

The Flying Free Podcast with Natalie Hoffman, Episode 354 - Breaking the Cycle of Fear, Obligation, and Guilt: Gwendoline'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: What if the very qualities that make you kind, generous and loyal are the same ones that keep you stuck in a destructive relationship? In this episode, you're gonna hear how one woman uncovered the hidden patterns, fear, obligation, and guilt. That were stealing her life and what finally pushed her to take back her freedom.

If you've ever wondered whether love is enough or why you can't seem to shake the cycle of fighting and making up, this story will make you stop and think twice.

Today I have with me a longtime member of both Flying Free and flying higher. Her name is Gwendoline and she is going to share her butterfly story with us. Welcome Gwendoline.

Gwendoline: Thank you for having me, Natalie. And as I said when we first met, it's really an honor to be here. This has been a lifesaving platform and, um, community to be a part of.

So thank you.

Natalie: Well, it's been great to have you for, so it's been since 2020 you said.

Gwendoline: Since May of 2020, um, which was such a crazy time for so many people trying to divorce in the pandemic.

Natalie: Wow. Okay. Well, why don't we start, let's start at the beginning with the, maybe the beginning of your relationship.

Why don't you tell it's, I, I like for people to tell a little bit about. When those, when that garden began to be planted, if you wanna call it a garden, when did you first start noticing that something was off in your relationship? Was it before you got married or after? What was that like? Yeah, so

Gwendoline: we were together, um, a while before, before getting married, and one of the first things, you know, looking back.

Thinking about what had felt off for me from the very beginning was how we would fight. So our, our fights were, you know, they felt like the ugliest fights that I would have with my sibling, and they were no holds barred, saying the most devastating things, and then pretending like nothing had happened.

And I'd never experienced that type of conflict in previous relationships. Um, you know, in those other relationships, even in conflict. We would pay attention to not intentionally hurt the other person. Um, but in, in, in my marriage, we, we didn't, um, or at least he didn't. And that always felt off to me. It always felt like, this isn't normal.

This isn't how you behave with somebody that you love, that you choose to love and be in relationship with. And, you know, I, I've obviously thought about my marriage a really long time and wondered what, you know, how could I have seen this done this differently? What didn't I see? Um, and, and looking back with the knowledge that I have now years out, and having gone through all of this, there were, you know, these three really prominent red flags that, um, I just, I just didn't understand at the time were signals that this wasn't good for me.

And the first was my ambivalence. I, I loved him, but I hated how I felt in this relationship, and I felt so diminished and dismissed and taken for granted. And, but I would repeat this mantra to myself that all I need. Is love and I would ignore the rest.

Natalie: So is this even before you actually got married?

Did you feel like that when you were dating too?

Gwendoline: I did feel like that when we were dating, but I, you know, I had had this, like, the spark from heaven that said, this guy is the one, um, this is the

one. So you just need, you love him. And if you love somebody and they're the one, then you just proceed. Um, but that's, you know, that's, that's an incomplete story that we tell ourselves.

Yeah. Um, and we were, you know, even from the beginning we were in a state of chaos. We were like constantly in this, this loop of rupture and repair, and it was so dramatic and so consuming. And I, I realized in hindsight that when you're in that emotional volatility, you don't have the space to ask yourself, is this good for me?

Is this actually a relationship that's good for me. Um, and, and the, the third is, was the intensity of his anger. Um, and because we met, we met our final years in college. Um, I, you know, we were young. I just kind of rationalized it as his immaturity and the trauma that I knew he came with. And I thought that I could, I thought that I could love him out of his wounding.

Yeah. So I was like, if I can just love you enough. Then you'll love yourself and then you'll love me. And that's really naive. And I, I kind of realized having gone through this, that I, I needed to learn for myself what love really meant. Um, you know, and I also realized that I was swept up in the cycle of survival of, of just going from moment of reconnection to reconnection and feeling like, oh my gosh, this overwhelming relief when we would reconnect.

Yes. And it, yeah, it just kept me going from. You know, just that intensity of the relief. And then I would try to ignore like the depth of despair in between. Um, and there's the acronym fog really captures it. The, that cycle of fear, obligation, and guilt. Um, and now, you know, having been in healthy relationships before and now being in one I healthy love doesn't feel like that.

