



BEWILDERED

WITH MARTHA BECK
AND ROWAN MANGAN

Episode #43: Vulnerability Hangovers

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: There should be one or two of those out there in the wild.
- Rowan Mangan: I think there are.
- Martha Beck: Don't you think?
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Well, tell them what you're trying to figure out then, Rowie.
- Rowan Mangan: Friends, this week I am trying to figure out politeness and as an-
- Martha Beck: You're Australian, do they have it there?
- Rowan Mangan: Well, we're learning. We're learning, but not from you, not from Americans. Actually I'm American now so I have to watch my mouth.
- Martha Beck: It's true. You are.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. So yeah, politeness, it's an interesting thing because here we are broadly anti-culture, but of course, the culture is a necessary part of life and being able to be literate in the culture while also being able to tell the difference between our nature and the culture, that's important.



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- Martha Beck: It's like spycraft. You have to be able to blend but not know... or anthropology where you enter a culture and you put brackets on your own belief system and you just go with the culture but from a position of knowing that you're not controlled by the culture.
- Rowan Mangan: Correct. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So with our daughter Lila, who's two, I've been trying to... We, collectively, have been trying to instill just the politeness markers that will help her get ahead in life. It's part of our job is to let her know when please and thank you are appropriate.
- Martha Beck: Please and thank you and a smile will take me far, one of my favorite songs from Honey in the Rock. Go on.
- Rowan Mangan: So we're working on this. I actually read an article, I don't know if I told you this, that was there was this huge study done to try and figure out what... so politeness markers, please and thank you, effectively are purely cultural and that this is well known, but we also need to be able to use it to get by. And so they did this study about how can parents influence their children to use them because you have to be taught that. You can't intrinsically know it. And so-
- Martha Beck: Are there cattle prods involved in this training?
- Rowan Mangan: Not really but it's really interesting because they were like, they tried all these different things and what it came down to in the end is if you want your kids to use politeness markers, nag them. So they spent millions of dollars. And what it came down to is what everyone does anyway. What do you say?
- Martha Beck: What's the magic word?
- Rowan Mangan: And it's funny because Lila is quite creative in her personality and she's made her own sense of this. And it's kind of funny because, so in our house, well, she'll be wanting something and, "What do you say?" And she goes, "Please." Oh actually at the moment, "Pwease." And then Marty will give her whatever it is, a cracker or something.
- Martha Beck: Or tranquilizers.
- Rowan Mangan: And she goes, looks into to Marty's eyes and goes, "Happy birthday, Muffy." And Marty goes, "You're welcome my darling. I love you too."
- Martha Beck: It is her expression of love, happy birthday.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.



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- Martha Beck: But ironically, the one time it was appropriate yesterday didn't come out like that.
- Rowan Mangan: Didn't. No.
- Martha Beck: I got home from my birthday walk. I'd gone on a long walk as a special treat for my birthday because that's my definition of a party. So you'd been telling her it was actually appropriate today to say, "Happy birthday, Muffy."
- Rowan Mangan: We'd been practicing in the car all the way home from school. We'd been singing, "Happy birthday dear Muffy," over and over again. Occasionally we had to take a little break from that to sing, "Happy birthday dear Lila."
- Martha Beck: Oh, you got to do that.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. And what do you say? "Happy birthday, Muffy." "Happy birthday, Muffy." "Okay, so when you see Muffy, what are you going to say?" "Happy birthday." "Happy birthday, Muffy." Okay, we're all set. Muffy walks in and she says-
- Martha Beck: I want birthday cake, Muffy.
- Rowan Mangan: Which we figured was close enough.
- Martha Beck: Close enough. That's the American way to say it.
- Rowan Mangan: Exactly.
- Martha Beck: Sugar!
- Rowan Mangan: So politeness is what I'm trying to figure out, Marty. What are you trying to figure out?
- Martha Beck: Oh, it's never going to work that politeness thing. I can never get it right. I go too far the other way. I am deeply and severely codependent to the point where when I want to say I love you, I basically say, "Could I put myself in your service for the rest of eternity? And please also kick me in the face." I'm working on it. Okay, I'm working on it. I'm getting better. But I have this deep belief as you know, and you may have heard it before on the podcast referred to as my God tentacles. I know for a true fact that there is not a human being or an animal on this planet that does not need my constant presence and attention to reach happiness.
- Rowan Mangan: This is literally true as Martha Beck herself might say.



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- Martha Beck: This is literally true. This is why I write self-help for sure. Except that I also have really, really bad ADD, so I'm continuously just forgetting what I'm doing. So it's this weird one two punch that I've been administering to my loved ones and others all my life. "I am here for you. I will be here for you forever. Let me do everything for you. You need never wonder. Oh, wait, wait. Hello, there's a squirrel. Hello." It's always, "I will never vary." And in my brain it never does vary, the love stays strong.
- Rowan Mangan: Well, in your heart, let's say.
- Martha Beck: The heart, yeah, yeah. In my brain-
- Rowan Mangan: Your brain can wander.
- Martha Beck: Like the other day we were in our apartment and I was trying to put... We had just painted a wall. I had just painted a wall.
- Rowan Mangan: You take the credit. You did it all.
- Martha Beck: Because everyone needs me to paint their walls. I will do anything for you. I will seriously install your furniture hangings and things, even though I don't know how, because I know you need me, all you people out there. But bear this in mind, while, I'm busily trying to put the outlet screws back on this little thing, which is not a complex task. I hear Ro in the other room coughing, and I'm like, okay, she's coughing.
- Rowan Mangan: My coughs are much sexier than that. She's not doing a good impersonation.
- Martha Beck: I don't want to just seduce our whole viewer listenership by doing a real Rowan Mangan cough. It was a deep throaty thing. It had an Australian accent. It was like "caarrgh". And so after about 10 minutes and I could not get this outlet thing back on, Ro comes limping around the corner from literally five feet away on the other side of the house and goes, "Didn't you understand I just choked on a piece of egg and I was going to die and you didn't even care." "I care. I'm just hyper-focused on my outlet."
- Rowan Mangan: In fact, I walked into the room and you said, "This is hard." And I was like, "So is near-death experiences, chick!"
- Martha Beck: Yeah, did you see the light? Yeah, that would've been good.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Probably, but it was just you getting electrocuted with your screwdriver in the outlet.



