseling business there. I got to meet her because they had a conference, and I got to speak there. I also was able to hear Polly speak and share a little bit of her story. For those of you who are watching on YouTube, I have her book here. She has a book called "Cherished: Shattered Innocence. Restored Hope." It's a beautiful book. It tells her story, which I'll ask her a few questions about. The cool thing about it is that it also has a study guide so that after each chapter you can process what you just read in relation to your own life and your own relationship to God. It's beautiful. It's a very healing book. I'm excited to talk to Polly about a brand new thing that she and Bob have just launched called HOP Boxes, which is an incredible idea. I was able to see what those look like, but I couldn't see what was inside because it's a secret. Let's start off with you telling us a little bit about your background, your story, and how you got to be where you are today.

POLLY: Okay. I was born.

NATALIE: A good place to start.

POLLY: Seriously, when I was born, I was born into a family of hippies. My parents were full on hippies: long, straight hair. My biological father was a musician and he redid houses and construction. I grew up very much in that era. Even though it was in the '70s, my parents were very much hippies, so lots of music and lots of people. My dad used drugs, so I was around a lot of that. When you're around that, a lot of times abuse happens. The earliest I can remember being sexually abused was at age three. From that, the last time I can remember was about seven or eight when it was done to me. It was people I should have been able to trust (usually that's what happens) as well as a

lot of people where I don't know who they were. When you have that, everything inside of you cries out to be seen and loved because the trauma switches things and rewires your brain. It was devastating to grow up not knowing what was wrong with me because I compartmentalized it so much to survive.

I started using drugs young. Instead of being introverted, I became incredibly extroverted. I thought, "If I can get guys to like me, I can get someone to love me and see me." The way I did that was being sexually active. Because of that, I put myself in some really bad situations. So I've been raped. I've had an abortion. I used to sneak out all the time. Somehow I got through high school. Somehow I was a tennis player, so I was very competitive, which helped me get aggression out and be passionate about something. I could kind of hide behind it. That got me through high school because you had to pass to play. I was an atheist all the way up until I was twenty-six, so at that time I didn't believe in a god. Now I can look back and say, "Oh, you are so clever, God. Thank you."

NATALIE: You got all of that out of your system when you were younger. That's awesome.

POLLY: Exactly. What I've found in my story and in working with people with a high level of trauma from childhood abuse is that we learn very well how to compartmentalize our lives to survive. You have to. It's a brilliant design by God because abuse and the evil and the will of people do harm others. I believe that we have been given this ability to compartmentalize to survive. So that's how I survived. I was a tennis player, but I was also an addict. I did this, but I also did that. I was an art major in college. I made it into college. But then I went into college thinking I would be this perfect student, that I could put my whole past behind me and now I would be this great student. That only lasted for so long because the pain eeked out.

I had a "friend," and he had asked me if I wanted to dance in a strip club. It sounded great because now I could control the men, which is a lie from the pit of hell. I danced for about two years and then tried to take my life. It was horrible and very dark. It was that I re-traumatized myself over and over every time I got up on that stage or all the other things that go along with the sex industry. From that, I didn't finish college and I never danced again, but I very much lived that lifestyle. I was crying out to be seen.

At twenty-three, I met a guy and got pregnant with twins (I didn't know I was having twins until I was five months pregnant). We got married, and I compartmentalized my life again. I became a stay-at-home mom and tried to live this normal life with this whole past of being shredded behind me. If I could be okay and if I could pour my life

into my girls and my family... But wherever you go, there you are. It was very difficult to walk through all of that. My girls were born at twenty-seven weeks. The doctor said if they lived, they would be severely physically and mentally challenged. Of course, I was just blaming myself for my girls. It was like this was my fault and if there is such a great God, why was He letting all these horrible things happen to me?

But then I got to start seeing miracles because my daughters were so ill, and they weren't going to survive. But they did, and they thrived! Through all of this I got to start seeing miracles and started to believe in this God, that maybe there was Somebody and something there that I had this opportunity to fall in love with and be pursued by a true Savior. He rescued me in October of 1999. I would love to say that I was one of those radical rescues and everything was okay. God is after process and maturing of faith. That is the process that I got to learn.

