



Episode 24: I'll Be Home for Christmas and in Therapy by New Years (Part 2)

Craig: So my mom worked retail. She worked at a local department store and she hated the holidays because the holidays for her meant work and she was strung out. And, um, I can remember even my mom would work all the way up to Christmas Eve and then she'd get off on Christmas Eve really tired. And then literally on Christmas day, because she had to work the day after Christmas, she was ready to take down the Christmas tree yet after lunch, it's time to take the Christmas tree down. And so for her, it was almost, you know, the holidays were just something to suffer through, I guess. I mean, there was, there was limited celebration, but yeah, when you stop and you, you know, and I am of the opinion that for the most part, people do the best they can do. And so both of my parents are gone now. And I think when I think back and reflect back on their life, they were doing the best they could do. And my mom under the, you know, I don't resent her for not having these magical holidays and, you know, these magical celebrations. I mean, she was, she was putting her head down and she was working and just doing the best she could with what she had.

Roane: Absolutely. Oh yeah. And my mother, you know, just using that example, it's like, certainly it might have been primary language, but certainly her secondary language, uh, second language was passive aggressive. And so when, when I would begin to, when I really began to have boundaries with her boy the secondary language begin to ramp up, you know, and she would begin to say things and it, again, when you be, if you've grown up and you don't know what boundaries are, and you've not had good boundaries when you began to put those place in your life, um, it, it doesn't make people happy.

Craig: Well, guys, let's, let's talk about that a little bit. Let's be a little bit more specific because if our listeners haven't gone back and listened to Roane and Eva in season one, I really do encourage you to go back and listen to them. You'll hear about their story, about their journey, how they got from, from where they were to where they are. When did that growth and development start happening in your lives though. Eva, when were you able to inform others of your plans as opposed to explain others of your plans? Because I don't, I'm sitting here thinking, I don't know if I'm an informer or an explainer. Um, I hope I'm an informer, but I'm sure I'm not. When did you, or when do you think that you were able to start doing it?

Eva: Oh, Craig, it's been a slow process. I wish I could say yeah, right away, because it's been a, my family role, you know, being the hero. I want everybody, I want to please. I mean, that's probably part of my, that's my problem. You know, it's also known as co-dependency. That's kind of a buzzword these days and it's been around for a while. But it was a slow process, really understanding that healthy

people live a life of rigorous honesty. I'm honest with myself and I'm honest with others. So it was really the first being able to go inward and say, what is it that I really want? And when you've been so other focused, you don't really know yourself. And so the journey in therapy was really to beginning to know myself and know what I wanted, uh, and what I needed, uh, in order to live a life that is full and, you know, with without much struggle. Um, and you know, that has a lot of serenity to it. So that was a slow process, I think. And I'm still growing. I haven't arrived. Don't get me wrong.

Craig: Other focused, is that, is that an easy way to define codependency when I am focused on others, as opposed to myself, what does codependency mean?

Eva: Codependency is a very compulsive it there's compulsivity to it in order to please other people you're looking to others to get love and acceptance

Roane: Friendly, and also not only pleased, but also manage,

Eva: Oh, yes, I love the word manage.

Roane: Uh, sometimes you could, we could call it control, but, but again, codependency meets a need. I would not do. I mean, you know, there is a reason for every behavior. And so, um, you know, if I'm just trying to manage the other person, uh, so that they won't get mad and I'm doing things just to please and appease them rather than being well, boundaries and beginning to speak into that stuff, I'm probably going to wind up being a pretty angry resentful, because when we're doing things to manage the other person and then they don't act right, even after we kind of lose ourselves, sacrifice ourselves, become a doormat, or that's just probably going to make me mad. And in my experience, uh, people just mostly, they do not act. Right. And so, if I have got this agenda, um, that I'm trying to get somebody to, you know, do something or not do something in a manipulative way, I'm not really being honest. It's going to lead to problems in me.

Craig: And it seems like you've just characterize the, the holidays and just those last few, those last few little things. Happy holidays everybody.