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- Martha Beck: I pretty much would have to have been there for you to see... for you to go toward the light. Because I am necessary to make everything go well for everybody. Literally, my kids had a hamster. My older kids had a hamster that died once. And I was so sad that I wasn't there to tell it to go toward the light. I really was. And then I was like, I wonder if I had a little tiny hamster shaped light and it went to the end of a long tunnel, which is a hamster tube. And then at the other end of the hamster, all the other dead hamsters plus Jesus hamster was waiting for it.
- Rowan Mangan: I wonder what would happen if you were going towards the light and it turned out you were just on one of those wheels. So you kept trying to run towards the light-
- Martha Beck: The Jesus wheel. I'm trying to come, Lord. I'm trying to come. I think that actually describes my life. And then I get swung from... You know how they go really fast and then they get swung by the centrifugal, centripetal force, one of those forces flings them, flings them from the hamster wheel.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah.
- Martha Beck: That's my life. I am trying to focus on getting everyone to heaven and then I get flung by my own velocity into wherever Jesus flung me.
- Rowan Mangan: Wherever Jesus flung you.
- Martha Beck: It will fly were Jesus flung it.
- Rowan Mangan: All right. Well, I don't think we're any closer to figuring that out either.
- Martha Beck: No, not at all. It's been a lifetime. So yeah.
- Rowan Mangan: Why start now?
- Martha Beck: 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 bewilder the world.



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- Rowan Mangan: All right. So Marty, today is a BeWild Files episode.
- Martha Beck: Woo, woo, woo, woo. I love a BeWild Files day.
- Rowan Mangan: We always enjoy this. And for those who are new to the podcast on the BeWild Files episodes, it's when we talk to you all about what you are trying to figure out and if you get excited by this prospect, then you can go to rowanmangan.com/bewildered and that's where you have instructions on how to tell us what you're trying to figure out. But listen, you got to say it with your mouth into a machine and send it because that's the format. That's how we do it. You can't write your email. I know you guys want to write it as an email. You can't. It doesn't work. It's an audio format.
- Martha Beck: We need your lovely voices.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes, I've written out very detailed instructions for how to record your voice and send it to us. It's actually not that hard. It's like a voice memo and plus an email, at least at the time of recording. We might get more high tech down the line. Anyway, you'll figure it out. That's the whole point.
- Martha Beck: You will. You will.
- Rowan Mangan: You absolutely will. And we believe in you.
- Martha Beck: So who are we hearing from, literally hearing from this day?
- Rowan Mangan: Today we are listening to the question of the wonderful Jenny.
- Martha Beck: Jenny!
- Rowan Mangan: And here comes Jenny now.
- Jenny: This is Jenny. And I've been putting my true authentic self into the world more and more and I'm the happiest I have ever been. But why am I feeling such hard vulnerability hangovers? Is that something I should be trying to prevent or is it just part of the process of becoming wild?
- Rowan Mangan: Such a good question. Oh, the vulnerability hangover.
- Martha Beck: They're rough, man. They are difficult.
- Rowan Mangan: So we should define that for people who don't already know this wonderful expression, Dr. Brené Brown... Always comes back to Brené sooner or later.



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Martha Beck: Always.

Rowan Mangan: She's the scholar of our time.

Martha Beck: Or Rome. All roads lead to her.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Yeah. And certainly in our little bubble, there's a lot of Brené going on and thank goodness. So, as anyone who's not living under a rock knows Brené Brown is a social researcher and she has specialized in vulnerability and shame and how those work and how those function within us and between us. And she believes that being vulnerable is really important. It's an important component of a well lived life. And she said vulnerability is our most accurate measure of courage.

Martha Beck: That's a quote.

Rowan Mangan: That is a quote. Can I say quote, end quote, boom.

Martha Beck: Boom.

Rowan Mangan: Brené there, mic drop. So yeah, it's hard to be vulnerable. But I think in the fact that Jenny used that expression, vulnerability hangover, she's probably aware that it's a thing that we maybe should enjoy but-

Martha Beck: I don't think anyone ever really enjoys it, especially at first. Maybe you can get to a point where you feel like, "Ooh, I'm being vulnerable. This is awesome."

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I didn't mean enjoy. That was a bad choice of words. Should think is a good thing because-

Martha Beck: Yes. Should value.

Rowan Mangan: Yes, thank you. Thank you.

