

Virtual Campfire S7 D12_3_Ep328 Transcript

Peter Bregman [00:00:04 - 00:00:17]

The scary part of transition is the ambiguity in the middle. Like, I could be really clear about walking away from something without necessarily knowing or being clear about what I'm walking towards, and that's very scary.

Nancy Barrows [00:00:19 - 00:00:31]

Your story is important and powerful and impactful. Every single one of us— you don't have to have been through what I've been through to have impactful Every meaningful change begins with uncertainty.

Tony Martignetti [00:00:32 - 00:01:19]

The question isn't whether we'll experience fear. The question is, what will we do when it arrives? Around every campfire, stories have shaped who we have become. They remind us we're not alone. They challenge the way we think, and sometimes they change the direction of our lives. Welcome to this special series of the Virtual Campfire. I'm Tony Martinetti. Together, we'll explore powerful conversations inspired by the themes of Campfire Lessons for Leaders, uncovering the moments of transformation, courage, and growth that shape who we are and who we become. The fire is lit.

Tony Martignetti [00:01:19 - 00:02:28]

Let's gather where stories spark transformation. Most people think courage looks like confidence, like certainty, like knowing exactly what to do. But if you've ever faced a difficult conversation, walked away from something familiar, or stepped into a future you couldn't yet see, you know courage rarely feels that way. More often, it feels uncomfortable. Today, we'll hear 2 remarkable stories that remind us emotional courage isn't about becoming fearless. It's about discovering that we can move forward even when fear comes with us. Our first guest has spent decades helping leaders navigate uncertainty, have difficult conversations, And bring about meaningful change. But long before Peter Bregman became one of the world's leading executive coaches, he was learning a very different lesson, one that began before he was even born.

Tony Martignetti [00:02:29 - 00:02:30]

Here's Peter.

Peter Bregman [00:02:31 - 00:03:25]

I'm going to start before I was born, actually. I mean, ancestrally. And because actually, really the first thing that comes to mind is I'm Jewish. My mother is French and was in the Holocaust, was in hiding in France. In fact, this summer we just went back to the town that she spent at least a couple of years in hiding in near the Swiss border. They tried to get over the Swiss border and they couldn't get over and they spent the rest of the war in a place

called Annecy. But I think for me, the stories of the Holocaust, perhaps even the sort of ancestral energetic formation of who I am in the context of my mother's experiences in the Holocaust, I think are very foundational. You know, I think we're all, you know, we all get formed.

Peter Bregman [00:03:25 - 00:03:44]

There are all sorts of things that determine and change our lives. But, you know, certainly for many of us, it's experiences before we had lives. And that was one for me. And it was, you know, very, very present in my life growing up and continues to be in many ways.

Tony Martignetti [00:03:44 - 00:03:59]

Every one of us inherits a story. Some are filled with opportunity, others carry unimaginable hardship, but eventually each of us reaches a moment where we must decide what will we carry forward.

Peter Bregman [00:04:00 - 00:04:44]

I was very, very involved in politics. growing up. I was president of an organ— I was quite to the left. I was president of an organization called SCARE, which was Students Committed Against Rightist Expansion, and the youngest board member of Americans for Democratic Action. And so I was in high school, but I was going to DC a couple of times, you know, maybe once every couple of months to be on the board with senators and congressmen. And I was a leader in this movement and I went to college specifically, I went to Princeton for the public policy school, for Woodrow Wilson. And I very quickly got disillusioned for 2 reasons. One is I sat in on a class where they were dealing with the American policy towards Nicaragua.

Peter Bregman [00:04:45 - 00:05:48]

Now, 2 summers beforehand, when I was a junior in high school, I had worked for the Senate Democratic Policy Committee and I had literally written the democratic policy approach to Nicaragua and El Salvador. And so I was sitting there and nobody in the class was proposing as an option the policy that I had actually written, which was actual policy. And my policy was very simple. It was, it's okay that the Nicaraguans are a communist regime, but we should still have diplomatic relations with them, that we need to build relationships with people who have forms of government that we disagree with in order to, if we hope to have any possibility of moving forward in any way. We shouldn't demand that in order to have a conversation, you have to agree with me. That would, I thought, reflect a misunderstanding of the point of a conversation. But in any event, the short of it is both, you know, the students in the class and the professor held a view that what I'd written was not a viable policy for the US government. And I didn't tell them who I was.

Peter Bregman [00:05:48 - 00:06:36]

I didn't tell them I'd written the policy. I just sort of asked them like, have you guys considered this? They said, no, it wouldn't work. So it was at that point that I sort of dropped out of the Woodrow Wilson School. I mean, I didn't, you know, I was in Princeton

and I hadn't, you know, declared major until junior year anyway, so I wasn't really in it, but conceptually I dropped out of it and I didn't know what to do. I wanted just to own the other reason was because I was a very good debater. And in my view, it was, you know, in being an 18-year-old tasked with debating conservatives with a whole bunch of other 18-year-olds, I found to be both very easy and very like, I leant towards ridicule. Like I could kind of, it's easy to win debates. But I also sat there going, wait, but I'm in college in order to learn things.

