

Transcript

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Podcast:

[#100: Dr. Jill interviews Aaron Carnahan on Having a Healthy Relationship After Divorce](#)

Text:

Dr. Jill 0:12

Hey, everybody! You are live with Dr. Jill, and today I have a very special guest. I know you've heard me say that before. But today, it is an honor to be here with Aaron Carnahan, whom I will introduce to you in a moment, who is also my ex-husband. Yes, you heard me. I'm super excited. This is actually our 100th episode.

Dr. Jill 0:33

A little backstory on this. COVID hit and we all stayed home, and I had a little extra time on my hands. And I thought: "You know what? If I can't get out and teach on a stage, which I love to do, why not start in my own study and get out there to you all virtually and start interviewing people?" So it just started on a whim, and it's become a popular Podcast and YouTube channel. And here we are again in Episode 100. I'm so excited to reach that landmark.

Dr. Jill 1:03

If you want to hear the other podcasts, you can find me on iTunes, Stitcher, or anywhere you hear the podcasts. You can also find me on my YouTube channel. I just ask: if you enjoy it, would you please leave a review on iTunes for me? That helps us get traction and get out to more people. So thank you for that. You can also find information at jillcarnahan.com, my website, and you can find products and services at drjillhealth.com. So in any of those places, you can find me. Like I said, we are on Episode 100, and I couldn't be more honored.

Dr. Jill 1:33

My office manager asked me a few weeks ago, "Dr. Jill, maybe you should have a special guest for your 100th episode." I thought about it, and there are a lot of special guests I've had on here. But what I found is, with COVID, I just heard a statistic in California that the divorce rate is now at 70%. Can you believe that? It's been at 50% for a while—but 70%! Obviously, more often than not, relationships are ending in divorce. I talked to a therapist who gave me that statistic, and I said, "Why do you think that is?" She said, "Well, you know, COVID happened, Jill, and all of a sudden those distractions that people had away from their relationships that kept them in their relationship but they were very distracted about"—[things such as] what was going on with their girlfriends or whether it was doing other things—"all of a sudden those distractions were gone and they had to deal with one another." I don't know if that's true or not, but it makes sense to me that COVID has really changed us. And some relationships have [even] gotten stronger than ever. I hope that's you sitting out there listening today, wherever you're at, in your car, or at home. But [for] some of you—I know it's very real—it has brought up conflict and things that maybe you weren't facing before COVID. Now, unfortunately, you might even be one of those statistics where you have gone through a separation, divorce, or breakup.

Dr. Jill 2:51

I am going to be watching your questions, so I want to just mention here that in a few minutes when we get going, I'll try to watch that feed. If you have live questions for Aaron and me, we will be watching those and we will listen to those.

Dr. Jill 3:03

So here we are today. I'm going to be probably as vulnerable as I've ever been by, again, bringing on my ex-husband here. But I'm super excited, and we'll tell a little bit about our story to start after I introduce Aaron. I also want to frame this in the sense that we're here just because often things in life happen. And at the moment, at the time, it can be devastating and can be one of the worst things that you've ever experienced or something you never thought you would go through. For me, it was like that. I never in a million years thought I would be divorced. But looking back, I know both Aaron and I will talk today about the change and transformation that's happened not only in our friendship, in our relationship, in business, but also in our own lives and interpersonal space. The people we've become because of this divorce have been phenomenal. So sometimes it actually turns out to be a blessing in disguise.

Dr. Jill 3:57

Aaron, let me introduce you, and then I'd love to hear your comments on welcoming you here. Aaron Carnahan is an award-winning producer and writer who strives to inspire and encourage the world through film, theater, and music. He loves to tell stories of inspiring people who live extraordinary lives. Aaron has produced four

seasons of network television, multiple music videos, and a feature-length documentary *To Joey, With Love*, in addition to producing and co-writing the award-winning feature film *Finding Josephine*. He also managed the careers of Grammy Award-winning musician artists *Joey + Rory*. And that doesn't really do it justice, Aaron. You've got so many other gifts and talents. Welcome, welcome, welcome! Thank you for joining me today!

Aaron Carnahan 4:39

Thanks, Jill. Thanks so much. This is awesome. This is crazy!

Dr. Jill 4:43

I know, right? We were just talking before about that, and I wanted to frame it. I was telling you before that I want to honor [the fact that] we both have partners in life and we're super happy and they've been so amazing with our friendship. I think that we always seek to honor them in how we interact and get along. But also, we've learned a lot. We'll talk later about what new projects we're working on because we're actually doing some business together. But what I love is that through these difficult last five and a half or six years through the divorce, I think one of the things that have really allowed us to become good friends who really trust one another is respect, right? We'll go back and tell the story in just a minute of what happened, what led to the divorce, and then what we've learned. But, any thoughts just off the top of your head on some of the things that you feel have been the most important in us being able to have a respectful, honoring friendship that's enduring?

Aaron Carnahan 5:44

Do you mean post-divorce?

Dr. Jill 5:46

Yes, post-divorce.

Aaron Carnahan 5:48

I think the number one thing, above all else, is forgiveness. We both have it in us to forgive; we're forgiving people. But I mean, that is first and foremost—forgiveness—also, that humility to ask for forgiveness. I think that the starter is that we forgave one another. We didn't just forgive one another; I feel like we talked through everything. It wasn't just, "Hey, forgive me," "I did this," or "I did this wrong," or whatever. Still, to this day, I remember last week, I called you, and I'm like, "Hey, I remember this; I want to apologize for that." So it's almost been an ongoing thing. Not because you demand it or anything, but just because it feels right to go to somebody

that you've harmed and say, "Hey, I'm sorry." Through the divorce process, a lot of harm was done. So even as things get brought to my attention now, I still want to be able to say: "Hey, I'm sorry about that. Would you please forgive me?" I think that is the number one thing, and then the second thing is that I believe we communicate now way better than we did when we were married. And we can get into why that is. But I think we have an amazing, open line of communication. I think that's huge.