Martha Beck: It's very, very difficult. It literally is exposing a part of your body to someone. You see it with little kids like our toddler, they start to get naturally inhibited about exposing themselves too much because it's a dangerous world out there. And if you expose part of yourself emotionally, whatever, the potential for getting hurt is very, very real. So it's a hard thing. And it does discourage us.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and it's not even just the fear of getting hurt because what a vulnerability hangover is to be super clear is when you have had a social interaction of some sort and you've shared something of yourself and then it comes back at you later that day, the next day and that night in bed.
- Martha Beck: Oh, the worst.
- Rowan Mangan: And you're suddenly like, "Oh, I think I've overshared. I think I've shared too much of myself. It was too intimate. It was too revealing." And I will say in terms of our preoccupation, I think the vulnerability hangover comes especially when what you've said is you've revealed something of yourself that goes against or is different from what our mainstream culture values in some way.
- Martha Beck: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think we both, and Karen too maybe, had a vulnerability hangover after we just said, here's the episode about our relationship which has three people in it. And then we actually went on Glennon and Abby's podcast and said it again.
- Rowan Mangan: We did.
- Martha Beck: And both times it was like I was putting aloe vera all over my body because I was going to be scalded by the exposure to the opinions of others like sunburn.
- Rowan Mangan: There was actually a time where you had written about our relationship and someone was just doing an edit of this piece of writing and where Marty had talked about the fact that we are a throuple, this person had written TMI, too much information.
- Martha Beck: Too much inflammation.
- Rowan Mangan: That was her, so that was-
- Martha Beck: She got very inflamed by this information.
- Rowan Mangan: Too much inflammation, too much information. And that was very shaming I think, for both of us.
- Martha Beck: Oh my God, it was horrifying.
- Rowan Mangan: I mean, I still feel like that TMI as though it's like, ugh, there's that implication. And it may not have been there at all.



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- Martha Beck: I once met someone in a... I was at a spa doing something for an Oprah event or something, and there was a woman there who had been reading my stuff and wanted to meet me. And I was in the dressing room going out for a massage and she was blowing her hair and she had a towel wrapped around herself and then rolled the way you roll it to keep... to make it stick around your torso. So she's blow drying her hair, and I walked by and she turned around and she said, "Martha Beck," and her towel fell off.
- Rowan Mangan: You think that was accidental? I think it was entirely deliberate because this is the effect you have on women. She's like, "Martha Beck, what do you think of these apples?"
- Martha Beck: They're called apples now? Thought they were melons or whatever. Anyway, she had-
- Rowan Mangan: I wasn't there. I don't know what you would've called those ones.
- Martha Beck: Anyway she was lovely. She was lovely and I mean that in a completely aesthetic sense as an artist not as a lesbian. But it's so funny because we did not say a thing about it. She grabbed it off the floor, she rerolled it, and then I felt sort of duty bound to have a 25 minute conversation with her so we could roll over that moment and we could basically be saying for 25 minutes, we were standing there going, "My towel did not fall off." And I was saying, "I did not see your entire naked body." "Yes, my towel did not fall." "Oh, I did not see your naked body." It was a challenging experience for me and I'm sure even more for her. And if you're out there, I admire and love you and you do have a beautiful body but I don't mean that in a lesbian way. I'm just digging myself in deeper aren't I?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh, this is... Yeah.
- Martha Beck: Well, this is the thing. This is what it feels like.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah. I mean that's a good one because it's automatically a funny story for both. Like the embarrassment is funny, but often this stuff happens more sort of insidiously and you're just like, you can't... Being naked in front of your hero suddenly without any presumed intention that way is clearly our culture sort of says probably best to be clothed except in specific contexts.
- Martha Beck: Lady Godiva.
- Rowan Mangan: Sorry, I've just completely lost my train of thought.
- Martha Beck: Oh, you were saying it's insidious.



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- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and so that is a very clear one, but sometimes you're just not sure if you've crossed the line. And so it's just like, and what were they thinking and trying to replay their facial expressions. Were they grossed out? Were they freaked out? Did they think I'm weird, unnatural?
- Martha Beck: Do you do that too, where you act out their facial expressions?
- Rowan Mangan: No, I don't do it but I love the way you... your mirror neurons are so turned up high that you-
- Martha Beck: Oh my gosh.
- Rowan Mangan: In fact, this morning... Can I just tell what happened this morning?
- Martha Beck: I don't know. But go ahead.
- Rowan Mangan: I was on the phone to the pharmacy and I was watching Marty across the room and she was doing something on her phone and she had this expression on her face where she looked like she was... She had her little teeth out and she was... I don't mean she has false teeth.
- Martha Beck: Not out, they're fixed in my head. It's not like it took them out.
- Rowan Mangan: She was baring her little teeth and she looked quite fierce. And I was like, "What is she doing?" But I was talking to the pharmacy and the pharmacy listens to everything and so any time, there's any volume when you're on the phone with our particular pharmacy, they go, "I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that." And it's so sarcastic.
- Martha Beck: Oh, you're an American.
- Rowan Mangan: So this is not strictly relevant, but just a personal bug bear. So I'm like, "Marty, what were you doing when you were looking so angry and ferocious earlier when I was on the phone to the pharmacy?" And she goes, "I was just really excited to be playing solitaire as fast as I possibly could because I was trying to beat a record."
- Martha Beck: They had to put that in that you can beat your own record now, but it's time. And my teeth come out when that happens.
- Rowan Mangan: They do. They come out, your little gnashers.
- Martha Beck: My little fight or flight, it goes just fight. I will fight the solitaire.