Peter Bregman [00:06:37 - 00:07:28]

And I did not have the skill and did not know at that age, how do I like win a debate and still learn and listen? How do I engage in the conversation in order to listen? You know, the Woodrow, I'm critical of the Woodrow Wilson School because they're not willing to look at other perspectives, but I wasn't willing to look at other perspectives. Like I was also, you know, I had my perspective and my goal was to win by making other people look dumb. And I was good at it, you know, but I wouldn't have learned anything. So I basically made the decision to completely and totally drop out of politics. Like I was like, I don't know how to be in politics and learn at the same time. And so I just don't, I'm not skilled enough to do that. And I asked my father, I said I wanted to sort of go to France and I wanted to study in France because I didn't know what I was going to do. And my father gave me terrific advice.

Peter Bregman [00:07:29 - 00:07:59]

He said, you know, if there's someone you want to study with in France or something specific that you want to study, great. I will support you. We'll figure out how you can go to France. But if you're doing it because you're bored at Princeton and you don't know what else to do and you don't know, like, you know, what your next move is, you're going to face that the rest of your life. Figure it out where you are. Don't run from it. And it was really absolutely terrific advice, which I followed. And for a couple of years, you know, I did fine and I studied history, but I really didn't know what I was going to do.

Peter Bregman [00:07:59 - 00:08:29]

And then by accident, I went on a camping trip. I was supposed to go on a bike trip, but the bike trip was canceled because the leader had broken her wrist. And I kind of talked my way into a camping trip to train other people to be leaders of camping. So, it was training me to lead camping trips and then eventually lead other students in camping trips. And I didn't know what I was doing. It rained for 6 days. I wore all cotton. You know, I really struggled and it was the best 6 days of my life.

Peter Bregman [00:08:29 - 00:08:41]

I mean, that was a transformational moment, like being outdoors with a group of people moving from point A to point B, supporting each other, learning from each other. I fell in love with it and it changed the trajectory of my life.

Tony Martignetti [00:08:41 - 00:09:10]

There's something about that, you know, what you just described, and there's so much to unpack, first of all, but there's something about sitting in your discomfort and enjoying that moment of like not knowing, but, you know, seeing discomfort as being like a way forward. Because in that you learn so much, like even taking on this ability to step in and being like, I'm going to learn to lead these people through. What do I know about leading these people? And what do you know about that at that point? Right. You didn't know much, I'm sure.

Peter Bregman [00:09:10 - 00:09:11]

Right.

Tony Martignetti [00:09:11 - 00:09:37]

And one of the things that really, a question that came up for me, what, as you were describing your, you know, your experience of being in politics or like learning about politics, I wanted to understand what was it about it that drove you, the principles that you were standing by that you really wanted to do that, what you were doing. For example, was it driven by a value around what was right or just was it about winning that really drove you?

Peter Bregman [00:09:38 - 00:10:15]

No, it was definitely values and it was definitely a sense— this was in the '80s and in high school it was the early '80s. I graduated high school in '85. No, for me it was really caring about people. I mean, actually SCARE, Students Committed Against Rightist Expansion, sounds very political. It was actually humanitarian more than anything. I mean, that was the name. But mostly we did stuff with homeless people and we did stuff with like, you know, working to get Jews out of Russia. And we did like, there's a lot of things that we did that was, you know, more humanitarian than anything.

Peter Bregman [00:10:15 - 00:10:18]

That was really what I cared about. That was my focus. Yeah.

Tony Martignetti [00:10:18 - 00:10:42]

I mean, it's something powerful about that. Like sometimes I hate to borrow from Simon Sinek, but that why of the reason why you're doing it is what drove you at the time. And then when you lost that connection to, well, people are not seeing my argument the way I'm seeing it, you maybe fell out of love. where you felt like this is not going to be, I'm not going to be able to make this work. And so then you decided to shift out of that. Yeah.

Peter Bregman [00:10:43 - 00:11:21]

It's actually less that I wasn't having an impact and more that I wasn't learning. Like what I did in that moment was I prioritized my own experience of learning. Like I didn't want to just fight a fight for the rest of my life. And I also, I didn't want to stand for something so strongly that I couldn't learn and listen to the other side. Like, I think more than anything, I value learning and growth. Like, I really love it. I love learning stuff and I don't always enjoy

being wrong, but I'm open to being wrong. You know, like, I just love ideas and I love learning.

Tony Martignetti [00:11:24 - 00:11:42]

One of the hardest things we'll ever do is loosen our grip on certainty. Because certainty feels safe. Curiosity doesn't. Yet Peter discovered something profound. The moment we stop needing to win, we finally create space to learn.

Peter Bregman [00:11:44 - 00:12:40]

You know, there are moments that you walk away from and then moments that you walk towards. And so I think politics and that drive was not moving towards as much. I mean, yes, I guess I was moving towards learning, but I was really moving away from, I didn't know what I was moving towards, which is why I turned to my father and said, hey, I want to go to France because I didn't know what I was going towards. And I think that's really important, you know, to the conversation that you're having with me and with your guests about transition, that the scary part of transition is the ambiguity in the middle. Like I could be really clear about walking away from something without necessarily knowing Or being clear about what I'm walking towards. And that's very scary. You know, it's like letting go of a known quantity and grasping for ambiguity. And that's a very, very hard move to make.

