



## Episode 8

### John and Jane's Recovery Story

#### **Marnie Breecker 0:02**

Hello, everyone. Before we begin today's podcast episode, we want to make an exciting announcement. We know that when couples are recovering from the impact of betrayal on their relationship, there can be a time where they feel stuck in terms of how to move forward with the sexual peace. How do we reintegrate sexuality after there's been betrayal, and that can be a really difficult conversation to have and a difficult process to go through. And so we've gotten a lot of feedback from our listeners who would like more help in this area. And so we're starting a group specifically for couples who'd like to start the conversation about sexual reintegration, and we have a fantastic coach. She's a sex and relationship and intimacy expert. Her name is Zoey cores. You can learn more about her and the group at our website [helpingcouplesheal.com](http://helpingcouplesheal.com). If this is a fit for you. Please don't hesitate to reach out we'd love to hear from you. Please remember that there's limited space so if you are interested, please reach out sooner than later so you can reserve a spot thanks and we hope you enjoy this episode.

#### **Duane Osterlind 1:17**

Welcome to the Helping Couples Heal Podcast, a place for healing and hope for couples impacted by betrayal resulting from infidelity and or sex addiction. Your hosts are Marnie Breecker and Duane Osterlind, licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, certified sex addiction therapists and founders of respected treatment centers in Long Beach and Los Angeles. Marnie and Duane co-created Helping Couples Heal, the most comprehensive in person and online resource for couples recovering from betrayal, and this podcast series is the first component of the program. Thank you for listening. Marnie and Duane are committed to helping you recover from the devastating impact of betrayal trauma, and are excited to support you wherever you may be in your healing. If you've lost hope, you've come to the right place. Now, take a slow deep breath, and let's begin with the Helping Couples Heal Podcast.

#### **Jane 2:13**

I'm Jane. And this is my husband:

### **John 2:18**

John.

### **Jane 2:21**

Anyway, so we're here to talk about our experience. And we had been together a very long time. And at about 26 years or so into being together in a very, what I thought, was a completely loving, safe marriage, there was discovery. And it was devastating and shattered my world and our world, and painful and traumatic and disorientating and it felt like, to me, it felt like my life was over. I'm an independent person. I'm a smart person, I'm working person, I have a very big life, in addition to being married to John, but it just felt like my life was over. And so I confronted John within hours of discovery and I'll actually never forget, he said, "we have so much work to do, I hope you want to do it." Which wasn't - all I could say, crawled up in a little fetal position on a couch because we're on the phone because he was out of town was, in a tiny baby voice and I don't speak and baby voices was, "how could you do this to us? How could you do this to us?" Over and over on the phone for about an hour.

### **John 3:56**

I had no answer for that at that point.

### **Jane 4:00**

And that was the beginning of our recovery journey. I mean, at first, I didn't know there was a recovery journey. I thought life was over as I knew it, and you know, don't come home. And all of that. And we started talking, I immediately looked at resources. I actually called my sister who's a therapist, and not in this field particularly and out of town. And she flew down from where she lives and told me about a place that deals with recovery. And I went immediately to a thing there that was like a - it wasn't like a meeting per se it was a -

### **Marnie Breecker 4:43**

Support group?

### **Jane 4:44**

- A support group, but it was an educational support group. So you'd go there. And this was within five days of - I was lost those first five days I was just kind of crying in bed, trying to pretend that I had the flu so my kids wouldn't be too freaked out and trying to pull it together when they were around. And other than that, told everyone I had the flu because I didn't go to work and just would drive around. And I don't even remember. But I went to the recovery place and heard a lecture. The first day I went, there was an hour lecture and then an hour support group. And I started to, and I met other women there, one of which ended up becoming one of my best friends and 11 years later, she still is, and just started that long process. And unfortunately, for us, for me, the first two to four years were really, really hard. And there were okay days, but mostly, it was seven days a week 24/7 that this was most of what was going on. Even though I carried on my career, my life, my work, family, it was this and the despair. In the beginning, I was pretty sure that no matter what I did, whether we stayed together, didn't stay together, that my life would never be okay or good again, I was just in such hopeless despair. Part of that was because the deep, deep connection and love and 20 plus years of a life I had built with my husband. And there was always - I mean, our love and our connection was always deeply beneath all the betrayal and the hurt and the obvious problems we were going through around those. I did find out later that it had been about 9 to 10 year period of betrayal out of the 20 Plus. And the connection was, this is our life, we're gonna grow together. And this was it, and the thought that that either was going to happen, but I was going to hate him forever and always feel bad about us being together, and always feel betrayed and never be safe, trusting or truly feel a clean love again, if we stay together. So that's horrible. Or if we're apart, we're going to be apart and I'm not going to grow old with the person that I know I was meant to be, with my soul mate, love, partner. So that was horrible.