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- Rowan Mangan: Anyway, it's just a cute thing that I can always look over and you're always completely... your facial expression reflects what you're doing in some way or another. If you're trying to write... Yesterday was your birthday, happy birthday.
- Martha Beck: Oh thank you.
- Rowan Mangan: And many months ago, by the time you're hearing this, and every time I looked over at her, if she was on her phone, she was thanking people for birthday messages and so she was doing this really wide cheesy grin as she did the thing.
- Martha Beck: Thank you. Thank you.
- Rowan Mangan: The one I do that I think is quite funny is if I'm searching for an emoji to remind myself which one I'm searching for, I try to do the facial expression as the reminder while I'm scrolling through all the different emojis.
- Martha Beck: Speaking of that, there was a time when people wandering down the street or standing on a beach with no one around shouting things like, "Well, I don't care if she doesn't want it. I want her to have it." That would be an embarrassing thing to do in public. Now everybody's got a phone in their ear or they're writing an emoji text to somebody. So people are doing all these weird gesticulations and facial positions and wordings into the open air, which once would've been a massive vulnerability hangover in the making. And now it's just no big deal. The culture's changed.
- Rowan Mangan: I don't think the culture's changed. I think people just understand what's happening.
- Martha Beck: Is there any difference between that and the culture changing?
- Rowan Mangan: No, because I think the culture, if there were no headphones in the ear of that person, the culture would feel exactly the same way about them talking to no one and would be just as judgmental.
- Martha Beck: But I would just assume they have a tiny device, even nicer than my device is tucked into their ear lobe or something.
- Rowan Mangan: Dr. Martha Beck there, ladies and gentlemen.
- Martha Beck: Anyway, be that as it may-
- Rowan Mangan: We've gotten a little bit off topic there.



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- Martha Beck: Whatever your vulnerability hangover is, Brené, again, all roads lead to Brené, her research shows that moving into the vulnerability thing is not just a mark of courage, but it can be one of the most positive things that can happen to you in terms of your overall relationships and the quality of life and your presence in the world and all of that adds to your sense of purpose.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, I think that's the thing is that it's towards a life that feels more meaningful because you're sharing. You're authentically sharing-
- Martha Beck: You're being authentic.
- Rowan Mangan: ... rather than playing this sort of mannequin role that the culture has set out for us. So let's just go into what does the culture say about vulnerability? It says don't show it.
- Martha Beck: No. It says, no. You can expose things as long as they're approved of by the culture. So showing a certain amount of eye candy is fabulous if the culture is into that, dropping your towel is not in our particular culture. But in Japan, going to the bathhouse, everybody's wandering around naked. It's completely culturally appropriate. Whereas in other cultures where people have to be very covered up, even showing your hair could be considered shocking and horrible. But in any culture that you're in, there's a line and you are supposed to know it somehow, and you do not expose certain things. And if you do expose them, then you should have a hangover. You should feel bad because that way the culture has you still in its controls.
- Rowan Mangan: Right, because the culture needs everyone to be homogenous. And if you're having a vulnerability hangover after sharing something, it's probably because you've expressed something that's true for you. And so the culture has to go, "Shh, shh." You need to only follow the party lines. Stay on message. And our true natures very rarely... I mean, it can happen that your true nature and the culture sometimes agree about things. I like wearing clothes when it's cold, for instance.
- Martha Beck: That was such an interesting thing with the TMI because I wrote this down in something that I knew an editor would read because I was trying to be completely authentic and it was such a... I was able to write it in a way that felt like it showed our feelings. I was totally comfortable with it. And then to get that whack-
- Rowan Mangan: Slap.



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Martha Beck: I don't want to know. It was a classic culture of lash-back against vulnerability. It stung.

Rowan Mangan: So there's a thing where I feel like there's two things. There's one where you haven't meant to... you accidentally overstepped the culture's rules so you've got a vulnerability hangover because you're like, "Oh no, did I say something too far? Is that person judging me?" So there's that where you actually weren't intending to, but then there's when you were intending to speak your own truth and which is what your writing was doing in that instance, and then you are trying to judge what the backlash was. Is this a safe thing to have said with this person?

And that's even more uncomfortable in a way because if you're just worried you did it by accident, you are not on a project of bewilderment. You are just trying to do the right thing and you can mess it up but this is trying not to do the right thing by the culture.

Martha Beck: Right. As you're talking, I'm remembering every British rom-com ever made because there's this-

Rowan Mangan: Oh, the faux pas.

Martha Beck: I'm just a girl standing in front of a boy asking him to love her. There's this thing of who says I love you first. And I think it's in America too. I think it's everywhere because-

Rowan Mangan: Well, that was Julia Roberts who said that.

Martha Beck: Well yeah. I don't know, if she felt hungover after that. Anyway, all his friends said he was an idiot for letting her say that and letting it just hang out there so that she would have a vulnerability hangover. They're very sensitive to it seems in England. But there's always this point, and I think it's every relationship where you're in love with each other, but you don't want to be the first one to say, "My heart is on a platter, do with it what you will."

That's like the ultimate vulnerability hangover and if somebody says it and the other person's like... It's like when I think I mentioned Adam said to Lila, she said, "I love you Adam," and he says, "I love that you've said that."

Rowan Mangan: I like that you said that.

Martha Beck: I like that you said that. You can find that in any love story I think. And it really pertains to love.

Rowan Mangan: It does.



