

Hey there, beautiful! 🌸 Before you dive in, a quick heads-up: this transcript is a super close-to-verbatim buddy from our podcast, but it's got its quirks! We didn't call the grammar cops on it, so you might bump into a typo or two. But hey, that just adds character, right? 😊 Embrace the wild side of language and enjoy the read! Happy exploring! ✨



From Darkness to Empowerment: Overcoming Abuse

Introduction and Guest Introduction

Carmen Hecox: Kathy Wisniewski, welcome to Create the Best Me.

Kathy Wisniewski: Thank you so much, I'm excited to be here and to share a few pieces of my story with you.

Kathy's Journey and Her Podcast 'Tragically Beautiful'

Carmen Hecox: Great Kathy you have a podcast called Tragically Beautiful. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your show.

Kathy Wisniewski: Sure. So, my podcast is definitely a result of my own experiences and things that I've been through. And unfortunately, those experiences were not all very good. I experienced a series of abusive relationships, different kinds of abuse. There was emotional abuse, mental abuse. There was even spiritual abuse in there and one instance of physical abuse as well.

And kind of throughout this process of healing, I knew that I wanted to be able to share my story and that came at a very distinct moment in my most recent abusive relationship. It just hit me in a very distinct moment, and I knew that this was my

mission. This was my purpose now in life was to help other people who are going through abusive relationships or who are just out of abusive relationships to be able to find the healing that they need.

And I was inspired by a performer that I followed on tv and also her solo work. Her name is Jessica Willis Fisher. And she used to be part of the band called the Willis Clan. And it was a group of siblings, 12 siblings, all very talented.

And then they, kind of got some notoriety on America's Got Talent and they made it to, I believe, the semifinals. They didn't win the whole thing, but I think they made it really, really far. And then they were on tour and all of a sudden, Jessica kind of disappeared from the family and there were some rumblings about what had been going on, but I just loved watching the family.

And, uh, anyway, fast forward that story. She had suffered some abuse of her own at the hands of her father and she has started a solo career, writing and singing. And her most recent album came out in April of 2022. And this album is almost completely about the abuse that she endured and what she went through during those times. And she also then subsequently put a book out called Unspeakable. And I listened to that audio book on a long road trip one day, and I found myself just kind of like hearing these stories that were so tragic.

The things that she experienced and that's how up until that point was all just kind of you thought that you knew what happened, but you weren't sure and that nothing was ever really said about it. So, she reveals her story. And then, I remember finding myself while I was listening to this book, constantly thinking, but where are you now?

I can't wait to get to that part. I want to know where you are now and how your life has changed. And obviously I can see how your life has changed. You're doing music again. You wrote the book and everything, but that those are the stories I really want to hear. And so. I kind of put all of that together and I thought, how do I express this?

How do I help other people? And, uh, my best friend had come out to visit me around Christmas time last year. It was a little earlier in December. And I was telling her like, I just, I need to use this. I need to do something. I'm not sure what it is, but like all of this is kind of coming together, but it's still very enigmas to me.

Um, and I was also in the same weekend she was here. I was telling her about the podcasts that I produce for my full-time job. I work for a nonprofit and I've done a podcast for them since March of 2021. And I was telling her, it's kind of separate conversation. I was just like, oh, I just love doing this. I love it. I love it, podcasting gives me life. And she was the one that kind of connected those dots for me and said, you have all of this that you want to share. You love podcasting. Put them together. And I was like, that's brilliant. And so that's where the podcast came from. And basically, the whole premise of the podcast is to use the tragedy more as a vehicle.

The tragedy is not what we focus on. I give my guests the opportunity to talk about some of the details of their stories, but we focus more on the beautiful and what did they learn throughout this process? How did they take that and turn it into something beautiful? What does their life look like now?

How are their relationships different? All of these kinds of things. So that's kind of where it came from.

Carmen Hecox: That's where you got your voice.

Kathy Wisniewski: Yes. Yep.

Kathy's Early Life and Relationship Experiences

Carmen Hecox: So, can you share a bit about your early life upbringing, and do you think that it played a role into the relationships that you entered?

Kathy Wisniewski: Yes, absolutely. They did. It did. So, growing up, I grew up in New Jersey. And, I had a fantastic childhood. You know, the childhoods that don't exist anymore, where you're outside until the streetlights come on, your mom has to call you back in. That was the kind of childhood I had, and it was fantastic.

And I lived in a very small town, it was one square mile, and our high school was very, very small. Well, the next town over from us was very large town, but the town beyond that was smaller than mine. And so typically what would have happened is that those kids would have gone to the bigger town to go to high school.

