

A Romantic Revival Pt. 2

[00:00:00] **Jesse (Producer):** What you are about to hear is the follow-up session of Where Should We Begin? None of the voices in this series are ongoing clients of Esther Perel's. But we wanted to revisit with this couple and see how their episode had impacted their story. To hear their original episode, just search for *A Romantic Revival* on Spotify or wherever you listen. To maintain confidentiality, names and some identifiable characteristics have been removed, but their voices and their stories are real.

[00:00:39] **Esther Perel:** So this is the first time that I actually have a second session with a couple that was part of a season in Where Should We Begin?

I became an instant parent when I got married to four kids who lost their first mom to suicide.

[00:01:04] **Him:** My first wife took her life on St. Patrick's day of 2011. A year later we met and we've been picking up the pieces.

[00:01:15] **Esther Perel:** This next couple has confronted death in their midst. For the past six years, this event has been at the center of their family life

[00:01:26] **Her:** Over these six years that I've been in their life, we have been in that survival mode. It has been the most heart wrecking, yet profound experience of love in my entire life.

[00:01:45] **Esther Perel:** They are now ready to live again. As a new year's resolution, the couple chose a word for themselves, an aspiration. Revive. And I have a sense that they came to work with me so that together they can transition: from not dead to alive and from survival to revival.

And many people have asked me what happened to those people, what happened to those people. Why don't you follow up? So it's been on my mind many times and of course what's also on my mind is what stayed with them? Where did it take them? Was it useful? Do they ever talk about it? Have they ever listened to it? You have stayed with me. I have no idea, if this stayed with you, if I stayed with you or what stayed with you.

(They both laugh)

[00:02:51] **Him:** You definitely stayed with us. I know that I've listened to the episode multiple times and I'm sure she's listened to it more than that. But it's been nice to go back and have that I guess, timestamp on our lives and where we were.

[00:03:07] **Her:** I know for me, when we first listened to it, we went for a walk and we shared the earbuds.

[00:03:13] **Esther Perel:** How soon after?

[00:03:15] **Her:** I think the day it released, the day it released. I was so nervous and about what. I think, just to hear the story back when you're in the moment and you're sharing, you're not thinking about what are people going to hear, what they're going to, you're just sharing. And then to hear it recorded, to hear those truths spoken the vulnerabilities.

[00:03:39] **Esther Perel:** And how did it serve you in creating change?

[00:03:46] **Her:** I think it made me more perceptive in moments when we would talk or even not to take things personal in a way that I think in the past I would. It helped me have a lot more grace in those moments.

[00:04:03] **Esther Perel:** Do you know what she's referring to? No, because you have an eyebrow that goes up: "I don't know what you're talking about."

[00:04:08] **Her:** The fight or flight freeze, the freezing that even though they're physically, maybe frozen everything internally is going rapid and then it's not so much that going to leave, it's that I'm so afraid, but I'm paralyzed. And it's a protective mechanism.

[00:04:32] **Esther Perel:** In tracking the brain's responses to trauma. We are often familiar with fight and flight, but we also have freeze. And sometimes it seems to me that the freeze points to an even more overwhelming set of experiences that were just simply too much to absorb and left the person frozen, helpless, and in a state of terror

[00:05:03] **Her:** After you said that, when you talked about that, it helped me in those moments, to even come down off of, okay. I just need to walk away right now because I'm not helping our situation and we need to come back to this later. Not because I'm leaving, but because I'm not getting anywhere, not out of frustration, but it's not helpful.

It gave me more compassion and grace. Didn't take away those moments of hurt, or my own frustration, but to just have some perspective. I don't know about you.,

[00:05:36] **Him:** For me, I think, we touched on a lot of topics.

[00:05:39] **Esther Perel:** You can actually talk to her.

[00:05:40] **Him:** Oh.

[00:05:41] **Esther Perel:** You can have this conversation together, rather. And I will watch it, witness it rather than you're actually reporting it to me, because I'm not sure you've had that conversation.

[00:05:53] **Him:** No, I don't know that we have. I haven't really even thought about that specific question that you asked us either. I think for us together, like to really break down and simplify what it is that you need from me. And it helped me a ton. I haven't necessarily been the best at following those directions over these last couple of years but it's definitely helped streamline things in my head on how to connect with you. As far as the other two topics, I'm just connecting the two, connecting my own childhood with what my kids went through and with the aftermath of suicide. If nothing else, it helped me to have some more compassion for the kids and what they're going through.

