



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #5: An Over-Cluttered Life

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.

Martha Beck: [Intro Music] Welcome to Bewildered. I'm Martha Beck, here with Rowan Mangan. At this crazy moment in history a lot of people are feelings bewildered, but that actually may be a sign we're on track. Human culture teaches us to come to consensus, but nature — our own true nature — helps us come to our senses. Rowan and I believe that the best way to figure it all out is by going through bewilderment into be-wild-erment. That's why we're here. [Music fades]

Martha Beck: Hi, I'm Martha Beck.

Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan, and this is episode five of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I know I'm trying to figure it out. Have been for some time. Martha, on the other hand, I think figured it out on a bus in L.A. in the early '90s, right?

Martha Beck: Yeah, right. It's all coming back to me now. It was like, when the bus got up to 50 miles an hour, it triggered a bomb and then if we went below... Wait. That wasn't me. That was Sandra Bullock. Sandra Bullock has it all figured out, people. Go to Sandra Bullock. Stop bothering me!

Rowan Mangan: Go listen to Sandra Bullock's podcast.

Martha Beck: Sandra Bullock, bus life coach. Boy, what a step up for Sandra that would be, right? Good times in L.A.

Rowan Mangan: Wasn't that song, "What If God Was One Of Us," wasn't that in a similar situation?



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Martha Beck: That wasn't me as well? I thought I was just sitting on a bus and then I saw that God was one of us, but then it turned out it was a dog.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, I thought it was Sandra Bullock.

Martha Beck: Because I'm dyslexic. So, it was a dog, but I thought it was God.

Rowan Mangan: The age that I was when that bus movie came out, I could easily have believed that Keanu Reeves was God.

Martha Beck: He's not?

Rowan Mangan: Well, I mean, it's not confirmed.

Martha Beck: Have you seen Little Buddha? I haven't actually.

Rowan Mangan: No, I haven't but I've just seen Speed on what-

Martha Beck: He's very pretty. He's a very, very pretty human being. Also, The Matrix.

Rowan Mangan: He's amazing. He's a phenomenon.

Martha Beck: Neo Anderson: "new son of man." Did anyone not catch that reference? That's what the name Neo Anderson means.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Good, good trivia.

Martha Beck: I figured it out.

Rowan Mangan: Good trivia.

Martha Beck: I figured it out.

Rowan Mangan: You figured that too. I mean, is there anything that you're still trying to figure out Marty? She says in an awkward segue.

Martha Beck: You know, actually I'm going to go to dead serious and yet not here.

Rowan Mangan: It's good to know.

Martha Beck: I mean I write a lot about magical coincidences that have happened to me and a lot of them have to do with animals. I go into wilderness settings and one time I was meditating out behind our house here in Pennsylvania and I had my eyes closed and I'm like...



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- Martha Beck: I felt this surge of love and I opened my eyes and there was a stag standing in front of me with this huge rack of antlers.
- Rowan Mangan: This huge rack.
- Martha Beck: Antlers. Antlers.
- Rowan Mangan: It was a Stag's night.
- Martha Beck: It was a staggering woman with a huge rack.
- Martha Beck: No, I mean... Stuff like this happens to me. And then I was like, owl. I want to see an owl and owl went right by me.
- Rowan Mangan: With a huge rack.
- Martha Beck: It's so hard to fly with a rack that big. Especially soundlessly. If you think it's hard to fly with the rack that big, think about hunting rabbits.
- Rowan Mangan: Now, I am thinking about being a busty owl trying to hunt rabbits and it's taking me to some weird places.
- Martha Beck: I like it. I like that very much. Hold that line of thought. No, seriously, I was writing away in my most recent book and I was going to write about how many weird coincidences have happened to me at Londolazi, our favorite game preserve in South Africa, where all kinds of magical things have happened to me. Right? For example, one time there was an elephant there that kept breaking into the camp. He was breaking fences. He was just destroying property and looting the gardens and the kitchens and just generally wreaking havoc, and we tried so hard to think of a way to get him to stay out of the camp that we finally, in desperation, some of the owners and I decided we were going to contact him psychically.
- Rowan Mangan: As you do. That's the obvious next step.
- Martha Beck: What you do? I mean, what else? So, we're sitting in their house, there on the game preserve, and we're like, "I don't know, let's try to pick up on him." And the first thing he said was, "I want my own camp. Please give me one camp." And he wasn't very polite either. We were like, "He's kind of rude, isn't he?"
- Rowan Mangan: Well, you could have guessed that from his behavior. Really?