But since that school was so filled up, they actually came to our school. So, in ninth grade of every year, there was this influx of new kids coming into the high school. And so that's where I met the person that I refer to as my high school sweetheart. And we were together for about 10 months in high school.

We just clicked right away. And this was just someone that I just held in such high regard. He was just a really standup kind of boy at that point. And I was in love as much as you could be at 14 years old. And then, you know, we dated for about 10 months or so. And then we broke up and I started seeing someone else.

And then, high school, we had graduation and then he and I kind of lost touch. And I was still with this other guy. And then when we broke up, which that wasn't one of my abusive relationships, when we broke up, I reached back out to my high school sweetheart. And now we're in our mid-twenties. And we got back together.

We actually went out to dinner that night together. And, then we were together for about two and a half years after that. And we had talked about getting married. We were now about 26 or so years old and talked about getting married and, then kind of out of the blue, he dumped me. There was no real reason. He said, I love you. I've always loved you. I'm always going to love you. I just don't think that this is right in where we should be right now. And I was devastated.

So, after that, obviously we weren't in contact anymore. And then, I met someone else and then, we started seeing each other, and ended up getting married at 28 years old. I remember thinking to myself, I'm old now. I want to have children. I want to have a family and I'm old and, I don't know. I felt like there was nobody in the world that could ever be better than second best. And so, I settled and this person, was, I think we made great friends. We were not great spouses and there was a little bit of abuse there too.

And, then 10 years down the line, we had been married and we were in the process of a divorce and my high school sweetheart comes back around and, tells me that he's in the process of a divorce too. So, we ended up getting back together for the third time in our mid-thirties. And, then ended up getting married and we were married for ten years before I left, twelve years before everything was finally complete and over with.

But I definitely think that he was the common thread throughout my life that just caused me to make some bad decisions. It changed my mindset. Like I said, no one

could ever be better than second best to me. So, I settled throughout my life. And because of that, I think I don't want to say that any of the abuse I experienced was my fault because everybody's responsible for their own actions. But I do think that I put myself in these positions by not having standards and boundaries, which is one of the main things that I learned throughout all of this.

Signs of Abuse in Kathy's Relationships

Carmen Hecox: What were the early signs of your first two relationships that indicated some form of abuse that you now see, but you didn't see back then?

Kathy Wisniewski: Yeah, so, it's interesting because when I talk about my abuse, I actually kind of pool the three of them together for a couple of reasons. One of them being, I don't want to incriminate anybody. I'm not interested in making anybody feel bad or somebody that knows the two of us.

That's like, I heard Kathy said this. So, I kind of pull them together and I always just refer to them as him. And, so although they're three separate experiences to me, I just talk about them as one. And, he'll have a name when the book comes out. Not a name that any of them actually has, but he will have a name in the book that comes out.

But, with the first one, he was in the military and there were times that he just started not coming home and I would literally sit up at the kitchen table all night long, just wondering if he was alive, if he was okay and all of this. And then, five o'clock in the morning, he would come strolling in like nothing happened.

And I, it's like what, you know, and of course you never wanted to say anything and just like, oh, I was out with my platoon buddies or this or that. And, I mean, that obviously is a sign right there that something is going on. But there was also, the person starts, pulling away. They start not wanting to talk anymore. They start to not like it when you talk. And it could be about anything. It could be about, what does our weekend look like? And they get annoyed by that. And then, they start to blow you off when you communicate, or they'll just walk away or walk out of the room when you're trying to talk.

And, that one in that relationship, that escalated to some physical abuse. It was just one instance. And that was when I knew this is, done. I will not accept this. And

so, I kind of hung on to that relationship until I could get into a better place. Um, I was very far away from home and waited until I got back closer to home where I could make this all happen and know that I had a support system and I had safety and all of those things.

So, those were some of the red flags that I saw there. And of course, it did turn out that he was cheating and all of that, which was obvious from the beginning. But, yeah, those are some of the red flags. When you're in a relationship with a significant other, that's supposed to be the person that loves you unconditionally, that supports you, that wants the best for you, that takes the safety of your emotional health and your heart seriously.

And so, if that person is not paying attention to those things and is not guarding those things, that's a huge red flag.

Kathy's Marriage and Its Downfall

Carmen Hecox: How did your marriage begin and what were the early signs of abuse?

Kathy Wisniewski: So, my marriage with my high school sweetheart, actually, when it started the first, I would say the first three years of our marriage were amazing. I loved every minute of it. We had such good times. We laughed together every day. We were just, really, really compatible in a lot of different ways and practically every way.