Natalie: Yeah, it's very,

Gwendoline: it's calm, it's steady, um, and it's capable. Yeah.

Natalie: It's almost like that volatility also. That you get a dopamine hit when you, that relief comes. Yeah. It's like this feeling of euphoria almost, that we're out of that now and um, and it makes everything disappear. Kind of.

Gwendoline: It it does. And then you, you know, I didn't realize the mental trick too.

Your mind is like. Your brain does not wanna focus on the negative. Yeah. Yep. And your brain, your brain, your whole body wants to focus on the positive, the

what feels good. And so it, it tries to ignore the negative, and then you just end up with this belief of your relationship that's. Really incomplete.

Natalie: Yes. You're not,

Gwendoline: you're not viewing the destructive cycle that you're in.

Natalie: Yeah. And I think our religious programming also plays into that a lot. It, it fits that story. It fits the story of, well, just love overlooks, love a multitude of sins. You know, love forgives seven times 70, and so you tell yourself the story that, well, I'm just being like Christ in this relationship.

And, and that gives you a sense of yes, we can forge forward,

Gwendoline: right? Yeah. Yeah.

Natalie: It's crazy. So I, I really hope that, you know, with all the people talking about this now, and so many people are, I mean, I think the awareness is definitely rising to the surface. I hope that our young people are getting a different message than maybe you and I did when we were in college and coming out, so that when they do find themselves in those relationships, and so many people do.

You know? Mm-hmm. They may be, ma might, hopefully they won't end up marrying those people, but we'll be able to recognize, wow, this is not, this, all this fighting and making up and fighting and making up, I'm not going to be able to rescue this person. It's not, this is not going to be, uh, this is not my calling, nor does it work.

That doesn't work. If anyone's listening to this, and you are a young person and you are in a dating relationship, it's never ever going to work. Don't, don't, you don't have to waste the years of your life that Gwendoline and I did, and that so many Christian women did. You can get out sooner and let, if you love that person, honestly, we would, could let that person do their own self-development work without us.

Let God do that work in them.

Gwendoline: Yeah. Which is so hard because I, you know, I've, I've learned too that some of the characteristics that we. It, they kind of get turned against you. You know? It's, they kind of get weaponized against you, like the characteristic of generosity and care and kindness and, and yeah, there's the whole, like,

you're a doormat, and it's like, that's not really helpful in understanding who you are.

It's like, no, these characteristics are amazing characteristics to hold. Yeah. But that doesn't mean that they're a gift for everyone and in, and in perpetuity. They, they are, they're a gift. They're not a given. And, um. And part of the lesson here is in learning to turn that towards yourself, um, and to be a little bit more discerning with who you give those those amazing qualities to.

Natalie: Yes. Yes. Okay. So yeah. I'm so glad you brought that up. 'cause a lot of people think, well, there must be something wrong with me. Yeah. That I would get hooked into someone like that or that someone would hook their claw. Someone like that would hook into me. And no, it's more that there's something really, really right and good about you that Yeah.

Um, that they see and try to take advantage of. And because of those good things, we can fall into that snare very easily. But yeah. Hanging on to those good things is important, I think. Okay. So can you give a few examples of ways that you might have been emotionally and spiritually abused in your relationship?

Only because I know a lot of people who are wondering is this abuse, um, because they've maybe been gaslit by their, their religious community into saying, you know, no, all marriages have those components to them. Um, so I like it when people can give some like tangible examples so people can go, oh, I didn't realize that.

I could actually call that abusive. And why is that called abusive? You know? So let's talk about that a little bit.

Gwendoline: Yeah. I, you know how I sometimes think the language of emotional or spiritual harm can be more accessible 'cause abuse is such a big word. Yeah. Yeah. I like that. And, um, you know, starting with the, with the spiritual and with the beliefs that we, we hold and we carry, um, I would say that that was, that was one of the more difficult parts and it was really deeply excavating, um, what was keeping me in emotional harm.

And the way that, that was, that the way that my sense of self and spirit was getting like completely tangled in these cultural messages that I'd absorbed things like, you know, from my family of origin of someone always has to give more in a relationship or be the bigger person or forgive. Um, and when you

pair that with being somebody who wants to express that, um, you know, they're so deeply embedded and they keep you tolerating things that.

