



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

## Episode #19: Perfection Paralysis

*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 feeling 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] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan. You've come to another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out. I, myself, have been trying to figure it out lately from under a blanket with a flashlight. Marty came and made a blanket fort in our living room, and somehow that led to her figuring it out.
- Martha Beck: Well, yeah, I mean, forts in general are the place where you figure it out. Yeah. Like the battle of the Alamo, for example, the Alamo was a fort. If you're Australian and you don't know.
- Rowan Mangan: I should learn about this for my citizenship test.
- Martha Beck: Everybody does. And that's the problem. There were people there, they figured it all out. This is the problem with forts. People go in there, they figure things out, and then everyone kills them.
- Rowan Mangan: I feel like we just started this podcast about 10 seconds ago and already you're like, this is the thing about forts.
- Martha Beck: Well, it reminded me of when I was teaching business school.
- Rowan Mangan: Uh-huh (affirmative).
- Martha Beck: No kidding. There's a place called Alamo Car Rental. I don't know if it's still running. But the challenge for all the students, they got in these different groups and they had to create an advertising pitch for whatever company it was. And these poor kids did a whole massive presentation called 'Safe as the Alamo'. And we were like, "You do know that everyone died, right?" And they were like, "Oh." But see, that is why I thought that.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Rowan Mangan: I thought that.

Martha Beck: I saw that and I thought, that's the thing. You go in the fort, you figure it out, you die because you no longer need to be on earth, because you've figured it out.

Rowan Mangan: Gotcha.

Martha Beck: So don't make a blanket fort unless you're ready to die. That's my... And tell that to all the kiddies out there.

Rowan Mangan: So it wasn't so much that they died, they just finished the game.

Martha Beck: They finished. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. They completed it.

Martha Beck: It's like, "What's your next project Davy Crockett?." He was like, "Well, I was going to make another raccoon skin hat, but I just figured everything out and now, dead."

Rowan Mangan: I don't know. It's a sad story, it's a transcendent story, it's got something for everyone.

Martha Beck: Yeah. It's bittersweet.

Rowan Mangan: Can I say that when I do my U.S. Citizenship test and they quiz me on this stuff?

Martha Beck: I think you have to. I think it's one of those things you have to know.

Rowan Mangan: I'll say, the Alamo, of course, is a story of redemption.

Martha Beck: And raccoon hats that never quite happened.

Rowan Mangan: Cool raccoons. I want to talk about that.

Martha Beck: So anyway, seriously, Ro, what are you actually really in your life trying to figure out?

Rowan Mangan: So I have this thing. I don't know if this is everyone, and I don't know if it's age, or not age, but I have these blank spaces in my brain quite often, increasingly. There's just these blank spaces. And you know how you kind of reach into your brain for a piece of information, or a word, or an anecdote, or something the way you would reach for it in on the shelf?



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: No, I don't physically have to reach for things inside my brain.

Rowan Mangan: No I don't. I do it by internal telekinesis.

Martha Beck: Oh.

Rowan Mangan: Right.

Martha Beck: You get books off the shelf by telekinesis? Sorry. Go on.

Rowan Mangan: I wasn't getting books off the shelf, I was getting tins of kidney beans.

Martha Beck: Of course you were, because that's exactly like figuring it out.

Rowan Mangan: And so there's, you know how you can just, you can't think of the word? Everyone has that thing of what's that word? What's that word? And often, just as a side note, you notice how if I can't think of the word and I say, "You know that word?" And you know what I mean, but because I can't think of it then you can't think of it?

Martha Beck: Oh yes. That happens.

Rowan Mangan: That's funny, isn't it?

Martha Beck: It's not funny it's terrifying. Your forgetfulness can make my brain go blank.

Rowan Mangan: And so sometimes there's just repetitive blank spaces for me. And one of them is, and I've taken a note here so that it doesn't happen live, because no one needs that, but the word fleece is generally a complete blank spot in my brain. And when you have a toddler, and you live in the Northeastern United States, and it's winter, that's a word that comes up.