And to me, it was like confirmation of all of the real estate I let him take up in my head all of these years. Because even when we weren't together, I was always thinking of him and hoping he was okay and hoping he was happy and all of that. So, this was like confirmation of, at the time of what I thought I knew all along that we belong together, like this is my soulmate.

And so those first three years were fantastic. And then, it just started kind of the same way where he would just pull away and isolate. He would come home from work and just kind of either want to stay out in the garage working on a car all night or just be on the computer. Friday nights were our date night, and we didn't have a lot of money.

So, our date night was like, doing our grocery shopping and going to need a cup of coffee and just simple things like that. And he started to, well, why don't you go without me tonight? I'm tired. And, or I'm going to go hang out with my buddy tonight and those kinds of things.

And that, being I was with the fact that I was with my person, the person that I truly believed was my soulmate, these things were even more hurtful. And it was like, when I tried to explain that to him and tried to express my feelings to him, he just wasn't open to it at all. I was just being ridiculous. I was being emotional. I was being a girl, those kinds of things. And I just believed that this was just something he was going through, and it was going to get better. He does have some childhood trauma that I knew about. I'm one of, I think, the fewest few people in the world that knows about it because I've known him almost all of his life.

And I knew even back at a young age of 14, I knew that if he didn't deal with this at some point in his life, it was going to come back to bite him. And I thought when we got back together this third time, I thought that he had dealt with it because he was so charming and so just loving. And there's a lot of the love bombing and just saying all the right things.

So, it was especially hurtful when he all of a sudden didn't care about what I had to say. And then it escalated to a point as the years went on where he would twist my words. And he would start to say things to me like, everybody knows that you have a terrible memory, so it did not happen the way you're saying it happened. Like that never happened at all. And it was like, I am not crazy. Like I remember exactly this moment or whatever. I remember this situation. I didn't really know what that was. I didn't know the term gaslighting at that time in my life. And, but just, I just knew that that was very hurtful. And I was like, where is this coming from?

And so, in my mind, I was like, okay, this is, he hadn't dealt with his childhood trauma. This is now coming up and that's what this is. And so, I kind of determined that I was going to be there for him no matter what I was going to help him through this, no matter how difficult it was, because this was just someone that I loved so completely.

And then he would latch on to single words sometimes. And get very upset about them. Like if, for example, I, at one point said like, I just, I want to spend time with

you. Like we never spend time together. And he latched on to never, he was like, never, we never spend time together. We're not together right now.

And it was like, no, no, we're not, we're fighting right now over something I don't even understand. So, there was that too. And then it went down the road of him not coming home or, the lies and the deceit. And, then it was, a few years later after, here I am still trying to work on this, fix this, doing anything I could to try and please him and everything else.

And, a few years later it came out that he had been cheating. And, he had been cheating with this girl that he had met at his church. And it had been going on for about four years at that point. And I had a lot of people say to me If something like this is going on for four years, how could you not know?

And I tell them this man was home every night. He was home. He was in the garage. He was in, on his computer, but he was home. The only time he wasn't home was when he went to his church that he insisted he wanted to maintain going to. He used to live further up in the state, and it was close for him then and had moved down to the southern part of the state.

Now it was a two-hour drive, but he maintained that this was where his friends were, and he loved the men's group there and everything else. And so, service was on Saturday night. So, he would leave at 12 or one o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, he managed the soundboard. It was, the church was set up in a school, so they had to set up and tear down every week.

So, he would go early to set up and then he would run the soundboard for the service, and then he had to tear everything down. In the beginning, he wouldn't get home till midnight, one o'clock after a two-hour drive both ways and all of that. And then it started, turning into, well, some of the guys want to go shooting tomorrow, so I'm going to stay overnight in my friend's trailer and all of this.

And then, it just was revealed that they were all lies, all lies. And he had been seeing this girl and he would, I, why she didn't, it never occurred to her, like, this is weird that I'm only seeing him one day of the week is beyond me. But she was very young, and very impressionable, had very low self-esteem, and here is this really good looking, older male paying her attention, and she just fell for it, much like I did.

Carmen Hecox: Why didn't you go to church with him?

Kathy Wisniewski: I, in the beginning, I wanted to go, but I was already driving an hour each way to go to work. And so, I was already spending 10 hours a week in the car. And so in the very beginning of our relationship, and I would say, if I look back on everything and there's one thing I regret, this would be it.

He had invited me to go in the beginning and I was like, I'm already in the car 10 hours a week. I don't want to be in the car another four hours on the weekend and everything else. And so, I didn't go. I didn't go with him. And that would be my one regret. I don't think it would have changed much, but that would be my biggest regret.

