

Season 5 Episode 52

Lea's Story: This Messy Life

Craig Robertson: All right look, I was a big fan of this TV show called *Cheers* that ran from 1982 to 1993, and there was a popular spinoff called *Frazier*. And the fictional main character was a Harvard-educated psychiatrist, who had his own radio show, where people with mental health issues would call in, and Frazier would help solve their problems. His catchphrase was, "I'm listening." Believe it or not, this show was still running after I became an attorney, and I always imagined as I got into doing divorce work that a call-in radio show would be so entertaining.

But fast forward to the popularization of podcasts, and in 2019 when Matt and I were ready to start our own show. So, I'm a "do it yourself" kind of guy. So I bought a hundred-dollar Yeti microphone, and I did a few test runs using the Garageband app on my computer. And I'll be honest, I was quickly overwhelmed at the time, skill, concentration, and energy that it took to create something, and I was just not proud of what I was able to put together. I did not think it represented the professionalism that our clients expect from us. Whether you need a fantastic editor, a partner in production, and a custom sound designer like us, a turnkey solution that integrates with your marketing strategy, reach out to Casey and Blue Sky to see how they can partner with you to bring your podcast idea to life. In the show notes, we have a link to a free guide. If you want to learn more about what they do or you can visit them online at blueskypodcasting.com.

Hey everybody, welcome to the podcast. In today's show, you're going to hear from Lea. Lea is a winner. She was a two sport athlete in college, and she has been successful at everything she has tried to do. When she was a teenager, her parents got a divorce, and it really turned her world upside down because everything she knew to be true seemed like a lie.

But Lea's preferred direction is forward, and she pushed through college, became a nurse, went to graduate school, and was super successful. She met her husband, but he was not quite on the same career trajectory as Lea, but they started a married life together, and as two young people they enjoyed spending time on their back porch.

But unfortunately, one drink, unwind led to two, and then three, and then two many. During a season when things were better, they started a family, and Lea buckled down and took care of everyone like she had always done. But her husband slipped further

and further into addiction, and I think you'll find it to be similar to the story we told about Barry in "A Double Dose of the Holy Ghost," which you have already made one of our most popular to date. And if you haven't heard it, I hope you'll go back and listen. And we're hopeful that Lea's story becomes a redemptive one like Barry's, and we hope that her husband finds a path to recovery too. Now guys, we recorded this show over Zoom.

Lea had a sick child, and I wish I could publish the video cause her son came in and out and so did her dog. It was fun and high energy, but it was really, really messy. As always, I am honored you decided to spend this time with us. I really think you're going to enjoy hearing about Lea's journey, so hang on

We're gonna hear a word from one of our sponsors, and then we'll be right back with today's show.

Adam Black: It's a challenging time to be buying or selling a house in Mississippi especially if you're in a life transition like divorce. Home prices are on the rise and so are interest rates. More than ever before having a creative professional who will take a customized approach to your unique lending needs is critically important.

My name is Adam Black, and I'm a senior mortgage specialist with First Commercial Bank. While my team and I handle every facet of residential mortgages, including lot acquisition, construction, purchase, and refinance, I hold the exclusive designation of real estate collaboration specialist with a focus on divorce mortgage management. My team and I help our clients and their attorneys using our specialized knowledge to not only assemble their required financial documentation to walk through the process but to also think through the global impact of their next housing or investment decision giving peace of mind to divorcing real estate owners. For more information, reach out to me at ablack@firstcommercialbk.com.

Craig Robertson: Well guys, welcome to the show. Today's just real life, and I'm here with Lea. And Lea is a single mom, and to be completely honest, she's struggling a little bit today. There's been a lot going on the last few weeks, and so she has been gracious enough to spend little time with us so you can kind of peek in the window of how sometimes don't go like you planned. And in fact, this is the second time that we've tried to do this. And although Lea and I live in the same town, we're over Zoom. So I apologize if the sound quality's not what you're used to hearing from our friends at Blue Sky Podcasting. But they have set up this amazing technology in like a matter of five minutes notice, so it's really impressive.

So hey Lea, how's your day going so far?

Lea: It's okay so far. A typical day in chaos. Woke up, had a big breakfast with the kids, slept in, took the kids to school, got home, and decided I was gonna go for a run. The first run I've actually gone for a quite a long time, had a great playlist, and got about two miles in and got a phone call from school that my oldest was vomiting in the sanctuary. So here we are, we're back home with one of 'em, and I think it's probably a matter of time before they call with the second one. So home nursing duties at its best?

