

Daughterhood the Podcast Episode #31: Caring for an Estranged Parent with Laura Davis & Karen C.L. Anderson

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SPEAKERS

Laura, Rosanne, Karen, Disclaimer

Disclaimer 00:02

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Rosanne 00:41

Hello and welcome to Daughterhood the Podcast. I am your host Rosanne Corcoran Daughterhood circle leader and primary caregiver. Daughterhood is the creation of Anne Tumlinson who has worked on the frontlines in the healthcare field for many years and has seen the multitude of challenges caregivers face. Our mission is to support and build confidence in women who are managing their parents care. Daughterhood is what happens when we put our lives on hold to take care of our parents. We recognize this care is too much for one person to handle alone. We want to help you see your efforts are not only good enough, they are actually heroic. Our podcast goal is to bring you some insight into navigating the healthcare system, provide resources for you as a caregiver, as well as for you as a person and help you know that you don't have to endure this on your own. Join me in Daughterhood.

Rosanne 01:30

Caregiving is inherently difficult, but navigating care for an estranged parent, or even one who challenges your boundaries adds more layers of stress and emotional turmoil. Today my conversation is with two people who understand this. Laura Davis is a writing teacher and an author of seven books

including her first memoir, the burning light of two stars, a mother daughter story, which tells of her traumatic and tumultuous relationship with her mother, which included caring for her at the end of her life. Karen Anderson is a life coach and author of five books, including difficult mother's adult daughters a guide for separation, liberation, and inspiration. We discuss not only the challenges that accompany these relationships, but how you can find peace in the midst of it. I hope you enjoy our conversation. You know, there are people I think, who start and then think well, I'm going to mend my relationship with them while doing this, or this will bring us closer. And it's you have to get it right in your mind that this is not a Hallmark movie, it can be.

Rosanne 02:37

It can be but it's hard. Because whatever problems you had, whatever issues you had, are still there. If you've never worked on them, they're still there. And then they just kind of grow. And then you throw in a little sleep deprivation, depending if you're living with them or not living with them. Or even if you're running back and forth, you're still fried, you're still anxious, you're still stressed. And all of that adds up into this big stew.

Laura 03:01

Yeah, and I think, you know, if there is a history of betrayal, you know, it just complicate. I mean, being a caregiver, in and of itself is hard enough is is an overwhelming task. But then when you have the complexities of the kind of relationships that we're talking about, it just it adds a lot of complexity. You know, in my case, I felt like my mother and I had resolved a lot of things. But her decline, just brought everything up that I thought had been resolved in the past, you know, it was not resolved it was it was papered over, you know, even therapy, it was still it was dormant, and her behavior. When she started having dementia, she started acting out her worst characteristics that I really hadn't been up against in years. And suddenly, it was all in my face again, you know, in and I was in close proximity to her after having had a 3000 mile buffer between us

Rosanne 04:02

Every time I read that your book, it made me laugh, because it was like we had a 3000 mile buffer and I thought, wow, yeah, and that's a buffer. And then when she moved, all of that went out the window

Laura 04:12

One of my jobs was like being head researcher, you know, like, I and that was something I'm really good at is accessing resources, and I just had to find out so much stuff I didn't know about just serve my mother's needs, you know, like, like, like, what are the places that are near here? And what are the pros and cons and, you know, how do you jump through these hoops and where's the support group for people with early stage Alzheimer's disease, and you know, just all of that that was something I was able to do for my mother and actually, it was something I easily did for my mother because it didn't really require any emotional closeness to make. It was much more challenging, being with her in person and dealing with her volatile emotions than it was to, you know, be the information gatherer

Rosanne 05:00

Hmm, well, it's the stuff and then the stuff. It's, you know, you can you can do all of that. But the the guts of it and even still, my wish is that when someone's diagnosed at the doctor's office, they say,

Here's your, here's your forms, here's where you find this, and this, and this, instead of everybody leaving, they're in such a disarray, and not knowing where to go, because there's no roadmap. And then you have to piecemeal all of this together, while you're trying to also support this person, in whatever relationship you're in. And it's like your drug, you're juggling knives. And it's, it just adds to all of that stress.

Laura 05:42

If you have I had teenagers at home when this was going on, you know, it's like I was I was in the sandwich general. And it's a whole other set of stresses.

Rosanne 05:51

Because at the end of the day, you're always you always feel like you're letting somebody down, right? At the end of the day, you lay there and think, wow, who got the short end of the stick today.

Laura 06:00

And you're not, and you're not even on the list.

Rosanne 06:04

But, you know, Laura, when I when I was reading your book, it's so honestly, it's just breathtaking. Between your writing, and the story and all of it. It just, it sat with me and it stayed with me for a long time. And it just got me thinking about how you actually did this. And that's part of why I wanted to do this episode is because how do you I'd like to my mother, I didn't, you know, we would go on vacation together, we had a different relationship. But I often wonder how that feels. When there are times when you You even said you saw her as an enemy. You saw her as betrayer. You saw her from this imperfect human, but she genuinely loved you. How do you make that transformation in your own being in your own mind? Like, how did that come about for you? How did you transform from point A to point B?

Laura 06:56

You know, I mean, that's what I wrote a whole memoir about because it's, it's it took decades. I mean, it's not like, you can't just turn a switch. You know, I think the first thing for me because there was a huge betrayal. With my mother, is I had to heal from that portrayal first, like that was number one. Everyone was urging me when we were estranged bitterly estranged. Everyone around me, not everyone, but many of my relatives were like, just let bygones be bygones. This happened a long time ago, just you know, like, get over it already. What are you going to carry this on for the rest of your life, that kind of thing. The truth is, I had to heal. And in my case, there was incest in my family, with my grandfather, my mother denied it, I said it happened. And I had to heal from that abuse. And I had to heal from being denied acknowledgement by my mother and being called a liar, you know, and that I had made all this up to destroy her. I had to get over that and that she was not there for me at the worst moments of my life, which was in my late 20s. When I was dealing with this, I had to heal from all of that I had to do years of therapy, I had to do years, I had to express my anger, my grief, I had to get through it, I had to get to the point where I realized that it was not going to control the rest of my life. And that I it was something it's not that I completely get over these things.

