

**A German Tells a Great American Survivor Story**

**Matt**: Welcome to season two at the Robertson and Eastern link podcast. I'm Matt Easterling

**Craig**: and I'm Craig Robertson, Matt and I are board certified family law attorneys with decades of combined experience serving Mississippians all across our fine state.

**Matt**: In 2019, we began wondering if the struggles our firm deals with on a daily basis could be used to help the general public. From there, the Robertson Easterling podcast was born.

**Craig**: During season one. We had open and honest discussions with everyday people about their individual relationship journeys, some ending and heartbreak and others in redemption, but all with powerful stories to tell.

**Matt**: In season two, you will hear more of the same stories from other marriage and divorce survivor, which is sure to touch your heart.

**Craig**: So now relax and enjoy today's episode. What you're about to hear is going to help.

**Craig**: Well, I've been looking forward to today for quite some time because I have two of my favorite people in studio today. The two of them together have really made my life more interesting over the last five years. Matt is not with us today, but we have Cassie who's our paralegal and client care coordinator. So Cassie, thanks for joining me today. Also in the studio, we have Heika. Heika is probably one of my top five all time favorite clients, she just radiates joy. She is so fun to be around. She sneaky, funny, and she's here today to tell our listeners her story. So Heika as always, it's so great to be with you. Thanks for being on our show today.

**Heika**: I'm nervous, but okay. I'm ready.

**Craig**: Well, Heika, I don't know if our listeners have picked up on it yet, but you have a little bit of an accent. I'm sure that if anybody outside of Mississippi is listening to this show, I think that Cassie and I certainly have an accent, but yours is a little different.Tell us a little bit about where you grew up in your childhood.

**Heika**: I grew up in Germany for 20 years until I got married and then we moved to the United States for the first time in 98 to Georgia. We ended up moving back in 2001 and ended up staying in Germany until 2010 when we moved to El Paso and then to Mississippi.
**Craig**: Well, obviously, um, we're a divorce and family law firms. So we're talking about, you met your husband in Germany, is that right?

**Heika**: That is right.

**Craig**: And so what part of Germany did you grow up in?

**Heika**: Schweinfurt

**Craig**: and where is that in Germany? Give us a geography lesson for those listening.

**Heika**: Oh, close the worsburg, about 30 minutes. About an hour and a half of Frankfurt.

**Craig**: What region of the country is it?

**Heika**: Balveria

**Craig**: Is it is considered Bavaria. Okay. So what's, what's it like, I mean, you've been raising kids in the United States. What was it like growing up in Germany?

**Heika**: Different. Of course it was, you know, years back where everything was different. It's more like we have the little villages where you go walk. We have a lot of walking, a lot of, you know, biking, not so much driving everywhere. Like our downtown area is just, there's no cars at all. What was it like growing up, we walked to school, we did a lot of stuff outside, everything, you know, nowadays it's just different.

**Craig**: And how far did you take your education in Germany?

**Heika**: Ninth grade I graduated and then I got my, like a certificate job training for three years. So I did have 12 years.

**Craig**: And you met your husband who was a U S service member. Is that correct?

**Heika**: That is right.

**Craig**: And talk about, talk about that because we were talking off the air before we got started that you're a little bit of a rule follower. However, meeting a foreigner from the United States, he was a service member and eventually deciding to move the United States is a very bold and daring thing to do.

**Heika**: Well, we met when we were 18 or more, we're out, you know, just doing our thing or we're younger, clubbing. And we just ended up being together and decided to get married because we knew he had orders. We were pretty certain that he was going to PCS back to the States soon.

**Craig**: All right. So educate our listeners. He's going to PCS?

**Heika**: A permanent change of duty station, which you only stay a certain amount of time in one location. So, we knew his time was up and the only way I could go with him to the States was if we were married.

**Cassie**: Y’all got married in Germany?

**Heika**: Yes.

**Craig**: And so what was that like? What did your parents think about you marrying this foreigner and moving across an ocean?

**Heika**: They really didn't say anything. They said, that's a decision I gotta make. If I'm happy, as long as I'm happy there were okay with it.

**Craig**: So Heika, what was life like as a German living in the United States?

**Heika**: Well, I was young, of course I was only 20. When we moved to Georgia, our best friends actually moved at the same time that were also in Germany. And they got stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia, which made it a little easier. The transition, it was different. It was adjusting to a whole different life. Being married, moving away from home, moving out of my mom's house cause that's where I stayed up until, you know?

**Craig**: So you lived in mama's house until you moved in with your husband.

**Heika**: That is correct.

**Craig**: Oh, that is a big transition.

**Heika**: And then he reenlisted, like I said, we were only there year and a half. He ran listed to go back to Germany and we got lucky enough to be stationed back in my hometown.

