



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

## Episode #36: Making the Right Choice

*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] Hi, I'm Martha Beck!
- Rowan Mangan: And I'm Rowan Mangan and this is another episode of Bewildered, the podcast for people trying to figure it out.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, so Rowie...
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: On this August occasion, what is it you are trying to figure out in your life?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, Marty, so many things. Ultimately, it's always child rearing for me at this moment in my life.
- Martha Beck: It's like for me too, because I am rearing myself as a 50 something year old child.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm just rearing up all the time on my hind legs.
- Martha Beck: You just rearing up the child.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm rearing in a childish way. Like I go, "ho, ho, ho," as I rear up.
- Martha Beck: It prepares them for life because when people rear up them in future life, the baby will just know to go into a very tiny ball and develop trauma responses.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So politeness markers, man. They're hard to teach.
- Martha Beck: Politeness markers? Is that like magic markers?



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: Yes, very much so. Except they're invisible, except to your child who suddenly magically will say, please and thank you, which is... Well, I won't bore you with the long articles I've been reading.
- Martha Beck: Too late! Haha.
- Rowan Mangan: So we were heading that way. All right. So anyway, here's what happened. Our daughter, Lila, who's fast approaching the two years old mark, she has an irrepressible spirit and I love this about her.
- Martha Beck: God knows I've tried to repress it, not working.
- Rowan Mangan: Me too constantly. And there's just so many moments where I don't know, should I repress the spirit for the sake of culture, or should I let the nature flow? I mean, maybe we should listen to our own podcast, but this is what happened and it makes me really happy. There's not really a point. I'm just going to tell the story. So Lila wanted to go outside. At the back door, she was at the back door and she was saying, "Outside, outside, outside." And then I looked over at her and I said, "What's the magic word?" Because this is what you're supposed to do, and she turned around to me and she flung her little chubby hands up into the air and said, "Lila." The magic word was Lila. Isn't that wonderful?
- Martha Beck: Oh, that's very sweet.
- Rowan Mangan: It's just wonderful.
- Martha Beck: It's really cute.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So then that night, we were trying to figure out as parents what part of her diet might be exacerbating her eczema because our lives are so cool, just so cool and interesting.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. I mean we think about eczema endlessly. You would wish to be there.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, my gosh. People are going to be jealous. I'm sorry to make you jealous about this. But anyway, so this is just a sort of moment of parenting with Martha Beck. Co-parenting with Martha Beck, a radio series.
- Martha Beck: I am asleep already.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: So, Karen and I were both quite chatty about this. Is it the dairy? Or is it the peanut butter? Those are two things that we've increased recently alongside the eczema getting worse. Da, da, da, could it be this? Could it be that? Meanwhile, Marty is staring at her phone very intently, and we had sort of come to a decision and I said, "Marty."
- Martha Beck: Yes?
- Rowan Mangan: And there was no...
- Martha Beck: That's the magic word.
- Rowan Mangan: And I said, "Did you hear what we were talking about?" And without looking up from her phone, this is what Marty said. "I will not be giving her peanut butter, but I will be sending you a photo of one of the rarest animals on earth." And that is what it's like to co-parent with Martha Beck.
- Martha Beck: It's a melanistic fox. I had to show you a picture of a melanistic fox. Think about if she could go her whole life covered with eczema and not knowing about the melanistic fox. And now I'm doing two good deeds, refraining from the peanut butter and showing the... Everybody go Google melanistic fox. You will not regret it.
- Rowan Mangan: Martha was like if you're going to talk about that, I really need to make sure I tell them what the name of it, because they're going to be really interested and I have to let them Google it.
- Martha Beck: It's true. And by the way, the no peanut butter pact took a lot because when she does say, "Please," oh my gosh, I'm just so manipulable. She can go, "Peanut butter." And I'll be like, "No, it's bad for you." And then she's like, "Please, peanut butter. Please, By." She calls me By for reasons we don't know. And I'm like, how do you refrain? How do you just say, "No, no. And I won't even show you a melanistic fox. Be gone."
- Rowan Mangan: They don't teach you what to do when they are nice to you and polite to you about something they can't have. And that, it's like a flaw in the teaching.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Please, explosives, please.
- Martha Beck: Please, crystal meth, By.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: All right. For goodness sake, Marty, tell me what you're trying to figure out. And if it is melanistic foxes, I tell you what, we'll be having words.
- Martha Beck: I wish, I wish no, it is ordinary squirrels.
- Rowan Mangan: Of course it is.
- Martha Beck: Ordinary squirrels. So we've had this battle going with my bird feeder because as you know, squirrels love bird feeders and they will eat everything, and people don't like that. So they sell squirrel proof bird feeders, which is a hilarious squirrel joke. There is no such thing. I thought that some of them were getting a little uppity and they also look different from each other. I thought, what is happening?
