

Transcription:

KEVIN + EMILY w/ ANDY TRT: 21:54

ANDY + EMILY TRT: 17:35

HOST

My name is Andy Horning, and this is Elephant Talk. It's about all things relationship. The soulful, the silly, and the sexy.

Today is a special episode for me because it's the one year anniversary of my good friend Kevin Basmadjian passing away from geoblastoma brain cancer.

Our friendship is the kind of friendship that starts in adulthood. We had our first job together as teachers. But, in reality you grow up together. And, Kevin and I grew up together. We shared the challenges of navigating that first job out of college. We talked and shared the joys of getting married around the same time of having two kids within months of each other.

And, this interview is recorded twelve days before Kevin passes away from brain cancer and Kevin is one of the most optimistic guys. That's the way he approached brain cancer. He wasn't going to talk about it much and he wasn't going to act as if it would hold him back. His favorite saying is, "make it a great day." And, that's what he did over and over again as he battled this cancer through radiation and chemotherapy...still working, still parenting, still being so positive.

He was so positive in fact, that the two of them, he and Emily, had not really talked much or made much space for the sitting down and the talking about the cancer and the impact of cancer on their lives. And, I was grateful to have that opportunity to sit down with microphones to ask them questions about their lives. What follows is a special interview with Kevin and Emily.

Quotes

"You know there's a lot of silver linings but that's one that's really been surprising to me it's how much you want to reach out and you know give to other people." --Emily

"...there's also just this belief that... you're part of a huge world and, you know, there's a plan and you do what you can within there and do the best you can." -Kevin

"It's been a remarkable...journey in so many ways, not just in the last six months but just the big picture, the small picture. I feel so much...love for you and all you've done for me our family. I want to thank you for always being here and being a real rock." --Kevin

Speaker	Dialogue
Andy	What do you want your kids to remember about you?.
Andy	What do you want them to remember, Kevin?
Kevin	You want to leave with your kids saying 'he was a great dad' you want- you know 'he was a great husband' you want to leave all these great things but...
Kevin	All those things are so important to me: a dad, a husband, a father, a leader at work, all those things, but friend was what I- and it wasn't that 'friend' is more important than 'husband', it wasn't that friend was more important than dad. There's no more important thing than Dad. What I was trying to say was friend is what I think about what's really important, friendship, I think a lot of it came off of what we had just kind of gone through, some health stuff and you see outpouring of friendship that's like... oh, my Gosh it's so...
Andy	It was moving.
Kevin	Yeah.
Andy	It touched you.
Kevin	Yeah.
Andy	I was thinking about the two of you and the way in which you have raised your kids and been such a great team together in doing it, you have made your kids your priority and you've done so much as a team...
Kevin	I mean I think it's been a dance from the time we first met, it's always trying to figure out the different steps and how we move together in different ways. One of the hardest maybe just figure out how we complement each other and I think that song that we first sung at grad school a long time ago, John Prine's song
Kevin	Sitting on a rainbow and it's like... it's a constant learning from each other and balancing, and always wanting to figure –for me anyways– trying to figure out the complement instead of contradict, I guess. It's a process.
Emily	One of the things I think about when I think about how we complement is when we throw parties and we've thrown a lot of parties... for Kevin it's always 'the more the merrier' just 'keep inviting them, don't worry about it, just keep inviting them, keep inviting them' and I'm always worry about 'Oh, my Gosh it's going to be crazy in our house' but when you watch us get ready for a party, I think you can see how we complement each other, you know. I'm running around making sure our house doesn't look messy, he doesn't care about that, he says friends won't care, you

