



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #12: Ghosting the Argument (Empty Boats)

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 am Martha Beck.
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan. Welcome to another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I, myself, have been trying to figure it out using all the latest productivity apps, and then Marti came into the room and threw a phone out the window and suddenly calculated the velocity of the fall and there she was ... Had it all figured out.
- Martha Beck: All figured out for literally seconds, and then, of course, I had to get my phone so I plunged out the window, sustained a head wound that broke my phone, and forgot it all immediately.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, hopefully, we'll be able to get that important wisdom back today.
- Martha Beck: I'm waiting for it to crawl through the window like a spider and go into my ear, as so many spiders do.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, no. Oh. That's a disgusting concept. I can't believe you said that.
- Martha Beck: My head is full of spiders. But you knew that. But seriously, Row, what are you trying to figure out?
- Rowan Mangan: Okay, so what's on my mind is that every time I walk into our kitchen, Marti, I seem to begin singing spontaneously without any forethought, Big Spender, the song Big Spender.
- Martha Beck: I have noticed that, and I thought there must be a reason.



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Rowan Mangan: Look, I can only assume there is but it is inaccessible to me.

Martha Beck: Wait, wait, wait. I think it's because you just ordered a lot of cookware.

Rowan Mangan: I did.

Martha Beck: Yeah, you did. Expensive good cookware.

Rowan Mangan: It was delicious cookware.

Martha Beck: It makes me nervous because it makes me think that every time you walk into the joint you're going to become a big spender.

Rowan Mangan: That same minute.

Martha Beck: Right, you're just going to start wildly purchasing things.

Rowan Mangan: It's strange though because I'll just be doing my thing, doing something in the kitchen, and then it will just come out ... (singing) And then I'll go, "Shut up, Mangan."

Martha Beck: Oh, I thought that was me.

Rowan Mangan: One of us does, I don't know which one.

Martha Beck: It's true. There are songs that get steep dependent memory connected to different spots. You think of a song when you're driving past a certain intersection, and then the next time you're in that intersection, it's ... (singing). Every time, you could be going to a funeral ... (singing) It's like there is something uncontrollable about the earworm.

Rowan Mangan: I want that played at my funeral. I want ... (singing).

Martha Beck: You know what we just figured out? My ears are full of spiders and yours are full of worms.

Rowan Mangan: That is disgusting. Shut up, Beck.

Martha Beck: All right.

Rowan Mangan: All right. So what are you trying to figure out, Marti?

Martha Beck: I am trying to figure out how to tolerate listening to audio books at the normal speed instead of double or more, regular speed, because I'm hooked on the speed. I'm hooked on speed, Row.



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I'm hooked on the speed of listening to books on neurology at triple pace.

Rowan Mangan: This is like your version of an extreme sport. Putting science books on very fast or audio books.

Martha Beck: And it's annoying people in the family. It's not just when the book is on, it's when I start talking after the book goes off. And I'm like, "Hello, you wouldn't believe this, but I just read a book about this woman didn't have any saliva. She had no saliva. She had no salivary glands. And then she ... things in her brain. And then she felt [inaudible 00:04:00]." It's like living with Alvin and the Chipmunks. It's disturbing.

Martha Beck: Alvin and the Chipmunks do neurology.

Rowan Mangan: Neurology.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it's a weird thing you've got into, but you can't sleep afterwards.

Martha Beck: I can't sleep afterwards. And I just stay up all night ... And then I'm like completely wired.

Rowan Mangan: We both have this experience where ... Because we're both quite big on audio books, I hasten to add I tend to listen to mine at a pretty normal speed, but we both try to fall asleep to audio books and they have a habit of entering our dreams. Do you have a recent one of that?

Martha Beck: I was like, "Why will this man not stop talking about meditation in my dreams." I thought I'd do a mediate yourself to sleep, and it worked except he would not shut up. It's like three in the morning, "Why, why is there a man in my dreams talking about meditation? I'm tired of him." Went on till morning.

Rowan Mangan: Whereas for me, it's like, "Why will these police not stop solving crimes?" in my dreams because I'm low-brow. Good times, good times.

Martha Beck: I just read a book about sleep, we should do a podcast on sleep.

Rowan Mangan: All right.

Martha Beck: And be like, "You've got to sleep, you've got to sleep. You really got to sleep."

Rowan Mangan: It's going to be a great episode.



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Martha Beck: Hey.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Let's get to our reader interaction, or our listener-

Rowan Mangan: What we call it when they read with their ears?

Martha Beck: Yes?

Rowan Mangan: We call them listeners. When they listen with their eyes-

Martha Beck: Yes.

Rowan Mangan: ... we call them readers. But they're the same people, I mean, come on, you guys.

Martha Beck: My mind is blown.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Let's not get too caught up in language.