Peter Bregman [00:12:40 - 00:12:57]

I think I was more courageous at making decisions like that at 18 than I am at 53, but that's what it takes. It's, and that's the scary part. The scary part of change is, you know, you're letting go of something you know to move towards something you don't.

Tony Martignetti [00:12:58 - 00:13:29]

Yeah, it's beautifully said and the way you said it. And I think that there's also something about when the stakes are higher, there's a lot more at risk of what you're letting go and what you're getting into. So I think people deal with a lot more emotions that come into play, whereas when you're young and you are feeling like, ah, you know, I have my whole life ahead of me, I can, Take some risks. I can figure this all out. But later on in life, things get a little harder because you feel like you have a lot more at risk in making those decisions.

Peter Bregman [00:13:30 - 00:14:27]

Yeah. You know, like when I was 18, I had maybe 5 years investing in politics, right? I mean, like how much time could I have had? Like, I don't know exactly. Maybe I started at 13, you know, like probably more likely 15. So, maybe I had like 15 to 18, like 3 years. Like, I don't know how much time I had invested in it, but at 53, I have a lot more time invested in anything that I've done. I have time invested, you know? And so, to make a decision to move away from something that you've invested maybe a decade or decades or 8 years or whatever it is, you've built something. And so to move away from it reflects a much bigger risk than, you know, also, you know, you have whatever, a mortgage, you have

commitments, you have kids, you know, but your ownership over the path you've already taken is heavy.

Tony Martignetti [00:14:28 - 00:14:50]

Yeah. Yeah. And you can put yourself in the feet of like people like your parents and, you know, like going through massive amounts of risk to leave where they were to do, to move, make moves in their lives. to make things happen for you in your life. It's really amazing when you think about it. Like, what were the risks that people before us took to move in the direction of creating the lives that they did?

Peter Bregman [00:14:50 - 00:15:27]

Right. Yeah, I think that's right. And I think, as you know, for listeners, as you're thinking about changes that you might make, it's like, I'm just reflecting on the challenge of that because you have to, and you talked about being uncomfortable and my book, *Leading with Emotional Courage*, you have to be willing to feel the risk of that if you're going to make a move. You have to be willing to feel that it is true that this may be the wrong decision. Like, you don't actually know because we know nothing about the future, but I have to be willing to risk to invent or to create something new.

Tony Martignetti [00:15:28 - 00:15:28]

Yeah.

Peter Bregman [00:15:28 - 00:15:47]

So, if you're waiting to make a change until you know for sure with 100% certainty that you're right, You'll never make the change because by definition you're leaving the past for a future. And the past is always 100% certain and the future is never 100% certain.

Tony Martignetti [00:15:47 - 00:16:09]

Exactly. Exactly. I hate to boil it down to such a simple quote, but like nothing ventured, nothing earned. And in a sense, that's really what it comes down to. It's really amazing when people feel like such a connection to their past and they just don't, they hold onto it with like white knuckles. And you just gotta let go and trust that, sure, it could go wrong, but it could go right.

Peter Bregman [00:16:10 - 00:16:17]

Right. And by the way, I'm not advocating for change. Like, it might be right to not change. Yeah. You know, there's validity in both.

Tony Martignetti [00:16:18 - 00:16:18]

Yeah.

Peter Bregman [00:16:18 - 00:16:25]

You just sort of say, like, that's the charm of life in many ways. It's like, I don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow, so I'm gonna make some bets.

Tony Martignetti [00:16:26 - 00:17:08]

Peter reminds us that courage isn't the absence of uncertainty. It's our willingness to keep moving even when the path ahead isn't completely clear. But understanding emotional courage is one thing. Living it, that's something else entirely. Our next guest has spent much of her life discovering that the moments we most want to hide are often the very moments that connect us most deeply to others. Through incredible hardship, healing, and an unwavering commitment to authenticity, Nancy Barrows discovered that courage isn't about appearing strong. It's about being real. Here's Nancy.

Nancy Barrows [00:17:11 - 00:18:07]

At about 15, 16 years old, and I invite your listeners to receive my story without judgment for any reaction they may have. It's not an easy story to receive. It's not something that's often talked about, and I certainly do not have any judgment of them for any reaction they have. I've probably had it myself. So yeah, at 15 years old, I was at a summer program and a bunch of young girls talking about different things and I got upset and brave 15-year-old asked me what was wrong and she caught me in a moment and I shared with her that I was being sexually abused by my grandfather and I was 15 years old at the time and it pretty much, I was 15 going on 16, I think, or 16 years old. I apologize. I don't even remember dates and timelines anymore because they're not hugely important in the grand scheme of things, but she was 15 years old, very brave, heard that I was being abused, that it had started when I was about 4 or 5 years old. And she went to an adult in the program who was a mandated reporter.

Nancy Barrows [00:18:08 - 00:18:38]

I didn't know there were such things as mandated reporters. I didn't even know there were laws against what was going on. I had no idea. And so here, this secret that I carefully kept, because in my eyes, my life depended on it remaining secret, was unleashed. and I use that word intentionally, it was unleashed on my family. It just, this wave that went across everyone. And, and even at the time, I didn't realize, you know, when you go through things, the people around you go through them as well. And so they have their own journey through it.

