



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #16: Rings, Ducks and Earbuds

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.

Note: Explicit Language (If you have little ones around, grab your earbuds for this episode—there is some explicit language.)

- 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, this is Marty.
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Ro, and here we are at another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I've been trying to figure it out lately by consulting our dog, Bilbo Baggins, but he just referred me to his personal assistant, who turned out to be a garden gnome with a headset. So, that wasn't much help. But then Marty came along, and it turns out she speaks gnome. So, they figured it out together in no time.
- Martha Beck: Oh Ro, in all humility I do not speak gnome. I read and write it. Which is weird because I kind of speak Chinese but can't read or write it for beans. I don't even know what I would do with a Chinese garden gnome. Anyway, yeah, we figured it out. These are dark days, Ro. Yeah, our dog, Bilbo Baggins, if you guys don't know, is a cockapoo which sounds cute. Don't believe it.
- Rowan Mangan: It does not sound cute. It sounds X-rated.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, you're right. It does. It sounds like something that has something for every perversion frankly. Anyway, he's super smart. Oh my goodness, he's half cocker spaniel and half poodle. We've got one dog that is as dumb as a sack of wet mice, and then this Bilbo Baggins who uses our credit cards regularly to, I don't know, subscribe to phone sex things where they want cockapoos. He's probably getting paid. Anyway, along with the gnomes they have planned our demise frankly.



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Rowan Mangan: Oh no. Really?

Martha Beck: Yeah, and they've been behind everything. Game of Thrones, bad dog judging decisions in dog shows, game of dog shows. Yeah, things are bad and getting worse and that's all I'm going to say.

Rowan Mangan: Didn't you think this about house cats in a recent episode as well?

Martha Beck: They are responsible for crime. Yeah, this is a whole different way of envisioning reality.

Rowan Mangan: I feel like there is going to have to be some sort of sequel down the line that is the house cats facing up against the cockapoos and the gnomes.

Martha Beck: Well, that'll take care of itself. We'll just be reporting the news at that point.

Rowan Mangan: No idea what's going on anymore.

Martha Beck: Seriously, Ro, what are you truly, in your life, trying to figure out? No joke.

Rowan Mangan: Okay, no joke. I am trying to figure out you really. You are an endless-

Martha Beck: That's the best thing you could ever figure out.

Rowan Mangan: It's certainly a challenge, this issue. So, lately what I was trying to figure out is that you, as our listeners probably know, are responsible for some really incredible prose that you churn out fairly prolifically. And I am lucky enough to sometimes be in the room when you're writing, and you've recently started just nibbling around the corners of a new book. And I-

Martha Beck: I eat books. What can I say?

Rowan Mangan: I was in the room with you, we were both in our office, and this is what happened. So, Marty's there writing what I later find out is breathtaking incredible brilliant-

Martha Beck: Sales copy. Sorry.



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- Rowan Mangan: Nonfiction prose. And type, type, type, type. I'm typing, typing, typing, doing my thing. And all of the sudden she says, "It's like that cat who adopted the ducks."
- And I just wait to see if anything else is going to come out of it. No, she goes back to typing her brilliant masterpiece-level-
- Martha Beck: Oh my God.
- Rowan Mangan: Work. And then after a while I hear a little voice pipe up again, ducks, no, it was just one duck. I'm like, "Okay."
- Go back, doo-doo-doo-doo-doo, doing our work, doing our work, typing, typing, the keys, and then all of the sudden she shouts out triumphantly, "No, it was several ducks."
- Martha Beck: Well, yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And so I'm just thinking about the relationship. What's happening neurologically between you changing people's lives with this brilliant writing and then there's this completely other part that's just constantly ruminating on-
- Martha Beck: Ducks.
- Rowan Mangan: Ducks. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Well, it isn't just ducks. First of all, thank you for all that complimenting on my prose style because now the peeps are going to read it and go, "This isn't much good. It's not what Ro said." But thank you.
- Anyway, yeah, there are things you have to think about if you know them at all. Certain things, I think it's a citizen's obligation to pay them some mind if we know they exist.
- Rowan Mangan: Who's them?
- Martha Beck: Citizenry. It's our moral obligation to think about certain things that we have known about. Yes, because they pertain- ... They freaking pertain, Ro.
- Rowan Mangan: Please tell me where you're going with this.
- Martha Beck: Okay. Well, I don't really know, but I will tell you this. You can look it up on Google. There was a cat, a mother cat, she had babies-
- Rowan Mangan: You can look it up on Google. There was a cat.



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Martha Beck: There was a cat. You may even find more than one cat on Google. This particular cat had kittens and then there were some little ducklings. I guess they were motherless ducklings and she adopted them, which is one thing. It's one thing to adopt them and maybe she's raising them to kill for Easter or something, right? That's what you would expect a cat to do.

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: You do that.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, but, whoa. You're thinking a lot of ... To kill for Easter?

Martha Beck: We do that.

