

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 331 - Escaping the Man Everyone Admired: Lisa's Story

Heads up, friend: What you're about to read is a raw, unedited transcript straight from the robots. That means you'll find some weird words, funky punctuation, and moments that make you go, "Huh?" If you want the real experience (and to actually know what's going on), I recommend reading the polished article, listening to the full episode, or watching it on 1.5x speed with captions on. Your brain will thank you.

Natalie: One of the most powerful things that we can do on our healing journey is to tell our story, and just as powerful is the act of listening to someone else's story. So today I have the deep honor of sitting down with someone who's been part of my community for several years. She has walked through the fire and she's here to share not only what she has survived, but who she has become.

These are conversations that matter. They remind us that we're not alone and that healing is possible and there is strength in every single scar.

Lisa, welcome to the Flying Free Podcast, and thank you so much for being willing to share your story here.

Lisa: Absolutely. Thanks so much for having me on.

Natalie: Yeah. Okay. So why don't we start with, um, how and when you first noticed something that might, that was off in your relationship. How long were you married?

And maybe just give us a little bit of a overview of, of all of that.

Lisa: Okay. So by the time I was actually divorced, it was 40 years. Wow. I got married at 20 and, um, divorced at about 60. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

Natalie: That's encouraging because I think there's a lot of people that they get into those middle years and they think it's too late.

I've already invested so much, you know, I, I believe it or not, some people think we have this mentality that it's like our life is almost over. And the reality

is that your life, no matter whether you're in an abusive relationship or not, life really kind of gets going when you're around 50. So,

Lisa: well, you really.

You really helped me see that you, you actually gave a little continuum about, you know, say a woman lives 90 years, her first 18 years, she can't make decisions for her life. So I was really in my middle years and that really helped me a lot to learn that from you.

Natalie: Oh, good. I'm so glad it helped me to reframe that whole thing.

Yeah. Okay, so when did you, uh, so 40 years, how long were you actually, were you married for 40 years then?

Lisa: Yeah. Okay. Yeah, I mean, I was legally separated for six months before I converted it to divorce.

Natalie: Okay. Alright. So in that 40 year time period then, and 40 years that, you know, back then is probably even more of a.

Stigma to get divorced. Oh, yeah. Yeah. And so, so when did you, I'm curious, when you first started noticing something was off in your relationship, was it right at the beginning or did it take a while, or,

Lisa: well, I'll tell you, I suppose this would be embarrassing to a lot of women, but I'm actually now kinder and more honest with my 18-year-old self than I used to be.

So it was our first date when I knew something was off. Wow. I had invited him to a sorority dance. I didn't know him well at all and he was my long shot. He was a movie star, good looking senior to my unsuspecting college freshman self. And I guess he mistook my bravado and in, in inviting him to this dance for a license to do whatever he wanted.

It was a date rape that took me decades to acknowledge, and this may be shocking for some to hear right off the bat in our interview, but it was foundational in setting me up to stay in a confusing and abusive marriage. 20 years later when I confronted my ex about what he did to me, his response was, yeah, I always felt bad about that, but I honestly thought you would've wanted it because of the guy you dated before me.

Oh my gosh. I was seeing, I know I was seeing my first Christian counselor at the time that I confronted him, and up to this point, she had been helpful to me, but her take on this situation did me a great disservice. I described it to her and asked if she thought it was a date rape, and her response was, well, I don't think so because alcohol was involved.

This response made me believe, once again that it was at least partially my own fault, and I buried it all over again. He had an out because we had both been drinking, but I said no many times that night and I still remember trying to push him off of me. It wasn't until I started crying that he stopped.

My understanding now is that with penetration, it is a date rape unless a woman gives a resounding yes. Mm-hmm. Otherwise what? Unconscious women are fair game for predators.

Natalie: Exactly. I, I can't believe a therapist actually said that to you. Mm-hmm. That is absolutely insane.

Lisa: Mm-hmm.

Natalie: Mm-hmm.

Lisa: Gosh, that makes me mad.

Yeah. So I thought forming a relationship with him and marrying him would rectify what had happened to me. So while I knew something was off, I wouldn't have called my marriage abusive. I had an attentive husband who didn't ignore me and I mistook his control for caring about me.

Yeah. I

Lisa: was shocked when that first counselor told me she would support me in a divorce if that was what I wanted.

Yes, he did terrible things to me, but I was adamant that I didn't want a divorce. I just wanted tools to help me cope and stay in the marriage, and she gave me what I asked for, but she did help me realize that my marriage was not normal. She used the terms crazy making and mind messing. Well, actually she used a word that began with an F about what he did to me.

Okay. Yeah. She later betrayed me, which is not uncommon among abuse survivors and their Christian therapists. She had pulled me through shot and bleeding, and then in a subsequent war she shot me and left me in the trenches.

Natalie: That's a great, IM, that is perfect imagery to describe it. Thank you for saying that.

That is gonna be so validating to so many people who have gone through the same thing thing. That is exactly what it feels like. It feels like they saved you at first, and then they turned around and shot you. Mm-hmm. Oh my gosh. It's so painful. Yeah. Okay, keep going.

Lisa: Okay, so I sought out a different therapist after I saw an improvement in the healing process of two friends who did the trauma therapy called EMDR, which stands for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.

As I'm sure you know, um, I'm now so incredibly grateful that I made this move. It changed my whole therapy trajectory. It allowed me to finally operate in truth. You recently posted something on Instagram, Natalie, that I think applies here to your question about something being off. In that post, you mention how we convince ourselves things aren't as bad as they really are.

You went on to say, this isn't self betrayal. This is a survival mechanism, but here's the truth. You deserve the whole picture, not just the version that keeps someone else comfortable. Natalie. I think those are important words because we do tend to blame ourselves for what we did to survive. So I believe subconsciously I knew something was off from the very beginning.

I had just convinced myself that it wasn't as bad as it really was, and I was partially responsible for it, but I did deserve the whole picture.