Nancy Barrows [00:18:38 - 00:19:17]

You know, I didn't get it until I was older that like my mom and dad, you know, not only had to process what had happened to their daughter, watch her go through it. I mean, I am all about talking about the ugly, snotty, unsexy moments in the journey because That's important. You know, we don't want to leave anyone seeing the end of the story and thinking they're failing because we have these internal report cards because, wow, she's out there speaking about it and she's doing great and she's healthy and recovered. And I'm not getting out of bed for 3 days. I'm not showering. Well, guess what? I was there too. And

so I think it's important, but they watched me go through all of that. And, you know, my mom, it was her father processing that.

Nancy Barrows [00:19:17 - 00:19:54]

There are so many pieces of the journey that, again, later I came to appreciate. But that really started what doesn't sound like at first a healing journey, but really was, was that flashpoint. So soon after that came out, I became anorexic. I started with just restrictive eating, and then it became I couldn't eat if I wanted to, quite frankly, something that's a disorder, disease of control, ended up being very different from what I thought it was. Again, I was not controlling food. If I had to eat, I remember at one point I had dropped outta college and was working at a doctor's office and he wanted to buy the staff lunch. And I panicked because I knew I wasn't gonna be able to eat. And what was everybody gonna say? And what was everybody gonna think? And they were definitely gonna know.

Nancy Barrows [00:19:55 - 00:20:32]

But I became anorexic and that was not only about control for me, it was about hating my body and punishing my body. In my mind, my body was broken beyond repair and it had betrayed me. So another hard thing to hear, and I think is important for people, especially people who have been through abuse, hear someone talk about is every cell in my body was programmed to do exactly what it did. It worked beautifully. Sexual touch equals pleasure, only I didn't want it. And so that was all rewired and all crossed and all mixed up. And to me, my body had betrayed me. And so why would I give it nutrition? Why would I give it sustenance? Why would I treat it well? I hated it and I wanted to disappear.

Nancy Barrows [00:20:33 - 00:20:55]

I am fortunate that I never had true suicidal ideation, but I was Totally fine with dying. I would go to bed and say, the universe, tomorrow someone's going to get a terminal cancer diagnosis. Someone who really wants to live, give it to me instead. Let them live the life they want. Because again, I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was broken beyond repair. There was no fixing this. There was no fixing me. Therapy, huge tool for me.

Nancy Barrows [00:20:55 - 00:21:21]

Supportive family, huge tool for me. And I know those are not things that everyone gets, so I'm deeply grateful. But at 20 years old, I decided I was going to confront my grandfather. And this was another flashpoint. I had gotten to the point where through therapy, I knew it wasn't my fault. I had not done anything wrong and wanted to have somebody who deserved to take the responsibility of it. And in my mind, this was going to be sort of my ticket to freedom. And as I like to say, not every story goes the way you think it's going to go.

Nancy Barrows [00:21:21 - 00:21:56]

So I went and confronted my grandfather and he admitted to one instance where he had been inappropriate with me. And instead of being this ticket to freedom, it was devastating. I was put into a place of not knowing what had happened to me, not realizing there was so

much that I didn't remember. Did I need to remember it to get well? Could I handle remembering it all? Like, it was just so much going on. And on top of that, someone took responsibility for it, but everything I was dealing with didn't just disappear. I didn't get to hand that over with the responsibility. It was still all mine. He didn't have to go to therapy for it.

Nancy Barrows [00:21:56 - 00:22:23]

I had to go to therapy for it. I had to do the work. I had to roll up my sleeves. I had to roll around in the mud and do that work, even though I had done nothing wrong and it wasn't my fault. And that led to my first major depressive episode, and I ended up dropping out of college. And for me, I wore many different masks over the course of my life. And so I had the high school mask where I was president of my class, captain of my volleyball team. I was socially popular, as they like to say.

Nancy Barrows [00:22:24 - 00:22:52]

Um, you know, I did volunteer work. There was no reason to look at me twice. There was nothing remarkable about me that you needed to even think about. And so moving on to college, I had gotten into this prestigious 5-year undergrad master's program in speech-language pathology. So how was I dropping out, right? I'd been there 2 years. What do you say to people? It wasn't that I didn't like it. Everyone knew I loved being there. My ego would not allow me to say I couldn't hack it academically and did not fit with my prior mask that I'd worn with the people I was going back to.

Nancy Barrows [00:22:52 - 00:23:33]

And ultimately it didn't matter because I stayed in bed most of the time, right? Other than going to therapy, I didn't have to tell my reasons to anyone because I wasn't interacting with anyone. But over time, again, this mask gets created. And I went through this and I dropped out. And at the time, my brother was living in LA and I was still in New York. And we conceived this idea that I would come to LA and I would do a summer session at UCLA where I could live in the dorms, take a class, have some free time on my own. I like to call it my trial life and my brother being my safety net because he was just 10, 15 minutes away from campus. And I had the best summer of my life. I loved it.

Nancy Barrows [00:23:34 - 00:24:09]

I told my parents at the end of summer I wasn't coming home. And again, I have, I have been given the most perfect parents for me. And I am deeply grateful for that because they said, okay, that's what you want to do. We'll support you. I realized in November of that year that when I was flying home for Thanksgiving, I hadn't been sober for 14 days and I'm not a drinker, but the pain had become so great. And it's a perfect mask for a college student to go out and drink all night. You know, I'd go party at night, sleep during the day, wake up, and then at some reasonable hour, start all over again. It was the perfect mask.

