

Done with Dieting Podcast #74: Mothers and Daughters
with Karen CL Anderson



Full Episode Transcript

With your Host
Elizabeth Sherman

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What do you think about when you think about mothers and daughters? The picture that most of us conjure up is that of a perfect, loving relationship where moms and daughters are sharing secrets. Mom is teaching the daughter how to grow up to be a woman, spending time together in the kitchen, may be going shopping together, spending time at the spa.

But for many, mother and daughter relationships can be very difficult. In my interview on today's podcast, we're talking about how mother and daughter relationships are highly nuanced and complex. If you're a daughter with a mother, you are definitely going to want to listen into it.

Let's get started.

You are listening to the done with dieting podcast. The podcast for women in midlife, who are done with dieting, but still want to lose weight and feel good in your clothes.

You know that diets don't work long term. But you feel like there's this secret that everyone else knows that you just haven't figured it out yet.

I am your host, Elizabeth Sherman. And I've helped hundreds of women get off the diet roller coaster, change their relationship with food, exercise, and their bodies.

Through this podcast, my goal is to help you too.

Welcome. Let's get started.

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We all love our family, don't we? Well, truth be told, not everyone has an idyllic relationship with their family. The reason being that families are made up of human people. And we humans are flawed. We don't always realize how our actions influence others. And when it comes to parenting, no one ever handed our parents a parenting handbook.

So, unless they had good parents to use as a template and pull from, chances are that they did the best that they could with the tools that they actually had. On today's episode, I'm chatting with Karen CL Anderson. Who works with adult women on their complex relationships with their mothers. And you are definitely in for a treat.

In our interview, we cover a lot of ground and tackle some pretty tough topics. But I love all of it. And I'm excited to share this super vulnerable episode with you.

Here you go.

Elizabeth: All right everyone, welcome Karen CL Anderson to the done with dieting podcast. Karen, I am so excited for you to be here today. We have so many interesting topics to talk about.

Karen: Yes, we do.

Elizabeth: So, let's get started. You are a coach for mother and daughter relationships. Or is it difficult? Mother and daughter relationships?

Karen: It's difficult mother-daughter relationships and it's not a hundred percent this, but it's generally, adult daughters who struggle in the relationship they have with their moms. I have coached mothers with adult daughters in that, but it's more the other way.

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Elizabeth: So, Karen and I have been in the advanced certification for feminist coaching program together. That's how we met, and she has a fascinating story and a fascinating relationship with your mother. And so, I assume that that's how you got into this. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Karen: Yeah. Interestingly, given what you do and with looking at food and body image and weight and all that kind of stuff. What's really interesting is that back in the day before 2009, for sure. But like in 2009, I started a blog which was about my own journey around weight loss, and body image, and working out, and that whole thing. And up until that point, it something I've struggled with my whole life.

And there's lots and lots of stories that I could tell about that journey. The relationship I have with my mom, it's not that it was all amazing. And then, boom, it wasn't amazing. It was something that I did struggle with, especially as an adult. I didn't make the connection that like up, this is a mother-daughter thing right away.

But it was through blogging, it was through all that sort of self-exploration that I started to see the connection between body image, weight issues, eating disorders, that kind of thing. And the relationship a girl has, or a woman has with her mom.

It's not to blame the mom necessarily, especially in the certification that we're doing, we are seeing a much bigger picture as to like why all of this stuff is an issue for women. Starting that blog, meeting a lot of other bloggers, going to blogging conferences, starting to meet coaches. And then, deciding that I thought it would be cool to become a coach as well. And I was going to coach around body image and weight loss and whatnot.

But it was in coaching training that my stuff with my mom really came to a head, and I started to really like work on my own relationship with her more intensely. And yes, I'd had therapy. And as I said, it's not that it was a surprise to me that there were these issues. But it really became very fraught at that time for me.

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As a result of the work, I did personally, I was like, this is what I wanted to, right? Not just that the body image thing I wanted to work specifically with adult daughters and their relationship with their moms. Because again, it seemed like every woman I talked to, inevitably there would be something about the mother.

Elizabeth: Yeah. That's so powerful. And one thing that I think happens a lot with us as coaches is that we coach our clients on the things that we need to coach ourselves on. So, I can only imagine that that was something that you're like, oh, I need coaching on this. I'm going to coach my clients on it so that I get the coaching as well.