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- Martha Beck: Yeah, and I mean we didn't really, we weren't serious. But we weren't not serious either because you never know. And then, he said, "Well then I want sweet spots."
- Rowan Mangan: Sweet spots?
- Martha Beck: And we were like, "Sweet spots in the camp where you can go?"
- Rowan Mangan: Do you mean a stag with an enormous rack?
- Martha Beck: Maybe. And we said, "What does that mean?" And then he said, "Oranges. I really love oranges."
- Rowan Mangan: No.
- Martha Beck: So, right at this moment Dave Varty, who runs the camp, came into the room and said, "Night Shift..." Oh, they named him Night Shift because he always came in at night. Okay. So, he says, "Night Shift is in the garden," like right outside the house in broad daylight. And usually, he was only there in the dark. So, we ran into the house. We grabbed all the oranges we could find and we ran outside and Night Shift was just standing there and my friend Boyd just threw oranges at him. And most wild elephants — just to be clear — do not run up and start throwing objects at them. They will not react well. Night shift just snagged them. He was amazing. He could just snag him with his trunk, like a baseball catcher, and just pop them in his mouth.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, so that was my interaction with Night Shift. Well, I was writing about this. I mean, I wasn't writing about it yet. I was planning to write about Londolozi and I was like, "Nah, I'm getting really stale. I'm going to go to read something because that'll get me moving again. And I'm going to read something by my favorite humor, columnist, Dave Barry, even though I haven't read anything he wrote since the '90s, I'm just going to look it up online. Yeah? Sorry, I'm monologuing. But I got to tell you this story.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm fascinated. I'm just on the edge of my seat.
- Martha Beck: So, I went online, this is 2019 when I was writing this, and found out Dave Barry just published a new book. Huh. He's in his '70s. But he came out with a new book. It's about his dog.



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- Martha Beck: And I was like, "This is super." So, I went there and I downloaded the book onto Kindle and I read the first two chapters and I'm like, "Okay, now I'll go write." And then I'm like, "No, I want to read one more chapter." Chapter three is about how Dave Barry went to Londolosi and saw an elephant named Night Shift.
- Rowan Mangan: He did not.
- Martha Beck: Same freaking elephant.
- Rowan Mangan: That's, I don't ...
- Martha Beck: I literally had to put my computer down and just walk around the room very rapidly for like an hour.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't blame you.
- Martha Beck: It's like, why? Why is this? Why does this stuff happening to me? Why is it always happening? It like happens to me a lot. A lot of these things happened to me. Yes. Why? I don't know?
- Rowan Mangan: But what is there to figure out in that, you know?
- Martha Beck: Why? Why is it happening to me?
- Rowan Mangan: But what does the answer matter? What does it matter, why?
- Martha Beck: It does. Because it brings up questions about the fundamental nature of reality. I mean-
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, that. Okay.
- Martha Beck: What the hell. I'm writing away. I suddenly stop in the middle of what you know is sacred writing time. I don't interrupt that. Go read this random book by an author I haven't read for decades and it's about the thing I was getting set to write about that moment.
- Rowan Mangan: The very elephant. I mean that's where the whole story just kind of takes off.
- Martha Beck: That particular elephant.
- Rowan Mangan: One elephant in the world.
- Martha Beck: And, then honest to God stuff, this is not like a once in a lifetime thing for me. This is like once in a week time.