Laura 08:23

But I could get over it to the point of having a functional, happy adult life. And until I got to that point, I wasn't ready to turn around and try to work things out with my mother, because I still was feeling too damaged. So that was the first thing and then we had a lot of back and forth. When I got pregnant with my first child. I was 35 years old. And I think that was a real turning point in our relationship because I wanted her to be a grandmother. You know, there's some people you wouldn't want to have around your kids. But my mother had some good qualities. And she was a good grandmother. I wanted that for her. And she really wanted to know my children. So I think that motivated both of us. And, you know, one of the stages we went through was agreeing to disagree. You know, we set aside this huge elephant in the room. I gave up trying to get her to acknowledge what had happened. And she gave up trying to get me to recant. And there were some years a period of years where we started focusing on what were the things we still had actually in common. And they weren't some of them were really small things like we love playing cards together. So we would play cards. We like going to the movies together. My mother was an actor, we both love the theater. And so we started with the ways we could connect and we left the unresolved stuff there and we had there were a lot of blow ups. There was a lot it was a very volatile for a long time.

Laura 09:50

The other thing my mother did, we're talking about geography a little earlier is that she started coming out to California for several months every winter. You know she wanted to get away from cold, New Jersey winter, she used to go to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico. And she gave that up. And she started coming to Santa Cruz. And not just to stay with me, she had her own apartment around friends. And I was not happy about it, you know, I was not welcoming at first. But those visits meant that during those three months, every year, she got to get to know her grandchildren, she would come over for dinner, we would play cards, we would do things together. And we gradually began connecting in the present in a more positive way. And so you know, it just, it kind of grew from there. Until we ended up with, I think, a pretty decent level of reconciliation, we did not have an intimate relationship.

Laura 10:42

And I, I never made myself vulnerable to her, like I didn't confide in her, I didn't feel safe, in my deeper self, but on a more superficial level, we had a functional relationship. And, you know, that was the case for a long time. And then when she got older, and she started developing dementia, and she called to announce she was moving across the country, it just changed everything. You know, it's like that that careful equilibrium we had achieved was just one part. And then, you know, the story I write in my memoir is what happened in the, the years from the time I got that phone call until her death and really facing is it possible to be a caregiver to someone who betrayed you in the past. And that's, that's what I explored. I wanted to open my heart to her, you know, I mean, that was I, I hope that that could happen. And even though I kind of dreaded her arrival, I was also hopeful, wishing that maybe we could heal our relationship the rest of the way. That was the journey I wanted to write about in that moment.

Rosanne 11:45

And and Karen, I don't know, in those types of moments, like, Okay, we have this buffer, and now she's come in, what do you do? How do you prepare yourself? Do you think that it's necessary to be vulnerable? When you're caring for someone, can you still care for them and have that divide?

Karen 12:04

I actually should mention that I was my grandmother's legal guardian and caregiver, my mother's mother, from about 2012, through her death at the end of 2015, October of 2015. So three years, and there was a lot unexpected that happened as a result of that. And my relationship with my grandmother was strained and weird, and but again, different. It's not my mother, right? Where it's there's a layer there that doesn't exist between the mother and the daughter. But having had that experience, and not knowing how I would grow through that experience. And now on the other side of it, I am absolutely grateful for that experience. And I know that I can't predict how things will be with my mom.

Karen 12:54

And it's so interesting, because my answer to that question of how do you prepare is different today than it was when I actually wrote *Difficult Mother's: Adult Daughters*, because now I have a greater understanding of our nervous systems and trauma and triggers. And it was interesting, because yesterday when I planned this call with my mom, so she could talk about the rest, I had no idea what she was going to say I didn't know if it was just going to be like, well, here's my will. And here's my or, you know what,

Karen 13:26

and she's eighty one for reference. And I noticed, I noticed prior to calling her because I had planned to call her at 10am. I noticed my heart was beating a little faster. I felt shallow breathing a little bit, and I know myself well enough to go okay. Yeah, your your trickled triggered a little bit here, right. You don't know what's going to happen. You don't know which mother you're going to get she going to be nice. Is she going to be mean? What's going to happen? You know, I don't know. And I think the beautiful aspect, for me yesterday was being able to be with myself in that triggered the sensations that I was experiencing, and not judge myself. And to just be like, oh, yeah, this is all this is, is your body perceives a threat. That's all. Logically, you're safe here in Connecticut, right? It's just a phone call. But your body doesn't know that your body is scared. Your body doesn't like this. And so that's why it feels this way. And so getting to know yourself on that level is priceless. In regards to preparing. And again, this is new, you know, not brand new, but I mean, it's relatively new for I think the general public to sort of be talking about our nervous systems. And yes, we've talked about triggers for years, but do we really understand what that means? And so getting to know yourself on that level, getting to know you know what it is you value, and then obviously boundaries are a huge part of the conversation and

Karen 15:00

I like to, you know, boundaries are such a word that it seems like it's what is going to keep things out. Right? And that it's a protection. And it can be it is partly that. But I have the way I teach boundaries is that it's also about what we want to grow. And what we want to keep in what do we want to cultivate in this relationship? And Laura speaks to that. Right. And it's not perfect, right? No, it's not perfect. It's messy at times. But but there are there are ways to look at boundaries in that are not so rigid and like, You're bad, I need to keep you out.