Craig Robertson: Yeah. Well and Lea is a nurse vocationally, so if there's anybody qualified to take care of her little ones. It's her. So Lea, let's just back up a little bit because one of the things that we like to do on our podcast is to tell people's real life stories. I like to share these with my clients. I'll say, you know what, what you're telling me sounds a whole lot like my friend Lea, and I think you would really benefit from hearing her voice and hearing her story. So Lea, give us a little bit of background on your upbringing.

Lea: So I grew up, I would say blessed beyond means Central Mississippi a medium to large size house with two great parents an older brother- pretty much didn't have to want or ask for much. I was lucky enough to have a mom who was able to stay at home and be a full-time mom, but that kind of led to dad going traveling back and forth for every T-ball game and cheer competition. So grew up in a great public school with close friends who were still actually close friends of mine 30 years later, but kind of lived up the typical -I say stereotypical- life of the happy home with two loving parents and an older brother spend lots of times at the ball field, changing in the car, going from the tee-ball field to swim team practice, and then after swim team practice, eating supper on the run, getting home, changing, doing homework, and getting ready to do it all again.

So pretty close-knit family, grandparents, cousins, that sort of thing, all within about 30, 45 minutes. Grew up with childhood best friends, as I mention. Still to this day are my best friends who all were within walking distance. So not only did we go to school together and cheer together and play sports together, but we also had the neighborhood game to ride ride bikes and shoot bottle rockets at the sand pits and do all the things that kids are supposed to do.

That's pretty much my foundation now; my mother was home. My father worked a lot on the road, but he was the financial provider of the family. My brother left and went to college and I soon became a lonely, teenage child who lots of kids probably dream of being an only child.

But I had a pretty big adjustment period, when my brother went to college, cause he was and is still my best friend to this day.

Craig Robertson: So you said there was about a five year age gap between the two of you.

Lea: Yeah, five year. He's five years my senior, which seems like a lot, especially with two different genders with him being male and me being female. But luckily he did include me in a lot of his activities. Not without proper, I guess, payments. So for example, if I wanted to play with his friends in the fort, then I was in charge of gathering up all the sticks to build the fort.

Craig Robertson: You had to work for your keep.

Lea: I had to work, I had to work for my keep. But I tell you what, if you learn how to play baseball with broomsticks and bottle caps; you can be a pretty darn good ball player. So, it made me tough. It taught me a lot about life, and it made me tough. And he with my dad being gone, working for his career, it's admirable. But at the same time, my older brother, not only a friend, but he kind of acted as the the male provider of the family.

He was the one meeting the boyfriends in high school in proms and making sure that his older buddies weren't talking to me, when they didn't need to be. So when he left, I went to college. It was hard, even though I was older and I kind of created my social circle, he was my go-to. And so then of course, when he went to college, then five years later here. And of course being who we were. I followed in his footsteps through the exact same path of scholarship, athletic program, same college, and he moved back to central Mississippi, and I moved off to college. But ironically around that time, our parents actually got divorced my senior year, which was shocking to most. And at the time it was shocking to us. But in hindsight, looking at it our parents had not been in a relationship in a very long time. I think they had just stayed in a relationship because that's what society says that you need to do.

Craig Robertson: Looking back on that, I mean how do you feel about that? Because you were older, you were 18 or 19, when your parents made the decision to get a divorce. You said you were somewhat surprised by it.

Lea: Well I was in the sense, we kind of knew without saying. We noticed that how you can't really have a happy marriage if you don't ever see each other, number one. And then there were subtle things you would notice about how they were around each other there was no affection, no hugging, no how was your day?

That sort of thing. But it almost seemed like a business relationship at that point. And they had been married for so long that, you know, why get divorced now? So we were a

little bit surprised when my dad came forward and kind of announced to us. He was very open and honest about his transgressions, and things in his past.

But both parents are very open about their inadequacies with the marriage and contributing factors to the divorce. But I think. It probably has taken me up until the past five or seven years to really get over it. If there's a way to really get over your parents being separated because there was so much resentment because I felt like they stayed together only for the children.

Only because what society would say; only because they didn't want us to be the only children in the community with divorced parents at the baseball game. So, I resented them for doing that for us because they both deserved to be happy a long time ago.