- Rowan Mangan: Some sort of feud.
- Martha Beck: Yes. So I just looked it up. Oh, I saw two of them sitting together and I found out there are gray squirrels, which are indigenous to this area and they're sort of mellow. And then there are red squirrels and they're tiny and they come from England. They're colonists. We're all colonists, but the red squirrels are colonists. The gray squirrels, not so much. And here's the deal, gray squirrels are ordinary humans. No, they're not humans, they're ordinary beings. But according to my Googling, red squirrels are, and I quote, "Six ounces of pure evil." They are.
- Rowan Mangan: Do you know what's interesting about this?
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: So the red squirrels came from England and there're several ounces, no one knows what that means, but whatever. There's some sort of random measurement of pure evil, so that's the British red squirrels here. But do you know what else I happened to know?
- Martha Beck: What?
- Rowan Mangan: The gray squirrels, they went to England and guess what they are? They are the evil ones over there. Over there, the red squirrels are all Beatrix Potter and nice.
- Martha Beck: It must be the sea voyage. It must turn them evil.
- Rowan Mangan: Maybe it's like just that colonial instinct like all those ones that decide.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: No, I actually, it just pinged for me because I was looking at what to do about these six ounces of pure evil. It's alarming to go out there and confront six ounces of pure evil or a hundred grams or 900 kilos or whatever it is. Anyway, I looked it up online, how do you get the red squirrels to stop scaring you and eating things? There's a whole thing called and I love this phrase, humane squirrel exclusion.
- I know right. You exclude them but humanely. It's like, we don't like you here, but other people like you. It kind of goes against everything that we stand for in terms of trying to include all these, the rainbow nation. Let's include everybody. No, you exclude red squirrels. And what if gray squirrels arrived in England? Like, "We're here. The Yankees are here." And the Brits are like, "We're angry because you broke off from us and then didn't help us in World War II until it was a very, very last minute thing. We'll exclude you." And the gray squirrels were like, "Well, that just cuts it. I came over here. Now, I hate you and I will be evil and over it." Here, the red squirrels arrived on ships and were like, "That's not a gray squirrel." And they said, "Well, bloody hell. We're going to hate you forever." And they became angry because they were excluded here. It's all because of exclusion. It makes them evil.
- Rowan Mangan: Maybe they just weren't doing it humanely enough.
- Martha Beck: Oh, that's true. Did they know that they weren't supposed to be humane? They're not human. How could they be humane?
- Rowan Mangan: I think you can be humane without necessarily being human.
- Martha Beck: No, you have to be squirrel.
- Rowan Mangan: Squirrel.
- Martha Beck: Human, humane. Squirrel, squirrel. That's a very Australian way of pronouncing it, but that sounds classy to me. So it's very squirrel. We're going to have squirrel exclusion.
- Rowan Mangan: None of the squirrels ever went to Australia by the way. And if they did, we killed them.
- Martha Beck: They died.
- Rowan Mangan: But not humanely.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: But they got killed by spiders, which who now wear their pelts because that's the size spiders are in Australia, which there's another, I do have to say there's one other thing that happened while I was out trying to exclude the squirrels. I noticed that we have this screen porch like where you can sit.
- Rowan Mangan: You just notice that? We've been living here for four years.
- Martha Beck: I actually did just notice it. But I went into it to get more bird seed, and I realized that there was a lot of spider activity in there.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, yeah.
- Martha Beck: Yeah, little webs in all the corners. And I thought, okay, I'll just get a broom and be done with this. So I went around and I thought it was just cobwebs, right? No, it was inhabited. There was-
- Rowan Mangan: What did you think?
- Martha Beck: I just thought they make a web. They're like, well, that looks crappy. I'm going off to make another web somewhere else.
- Rowan Mangan: So you were judging their webs even as you were excluding them not humanely?
- Martha Beck: I wasn't being spider. Spider, it's like humane only spider. Anyway, I got my broom. I started brushing the cobwebs and I noticed that they were like, ugh, this is so gross, there was egg sacks in the cobwebs. Like they were planning a whole...
- Rowan Mangan: Marty, that is the miracle of life. Don't insult it. That is beautiful.
- Martha Beck: And when it's a spider, somehow, it's just a lot less beautiful. So I am quite creeped out by spiders. So I was like, "Okay, I'm going to take these. I'm going to put all these webs and eggs and stuff in the bushes. I'm not going to destroy them. I'm going to take them on my broom and go put them in the bushes." So I went at this, the biggest web and I was doing this and it was like, ugh, little spiders running around. And then I came to the biggest one, and I started poking at it with the broom. I know right. And I got the cobwebs and exposed the spider and I took the cobweb away and then I'm creeped out. But then I looked at the spider and I swear to God, she looked depressed, like dispirited. That was the word that came into my mind. I saw this spider watching me take her web away, and I felt that she was really deeply dispirited.
- Rowan Mangan: She was like, "I am going to have to lay so many more eggs."