Rosanne 15:39

Right. And in your book you you referenced it's not, it's not avoiding, it's not ignoring. It's not resisting. It's not that and it's also not the complaining and the wallowing and the let me tell you about what happened. It's not either of those things. So there's someplace in between those two, but it's more about us than them. And, and I think that when I read that, I thought, Well, that makes perfect sense. Can you speak to that a little bit where people think a boundary is well, I'm just not going to talk to you. That's not That's not it, because you're still carrying it.

Karen 16:16

It can be, right? How many, but it's still eating at you. Right? So there are times when a boundary is crossed, and you feel annoyed, or frustrated or angry. And that is simply a message that is simply a cue, right, something has happened here that I don't like. And it's usually that a boundary has been crossed, or that there isn't a boundary that where there needs to be a boundary or where you want to have a boundary. And the the key isn't that you set the boundary in that moment. The way I and it's funny because it has evolved a little bit since I wrote the book, but the way I describe a healthy boundary, it's an equation and it is your value, or a value that you have, plus a request plus an action plus a benefit equals a healthy boundary. Now the value and the benefit are optional, but they can be helpful. So the core the core, if we just look at action and action, I'm sorry, request an action as like the core of a healthy boundary, right. And I again, this is a very simple one. But like, let's say your mother calls you every day, and you don't want to talk to her every day. The request is, please don't call me every day. And then you have to know the action that you will take if she continues to call you every day. And a simple one would be that you don't answer the phone, when she calls, right. Now you can expand that into what is the value and what is the benefit. So the value might be that you it's quality time, let's say, right, you value quality time with your family, your mother, your kids, whoever. So you're you can you can lean on quality time and say, hey, please don't call me every day, let's talk once a week for an hour, let's talk once a week on Sundays for an hour. That way, here's the benefit, I can give you my undivided attention. But if you're calling me every day, you know, I'm not going to be able to do that. So that's you know that that is that is sort of like the whole equation of value request. Action and and benefit. And so it was interesting because I was speaking to a group of women who are caring for elderly mothers with memory issues recently. And one of them brought up that her mother brings food over every day. And she doesn't want her mother to bring food over every day. And I said, Well, have you told her that? And she said yes. Well, she's got memory issues she's and I said, and it was it was there were a lot of women on this call and watching their faces was was interesting. I said, Well, how about Mom, please don't bring food over everyday, bring food over once a week. If you bring food over every day, I will throw it away. They're like, Oh, you know, it was like, Oh, I could never right. Here's the thing, you don't have to communicate that piece.

Rosanne 19:12

Exactly.

Karen 19:13

But you don't want to you know, I mean, I jokingly say this, but it's like if you have a choice between guilt and resentment, choose guilt.

Rosanne 19:28

Right, right. Right.

Karen 19:30

I mean, the resentment will well just like poison your relationship more than it may be already. Right. And that that resentment seeps out into all your other relationships. You know, right,

Laura 19:40

As you're talking about, like, if you, you know, like my mother was not able to respect my boundaries. When when when she was younger, for one reason she didn't want to she was impulsive and narcissistic, and then later she couldn't because she had dementia. And it's like, right and then it was like, okay, is this because she had dementia or, because she's doing the same thing she's always done. And if it's dementia, it's like really hard to get very angry about it exactly. But if it's, you know, so I was always trying to sort out, you know, where is this lack of responsiveness coming from?

Karen 20:14

Well, and also right, if she was disrespectful of your boundaries when you were younger, intentionally, right, you have the anger, which is a trigger, which is a nervous system response. So of course, like, even if you know, it's not on purpose, you are primed? Right? To be angry.

Rosanne 20:33

Yes. And that's, that's the circle. But when dementia when dementia comes into play it all bets boundaries. Don't really, they're they're Swiss cheese, because depending because you can't you can't say Mom, I told you don't I told you doesn't work?

Karen 20:52

Well, but even without dementia, ultimately, right? The boundary is with ourselves. It's being it's being willing to take the action that we say we're going to take, we're honoring the boundary.

Rosanne 21:04

Right.

Karen 21:05

And I have no I have, not all the time. But I have seen it. I've seen it with my own mother for actually like that, when I'm honored when I'm really truly honoring my boundaries, she tends to honor them more. Right? Not always, not perfectly.

Rosanne 21:23

But But I think one of the important things too, is when you say, it's not your mother's job, or responsibility to respect your boundaries, right, your responsibility, and that gives you a little bit of power. It gives you the empowerment.

Karen 21:37

Yeah. The other thing too, you know, and this this sort of gets into, like, why why do mothers and daughters struggled to begin with, and there's so much out there, but it is a macro issue. And, you

know, I feel like it's important to just bring this into the conversation. And that is that, you know, in a culture that where women aren't valued equally, wherever sexism, misogyny, patriarchy, all of that impacts the mother daughter relationship, but like getting back to the idea of, you know, like the woman with the, you know, her mother bringing the food, you know, please don't if you don't, I'll throw it away. That is very clear. Right. It's brief. It's clear. And it's, there's no wishy washy, there's no vagueness about it and to quote one of my favorite people Brene Brown. Right, she says, clarity is kind, unclarity or you know, not the unclear is unkind, clear is kind unclear is unkind. And, you know, when we think about values with boundaries, right, kindness, respect are two real obvious values. And it's like, we have to include ourselves in that. It's not like we're just doing it to be nice to them. The clarity, and the kindness is for us to,

Laura 23:01

you know, there are situations where you can't respect your own boundaries. I mean, I was there,

Rosanne 23:07

I was just gonna say that so many times.