Rowan Mangan: I don't.

Martha Beck: We have piglets and then we kill them for Easter.

Rowan Mangan: Jesus Christ.

Martha Beck: To celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. Sorry, I didn't mean to say Jesus in an insulting way. Huge veneration for the Jesus truly. Anyway, I don't think he would have raised a pig to kill it for his birthday or whatever, re-birthday. He gets two days a year, doesn't he? He gets Christmas, that's his birthday, and then Easter is re-birthday.

Rowan Mangan: There you go.

Martha Beck: All right, another thing to think about. My point is here's what those ducks did and what the cat did. The ducks and the cat did it together. She nursed them to adulthood. They freaking nursed, Ro. Ducks have bills. I don't even know what's a bird and what's a mammal now.

Rowan Mangan: Nurse is not ... I don't know if it's universally understood to- ... The verb to nurse primarily to me means someone is a nurse and they come and administer to you. Let's just say what we mean.

Martha Beck: Wait, wait, wait, what? Do Australian nurses not breastfeed you? Sorry.

Rowan Mangan: Only the special ones. You have to pay extra for that. It's not part of the socialized healthcare.

Martha Beck: You at least have to tip them so to speak. Move on.



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- Rowan Mangan: All right, I'm just saying what you're sort of euphemistically saying is that these ducklings with their little beaks, I don't care if they're supposed to be- ... They beaks. It's the same. They have little beaks and they somehow managed to wrap their little beaks around cat titties.
- Martha Beck: Let's just take-
- Rowan Mangan: And extract milk to drink from that. Is that right?
- Martha Beck: They apparently did to the point where they got huge. They were bigger than any of the cats. And then mother duck was still trying to get her- ... She's like, "Here kids." This cat was very confused. And here's what I was thinking, you and I have both- ... I don't even know what to say now. Both of us had children and fed them from our bodies.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah-
- Martha Beck: Milk, yeah?
- Rowan Mangan: Yes [crosstalk 00:08:48]-
- Martha Beck: You just weaned Lila.
- Rowan Mangan: I did.
- Martha Beck: What if you were breastfeeding away and I would bring ... Rowy, I found this sick owlet in the forest. You have two. Why can't the owlet nurse? That owlet would have torn your rib from rib.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you remember when we didn't know each other very well, one of our earliest conversations and the time I think I first really made you laugh was I was telling you about how in Australia because of the marsupials, if you see roadkill that looks relatively fresh you have to stop your car and go look in the pouch in case there's a little baby that's still alive? And that's just considered good form in Australia. And Marty says to me, "What do you do if you find them?"
- And I said, "Well, you've got to breastfeed them." And it was the first time I made you laugh and I remember it very fondly.
- Martha Beck: Oh, it made me laugh again just now. Okay, yeah, the duck, the cat, it was several ducks.
- Rowan Mangan: It was several ducks. That's the punchline. Meanwhile, you wrote a third of a book that will change lives worldwide.



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Martha Beck: That's just different.

Rowan Mangan: It was several ducks.

Martha Beck: Well, actually, now that you mention it I'm trying to figure out ducks because the things are freakish.

Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah?

Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah. Those ducks not only slurped that cat until they were massive and monstrous, and then they ran away and she had to get out and catching them and bringing them back and trying to get them to nurse more. And then they grew up to be the weirdest creatures. And you see them, you think they're normal, they're not normal. They have 10-inch deciduous penises, corkscrew-shaped.

Rowan Mangan: I think that this is what's going on. You're just revealing what that monologue was in that room while you typed out this life-changing prose. It was doing this, just deciduous, corkscrew-shaped penises.

Martha Beck: Absolutely. And I think you are such a lesbian because when I said 10-inch deciduous penis, corkscrew-shaped, you were like, "Huh."

Rowan Mangan: Been there, done that.

Martha Beck: Any woman with one molecule of heterosexuality would have gone, "Corkscrew-shaped deciduous penis? What world am I living in?"

Rowan Mangan: I accuse you of being a lesbian because you just Freudian slipped corkscrew scrape. Corkscrew-scraped penises.

Martha Beck: But, no, they fall off every year. They do. And then the duck has to swim around. And I think during the time-

Rowan Mangan: What happens to them after they fall off, the penis?

Martha Beck: Well, for a while the duck can't fly. I don't think because of the penis. That [crosstalk 00:11:56]-

Rowan Mangan: As a rudder in the air.

Martha Beck: Oh my gosh. Google duck penises, you'll never ever have a good night sleep again.



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Rowan Mangan: Yeah, don't do that.

Martha Beck: But, yeah, I think their feathers fall out at the same time and then they can only swim for their lives if something attacks them, like a cat.

Rowan Mangan: I'm sorry. I just suddenly landed in the middle of the absurdity that is this conversation. And I just love you all the more.

Martha Beck: It gets better.

Rowan Mangan: Impossible.