I think I might've said in the session that you would think I would have more compassion when people are struggling and I ended up not having compassion. One of my children was struggling with their own suicidal ideations. And so I'm dealing with that on a personal level and thinking about what's going to happen and what do we do?

And then I went to work and I have a coworker who's a first time father. He's got a newborn baby and the baby had pinkeye. And so my colleague was carrying on about how horrible it is to have pink eye for the baby. And I couldn't have compassion for him in that moment because we were comparing life and death to pink eye.

And I think that's been, it's been eye opening for me to recognize that I need to let him be in the space that he's in, even though it's very trivial from my perspective.

[00:07:33] **Esther Perel:** The voice that has no compassion. How does it speak, that voice? It's a contemptuous voice?

[00:07:41] **Him:** Sometimes it would be, that's really dumb, that's stupid. Or if it is something serious, sometimes I'll think that's life. That's what happens in this world. And so I, there's a part of me that knows that's maybe not good to not have compassion. And there's another part of me that wrestles with, is what we struggle with and why we have anxiety or depression, or we seek counsel, is it because of unmet expectations? And is the unmet expectations because we're in denial that death happens or that bad things happen? And so is that what leads to trauma? Because we expect nothing to happen. And then when it does, we don't know how to process. I don't know. I don't know whether what is going on in my head is a good thing or a bad thing, when I think those things.

[00:08:29] **Esther Perel:** I'm sure your wife has an opinion about that.

[00:08:36] **Him:** Probably not.

[00:08:37] **Her:** That's an understatement. Sometimes, I wonder if he has a pulse, does he feel anything? But recently, I don't know if it was a few months ago, a former colleague of his passed away to suicide. And I saw a side of him that I've never seen. The level of compassion that he had for the spouse that was left behind with four children, and they were similar ages that his were when his former wife passed away, I was heartbroken for what he was experiencing, but I was also glad to see him grieving and having compassion and seeing that pulse alive in him because in the way he responded in that moment, he gathered his peers together to help this family. It was really incredible. And so I know he's capable of it.

[00:09:41] **Esther Perel:** As he just said, when it's life and death, it all comes pouring out. And this is a very clear example of life and death. So there is no, what do you have to complain about? You really want something to complain about? Let me show you.

[00:09:57] **Him:** When we got the news of what happened, I had multiple people that reached out to me that I haven't talked to in maybe 10 years, that basically called me to say, I'm really sorry, but when your wife died, I really wanted to call, but I didn't know what to say. And so I just didn't. And they were calling to ask for forgiveness, that they didn't reach out to me. And but it was after...

[00:10:22] **Esther Perel:** How was that for you?

[00:10:23] **Him:** It stirs up some emotions in me right now as I talk about it.

[00:10:26] **Esther Perel:** But if you were not cleansing your throat...

[00:10:30] **Him:** Do I do that? Was I doing that a lot?

[00:10:31] **Esther Perel:** Yes. That instantly says I'm feeling something here. And so I'm going help you. Turn that throat clearing into expressing what the feeling actually is.

[00:10:48] **Him:** Yeah. So initially just getting those phone calls, it felt good. It felt validating that people were actually were thinking about me because honestly there, I don't remember a whole lot of conversation from many people. So at the time I felt very alone.

[00:11:08] **Esther Perel:** Alright stop one sec. Okay. Now breathe because you've just described an entire experience, an entire narrative, a whole phase of your life, where your wife commits suicide. You have four kids. You don't know where to turn, where does one begin and nobody calls.

[00:11:40] **Him:** Yeah.

[00:11:41] **Esther Perel:** And you're so used to doing everything alone that you don't even realize that maybe you shouldn't have to do it all alone.

[00:11:46] **Him:** Yeah.

[00:11:47] **Esther Perel:** You just feel alone. Let that sink.

[00:11:58] **Him:** I think in the moment you don't, even like when I was in that moment and you're dealing with the logistics after death, there's a lot that's happening. And so I don't know that I was even really dwelling on the fact that no one was calling. It wasn't until afterwards that you start to think where were people? My parents came and they really helped out a lot, but I anticipated more.