Martha Beck: Anyway, we got lots of feedback to our, "What bewilders you?" We can't do all of them, but some of them were remarkable. We just had to bring them in.

Rowan Mangan: We put the word out on Instagram a few days ago, in the distant past, by the time you're listening to this, honestly. But we said, "What's bewildering you? What are you trying to figure out?" And goodness gracious me, for instance, one of our beloved listeners is bewildered by why others don't dress in costume. She says, "If I'm going on a horse, I need a bandana, et cetera." It's funny because on the Instagram format that we use, it's really limited by characters which frustrates a lot of people and it's quite funny. And so you can see her getting really, like working up to a big thing. "For instance, if I'm going to on a horse, I need a bandana." And then, no more room, "Et cetera."

Martha Beck: "Et cetera."

Rowan Mangan: I definitely need a bandana if I'm going on a horse.

Martha Beck: This reminds me of a time when my son, our son, Adam, was seven or eight. He would not take a bath without a shark fin on his head and swim fins on his feet. I knew he was headed for a bath when he'd go slurping past me in the background with goggles and a shark fin on his head and these fins on his feet. It was remarkable.



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- Rowan Mangan: I love that image. I love that image.
- Martha Beck: It's actually worth living a human life just to have that image in my head.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh god, yeah. Are there any other-
- Martha Beck: Yeah, I think so.
- Rowan Mangan: ... I'm trying to think if there are any other things that I need costumes for. Look, well, I'll tell you one really important one. When I record a podcast I have to be wearing my pajamas. It's a new development, it began today. But I'm proud of it, I don't regret it. I think it's a new fad. I think you all intuited that I was wearing pajamas while we recorded this and it made you feel more comfortable.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, it's good. The pajama vibe goes out through the ear waves.
- Rowan Mangan: It does. The ear waves, it does. Yeah. Who else? What else?
- Martha Beck: Okay, so I like this one a lot. "I was reading about avocets, later I craved avocados. Are the first three letters of a word really that important? So powerful?" [inaudible 00:08:13] I lost the thread for a minute. And I was thinking about it, the first three words, and I was like, "Hm. I can't think of anything. That means I'm bad." And immediately I thought of badminton and ... (singing) So I think you're right. I think you're right whoever you are.
- Rowan Mangan: Grammar for dreamers.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I think the first three letters of everything are so powerful, they're like a spell of some kind and I didn't realize it until she wrote in.
- Rowan Mangan: We also heard from friend of the show, Miranda, who actually had quite a few things that were bewildering her, I have to say. The one that I felt particularly resonate with was, she says she's bewildered by, "The fact that I'm often right and everyone else is wrong in every way." I like that she clarified, "In every way."
- Martha Beck: Right, and that is bewildering, isn't it? Is it fun to be the smartest person in the room?
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: No, it's horrible. Poor Miranda. And she also wrote in she's bewildered by the fact that she wants to reply to this 5,000 times.



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- Rowan Mangan: And she did. No, she didn't. But her final thing that I feel like she typed this in in just an absolute frenzy of bewilderment. So it's like, "What are you trying to figure out?" And she replied simply, "Gnocchi, gnocchi. Gnocchi are nummy."
- Martha Beck: Could I just say, I saw the G-N-O which is the beginning of gnocchi-
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: ... and I immediately thought of gnosticism and the Gnostic Gospels from G-N-O. I mean-
- Rowan Mangan: I thought of gnomes.
- Martha Beck: The first three letters, I'm telling you, it is a spell cast upon us.
- Rowan Mangan: It is.
- Martha Beck: Rule our days. But yeah, we too, are bewildered by gnocchi, how can it be so nummy, and yet related to gnosticism and gnomes. I don't know.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't know either.
- Martha Beck: Someone else said she's bewildered by how long it takes to make good things, dreams, creations, futures, patience, baby.
- Rowan Mangan: I read that as it takes so long to make dreams, yes. Creations, yes. Futures, yes. Patience, yeah, it takes a while to make patience, and then she just said, "Baby." I'm like, "Ah, I get it."
- Martha Beck: I read it wrong, it says, "Patience, baby." Patience, baby. They may not have guessed this, but I can't see these things particularly well, the way I've got them set up. So yeah, I thought it took a while to make patience. Yes, and a baby. And I'm like, "Wait, that doesn't take that long."
- Rowan Mangan: It bloody does.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, if you do it. If you go to a doctor and have it.
- Rowan Mangan: Either way, it's a pretty long chunk of time. Can't get it over in a morning.
- Martha Beck: Making the baby? I was able to make three with simple objects I found around the house.



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Rowan Mangan: That wasn't a baby. That was just the beginnings of a baby.

Martha Beck: Well, call them and tell them that.

Rowan Mangan: Patience, baby.