Craig Robertson: You resented them for waiting until you and your brother were outta the house.

Lea: Correct.

Craig Robertson: That's funny that it's not funny, but it's interesting that you say that because I meet with so many people who seem like they're just doing that. They're going through the motions kind of waiting for the kids to be independent and to be on their own. But you said you harbored some resentment about that. Can you speak about that a little bit more?

Lea: Oh absolutely, just the older -especially now having gone through life changes that I've gone through and being in the medical field- you just realize life is so short and to think that two people would -it's humbling because they sacrificed so much for our happiness to stay together, but at the same time they both worked so hard being our parents that they should have chosen to be happy themselves a long time ago.

The other aspect B of that is there was a percentage of me that felt that my part of my childhood was quote unquote a lie. Thinking back to those Christmas mornings where they pretended to be a happy family, we pretended to be chipper. Really, my parents didn't sleep in the same bed, but they hid that Christmas morning they were in the same bed, and everything was perfect.

So there was a little bit of resentment just for the thought of them putting on this facade for so long that they were happy when they really weren't. So I felt like I'd been lied to for a while.

Craig Robertson: Well, that makes a lot of sense to me. So as now an adult woman could go back and sit down at the kitchen table with your parents when you know you were 15, 16, 17, or even younger, what would you say to 'em?

Lea: Oh, there's no doubt. Even younger, gosh, I wish I would've realized younger, and I could have had been strong enough to have that conversation. To say, Hey, it's better to be happy within yourself than to be miserable with somebody else. There's nothing in life should be suffered through not for anyone.

We could still be a family, even better apart than together. I mean fast forward now, I'm soon to be 35 years old, and my parents have a better relationship now present day than I've ever seen them my entire life. They're happier they joke, they get along, they call each other, they check on each other, they poke fun at each other, they take care of each other when each other is sick, and they're divorced. And there's no absolutely no love interest, no romance. But they're simply best friends. So the thought of them both being happy now, if they could have had that so long ago especially when they were younger and they had more time to experience life and meet other people, do other things in their career? I wish they would have.

Craig Robertson: Yeah. So on the one hand, it's admirable that they were sacrificial that they felt like they needed to subordinate their happiness fulfillment in a relationship for you and your brother, but contemporaneously you feel like you were lied to that you were misled that you were led to believe that everything was okay and everything was'nt.

Lea: Absolutely.

Craig Robertson: So you walked through that. What do you remember about your parents' divorce as you sit here years later?

Lea: Gosh, really not much. Fortunately, senior year is busy, as you know, and then off to college and the summer between, my freshman year of college, is when all that hashed out and.

Luckily there was no custodial battle. It was predominantly financial stability for the future of the the children, and stability of each other. And my mother not have worked for so long, she didn't have a career. She didn't have a job, she didn't have any income, and so just kind of looking back, that's what I remember is as being part of it.

And the other aspect of obviously being emotional out of the two. My mother being more -I think she had been hiding emotion for so long that she almost had no emotion left at that point. Versus my father experienced a lot more remorse and emotion from regret at that point.

Craig Robertson: Wow Yeah, So you said you're on your way to college as your parents are going through their divorce. Talk a little bit about college and life beyond college.

Lea: College was great. Majority of my large graduating class and even friends throughout the state kind of chose to stay within the state and go to one of two universities. And I chose to go against the grain, although; not to explore and go outta state to a huge university, but to experience a little different culture within a state.

So I always tell people when they question where I went to college, I said it was the best four years of my life. Not for any kind of social parting or not just specifically education, but the people that I met. The things that I experienced. I now have lifelong friends who were born and raised in the Ukraine, and Russia ,and Australia, China, New Zealand, South America -you name it.

So in four years at a small private college, fairly private local college, I was able to meet people from all over the world and learn about different cultures. It was a small enough university where you knew everybody bigger than high school, but smaller than the big colleges.

So that's where I met lifelong friends, not only did that, but started my career in the nursing field. So I knew I didn't wanna live there and settle there forever.

Craig Robertson: You were involved in athletics during college, and you met people from all over the world.