And again, it's not something you think about in the moment, you're getting phone calls from insurance, and you're trying to deal with bank accounts. I've told my wife that one of the hardest calls I ever received was shortly afterwards, I get a phone call from the organ donation people, and it was a brutal phone call because to be a little gruesome, you're talking about carving up your loved one.

And when that phone call comes, it's heavy. There's no one to take that call, but yeah. And it's not a conversation that you talk about, but even afterwards, I almost thought, I think I want to take my name off the registry because I don't want my kids or my wife to have to deal with that phone call, and so there's a lot of those kinds of things that happen. And when all that dust settles, that's when you start to think, how come nobody reached out? In a sense you think, did I have friends? So to get those phone calls 10 years later and find out that I really did, but in their own way, they were scared. They didn't, I think we... there's the throat clearing again, I'm sorry. Like I said earlier, that death is inevitable. Death is a part of our life. It's part of...

[00:13:39] **Esther Perel:** One second, one second. Don't use words to just wash over everything. Now you just went right there. Do I even have friends? Where is everybody? In that moment, you don't know where they are. And 10 years later you realize they just didn't know what to say. How is all of this for you?

[00:14:13] **Him:** Honestly in that moment, it was empowering for me because the light went on in my head and I thought this was my story, but it doesn't have to be this other spouse's story. And I, so I said, all right,

we're going to, I'll put something together. And I thought, if nobody knows what to talk about and what to say after a death, but really after a suicide, then let's have the conversation. Let's talk about what are the good things to say and are the helpful things to say. And what are the really not helpful things to say?

[00:14:45] **Esther Perel:** What's the one thing that you wished someone had told you back then?

[00:14:51] **Him:** There was one guy that was a coworker of mine. What he did for me was better than anything else that anyone could've done. And I bumped into him as we were going in, I think to Target and his family was coming out. We were getting ready to travel to a different state for the funeral. And I just saw him in front of the store and he let me wrap my arms around him and cry. I don't know what he said, I don't think he said anything. He might've said I'm sorry. But I think all he said was I heard what happened. And that was it. And there was more healing in that moment to me than fumbling around with what's the proper word to say. I think he just let me be vulnerable with him.

And he wasn't embarrassed that we were in public and then we walked away and so it doesn't come, it's not about words. It's about just being present and I guess really what he did was he acknowledged what happened and he didn't try to gloss over it. It's just not helpful. It feels very shallow sometimes when you say the typical platitudes of what they're going to better place or whatever.

[00:16:01] **Esther Perel:** And have you been able to let your kids lean on you like that? Collapse while you hold them up, while you buttress.

[00:16:19] **Him:** Yes and no. I have done that. I could have done it more, but I have been doing that more lately than early on. I think I told you that one of my kids was struggling with suicidal ideations. And I just got angry because I, all I could think of was we've already been through this almost like, how could you do this again?

[00:16:41] **Esther Perel:** To me?

[00:16:42] **Him:** Yeah. Yeah. Like I don't, I can't go through this again. And thankfully she was here, there to step in, into the gap for me and bring that compassion that I couldn't bring. But then, recently we had another child struggle and, I was able to get on a plane and fly back immediately and, be there.

[00:17:04] **Esther Perel:** That is very special.

[00:17:07] **Her:** I think it was probably one of the most now I'm going to cry.

[00:17:12] **Esther Perel:** By the way he has a pulse.

[00:17:15] **Her:** Yes, he does. Him getting on that plane, actually, it was a train here to get on the train, to go get to the plane. That moment was for all that they've gone through together, the two of them, for me, it was really powerful. To me, it was a healing moment for their relationship. And who doesn't want their dad to come rescue them?

[00:17:42] **Esther Perel:** But demanding is that you didn't freeze.

[00:17:45] **Her:** Yeah, no, I didn't.

[00:17:46] **Esther Perel:** You didn't freeze neither in terror nor in rage. You got up and you just knew exactly what to do and you did it. How do you talk about the mother of your children with your children? Both of you?

[00:18:00] **Him:** Oftentimes I don't. Yeah.

[00:18:03] **Her:** You don't talk about her?

[00:18:07] **Esther Perel:** And they have learned not to talk about her with you either?

[00:18:11] **Him:** No. The younger ones don't really remember her and so it doesn't come up. Not, I don't believe that it's because they feel like it's a taboo topic because when questions do arise, I engage. I'm not afraid to talk about her, but I don't ever think to initiate conversations.