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- Martha Beck: Things like this happen to me a lot and I've been thinking about other people, like examples that I've heard from other people that are just as cool and not many people talk about them. Are they just happening to me?
- Rowan Mangan: I think that you have a worldview that is quite open and can allow these things in and I think for some people those kind of things can feel chaotic and scary because they do point to the fundamental nature of reality.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: It is kind of Matrix like.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Jokes about Neo Anderson aside, there's something very Matrix like about my life and I have not figured it out.
- Rowan Mangan: Your Matrix has a lot of glitches.
- Martha Beck: My Matrix has a lot of very fun glitches.
- Rowan Mangan: I was in a restaurant once and ordered something and it didn't come.
- Martha Beck: What? What a wild coincidence.
- Rowan Mangan: Sorry. So, I flagged the waiter and he came over and I said, "Oh, I'm sorry my drink didn't come." And he said, "Oh, I'm so sorry ma'am. There must have been a glitch in the Matrix," and I loved him, and we're married now.
- Martha Beck: Seriously, what are you trying to figure out?
- Rowan Mangan: You know, it's funny. I don't have a funny one either. I just have a serious one. I have noticed in the last couple of weeks, out of nowhere, this very intense reluctance to go on social media and it's not that I don't want to hear about other people's lives, it's just that I don't want to have to tell anyone anything. I feel quite protective of myself lately.
- Martha Beck: I would think that would be a thing for many people. I almost never go on social media at all.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. You have a different kind of relationship with social media.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, but so many people are out there doing it, exposing aspects of their lives so freely. Do you ever get to a place where your psyche just says no more? I must dam the flow.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, yeah, I guess maybe I have, but it's, I don't know. It's just a funny thing. I seem to go through cycles with it because I'm still taking photos of my dog and that's about as personal as I get on the old socials.
- Martha Beck: But even so, there's got to be a place where it's just too much. Where there's so much going ... Maybe it's an inflow outflow thing. Maybe you just need to take in a certain amount of energy before you put energy out into the world in the form of social media.
- Rowan Mangan: Maybe that's true. Yeah. I don't know. I just noticed that I get really scared. I was talking to someone in our family about this the other day, but the fear of the apps where people who send you a message can see whether or not you've read it. Absolute terror of that thing. And, I avoid it. I avoid it. I don't read messages if people can tell that I've read it because I may not be able to reply. You know what it is?
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: When we're recording this it's winter and I think there's a deep kind of insularity that comes with winter for me. And I think it's more just like I'm turning inward. I'm not like dah, dah, dah out in the world.
- Martha Beck: Does it happen every year?
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know. I haven't thought about it before.
- Martha Beck: Have to notice if it's seasonal.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I will notice.
- Martha Beck: Did you feel especially social media-ey when it was hot?
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know. I don't really track myself in this way.



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Martha Beck: Your theory is fascinating. Theoretically, it's fascinating, but it lacks data.

Rowan Mangan: See this is the difference between someone who studied English and someone who studied Social Sciences.

Martha Beck: Right. The English student is interesting. While the Social Science person is unbearable.

Rowan Mangan: Not at all.

Martha Beck: Oh, yeah.

Rowan Mangan: You just never come to land.

Martha Beck: Oh, yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Never come to land. So, listen —

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Today we are going to be helping someone figure something out, as we do.

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: That's our thing.

Martha Beck: Because we live to serve.

Rowan Mangan: We do. We live to serve, talk about Keanu Reeves, and serve, a lot of serving. So, today's person is someone we know who we're going to call Philomena Fustybump.

Martha Beck: It works for me.

Rowan Mangan: Philomena Fustybump. So, Philomena is feeling bewildered by stuff. She's got literal physical stuff in her house and there's too much. But she keeps getting more. She doesn't understand the compulsion to keep acquiring stuff and what she's got is overwhelming her. So it's a sort of clutter thing and an acquisition thing. As you know, in this podcast we help people from bewilderment to be-wild-erment, to their wild true nature. So, Philomena is bewildered by all this stuff and we're going to get her from the places where she's feeling bewildered, we're going to take her through, she's going to come to her senses. Boom. Podcast.