Don't feel right. The alarms are going off and you're like, but I have to forgive and I have to this and be the bigger person. And it's like, but there are other cues in you that are actually also worth noticing. And um, what, you know, what, I was living at home, I understand now is a destructive cycle.

There was the honeymoon phase and, sorry, the attention building phase. And then the explosion, and then it, we, it would soften and we would have reconnection and we just went around and around and around. Yeah. And, um, living those extreme highs and lows, uh, was blinding me to what I was really feeling. Um, and I wasn't.

I wasn't able to, I, I wasn't noticing how profoundly sad I'd become. I'd have people around me who would make comments like a, a couple's therapist who was once like you, you know, your, to my ex. She was like, your wife is so sad. And I was like, I'm not sad. Um. But I, you know, I realized that I was, you know, I was living from one positive event to the next and I was hanging onto these little moments of joy like buoys in the storm.

And, you know, it's really interesting to understand hope and how hope sometimes can be a destructive force. It's like you gotta have the bigger picture. So, and, and speaking of hope, I would find myself thinking, um, once he gets a raise, once the kids are older, once this passes and this and this and this, um, we'll be better.

And I kept waiting for that horizon and we would never get there. We would never get to the calm. And if we did, it would never last. And. What worked for me was, um, going back through my journals. We had, you know, a really bad fight one, one day years ago, obviously, and I went back through my journal and I was like, holy crap.

I, sorry, I, that's okay. I thought I had just lived this. I thought that this was just now, and I went back through my journal. And I was like, wow. I actually lived the exact same thing three weeks ago. And then I lived the exact same thing three weeks before that. And, you know, I was realizing that what I was experiencing wasn't random.

It was a pattern. Um, and then I started to notice how my body was already knew this before my mind did, and my, my hips and my lower back. Um. Uh, we're attuning fork to the tension in my marriage. Wow. And they would lock up

and seize an ache as the tension was mounting. And then right before, and, and I was like, I knew an explosion.

I became, I began to understand that there would be an explosion in the upcoming days. And, um, you know, once I started realizing that I couldn't just rely on my, my cognitive. My memory, um, I started to document everything because I would quickly forget, like we would have a fight and it would be so horrible that I would forget what was exactly what was said.

I would just be left with a feeling, um, and documenting it. You know, I started putting like happy, sad, or medium faces on my calendar every day. I was like, what? What did I actually feel every day? And it let me track the emotional temperature of my relationship and it let me see like what was actually going on versus what I wanted to believe.

Um, it was giving me the clarity of like, no, this is. Overwhelmingly, you are not, this is not working for you. This is a really difficult place. And around that same time, I came across the, um, you know, diagram that explained the cycles I was experiencing and seeing it in this professional setting was really surreal.

Um, it gave me words. You know, it gave me, it gave me the words to help to begin to understand what I was up against and to understand that what I was up against was bigger than, it's not something I could control and contain.

Natalie: Yeah. And that

Gwendoline: if there was gonna be change, it had to come from within my ex.

And he needed, he needed to, um, have the desire to have that change and what's, you know, what's doing all this healing work in the years after. Um. What we live lives in us so deeply, and I find myself, my body still remembers. And so I will find myself, you know, early on in our separation, I would find myself being in these same three week cycles of just dreading something.

Wow. And then, oh, I don't live this anymore. Wow. Um, but I can still, I've gotten to the point where I can feel what, um, I know what that trauma feels like and it feels like static. And I'm like, okay, I, I still need to release this. Um, it goes really deep.

Natalie: Yeah, it does. Yeah. It, it does it. When you say release it, it's like, it, it's, um, you need to go through a process with each layer that comes up as it comes up to metabolize it.

Yeah, I like that word metabolize because it's like we take in food and we have to metabolize it and process it so that it becomes a part of who we are, but in a positive way.

Gwendoline: Yeah.

Natalie: Like in a way that, um. That serves us and not in a way that destroys us if we just eat food. Yeah. And it just sits there and it doesn't do anything and we don't actually metabolize it.

It causes all kinds of problems in our systems. And same thing with trauma that happens to us. And when you live in a situation like that where it's happening over and over and over again, I think it's brilliant that you even started well writing things down, but even started just tracking your emotional, um.