Dr. Jill 7:16

I love that. So forgiveness and communication, right? I totally agree with you. I know in the very beginning when we separated and things were not good at that point, there was this peace in me—and I know you've been the same to me—that we're all human and we're in this game called life. What happens is the traumas from our childhood, the difficulties, the way we were raised—all of those things shape who we are. I have deep compassion for the fact that we're all fallible and that we're all human. I think what I did is, I actually jumped right to forgiveness before I went through anger and grief. So I actually did it the wrong way, and I think I've been through all those now. But in the very beginning, first of all, it was a shock; it was a big shock for me. And then I went to, "Oh, I gotta forgive." That's the first thing. But after that, I went through anger and sadness, and all of those normal emotions that we would have, and then came back to forgiveness.

Dr. Jill 8:19

Like you said, we've been in a process, right? Because I remember that you were very numb in the beginning. I don't think you could have forgiven or even understood what happened until it was probably two years post-divorce, when we really had the first conversation where I felt you understood what we went through. And me too. It took some time because what happened is that it catalyzed us to go deeper and say: "What's up with me? What do I need to do? What do I need to work on?" And again, that's one of the messages today too, is that the work we've both done has been immense. And it takes that to go on to have healthy relationships and to also have healthy relationships with your exes, right?

Aaron Carnahan 8:56

Yes, absolutely. I think that might be why this message of continued asking for forgiveness, not for the same thing but as things pop up, or whatever it might be [is so significant]—or maybe the same thing, even in that case. You were so quick to forgive. I didn't even know what I was feeling at that time, and all of these things because it's traumatic. At the time of our divorce, I had also experienced the deaths of a very dear friend, my father—and then [after], our divorce [occurred]—and my mother as well. So there was all this death happening around our divorce. But I always tell people: "I experienced four deaths." I didn't experience three deaths in that couple-of-year period

of time; it was four deaths. With death comes a lot of trauma, a lot of reflection, a lot of those types of things. So I think that's one of the reasons why maybe we come back to it a little bit; it just feels right; it just feels right.

Aaron Carnahan 9:58

And you're right, I agree 150%: I would say the biggest thing when you talk about the self-work that's been done, the reason you and I have a great relationship right now, I believe, is that you've done a lot of work on yourself. That working on yourself wasn't to point fingers at me, it was to work on your own things and your own issues within your own life. I've done the exact same thing. You've got to humble yourself and be willing to say, "What the hell did I do wrong there? And why did I do that? Why did I make those decisions?"

Dr. Jill 10:38

It's so easy to point fingers, isn't it? I see this happening all around [us], and we're like, "Oh, well, you did this," or "you did that," or "you do that." But the truth is, when we point back here again, this is two imperfect people coming together, and there are mistakes that are made on both sides. The only way that we can actually come together in a healthy friendship post-divorce is when we start to look at ourselves first, and then honor and forgive the other person.

Dr. Jill 11:04

I would love to maybe tell just a two-minute version of "this is what happened" and then where we got to. But literally just this morning in Brené Brown's new book, *Atlas of the Heart*, I read this quote and I think it frames a lot of what we went through: "True belonging doesn't require us to change who we are, it requires us to be who we are." I think one of the things that I look back [on is], "What happened?" We were both, first of all, not really able to love and accept ourselves. I know now, and I know you do, too, until we love and accept ourselves—we were both [raised] in cultures where that maybe wasn't right or wasn't accepted—and believe that we're worthy of a sustainable, healthy relationship and love, we can never go into a relationship and expect the other person to complete us. [Yet] so often we do. If there's a hole in our hearts that we expect another person to fill, we're always going to be unsatisfied. That person will never ever, ever live up to our expectations; they're going to fail every time.

Dr. Jill 12:05

I think we both came in with wounded hearts and we tried to be what we thought people wanted us to be. Not only our families, society, or our world, but even each other. By doing that, what we neglected to do was express needs. We thought, "Oh, we have it together." I always think we almost had two parallel lives. We had fun, we

connected, and we had a lot of really good positive things in the relationship. But what we maybe didn't do so well was what I consider true intimacy, which is truly being vulnerable to one another and expressing, "Hey, I need this from you." We are two very independent people, and we thought we'd be okay until you know what hit the fan—until things fell apart. So, our story—we met when I was 19, and we married when I was 21.

Aaron Carnahan 12:53

Can I just add something to that?

Dr. Jill 12:54

Yes, please.

Aaron Carnahan 12:53

I'd love to just piggyback that real quick. I love that you're saying that because I think our relationship was all about: "Hey, this person completes me"; I'm this and she's that, and "she completes me." That's not where it's at. Where it's at is coming completely yourself to a relationship—when you can bring yourself completely. You are 100% authentically you. You're not relying on someone else to fill the gaps. You've done that; you've come completely and have come to [be] that person. I think that's what we've done. That's where both of us are at in our current relationships; we've come to those relationships as complete human beings. The person I'm with doesn't complete me; she shares in who I am, and I share in who she is. We just experience a beautiful life together.

Aaron Carnahan 13:59

I just want to make sure that people know—I've talked a lot about forgiveness, and the way that you said that is [in essence]: Yes, it's important that we look at ourselves and see what we could have done better, or done differently, or whatever it might be, and then ask for forgiveness; but I also think the importance of therapy and self-reflection and understanding self and understanding what we did wrong, that's all important. But it's also important because it allows us to get to that place where I need to take care of myself by saying, "Jill, you hurt me" or "Aaron, you hurt me." But [it's about] learning how to say that in a productive and positive way so that we can really get through those issues of hurt, pain, and frustration.