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: I know. So now I'm freaked out. I got spider eggs on my broom. There's a large hairy spider looking at me in a dispirited way, and I am feeling empathy for her, and at the same time, revulsion and I was in such a high state of anxiety.
- Rowan Mangan: And at that moment...
- Martha Beck: No kidding, the fire alarm went off in our house.
- Rowan Mangan: That's when the smoke detector went off. And can I pick up the story from my...
- Martha Beck: Yes.
- Rowan Mangan: So then I'm inside the house. I'm unaware of the whole tragic spider...
- Martha Beck: Dispirited.
- Rowan Mangan: The dispirited spider debacle that has been going on with Marty. I'm blissfully ignorant, but then the fire alarm, the smoke alarm goes off. And the first thing I'm like is we need a broom. We just need a broom. We just need to turn it off. There's no fire. It's fine. Karen, of course, was running around the house, looking for the fire. I was looking for the broom. So I look for the broom. I look for the broom and then Marty says, "I have the broom." And I'm like, "Great, can I have it?" Because it's really loud.
- Martha Beck: It was my only line of defense against that massive spider, and you came and took it.
- Rowan Mangan: So she comes over to me. And as I'm about to grab this, and remember I am from Australia, like it's not spiders mean something over there, okay. And I'm just about to save the day with the broom with the smoke detector. And Marty says, "Oh, by the way, there might be a few spiders on that broom." Sorry.
- Martha Beck: I just put some spiders and some spider eggs on there. So enjoy using it as an extension of your own arm.
- Rowan Mangan: Marty thinks her own anxiety about the spider incident is what set off the smoke detector by the way.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, I hit that saying, "Weet, weet, weet." That's exactly what I was feeling inside and then my environment reflected that. And Karen was running around, "Fire, fire." Then Ro pokes the fire alarm, the smoke alarm with the broom and it stops. And Karen like goes from full Karen around the house, like a pin ball. "Ring, run, fire, fire." Suddenly she just stopped, calmed by the lack of the distressing sound. She's the idea that there could be a fire was gone as soon as the ear trigger was gone, and that leads me to my Karenism.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, yeah. We've got a Karenism this week.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. This is so funny. So, Ro got a horrible about of chronic fatigue syndrome. I think we've mentioned this and she had COVID and it was way worse than that.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I don't think we did mention it, but there was an episode where I didn't smile or laugh and it turned out later that it was like, all right, because...
- Martha Beck: Chronic fatigue.
- Rowan Mangan: ... I wasn't well.
- Martha Beck: It was called, "Cave Early" and she was dragging herself to her chair and saying to the microphone, "Don't ever keep going when you're tired," like a dispirited spider.
- Rowan Mangan: Podcaster. Podcast myself.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, it was post COVID. It was much worse and it was quite scary, and she really can't move much at all. It's like no oxygen is getting to the cells. It's a very scary condition. So she came out of it later than-
- Rowan Mangan: Especially when there's like fires and spiders around.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. So this was after like five days of being laid low and she finally made it to the dinner table and we're all sitting there. Adam is there. Lila's there. It's a very thing for us dinner, and Ro just said, "Well, I'm just so grateful to be sitting up. And I just want you to know that when I could do absolutely nothing, the only thing that matters to me really are the people around this table. And I just want to say how much I love you and how grateful I am for you taking care of me when I was sick and..."
- Rowan Mangan: I was speaking from my soul.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: From her soul. And Karen looks at her in an equally intense way and says in the same tone, "A Dane won the Tour de France."

Rowan Mangan: The thing about Karen's pivots is that she doesn't adjust because when you completely change the subject, you need to change your tone of voice.

Martha Beck: Yeah, or at least-

Rowan Mangan: Just demonstrate that.

Martha Beck: Huh?

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, or like something. But what she does is she completely changes the subject, but she uses the continuation of the tone of voice. So it's always very baffled.

Martha Beck: It's very baffling.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: But she was right. As she would say, if she was here, she would probably say, "Well, a Dane..."