Martha Beck: If you've got a flock of ducks and for some reason a whole bunch of the male ducks get taken out or a whole bunch of the female ducks get taken out and the population-

Rowan Mangan: Taken out for dinner?

Martha Beck: Yeah. That's a nice pun. Tell that to a duck. Do you want to come for dinner? And then kill it for Easter because you're human dammit. Okay, no. If the duck sex ratio, biological sex ratio, I'm not talking about identity, okay? If the biological sex ratio changes so there's a lot more male than female or vice versa, a certain number of the ducks will switch gender. A totally male duck fully fitted with a deciduous corkscrew-shaped penis will decide I'm just going to be female, and then make the shift and be able to have eggs and babies and, I don't know, nurse cats.

Rowan Mangan: It's like Jurassic Park.

Martha Beck: Yeah. No wonder I sit there in fear thinking about ducks.

Rowan Mangan: Could you please just do me a favor and say biological sex ratio one more time?

Martha Beck: Biological sex ratio.

Rowan Mangan: Thank you.

Martha Beck: And I think it's not a coincidence that in duck- ... I mean in German-

Rowan Mangan: Do you also speak and read duck in addition to gnome?



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Martha Beck: I don't read it so much, but I speak it and write it. No, but the word for ducks in German is [foreign language 00:13:56]. So, when you say, "[foreign language 00:13:58]," it means, "Then come the ducks." But it sounds like, "Then comes the end."

See, here's the thing. When you're raised in an apocalyptic religion, such as Mormonism, which I was, you're constantly being told as a small baby that the end is near and it could come from any direction. Is it any wonder I fear the world?

Rowan Mangan: And the ducks.

Martha Beck: And the gnomes.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and the house cats.

Martha Beck: No kidding. Plus the cockapoo revolution. Jesus. Sorry again with the insulting Jesus. I don't mean to.

Rowan Mangan: No.

Martha Beck: Lots of veneration. Seriously, I'm not kidding.

Rowan Mangan: Now, Marty, before we go any further in this podcast, we have something to address from an earlier episode. Yes. We did talk about our relationship a couple of episodes ago, I don't remember what number, but if you're curious just listen to all of them. They're all good. Hey, just go back. You won't regret it.

Anyway, a couple of episodes ago we talked about our relationship and I made the terrible mistake of appearing to dis your ring story. Which was that I said, "Marty finds ways to make our relationship seem less strange by fixating on particular details or anecdotes that she thinks will make people think it's completely normal."

I was like, "Yeah, she thinks that telling a story about our rings"- ... So, I got well and truly schooled on Instagram by-

Martha Beck: As well you should.

Rowan Mangan: Well, I guess so. The people have spoken and they wanted to hear the ring story. I just want to say that maybe once you guys have heard it you'll understand why I was like, "It's not that big a deal." But anyway, Marty, please would you tell the story of our rings?



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- Martha Beck: Listen, every ring story is a big story because I think we have a primordial relationship with ring stories. Wagner's [foreign language 00:16:00] and the Lord of the Rings. Rings are a big deal. I think we have a biological imprint of stories about rings.
- Rowan Mangan: I know one. In CS Lewis, in the Magician's Nephew, you get a gold ring or a green ring. You put one or the other on and then you jump into a pool. Do you remember this?
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: And you go through the pool into a different world depending on whether you've put the yellow ring or the green ring on your finger.
- Martha Beck: Oh, you just undermined your point because that is fascinating.
- Rowan Mangan: I love that.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, it's all like all honey badgers are attracted to things the size and shape of a softball. You can give them a softball, they will tear it to shreds. The reason being that they eat dung beetle maggots that are stored inside balls of dung the size and shape of a softball. That is not what I'm talking about.
- Rowan Mangan: Marty, you are such ... You're a nerd in such a disturbing way. You're a nerd about disturbing things. Continue.
- Martha Beck: I love the animals. But anyway, they love softballs, we love rings in much the same way I feel. So, here's the thing. We have an odd relationship in case you didn't listen to that other episode. It is odd in the sense of odd number-
- Rowan Mangan: Of people in that relationship.
- Martha Beck: Yes. Yes. It's even a prime number. It's mathematical.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God.
- Martha Beck: It is. All right, listen though. Here is how I will explain it. There are three of us in the relationship. But-
- Rowan Mangan: But go listen to that episode because people found it much more normal once they listened to that.
- Martha Beck: At least they didn't try to hurt us which we really thought they would.



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Rowan Mangan: I didn't think they would. I loved them from the beginning.

Martha Beck: Well, I love them and that makes me even more worried about them hurting me.

Rowan Mangan: We'll explore that more later perhaps.

Martha Beck: Okay, anyway, here's the deal. So, we were like, "Hey, we all love each other and it's seeming to last for years on end. We got to do something about this." So, you know how people wear rings on their ring finger to show that they're committed to someone. Well, I discovered there are three colors of gold.

Rowan Mangan: There you go. Hello.