NATALIE: That is beautiful. I want to show a picture for anyone who is watching on YouTube. Those are her twins right there. Aren't they gorgeous?

POLLY: Natalie has the headband, and Ryan has no headband.

NATALIE: Gosh, they are just so beautiful.

POLLY: Thank you. They are twenty-three now.

NATALIE: There's another picture of her with the twins. I wish you could see that on the podcast. You can go to YouTube. I'll put the link in the podcast notes if you want to see what Polly looks like. [Unfortunately, this YouTube video is no longer available.] She's gorgeous.

POLLY: Or buy the book.

NATALIE: Exactly. So God rescued you, but it was a process. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that process, because when you have that kind of trauma repeatedly in your life, there is quite a process you have to go through to heal that. I'm curious to know if you feel like you have completely healed, or do you still feel like you work through things?

POLLY: Oh, I still work through things. I am still in process and I will more than likely be in process until the end of my days. It's one of those things that I've come to peace with. I won't say I'm always peaceful about it. Sometimes I'm kind of ticked like, "Really, God? Could we just be done with this part, because I'm tired." But then He's like, "No, we have

another opportunity to learn something." Then I'm saying, "Yay!" But He says, "It's much more of a battle that I'm not going to do with you guys here."

But once I came to know the Lord, we ended up moving a lot. My husband traveled. He was probably home 48 to 72 hours a week. So he was gone all the time. I'm raising these girls and trying to navigate, but I don't have a picture of what normal family life looks like. I loved (I still love it, but my girls are grown) being a momma. I had a blast being a momma, but it was hard. It was a hard life. I'm originally from Texas, but we moved to Colorado, then to Chicago, and then back to Texas. When you deal with trauma and you are married to someone who doesn't understand trauma and has their own issues, it's difficult to connect.

So I was doing counseling, trying to walk through all my stuff, the pain, the figuring out what is wrong with me. I wrestled with drinking because that would help numb me, especially when my now ex-husband was gone all the time. I thought if I could numb myself, if I could figure it out, if I could live these compartmentalized lives then I was going to be okay. God said, "I did not create you to be compartmentalized. I created you to be whole." So as I was doing counseling and trying to do my own healing journey by reading a thousand books and doing a thousand Bible studies and everything I could to try to understand the Lord, my journey, and the healing process in that, He actually asked me to reach back out to the sex industry to the girls back in the clubs. I don't know if He has asked you to do things where you were like, "Bleep no!" I don't know if you "bleep" and I don't know if I can cuss on the podcast.

NATALIE: Yes, we are okay with that here.

POLLY: Okay, so "Hell no!" I don't know if you have had those "Hell no" moments with God, but He was just sitting there saying, "Oh, you're so cute." It was through all the healing and His really prompting my heart to reach back out to the women in the industry. That "hell no" moment was, "I am not sharing my story. There's no way. I'll share about my abuse. I'll share about all of that, but we don't share the sex industry." You get your life together just to bury that. He said to me, "That's not why you walked through it." I thought, "Yeah, well, You don't use my story, Lord. I get to be a part of it with You." So we argued and argued, and He won in a beautiful way. I started a ministry called "We Are Cherished" to reach out to the women in the sex industry. There were almost fifty clubs at the time in the Dallas/Fort Worth area where we would take gifts and just love the girls right where they were at. We never asked a woman to leave because once you remove choice you remove love.

NATALIE: Amen! I am so glad you said that.

POLLY: That's in everything. That's not just ministry. That's in our families. That's in everything that we do. We cannot remove choice because they get to make the choice, and we get to love them right where they are at in their own story. We've had several women who chose to come out of the industry, and we had several women who would come to the weekly dinner support groups and stay in the industry. It's a part of their journey, and we get to journey along with them.

NATALIE: We don't know the timing of things. Where one woman might seem to be staying for many years, she eventually gets out and looks back and realizes how formational that was for her. That's taking on the role of God by saying, "We're going to decide for you the timetable of your healing." We can't do that, and yet, Christians do that all the time. We try to dictate that.