Martha Beck: It does.

Rowan Mangan: It tends to come up.

Martha Beck: Fairly often.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: And so in my brain, my little brain hand reaches out to grab *fleece*, and what my brain gives it is *felt*, every time. And I'm just trying to figure out, what is that? And so it's like, I go, "Brain..." This happens so often, you guys think I'm joking. I'm not. This happens so often. I go, "Okay, brain, I need that stuff. I need the word for that stuff." And my brain goes, "Felt." And I'm like, "No, no, no, no. Remember how we always go to felt, and it's not felt. It's the other thing, similar ish word." And my brain goes, "Mm. Mm." That's what it does. And then it goes, "Felt." I'm like, "God damn it, it's not felt."
- Martha Beck: Are you familiar with the term fleece as in to fool someone and take their money?
- Rowan Mangan: Aww, I hadn't.
- Martha Beck: So I'm imagining you going into the police and some man has taken your purse or something, and you say "That young man totally," and you mean to say fleeced me, but instead you say, "He felt me." And now the guy is up for an assault charge. And it's all because you are reaching for things in your brain with telekinesis, like a can of kidney beans. I don't even understand that metaphor.
- Rowan Mangan: No, I don't either.
- Martha Beck: Well, I feel you. I fleece you.
- Rowan Mangan: It's all so confusing. Marty, please save me. What are you trying to figure out?
- Martha Beck: I'll make you a little sign. Well, mine is, I think, much more serious.
- Rowan Mangan: Okay.
- Martha Beck: It's about shame.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah. Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And specifically, what I have always called waves of shame, I think other people probably call it that too, but you have to understand. I get tsunamis of shame. Waves of shame can hit me out of nowhere. And this is literally true. I will go... Sorry.
- Rowan Mangan: Listeners, first of the night, this is literally true. Martha Beck.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: I occasionally, when I have a wave of shame about some embarrassing or terrible thing that I did and someone else was involved, sometimes I go online and Google to see if maybe they're dead, because that's the only way I could cope. It's like, oh, thank God. He's dead.
- Rowan Mangan: Because if they're alive, they're probably still thinking about it, huh?
- Martha Beck: Exactly. And the one that has hit me recently, it was so bad. And I was only like 16 years old. So this was like 400 years ago. And I used to go jogging every day. Jog, jog, jog. And I liked to go out this mountain path, but to go out the mountain path, you had to go along this long walkway through two hedges with trees around them. And one spring a blackbird put up a nest in one of those trees. And blackbirds are very territorial.
- Rowan Mangan: This is a fairy tale. This is not something that happened to you.
- Martha Beck: No, this is, this is what happens when we grow up in Utah.
- Rowan Mangan: Utah.
- Martha Beck: So I would go jogging along and the blackbird would see me coming. And he'd swoop to the first tree, and as I ran past the first tree he would divebomb me, and like go, \*bawk, bawk\*, and try to get in my hair and whatnot, and then he'd go up to the next tree and wait for me. And I'd run past that and he would divebomb me again, all the way down the row. And it was long.
- Rowan Mangan: So when you Googled him, was he still alive?
- Martha Beck: I found out he just Googled me. No, but at first it was like, okay, it's a blackbird, it's not going to hurt me. And then it's like, no, I was like Tippy Hedron in The Birds. It's definitely going to hurt me.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: So one day I just thought I can't handle this anymore, but I want to go on my route. I'm going to take back my power. So I got this stick, and I was like, I'm coming for you, blackbird. The best defense is a good offense. And I would jog along, jogitty, jogitty, jog, and here comes the hedge, and I'm so ready to fight.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: And I jog in, no blackbird. It was eerily silent. I'm like, where is he? Where is he?

Rowan Mangan: Too quiet.