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- Martha Beck: Because you can't really be loved until you're exposed.
- Rowan Mangan: That's so true. That's so true. But that's an interesting one because that's actually, like you say, it's the rom-coms, it's the script, the culture script of we can laugh at each other because I love you is, I mean in a way, it's the beginning of creating a new two-person culture in that moment. So that's one where because there's embarrassment, there's a little bit of faux pas, but ultimately two people who are in love with each other is culturally sanctioned, not three.
- Martha Beck: Not three. Stop right there.
- Rowan Mangan: But two is-
- Martha Beck: This has gone far enough.
- Rowan Mangan: Yes.
- Martha Beck: What next? Helicopters? Marrying a goat?
- Rowan Mangan: I'd love to marry a goat.
- Martha Beck: You should do that.
- Rowan Mangan: What were we talking about?
- Martha Beck: I was trying to get something from a pharmacy, a medication that someone in the family really needs and we finally found this pharmacist who gave it. He runs this little mom-and-pop pharmacy and all the big ones don't have this medication. So we found it. And I was like, that man was so nice. I would marry him.
- Rowan Mangan: Karen, without looking up from her puzzle just goes, "Why stop now?"
- Martha Beck: Might as well keep marrying people. You got a run on it now. Yeah, we don't have a lot of vulnerability hangovers anymore do we? Well, what is your experience though of your own hangovers in this regard?
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my gosh. I am a chronic oversharer. And I think sometimes I cope with it by putting even internally within myself, putting on a kind of bravado about I don't care and try to just bluff my way through it. I can even remember saying, I love you first to people in the past and saying, "Look, this is how I feel in this moment. You don't have to say anything." I'm just telling you.



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Martha Beck: You know what would be funny?

Rowan Mangan: Not at all.

Martha Beck: Is if you said I love you and the other person also loves you but is too afraid to say it in that moment. But then they go away and they're like, "Oh, I really do love her." But in the meantime, you've got this echoing silence. So you get a massive hangover and you're like, the next time you see them, they take a breath and they're about to say, I love you too. And you say, "Remember when I said I love you? I was just joking."

Rowan Mangan: It's basically the plot of Romeo and Juliet.

Martha Beck: It's every rom-com, actually,

Rowan Mangan: I don't know that Romeo and Juliet is considered a rom-com, but-

Martha Beck: Yeah, or one of those suicide rom-coms.

Rowan Mangan: Suicide rom-com should be a genre.

Martha Beck: It's going to be a genre. Suicide rom-coms.

Rowan Mangan: Oh I love that.

Martha Beck: I loved before I died.

Rowan Mangan: It would be a great name-

Martha Beck: What?

Rowan Mangan: It would be a great name for a band, Suicide Rom-com.

Martha Beck: Suicide Rom-com. We may actually have to do a band.

Rowan Mangan: We're going to have to do it.

Martha Beck: Except that would mean I had to... I would have to perform music in public and you know what happens when I try to perform music.

Rowan Mangan: Okay, we're on a bit of a divergent kind of thing today.

Martha Beck: It's not. It's a real thing.



BEWILDERED

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- Rowan Mangan: And so I'm just going ahead and following this rabbit hole. When we hadn't been together that long... This is so cute. I don't even know-
- Martha Beck: I needed to express my love.
- Rowan Mangan: So I was with Karen in, I don't know what we were doing, watching TV or something, working, and Marty thought we'd gone out because the room where we were in went on to the garage. She thought we'd gone out. We hadn't gone out. Marty starts beautifully playing the piano. Sounds lovely. Karen and I are like, "Aww."
- Martha Beck: It was not lovely. I was not in practice.
- Rowan Mangan: She's very judgemental of self. And so she was playing away and we didn't think anything of it. And then at one point I think I went into the kitchen to get a glass of water and the piano was there and Marty saw me and honestly, you have never seen a bigger drama queen than Marty is.
- Martha Beck: It was completely appropriate in the situation.
- Rowan Mangan: Folks, she literally threw herself onto the floor.
- Martha Beck: What else could I do?
- Rowan Mangan: In shame that I'd heard her playing and a piano's not a violin. You can't really mess it up that much.
- Martha Beck: Oh yes you can.
- Rowan Mangan: It's a dong, dong, dong.
- Martha Beck: Doingie, doingie, doingie, I hit all the wrong notes. Oh, I wasn't in practice. You got to be in practice.
- Rowan Mangan: As I'm listening here, the other part of your God pentacle-
- Martha Beck: Dod pentacles.
- Rowan Mangan: I'm trying.
- Martha Beck: I have God tentacles and Bob Pentacles or something.
- Rowan Mangan: Oh my God, what is wrong with me?