Martha Beck: Patience, baby. Yeah, it does take a freaking long time to do things.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: It does. Really, like a podcast.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, oh god, yeah. That's true. Now, my favorite here is the one who is bewildered by obtaining locally sourced produce for Mangan-style frittatas. I feel you. I feel you. Patience, baby.

Martha Beck: Patience, baby. See, the thing is though is that you need a caught-wild frittata.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, you want to go foraging for your frittata because it's very easy to come by the farmed frittatas, which they'll say a wild caught, but ... Then it's basically not good, it's factory farmed.

Martha Beck: You just see them in their little pans, like strolling through a pasture, and you know they'd rather be frolicking in a swamp the way a wild frittata will do.

Rowan Mangan: That frittata is not grass fed.

Martha Beck: It's not swamp fed. There are no dead frogs in that frittata.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you for following me on Instagram and for enjoying my self-indulgent food posts.

Martha Beck: Could I just say that your frittatas are bewilderingly good.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you.

Martha Beck: No joke.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you, yeah. I can only agree. So as you know, Marti, and our listeners know, on this podcast we are all about getting people from a state of bewilderment to a state of bewildment.

Martha Beck: Like the frittata.



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- Rowan Mangan: Like the frittata, exactly. So where we go from feeling confused to reconnecting with our own true natures.
- Martha Beck: And thereby we solve our problems and the problem we want to talk about today, specifically, is argument, conflict. Something that is so rife in the culture and it just seems to be getting more and more argumentative all the time out there, more conflicted.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I agree with that. I mean, there's sort of an element of, "Yeah, it's always been like that," for sure.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, but think about, when you just had a village and it took a messenger going to another village to carry a message of argument. Your sister who married out of the village, and is like, "Screw you, Margaret." And the messenger would have to come back and sing the reply to you, that's-
- Rowan Mangan: Screw you, too.
- Martha Beck: There was a lot of work for messengers, too. But arguments tended to be slower paced, give people time to calm down, and then we had the telephone and the telephone argument. But now, it's like light-speed argument and everybody is doing it all the time with everybody, or so it sometimes appears.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I agree. And even just like, all right, look at TV and look at courtroom dramas. Argument, it's an adversarial ... That's adversarial by definition. Cop drama, all that stuff, it's all about people against people.
- Martha Beck: Somebody against somebody else, yeah. And the more conflicted you get, the more attention you get. So people are fascinated by argument. And it's true, in high school English they told us, "You have to put conflict in your story or no one will be interested," because our brains are really geared to be fascinated by argument. But man, we're blowing out our circuits here because people are making money by creating bigger and bigger conflicts to draw more and more attention which can equal dollars.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and I think even before that you've got just people online. There's trolling each other, there's the anonymity of that and just something really nasty about human nature can come out on these anonymous forums, you know?



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Martha Beck: Yeah, when you have to stand up and say something like in a town council, even. Even after we had telephones, people would stand up in town councils and say, "I disagree with this person, my neighbor." They might come to words, but there were other people there and they were filtering it. That trolling stuff, my gosh. Every now and then we get a troll when we're doing something online, it's devastating.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: It's so malicious.

Rowan Mangan: And it doesn't seem to come from anywhere. It's this sort of harm for its own sake. There's a cartoon that I really love that has someone says, "Come to bed, it's late." And the other one says, "I can't, someone on the internet is wrong."

Martha Beck: It's true. And we'll talk a little bit later about how that hooks us, when someone comes at you that aggressively with an argument. It's easy to get really hooked.

Rowan Mangan: And for it to escalate, and there's no nuance in that. So you don't even have to be intending argument to make argument, I think, online a lot of the time.

Martha Beck: Can I bring up a very long and ridiculous word-

Rowan Mangan: I was hoping not.

Martha Beck: ... that our listeners would, I think, really love. The word is schizogenesis and it means the birth of the division. Schizo is division and genesis is birth. So what happens when people start to argue or get into any kind of conflict is that one person, say, gets their feelings hurt accidentally. So they're like ... "Must be nice to be you." And suddenly that tone makes the other person afraid they're being attacked. So they have a flight or fight response, so they're like, "What do you mean by that? What are you saying?" And the other person is like, "You're always talking me down." And the argument escalates really quickly and goes into ... It's almost like an earthquake starting with a tiny little touch. And you see that online so much because people can't hear each other's voices or look into each other's eyes. So there's nothing modulating the aggression. And we have something called a negativity bias that makes us read conflict into things even when it's not there.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, really?

Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah.