Tony Martignetti [00:24:09 - 00:24:09]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:24:09 - 00:24:22]

But the reality was throughout my life, what I presented on the outside couldn't be more different from what was going on on the inside. And what was going on on the inside was I was mad at myself because I had taken me with me.

Tony Martignetti [00:24:23 - 00:24:23]

Yes.

Nancy Barrows [00:24:24 - 00:24:26]

You cannot outrun your story.

Tony Martignetti [00:24:29 - 00:24:47]

Listening to Nancy, I'm reminded that courage rarely announces itself in the moment. It often looks like telling the truth, asking for help, or simply choosing not to hide anymore. Sometimes the bravest thing we can do is to let someone see us exactly as we are.

Nancy Barrows [00:24:49 - 00:25:53]

The truth is I was reliving my past and getting nowhere. I was chasing my tail until I decided, okay, it may mean pain and it may mean reliving it, which I'm already doing, but what can I do to make it so that this isn't the pattern I live with my whole life? I had a therapist say to me, someday you're gonna look at your history book, your story, and you're gonna turn the page on this and it's not gonna cause you The pain and distress it causes today. And I probably used some really flowery language to tell her off because I thought she was full of beep. And I won't use my New York language here, but it's absolutely what happened. It is absolutely what happened. It was painful, but I've learned by going through what I've gone through, doing the work I've done, that it doesn't have to remain painful every day of my life. And I like to tell people that if you would've asked me at 20 years old, I would've thought that the things that continued to quote unquote plague me in my life would've been my anorexia and my abuse. That was my identity for so, so long.

Nancy Barrows [00:25:53 - 00:26:25]

And before I got on LinkedIn and started telling my story, I hadn't thought about those things in a really long time. I would occasionally call like my best friend who's in Virginia, Raquel, and I was reading a Gwendolyn Doyle book and she talks about having an eating disorder and I called recount. I was like, oh my gosh, I totally forgot that I was anorexic. And she was like, oh, that's right. She remembered you used to put ketchup on everything. And it just wasn't forefront of my mind. And that was something I never thought I would get out from underneath. And the honest truth is the thing I struggle with day to day is my mood, is my depression.

Nancy Barrows [00:26:26 - 00:27:03]

And I think that that's true for a lot of us. And that, you know, mental wellness is not some destination. It's not somewhere you go and get to, you fight to get there. And you arrive and

someone gives you a plaque to hang on your wall and you're good to go. It is a daily choice. It is a daily choice. And I will not say you choose to be happy because if that's so insulting to me, because if I could have chose to be happy through all those years, I would have. But I can choose to be positive and I can choose to be grateful and I can choose to surround myself with people who will not let me forget who I am, who will not let me disappear, who notice the changes in my patterns.

Nancy Barrows [00:27:03 - 00:27:33]

When they happen. And I can use the tools that I have to get back to what is my— everybody's got their homeostasis in our place. We're functioning optimally for us. And now I will say it's not that I don't try those old masks on from time to time. I'd be lying, and I will not do that. I think of it as that gorgeous pair of shoes that I have in the closet that I still won't throw away because I love them. And I want them to be comfortable, but they're not. And I will put them on and I will start to get ready.

Nancy Barrows [00:27:34 - 00:28:17]

And before I can even leave the house, I have to take them off because they're too painful. It's the same with the old masks, right? You can put them on for a little while, but every time I play dress-up, it's an opportunity for me to remind myself how far I've come to use those tools I have. And it's not that those times, those moments, those thoughts don't come up. I just choose You know, and some days it's harder than others. I choose to make a healthier choice than I used to. I engage in behaviors that are proactive and healthy and are self-restorative and caring. So again, I don't wanna miss the ugly middle, but I don't wanna not discuss the fact that, hey, I'm human. I throw tantrums.

Nancy Barrows [00:28:17 - 00:28:50]

I throw my hands up and look at the universe and say, all right, When is it enough? What am I missing? Just hit me over the head with it because clearly I'm not getting it. So we all have our moments, even in our most optimal place of functioning. And that's important to acknowledge. We have these invisible report cards. You know, we didn't get to the point where I'm divorced, but I'm divorced. And when I went through my divorce, I literally thought I was failing at divorce. I called that same friend, my best friend, Raquel, and said, I'm failing at divorce. And she said, what are you talking about? And I said, I can't do this.

Nancy Barrows [00:28:50 - 00:29:06]

I'm literally a mess. Yeah, I'm crying on the floor. Everything in my life reminds me of him. And mind you, it was my choice to end the marriage. But this is 18 years of having someone with me. It wasn't because we fought. It was because we both deserve to be loved completely and deeply and unconditionally.

Nancy Barrows [00:29:07 - 00:29:35]

And because I had put on a mask during our marriage that even I didn't recognize. I like to say I'm a skilled illusionist and sometimes delusionist, but I had created a mask that even I didn't recognize. And what had happened through no fault of his is I had recreated the

emotional dynamics of my abuse relationship where I was surviving on breadcrumbs and I allowed myself not to have a voice and all sorts of other pieces that were part of that. My needs didn't matter. And so that was 5 years ago.