**Craig**: Well, what about the language? I mean, obviously in Germany, unlike in the US you're bilingual, I guess your whole life, but there had to be some challenges moving to the Southern United States with, with language.

**Heika**: I started off with the dictionary, of course, you know, and if I was never like ashamed of not asking questions, like, so the state, if I don't know what a word I'm going to be like, can you explain what that means? And everybody, I mean, never had a problem with explaining what anything meant or, and over the years I just got better at it, I guess.

**Craig**: So obviously you, you guys made your way through various stations in the military, but you landed in Mississippi. Is that right?

**Heika**: That's correct.

**Craig**: Talk about when things started going poorly at home,

**Heika**: It was about a couple of months when we moved to Mississippi, we received a letter in the mail. Somebody claiming to have a child by my husband and he denied it. I moved forward, DNA testing was done and it was confirmed that it was his child. He knew about it all the years. At that point I think the child was a teenager, which put a damper in the marriage. Of course I was going to try to make it work. Cause I was like, okay, that was a long time ago.

**Cassie**: How long had y'all been married at that point?

**Heika**: 14, 14 years.

**Craig**: Well talk about the, again, you get married young, you take a big chance. You move across the world and then one day you go to the mailbox and you get a letter where there's a, what, what was in the letter? Was it a court document?

**Heika**: No, it was just saying that, um, such and such is requesting child support for such child birthday. It was pretty much from the child support office.

**Craig**: I see. So when you opened this letter, what's going through your mind. What are you feeling? Describe that moment?

**Heika**: Well, I guess at first I called him because I was like, what is going on? So I called him, he denied it. He said, well, that's got to be somebody else. And you know, of course when you see the birth date, it's been so many years, I guess my thought was too. Why come now? Why wait so many years to ask for child support. He denied it. It was scary. It was, um, you feel like your marriage has been a lie this whole time really?

**Cassie**: And y'all had two kids. Yes.

**Heika**: At that point we had two children.

**Craig**: So you had two kids. And how old were they when you got that?

**Heika**: Um, my son must have been about 12 and my daughter eight.

**Craig**: So you, you basically, you were working in Germany when you met your husband doing bookkeeping work. If I remember correctly, is that right?

**Heika**: Right.

**Craig**: But when you decided to get married, you discontinued your career and became a wife and a mom. Is that true?

**Heika**: That is true.

**Craig**: So there had to be just a flood of fear. I would think.

**Heika**: Yeah, it was scary not knowing how life was going to continue and how things were going to go on, but we tried to make it work and it ended up, because the first letter came from a different state and he, he like, he ignored it. So it finally was transferred to Mississippi and that's when it ended up going to court and DNA testing and all that. So it took about a year. It was about a year before it was confirmed, do DNA testing that it was his child. And then the court papers revealed a lot more than what he was telling me. Like he knew all along the child existed. He went and visited the child. They had contact over the years. So that was more, you know, kind of a slap.

**Cassie**: And I've totally forgot about all that. Like he knew like he was going and seeing her, while ike you're thinking he's out of town for work or something.

**Heika**: Right, right.

**Craig**: So Heika, you received this letter in the mail from a child support office where they were trying to have your husband begin supporting a child. He denied that the child was his. And it turns out that obviously he was lying to you. When did the lies become so much that you didn't think you could stay in the marriage?

**Heika**: Mm, it wasn't so much that we tried to make it work after that, but then he decide to move on with his life and go back to his past. That's when I decided that, that point talking to my mom and she was like, Heike, you got to do something. You can't stay in this, this, this not healthy for you. It's not healthy for the kids. So that's when I contacted you

**Craig**: And talk about that because do you remember making that first contact with our office and, and what that was like

**Cassie**: Or how you found our number? Why you called us where you referred?

**Heika**: Yes. I was referred somebody. I had asked my neighbor, she was going to kind of a similar situation. So I talked to her and she gave me y'alls number. So I called and I came up here and it was scary. I mean, it was, I didn't know how my life was going to continue. I had no means of supporting myself. I had no means of supporting my children, but I knew I couldn't stay in the marriage. I knew that was it for me. I can't, I couldn't do it anymore. So I filed for the war.

**Craig**: Talk about that process.

**Heika**: Like I said, it was scary, but at the same time, I remember Cassie calling me and telling me he's getting served. So that was scary. And then of course I got a phone call right away from him and I was like, it is what it is. And, um, after that, it took me about maybe a week or two to realize, I said, okay, I gotta do what I gotta do. And I gotta do what I gotta do for my, for my kids. So I got a part time job at a dentist office at the front desk. She pushed me to go to school. I went to Hinds and found out what I had to do. I took the placement test and then I started school. I did two years at Hinds. And then I transfer that to Belhaven. And I did two years there. And I just graduated in December with a bachelor's degree in accounting.