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- Rowan Mangan: I think I see people with this. I'm kind of fascinated by the part of the conversation about where we create argument because we can't understand each other. We're so disconnected from each other in some of these online spaces that, you know, where there'd be body language, where there'd be a laugh or a chuckle, or modulating your tone of voice, and all of that is gone. I know that there is one thing people have started doing, they've been doing it for years, really ... People started saying there should be a font for sarcasm. So what people do online a lot, our listeners will know about this, is they'll put ... As they finish the sentence that is sarcastic, they'll put a slash and an S to say this ends sarcasm, ends the sarcastic bit. And it's against this because there is so little ability to be nuanced. And it's also where emojis would come from, right?
- Martha Beck: That's true. I write almost exclusively in emojis.
- Rowan Mangan: You do.
- Martha Beck: We've returned to hieroglyphics.
- Rowan Mangan: "I mean you no harm, I mean you no harm."
- Martha Beck: But it's interesting that you talk about the slash and the S, because it's still logical. It's still language, because if we're in nature, so we talk about culture versus nature. If you watch animals fight, and I've watched everything from chipmunks when I used to meditate with the chipmunk birdseed in my lap. I've watched them fight, two chipmunks, not kidding you guys, two chipmunks once had a territorial dispute in my open hands that were set together. They were like two little sumo wrestlers.
- Rowan Mangan: Your hands were the territory ...
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: ... they were fighting over?
- Martha Beck: Yes, I had been sitting without moving for an hour and they were like-
- Rowan Mangan: Time to colonize this.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, it's always been there, it never moves. So let's take over. So they crawled right into my hands and they were so soft and warm. And then they had a sumo wrestling match over the turf of my hands.



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- Rowan Mangan: Aww.
- Martha Beck: But you see, that just goes to show you how cute arguing can be if you're not in it.
- Rowan Mangan: Or if it's happening in a natural environment.
- Martha Beck: But no, seriously, after they fight there is a winner, loser. And they both shake like ... Not trembly shakes, sometimes trembly shakes, but they shake it off like water. And I've seen ducks do it, I've seen leopards do it. I've seen all kinds of animals do it. And they go ... And what they're doing is they're coming out of the fight or flight state. The sympathetic nervous system arousal into the parasympathetic nervous state, so instead of fight or flight, they're now in rest and relax. But humans sustain the fight with language indefinitely, sometimes for 80 years and never come down from it.
- Rowan Mangan: Ah, so language is the thing that stops us from shaking it off somehow.
- Martha Beck: Language and imagination, because we can imagine the thing going on. And we do, we don't just imagine it going on, we imagine it worse.
- Rowan Mangan: "I bet he's thinking this about me. Oh, well, I'll give him a piece of my mind. Oh my god, then he'll think that. Well, I'll be ..." like that.
- Rowan Mangan: Right, yeah. And it's all about what you're projecting onto the other person as their intent, right?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. All right, so I think we all know this feeling of getting sucked into an argument. What we want to talk about in this episode is how do you disappear from the conflict when you're locking heads with someone? We're calling it, ghosting the argument because ghosting is that sort of process ... Actually, ghosting is another response to this weird lack of nuance in the way we live in a sort of highly technologized world, right? Because ghosting is a term that has to do with modern dating, or friendship, I guess, where you just stop contacting the other person. Like you've been on a couple of dates and then you just stop replying to their texts and you don't answer their calls. And that's called when you get ghosted by someone. And so we want to talk about ghosting this argumentative stance, is that fair to say, Marti?



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- Martha Beck: Ghosting the conflict. Ghosting any argument you see that's pulling you in and it's making you unhappy. It's not resolving anything. So there's nothing productive about it, but, as you said, you get locked in by the structures of the brain.
- Rowan Mangan: So we want to talk about how to get unlocked.
- Martha Beck: How you get unlocked. Yeah, it's like taking a fishhook out of your skin. It's got all kinds of barbs and prickles and snags, and you have to get it out because it's going to hurt you if you leave it there.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, a lot of it has to do with what you are saying about language and that we perceive an intent to harm on the part of the other person, whether they're at the end of a Facebook comment thread or wherever. So, Marti, how do we come to our senses on this issue of conflict and argument.
- Martha Beck: It's not easy, but there's a really interesting image that I take from my favorite place, Daoism, the Chinese philosophy that says there is a force that runs through life called the Dao, or the Way. And we just need to trust the force and get in harmony with it. This is a story from [Zhuang Zhou 00:22:11], who was one of the preeminent Daoist scholars and he says this, "Imagine yourself ..." And I want everybody listening to do this. "Imagine that you're rowing a boat across a river." Do dah doot dah do. And you're rowing backwards as one does. That's the weird thing about rowing.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, you're not rowing backwards. You're rowing forwards. I'm confused.
- Martha Beck: Your back is to the prow, right?
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, so the boat is going forward, but you are backward compared to the boat.
- Rowan Mangan: I mean, that, in itself, is just a Zen koan as far as I'm concerned. [crosstalk 00:22:42] Go backward to go forward.
- Martha Beck: Go backward to go forward. That actually is in the Dao De Jing. Sorry, we're having an argument here, "How do we ghost it?" Here's how. Okay, you're rowing, you're rowing, you're rowing. You can't see where you're going because your back is to the direction you're headed. And bonk, another boat runs into you.
- Rowan Mangan: Bastard.