Laura 23:10

The name of the game is you have to surrender to the moment that's, absolutely, we have to show up, and you have to be there and you think you can't, and you can, and I found that I ended up feeling like a better, more capable human being I was more capable of compassion, I found that I took care of myself every way I could, but I could no longer control the situation in the same way I needed when my mother was had more capacity. Yes. And sometimes I had to walk away and I had to have support I built I did a lot to build support, I joined support groups, I got myself back into therapy. My partner, Karen was incredibly helpful to me. I did so many things to take care of myself. But there were times that was just like, I had to keep giving or I had to keep giving up my own plans, my own ideas, my own agenda. And it just went with the territory. Yep.

Karen 24:07

And yeah, I mean, there's, you know, and I'm not taking care of my mom, but there are times where I have had, you know, I have, I have not honored my own boundaries with her. And I have to own that. And, you know, and it's some, it's not pretty sometimes, you know, it's, it's awkward, and it's, yeah, there's all this inner work that I you know, that we do, hopefully, to not shame ourselves and to not hold ourselves to some level of perfection or, like, this is gonna work like a well oiled machine because it's not.

Rosanne 24:44

Well, no, because it can't because it's, it's the other whenever you're caring. You know, it's great that you're having dinner with your children. And if your mother needs to use the restroom, you got to go help her get to the restroom. There are things that Come up, that there is no getting around. It was it was your trip back, Laura, when your mother hurt her leg,

Laura 25:07

Right.

Rosanne 25:07

And you knew, if you didn't go, it was going to be another day. But your kids were waiting. And you had all of that all of that angst, and you had to choose. It's the how do you come to terms with that, in the midst of this,

Laura 25:22

I just, I remember that, that feeling of feeling like I was enough ice, you know. And it was it's similar to what you were saying before, you know, squeezed between my children's needs, my mother's needs and my needs, you know, I had a, I had I was self employed, I had a business I was teaching, I was traveling, I had a career, I had a demented mother in town and two teenagers. And it was it was incredibly difficult. And that feeling of failing on all fronts was something I felt a lot. And the other thing I want to say is that, you know, we're talking about how hard it is, there was a lot of humor. Totally, there were a lot of moments. My mother was hysterical when she had dementia. I mean, sometimes she sometimes she would I remember this one time, I said to her, I'd had breast cancer, you know, and I was talking about my breast cancer, you know, and she said, You had breast cancer. I said, Yeah, Ma, she said, they cut your boobs off.

26:21

Cracking Up, I mean, it was like theater of the absurd a lot of the time and I had to kind of go with that, go with that humor, and just just surrender when I could, and then grab the moments where I could do what I wanted, or take care of myself or, you know, go out in the woods, or go to the ocean or, you know, have a special time with my daughter or whatever, I just did that when I could and then you know, there'd be the 12 phone calls the next day.

Rosanne 26:48

Right. And it's those, it's those taking those moments. And that's where, you know, the support and the self care. And I hate self care as a word, but you have to build that in for yourself, because you have to survive it because it will end. And then you're left with whatever you're left with. And you have to find ways to find that support and to find something to feed your soul as you're going through this.

Laura 27:13

I mean, writing was a big part for me. I mean, that's how I ended up writing this memoir is, you know, I, I was I would sit in the doctor's office with my mother, you know, she was kind of out of it. And I would be taking notes because she couldn't remember anything. And I'd also be writing like, what was on the wall? What poster was on the wall? And what was the little bits of dialogue? And because I'm a writer, you know, and we cannibalize our lives. And I, I was always thinking, I'm going to have to write about this, because this is just unbelievable, what's going on here. So it created a little bit of distance, you know,

Karen 27:45

I said to my husband, man, after after the call with my mom yesterday, I'm like content for the rest of my life. She moves here like

Rosanne 27:55

it is, absolutely is, I did the same thing. Every day. It's almost like part of it is also a recording of what was happening. Like, I can't believe what's happening. I can't believe this is where we're at. And it was therapy, really, aside from therapy and support group and all of that. But it's an it's an experience. And it's Well, it's interesting, because, you know, Karen, when you say about the triggers, you also wrote about the amygdala and how that kind of sits in there. But it's only a 90 second emotion.

Karen 28:29

Yeah, I mean, I don't know if it's 90 seconds Exactly. But I think that if you know, what I've heard is that if you allow an emotion to be there, right, you notice the annoyance come in, or like me starting to feel nervous yesterday, right? Or sadness, or whatever it is, if you just sort of let it be there, and you say, Okay, I'm going to be with the sensation, and not try to block it in any way or stuff that are avoided, right? It'll flow through and about 90 seconds, two minutes, I actually have a colleague who says it's like drinking a glass of water, it flows through and then you pee, we generally don't like the way emotions feel now, and we have been taught how to be with emotions. We've been taught to like, cut from here, down, off.

Rosanne 29:15

Right. It's like what is that I sat with my anger long enough and found out her name was grief now.

Laura 29:21

That's so true. It really is.

Rosanne 29:24

Now, Laura, when you were carrying, did all of that old stuff come up?