### **Duane Osterlind 7:24**

Jane, could I ask you a question? I was just wondering like when you say, like in the beginning. So for people who are listening to this, they they might be listening, this might be the beginning of the journey for them, that at that time, it really felt like it was impossible for this to heal, or is that, would that be correct?

### **John 7:43**

Yeah, the feeling was that this would be impossible to ever heal, to ever get over, to ever really recover from, to ever forgive. I remember, that's how it felt a lot over the first handful of years. But we did a lot of stuff immediately. Within the first week, I had that recovery place that had a lot of resources, and one of them was an individual therapist to work with. And within the first week, I had a list of boundaries. These are things that I need in order to feel safe. And at the time, the first one was, you need to be locked away in a dungeon somewhere for as long as humanly possible. That's what I need him to be: off the streets of LA.

**John 8:32**

And the dungeon was in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

**Jane 8:34**

Yeah. So because I just knew the first step to this was I needed to get some sense of safety and knowing in through the discovery, which didn't have yet a disclosure, but had enough information of knowing that there was all sorts of things going on every day in all sorts of ways. I knew that the first step was I just needed him locked away. I wasn't even thinking about it. Go someplace to kickstart your recovery, go to an inpatient, I didn't care. If the Gulag would have taken him, that would have been fine. But luckily, we found - together we found I come up with places and he did and he was you know -

**John 9:20**

That was your sister also.

**Jane 9:21**

Yeah, that was my sister too. We found because at first there was like places that looked a little like country clubs to me. And there were women there. I was like, Oh, no. Oh, no, my brother, you are not going anywhere where there's any females. Maybe if they work there, it might be okay.

**Marnie Breecker 9:40**

Did you ever have any issues with -

**Jane 9:42**

I'll just say there was no prior to recovery with John. There was no suspicion. I knew that he was out there in the world and did have interaction where women would come up to him and talk to him and whatnot. And it was, I felt 100% secure and safe, and not jealous. I'd started as a very jealous person, but after the 20 plus years, he was also so Brene. So it was a that was a program of complete honesty and whatnot. So I really felt safe and secure. And I never would have thought about it. And I didn't have problems of talking to women or anything. And it was no suspicion: I didn't discover because I was searching or it was, you know, or suspect. So, that was the first thing I needed. I needed, and everyone needs different things, but I needed him away. And so some of them look like country clubs and whatnot. And then we found one that was in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

**John 10:39**

That was the epicenter of recovery.

**Jane 10:41**

That was, what's his name was there -

**John 10:43**

Dr. Carnes.

**Jane 10:44**

Dr. Carnes was there and I had read, like, within the first week or so I had my list of things I need to feel safe, boundaries, because we had also been through Al-Anon decades before, I didn't want to feel like these are just controlling rules. And I had a little trouble with that, because it was against my Al-Anon type ways to write a list of rules. But when I changed the wording, instead of these are controlling things too. These are the things that I need to feel safe today. And they can evolve, to one, his phone was taken away, immediately, no computer immediately find a place to go. And then we agreed on Hattiesburg together. I liked it, you know, that it was really austere. And like the rules where, you know, he couldn't wear the kind of clothes and the kind of style and the kind of thing he likes to be and do and it was really stripped down and it was in this terrible, dustier place Hattiesburg. And it was just men only, so we signed up for as long as humanly possible. And then we also I started I found S-Anon meetings and Cosa meetings and therapy. And our thing was really, before he went, he didn't go for a few weeks, because it was - This is insane, but we have a family Christmas party that we have hosted for, at that point, for 20 years. And I didn't cancel it. So we had the Christmas party where 50 people came to our house. And he left the next morning to go to Hattiesburg.

**Marnie Breecker 12:20**

And nobody knew?

**Marnie Breecker 12:21**

No, just a couple people knew.

**John 12:23**

Our kids knew that I was going away, but they knew no real details.

**Duane Osterlind 12:27**

Jane, did you feel like, because I think a lot of partners struggle with this, they have to kind of keep it all together as they're falling apart on the inside.