Roane: It's such a wonderful time.

Craig: Let's, let's, let's transition a little bit because I mean, it's not all, it's not all just misery.

Eva: No if you can keep it simple and if you can stay connected to one another and to your children and, you know, really focus on the real reason for the holidays is really intrusively to, to connect with, with Jesus and to know Jesus and to celebrate that becoming more intentional that keeps life so much more simple.

Roane: Yeah. It's building your own traditions your own rituals, uh, the things that you do with your family. And again, it's like our family, husband, wife, children.

Craig: Right. And I think that's a perfect segue into the idea of when that family system is broken. When husband and wife are not getting along and they're having to figure out how to manage these big holiday events through, through a breakup and Matt when we sit down with a person who is

contemplating the idea of divorce, one of the things that we give them in our, in our very first packet is, is a schedule. And just for them to start thinking about what custody schedules look like and the most, um, substantive part of that is the holiday schedule and where people are trying to navigate the holidays. It's not as simple in most situations as all right. Let's just fairly divide up the holidays as best we can. You've got geography that plays into it. There are lots of, lots of dynamics that play into it. It's not uncommon for one party or the other to demand. You know, I'm going to have every Christmas Eve and Christmas morning because that's the way my family has always done it. We always have, you know, a dinner on the 24th and we always opened presents exactly at nine o'clock on, on Christmas morning. And so people, um, have these ideas that the holidays have to follow this exact script and a breakup makes all that very messy.

Matt: Yes. Uh, it definitely does. And, and going back to what we said earlier, the holiday seem to amplify things that are already happening. And so that is a good time that it feels like the, the issues, the relational issues that you're having are almost on steroids. And, uh, of course you also have the issue of people that they try to view everything. In my opinion, when they're, when they're getting divorced, as they are, they're looking at it like their life is in this, um, very specific mold at the moment. And it's difficult to think about what it might look like a year, two years, five years, 10 years down the road. And so when we're building these schedules, they have to be detailed enough that people can live under them, but you have to make them flexible enough that it allows for people to, for new pieces to come in and for things to change. Because right now, everybody does live here in the same town and they don't, you know, neither one of them are remarried and there aren't step children involved and things like that. But two years from now, it might not look like that if she's having Christmas morning, that I have to have Christmas night. Well, what happens when one of you gets remarried and your new spouse, their family lives four hours away. Now you've turned Christmas day into nothing but a travel event, you know, for your children. And of course, it's the hardest thing I think for people to do, but to truly try to take themselves out of the equation and focus on, okay, what is the best way for my children to be able to experience this holiday? You know, what all want their actual Christmas to be like, do I want it, you know, shrouded and all the stress and anxiety of getting up and then having to get in the car and all that stuff, are we going to, you know, let it, let them enjoy it and have the Christmas experience that they deserve, or any other holiday that we might be talking about? I think all of that is very difficult. And coming to grips with that of the idea of not being able to see your children on a, any given holiday and what that, what that looks like.

Craig: Well, and it's a, it's a really good time of year. Uh, for someone who's hearing my voice who might be contemplating, um, a separation or breakup or divorce, it's a really good time of year to stop and think about whether or not this is really the path that you want to take. I, uh, when I'm meeting with a new client, sometimes I'll, I'll draw a picture of, I'm a very visual person, even though for whatever reason, we've got a podcast and you can't see anything that I'm doing, but just if the listener will imagine with me this idea of, of two mountains. And I say that a person who is getting ready to walk through, um, family transition, a divorce, they're on the foothills of two equally challenging mountains in front of them. And one would be the mountain of reconciliation and one would be the mountain of divorce. And I think there is a misconception that one is easier than the other, but they're definitely not. They're both super challenging. And I think that the holidays is a time where a person who is on the foothills of one of those two mountains can stop and think about which journey they want to take, because the holidays for all the reasons that you've heard us talking about so far are challenging. They

magnify the, the problems that people experience in the family dynamic as a whole round. Do you agree or disagree?

