



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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## Episode #3: Self-Doubt and Creativity

*Please note: This is an unedited transcript, provided as a courtesy, and reflects the actual conversation as closely as possible. Please forgive any typographical or grammatical errors.*

Rowan Mangan: Hello and welcome to Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I'm Rowan Mangan and I'm trying to figure it out, and I'm here with Martha Beck who figured it out when she was nine and she's here to share her wisdom. Hi, Marty.

Martha Beck: Hi. Yeah, I thought I figured it out, but it turns out that it was just something that the doctor needed to remove.

Rowan Mangan: Oh dear.

Martha Beck: Yeah, so it's a bewildering world out there. Hence the title, Bewildered. They have spiders that are now crisscrossed with goats genetically.

Rowan Mangan: Crisscrossed, eh?

Martha Beck: Yes, crisscrossed is the technical word, so that... Well they inserted a spider gene into this one goat's DNA and then --

Rowan Mangan: Sounds painful.

Martha Beck: It was, yes, I'm sure it was, but he then went on to father a bunch of other goats that had the spider gene, and the female goats that are the daughters of that goat, when they give milk, it turns into spider silk and it's the most powerful fabric ever made by the hand of man and the gonad of goat.

Rowan Mangan: I'm bewildered.

Martha Beck: Is that not bewildering?

Rowan Mangan: It is bewildering.

Martha Beck: These are the times in which we live.



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- Rowan Mangan: Is it okay if I steal gonad of goat for my debut album?
- Martha Beck: I was going to use it as the name for my new perfume, but if you want it, I'll let-
- Rowan Mangan: We could get a whole line of things out. It could just be the new brand.
- Martha Beck: Right, okay. Good. That's for later.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay. Well, I actually do find the spider goat phenomenon very bewildering. I do not mean to make light of its absolute weirdness.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, and the thing is that humans are just such weird creatures that we've created cultures that do bizarre things. And it's wonderful to be able to make a spider goat, although we don't know how it feels to the goats, but there's a big part of us that is left bewildered in the wake of such things and then we're bewildering the whole world to death, which is not a good thing. But bewildered, it struck me long ago, could also be pronounced, be-wilder-deh. Be wilder, duh! So, I thought, well that's a good way to navigate because the culture is completely insane, and it pulls us all away.
- Culture is the opposite of nature if you look at it in a certain way. So, what about when culture loses its way? If we all be a little wilder and go back to our true nature? So, the truth of a society is just consensus. We all decide what we say is real and true and you get beaten up if you disagree. But if you get a little be-wilder-ed, then you don't come to consensus. You come to your senses, which is what mystics and meditators do, and it turns out they live longer and have happier lives, so there.
- Rowan Mangan: And so, we believe that if you find bewildered in this world of spider goats and whatnot, that you might be on the verge of your own... A truer path and a truer place to be in the world, than that defined by culture.
- Martha Beck: Well said. And it can just be a little sidestep in your mind and suddenly you're wilder and everything's much more interesting.



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Rowan Mangan: So, we try to figure it out in a different kind of way. We don't want to figure it out back to culture.

Martha Beck: No.

Rowan Mangan: We want to figure it forward, if anything.

Martha Beck: Outward.

Rowan Mangan: Onward.

Martha Beck: Outward bound, onward, upward, onward, inward, just ward.

Rowan Mangan: Wildered.

Martha Beck: Just thatward. It's just thatward.

Rowan Mangan: Thatward.

Martha Beck: Yeah, we go thatward.

Rowan Mangan: I buy it.

Martha Beck: We go thatward. As in I am that.

Rowan Mangan: What's been bewildering you this week, Marty-moo?

Martha Beck: Oh, good God, I've been out in our backyard, looking at the pond, and we have these three big koi and one smaller koi and then we went out a few weeks ago and there were tiny fishes in the pond, and they did spawn.