Lea: Oh, absolutely. I've always been a busybody, and it's a blessing and a curse at the same time. Cause even to this day, I can't stand to be bored. I've gotta have some sort of hobby, some race I'm signing up for, or some challenge to redo something in my home by myself. I've always been that way, and that's how it was through college, and after college I moved straight back to Central Mississippi, and I only probably worked one or two months before I was already enrolled in graduate school to get my master's just because I knew what my end goal was.

I knew I needed to do it now, and I'm so thankful that I did. So luckily enough, I was able to work full-time for the first year through my master's program, and then the second year work part-time to finish school and survive to work full-time. And luckily, I was able to finish while I was in my early twenties and was not married and had no children, so I could focus strictly on work and getting my master's under my belt by the time I was 24.

So I'm glad I did it that way. Thinking back, I think whoa, I don't know how I did that, but I did. But I'm so thankful now, there's no way now I'd be able to go back to school. I'm glad I did it when I did, but it was tough.

Craig Robertson: Well, how did you meet your husband?

Lea: So we actually met through a mutual friend, who just kind of through a local business, she was a rep that caught on some local places that he was employed. And at the time I was doing a lot of heavy biking and running and socializing as a single female in her twenties. And she had a husband who actually worked out of town. And so she kind of lavished in the single life of trying to introduce me to all of her friends. And so she introduced us, and we kind of hit it off from there.

Craig Robertson: Talk about your early life together.

Lea: We met at a bar, which hindsight was actually his place of employment, and he had a very good income and a very good schedule. At the time I was a new nurse, and I'm in school, and we both had crazy hours, but it worked.

So we dated for I'd say what, two years, got engaged, got married, or bought a house. I bought a house, and we moved in together, and then got married shortly thereafter. So within a period of three months, I bought a house, graduated nurse practitioner school, and got married within a period of a couple months.

And so both of our families being here, both of our jobs at that time being here, we stayed in this area and bought our first home. You know, those first couple years were just purely social, we worked, and we played, and we didn't have a whole lot of responsibility at that time.

Craig Robertson: Well, how did things change, when you started getting responsibilities?

Lea: Well so it didn't change initially, so we both actually worked a two to midnight schedule, which sounds crazy, but it was the best schedule in the whole world for a newlywed couple. We woke up, we went to the gym, we had lunch together, we both went to work, and then we came home, and we had time to watch movies or sitting on the patio with the dogs at that time, looking back the time on the patio grew, and it grew pretty exponentially as far as what we did on the patio. It went from one glass of wine to hours on the patio, and then skipping the gym the next morning. However at that time, we still were no children and no responsibility.

Didn't have to be at work till two the next day. And one night on the patio we just decided, you know what? All our family here, all our friends are here. We've never

experienced life out of Mississippi. Let's move, and so actually just started to find for jobs at different places. And we knew, we loved the beach actually interviewed for a job in California, which gosh almighty would've been a daisy of a trip.

But it was a great place in California, cost of living was high, but we thought why not for a year let's experience life. Let's move to California and luckily the following day, I got a call from Florida, a great job opportunity there with a more adult schedule Monday through Friday.

But it was close enough that we could drive home and see family, but far enough where we could kind of get away to create our own identity as a new couple together without the influence of family and friends and without the pressure of being at every Sunday lunch with family, so we moved.

Craig Robertson: It sounds like you guys were looking for an adventure together.

Lea: We were. We're best friends. I mean at that time, I was very into training for triathlons and races, and he was not, however; he kind of went along with it. We thought Florida's the place to do it.

It's beautiful plenty to do. There's always a lot of music. So we moved, great. We had a little apartment with two dogs, and it was more twice what our mortgage was back home, Mississippi. But it was fun, and that career path that I took there really prospered and took off much quicker than I expected, and I fell in love with the job that I had there.

His line of work allowed him to easily just pick up a job in the food and beverage industry making about the same as what he made here. So as far as we were concerned, the first year life was grand. Then we decided, okay well we like it here. We're gonna stay. Let's think about purchasing a home and maybe starting a family.

Kelly Engelmann: Hi, I'm Kelly Engelmann a family nurse practitioner and functional medicine provider. I founded Enhanced Wellness Living Mississippi's leading functional wellness clinic with the understanding that one's healthcare plans must be congruent with their beliefs and values. At Enhanced Wellness Living, treatment is focused on you, as a whole, rather than just looking at your symptoms or what particular disease state you have.