Natalie: Yes, yes. So can you tell us some of the ways that you experienced emotional and spiritual abuse? You, you, you mentioned that, that your counselor was a Christian.

So were you, were you guys in a Christian community? The entire marriage? Did it, was this like a, a, a Christian marriage? And I'm also curious, since you were, since you were date raped, did you think because you were a Christian, that now that you were, you know, used goods and you had, the only way to redeem yourself was to marry the person who raped you?

I'm just curious if that was, did that come into play at all in your thinking? Uh,

Lisa: it did come into play. I was actually raised Catholic, but I had a mother who was way more Jesusy than she was Catholic. She had a mountaintop experience and, um, always told me, not the words you need to make, um, you need to accept Jesus into your heart.

Her words to me were, you need to make a decision either for or against Christ.

Natalie: Okay.

Lisa: And so those were her words to me. So yes, I felt like somehow the fact that he date rape me, I could make this all. Okay. If we got married.

Natalie: Hmm.

Lisa: Now we weren't really practicing Christians. He was raised, you know, Methodist in a small little community.

And as I said, I was Catholic. Yeah. Okay, so, um, so I'd say that I was emotionally and spiritually abused in all the classic ways that emotional abusers abuse. I was belittled and shamed and degraded and insulted and lied to and lied about and confused into a state of helplessness and despair. This, despite the fact that I'm actually a pretty strong Italian woman raised to engage in battle rather than shrink into submission, I guess I was just more of a challenge, something a perpetrator would enjoy.

Hmm. He

Lisa: did the usual spiritual abuse of quoting Proverbs 21 9. Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife. Interestingly, I felt the same way about that scripture. I knew deep down that living with this man was killing me. I now realize he was reversing the victim and abuser in our relationship by using this verse against me.

Yeah. So that was spiritual and emotional abuse. Yes. Wrapped up into one.

Natalie: That's right. And plus when you, it makes it so that you can't even, oh, you know what? I think there's an echo. Oh, maybe not. It makes it so that you can actually, you're not allowed to actually call out what he's doing. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Because then you're turned into the dripping faucet on the roof. Yeah. Yeah. It's crazy.

Lisa: It is crazy. Um, he would also elevate other women to shame me. Um, I've always been in pretty good shape, but he would shame me for my body. One time he said, yeah, you look good for a woman your age with three kids, except for the cottage cheese on the backs of your legs.

Oh my God. He communicated I was defective. That was emotional abuse. And he would create even more confusion by then telling me. He would look at other women and wonder what would it be like to be with them, but then he would realize they couldn't hold a candle. To me, this type of backhanded compliment was especially damaging to me.

He was, in essence, communicating You're wonderful, but very replaceable. Yes. So I'd better work harder to please him. And he was also communicating his disloyalty to me, again, it was very emotionally abusive.

Natalie: Yeah. It's almost like they try to test to see how how bad they can get, get, yeah. How far they can go to before we call them out or, yeah.

It's absolutely insane. So what did, why did you, what kinds of things did you do to try to fix the problem? And then were there any things that you, because, and it's not just about fixing the problem, although I think that's how we think of it when we're in the middle of it, it's like there's this problem in my relationship and I have to try to figure out how to fix it by maybe fixing myself.

But also you can frame it as we survivors are also trying to resist the abuse in trying fix it. They're actually resisting it, trying to make it go away. Trying to, you know. Avoid it. Were any of your, tell us what some of your strategies were and then if any of them were effective and maybe your discernment or your judgment calls now looking back on why or why not.

Lisa: Right. Um, so first I'm gonna say that something that I told myself when I first walked out, I think my anger saved me. Okay. Okay. Um. And I'll get into my anger a little bit later, but I think that saved me. But here's what I did to try to fix the problem. I cried and screamed. I reasoned with him. I threatened to separate.

I never threatened divorce, but ultimately I ended up crumbling to his will. It was, it was useless. Yeah. I dragged him to marriage counseling at the church, and the counselors there seemed mostly interested in equalizing blame and calling it a communication issue rather than addressing the abuse.

Yeah.

Lisa: So I came into contact with one of our early counselors, maybe 30 years after he counseled with us. He was coming on board at the Christian school where my ex still works. During our brief conversation, he mentioned how when he was counseling us. And interestingly, he remembered us 30 years later. Okay.

But when he was counseling us, he thought my ex was very arrogant. But now, 30 years later, he was pleased to see he had become such a great guy. That is when I realized how my ex could fool even the experts. It made me feel more isolated and trapped than ever. So, no, none of that worked. Wow. Yeah. But after 37 years of marriage, I finally went to the Christian therapist that I mentioned before who was trained in EMDR, uh, for a brief period.

My ex and I were both counseling with her. We had been on a family vacation, and he apparently didn't appreciate my navigational skills. I tried to defend myself from his beratement, and three times I brought up what he had said and he retorted with, I never said that. You've heard that many times, right?

Yeah. I never said that. But three times my oldest daughter piped up from the backseat. Yes you did. Dad. It planted a seed that maybe just, maybe I wasn't the crazy one. Yeah. And I suggested to him during that trip that we both see this new therapist that I had heard about. She recently reminded me that I told her in our first session together that I wanted to address my anger issues, minimizing his abuse by saying he had some anxiety.

I was protecting him because of course that was safer for me to protect him. Yeah. Yes. So she, yeah. So she described her assessment of our situation to us in a session that we were in together, as Lisa is bleeding right now and I need to perform triage to stop her bleeding. Our therapy will focus on getting Lisa's bleeding to stop.

Well, as you can imagine, he didn't like this. Yeah. He honestly thought I was the problem. He didn't think he was the problem and that he was causing me to bleed. So, of course. Um, so the therapist asked him to write, asked him to ask me to write out those things he did. That contributed to my pain. Of course, how he phrased it to me was that I was supposed to write out those things he did.