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- Martha Beck: Yes, immediately. You hate that other boat. You hate the person rowing the other boat. "How could he have rowed right into me?"
- Rowan Mangan: So typical.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, just the way they are. And you turn around, you're ready to curse and swear and yell, and you see an empty boat just drifting. "Oh, empty. Oh, well." So do you feel the weird internal shift? Like you're all ready to be enraged and then it's just ... There's nothing to be angry at.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, can I give you an ... It's a different one, but it just occurs to me that is exactly the same thing and I think you do this too, because we go in cars together. What about when you see roadkill up ahead of you on the road. And you getting closer and you're like, "Oh god, I have to see this poor creature that's died." And you're getting all ... I speak for myself, I get really preemptively upset. And then you get closer and it's just someone's sweater that's been wet in the rain. And it's that same thing. It's like, "Oh, nothing died. Yeah, there's nothing in there. Cool."
- Martha Beck: I had an actual experience of this while I was driving the other day. Yeah, so I'm driving along and I come to a place where there's major ... It's like a six-lane road-
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, this is wild, this story.
- Martha Beck: ... a big highway. So there's a traffic light and I'm turning left. There's a green arrow for left, and there's a whole lane for that, but there's only one left-turn lane. Okay, so I'm right behind the front car. So the front car that is facing the light is right in front of me. I'm waiting, I'm waiting, all the lights turn red. It takes forever, then they go green. Finally, we get the green arrow. The car doesn't move. The car doesn't move. The car doesn't move. Someone behind me goes, beep, beep. And I go, beep, beep just to show them it's not my problem, it's that ... in front of me.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yes. And the car didn't move.
- Rowan Mangan: The bastard.
- Martha Beck: I know. The light went red again. We had to go through a whole nother cycle.
- Rowan Mangan: I bet that bastard was texting.



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- Martha Beck: I bet so. And we go, the green arrow turns, and right behind me, this truck goes, beep beep. I'm blaring. Everybody is honking.
- Rowan Mangan: It's escalating.
- Martha Beck: It's escalating. There's a long line of cars and we're all honking like crazy. Doesn't move. And we were ballistic. I feel like I speak for my other drivers, my fellow drivers, all like a mile back. We were furious. The next green arrow-
- Rowan Mangan: What were you doing to express your fury? You, yourself.
- Martha Beck: I was just going, "Ah! Oh my god, ah!"
- Rowan Mangan: I wish I'd seen you.
- Martha Beck: And I was thinking, "They're all mad at me." Everybody behind me, they think it's me. It's my job because I'm the one right behind. I'm supposed to get that blankety-blank ... I got to get them moving. And it's my fault or everyone things ... I was in a state.
- Rowan Mangan: I can only imagine.
- Martha Beck: Talk about fight or flight, I was squirting adrenaline out of my ears. So then finally, the lights go around again, and as soon as the green arrow goes, the truck behind me goes vroom, vroom, and drives over the median and drives into the opposite traffic flow. But they've got a red light, but it's still pretty dicey. And I'm like, "I'm getting in on this." So immediately I vroom, vroom, and I go over the median. And as I pass the car waiting at the light, I see there's no one in it.
- Rowan Mangan: It was almost literally an empty boat. It was an empty car boat.
- Martha Beck: I don't know, it [crosstalk 00:26:32].
- Rowan Mangan: It was an empty car boat.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, it was a car boat which is similar. It could have been an amphibious boat, we don't know.
- Rowan Mangan: That's a really good point. We should investigate further.
- Martha Beck: The person in it may have been sleeping, but they had slumped down if so, to the point you couldn't see anything. And it was so odd, because everyone of these cars behind that was just like, "Oh my god." And they would go over the median, "Oh."