Martha Beck: "A Dane won the Tour de France."

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: And I guess that's what's most important to her in the world.

Rowan Mangan: We'll be right back with more Bewildered. I have a favor to ask. You might not know this, but ratings and reviews are like gold in the podcasting universe. They get podcasts in front of more faces, more eyes, more ears, all the bits that you could have a podcast in front of, that's what they do. So it would help us enormously if you would consider going over to your favorite podcasting app, especially if it's Apple and giving us a few stars, maybe even five, maybe even six. If you can find a way to hack the system, I wouldn't complain, and a review would be also be wonderful. We read them all and love them. So thank you very much in advance. Let's just go out there and Bewildered the world. Mwah.

Marty, I think that we haven't at all gone on for a long time about our lives.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: No, no, no. I think...

Rowan Mangan: Not at all.

Martha Beck: ... we need hours more. Honest to goodness, let's get to the topic.

Rowan Mangan: All right. We've got a BeWild files today because we are just more and more excited to hear from you all, all the time. So please look in the show notes if you want to know how to contribute to BeWild files. Tell us what you are trying to figure out. And today's wonderful listener is Stevie from Galway. Can I just say Stevie... Christmas season, 2003, busking on shop street in the freezing cold. It was a great time, and I love the Roisin Dubh. It's my favorite pub in Ireland.

Martha Beck: Just to clarify, Ro was the one busking, not Stevie.

Rowan Mangan: Stevie was there.

Martha Beck: Stevie was there in spirit.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. She was probably the one across the way like competing for my...

Martha Beck: Fighting with a huge gray squirrel somewhere in upper Ireland.

Rowan Mangan: Upper Ireland. She's in like Lefton Island.

Martha Beck: In the hills.

Rowan Mangan: All right, Stevie, what are you trying to figure out? Let's hear it.

Stevie: Hi, Rowan and Martha. So what I'm trying to figure out is how to move past decision paralysis. I'm kind of overwhelmed by the amount of opportunities or options in front of me. Even with career change, I've been out of work for a little while, and I'm really feeling the pressure to make the right choice at this stage for financial reasons and other reasons. I've tried to listen to my intuition, but I just feel pulled in so many different directions, and it's so noisy. Meanwhile, I'm not doing anything, which is crazy. Please help.

Rowan Mangan: I love you, Stevie.