That irritated me. Okay. That's a big difference. By minimizing the seriousness of her assignment to us, I now realize he was trying to, I undermine her identification of his abuse. Yes, he was, you're right. Was just, oh, write out those things that I do that irritate you. Like I'm just a normal, everyday guy.

She told me that her goal in asking me to do that was akin to gathering an inventory for an alcoholic so that he could make amends for his sins against me. I didn't wanna do the assignment. I knew I'd be opening Pandora's box, but once I started in, it was unstoppable and devastating. I was writing and crying, and I had to leave for my session with her, with wet hair and all these single space pages having been freshly poured outta me.

Wow. He helped me to name the date rate for what it was, and I was forced to look at how he shamed me for it.

Hmm. In

Lisa: those pages, I identified emotional affairs during the marriage, at least one affair before we married, and I suspect more during the marriage that he won't admit. But I will tell you that I did get HPV during the marriage and I was totally faithful to him.

Hmm.

Lisa: I also identified his elevation of other women over me. The control with money, the disregard for my opinions, the frequent sex requirements through coercion, the shaming of me for reading Christian fiction over something more spiritual. I suppose the belittling, the needing to win at all costs. The lying to me and about me to others in our community, and the general lack of loving.

Honoring and cherishing me. I realized why, while I was supposed to be protected by him, I needed protection from him.

Natalie: Hmm.

Lisa: This therapist identified me as having Stockholm syndrome, a trauma bond with him and complex PTSD. So unbeknownst to me, she gave me like quizzes and um, she said, as far as Stockholm Syndrome goes, are you familiar with Stockholm syndrome?

Yeah.

Natalie: Yes.

Lisa: Um, there's a little bit of

Natalie: controversy about that, but go ahead.

Lisa: Well, um, it was a short questionnaire and she said, I answered yes to every single question in there, except that I wasn't physically afraid that he would harm me. Um, but as a background to people on the Stockholm Syndrome, there was a bank robbery and these bank robbers, um, took hostages and afterward three of those hostages married their captors.

So that's the description of Stockholm syndrome. You marry your captor. Um, so when she identified those things, I started to feel like I was doing some real work with a therapist. We were identifying that I was actually being abused. I couldn't admit it before that. And as you can imagine, my ex launched a whole smear campaign against her, as well as me telling others who went on to parrot his words that Lisa's therapist hates men and is pro divorce.

Natalie: Yeah, that all ma that all tracks

Lisa: It. All tracks. Yeah. And all I can say is she did hate what he did to me. Mm-hmm. But she loved men. She had two sons husband, you know.

Natalie: Yeah, yeah. Well he was just slandering her. Like he had been slandering you the whole time.

Lisa: Right. And this came back to where, um, someone was going to do counseling with her and a friend who was a board member of the school where he works, told this woman, oh, you better be careful, um, counseling with this counselor because she hates men and is pro divorce.

So it came back, my therapist said if she had had it in writing, she had two of three therapists. Even without it being in writing, she had two of three therapists. She consulted with, advise her to sue him because he was messing with her livelihood. Yes. Yeah. You know, she's a Christian therapist. Did she, did she end up suing him or no?

No, because she didn't have it in writing.

Natalie: Oh, I see. Okay. It was slammed, but

Lisa: it wasn't liable because it wasn't in Right. It can't, she'd probably

Natalie: be proven. Yeah. Okay. Wow. It couldn't

Lisa: be proven. And she knew going through what she'd go through, but, and in the end, her practice is groan by leaps and bounds.

He didn't end up hurting her, but there was that fear and that's exactly what he wanted. Yeah. Yeah. Wow. So I, I'd still say engaging my current therapist was pivotal for me. Um, that therapy finally worked because she helped me to have the courage to wake up to the abuse. I found my resolve to get out and I realized I never even had to look back.

And I believe that women in the Christian culture are so afraid to make a mistake. I was, yep. She taught me that we have a right to change our minds. This was new news to me and that we have a right to make a mistakes and, and that was important for me to learn. Yeah. Um, and you've taught us that. Make a mistake.

Um, you learn from it. Yeah. So, well, because we're human, that's what finally worked for me. Yeah. Yeah.

Natalie: Okay, cool. I just wanted to go back to something you said at the beginning when you first started get getting together with her. You mentioned how you told her, you know, that he's got problems, but then you also made these concessions.

Then you have these other problems, you have anger you need to deal with and all of that. I just wanted to say I can relate to that and I think a lot of survivors can, when we're in these Christian circles, we kind of learn that, that if we fawn to these people, helpers and we offer these concessions that maybe then that will, they'll, they'll approve of us then.

Whereas if we just come and speak the truth about what's going on, they're gonna go, oh, well, she's hiding something. There's something she's doing wrong, and they won't even look at what he's doing if she's not, you know. Spilling out all of her, quote unquote sin to them. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So you, so we learned how to spill our sin out and say, yes.

I, I'm so angry, even though the anger and the depression and the anxiety is because of this situation. You and I, we are not angry people when we're not being abused. Right. Right. And I think we're, yeah, we're pretty joyful

Lisa: people

Natalie: actually. Exactly. Exactly. We have a vim and vigor for life and we, yeah. Um, it's hard to, we are very long suffering.

We can put up with a lot, I think, from people. Mm-hmm. But it just gets to the point where after 40 years, you might have an angry feeling in your body after that much time. And then they wanna to spin it and call it, well, you're, let's focus on that now. And, you know, so we know that. So we kind of give them their bone to get help.

But thankfully this person. Was able to see the truth about everything, so

Lisa: Right. And I readily admitted to my anger. Yeah. I mean, my ex told people that I was a rageaholic. Um, I wasn't a rageaholic, um, because he would abuse me for like five times and by the sixth time, then I'd blow. Yes. But the helpful thing that my therapist told me is she said, Lisa, are you really expected not to scream when someone assaults you?

I. Amen. Amen. Good for

Natalie: her. Mm-hmm. That is exactly it. Mm-hmm. That is exactly it. Mm-hmm.