Martha Beck: I didn't know about that. Ro was telling me about rose gold, which made me think she loves it. Whereas actually she doesn't love it which is confusing. You should. It's your gold.

Rowan Mangan: I don't know.

Martha Beck: All right, so anyway, we had six rings made and each of us wear two and Karen and I each wear a very thin rose gold band to stand for Ro. Then Karen and Ro wear a very slender same kind of white gold band to stand for me because of my sort of silvery-

Rowan Mangan: Pallor.

Martha Beck: And metallic complexion. And then there's yellow gold for Karen, and Ro and I each wear yellow gold rings. And all we have to do is show our hands and people go, "Oh well, shit, I could wear two rings."

Rowan Mangan: I guess it's completely normal.

Martha Beck: It makes complete sense now. That's the ring story.

Rowan Mangan: There you go.

Martha Beck: Also they were forged by Alberich the Dwarf under the River Rhine.

Rowan Mangan: Ta da.

Martha Beck: I don't know which one. Not a big opera fan.

Rowan Mangan: Couldn't tell.



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Martha Beck: I'm probably slightly larger opera fan than some people.

Rowan Mangan: My dad used to go around to his friend Mark's house every weekend and they would get really stoned and listen to Wagner.

Martha Beck: Really?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: I always knew I liked your father.

Rowan Mangan: Speaking of weird nerds, nonstandard nerds.

Martha Beck: I love that man.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, he's a good one.

Martha Beck: All right, so, hey, hey, guess what?

Rowan Mangan: What? What? What?

Martha Beck: We have a new kind of episode.

Rowan Mangan: Dude. This is big news. How are we only getting to this now?

Martha Beck: It's changed our lives.

Rowan Mangan: I know. And it's all your fault, listeners. Because I did ask on Instagram, I said, "What if we just did a few episodes here and there that are about what you guys have to say?" And you were all about it. So, here we are doing that thing you asked for, can't do us for it, it's your fault.

Martha Beck: Yeah, and we call it the (together) Bewild Files.

Rowan Mangan: Which is just so good- ... Both of us just said that and it just took a moment because it was such a good name.

Martha Beck: We just had to smile and smile.

Rowan Mangan: We did.

Martha Beck: Yeah, we're going to get this technologically slick as a whistle someday.

Rowan Mangan: Slick as a whistle.



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Martha Beck: That's the thing. It's not ducks. Ducks aren't- ... Well, they are. They're slick.

Rowan Mangan: Clean as a whistle, sharp as a thistle.

Martha Beck: Clean as a whistle is a thing.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, but you said slick as a whistle.

Martha Beck: Ew.

Rowan Mangan: Anyway, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have interrupted the flow. Yeah, what we're going to do is we want to actually hear your voices. So, we're working in the background to get that to happen. And, in the meantime, no worries. We will just go back to some previously elicited or solicited, I can never remember. Elicited-

Martha Beck: Elicited. You didn't solicit. You haven't been soliciting again, have you? With our listeners no less.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, there's so many things I want to say right now and I'm censoring all of them. Okay, yeah, so follow me on Instagram if you don't already because that's where we put up stuff about the show that's coming up and news about how we can hear your voices because we want to. But, for the moment, here is the previously elicited content that we're going to talk about on the Bewild Files. Welcome.

Martha Beck: The Bewild Files. Welcome. Hey. So, our first ever question on the Bewild Files, doo doo doo doo.

Rowan Mangan: Doo doo doo doo.

Martha Beck: Comes from Tana, who says she's trying to figure out, or he or they, being so distressed by and happy with the same exact life depending on the day.

Rowan Mangan: I totally relate to that.

Martha Beck: Me too. Oh my God, so much. We have a friend who has only two mode states. One is what a time to be alive and the other one is I wish I had never been born. And that's me too.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. There's different ways that you can look at Tana's situation. So, this is what she's trying to figure out and on the one hand I'm sort of like, well, that's called having different moods. But I think what she's getting at is where she says with the same exact life, I think maybe what she's looking at is the life choices we make and the place we end up as the consequence of our decisions and everything. And so on some days you're like, "This is brilliant. I'm doing exactly what I came on Earth to do." And then on another day you could just be like, "Oh, I shouldn't have done that. I should have-" ... I always think I should have agreed to quit my job and move on to a canal boat in Amsterdam with my boyfriend at the time when he brought that up in 2003. But I was too scared to give up my waitressing job. I felt like I'd be letting them down.
- Martha Beck: Gloriola.
- Rowan Mangan: So, I said, "No, we shouldn't do that." And I think I wonder where I'd be now. We were going to-
- Martha Beck: On a damn houseboat in Amsterdam is where you'd be, and I'd be so sad.
- Rowan Mangan: No, we were going to go through all the canals of Europe. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Good God. You could be anywhere. Put a dump down into the Black Sea and just be swimming around looking for sturgeon or something.
- Rowan Mangan: That is such a you thing to say. What about you? Do you have any of those sliding doors things that you look back on?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. There was this one time, the last time they asked me to come on the Oprah Show.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh yes.
- Martha Beck: I had gathered a group of my friends from all around the world really, some from South Africa, and some of my favorite people who had gone through my coach training and people I really thought were movers and shakers in the world, and they are. And we were all going to do this thing we called the Purpose Project. Which was ironic because we had no idea what the purpose of it was. We just felt this sense of purpose dammit. And we were going to go do everything that everybody in the group did. Michael made fire and somebody else was doing ... Lloyd was doing tracking. We all had different things that we did. I did coaching and drawing and everything. We were all gathered and the Oprah Show called.



