

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 336 - Military Marriage Abuse: Elizabeth'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: Wonder what it's like to be a military wife trapped in an abusive marriage. Meet Elizabeth. Her story will shatter every myth about just trying harder. If you are tired of pretending everything is okay, when it's not, this is the episode you need to watch.

Today I have with me Elizabeth. She is a survivor and she's been, I've known her and she's been in our programs for, I, I looked on the backend and I'm not even, I, I'm not, I, I don't know if you came on before this, but I have certain records and I only looked on one of our platforms, but it looks like you joined in 2020, so that's like four and a half years ago.

Was it sooner than that?

Elizabeth: That's correct. It was during the springtime opening in 2020.

Natalie: Okay. Wow. So that was COVID year. That was, did that have anything to do with it by any chance? Just curious.

Elizabeth: Uh, it started it and then I think it accelerated it.

Natalie: Yeah, I, I, there, that was a huge growth year for Flying Free and I think it was because people were in their relationships and just going, oh my gosh, now they're with them, you know, 24 7 and going, I don't think I can sustain this.

Yeah. Lot of mental health breakdowns happening during that year. Well, we're gonna dig into your story. So first of all, I wanna thank you for being willing to

come on here and share your story. You know, sometimes it, it's a very vulnerable place to be. Do you feel like you're ready to share your story?

Elizabeth: I do.

Thank you for having me. It feels, um, it feels like sharing my story. I'm on the other side.

Natalie: Yes, you are On the other side. I mean, there's always, you know, we're always growing, right? Right. And then we cycle back and we loop through things and we have to relearn things. I feel like that's, at least that's what's happening with me all the time.

Um, I mean, I just went through my second divorce, so, so there's definitely a little looping going, going on here, but we're gonna talk about your story today. Why don't we start with, um, you sharing how and when you first noticed that there was something not quite right about your relationship.

Elizabeth: I think early on I noticed things weren't quite right.

We were very young when we started our relationship, but it wasn't until I was overseas and in another country, uh, he was active duty military. And so being away and isolated, there was almost like a light switch of behavior that went off. Um, nobody that I could go to, nobody that I knew, um, nobody that I knew well enough to even talk about any of these really dark things.

And, uh, at the same time that I moved overseas, I was pregnant with, uh, our, our daughter and I had a baby, was married and living in another country all within four weeks of this lightning switch.

Natalie: Oh, wow.

Elizabeth: So when I

Natalie: must have been, was that scary?

Elizabeth: It terrible. That sounds terrifying. It was terrifying. Yeah, it was.

It was absolutely terrifying. Um, and I think looking back in what I know now, my growth, it tracks for these big life changes to kind of cause these eruptions and behavior shifts. Mm-hmm. Um, and so. When I look from the, the place I'm at now to what it was in the history, I feel like, wow, that seems so obvious.

And so I have to give younger me a lot of grace in seeing you didn't know this was not, you know, and so at that time when you're overseas, you've got this marriage that people are celebrating and happy about. Um, there's this massive move. I mean, we're talking oceans and countries, um, and a baby that's brought into the world and.

It is a very big decision to make, whether you stay or go or something shifts even so much as the phone calls you have where you talk with people and tell them what's going on. You don't really let those dark places open to people because that's not what they're prepared to hear, and, and then that's the only thing they hear.

So. For me, it was the beginning of when I started to hide all the things and present the front, um, but also the beginning of the radical shift in his behavior.

Natalie: Hmm. So what, can you tell us what some of those things were that you experienced? Um, as far as emotional abuse or spirit or any, any kind of abuse really.

What were some of the ways Yeah.

Elizabeth: So around that time when the lightning switch happened, there was a lot of, I'm not good enough for you that he gave to me when I needed other people. So, um, having started this new life, I think anybody who has given birth to a child knows you just, you need, you need your tribe.

Yeah. Whether it's family or friends or another mom that's going through it. You just need someone who understands and who can be there. Yeah. Um, and my need for somebody translated to him as you are not good enough. Mm-hmm. Um, and then it became the isolation that would set in being active duty military.

I was, he was, I was left to fend for myself. So his schedule was decided by somebody and a complete entity outside of us. So it was very easy to hear. He, I have to go, I don't have a choice. This is my schedule. I don't have a choice. And so I did a lot of, you're left to deal with all the things, so you figure it out on your own.

You make the decisions on your own. And um, it was a strange place to be in because then I was also blamed for all the things. So when those isolation started, and then I had this insane responsibility, uh, isolated, and then if something was displeased or if he didn't like something, I was to blame. And in

my rationale at the time, I thought, well, yeah, I didn't, I had to make that decision of, of course it's my fault.