Rowan Mangan: The tiny fishes did not spawn. The tiny fishes, point of fact, were probably the product of the spawning.

Martha Beck: This is a family podcast for the fish. It's a family fish podcast. Little ones did not spawn, no. The big ones spawned and made tiny ones and then ate almost all of them.

Rowan Mangan: And you have never seen fascination like Martha Beck with a koi pond.

Martha Beck: Oh my gosh, baby fish. Are you kidding me? But then we put a net over the pond to keep the Great Blue Herons from eating the baby fish in the fall when the leaves go away.

Rowan Mangan: Well that's a worthy -



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- Martha Beck: But then I went out to watch them and there was a frog and he was trying to get in the water and he just was hopping around on this net, bewildered, completely bewildered.
- Rowan Mangan: He must have been utterly bewildered, he tried to jump into the pond.
- Martha Beck: He's like, "No can reach water, no can reach water." He jumped right toward me and then just landed by my foot and just stayed there for five minutes. He wasn't even afraid of me. And I think he was just saying, "I'm bewildered. You got to help me. There's something wrong with the pond."
- Rowan Mangan: He was just trying to take it all in. He's like, "I am a frog Jesus. I do not land on the water. I travel across the water, but I never get there."
- Martha Beck: He probably was waiting for me to worship him.
- Rowan Mangan: He probably was, he was just sitting there -
- Martha Beck: Or kill him and then worship him. That seems to be the pattern.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. That's bewildering.
- Martha Beck: There's a whole nother thing. A podcast, is Jesus the toads that you lick in Australia? But anyway, I couldn't put him back in the pond in good conscience because they eat baby fish.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So, I went and got him a bowl of water.
- Rowan Mangan: Which is just a small pond when you think about it.
- Martha Beck: It's a poor substitute, but at least he can wet his little amphibious skin. So, I was trying to figure out, but I don't know. I'm going to have to figure this out at length. It's a situation.
- Rowan Mangan: I can see that.
- Martha Beck: Ecosystems, it's always a situation. What have you been trying to figure out?
- Rowan Mangan: Well, I've been in New York this week and I have been trying to figure out the paradox within me that wants to spend a life in New York and wants to spend a life out here in the woods.



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- Rowan Mangan: And it's very interesting coming to terms with this sense of... I mean, my God, the privilege in this, right? But maybe I can somehow do both. Maybe I can design a life that's not... Is a little bit different from what the culture says and go, sometimes... I can give New York and the woods joint custody of my life. What about that?
- Martha Beck: You notice when you said that you were like, check your privilege, and it is really true. We are grotesquely over privileged, but one of my best editors of this is my daughter, and when I was writing in my book, Oh I'm so over privileged, here's my problem, she was like, "Eh, enjoy your privilege. Don't let shame of privilege force you into something that you don't want." So, we've talked a lot, you and I, about how Australian culture-
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: Is even more than ours, it's like, don't you bloody get too big for your britches.
- Rowan Mangan: That's exactly it.
- Martha Beck: Thank you. I just feel like I was a kangaroo in another life. Vertical deer.
- Rowan Mangan: Kangaroos, by definition, too big for their britches, just saying.
- Martha Beck: Hashtag vertical deer.
- Rowan Mangan: Hashtag check your privilege, kangaroos.
- Martha Beck: I think we should mention that deer are horizontal kangaroos on every single podcast.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, well, I was intending to, but I was building to it.
- Martha Beck: It just needs to be done.
- Rowan Mangan: But I was building to it because to me that's the climax of the show.
- Martha Beck: But no, it's like, I love New York and I love the woods. Oh my God, I really want a life built at both of these. And then the critic comes in and goes, check your privilege. Who gets to do that?