Dr. Jill 14:46

Absolutely. And that's honestly the honesty that we lacked at some point. Because we're really honest with saying, "This hurt me." What happens when you have a relationship

[is]—I'm going to briefly talk about John Gottman's 'four horsemen' of broken relationships because they're so classically studied. I guess I could mention them in a minute, but one of them is this: it leads to resentment and contempt. If you have contempt in your relationship, you're almost guaranteed to fail. John Gottman took couples into this apartment where he researched [their behaviors]. He observed them, and he would note their language towards one another, how they treated one another, and how they interacted with one another. When he saw contempt, he could predict with 96% accuracy who was going to end in divorce. Often, that contempt comes from held in expectations or needs that are not expressed. You expect the person to read your mind, right? Tell me, yes. I see your face, so tell me more about that. I always think that we were just kids who didn't know any better, right? I look back and have a lot of compassion for both of us because we were just young, and we didn't really know what we know today. But what do you think about that?

Aaron Carnahan 15:56

I think it's interesting because I would have never thought that until you—"contempt," I'm like, "I don't know." But that's almost the root of—we'll get into how everything happened—I guess, I don't know—the end. And me coming and saying "I'm done." It was the contempt. That contempt was bred out of the fact that I couldn't tell you, "I am broken; I am hurting." We weren't able to have that communication. I wasn't able to communicate that in a successful way to you to be able to say things. Rather than me trying to figure out another way or whatever to be able to have a conversation with you to say, "I'm hurting here," instead, I just felt contempt. Yes, it was like—

Dr. Jill 16:54

Listeners, please, if you're hearing this and you feel contempt for your partner—gosh—this is a red flag. Please take it seriously because it's literally one of the most [detrimental issues in a relationship]. I'll just read these while we're here and then we can talk about them. Again, this is from John Gottman's research. He's a relationship researcher; it's some of the best stuff out there—data-driven. He's identified four characteristics that can basically predict the end of a relationship. Then we'll talk about solutions. So don't worry, we're going to go positive. But criticism is number one. It doesn't mean we can't say: "Hey, I don't like it when you do that! Could you do something differently?" But there are ways to be less critical and to build appreciation. You need this foundation of love and gratitude and appreciation. And then you can ask someone that you love to do something differently. But criticism is number one.

Dr. Jill 17:40

Contempt is number two. Contempt is the biggest predictor of divorce and ended relationships. Defensiveness is number three. How many of us are defensive? Like if someone says we did something. Instead of owning it and saying, "I totally get that you

feel that way," [and], "I will try to do that differently," we become defensive, right? Because we feel like we're [being] attacked. And then stonewalling—

Aaron Carnahan 18:00

I can come back to a way that I've learned since our divorce—and you and I have even used it before, but I definitely use it in my current relationship—[that] can help some people with a way to maybe help with the defensiveness.

Dr. Jill 18:10

Oh, I totally want to get to that because you've had some clues and you've had some things that you've shared with me that have been helpful. So, criticism is number one, contempt is number two, and defensiveness is number three. The last one is stonewalling. What is that? Stonewalling is [when] you check out. You check out, you're overwhelmed, it's too much, you go away, you become quiet, [and] you won't engage in conversation. You might need some time; that's different. You can say, "Hey, sweetheart, I am really overwhelmed right now. Can you give me three hours? I'm going to take a walk." Or [it could be] one hour; you give a time and then you come back. That's okay. That's not stonewalling. Stonewalling is literally checking out—no communication. You're like, "I don't want to talk about it; I'm done." That's stonewalling. So let's talk about solutions for that. You mentioned that you had one, and I think I have no idea what you're going to say. But tell us more about the criticism and defensiveness.

Aaron Carnahan 18:56

Defensiveness is, I think, one of the greatest things that I've learned. Again, the interesting thing is that this is through self-therapy. It's learning about myself and my inability to communicate effectively and especially intimately. I wondered, "Why does Jill say that we lacked intimacy?"—and I understand now. For me, what that means is that we weren't able to truly communicate what we were feeling—ever. We could be angry, or I could be angry, and she could shut down, but there was no communication. It was only after I went to therapy—is it okay if I mention a name, like where I went? Because it's amazing—the biggest part of therapy that I went through personally was at Onsite in Tennessee. Onsite is just an amazing place with an amazing program for working on your own stuff. Now, they also have a program like a weekend retreat getaway for couples. So I'm going to say that because I literally feel that Onsite forever changed my life. I feel that Jill and I wouldn't be having this conversation today, and I definitely would not be in a healthy, committed relationship right now unless I went through this.

Dr. Jill 20:17

I agree. It took us a year or so to really get to [the point] where we could start to communicate like this. Definitely, I did my work. It wasn't Onsite, but it was my own personal work, and you did Onsite. That was after that when you asked for forgiveness and we talked about those kinds of things. There were a lot of different things that happened that were profound after Onsite.

Aaron Carnahan 20:38

Yes. For me, one of the big takeaways from Onsite was just this little exercise with regard to communication. But it fits within this defensiveness and how you can combat that [mode] of being defensive when somebody says something that seems like it's critical, or whatever it might be. I cannot stress this enough. I use this in business, I use this in my personal relationship, I use this with friends, [or with] anybody where there's any type of conflict or any type of unresolved thing that I need to cover with them. It's just this and please write it down: "I feel" blank. It starts with a feeling statement: "I feel." Because what you're not starting with is, "you did," you're starting with "I feel." It's not, "I think"—because what you think sometimes, your perception might be off, and you can get through all of that—but it's, "I feel." "I feel" blank—fill in the blank—"when" or "because." It could be "because" you did something or "when" this happened, or whatever it is. Try to frame it in the best way that you can. "I feel" blank "when" or "because" blank. "I need" blank. Then you fill in [the part regarding] "this is what I need."