My team and I partner with you to understand the root cause of your symptoms, and educate you on creating a lifestyle of wellness, energy, vitality, and longevity. Combining my food first approach to healing with inspiration, education, integrity, empathy, and balance. We empower you to take ownership of your health for your life.

Enhanced Wellness Living is proud to offer a variety of lifestyle and regenerative treatment options including: sexual wellness programs. Take control of your health. Live life well with Enhanced Wellness Living

Bill Blair: Hey guys, this is Bill Blair with Rocks and Rivers. We are an adventure-based coaching organization. Brandon Henry and I sitting across from me here, man, we just took a group of guys to Sand Rock, Alabama. Dude, tell 'em about that.

Brandon Henry: Yeah. Incredible. Seeing a group of guys, 15 guys, be able to get up on the rocks, engage life in a new way that is beyond anything they could have imagined, be able to sit around a council fire, share where they were in life, being able to come up with their next steps were what they wanted outta life.

Uh, big living Bill, big living.

Bill Blair: It was definitely big living. The only time those guys were quiet, dude is when they had food in their mouth, and boy, they ate good.

Brandon Henry: For sure.

Bill Blair: It was incredible. Hey, if anybody's out there, and you're wondering what your next step is. I'd encourage you to go to rocksanddrivers.com/coachingadventures and check out one of our four adventures sign up. We'd love to see you there.

Mandalin: We hope you are enjoying this episode of the Robertson and Easterling podcast. I'm Mandalin, I'm part of the legal team of Robertson and Easterling. If you think you need to speak to one of our attorneys, you can request a consultation from our website or simply call the office. Getting legal help is not only the best way to take control of your future. It will give you the clarity needed to feel better. You owe it to yourself, and more importantly to your children to take initiative. Be brave. And now please sit back and enjoy the second half of our show.

Craig Robertson: Hey everybody. Welcome back to the show. I am here with Lea, and she is right in the middle of real life with kids and dogs and work and exercise, and she is a capable, busy mom, and she was telling a story about her childhood and how she had lifelong friends and an older brother who took care of her. Unfortunately there was a setback when her parents were divorced, when she was a senior in high school, and she talks about maybe feeling a little bit lied to, although it was self-sacrificial on her parents' part to stay together until the kids are grown, so to speak. But she resented them, because mainly she wanted them to have a great life too and to feel fulfilled and not to sacrifice her own happiness and self-worth for her. She said that she got married,

and she and her husband wanted to have fun, and so they just picked up and moved. Lea, pick up the story from there.

Lea: Yeah I mean as he said, it was fun. It was an adventure; we could still get home when we needed to, but we were creating in our minds creating our own identity.

However, things became pretty difficult because we reached Crossroads where I had a career and he had a job, and a job that he was not necessarily happy with, and that didn't provide longevity when a new couple was wanting to start a family. It wasn't the atmosphere; it wasn't the safest.

So the journey began to try to find him the career path, the job of choice. So we end up buying a house and getting pregnant with our first child during that time, which was extremely stressful because you settle into one career, one schedule, and then you bounce around to a couple different jobs. The stress on yourselves, and the stress on each other and the marriage becomes more. And so all that fun we were used to having, which involved a lot of social activities and a lot of late nights on the patio, really that's when we really kind of got outta hand as far as we found ourselves having those late night conversations about what are we gonna do next? Where are we gonna go? How long were we gonna stay? We found ourselves on the patio having those conversations with alcohol, which ended up being a depressant, which led to fighting, which led to poor decisions, and so and so on and so on.

So all of this was private, we were in Florida, and we were both stubborn that we were gonna make it, and we didn't need to any help. So, made it through the first child, healthy child. Very lucky, very fortunate pregnancy. Easy enough. To parent one child and not have any family or babysitters became difficult to parent individually without the help of your spouse.

Not to say that he wasn't helpful, but I would say more unreliable.

Craig Robertson: Break that down for me and our listeners. Lea, you say unreliable. What do you mean?

Lea: Yeah. So when the career path that he chose in the food and beverage industry involves a lot of alcohol and a lot of pressure and a lot of unusual circumstances socially that maybe are okay and maybe not even okay at a younger age. But as you age and as you get married and your wife is pregnant or you start a family, you just can't do the things that you used to do and you have to make educated adult decisions. And yeah, every decision you make as a parent affects your child one way or another, whether it's now or later.