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- Martha Beck: There you go. So, yeah, the first thing you know, you go back to first causes. What is the problem with us wanting stuff? I mean I definitely go through phases where I feel overwhelmed by stuff. Do you, as well, Ro?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Definitely. I'm just wondering, is there a cultural component to this or is it more of a psychological, actually?
- Martha Beck: There is. I mean, I always start with biology. Like, what if you're raised by wolves? Not unlike myself.
- Rowan Mangan: Or me.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Interesting. Other podcast. But there's definitely an impulse to hunt, and gather, and to forage. And I've often thought this is one of the bases behind shopping. That people would go out shopping for fun. Like people who don't need anything. Karen's family, and I love them and they're awesome, and when they get together they go shopping together as a form of recreation. And I know that a lot of people do that. It makes me super anxious because I was raised without any money and when you're little and you have no money, it's really shopping is a bummer.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: But I've often thought that this sort of pacing and the fact that they're just walking and looking is very similar to how hunter-gatherers forage in the forest. I've also noticed that, I don't know if you had this, but I've noticed in all little kids that I've known, if they see a really great rock or a really great stick, they must have it.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I can access that part of myself instantly.
- Martha Beck: I don't think there's a person alive who, if you see a really good stick —
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I know and I still do.
- Martha Beck: You have to pick it up.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: I mean shells on the beach.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Good shells, beautiful shells, useful shells. Like there's just something like, "Oh, I am doing things with that. Rocks, sticks, shells. Yes!" And, I think that is part of a biological imperative to hunt and gather. That being said, if you look at the hunter-gatherer tribes that still exist because there are still a few, like the Khoe-Sān in South Africa, they live in a state of complete trust that nature is going to provide them with what they need.
- Martha Beck: So, when the white farmers came the Khoe-Sān thought that they were mentally ill because they kept stuffing stuff into their houses. They needed houses, first of all, and then they had to fill them with more stuff than you could need in imagination. And the Khoe-Sān were like, "You know, nature will provide. What is wrong with you?"
- Rowan Mangan: The Khoe-San are the Bushman, right? That they —
- Martha Beck: That's another word for them, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. That they made that movie, "The Gods Must Be Crazy," was based on that tribe. Just to situate them for people.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, they're considered to be probably the oldest existing civilization going back as far as 100,000 years, where some scientists thought that humans only evolved like 12,000 years ago. Now we think the Khoe-Sān were doing what they do now 100,000 years ago, which is just unimaginable.
- Rowan Mangan: So, their trust was not misplaced?
- Martha Beck: Their trust was not misplaced at all. The Europeans came with their European ideas, and here's the thing, if you go to what caused the great expansion of European civilization all over the planet, it was married to the shift away from theology and on to material science. So, everything had to be physically measurable and that became the basis of the philosophy of the culture. And I think along with that came an obsession with material objects and wealth.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I was thinking about something that I've read in a number of places that also talked about the big shift in 10,000 years ago when we sort of started doing agriculture, that you came to this place where in the past you pick it up as you go by to this place where we end up with surpluses.
- Martha Beck: It's kind of interesting too because only after agriculture did women start popping out babies like boom, boom, boom. In a hunter-gatherer society —
- Rowan Mangan: Is that what they did?
- Martha Beck: They did.
- Rowan Mangan: Boom, boom, boom.
- Martha Beck: Boom, boom. Take it from me, I grew up in Utah. Just boom, boom, boom, Babies-a-GoGo. But in hunter-gatherer societies, because the women nurse a lot and something about the fact that they're always moving through the environment, usually the births are spaced out by about four years.
- Rowan Mangan: It makes sense. You got to have one walking comfortably before you can carry another one.
- Martha Beck: Right, right. But when agriculture came in, women started having babies in large numbers like once a year for 13 years or whatever. And you could support that big a population because the Agrarian Revolution meant there was more food, but at the same time it led to this kind of, they call the Malthusian problem of the population always expanding to eat every available calorie and then beyond so that there would always be poverty, always be starvation, and even more obsession with having a lot of material stuff. And I think we're driven by that and it's ironic because now we have more stuff than we know what to do with. We have so much stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: So, I'm still struggling with the ways in which that urge is cultural instead of a shared psychological thing.
- Martha Beck: I think it's both. But I really do think... Well, you know, Max Weber, I'm always talking about Max Weber.