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Rowan Mangan: Oh wow.

Martha Beck: And said, "Can you come on tomorrow?" Because the Oprah Show does not give you a month to plan it, or they didn't. This was in the big days of the Oprah Show.

And I was like, "You know what? I actually can't come."

And I remember Karen was standing there and she went pale and said, "They're never going to have you on again." And she was right. Because when the Oprah people said jump, you said how high when it was over. And that's not Oprah by the way. That's not her personality, but it was the whole organization was huge.

Rowan Mangan: They probably weren't used to people saying no.

Martha Beck: No, they were not. The woman was absolutely stunned and angry, and that was it for me and the Oprah Show. And I don't know if that was causal, but sometimes I think if I hadn't gone off to Montana and discovered my alfalfa allergy on that trip, where would I be?

Rowan Mangan: Where would you be now?

Martha Beck: And it was one where, yeah, interesting.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. It is interesting.

Martha Beck: I'm kind of glad I went.

Rowan Mangan: So, yeah, Tana, I get why you're trying to figure that out.

Martha Beck: But can I say one thing?

Rowan Mangan: Yes, by all means.

Martha Beck: This is literally when I read the question, this is what came out of the other side of my brain, just so you know, and this has nothing to do with it, but dolphins sleep one side of the brain at a time.

Rowan Mangan: And what shape are their penises?

Martha Beck: They're actually quite human-shaped. In fact-

Rowan Mangan: Are they prehensile?



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Martha Beck: No. That's elephants. There was a researcher, and this is true, who decided to see what would happen if dolphins lived amongst the humans free and clear. And so he made this house that was half underwater, and he hired this woman researcher to live in the house with a dolphin. The dolphin, a few weeks in, started pressuring her for sex in a very obvious way. He'd come poke her with his nose, but he was ready for action. And it's not dissimilar.

Rowan Mangan: Excuse me, I would just like to interject. I'm so sorry about this, Tana. You never ... This is going to definitely ... When she listens to this it's definitely going to be one of the days that she's so distressed by her life. But I just want to say that the Smithsonian itself in an article entitled, Nine of the Weirdest Penises in the Animal Kingdom, notes dolphins are known for their intelligence, promiscuity and absurdly dexterous penises. They have a prehensile penis, meaning it can swivel, grab and grope. Hey, that's not me saying it. That's the Smithsonian.

Martha Beck: I am definitely a lesbian now.

Rowan Mangan: Oh sorry, this is really interesting. A prehensile penis helps males navigate the complex labyrinth-like reproductive tracks of female dolphins. I feel like there's some sort of duck-dolphin ... Maybe ducks would be better off with female ... Male ducks, female-

Martha Beck: I'm sorry. I was just thinking of how complicated it would be to be a dolphin lesbian. Nothing to grope with. You just have flippers. This is wrong.

Rowan Mangan: This podcast is just going downhill.

Martha Beck: This is terrible. Don't let the children listen to this. Anyway, the dolphin started pressuring this woman for sex, and she wrote in her lab notes, which were very formal science, "He will not go away." Hand to God she started giving him handjobs. I used hand to God in conjunction with giving a dolphin, a prehensile groping dolphin, a handjob.

Rowan Mangan: We're losing all our listeners.

Martha Beck: Oh my God, Tana asked a really good question.

Rowan Mangan: Should we really have talked about penises this much?

Martha Beck: What I was going to say is dolphins sleep one half of the brain at a time. And I think half my brain is thinking, doo-doodle-doo-doo doo-doo, and the other half is thinking I remember a story from a sacred tradition that addresses this directly. And I do, all right?



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Rowan Mangan: Okay.

Martha Beck: Bring it back down. Bring it down, Ro. Land the plane.

Rowan Mangan: You land the damn plane for once.

Martha Beck: Okay, so in the Sufi tradition, a mystical branch of Islam, beautiful, beautiful writing, there is what's called a holy fool. And this is in Shakespeare's plays it would be the king's fool that would say the wise things.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, like the court jester.

Martha Beck: Yeah. And there's a holy fool in the Sufi tradition called Nasreddin, and Nasreddin is always doing things that are sort of trickster-like, but they have a point. And this is what I have to say about the way I experience my life as either unbelievable, what a time to be alive, or I wish I had never been born.