Karen: Yeah. So, I got my coaching certification in 2013. And it was at the end of 2010 that I actually estranged myself from my mom. And I had estranged myself with the belief that, okay, that's it I'm done. I'm never going to see her speak to her again. But in the meantime, I had become my grandmother's legal guardians. My mom's mom.

Legally, I was responsible for being in touch with my grandmother's errors. She had three children, she died in 2015, she was 98. But anyway, so I was the legal guardian, and I had this responsibility to be in contact with my mom, her sister, and her brother. Even though, it was like a strange from my mom, legally, I had to have these center things and whatnot.

Some specific things that were going on at the time and my mom sent me an email and I just completely lost it. I was so pissed off and I brought that to the training. Cause we get coached when we learn how to coach. And that was some of the most powerful coaching I've ever gotten.

Elizabeth: Wow. I could only imagine. And I think I love it that you brought up estrangement, because I'm actually estranged from much of my family. And I think that estrangement is something that we really don't talk about. I'm estranged from most of

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my family due to my mom's death that often happens when a parent dies that the children separate from one another.

And so, I think it's fascinating that you brought that up because it's something that's so many families are having these troubles and it's done in a shroud of shame that we don't talk about this. Because what does that mean about me, if I'm not talking to the other members of my family.

Karen: Yeah. There's a statistic that I remember is that it's about 30% of adult children are estranged from their parents at any given time. Cause like I am no longer estranged from my mom. I have a relationship with her. So, it's like we can be estrange, and then we're not estrange, or we go back to being estranged.

But that's a big number. And I think a lot of people think, oh, this is only me or it's only us. And that's why, where the shame comes in. I've actually been doing some writing recently around, how can we look at estrangement differently? What are the opportunities there? And like, why are so many people estranged?

And it might be because humans at this point in time, the old ways of being don't serve us anymore. We still need each other, but we don't need each other the way we used to. And so, I think humanity is like trying to figure out how do we be together differently. And it causes a lot of confusion, strife, and misunderstanding, right? It's like, how do we be with each other.

Elizabeth: Yeah. I'm wondering like how much of that estrangement really has to do with parents seeing their children grow up. And still having these beliefs about their child, that their child is supposed to be a certain way. And the child really trying to exert his or her own identity. Like, having that disconnect between the parent and child about who you really are versus what my expectations of you really are.

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And sometimes an estrangement or a breakup is potentially necessary in order for the child to truly receive that independence and acceptance of their own before they come back to the relationship and say, okay, this is who I am. Now, how can we renegotiate this relationship?

Karen: Exactly. And it's interesting, there's a book called, "a woman is no man." And it's written by Palestinian American woman named Etaf Rum. I think that's what her name is. And it's a novel and it's about that very thing. And it's about the character in the book. As I call it walking a middle path between estrangement and enmeshment. Right?

So, on the one hand on one extreme is where co-dependent emotionally enmeshed. We don't know where one begins and the other ends unhealthy. And then, on the other extreme, complete estrangement where we never see or talk to each other.

And the character in the book says something like, you know what? I didn't want to estrange myself from my family, but I was going to say, this is who I am. And you don't have to love me as I am, but this is who I'm going to be. I'm not going to cut you out, but I'm also not going to be who you want me to be.

Elizabeth: Yeah. That's so beautiful. So, how did you get back in touch with your mom? How did that work? What were the events that led up to that and how did you negotiate that?

Karen: It's really interesting because as I mentioned, I estranged myself from her at the end of 2010, because she had sent me an email. I live in Connecticut; she lives in Maine. My husband and I had gone to visit her and her husband at Thanksgiving of 2010.

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And what's interesting is at that time I was becoming more and more of who I am. I was liking myself more than I'd ever liked myself. I was feeling more successful. I had actually lost a lot of weight. And I was blogging, and I was finding this sort of way in the world of like, oh wow, this really lights me up.

So, we went to visit at Thanksgiving and from my perspective, it was rather a shit show, that visit and for a lot of different reasons. And we ended up leaving early, came back home, and I was about to publish my first book, which was based on this blog that I had.

Again, I was trying to include my mother in my life, and I think we had Skype or something like that. I wanted to Skype with her because I wanted to show her the cover of the book. And that Skype thing never happened. But I got an email from her, saying a lot of things about how terrible I was at Thanksgiving. And then she said, I'm really disappointed in the person that you've become.

