

Interviewee: **Carol Conzelman [C]**

Interviewer: Andy Horning [AH]

Transcription:

Speaker	Dialogue
C	I've always said to people that we should have been breaking up when we were getting married, but neither of us is willing to stop it.
AH	Do you remember anything asshole I did? What was the worst thing I did in our relationship?
C	I don't think I want to say.
AH	Okay. Don't say it. Thank you. Is that bad?
AH	MY NAME IS ANDY HORNING, AND THIS IS ELEPHANT TALK. IT'S ABOUT ALL THINGS RELATIONSHIP - THE SOULFUL, THE SILLY AND THE SEXY. Today, and for the rest of season two, we bring you fun content from our archives that didn't make it into our regular seasons. As you heard in the opening quotes, that was my voice...and, yes, also the voice of my first wife. I believe in transparency and speaking the whole truth. So, to that end, we bring you my ex-wife, Carol, and I talking about our first marriage.
C	Here we are.
AH	Oh my God! Here we are.
C	Okay. Who could have predicted?
AH	I was thinking as I walk in the door, the thought came to me, "We got married in 1995."
C	Six. We moved to Ann Arbor in '95.
AH	Yeah. Got married in '96.
C	We met in '93.
AH	So here's a question I have. Why do you think we got married? We loved each other.
C	I think we loved the idea of marriage and it seemed like the right time. I was 29. You were 31, I think. We were living together. It just felt like we were on that path from early on.
AH	My brother Joe got married two years before. My other brother John got married the year before.
AH	And it was like I guess we're next.

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C	I know. It just seemed like that was the progression and with my conservative parents, the fact that we moved in together, remember? My mom cried.
C	When we called to tell her that we are moving in together, she said, "Oh! This cheapens you, Carol."
AH	No way!
C	Yes, she did.
C	And then my dad who's far more conservative and fundamentalist Christian, my dad is always the one when it comes to me personally where he loves me and it's just like...
AH	You can do no wrong.
C	Yeah. Just loving and supportive.
AH	That set us on that track that we couldn't really get off of because I remember fighting after we got engaged.
C	Brutally.
AH	Yeah, and wondering like, "Oh, oh," but then somehow that train had left that station and we were way down those tracks.
C	Yup. I mean I've always said to people that we should have been breaking up when we were getting married, but neither of us is willing to stop it.
AH	I know. Isn't that weird that we were more willing to be open to the possibility of divorce after marriage than to break up prior to marriage?
C	There was that one time, I took my ring off and I was like, "I don't know. I'm struggling and then you were so nice and then we got back together. I definitely had the sense that I was talking the hard road.
AH	Like the good hard road or the bad hard road?
C	I didn't know. I didn't know at that point.
C	Things had just always unfolded naturally for me and then I just felt like, "Okay. Well, relationships aren't easy," I mean the relationships that I had been in up until that point had been...extreme on passion and sex.
AH	I know.
C	But no communication, like no ability, like how are we navigating a relationship. And so I felt like it swung the pendulum a little bit the other way and I felt like, "Well, this is the right kind of relationship. This is the right kind."
AH	Because we're like processing.