And then as time went on and I started to see the problems, then I started to say to him, I'm going to go to church with you this weekend. And he would be like, this is my men's group. This is where I get to plug in, like, I don't want you to go and all of that.

Carmen Hecox: You said that this was your high school sweetheart. This was your first love and you had known him since you were young, and you knew a lot about his upbringing. Do you think that, because I know that we as women were fixers, do you think that maybe when you first fell in love with him do you think that maybe you saw yourself as a hero and maybe this is a broken person and with my love and my support, my healthy upbringing, I can fix him.

Kathy Wisniewski: I think it definitely played a role in it. I don't think that was the first thing. Cause obviously I didn't know about everything at first when I first met him and we were already, building a friendship and everything else. But once I learned about that, I think that was definitely an element.

And of course, that played through to our marriage where I was like, I'm going to love him enough to make him come around and you know, it's like, I think of myself as someone who is a really good partner. And so, I thought that, if I can just be there for him and support him and, just, try to encourage him that things would change.

Carmen Hecox: What were the moments you went through during the marriage that made you just say, this is not worth it, I'm leaving? Did you have those

moments like pop in your head, but then there was something that kept you there when you should have left earlier?

Kathy Wisniewski: I would say that there was never a time that I wanted to leave him prior to finding out about the affair. And that's because, I have Christian beliefs. I believe that, you know, marriage is supposed to be for life and there's really only one provision for divorce, and that is cheating and adultery. And so up until that point, I was like, okay, like this is, I'm just going to dig in because I'm not leaving him because this is what I believe that marriage is sacred, and it should be honored. And, even taking out that spiritual peace I'm a person that likes to see my commitments through. And so, I had a personal responsibility to myself in a way too that I wanted to, you know, I dedicated myself to this and I'm going to see it through. But, once the word came out about the affair, I did actually try for about a year because I thought, okay, this is all wrapped up in his childhood trauma.

So, for about a year, I tried to still mend things and say, okay, let's work through this. Let's go to counseling. Let's get you the help that you need. And he just didn't want any part of it. He just, I believe that this is just my own belief. I believe that more than anything, he wanted children. And, when that wasn't happening for us, I think that was part of, I mean, I think it's multifaceted, but I think that was part of what made him seek out a younger woman.

Carmen Hecox: But even though the fact that he wanted children, he still had an issue he needed to address and that was respecting you.

Kathy Wisniewski: Mm hmm.

Carmen Hecox: Because then children would have come into an unhealthy environment.

Kathy Wisniewski: Right, right, yeah, that was definitely a big, a big issue he just, had no respect for me as a person. And like I said, in the beginning, there was all of the charm and all the love bombing and all of the, the protection and all of that. And, looking back on it now, I don't think any of that was real.

I don't think that he's capable of it, honestly, because of everything that he's been through until he deals with it. And then maybe not even then, I don't know.

Kathy's Healing Process After Leaving an Abusive Marriage

Carmen Hecox: What steps did you take toward healing after leaving from an abusive marriage?

Kathy Wisniewski: Yeah, this is where, this is where my story turned to beautiful and, taking the tragedy and turning it around. There was one evening when I was at the house and I was in my office and I was in a puddle on the floor, just sobbing. And this was, I don't, I honestly don't even remember how long after I found out, maybe a month or two.

And he came to the doorway of my office, and he said, “what are you crying about?” And I said, “what am I crying about?” And he's like, are you still crying over this? And I was like, I'm leaving. I'm leaving. But I was just like, it's just not what a marriage is supposed to be. And obviously, the cheating did that as well. But I just remember laying there sobbing after this experience with him and being so let down and feeling so betrayed.

And, you know, when you kind of put all of your stock in something and then the rug is ripped out from under you. It's just, you just don't know which way to turn. And I remember talking to close friends at that time and just constantly saying like, I can't even breathe right now. And all I want to do is just take the next right step.

Just, just one, just one. I can't see what's up ahead, but I can see the next step. And, as I was laying there on the floor that night, I remember thinking to myself, I could curl up in a ball and sit in the corner and be bitter for the rest of my life. And probably no one would blame me because this is terrible what he's done.

Deciding to Make a Change

Kathy Wisniewski: Or I can use this, and I can make my life better because obviously we're going down a road where we're not going to be together anymore. So, what kind of life do I want to live? And I decided that I was going to use this to make me better.

The Power of a Mentor's Words

Kathy Wisniewski: And at that time, I also went over to, I had a wonderful, beautiful mentor, an older woman who I just adored and loved and trusted completely.