**Craig**: Heika, I'm just so proud of you really, because a lot of people when faced with negative life circumstances, just, just go into victim mode. And you had plenty of reason to feel like a victim. You had left your family, left your culture, taking a chance on this guy and moving across the world. And then he lets you down. But instead of feeling sorry for yourself, you took affirmative action. You went and got a job. You found a great mentor in that work. She encouraged you to go back to school. I think I remember encouraging you about the potential that you had. And once you sorted out the logistics of translating the German education to going to junior college in the United States, you, you dug in and you were a full time, mom going through a divorce, working, going to school. I mean, I think that's a real, it's a real Testament to you and your character. And it's also, I think, an encouragement to someone who might be listening to this about what they can do and the potential that's within them. So what, what was it Heika? I mean, you know, what was it in you? Is it that, is it that German heritage? What is it in you that gave you that kind of grit?

**Heika**: Well, I guess just looking at my kids, you know, I have to set an example and I had to make sure that they were taken care of. I didn't know what was going to happen down the road. I didn't know what was going to happen down the line. So I had to do what I had to do to support my children, which the best option was to go back to school and get the degree and also show my kids that if you put your mind to something, you can do it.

**Cassie**: You are such a good mom. You're gonna make me cry. Yeah. I don't ever remember you like that being like in a puddle or why you've always just been a fighter. Like I don't ever remember you being in real when you were upset, but you've always like pushed through to make sure that, you know, you are going to do, you would do anything you had to do to make sure your kids were taken care of.

**Heika**: Yeah. And that's pretty much it. I love my kids. My kids are the reason why I do what I do.

**Craig**: We'll talk about the divorce. You were one of the unfortunate people who have to have a divorce trial. I can remember, obviously you had a very animated lawyer representing your ex husband will even at that. So we lawyers can get very animated and aggressive. And um, this particular one who was representing your husband was both. And so what was that like? What, what is, what does it feel like to go to court and talk about all the skeletons in the closet of your family?

**Heika**: It was tough. Just some of the questions I didn't, I felt like I was on trial for doing something wrong, more than anything else. I felt like attacked and you know, stuff that I was though, but it was a long day. It was a scary day. That whole day we went to court. I'm just glad you two were there. I think I cried like four times there in the process. Um, it was scary. It was just something I've never done before. I mean, I never been on a witness stand asking, you know, questions that I wasn't really sure. I don't even know how to explain it. I'm just glad we didn't have to go back.

**Heika**: So if I remember correctly, we did a, a pretty long day of trial. But after that first day of trial, we ended up actually reaching a settlement agreement.

**Heika**: Right.

**Craig**: Well, talk about the result. Did you feel, did you feel happy with the result? Did you feel slighted by the result once you finally were divorced and you had a set of rules to follow, how did that go for you?

**Heika**: I mean, when I first got married, of course, nobody wants to get divorced. So the whole divorce thing was hard on me, but once the divorce was, it was, I was glad that it was finally over with as far as what was in the divorce papers, I thought it was fair. It was fair to the both of us. It was divided equally. So, I was happy with the outcome.

**Cassie**: I remember something about his military retirement. You were very involved or were researching or there was specifics about the retirement and the benefits that he was getting that you, or you kind of educated us on, making sure that you got certain things out of his military benefits or something, right?

**Heika**: So there are certain rules if you married for certain amount of time, while you're in the military, if you married over 10 years on active duty, you are entitled to 50% of their army retirement. So I did my research on that. And, um, you can also get the survivor benefit plan, which means you pay a certain amount of money off that pension a month. And if something happens to the service member, I will continue getting half the pension. Now, if something happens to me first, obviously we paid that money for nothing, but I just wanted to make sure that I'm secure moving forward once I get older. And, you know, once I retire, I guess, to make sure that I have enough money to make a living

**Craig**: Well, and I think the lesson from that is regardless of a person's circumstances, you took it upon yourself to educate yourself with regard to your specific circumstances. I mean, you became really an expert with regard to when military spouses divorce and you taught us a lot in that process, for sure. And I think that's a great reminder for those who might be listening is the more involved and the more proactive a person is in their case, the more involved they are really the easier it is for us, mean those clients who are organized to have done their research, who understand the unique circumstances with regard to what their financial future is going to look like. Uh, it just makes it that much easier for us to help them accomplish a good result. Just like you were able to accomplish a good result.

**Cassie**: You're just a dreamy client. And I just love you so much. You're just awesome.

**Craig**: So what's life like now. I mean, the divorce is a few years behind you. You did go on to get your degree and I'm so proud of you for that. I mean, I really am. When I, when I talk about a success story, I think of Heika because you took such a big chance to be here. You took such a big chance to get a divorce, to stand up for your own self worth and your own self esteem. And then you didn't just sit around and wait for someone to take care of you. Obviously you wanted to get a fair financial settlement, and I think that you did, but you also took it upon yourself to make sure that you did everything that you could do to help yourself. So my question is what's life like now?