Martha Beck: Stevie. We feel you so much.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Isn't it funny? It is so noisy when you're being pulled. I feel like that's such a great way of putting it. It's so noisy to be pulled and pulled. And I just want to say right off the bat, I bet you are not doing nothing while you said you're doing nothing, which is crazy and I bet you are not. I just think that maybe your inculturated brain thinks, but I don't want to get ahead of it. So we'll press on. We'll get there.
- Martha Beck: It's interesting that one of the ways that English gets sort of parochialize is that when you say you're not doing nothing, double negative. When you say I'm not doing nothing, it's kind of a hillbilly way of saying you really are doing nothing. So we think you are doing something. We don't believe that you are doing nothing.
- Rowan Mangan: You're not doing nothing.
- Martha Beck: You're not doing nothing.
- Rowan Mangan: Have some moon shine.
- Martha Beck: I think I heard that on the Soprano Story. You're not doing nothing.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, I'm in the wrong subculture then.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. But I think like the hillbilly culture and the mafia culture share so much, such a rich cultural...
- Rowan Mangan: Overlap.
- Martha Beck: Overlay.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. We should talk about that for a really long time.
- Martha Beck: Yeah I think we should. Okay, so what does culture say about Stevie's question?
- Rowan Mangan: About making the right choice. I think the culture very strongly believes that this is something that you must do, and this is something that you must not mess up. Do you agree with this, Marty?
- Martha Beck: I do, and it's so stupid. How do we even know? How can you possibly know what the right choice is going to be ahead of time? It's like, it's a very poor... There's no way to know. I'm getting ahead of myself.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: It's almost like what you're supposed to do with the culture is just be like, whatever you do, be really, really sure and maybe why Stevie is breaking the cultural covenant or whatever is that she's saying, "I don't know. I'm not sure."
- Martha Beck: Ah, yeah. And that right there is a difficulty for people. So many clients I've said, "Okay, you're not doing nothing."
- Rowan Mangan: You're not doing nothing.
- Martha Beck: You're not doing nothing. You're in a place of decision or you're in a place where you don't have enough information or whatever it is. So it's fine to not know and not make a choice, but you have to have a cultural cover story because everyone wants you to tell them what the decision is and make sure it's right.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. The cultural cover story is a very powerful little incantation.
- Martha Beck: And we genuinely believe as a culture that there is a right solution, a right decision to be made in any situation.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Stevie also sent us a little email with her recorded question. She was sort of saying, what if I'm like, I want to do this kind of biology and then I want to do architecture and this... And she pointed out like this is a very privileged position to be in for sure, but it doesn't make it less scary. And if you are operating under the idea that I will have wasted my life if I get this wrong and there's no... You have to get it right, but there's no structure in which you can understand what's right or wrong.
- Martha Beck: So you are told, okay, there is a right answer and you have to get it right, and you have to get it right ahead of time. And haha, nobody knows what that is, but you have to prove to everyone that you've done it.
- Rowan Mangan: And I think what people default to, honestly, I don't know if this is true, but I think in that situation, what you default to is well, I can count money. I can't actually count right or wrong, but I can count money.
- Martha Beck: Or joy and misery. And she actually said, "I'm really conflicted about my choices because of money." And that is we talk about it almost every time because it is the way to know it's a right choice. If you want people to leave you alone, you say I'm making money here.
- Rowan Mangan: Money is the culture's version of points.
- Martha Beck: Yeah.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Rowan Mangan: And if you're amassing points, then you're winning.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. And if you have a ton of points when you die, you have won life. And it doesn't matter if you're miserable and that you don't explore anything, I'm so wanting to get to come to your senses. It's hard for me to even slow down and talk about the way the culture goes at this, because it just seems so wrong. The assumptions are that the decision, it has to be right, it has to be logical. If you're not doing it, you're wasting your life and waiting to make a decision is also wasting your life. What? That is just a recipe for a panic attack.
- Rowan Mangan: Also, doing something with your life is...that's a job. That's part of your life, but that's not the actual substance of your life. Right.
- Martha Beck: It's funny, because when you said doing something with your life, I wasn't thinking of a job. When you said doing something with your life, I was thinking of like frolicking through the woods and stuff.
- Rowan Mangan: Right. But that's what I'm saying is that for Stevie and the way she set it up, it was about looking at different career options.
- Martha Beck: I know.
- Rowan Mangan: And yeah, well...
- Martha Beck: The whole thing is frankly so far removed from the way I think now. From the way I've ever thought really that it's describing the culture's messages. It's almost unbelievable to me. It feels so absurd. It is observably absurd. It's logically absurd. It's absurd from every angle. And yet people believe it, people are told they have to do it, and they get punished and shamed for not doing it the culture's way.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I mean it's interesting because I don't have too much of this kind of anxiety around decisions anymore and the sort of paralysis feeling that Stevie described. But I know that I did use to have it a lot more when I was younger. I remember when I would, actually, I was living in Ireland. I was in my early 20s and I had a chronic fatigue flare up and I'd been waitressing and I couldn't waitress anymore. And I didn't know, I'd sort of had this idea that I was moving to Ireland, hang out with Stevie, was going to be the two of us on shop street at Christmas busking with this girl, and I called my mom.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

I went to internet cafe call shop place where you could make international calls, and I called her and I was like, I just don't know how to make the decision. And one of the wisest things my wonderful mother has ever said to me is she said, "Oh, don't worry, decisions make themselves." And I was like, "Holy effing F."

Martha Beck: That's a real, that's a mic drop there.

Rowan Mangan: Right. And because we take out the time as a variable, right? As soon as I made it not my responsibility to make the decision and took all that pressure off myself, it was much easier to see what was going on and what I needed to do. It's like what we were talking about when you make something artistic and you put it out in the world and you were telling me, stop making it about you. Let it be the thing. Like it be its own thing on its own journey, and it's sort of like the decision. That's how I felt when I was trying to decide whether to move back to Australia. The decision ultimately did make itself. She was absolutely right.

Martha Beck: I love that. And it reminds me of Byron Katie, one of my favorite spiritual teachers who once said, because she's always watching her mind at work, and she said, "I don't make up my mind. I wait and my mind makes itself up."

Rowan Mangan: Right. So, if you don't know yet what to do, what it means is the decision hasn't been made yet by whatever.

Martha Beck: By the force, by whatever it is. I love what you were just saying about making the object that you're putting into the world have its own personality. So like, I want to go into that a little bit. So I have this little company that I swear to God made itself about 20 years ago. I was working for other people. I was getting my little paycheck for going to their institute and then teach people. And then one of the students said, "Why are you doing it that way when you could have your own business?" And I was like, "Well, I don't know how to do business." And she said, "No, no, no." And she sketched something on napkin. And I was like, "Oh, that wants to be, that actually wants to be."