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C	<p>Processing, which I never learned obviously with my parents.</p> <p>So it was very meaningful to me that I was... you were opening up that world for me of how to even talk and process and own my feelings. But I think that I abandoned my intuition because I felt like, "Well, had that really served me?" I've been following my intuition my whole life but if I really want to have commitment and grow as a person and have a marriage, I don't know what marriage is, but it seemed like it was... suppose to be it worked, but then I realized later that it's not supposed to be that hard.</p>
AH	<p>That hard, exactly. There is it. That's taking the work component a little too far.</p>
C	<p>Yeah.</p>
AH	<p>One of things that helped me make sense of it after the fact because I feel like that's in a way maybe what we both did separately is, "How the fuck did this happen? How did we fall love? How did we get married and how did we get divorced?"</p> <p>One of the things I look at is how we fell in love, a couple of things. One is San Francisco.</p>
C	<p>Yeah. Yeah.</p>
AH	<p>I moved to be with you in San Francisco and we lived there for only like nine months.</p>
AH	<p>Yup. And that goddamn city is magical.</p>
C	<p>Yeah, all these back stairways.</p>
AH	<p>Oh God! We fell in love in that city.</p>
C	<p>Walking, having amazing dinners.</p>
AH	<p>Yes. It's just a magical city.</p>
C	<p>That's true.</p>
AH	<p>And even now when I go back there. It's like our memories together and that feeling of being in love like comes over me.</p>
C	<p>That's interesting.</p>
AH	<p>And then the second thing is location as well. You and I met on the NOLS Course, National Outdoor Leadership School. It's a three-week, 24 days.</p>
C	<p>The Outdoor Educator Course.</p>
AH	<p>So we are in Wyoming in the Absaroka a month.</p>
C	<p>Three weeks in the backpack and then a week at the climbing.</p>

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AH	And there is something magical and powerful about camping night after night and hiking and backpacking.
C	I remember the meteor shower.
AH	You do? Oh yes, on a rock looking out.
C	Yeah. I remember sitting there with you.
AH	I remember you explaining about the difference between U valleys and V valleys.
C	I was a geology teacher at the time.
AH	I think I got confused a little bit between falling in love with you versus falling in love with the outdoors. I conflated those two and ended up associating all of my feelings for the outdoors and I sort of transferred them to you.
C	I just remember you were just an observer of me and I had never had that experience where...
AH	Stalker?
C	No. I remember after we had our lesson, the first climbing lesson, and afterwards you say, "I was watching you and you were just taking notes the whole time and so serious." And I was like, "Wow! Somebody is noticing kind of the way I am, which I hadn't thought of."
AH	You're listening to my first wife, Carol, and me talk about where our first marriage went wrong.
AH	What did we do wrong? I remember yelling as loud as I could in a frustrating moment and someone walking down the alley and literally like stopping a woman and going, "Oh! Oh! Do I need to intervene?" And I remember thinking like, "Holy shit! What the fuck is going on between us? And look at this anger inside of me." I mean it was a part of me that I had never seen before. Originally like what our marriage did for us is introduce me to all of me, not just this part I wanted to be me.
C	The curated self.
AH	Yes, the curated self, exactly. I could be a fucking asshole sometimes and I had a temper and I was actually kind of judgmental and critical. And it was surprising and fucking humbling.
C	Well, I happened to overlap with that period of your life where you were transitioning into going to the MSW program at Ann Arbor. So you're fulfilling this kind of deep whole passion that was...

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AH	For relationships, for growth.
C	Just emergent from being a teacher.
C	And then trying to pursue what had become your calling to be a counselor and a therapist and I think...
AH	Only I couldn't therapize you.
C	I think the lines were definitely blurred and I think you had a hard time drawing a line between your professional world and your personal relationship. I know when we went in to therapy. I remember feeling like it was two on one that, "You both just had all of the right questions and the way to frame things." And I'm just like flailing around trying to figure out what I'm doing. I had never been in therapy before so I didn't really know what it was.
C	That was the other reason why I abandoned my intuition because I was like, "Well, this is a higher way of being. This is a better way of learning and processing."
AH	Which is total bullshit, right?
C	Right. You can never abandon your intuition.
AH	Yeah. And if you listen to your intuition, what would you have done?
C	Well, I just would have tried to honor the anxiety of us feeling and the sense of like no, just the sense of no.
AH	Yeah.
C	But I think this is one moment that stands out for me, there were a couple of moments during the engagement, we're planning this wedding, all these amazing details and writing everything ourselves. But I remember I would just break down. Just sobbing in that little living room we had and you went into therapist mode.
AH	I did.
C	And I remember it's just like, "What is wrong with me?" Because you would listen, I remember you said, "Well, it sounds like you're going through a hard time."
AH	In that like therapy voice.
C	Yeah. And I was like, "What is wrong with me?" Like it really felt like I was having a problem, like I was struggling in what I need to do.
AH	When in fact you were just reflecting what was going in our relationship.
C	Right. And it wasn't until years later. It struck me one day. I was like, "Nope. I wasn't having a problem. We were having a problem." I remember our honeymoon as grand as it was. We talked about divorce.