Roane: Oh, absolutely. It's going to be magnified and amplified. And like for Eva and I, and if you'd listened to the, you know, go back and listen to the earlier podcasts we were on, we talked about the fact that we, we actually divorced and remarried. Um, and so we went through the, the, you know, our own holidays, uh, after divorce and, uh, boy that first Christmas or Thanksgiving or whatever it is, those first in that when we're in now and in a whole new state of, of living, uh, it's always hard. And, uh, that's one reason, you know, certainly I experienced some depression and it's pretty common for people to go through that because you've got all these, you know, kind of like crazy expectations. And now your whole world of what you thought, the way that it was going to be is completely turned upside down and shattered. And so it's a difficult time, uh, in that, especially those first,

Craig: So Eva, some of our listeners will remember from the podcast you guys did in season one, your story and that you and Roane actually walked through a divorce. Um, my question for you is, do you remember that first Christmas after the divorce and what was it like?

Eva: It was overwhelming, uh, exhausting doing it all on my own. I was working full time. Uh, I stayed in Atlanta. I don't remember if I came home to Mississippi. I don't think I did. I don't think I had that time quite honestly. So it was a lonely time. I was very intentional though to have, have support around me. I had girlfriends, um, uh, that, that surrounded me during that time, our therapist at the time, it given me the analogy a stage. And we may have mentioned this in the first podcast. I can't remember, but when there's a divorce, uh, the analogy is before divorce, the parents are out, are in the audience and the children are up on the stage and the parents are cheering them on. If one of them forgets their lines, the parents will go up and help them. And there's two parents doing that. They're very supportive, but after divorce now, the children are in the audience and the parents are up on stage and the children are trying to support the mom and dad and try, and it just rocks their world. The roles have definitely changed. That helped me knowing that analogy, that I didn't want my children to be in the audience and having to support and take care of us emotionally.

Craig: That's a really great, I'm thinking as you're talking of an empty auditorium and there's a Christmas play happening, there's nobody in, there's nobody in the audience, but there is think of whatever Christmas play you, um, you've seen before and that's happening. And the, the, the parents are sitting there next to each other and they're watching the children in the Christmas play and they're smiling. And then in the second act, maybe there's a seat in between the two, the two parents. And then by the finale, they're not even in the same part of the auditorium. And then it transitions as you've described to where the children are, the ones in the audience, and they're watching their parents, um, perform this Christmas play. That's a really powerful thought because that is really exactly the way that I experienced it because Matt and I, we really, you know, like I said before, nobody, nobody picks up the phone and calls on December 1st, ready to walk through a divorce. I mean, most people are going to try to let the holidays play out and try to, to at least fake a sense of normalcy through the holidays. Um, Ron, what was your experience? I mean, we've heard Eva talk about the busy-ness and I do want to talk a little bit more about busy-ness in general, but just the business, because parenting is a two person job and it is really difficult for a person to do it on their own. And I know that plenty of the listeners out there are

doing that and they're in that season. And I just want to encourage you that I know how difficult that is and it's okay to express how difficult it is. Roane, what was your experience like post divorce? Christmas?

Roane: Yeah, I think for me it was just, um, it was really just a deep sadness, um, because I had just begun my work and my counseling process and beginning to figure out the, uh, the deep effects of my parents' divorce on me. And then I'm sitting there looking at my two little baby boys and, and I'm just heartbroken plus just the added bonus, um, you know, um, aspect that, that Christmas with my dysfunctional family. And, um, you know, as we've talked about, you know, that just put me back into that, that old role. So yeah, it was, uh, it was a pretty miserable Christmas after the divorce. Yeah. It was not the most wonderful time of the day.

Craig: Roane, you brought something that I want to talk about a little bit more about the, about the hurt associated with the holidays and the, the lost expectation. And then reverting back to the role that we play in our family of origin. It seems like the holidays would be a time where a person might slip back into this idea of medicating and whether they're medicating with pornography or whether they're medicating with alcohol or drugs, or even sometimes busy-ness, um, just over committing, I mean, is that something that you have experienced in your practice with, um, with your clients?