	know, he's setting up the music and he's setting up the things that will make sure people have a good time. I always wanted to watch one of our parties from above and see how the two of us do it because I'm always so crazy that I never can actually sit back and see what happens at our parties.
Andy	Do you guys ever sit back afterwards and be like 'That as a great party'?
Emily	We have a ritual.
Emily	Everyone's gone and we're cleaning up, and Kevin will be over washing dishes and he'll say...
Emily	He'll say 'success?'
Kevin	You would say success.
Emily	The last one- the last one we had was on his birthday,
Emily	We had scheduled it for Sunday because we thought he was going to have treatment and we wanted him to be as rested as possible and... he didn't want anything on his birthday, you didn't want anything on your birthday... but I knew you would want all your friends there and it turned out you had to go for a transfusion that morning so you were gone for that whole routine and that whole dance of us getting ready and what was nice is that the kids just... they slipped right in, you know, Christian blew the leaves off the deck and I don't remember what Carly did but we did it all, you came home and it was all ready.
Emily	And I liked it. You know, one of the things that had growing up was that my parents had tons of parties and we were always there so I'm glad that they're seen that, hopefully they'll carry that on or something that's important to them.
Kevin	I know it's been a tough journey but I think we're- it's brought us- I think it has brought everybody closer. Obviously, when you go through something as challenging as this is unsettling and there's a lot that goes on but... you realize just how precious family and love is, it's... so I think it's just been something that's really brought a different sort of lens you can't even understand how it would've changed things...
Andy	Do you feel that connection more with Emily as that-? You know, you feel that love and support?
Kevin	Yeah.
Kevin	I know you are always there. You understand all the things that are involved and me and my family.
Emily	One of the things that's so remarkable, it's hard because this is both incredibly annoying but also very admirable, your whole desire to not make this all about you

	<p>and not that I don't think you should, I think you should make it all about you and I wish you would but, it's part of who you are, you don't like to be the victim and you don't want pity and... although I think you deserve both of those right now... and I can't tell you how many people would comment on how unbelievable strong you are and, again, I don't think you have to be, I think you have every right to be vulnerable and weak. I can't tell you how many people say 'You would never know Kevin is sick.' And I think that's what you would want, I think you would want- you wouldn't want people say 'Oh! There is that guy who has cancer.' You would want people to just see you as a friend and you're still able to help people, you always are saying 'I don't want to burden people.' I would like us to burden people a little bit but it's a double edge sword, I want you to hear the part of it that is very admirable even though is also a little hard [Laughter] to deal with, but it is admirable.</p>
Emily	<p>Part of me deep inside is wondering 'are you doing that for us or is it just the way you are?' I don't know.</p>
Kevin	<p>You've dealt with migraines and things like that, and I think things like these help people to empathize. There have been a couple of moments where I know you've said, in the past, you just want to... you know, you'd rather be not even alive and have to deal with it. And I think that's really important for people to be able to empathize at that level, because there was a moment when I was like 'I'd just rather not be alive' the pain was so hard and I thought about you because there've been time you've said that with your migraines and those to me are moments where we connect to people because all these things allow us to get closer to each other when we can do that. I think those are the little moments that... help us to... be closer, to better love you and appreciate what you've gone through.</p>
Emily	<p>Well I'm glad you shared it because I thought about that at the moment, well actually someone said it to me, they said 'maybe now he'll understand your migraines' and I was like 'I'm not going to go there because I'm not going to compare my migraines to brain tumor,' but now that you've said it, I'm glad it's out there.</p>
Andy	<p>I just wanted to check in on your wedding, I was remembering it the other day.</p>
Kevin	<p>Our anniversary [<i>Phonetic</i>] is tomorrow.</p>
Emily	<p>Tomorrow's our anniversary.</p>
Andy	<p>No way! So let me guess, thirteen years. Thirteen years?</p>
Emily	<p>Lucky thirteen.</p>
Emily	<p>I think the thing we'll remember the most is everyone who spoke during the ceremony, I mean, most people haven't been to a Quaker wedding before so they didn't know what to think about this 'now everybody can get up and speak' moment, uhm, but so many people spoke. People just kept popping up, your dad</p>