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- Martha Beck: Nobody gets to do that. Stop it. So, culture is... You need to be wilder there.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God, I'm having that moment. I remember, I forget what it was that I was listening to, but Brene Brown on saying on something she'd go on and someone had asked her a question or something, and she... I just remember her saying she got into her car and she was driving home and she was saying to herself, "Oh my God, I am the patriarchy." And I feel like, oh my God, I am the voice of culture keeping me down.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, man. Yeah. You have your foot on your own head.
- Rowan Mangan: What's wrong with me. I need to get wilder. I need to be wilder, duh.
- Martha Beck: It's really wild to have your foot on top of your own head. I saw this guru from India who could do it, a dude, but he was on a lot of hashish.
- Rowan Mangan: We are getting so many potential spinoff podcasts already from today. My goodness.
- Martha Beck: He could literally stand on one foot and put the other foot on the top of his head with his neck straight and everything.
- Rowan Mangan: Hashtag life goals.
- Martha Beck: Life goals from a life coach. Okay, we have a question from a bewildered listener.
- Rowan Mangan: We do, and today the person who's come to us who's trying to figure shit out... We can swear, it's a podcast.
- Martha Beck: It is.
- Rowan Mangan: Is called Paula, and Paula's life puzzle, I think, is one that I was quite excited to read because I think a lot of us can relate to it.
- Martha Beck: Absolutment.
- Rowan Mangan: Paula is a writer and her issue is about the need to use judgment in her work and discernment when it comes to her writing.



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Rowan Mangan: But she doesn't want to fall into self-doubt in a sort of self-destructive way, but she still wants to retain her judgment about her work and a discriminating eye with regard to her own work. So, she wrote to us: "My life puzzle is about creativity in the face of doubt. I'm more than a third of the way into writing a novel and I am paralyzed by this self-doubt. I'm fascinated by the story, but I feel the writing just isn't working. It doesn't have the life and direction it needs. It makes me doubt the whole project, not just particular parts of the writing.

There's inner conflict. I have the creative part of me that just wants to fly through the writing, then there are the two faces of the critic. The critic can be helpful because it can make my work better. It uses judgment to improve the writing. The other side of the critic is the part that throws me into self-doubt and is completely destructive. How do I know if this work is even good or if it's even worth doing in the first place?"

Martha Beck: I wonder this every morning when I wake up, is this even worth doing in the first place? Should I even get up? Seriously, what day is worth doing in the first place? But then when you get to creative work, holy smokes and... So yeah, I mean, how much do we relate to this? Every day's writing. Is it good enough? Everything I put online, every time I give a speech... I mean, it's continuous evasive action between the self-critic and the part of you that believes.

Rowan Mangan: Absolutely, and I do think that just even the existence of that self-doubt is sort of part of the gig of being a creative person in the world. That managing that, to an extent, is always what you're going to be doing if you're not completely self-deluded.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I have to say, people who don't ask this question are the ones who worry me because I get this all the time. People come to me and they say, "I just can't do this, man. It's like, Ooh, I can't make it work. I'm not good enough." And then they show me their work and it's amazing.



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- Martha Beck: And then there are people who are like, "Oh Martha, I love to write. Like you, I sit down and pour forth words continuously. Call the coast, everyone will want to know." And then they give me a manuscript called "Why I am Me."
- Rowan Mangan: They actually do.
- Martha Beck: And it's not great writing, typically. Because there is no critic going, "No, your reader doesn't really want to know that." On the other hand, the first time I wrote a poem... Famous story, I was 15 years old and I had to write a poem for this poetry contest.
- Martha Beck: And I wrote this sonnet, but not before spending five straight nights wide awake in absolute panic and then being put on Valium by my doctor. Then I wrote a poem, but it still embarrasses me. What about you? Have you ever had the...? How does the struggle between the vicious tormenting critic and the judicious discerning critic, how does that come up for you?
- Rowan Mangan: For me, I'm always fighting back the nasty one and I think I do that with a lot of mind games. A lot of, just write it, no one ever has to see it... and just enough to have the courage word by word to keep going forward. I think that where Paula is, is a really interesting point because she's a third of the way through and I think that's an interesting point in a project because I think you can go a long way on the enthusiasm and excitement of your premise in the beginning of a project and that will get you a long way. But at the same time, it's going to lag, that you cannot sustain that.
- And it was interesting because we were talking about this earlier, and a friend of mine had just posted this morning a quote from Virginia Woolf that I want to read because it seemed so apt as an aspect of this creative self-doubt. She talks about... This is in a journal, "It's worth mentioning, for future reference, that the creative power which bubbles so pleasantly in beginning a new book quiets down after a time, and one goes on more steadily. Doubts creep in. Then one becomes resigned." And I love this. She says, "Determination not to give in, and the sense of an impending shape keep one at it more than anything."