At the time, I was still very much needing and wanting her approval. Like, I don't even think I saw that that's what it was. But it felt like, okay, knife in my heart, she is telling me she's disappointed in me. As I said, it's not like it was a brand new, like, oh my God, my mother's never been mean to me before.

But I was like, okay, I could go back into our regular pattern and try to fight and defend. But I decided, I'm done. And I wrote back, and I said, based on what you've said in this email, I don't ever want to see you or talk to you again.

And then, a few days later, I called my dad. So, my parents were divorced when I was two. I called my dad to tell him what had happened. And he was very proud of me. And he told me some stuff about his marriage to my mom that he had never been willing to tell me before. Because he was very polite, he didn't want to ever disparage her. And it's

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not that he was disparaging, but he was the kind of telling me some stuff that I had never known before. And it made a lot of sense.

And that night he died of a massive heart attack.

Elizabeth: Oh, wow.

Karen: Yeah. So, it was like, wow, okay. Boom, I don't have parents anymore. But I went ahead, I was like, okay, I'm publishing this book. I also started therapy. I don't know when it was exactly. I don't know if it was in 2011 that I became my grandmother's legal guardian. I don't know exactly when it was.

But I know my mom at a certain point, sent me a letter in the mail and said, okay, Karen, enough is enough. What are you going to do to fix this? Actually, it must've been after 2013, because at that point, I was learning coaching and I was like, well, mom, what are you making it mean that blah, blah, blah.

Elizabeth: Oh, doing all the young coach speak.

Karen: Yeah, baby coached stuff. Yeah, it's funny it's sort of fuzzy in my head, like the timeline. But we went back and forth via email quite a bit, and then decided that we would meet. And that was in 2014, I drove up to Maine and I was all like ready with my boundaries because she wanted me to come and stay at their house.

And I said, no, I'm staying in a hotel. And she's like, oh, don't be silly. And I said, no, my preference is to stay in a hotel. And my preferences matter. I was like, you know, boom. And yeah, that visit went well in a lot of ways. And it went not well in a lot of ways. Again, it's been a sort of tentative rebuilding.

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And there have been times where we don't talk much. There's been times where we talk more often. When I'm coaching with my clients, the thing about boundaries is that it takes time to have boundaries that become energetic.

It's the result of you, knowing yourself very, very well and knowing what's okay and what's not okay. And being able to, as I call it, trust yourself with the anger that you feel when your boundaries are crossed. It's okay to scream and yell and fight and whatever, right? It's like this isn't that like, oh, you shouldn't ever get upset. I think most of us want to respect ourselves and not quote unquote, get out of control.

But when we can trust our souls with that anger. When we're familiar with how our nervous systems work and we know our nervous systems and we can work with our nervous systems, I call it the inner gravel. It's a very subtle, but from energy that's like, no, we're not doing this. And that's where I've gotten with my mom.

Elizabeth: Yeah. And I think that when we're first starting to establish boundaries, it's very off putting to the other person. Right? Because they're not used to that. And so, they pushed back a little bit harder. And so, women, I'm going to generalize here that we don't like to be the bad guy. We don't like being super angry about it.

In the situation that one of my clients would have where they've prepared dinner and the family's kind of rebelling and being like, no, we want to have pizza, instead. You know, really putting your foot down and not being afraid that they're not going to like you because of doing that. Right?

We're talking about two different situations, but the feeling, the energy there is exactly the same. That I'm putting my foot down. I'm not going to be swayed. I really need to respect and stand up for myself so that I can respect myself in the morning, right? Tomorrow and not feel like a doormat in the process.

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Karen: Yeah. And no matter how old we are, we still have our primitive part of our brain. And we still also have, I don't know if we want to call it an inner child or whatever, but it's like, there is a part of us that still has the fear that if mommy doesn't love me, if mommy doesn't approve, I'm going to die. That primitive part of the brain is like, at one time, my very life depended on her liking me.

Elizabeth: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that the other piece to that is the safety that's involved with growing up, believing that your parents are right, that your parents are gods. And that everything that they do is for your preservation. If we didn't believe that as children, I don't even know what would happen.

And so, we grow up believing that our parents are infallible, when our parents are really just human, like we are. Carrying through generations of trauma and shame that they've also experienced and they're imperfect people.

Karen: Yeah. Again, depending on how old you are, how old your parents are when they were born. My mom is 80 will be 82, so she was born in 1940. Her mother was born in 1918 or 17, I think, whatever. It's really fascinating to look back at what was the parenting advice back then? And it was awful in some places.