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AH	On our honeymoon.
C	Several times.
AH	Yeah.
C	We spent a couple of days apart. We were fighting so badly at breakfast. We'll be like, "See you later. See you at dinner."
AH	Oh, I remember that in Kathmandu. I remember spending days apart.
C	Kathmandu and England in the Lake District. I went off to watch the Sheep Dog Trials, one of the best days of our honeymoon. I had a beer and a bratwurst and was watching the Sheep Dog Trials beside the road.
AH	We had put so much, so many expectations on our relationship that we weren't willing to let that dream go, the reality, we were going to keep pushing to the side.
C	It's toxic though, like introducing that potential on our honeymoon was totally undermining I think.
AH	Well, I don't think we introduce it. It was there.
MUSIC BREAK	
AH	I tell people that I just married the wrong person, and I will never forget thinking, "Carol is going to find someone better for her and I'm going to find someone better for me." And it was like, "Oh, okay. She's not fucked up. I'm not fucked up."
C	Right. It's just the wrong match.
C	We had a different sense I think of what we were doing in the relationship. I'm process oriented, but in a different way I think. I feel this deep need to be understood.
AH	You used to say, "Just listen to my words. Just listen to my words." And I'll be like, "I'm listening."
C	I still say that.
AH	But I'm experiencing them another way like intent versus impact.
C	<p>I guess. I don't know.</p> <p>I remember another conversation we had sort of towards the end and I said, "Andy, I feel like I'm over here, you're over here and I have thought throughout our relationship that we're both trying to move towards the center and create some mutual way of understanding things, understanding each other and operating and communicating."</p> <p>And you were like, "No." I know that I have the corner on the market. I said, "You act like you have the corner on the market on how to communicate." You're like,</p>

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	"No. I know I have the corner on the market on how to communicate."
AH	That's always fun to hear in a relationship.
C	So it felt like my way of doing it was just wrong and that was one of the things for me that allowed me to let it go. I was like, "Okay, well, we're not moving towards some middle ground so I can just let this go because it's not going to work."
AH	I'm just curious about regrets. I have a little bit of regret around not disclosing earlier that that was as important to me as it was. I think I played the nice guy and all this stuff and I am that guy, but what I'm also is that I have real strong opinions about what connection looks like and I didn't put that upfront as much as I should have.
AH	Do you have any regrets?
C	Sometimes I think, "Well, I wish that we had just called it off, like not drag everybody through this process." But I don't know. It happened for a reason. I don't know. Yeah.
AH	You have a daughter and I have two kids, what do you tell your daughter about your first marriage?
C	Well, I haven't. She's seven. So I haven't ever told her that.
AH	Oh, you haven't told her?
C	No, someday, someday. I've thought I'll sit down when she's a little older. I have an envelope of photos of that beautiful wedding album that we had.
C	I think that's another thing that I was really enamored of in our relationship was you honored me in a lot of ways. You really saw me. I mean that was the positive side of the therapist side of you.
AH	Thank you for that. Thank you.
C	Yeah. Oh my God! I had never felt so seen.
AH	I totally don't regret getting married and in fact, at one point someone said in a hurting healing moment at the same time said, "Oh, Andy, don't worry. That's a starter marriage." And I remember feeling like, Oh, I'm learning like a starter home." But as I walk out of the house this morning, my 11-year-old said, "Have a good interview with Carol."
C	Oh my God! You told her.
AH	They not only know that I was married, but they know your name. My favorite story is about three years ago. We went to a playground and Jenny was off somewhere and I take my kids to a playground and Mackenzie comes back, my 7-year-old daughter at the time and says, "Dad, I found a new friend." And up