Lisa: Wow. No, she was, she was a lifesaver. Yeah, she was absolutely a lifesaver and, okay. So

Natalie: was she part of what helped you decide to get out them that divorce loving

Lisa: therapist of yours? Oh, yeah. I'm kidding. Oh, yeah. But she never once, um, never once suggested, she never even used the word abuse with me.

She let me come to that conclusion. She never suggested a divorce. That first therapist suggested a divorce. She said, if you want a divorce, I would support you in it. The second therapist never did. What was ironic is that that first therapist ended up becoming my ex's therapist. When we were splitting up, of course.

Oh my goodness. And I went to her and asked her, and I said, so I'm going to ask you if you were me, would you want to get a separation from him? I said, I haven't asked no one else this question. I haven't asked my therapist this question. I haven't asked anyone else this question. You're the first person.

And, um, and she said, yes. But then later recanted,

Natalie: she totally me. She wasn't, she scared, wasn't having sex with him. She needs to live with him and have sex with him for at least five years. And then give her your answer. Yeah.

Lisa: He was, um, he was in a powerful position in the Christian community and, um, I think she was afraid of him.

I, I know a lot of people are afraid of him. Mm-hmm.

Natalie: Wow. Mm-hmm. Okay. So, all right. So what was the hardest thing about getting hou out and, and also what was the most transformative thing about getting out?

Lisa: Um, so the hardest thing, or do you wanna go over what made me decide to get out? Decide, yeah. Yeah.

Tell us that. Okay. I'll go, I'll go over that first. Okay. Okay. So, to be honest, I was in deep despair when I decided to get out. I knew I either had to end my life or I had to get a lifesaving divorce.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: So when my ex told me, everyone thinks you are crazy, you won't have access to anyone or anything, I realized he was out for my destruction.

But before that, I was lulled into thinking if I just tried harder, we could be okay. But after he said that, I called a lawyer, I knew I had nothing to work with anymore. Mm. Yeah. I don't know if you've ever read the book, bold Love by Dan Allen and Trumper Longman.

Natalie: Yes, I have. It's been a long time, but I have, it's

Lisa: been right and it's been a little bit for me, but Adam Young refers to it sometimes in his podcast, the place we find ourselves.

Mm-hmm. So I had read that book, um, at the advice of a friend, um, when I was first escaping the marriage. Well, the author, and I know you went over this recently, but the authors talk about three different kinds of people in the world. The first type is the everyday normal sinner. That's you and me. Then there are the wicked people, and those are the people who simply won't take responsibility for their actions In the Bible, they're sometimes called fools.

They blame shift and scapegoat other people, so that's bad enough. But then there are the evil people. The people who not only won't take responsibility for their actions, but they also aim to destroy other people. These are the mass murderers, but they are also the people who want to emotionally destroy other people in order to gain their submission.

Yeah.

Lisa: So the light bulb went off that this was my situation. My ex had been dismantling me emotionally, spiritually, and physically. He had locked me in a closet and physically prevented me from leaving rooms or the house for years. So once I realized I was living with the evil of a man in ministry, parading around as an angel of light, but abusing his wife, it supported that I was right to get out.

Yeah. So I initially filed for a legal separation thinking I'll never date anyone again, let alone remarry. What do I need a divorce for? But after a very difficult year of negotiation, we finally reached a settlement and in the state I live in, I had to wait six months after the legal separation was declared to convert it into a divorce.

Um, I didn't have to go through any additional negotiation. We just had the settlement as it was. It just got converted to a divorce. So I know different states have different rules. So I decided to divorce. Once I realized I couldn't have any legal ties to that man after seeing how ruthless he was while separating, if I wanted to declare my kids as my beneficiaries of a, um, life insurance policy, I had to get his permission 'cause he was still legally my husband.

Yep. So, but understand, I had left a comfortable lifestyle. I lived in a big, huge house. I traveled all over the world. What 60-year-old woman would leave all that to work at a minimum wage job and live in someone's basement unless she had to. Yeah. That made a difference to some people. When I mentioned, you know, that I left some people, they realized that I had, I had the perfect life according to what other people thought.

Yep. So my estimate is that we easily spent a hundred thousand dollars on our settlement and we never even made it to court. Okay. The thing I'm so grateful that he did do was he gave me no indication this time around that he would do any changing. I. That was a gift

Natalie: to me. Yeah. Yeah, because that can really spin people out.

Oh, that is probably the one of the most it, I would say it is the most typical thing when women finally are like, I gotta get out, and then their husband makes those promises and then they're looped right back into that confusing cycle again. Yeah.

Lisa: Right. Well, you know, the statistic is what the average woman, it takes her seven times to leave.

Yeah. It didn't take me seven times to leave, but how many times did we go into counseling and he convinced me that he would change. Okay. I didn't leave, you know, those seven times because he convinced me he would change. Yes. He would come back from these mission trips and I can't tell you the number of times, oh God really got a hold of me over here, or got a hold of me over there.

But yeah, but it was a gift to me actually because it allowed me to move full steam ahead and I am super grateful for my divorce and I feel the legal fees that a hundred thousand dollars was about 50 for me, 50 for him. Um, I think they were well worth it because it made me feel that I fought for myself.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: Yeah. Now I sure wish I had been in flying free at the time because I know you offer a course to help during divorce in the flying free program, and I think I could have felt better protected with the information that you provide in that course. Specifically, you talk about a, um, um, financial investigator.

I'm convinced he hid money. Um, but I got out and I have enough and I'm grateful.

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah, that is awesome. So, okay, so, so you weren't in flying free. Did you just jump into Flying Higher then? How did you hear about that program?

Lisa: Um, it was interesting. Um, I heard about it from two people. One was, um, my best friend, um, someone had told her about it.

She was doing like di what did they call that in Churches? Divorce care. Divorce Recovery, yeah, divorce something. I

Natalie: think

Lisa: it's,

Natalie: I think it's called Divorce Care. I think that's actually Divorce Care Program. Yeah.