**Heika**: What is life like now, well I own my own house that I purchased. I'm raising my two babies. Well, they're not babies, but I work for the state.

**Cassie**: You bought a new car.

**Heika**: I bought a new car.

**Cassie**: You have a cute boyfriend. You're just living your best life girl.

**Heika**: Yeah, life is good. Now that school was done. Four years of schooling doing everything was challenging. Definitely. Um, a lot of stuff was put on the back burner because school was more important than some of the other stuff. So now I'm kind of just enjoying life. Like not have to worry about discussion boards and just really trying to spend time with my kids, making sure they have everything they need and just live in life.

**Craig**: Heika, if you could go back in a time machine and land it. And I can't even begin to pronounce the name of the town you're from in Germany, but let's say that you could hop in a time machine and you could go back and, and talk to yourself that 20 year old self, what would you tell yourself?

**Heika**: I wouldn’t change anything. I really wouldn't everything because I feel like everything happens for a reason. And there was a reason for that to happen the way it did. I feel like there is a reason why I'm in Mississippi. I might never know what that reason is or why things happen the way they did. But I do truly believe that there is a reason for everything. If I would go back, I wouldn't have my kids and they're my world and I would not change anything. I would do it exactly the same way.

**Cassie**: I love you. You're such a strong, strong mama.

**Heika**: And it's interesting that you say that now because I can remember it as I often do. When I talk to a former client, I pulled your not the very first notes I took when we first met each other. And I was looking through those, um, in anticipation of you, uh, you coming back in and one of the, one of the notes I had and I have three stars by it. It says, if she cannot make it here, she may could go back to Germany, but you didn't do that. In fact, you, you even now work for the state of Mississippi. So you're, you're a Mississippian. Now I do want to talk to you about one other little thing. And, um, we didn't touch on this, but that is PTSD because I know that your ex husband did serve some time in Iraq and in, um, in combat. Talk about that. What's it like to live with a person who is suffering from PTSD?

**Heika**: It was rough at times because you never knew, you never knew what was coming. I guess he had it under control. For the most part. It was rough when he first came back from deployment, more than moving forward. But he was, to me, it's more like they're trying to make up time that they missed while there were down range. So he was doing stuff that he wanted to do. Not really caring about the family or the kids, if that makes sense.

**Craig**: Yeah. So what I heard you say is the way you experienced his PTSD is that he, it was almost like he put his life on hold. So, when he, when he came back from deployment, he wanted to make sure that I guess he was comfortable more so than concerned about you and your family. Heika, as a person who is originally from Germany, you've come to America. And you've really written this great American survivor story of someone who not withstanding circumstances, not withstanding, you know, the difficult journey that you've had. You stayed positive, you became educated, you are self sufficient, but you haven't had a lot of help from your ex husband. He hasn't always followed the rules. Has he?

**Heika**: No.

**Craig**: And what's that been like for you?

**Heika**: It's been hard at times because I feel like he, he moved out of state. So it's just me here. So sometimes it's hard trying to be there for the kids at every event at every doctor's appointment and taking off work when they're sick, all that stuff. So it's, it's just me, it's hard and frustrating sometimes, but I don't let it get to me because then I'll be out there. There is no point I can't change it.

**Cassie**: but you do take really good notes. You keep up with miss payments. And the times that he's seen the kids in times that he's not seeing the kids.

**Hieka**: I try to.

**Cassie**: it's always good for people to, if they're not doing right, you, you have to just take a notes. Cause you have to tell a story. If you do have to tell a story, eventually then there it is on the paper that you've been keeping up with everything.

**Craig**: And I think Cassie makes a great point because really when someone's walking through a divorce or they have children with someone to whom they're, they're not married or they were never married, it's, it's really important to just do great record keeping. You don't have to be consumed by it. But if you just organized and you spend just a little bit of time each month, it really does make post divorce enforcement proceedings much easier. But Heika you, you kind of do it all on your own. I mean, you know, parenting is a two person job. No, no question, but you've taken on both roles pretty much.

**Cassie**: Hair Flip

**Craig**: I don't know how hair flip trends.

**Cassie**: Okay. Just imagine that she is flipping her hair. She is, um, the bomb she's got to go in on.

**Craig**: Well, Heika on, on Cassie's virtual audio hair flip we'll end today's show. But I do again, want to just commend you for all that you've accomplished for going back to school, getting your degree, becoming a homeowner, taking care of your children in such a tremendous way. And so really congratulations for all that you've accomplished, who would have known that when we first sat down together in early 2015, that would be back five and a half years later, talking about all of your successes. So really, truly deeply thank you for spending this time with us today.

**Heika**: Thank you for having me.