Being in healthcare, I didn't have a job where I could just leave at the drop of the hat, although I had to many of times because the career path that he was involved in, and the addiction he started to struggle with alcohol. I didn't know whether he had been drinking or not. Nine times outta 10, I knew without a shadow of a doubt he had been drinking at work.

It was just a matter of how much had he been drinking? Has he been drinking enough where he can go get the baby from school, or do I need to leave work and go get the baby? So that uneasiness of every day wondering- how much he had had to drink, or if he was going to be able to drive in an emergency, or if he was going to pick up the kid that that became in itself kind of a bowl of anxiety that I struggle with every day while trying to focus on a career.

Craig Robertson: Lea, it sounds like you guys had a lot of fun together. You said late nights on the patio, and it was fun. It was great, but then you moved away from the support of your family, and you got a job that was demanding, and he got a job that was more social. And it sounds like you did a lot of growing up while he didn't. And then the burden associated with somewhat being a single parent, even though he was present, but you couldn't rely on whether or not he was always sober.

Lea: Yeah, you just get to a point emotionally where I didn't have an outlet and of course I kept everything so private with the issues with the alcohol and the golfing and those things came up. I was so private that I didn't wanna ask for help. Not from anyone local.

I had great support system with friends, who became my family locally outta state. But I was too prideful to ask for help, and too prideful to ask for help at home. There were spouses. There were spells where things were great, and we were responsible, and a job change was the answer, but was never really the answer long term.

He bounced around from job to job searching for happiness, that was never going to be there, because the job that he wanted, and what he wanted for that sense of fulfillment was through something financial. It was a amount of money he needed to feel that he was being supportive.

We went through great times where things were great, and I had help. It was a facade because in the back of your mind in the back of your heart; you knew it was only a matter of time before the bottom falls out again. And it's a sickening feeling to live with on a daily basis, so to speak.

Craig Robertson: Looking back, how were you managing his unhealthy behavior?

Lea: Yeah I mean at that time, I was just surviving. I mean, it was purely survival mode because around the time things had really gotten better and you kind of put all your eggs in one basket, so to speak to think that someone is well.

We decided to have a second child. And I mean, it was 100% planned. At our age we if we wanna have two and we want our oldest to have a sibling, we're gonna go ahead and have another one. And we're in a good spot, and we've changed jobs, and we're drinking less. You know, it's time, and so we thought that was the answer or I thought that may be the answer.

And then in hindsight, that was the biggest blessing. But at the same time a poor decision because, once again, the cycle, the dreadful cycle began to repeat and then I ended up in a circumstance that jeopardized my career some days, my sanity, most days where I went from having one child to worry about to having a two year old and a newborn, and a full-time job and no help and unreliable. Your spouse who was suffering from addiction. And so it was hard. It was hard. You learn to kind of humble yourself and do what you can, and it's purely survival mode at that point.

Craig Robertson: When did you reach the breaking point?

Lea: So my youngest was about eight months old, and we had battled issues with alcohol, and we had made some choices and some decisions, and several things had fallen through.

The point that we reached where we really thought we had headed things off is when he made the decision himself to go to rehab. That was his decision. I had suggested it for a while, and he made that decision on his own, which was respectable. But we did that. We did that for 45 days and that left me at home with a two year old and a newborn and a career.

And that was difficult, but if that meant the kids had a healthy father, and that I had a healthy husband, then that's what we did. And that's the decision we made at that point. And so that worked well for a while.

Craig Robertson: Leah, it's interesting, I don't know if you hear yourself, but you're still using words like we, when you're talking about the decision to go to rehab. It sounds like you really were truly trying to be a partner while he was struggling to maintain a lifestyle of recovery.

Lea: Oh yeah I mean, it was always us against the world. It was always "we" financially and physically I was strained, but I loved him. I think he truly loved our children. Going back to my parents, and they're sacrificed. In my mind I thought, I will sacrifice however

much time and money it takes for my children to have a healthy father and to see what it's like to grow up with two healthy parents. And so that's what we did. The breaking point was not until we had made it through rehab, and we had reached about two to three months of sobriety, and unfortunately a ton of events led to an unpleasant incarceration, which left me even more alone than I had ever been.

Craig Robertson: When did you finally decide to start telling other people about your struggle and eventually reach out for legal intervention?

Lea: When we made the decision to go to rehab is when both of us- with with his consent cause I had respected his privacy and his struggles because Lord knows we all have our own demons.