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it's so funny in how in all of these examples, it just disappears, that anger. It just disappears, or in my case, tragic grief, for a dead animal that never was.
- Martha Beck: Even Eckhart Tolle describes having an experience like this, the enlightened spiritual teacher.
- Rowan Mangan: And guys, if I have said this on this podcast before, please never tell me, because it's embarrassing enough to tell it one time. So this is a story that Eckhart Tolle tells about being in a public toilet. Because this is going to go well, when you hear about an enlightened master in a public toilet, you just know that like everyone's just sitting down and getting settled in with their popcorn for this story. So it was a unisex toilet and a woman goes out and he goes in. And there's pee all over the toilet seat.
- Martha Beck: Pee?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And he's absolutely disgusted. And he's just like, "How did that woman pee all over the seat?" And he was trying to think through the anatomy ramifications and finally what he realized as he sort of scrubbed the seat down with toilet paper, is that she must have been a transgender woman, and so had peed all over the seat from a standing position. That's the only thing he could figure out. And he's like, "Well, I suppose I should ... But even so, I mean, you shouldn't pee all over a seat, whatever your identity is, keep my toilet seat pristine." And he's so angry, this enlightened master, is so angry. He's got himself all worked up to go and say something to her. He's like, "I'm going to come out and I'm going to find her, and I'm just going to tell her that that is not acceptable." So he finishes and he flushes the toilet and, of course, the toilet flushes all over the seat. It was the toilet flush. It wasn't pee.
- Martha Beck: It was the toilet.
- Rowan Mangan: Isn't that a great story about pee, honestly, in a public place?
- Martha Beck: So you just talked about that interesting de-escalation, and it's fascinating. In the body, it's called the alkaline tide.
- Rowan Mangan: Ooh.



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Martha Beck: It's fancy, right? Because when you go into fight or flight, all these acidic hormones go to work. Your blood acid rises and then when you see there's no threat, there's this wash of chemicals that are related to the parasympathetic nervous system, and it's literally alkaline. It literally calms you down and they say, I don't know if it's true, that cancers can't form in an alkaline environment, but they love acids. So like if what you're experiencing-

Rowan Mangan: Like hippies.

Martha Beck: Yes, you need a lot acid. Yeah, you can get some interesting mental shifts on acid. But these internal acids, when the alkaline tide comes in, it's just like ... Ah. Oh, nevermind.

Rowan Mangan: That's so funny, I didn't know the physiology of it. But what it seems like to me that the psychology is to do with when you see that the boat is empty. That projected intent to harm that you're putting onto the other person disappears because the boat's just bobbing along and it happens to bonk your boat. It's not heading for you, it's not intending you harm, right?

Martha Beck: Yeah, and one thing I found over and over again in coaching is that people who are aggressive, 99.99% of the time, will tell you they are afraid. And it's usually about something that happened a long time ago. So they got some kind of internal scarring and, I mean, I used to have this reaction. I had a bad experience with a person with white hair once. And I realized people who had white hair would trigger that in me, and I would assume that there was something scary about them. So I would become slightly defensive and defense is the first act of war, as Byron Katie likes to say, "The moment you come across as defensive, 'Well, hello,' immediately the other person's physiology is hooked."

Rowan Mangan: The first dog I had, we rescued her and we didn't know anything about what happened to her before she came to us. But if she ever saw a man with a beard or a man in overalls, she would lose her mind. And it's the exact same thing, right? But it's without the language component of the psychology, is it demonstrates how simplistic our mechanisms actually are. It's like, beard, white hair ...



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- Martha Beck: What I also say is when we're scared, we are scary. And I do this to remind myself not to be afraid. Like if I'm in a session with a client or if I'm doing something online, and I start to get nervous that I can't help them, I start to get alarmed. And I actually think you can feel it energetically, that somebody when they're going ... Remember, it's fight or flight. So anytime you're scared, and you're talking from a scared place, you got to kind of force yourself to realize I'm coming across as attacking and frightening the other person. So my intent to harm is zero, but what they're seeing is a boat smashing into them with someone in it, and they, of course, assume I intend to harm.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't think it's true to say necessarily that it's always fear that motivates every single ... I mean, who knows? Maybe it is at some deep level, but I think people can be obnoxious without being in a particularly heightened state of fear, maybe some generalized, I don't know. But I think the point is you don't have to understand them as afraid in order to get to this ultimate spiritual life hack for dealing with other people, right? Because what's the punchline, Marti, to the empty boat situation?
- Martha Beck: The punchline that Zhuang Zhou put in there is, "All boats are empty." What?
- Rowan Mangan: I already knew you were going to say that, and I got chills right down my arm when you said that, because it's just like it is so powerful, that idea.
- Martha Beck: Isn't it a mind blower, that one? I got the chills, too, when I first read this, and actually, every time I think about it. But here's the thing I didn't understand it. It gave me chills. So it's the chill of truth. But I've got no idea what it actually means. And I had to parse it out for myself because it's not just like a nonsense statement. It's a nonsense statement apparently to my cultured mind, that went right to my nature and said, "This is important, pay attention." And so what I did, I spent many, many hours meditating and looking at my own fight, flight reflex which is extremely hyperactive. And watching myself have internal arguments with people who have upset me and I'm very upset with them. And the thing that meditation is, it moves you out of that fight, flight part of the brain into an observing role. And the part of the brain that observes is also very compassionate.