	spoke, which is very unlike him to speak in that kind of setting. And I remember laughing, I remember crying, I remember being so happy that basically people from every aspect of our life spoke.
Kevin	Just have friends and family talking about you and how much... it's mutual too because we are the people we are because of them and they are because of us, to have all those people there sharing those things and being a part of it, it was... It could not have been better for me.
Kevin	I mean I never had a sense of what a Quaker would even look like, it's the most perfect... way to sort of celebrate your life and the lives that all those people that influence you, and make you, and contribute to you, and vice versa.
Andy	I remember when Kevin having known you as single for so long, I mean you and I have been knowing each other for twenty-six years and when you were in California, we were in California together teaching, little dates here and there both of us –
Andy	And then when we both moved to the Detroit area, and Emily was coming to town,
Andy	Uhm, do you remember that, Emily? Going to Ann Arbor because you guys hadn't quite dated yet. It was complicated but you were interested in each other?
Emily	I was seeing someone long distance that I was seeing before I moved to Michigan, remember?
Kevin	I remember when I first asked about you, and I said 'what about Emily over there?' And he said 'she's got a long term boyfriend, don't even try going in there' and of course I'm always up for a challenge like that. Then I think we went to some, I remember sitting in a corner somewhere that had fries.
Emily	It was some Greek diner we went to.
Kevin	Yeah, like a Greek diner we went to and...
Emily	You told the story about how your dad was an extra on some movie and then you asked the waiter to pretend like he knew them from the movie.
Kevin	Oh! I told you that story?
Emily	You told me on that first date, yeah.
Andy	Did Kevin make you something? Like a tape or... a book or something?
Emily	He makes lots of things but I think one of the reasons you said you first liked me was I made you this binder for the class you were going to teach.

Kevin	I remember that.
Emily	That's how we started getting to know each other, we were going to teach the same class.
Kevin	Right.
Emily	So I was helping him because I had taught it before and I made him a whole binder for the class, and you like that crafty kind of stuff.
Kevin	Yeah, I remember that. Well that's a good example, those are things that I like doing and it's like you're somebody- I never had somebody actually give me something like that, that nice.
Emily	Because you always make for other people
Kevin	That was sort of telling that 'wow, this is' I mean 'no one's ever... I used to make a lot of this' you probably remember one time we visited Staples, remember I made that big banner?
Emily	[Laughter].
Kevin	And no one ever did that stuff for me. And here's Emily, I'm usually the one who makes those kinds of things.
Kevin	I made probably fifteen binders that I gave to girls, they were probably 'What the hell did you give me a binder for?' but you were the first to give me something special there. No one ever gave me a binder and I loved it.
Andy	So what if- if Christian and Carly are listening to this ten years from now what would you want them to hear? Both of you what would you like to say to them?
Emily	I want them to know how much we love them obviously but how much they should rely on each other and take care of each other. I say that to them all the time I- I care more that you come home having done something kind to somebody than you get and A on a paper. I want them to hold on to that.
Kevin	I think in many ways it's why there's a strong foundation between us because I think those are very important to me.
Andy	You've always had those values. You're just always building community whether is through games, parties or coaching little league baseball, you captained our football team and coached our softball team when we were on our twenties.
Andy	I think of the community and you bringing people together. You keep going to this core peace and at the deep level.. Do you feel that heart opening kind of openness that I'm experiencing?