Um, so looking back again on this side to there, I can see now that it wasn't my fault and it was a huge misplacement of responsibility, but. Early on, it was the isolation, uh, the misplacement of responsibility and blame. Um, and, and, and my role in that was I, I continued to buy into that. And so that continued to just sort of decide our roles where I was the doer.

I did all the things. I managed all the things, you know, essentially being the mom to everyone in the house, um, which made me responsible for all the things and that. Came with the responsibility of also managing his emotions, managing his atmosphere when he came home. And if any of that was out of place or, you know, not too par.

It was a massive argument. Um, hours and hours of circular conversations. Um, and, and at the time I was so busy trying to explain my heart where I came from. What I needed him to know or to hear, or just really trying to gain an like, would you please understand me?

Natalie: Yeah. Will

Elizabeth: you see that this wasn't my intention?

Um, how can I make this happen? And those conversations were always, um, a really big argument. And then he would come around and he would, he would see it differently and he would apologize and he would take to heart everything that I said. And then three days later when I said, remember that conversation?

It was, no, I never remember that conversation. I black out when I'm angry. I, I don't know. You'll have to remind me.

Natalie: Well, how can you ever make any traction in your relationship if you start at ground zero every single time you have a conversation?

Elizabeth: Yeah, and there was, um, at the time, so this was, um, early on in the wars on terror, if you will.

So there was a lot of unknown with where he was getting deployed or not. So then there was a lot of, because I serve in this way to our country because I fight these battles in this way, I wanna come home to peace. There is an expectation

that as the wife, you are not supposed to burden any home front things to these, you know, brave people who are out sacrificing.

And, and I don't mean to minimize that, but we can see where some, that was weaponized.

Natalie: That was we, that idea was weaponized against you.

Elizabeth: Absolutely. And so I wasn't allowed to have thoughts or feelings that disagreed because then I was the problem or I was a problem. Not being supportive. So there was Correct not being supportive.

And it wasn't just

Natalie: about your marriage, it's about like being supportive of your country or being supportive of your, you know, being a good patriot. I just can't believe it's like tied into that crazy. Yeah.

Elizabeth: And actually he goes even further. So if you think if he's in charge of X, Y, or Z and there are people underneath or with him and he's distracted from some home front problem.

Then something happens and you're now responsible for the domino effect of what that could possibly create.

Natalie: Unbelievable. Wow.

Elizabeth: And while I do completely see that, you know, we shouldn't always make our letters from home to be something that's going to bog down and burden, um, the idea that there's this blanket, we can't bother him.

I can't, I could not bother him with any troubles at any time. Um, was a problem. And then for him, a lot of the times. He, he was not, um, boots on ground. It was a lot of, he was in the Navy, so it was like a ship. So you would be going into ports in foreign countries where there's a lot of, um, indecent activity, if you will.

So port calls were not just somebody that was out boots on ground. It was a lot of partying and I was not really given thoughts to have for that. It would be quickly turned against me. My wife won't let me. I've sacrificed all this much and I can't even go out for one night. Um, but there wasn't like a whole lot of in

between, it was either kind of an all or nothing, which is very tracking with how the personality types can be.

Um, but for me it was, it was really hard to know when to bother and when not because it, like you said, it could be weaponized. So I just started to take on all the burdens. That's just really where I went.

Natalie: So you weren't allowed to get support from anyone else. He wanted to be your sole support, and yet he couldn't be your sole support because if you needed support from him, then you were gonna distract him from his patriotic duty.

Right. And possibly cause people to die.

Elizabeth: During the times. Yeah. And, and part of it was because he didn't want his family to know, or my family to know because, you know, if you open up and tell people what's going on, that they think badly of this person. And, and we needed to keep the marriage sacred, keep it between us.

We could work out our problems. Um, so I reached out so many different times, um, for help through outside people and. Every single time that would happen, he would find a new reason not to like that outside person, so, okay. Um, okay. It, it doesn't see, I think if you live in one place for an extended period of time, the track record of how many therapists you've spoken to, how many different things you've tried.

Is more apparent in your view, but when you move from place to place every two to three years, you can kind of go with the, well, let's try. We're in a new place. We didn't really have the time to really make traction, so let's make traction somewhere new. So there was a lot of this rinse and repeat. Yeah.

That didn't seem so obvious.

Natalie: Yeah. Very interesting. Okay, so what kinds of things did you try to do? I mean. Obviously you tried to reach out once in a while to other people and that you got, it sounds like you were damned if you do, damned if you don't every, everywhere you turned. But what, what were some of the other things you tried to do to try to fix the problem since you were supposedly completely responsible for everything and then what kinds of things were effective or weren't effective and why or why not?