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So, the first thing that happens is if you start to watch an argument, like replay it with a remote control, and say, "Okay, I can have compassion for what I was feeling at that moment and why I got so argumentative." And you get that alkaline tide reaction, and then you can say, "Maybe the other person was just in their crap. Maybe they have some history of whatever. Maybe they would have yelled at anyone. It was nothing personal to me, it was somebody in some kind of pain, like shrieking out and doing something horrible. But I have no idea what are the forces causing that and maybe they're just an empty boat."

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, so like in the metaphor it would be like there's a tide that is pushing them towards you, in a movement that feels like attack if there is someone in the boat. But it's actually just the tide and the boat's empty, right?

Martha Beck: Oh, I love that.

Rowan Mangan: So that the force isn't intention. The force is natural. It's like you thinking that someone, you know, the difference between someone attacking you with a knife or an avalanche. All this isn't to say that because we can recognize that the other boat is empty, then we get hit. It's not to say you won't respond to it. We can't help having a reaction when we get hit by a boat. I hate getting hit by a boat.

Martha Beck: I know.

Rowan Mangan: It's the worst. And I can have a moment of, "You bastard," followed by the moment of, "Huh, it's an empty boat." But I'm still going to get riled up when I get hit.

Martha Beck: Right, and you know what I said about the animals, how they just shake off their aggression and move forward?

Rowan Mangan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Martha Beck: I left something out, actually. In higher primates, like baboons, because they're able to sustain a thought of somebody being a rival or an enemy, they actually have similar responses. So they're very close to us biologically. We are monkeys. We have a biological response to a boat hitting us and it is boom, fight or flight, and anger. So yeah, we're human.

Rowan Mangan: So it's all about don't expect that coming to your senses one time means you're going to walk around ... Like Eckhart Tolle couldn't stand the sight of a toilet seat, you know? So what we're saying is the point isn't to free yourself of argument, the point is to learn how to diffuse it when it happens, is that right?



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Martha Beck: Absolutely. And there's an exercise that I read in a book, and I was listening to it on double speed.

Rowan Mangan: I bet you were.

Martha Beck: So it affected me very deeply.

Rowan Mangan: And very quickly.

Martha Beck: It's a book called Words Can Change Your Brain. It's very cool. Go get it. And it was describing how we have this biological response to apparent aggression. And it says in the book, the reader says, "Okay, now I'm going to say some things, and I want you to listen. And I just want you to notice how your body, how your feelings react to this."

Rowan Mangan: Okay, I'm going to do it now, okay?

Martha Beck: Okay, here we go. Everybody listening, this is the exercise. Just watch yourself. No, no, no. No!

Rowan Mangan: Jesus.

Martha Beck: Right?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: I mean, I specifically have no agenda. I am literally just shouting.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and my heart rate picked up and my palms are sweating. Wow. [crosstalk 00:37:36].

Martha Beck: And that's how, I mean, even when it's set up and, by God, for sure, this is an empty boat, we still have that biological reaction. And it's still really tempting to say, "You steered right at me and hit me with that. It was more than I was expecting." So how do you come to your senses when you've got that to deal with?

Rowan Mangan: How do you?

Martha Beck: Well, here is the interesting thing. You just heard the no, no, no response and you got all verklempt, right?

Rowan Mangan: I'm still a bit verklempt.



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- Martha Beck: Yeah. Okay, so the first thing is, and I say this on like every show because it's the way, the way back to nature is breath. So take a long breath, and especially that long exhale because no creature in the middle of a fight ever went ... Right? So that's the first thing, if that got you riled up at all, take a deep breath. And then say, "There was nothing in that." There was literally ... "That person doesn't even know me. Marti doesn't even know me. Isn't talking to me. Didn't mean any harm. It was just a thing that happened. I have no idea what's behind it." How's that working for you, Row?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it is. So I breathe and then I just picture you. That was the definition of an empty boat because you just said, "Now I'm going to do this thing. Get ready." It's clearly not coming from ... It's impossible to impute intent to harm on her part because she said, "This is an exercise." Then she started yelling at me, victimizing me. Making me feel like shit. Denying me of something, I'm not even sure what.
- Martha Beck: Can I tell you what's really going on in me right now?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: I'm thinking about our editor, Scott, who has to put this together-
- Rowan Mangan: Hi, Scott.
- Martha Beck: ... and how he's begged me not to scream into the microphone. Begged me on his knees to stop screaming into the microphone. And I just screamed as loudly as I could and I'm thinking, "Oh, he's going to be so mad. He's mad at me right now. Oh my gosh, I've got to defend myself, he's really going to be upset. I am fully in it."
- Rowan Mangan: I love it when ... This is really funny, because this is a boat that doesn't even exist, like let alone empty. It's absolutely certain that at this moment Scott can't know that you yelled-
- Martha Beck: But in my heart and mind, he's furious. Fast and furious.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, that's too funny.
- Martha Beck: It's like, unhook, unhook, unhook, unhook. It's constant unhooking.