Aaron Carnahan 21:55

Now, here's the powerful thing about that: the other person might not be able to fulfill that need, but I cannot even begin to tell you the power of just expressing your need. It's like when you ask for forgiveness and the other person doesn't even know if they can forgive you, and they might not forgive you. [But] you already feel better because you asked for forgiveness. It's kind of the same thing. Just saying "I need" and hearing yourself express that verbally is so healing. And then, sometimes, that person can immediately [fulfill] that need. Now if you're in a relationship, the beautiful thing is, that person can say, "I don't know if I can do that." But then they can do an "I feel" statement back.

Aaron Carnahan 22:36

Right now in my current relationship, anytime there's an argument or we're in a difficult position for anything—we can start raising our voices or whatever; we're human, and that's what happens, right?—one of us inevitably now says, "I need an 'I feel' statement." And what happens is, like that, it de-escalates the argument because that stops everything, and it just slows everything down. I cannot begin to tell you what this little thing does to keep you from being defensive about something, because all you're doing is telling someone that you're feeling a certain way and you have a need. Most of the time, it's just a communication breakdown: "I don't know," "I'm not thinking," "I'm

thinking something differently than what actually happened" or what was actually said, or whatever it might be. Usually, it's a communication breakdown. But it's a beautiful, beautiful thing. If you find yourself getting defensive and arguments escalating or arguments never resolving, it's a beautiful way to resolve them. Sorry, that went a long time, but this is such a simple thing that changed my life forever.

Dr. Jill 23:54

I think this is one of the most important things we could give to listeners. Maybe [you can] give an example—it doesn't have to be personal, just randomly—so someone can walk through what it might sound like. "I feel" maybe "sad when you forget to tell me you're going to be home late, and I need you to text me next time if you're going to be late." Would that be one?—that's just random.

Aaron Carnahan 24:19

Yes, and it could be something very, very simple like that. Or "I feel hurt."

Dr. Jill 24:25

Yes, and "I feel less important."

Aaron Carnahan 24:27

Yes, "I feel hurt." Let's say I hadn't told my partner about this call that's happening today, and then she finds out about it later. "You did a podcast with your ex-wife?" or whatever. She could say, "I feel hurt that you would have that out into the world" or whatever. "I feel hurt that you didn't talk to me, that you did that podcast without talking to me first. I need you to communicate before doing something on a social platform." I don't know, something like that. That could be a bigger one.

Dr. Jill 25:06

Oh, that's great. That's so, so helpful. And embedded in that is, like we said, mutual respect. One thing that goes very close with that is this—there's a name for it, [and] I'm probably not going to say it right—assumption of goodwill, assumption of goodness. This can be in business, it can be at work, it can be in your partners, it can be children with parents, parents with children, or family members. But when we come to the table, and I assume, Aaron, that your intent is good towards me as a friend, or I assume my partner's intent is good—that assumption of goodness and giving them the benefit of the doubt [is] also [important], right? Because so often, what we do is let our own monkey minds go down a tangent: "Oh, he's late. He must not love me. He must not believe my time is valuable." We make assumptions and 99% of the time they're freaking

wrong, right? And then we're down this rabbit hole, assuming [things] like: "Oh, my gosh, life is over because they don't love me" and this and that. It's totally false anyway.

Dr. Jill 25:59

And again, as long as we have a fairly healthy foundation, most of the time we want to do good for our relationships, right? So we're right in assuming the best about another person. Even with us, with the downfall of our relationship, both of us, I think, hit a rough little patch in the very beginning because it was so traumatic. But in general, in the last five years, we have almost always assumed goodness in the other person. I assume that you mean well, even if you say something that hurts me. I'm like, "Oh, he didn't mean that." Or the same with you to me, right? That's really the opposite of contempt. It is this assumption of goodness, this assumption of kindness. That goes a long way too, doesn't it?

Aaron Carnahan 26:42

Yes, it absolutely does, and that's a hard one.

Dr. Jill 26:46

It is because our monkey minds will make up stories, right?

Aaron Carnahan 26:49

Actually, even doing reminders for yourself [is beneficial]. My reminders list is never like, "Get the groceries." My reminder lists are "I feel" blank, "when" or "because" blank; "I need" blank. So, that's another reminder: assume the best; assume good. Those are great reminders to give yourself.

Dr. Jill 27:10

So, we said the "I feel" statement is huge, and that's really the opposite of criticism here. Contempt—the opposite would be building a culture of love and appreciation and assuming the best about your partner or your family member or your business, coworker, or whatever. Another thing is taking responsibility. That's a hard one. That's where defensiveness can come in. Usually what happens is the younger parts of ourselves that were maybe hurt or belittled or shamed go automatically to, "Oh, my gosh, I can't be... " You and I, both, I'm going to say this, and I hope it's okay, Aaron, but we had things around, like, we want to be good, right? We want to be good. We wanted so badly to be good and to be perceived as good, but also to be good; we wanted to be good people. So if anyone would ever say "you're bad," or if we would infer to one another, "You did this and I'm upset," inferring [disapproval], that's a big wound we both had, right? So I can guarantee [you], before I did all the work, if you would have said

something that made me feel shame, I probably would have been very defensive. So if we can be aware of those triggers and be like: "Oh my gosh, that's my little girl part that's afraid of being bad. He didn't mean to..." But that's a big one, isn't it? That defensiveness?

Aaron Carnahan 28:19

It's so huge. I think that's still a big one for me. Just so you know: all of these things, I never get them all 100% right. Of all of them, that is the one that I have to remind myself more and more of—more than anything else—because I catch myself being angry because I perceive that somebody thinks I'm bad. It's a huge one; it's a huge one.