POLLY: Yes: "Here is this Bible study, now you should be fine. Here's four steps to whatever, and now you should be fine." It is all process and all growing. Wherever each person is in that, that is their personal journey and we must love them through that. Sometimes we get frustrated. Sometimes I think, "Okay. Why did you go back to the industry? Why did you go dance again?" But it's not my story.

2010 is when I started that to 2014, and then my whole world fell apart. That summer I found out a lot of very painful information from my ex-husband. My girls had graduated high school and were going off to college that fall. Pretty much the bottom of my life fell out from under me, and I could barely function. When you walk through trauma and you work hard to get through it, and then the things that you think are foundational and solid in your life are not... I almost think I didn't have a choice to what happened to me when I was little, but I had a choice to what happened to me when I... not "happened" to me, but the things that I chose when I grew up. It was almost harder maybe because it was fresher, I wasn't so young, and I had a lot of life experience. The pain seemed greater, especially within the religious world, and the amount of people and a church family that I lost along the way was very painful because I didn't know how to function and they didn't know how to relate to me. So I laid the ministry down and healed some more after getting a divorce. It was very difficult to make those decisions, but I wasn't going to survive.

NATALIE: When you were talking earlier about the "hell no" moment, I think a lot of women listening have been... At least, I remember when God told me He wanted me to file for divorce. That was a "hell no" moment. It took two more years to get me to the place where I was willing to do that. It is such a painful thing to have to be the one to take initiative in that way when that is the last thing in the world that you really wanted for your life or for the lives of your kids or for the life of your partner. So how old are

your kids now? That couldn't have been that long ago?

POLLY: No, it was 2015 when the divorce was final. My girls will be twenty-four in May. They've graduated from college. They're living their lives. Ryan's been out of school for two years. Natalie finished her master's, so she's been out of school for one year.

NATALIE: How did you meet Bob then? That must have been a turning point.

POLLY: I knew Bob because he was doing ministry training through a large church that he worked for here in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. I had done some of the training through that. We had known each other since probably in 2011 when I did a freedom training to understand how to do ministry. I had never done ministry. I didn't go to a theological school or any of those things. I'm the perfect person to do ministry, but I'm not the perfect person to the church's eye. They'd say, "Oh, you're so cute and eager." But I was thinking, "You know I'm going to blow this out of the water, right?"

We did. We had a blast. So I got to know him through that, but then we had lost touch. Then his life changed and my life changed, and we reconnected. It was like, "Oh, hey." We had such similar stories. I had made an inner vow that there was no way in hell that I would ever marry again. I would not do that again. Obviously my picker was broken, and I was just not good at it. So I would have my corgis and be that dog woman. I'm still the dog woman, but God put an incredible man in my life. Having already known him and seeing his heart for the Lord in ministry and people, when we first started dating we thought, "What is this? This is kind of great." So we got married and it has been great. We both have trauma, so we're both trying to navigate it in our marriage together and separate. I still do EMDR therapy and he does too. We're just walking through our healing and having a blast together.

NATALIE: That's amazing. But that also shows that you don't have to feel like you have everything together before you can have a new relationship. The more self-awareness you have and the more skills that you have in dealing with your own stuff and being good with yourself wherever you are in your journey, the more accepting you are going to be of someone else. If you both bring that to the table, then you can work things through, support each other, and help each other even though there are snags.

POLLY: Absolutely, yes.

NATALIE: That's amazing. Did he already have his thing going when you guys got together?

POLLY: Yes.

NATALIE: So you enfolded yourself into that ministry, then? But you kind of have your own thing going too, and you brought something new?

POLLY: Yes.

NATALIE: Let's talk about that.

POLLY: I'm an NLP practitioner, so I see clients, but I'm not a licensed counselor.

NATALIE: What does that stand for? NLP?

POLLY: Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

NATALIE: Tell us a little bit about that.