**Jane 12:35**

I was trying to keep it together and I was falling apart on the inside. And then when alone or with certain friends I was falling apart on the outside as well. We had knockdown, drag out, screaming fights, touch physical on my end towards him. Not too bad. If, I swear, so many times, if I'd had a gun or a knife in the house, he'd be dead and I'd be in prison. And our kids would be in trouble. But what happened then, we just started this road to try and figure something out. And I did a lot of things to protect myself. I'm gonna say a couple things that are very specific. I am more of the breadwinner in our situation. So I immediately got a lawyer. And then instead of a lawyer, I went to, what's it called, arbitration. I insisted that we get a post nuptial agreement that he signs everything over. And I did therapy, individual therapy in Vigil Trauma Recovery thing, a group of women group therapy, I went to the Saturday educational lecture and the group on Saturday, and we went to a couples therapist. So there was six days and my Cosa S-Anon meeting and an AI-Anon meeting. So I think there was, out of six or seven days, there's at least six days where I did a recovery thing every day, and so did John, you know, and he'll tell you his side, but there was, um, you know, he was doing meetings, you know, he was doing like six, seven meetings a week and therapy and other stuff, too. And from there, we found, you know, the recovery community was very strong, and we were deep into it. And then we did the trauma workshop that this is about, we did it, I think it had to have been about a year in and I wish we had done it earlier. I think it would have -

**John 14:26**

More than a year.

**Jane 14:27**

Maybe year and a half?

**Marnie Breecker 14:28**

It was 2010 I think -

**Jane 14:30**

So -

**John 14:30**

Yeah, so it was two years.

**Marnie Breecker 14:33**

Two years?

**Duane Osterlind 14:33**

You had been doing kind of the standard recovery. You had sobriety and you were doing that, and then you started doing this other workshop.

**Jane 14:42**

Yeah. And that was one of the turning points, we had had several along the way. And one of the other turning points was after that workshop, I did the TRT, trauma reduction therapy, group individually. And that helped me so much with everything that would trigger me and all the stuff, they just really helped reduce that. But we dove into the community of recovery, and took every bit of that was offered. And we were fortunate enough as well to be able to, you know, afford a lot of therapy.

**Duane Osterlind 15:17**

Right, yeah.

**Jane 15:17**

And, and we also we did everything,

**Marnie Breecker 15:19**

Not just affording it, you also really carved out the time from your schedule, if you have very busy lives.

**Jane 15:25**

Yeah.

**Marnie Breecker 15:25**

And a big family, and you made it happen. And I think it's important to say that just because a lot of times what I hear over and over from people was "well, I don't have time to do all of that."

**Jane 15:34**

Well, we didn't have time NOT to do all of this.

**John 15:37**

Yeah.

**Jane 15:37**

Because the pain -

**John 15:38**

Nobody has time not to act out.

**Jane 15:40**

The pain we were in the torture we were in, we were definitely torturing each other in the early recovery as well. And we didn't, a lot of the things that I would say and needed in recovery from him, people were going "no, no, no, you shouldn't be saying or doing that." And it was, you know, but it was just the way it was. But in those first three to four years of climbing out of the despair, what happened for me was, first of all, we both dove into individual recovery as well, because it takes no responsibility for his actions and his acting out. But I take responsibility for being a part of the couples if that wasn't working, and it wasn't communicating. And that was for whatever reason, part of this and broken.

**Duane Osterlind 16:30**

Right.

**Jane 16:31**

So there was a point about four years into the recovery, he had made some major strides in there, signing the postnup. Finally, which took a few years and it took a lot of - there's a lot of fear on John's side, because I was all about "this has to be signed in order for me to trust you, that you're willing to do this," it was a really strong one, basically, you know, after all these years, and with big homes and things, he leaves with his a few private possessions only. So I needed that to feel that I could trust him. And then I realized, and he realized, that it was a big leap of trust,

**Duane Osterlind 16:36**

Right.

**Jane 16:47**

- for him to sign that because there was the fear, "I'm going to sign this and then she's going to leave me the next day." And so it took a lot to come around to getting that signed. And that was a huge leap for both of us. There was little, what built trust over those first four years was as much as possible, John consistently showing up, being trustworthy. And it wasn't always because last thing to go, they say, from the perpetrating addict is the lying and keeping secrets and some old behaviors. I'm very fortunate, he worked so hard, and he never acted out again. But there was some secrets and some lying and things after discovery, and discovery was hard, that would come up. But at some point it just, and there were behaviors where I feel I was testing him a lot and would push his buttons. So hard and so far until got the reaction of him losing his temper and I go "See, see? That's who the real you is."



**Duane Osterlind 18:15**

Right.

**Jane 18:15**

This bad guy. And so we had a lot of that for a lot of years, and that was really hard to get over. But at one point, he just had a shift. And no matter how hard I pushed and tested, he wasn't a bad guy.

**Marnie Breecker 18:28**

What was the shift?

**Jane 18:29**

The shift was he - what I needed all along was no matter kind of what I did or said, I needed my husband to say, "you have every right to feel this way. It's because of what I've done and I'm sorry. I want to make this up to you. What can I do to make this up to you now and I will spend the rest of my life trying to make this up to you."

**Marnie Breecker 18:51**

I'm so curious, and you don't have the answer now, you could totally do it when you talk, John. And I'm curious what shifted for you that you didn't do that. And then you did do that.