And I remember sitting at her kitchen table one night and I was crying about all this. And she said, “I’m going to say something and you’re not going to like it. She said, but it’s not for now. I want you to tuck it away and I want you to bring it out when you’re ready.” And I was like, okay. And she said, you’ve been in several abusive relationships now.

You’ve been in several relationships where you’ve been cheated on and you are the common denominator. And you need to figure out why that is. So, like I said, tuck it away. It’s not for now. And I know it sounds terrible. And of course, my first reaction was, why would you say something like that to me right now?

But I trusted her so implicitly that I did. I tucked that away and I thought, you know, all right, at some point I’m going to come back to this, but it’s not for now.

Moving On and Seeking Distractions

Kathy Wisniewski: So, I ended up moving out of the house and I moved in with a woman that I hadn’t met before. And that was a difficult situation. It was a very difficult situation. And so, I felt like what I needed something to distract me from everything that was going on.

Discovering the Health Coach Training Program

Kathy Wisniewski: And so it was at that point that it felt like the stars aligned in a lot of different directions, for me to attend the health coach training program that, IIN, has. I had known other people, my new boss was, had gone through the program and, it had kept coming up on my feed and all these things. I kept thinking about it. And I was like, this is the perfect time. I’m going to put myself through this program. And so that’s what I did while I was living with this woman. And that

was the thing that kept me sane that, and we worked opposite shifts. So, she was not home at night, which was a good thing.

Understanding the Different Facets of Health

Kathy Wisniewski: Um, So I went through the training program and that was where I learned about the different facets of health. And I'm very type A, I'm very all or nothing. And, to me it was like, I have to heal all of me or why even bother? And it was through this program that I learned that there are different pillars of health.

There is your physical health; yes, there's your emotional health, your mental health, your spiritual health. And all of these different pillars that are in their career and, your social life and, hobbies, all of these things are involved in there.

And so going through that program, I realized that I don't have to do everything at once. And what is most important right now? And that was my mental and emotional health. Because I was just in such a dark place, a darker place than I had ever been in my life. And so that was what I decided to focus on.

Moving Out and Starting Fresh

Kathy Wisniewski: And eventually I moved out of living with this woman. I was living there for about eight months. And then I moved out, I bought a condo in another state, and I moved out to where I am now. And I just spent the next, honestly, it was about three years. Of course, the whole divorce process I was going through that at the same time and he was fighting me on every aspect.

But I took that time and I said, I don't want to really do anything as far, I'm not looking to date anybody. I'm not there. I won't be there for a while. I don't want to do a lot of extracurricular activities.

The Importance of Self-Care and Setting Boundaries

Kathy Wisniewski: I just want to take the time for me and that's okay. And that was something that prior to this was not ever a part of my life.

It was not ever something I thought about that I was worthy of taking time for myself. I was worthy of self-care and healing. And I was worthy, most importantly, that carries me through today, that I was worthy of the standards and boundaries that I needed to put in place for myself in order to keep myself happy and healthy and to have a thriving life.

Finding Support in Books, Podcasts, and Groups

Carmen Hecox: So, were there any, other than this coaching program that you went through, were there any books or support groups that helped you during your journey?

Kathy Wisniewski: I had a wonderful group of women through my church that we were really good friends and, they helped me a ton. And there were a few podcasts. That's when I found [Jasmine Starr](#) and a lot of her stuff, she's talking about business, but it can be applied to life as well. And, hearing a lot of her things really, really helped me.

[Lewis Howes](#) as well, The School of Greatness. He talks a lot about this kind of thing about, finding your happiness and finding your greatness. And it was kind of through all of these things together.

And for me, I'm not saying that this is for everyone, but for me, isolating just a little bit was what I needed. I'm an extreme introvert. And so, kind of pulling away and, not interacting a whole lot. I didn't completely hermitize my life. But I did pull away a bit that was helpful for me and also, therapy. I had never gone to therapy in my entire life. And I started when all of this started happening and that was so helpful to help me kind of change the narrative in my own mind and the story, I was telling myself.

And she was the one, my therapist, who introduced me to what a narcissist is. I had heard the word but didn't really know what it was, and she explained that to me and walked me through that process and, that was super helpful for my healing.

Carmen Hecox: So, for some of the women listening or that are in the audience right now and are listening to what you're saying, how can they find a healthy

support system? Because I know that another thing that is real important, I always think about and I always tell my children, is don't overshare.

Kathy Wisniewski: Mm hmm. So important. Yeah, when I was going through this whole thing. I kept my circle very, very small. That's not to say that other people that you know, aren't your friends, but there are people that are closer to you that, you know, you can trust. And that was, I had a group of about five people that knew what was going on.