Kevin	I mean I don't want to go too far but I think.
Andy	Why not?
Kevin	Well, I just don't want to bring up my health thing all the time but this really was a life changing event in that way and it just in a- it just...
Andy	What did it do?
Kevin	Well I think it opened the heart a little bit more in ways that I thought it was opened. I just could not have understood what it meant to do that and –
Andy	What is like to have that- to have your heart so open?
Kevin	It's just so freeing to want to just... love everybody.
Emily	It's interesting because I think that you know, you always hear people say that 'the poorest people are the most charitable', 'the people with the least to give, usually give the most' and I remember this moment right after you got diagnosed, it's almost like that moment when the Grinch's heart turns you know and I just- you just feel like you want to reach out and help everybody and I was like here we are in this, you know horrific crisis and I just remember going to work and I would just stop and say hi to people and then someone pulled over at the end of our neighborhood with their flashes on and I got out of the car and I was like 'You need help?' I never would have done that, not because I'm unkind but I'm just like either late or I'm like 'Who's this freak?' It's just strange how that happens, you would think it'll be the opposite because you're so needy and you're so beside yourself, yet here you are. So that's the gift I think that comes from this. You know there's a lot of silver linings but that's one that's really been surprising to me.
Kevin	I really believe every person has that in them, and the heart just changes.
Emily	That's what has been so hard for me about the kids is that I want that to happen for them, but it's hard to have that happened without them fully appreciating what's going on. I want to be like 'This is your moment to really love each other and to really be here and you know stop freaking fighting.' You know you don't want to weigh them down with the heaviness of it but at the same time I want them to experience this, this is the moment.
Andy	Kevin, are you scared at all? Is fear a feeling?
Kevin	You asked me that a couple of times.
Emily	Persistent bummer.
Andy	You're not.

Kevin	I'm not. Sad, but I also am optimistic so, 'We've got to deal with it, bring it on, move on.'
Andy	You have always been an optimist, haven't you?
Kevin	Yeah.
Andy	Emily do you notice his eternal optimism always there, right?
Emily	Definitely, I feel like I saw it waver these past weeks because it's been really hard, and that's when I started to see how fortunate we've been that you have this attitude because I was like 'what if it'd been like this since February?' and again, please feel free to have your moments of whatever. But everyone who asks me about 'how is he able to get up and go to work?' I just say 'he has a great attitude.' And so I guess now it's the time to ask, everyone asks me this question and I say there's one of three options, either you're a truly optimistic and truly believe that best things are going to happen; two it's for us, to keep us happy; or three, you think it's your best possible scenario and it's what's keeping you going.
Kevin	Can it be all three?
Emily	It could be! I lay those three options to people all the time, they say 'how is he doing?' and I say 'these are my possibilities: he really believes this, he wants us to believe this or this is all he's got'.
Kevin	You know, I really do believe it but there's also just this belief that... you're part of a huge world and there's a plan and you do what you can within there and do the best you can.
Andy	I was thinking about losses you joked that, you know, your dad didn't lose his sense of humor at all.
Kevin	And he's a big part of this whole thing too.
Andy	Yeah.
Kevin	Because he had a very laid back, You know, whatever, things are going to happen, what are you going to do about it?' And that was him, he just took things as they came. That's a big part of me, there's no question.
Andy	You were writing a little for a while, too, writing stories, what else is important to you to say or do?
Kevin	Yeah, no, it's a tough one. There's a book I want to put something together for the kids and someone mentioned, you know, put some audio in there too so they hear your voice. And it's really, you can share a whole narrative so that when they're older and you'd passed on they actually can hear your voice speaking to them.

	<p>One thing I thought about putting is, like, a road map because the kids and I used to go on Wednesdays to this car show. I thought there could be like twelve lessons of the road. Because cars have always been a big part of my life and I tried to passed that on to the kids too and they kind of have been- they get into it! They go to the old cars show, we have ice cream there and looked at the old cars. But, 'Twelve lessons for the road.'</p>
Emily	<p>I was just looking at pictures of us from grad school.</p>
Emily	<p>How different we look. How young we look. It's like we're different people.</p>
Kevin	<p>We probably are in ways that are so much stronger. You can't know all the ups and downs that happen or are going to happen in your life, some pull you apart, some bring you closer. And I think at the end they all bring you closer, all the miraculous things that have happened that have made things stronger and tighter, and –</p>
Emily	<p>[Sobbing] You know, there's something strange about how people- how people change when they're sick. Some things that get more pronounced, for you I think obviously your optimism comes through no matter what. Your independence comes through. You know, there's things that get harder because of who you are. The one irony, these past weeks where you've been really dependent, I think for the first time, you've just been so grateful in a way that you never vocalized and it's kind of nice to see you let down your guard. And I hate that is for this reason but it's been kind of nice. It's just amazing how many silver linings there are to...</p>
Kevin	<p>Yes.</p>
Emily	<p>...a serious illness. It's almost a relief to know that you let me in. You let me help you.</p>
Kevin	<p>I know, I understand that. I would not have understood even a month ago or two weeks ago</p>
Kevin	<p>It's been a remarkable sort of journey in so many ways, not just in the last six months but just the big picture, the small picture, I feel so much open and loved for you and all you've done for me [Crying] and our family. I want to thank you for always being here and being a real rock. Because you are a rock. You say I am but you are pretty strong.</p>
Emily	<p>Well I think it's a good example of how we compliment. You're a rock in terms of you don't sweat the little stuff or the big stuff, you're optimistic, and I think I'm a rock and that I work hard, I just keep going and I will.</p>
Kevin	<p>You do, you definitely do.</p>
Emily	<p>And I think those two things, we have them both, you know?</p>