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- Martha Beck: It's a whole new kind of witchcraft.
- Rowan Mangan: Another part of your God tentacles is that you also think that everyone's laser focused with their attention on you and evaluating your performance.
- Martha Beck: Well, of course, they are. Why would they be looking at anyone else? Oh my God, I just did it again. Everybody's out there's going to think I'm a horrible narcissist, which is fine because I am. But I don't want them to think that I am.
- Rowan Mangan: It's complex stuff that we are dealing with today. So what about your or I mean, I just have vulnerability hangovers and they're really unpleasant. It's a very shamey place, especially when it's someone you're just getting to know and you really are, you're doing that sharing a little bit extra to test it out. And so you are in that, it's very much like the I love you. It's like here's a little taste of who I really am.
- Martha Beck: You know what? I think it's always, I love you. I think sharing your true self is always a little bit of here I am and I'm available. And that's love. I mean, not romantic love. You may not even know it, but you're basically by sharing your real self, saying here I am, I'm just a girl standing in front of the entire world wanting it to love her obsessively. No, but I'm serious. It's love.
- Rowan Mangan: It is. Yeah, but it's also like, I love you is vulnerable because you're expressing a feeling that may not be reciprocated. But what's different when you're telling some sort of truth about yourself that isn't sanctioned by the culture and doesn't have a script like I love you in the culture, you are potentially putting yourself out there as a weirdo or insert worse word. In our case, it's always feels like something to do with perverts, that sort of-
- Martha Beck: Yeah with the throuple thing.
- Rowan Mangan: Yeah, yeah. So it always feels like that's where people are going to go and that's how our shame... That's how we feel when someone says, "TMI." And by the way, if this is TMI, hi.
- Martha Beck: Hi. We love you-
- Rowan Mangan: Love you.
- Martha Beck: ... and that's why we're talking about you on the internet.
- Rowan Mangan: What's your experience of vulnerability hangover, Miss Marty?



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Martha Beck: I used to do this thing. I've come a long way. I know because you've never really seen me do this.

Rowan Mangan: I have seen you hurl yourself to the floor.

Martha Beck: That's minor. That's nothing. I used to go into things that looked like epileptic seizures. I would literally be convulsing and grabbing my head and going, "Aaaaah." My older kids were like, "Waves of shame?" And I'd be like, "Yes, waves of shame. Pay no attention." "She did something," they would say and it could be anything. And furthermore, I not only had to get away with being vulnerable, I had to be... Somebody had to basically say, "You are absolutely accepted."

So one thing that happened is I used to give a lot of speeches to... especially, I wrote a book about Adam, has Down's Syndrome, my son. And so I went on this endless speaking tour... It really never ended. People just kept asking me. I spoke in every State of the Union sometimes many times. But I would share things about my family, about myself and if I felt vulnerable... I remember one time in North Carolina I said this and I did not... This is so stupid. I didn't get a standing ovation.

Rowan Mangan: Oh yeah, here we go.

Martha Beck: Yeah, I did that poorly. And they had given me this beautiful room in the hotel with a view of the ocean. And I went back to my room and I turned the bed away so that I could not see the ocean because I did not deserve to see the ocean because I had overshared and I had to pay for my shame in some way.

Rowan Mangan: I love that you are being so vulnerable in talking about this topic because it's awesome. I mean, I can see exactly where the courage is that Brené is talking about because that is a very raw thing to share. And, no seriously, because to let people know that that's how much them as an audience affects you as a speaker is incredibly vulnerable because it's the one to the many. It's amazing.

Martha Beck: The other big one was when my dog died and I was writing a column for Oprah and I had to get this dog put down. I had to have him because he was full of cancer. He was suffering and I had an article due that day and I'd been trying to take care of him and it wasn't working. So I'd spent three days doing that and I couldn't... There was nothing in me to write about it except my dog's death. So I wrote this article and I just sobbed all the way through it. And my editor said, "This is sophomore, this is sloppy, this is emotional."



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Rowan Mangan: My God.

Martha Beck: And it was the one time in my life that I went back and said, "I don't care. This is what you get this month." That was the only time I haven't just done exactly what they said. But then when I put it out, I was horrified. I almost went into hiding for the month knowing that that would be out there and that they would think... But it was for him, it was for my dog that I did it. And then one day, years later, I think, I was in... No, it couldn't have been years later because it was really recent and I actually was interacting with Oprah and I said, "Yeah, my dog died," because I was just dying with shame because she would've read it. And she just looked at me and she said, "It's a family member." I was like, "Oh, she gets it." And that it erased my shame and it showed me the power that one person has if you go right at somebody in the middle of a vulnerability hangover and say, "I see you, I'm with you."

Rowan Mangan: Wow. God, that's so true. And that's almost like something that we can do for each other as we're all trying to reclaim the wildness that is our birthright, that sort of reinforcement of... Yeah, I mean because it's all social, it's all about how the other person... It's not about the truth that you've spoken. You could speak it on a cliff top, you don't care. It's about how did the other person perceive me? And so that's lovely because that's almost like, okay, so there's something that we can do for each other.

And I think people are better now. I think there's a lot more, and probably because of Brené's work, there's a lot more literacy around vulnerability in the culture, I think. And I know that, for instance, online in forums and groups and stuff, I more often see people go, this is a very vulnerable post, right at the top because it's like saying, I'm pretty raw. This isn't easy for me to do or something, some little signal to say, don't culture at me too much because this is me here.

Martha Beck: And that's so powerful. That in itself is an act of vulnerability and it kind of gives you a little protection. And then if just a few people come back to you and say, "That helped me," or, "I'm in exactly the same place, but I was afraid to say so," I think it opens up the channel for self forgiveness.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, and even if they don't-

Martha Beck: Yes, that's the key.



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Rowan Mangan: ... the practice is figuring out how to forgive yourself. And I think it's sort of a muscle that you can build, I think. And it's one of those things that where fake until you make it can work as well, like me and my bluff saying, "Well, I don't even care. I refuse to feel vulnerable about this. It's true what I said. It's true what I said." So what's the great quote about forgiveness?

Martha Beck: I think this is from the Twelve-Step books, "Forgiveness is giving up all hope of having had a different past." So basically you do something that makes you feel vulnerable and you're like, "Oh no, waves shame," and this is why I've gotten better. I've gotten better at self-forgiveness, but I've also gotten better at going, "Oh well, it's out there now."