**Jane 19:01**

And I'm gonna finish because I have to leave unfortunately, we could do another time if we want to finish this if you don't get what you need. But when that shift happened from him, consistently for a long time, I started to trust again and at one point because I was angry and I was mad and part of my thing that people didn't like was I needed him to crawl over broken glass, was my figurative thing is like, "you're not crawling hard enough on the broken glass. You're not scraping yourself enough. I don't see enough blood, if you ever want to make any of this up to me," and metaphorically, physically would have been good, maybe, but metaphorically. And what happened was at that point in about four years, I remember just sitting in the chair at the foot of our Betty, you were sitting there, I just looked at my husband, feeling so much love and realizing, "I have to make a choice, I really have to make a choice. This is not going to be good or happy for me or him, we can't have a marriage and a life where what I want to do is hurt him every day and punish him." And I don't really feel that way most the time anymore, can I wake up in the morning wanting him to have a good day. Can I wake up in the morning and do things during that day, on a daily basis, it make his life happier and better for him, as well as him doing that for me. And when that shift came was the real changing point, that got us to where we are, 11 years in, where I mean, I knew I needed a new relationship. When this happened, the old relationship had to end, die, bury. And all I can say is I'm just so glad that the new relationship that I built was with my husband.

**Duane Osterlind 20:52**

That's awesome.

**Jane 20:52**

And it was him. And it's us. And we're the happiest we've ever been, mostly over these last seven years since that four year turn. And things are good. And we communicate better than we ever did before, better than we knew how, we didn't even understand most of this stuff. We didn't understand the roles we were playing.

**Duane Osterlind 21:12**

What about understanding, really being able to understand that partner trauma component? How did that help you, help you guys, like understanding how this creates trauma?

**Jane 21:23**

Well, I think in the beginning of recovery from this, because it's so personal, what has happened, it really is all about - the coupleship surviving is all about the partner that was perpetrated upon, that was the victim in this, in some way. And I use those words, that it's all about their recovery as a form of triage. The first beat, whether it's a month, six months, a year or four years if you're as hard a case as we were, or I was, it's triage. And the sooner that all the therapist and the partner accepts, this is triage. My partner's bleeding out. And unless we stop that, we can't move forward. And it all has to be about "what is it going to take to stop that?" for the couple ship. Separate and at the same time. The addict and partner needs to be recovering himself and working on the shame and the stuff and the core things and whatever has led him to all of the acting out and has to be able to be sober.

**Marnie Breecker 22:33**

I always say the addict is really tasked with a huge job, in the beginning getting sober, right? And then dealing with yourself after using a behavior for a long time to cope with this maladaptive behavior, but it was your survival. And then having to get sober, deal with the feelings coming up, dealing with the underlying trauma, but then dealing with your partner, who is like you said, would you say hemorrhaging?

**John 22:58**

Hemorrhaging, bleeding out.

**Marnie Breecker 23:00**

Bleeding out, right. That is a hard, hard thing to do. And at the time, the partner is not going to have any empathy and compassion for what you're tasked with. Right?

**Jane 23:09**

And it was really hard because anytime, zero empathy for him or any - I mean, when he would be like, "but, but I'm doing so good. And, and I'm sober, I haven't acted out. And I've changed all these behaviors." And I go, I had so many analogies, I'd be, "it's like you're looking at me and you just had hacked off both of my arms. And I'm standing here bleeding with no arms and you're asking me to pat you on your back. It ain't gonna happen."

**John 23:38**

I think the analogy was-

**Duane Osterlind 23:40**

That's a good analogy.

**John 23:41**

Three inches, the 12 inch blade, if you pull the blade out three inches and you want a medal.

**Jane 23:53**

Yeah!

**Duane Osterlind 23:54**

I think it's just hearing you guys talk about it, to be able to, because I know that those times it is so incredibly painful. But just to hear you right now, to be able to talk about it and look back on it. But with such a different perspective. To really be able to see it that way and to see the healing that you guys have come through is pretty amazing.

**Marnie Breecker 24:16**

I literally have tears in my eyes ongoing throughout this conversation because to see you go through what you went through and to come out here? This is, I mean, it's the greatest story ever.

**Jane 24:30**

Well, people say, "you know, I'm grateful this happened". I will never say that. I am not grateful for the level of the acting out, the deception, the perpetration, the gaslighting, I will never be grateful for that. But I am grateful that we had a traumatic rupture in our marriage. Because it led us to doing enough, the work, to have so much of a better life and a better marriage and a better quality of life both together and individually. The way I deal with everything in my life has changed through the growth that I've done. And John has changed so much from who and what he was as well. And he's still the same person. But he's so... I don't know what the word is, recovered?