Recently, I don't even remember the conversation, but I was in the car with our youngest, who at the time was 22 months when her biological mom passed. And I said, do you have...

[00:18:42] **Esther Perel:** Pause for the distinction just now.

[00:18:45] **Him:** Biological mom? Is that what you mean?

[00:18:47] **Esther Perel:** Yes. Because what you're saying is there is a mother here.

[00:18:51] **Her:** Yes.

[00:18:52] **Esther Perel:** There is a person who is doing the role of the mother. And that is me. And I just said the mother of the kids as in the woman who brought the children to the world and you made a distinction between that and the woman who mothers them. And that's a very crucial distinction to make.

[00:19:12] **Her:** I think about her all the time. And I think about her, gosh, it depends on the kid, what's going on. But with our youngest right now, she's looking more and more like her biological mother. I said to her, do you have questions? Do you ever want to know? I said, I can't tell you the stories, but we can always ask and find out.

And she said, I do sometimes, but I never feels like the right time to ask. And I said, I could understand that, that you wouldn't know she was, I think about her, but I don't know what to think. It's just this, somebody, you'll always love, you just don't know who they are. And I said that it has to be, that has to be confusing sometimes, but I also understand that intrinsic feeling within you, she will always be a part of you. She gave you life. Therefore you'll never stop thinking about this person. And so I just reminded her, she could always ask. And then it just goes on and there's never, it's nothing ever any dramatics or big deal. And even tonight you had a conversation with the older kids about her, right?

[00:20:28] **Him:** Yeah. To go back to your question of, do I talk? The two older kids are the ones that remember her better. They were 12 and 10 when she died. And so they, they have memories and, it's

interesting because the two of them now live near each other and they've actually grown a lot closer together, almost like they're discovering that they have a trauma bond.

And so they get together and talk about things. And you can, I can tell by when they relay these stories to me that they're in their own mind, trying to piece together, the fragmented memories that they have and they're and, they'll occasionally share that with me and we'll talk through it.

But, from the very beginning I've told the kids, like I never wanted to schedule grief. I didn't want to. Scheduled days to memorialize because pretty soon you, you have an excuse just about at least once a month. So you have birthdays and the death date and Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving, whatever it is to remind you.

And so I, wasn't going to set about doing that to say, today's the day we have to do this, but I also told them, I want you guys to have the freedom that it could be a random day of the week that just suddenly you're the grief hits you and it overwhelms you. I said we'll stop what we're doing. And we will press into that, but maybe I should have scheduled it just at random times, because there is something about the ritual of,

[00:21:54] **Esther Perel:** You have four of them and it's not one size fits all. It doesn't have to be about grief. You remind me, or there was a time once with your mom that this and that. So that she's just a person that you can chit chat about, actually, not just grieve. She's a presence and that presence is not an aura or a secret or hidden something, it just is there and it's accessible. And she used to cook this dish and that pot, she brought me. And when I was dating your mother that oh, your grandfather or grandparents, that. It's on the one hand more ordinary, it's not ominous memories. If you don't have memories, everybody's interested in their origin story.

[00:22:46] **Him:** You're right. It does not.

[00:22:48] **Esther Perel:** That doesn't mean that you did anything wrong. It just means that you can expand this because what happens is that because you are silent, your very intuitive, sensitive wife here starts to do what she often does, which is she picks up the burden and she starts to feel responsible that she needs to fill the gap.

[00:23:16] **Him:** That's very true. I think so. I don't want this to sound like I'm making excuses, but I think it gets more complicated for me in how, I'll be honest, I don't really want to remember because it's more than the grief of suicide.

[00:23:34] **Esther Perel:** Of course. It's every time you came home and you didn't know what condition you were going to find her in, it's what it's like to live with an addict. It's what it's like to live with a person who is promiscuous. And you have no idea in which bed she currently is, or if it's even a bed and all of those things. So it's not the fact that they don't have memories. It's the fact that. I don't want to go back to your memories.

[00:23:59] **Him:** That's true. It's not only do I not want to go back.

I also realizing after she was gone, there was so many years that was a lie that I honestly don't know what memories are real and what aren't. I can't, I don't think of it in terms of, I'm trying to avoid it as much as it's almost impossible to navigate. And I just don't I guess.