So, Nasreddin is walking down the road and up alongside him walks a very sad man with a big bundle over his shoulder. And they get talking and Nasreddin says, "Why are you so sad?"

And the man says, "Well, I am a prince. I've had everything except I am really depressed all the time, and life seems so pointless and miserable. And I wish I had never been born."

And Nasreddin says, "Oh." And he grabs the man's bundle and rushes off into the forest.

And the man is like, "What?"

And then Nasreddin takes a shortcut and runs ahead on the same road and puts the bundle in the middle of the road and then he waits. And here comes the depressed prince looking like, "I've lost all my stuff. I wish I had never been born." And there in the middle of the road is the bundle of stuff he had all along. And he looks at it, he goes through it, he finds that he has exactly the things he had before and he started jumping up and down with joy. "Oh my God I'm so glad."

Rowan Mangan: What a time to be alive.

Martha Beck: What a time to be alive. And Nasreddin from the bushes says, "Funny what it takes to make some people happy." And I think we're all like that, right?

Rowan Mangan: That's perfect. Yeah.



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Martha Beck: And it's about focus of attention. What are you turning your attention to, the dark part of your life or the bright part of your life? And I think it's good to have both.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: It's all part of the richness of the experience. But if you stay too long in the dark sometimes it's good to pretend that you've lost all your possessions to a robbery and then you look around and they're all still there and you're really happy.

Rowan Mangan: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know what's interesting to me is I got an email this morning from a friend back in Melbourne, and she was saying Melbourne's had such a rough time because they've just been in lockdown for longer than any other city in the world, any other place in the world. And it's just miserable. And my friend was saying, and this was very much the sort of sentiment I keep hearing from people is, she said, "It's pretty bad over here. I'm so grateful that we've got what we need, but a lot of people don't."

And it was just interesting to me that as I read that I thought, yes, people ... Adversity. What I'm trying to say is adversity can ironically sometimes push us towards that recognition when it's strong enough. If life is just kind of tepid and going on and going on I think maybe there's a human tendency to start dwelling on the negative things. And that sometimes getting thwacked over can force you to-

Martha Beck: It actually is called a negativity bias and it's firmly established in research psychology. We focus on what's negative because in evolutionary terms that's like, okay, everything looks great, but ooh, there's a cobra. So, you want to focus on the cobra until you get it out of the space, but unfortunately the human brain will find anything to be the cobra. It just wants to find something negative.

So, I actually think you have to school the brain away from that, and there's lots of research that says if you just refocus on gratitude is one of the biggest things to come out of positive psychology, that it actually reshapes the brain to be happier. And I'm not saying everything's fine, just smile. But really truly, our friend Anita Moorjani, who died of cancer and then came back, great story, read her book, I said, "How do you get from total misery all the way to joy?"



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And she said, "Okay, if you're in total misery you can at least accept that you're in total misery and you can come to peace with it. The moment you're at peace with it, you're within shouting distance of gratitude. And once you've got gratitude you can go to appreciation. And once you're at appreciation it's just a little hop over to joy." And I thought that was really cool.

Rowan Mangan: That is cool. It's like you could actually do a practice, a daily practice of going through those stages. I love it. It's so good when someone ... The thing about spirituality is it's just so difficult to grasp sometimes, isn't it? And so it's such a great thing when someone goes, "Step one, step two." I love it.

Martha Beck: Thank you. Thank you on behalf of Anita Moorjani and Nasreddin. Okay, so who's next? Who's next?

Rowan Mangan: Next we have Allison and what she was trying to figure out is she says, "We've lost wisdom around transitions. The importance of rituals around change." And I love this because I, and I think it's probably fair to say we, Marty and our family, are a little bit obsessed with ritualizing everything.

Martha Beck: It has something to do with our main man about town.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, that's true.

Martha Beck: Mr. Adam Beck.

Rowan Mangan: Mr. Adam Beck himself.

Martha Beck: He has Down syndrome. I'm not sure if that's what causes this, but he is very, very specific about what rituals have to be performed at every hour of the day. You know what it reminds me of? I may be wrong about this. You've spent more time in Bali than I have, yeah?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: It's a civilization that never got colonized, and it's deeply Hindu. Every time I'm there there's always a ceremony going on. It's like every moment of every day, every day of every week, every week of every month is special. It actually shows you that people, even in ancient times, spent a lot of time with beauty, with protocol, with dance, with all these ways of saying, "This is this moment in our lives and it's important."



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Rowan Mangan: Yeah, that's so well put. No, it's true. In Bali you go to visit a temple that you've read about, and you go in and then you realize, oh, I'm going to be here for seven hours because I've got to sit down because we're in the middle of something very sacred. You don't actually have to even understand what it is to appreciate that quality. So, it's interesting that Allison is talking about specifically rituals around change.