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Rowan Mangan: I love that, "the sense of an impending shape." And I think that there's something in that that can, as in balancing your critics, there's a sense of, for me, to get myself out and get into fidelity to the story I'm telling, to the work that I'm doing, and forget an audience as well. A lot of the time I can't... I'll get stage fright if I picture them, but I can sort of pledge my honor to my characters and to the story I'm telling, if that makes sense, and that impending sense of shape.

Martha Beck: That's so interesting. I actually rely on... I think everybody finds their own path through this, but mine is the path of fascination and I recently saw fascination defined as attention without effort. And if a project keeps me fascinated... I will sit and tell people about spider goats until I die. On my deathbed, I will be telling people about spider goats because I find it fascinating.

Around the same time, I started writing in high school, I started doing competitive speaking because I had a crush on the guy who was coaching the... He was the student leader of the debate team. So, I just climbed on a bus and found myself in front of a judge, passed out cold the first time, fell on the floor. I had such bad stage fright and woke up and it was like, oh that's the worst that can happen and I'm still alive.

So, I kept going back, but I didn't do well, and they put me in impromptu speaking because I had no skills of any kind. And then I finally... One tournament, I got to the point where I got to the quasi finals or something. I don't remember what they-

Rowan Mangan: The quasi finals, they had you in a special room.

Martha Beck: A different room.

Rowan Mangan: Congratulations.

Martha Beck: Those of you speak in words of only one syllable, we have the quasi finals. But it wasn't the semifinals. It was not a glorified thing. It was very low, but it had three judges instead of one. And we'd get these ballots and I would veer wildly depending on whatever the last judge had said. This one speech, this one three-minute speech, I had three different ballots from three different judges. I read them.



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- Martha Beck: They were absolutely contradictory. They had nothing in common and I was like, well, screw that.
- Never read another ballot. I would just walk into a room and say whatever the hell I wanted, but it had to be interesting to me. Next tournament, first place. Tournament after that? First place. Tournament after that... I became a force. I never slept and I took large amounts of Excedrin to keep going, that was a headache pill.
- Rowan Mangan: Sure, it was.
- Martha Beck: I became a force to be reckoned with because I just started doing what fascinated me and I have to be so fascinated that the complete nervous collapse that is waiting for me in self-doubt cannot get to me, but for me, it's not a feeling of I owe it to my story or anything. It's just like, Oh, I got to follow this trail, this is... Oh, yeah, I got to follow that trail.
- Rowan Mangan: And does that even carry you through that sort of initial... Through the long stretch?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, by then it's like I'm hungry. It's like tracking an animal. It really is. You and I both have tracked animals. We used to track bears on the ranch in California. It's so fun. These little humanoid, not little, big humanoid footprints and you get so entranced by the track itself and the whole world goes away because I think the human mind is meant to be a sort of forensic expert. Excuse me, a forensic expert that is constantly decoding the world and when you see something going forward... If something's fascinating to get my attention, it's moving. I love in Tom Brown books... Brown's book, The Tracker, it's not his book. His ghostwriter was amazing in this one book. But a guy named Tom Brown wrote The Tracker, and the first sentence is, "The first track is the end of a string. At the other end, a being is moving."
- Rowan Mangan: I can't even, it's amazing.