[00:24:26] **Esther Perel:** Just join us. You have something to say about this?

[00:24:32] **Her:** I'm just thinking about maybe the things that seem, things I can't ever answer. I don't know .What was her favorite color? What was she like as a teenager, because that's when he started dating her. And, have three, you've got almost a fourth one that's a teenager. And so those little things of just being able to share those moments with the kids, I think is important for them to just take hold of somebody that gave them life. And even for me, because there was a life before me that created these children. It's not about so much the actions of what she did or didn't do. It's just who she was.

[00:25:21] **Him:** But I guess that's where the struggle is, I don't know who she was. I don't know how far back the lies go. I don't know how ...was it just the last couple of years or was it the whole time?

[00:25:34] **Esther Perel:** That is less for your young kids anyway, that's yours to sit with. For them, it's sometimes exactly as simple as her favorite color, what did she like to eat? What did you guys do when you were dating? How did you meet? Why did you pick her stuff like that in a way. By answering or by being in conversation with your kids about more trivial stuff sometimes, it allows you to also not just think about the betrayals, the duplicity, the secrets. But their reality is different from yours. What the little ones want to know, they want to know themselves. And in knowing more about her, they figure out a few more things about themselves.

I had one question in my mind. I said, oh, I would love to talk with them. Which was that I remember when you came, you said that the word you had written for that year was revive. And that you felt that you had done a fair amount of suffering of healing, of surviving, of putting the pieces together of what we ended up calling in a metaphor, the ER room, and that you want to start to live and to be more greedy with life. And I just was curious, did you do that?

[00:27:30] **Her:** We've definitely had the moments. Moving overseas has given us opportunities to get away just the two of us. I think one of my favorite moments most recently was when I had gone into London for the day. I texted him, do you want to just come meet me in the city? And he's like, sure. And it was the summertime here in London, during the pandemic when we were finally able to go out and it just felt alive and vibrant and with a pulse.

And I was sitting outside this little Italian cafe and just waiting and just seeing him walk through the crowd and thinking, when I would dream about who I would meet, I would always think I would meet my future spouse in a cafe in Europe or somewhere really romantic. And the way we met wasn't necessarily romantic.

But then in these moments, I feel like it's, it is exactly what I ever dreamt up, but it's my reality. And we're just sitting there at the table across from each other with everyone else. And it's not, we're not parents. I love those moments and you probably don't think anything of them. I don't know, but for me, I'm very aware of how much I'm just loving it.

[00:28:51] **Esther Perel:** Wait one second, one second. You're going to get, you're going to let this go by? Is it like you don't make any of this? This means nothing to you? It's huge for me though.

[00:29:01] **Him:** No, I definitely enjoyed that. I know that she's been thinking of those kinds of moments in ways I never did, but I still love it. I still, I still get something out of it. Hopping on a train and being spontaneous, and you're in London.

[00:29:16] **Her:** And we're not in the suburbs, we're in London, this is their life. Anna Quinlan has this beautiful quote. It talks about the glittering Mica in the long stretches of gray cement. For me, those are those moments, those pearls and it draws us out of those roles and it's playful. It's delight. It's getting to know each other. It's sharing stories. It's just that connection to me.

[00:29:48] **Esther Perel:** These types of moments are among the most exquisite parts of a relationship. They are the things that truly cement, there is a view that just sometimes says sharing the vicissitudes of life together, going through the struggles of life together, mourning together, suffering together, the things that really bind us and they're there too. But those moments when you're able to transcend the limits of reality, when you are completely focused on each other. Curious, that this person who is next to you is still somewhat mysterious and elusive, and there's still something to learn about them. She's the poet of the house. She creates these scenes. You are in that state that you said, now we want to live. Now. We want to feel not just that we are surviving, but that we are alive

[00:30:50] **Her:** I have this memory of actually, when I lived in Manhattan, of going on a date and I hadn't lived there long.

[00:31:01] **Esther Perel:** A date with him, or another date?