Like doing those little You did like what little faces or little emotional faces, emoji faces. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. That is, that's brilliant. And I think even in Christian circles, we tend to think, oh, you, you can't trust your body. Your body is like not, it's sinful or something, or whatever. We always think, especially women, I think we're taught that our body, there's something wrong with our bodies.

And even if it's not spoken, I think it's like, it's like an unspoken thing about our bodies and that they'll betray us and that our hearts are deceitful. And I think that is just a such a destructive teaching that's keeping so many people stuck. So, yeah. So I just wanna offer that to anyone who's listening if you are in this place.

And by the way, what Gwendoline's describing is exactly what I went through as well. If, and she, so she's been with, in this program for five years. Gwendoline is like, if you're ever wondering, is this program for me, if you, if anything that Gwendoline is saying today sounds like what, uh, your experience. Then this program will help you.

It's not gonna help everyone, but it will help that person. Yeah. That person who is going through this and is, it's so painful when it's done and you can't remember. I, I remember that too. I remember thinking when I started writing things down, I remember thinking. I have to write it down as soon as possible because I will not remember what happened even an hour later.

Yeah. And I couldn't figure out why. I couldn't remember, I couldn't remember how it started. I couldn't remember where the conversation went. All I could

remember is just the searing pain inside my whole body, and that that's, that's what we're describing. That's what it feels like. You don't even have to know what's happening.

But if that, if your relationship is like that, it's definitely hurting you. So what it made you decide to get out and what was that process like for you?

Gwendoline: What made me decide to get out? Um, so, you know, there are so many moments when, when I. So many moments when the thought of divorce came into my mind, but I, I didn't say it, I didn't wanna say it until I was sure.

And even really early on in our marriage, um, my, we were, my family's European. We were in Europe with my family, with our baby, and there was, um, an encounter there in, in Barcelona that, uh, left me terrified for my family, or I'm sorry for my safety, like for my, for my, my safety. Wow. Um, I felt, you know, deeply unsafe and, um, at risk and.

Returning home. Um, you know, and I, and I, and I said this was, this can't happen. Like if this happens again, we're done. And, uh, back home though, the, the moments of rage would continue and I. Pleaded with my ex about, you know, the way that he spoke to me, um, the model that it was setting for our kids. Like I, I wrote him a letter saying, I can't continue to carry this in silence, and if nothing changes, I will have to act.

Um, and I shared that letter actually with, you know, I shared it with people to hold me accountable. Um, and I had decided that I would act at the end of 2019 and then. 2020, I started putting things together and then the pandemic hit and, um, it really complicated things. Um, but what, you know, pushed me to.

What pushed me into action were the moments when my ability to mother felt threatened. Um, and it was in early 2020 when, you know, I, I heard things that no, no mom should ever hear about how she is as a mother, her fitness, her custody. Um, it was, it was genuinely terrorizing. And that was, no, I just realized the risk.

I'm like, I am. I could this, I could potentially, you know, I'm, I'm being told I might lose my kids. And, um, I called a lawyer that morning and just, and just took it seriously. I was like, I need to know what, what divorcing this person will be like. Um, you know, I need to do all the research. I joined Flying Free a month later.

I was like, I can't, I have to equip myself, support myself, um, to move through this and start to plan my exit and. You know, I, I, I feel like this is an important thing to add, is that I didn't divorce, I didn't begin to think of when I was thinking about divorcing my ex. It wasn't because I, I, it wasn't a lack of love.

I still loved him. I still would say that I was in love with him at the time and I was working through my own internal beliefs of, but I still love him, but I still love him. Um, so it was just, it wasn't about waiting to not be in love anymore. It was just having done enough internal work to realize that love is not enough.

Feeling love is not enough and that, you know, my kids are my saving grace here. Um. I left because I wanted to be able to be the full mother that they deserve. And, um, that if I stayed, that my kids would never know the fullness of me. And, you know, the, the environment of our marriage was keeping me in a constant trauma response.

And by, by the end of it, I was, I could feel my mind fraying. I could feel, I was like, this is just insanity for me. Yeah. Um, I remember standing in the kitchen feeling demeaned and diminished in front of my kids and like seeing the confusion in their eyes of what these words, what is this? And it was my breaking point and I, I just realized that I could stay, but if I stayed, I would lose myself completely or I could go and give my kids their whole mother, even if we wouldn't see each other every day.

And so choosing to leave was the only way to stay intact, both for them and for me.