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Martha Beck: If something fascinates me, if an idea fascinates me, I know there's a being moving at the other end of this string and the string is made of words and I am going to follow it and it's not, it doesn't feel like invention as much as following.

Rowan Mangan: And so, for you the... So, if the self-doubt is sort of mitigated or eliminated by the fascination, do you experience the faculty that Paula is talking about? The split critic, the one that can make the work better with discernment versus the one that tells you that your work is shit?

Martha Beck: Oh yeah. I make this all sound like I've got it figured out, but last week when you were in New York, I sent you a chapter, first half. I was looking at your notes, going great, looks good, good point. And then I hit the middle of the chapter and just fell apart because I got into this mental problem with the chapter. And your notes went from, this is great, to hmm, perhaps you could look at this.

And I just saw that it was not... I stopped following the track. It was a diaspora of tracks I was running around trying to follow, and it was a terrible chapter. And when I saw that you knew that -

Rowan Mangan: It was not a terrible chapter.

Martha Beck: It was. When I saw that you knew that, Oh my God, the shame and the horror. The horror, the horror. I think that's what Joseph Conrad was actually writing about. It was just he read his own manuscript and he was like, "The horror, the horror!" Had nothing to do with Kurtz. He just didn't take it out because it was too complicated without word processors.

But I just stopped writing. It was like I'd run into a plate of glass, and I had to work out why I stopped... Why the fascination stopped following me. I had to get back on the track. But the shame of having lost the track was enormous, yeah. And I had to cry a lot.

So that shame for me, I had given a name, it's called Fang.



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Martha Beck:

And I was actually reading about using family systems therapy to deal with different aspects of yourself. And I realized I'd been doing this for years without really knowing it.

You let the critic come out, the nasty critic, you let it have it say, and this one psychologist recommends you even let it write down all its abusive, horrible stuff. And then you say to it, "Okay, I get that you're somehow a guardian of something in my psyche and that you have to be vicious and ferocious. Now I would like you to step back and I want the writer to step forward and write with you in the back. I heard you." It's very important that you say to the critic, "I've heard you."

Because it comes on like a vicious monster, but it's always a scared child. So, if you say, "Go away, I need to focus." It doesn't respond by feeling calmer, it gets more aggressive. So, I've been pushing it away and holding it out with fascination. But as I was reading this stuff, I'm like, "Oh wait, somewhere in there I got a little softer."

And I started saying to that vicious critic: "I get that you're trying to help me. Say your say, step back. Will you let the writer come out and write now," and the interesting thing is that if you let it have it say and you ask it nicely, it will. And then the writer comes forward and you can write down, "I'm afraid of the critic," and say, "Well the critic's just sitting over there. She's fine. How about we get back to the fascination now?"

Rowan Mangan:

I love that. So do you think that the writer then, unhampered by that particular voice of the critic, is free to use what policies as the other voice of the critic, which is the discerner, the one that says, "Hmm, I'm going to make this better with this." Because what I'm wondering, listening to you, because it seems like you experienced those two things as actually quite different. And I'm wondering if she's maybe grouping them together under this idea of criticism, but that's just a semantic sort of thing-

Martha Beck:

Oh, that's interesting, yeah.

Rowan Mangan:

And maybe the discernment and self-judgment actually can be quite free from each other.



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Martha Beck: It's funny, they do get conflated in the language because even the critics in the newspapers and in the magazines, they could be estheticians who are making discerning judgments, but they're often just nasty, horrible people.

So, the deal is, I think that that is semantically confusing, and I think that gets us into trouble, but it helps me to make a semantic distinction between making judgment and passing judgment.

Rowan Mangan: Ooh, I like that.