My grandmother's parents or her parents I think were born here, but I'm not sure. But they were German. And one of the parenting gurus of the day was a Nazi. And I've been actually doing a little bit of research on this recently. Another one, I can't remember his name. I think he was American, but it was like basically children, babies, infants can be trained like animals. And don't touch them, don't hug them.

Elizabeth: That's Mengele stuff.

Karen: Yes. And again, I don't know what all parents were doing in 1920 and 1940, but they didn't know from drama, right?

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Elizabeth: Yeah. You were just being soft. You just weren't being parented hard enough if you are crying.

Karen: Right. And that they even had their own traumas or that trauma was a thing. I don't know what they knew or what they thought. So, it's that context that helps, I think. It's like, okay, this person isn't out to get you. It's their own trauma. As you said, we see our parents as gods or as all knowing, and they were taught too that that's what parents are, right?

So, they go into parenthood thinking my baby is a blank slate, I will make it, and not having any clue. That's not how it works.

Elizabeth: Yeah. And I also think about like my mother's parenting style, my parents' parenting style and how they couldn't show any weakness. If you showed weakness, then that meant that you weren't the parent, or you weren't the adults. And you couldn't show any vulnerability or anything like that. Once you made the decision that this is how you were going to punish, you better stick with it because otherwise all bets are off.

Karen: Yeah. So, in the context of not only do as a child, see the parent as the boss or the hoodie, the parents are seeing themselves that way or thinking that that's how they have to see themselves.

Elizabeth: Yeah. As the expert or infallible. Like, I don't make any mistakes.

Karen: Yeah. So, anyway, this like, how did we get here? This is how we got here.

Elizabeth: Well, to that end, something that we can tie this into the shame of growing up and getting messages about our bodies, about food, about all of that stuff and how that's carried through generation, after generation, after generation.

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Karen: Yeah. My grandmother was a beautiful woman. In fact, where's the picture? Hold on. Can I get it? This isn't going to be a video, right? The people aren't going to be able to see it.

Elizabeth: No, but I can. I can use it.

Karen: Well, that's okay. I'll just take my word for it. My grandmother was a beautiful woman. She wanted to be a model or an actress, and that didn't happen. She met my grandfather, they got married. He wanted to be a family man. He wanted her to have kids and my mom was her first. She was in high school in like the fifties, the mid to late fifties. And she was voted prettiest in her class, or most popular, or both, or something.

And then, I came along in 1962. But there was this total emphasis on looks and my mom tells the story of the time that my grandmother said to my mom, it's too bad I don't have enough money to get you a nose job. I don't know why she needed a nose job.

I remember my grandmother thought she needed a nose job, but there we are, right? You need to look a certain way. My first memory of that there's something wrong with my body, came when I was about, I don't know seven or eight maybe. And I'd gone to the pediatrician, and I don't remember any of this other than when we got home.

My mother says to my stepfather, the doctor says she's chunky. And I hear like, fear, and disgust, and amusement. I remember it so clearly, it's like that is a memory seared in my brain. From then on, it was just, you have to be on a diet, you have to be exercising, you have to conform, and have your body be okay.

And it's so funny because when I look at pictures of myself, I'm like, there was nothing there. But going on through high school, I remember when I got over a hundred and twenty-five pounds and that was like the worst thing ever. I was playing 130 pounds and that was not okay.

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In college, I gained a lot of weight and then my senior year in college, I lived off campus with a bunch of other women. And one of them had this boyfriend who was a drug dealer. He brought speed.

Elizabeth: Oh yeah.

Karen: It was a big, huge bag of speed into the house. And we all took it and we all lost a lot of weight. My mother was so happy. And then, going on into my early twenties, I gained weight back and my grandmother wanted to pay me to lose weight. So, again, like in hindsight, it's like, geez. Just shame, shame, shame, here you go.

Elizabeth: Yeah. And the thought that process behind that is it doesn't matter how you lose weight. It can be unhealthy, but as long as you look the part, that's all that really matters.

Karen: Yeah. And it's so fascinating too, right? I can't speak from my mom or my grandmother. And as we know in coaching, it is what we think and the stories that we tell. And I am very intentional now about the stories that I tell myself and others about my mom and my grandmother. Because I like how it makes me feel.