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- Rowan Mangan: So what I think happens though, and this the bit where the spiritual life hack just gets itself on some steroids, is that for me, as I go through the exercise, I feel myself getting riled up when you victimize me like that, with your dark, black heart of doom, and I'm all stressed out. Then I picture your boat as empty, like the boat that just screamed, "No," at me was just coming on a current. And yeah, I can breathe a bit. But what I notice is that as I got into that place, my boat is empty. Like this is the idea, right? All boats are empty, then my boat must be empty too. And then I'm just like floating.
- Martha Beck: I just had a weird experience in my head while you were doing that. I was thinking about this woman, who during the height of the pandemic, I think she was drunk and started licking the windows of a bar. She was so angry-
- Rowan Mangan: Of course, you thought that. What about me, saying my little spiritual epiphany, made you think of an angry woman licking doorknobs?
- Martha Beck: It just activated ... But no ... This is the effect I have on her.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm here, like expressing my soul, and she's like, "That really reminds me ..." You are so lucky your boat is empty, Martha Beck, because if it wasn't, I'm telling you I'd be climbing onboard right now with a knife.
- Martha Beck: I don't know why that came up in me while you were talking, because I was so horrified and offended by this woman. And I saw that awful face licking the window, and you said ...
- Rowan Mangan: Between takes, she said to me, "Don't mention Donald Trump and if his boat is empty or not. Just don't do it." Then-
- Martha Beck: I went there.
- Rowan Mangan: ... she had the cheek to go to the licking doorknob woman with that terrible face.
- Martha Beck: Empty boat. Empty boat. No, but what happened as you spoke, I looked at her ... And I hated that woman, I have to admit. And it just switched. You're now experiencing the full-grown Mangan can't stop laughing experience. And you know what's a wonderful thing? Is our baby has that too.



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So, but it was like boom. I had aggression against that unknown woman for months, and as you talked, I just looked at her and went, "Oh, you're just crazy." And all my antipathy for her went away, and I was like, "Oh, you're crazy." And the boat was empty and I felt myself leave my own boat. It's not funny, it's a deep spiritual experience.

- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, that's how I felt. So where did you go when you left your boat?
- Martha Beck: It was very strange. It was actually a feeling of something vaporizing, like on Buffy the Vampire Slayer when they kill the vampires and they conveniently just got ... and they're gone. It was like Buffy the Vampire Slayer stuck me with a wooden stake and I disappeared. My anger disappeared and all I was was ... The boat is an awareness, observing the other woman. And she's completely caught in the tide or the avalanche, and she's just rolling downhill. She's just helpless and crazy. Maybe that's true, maybe that's not, but my antipathy disappears and there's nothing there. I remember when I started using this and people would get mad at me. You know that thing, "I'm rubber, you're glue, bounces off of me and sticks to you," that kids say when they get teased? A new one came up for me and it was, "You're solid, I'm air. Try to hit me and I'm not there." And that's what it felt like ... Nothing to fight.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, only because I successfully staked you a couple of seconds earlier.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And you vaporized into air.
- Martha Beck: And I thank you for it so deeply.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, no worries.
- Martha Beck: My vampire self was suffering with the horrifying image of the doorknob licker.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay, so to recap, you're in a boat.
- Martha Beck: Honestly, I don't know why we are not therapists.
- Rowan Mangan: I just peed a little bit. [inaudible 00:45:05] would be so mad at me. Okay. We're on a boat. Someone is licking doorknobs on our boat, but we jump onboard, stake them with a stake, and then we say, "Na na nuh na na." We stick our tongue out, and then we just jump into the sky and we're done.



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Martha Beck: Yeah, except you staked me, so doorknob licker's coming in her boat. It's got a motor on it ... Nobody ... is going. It's coming out and it smacks into us. Smash, boom. And I'm like, "I hate you forever." But you then jump out of your boat, stake me with your deep spirituality ... My aggression is gone, your aggression is gone, it's just empty boats everywhere.

Rowan Mangan: All boats are empty.

Martha Beck: All boats are empty. So anyone have any questions? I don't see how you could. I don't think we could have been any clearer. So here's the deal, next time something riles you up, on the internet, in person, anywhere, do the steps. Take a deep breath. Come back to calm. Remember the no, no, no exercise. Okay, that didn't mean anything, maybe this doesn't mean anything either. And then, picture Rowan Mangan stabbing you in the heart with a wooden stake and you see that the boat of the person that hit you is empty. And as you realize that, all your aggression vaporizes. All the boats are empty and you are just like lifting up in the sky away from all the boats.

Rowan Mangan: It's really nice, Marti.

Martha Beck: Yeah, so see the empty boats, be on an empty boat, and stay wild.

Rowan Mangan: Stay wild.

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