Laura 29:30

Yeah. It absolutely did. Because, you know, my mother and especially in the early stages of her dementia, you know, before she got more passive, but in the beginning, she was incredibly agitated. She was anxious. She was rageful. She was explosive. She was erratic. She was irrational. And it was like she it was like all her worst qualities that I had grown up with were being replicated and they were playing out in front of me on a daily basis, and I was I was triggered all the time. And yet I was trying to be the good daughter, you know, so there was like, there was this part, this overlay of me trying to do the right things. And I did I went through the motions I, I prepared for her impeccably, you know, her arrival and I, I did all the right things you could do, but I was constantly being triggered, and I still had this wall up to her, you know, it was just a different kind of wall. It wasn't, it wasn't the wall of rage. It wasn't the wall of distance, 3000 Miles distance, you know, but and it wasn't like the polite rules of detente of this is how we've made peace. But But I still had this wall and she confronted me about it because I, I remember this one time, I went over to visit her I had been away teaching for a week I came back and I was helping her with her computer and her printer. And you know, all this, she was still living on her own then. And I just she was going on and on about how miserable she was. And I was somewhere else I was thinking about my daughter in school, I was thinking about my son and she confronted me about it, she knew I wasn't present. And that also that I was just, I didn't want to touch her. I didn't want to go near her. I was like being polite. But it was this false politeness. And, you know,

she confronted me and afterwards I, you know, I went home and I wrote about that wall that I had had been always up and I looked at all the different ways that had shifted over the years. And I realized that there was a part of me that really was longing to know if it was possible to take down that wall. And that was the trajectory for me. Of the rest of the years of her life was, could I take down that wall? Could I allow myself to love her and not always feel I had to protect myself from her. And, you know, I think the most ironic thing for me, which was painful is that when her dementia developed more, she turns sweet. And I really expected her to turn bitter and nasty. You know, I thought she'd be one of those kinds of people with dementia who were really, really challenging. But she turned sweet and I would walk into her apartment in assisted living. And she would say, Laurie, you're the best daughter in the whole world. What would I do without you, you know that she'd say things like, you and Karen have done such a great job with those kids who says lesbians shouldn't have children. And she, she she was so loving. And it was like the love and attention I had long for my whole life was there. But she wasn't she wasn't the same mother anymore. And so it was like it finally became safe to love her when she was no longer herself.

Rosanne 29:54

Oh my goodness, Laura. And where does where do you put where do you put?

Laura 32:45

Yeah, I felt a lot of grief. I mean, I felt it was so so many mixed feelings because I I drank in her love. And this this this love that was safe. It no longer had barbs and attacks attached to it. It because she was beyond the capability of doing that. So I took it in and yet I would dread going to see her. You know, so it was just it was so it was painful to see her decline. It was painful to be around her. No, it wasn't her anymore. I missed her feistiness. Even though I had hated it forever. You know, it's just so complicated. Really, really complicated. But I did drink in her love. And it was like, that was the truth. The truth was, she did love me unconditionally. This was all this shit in the way. Right? That all these other layers of other things that made her so reactive and so difficult. And so I really drank that in I took it in and I it was a very painful, challenging time.

Karen 33:50

I am I wonder if my mother which way if Well, first of all, will she have dementia? I don't know. And will she become sweet? She has she can be sweet. But, you know, again, something that was very helpful to me again, learning about the nervous system and recognizing that when somebody perceives a threat whether it's actually there or not. Right? They will act a certain way. And my mom tends to fight that is her like tendency and mine is to freeze. So I've learned, like, Okay, I don't want to trigger her. She me I have a nervous system. She has a nervous system, right? And it's like it's the triggered nervous systems that are having the relationship, not our higher selves.

Karen 34:46

And I you know, I was funny I was gonna say I'm naive enough but I'm not going to use that language. And I'm okay with hoping I'm okay with hoping and maybe being let down or whatever, that my mother will have that sweetness. But I feel like, you know, sort of like Laura's before, which is I never know what I'm going to get. And sometimes what I get is pretty awful. And yes, I have learned to not take it as personally, although sometimes I do. And then I have to have a conversation with myself about that.

And I think for me, and I don't know, you know, for other women, I think it's, I think we can, we can get at it in different ways. But the more I have been able to have compassion for myself.

Karen 35:39

And like, recognizing that a lot of the messages that I received from my mother, just sort of in general, but also about me, that I used to believe, being able to have compassion for the part of me that didn't know better, has helped me have compassion for her the part of her that doesn't know better, yeah. Which doesn't mean that I think she's stupid, because she's not. But there's, there's, there's, there are things that that just, you know, given the time, the time, the times we live in, that we have access to, and knowledge of that, our mothers didn't have time, they didn't, they weren't, they didn't have quite have quite the, the access to what we now know,

Laura 36:25

it took me a lot of decades to get to the point of looking at my mother from, you know, more like a 30,000 foot view, instead of seeing her as my antagonist. But to really see, like, I'm Jewish, and there's like the epigenetics of trauma going through the generations in my family, there's the fact that my perpetrator, my grandfather was her father, there's the fact that she grew up, you know, to poor immigrant parents, and was terribly ashamed of her poverty, there was, you know, the very limited options for women of her generation, which she blew right past, you know, it's like I, as I looked at her, not just as my mother and as this impediment, but when I looked at her whole life, she was really an awesome person. You know, I mean, she there was so much to admire about her. But it took me many decades to get to the point of being able to really see that and appreciate that. And then, and then just realize that she went as far as she could, you know, in terms of trying to believe me, or trying to support me, she, she wanted to, she tried to, and she hit a wall, and she didn't have the skills or resources to get past that wall. And so it felt so much better to reach a place of real compassion for her not papered over compassion, like, I'm going to, I'm going to stuff everything and pretend nothing is wrong.

37:45

This would be great to actually reach that place of deep compassion for her as a, as a troubled complicated human being and and also to start seeing myself the same way that I was not the hero of the story. And I think that's, it took me 10 years to write this memoir, because I had to get get past me being the hero and her being the villain, I had to really be able to portray us as fully human. And I had mature a lot, a long time to get there. Yeah,

Rosanne 38:14

Well, yeah, I would think it would. And it's funny, because it's like, you see, you see her as a person, not just mom. She's a person, and she has her own history, and she has her own baggage, and she has her own triggers. And I think we forget that sometimes. And I think one of the things that you address Karen, that really was a lightbulb for me also was what meaning do you assign to those words? When is it simply did you call your uncle and not Did you call your uncle stupid? Exactly. You know, it's not, it's not She's not saying, Well, you know, I have to remind you, because you're dumb and you forget, that's not what she's saying. She's it was a question. It's what you're hearing. It's like impact versus intent. That's not that was not my intention. But that's how you and I think when, when those things land like that, we're already ready for a fight.