Natalie: I think you put that really well. I love your word, your choice of word F frame. Like you felt like your mind was fraying. That's ex, that's exactly what it feels like.

Gwendoline: Yeah. It's

Natalie: so, it's interesting you mentioned your kids.

Your kids were kind of your clarion call. I think that happens with a lot of survivors. It's like, what? So you're willing to throw Gwendoline under the bus? But when it comes to your kids, like you don't want them to miss out and you had enough of you still left to realize they deserve all of Gwendoline.

Gwendoline was their mom and they deserve her. And so I'm gonna take care of Gwendoline, I'm gonna take care of their mother. I'm gonna take the care of the

mother of these children, is who I'm gonna take care of for their sake. But, and then you talked about love too, how much you loved him. So many of us left.

We still loved our husband. We didn't leave because we didn't love our husbands. Yeah, I think that's really important to point out. Um, 'cause we get accused of, you know, abandoning the marriage and not really loving and all of that. That's completely not true. What is, what is true though is that we're not showing love.

We, we, we kill ourselves in order to show love to our husband, but we're not showing, our husband is not loving us, and we are not loving us. We're not showing love and respect and honor for ourselves when we're doing that. And that's why we're completely fall apart as well. So you just made, you pivoted and you made that that decision, I'm going to love my kids.

And in that process, you eventually learned. I think that you yourself were worthy of Yeah. Having a little bit of love too, right? So, um, what was the hardest thing about getting out for you? And so maybe you could tell what the hardest thing was as well as what the most transformative thing was for you.

Gwendoline: Yeah, so the, the hardest part for me was the, you know, how permanent the decision to divorce would be. Like, I, I didn't toss around the word divorce. I didn't use it to silence agreements. I knew that once I said it, I would mean it, it would be irrevocable. Um, and that I would, you know, once I did say it, I had gotten to the point of being willing to lose everything.

It was like I would lose my house, my car, my assets, so long as it meant that I could leave with my kids and I, and be safe. And so even, even with that signing on the dotted line of the divorce petition was excruciating. I had to talk myself up to be like, I'm really doing this. I am undoing my marriage.

And um, there was a technical error in my filing and so a month later they were like, Hey, this never went through. You have to do this again. I was like, you have no idea how much strength and courage this took. Um, and I just had to muster it again to do it and

Natalie: wow.

Gwendoline: Yeah. Uh, just 'cause I, I don't know. I, I believe in like, mean, what you say.

Say what you mean.

Natalie: Yeah. Was there a part of you like, I can see people spiritualizing that and going, oh, maybe God is giving, you know, God wants me to give this a second chance. I could see a part of me thinking, possibly thinking that, did you that at all or not?

Gwendoline: There was a part of me that was like, oh my gosh, this is just too difficult.

But there, I had done enough of the, you know, I'd gone through enough of the, all the things you're supposed to do to save your relationship to, I had done enough of that work to realize that I alone could not, like, it wasn't a communication issue. It wasn't, you know, we were talking about power and control.

I wasn't gonna out therapy my way through this relationship.

Natalie: Yeah, yeah.

Gwendoline: Um, and that it was really destructive and I just had to, what it was teaching me is that what I actually had to do is really know my own inner strength.

Natalie: Yeah.

Gwendoline: And act on it.

Natalie: Yeah.

Gwendoline: Yeah. So, and then the, you know, the transformative part, and it was almost instantaneous, was how was feeling the weight of the, the destructive environment that I was in slough off.

Um, it was like almost from, you know, the next day of our separation, it was, I could just be, again, I could breathe again. Um, you know, I, I realized I had been running with adrenaline and cortisone coursing through me for so long, and I was like just always on alert. And yeah, for all of those years I lived in a cage within myself.

I had been like flattening my emotions, making myself robotic, aloof. I wanted to be unnoticed, uninteresting emotionally or anything. I wanted it to fly under the radar of my ex's attention and his anger and, um, leaving helped me see that, you know, this, this like robotic aloof version of me wasn't who I was.

That was me in survival, not me in essence. And, um, I just like pretty quickly began blossoming back into my full connected self and into reconnecting to my self sovereignty, into that inner compass and my inner intuition. And doing that shifted everything. Um, it shifted everything and it meant that I stopped outsourcing.