Kevin	Yeah. Ok.
Emily	When I crash you say 'We've got to keep going.'
Emily	I think one of the hardest things for you can be to balance your optimism with the need to treasure moments. You know, don't be afraid to write down your hopes and dreams for the kids, I mean we all should. But don't feel like doing that means that you're saying 'I know I'm going to die'.
Kevin	Yeah, it's a good point. I understand.
Andy	So, write down your hopes and dreams for the kids, and anything else you would request of him to do while also remaining optimistic?
Kevin	[Laughter].
Emily	People want to connect with you.
Kevin	Yeah.
Kevin	That's a hard one because need to protect a little bit myself. It's exhausting. I totally get it because I don't want that and actually I have an email to all my friends, a very lengthy one that I've just not finished because I'm trying to get it perfect, to talk about all this. So, it's hard.
- BREAK -	
Andy	<p>There's something special in that recording of Kevin and Emily. Being vulnerable to the cancer. Being vulnerable to the impact. The impact it was having on him. The impact it was having on Emily, on their marriage, on their kids. I will not soon forget that conversation in their living room that October afternoon.</p> <p>You know it's one thing to love someone else. Certainly that takes courage and is a beautiful thing. But, maybe even harder and at the same time more rewarding is letting someone love you. Letting love in, allowing yourself to be seen, to be loved...and, that's what I witnessed in that recording.</p> <p>Less than two weeks after the recording, after the interview Kevin passed at a hospital on Oct. 23rd, 2016. And, just a week later we had a celebration of his life, a gathering of his whole community...his two brothers, his sister, their families, his mom, and his whole community came out from grade school to high school to college to grad school to his jobs as a teacher. This was a huge celebration of Kevin's life and they got married in a Quaker church, so at the end of the ceremony they opened it up to the whole community and people stood up one after the other sharing anecdotes and memories of what an incredible community builder Kevin was. And, I get it. I get what funerals are about now.</p>

	It was so cathartic to be amongst Kevin's community celebrating him. And, just five months after that funeral, that celebration of life, I had the chance to sit down with Emily and talk about his life and her life since his passing.
Andy	What do you feel right now?
Emily	Nervous.
Andy	Are you?
Emily	I mean I think the first time it was easier because Kev was there.
Andy	Yeah.
Emily	And now I don't like being in the spotlight.
Emily	I like being able to deflect like I could go, "Kev, what do you think?" And there's...
Andy	There's no Kev.
Emily	There's no Kev.
Andy	Yeah. We should just mention, as we took an Uber over here with a very colorful character as a driver. She told the story of how her husband died. She was widowed and she had a 12-year-old and a 9-year-old. I asked her, "How did you get over it, get through it, move beyond it, something?" She said, "You don't ever."
Emily	She said she puts it to the side of her head so that she can be there for her kids. She said you have to pull yourself together because of your kids, which is a hundred percent accurate.
Andy	Do you feel like you put it to the side?
Emily	I actually feel like I don't put the emotions to the side because I want them to see that, I mean, because they will never put that front and center. So I don't shy away when I cry because I feel like they don't engage with it enough.
Andy	Your kids?
Emily	But what you put to the side is like I don't feel like getting up. I don't feel like doing anything. That's the kind of stuff you have to like, "Okay, I'm here. We're doing this." For me, that's the kind of stuff. I don't put aside the emotions. I put aside the feelings of like I really don't want to do this.
Andy	And instead you say like I'm doing it?
Emily	We're doing this. We're going.