Dr. Jill 28:47

I talked to my friend the other day. We were talking about shame. I have a best friend who's a neuropsychologist. You know her. She's amazing. I always say I get secretly therapized all the time; I'm so lucky. But we talk about shame openly, and it's so beautiful. We have this joke; we have 'shame lip gloss' that makes the shame okay to talk about. "Get out your shame lip gloss, I have a story to tell you." When you bring shame to the light, it takes away its power. The power of shame is that when we're alone and we think we're the only ones who have shame about this feeling, or someone said something that hurt our feelings, or something went wrong and you feel really bad about how it ended up, the shame that we feel is going to be more powerful if we don't share it. But if we have a close friend or relationship where we can talk about it and literally say, "I've got a shame story for you"—I do that all the time with her and she does that with me—what happens when we talk, we laugh [is that] it totally takes away the power of shame. When you look at the data—again, Brené Brown, she's a researcher on shame—the data shows some of the most horrific crimes and people who've done really awful things come from shame. Shame is not a motivator; it's not a good thing. And all of us have it. It's human, right?

Dr. Jill 30:00

So back to relationships. If you can notice and be aware enough of yourself to notice your triggers, [it is very helpful]. Before, I think we didn't know that. Now that we've done the work, now we know: "This is a trigger for me." I struggle with perfectionism, so if I view that someone thinks I'm not doing things right, good or perfect—which I never do anyway [since] we're all human—that can be a trigger for me. Now I'm aware of it, so I'm like: "No, no, no. Good is okay. I did my best and that matters." Another trigger might be if someone makes me feel unworthy. Or another trigger for me might be performance [related]. So if I get a poor grade, or if I don't do a great job, all these things for each of us [can be triggers]. We have our own triggers and if we can become aware of those, then our partner might say something that's totally innocuous—it's not

meant to hurt us at all—but if it hits our little girl trigger that we were wounded, then we get all defensive.

Aaron Carnahan 30:54

It's super, super easy. I've got an example of that one. The irony of shame for me is that a lot of times I could have that shame without anything [specific]. [For example], I'm thinking about the future and I've got shame for it, and I'm like, "What the heck is my problem with that?" I had a situation the other day [where] I got frustrated with my partner. It came down to the fact that I was stressed and I felt shame because I didn't feel I was doing a good enough job with my job. And she never said anything. It's just this story that's playing in my head. For whatever reason, I twisted it around so that she's saying that I'm not good at my job or something, and she never said anything about my job. It was all internal, in my mind, of "What if I fail at this?" Or "What if I fail at that?" I know that doesn't make a lot of sense because it's everything that was playing out in my head. But my point is that if you can be so worried about your performance and about not being good, it can mess up things that have nothing to do with—

Dr. Jill 32:13

I love that you said that because that's the other piece of communication. We can actually talk to our partners, or those close to us, whether it's friends or romantic relationships, and say: "You know what? I really struggle with this, and I need you to help me." You can give them the power to help you be accountable for your areas of weakness where they start to notice and help you not go down that path to assume the worst or to assume whatever triggers. So it's great if you're in a relationship to know your partner's triggers and know the areas where they maybe don't feel good enough in this area, or they feel fallible—all the things we all have as humans—because you can help them. You can actually be their cheerleader in that time when they go down a slippery slope and think something that's maybe not true at all.

Aaron Carnahan 33:02

The way that was resolved—I actually was leaving and getting into my car after that, without resolution—I recognized what happened. I recognize the trigger. I recognize that I just had some internal things going on, some fears about how I would be perceived and how I perceived myself. I went back into the house and I said, "I'm sorry." This wasn't an "I feel" statement. I needed it for her. My "I feel," my "I need," was, "Please forgive me." But it was like: "I felt" this "when you said this and I know it has nothing to do with this, but when you said" this thing—I can't even remember what she said—my mind went to, "I'm not good enough." She knows that that's one of my things, and I said: "I just need you to forgive me. I'm sorry for that." [It was] completely resolved and it's because of two things: recognizing that trigger around shame and not feeling good

enough and also going in and helping her to understand why I got so upset; and helping her to know that she did nothing wrong and I know that; but also revealing to her what it was that got me all twisted up.

Dr. Jill 34:18

Yes, because, again, we all have these triggers. And you really can share with your partner. Part of our downfall was that we didn't know our own triggers, right? We were just living life reacting, so we didn't understand these old shame triggers [such as] trauma, and the things that we dealt with. So we had no awareness. One of the things I want to leave is—if you're listening—that's really, super important. There are so many ways to do the work: you can read books; you can do it on your own; you can get a professional therapist; you can go to Onsite, and there's more than that. If you're in the chat box and have some ideas, you can suggest them too. But the truth is, until you become self-aware and start to understand your own self, your psyche, and your childhood and what led to creating the being that you are in the world, you can never really show up in a relationship because you're just reacting. You're reactive and you can't take ownership of your own self, trauma and triggers until you know yourself.

Dr. Jill 35:13

Again, if I look back at you and me almost 20 years before our divorce—so a lot of years together—we did a lot [of things] right. We played together, we had fun together, we were kind, we were respectful in general—all those things were there. But we didn't know how to express our needs. We didn't allow the other to really see ourselves. We put on a mask and said [in essence]: This is the perfect version of myself, but don't go too close and don't see too much, because you'll see my flaws. What else would you say are things that we have learned since that time? Maybe things that led to our divorce?

Aaron Carnahan 35:51

Well, the interesting thing is, in the year or two leading up to the divorce, from the outside world, we looked like we were both very successful. We were successful, we were doing well, and on the outside, everything looked beautiful and wonderful. I would say one of the biggest things is that we started living parallel lives. We would give one another just enough, but our lives split and they went completely parallel. I think that was one of the biggest things. We quit being partners, and we quit being a team. I'm over here applauding you as a solo artist, and I'm over there applauding you as a solo artist rather than us being a part of one another's lives. We did rose-colored glasses all the time.