Outsourcing truth or power, um, you know, even, even being in the courtroom, having to go through trial. Um, you know, I, I knew I realized that my legal team could advise me, but there was nobody other than me who was equipped to really know and articulate what had been going on in my marriage and to present that in a, in a legal and judicial way.

Um, and then fast forwarding to today, that means that I deeply trust my signals. And I compare it from that clarity. And I, I don't let anybody else's version of me override my own. Um, and I'm not, you know, I'm not perfectly aligned all the time. It's a work in progress, but I don't decenter myself and my knowing anymore, and that this inner space within me belongs to me.

Natalie: It's so beautiful. You, you're a very articulate human being. Do you know that What's so funny about this is that I think a lot of us had husbands who said that we were terrible communicators.

Gwendoline: Yeah.

Natalie: I swear. Everyone I've ever talked to is an amazing communicator, these survivors. So, okay, so tell us how, well, actually, I wanna back up and ask a little bit of a question.

How long did your divorce. Take. And it sounds like you went, you had to go to court. What was that all about? Do you wanna share any high level? Yeah.

Gwendoline: Yeah. So it took us, you know, partly because of the pandemic and how backlogged everything was, it took us okay. Us about two and a half years.

Natalie: Okay.

Gwendoline: Um, which, you know, one of the most important things that I've learned in the divorce process is, um.

I had done the work of understanding who I was up against, what this would be like, what would likely present in our negotiations or, or inability to negotiate

really, um, the likelihood of ending up in trial. Um, the things that were really important to me, like I had, I was really clear on my North Star.

I'm like, I just, I, most things were negotiable except for me and my kids. That was it. And, um, and knowing, you know, and what I would offer in hindsight is that. It is a, it's a journey. Um, it's a really difficult journey. And going through divorce, you go through the tunnel of despair and you go through, you know, you, you go, then you do go through dark, this period of darkness, and there's that initial sense of liberation, of like, wow, I've done it.

I made the decision. I signed on the dotted line. I feel free. But to actually untangle yourself from this human is a long process. And it's one that, you know, even post-divorce, like you're still in dialogue with this person. If you have kids, they're still who they are. Um, and that there are moments of, there are moments of deep despair.

There are moments when it feels like this is never gonna end. I thought I was going to escape this. I'm still connected to this person. He's still exerting power over me in some ways. And you, um. You just have to take a different shape, and you have to have, it's, it's almost, it's like you have to have a depth, a, a level of endurance that's bigger than what you ever could have imagined.

And in the moments where it's really, really tough sometimes you just separate and let, let the toughness go and just be in the place that can hold you, and then you step back in when you're, you're better resourced. Um. Because the despair can feel, uh, it can knock you, you know, it can make you feel like you made the wrong decision.

Natalie: Yeah.

Gwendoline: Uh, but it's, it's not really, it's one way to view it. Another way to view it is to just to understand that this is part of the journey. It's part of the journey of transformation. And you will get to it the other side of despair.

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah. It does feel like it's never gonna end. Yeah. Or that when it does end, it's gonna be like way worse than you, than you dreamed it was.

And for some people it is, it, it can be worse than what they thought it was gonna be, but you're right, it is part of that horrible hell that you have to walk through. It is part of, definitely a major part of how you actually transform and moving to a different, a completely different version of yourself.

I mean, when you look back five years ago, do you, can you see like a, you're not the same person today? That you were five years ago?

Gwendoline: I'm, I'm, um, I'm not the, I mean, there are parts of me that have, that have pulled through, but I'm, I have so much more strength and, um, a, a much more, I don't live through, I wanna say I don't live through like the, the frivolousness of life anymore the same way.

I'm like, this is just, this doesn't matter. This is, this is like not even a thorn in my foot right now. Yeah. This is just whatever, and it's. It's really a, a deep process of maturation and of, of like realizing that you, you are a pillar of strength and, um, you are a pillar of strength for yourself and you are a pillar of strength for the people around you.

Um, and that life is beautiful and it is short and it is precious and there's a much better way to stand and move through it than, um, to be caught up in the, the turmoil.

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I should, I should clarify when I say different version of, when I describe that, even in other episodes I've used that terminology, different version of yourself, or you're a completely different person.