**Marnie Breecker 25:25**

And you feel like he's the best version of himself?

**John 25:28**

That's it. You know what, he's the best-

**John 25:30**

Not yet! I'm working on it.

**Jane 25:32**

We're constantly working on being the best version of ourselves, we could be in the best relationship version we can have. And so, that I'm grateful for.

**John 25:44**

We're growing, we're moving on up, baby.

**Marnie Breecker 25:48**

You have to leave now?

**Jane 25:50**

I don't want to go.

**John 25:51**

It's my turn!

**Jane 25:51**

It is your turn.

**Marnie Breecker 25:51**

It's John's turn. Yes.

**John 25:55**

I don't want to go and hear what he says but I have to go to this thing. I'm so committed to it. But.

**Duane Osterlind 26:00**

Thank you so much. I think you know, just for people out there who are in the midst of the pain, to hear that there's something on the other side, I think is just so valuable, because it's sometimes so hard to see how difficult it is when you're in it. And to know that there is a way out.

**Marnie Breecker 26:19**

I said to Jane earlier, I don't know if this was when we were recording, but she was hopeless at one point. But oh, yeah, you did say it, that when you said you were trapped. That hopelessness of, "Well, it wasn't even just when I saved my marriage, but it was "Will I ever be okay again?"

**Jane 26:26**

Yes, exactly. That I didn't think I could ever be okay again, and all, you know that all the stuff you read in the books, it's amazing. I had one of those books of betrayal bond or some of them. And I remember having a highlighter, I was gonna highlight everything that pertains to us and me. And, and the pages got soggy. From everything.

**Marnie Breecker 26:55**

Tears?

**Jane 26:55**

No, from from highlighting every word of those books and mending a shattered heart, which actually came along a little later. And it was all... it's so interesting. And one of the biggest educational things was when I went to Hattiesburg, and we had the workshops, their family week and the weekend. And one of the first lectures I ever heard talking about how an addict starts acting out, or has their whole life acted out sort of and have that propensity, and then they find the woman that's gonna fix it all and they get married, and then they have children. And then then all of a sudden, they're not the center of attention and the acting out because it was like - I was going, textbook us. It was so textbook us, it was so clear, this is exactly what happened. This is exactly what was going on. And there was - because so many have come before us, because there's so much work being done on it, because there's so much recovery out there that if you really go in open to it, you can get through recovering and come out the other side, and there's the individual recovery, a couple ship recovery. And, you know, here we are. So...

**Marnie Breecker 28:09**

I was gonna say you could say one thing to somebody who is in the place that you were in, when you were at the lowest point, what would you tell them now, knowing what you know now and what you have with your husband, now?

**Jane 28:22**

I would just say show up for the work, and be easy on yourself, and reach out for help and do the work and do the work knowing that whatever the outcome is, you'll be better for it. And I'm really glad our outcome is that we kind of have a really great marriage and a really great life together. And I think our kids are healthier and happier because of the 11 years of this different style of living. We were obviously living in quite a bit of sickness and illness and didn't quite know it. Didn't know it at all, actually, before. So show up.

**John 29:14**

Show up.

**Jane 29:15**

Do the work. Reach out.

**Duane Osterlind 29:17**

Well, thank you so much.

**John 29:19**

Show up again -

**Jane 29:21**

And again. Alright, I'm gonna go to my thing. Love you.

**Marnie Breecker 29:30**

Okay, so John, I'm curious from you what it was like to hear your wife sort of go back in time and tell that story?

**John 29:37**

Well, there's a lot of things that you know, I felt, I felt deep grief for those times that it was just when that scab got ripped off. And it's not just like a victimless crime, which like, I as an addict sort of had that like, "this is - in a way it's benefiting my marriage," and all this crazy shit that the addict manages to come up with. And it was not just the pain that Jane was going through. But my two daughters, one was 14, and one was 11. And they were so bewildered. And no matter what, there was no hiding from that truth that I was the one that caused that. And that I was the one that brought that down on them.

**Marnie Breecker 29:53**

How do you handle that?