POLLY: Everyone stores pictures in their brain, and where we store them is how we experience them. Our experiences connected to our brain storage can be where the trauma is like a flashback level or you have a memory, but it doesn't have any power at all. The way I use NLP is that I help disconnect the power of the experience like a flashback from the memory and change modalities of a picture and experiences to where we literally rewire the brain to release anxiety, so there is no anxiety or panic attacks any more. I work with people with trauma or people who are just in stuck places. I love it! I have a blast sitting with people and watching them. One of the first women I worked with, and I talk about her all the time, had anxiety attacks every day for a very long time, as long as she could remember. We did one session and she no longer had them. That's not always the case. But when you find that disconnect and how we can change our brain in ways that heal... When you are healed it's like, "Now I can go into a conversation and not be triggered but be able to think through it in a new way to be able to communicate in a new way." That's what I do with clients. Then I started this little thing called the "HOP Box."

NATALIE: Tell us about that. What does HOP stand for?

POLLY: HOP stands for "healing on purpose." Healing on purpose is the intentionality of our process. It walks you through five steps: 1. "What is Trauma?" 2. "Are You Safe?" 3. "Emotional Regulation," 4. "Learning Your New Reality," and 5. "The Road Forward." The box is created... Now I'm going to lose it. I will be able to tell this story one day, maybe, without tears. The women that I worked with through the ministry are called butterflies.

I love that. I think you use the butterfly, right?

NATALIE: Yeah.

POLLY: The importance of privacy and the importance of confidentiality... We never used their names. We called them butterflies. We would call them their names within groups. Two of the precious women lost their lives this fall to suicide. The one that I knew very well, I won't give her full name, but this first box is called the "Jules" box. I was sitting and asking God how we can help people who are at their houses or are at their wit's end, or they have trauma, but they are afraid to go to a counselor or don't know how to pick a counselor because not all counselors are trauma trained or trauma informed and they don't understand what trauma does to people. God said, "Do an emergency box." So from that last November, I put together this box with thirteen gifts and a booklet that has all this information about trauma, but it's not overwhelming. Have you seen the new box?

NATALIE: I just saw a box. I watched your video. That is gorgeous.

POLLY: So you know the sea glass parable? That is sea glass. (Sorry for those who are just audio.) But the box is blue, and it emulates the ocean because I love the ocean a lot. It is just a calming peaceful place. A parable was in my book called "The Sea Glass Parable" about being refined and restored. One of the most important things I think about the box (besides the content and the "I'm not crazy" because trauma makes us think we're crazy) is that each gift is wrapped for the reason of anticipation. Say you've been in a car accident and you just start driving, you anticipate. It's like you are afraid to go through a light because you anticipate being hit. You're afraid to turn a certain way because that's the way you've been hit, so you anticipate fear and your body stays in this high state of anxiety.

We can rewire anticipation, so each gift is wrapped so you anticipate opening that next gift. You anticipate, "What is this?" And it is fun stuff. "I get to open up this fun blah blah blah," (I'm not going to tell you what's in there!) because you are going to anticipate excitement. Literally every aspect of this box is designed to rewire your brain and to rewire experiences. So even if you're not thinking anticipation, maybe the next time you have a conversation that hasn't gone well in the past, you're not going to anticipate the fear because you've had your brain rewired to anticipate something new.

NATALIE: Anticipate good things. Yeah, that's very interesting. So do you open each thing on a different day of the month, or do you open things up when you feel like you

need them the most, or how does that work?

POLLY: It's however you want to do it. This one is a one-time box. At the end of May I will be launching a subscription. I believe it will be a nine-month box. It will have each process for nine months. But with this one, you have thirty-two journal prompts. Then you read through the book, and at the end of each section there is a gift picture, and underneath there are the numbers of the gifts. Some people sit down and go through the whole box at one time. I have a few clients that are going through the box right now who are doing one a week. They are journaling and taking their time with the gifts. So really, it is your process.

NATALIE: Is there symbolism to each gift, then, and a lesson that goes with it?

POLLY: Absolutely, yes. Each gift has the intentionality of the five senses: sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste. They are all in there. That way you get to experience different senses that help rewire the brain also.

NATALIE: That is genius.

POLLY: It's fun! I'm blown away at God's gift with this.

NATALIE: So you launched it. I know you had fifty boxes at the Reclaim Conference and they all got sold out right away. Now you had this roller-skating launch down in Texas. I saw the videos. It looked like you guys were having fun. Moving forward, is there a website set up for this?