Dr. Jill 37:03

Oh, yes. Briefly, I'm so sorry to interrupt you, but I was like, "This is hilarious!" Because when we know the Enneagram [personality types]—if you're listening and you don't know the Enneagram, find out your type, get to know that—there's something that I think is so funny. Because, Aaron, you're a seven, which is amazingly fun, excitement, loves adventure, hates missing out; you don't like fear. I'm a nine and I am very spiritual, sees all sides of the story, hates conflict. And I don't like conflict. So we have no fear, no conflict. Guess what? That was part of the problem too, because we didn't know how to navigate. I hated conflict and I thought it meant the end of the world. I was catastrophic with conflict. Now I know that when you resolve and repair in a relationship, that's the best way to grow. Did you know that?

Aaron Carnahan 37:46

My goodness, it does so much!

Dr. Jill 37:47

Right? So conflict is the best thing you could have in your relationship, as long as you know how to actually be kind and respectful and avoid the Four Horsemen, because you learn. But I avoided it. Was there anything else that I missed there? Those two things, the Enneagram [types] seven and nine, we had a lot of fun, but we avoided fear and conflict, didn't we?

Aaron Carnahan 38:06

Yes, absolutely. I think that's part of it. When you're talking about wearing a mask or whatever, for me as a seven, what that looked like was: I'm feeling pain, I'm experiencing pain—

Dr. Jill 38:16

That's what I meant, not fear, [but] pain.

Aaron Carnahan 38:17

Yes, fear is right as well. But it's like you do not want to feel bad, you only want to feel good. So that's why a lot of [type] sevens have a lot of issues with dependency on different things, [be it] substances or whatever. You just want to have fun all the time. I mean, if you're going to have a flaw, to want to have fun all the time, it's not that bad; it's pretty good to have. But when you're in a relationship, you're not going deep—I'm talking [about] intimacy. I agree with you, and it's weird because I'm talking about my current relationship, but at the same time, we talked about the failure of our relationship. But part of what's making this one successful is the fact that when we have conflict, we go deep, and we understand one another, and we allow ourselves to

be real and honest and authentic and tell one another our needs. The difference is crazy. And every time we come out of it, we are stronger.

Dr. Jill 39:20

I love that! It's a perfect example. If it were me 5–10 years ago, I would have been like, "Oh, conflict means really bad things happen." And that's just not true. What I love is the repair. The repair process, if you can do it respectfully with all the tips we just talked about, will almost always lead to a closer intimacy. You and I were in avoidance [mode]. We were in this pattern of avoidance. If there was anything difficult, we just kind of avoided it and we went to our happy [place]: let's pretend; let's paint it all good. Intimacy—I write in my book about this—"into me see." It's kind of like letting someone see into yourself. We both had a mask on, and again, it wasn't like our marriage was all bad, but we kept a distance. We didn't really let the other person get to know us because we were afraid, we thought we weren't worthy, and all these things we just talked about, right?

Aaron Carnahan 40:11

Yes, I think if you wanted to distill it down to the root of everything, it was fear. Fear drove everything, and fear was the thing we were afraid of. It's this really weird thing. We feared intimacy; we feared being alone. But we were alone when we were together, which was an interesting thing. It's an insane, insane thing.

Dr. Jill 40:45

I love that Brené Brown quote. I'm going to read it one more time: "True belonging doesn't require us to change who we are, it requires us to be who we are." We all long for belonging in the world, and relationships and family. So often, we don't feel like we belong, or we feel like we have to be something else. But true belonging is where we can actually be the most ourselves. And if anything should have true belonging and partnership, it's in an intimate relationship.

Aaron Carnahan 41:15

We've got to be honest about relationships. Think about your friendships before and after our divorce. For me, my friendships—it's easy for me to make friends as a seven; I have a lot of friends—can be a lot more real. You'd be a lot more honest. And sometimes you scare people away because you can really get into some depth with your friends. That's huge; that is huge.

Dr. Jill 41:47

It really is. I think our society now, especially post-pandemic—being isolated, and now people are sick—there's a lot of fear. Now more than ever, we need belonging, we need acceptance, we need kindness, we need forgiveness. This is where we model for the world. I mean, our world is in chaos right now. There's a lot of conflict, there's a lot of evil going on. If there's anywhere we can model, it's in our relationships—this is where it starts. We practice here, and then we can go out into the world and try to do the same thing on a bigger scale. But it really, really starts in our own relationships with friends and family and loved ones, doesn't it?

Aaron Carnahan 42:22

Absolutely.

Dr. Jill 42:25

So we kind of talked about what we did right and what we did wrong. What would you say, Aaron, is some of the best advice? You might have already given some tips. If we had to boil it down to some of the best advice you could give someone who's maybe struggling in a relationship, what kind of advice would you give?

Aaron Carnahan 42:38

I would say, "look internally." I would say, "Ask yourself what you're feeling and why you're feeling those things, and acknowledge what you're feeling, not what you're thinking." And then, "Be open and honest about what you're feeling." If you're on red alert, the sirens are going [off] and everything else: communicate, communicate, communicate. Let it be known—red alert—"I'm hurting"; "I'm falling." I think that's a huge thing. That's something that I was not able to do, and I regret that I wasn't able to do that. I don't ever want to be that anymore. I want to be able to reveal: this is where I'm at. But I think that's a really, really, really big one.

Dr. Jill 43:36

I love that. I think that's so true. We didn't talk much about the downfall, but just very briefly: I had a bad mold-related illness; I was way sicker than I knew. One of the things about mold that's so weird is that it almost takes away your ability to understand how badly you're really hurting. So it's the same thing. That contributed as well. That's not an excuse by any means. But that actually made me even more disoriented and numb to what was actually happening and more unavailable to you as a partner at that time, Aaron. So [I got] the mold-related illness and things were [also] changing because my clinic was moving. It was chaos in my life. You had, unbeknownst [to you], been bitten by thousands of ticks in Virginia and contracted Lyme disease, which affects the brain and body as well. Then you lost your father. Your mother was very ill the year we separated, then one of your dearest friends [was also whose] career you managed.