I don't know whether these stories are true. I suspect there is truth in them. I don't care. And the story that I like to tell is that I don't think my mother, or my grandmother wanted to get married and have children under the circumstances in which they did.

I think they probably wanted to have a different kind of life, at least for a while. And maybe then, get married later to somebody that they really loved. Because my grandparents lasted 40 years, but it was miserable. They both cheated on each other. And my mom's been married three times. And that's not a criticism of either of them. It's an understanding that they didn't live the life that they wanted to live.

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Elizabeth: Yeah. When you were saying that your grandmother wanted to be an actress and a model, but she got married instead, I was thinking back to what would that have been like the 1930's.

Karen: Yeah. She married my grandfather in 1939, I think. And so, she'd graduated from high school 37, 38, something like that. 1937 and 38. And she wanted to go to college and it's so funny because I found this document, it was like a letter, I guess that she had written, or it was the rejection letter that she'd gotten from some college that she had applied to.

So, if we look at my mom, she wanted to go to college. She was the oldest. She had a brother two years younger. And back in the fifties, it's not like we're going to save the money for the boy to go to college. But they did send her, they sent her for a year. And in that first year, she flunked out again, not because she was stupid, but I think she was so like excited to be free.

And the shaming story goes, and I can hear my grandfather saying it, well, Sidney flunked out because she majored in bridge and boys. So, she comes home from college. She'd fallen in love with a boy at school. His name was Johnny Macintyre, and she couldn't be with Johnny. So, she came back, got a job, met my dad, and married him.

The day they got married was the day my father had his first panic attack. And then, they had me and then they got divorced.

Elizabeth: Well, thinking back to the 1950s, so her parents are judging her for being infatuated with boys. And yet at the same time, that's the messaging that she's receiving that you're going to college to get an MRS degree. Right? Like, you're going to college so that you can meet a nice boy who will take care of you for the rest of your life. And so, on both sides, she's screwed there.

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Karen: So yeah. And it's so funny, sometimes I joke that like the only reason they got married was so that I could come into the world.

Elizabeth: Maybe.

Karen: Yeah. But what's fascinating and something that I really admire about my mom, even though it's also the thing that has caused me a lot of pain in my life is that in 1965, she got on a plane by herself. She was 24, 25 years old and flew to Mexico by herself, so that she could get a quickie divorce because you couldn't get divorced here in Connecticut at the time.

Elizabeth: I've heard you tell that story before and you know, what's fascinating about that is that Gary, my husband was doing his family tree. And his grandmother was married several times. And one of the times she talked about going to Mexico to get a quickie divorce. And we're like, why was that even a thing? And I didn't realize until you told that story, that women could not initiate divorce in the United States until like the 1970s was it?

Karen: I don't know. I think it was different in different states. I don't know what the exact timing is there but yes, there was all kinds of laws about that kind of thing.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Gary's grandmother did the exact same thing. And I just thought that that was hilarious. But now with that understanding of oh, that's why it happened. Because you hear about go to Mexico and get a quickie marriage. Right? But I had never heard of getting a quickie divorce before.

Karen: Yeah. It's fascinating because when I think about my mom doing that and the balls, or ovaries, or whatever that it would take to do that. And so, the spirit that I see in her, I will not be in this situation that I do not want to be in, and I'm willing to do this in order to get out of it.

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I'm like, what a bad ass, you know? But yeah, like getting back to the whole thing about our bodies, right? Even though, I think both were wanting to live a different life than the ones that they had. They didn't want to necessarily be getting married and having kids at 20. But the body thing was all about, you need to look good so that you can get a man.

Elizabeth: Yeah. It was like the best man.

Karen: Right, the best man.

Elizabeth: Which generally means maybe looks but rich.

Karen: For sure. Interestingly, I've told you this part too. When I was 21 in college, my senior year of college, I got pregnant, and had an abortion. And my mom was like, all for that. It was so funny because I never wanted to have kids. And she has told me, she's like, you know, even from a young age, you said you didn't want to have kids.

I appreciated her support of me in that. And again, I don't know what she was thinking. Probably, she didn't want to have to take care of a baby if I couldn't take care of it myself. Right? And the father, we won't even get into that.

But I appreciate her support in allowing me to make that choice, so that I didn't have to make the same sacrifice that she and my grandmother had made. Being forced into something that I suspect they didn't want, at least not as I said in the circumstances in which they did.

Elizabeth: Yeah. So, tell me, when a client comes to you and she is working on her relationship with her mother. I think that so often, we see our parents that they should have known better.