And I kept it at that until I knew I was at a point in my life and in my healing where I could share more broadly. But, for me, it was this group of women from church was, the primary group that I shared with. And I think if I didn't have them, I had a couple of close friends, from over the years, that I would have relied on as well. But, having that spiritual background I think this group of women from church really helped me to kind of frame everything in a way that was, that really made sense to me and was healthy for me. And they were there for me, no matter what I needed. They would change plans if I was having a breakdown. Or invite me over just so I could spend some time with them. Of course, that all ended once I moved cause I did move out of state. But, yeah, that was my primary resource of people, and they were phenomenal.

Carmen Hecox: Do you think going through this coaching program helped you figure out what you could share and what you couldn't share with certain people?

Kathy Wisniewski: Um, I think it helped me frame things a little differently because, now I look at my experiences through the lens of health and how that affected my mental health and my emotional health and my physical health. Because everything is connected. Right? So, I think that helps me to frame it and it helped me to put into perspective what details are important and what is not.

And so, I think I've been able to kind of draw the line there between what people need to know. And again, like I said in the beginning, I'm not out to incriminate anybody. I'm not, you know, what happened, happened. And I don't at this point feel anything towards him. I don't hate him. I don't like him. I feel absolutely nothing towards him. And that was kind of how I knew that I was healed. It's like I can look at the situation, I remember every detail, but I don't feel any of it.

And so, in, actually the first episode of my own podcast I had my best friend kind of interview me about, why I was doing this. And I was careful to say in there that

like I understand that there are two sides to every story. This is my side. This is what I experienced. If you talk to him, it's going to be completely different. It doesn't mean that he's wrong and I'm right. It just means that was his experience.

And I truly believe that most of the time, I have no statistics or anything to back this up. It's just my own personal belief. Most of the time, I don't think that abusers think or know that they're actually abusing you.

Carmen Hecox: Yeah. Talking about statistics, I read an article, or I read a blog post before we came on, and this was really shocking for me, is on average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States during one year. That equates to about 10 million women or men.

Kathy Wisniewski: It's, it's incredible and that was one of the reasons too that I wanted to create this podcast. I have, what I say are four different audiences. One is, the person who's in it right now and to give them hope and encouragement that I got out, the guests that I interview have gotten out, you can get out too and you can live a beautiful life that you create.

I want to reach out to people who are just out of an abusive relationship. But maybe they're in that place where everything is still so emotionally charged and volatile. And maybe if they hear these stories, they see, okay, this is the messy part, this is the hard part, but I'm going to get past it.

And then the third person that I would love to reach out to is somebody who hasn't been in an abusive relationship so that they can see the red flags and they can, you know, maybe if they're starting to date someone and they're starting to see some of these things, maybe they can go, hmm, I'm not sure about this. Let me think it through. And they can be aware of some of the red flags before that happens to them.

And then fourth, I don't know if this will ever happen, but it would be my dream if someone who has abused someone else would listen to this podcast and understand how he or she made them feel. And maybe, maybe that would just spark something in them to say hu, I think I did that. and I think I need to change. That would be my dream.

Carmen Hecox: Yeah, and it would change the statistics that I just read. Totally change it.

Kathy Wisniewski: Yeah.

Carmen Hecox: I know this may be a question that you may not be ready to answer, so please, if you're not, then let me know.

The Journey of Forgiveness

Carmen Hecox: Have you forgiven your ex-husband?

Kathy Wisniewski: Have I forgiven him? I think if I'm being really honest, the answer is probably no. Um, and I think if I'm being really honest, I've probably given myself permission not to. And I don't, you know, there, you can argue if that's right or wrong, especially from a spiritual perspective, but I think that's, that's where I am.

I just feel nothing towards him at all. I remember actually at one point talking to my therapist and telling her, because I've known him since I was 14; because I have always thought about him, whether we were together or not. I don't know who I am without him taking up space in my head.

And, she said it's time that you figure that out. But now it's like, I feel like I'm free from him. I'm free from him being in my life directly. I'm free from him taking up space in my mind and yeah, I just, I feel nothing towards him. I don't he's now re-married and he has a son and, sometimes friends will ask me like, does that bother you or does that trigger you or anything?

I'm like, no, I feel nothing. Like, I just hope his kid doesn't grow up like he did, that's it. But yeah, I think if I'm being honest, the answer is probably no.

Carmen Hecox: Yeah, and you know, I don't think there's anything wrong with that? Because my ex-husband, the father of my two children, he cheated on me and to be really honest, it took me about 18 years to honestly, I mean, to where I can say wholeheartedly say, I forgave him. And I called him, and I told him, I forgive you.