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- Martha Beck: He said that the whole American ethos was based on Calvinism, which is this belief that if God loves you, he gives you all this stuff and you're marked for salvation and you have good luck and lots of stuff your whole life. And so, in order to prove that they were worthy in the eyes of God, these Calvinists tried to get more stuff than other people. And I do think that it's a natural tendency gone completely berserk in our culture.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, yeah. Oh, that makes total sense.
- Martha Beck: This obsession with having more stuff than other people because most of the stuff we have is about comparing ourselves with other people, not with our actual physical needs.
- Rowan Mangan: Conspicuous consumption sort of idea.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I mean it's funny because I've just been thinking about myself and where I do this and I know that I have my room in the house, that's my office and it's my little reading room and sanctuary and I have noticed in myself that every now and again, maybe every few months, the room is perfect, right? It's perfect. I have everything I need in it. And then I'll sort of be going along loving my room and then at some point there'll be this little thought that comes in and it goes, "You know, if you just ordered a lamp for that corner then the room would be perfect and it would feel like just like me." You know, it would feel like me and it would be the representation of
- Martha Beck: That lamp completes you.
- Rowan Mangan: That lamp completes me that. And that is the consumer mindset, right? Is that if I just have this, then I'll be finished. And I think maybe that's what's going on with Philomena too. I don't know?
- Martha Beck: It could be. Oh, another thing you bring up and that is that once we started this consumer economy, vendors, people selling stuff, had every reason to try to maximize our tendency to want stuff. So, all of advertising is designed to play on that psychological sort of hankering for more stuff. And it goes so far as...



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- Martha Beck: There was an architect named Gruen who designed shopping stores, shopping malls, and things, to create something called the Gruen Transfer, which is a brain state in which we become hypnotized by stuff to the point where it's all we can think about and all we can do. And even the way when you go into a mall, you'll notice that you immediately have to turn three times and then you get into the mall central, all these little stores that you go past. The reason they do that is that the mind gets confused after those three turns and makes it hard to find your way back to your car. So, it leads —
- Rowan Mangan: Activates the Gruen Transfer.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, so it puts you in this space that you're blasted with this massive amount of stuff. Oh, my God, I'll never forget coming back from China in 1983. Where in Beijing I went into this electronic store, in this huge warehouse-like store with hundreds of Chinese people in it all staring at a single radio. I never saw garbage in Beijing except for seed husks and eggshells because that's what people had for snack foods.
- Rowan Mangan: A good story today.
- Martha Beck: Then I came back. I went back to Boston where I was living at the time and went into a grocery store and it was like my head exploded. I just could not tolerate the amount of stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah. I've had a similar experience coming home after being in the third world or whatever.
- Martha Beck: Like you're affronted by it. What was it like?
- Rowan Mangan: It's sort of dazzling and hypnotic. You know? It's funny The Gruen Transfer, we have Aussie listeners who will know, we have in Australia or we used to have, I don't know if it's still going? A TV program called The Gruen Transfer which was —
- Martha Beck: Really?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It was like a panel show where they had top advertising execs come and deconstruct ads and show you exactly how you were being manipulated in these advertisements.
- Martha Beck: Wow.



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Rowan Mangan: It was brilliant. Really funny too.

Martha Beck: Oh, can I stream that online?

Rowan Mangan: We'll find it.

Martha Beck: Okay. That's awesome. But —

Rowan Mangan: We'll find it legally, obviously.

Martha Beck: Legally.

Rowan Mangan: Disclaimer.

Martha Beck: We need it to complete us.

Rowan Mangan: That show will complete us.

Martha Beck: So anyway, there are all these influences saying more stuff, more stuff, more stuff. And then you get the occasional person going, "Hey, you should declutter your house." And that's where I have problems.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, yeah.

Martha Beck: Actually, I don't like going into shopping centers or whatever. I feel very overwhelmed by them and I just want to run away. Of course, I can't find my car. So I just physically run a way. But here's the thing that happens to me and it's so weird. Once you're known as a person who is seen as having stuff, like people have heard your name or you've been on The Oprah Show or whatever they send you more stuff. They send you infinite amounts of stuff.

Rowan Mangan: What would she like? I bet she likes stuff. Let's send her some.

Martha Beck: I get like gift baskets full of sandals. What? I don't need this.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, God. It's fun trying to think of the thought process that goes into that.

Martha Beck: "Here, I macraméd you a whole set of beachwear." I like, "Thank you?" Then people with their hands, and their love, and their kindness, they make me macramé beachwear and then they send me packages of stuff and I just...