Lisa: So she was leading Divorce Care. She had someone in her church who had recommended you. And um, and then my friend Kim and I joined together, um, uh, because she had heard about it.

So I was like, okay, I'm outta my divorce. Um, I'm hearing from two people. Now's my time. To get in and do the work.

Natalie: So you joined Flying Higher then? Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Okay. From the beginning. That's so interesting.

Lisa: Mm-hmm.

Natalie: Because most people come in through flying free. Right. You know, they kinda go through flying free and they either get divorced or they just kind of detach from their husband, but then they're ready to kind of move on into flying Hire.

But, and that's why I made it was for those people. Mm-hmm. But it's always interesting to find out how people, um, you know, just came in cold Turkey into Flying Hire. 'cause it's just kind of, it's a different sort of program a little bit, but, okay. So how did, so you've been in Flying Hire for two or three years, right?

Lisa: Um, since January of 2020 or February. Oh

Natalie: my gosh. You've been in a long time. Oh yeah. I'll never leave. That's like almost at the beginning I feel like, oh no, I'll never leave. Oh, that's so funny. Well, tell, tell them why. Okay. Tell 'em I'll not leave.

Lisa: Um, so, uh, you wanna know why or, um, do you wanna go back to the hardest thing about getting out and the most transformative thing about getting out?

Yes.

Natalie: Tell us that first. Tell us that. Okay.

Lisa: So

Natalie: I'm

Lisa: sorry, I'm like rushing ahead into the future. I know, I know. That's okay. That's okay.

Lisa: Um, so the hardest thing for me was dealing with other people's reactions. I think that's hardest for most people. Oh, yeah. Um, because I was leaving this great man of God, um, the most hurtful were my adult children's reactions.

But I did lose a lot of friends to, um, there was a pastoral counselor that I, um, consulted with for a period of time, and he actually gave me some terrific advice, which is helpful for anyone, whether they're in an abusive marriage or not. But he said, Lisa, you think everyone's your friend. You need to take your address book and divide it into friends and contacts.

Sadly when I isn't that good. Yeah. When I did that, I found I had far more contacts than friends. Wow. And I believe this is super common for those of us when we divorce abusers in Christian circles. Yes, it is. So my current therapist, the good one, told me the biggest reason victims are not believed is that people just don't wanna believe that other people are really that bad.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: Especially those who work in ministry like my ex.

Yeah. Many

Lisa: people didn't believe me or stand up for me, including that first therapist I told you about. She threw me under the bus. Um, but my therapist now said she knew, I didn't see myself this way, but she said we were like a celebrity couple within all of these concentric circles of the Christian community.

We were in the big church and, um, the prominent Christian high school where my ex still works, um, the mission circle and the seminary circle. And as with celebrity couples, people think they can weigh in on whether the marriage should end or not. It caused me to be more of a target than your average person.

She told me. Yeah, yeah. But, but regarding my adult children, I believe they were embarrassed by our divorce. We were the perfect family. Um, my kids were outstanding. I mean, literally they graduated first, second, and third in their

class. They were athletes. They were prom. Queen, homecoming queen, we were who everyone wanted to be.

Yep. Um, and And my kids also wanted to believe both of their parents, but the stories were so wildly different. 'cause of course I was the rageaholic and I was the one who left and he was this man of God. But yet they knew. They knew that something wasn't quite right. But I think it was maybe easiest sometimes to discredit me because I'm the one who left.

But I now prefer to call it my escape. I didn't leave. I escaped.

Natalie: I like that. That's a really good way of framing it. And it tells a more honest story I think.

Lisa: It does. And I literally escaped. He was out of the country performing a wedding, you know, and, um, my lawyer told me it would actually be better for me to leave when he was outta town, because if he came home when the movers were moving my things out, he could then put them back into the house and they'd have to do it.

Okay. So I did, and, and I was blamed for that too, you know. Sure. You, you just left in the middle of the night. How could you do that? You know? It was, yeah. How old were they

Natalie: at the time when this all happened?

Lisa: My kids? Yeah. They were, they were 22, 25 and 30. Okay. So, but my one, um, had just graduated from college, my youngest one.

Okay.

Natalie: I still feel, I feel like kids at that age, they all, you know, they. They're not quite at the stage of life where they, where they under, where they have a lot of life experience under their belts and understand things on a different level. They're still kind of in that immature stage of like thinking they know everything, but really not knowing much of anything, but believing that they're, you know, that they're adults.

And they are adults, but they're, they're young adults. They just don't, they don't, well,

Lisa: and, and they think they know it all because they've been raised in this culture of black and white. Yeah. Yeah. That I've got all the answers. Yeah. Raised in the purity culture, getting married, you know, fairly young. Um, I've got all the answers.

And you get married and you stay married no matter what. Yep. One thing my son asked me is, mom, do you really think it's okay to get divorced for abuse?

Natalie: Wow. Well, he needs to have some children of his own. And then this, he wants his, so, you know, do you want your children to be abused for the rest of their lives?

Lisa: So that's what I asked him. I said, so what would you do if this happened to your daughter? Yeah. His response was, we would tell her, you don't have to live with him. You come live with us, but you should never get divorced because that closes the door on there being repentance and reconciliation. I said, no, it doesn't.

It doesn't. And I said, I gave him 40 years to repent.

Natalie: Exactly,

Lisa: exactly.

Natalie: We would've reconciled

Lisa: if he had repented.

Natalie: Yeah. And his daughter is, I'm guessing, under the age of five.

Lisa: Well, um, at the time he said that she was probably about seven. Okay.

Natalie: So young enough that, you know. It, you gotta give them some time to grow up.

I know, I know. These middle, these adult children. Well, and, but yeah, you, that is it that I, we, you, you know this 'cause we've heard so many stories of people in flying hair, adult children, they can be some of the ugh. Stab you in the heart, you know? Oh, the worst. In the worst ways. Worst. Yeah.