Elizabeth: So I would try to do every self-help book there is Any how to be a good wife book any, how to do it better. I mean, more sex, more home cooked meals, the whole, you know, be like puppy dog when they come home. Like it's so cringeworthy to hear it now. Yeah. Um, but that, that sort of stuff was one, um, I.

Definitely made the appointments for the therapy. I would invest in the time and the energy for the date nights. I would, I would ask very clearly things like, what do you want to see happen? And I would execute those things. And then again, it was the, well, I've changed my mind. That's how I felt at that moment.

So it was essentially just a moving goalpost? Yes, all the time. Um, so when those things didn't work, uh, I started to become. Less involved and just made him responsible for almost zero. So it was easier when I did everything and just let him come and go as he pleased. Just let him, you know. And I, and it was packaged in like the way you work so hard, this is what you do.

So you keep your mind clear. And it was this, we even had two bank accounts where money was put into the account. That was his, so he managed, I managed everything and he just had spending money and his own bank account and could do things in or out of port on deployment in our home. And that was like it, it was alm, it was very childlike.

Now when you think about it, like here's your allowance. Um, yeah. He was responsible for him and I was responsible for everything else. Unbelievable. And did you get spending money? Actually, that's one thing he wasn't very controlling of, but it was looking back as very coercive control because I actually was the budgeter.

So he would rack up the credit cards and I would work them down. And that's how it kind of, um, I was super transparent with all of the budgeting. It was always like, you know, out there you could see what was being spent on, but when you stay at home with children and you homeschool them, there's not a whole lot you do that.

That isn't accounted for.

Natalie: Right? Right. It's not like you got to go out and have some fun with your girlfriends or anything.

Elizabeth: There were times that I could, and there was times that I couldn't, so when I would go out, I actually, he gave a lot of freedom in that way. So, but

when I think about it now. I think about it as like, it was usually done in a group setting.

It was usually done where other people were involved. Um, and so it made him look good. He looked very noble, right? It was all about the image. And so we would have group friends, like couples friends, and the girls would go out one night and then the guys would go out. Um, but so we're going out with people who.

Were essentially approved,

Natalie: if you will. Right, right. And he would look bad if he said that you couldn't go out with those people on the girls. Right? Yeah. Interesting. So why, what? What eventually caused you to decide, I'm not gonna do this anymore. I need to get out. And what was that getting out process like for you?

Elizabeth: He became more violent, he became more aggressive. Um, throughout the years, his temper would definitely flare and he would throw things or hit things. Um, it was more sporadic, but it was consistent from the beginning. Um, however, towards the end. He started involving the children more with these lies and made up stories that he had.

I had, um, I was actually getting ready to divorce and we were living in our home state. He was stationed at the time. And, um, our youngest, I found out I was pregnant with and as much as I was ready to divorce, I wasn't ready to do it with a pregnancy and a baby. And that terrified me. So, um, things got better for a little bit as the cycle continues and goes, you know, um, but we got to the state that we're in now, and again, there's that radical shift.

It was like, we got there. I'm then, I'm there. 'cause when we were in our home state, there was family that I could go to. There were people that were involved. Um, and so when we were in this home state, there was not support. And so it radically shifted really early on. So anytime I needed help. It wasn't a no, I didn't get told no.

I was given reasons why it wouldn't work. So I would, I needed to put together furniture, Ikea, right? It's gonna take a minute, and I would give him the little one and he would find a reason why he couldn't have him. He's, he wants you, he wants to be nurse. Like, there's all these reasons, you know, um, that are not so obvious.

And so I started just. Letting him deal with them. And that's when things started to escalate. When I stepped back and started letting him have the responsibility, he could not handle it. And he wouldn't say, I won't watch our son, because that doesn't look very noble. That doesn't look very good.

Father-like and said he would spark a fight and then leave in the car with the car seat, and there was constant isolation. There was constant. Checking out emotionally. I mean, he wouldn't talk to me for days on at a time, weeks at a time, um, if there was an argument that he disagreed with something and I was not giving in just flat out stonewall for weeks.

Um, so that all kind of started to, to go from being. More every couple of months to every other week for the bigger, bigger ones. But he, I started to track a pattern and he could not go three days without an explosion of some kind. When you say you were

Natalie: tracking, were you writing things down or how were you tracking?

Elizabeth: I started to, so I would get told a lot. Those conversations remember about like, it didn't happen. Those things never happened. Yeah. So I started to journal some of this. Um, when I got here, I started seeing a therapist and in order to tell her what was going on, I felt like I needed to make sense of it myself.

And there were some accusations he made, which is why I said we get in therapy or I leave. This was a regular occurrence. Um, and at that time I was emailing him to communicate because. You were, it was said to be healthier, to communicate through written text rather than this escalated, you know, conversations.