It's, it's more of a coming home, I think, to who we really are in our core and who God created us to be and, and seeing that and living into that identity more and more and more, I think. Um. I don't know. At least for me, I felt like I was a child. Yeah. And like I had no control and I had no power. And coming out of that made me realize, wow, I'm an adult woman.

I do have power, I do have control, and I can make choices. Yeah, I might make a few people mad, but I also have this ability to actually tolerate their disapproval when, when necessary. And I didn't know, I don't think I had that before.

Gwendoline: No, and, and I would add this from a, from kind of a spiritual standpoint, it's actually asking you to be in deep surrender to these bigger forces to, to how you believe.

Uh, I want to your spiritual beliefs because there is a part, there is a part of, you know, there's a part of your belief of, of. God or the universe that is telling you that is speaking to you and saying you need a different path. Like you, I actually need you to be of service to me and to your intuition in a different way.

And I am going to put you through a huge trial and I'm, you're going to have to go in a different direction than what everybody else is telling you is the right way to go because. If you're going to surrender to this life force and to, um, to this truth of who you are and how you need to be of service to yourself and to humanity, you're going to have to go through the fire.

And it's, it, I just, you know, I had a, another mantra through divorce, which was radical acceptance. Just like continuing to radically accept what I cannot control and what I, and, and to my knowing and to what was coming through me spiritually.

Natalie: Yeah.

Gwendoline: Not, not to what other people were telling me was spiritual, but what was true for me?

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah. That's so beautiful. Okay, so why don't you tell us how, how you've been in Flying Free and flying hire for five years, and what role did those programs play in your process?

Gwendoline: So you, um, you wrote the book, should I stay or Should I Go, I think, right? Or is it me you wrote, is it? Yeah. Okay. I was like, no, that's a different one.

Um, and it, I had been asking myself that question and then I came across your book and I was like, you wrote this for me. And, uh, there's the part about wanting to be rescued and I had been literally daydreaming about having somebody, anyone pluck me in my kids out of my current life. And I was waiting for this external rescuer and I realized that, uh.

There was nobody coming. No one was coming. And the only person who, the only thing, the only person who was gonna save me was me. And what I needed to do was, you know, I, I still say this to myself as like, pull up your big girl panties and rescue yourself. Yeah. And it was. Um, it was such refreshing advice because I'd been, you know, for years, like decades plus, I had been pouring over relationship advice.

I couldn't Google anything new anymore. I'd like read all the things and, you know, advice about how do you live with an angry partner, how do you do this? And I kept coming up against the disclaimer of. Um, this doesn't apply to unhealthy or harmful relationships, and it was infuriating. I'm like, how do you

know when your relationship has gone from normal to dysfunctional to destructive?

Um, I mean, when you're in the thick of it, like it, it's not easy to recognize harm when it, I mean, it's easy to recognize harm when it's overt and when it makes you black and blue, but when you're in the thick of it, it's, and when it's covert and subtle and behind closed doors and the bruises are only on the inside, it's impossible.

Natalie: And when other people are telling you that's not a big deal, that marriage is just, you know, you, if you, you just need to do, make a few little tweaks in how you're showing up as a wife and everything will be fine.

Gwendoline: Yeah. And yeah, and it's, it, it's, it's, it's so hard and you. Book just spoke to my inner, you know, my inner questions at a pivotal time.

And then from there I started pouring over your podcast and listening was my escape. I would listen to anything I could get my hands on, like while I was putting my kids down for a nap or going for a walk. And, you know, Lundy Kos like, is it me, you, or, uh, whatnot. Is it what? Why does he do that? Was chilling.

And all of that put together was, um, preparation for me to get the strength and the insight and the information that I needed to, to move forward. And, um, you know, I joined Flying Free, like I said, in, in May of 2020, um, during the lockdown, when I was in lockdown with the person who was, who was hurting me the most.

And it was, uh, it, it was devastating and it was dangerous. Yeah. Flying Free was my sanity. And you know, looking back it was my sanity because. You were helping me explore my own socialization and my beliefs and my thoughts, um, so that I could understand how I was, how I was keeping myself a prisoner just based on my own belief system.

Um, and then realizing I wasn't alone, like the number, you know, the number of conversations on Flying Free were like, wow, this is basically what's happening to me. And, and then, and then seeing over the course of all of these years, I was like, this is, these are scripts like. It's sub out the name and maybe a few other details and it is point by point, the same thing.