Karen 39:06

Yeah. 100% I, and my mom does say things like that.

Rosanne 39:13

So that's probably why you assign that meaning.

Karen 39:16

But, but here's the thing, I have had to work on asking myself if I want to believe that about me. Right. And, and, and like, you know, we have stories about our moms, and they have stories about us. And there was a situation. Last summer we went and visited and my husband was talking to her and whether it was intentional or not, he really challenged her worldview of me in a way she didn't like. And it was, it was it was a weird situation afterwards, but it was almost like I could see her being like wait, what my daughter isn't an idiot. You know, or Oh, my daughter isn't this weak, ineffectual person? And wait, no doubt reel that back in I got it. I got to reestablish my story here. And this is one of those times where I didn't have very good boundaries. And but interestingly, in the moment I, you know, I, one of the things I like to teach and and practice myself is again finding out what is what are maybe three things that you value that you can carry with you and lean into when you need support with your boundaries. And my three and I actually have them on my wall right here. Dignity expression in Audacity.

Laura 40:43

That's a great combination.

Rosanne 40:44

Yeah, that's, that's awesome. Yeah.

Karen 40:47

Dignity and Audacity are pretty far apart, they serve different purposes. And in that moment, in this situation, I chose dignity for myself and for her, right. And the way that that looked for me, was recognizing that it was going to be hard for me to not cry, because I was angry, it's gonna make me it's making me feel a little teary right now. So I just I put my sunglasses on, we were outside, I put my sunglasses on, and I took a little walk. And I came back, and I just kind of had my energy be a little bit in. And it's not like I don't, you know, again, I don't think, you know, somebody would have said, Oh, you're being rude to your mother, or you're being mean to your mother. It was just it was a shift that I noticed in me that I was able to then, you know, be in that situation, because I was focused on dignity.

Karen 41:42

Ours, both of us. So it's things like that. That's, that's, no, that's Yeah, that's great. And is that what you? So would you advise that? Yeah, going forward for anybody carrying? Yes, you know, I mean, values work is done in all kinds of places, right? It's an I didn't make it up, right. But you know, people in therapy and coaching and all different, you know, types of scenarios, we have opportunities to really delve into what it is we value and how can we use those values in support of what how we want to be in

the world. And the way I do it is, you know, I came up with these, these three, and I, I know that each of them feel differently in my body.

Karen 42:33

And I know I actually have a list. I don't I can't pull it out right now. And it's not very pretty, it's all scribbled, but it's like a list of of im statements are and some of them aren't. Some of them are just other kinds of statements that support me in feeling each of those three things. And it's funny, I think this speaks to what Laura was saying earlier. And about understanding that, you know, we do eventually recognize our mothers had lives. Our mothers are human beings, they were human beings before we came along, they have their own dream, their dreams, their disappointments, the all the things, and one of the thoughts that supports me and feeling dignity and feeling that how I want to feel and have that compassion, is it. The thing about these six these statements is that they are they're different for everyone. And you you sort of like you want to do a body check and like Yes. Oh god, yes, this feels good to me. But one of mine is she's a woman just like me.

Laura 43:34

That's right.

Karen 43:36

And it's like when I'm Oh, yes. Okay, boom, there it is. And then I have other other, you know, for Audacity every once in a while, right? It's like Frick, yeah. You know, and that's all it says, and I know how it feels. And I like, you know, where that leads me. Right? Right.

Rosanne 43:52

It's, yeah, go ahead Laura.

Laura 43:54

Well, just you were talking Karen, about your mother, and, you know, calling you stupid. And what, what came up for me is one of the things I had to grapple with, in my caregiving and also in writing the memoir was that I had to face that I had these habitual stories about my mother, that it didn't just go one way it went the other way. And, and that I really set in stone, her transgressions, you know, all the way she had failed me all the ways she had betrayed me. They were like in these marquee lights, and her good qualities and she did have a lot of good qualities. I just like dismiss them. It was like they were just water flowing through my my fingers so that I reinforced my story about her. That validated me as the hero and me as the victim and whatever else I needed to believe about myself. And I not only reinforced it by selectively noticing things and remembering things, but then I went and talked to everybody I knew about it. So like when my mother moved out here there were a lot of people already set against her because of the stories I had told. And, and Karen, my wife really confronted me about that. And I, I felt really bad about having done that. But so I, one of the things I had to face was, you know, how I had not been fully honest or transparent and how I was so invested in seeing her in a particular way. And, and it didn't allow either one of us to change, and it didn't allow our relationship to evolve. So for me, letting go of my habitual stories was really, really critically important.

Karen 45:39

Yeah, I mean, that's me too. And, and, and, you know, from a biological perspective, right, we do have a negativity bias. And so our brains love to look for negative evidence, or, you know, that kind of thing. So it, but it's just something to notice, like, Yes, I have a story about my mother. And I'm going to look for evidence all over the place for how it's real and true. And, you know, when, you know, not, not everyone is ready to do this right away. But when you are ready to do it, and you know, to find an I've done this, right, there's lots of things I really admire about my mom. And I see how I'm just like her in some ways, not just the good things. Not, but not just the things I admire.