No, this was 20 years ago. I'd been set up on the state. I didn't know the guy, I remember meeting him somewhere in Midtown and I we were going to eat somewhere in Brooklyn and I said, let's walk. He was like, are you crazy? And I was so excited to see the city because the only way I could understand my sense of direction was by walking, because I would come out of the Metro, the subway, and I'd think, where am I? And I remember walking, I think we were over in the promenade in Brooklyn and seeing the Brooklyn Bridge and thinking, I don't even know this person, and I'm having this incredibly romantic moment. And I remember telling myself in that moment, I never wanted to have these experiences again with someone I didn't want to experience it with. And so years later, I'm working as a travel guide. I've seen incredible places. I've never seen the Sistine Chapel and I've taken so many people to Rome, to the Vatican because I've waited to do these things with whoever that future person would be

Have you taken them?.

[00:32:09] **Her:** We've checked off quite a few things on my list. Not everything.

[00:32:13] **Him:** The line was way too long to get in, so we did other things, but we will get back there.

[00:32:21] **Esther Perel:** But you're not just showing him the site. You're sharing a part of you through the site.

[00:32:29] **Her:** Yes.

[00:32:29] **Esther Perel:** And you know that right?

[00:32:31] **Him:** Me or yeah? I know that.

[00:32:33] **Esther Perel:** You know that. What are the other ways that you share parts of you?

[00:32:39] **Him:** I don't know why you've got to ask these kinds of questions.

[00:32:42] **Esther Perel:** As they say in French un défo professionnelle, professional bias or something.

[00:32:49] **Him:** Yeah. I don't want to be a Debbie downer. But as I'm listening to this and I'm thinking about your initial question of did we revive and I'm thinking about myself, And I don't know that I did. For me, throughout my life I've always been a creative person, but I don't have any creativity anymore.

It feels like that part of my mind has died, which the romantic part, the creative part. And it has been in fact, the last couple of years were really, I wasn't in a good place. I think it was a convergence of finally the kids didn't need me to support them. And I, and so that imagery of you put the mask on yourself, but then you put it on your kids.

I really didn't do that. I went masks to the kids and I, and so now I get to the point where I'm just left with me. And it's converging on, I don't know, midlife crisis, forties, being stuck at a job that I'm so tired of being in and feeling like there's no escape and I'm just trudging along. And all of that's compounding and I'm not, she's making moves vertically, she's moving in a positive direction, she is reviving and I'm, a dragnet holding things down a little bit. And to her credit, she's not gotten bogged down and she's continued to persevere.

[00:34:19] **Her:** I mean, there's moment where you weren't sure if you wanted us, even. That for me, it was pretty low.

[00:34:33] **Esther Perel:** But how did you get there?

[00:34:36] **Him:** I don't know, I think.

[00:34:39] **Esther Perel:** You're stuck.

[00:34:40] **Him:** Yeah. I was thinking about this before we had this call and I think a good analogy might be like I was, so I've been so stuck inward that it's almost like having an emotional affair with yourself, where like my mindset was not on her in, in ways that it should have been because I was so stuck.

[00:35:04] **Esther Perel:** All right, so tell me, if this resonates with you, that's how I'm receiving this is there were six years about where I couldn't really think about much. I had to just function and do and be responsible and I was often enough in a panic that I didn't even have the bandwidth to even think, do I want any of this? I have no choice. And on occasion, I just say I can't take one more thing, but they keep coming. What kind of life is this? And she wants to be romantic and she wants to experience depth and she wants to connect. And on occasion, I'm blessed that I have somebody who wants that because two like me would be really a basement life.

And I'm stuck because on some level I haven't had a chance to really think about myself, when you don't grow. When a living organism doesn't grow, it fossilizes. For awhile, you had so much change that you'd felt chaotic

because so much was happening, then nothing's happening. So I start to go and feel slightly numb, depressed, lifeless, listless, low energy, et cetera. The opposite of creativity. Creativity is an active engagement with the unknown, it's risk-taking, it's curiosity, it's exploration, it's discovery, it's mystery. It's all of that. He has this way of raising his eyebrow. Sometimes it means what the hell are you talking about? And sometimes it means she got it.

[00:37:01] **Him:** I've heard this. I never get to see it myself. But yeah, I've heard that. I know.

[00:37:05] **Esther Perel:** Like I talk and I watch your eyebrows. They tell me: on track, off track.

[00:37:13] **Him:** Yeah, you were very much on track. I think it's been all of that. I've been worried about myself in the sense that what has happened, I am a creative person, but I'm not now.

[00:37:22] **Esther Perel:** What do you mean when you say that? Where is your spark?