So I set it up, I bought a little website template for 150 bucks and it just wanted to be, and now it still just wants to be. I never did that on purpose. In fact, my whole life coaching gig, that was a complete - that did itself. So will the company make it enough for us? How about the company is just going to do. It has a mind of its own, and every now and then, it wants me to come feed it something or give it a little push, but it has its own personality. I can think of it as like a sweet little Lila type personality.

Rowan Mangan: Little toddler.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: Yeah. So if you write a book, if you put music out there, it's the song that wants to be sung.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Do you ever do that thing where you have to like forensically or retroactively look at why, look back at times where you're like, why won't stuff work out? And I know this isn't the same as making the right choice. And then when the thing pops up, you realize, "Oh, that's why I had all this time of being uncertain or still," as Stevie said, because at that time, the thing that you needed to do, the next thing wasn't available yet. There were other things going on in the whole machine that made it impossible for that to happen yet.
- Martha Beck: And there is a time to be indeterminate. There's a time to be Schrodinger's cat, right? Like everything... So I'm blanking on her name, Stevie. Stevie has Schrodinger's job.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Schrodinger's career.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. We don't know if it's right or wrong. It's in an indeterminate state. So we always think things have to be either right or wrong, but they can be indeterminate, and most things are for long, long periods.
- Rowan Mangan: We had an episode recently that we called "A Space for Dreaming," where we talked about this exact time. You should listen to it, Stevie. It was brilliant.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. The unformed state, the amorphous state, that kind of is the mystery. And that's where you can, in ancient traditions like European magical traditions, the threshold of a cottage or building was considered magical because it's a liminal - liminal actually means threshold. When you're on the threshold, you're not in or out, you're in between. So there are these liminal periods. Like when you're pregnant, like when you had your first baby, you're not a parent yet exactly. When you're three months pregnant, but you're not not a parent. When you're engaged, you're not married, but you're not not married, single and dating. So in a liminal space, you're nobody nowhere, and that's where they would do the magic. Because when you're nobody nowhere, you can become anything anywhere.
- Rowan Mangan: And I feel like maybe that exact sensation is instead of opening Stevie up, she's experiencing it as that very opportunity of that moment is what's shutting her down.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: Yeah, she's saying there's too much. I could be anything, anybody, anywhere. So I'm scared. I don't know what I need to be. So this is the time when people go groping for guidelines to tell them what they should be, should do. And this is where I really truly believe no one but you can make that determination and you may not get, it might have come up very quickly. The only thing you can do is start moving toward whatever feels like relief, like enjoyment, like peace. People try to make an exciting decision, but when you're in a liminal space, the shifts that take place are really, really small.
- So you actually feel them very deeply internally, and they're little tiny things. It's like the beginning of Eat, Pray, Love where she's on the floor trying to ask. She prays to know how do I get out of this marriage? I don't want to be married. Big, huge life decision, what should I do? And when she gets an answer, the answer is go back to bed, Liz. And that's how you get your guidance in those liminal places. They're tiny acts of self-compassion that put you in a place where you can stand being liminal and come out in the right arena to do something wonderful with your life. It's just this little subtle compassion.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So, we are going to take a break. And when we come back, we're going to talk about coming to your senses around making the right choice.
- So coming to our senses when it's about making the right choice. Man, this is a good question.
- Martha Beck: That's a very good question. It's a sticky wicket.
- Rowan Mangan: It is. It is. And I just keep thinking about the time factor like I'm wasting my life. I'm sitting still in all this noise about all the different possibilities. I just keep thinking like, what comes to me is life is long. This is a short period of time. What's the rush, Stevie? That's my initial sort of thing in terms of coming to our senses is just like, let's come to our senses around time. Let's just take a few deep breaths and go, all right. It's okay. There's no rush.
- Martha Beck: It's so funny because people sometimes tell me that I have done a lot of things and that I must be very busy and I am busy, but I'm watching videos of otters playing with rocks.
- Rowan Mangan: You're not doing nothing.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: I'm not doing nothing. But the thing is, most of my adult life has been spent lying down, trying to get enough energy to do something. I mean, I am not a robust or energetic human being and yet creeping along toward the things that made me happy. The things that I have put out in the world, it's like it's interesting because I think people feel that they're important to me. And if I had-
- Rowan Mangan: I do feel that.
- Martha Beck: If I'd been going to like a donut factory and making donuts all the time, it would be a worthy, worthy way to spend a life. But I would just look back and think, oh, donuts. And nobody would say, "Wow, you've made so many donuts." But because I did what I loved, even if it's very amorphous. Wow, you went to Africa and tried to help people heal the wilderness. That's hard to quantify too, but people tell me I've done stuff. I haven't done very much stuff. I wait most of the time. I just hang out going, what's the rush?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, good.
- Martha Beck: I used to think there was a rush. I was very anxious, but I couldn't move forward so I didn't rush.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. There's a lot of life that we spend where it doesn't look like a lot's going on, on the outside.
- Martha Beck: In fact, can I tell you? I'm so grateful I got to go to Asia and live there when I was fairly young for a little while, because if you said to someone in America, what have you done for the last 12 years? And they said nothing. You would say, "So what's wrong?" It would be a very embarrassing moment. But one of the most revered people in Buddhism in the last several decades is a woman who went into a cave and just sat there for 12 years, just getting still. And in Asia, she was like amazing.
- Rowan Mangan: Everyone was like, "You are not doing nothing." She's like, "I'm not doing nothing."
- Martha Beck: I'm not doing nothing for 12 years. I'm doing nothing. And people would tell that story like, can you believe how much she's made of her life? It's amazing. She's so advanced. And it's true. I know this because life has forced me to sit still. Nature has forced me to sit still. And what I've found is that until you're in the stillness of your soul or of your being, you actually can't feel or record anything that's happening to you. There's this quote by H.L. Mencken that I love, it goes, "We think about sex constantly, except during the act when our minds tend to wander."