Andy	And since there's no Kevin, that means you're on all the time with those, your 9-year-old daughter and your 12-year-old son.
Emily	Right. I think it's so hard for them to have any concept of that because children are so naturally self-centered.
Andy	Yeah.
Emily	And I don't think they're being selfish. It's interesting because I think all the time about how were they not so affected by this? I mean, I know they are, but sometimes I think they're like, "We still have Mom, so let's go," which sounds ridiculous.
Andy	Yeah.
Emily	But you see them, you know, they're just like, "Okay, let's go."
Emily	I can't decide if it's resiliency or denial or self-preservation. You know the only way they can survive is to just put it over here.
Emily	Out of the blue, I'll say, "You guys thought about daddy at all recently?" And Christian will say, "Maybe a little." And Carly will say, "Nope." And that's hard to fathom because I mean you look around our house, he's everywhere. You know everything we do there's a void. And I know the kids have that way of self-preservation of putting it aside.
Andy	I mean it was five months ago that he died, right? When I say that word, it seems like nothing. But for some reason, it feels like forever ago that he died. Doesn't it?
Emily	It does. It feels like he's been gone a very long time and not because like life is so hard and my days are long. I can't even imagine him in our house right now.
Andy	So what are the moments that come back to you?
Emily	The hospital comes back a lot because he, as you know, didn't think he was going to die from this. And so when he had the brain hemorrhage and was just a body lying there, he was just breathing, I mean that was all that was left was just breathing and that image of him, just the antithesis of him, you know, who is never going to succumb to this.
Emily	That image of just his body breathing comes back a lot. Those moments are hard to get out of your head.
Andy	And was that his last conscious moment?
Emily	I don't know. So some of his friends went to visit him after they found out. Some of his buddies were getting him stirred up in ICU. I wasn't there but apparently, he

	raised his arm in the air like this because I guess it was someone in their Fantasy Football League said I'm going to beat you tonight. Kev shook his head no and put his arm in the air.
Andy	That's so fitting.
Emily	It is so fitting.
Andy	Because he's so competitive.
Emily	I know. He is. Well, I also think he wanted people to know he was still there. They said that his hearing would be the last to go before his breath, but he did not respond to anything else after that.
Andy	What's the feeling attached to those images? Do you have regret? Are you pissed?
Emily	No. I'm very sad for him because he had such an amazing vibrant life. Everyone feels like their life is cut short when they die, but I just feel like he's such a dynamic person who touched so many people. It just was made tragic for him but also for all the people. I mean all the kids he coached. Ever see so many 12-year-old boys crying? His colleagues at work are still devastated.
Emily	I don't feel any anger at all, none, which is a blessing. I don't think I feel regret. And I feel fearful for our children. I'm terrified that there's no way it cannot affect your children. So it's not manifesting now, but who knows? Oh, I feel like it's going to be a tsunami. I mean adolescence is already rough for kids. So I don't know. That's my fear is that what should I be doing now? Am I doing enough for them to process they don't want to process?
Emily	I mean Carly is so angry that I make her go to this family grieving.
Andy	And Christian doesn't go?
Emily	He does. We all go together. It's a family-based grieving program. He gets it. It's like, "Okay. We got to do this." Carly is mad as hell about going and won't participate.
Andy	And so what happens at this family grieving?
Emily	It's actually at a community center and then there are mostly women because it's mostly men, fathers, who have died.
Andy	Sitting around in a circle?
Emily	No. So it's an open gym. So they play sports. They let the kids like run around and play basketball and floor hockey and then come together for an opening circle where everyone has to say... you say, "I'm Emily and I lost my husband." And