Nancy Barrows [00:29:36 - 00:29:54]

After a lot of hard work to wake up one day and go, oh my God, God, how did I do that? And then I had to start over. But the reality is I wasn't starting over. It was a reset. It was the universe, like a little course-correcting hip bump kind of thing. Yeah. Didn't feel like that at the time. It felt like, you know, I got hit by a Mack truck, but—

Nancy Barrows [00:29:55 - 00:30:17]

I don't even remember where I started with all this, but the point is, is that even as our highest selves, we're going to struggle. We're going to be challenged and we're going to have tests and places of making choices. And to me, coming back to gratitude every time, the community I built, like I said, all that stuff prior is what's allowed me to thrive.

Tony Martignetti [00:30:17 - 00:30:18]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:30:18 - 00:30:57]

I was a survivor and I wore that like a badge of honor for a really long time. Like, I was an angry survivor. I was a tough survivor. I was a come bring it to me, come at me, I got it, I can handle this kind of survivor. And I think that's true about a lot of us that go through trauma. And for me, it felt stronger to be angry than vulnerable. And it's funny because I have heard from people in my life who've come across me at that time who told me they were intimidated by me. Now, granted, I moved to LA being, you know, like in the '90s, early grunge, and I was the New Yorker who wore black leggings, knee-high steel-toe Doc Martens.

Nancy Barrows [00:30:58 - 00:31:15]

men's V-neck white t-shirt and a flannel around my waist and a baseball cap. And I was really, don't mess with me. And people got the message. People got the message. And I did a really good job of keeping them at arm's length. And it was a great plan, except I was lonely and I was tired.

Nancy Barrows [00:31:16 - 00:31:36]

And I couldn't sustain it. And I was given— I've been given so many gifts along this journey, but, um, 3 women that I met when I came to UCLA, Raquel, who I've mentioned, Courtney Franklin, and Candace Spann. They gave me life in that these were the first 3 people who I chose to take my mask off with.

Tony Martignetti [00:31:36 - 00:31:36]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:31:37 - 00:32:20]

And they didn't see me any differently. They weren't disgusted. They didn't run. They didn't look at me with pity. What they did do was offer me unconditional love and acceptance. And that is one of the reasons why I am out there radiating real. And I have the Chick with the Tool Belt program and I have my shows and I come on other people's shows because those women who gave me that experience were the ones that showed me that I could be real and be loved. And it really wasn't until my divorce that I 100% decided to be 100% real 100% of the time because I went from the mask I was wearing.

Nancy Barrows [00:32:20 - 00:32:42]

in my marriage, the scales tipped. It became less comfortable in the known, in the illusion, than what I had always been fearful of was the unknown being real. And what has occurred to me over time, which seems so simple, was certainly hard fought to get to, was I want to be real, but more importantly, I'm meant to be real.

Tony Martignetti [00:32:42 - 00:32:43]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:32:43 - 00:32:57]

And I get that reinforcement every time someone comes up to me and says, I was inspired by your story. You are so brave. Or I've had countless men and women hear me speak and then contact me afterwards or walk up to me afterwards and tell me their story.

Nancy Barrows [00:32:57 - 00:33:03]

And often it's the first time. Yeah. And it gives me chills just thinking about the privilege I have of being in that moment with them.

Tony Martignetti [00:33:05 - 00:33:19]

One thing I love about Nancy's story is that she reminds us authenticity isn't something we achieve once. It's something we choose Again and again, every time we decide to replace performance with honesty.

Nancy Barrows [00:33:21 - 00:33:46]

People enter into brave space. I love safe space. I think it's important, but brave space to me is the key because brave space, as I will define it, is where it's not safe space where I come and tell my story and I know everybody's gonna be like, okay, it's okay. We got you. But I'm the one. brave space we enter into together saying we're all willing to be vulnerable together. No one is doing this alone. We're all going to show up real.

Nancy Barrows [00:33:47 - 00:34:30]

And that to me was the environment and the people. The people who could do that created the environment I needed. And for me, everything shifted for me in my life. I live my life in a totally different way and it didn't happen overnight and it wasn't without tears and it

wasn't without doubt and it wasn't, you know, gosh, it was ugly, snotty, and unsexy. Certainly at points, but it was transformational. And I think that we talk about this on another show that I'm a host of, and it's transformation through transparency. You can only get so close to people if you're not both willing to be vulnerable. I know one of the things in my marriage was because I had my past, I was sort of the identified patient and all the vulnerability came from me.

Tony Martignetti [00:34:30 - 00:34:30]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:34:30 - 00:35:11]

And my ex-husband being a wonderful, supportive man, was the strong one, but he never dropped into vulnerability. So our relationship became me being vulnerable and him being the one that saved, you know? And so that ability for both parties, all parties involved to drop into vulnerability and say, here I am, here I am. Here's the girl who still sleeps with her baby blanket in her pillowcase. You know, hey, it was at my wedding, but if you can't love me because of that, then Okay, you're not my people. Yeah, I have— and where you can find most of my content, and I am real on all of my social platforms, but I really spend the most time on LinkedIn.