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- Martha Beck: I open it and sit there and sometimes I want to weep because there's too much stuff in my life. But am I just supposed to throw this stuff away? And I can't take it to Goodwill because what if they find it?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh gosh, you're raising a lot of important issues there.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, I mean, I probably have a bit of a hoarding instinct. You know, I'm more on the hoarder side than the acquirer side. But I have all these reasons and emotional tentacles that make me have difficulty getting rid of stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah.
- Martha Beck: I don't know if Philomena's that way.
- Rowan Mangan: There's two different sort of things going on there to me, which is the one is that if you didn't live in the age of Amazon Prime, your fear of malls might not control the hoarding instinct, right?
- Martha Beck: Your fear of what?
- Rowan Mangan: Malls. Malls.
- Martha Beck: I thought you meant... Australia. I'm like, "Yeah, I am afraid of moles.". But I'm not sure how it connects to my hoarding instincts?
- Rowan Mangan: In Australia where we're afraid of moles that grow on your skin but I happen to know that there was a time when you were very, very afraid of a mole that lived under the ground.
- Martha Beck: That's true. Yes. I remember this. I think it's worth saying because in a sort of spiritual way...
- Rowan Mangan: On some very deep level, it's relevant.
- Martha Beck: I used to meditate outside in the woods in California and I would put birdseed on myself and the chipmunks and birds would come and sit on me. I also put up many bird feeders around me because the birds kept coming. There were more and more. One day I was sitting there and all the little critters were there, the chipmunks and the squirrels, and even a few foxes, and the birds, and everything. And suddenly everything started to give alarm calls. Like [high-pitched meeping]



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- Martha Beck: When animals and birds give alarm calls, it means there's something wrong, something wrong. And I was like, "What is it? Is it a Hawk? Is it a snake?" And then, suddenly from the ground right in front of me under a bird feeder, this creature, it was ah, it was honest to God, like a pimple rose on the earth and then burst and out came this creature.
- Rowan Mangan: Moles. Skin moles.
- Martha Beck: It was a mole. Well, actually it was a pocket gopher. But in my mind, which was in deep meditative silence immediately blared, "That mole is ruining the world." You know, you're watching your mind. That's what said very loudly.
- Rowan Mangan: It doesn't get much closer to God than that folks.
- Martha Beck: It creeps me out to this day. I was trying so hard to follow your argument and you were like, "Yeah, that really explains your fear of moles. Really? What was your point, Ro?"
- Rowan Mangan: My point was that on the one hand you have a hoarding instinct, but I think that that might be controlled naturally were it not for the ability to order things from home that come to the house.
- Martha Beck: Oh, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: That's really true. That is point the first. Point the second is, I can't remember because it was so long ago.
- Martha Beck: All the people giving me macramé, explain that?
- Rowan Mangan: You know, I'm baffled by that one. I feel like people don't intend to foist but one can feel foisted upon.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Foisting. That should be a crime. You should not be allowed to foist. Foisting to a certain degree, fine.
- Rowan Mangan: Misdemeanor.
- Martha Beck: I will foist upon you this cup of water. Misdemeanor.
- Rowan Mangan: Felony foisting.
- Martha Beck: Felony foisting. If you give me say a big red wagon, that's a felony foist.



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- Rowan Mangan: Oh my god, that's too funny. You would love a big red wagon. You would go riding around on it. I know that you would.
- Martha Beck: That is true. Bad example.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Okay. No, seriously, we have to get back to Philomena's problem. So, there are lots of reasons that we acquire stuff. Lots of reasons we can't let go of it. We might feel overwhelmed. Getting back to Philomena, as you know, in our coaching system, we use this idea by Thomas Moore who was among, not the ancient one, a modern one. He was also a psychotherapist and after he stopped being a monk, he realized that everything he put in his house was based on a decision in himself and that that meant the house was kind of a three-dimensional representation of his inner life.
- Rowan Mangan: That's how I feel about my office.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: It is. You have a very nice inner life. I have to say.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, thank you.
- Martha Beck: And, so if something gets cluttered or you can't let go of something or you keep getting too much it may reflect something else psychologically, emotionally, situationally, where you're stuck in a different area of your life. And always, I was going to say almost always, but I'm going to say always I have found that people's physical stuff mirrors their inner lives.
- Rowan Mangan: Why do you think that is?
- Martha Beck: I think everything we create is a self-portrait. When I used to teach art at Harvard — drink, I just said Harvard — we'd sometimes have a model come sit and the artists would draw the model and then we'd put up the drawings on the board and without names or anything, but you could always tell who drew which portrait because it would look like the model, but it would also look a little bit like the artist.