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

And that's the thing, if you're not completely still in present, the experience you're having doesn't land. So to me, I think if I don't have any stillness, if I'm too actively trying to decide to do things, I'm missing my life. I'm wasting my life.

Rowan Mangan: That's a really good point.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Those still liminal times are it, man.

Rowan Mangan: We made a writing course a number of years ago. And we talked about like we invented this kind of process that we talked about in terms of the inhale and the exhale, but wasn't there like a thing that we did between the inhale and the exhale.

Martha Beck: There's a pause.

Rowan Mangan: The pause, yeah and there was something... I can't remember. I'm so sorry, I can't remember exactly how we did it, but there was something for them to do between the stage of writing we called the inhale and the stage of writing, we called the exhale, which is that liminal moment, right?

Martha Beck: Yeah.

Rowan Mangan: And if we just spread out the timeline a bit of life, then what Stevie's doing is just pausing between an inhale and an exhale.

Martha Beck: Yeah, and it's in that pause. I mean, what to do in that moment, it's a moment of no self. So if you're breathing, if you're meditating and breath in and you breathe it out, and if you're just tracking your breath, breathing in, breathing out, and then it stops sometimes. If you're not forcing, you'll just, you'll breathe out and then it just won't breathe in for like 30 seconds, a minute and you're watching your body and nature's taking care of it and it's not breathing at the moment.

And it's so still, and I don't remember what we told them to do at that moment. But I think this is just about, I'm not coming up with any good methodology on this, because it's actually not verbal. You go into a space that's no self, not verbal, not matter and yet everything is present and everything is brimming with life and brimming with possibility, and it's a moment of absolute awe, and nothing, you're not even breathing. And that's when you finally get to this experience that you've kind of been looking for your whole life. You didn't even know you were looking until you had it.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, my God.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: And maybe that's what the universe is trying to give to Stevie.

Rowan Mangan: I believe it is, and I just came up with the best cultural cover story.

Martha Beck: Oh, good.

Rowan Mangan: Do you want to hear it?

Martha Beck: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Rowan Mangan: It's one word. Sabbatical.

Martha Beck: I was going to say... There was a time when... oh, you are triggering my memory girl because there was a time when I told everybody I was going to a writing, I was going to retreat. I was going to have my writing retreat, but it was a word like sabbatical. It was sequestered. I'm sequestered.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, nice.

Martha Beck: I'm sequestered. You're on the threshold. Stevie, say, when people ask, when your mother asks you, so what have you decided to do with your career? You just say, sequester.

Rowan Mangan: Can I also just add that if it was retreat, that you could make that into a way where you're not telling a lie at all, because if I said I'm retreating, what I would mean was I had a treat this morning and this afternoon. I'm going to retreat myself.

Martha Beck: I'm going to retreat. That's a good way to look at it.

Rowan Mangan: Retreat.

Martha Beck: Could I be unbearable and talk about the brain for just a second?

Rowan Mangan: All right. Whenever we make this sort of joke where she tries to be nerdy and I pretend not to be into it, I get a lot of letters going, "You must stop being so mean to Martha. We love it when she's a nerd." And I'm like, "So do I, you morons. I married her."

Martha Beck: So thank you for that. Thank you for marrying me.