Martha Beck: So yeah, so passing judgment is a shaming attack on something that has no constructive quality to it at all. Making a judgment is much harder. It requires much more engagement to say... And this is the way I used to, when I was at Harvard - drink - and I'd be in these feminist seminars and they would critique patriarchal society and it was easy to pass judgment. Easy. And then I'd say, because I wanted to know, what can we make that will work better? That's asking someone to make a judgment. What kind of a social structure do we create? How do we do this class so that it doesn't work on a patriarchal hierarchy?

And they would attack, they'd say, "Men broke this system, they have to fix it." And I'd be like, "But they aren't the ones being broken, so it's the person who's having to create... It's the one who has to create, who makes the judgment." So as soon as somebody is criticizing in a helpful way, they are supporting you.

And what you did with my chapter, was you made judgments about what might work better that rang true to me. And it stung because you were right, but it stung the way antiseptic stings and not the way an infected wound stings. When you pass judgment, it's like an infected wound. So, feel the difference in yourself between passing judgment on yourself, which is a random violent attack without creative components, and making a judgment, which always creates something interesting. It might not be perfect. It might not even be usable, but it will be interesting if you're always saying, "Is this making?" Instead of, "Is this tearing down?"



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- Rowan Mangan: Am I tearing something down here or am I making something?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, that's the whole difference.
- Rowan Mangan: And they can even just hypothetically, you can feel how different that feels. We talk about coming to our senses, right? In my senses, when I ask myself that question, I know if I'm hurling rocks at myself or if I'm just bringing a shrewd eye to my own work.
- Martha Beck: And it's so interesting. I don't know if you'll experience or if Paula will experience it the same way, but for me, before I start the creative process, that's when the critic that passes judgment can attack and say, don't even start.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, interesting.
- Martha Beck: Don't even start. Don't even start, and it happens every single day, pretty much.
- Rowan Mangan: Really?
- Martha Beck: Yeah, but the moment I start working on even a single sentence and saying, "What can I make?" That, I swear, if they can look at a brain doing this, I'm sure it would just... You'd see the activity switch from one area to a completely different area because they can't work at the same time.
- So, if I can just trick myself into starting to make anything... Make something rhyme, make a paragraph better, make an idea a little better. The moment I'm engaged in that, there's no room for passing judgment.
- Rowan Mangan: This is epic. I am just getting tingles. I love this. I think this is so key because it's almost like you can't be in both places at once, right? Or did already say that?
- Martha Beck: You can't, no.
- Rowan Mangan: It's like you can only pass judgment when you let yourself be at... You take yourself away from the making.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, if you're in the creative mode, you literally can't pass judgment.



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- Martha Beck: It's alien to the nature of creativity, which is kind of nice if you think of God as creator or whatever your image of God is, that passing judgment is alien to its nature. And the moment you're passing judgment, you're dissociated from creation itself.
- Rowan Mangan: Which is so funny because you think about nature and culture and you think about the cliché of the film critic or the book critic. It's such a cliché of culture, in a way. Some highly urbanized, snooty, head up their own ass, kind of person.
- Rowan Mangan: That's a cliché, right? I'm not saying that's what critics are, necessarily. Though, I think some of them are.
- Martha Beck: Are you criticizing critics?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God.
- Martha Beck: I don't know.
- Rowan Mangan: I think I'm making a judgment. I think I'm just discerningly making a judgment.
- Martha Beck: Okay.
- Rowan Mangan: And so, the idea of being back in making feels so much more like a frog than a critic.
- Martha Beck: I was just thinking how funny it would be to go into nature and say, I'm going to live off the land as a critic. Yes, yes. I'm going to"-
- Rowan Mangan: Just walk up to a tree and go, "You're stupid."
- Martha Beck: "Look at me jump. Try and do that!"
- Rowan Mangan: Unoriginal, unoriginal, unoriginal.
- Martha Beck: Unoriginal. "Leaves, leaves, leaves, when will you stop with the leaves!" But the interesting thing is if you went into nature and you built a shelter and it leaked, then a part of you would say, "What here...? What type of wood or what type of leaves would keep the rain off better? Let me try this. Let me try that."
- I used to do this in seminars with this wonderful master coach named Michael Trotta, who's just, he's amazing.