### **John 30:26**

I don't know, I - look, I'm really good at dissociation. I actually had been doing that because of other shit in my life since I was pretty young. You know, I leave my body. And I tell you that that word is used. And it's there's a lot of negative things attached to it. But had it not been for that dissociation, I wouldn't be alive. But I, I mean, I think there was lots of times where I felt so out of my body, just to sort of like make it day to day, especially before I went to treatment, but it lasted a long time. So I think, you know, look, I was grieving then, for the actions that I had pulled. But also, there was a lot of just being numb to the world around me at that point, in my early sobriety. And I always - I picked the day that I went to treatment as my day of sobriety. And that was, that was December 26 of '07. And it was, I mean, leaving after this Christmas party. And I'll tell you like, as, as my wife was saying, the first few years were rugged. And we had a screaming fight in a parking lot of a Target. And then I noticed that there was a security guard watching us. And I said, "they're watching us right now." And then we went back home, and my youngest daughter was decorating a Christmas tree, and the cops showed up. And I felt really, I felt a lot of gratitude, actually, because somebody had reported what they saw, there was nothing physical that happened. But somebody saw something physical. And the police separated Jane and myself. And it was just another one of those moments like, "Oh, my God, look at all this, the fight, it doesn't matter what started it, but I'm bringing the cops to my door, you know, or this is the end result of the stuff that I was doing. Here the police and, and our daughter didn't see it, just assumed - that they just took us outside and separate us interviewed us and split. I mean, because nothing had really happened other than we had a screaming fight.

### **Duane Osterlind 33:01**

But I think it just shows you how, you know, for people who are beginning that it can start at this really dark place. You know, recovery sometimes starts there.

### **John 33:10**

It's shame, dude, you know, I mean -

### **Marnie Breecker 33:12**

You were saying, I think that what you were talking about, John was grief, that you felt so much grief -

### **John 33:16**

Yeah, and the shame of all that stuff. And you know, look, I'd grown up feeling ashamed of myself. And I took it out on other people, you know, and I want to say the other thing that really, as an addict, the most dangerous thing for me to do is to feel like a victim because being a victim gives me the right to perpetrate. And the one thing, I swear to God, my mind is still pretty cloudy. But as when I was in treatment, the thing that came home to me was that Cartman's triangle, the victimizer, the victim, or the rescuer, those three places you know, and it's it's easy to go from one of those points to another. And for me the most dangerous point is being the victimizer, so -

**Marnie Breecker 34:08**

The victimizer or the victim?

**John 34:10**

The victimizer, but being a victim is the place that it funnels me right into being, somebody who can make up a good reason that I have the right to act out. I have the right to betray, I have the right to victimize others.

**Duane Osterlind 34:25**

What was the point for you, John, when you were able to kind of say, "I have to just show up and be here for my partner, like I need to just, I just need to be here."

**John 34:38**

I think that when you're in a community of recovery around you, which I was lucky enough, you know, I live in LA. And there's great recovery happening here. And I started showing up and I found people that I really trusted around me and I was able to take that knowledge and that recovery back into my house. And I think that's really the deal that I was lucky enough to. I think that my sobriety, and I had considerable sobriety and Alcoholics Anonymous, and no matter how fucked up I was in the shit that I was doing, and perpetrating, I believed in that and I had a belief that recovery is possible. And I stopped, I realize that the voice in my head wasn't the voice of God to me. And then I got to turn that around and actually start listening to other people, and be willing to maybe believe something that contradicts my belief system. And that was it, you know, I mean, because the shame that I felt that seeing my wife, so devastated, was really hard to take, you know, I'll build a wall just to try not to feel that shame. And unfortunately, what that does is it builds a wall between me and my partner, instead of saying, yeah, maybe you are right. And it touches on so many core issues, and childhood issues that there is everybody has to recover on so many levels, to make it happen, to make it work.

**Marnie Breecker 36:21**

So what do you think was the driving force that allowed the relational healing? Because I know that from the get go, like, you know, like Jane said, you went away pretty early to Hattiesburg and got into recovery, and you never relapsed. You had strong sobriety, you worked in the program, you were connected to other guys in the program. But you guys were still really struggling.

**John 36:43**

Yeah, we were. Well, I've already said to you, that there's, I feel blessed. And there's something special about the relationship that I have with Jane. And she mentioned, maybe it was just that we were too needy, and, and, and, and sort of codependent on each other. But I don't believe that.



**Marnie Breecker 37:04**

No, there was something.

**John 37:05**

There's something else.

**Marnie Breecker 37:06**

You said that you had a shift, she did talk about -

**John 37:06**

Yeah,

**Marnie Breecker 37:07**

You were able to able to meet a need that she had.

**John 37:12**

I personally think my shift happened before four years, but -

**Duane Osterlind 37:18**

But it was at a time that she could be able to see it.

**John 37:20**

It just is, you know, it's again, like it got less shameful for me to hear her pain. And also, I have experience in the fact that like, you know, when you start learning how to fess up for the things that you've done, actually, it's an esteemable act, it's an act of self love. And so it didn't feel so horrible to come to her and come to her side, more quicker. And that was - That's the deal. Like, it actually was easier to do that, than get back in the cycle of, "Well you said this," and finger pointing and making the other person the bad guy.

**Duane Osterlind 38:07**

So kind of like that, when your shame - when you had more self love and more or less shame of your own, you were able to show up for her pain, it sounds like.