Lisa: The worst. Yeah.

And, and I think I gave my kids maybe too much information, but like I said, they were 22 through 30 and they had lots of questions for me. Yeah. And I decided to go to the honest street route. Yeah. Yeah. And so I told them what happened and why I had to leave. But then I heard your interview with Bob Ham and.

His approach was more that we should ask, well, what do you think? Rather than giving them the information. And I like that, but I also wonder how respectful to my kids would it be to give more information? I'm giving more information to you than, than I give to them. I mean, yeah, that's not very respectful.

I feel the same way.

Natalie: I feel the same way. And I don't, you know, I don't have the exact answer. I don't know if, if that's the right thing or not. I just know that it resonates with me also to be able to give my kids the whole truth, my, at least my whole truth, right? Yeah. How I perceived it to be and to say, this was my personal experience.

Mm-hmm. Believe it or not. Mm-hmm. Like it's, you can, you don't have to believe it, right? I'm just telling you, uh, uh, what happened as I experienced it and, um, and, and I had to make my own choices and I support you. Whatever, you know, you might find yourself in a pickle someday where you have to make a really hard.

Choice. And I just want you to know that that is your right as an adult to make that choice. And also, I'm an adult and I have a right to make choices for my life as well. And no one has to like it. You don't have to, like, you can have all kinds of feelings about that. It's completely fine. Yeah. But I'm still gonna, I'm still gonna make my choice.

Lisa: Well I'm still, um, my therapist says we still need to parent our adult children at times. Yeah. There are certain things that, like you mentioned, that are very immature and I had to communicate to them, Hey, look, I am not that woman that you grew up with.

Natalie: Yeah. Who,

Lisa: who had to submit to that patriarch of that family.

I am much better boundaried now, and I hope you will be too. Yes.

Natalie: Yes, we've had those same conversations. Yeah. It's like I'm not the same person. And, and I, and I hope that, and, and also I had some younger kids too, right? So I, you know, my older kids have kind of watched me raise the younger kids in a very different way and they have thoughts and ideas about that as well.

But they've slowly, you know, time is a great, it is. Time changes things, but Right. They've slowly kind of, they've, 'cause they've seen these younger kids come up and they're, you know, it's just, it's different for the younger kids and the Yeah. And um, and I think that they're seen, oh, maybe there is a little wisdom in.

Not, not raising them the way, you know, not smacking the heck out of them every time they, you know, talk back or whatever, but instead listening to actually find out what the problem is. You know, that's just one little example, but of how things are different, but yeah. Um, and also I see two of my adult kids who have children of their own, who are raising their kids differently than I did.

Yes. Yeah. And that is like, uh, amazing. I love seeing that.

Lisa: Well, I have two different, I've got the son and his daughter who are very legalistic and black and white thinking and believe in spanking. Um, and then I've got my daughter who is not choosing to raise her kids. She's trying to communicate, I understand you have big feelings and let's talk about that.

Yeah. And I'm happy to see that. And I've actually, actually gone back to one of my daughters who would've been the classic difficult child, extremely bright, and um. Partially because of that. She really was difficult. And so I read the book, the Difficult Child Focus on the Family, the Difficult Child. Yeah.

And it was, you know, with disrespect, corporal punishment. Yeah. And I told her, now I wish I wouldn't have done it that way with you. I wish I would've come alongside you and said, tell me what this is really about. The screaming in your room for 40 minutes didn't solve anything. Yeah. It just made her feel more abandoned.

Yeah. So that's right. Um, so. I actually called in for coaching with you about three years ago over stuff. I was going through with my one daughter. She was moving in with me for, um, she was starting a graduate program and she told me she didn't believe what I told her about their father was true. Now I believe my other two, believe me.

Um, but she's told me that more than once. And you gave me a really helpful insight. You told me if you asked your kids if they thought that what you said about your ex was true, that they would say, no, I don't believe that. But if you ask them, is your mother a truth teller, they'd say, absolutely. Yeah. And that was super helpful to me to know that this is what adult kids do many times in order to love both of their parents.

Yeah. So you really helped me with that. Um, so now I've since learned something that has been helpful to me. I've learned you don't have to trust your kids to have a relationship with them. Mm-hmm. In virtually every other relationship. Trust is essentially essential, but not necessarily with your kids.

That bond that we have between a parent and a child can transcend our normal need for trust because we just love them so much. Yeah. So that really helped me because I felt like, how can I even have a relationship with my kids? It, well, this one who thought I was a liar, you know, that just felt mm-hmm.

You know, awful to me. Mm-hmm. And you know, I really hope that. The work I've done, and I know you, you explained this to us many times, the work we do has generational positive consequences. Not consequences, but benefits.

Yeah.

Lisa: Um, because hopefully we can thwart some of that trauma that these kids carry from growing up in these toxic homes.

And I hope they're going to do their own work. I tell them, I hope they'll do this, but I can't make them and I'm not gonna pressure them. But they've seen my example that I am committed to healing and I'm committed to growth. Yeah. Um, so, so I would say that, that that's the most transformative thing, uh, for me, um, is the opportunity to grow and learn.

And it's been so life-giving to me. Um, people will tell me I'm different. I'm different than who I was in my marriage. I'm, I'm more joyful. And I will say your ministry has been a huge part of that for me. And, and you mentioned this in your program. I get fed by you multiple times a week. I can't afford to see a therapist multiple times a week.

I see her once a month, once every other month, something like that anymore. And you know, my therapist highly recommends your program. Mm-hmm. Which I think is interesting 'cause I think maybe some therapists would think, oh, this'll cut into my livelihood. But she tells me that she tells all of her trauma

surviving clients to get into your program because part of it she's told me is because she's seen the growth in me.

Yeah. Yeah. Um, I mean, she really likes your program. She thinks it's very beneficial. And she's the one who told me, she goes, you need to be interviewed by Natalie Hoffman.