Yeah. And so I would go through and I would realize that I would put things in writing and he wouldn't respond to it. It was very much like a word salad in an email. And I would keep trying to get to the point and keep trying to get to the point, and then it would turn into this entire different thing.

And I'm like, but I still don't feel like this is addressed. This is the reason we're in therapy. Why is this not being addressed? And so that's when I started keeping track. I know I told him on this date. And he is saying, I never said this to him. And I had a little bit of written in the email as well.

Um, and I would screenshot these text messages because I knew that I would say it. And then we'd get in these arguments and I'd send him the screenshot text

message and be like, right here. I said it right here. Um, which was basically gaslighting. And I, I had, I hadn't really an understanding of what that meant.

Mm-hmm. And so I got to the point where I was just sort of defeated and I. I, I just wanted to continue doing what I was doing. I'd wanted peace and I didn't want the arguing. And so, um, it was about a year into living into the state that we're in now, and things started to escalate. He was realizing that I would go and do things without him.

So like the isolation wouldn't happen anymore 'cause I, now I have two car seats, so you could take whatever car you want. I've got car seats, you know, I was solving these problems for myself. Yeah. And that's when it was like, oh, no, no, no, you can't be, you know, able to do your own things. And it depended on his mood.

If he was in a mood where he didn't, where he wanted to withdraw and didn't want to be part of responsibility, he didn't care if I came or went and the kids and I were doing whatever. But if he wanted an argument, he was gonna make sure that everybody knew he wanted an argument. And they were very loud, they were very, um, overt.

It was, everybody was involved if you knew. Dad was mad, dad was mad. So there was a lot of walking on eggshells, testing his mood. Um, he is very, he's a really fun guy, like, so much fun. So that to the point where when he is not fun, it is the exact opposite and it's very apparent, you know, so it was a lot of, are we gonna be able to guess his mood today?

How do we manage this? Um, and I got really tired of that. So I just started focusing on the kids and rolling with his moods. So rather than trying to manage them as much, I just kind of rolled with them. Okay. So no more. Did you

Natalie: stop arguing within them? Just let him think what he wanted or, or what did at that

Elizabeth: point?

No. At that point I was still. In the cycle. I was still in that dance of arguing. Um, but I, I started to feel less concerned with how it was gonna go forward, and I really was like, I feel like I need a divorce. Um, and a friend of mine invited me to, um, a weekend. She had a, a hotel for work, a work thing, and she invited me to go and I got away for those four days and I just, I had never like.

Been gone like that before and I had gotten some perspective and I had done a lot of just kind of, and I, and she and I actually didn't talk about this because I was still not opening up with people, but I just got some perspective away and I noticed the difference in how I felt out of that environment versus in that environment.

And I came back with this sense of, I can't keep doing this. And he continued. To escalate. And that's when I started to put some firm boundaries in. But I didn't know I was putting boundaries at the time. It was, no, I'm not gonna sit here for this. I'm walking away. Um, I was just done and then I decided to move into.

A different bedroom. And I, and I saw very clearly that things weren't working. He started, um, hitting walls and hitting doors to try to gain that control. And so, um, I moved into another bedroom, and after I moved into the other bedroom, it was a couple of weeks and, and COVID hit. Okay, so. At that time, I was really concerned just about, I mean, as everybody else, was just what the next day was gonna look like and the next steps.

And, um, I was still doing his work for him, trying to, he wanted to make it work as, as usual. And so I was finding therapists and still doing that work. And I had, I had seen somebody post, um, on social media about gaslighting and emotional abuse and. I never applied those things to myself, but the post that they had had made, resonated, resonated with me so deeply.

I continued to click and click and I just went down the rabbit hole, taking the quizzes, taking the tests, and I was not, I was still not ready to accept that this was an abusive relationship and not just slightly severely, um. But then I was left with all of this information and I had no idea what to do with it.

I mean, zero idea. So I started, I started a book that, that was incredibly helpful. Um, but it was just a couple weeks into me working through that book that I found Flying Free.

Natalie: Hmm. How did you find Flying Free? Do you remember?

Elizabeth: Yes, I was in, um, I was in a, a free online Facebook group for, um, women that were going through similar situations.

And at that time, I don't know if that's still the case for, for your group, but at that time there was two openings. There was, I think I could. Every, so we, so many weeks or every so many months, you would open the group for those who

wanted to come in and it was about to launch again, and somebody said, Natalie's group is opening up this, get in.

You know? And I had no idea what the group was about, but I had done some clicks and I, and I thought, ye yes, yes, yes. All the, all the yeses. Um, and so I joined and was. It was the beginning of the growth for me. Um,

Natalie: your own personal growth because I had no

Elizabeth: idea I needed. Yeah.