It's crazy.

Natalie: It's,

Gwendoline: yeah, it's so predictable and rote. And the, the last bit, which is, you know, which is really important was recognizing the patterns. Like starting to moving out of seeing things as singular events and starting to see the bigger picture and the commonalities and yeah, sometimes something is just a one-off, but.

When it's not, and you see the behavior over time, it's like, this is, this is what's going on for you. These are the cycles that you're in. And that was, um, it just again, made me realize like, this is not a me thing. This is a much bigger, a much bigger thing.

Natalie: Yep.

Gwendoline: That at minimum requires my, my then partner to do something to.

Natalie: Yeah. Yeah. I was gonna say, when you talk about, when you bring up the idea of, I knew that I had to save myself, um, I, I always hear my inner past self, you know, that's like. Judging everything that even I say, and that inner past self is going well, that's then where's where does God come into the picture?

Right? If you just save yourself, like, oh, you can just save yourself. Who do you think you are? What about God? So I just wanna say, if anyone's thinking that if anyone has a part of them's coming up and saying that it's a collaboration, it's a God assignment, it's God saying, yeah, it's like God saying, okay.

Guess what? Someone is going to come and save you. It's just not someone external to you. I've appointed a special person and I'm going to equip that special person to save you, and her name is Gwendoline. Gwendoline's gonna do it. And while you're learning how to do it and getting the tools to learn how to do this, you are gonna be morphing into more and more of the essence of who Gwendoline actually is.

Who I actually created Gwendoline to, to be. Yeah. You are going to be the strong warrior princess that I always, that I create, that I had envisioned for you. That's the, that's the deal. So that's where God. He, you are in collaboration with God in your own rescue. Would you be in collaboration with God to rescue any other victim or poor, innocent child or you know, someone else that you had the power to do that for?

Of course you would. You would do that in a hot second and God's just saying, well, guess what? Now you're gonna do that for you. Yep. Yeah. So let's close by. Do you have by just sharing maybe one piece of advice that you might give to women who are listening right now? Real live. Women are listening right now and they are thinking about getting out.

They may, maybe they're at the place where you, where they're, where they're writing things down and realizing I am sad and anxious and uh, and miserable most of the time. And I don't know what to, I don't know what to do about it. I don't know how to, I don't know how, where, where do they even begin? What?

What are some advice? What's something you'd tell them?

Gwendoline: I, I, to me, the most important advice is, is around fear. And it's understanding that fear comes in many forms. Um, you know, whatever the fear of, not like cutting yourself with a knife, but the fear that we have of separating, of divorcing, of the pain that it's going to cause our loved ones and of the hurt and the unknown.

This, the fear is appropriate. It is commensurate. It is normal. It is it, it is absolutely part of the experience. But the presence of fear here doesn't mean don't do it because this is the fear of standing on the precipice of your own transformation and the, the amplitude of the fear that you feel in making the decision and contemplating the decision.

It's a measure of the magnitude of the size of the transformation that awaits you. It is the risk and the reward of becoming and of, of shedding these, you know, outdated underserving ideas and ways of being for yourself and of, of daring to step into and to become this much, much fuller version of you.

And so, you know, to face this kind of fear is to have courage. I always think of courage as you know, I invert the word and it is the rage of the heart. Means heart in French, which is my first language, and there's an expression in French that says to take your courage in both hands. And so take that courage and you leap and you step forward despite the fear with your hands full of courage.

Natalie: Oh my word. I have never heard that before. That is amazing. I just wanna stand up and give you a standing ovation right now. Seriously, I wish we were in a room 'cause you would be getting a standing ovation right now. What you've just shared is so powerful. That was amazing. Thank you so much Gwendoline, for coming on here.

Here. Yeah. When we, when we first started, she was a little nervous and she expressed a little bit of nerve nervousness. Yeah. And I told her I've never interviewed anyone where we get to the end of it and I'm just like, oh my gosh. That was such a fail. I always end up, when they're done, I'm always just amazed and in awe and I am once again.

I am so grateful for your time. And I know that this is going to change people's lives. Your story is going to change people's lives. It already has.

Gwendoline: Thank you, Natalie. Thank you for that. Yeah,

Natalie: thanks Gwendoline,

Gwendoline: and

Natalie: thanks for listening. Until next time, fly free.