POLLY: Yes. You can order the box at starthopbox.com. It will give you more information. I know you said you would put the links in the notes. It will give you more information about what it is and how to order it and the upcoming boxes as well.

NATALIE: This episode is coming out in March, so maybe they will be ready by that time?

POLLY: My goal is to launch the subscription boxes by May 15th.

NATALIE: Okay. But you can still get this initial box, though?

POLLY: You can still get this initial box. This box will always exist, yes.

NATALIE: Gotcha. This has been good. I do have one more question, though. I wanted

to hit this question before we hit the HOP Boxes. Are you working full-time, then? This is just a personal question. Do you work full-time in the office at Think Differently, or what does an average day look like for you?

POLLY: Oh, girl. Really, I only see clients one day a week. I used to see clients two days a week. Because of the HOP Box, I have pared down to one day a week.

NATALIE: I can imagine this project is huge.

POLLY: It is, and it is so fun. You should see my house. It is like, "Poof!"

NATALIE: Are you sitting in your dining room right now?

POLLY: Yeah, and that back there is the family room. I don't know if you can see all the stuff.

NATALIE: It looks very peaceful back there.

POLLY: Thank you. Yes, and everything is hidden. But it is crazy. Bob calls the house "HOP Box International." So I see clients and help get ready for different events and teachings. I do some social media stuff, but I'm 90% focused on HOP Box right now. Can I just say one thing as to why we had the book launch and the HOP Box launch (I also launched the third edition of Cherished) at the skating rink?

NATALIE: Yeah, talk about that.

POLLY: One of the things that I have learned is important is that trauma and healing from it really sucks. This is hard stuff, and we either work our butts off or try to ignore it as much as possible, one or the other. If I can work my butt off on ignoring it, I'm going to do that for a while. Then I'm going to jump right back in. But the reason we had it at the skating rink is because we must have fun. We have got to really be intentional on having fun, because if we don't have fun this healing stuff will wear us down. If you look at the fruits of the Spirit, the second one after love is joy. Joy is this gift that we get to express even in the hard places, whether it is just watching some silly movie or going outside and finding joy in the things around you even when you are physically in pain because things are so hard.

NATALIE: When I was younger, I loved roller skating and I loved bike riding. I think it really helps your body to be moving through space like that. When you add music to it, that is also healing to our bodies. So you add that kind of movement and music, or

even if you are just silent if you're outside riding your bike alone, I think... I think it's incredible how God made our brains to work like this, this incredible computer. We can manage our brains and take control of it. I know that's one of our challenges and one of our opportunities is to learn how to manage our own thinking. But our bodies are connected to our brains and our spirits, so when we involve our bodies in healing things, just like our bodies were involved in the trauma, it helps to change everything else as well.

POLLY: The reason why the HOP Box is so experiential is because trauma is experiential. It has to be a component because in cognitive behavioral therapy and different types of therapy, it is important to share your story, yet it's also important to have experience that you can't put words to that help replace and rewire your brain from trauma. So having fun... go roller skating or bike riding. I love bike riding, too. Just go have fun and make it a weekly thing and make it intentional even when you don't want to.

NATALIE: Yeah, I agree. I recently heard somewhere that our thoughts are the language of our brains, our words are the language of our... shoot, I am massacring this. But the point is our sensations are the language of our bodies. I never thought about that, that our bodies have a language. Unfortunately, those sensations that we get when we get triggered, we see something that triggers us, suddenly our bodies will react with a sensation that it remembers, and it is bringing that sensation back to us. We might not even cognitively understand what that is about, but our body sure understands what it is about. So creating those new sensations or creating healing sensations... it's fascinating. Healing is a really fascinating process, and it's a fascinating thing to learn about. I tell survivors that you have an opportunity to uncover layers and go deeper in your humanity and your personhood than people who have never experienced anything like that. On the one hand it is a negative, but on the other hand God takes it and turns it into an incredibly positive opportunity. It opens worlds and vistas that you would never have access to otherwise.

POLLY: I agree.

NATALIE: Thank you so much for taking some of your time, Polly, to talk with me and to share your life with the people that are listening. I hope we can do it again sometime.

POLLY: Thank you. I agree. I appreciate it.

NATALIE: For the rest of you, until next time, fly free.