Natalie: Yeah. Okay. We'll get to that. I do, I do wanna hear a little bit more about that, but let's back up just a little bit and what would you say was the hardest thing about getting out of your relationship?

And also tell us what the most transformative thing is. Because here's the thing, there's so many women listening to this podcast who are exactly where you were, where they. They know there's something wrong. They, they don't know what to do. They don't know what to do about it. They're, they're stuck because it's so beyond our programming at that point of getting out.

And what does that even look like when you've got all these kids, uh, your husband was in the military too, that complicates things. Um, and we, plus we don't wanna get out, we don't wanna end our marriage. That's not what the entire marriage, we've been all about making this thing work and doing everything we possibly can to make this thing work.

And now the thought of getting out is not, is not like an option for us at this point. Right? So tell, tell us what the hardest thing was and also what the most transformative thing was.

Elizabeth: The hardest thing for me was no longer protecting the mask, no longer protecting the image. Um, because that was everything, you know, it happened at home.

It stayed at home. You cannot reach out to people for support because he could lose his job. You cannot reach out to people for support because then they're going to insert whatever belief, you know, we all have. Um, so that was. Probably the very first hardest thing to do because after years of protecting the image and protecting all of the marriage things that you're supposed to protect, it came with a very hard thing to admit out loud.

Because once you say it out loud, once you involve other people, that's like a bell that can't be on wrong, and it makes it reality.

Natalie: Yeah, so true.

Elizabeth: So that was probably my hardest first step because, uh, the, I knew at that moment, the minute I said it out loud, and this is my personality type. This is not everybody.

Um, but the minute I said it out loud, it became real and I had to do something about it. Yeah.

Natalie: Yeah. I could

Elizabeth: not hide in that anymore. Um. So that was probably the hardest step for me. And then that same step on repeat sort of progressed. So I micro. Would make these micro steps. One of them was moving into the other bedroom.

The next was, um, not going places with him pretending we are family. And this started in 2020, so it was relatively easy to do. Uh, however, he had a promotion in the middle of all of this for work and it's tradition that the spouse goes and is not only present at the promotion, but participates in putting the, the new rank, like they call it pinning.

They put the pins on. Okay. And I was already working on, I was six months into this program and I had already been working on myself so much that I knew I was not going to continue with the marriage. And I made the decision to stop pretending that we had a marriage and I told 'em I wasn't going to ceremony.

Oh my word. What happened? It was within days after that that he was threatening divorce again, telling me he was going to file. Um, I probably posted a bazillion times into the forum asking for advice. How do I respond to this email at the time, because of the lies, and I'm gonna fast forward us a bit. But because of the lies in the gaslighting, I actually wouldn't communicate with him in person.

It was all on email.

Natalie: Um, which I just wanna say is so smart because they, because they are trying to spin everything and at least if you get it in an email, you can see it.

You can see it in black and white and go, oh my word. He really does do that. And also gives you time to think like, how do I wanna respond to this?

Wacko stuff.

Elizabeth: Right. And I had put this long email in and your, I had a few responses, but your response was very, very much where I would be on this side. And you said something like, he sounds like an 11-year-old boy. He sounds like one of my children that is just trying to get his way. And he sounds like an 11 year that really, like he feels that emotionally stunted.

And it just hit me like a ton of bricks and I was like, she's. Absolutely right. And I'm looking at this, thinking that, and so, so he started threatening the divorce and sending all these emails. And, um, at that point I had made different connections, right? Because we find ourselves with different sisters that we connect with through just our journey and our forum.

Um, and there was somebody who she said to me, she, she gave me the words and she said, it is very sad. And it is possibly the first in a, in a long. And a long line of things that we just won't be able to do together. And that's where I left it.

Natalie: Oh my gosh. Stab in the back and twist the knife.

Elizabeth: Yeah. And so that's what I left it as.

And he tried until he was walking out the door to get me to go. And that was hard. Um, but it, it was. It was just all these little steps that led me to, I mean, I, I got to the point when I finally filed, filed where I had to get a protection order, a domestic violence protection order because of how he was escalating.

Um, and that was sort of the same thing, but the, a bigger step, like the world will now know this, this bell can't be on wrong.

Natalie: Yeah. Um,

Elizabeth: and that was a hard one for me for a long time. For a very long time. And I think more because I was worried about what the world was going to think of me making this decision and not what I needed to do for myself and for the children.

I, I walk through the motions of doing the right thing. So it's kind of like when you know you need to go to the gym and you don't wanna go to the gym, but you go anyways. Yeah. That's really how it was.

Natalie: Yeah. So did that impact his job then?