Martha Beck: Jogging, jogging. He's hiding in one of these trees. He's going to divebomb me any minute. And I just got to a fever pitch. And then I heard him behind me. And I whirled, and I waved my stick frantically, and I said, "Why don't you just leave me alone you little bastard? Get out of my life." And Ro, it was a little old man on a bicycle. And I felt so bad.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, well how did he respond?

Martha Beck: He looked so hurt. He stopped his bicycle, and he just looked so sad. And I waved my stick.

Rowan Mangan: Did he say, "I've always considered you a friend."

Martha Beck: I think he was too sad.

Rowan Mangan: Aw.

Martha Beck: So I kept waving my stick because the best thing to do in these instances is to pretend you mean it.

Rowan Mangan: Lean into it.

Martha Beck: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Lean into it. And I said, "Sorry, I thought you were a bird." And I don't think that made him feel better. And then I just had to jog on, and he just stood there with his little bicycle waiting for me to get out of his life. And I don't even know his name, so I can't-

Rowan Mangan: Google him.

Martha Beck: ... make sure he is dead.

Rowan Mangan: Make sure he's dead.

Martha Beck: Pretty sure he is after that. Anyway, I don't know what to do with my waves of shame. Things like this come back in the night, and they wake me up and haunt me.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. Well maybe this is like therapy for you. Maybe just talking about it will get getting it out of your system.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: Get it out there. I'm sure there are so many people listening who've done exactly the same thing.

Rowan Mangan: You know what I can't help wondering though?

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: Where was the bird?

Martha Beck: I know, right?

Rowan Mangan: When you think about it, it's a bit suspicious that the bird's gone and this guy completely innocently just turns up.

Martha Beck: And I never saw them together.

Rowan Mangan: I think he was trying to fleece you.

Martha Beck: Well, he certainly felt me. That's what he did.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. He felt your stick.

Martha Beck: I said, "Do you feel me?" And then I ran away. And I'm still running inside my heart to this day. I feel so bad for that man.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, you're a funny girl. We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a little favor to ask. Would you consider giving us a little rate and review love on your favorite podcast player? It helps people find the podcast, it builds this beautiful community. Most of all, it helps us in our quest to bewilder the world. Thank you so much. So as many of our listeners know, Marty, on this podcast we help people from a state of bewilderment to be-wilder-ment, to their wild true nature. You know this.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Go a little wild, find yourself.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So today what we're talking about is, what I call...

Martha Beck: What I call.

Rowan Mangan: What I call "perfection paralysis". And that is, as you've probably guessed, the feeling that you can't do anything unless it's perfect.

Martha Beck: Right.

Rowan Mangan: And there's, oh, that's a juicy one, really.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: It really is.
- Rowan Mangan: And what's so interesting about it is, we were chatting about this in preparation for the podcast, and we realized that we both had really different sort of perspectives on this idea of perfectionism, which I didn't expect, because I thought, we all know what perfectionism is.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: But no. They're different things.
- Martha Beck: No, no, no. Mine is just completely social. Mine is this will be judged, I have to make sure that nobody's upset with this, that it's the right thing, that it's impressive. It's the whole, go to school, get shame for doing it wrong, get rewarded for doing it right. So for anything I do, I mean, it happened today. I was painting away. I scheduled an appointment for two subsequent weeks and it was really only for one. So I happily, this is the life of an ADD person. It's like, I made a mistake in my own favor. So I had a three hour, and I went and I got my paints out and I started painting and painting, and then Ro came in and I was like, "It's only an underpainting. It's only an underpainting." And she's like, "I don't even know what you're talking about."
- Rowan Mangan: It's actually worse than that, because I had called her on my way home to see if she needed anything, just because we're really ridiculously codependent. And I said to her, "How you doing? What have you been up to?" And she's like, "Okay, so I've been painting. When you come in and you look at my work, what I want you to bear in mind is this is an underpainting. This isn't what it will look like." And then you said it again, when I came in.
- Martha Beck: Yep. It's true. I have to say, also, that I got paint all over myself, which most people forgive, but then I went in to say hi to the baby and she'd never seen me covered with paint.
- Rowan Mangan: You were in your long underwear and you just came out and said...
- Martha Beck: I had to be in my long underwear because if you wear your regular clothes when you're painting, you get paint on them. So you have to take off your regular clothes and be in your underwear.
- Rowan Mangan: She just walks out to say hi to the baby and the first thing out of her mouth is, "I took off my trousers." I'm sorry you said pants because you're American.





# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: But I like trousers better.

Rowan Mangan: "I took off my pants."

Martha Beck: I took off my pants. So my face was relatively clean, so I went to give the baby a kiss and she smiled at me. And then I went to hug her and she looked at my hands, which were completely covered with paint. And the look of disgust that came into that child's eyes. And she planted her own hand firmly in the center of my face, on the nose area, and pushed very hard. And as I have told this group, our listeners, before, this is an extremely strong baby. I mean, my head bounced off the opposite wall. It's weird how I don't care that the baby is disgusted with me, because I figure she'll grow out of it. But you coming into the room and seeing a painting before it's finished, I could bear that as a scar that would go with me to my grave.

Rowan Mangan: Mm.

Martha Beck: Yeah. And I think it's because I was so geared toward high achievement. And there's school, and then there's also being raised really religious.

Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah. That's a whole other...

Martha Beck: In a monotheistic religion. That is, a religion with one God, one way, because a lot of Eastern religions are like, "Oh you've got a God? Oh, let's add it to ours. That's cool. You want to do that way? Oh, that's one of the ways. Let's do that." But the monotheistic religions are like, "No, there's one way, and if you don't do it you are going down." So that's what my perfection is. Who's going to hurt me?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And so for me, what I realized is that, when I think about perfectionism, it's about not being able to start something because the minute anything of it exists outside of my mind, and the beautiful idea I had of it, it ceases to be perfect, as it always is when I imagine it. Right?

Martha Beck: Well, I got completely off track, because my next line is Plato's Theory of Forms and I don't know anything about Plato's Theory of Forms. So I was Googling it. Oh God, maybe we should just leave this in as an example. I know a little bit about Plato's Theory of Forms. It's just, it's probably wrong to Google the thing that you're planning to talk about on a podcast while recording the podcast, but that's just how I do.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

So yeah. When I used to teach art, what happens is that, when you ask someone to draw a table, or a building, they think in their head, that table is square, and they make it square. The brain sees a perfect square when it looks at a table. But the eye is actually seeing a trapezoid. The brain translates things into their perfect form. So the platonic image of a square is what you have in your mind, and you may never see it in real life. You may only see trapezoids, but you'll still have this idea of the perfection of the square. And then when you set out to do something, because I know you, I know how you do, you're going to write a poem, or you're going to make a baby, or whatever it is you're going to do. And you're like, I know exactly what I want.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: And then I'll say to you, "Let's go do it." And you're like, "How dare you."

Rowan Mangan: I know.

Martha Beck: And the most common thing is, she'll be like, "Okay, this is what we're going to do." And I'm like, "Look, I just Googled it. A little song, a little dance, a little seltzer down your pants. Here we go." And she's like, "How could you? How could you mar the perfection of this beautiful thing that I am creating in my mind?" And I'm like, "Ah, just push it out there. It doesn't matter, as long as nobody else sees it." Because for me, it's about the other people. But for you, it's about you. That's a harsh critic.

Rowan Mangan: Mm.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And it's just disappointing when something perfect... Actually I'm thinking, I forget who said it, but someone said, "Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children."

Martha Beck: Ooh, I like that.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: No offense to anyone out there who is either perfect or cannot have children.

Rowan Mangan: I don't think you can offend the perfect. I think by definition they're unoffendable.