Everyone has demons of different sorts, and I respected his privacy, but when he went to rehab, he was okay with everyone knowing. In fact, he called his family on the way we called my family on the way to rehab. My family visited him in rehab my; father wrote him letters and sent him care packages and just to show how proud and how hard of a decision that is.

But when the relapse happened, a few months later in a different city with two small children and to get that phone call that that's really when I said I have to have help. And that's when I kind of tucked my tail and started seeking some legal advice and made the decision to get back home and closer to family where for the my own and the children's sake, they needed a support system. They needed consistency, but for my own sake, I needed some help, some reprieve to kind of figure out what the next steps were going to be at that point.

Craig Robertson: Lea, you're a very capable, driven woman. How did it feel in that moment to be vulnerable and to reach out for help?

Lea: Oh gosh. It's still hard. You feel embarrassed. You feel embarrassed that you were too prideful to share it sooner. You feel embarrassed that people will judge you for staying in a relationship like that. When most people, it's easy as an outsider to I would've left said person a long time ago if they weren't working, or I would've left them a long time ago if they had a addiction problem.

But until you struggle until you truly love someone who struggles with addiction, you don't know until you've been there. And so I think the pride hurt and the embarrassment and the just feeling. That sense back to my parents that feeling of false hope, and that feeling that I had been lied to for so long.

Because after moving home and making decisions and kind of proceeding with separation and divorce, so many new things were exposed. Where at the time I only thought I was battling addiction with alcohol, but there was a lot more to it. And so even to this day, it's an ongoing battle to not hold resentment and to grasp for hope and things for the future and not hold onto past experiences that will shape your entire future, and the way you look at life. The way you interpret new relationship, whether it be professional or personal.

Craig Robertson: But you said we came back home, you used the word “I tucked my tail and we came home.” I needed the structure and stability of home, and you were struggling with whether or not you were gonna stay in the marriage. But you said there were some other things that you guys were dealing with when you got home. Can you tell me and our listeners a little bit about that?

Lea: Sure sure. When we made the decision together as a family on where to live and what was best for us at that moment, and that at that moment, it was not where we wanted to be, but it was where we needed to be. That meant moving back in with family for physical and emotional support and financial support at the time. I was the only means of transportation for my children, and when I'm working they need to be at school, and they needed to be at extracurriculars. And so we made that decision jointly.

But unfortunately after being home for just a short while, my partner was not okay with that decision. And emotions and tempers begin to flare that I had then chosen “my friends and my family over our family, over our wife and our decisions.” And so ultimately, although I was hurt, he felt that I had stopped choosing him, and so he actually left.

Craig Robertson: Yeah. And to clarify, you were the only means of transportation because of some of the decisions he made impacted his ability to operate a motor vehicle, correct?

Lea: Which in turn impacted his ability to have sustainable employment without a valid driver's license. And so there were so many backers on why we needed to be where we needed to be when we needed to be.

And I had chosen him, and I had chosen our family for so long that I had to then choose my children, and where they needed to be. And that meant here, and that was not

where he felt like he needed to be. He felt like his addiction issues were going to worsen here. In that scenario, he felt abandoned.

He felt I chose my family and my friends. He felt embarrassed because I had discussed our private life with them. And so one night he left, he made the decision to leave. No warning, no planned discussion. No call the next day with, Hey, let's meet? Let's have lunch. Let's talk about this.

It was simply, he packed a bag, and he left. And that was about eight or nine days after both children had had surgery. So that was shocking because I had made the decision to stay in the marriage for so long and fought so hard and had fought so many battles and fought so many demons, and finally got up the courage to move home to get help, just basically start over. And for me in my mind for me to have fought so long and hard for him to walk away so easily. It was pretty tough.

Craig Robertson: Yeah, I can see that for sure. I don't wanna go too much into the divorce process, but you guys did walk through a divorce, and it was not that easy actually. I mean, I have different perspective than most people on how divorces go.

And if I say a divorce is easy, it was pretty easy. And if I say a divorce was hard, it was awful. But you guys, it wasn't, it took a while. There were some courtroom appearances, but you guys did eventually divorce. Talk a little bit about the impact of the decision to divorce on you, and where you are today.