	<p>Christian says, I'm Christian and I lost my dad." Carly refuses to speak, so she's sitting on the side. And then they light a candle. The facilitator says, "Here's what we're going to do today." And then the kids go off by age and the parents go off and there's a theme. So last time was resilience. You had to do a painting on a canvas about what gives you resilience and then they come back. There's no talking. It's not like talk therapy. It's all art therapy, physical.</p>
Andy	<p>Expressive.</p>
Emily	<p>You don't have to ever talk about it. You just engage with the emotions through what you're doing and then we have dinner together with all the families.</p>
Andy	<p>It's designed to be fun and interactive for kids and yet she still hates it.</p>
Emily	<p>She hates anything that is trying to get her to access her emotions. She's terrified of somebody getting in there and making her talk about her dad, so she's closing off any possibility.</p>
Andy	<p>That is a little scary, isn't it? And probably very normal at the same time.</p>
Emily	<p>Totally normal.</p>
Andy	<p>Have they ever seen you cry?</p>
Emily	<p>Yeah. When we got home from the hospital when we knew he wasn't coming back. I brought them to the hospital to say goodbye before he died. We got home and I was like, "All right, now, we have to cry." We just cry and cry and cry. And I cried and they cried, but mostly because I was like, "Now we have to cry. This is what we do now. This is how we grieve." Yeah, they saw me cry, I mean, the whole week of the funeral.</p>
Andy	<p>When I recorded the two of you together and we came to your house, I had no idea and you had no idea too. You're like, "Andy, I don't know what it's going to be like. I mean I'm home from work, but he's been in bed for two weeks." So I went upstairs to get him and I'll never forget. He was listening to cello music and he's like, "Have you ever heard such beautiful cello music, Andy?" I remember thinking, "Is that you Kev? Really?". And then I said, "Kev, do you want to come down and do this? Are you okay?" He popped out of bed, walked downstairs in his pajamas, sat on the couch, we hooked you two up with microphones and we had a great conversation for an hour and a half.</p>
Emily	<p>Yes. I'm so glad we did that because he doesn't like to talk about his feelings that much and he really did. He really opened up.</p>
Andy	<p>He just did not want to talk about cancer. He didn't want to be that guy.</p>
Emily	<p>I don't know if you remember during the interview. I said, "Is your approach because you don't think you're going to die or you don't want to upset us?" And</p>

there's a third option. I can't remember. And he said, "All of the above." He really thinks he was going to beat it, but he also didn't want us to walk around thinking he was going to die. But he only cried in front of me twice. One, when he was first diagnosed and I arrived in the hospital and he said, "I don't care about me. I'm sad for the children." And we didn't even have the diagnosis yet. He had one PET scan, but he knew.

Emily Did I tell you about the egg salad story? I think it was in September. He had lost his sense of taste because of the chemo and his hands were shaking so badly because of the steroids and he couldn't see. At that point, he hadn't yet let me start taking care of him. He still wanted to do everything and he tried to make himself an egg salad sandwich and it went horribly. I mean the egg just didn't cook right. He must have put like way too much pepper in and he sat on the sofa eating the sandwich and he just started sobbing. He said, "I can't even make a sandwich anymore." It was just the worst moment because he finally was letting it out that but also acknowledging like this is getting me and that was the only time he did it. And then I of course was like, "Let's talk." He said, "No, I'm fine," like quickly just cycled out of it, but that was just such a sad moment because those are the things. It's like when these little things in life, you can't do them anymore. And he had walked, he's supposed to be walking so he walked to the grocery store which is not close in his pajamas and got so tired he sat at the bus stop. I mean those are the images that you just can't get out of your head of this man who's just dying. You know it was such a strong vibrant man. And that's why I think early death is so hard because you're going from a hundred percent to zero percent where is like if you're 90 and you've already been slowing down, it's less of a slowdown, but he was really going a hundred miles an hour. So to see someone like that, vulnerable and weak at that prime, is very hard.

Andy Yeah. Is this gauche of me to ask?

Emily No.

Andy Do you think about love after love?