He thought I was crazy because he was wondering why I was calling him. But I felt like I needed to do that.

Kathy Wisniewski: hmm. Mm

Carmen Hecox: and I'm a woman of faith. If I'm a woman of faith, my faith teaches me that I need to forgive. And I felt guilty that it took that long for me to do it, but it was because it hurt.

And that was part of my healing journey was to get to that place. And maybe I'm slow. It took me a little bit longer to get there.

Kathy Wisniewski: Right. Right. Yeah. I know this podcast isn't about faith, but to touch on that just for a second, I think that after I came through this, I had more of a struggle with my relationship with God at that point because I was like, why did you let this happen? And you know, our divorce was finalized April of 2022, but like I said, it took about three years to get to that point.

And he fought me every step of the way. And it was just recently, just within the last three or four months where I was thinking about this again and praying about this again. And I felt like, I felt like God was saying, like, I see the beginning from the end. I know where this would have gone.

And, you know, there's always that difference between, did God make this happen or did he allow it to happen? And it's like, it doesn't matter because what matters is that the way it happened was the most loving thing that he could have allowed to happen. Because if we had you know, like I wanted to, I was trying to patch it up and trying to get everything back to normal.

I never would have felt safe in that relationship. I never would have felt like I would always have been suspicious if he didn't come home on time or, anything like that. And I think that, now doing all of this work on myself, I feel healthier mentally and emotionally than I've ever felt in my life.

And I'm happier than I've ever been in my life. And so that is part of my beautiful as well. And just to kind of take that a step forward and bringing in the issue of putting standards and boundaries in place for myself. I did eventually start to feel like, okay, I'm ready to start dating again or whatnot.

And I met someone, and I've said from the beginning, once I started, saying I'm ready to date that I'm not looking for someone who's perfect. I'm looking for someone who's perfect for me. And that includes the flaws and everything else.

And that's fine. We're, we're humans. We're allowed to be flawed. And I did actually meet someone who was just about perfect for me. And it was interesting because as the relationship progressed, I was like, I'm just really happy single. I'm really happy being on my own right now. There are things that I want to build like my podcast and, the course that I want to build and everything else.

It's like, I feel like this is my mission right now is to help other people in abusive relationships. And so, I did cut that off. My friends thought I was crazy. They're like, how could you do that? But it felt like the right decision. And I, I stand by it.

Carmen Hecox: Yeah. Well, you have to listen to what your heart is telling you and your heart is telling you that the journey that you have been through, there's a purpose behind it. And your purpose is to help other people, to be the voice for those women or men that are not ready to speak up. And to strengthen that community. So that they can heal and do what you're doing.

Kathy Wisniewski: Yeah, I just look at it exactly that way. If I can help one person, then I've done my job. And, you know, the feedback that I've gotten from the podcast, people have just said the kindest things that I didn't know I needed to hear this. I didn't realize that there were other people out there who felt the same way I did and keep doing this or what we want to hear more and all of that.

So, I'm really excited to, even to hone my own interviewing skills and podcasting skills and to continue to invite guests on who are ready to share their story or those who aren't. Like I said, I don't ask them to share details. They're not comfortable sharing, but it's been a wild ride.

Like I said, I just started it in June. It's only been a couple of months, but it's been really fun to get to know my guests. And what has been the best part for me is that I always have a phone call with them before we record. And this has been just like this healing experience for all of my guests where they can finally just like, feel like they're in a safe space and just share everything.

And I never bring any of that up on the recording, but I just give them the space to share their experience. And I think them just feeling like they're being heard, feeling like they can unload a little bit. And several of them have said, I've never shared all of this with anyone before. And this is just helped me to feel so free. So that to me is where the magic is. I love bringing you the episodes, but to me, the magic is in our one-on-one calls.

Carmen Hecox: And I think the magic comes because they know that the person on the other side of that phone call is someone who's been there.

Kathy Wisniewski: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. They know that it's safe. They know I'm not going to share any details and yeah, I'm a vault.

Defining Healthy Relationships

Carmen Hecox: How do you define healthy relationships now?

Kathy Wisniewski: Oh, that's a good one. I define it by two people, and it could be any kind of relationship, right? It could be family, employer, employee, coworker, significant other. Two people that are supporting each other and they encourage each other and want to see the other person succeed and are willing to hear that other person's point of view, whether they agree with it or not.

I think that I think that we do ourselves a disservice if we are only ever around people that agree with us. I think that you need to see other perspectives and things like that. And some of these red flags that I mentioned earlier about someone that doesn't want to listen to you or walks away or dismisses you when you're trying to talk.