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- Martha Beck: We literally can't create anything that doesn't reflect our state of being in some way. It kind of has to, right?
- Rowan Mangan: Fascinating.
- Martha Beck: That's the lens through which everything's coming. So, if culture has confused you, if your life has confused you, and you're overwhelmed by stuff, our go-to answer is stop coming to cultural consensus and come to your nature, your senses.
- Rowan Mangan: It's so interesting because, on the one hand, we have these very strong, you know, we've talked about how there's a very strong instinct to acquire and to have surplus for a rainy day or whatever. Whatever's going on up there, there is a tendency to stockpile stuff that we don't need. And yet it seems so surprising to me that given that what we... Well we, I don't know how general I'm being, but it seems like a lot of people at the same time as living in these cluttered places like Philomena Flustybudget, whatever name was, that we want to go outside. We crave these open, sparse landscapes in which there isn't clutter and there isn't that and I think that's a kind of interesting thing when we talk about coming to our senses where we're doing this thing to our space that our soul is in revolt against it.
- Martha Beck: Isn't that interesting? It's like the screensavers on computers—
- Rowan Mangan: Right.
- Martha Beck: Where we have these vast quiet spaces, space itself, or a mountain or something. It's never like a whole pile of Teddy bears.
- Rowan Mangan: It isn't.
- Martha Beck: And yet we acquire massive piles of Teddy bears or whatever and we don't like it.
- Rowan Mangan: And then we put the Grand Canyon on our-
- Martha Beck: And then we buy computers so we can look at an open space. And going out into an open space, open spaces are harder to come by nowadays, but we still love to go out in them and maybe that's where I would start someone.



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Martha Beck: Like on the organization shows, they always take people in and I remember doing this presentation once for this house organizer. It was supposed to force this woman to clean her house and the directors and producers were telling him he had to make her burn her mother's books.

Rowan Mangan: What?

Martha Beck: And she was crying and everything and I was like, "What is wrong with your people?" It was atrocious. Anyway. That is not how I would go about it. What I would do, the very first thing is say find a space somewhere that puts you at peace where there is not stuff. Tune yourself to the energy of a place without too much stuff.

Rowan Mangan: Even just go for a walk outside.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Or you know, if you're, maybe you're in prison. If you get some yard time just look at the sky. Seriously, look at stars, look at clouds, look at things that aren't moving fast, that aren't pushing physically into your space and notice the sense of the place that contains the stuff which is actually, so the philosophers say, our real identity. That spaciousness without clutter.

Rowan Mangan: Then you kind of can bring the space back into your clutter —

Martha Beck: Oh my gosh

Rowan Mangan: ... and maybe hold that in different energy?

Martha Beck: Ooh, I'm getting the chills and I'm flashing back to one time when I was in Africa for a month before they put internet into the camp there. For a full month, I was completely in nature every day. I had five outfits, one for each day of the seminar I was running. And my computer and my phone, with some books on it, but I couldn't get on the internet and I meditated for three hours a day. And when I came home I threw away everything.

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: I was happier than I'd ever been in my life. And the joy of putting those five outfits, you know, washing one each day so it'd be ready for the next week. I have never felt so rich.