Natalie: Oh, I'm so glad. I'm so glad she recommended that to you.

Lisa: Well, it's why when you asked, you know, I was like, okay, I guess I'll raise my hand here, you know, so.

Natalie: Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah. I was gonna say, you know, there are a lot of people will come in and they'll say, yeah, my therapist recommended that I join this program. And I think, um, people who are in, who are getting private therapy, but also have something that's. Like constantly inputting and giving them things that they can actually take to their therapist and go, yep, I learned this new thing and I'm want, and I'd really like to implement it.

Then they get that one-on-one help to Yes, actually apply it to their life. Because I can teach the concepts in a class, for example, and we can have a discussion with the group, but to actually work through it with your therapist, that's like, that's priceless. So it is the most ideal situation is to be in therapy, but also to have something like this kind of program that, so that I think that they dovetail together and work together really well.

Yes, and I think that's why therapists probably recommend it because it also helps the therapist. Mm-hmm. To 10 x the, you know, sometimes when someone comes into therapy. And they don't really know what to talk about or how to, you know, that can be challenging for a therapist too after a while. Mm-hmm. So it's nice for people to be able to have their mind stimulated by new ideas and new concepts, and then bring that to therapy.

Lisa: Right.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: And I do, and my therapist told me, she said, you're probably my only client that I learn something from every time you come in.

Natalie: Oh, that's so cool. That's great. That fun. Yeah. Yeah. That's really fun. I love that. Yes. Yes. Yeah. Alright, well, so, so the, the final question is, what is one piece of advice that you'd give to women who are thinking of getting out?

Lisa: Well, um, I have two pieces of advice. Is that okay? Okay.

Natalie: Yes.

Lisa: Okay. Um, my first piece of advice would be to learn and grow and never stop hungering for more. We've talked about that before, but information is power, power that God gave to us. Yeah. And, um, I think of the books that I've read, the experts I've followed on Instagram and the podcasts I've listened to on abuse and healing, and I've come across all of them from listening to you.

Um, but they've all played a part in my healing and growth, and you never know where you'll find a nugget. Yes. And short. Shortly after I escaped my marriage, I read a fiction book. I can't even remember how it was recommended to me, but it's called Glittering Images by Susan Ho. And there is so much powering over of people by the clergy in this book and it illustrates how sickness can spring outta the power given to those in ministry.

And my ex very prominent in ministry, I'll never forget a phrase, the author used to describe a relationship between the bishop and his assistant, erotic subjugation. I believe so much of the advice given in several toxic Christian marriage books is for women to be subjugated within Christian marriages.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: Hearing it described like this in a fiction book, used in seminaries to illustrate what not to do, help me to understand how I could possibly have married and felt any desire for my date rapist. It made me feel dirty, but this is what women are advised to do in some very misguided books on Christian marriages.

Yep. Those two words, erotic, subjugation, helped me to make sense of what made no sense to me, and it was reinforced to many of us, and this is not what God wants for his daughters. Yeah. So another piece of advice I would give is that it is important to not believe that we made a vow with God to stay married to our abusive husbands.

I know that's gonna sound heretical, but I have learned there is no such thing as a three-way vow in the Bible where one person is to remain tied. By a supposed

vow to God dependent on another person's actions. And after I found out that piece of information, I couldn't find any verses in the Bible that indicate a three-way vow.

And yet this is what we've been taught. There are examples in the Bible of covenants between God and people, covenants between people, but no three-way vows. Natalie, you taught us a few years ago that while the Christian woman is many times accused of being a vow breaker for escaping an abusive marriage, it is the abuser who is the vow breaker.

Yeah. So we can't be tied to God because this other person broke their vow. Right. Right. And they, they broke the vow when they failed to love, honor and cherish us.

Natalie: Right. Exactly. There was a, there's a video out there somewhere. I don't know where it is, but I remember, um. I, it's a really powerful video of a woman, a man and a woman up in front of a congregation making their marriage vows.

And she's promising, and, and it, it, it shows what it would be like if you actually vowed to be with this person who's promising, who, who, who's basically saying that they're gonna abuse you, right. For the rest of your life. Would you ever do that? Of course not. Right? No woman is gonna stand up and go, yes, I vow to stay with you.

Even if you abuse me and mistreat me and lie about me and lie to me and gaslight me and all the things. Nobody's gonna do that. So when, um, I've been divorced twice now, and both times when I said I do, I was saying I do to someone that was not really standing in front of me. Someone who was pretending to be someone that they actually weren't, right?

And I didn't know, right? If you don't know what you're, if you don't know. And then you find out afterwards, what are you gonna do? Just are you gonna then continue to live this lie that, that was perpetuated by this other person? No, I don't believe that God holds us responsible to continue to live out a, a lie, a vow.

That,

Lisa: but we've been, we've been told there's a three-way vow. Yeah. I, I drank the Kool-Aid that I made a vow to God to stay married to this person. Yeah. Yes. It's just another way of explaining the same thing. Yeah, yeah,

Natalie: yeah. Yes. I love that. Um, I just wanna say too, one last thing. The people, the women that are in flying higher, that are divorced, just so, just if, if anyone's listening to this and thinking, oh, if you get divorced, you know, you must not love God very much, or you must not be a very committed person.

These are some of the most, and these are people, we have discussions. We have get togethers every week. We're constantly interacting with each other. These are some of the most incredibly devoted. Um, God-fearing, kind, loving, caring, brave, amazing Christian women that I have ever known in my entire life.

Mm-hmm. And they're not just paying lip service. Mm-hmm. They have lived out their faith in the most difficult situations that you could possibly imagine and been vilified for their obedience to God in these areas. And I just think, you know, God's kingdom is always upside down from what we people think is, is good and evil.

And the Bible talks about that. It woe to the people who say light is dark and dark as light. And you know, good is. I don't remember what, what that verse is, but you know what I'm talking about, right? Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And that's what I think, that's what I think is happening when it comes to this dynamic of abuse in Christian communities and in marriages.