Elizabeth: No. Not that I'm aware of. So he happened to find a way to slime out of all consequences. I mean, that's a whole other podcast for us now. Are you kidding? I, I wish that I was, I wish that I was kidding. So there was, um, a level of it where, I mean, these are kind of the good old boys where they take care of one another.

Yeah. And so there was a lot of coverup. Um, to the point where like the military has these programs where they want to help people and then they're met with this protective, uh, chain of command that won't allow it to go forward. Um, and so yeah, he did not, he, it was something that affected his reputation, but nothing that affected him on paper long term.

Natalie: That's crazy. That's like, um, I've, I've, there's been a couple of women who have been married to cops and that's the same, you get the same kind of dynamic there. It's almost like, it's almost like you're married into a mafia, you know, into a group a, a club. That, and, and if you're a wife, you're getting out or having people believe you or whatever is gonna be really, really hard.

Elizabeth: Yeah, he is. He was military police.

Natalie: Well, there you go. Um, yes,

Elizabeth: it's tracking.

Natalie: Wow. And, and

Elizabeth: it's so hard because as survivors, well, at the time, victims, the amount of courage it takes us to tell the truth finally.

Natalie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: To make this step to even get help. It takes, I mean, I, I can't even tell you how hard it was for me to call 9 1 1, you know?

Um. Shaking. I broke down like multiple times, like to do that. My, my mind knew it was the right thing to do. I said I was gonna do it if he continued with

that behavior, and he continued and I did it. And so I was so proud of my looking back, I'm so proud of myself. Yeah. But the, you walked me through this on a coaching call, um, because I was really upset about it at the time, and you had talked about the Elizabeth.

Who was upset, the Elizabeth who was protecting her, the one who called for help, the one who needed the help, who is protecting her. Um, and I needed to do that. And so I had to get up and do that every day when I didn't want to, when it didn't feel right. When I lost family, when I lost friends, um, when I lost the people that I thought I would never lose because they.

Take a side. Yeah. And that was really hard. So that was part of the telling the truth part. Right? So the consequences that follow after speaking the truth have has been really some of the most painful parts.

Natalie: Wow. Yeah. I, I know that this is gonna resonate with a lot of people. It's showing up for yourself when you haven't really been able to do that.

Because you've really been brainwashed and groomed not to do that. To believe that your job is just to show up for everybody else, it's really, really hard. Telling yourself, telling other people the truth is one thing, but telling yourself the truth is the first really horrific thing that you have to do.

And yeah, and, and you're right. Once you tell yourself the truth and you, your brain kind of tilts a little bit. Now what do I, now I have to, what am I gonna do about this? I'm either gonna stay and hunker down and, and deal with this and some, and some people do because they can't get, you know, for whatever reason there's frightening things going on.

Or there's kids lives that are at stake or whatever and they don't have a choice. And then some claw their way up and out and, okay, so let's talk about how. You mentioned Flying Free. So you had joined Flying Free in 2020. You've kind of mentioned a couple of times when you and I have coached together. I do remember coaching you.

I don't remember everything we coached on, of course. 'cause it's too many people that I've co I coached during that time and regularly. But, um, I do remember, I, I remember thinking when I would see you, I would think. That you were hungry and that your brain was like transforming very quickly. So honestly, it was very gratifying to coach you because you would grab hold of ideas and light bulbs would go off in you, and then you would just go and like do something about it.

You know what I mean? You wouldn't just, you wouldn't just get an insight and then walk away and continue to stay stuck. So it was just fun watching your whole progression. I, I'm so glad that you're, that you're here telling your story on the podcast. Uh, I mean, did you ever think that you'd be on the Flying Free podcast telling your story one day?

Elizabeth: Maybe you did. I never did. I mean, I couldn't even listen to the butterfly stories. In the past when, remember the butterfly stories? Yeah. 'cause I thought I, I can't even get there. That's so far out of my reach right now that, that hearing that makes me feel like this is my own program. And not that makes me feel like I just, I feel more stuck.

But that only lasted a short time and I was like, absolutely not. If they can do it, I can do it. Yes. You know, and it became a motivating factor for me.

Natalie: Yeah. Um, well, because so many of those stories have terrible. I mean, those women were, had horrible situations just like yours that were just absolutely whack.

I mean, some of them married to, you know, pastors and entire churches that would blame them if they tried to get out and yeah. Um, those stories are so inspirational, but they do show what's possible and when you start to see what's possible, it is harder than to go, well, I, it can make you kind of angry inside like, well.

It can make us jealous in a good way. Do you know what I mean? Yes, exactly. Like I'm jealous, but also what I'm jealous of and what I'm upset about is that I, this is possible and I'm scared to cross that Raging River. I don't wanna go through the pain that it's going to cost me to get across that river to the other side.