Rowan Mangan: And that's it because we roll around in bed in agony, trying to replay the conversation and change what we said and as Jackson Brown says, "The future's there for anyone to change, but we still think it's easier to change the past." And don't get Einstein relativity on me.

Martha Beck: No, no. I just had a little thought that I want to talk about in a minute.

Rowan Mangan: Oh, oh, intriguing. Yeah, so I think that we can work on the self-forgiveness and we can work on trying to... We've talked before about trying to make our focus the inward looking out instead of our projected outward looking in at us and just be like, well, what did I say? It doesn't matter how that person responded. And by the way, we don't even know what they were thinking unless they told us and were upfront. Did I say my truth? All right, I forgive myself. What is that? I'm giving up all hope of having had a different conversation.

Martha Beck: And as we were discussing this, you used a really interesting term that I don't think we've ever used and you said, "Then we have to do our culture work." And I love that. And I think it's a wonderful concept.

Rowan Mangan: So because what we're talking about is the culture expressed through the other person or through what we're imagining the other person and their reaction to us being, and so that's why it's... That's where the culture is showing up is in the other person so that's why we do our culture work with regard to that person.

Martha Beck: But culture work is a great thing to bring to any topic we speak of on the BeWild Files.

Rowan Mangan: Totally. Totally. So how do we do our culture work, Marty?



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Martha Beck: I will tell you in a minute. So I want to hear what you think about culture work and what it is but in this context, I can tell you one of the things I did that helped free me from the hangovers, the vulnerability hangovers. I used to-

Rowan Mangan: Take a big glass of water before you go to bed.

Martha Beck: Huge glass of water. No, I did my, I called it anti-shame magic. And I imagined a very cold and wind swept island that it was just rocky island. And I was on it with the person that I felt worried about who might be judging me. But the thing was, on this magic island, anyone who wasn't being authentic would turn blue. And the less authentic you were, the more blue you would appear. And so there were audience members looking and I would be there and I would be sharing my authentic self and I wouldn't be blue. And then the other person would be like, "TMI?" And they would start to turn blue and the culture would judge them instead of me.

Rowan Mangan: The culture will always judge, even whether they're blue or not. The culture will always judge the person who's being authentic.

Martha Beck: I know.

Rowan Mangan: So it was only what we can do ourselves. And I just want to return to the, by all means the blue people is a great magic-

Martha Beck: It was a good image. So for reals then, it helped me. All right, so that is a for reals thing, but honestly without being completely ridiculous, how do we come to our senses around this vulnerability hangover thing?

Rowan Mangan: Well, Jenny's question, which I want to get back to is should we just get used to it? If our project is that we're moving towards greater and greater authenticity and being our true self and with it we get all the joy that goes with that and all the release and creativity and stuff, do we have to just get used to the fact that vulnerability hangovers are going to be part of our lives or will they go away at some point? And this comes back around to this idea of culture work.

And as I said before, this topic is showing us how the culture is inside of us. And so I think that culture work is a muscle that can be built. What do I want to say? A defense against the projected culture in other people is something that we can build, but we have to start by erring on the side of openness because it's something I've heard you talk about a number of times like that edge out, you have to keep testing the limit of your comfort zone if you want to grow.



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Martha Beck: Yes. I was taught by a native Cantabrigian when I first went to live in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that the way to cross the street in Cambridge is to edge out. And that means stepping into traffic and fixing your gaze on a driver in a car and just forcing them to stop by sheer eye gaze. And what you're basically saying is, "I'm more vulnerable than you are, but you aren't allowed to hit me." Which is a very interesting New England sort of thing. There's another way of expressing it that I read in a book on recovery from sexual abuse, which is just fraught with shame because people always blame the victim.

I mean, I think Aretha Franklin was actually put in jail after being raped by a white man because she was considered to have been the bad... It's insane what survivors of sexual abuse go through in terms of public shaming to keep them quiet. So this was a really, really loaded area. And I think it was Laura Davis and Ellen Bass, they say try a method called step-check-step. So what they said is you share a little bit of yourself, you lock eyes with the driver and you say, "I'm going to put my real story out, but only a tiny bit. I'm not going to jump, I'm going to edge. So you share-"

Rowan Mangan: And maybe also just with one person at a time as well, a small part of the story and just with one person.

Martha Beck: It's interesting to consider what you do with a crowd, because I think crowds can be checked as well. But anyway, most people don't have to check with crowds. So you do it with one person and it's when you want to share that you share because you have very sophisticated mechanisms for evaluating what another person's reaction will be. I mean, we're incredibly subtle in our ability to pick up energy. And what I've noticed is that especially with coming out as gay, coming out as a throuple, there's a moment where you actually want to share because you want to be closer to the other person. You want them to know you, but it's kind of a big edge out. You could get hit.

So you don't edge very far. You say, "Okay, there's something I need to tell you. I have close female friends." And then you wait for their response. And if they say, "Well I only have male friends." You're like, "No, okay, not you, really close female friends." And if they start to get it, they'll say "What are you trying to say?" or something, you'll start to feel that you're on safe ground instead of dangerous ground.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, you could be like, "You know those female friends I was telling you about last week? Yeah, so we share a laundry basket."

Martha Beck: I occasionally do their laundry for them.

Rowan Mangan: You know those close female friends? They live in my bedroom.



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Martha Beck: But only in my mind, sorry. I'm just a lesbian standing in front of a straight person asking you to accept me. Who could say no to that?