Rowan Mangan: You're so welcome.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

- Martha Beck: It's very interesting. I just wrote this book proposal where I said, the first 30 years of my life, I was anxious all the time and I was. Like I wrote in the book, I was always, always, always anxious, I was. But then I went to a chapter summary that I was writing later and I said, I was bringing my... I was modulating my... I was bringing myself back into homeostasis, regulating my emotions, that's the word I was looking for, by doing things like drawing 10 hours a day, trying to teach myself to play the piano. I was horrible at it, but I would do it six hours a day. I would spend hours creeping up on a bird nest to see how close I could get. I mean, I spent enormous amounts of time doing things that lit up the right side of my brain.
- And yes, the whole brain is involved in everything, but there are differences between the hemispheres. And I wrote about how I've done this for hours and hours, so because I wasn't anxious when I was doing them. And then I realized that I had just written, I was always anxious. And that's how I'd remembered it. But you know why? The part that remembers it doesn't count the other because the right hemisphere doesn't measure time and doesn't speak in language. And it doesn't like offer you a prize and say, "This is what you won." It doesn't care about money. It doesn't even care about points. It cares about what you're doing in the moment. So I have this weird thing where huge sways of my life were stillness, not doing anything and...
- Rowan Mangan: They were invisible...
- Martha Beck: They had become invisible...
- Rowan Mangan: ... to your left hemisphere.
- Martha Beck: ... to my linguistic cultural mind where I was saying, no, I actually, every single moment, I was scared because I was only counting the things that scared me. But it's the stuff that I did when I was timeless and not thinking and in awe, those are the things that became my career.
- Rowan Mangan: I love this. I love this.
- Martha Beck: And actually, when we were talking about this, you said, yeah, I've had decision. I've had difficulty making choices about this and that. And I was like, I don't remember ever doing that ever. And I think it's just because I have my massive ADD and I had a very free childhood. So I just wander around doing whatever I damn well wanted, and realizing that you can't make a wrong choice because there are infinite choices all the time. And if you get the result you're looking for, you could count that as a success with the left side of your brain.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

But if you're not, if you're just constantly experimenting, that's the joy of experience in your life, and it teaches you things. And then people would come to me and say, "Ooh, teach me what you're doing." And I'd be like, "Oh, okay, do this writing course where you go to the place where you're not breathing and pause there." And then later, you write something. I don't know, it's made a career.

Rowan Mangan: And it's the stillness that makes the movement. And without the stillness, you won't have the movement. And Stevie, it is so sacred what you're doing.

Martha Beck: Yeah, still point of the turning world.

Rowan Mangan: And just know that all that noise that's around you said it's so noisy feeling all these possibilities, that's music and it doesn't actually touch you. It's just happening around you. It's not happening inside you.

Martha Beck: It really is. Anything that is noise, ignore it.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah.

Martha Beck: And what isn't noise, like what is present when the noise is gone? The stillness. That is when you are actually living your life. And that's what T.S. Eliot meant. He also said still and still moving. So you become the still point of the turning world, and then you move toward whatever it is that brings you joy but you're so you're still inside.

Rowan Mangan: So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness, the dancing.

Martha Beck: So when the dancer becomes the dance, there's motion and there's stillness complete, and that's when it becomes a holy act.

Rowan Mangan: I think what we're trying to say is that you are doing it right. Not just Stevie, but everyone.

Martha Beck: Everyone. Did you make a choice? Great.

Rowan Mangan: Beautiful.



# BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK  
AND ROWAN MANGAN

---

Martha Beck: You're winning. Can you not make a choice? Great. Dive in, be still be unformed. Did you make a choice and it turned out to look wrong? Wonderful, you're learning. My God, you probably would never have learned that in a million years if you hadn't made that perfect choice.

Rowan Mangan: There's no such thing as wrong in nature. That doesn't make sense.

Martha Beck: Well, there is, there are red squirrels.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, God.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Six ounces of pure evil.

Rowan Mangan: I was going to say those gray squirrels are so evil.

Martha Beck: And there are very disaffected spiders. I mean, it's not as if there's not the stuff to be done.

Rowan Mangan: I think that what we really need to take from this is just a maxim for life.

Martha Beck: Yeah. I don't know, something short and punchy like...

Rowan Mangan: 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. We're also on Instagram. Our handle is @bewilderedpodcast. You can follow us to get updates, hear funny snippets and outtakes, and chat with other fans of the show.

Bewildered is produced by Scott Forster with support from the brilliant team at MBI. And remember, if you're having fun, please rate and review and stay wild.