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- Martha Beck: And by the way, I don't keep the money I was earning there either. So, I left all of it in Africa. I had very, very little and it was the most blissful time of my life.
- Rowan Mangan: So, you came to your senses?
- Martha Beck: I really did, and I'd actually forgotten about that.
- Rowan Mangan: Ah.
- Martha Beck: But when I came back, I brought some of it with me. So, I really hope that people can find a spacious — an opportunity to experience spaciousness and focus on it because we don't focus on the space. We focus on the stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: Wow. Yeah. And it seems to me like just even just feeling your energy as you tell that story and remember that, I can sort of feel it coming into me as well. It strikes me, and you tell me where I'm wrong with this idea, but it seems like if I just bring this sense of spaciousness into my house, then I don't actively have to go burn my mother's books. I can just exist in a space and it seems like things might just naturally start to, it might naturally, I might just find myself picking things up and throwing them out and that gradually sort of...
- Martha Beck: Right. If you have a little hit, another thing that can play a role is trauma. I do think that if you go through a period of abuse or neglect or want of any kind, if you grew up poor or whatever, then throwing things out can be quite... It can bump up against a trauma wound. So, in that case, if you find yourself going to a spacious environment, you love it. You come back into the house, you try to throw out...
- One time I helped this woman in New York in a penthouse apartment. She was trying to throw away something. She had three copies of every weekly magazine that had been published from like 1960 to 2000 and I said, "Maybe we could throw away one magazine out of these thousands." She's very wealthy. So, she had this filing system taken care of by other people and stuff. We got to the trash dump and she could not, she could not put that thing in the trash chute. And the reason was that stuff had come to symbolize emotional sustenance.



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- Martha Beck: She had an emotionally impoverished life. She had all this money and could not access love. So, we had to stop and work on that before she can be able to let go.
- Rowan Mangan: That's heartbreaking. Oh, yeah.
- Martha Beck: So, if you can't let go, get help. Therapy is a real, real issue. And there's nothing wrong with you, but you may have been broken a little bit by life.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And I should say, what we're talking about today isn't about really serious hoarding.
- Martha Beck: No. Mm-mm (negative).
- Rowan Mangan: It's about, you know, you've got a bit too much clutter in your den so just to make that distinction really clear.
- Martha Beck: But try the one walk by each day as you walk through. I've been doing this lately in my bedroom. Walk through, take one object and throw it away. And it could be like a tiny scrap of paper or it could be a TV. But each time you walk through... And if you want to up the ante, get like an apron with pockets and put three things in every time.
- Rowan Mangan: Because that'll make you seem a lot saner.
- Martha Beck: No, it's really good. If you have pockets, like house things become easier.
- Rowan Mangan: That's true.
- Martha Beck: You need more pockets. You need a vast number of pockets.
- Rowan Mangan: I mean sooner or later everything will fit in those pockets. And also just a obvious shout out to recycling and donating, not just making more landfill.
- Martha Beck: Yikes. Yeah, we are a very, very deviant culture. When you think about like—
- Rowan Mangan: Well, there's a lot of people doing good stuff. I don't want to say erase distribution. I feel like I'm getting a bit too communist here, but...



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- Martha Beck: I know, but it really is weird that we, you know, like we are a species that ... Like other animals avoid falling from high places to their death. We put massive amounts of wealth, technology, and time into creating machines that will fly very, very high in the air. And then other things that allow us, more stuff that allows us, to jump from those planes and then land. This is what we... Like what is wrong with us? It's amazing what we do with stuff and it's miraculous and we should... Like here we are recording our voices onto the... It's a miracle. The human factor, the ability to do things with stuff is truly miraculous and we got to curb it.
- Rowan Mangan: We got to find that state of calm and order and peace and emptiness. I mean, emptiness, openness within ourselves.
- Martha Beck: And, I have to say your office feels bigger than before you decorated it. It feels more open.
- Rowan Mangan: Thank you.
- Martha Beck: Could I quote from the Tao Te Ching, my favorite Chinese book?
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: It says, "We hammer wood to make a house, but it is the space inside that we live in. We form clay to make a pot, but it's the inner space that holds what we want. We join axles to make a wheel, but it's the hole in the center that allows the wheel to turn. We work with being, but non-being is what we use."
- Rowan Mangan: Wow. Beautiful note to end on. Thanks, everyone, for listening and —
- Martha Beck: Thanks, you guys.
- Rowan Mangan: — Stay wild.
- Martha Beck: Stay wild.
- Rowan Mangan: Are you enjoying these shenanigans? We can notify you when a new Bewildered episode comes out. Just text the word "wild" to (570) 873-0144. You can also follow Martha on the socials for all kinds of ways to improve your life. On Instagram she's @themarhabeck, on Facebook @themarhabeck, or on Twitter, plain old @marthabeck. Her website is marthabeck.com.



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Rowan Mangan:

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