Rowan Mangan: Nobody.

Martha Beck: Yeah. Well, somebody. Some people just don't get it. And so you yank back.

Rowan Mangan: And this also, it applies what we've said in other context about shame and everything is that it's highly likely that where you get a strong unambiguous pushback from someone that is shaming is probably because they're someone who has a lot of shame, especially maybe in that whatever area you're going to be talking to them about. It doesn't have to affect anyone else. So if they come back at you, it's that you wrote about this in the way of integrity, this idea where it threatens our way of life, that kind of mentality, which is so blatantly false, that anyone is threatening anyone else's way of life with how they live their life.

Martha Beck: You know what I think is happening there? If gay marriage threatens straight marriage, divorce is fine, it doesn't threaten straight marriage at all. What I think when somebody's really anti-gay marriage and says that it's attacking their relationship, it means that their relationship is only held in place by the constructs of shame. You have a heterosexual marriage, you have 2.5 kids, the whole thing. If that's a strong bond that they're not afraid to lose, then if you say, "I have a totally different kind of marriage," they'll go, "Oh great." But if their relationship is being held together strictly by the social restrictions around relationships, then a difference does feel threatening to them.

Rowan Mangan: Yeah, that's so true.

Martha Beck: Do you remember I was so scared when we got together because I was good friends, am good friends with Stephen Mitchell and Byron Katie who are two... They're two beautiful, lovely people that I love. They're both really spiritual. The worst thing about us getting together was I said, "I can't do this. I have to tell Stephen Mitchell." And I thought he would be so judgmental because I don't know, he's just a lovely human being, but he's not really wild. And so we told Stephen and Katie almost the first people we told, and they were absolutely no problem, no problem whatsoever. Just went straight through. Because what they care about is are you sharing your true nature? Are you being authentic with us? That's all.



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Rowan Mangan: Yeah. Okay. So for Jenny, just coming back to Jenny, then the question becomes is your vulnerability hangover the consequence of you sharing something that was true? And that's the first question. And that's really important.

Martha Beck: And if so, be proud no matter what their reaction is. And that's what sort of the gay pride movement has taught us all and the Black Lives Matter and everything. Be proud of your truth even if they try to shame you. And if it's not true, still forgive yourself and be willing to move on. My favorite phrase for this, I was writing away in a book and I was writing about Adam and I believe that he's kind of psychic and magical, he's shown that many times.

And I wrote that down and I always used to go back and change it and say, "If you don't agree with me, I totally respect your point of view. I could be making this all up." And one day I went back to change something I'd written so it would be more culturally sensitive. And I said, "I live with a spiritual master. If you disagree with me, I respectfully do not care." And it was a massive liberation from so many hangovers, vulnerability hangovers.

Rowan Mangan: And it's the word respectfully because it's what we've talked about a number of times, that is it's you are either... There's in the culture, there's in reaction to the culture and then there's independent of the culture, which doesn't have to have that oppositional-

Martha Beck: Yeah. There's nothing dual about it. It is simply the truth. It's not pro or anti. It is simply what it is. Is a tree pro or anti anything? Nothing. It just is. So you're in nature, there's no judgment. And if you be what you are and stand up and be what you are, you're also probably helping to liberate someone else.

Rowan Mangan: That's true. That's true. And I do think that it does get easier over time and the hangovers are less and less, but even while they're still fresh and raw and sharp, it's a sign that you are doing it. You're doing it right.

Martha Beck: You're going wild.

Rowan Mangan: You can't go wild without this experience. This is what it looks like.



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Martha Beck: And as you do your culture work, I mean, I think we said earlier, as you change your attitude toward your own shaming, you start to project a different culture, which is the acceptance of individuality which is what I have felt from Stephen and Katie who were quite a bit older than we are, had no trouble with it. They did their culture work. They're beyond it, I think. So what are some culture work quick fixes that we could tell the folks.

Rowan Mangan: If you are in a vulnerability hangover and you don't have someone nearby that you can call and tell them about it, because that would be the ideal thing, someone that gets it who's also on the same path and trying to do the same thing. That's the first thing. It's call your friend. If there's no one who you know or who's available, I would listen to us. Listen to Bewildered.

Martha Beck: We love you.

Rowan Mangan: We love you. This is what it's all about. And then there's always books, isn't there?

Martha Beck: Oh, books were my... I called them my paper mothers when I was rupturing every social bond that I had. I could recreate them by reading the books of certain people who felt deeply true and who were themselves wild like... I mean, you can read in the show notes, we'll have a list of books that you can read.

Rowan Mangan: Books by weirdos.

Martha Beck: By weirdos.

Rowan Mangan: People who are outside of culture and help us to say stay strong.

Martha Beck: And some of the best of those are the poets, by the way. Poetry-

Rowan Mangan: That's true.

Martha Beck: ... really-

Rowan Mangan: That's true.

Martha Beck: It steps outside of nature and then it invites us with language to step away into something wilder and without language where everyone is acceptable just as they.

Rowan Mangan: Absolutely. And Mary Oliver's the classic person of our time with that, but Wendell Berry is another one. John O'Donohue, always. And our friend, the magnificent Mary Walker is also-



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Martha Beck: Hmm, New Zealand poet. She's fabulous, fabulous. And remember, it's love you're always, when you open yourself to the world, you are giving the world love and the world needs more love. The world does not need more shame. So let yourself just hang out there in the breeze, do your culture work, and-

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.

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