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- Martha Beck: And we used to make a corporate groups build fire with a rope, a stick, and a board or something, and some kindling. Only they weren't allowed to talk to each other, and to make it work, they had to cooperate. And what you saw was the ones who passed judgment, they weren't allowed to speak, right? So, they'd be these executives jumping around silently, like little boys, throwing things at each other and steam coming out of their ears and sometimes, literally just running off into the woods, literally running into the woods.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow.
- Martha Beck: They were so frustrated that they couldn't boss people around. But then the other 10 guys would be fascinated; Try this, try that," gesturing to each other. And sometimes it took two or three hours, but eventually they always figured it out because they were making discerning judgments. Did that work? No. Okay, did this work better? Yes. Did that work better? No. It's like going to the optometrist. Does this work better, or does that work better? A or B, one or two. And that's making judgment. It's just, is it making fire or isn't it? There's no moralizing. There's no shaming in that.
- Rowan Mangan: So, if we can calm the violent vicious voice, the one that we know is passing judgment, and I think we can now sort of sense the difference and sort of separate those out, then from that place, then you're even making improvements. Even doing things that maybe, oh this bit could be better, I may need to improve this. It's still a creative act. It's still enjoy and, well not necessarily enjoy -
- Martha Beck: Fascination.
- Rowan Mangan: ... but in fascination. It can actually the... "How can I make this better?" can be as fascinating as the thing itself.
- Martha Beck: It's tracking, it's tracking. So, to sum up, we've got the... If the violent critic is just attacking you and stopping you from even starting, let it tell its story. Let it have hysterics. Write it down.



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Martha Beck:

Be as nasty to yourself as you want to be and then say, "I appreciate that you, as a small child, have to be big and scary because you're trying to protect me from, I don't know, my eighth grade English teacher or my mother, or whoever it was. Thank you for sharing that. Now, would you be willing to sit over there while the writer comes out or while the businessperson comes out or while the dancer comes out or whatever it is," and when it says yes... And it will, if you ask it and you treat it with kindness, then you come forward and you stop passing judgments and you start making judgements, and you write one sentence. And here's the thing, you can tell if it's making fire because it will affect the part of you that is nature. It will affect your body. So, Emily Dickinson said when she read a line of poetry that was good, she felt as if the top of her head were coming off.

For me, it's just a whole-body chill or sometimes tears in my eyes or whatever. But if a sentence or a paragraph or an idea is right... We talked about my chapter and I said, "What if I did this instead?" And you just went, "Oh, that just landed in my body." That was making a judgment, making something that had an effect on nature. So, at that point, we were outside culture. I fell apart as a writer when I got to being afraid of the culture. And then you brought me back to tracking through nature, as nature.

Rowan Mangan:

Yeah. And you know you're in nature when you're making.

Martha Beck:

Yeah, and you know what? At that point it doesn't matter. It truly... I know people say this, but it truly in that moment doesn't matter who reads it or what they think. At that moment, the pure divine act of creation is so fulfilling and meaningful.

Sometimes it's ecstatic and sometimes it's hard, but it is so fascinating and what else are we here for?

Rowan Mangan:

I was just about to say that.

Martha Beck:

You're fascinating that way. How you always think what I'm saying.

Rowan Mangan:

I always think what you're saying.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

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Martha Beck: Always. I don't think she really exists except as a figment of my imagination.

Rowan Mangan: I was just going to say that.

Martha Beck: Right? There we go again. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: All right, well that was so fun, and I am going to try all these things -

Martha Beck: Me too, bam.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I'm amazed at us.

Martha Beck: Thank you, Paula, for your fabulous question.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you, Paula.

Martha Beck: I'm glad you figured it out for us.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and we'll see you with the next podcast.  
See you next time.

Martha Beck: Be wild.