Martha Beck: Good point.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Yeah. And I remember, there's a writer who said that in your mind the story you want to tell is this beautiful butterfly, it's this soaring thing. And then you put words on it, you do your very best, you polish it up and it's still just like a dead insect pinned to a cork board. It's just lifeless compared to what you dreamed it would be.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Every time. And isn't it like, maybe that's what we all need to learn at the Alamo is that we like to be able to get over that process. To keep making things, despite their stubborn insistence on not being perfect.

Martha Beck: There's this thing called deep practice, or dedicated practice that I talk about a lot in coaching. And it starts when someone has a really beautiful idea. So they look at it with people, for example, who are musicians. And kids who are being taught music and they don't really care they just repeat their scales or whatever, and they improve at a certain rate. And then there are the kids who hear something perfect. Either they've heard a recording, or somebody playing, or in their own heads they hear it perfectly, and they try to do it. And it's like a four year old with a violin trying to do that. It's impossible. And they get really intensely gripped around it. And there's a certain facial expression that you see with people, and it's not fun. It's like this intensity. And you may even make the same sounds.

And we see our one year old making these, trying to walk and manipulate things. And it's like, "Argh." And they try really hard to create that platonic beauty, that perfection. And they always fall short. But then they're like, and here's how, and here's how I'm going to do it again. And they learn more in six minutes of practice than other kids learn in a month.

Rowan Mangan: Wow.