Emily It's funny. I don't think about love. I think about companionship because I have this image of my kids going off to college and being very alone, not lonely but alone, you know, and the idea of not having anyone to share your life with, go places with. So that's what I think about is, you know, am I really going to be by myself for the rest of my life? But those are the things I think about. I don't crave like, you know, I want romance again or I want, you know, passionate sex, I think about wanting another person to share my life with. I mean, who knows? Everyone thinks they're not going to because they can't imagine going on.

Andy Did you and Kevin talk about things like that, like remarrying or staying in the house? I know that was one big thing he wanted was to have this house that he put so much work into. He wanted you to stay there.

Emily	That was the only thing he voiced. We didn't talk about anything related to life after Kevin because there was no death. He was going to beat it.
Andy	You know you did say during the recording together that on one level, that was a gift because it bought more time, more normalcy, more chance to be in the moment and enjoy this thing that was your family, the four of you.
Emily	Yeah. I mean it was very selfless of him and it was also his MO though. I mean he wouldn't have done it any other way.
Andy	Yeah.
Emily	I mean at some point, everyone has to be a little bit selfish and say like, "This fucking sucks." You allow yourself to have this like me-me-me moment and be like, "This sucks." If he had that moment, he didn't share it.
Andy	We talked a couple of months after and you were sharing that in a way he was so positive. So you had to be more of the realist at times.
Emily	Yeah.
Andy	And now that he's gone, how did you frame it, you're working on taking on his more positive?
Emily	Actually, I'm not working on it. I feel that I have more space to be the person who is more carefree, you know, because I knew he would always be the one at the pool to say, "Sure, let's just buy the goggles. Let's just buy all this stuff." And I had to be the one that's like, "Okay, let's be a little bit frugal here." And now I get to be that person because it's not always him. And I don't say that to critique him. It's just that's who he was. It was always like, "Just don't worry about it. Figure it out later." Now I get to be both roles.
Andy	So as we wind down here, what it's been like to talk about your husband Kevin?
Emily	I actually crave opportunities to talk about it because I think most people think they're helping you by not bringing it up. When for you like this is your track all the time. For them, they kind of bump into you and like, "Oh, there's Emily. Don't talk about death. Don't talk about cancer. Let's talk about happy things."
Andy	And meanwhile, you've been thinking about it all alone so talk about isn't a big deal and something that...
Emily	No, it's helpful. It's helpful to talk about it. I just think people don't know what to do.
Andy	Well, what do you notice for you when you talk about it? What's the experience of talking about him and his passing?

Emily	It relieves the anxiety about it because if you don't talk about it with your children right that much, because they don't want to, it just cycles around in your head, you know, so it gets it out.
Andy	Gives it some oxygen.
Emily	And also shares the burden.
Emily	And maybe the people who ask feel like they're close enough that they don't feel like they're intruding.
Andy	You're about to say earlier it creates this awkward space if people don't ask about it.
Emily	Well, it's awkward because you don't want to be one of those people that's constantly talking about, "Every time I see Emily, we have to talk about death." So you don't want to be that person and then no one wants to hang out with you. It's weird because it's like for me it's the elephant in the room, but it may not be for the other person.
Andy	You and I know each other well enough. So within the first five minutes, I remember asking you questions and I'm afraid I don't want to be that person because I know you more than just a widower. But there's also this thing that I can't avoid talking about it. If there's something there, I'm so much more comfortable naming it and talking about it and I notice my anxiety just decreases with a dialogue around it.
Emily	Yeah. That's what I feel is like, "Let's talk about it and then we'll talk about other things."
Andy	Yeah, right. Right.
END FILE	

HOST

I'm grateful for Kevin and Emily's participation in this episode. I'm honored to have had the chance to follow up with Emily so soon after their family's loss. And, I'm grateful to have had those years with Kevin and grateful for our friendship.

And, to learn more about the family grieving centers that Emily talks about in our interview, please go to our website elephanttalk.org, for additional information and resources.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE YOUR STORY OR SEND US COMMENTS
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