Tony Martignetti [00:35:11 - 00:35:12]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:35:12 - 00:35:43]

Because that's where I found this community. I think LinkedIn is unique in that sense, in that people from Facebook knew me before, you know what I mean? Everyone I met on LinkedIn since November 2020 met me exactly where I was in that moment. And there's something about that. And so I have Radiated Real, which is the hashtag campaign I think we alluded to earlier, which is all about taking off your mask. It started with take a picture of yourself right when you wake up in the morning, right? And I even saw your eyes go, whoa, right? It's a scary thought.

Tony Martignetti [00:35:43 - 00:35:43]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:35:43 - 00:36:01]

Take that picture, post it, share those scary thoughts, share what went through your head because you are definitely not the only person who had that reaction or those thoughts. when Radiating Real came up. Share those thoughts, encourage others to do the same, and allow your Community to shower you with that unconditional love and acceptance.

Tony Martignetti [00:36:02 - 00:36:02]

That is beautiful.

Nancy Barrows [00:36:02 - 00:36:39]

And that was what Radiating Real was. That was what it was all about. And I have radiated real crying. I have radiated real looking like a raccoon because I was so exhausted the night before that I went to bed without taking off my makeup. And you know what? I am not going to clean this up because this is life. I know I am not the only woman or man who went to bed without taking off their makeup last night and woke up looking like I belonged out in the animal kingdom digging through some trash. And I know that you and I connected for a very powerful Radiating Real post for me. And I had posted my first Radiating Real photo, and my best friend Raquel messaged me, and she has taken responsibility for this.

Nancy Barrows [00:36:39 - 00:37:07]

And that's the one I think you joined in and maybe looked back at the others. But she on the side was like, hey, I'm calling. You look too good for this to be first thing in the morning. Right? And I thought, whoa, whoa, whoa. The person who knows me best thinks that I would jeopardize the integrity of this campaign, that I would not hold to the same standard I'm inviting everyone else to step into and experience was devastating for me. And I was worried that I jeopardized the whole movement.

Tony Martignetti [00:37:08 - 00:37:08]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:37:08 - 00:37:36]

Because there are people who, man, are people brave. People have done it with their CPAP machine on in the morning before they even take it off. You know, people have done it with one eye open, like, you know, not even really awake yet. People have done it with a mouthful of food, you know, like, and just take a picture because in that moment, that's who they are. But I put a post up saying how difficult it was to be questioned and a picture of me in the moment. I took a picture of myself crying, which I often do, which I know sounds so strange to people, but those moments are important too.

Tony Martignetti [00:37:36 - 00:37:37]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:37:37 - 00:38:06]

Those moments are important too. And it's important to have grace and empathy and understanding compassion for myself in those moments. Going through this, my worst fear was recognized, right? I have gone through a lifetime— women experience this all the time. You know, we are on social media judged if we're quote unquote less than perfect physically, whatever that physical perfect standard is. You know, people feel the need to tell us. They feel the need to make sure we know. Like, I don't understand the mentality of it. I really don't.

Nancy Barrows [00:38:06 - 00:39:03]

But In my lifetime, I have been having to apologize for being attractive. And in that Radiating Real post, I shared that in 4th grade I was tested for learning disabilities. And 4th grade was my hardest year because my grandparents who didn't live near us ended up staying with us for months because my grandmother broke her hip. And I learned nothing in 4th grade. I had such a trauma brain that you asked me about fractions or I still don't know my times tables by heart. But even then in 4th grade, the report written by a professional who happened to be a man the first line of that report was Nancy, an unusually attractive 4th grader. Like, yeah, what the— And so throughout my life, I have had to dim my quote unquote beauty, which I radiate from the inside. But I also know that I'm very lucky that I meet the standard closely enough that people think I'm attractive, but that I've had to dim that because People can see the beauty in me and it breaks my heart.

Nancy Barrows [00:39:03 - 00:39:06]

They can see the beauty in me, but they can't see the beauty in themselves.

Tony Martignetti [00:39:06 - 00:39:07]

Yeah. Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:39:08 - 00:39:24]

And that post was really about being real. What I was able to say was, while this was really difficult and it was one of my worst fears realized, I now can sit with someone who has a similar experience because they choose and are brave to put themselves out there.

Tony Martignetti [00:39:24 - 00:40:10]

I can say, I know exactly There's so many things that come to mind right now. And one of the things that I just, I love the idea of Brave Space because it is just the idea of like, it's the next level, taking it to this place where you're not just creating a safe space, you're creating a place for people to like, to go boldly beyond just showing up and opening up. It's about going deep. And when you do that, there's an essence of like, this is foreign to most people. So because it's foreign, the reactions you get are, whoa, this can't be real. This can't be right. No, this is not happening. Like the reaction is going to be visceral.

Nancy Barrows [00:40:11 - 00:40:16]

It's not about me. It's not about you. It's not about the person putting themselves out there at all, but it gets hurled at us.

Tony Martignetti [00:40:17 - 00:40:39]

Yeah. And so in some ways, I think that is what is really frustrating is that we need to be more raw, real. And the word that really is coming up for me is beautifully flawed because we all are. And if we show that to each other more, we'll actually become more accustomed to it and it becomes normal.

Nancy Barrows [00:40:39 - 00:40:40]

More and more comfortable.

Tony Martignetti [00:40:40 - 00:40:40]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:40:40 - 00:40:43]

I think so many of us are comfortable sitting in our discomfort.