Martha Beck: So in a way, I mean, if you're a perfectionist and this is a problem for you, if you're Ro's kind of perfectionist, I'm just like a complete slut. If you like it, it's good enough for me. But maybe use that as a real strength. I mean, if you can get yourself past the paralysis of the perfection, it can drive you to that deep practice that'll make you great. But getting started is the problem.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: Well getting started, but also finishing. We had this conversation about this that sort of took us in the direction of, huh, beginnings and endings are where perfectionism is, because you can't begin because the minute you put pen to paper the perfection dissolves, and, or you put pen to paper, but you can always make it better, make it better, make it better until you put the final full stop and send it. And this is really interesting to us at the moment, because we have this resolution, shall I say, a New Year resolution.
- Martha Beck: It's for the beginning of the year.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes. And our resolution is about, in a way, is trying to address this tendency of not being able to start, or finish, or both.
- Martha Beck: Basically we just lie around thinking, wouldn't it be awesome. Yeah. But what if people didn't like it.
- Rowan Mangan: It'd be so beautiful.
- Martha Beck: We'd just lie there. So tell them about our resolution.
- Rowan Mangan: Our resolution comes from a very smart man by the name of Seth Godin, who talks about shipping the work.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: You've got to ship the work. And he talked about this in his latest book, which I'm just blanking on.
- Martha Beck: Google it right now while you're making the podcast. Yeah. Seth Godin is a genius, and he's so good at making things brief, simple and punchy, that help you sort of get yourself in the zone of productivity. Creativity. I hate that word productivity. Ah. Yuck. That's the voice of the oppressor right there, but creativity can be joyous and fun. And perfectionism is its major enemy.
- Rowan Mangan: The Practice is the name-
- Martha Beck: The Practice.
- Rowan Mangan: ... of Seth Godin's book. And I would just like to say-
- Martha Beck: Yes.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: ... more perfectionist types than me might have insisted on stopping the recording while I got this information, out of fear that not knowing it immediately ruined this episode of the podcast. No?
- Martha Beck: No.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't care.
- Martha Beck: You're going to get to my level where you just do whatever crap comes to your face. And then for decades afterward you experience mortifying waves of shame that make you want to die.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God.
- Martha Beck: But at least it's out there. I mean, so much of what I've written is, to me, just absolute drek. I mean, it's just horrible. Some of it, I can't say the ones, but there's a book in particular that didn't actually get edited. They kind of published my rough draft without... I mean, I sent them a rough draft and they sent me a finished book. I didn't have things in it like notes to my editor. And yet you say you liked that book.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I loved it.
- Martha Beck: Oh, my God. It's so...
- Rowan Mangan: Everyone go read all of Martha's back catalog now-
- Martha Beck: Oh, no, no, no, no, no. Don't.
- Rowan Mangan: And figure out which book it is.
- Martha Beck: I've never written a book. Ignore it. Pretend I never said anything. Okay. So here we are right in the place that people get to. Right? And so in Asia there's a proverb that says, beginning is half the task. Getting past that initial thing of how can I make this into something that either won't offend other people, will please them and get me praised, and, or will fit the beautiful ideal I have in my head. I always say, when I'm writing, getting from nothing on the page to something on the page is 90% of the work.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And it can be absolute crap. Getting from something on the page to something better is another 9%. And for me, 1% is just pressing send, because I'm so sick of it. But you have trouble at the end. You're always polishing.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And we were reading Marie Forleo's work, and one of the things that she says, that was also quite illuminating on this topic, is she talks about start before you're ready. From a sort of entrepreneurial standpoint, people with creative ideas who want to create businesses, and they're waiting to be ready.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: And so I love that. Just start before you're ready. Just start, hit the ground running, go. And then what you were saying was, start before you're ready and finish before you feel done, right?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I audited a class by a famous watercolor artist once, and he is really, really successful. Being a working artist today and making a lot of money is not easy. He did these incredible watercolors.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Question.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Why is it nerdy, and special, and aren't you wonderful if you audit a class, but you are an evil demon if you audit someone's taxes?
- Martha Beck: Hmm. I think actually I probably was perceived as an evil demon auditing that class.
- Rowan Mangan: Good. Please go on with your story.
- Martha Beck: Moving forward then. "You little bastard. Why don't you just get out of my life?" That's what the teacher would shout every time I came into audit. But watercolor is a cruel task mistress.
- Rowan Mangan: No.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. You put the paint on the page and you wait half an hour to see what it's going to do. And if you over paint it by one stroke you've ruined the whole thing and you cannot erase. So he used to say over and over again, "Stop before you're finished. Stop before you're finished." So start before you're ready, and stop before you're finished, this is our resolution-
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: ... so that we can ship the work.
- Rowan Mangan: And ship the work, ship the work.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: I mean, we should sort of point out what Seth Godin means by ship the work. Not in literal ships, always.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, I mean, it depends how fancy you are. But no, he's just talking about what you can make. It's another version of the perfectionism. You can make something amazing and it's in your drawer, what good is it to the world? So it's about sharing what you've made-
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: ... essentially.
- Martha Beck: It's not actually finished until it's shared.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. Which is very powerful, because I think for me, what is really liberating about this as a kind of theme for us for the year, Marty, is that, usually what happens is I have my focus on the quality of what I'm making. And so all the stories I tell myself about what I'm doing and everything is built around the quality of the thing. Whereas if what my priority is, is, have I shipped it, and I give myself my internal dopamine kind of accolades for shipping it, it's weird. I'm actually susceptible to just being like, "Go me. Well done."
- Martha Beck: It's interesting. I think people who are perfectionistic will have more success with this because one of the things I've seen is people coming and saying, "You know, I've never really read a book, but I wrote this 150,000 word novel about my first romance, and it just flowed. It just wrote itself." And I always go, "Oh my God, this must be inspired." And then I read it and it's like, oh yes, this is like something that just flowed out of you, potentially in the little room. It's not good. So if you have a tendency to just throw stuff out there and expect it to be, I don't know, is this too harsh?
- Rowan Mangan: No, I think it's fine. But I do think, I know a little bit about our listenership, and I think we've got a few perfectionists on board.
- Martha Beck: I think we've got a few perfectionists.
- Rowan Mangan: The Bewildered ship.
- Martha Beck: So if you have a little perfectionism in you, then actually sending out the work is kind of on two counts, a kind of moral imperative.
- Rowan Mangan: Mm.





# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: Because if you don't send it you're robbing the world of the gift that you were meant to give.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And you're not respecting the work you've done if it doesn't match the ideal. You're basically dissing it and saying it's not good enough.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. What do you think about this idea, Marty? If you have something beautiful that you've made that should be for the world. We're not saying send your journal, your private diary out to the entire-
- Martha Beck: I have, not once, but twice published extensive sections of my journal.
- Rowan Mangan: So that aside, if you've made something that the world needs, then there's a type of hubris, a type of arrogance in refusing to share it, because we all know it's a vulnerable thing to do. One of the nastiest vulnerable things to do. And so sometimes, I think, to avoid that terrifying sense of vulnerability, we just keep it locked in. And I put to you that that is selfish.
- Martha Beck: Selfish.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: Rude and selfish.
- Rowan Mangan: Absolutely.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I agree. And that means that when you send your imperfection out into the world, what you're doing is you're basically bowing. It's a humility in the face of your limited potential to create, but your effort. You want to do it so you're giving yourself respect, and then you're allowing other people to see this thing that you don't think is perfect. It reminds me of, I don't know if I actually heard Glennon Doyle say this, or if I just saw her somewhere on a speech or something, but she said for the longest time she wrote this blog and it was getting increasingly popular. And she said, "I didn't feel like a writer. All I would do is I vowed that I would press send every day. Just press send." And she was very, very, she's extremely vulnerable to perfectionism, but by just pressing send she has reached the heights of everything.





# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: It's almost like reframing. The ego wants to think, because we are so self-centered, right? I've made this thing, it's all about me. I'm being judged when I send it out there. But if we reframe the shipping, the giving of it to other people as service, because if you've written something that can help people, if you haven't well, keep it, whatever it doesn't matter.
- Martha Beck: Or put it out there and let them decide.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, that's true.
- Martha Beck: I mean, so much of what you did. You did an article for publication that went absolutely nuts. People loved it. It was in Maria Shriver's Sunday Paper. And you told me, as you were working on it, this is not going to help anyone. And the thing went nuts. It was so helpful. But you'd overthought it in your little platonic theory of forms way until it couldn't help anybody. But you did ship the work. You shipped the work, and then you got thousands of people going, "Oh, thank you so much. I needed that."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And then if you get negative feedback, worst case scenario, I've had that happen, too. It's like being punched in the face by your own baby. And I know because it's happened. You know what? That's a type of humility too, because it makes you say, okay, I accept this feedback is accurate and I am going to do better in the future.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And you become a much humbler person as you do that. I mean, messing up in public is basically a short trip to letting go of your ego.
- Rowan Mangan: Mm. Yeah. It's spiritual growth, really?
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Like the first time I ever spoke, I was in high school and I had this terrible fear of public speaking. And I had a crush on a guy on the debate team. So I went to a debate tournament in impromptu speaking. Ended up in a room with a judge. I was supposed to give a speech, impromptu, passed out cold. Boom, on the ground. Woke up. The dude was looking down at me going, "Do you want to just leave?" And I was like, "No, I'm going to finish my speech." So I got up, finished the speech, went out, and lost horrendously. But never... It's funny, I still have a fear of public speaking, I just don't care.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Rowan Mangan: Huh.

Martha Beck: That reminds me. I wrote an article once for Oprah Magazine where it was all about, I'm still a perfectionist, but now I don't care.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, yeah.

Martha Beck: That's a way to ship the work.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, it is. And it's also like, you can be that and other things.

Martha Beck: What? Say more.

Rowan Mangan: Well, I'm just thinking through what you just said, like, okay, I'm a perfectionist, but it's not the only thing I am. I'm also a professional. I will send my work by my deadlines, and I can make that a priority above my perfectionism.

Martha Beck: Well, that's interesting, because it is very professional to show up when you don't feel ready, and let something go before you feel it's finished.

Rowan Mangan: That's true. Yeah.