Lea: I think the decision looking back maybe you should have done it sooner. I'm not sure. There's never a good time just like there's never a good time to be sick. There's never a good time to gain weight. Having small children, that was my biggest factor of when to do it and how to do it.

And to do it, I'm not gonna do it. We can fix this. And I'm a fixer. I'm a fixer by nature. That's my career path. That's my love language, once I finally realized that there was no fixing this, that I had to make a decision that I thought was best for myself and my health to be able to take care of my children who had one sick parent, although he did not realize he was sick.

He was sick, and then I needed to be there for my children. That process I thought would be fairly easy that it would not be surprising to file for divorce being the fact that he left, he chose to leave, he chose to obtain financial things, and make sure that he was taken care of.

So when I made the decision to file and serve, I was a little bit surprised that he was surprised. To this day, he still appears blindsided, which is baffling to me because he

was the one that made the choice to leave, not me. I was just the one that made the strategic move to make things legal. So that was hard, and it still is hard.

Cause there's a lot of personality traits that you learn about an individual that maybe dismissed before when things were happy or kosher. But you weren't thinking a lot about the narcissistic traits and transfer of guilt, and I still struggle with that daily of with simple issues, sick children and financial obligations and such.

It was just shocking that the divorce took so long being that the cards were pretty cut and dry that he left. So clearly he didn't wanna be a part of our family anymore. And the fact that he would not settle and simply be divorced and moved on that was a little bit surprising, and it was a little bit straining to have to function and work two jobs and take care of children while trying to buy a house to start our life over while dealing with the legal aspect. That was difficult. Very difficult.

Craig Robertson: Wow. Yeah, I know, but you sure have come out on the other side. Talk a little bit about life today. Maybe not on this date, but generally speaking this season of life that you're in now.

Lea: Life today is messy. No, life today is great. The friends that I have mentioned at the start of this podcast that I grew up with since I was three and four years old. They now were my neighbors. We've been friends for 34 years. I'm now back here, and I'm lucky enough to be able to, like I did as a child, walk to their house. Now I can walk to their house or ride the golf cart with my children to their house. And our children are growing up together.

And so, my circle is strong. My family is close. My parents now have a great relationship, so they're able to spend the night with each other with all the grandkids. I have nieces and a brother who I run with and try to keep up with exercise wise. It kinda is my motivation to keep me challenged.

So life is good. I've been lucky enough to pick right up where I left off career-wise here. I'm able to work a little extra in order to buy a house. It took me forever with the market being this way, but I finally found a house. It's gratifying to do it alone and to keep the simplicity of the small joys of life with raising two beautiful children, and how blessed at the end of the day everything we've gone through how blessed we truly are to have what we have.

Craig Robertson: Well, that's a real testament to gratitude, and I am grateful that we got to do this, and that you got to tell your story. I can just imagine women, who are in the same situation, who are really gonna connect with the words that you've spoken

today. I wanna ask you one more question... If Lea today could go back and talk to 25 year old Lea, what would you tell yourself?

Lea: My 25 year old self would say, don't settle. Don't fall into the pressure of society to be a certain person to date a certain person to become or morph into a person that you think you need to be. To continue to challenge yourself and never settle because true happiness is found within yourself. It's not in another human. It's not in anything tangible. It's within yourself. And when you get caught up in reaching and searching for happiness in other people, you're not going to find it. It's not gonna be true happiness, and you're not gonna change people.

Craig Robertson: I don't have anything to add to that. That's so beautifully spoken, and I am so grateful that you were willing and able to do this today. So Lea, thank you.

Lea: Thank you for having me.

Matt Easterling: You've been listening to the Robertson and Easterling podcast. Thanks for tuning in.

Craig Robertson: If you need our help, we're here for you. You can request a consultation from our website day or night, and it takes less than five minutes. Subscribe today on Spotify, iTunes, or your favorite podcast player, so you'll be the first to know when our next episode drops. You can also join us on social media. We're on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Matt Easterling: Have a great rest of your day. And remember, there's nothing wrong with arming yourself with information. On behalf of the Robertson & Easterling family and all of our sponsors, thanks for spending time with us.

Mandalin: This podcast is not a substitute for an attorney. All information is provided as a general reference in public service. Listening to this podcast does not create a professional relationship with Robertson and Easterling, or any of its attorneys or guests. This podcast may be considered advertising under applicable rules and free background information is available. Upon request For more information, please visit our website@robertson.ms.