What's interesting, I just recently read about this and I think I shared it with you. You were numb at that time, weren't you? And if your partner is in a place where they are in massive trauma... I was too. I didn't know it. We were both numb. These things led to us being completely numb and really not able to connect, even if we had wanted to. There was so much trauma for both of us at that time, I don't think we could have if we wanted to. But because our foundation was kind of shaky, it didn't take much for things to really collapse under those circumstances.

Aaron Carnahan 44:56

Absolutely. You don't want to make the excuse of Lyme and mold, but it's interesting because I'm working with a lot of people with Lyme and mold issues right now. The interesting thing is, they're almost always in relationships where it's so huge for the spouse to be there for them because it's such a difficult journey. Here [in the situation you described], you and I are both in this place where we're needing the other to be there for us.

Dr. Jill 45:22

We were sick, really, if we're honest.

Aaron Carnahan 45:25

Both of us were needing the other person. It was really a weird thing. So there was that. But I 100% agree. But I wouldn't blame it on the mold or the Lyme. I think we didn't communicate. We hadn't dealt with our stuff. We had the mask on and to the world we looked amazing, but inside, I was a little boy that was hurting greatly; you were a little girl that was hurting greatly. We need to get to that; we need to get to those issues and deal with them. I'm really, really, really glad we did.

Dr. Jill 46:00

I know that's the thing now. If you're out there listening, maybe you're in the process of [getting a] divorce, you've just gotten divorced, or your relationship is in crisis. Divorce wasn't part of my vocabulary growing up. I never in a million years thought it would happen to me, and I grew up in a very conservative Christian family. That just wasn't part of what I believed in. Now I know that sometimes there are expiration dates. I won't go into the spiritual [aspect and explain] where I'm at as far as those details. But what happened was, I actually felt like there was an expiration and there was a reason. Now I look back: God did so much healing in my life by taking us apart. Again, now we can show up much more healthy in our relationships. But that would have never, never, never happened, had we stayed. That may sound contrary to some of you, what you believe, and I respect that. But I'm just going to say, it was the best thing that could have ever happened for me and I think for you too, Aaron, as far as growth and

development for us as humans, and for us in the world, and for us in relationships, and even now in our friendship. I want to end in a few minutes with what we're doing together as far as projects, but what are your thoughts on that?

Aaron Carnahan 47:10

It's interesting that you say that because you can carry a lot of guilt around from that, especially when you're talking about values and belief systems and those types of things. I understand and respect it so much. But I think when you're brought up in that tradition, and that tradition says: "No! You're in it forever," or whatever it might be, and a big part of that tradition is: "You are one. You've become one." I understand that. I would say that we said the vows and we lived a life that appeared that we were one, but we weren't. We were two separate little children on separate little islands that hung out together a lot. I would say post-divorce, once we did the work on our own, you and I are more 'one' than we ever were in our 20 years of marriage, I feel. We feel so connected not only to one another but to the world. We have so much more love to give because we receive it now, and it doesn't take away from our current relationships. I'm not saying it in the sense that you and I have something that—no, that relationship is different. That's that more intimate relationship and everything. It's not meant to take away from my relationship, because my goodness, that's what it is.

Dr. Jill 48:43

And just for the record, I love and respect your girlfriend so much!

Aaron Carnahan 48:50

We have the utmost respect for one another. But that's an interesting thing because [it means] I care about you more, I love you more, I trust you more, and I serve you more. But it's because it's out of the right heart. It's an interesting thing.

Dr. Jill 49:20

I think people have a box, for example, soulmates. I really believe there are these soul connections we have, that we have work to do in this life and God brings those people into our lives. I always thought a soulmate was like a lover, and I realized [it goes beyond that]. I told my best friend she's a soulmate, and I was like: "You can have friends that you have a purpose in common with, a common mission in life, and a common connection. Some of these relationships transcend the definition of what the world says it should be." I think that's how we feel. It's the sense that we have work to do together; we have a purpose. We've learned so much and we have deep respect for one another and gratitude. But we also have our own relationships, and they're very different. Again, we have respect for that in the sense of honoring them as well in our lives.

Aaron Carnahan 50:05

I think our relationship now is such an act of service to other people. Hopefully, this podcast is an act of service to people. Hopefully, you get love out of this, and you don't get [the impression] that we've done this perfect thing on the other side of divorce or whatever it is.

Dr. Jill 50:25

No, we're a work in progress, right?

Aaron Carnahan 50:27

We're a work in progress. But the main thing is that our relationship now is about loving and serving other people.

Dr. Jill 50:34

Yes, yes. And we can encourage one another to do that.

Aaron Carnahan 50:36

We can encourage one another to do that. Hopefully, we can do that. Maybe this podcast will save your marriage; maybe it will save you so that you can finally get your own stuff together—whatever it might be. I feel that is the beauty; that's the beauty.

Dr. Jill 50:54

I love it, yes. Like I said, I hope this has been helpful to [those of] you listening. I would love feedback and comments. Anywhere, anytime you're listening, please share. What I want to end with, though, is that we're doing something pretty crazy now. I'll maybe frame it and then I want to hear what you have to say. But about a year ago, I was sitting in my chair—it was the beginning of 2021—and I had this thought: "I'm writing a book, and that's great to reach people with a story of functional medicine and some of those healing things," but people were switching to screens because of COVID, and that "we need to be on screens." Obviously, you have the background. I introduced you to lots of production, film, and experience in the entertainment world and you're very, very good at what you do. But I had this thought: "What if I make a documentary?" But then I'm like: "Who am I? I don't know anything." But what I find is that when I go into that place and talk to God, He reveals the direction to go; He brings all the people and resources. Within a week or two, we had talked. You had a friend who is a director, Dan, who you're currently working with, and we all said: "Let's do this!" [To make a] long story short, we're creating a documentary together; you and Dan as Embark Features, and me as the story and different pieces there. But I'm so excited now to work with you

to bring the story to the world about not only functional medicine but environmental toxicity, relational toxicity, trauma, and all these things that really, really impact our health [in a way that's] probably even greater than the toxic load in our environment.