Karen 46:26

But doing a little bit of that, you know, what's called Shadow Work. Right? And to see, yep, just like mom in that way, or, and not liking it so much. And, and, or, but then having compassion for the part of me that, you know, yeah, we share this thing that's maybe not so great. And how could we not because I mean, for example, ourselves after, for better or worse. And I also, I also think, one thing that, and I, you know, I don't know if I'm if this is correct, but I suspect that we have an opportunity, we have the opportunity, I should say one way we have an opportunity that our mothers maybe didn't, is that we can examine when we feel ashamed or guilty, and learn how to process those emotions rather than let them lay sort of unconscious in and running the show.

Karen 47:27

Because I again, like when my mother tells me that I'm weak and ineffectual. Just like my father, who she divorced when I was two and a half, and she hated her whole life. Um, you know, and I'm left to be like, Okay, thanks. Yeah. Right, is, is where does she herself feel weak and ineffectual? And where Hasn't she been able to grapple with that? Maybe. You know, and one of my favorite quotes is from Carl Jung, and it is I'd rather behold and good, that's beautiful. And, and women aren't allowed to be whole. And so, you know, we are learning to be more whole, hopefully. And whereas our mothers, right, they maybe let those those that shadow side, fester faster. Because they didn't have the the opportunities that we do.

Laura 48:26

Speaking of favorite quotes, one of my favorites is when I put in the front of burning light of two stars, and it was this, this former student of mine, Deborah, for Shay, and she said, Every time I look into the past, every time I look in the rearview mirror, the past has changed. And, you know, I think that for me, that is such a hopeful statement. Because it really shows that we can grow and evolve as human beings and that are these long, deep, incredibly complicated relationships, like a mother daughter relationship, that it is possible for it to change in ways we might never anticipate. And it may not. But in my instance, you know it, if you had said to me when I was 27, or 28 years old, and my mother were at, we were at war, absolute war, that I would be at her deathbed, and I would be taking care of her at the end of her life, I would have looked at you like you were the most insane person. So for me that that gives me a lot of hope about life, that no matter how stuck we are and how trapped we feel, or how challenging things are, that things can be different in the future and in ways we just cannot anticipate. Yeah, so I just really like that, you know, every time we look in the rearview mirror, the path has changed.

Rosanne 49:41

Agreed, agreed. And I think empathy has a long way. It's a long play here. Because we have to try to understand each other and we have to try to extend that. Do you know what I mean? It's the extension. It's not it's not always going to work. And that's a Okay, too, but it's an extension. And you you've both characterize that.

Karen 50:05

Yeah. And I, um, it's it's like, you know, liking and respecting my reasons or, you know, and why I'm doing something is not so that she'll be a certain way. It's like I'm not doing something to have something work. Right. Right. It's I like I like who I am when I'm this way, whether she is or not. Yeah,

Rosanne 50:29

I almost also feel like, when you talk about having your words on the wall, it's almost like having an alter ego, like, um, you know, like Beyonce and Sasha Fierce like, I'm gonna have today I'm Sasha Fierce, you know, give me my wind machine, and I'm going at this, but it almost is that, isn't it?

Karen 50:47

Yeah. Yeah. And I think, you know, one of the things that's very powerful about being a human being, and that again, we are not taught this. Is that being able to summon emotion intentionally. It's like, I mean, that's what witches do, I guess, and goddesses and like, all that kind of stuff that people talk about. But like, every human being, can do that. Yes. And it's not perfect. We don't do it, like, you know, but it is something that we can play with and we can expand capacity for and yeah.

Rosanne 51:24

It's, it's a way of working it out. Yes. Laurie, you're I feel like your story is a story in I don't want to say redemption. But it's a story of redemption, almost. Because you did go from this point of, I don't know if we're ever going to be, you know, you had a lot of anger, you had a lot of resentment, and then wound up caring for her. I know you have something you wanted to read from your book about going from that point, to then being the good daughter and caring and, and all of that that went with it.

Laura 51:56

Yeah, just to introduce this. This takes place. Most of the book takes place when my elderly mother has moved across the country. So this is an I was describing. I describe the scene. And now I'm going to read it to you it was it was when I came and she confronted me about my distance. And so this is what I wrote.

Laura 52:18

Three decades earlier, I had erected an impenetrable wall between us a fortress with narrow slits so I could watch her approach. I ensured that my defenses were prepared anytime she came near me. I always had an escape plan.

Laura 52:37

It's true, we later reconciled, and the fact that we were able to create a functional relationship was a miracle. But it wasn't an intimate miracle. Because I never took down my wall. Oh, I taught myself to be

kind to her and fake it till you make it kind of way. But I still held her at bay. My wall just got subtler. It wasn't permeable. It was hard and opaque, and there was no door.

Laura 53:08

We only met in the Enter chamber, the common room where guests are received. Only my polished self was on display, my masked self, and only in the anti chamber. Mom never saw my inner sanctum and I never saw hers. I got as close as I could within the constraints I had established, but closed is closed. And a closed heart is a lonely one.

Laura 53:38

The price I paid to keep my mother out, at first with withdrawal later with an armed fortress. And finally with the polite rules of detente was love the pure, unfettered love. I longed for the pure, unfettered love she craved. That day in the kitchen when I couldn't comfort her. I had to face it. My mother was still a stranger to me. With tentacles of need, I was loath to touch. I wanted to be more than kind to do more than merely what was right. I wanted to love my mother, just once freely and with the relief of a lost, exhausted child. beyond words and beyond all pretense. I wanted to lay my head on a place that was safe. Just once before it was too late.

Rosanne 54:37

That's beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. Thank you for reading that.

Laura 54:44

Yeah, that was the that's the trajectory. You know, every protagonist in a story has a trajectory of where they're going and that that I like to read that because it really summarizes kind of the quest I had. Could I open my heart?