It's an upside down. We have to flip this narrative, and I think it is flipping, I think there's more and more people realizing, wait a minute, there is something deadly wrong here. Mm-hmm. I believe it's a satanic situation. I really do. Because it's such, such a lie, and I think it's changing. Mm-hmm. I think the tide is turning so

Lisa: well, and I think my ex, um, utilized that, that, um, he, he truly was a and is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Yeah. But worse than that, he's a shepherd. Yes. In, or he's, he's a, a wolf in shepherd's clothing. Yep. He is parading around as this angel of light. Yep. He recently got remarried. Seems like a really nice woman. She has no clue. Yeah, he has been. Claiming he's this shepherd, I'm sure. And I was this rageaholic, or, you know, he accused me of cheating or, you know, who, who knows I was bipolar supposedly.

I mean, who knows what he's told me. Yeah, yeah. As an explanation for why he got divorced. Um, one thing, so I have remarried, um, and I swore I'd never get remarried. Yeah. But we were introduced by quality people who we both

respected. And we thought, oh, well, you know, a friend, it'd be nice to have a male friend.

Yeah, sure. You know, but we, we did remarry. But when I was dating him, I said to my therapist, I said, I don't care if I'm dating him. I don't care if I'm engaged to him. I don't care if I'm married to him, if I ever find out he's not who he says he is. I walk. Yeah. And she said, well, of course, because you would've been tricked.

You can't be held to a vow. When you were tricked. That's right. So I told my husband, he was, I was dating him at the time, what I said, and he goes, well, and you should, you should leave. Yeah. If I'm not who I say I am.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: I

Natalie: mean,

Lisa: those were the kinds of things that made me go, okay, I can take a chance on this guy.

Yeah. Yeah. How long have you been remarried? Um, a little over two years. Okay. And he dated so far.

Natalie: Is he, is he who you? He he is.

Lisa: Oh, good. He totally, and interestingly, I, um, reconnected with his ex-wife and, and they had their problems. They never should have gotten married as what it boiled down to, but she told me he's the most empathetic person she's ever met.

Oh, wow. I mean, when the ex-wife says that. Yeah. That's amazing. And he is, you know, is he perfect? Am I perfect? No, but so far he's exactly who he says he is. How refreshing. It really is refreshing and I am in a safe relationship for the first time of my life. I've never been in a safe relationship. I can say anything.

I can do anything. I don't have to, you know, worry. He's gonna be embarrassed of me. He's, he's praying for me during this interview with you and Wonderful.

Natalie: That's wonderful.

Lisa: He's, he's a kind, kind man, not rich kind.

Natalie: I hope that gives people hope too, because again, you're, are you in your sixties did you say?

I'm 66. Yep. Okay. Because, because that love can come at any age. Mm-hmm. I've seen this, I've seen love come in your seventies. Mm-hmm. Uh, and, and I think a lot of times our younger survivors feel like, oh, I'll never find anybody. I. No, you've got years and years ahead of you. Get healthy. Take the time to get healthy, to learn how to care about yourself and take really good care of yourself.

And love will. Love will come. Love will come. Love can come to you again. Love can come. Yes. Yes, it can. I guess. And I will come. That can.

Lisa: Yes. Well, and the beautiful thing about my current husband and I is that we were both content with getting to know ourselves better. We had about three or four years in between marriages where we were content with getting to know us.

We didn't feel this need, like I have to have someone else in my life.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: To have a good life. We were feeling like we've got a good life now, you know? Yeah. Yeah. And, and our, our life has just been enhanced. Yes. Yeah. You know? That is so beautiful.

Natalie: I love that. I'm glad you shared that at the very end here.

Lisa: The other thing I really wanna share is kind of a little bit of an epilogue to my life because, um, uh, I think without knowing, you know, my background and my experience and where I'm at, what would give me the right to give anyone advice, but, um, I've been asked to come alongside other women. So when my therapist said to me, you should be interviewed on Natalie Hoffman, I said, that's kind of not my shtick.

You know, my thing right now is I am, as people bring other people to me, I wanna come alongside other people. Um, and. I tell these women, I'm not a certified coach or a licensed therapist. I can only show you what seven years out looks like if you're willing to do the work. And I tell them, I'm privileged to pass along what I've learned along the way, and I recommend the Flying Free

Ministry to every single one of these escaping women in order to get them out of continually reliving the trauma.

Yeah. Which

Lisa: is what I did until I really started deep diving into doing the healing work.

Natalie: Yeah.

Lisa: And I tell them, if you are willing to never stop learning and growing, you will heal and be able to come alongside other hurting Christian women too. And I believe it's important Jesusy work showing people God's love when they have been terribly traumatized.

I know. It's made me feel that my suffering hasn't been wasted. Um, and I believe Jesus came to earth to show us God's love. I think that's what what's God's plan was. Yeah. He loves people and he cares about them, particularly the marginalized. And as women who had to escape abusive marriages, we have been marginalized.

Mm-hmm. The woman at the well was not being shamed by Jesus for having five husbands. He was telling her he saw her pain. A woman in that culture couldn't divorce those men. She didn't have such a choice to make. Yep. She suffered because she was either widowed or cast out by these men.

Natalie: Yep. But that's a story you won't hear in the pulpit for some reason.

Lisa: Actually, I talked to someone who told me they actually heard it in the pulpit, basically. Oh, good. I was shocked. I was shocked. But she was the first person who Jesus told, you can tell other people about me and what I've done for you. So she was the first evangelist. She was a Samaritan, she was a woman and she was five times divorced.

She was our first evangelist. So I think Jesus, in essence told her, go and fly. Beautiful butterfly. Yes, you were meant for this. Yeah. So thank you Natalie for all you and your team and all your guests who have been willing to be on your program have done for me and for so many women out there. And I believe the flying free ministry shows survivors God's love.

So thanks. Thank you.