'cause it is painful. You get whipped around in that water. I mean, imagine like if you were really to jump in a raging river, your head and your body and everything would be banged around while you're going around, you know, circling like a rock in a, what do you call those, those rock smoother things. Yes.

Where they like do the rocks. Yes. Yeah. And. That is not fun. And plus then you don't know where you're gonna end up on the other side. Like how far downstream are we gonna be and are we gonna have a life when it's all over? Is there gonna be anything on the other side to get to crawl out and actually live?

And maybe it's just safer to stay with what I know than what I have no idea about. That's what's so terrifying about it. I, and I only wanna articulate that just because I know that's what scares people and trust me. Everyone who's gone through this knows that terror and understands and, and it's a real, it's a real fear.

And, um, and we get it. We do. And also we just wanna say it is possible. Timing might be different for every person. You know, it might not be possible tomorrow, but it is possible for your future. And I just think everyone, at least I wanna open up everyone's mind to the idea that yes. This my future. I do have a future.

It is possible. I mean the Bible talks about that I will make streams in the desert. I will make a way where there seems to be no way. That is a verse that I just had to hang onto a a lot during that time. But okay, so tell us how, I dunno, maybe you've already told us how Flying Free helped you, but is there anything else you wanted to share on that?

Oh so much. I mean, oh, okay.

Elizabeth: There's so much to share. It was different for every chapter, for every part of it. And I, and I think as somebody who has been here since 2020, I feel like a veteran. You are. Yeah. It has been exactly what I need for the season that I needed it, but those things are available all the time, if that makes sense.

So in the beginning it was, I think you call, I could be wrong, but I think you called it the buffet. Yeah, and I saw it a little bit more like the feast, you know, it was like there was so much and it was all the best of the best, and you don't necessarily have all of it at one time. You know, you go to what you need, when you need it, and if there was anything I needed, it was there when I needed it.

Um, because the journey was not. Well, I, of course, I think most of us start because we want to save our marriage, right? Yeah. How do we fix it? Um, and very quickly I realized I, that's, that's not happening. Um, but this, the, the, the quicker switch was how do I parent from what has like these ashes, like it's all burned to the ground.

How do I parent from that? And I feel like. For me, and, and my biggest takeaway from the group was changing myself to the point where I could be the parent I was proud of. Mm-hmm. Even messy, even when I don't do it right more than before, and every example going forward, I can say, I know that was wrong, or, I know that that's not how it should have been done, but I hope you see how hard I work to do it, right?

Mm-hmm. And, um. The reality of what we go through as survivors is just one part of it. But what our children see and what they face throughout our entire journey, that's like half of our heart dies when we think about what we've given to our children as this example. I think for me anyways, right? Like we just grieve that.

Natalie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: So deeply. Um, and then to be able to show them. You can make a change and do this differently has been huge. But you having been. The one who paved the way for yourself, Natalie, and you having been so vulnerable with your experiences just in raising children and navigating life has been such an influence.

And I mean, there was a moment I was sitting in my car breaking down writing on the forum about this really massive struggle with my daughter and. You met me exactly where I was at and you responded and said, you know, I know you don't remember these things in the way that I do because they were so impactful to me.

But you said, I have so many things that I have faced children that do all of these things, you know, that are just normal human experiences, but they, they hurt so deeply and I feel the most lonely through parenting. So I get it. And just having somebody else. That gets it, that supports you and also picks themselves up the next day and goes on a podcast and does their job and pours into others when you are needing poured into you has been such a beautiful example of like, yeah, we can do both.

We can make the steps to do the next right thing tomorrow morning. We can make the steps. To show up as the best we can and we can also do our own work on ourselves and not be a complete project. We can make good decisions from a place of where we are now.

Natalie: Yes. That was beautiful. You're making me, I got tears.

Oh my goodness. I, that is a beautiful thing about, about our community is that I, I feel like we do have a community of. A lot of wounded healers that are willing to be vulnerable and to share their hard things, and nobody is saying, gosh, why aren't you further along? You should be further along. Why aren't you showing up in these ways?

I mean, when we, you know, when women rant and rave about something, we can all relate. We've been there and we get it, and nobody is. Pointing a finger or judging or saying that, that anyone needs to be doing it differently. Um, but we're also helping trying to help each other heal. Right, right. And and that comes from encouragement.

It comes from love and acceptance. It doesn't come from condemnation and judgment.

Elizabeth: Exactly. So. So it's been a beautiful program for me and I thank you so much for it. And even in this next chapter, um, the Flying Free side of things, I feel like there is just endless amounts of growth to continue to do, and it has been everything I need for when I need that part.