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Karen: Yes.

Elizabeth: Right. That they didn't do what was right for me, and there's a lot of resentment, and a lot of blaming, and all of that going both ways. How do you coach women around that? And I guess, what is the resolution or is that different by client?

Yeah. I have all different kinds of clients. The first thing I do with a client is introduce them to what I call self-concept work. And I have a little exercise, a little worksheet, and process for who do you think you are right now? And who do you want to be in this relationship that you have with your mom? Are you estrange and do you want to get re-established contact? Are you in contact and you just need better boundaries? Are you in contact and you want out and you want to do that in a healthy way?

And so, the self-concept work is kind of like, what we've talked about in coaching as an unintentional model and an intentional model. Because the self-concept work that I do incorporate thoughts and feelings. And the way that I teach it is a way that and I still work on my self-concept, it's like a never-ending process.

But it's a tool that I can look at and say, when I need to like, remind myself of who I actually am. Because it always is up about who we are. Our mothers aren't going to change, or maybe they are, but we can't expect that.

And so, the who do you want to be in this relationship, if at all. And what do you need to think and feel in order to show up that way? So, the interesting thing is we have this shame-based messages about ourselves, that often get passed down. And it was so fascinating, I don't remember when I became aware of it, but the message or the belief that I've had about myself for as long as I can remember is that I'm a pathetic loser.

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And I actually went to work with a coach around that. And she asked me, she said, do you think your mother ever felt like a pathetic loser or your grandmother? And I was like, no way. Like, at that language, I couldn't see coming from them.

But as I just told you, my mother and my grandmother both had in their young adulthood scenarios, where they didn't weren't able to have what they wanted. They were rejected for college. They were kicked out of college. They had to marry somebody that didn't really want to marry.

And I actually was like, yeah, that there's shame there, right? Whether they were using the words pathetic loser or not isn't important. And that's when I was like, okay, this isn't mine, but it's probably not even there's either.

So, old self-concept for me is one of that is pathetic loser. So, with a client, once we're able to identify some of the shame-based beliefs they have about themselves, we then are at the same time building the new self-concept, right? We're not going to get rid of our shame-based thoughts, they're always going to be there.

So, how do we work with them in the way I talk about it is that they don't take up as much space. We give ourselves this new self-concept that takes up more space in us. And how can we remind ourselves? And it's funny because when I'm done working with a client, usually I send them an email and I said, your only job is to remember who the fuck you are.

Not all of them, but a lot of them, I prompt them to give their self-concept a name, so that they can remember. My self-concept name is elementally powerful. And I have three pillars that uphold my self-concept, and they are dignity expression, and audacity. And each of them has three different feelings. Each of them has a set of beliefs and mantras.

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And it's funny, I have my self-concept right here. Each of them has thoughts and it's like, I can look at that and I'm like, yep, that's who I am.

Elizabeth: That's so fascinating. I work a lot with creating a vision, but I don't get that nitty gritty into it. And so, I love that approach. And yeah, just allowing the inner critic, that shame-based story, those stories that pop up, the narrative that our lower brain is offering us. They're always going to be there. Right? But just quieting them and saying, oh, there you are. Okay, we've worked through this. Go away now. Yeah.

Karen: I keep mine in this little box. I have a little box on my desk and inside are little pieces of paper that have my shame-based messages. People are like, oh, you should burn that. Throw it away. I'm like, no, it's no longer inside me, it's out here, it's in this box. And it's another way to remind myself, that's not who I am. That's over there in the box. Right? That's my cat.

Elizabeth: I love that. And so, you did this exercise where those shame-based stories, do you want to talk about that? The visual that you had of the women holding hands?

Karen: Yeah. It's so funny, I actually met this morning with the woman who's painting this vision that I have.

Elizabeth: Okay.

Karen: Yeah. It's so fascinating, over the course of the past three years, I've really honed this as a process and now I'm going to be offering it as a workshop. So yeah, I had this vision of a line of women standing. And one of them is holding a box and in my mind, it's like beautifully decorated. Let's say, it's like a purple box with a gold ribbon.

And she takes the box from her mom. It's this beautiful looking thing. And she internalizes it. And then, she passes the box, but it looks different now. She hands it to

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her daughter. And inside is the same shit. Inside, are these unconscious things, shame-based messages that we have about ourselves from patriarchy, from the women not being valued equally in our world.