Martha Beck: Yeah, because here's the other thing that brings up for me. I used to be obsessed with ... I was very depressed about change even when I was a child. Oh my God, it was so bad. The first poem I ever wrote I had to write for junior class English in high school. I have such a reverence for the written word that I couldn't sleep for five nights in a row because I was supposed to write a poem. So, finally-

Rowan Mangan: Maybe you should have just been thinking about ducks and letting that part of your mind-

Martha Beck: I know that now. But, yeah, my pediatrician, my pediatrician, put me on Valium.

Rowan Mangan: Oh my God.

Martha Beck: And I finally went to sleep and I woke up and I wrote a sonnet about transience.

Rowan Mangan: Oh dear.

Martha Beck: Yes, the fact that everything changes.

Rowan Mangan: Of course you did.

Martha Beck: And later I was dating this guy and he said-

Rowan Mangan: Was it your pediatrician?

Martha Beck: No, but it helped to have the Valium. He said, "What bothers you about the world?" And he was very poetic.

And I said, "Transience."

And he thought I was talking about homeless people and he got really angry at me and I didn't know why. He's like, "How can you say that? They're people too."



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And I'm like, "Everything changes." Yeah, it wasn't a good relationship. It did not end well.

Anyway, anyway, then I grow up and go to Asia and find out there's a whole religious philosophical tradition based on the fact that everything is always changing. The Tibetan rituals are all about change. That's why they make the big sand mandalas that are beautiful and it takes weeks to make. And then they just blow on them or sweep them and they're gone forever. And they would never keep them because every ritual is about the present moment and the beauty of the present moment, and attaching to the thing that you've made or the thing you're experiencing or this moment now is a surefire recipe for misery because everything's always changing.

- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, but it seems to me that there's two different themes because I feel like you're talking about rituals that celebrate the concept of change or the transience of mortality, whatever it is. But I think what Allison's saying is actually rituals that mark concrete changes in our lives, like so I'm thinking about ... I don't know, like puberty or menopause. That's all I got. Those are the only changes.
- Martha Beck: Those are the two.
- Rowan Mangan: Those are the two.
- Martha Beck: And when your penis falls off. Those are the three occasions you want to mark.
- Rowan Mangan: I wonder how you'd design that. So, anyway I'm just thinking what are some rituals that we should have in our culture around ... What are some change rituals? Let's design some.
- Martha Beck: I love it.
- Rowan Mangan: So, I was thinking what about changes that we experience in contemporary bewildered life?
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: What are some rituals that could go along with those changes?
- Martha Beck: Oh, my weary soul is rejoicing even as you speak this.



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- Rowan Mangan: Right? Because I was thinking there are moments that we have no way of really marking with the magic that ceremony can have. So, I was thinking, for instance, a big one for me is the moment where you first move to wireless ear buds. All this time you've been sort of only able to move your phone that far away from your head because you were listening, carrying it around. Then all of that goes. The tethers that have connected you to your phone, to your audio book, to your podcast-
- Martha Beck: I feel so unmoored just talking about it. We have to have a ceremony for this.
- Rowan Mangan: I feel like maybe what we should do is just take the old wired ear buds and, I don't know, sacrifice them in a cleansing fire of some sort.
- Martha Beck: Cleansing fire is good. You could also bronze them.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah, yeah, that's nice.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, you could climb a tree and plant them at the very top of the tree for the birds. The air burial.
- Rowan Mangan: Did I ever tell you about the time at the ranch in California when our friend, Maya, who at the time was about eight, and I pissed off the fairies in the sacred grove?
- Martha Beck: No wonder. Do you know Mormons have a whole thing around the phrase "sacred grove"? But go on, what happened with you and Maya? What did you do to piss off the fairies?
- Rowan Mangan: We wrote them a letter and put it in a hollow of the tree, and we went back the next day and our letter had been ripped in half.
- Martha Beck: Wow.
- Rowan Mangan: I know.
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: Anyway, probably they were expecting headphones.
- Martha Beck: One word, Sasquatch.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, or squirrel I guess.



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- Martha Beck: Oh well. Okay, yeah, do something. I prefer air burial because I think fire burial is good for something else. And that is the moment when you realize that Facebook is really, truly dead to you.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah. Yeah, that's a big one in the bewildered life, isn't it? It's happening to more and more of my friends and family.
- Martha Beck: It was such a wonderful place. A place of celebration, a place of birthday parties and I don't know what else. More birthday parties.
- Rowan Mangan: Memes.
- Martha Beck: Cute animal videos, that was my favorite. But now I get my cute animal videos elsewhere.
- Rowan Mangan: Awkward.
- Martha Beck: Awkward.
- Rowan Mangan: Awkward for Facebook.
- Martha Beck: So, what I was thinking is, having some Viking blood in myself, you are Irish but you probably have Viking blood in there because they were always marauding and whatnot. I think you should take Facebook, make a little digital Viking ship, then take your Facebook bookmark, digitally move it-
- Rowan Mangan: Drag and drop.
- Martha Beck: Drag and drop to the Viking ship.
- Rowan Mangan: Yup.
- Martha Beck: Digitally set it on fire and make it float off screen.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I love it. I love it. There you go. That's a ritual right there for Allison.
- Martha Beck: And if you can't do that you're probably stuck with Facebook for a while, you loser. I could never ever do that.