That to me is not a relationship at all. That's toxic and is only going to lead to bad things. But, um, yeah, I think that, wanting to see the success of the other person and to respect them and to listen to them. I think that those are three things that make a really great relationship.

The Impact of Abuse in Different Relationships

Carmen Hecox: And I think that what people really need to understand is that abusive relationships don't necessarily only happen in marriages. They don't just happen in, mother child or father child dynamics, they also happen in the workplace

Kathy Wisniewski: Mm hmm.

Carmen Hecox: Or, between neighbors and stuff. And so, I think that we need to look a little bit more broader and become more aware of do we have any abusive relationships in any area of our life?

Kathy Wisniewski: Right.

The Importance of Recognizing Red Flags

Kathy Wisniewski: Yeah, definitely. I talked to one woman who hopefully will be a guest on the podcast at one point and she talks about, the abuse of her employer and how her employer wanted her to do things and would like constantly hold her employment over her head and they were things that she didn't agree with and all this.

So, it definitely happens there. I've had my fair share of abusive employers. Employers that I would consider to be abusive. Not now, not now. I love my employer and my boss right now is fantastic. Um, but yeah, I think that when we think of abuse too, the type of abuse is something that we kind of, our minds automatically go to physical or sexual.

And I look at that as kind of a layered thing. It's like the physical and the sexual is kind of on the outside. It's what you can see and feel physically but then it goes, a layer deeper. And none of this is to say that any one form of abuse is worse than another. I think that they're all terrible and wrong.

But if you go a layer deeper, then you get into the mental and the emotional abuse and those scars that take a lot longer to heal. And then one step deeper from that is the spiritual abuse. And the first guest I had on my podcast talks about the spiritual abuse. And it's interesting with that kind, because when you are now, abusing someone's very core values and the things that are at the center of what they believe and, taking advantage of that and abusing that.

That's a kind of abuse that's like that one's even hard to explain to people, I think. And I think that almost takes the longest to heal because there's so many. There's so many variables with that.

But that's how I kind of look at it as just a layered thing. And, obviously they can cross, physical abuse can cause mental and emotional abuse, but yeah, it's so layered.

And I just hope that this podcast can help people.

The Message for Other Survivors

Carmen Hecox: What message would you like to share with other survivors out there?

Kathy Wisniewski: That, I'm just like you. I'm no different than anyone else out there that's experienced any kind of abuse. That, I'm not special. And I think that, a lot of times the piece that maybe we miss is just like the piece of advice that my mentor gave me. Like, you're the common denominator. If you've had more than one abusive relationship, figure out why. And don't be offended by that question, but just do the inner work to figure out what is it about me that may be causing me to walk into these situations to not be able to see the signs or that kind of thing. And go within and control the controllables. You can't control everything obviously, but there are some things that you can control. And there is hope and there are people and places that can encourage you.

I would definitely listen to my podcast and hear some of those stories of hope. And yeah, I think that, if I did it with someone who I was deeply, deeply in love with, I think you can do it too.

Where to Find Kathy and Her Podcast

Carmen Hecox: Great, Kathy, where can people find you?

Kathy Wisniewski: You can find me, my, my last name is a little challenging. My website is www.kathiewisniewski.com. It's W I S N I E W S K I, but an easier way to find me is, on Instagram, my podcast page is at Tragically Beautiful Podcast. And, the website for my podcast is, tragicallybeautiful.me.

Carmen Hecox: Kathy, thank you so much for sharing your amazing insight, your amazing story, and your tragically beautiful outcome.

Kathy Wisniewski: Thank you so much for the opportunity. I appreciate it.

Carmen Hecox: Yeah, I will include all of Kathy's information on my show notes and on my website. Thank you so much.

Kathy Wisniewski: Thanks.

Closing Thoughts and Reflections

Carmen Hecox: What an enlightening conversation with Kathy Wisniewski. Her strength, resilience, and the commitment to helping others is truly commendable. It's stories like Kathy that remind us that the power of the human spirit and the importance of community and support.

If you or someone you know is going through a similar journey, remember that you're not alone. Kathy's podcast, *Tragically Beautiful*, is a wonderful resource that offers stories, insights from other survivors, providing hope, and encouragement.

Kathy's information along with today's show notes can be found at createthebestme.com/ep040.

If this episode resonated with you, please subscribe to stay updated.

Join me next week as we will delve into the topic of purpose. This episode is an important topic no matter where you are in life, so be sure not to miss it.

Until then, keep dreaming big, take care of yourself, and remember, you are beautiful, strong, and capable of creating the best version of yourself.

Thank you for watching. Catch you next week. Bye for now.