**John 38:17**

And you know, so but like, she's right, though, that there has to be that triage of her issue of that trauma to the trauma that would come up. And it seems to jump up out of nowhere, you could be having a wonderful time. And then all of a sudden, something clicks what, you know, I'm not a big fan of the word trigger. But something activates that. And all of a sudden, though you're miles away, the view is the same. And I heard, our couples therapist said this, you know, because we've been going there and weekly and it was always like, there was a lot of tough times. And he said you're going up a mountain together. But you're not going straight up the mountain. You're spiraling up. So it goes around and around and around and you travel miles and miles. But you get to this one point and the view is the same. So that it's like that painful view. But we've been trudging and trudging. But it's that the view is going to be the same even though you're on a spiral upwards.

**Duane Osterlind 39:23**

Right.

**John 39:24**

And that really helped me. And it gave me that willingness to continue to work and to sort of like, lay my sword and shield down.

**Marnie Breecker 39:36**

I'm curious, John, when you came back from Mississippi, and you continued your program here, so I imagine you had an individual therapist. Group.

**John 39:45**

Yeah.

**Marnie Breecker 39:46**

So was this -

**John 39:47**

I'm still in that group, that men's group.

**Marnie Breecker 39:49**

You are?

**John 39:50**

Yeah. And there was people who had like eight years in that group and I went, those cats are crazy, man! And then I've been there over 10 years now.

**Marnie Breecker 40:02**

Well I think it's good for people to hear too, to recognize that this isn't something that just goes away and that you know, you get the recovery. And then, you know.

**John 40:09**

Well, my recovery, you know, has to do with consistency.

**Marnie Breecker 40:12**

Absolutely. So in those early days, when you were really getting sober and doing the work initially, was there a lot of talk about your partner's trauma? Because what you're both saying today is that it took a while to get to that point in the earlier stages you would associate with the wall, you would maybe be defensive, or transfer the blame to her, any of those things. And then you were able to stop doing it at some point. And I know you did do the workshop as well, where we were talking all about partner trauma. So I'm just wondering if you feel that there was more that could have been done in the earlier stages to help educate you, to kind of give you guys a, maybe a better start at that relational piece?

**Marnie Breecker 40:54**

I don't know, I think there's a lot of things. And I think that, I mean, the whole way people are treating sex addiction and infidelity and those things, and I'm a sex addict, there's no doubt about it, that the way people are treating that now is different than then. I think that, I mean, I'm just coming up with my own take on this. But I think that like, disclosure for us happened way too quickly. And I think it retraumatized my wife, and in a way that had we had a little more time and, and that knowledge had been present, that you're in deep shock right now, as the partner of a sex addict. And you have severe, severe trauma. And your partner has to learn this and be brought to that place of like, look, I heard when I was in treatment, the only thing more traumatizing than a betrayal of that magnitude is the death of a child. So that's pretty clear how disruptive in somebody's life that is. And man, like, I just remember my feelings of hearing that like, whoa, that's like, second only to my daughter being murdered in front of my wife, is what I did to her. You know, that's, that's not, you know, that's pretty clear about the level of traumatizing that somebody gets. It's like, I think that the person has to really learn to fess up to that, to the magnitude of that statement. So yeah, the earlier the addict can hear that. And like the addict has to hear it. You can say it to the addict. So how does the addict hear it better?

**John 40:58**

Well it's interesting, because you said you heard that when you were at treatment. That's where you did the disclosure?

**John 42:28**

Yeah.

**Marnie Breecker 42:29**

And then it wasn't for at least a year -

**John 42:59**

Don't they say that's like, two to four years, I mean, is the sort of rule of thumb and we're a classic case of that. The only thing I can say is to don't dig in, you know, to try to not dig into being right.

**Marnie Breecker 43:15**

Yeah. And I remember, we were talking to you first, when we first sat down before, and I don't think you remember this. But what we remembered was how angry you were in the workshop. Because of the fact that you were saying, "why am I hearing this now for the first time?" But what I find so interesting, is that you were just saying you did hear it?

**John 43:34**

Oh, I did. Yeah.

**Marnie Breecker 43:35**

But maybe you forgot?

**John 43:36**

I certainly don't remember saying that! Maybe I do, like I say, my mind is pretty clouded from those days in so many ways. I really, it was like that sort of, whatever it was, dissociation on my part, or just massive amounts of shame to the core of me. It was hard to hear.

**Marnie Breecker 44:01**

So how would you describe - you talk a lot about, instead of Jane, about the turmoil and distress and trauma that your relationship went through. How would you describe your relationship today?