Karen 54:58

I I feel like I'm in this like, again, 10 years prior, right? You know, you're 10 years down the road from me in this scenario and I crave the same thing. Crave the same thing.

Rosanne 55:14

It's amazing. It's an amazing journey through all of it. Because you learn. Not only do you learn so much about your mother, you learn so much about yourself.

Laura 55:25

Yeah.

Rosanne 55:27

And what you what you value and what you have inside of you, that you may not have realized before.

Karen 55:35

You know, it's funny when I spoke to my mom on Sunday, yesterday, she, we were talking about her mom a little bit, and she had nothing to do with her mother in the final years of her mother's life. And I actually her my mother's husband has dementia. And so part of this whole thing of them perhaps

moving is, you know, a place where he can be in a memory care unit or whatever. And I was mentioned, I'm like, Yeah, well, you know, grandma had dementia, and she was in this place. And I mentioned the name of the place. She had dementia.

Laura 56:09

Oh My God.

Karen 56:11

I was like, yeah.

Laura 56:13

Oh, that's That's amazing Karen. Like my mother said you had breast cancer. Exactly. Yeah. The excuse of dementia. She just didn't want to deal with it.

Karen 56:27

Yeah, she she Yeah, I again, it's sometimes it's shocking, right? Like we have these things our mother say he's like, you know, um, and like I see the guardedness, right, I see the places where she has chosen to be guarded. Right? Of course she has, right of course we do.

Rosanne 56:50

Right. And what do you do with that?

Karen 56:52

Yeah, you love yourself through it? Yep. Yeah.

Rosanne 56:55

What would you advise to caregivers in in tackling this? You Karen.

Karen 57:03

Love yourself through it. Know yourself, right? Know. Your triggers. Don't shame yourself. And you know, we mentioned self care is that word, right? Like, yeah, taking care of yourself doesn't mean I mean, it can mean going and getting a pedicure, but it really is tending to yourself. It's like, you know, I mean, I some really simple things like look up and out. Look out at the horizon, right? This is a way that you're, you're sending a signal of safety to your body that everything is okay. Simply twisting in your chair once in a while does the same thing. Like these are like things that you can do in a moment. Chanting, humming singing. Ahhhhhh Like this.

Rosanne 57:50

Yes.

Karen 57:51

After yourself reminding yourself this is I'm here. I'm here. Yes. Yes.

Rosanne 57:57

Because we lose our bodies

Karen 57:59

To the core, you know, yet like feeling grounded this morning. You Yeah.

Laura 58:03

Yeah. I love that about the pedicure. I love that. Because yes, like, there's like this, like self care mantra that feels like something packaged on Instagram, you know, like, yes, purchase yourself care here, you know, and it's yeah, it's so much more organic and rudimentary than that.

Karen 58:21

Yes, its mothering yourself. Right. And when and if you didn't learn that, if you didn't get it, right. Yeah. It's like you have to sort of figure it out. That's what the next my next book is about is re mothering.

Rosanne 58:32

Oh, that's awesome. And Laura, what would you say? Listen, you've, you've run the gamut. What would you say to somebody? Who's Who says to you, you know, my mom needs help. I don't know what I'm going to do. We never really got along. What would you tell them?

Laura 58:51

I would tell them to get into therapy.

Rosanne 58:53

Yeah.

Laura 58:55

I wouldn't tell you should or you shouldn't, you know, it's a journey. It's definitely you know, it for me a lot of really unexpected things and, and times I just hit the wall. And other times, I was like, really proud of myself. And but yeah, it's it's like being in a vise. That's how I felt. But in retrospect, I'm so grateful I did it. You know, I feel like I, I became, I showed up as the daughter I wanted to be. And it wasn't because I had to, or I should or I owed her because I think, I think when someone betrays you in a really severe way, they break the expectations of what children owe to their parents, and then it's really up to the adult child to make a decision.

Laura 59:43

Well, I'm thinking about this, this woman I interviewed for my reconciliation book, the one I wrote 20 years ago, I thought we'd never speak again. And she had an incredibly toxic relationship with her mother. Her mother was abusive and nasty. And her and she and the woman was hospice worker. So her profession was taking care of people who were dying. And her mother contacted her and said she was dying of cancer. And so this and this data had nothing to do with each other. And, and this woman said, she said, I had to really face what kind of person What kind of daughter did I want to be. And she decided that she would never take her mother into her home, that she could not be her direct physical caregiver. But because of all her contacts and everything she knew, she was able to arrange really good care for her mother. And she decided that she would go visit her mother for two hours every

Wednesday afternoon. And she would go and she would be fully present with whatever was happening. And she did that until her mother died. And she said she felt like she that was the level at which it made sense for her to be her mother's caregivers. And I really love that. And she said, she felt clean, she felt good. She during that those months, she tried, you know, for like the 18,000th time to actually have some kind of breakthrough with her mother. It never happened. Her mother was not capable. But she was able to show up, and be kind, be loving, be generous, but keep her boundaries and protect herself. So I think that's really important for people to know that there's, there's a lot of different ways to do it. And someone else I'm thinking of the parents had sexually abused her and then sexually abused her children. And she was never going to see these people again, or have any contact with them. But when she found out they were dying, she said, she did all this internal work to be able to actually send loving kindness to these two people who were so damaged, that all they could do was damaged the next generations. And she said she just got in touch with how much suffering they were in because they were living with that toxic stew 24 hours a day. She hadn't been around them in decades already. And she said she was able to send them loving kindness from afar. And that was the extent of what she was able to offer. And so I just think there's this whole continuum. And it's going to different things are going to make sense for different people. Depending on so many factors that we don't know but, but to let go of the idea that I have to do this, I owe this I must do this. When the relationship has been devastatingly broken by the other person. It just isn't true.

Rosanne 1:02:28

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