Aaron Carnahan 52:21

Yes, and it's exciting. To talk about that oneness thing again, if you remember, you were thinking about those things and I called you and I'm like, "I think we're supposed to do something together." I'd been watching a lot of masterclasses throughout the pandemic and I think I called you and I said: "We're supposed to do something to get this message out. It's too important." And I said, "Is it a masterclass?" I remember you were on the other end of the phone and you're like, "Uh, you're going to think this is crazy, but I've been thinking about..." And then you mentioned the documentary, and I'm like, "Oh, my gosh!" That was huge.

Dr. Jill 52:57

Again, you're a producer, a director, you've got so many talents in this. I don't have any of that; I have a story to tell. But it was so neat, and we've been working together for the last 15 months. But what was neat is that as we came together with this common goal of really reaching the world with love, compassion, transforming, healing—transforming people by even introducing them to functional medicine—[and] everything came together. We had funding from a brilliant, amazing investor who's become a friend to both of us. We had the timeline. As we got the crew together when we were filming here in Colorado, what's amazing is that we both said, as we've been doing this, "It's those day-to-day interactions that are what this is all about." The end product: we're going to get a documentary. But tell me just a little bit about what your perspective is because I know I've seen that every single time we get together and film with the crew and all the stuff we've been doing, it's amazing what happens. It's like magic.

Aaron Carnahan 53:58

Yes, I think the biggest part of this is being present every single day and in every single aspect of this film. We've got a goal and we've got a desire, and the biggest desire is to love and impact people to love and impact people, right?

Dr. Jill 54:14

Yes, Aaron! Say that again, Aaron, because it's really important. Say that again.

Aaron Carnahan 54:17

We want to love and impact people to love and impact people. Daniel and I, when we started Embark Features, we said we want to make films that just encourage people to step out and make a difference and love people so that they go love people and on and on and on. That's why we're doing this. But if you're doing that and you're not treating people right in the process or treating yourself right in the process—sometimes I have a harder time with [certain projects]—I mean, [then] why are you doing it? All we have guaranteed is today. So through the process, we've just been trying to love on the crew and encourage them and one another. I'm in a house right now. Dan came to New Jersey and we—

Dr. Jill 55:05

You guys are editing right now, right?

Aaron Carnahan 55:08

Yes, we're in the middle of everything. We've stopped work for the day. We've been working really long days, and we've been doing a lot of editing. We just stopped. So we're at a little house right next to the ocean doing some pretty intense editing. But even in that, you'll get frustrated and be like, "Why isn't this going in the right way?" Even for ourselves, just to have mercy with one another, for ourselves, and love ourselves through this process, has been teaching me so much as I go through this—so, so, so much. I'm excited to bring it to the world.

Dr. Jill 55:41

I wanted to say that because I don't know how many people do a project like this with an ex-spouse. And again, our partners are so supportive. It's been amazing because on all the levels that we've had, it's been really special.

Aaron Carnahan 55:55

I said, "Hey, I've got to go. I'm going to jump on this podcast with Jill," and she goes, "Oh, is this your BFF podcast?"—or something like that.

Dr. Jill 56:03

I love it! That is so awesome. I wanted to share this as we end—we are just about out of time—even you and I and how we interact, people know our names, so they're like, "Carnahan; is that your brother?" I've gotten [those types of questions]. [I would answer]: "Well, no. But oh, my ex-husband is producing the movie." But I was going to say there have been two specific things I remember, and you might even remember more. One, in particular, was [when] I'm talking and you guys are filming and interviewing me, and you had gotten to a point about what happened with the divorce.

I shared some deep hurt and some difficulties, and literally the crew, an hour later, they're like, "Oh, Aaron, you're behind the camera, right?" They're looking at you and they're like, "You were the ex-husband?"—because they had basically seen us interacting together. I was telling just the hurt part that we got through and got over and they were literally shocked: "You're her ex-husband? The one she was just talking about?"

Dr. Jill 56:57

The other thing I remember is we did a climb, a special event, and it was really, really cool. It was scary for me, and it was so awesome—the support I felt and everything. One of our climbing film crew [members], afterward, was like, "I want to know more about after the divorce." She was in the middle of—I now know more—a crisis; literally a crisis in her relationship. She looked at us and we were being friends like we always are; kind, respectful, and working together. She looked at that and said, "This documentary is great, but I want to know your story. What happened that you could work together so respectfully and kindly after a divorce?" Do you remember those two things?

Aaron Carnahan 57:35

Yes, yes. I do. You get those moments where you're like, "We're doing something right." So I feel that it's going to be really special. I feel that this is right and I hope it's a blessing to people as well. If there needs to be any clarifications or questions, you know—

Dr. Jill 57:57

Yes, we might have to do a follow-up. We'll see how people like this, and then we might have to do another Q&A.

Aaron Carnahan 58:02

Or they're going to be like, "Oh, my gosh!"

Dr. Jill 58:07

"Not again!" The other thing is, stay tuned because we'll keep you posted about the documentary. Or maybe I'll have you and Dan on to share as we get closer to the process. But yes, thank you for taking time out of your editing. Thank you as always for being here today with me. It is truly my honor and privilege, and I'm so thankful for that.

Aaron Carnahan 58:24

All mine. It's beautiful. Thank you so much!