### **John 44:13**

It's so many light years from where we started. And look, in this day and age, people split up and break up for a lot less reason than what I did to my wife and what we did to each other as a couple. And I learned this lesson a long time ago before I got my recovery in SAA and that was that I'm gonna, I could leave my relationship and go off and find somebody new and I'd pick the same person. And I would also have to just start all over again. And I knew I love my wife. Even when I was acting out I knew I loved my wife, even though it didn't feel that way to her, obviously the betrayal of that is, you know, and she has that in her past, you know, with with her mother and father. So I picked the perfect person to blow up her life in that way. And you know what, and this isn't the first time I've done that, you know, I just a relationship never got any further than a year before that to anybody. And it was always blown up in a horrible ugly way.

### **Duane Osterlind 45:31**

John, I mean, if anybody at once again, you know, I think people who are a lot of people are going to be listening to this maybe in the beginning stages of this whole process. What would you want to tell the addict out there who's starting this journey with a partner? What would you want to tell them?

### **John 45:49**

I tell them this; it could always get worse. Like -

### **Marnie Breecker 45:53**

What if they're listening, and they're saying you have no idea what you're talking about? It can't possibly get any worse, it can't!

### **John 45:58**

It can. Not only that, I just say that, believe me that. I don't know if I'm a certified 18 karat sex addict. But I'm a really good one. And I had a lot to deal with, in order to recover from this seemingly hopeless disease. And I did it. And it was hard. But it wasn't as hard as what would have gone on had I not been discovered, or had I decided to just end the relationship and go off and just go on my merry way. Because I was pulling shit that was life threatening to people, to the people I love. So I would say that it could always get worse, but you have the opportunity right now, to go through something that's going to change your life for the better. And it requires some some heavy work. But it's definitely a worthwhile cause. And that's the deal. I mean, to get really like, new age about it, you're a worthwhile cause that's what I'll tell the attic, that you're worth it. In order to recover, do the stuff that people are telling you and just start finding people that you trust, and who maybe have something that is desirable for you in your life.

**Marnie Breecker 47:29**

And I want to ask one last question: in talking about this today, has this brought up shame for you?

**John 47:36**

Yeah, I did feel shame. But it's like, I can actually say that and be cool with it. And I feel remorse. And I feel grief. And I also feel totally free at the same time. And it's possible to have all those feelings inside. And that I'm able to be cool with them all.

**Marnie Breecker 47:59**

You're such an amazing example of recovery and so inspiring. I mean it, from the bottom of my heart, can I think that your marriage as well. But again, I want to - You talked earlier about having something incredibly special in the marriage. I think that that's true. And I really want to reiterate that you did a lot of work, both of you really jumped in and you took guidance from the professionals. And you did it and that's what I hope that people are able to hear.

**John 48:28**

Yeah, they're - you know, it's all possible.

**Duane Osterlind 48:31**

Thank you, John, for coming on and talking and to give this voice to people who need to hear it.

**John 48:37**

Yeah. Well, it's - look, my particular brand was acting out with people, but we see it all around us. What's, what's out there. And I want to say I'm a big proponent of sex. But just and then it doesn't have to be horrible for the rest of your life. And there's ways to live a fulfilled life.

**Marnie Breecker 48:59**

Thank you for saying that.

**Duane Osterlind 49:00**

Thank you.

**John 49:01**

You know, I think it's important that people hear that, in the community of recovery.

**Marnie Breecker 49:07**

Yeah, you know, it's, you know, I think Duane and I are both very sex positive therapists. And when people hear that we work with sex addiction, I think sometimes they think, well, if you're pathologizing sex, you know, then that means...

**John 49:20**

Here's, like, I've used this analogy, if you don't mind me cutting in.

**Marnie Breecker 49:23**

No.

**John 49:23**

You know what the deal is? I think that addicts of every stripe, you know, and I certainly know about being codependent and addicted to somebody or addicted to sex or addicted to drugs and addicted to alcohol. And there's so many of us and there's such great artistry and creativity within that community. And people who are very brilliant people. But there's this - we have all this other shit woven into the fabric of our psyche and our core. And the trick is how do we like pull those strands of this weave of destructiveness out and keep that beautiful tapestry? You know, it's like pulling the strings or the twine out of that, and being able to continue or keep the tapestry intact, you know, because like, look at these beautiful, creative artistic people who are around and you hear them just destroy themselves in lots of different ways, you know, and I heard this. Here's another thing, I remembered them saying that that part of the brain that drives addiction also drives creativity. And so like, it doesn't mean that your creativity is going to fly away if you get recovery from the addictive side. It means maybe that there's more room for it.

**Duane Osterlind 50:59**

Well said. Well said.

**Marnie Breecker 51:01**

Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.

**Duane Osterlind 51:05**

Thank you so much.

**HCH Narrator 51:08**

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