Roane: Oh, certainly. I always say the holidays are really, uh, kind of a time of excess. And so if we're not really working on those areas of our lives, we're living excessively in some kind of addictive compulsive way. And whether that's, you know, alcohol drugs, sex, or rock and roll, when we get under stress, that's one of the things that we're going in trying to medicate. And then when you throw in kind of the depressive feelings, anxious feelings being around family, boy, it's just a prime time, uh, to go and act out in some crazy way. And so it's really, uh, a time to, uh, be very intentional to shore up. Um, you know, those people in your life that are your safe people, your, uh, your seal team, so to speak and, um, and kind of be prepared

Craig: As we are ending our time together today. What are some ideas that you would like to express to the listeners about the best way to navigate the holidays?

Eva: Well, we like to say connection is the cure. So being very intentional about staying connected to your partner, uh, and if, if you're going through a divorce or you're separated, or there's been betrayal, the partner may not be the person that you can connect with that have someone in your life that you're able to really go deep with. I would also say, keep it simple as mothers, as women, we up with so much trying to, to create this fantasy, this idealized holiday season, and really going inward and going, how can I simplify that? How can I make it where I'm not staying up to midnight every night, trying to get the presence wrapped, ask for help, ask for other family members to help you, um, you know, only limit what you're going to spend limit, what you're going to wrap limit, how much you're going to decorate limit, how much you're going to bake, limit the gift giving, keep it simple,

Craig: Matt, from a legal perspective. What if you have a, a family, um, a person that you're talking to and they're looking, they're staring down the barrel of their first holidays after a breakup, whether or not it be a divorce, or whether it be something that shakes up a relationship, what, what advice would

you give someone from a legal perspective?

Matt: One thing that I think is important for people to remember is holidays are typically done in an alternating fashion. So, you need to be mindful of how you behave on a certain holiday. It's going to come back and bite you later. Okay? Sometimes the person that in your mind deserved the least amount of grace or the least amount of wiggle room, or you don't want to give in to that individual at all, but you have to think about it from the perspective of array. At some point, this is going to come back and there's going to be something going on in my family. And I'm going to need to say, Hey, I know that this is your year to have Christmas, but Gram Gram is not doing too well. And we think this might be her last Christmas. Would it be possible for the kids to come be with Gram? Can we switch, can we alternate do your best to give grace in those, in those situations? Not only because it's the healthiest thing for you to do, but because it will come back and bite you later. And then, like we said earlier, focus on your children and trying to make sure that this works as smoothly as it can, you know, for them you want their holiday experiences to be happy and joyful, not, uh, you know, full of, you know, their parents misery and keep in mind that it's going to get better. I may not. I think it's important to know that those first ones are going to be hard and they're probably going to be the hardest. And if you can just keep looking forward, instead of focusing on the things that you don't have at that moment, or the things that failed or that didn't work, it's going to make it a lot more light, easier to bear.

Craig: Well, I think that's great advice and great ideas, Matt. Thanks again, Roane and Eva for, for being with us and to our listeners Happy holidays. We hope that you have the opportunity to, to slow down, to simplify things, to give and experience grace, to really stop and reflect on what it is. That is the essence of peace, um, of just the opportunity to really slow down and unplug. And so to everyone who can hear my voice, um, we hope you have a great holiday, but I do have one little announcement before we wrap up season two. We are excited to be partnering with Roane, Eva and life or it's counseling in season three of our podcast. And so be on the lookout for that in January. You're probably already tired of listening to me and Matt talk about all this stuff. So, we're going to mix it up. We're going to bring in a Roane and Eva to be our co-host and to walk with us through season three. So, Eva, thanks so much for agreeing to be a part of that. We're really excited to partner with you guys.

Eva: I'm excited to

Craig: and Roane, my friend, happy holidays to you and excited to work with you guys and season three of the podcast.

Roane: Oh, same here. So looking forward to it, thank y'all.