Martha Beck: Work as hard as you can on it, but that beginning paralysis and ending paralysis, take it as a task in itself to just get through those two phases.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Because it seems to me that if you want to make something beautiful or helpful in the world, then there's a great generosity to sharing it. And it's a contribution. It's like, if your choice is, music or not music.

Martha Beck: Right.

Rowan Mangan: I prefer music.

Martha Beck: I prefer music as well.

Rowan Mangan: Art not art. I prefer art to not art.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: I love it.

Martha Beck: I do too. Sometimes when I'm-



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Rowan Mangan: Except under paintings. Oh, they're terrible.

Martha Beck: You know what? When I was teaching all these students how to draw realistically, when I was a teaching fellow at Harvard.

Rowan Mangan: Drink.

Martha Beck: Drink for Harvard. I would get so critical that I would go to an exhibit of the French Impressionists and I'd go, "oh, Renoir, learn your persp... Oh my God. You're making that mistake?"

Rowan Mangan: You are insufferable. Do you know that?

Martha Beck: I am. And it would turn out if you look at the under painting, he'd gone over it like 400 times trying to get it right. Oh my God. Do I know that feeling.

Rowan Mangan: Only to be insulted by some uppity little Harvard brat.

Martha Beck: Little, yeah. I bet if he had a stick and he could have just waved it at me, and said, "Get out of my life."

Rowan Mangan: Get out of my life.

Martha Beck: But he's dead now so it's okay.

Rowan Mangan: Thank God. I just Googled it, and I can confirm Renoir is dead.

Martha Beck: Okay. Good.

Rowan Mangan: Okay.

Martha Beck: Anyway, I love the point you just made, because it was a big aha for me.

Rowan Mangan: Say it.

Martha Beck: And that is that the opposite of perfectionism is not sloppiness. The opposite of perfectionism is generosity.

Rowan Mangan: Mm. Hmm.

Martha Beck: I had never thought about it that way.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. It's like it's abundance mindset stuff, isn't it?



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: Yeah, because we all have some kind of beauty or wisdom that's flowing through us and it comes into our attention and we think, huh, maybe I should share that. And then the perfectionist paralysis says, no, don't even think about sharing it.
- Rowan Mangan: Don't think about sharing it because you yourself will be judged. And so if we can accept the spiritual growth that says, yes, I very well could be judged for this, but it's actually not about me it's about the work, and get over that kind of ego monkey puzzle.
- Martha Beck: Remember when we did that writing course, and I think my absolute favorite writing exercise that we gave people, and it brought out such amazing stuff in people as they wrote. We said, "Imagine the worst thing in your life, the worst experience in your life as a cave that you got stuck in at one point, but then you found your way out. And as you're leaving the cave, somebody's coming toward you who's about to go into that same experience, whether, I don't know, a breakup, an illness, bankruptcy, whatever it is. And they're about to go into it and you're coming out of it back into the light, and you can write them a one page letter to help them get through it. Now go."
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and how to get out, because you now know how to get out.
- Martha Beck: My God, the stuff people turned out. I mean, they went past writing talent and they got to this rawness, and generosity of spirit. Just love, and compassion, and empathy.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: And they sent in these pieces, thousands of them that were just shining. And I mean, if that's the opposite of perfectionism-
- Rowan Mangan: Bring it.
- Martha Beck: ... Yeah. Bring it on. And if other people are better, if they out compete you, if they find flaws in your work. Every author has had the experience. Anne Lamott said this of her editor coming to work on her manuscript, and they worked on it together, and she said, "And then I saw her one morning in the bathroom brushing her long angry teeth." And I was like, yeah, that's how it feels when someone's editing your book. But let the humility come to save you there, too. Be generous enough to say your ideas might be better than mine, let's give it a try. Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Let's do it, Marty.
- Martha Beck: All right.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Rowan Mangan: And let's 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, [themarhabeck](#). 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.