[00:37:27] **Him:** In the past I used to be able to come home and read and write and create. And I don't know, I'm saying that word a lot, but.

[00:37:35] **Esther Perel:** Imagine.

[00:37:36] **Him:** Yeah, imagine is a great word. Just to be imaginative again and I can't seem to access that part of my first.

[00:37:46] **Esther Perel:** Do you have a social life? Do you have friends? Do you have other people you talk to and do things with?

[00:37:52] **Him:** 2020 has made that hard. We haven't been able to really legally do that.

[00:37:59] **Esther Perel:** But I did hear that, you didn't say this is a pandemic development. That's true. There's an atrophy.

[00:38:08] **Him:** That's a great word.

[00:38:09] **Esther Perel:** Atrophy.

[00:38:10] **Him:** That was a really good word. Yes.

[00:38:14] **Esther Perel:** How many close people do you have around you there?

[00:38:17] **Him:** For me personally?

[00:38:18] **Esther Perel:** Four people, could you bring four close people together?

[00:38:23] **Him:** We could bring four people here,

[00:38:26] **Esther Perel:** No "we."

[00:38:26] **Him:** No. The closest friends that I have are back in the states. And so we do stay in touch.

[00:38:33] **Esther Perel:** I really am not talking local.

[00:38:35] **Him:** Then yes, then I do have four friends that I could reach out to.

Okay. Do you want to do something daring? I will only share it with you if you're going to do it. Otherwise I don't waste my precious ideas.

Yes. Yes. I'll do something daring.

[00:38:52] **Esther Perel:** Okay it's not fleshed out, but this is what I'm imagining. You're going to bring four people together. If its zoom its zoom, or wherever online, that you like that you think you can talk to that, get it, that are creative problem solvers of the existential sort. And you're going to create a little council of friends and you're just going to say I needed to bring together people I trust and respect because I have some questions. This is what's been troubling me. I used to be in high pressure, high action mode, so I didn't have much time to think or to sink. I was in crisis mode much of the time too. And now it's quiet and it's quiet inside too. And I wanted to invite you into a conversation with me about this.

[00:40:09] **Him:** I can do that.

[00:40:11] **Esther Perel:** Good. Have fun.

[00:40:15] **Him:** It will be fun.

[00:40:18] **Esther Perel:** First of all, people love to be invited in a way like this, because they suddenly realize they're important, they matter, you care about them and they love to help. And they've been there, variations on the same theme, each one, a piece.

[00:40:32] **Her:** And just like you said, maybe some people didn't know how to be there for you, and you didn't know how to ask for this help 10 years ago but here you are now

[00:40:40] **Esther Perel:** You got it, that's what I'm doing. And that may lead to all kinds of trips, visits, basketball playing, music sharing, movie watching, walks, philosophy, seminars, you name it, but you have got to go back where the hinge snapped off. And the act itself of going to fetch a group of people who are important to you and surrounding yourself with them and inviting them to be there for you is the opposite of your origin story.

[00:41:21] **Him:** Yes, it is. There is something about just being in the presence of others that you know, that sharpens one another. Just, it's almost like the collaboration that you hear about with musicians in the recording studio and, there's a songwriter who's brought in. I don't know some piano player to play the part that he's got in his head, but the piano player comes in and he plays a line and it's different than what the original songwriter thought of, but it's better. And then maybe there's a banter back and forth. And ultimately you end up with a beautiful song that's better than what you started with, that was in your head. And so that's what I imagine getting these group of friends together. That's what I hope to achieve is that working out the parts of the song.

[00:42:16] **Esther Perel:** Beautiful, beautiful. Especially interestingly, our first session ended with a song is there a song, you love?

[00:42:38] **Her:** Yes. (Sings) *It isn't your sweet conversation that brings this sensation, oh no it's just the nearness of you.*

[00:42:53] **Him:** Love you.

[00:42:53] **Her:** Love you.

[00:42:53] **Jesse (Producer):** This was a follow-up episode of Where Should We Begin? To hear their original session just search for "A Romantic Revival" on Spotify.

Esther Perel is the author of *Mating in Captivity* and *The State of Affairs*, and also the host of the podcast and How's Work? To apply with your partner for a session for the podcast, or for show notes on each episode, go to whereshouldwebegin.estherperel.com.

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