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Rowan Mangan: I'm still on Facebook. All right, okay [crosstalk 00:42:12]. All right, so this is something about turning 40 that I discovered that I don't think you know about until you turn 40, and maybe I'm actually breaking some sort of cultural pact by even revealing this, but who cares? It's funny, so I'm going to say it. So, before you turn 40 you go to the doctor for your checkup and there are a list of questions they run through and they'll say, "Da da da, do you smoke? Do you drink? Are you sexually active?" But I tell you what happens. When you turn 40, and I swear to God, I was 40 and one month and I came to the doctor and it was like a completely different conversation.

I go into the doctor, I sit down. Do you smoke? Do you drink? And then, all of the sudden, have you had any recent falls? And I was like, "Dude, you did not ask me that six months ago."

And she got quite red and stammered and she was like, "Yeah, no, it is because of that. It is because now we don't ask you for sexual activity, we ask you if you've fallen over." Oh, it was devastating.

Martha Beck: Have you had any recent falls in any attempt to be sexually active?

Rowan Mangan: Well, you try it with a corkscrew penis.

Martha Beck: We could be misquoted so grotesquely. Okay, here's the thing-

Rowan Mangan: I don't think it would be misquoted.

Martha Beck: Yeah, I think we're starting with grotesque. But I was thinking it's an excellent point, goes right along with the time that you realized when you go in to the doctor and the doctor is younger than you are.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Martha Beck: And you're like, "Why are they having a 12-year-olds be my doctor?" Because of course you're always 25.

Rowan Mangan: Doogie Howser.

Martha Beck: Doogie Howser. They're all Doogie Howser. Hazard. No, I think that what you should do at the age of 40 so that you can prepare for this shift in the medical field is set up a ceremonial fall with everyone watching. A banana peel out in public, slip fall in the mud, just get it over with, right? Say, "I am a person who has recent falls."



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- Rowan Mangan: Got you. Oh, that's really good. And if people stand around and applaud and give you something nice to eat or maybe a warm compress or something for your bed that would be also good.
- Martha Beck: Can we tell the story about the person, and this was on the internet, who knocked over an old lady in the street accidentally?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God, so funny. There's a list that Buzzfeed or someone put together of just the funniest tweets about extremely awkward social moments. So, this person, I'll try and find this and put this in the show notes, okay? Remind me. But he walked into an old woman on the street and he was so distraught to have walked into this old woman that he tried to say two things at once, so he tried to say, "Are you okay?" and "I'm so fucking sorry." And instead he accidentally just shouted, "Are you fucking sorry?"
- Martha Beck: I think that should be part of the ceremony.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, yes.
- Martha Beck: A younger person walks towards you, you fall, and the younger person shouts, "Are you fucking sorry?"
- Rowan Mangan: That's beautiful because it's also symbolic of your handing over the power and destiny.
- Martha Beck: It's true. It is really true.
- Rowan Mangan: You are the main generation now.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, and then you get up and everyone gathers around you and you get in front of them and you say, "Get off my lawn."
- Rowan Mangan: Genius.
- Martha Beck: And then you say, "Do you kids have any idea how hard it was to send a meme in my day?" Because I did. I swear to God I would cut headlines out of magazines and funny pictures, usually of animals, with them, and then I would force my friends to look at them on paper. And I loved it. We didn't have ear buds. We had gravel. We put it in our ears and we loved it.
- Rowan Mangan: Gravel. I would have been grateful to have gravel. Sorry, there's another thing that we should put in the show notes which is the four Yorkshire men or the five Yorkshire men, I don't remember how many Yorkshire men, but it's a Monty Python skit and we'll get that to you too. It's good.



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Martha Beck: Okay.

Rowan Mangan: So, Marty, I do hope that the peoples out there have enjoyed us delving into the Bewild Files for this episode. We're planning to do it more. As I said, follow me on Instagram so that you can find out how to get involved.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Get bewildered.

Martha Beck: Yeah, figure out how to get to the place where you're figuring it out.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and stuff like that. So, yeah, stay tuned and we will be back very soon with more. And in the meantime, stay wild.

Martha Beck: Stay wild.

Rowan Mangan: We hope you're enjoying Bewildered. If you're in the USA and want to be notified when a new episode comes out, text the word 'WILD' to 570-873-0144. For more of us, Martha's on Instagram, themarthabeck. She's on Facebook, The Martha Beck, and she's on Twitter, marthabeck. Her website is, MarthaBeck.com. And me, I too am on Instagram. Rowan_Mangan. I'm on Facebook as Rowan Mangan. And I'm on Twitter as RowanMangan. Bewildered is produced by Scott Forster with support from the brilliant team at MBI.