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	comes this cute as a button, redhead, and she said her name is Mally and I'm like, "I think I kind of know that name." And then around the corner you come and I'm like, "Carol! Are you kidding me?" And the fact that our daughters found each other for me is just beautiful.
C	It is beautiful.
AH	So we've been mutual friend with Brooke. She we went to grad school with me and then...
C	We were all the same group of friends in Ann Arbor and to our soccer team and sort of keg party.
AH	Is it worth revealing that after we broke up she's my first my girlfriend?
C	Right.
AH	And now you guys are still good friends and I'm still good friends with her.
C	Yeah.
C	So we decided to separate and I was going to spend the summer in Mexico and Guatemala. When I left, that was the mark, the time that we just decided from that on we would be separated, but I wasn't going to move out until I came back in August, right?
AH	Right.
C	And so before I left for Central America, I remember you were in the shower downstairs and I was in the kitchen and we were just yelling, having this conversation while you're in the shower and you're like, "Who should I ask out first?" And we came up with these four options and Brooke was one of them and I was like, "I don't know. I think this one."
AH	Really?
C	Yeah.
AH	God! I do not remember that.
C	Yeah. It just seemed like a normal conversation.
AH	That's so mature of us.
C	<p>It was. It felt kind of healthy. It was like, "Okay, let's just be honest and rational about this." So it wasn't surprising that you and Brooke. By the time I got home in August, you guys were seeing each other and she was going to come visit at the end of August.</p> <p>When I moved out, my computer and my cat were still at your house and I've rented a place like a room and a house. So I was still going back and forth and I picked up a job, cocktail waitressing, and I was starting my PhD program. I think you dealt with the divorce in part by like traveling and getting out and stuff.</p>

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AH	Yeah. That sounds like me, like, "Let me hit the road."
AH	Do you remember anything asshole I did? What was the worst thing I did in our relationship?
C	I don't think I want to say.
AH	Okay. Don't say it. Thank you. Is that bad?
C	Your dating somebody like Brooke. Just it helped legitimized that I wasn't crazy. If she could fall in love with you, then I wasn't totally out of my mind.
AH	Oh, that's good.
C	<p>And anyway, now we're all still friends, which is funny.</p> <p>But at that time, my world was sort of turned upside down. I was cocktail waitressing. I was in the PhD program. I was TAing in anthropology for the first time and I started dating this musician and I got a tattoo. When I was in Mexico on our anniversary, it would have been our third anniversary but we had just split up, in that morning I just walk down the street and I got a tattoo, which I've been wanting for a while.</p> <p>I came back that summer when I was moving out. I was packing up my stuff and you're sitting there talking to me and I leaned over and you saw my tattoo on my back and you were just like, "You have a tattoo. You're working in a bar. You're dating a musician. Who are you?" And I was like, "You know what? This is who I am." It felt like my old self. I felt like when we got married.</p> <p>And that was very healing for me.</p>
AH	Thank you, Carol.
C	Yeah, thanks, Andy.
AH	<p>As I reflect back on my first marriage and this conversation with Carol, I hear how young we were and how much we wanted to fulfill society's expectations of us--by getting married. And, in doing so, we really left our own innate intuition and knowledge on the table.</p> <p>I am grateful that we were able to quickly right the sinking ship and realize this was not what either of us needed or wanted.</p> <p>It's not easy to open up about my own life and share my failings. But, in the spirit of Elephant Talk's mission, I believe it is important to name the areas we're working on and learn from the stories we've created.</p> <p>THANK YOU TO MY FIRST WIFE, CAROL, FOR BRAVELY OPENING UP ABOUT OUR FIRST MARRIAGE. I AM GRATEFUL.</p> <p>FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON THIS EPISODE, FIND OUR SHOW NOTES AT ELEPHANTTALK.ORG.</p>

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	<p>END FILE</p>