Natalie: Yeah. So she is, uh, I think, or were you referring to Flying higher there, or No? Oh, yeah,

Elizabeth: sorry. Flying

Natalie: higher, Mike. Oh, that's mixed. So she's talking about Flying higher, which is a program for it. It's originally for divorced Christian women, and it really is sort of, I mean, that is, most people that are in that particular program are already divorced, but there are some people, you don't have to be divorced to be in there.

Uh, just, just maybe ready to move on, like ready. To move past Flying Free, all of the things that are in Flying Free. And then, um, if you wanna go deeper, that's what we do in Flying higher. So, and it's more of a, um, I don't know, it's a smaller group, so there's a little more comradery, a little more. It. The smaller the group, of course, the more you know, the more intimate it is and whatever.

So the, I feel like those are really my people. Um, at my church, honestly, not my church, but I, I feel like it's my community where I experience church, the church of Jesus Christ in that group. Um, okay, so let's close by. Maybe you could offer one piece of advice that you would give to the women who are listening, who are thinking.

I think I wanna get out one day. What would you tell them?

Elizabeth: Not to focus on the big steps. Just to focus on the very small everyday steps.

Natalie: Yeah. And you gave a good, you gave so many good examples of that you, you tested out, you practiced doing little boundaries at a time. And of course, what did you notice every time you set a new boundary for yourself?

A

Elizabeth: big reaction.

Natalie: Yeah. Towards allowed to have it. Exactly. So you're not, you're gonna get a lot of kickback. It's very painful. And obviously if you are in an, in a, a physically abusive relationship, um, you know, that might not be a strategy that you can employ. You have to kind of consider who your abuser is and what their MO is, um, you know, profile them.

Make sure you know what you're dealing with before you do things. But I. Um, but most of the people listening are in emotionally and spiritually abusive relationships. You know, with Christian men, they're in Christian communities where the men take pride in not hitting their women. They just, you know, blast 'em away emotionally or verbally or even they could threaten.

But, um, the point is, is that you can take those small steps, it, and it reveals to you the truth about what's actually underneath. This person, this person's agenda, they really are about control. And when you start setting those boundaries, you're showing I am gonna be my own adult. I wanted a partnership.

I made bids for that connection for decades or however long it was. It was met with resistance. And now I'm just saying I, I am an adult. I have a right to show up as an adult in this relationship, I have a right to make choices. You have a right to not like them. And then I have a right to say, well, if you don't wanna partner with me as two adults in a relationship, then maybe this relationship is not a want match.

Maybe I don't want to be in this relationship. You obviously don't want to, you know, be with someone who is another adult. You obviously don't want a partnership. So this isn't really gonna work out, I guess, say. Small steps. I love that. 'cause a lot of times we do think, I think we think, oh, I just have to go get a divorce.

And it's just like so overwhelming. No, you don't. If your brain is already balking against the idea of divorce, then you're definitely not ready to get a

divorce. So why even put that on the table right now? You don't have to put divorce on the table right now.

Elizabeth: No. And the worst thing that happens is you walk away with some new skills and some growth in your personal life.

Natalie: Yes. Exactly there. Well, I just read on the podcast, uh. Oh, a little while, a couple of episodes or three episodes ago, um, about someone who did that. She came in, she started getting stronger herself. She started like growing up into her own emotional adulthood and just was released to her own true identity.

And, and in that process she ended up divorcing her husband, but then she just kept growing and kept learning and kept growing. And he turned out that he did the same thing. Once he was out of the relationship, he got his own help and then they ended up getting. Back together again. Wow. But she came back and said, I couldn't have, I wouldn't have taken those steps had I not discovered that I was, you talked about fixing the marriage, like it's our job to fix the marriage, and then you realize when you come into Flying Free or Flying higher, my job isn't to fix a marriage.

My job is to work on my, is to heal myself. That's my only job. And then out of that healing, either the relationship is gonna work or it's not gonna work. But most of the time what women discover as they heal and grow into their own identity is that the relationship falls apart then because it was predicated on their being not who they are on their basically being, you know, dead, uh, and just being a play thing to, to someone else.

Elizabeth: Right?

Natalie: Yeah.

Elizabeth: It makes it very difficult to continue after you kind of the, if you will, the glass shatters.

Natalie: Yes. Yep. Well, Elizabeth, I just want to thank you again for coming on to the Flying Free Podcast, and thank you so much for those of you who are listening, I hope this. Encourage your socks off. If you want to join Elizabeth and myself inside of Flying Free or Flying Higher, you can learn more by going to join Flying Free dot com.

Or if Flying higher is of interest to you, you can go to join [Flying hire.com](https://flyinghire.com) and those pages are informational pages that will tell you all about the programs. Give you an opportunity to, um, if it's open, you can join and if it's closed, you can complete an application and join when we open up next time.

Alright, thanks so much for listening. Until next time, fly free.