Tony Martignetti [00:40:43 - 00:40:43]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:40:44 - 00:41:07]

And that makes it hard to make that move to something unknown and scary. And I'm a true believer that we're hurting one another by continuing to wear our masks and not show up. Like I said, I thought I was failing at divorce. There's no such thing. You get through a divorce. You don't pass or fail. You get through it and you get through it however you need to get through it. Like, there's no right or wrong and there's no timeline for it either.

Nancy Barrows [00:41:07 - 00:41:19]

And so for me, it's that we're hurting one another by wearing these masks because we are all out there living life and we know it sucks at times. We know how hard it is, yet we're unwilling to show that to one another.

Nancy Barrows [00:41:20 - 00:41:57]

And so we feel less than or shamed or that we're doing something wrong. And for me, I know it's hard to find your inner voice and it's hard to do that work, especially on your own. And I don't think you necessarily need a therapist. I was someone who needed that for— to get me to a certain point. And the rest of it was evolution, using the tools I had, the people who came into my life. But I also know that those are things that would've been hard for me to do alone, and I credit the people with me along my journey for that. And The Chick with the Toolbelt, which is a program I mentioned earlier, it's funny because I have a bit of a hard time bringing it up because I don't like to promote me. Most of what I'm doing is really to help other people, and that's where I'm comfortable.

Nancy Barrows [00:41:57 - 00:42:31]

I'm comfortable in that space. But after lots of people coming to me and saying thank you and reflecting back the ways spending time with me helped them and how I, in just being me, I am fortunate. I have insight. I understand people. People feel comfortable with me and I am so careful with that privilege. But the Chick with the Tool Belt was really about, yes, I have all these tools, but how can I help others? I'm not a therapist. What I have is my experience. And it's really about helping people go find what's already within them.

Nancy Barrows [00:42:32 - 00:42:45]

That's why I don't say I'm a coach. And I think coaches do wonderful work. It's the Chick with a Tool Belt program. It's a program. It's got steps. It's got homework. It has things you

need to think about, and you're going to get out of it as much as you put into it. I'm there to guide.

Nancy Barrows [00:42:46 - 00:43:23]

I am there to share my wisdom. I'm there to help. And I've had, I think one of the most beautiful things someone said to me was when we started talking and you said I was going to have to post because her goal was to, she's a baker. Her name is Alexis Thornton. And if you don't know about her on LinkedIn or Bread and Butter Joy, go find out because her journey is Extraordinary in her bravery and walking away from a traditional lifestyle to do something very different. But we were talking and she said, when you said I was going to have to post, I was panicked. I don't have anything to say. And as we talked, she goes, when we got to the end of the call, I'm sitting here going, oh my gosh, I do have important things to say.

Nancy Barrows [00:43:23 - 00:43:53]

I have impactful things to say. And I now feel like I have years worth of content. where I started off thinking I had nothing important or interesting to say. And being in the presence of that, when people get there and come to life, I have chills sitting here now. And every time I will have chills because every person that gets to do that and I get to witness and be there and celebrate with them, I use the word privilege, honor, gift often, but truly those moments are precious.

Tony Martignetti [00:43:54 - 00:44:12]

Yeah, I feel that. And I can relate with that feeling of just helping people to find their brilliance and to realize that each person has their own unique thing inside of them that's dying to get out. And you just have to help them to connect with it and realize that the gift is— they, they're the gift. Your story is the gift.

Nancy Barrows [00:44:12 - 00:44:13]

Your story is important.

Tony Martignetti [00:44:13 - 00:44:14]

Yeah.

Nancy Barrows [00:44:14 - 00:44:24]

And powerful and impactful. Every single one of us, you don't have to have been through what I've been through to have an impactful story. You have an impactful story. And our stories start from well beyond when we realize they are there.

Tony Martignetti [00:44:27 - 00:45:25]

What connects Peter and Nancy's stories Is that neither of them describes courage as something dramatic. Instead, they remind us that courage often begins quietly. It's choosing curiosity instead of certainty, truth instead of appearances, connection instead of isolation. Peter challenges us to stay present in the uncertainty of change. Nancy reminds

us that healing begins the moment we stop hiding behind the masks we've created to protect ourselves. And maybe that's what emotional courage really is— not becoming someone new, but finally giving ourselves permission to become who we've always been. I want to express my deep gratitude to Peter Bregman and Nancy Barrows for sharing their stories, insights, and experiences so openly and generously. And to all of you Thank you for joining us on this journey around the virtual campfire.

Tony Martignetti *[00:45:25 - 00:46:17]*

It's been great to have you with us. If you'd like to learn more about today's guests, connect with their work, or explore their books, organizations, and resources, you'll find links for each of them in the show notes for this episode. If this conversation resonated with you, I encourage you to reflect on this question: what part of your world are you being called to create now? Next. Before you go, please subscribe to the Virtual Campfire Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, I'd love to hear from you. Leave a comment or review and share this episode with someone who would benefit from listening. And if you're ready to take the next step in your own journey or would like to learn more, visit tonymspeaks.com. This special series inspired by the themes of Campfire Lessons for Leaders is proudly produced by It All Works.

Tony Martignetti *[00:46:18 - 00:46:24]*

Until next time, keep leading, keep growing, and keep showing up for the life you're meant to create.