And I think we all internalize it. It's all the same kind of thing, but the specifics of it are unique to us. And so, it's this line of women handing down this bullshit to each other. And then, in this vision that I have, the last woman, she just puts it down. It's like, take it out and put it down.

Elizabeth: It's such a powerful visualization. Because as we learn more about trauma, as we learn more about ourselves. And I love the Maya Angelou, quote that "As you know better, you do better." And so, with each generation, as we learn more and we're able to make those changes for ourselves, we're able to protect our children from that same generational trauma. Right?

Karen: Yeah. There are people who know more about it than I do, obviously. But I've heard something like it takes nine generations to cleanse out, something like that. And I don't know whether it's possible, like someday will there be people who are like, nobody has trauma, nobody feels bad. Everybody is happy all the time. I don't think that's going to happen. I don't know.

But I see it more like, and you have alluded to this several times today, right? That it's how do we be healthy about pain. Rather than, I don't have any pain, I'm stuffing it down. How can we just be honest about our human experience, which includes trauma? Because I think humans are probably going to traumatize each other forever on some level.

Elizabeth: Well, no. And it's fascinating, it seems like the better things get. Because when you think about the environment that your mother grew up with, that your grandmother grew up with, things were not great, but they weren't terrible either.

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It seems like now that some things are better and some things are worse, right? To go back to our coach and mentor Brooke's idea that life is always going to be 50-50. That we need the lows in order to experience the highs that when we change our circumstances, we're still going to have problems. That maybe what's happening here is that we're having higher highs and lower lows at the same time.

Karen: And can we hold ourselves and not have it be a shameful experience that we have a low. It's unpleasant, we don't like it. But we don't have to beat ourselves up and hate ourselves because we're having a shitty experience with something. Yeah. Shame is one of those things that maybe it is something we will evolve out of but for now we need shame.

And so, for me, the question is in the work that I'm doing around how do we have shame resilience. How do we recognize, oh yup, here's my pathetic loser message coming in. How do I love myself through that? Because it still does. I mean, does the idea of conceiving this workshop that I'm doing and scheduling it has brought up a lot of shame for me.

It's like pathetic loser message comes right in to say, yeah, don't do this. It's going to be inevitable that you're going to feel shame.

Elizabeth: Well, yeah. Whenever we try to grow, we feel shame. Right?

Karen: Is it?

Elizabeth: Well, I don't know. I kind of think so. Like, whenever we step outside of the boundary of what we're used to experiencing, we have the self-doubt that comes along with it. Yeah? And with self-doubt, comes some shame. No?

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Karen: I don't know, maybe. I know I'm not the only person who experienced the shame, but I talked to other people in like, okay, they might have fear. They might be nervous. They might have anxiety. Are they afraid of feeling shame or is it something else? I don't know, maybe you're right.

Shame, the way I understand it and I am a huge advocate of Brene Brown's work and I use a lot of what she talks about. But she described shame as the belief that there's something so inherently wrong with you that you cannot belong. That's not exactly how she puts it. But you don't deserve belonging and connection.

Elizabeth: Right. That if all anyone, what you've done that you will be ousted from the group. Yeah, for sure.

Karen: So, yeah. I don't know.

Elizabeth: Are you familiar with Joe Dispenza's work?

Karen: Yeah, A little bit.

Elizabeth: So, one of the things that he talks about a little bit is as we grow up, we have familiar emotions. And even if we deal with the stories that go behind those emotions, that because they're familiar, the body will still send out the endorphins, the neurotransmitters to make us feel those emotions. Even though, you may not be feeling shame, but it feels like shame because it's such a familiar and your body is so used to experiencing that.

Karen: Yes. And that is something I very much relate to. And from the perspective of coaching, all thing I love to do with myself, and my clients is when they're like, oh God, I'm so angry, or I'm so guilty, or I feel ashamed is to ask them what they make the shame

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mean. It's like, oh, here is a sensation in my body, it must be true. It's not just a sensation. This is proof that I should be ashamed.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Or worried or whatever it is the emotion.

Karen: Yeah. It's so fascinating. So, the thought that I have now worked into my self-concept is that I am more committed to doing my work and putting myself out there than I am afraid of feeling shame.

Elizabeth: Yeah.

Karen: Like, it's inevitable and I can laugh about it now, but I know when it happens, it's going to be like, shit, I just going to to like, shut this all down now.

Elizabeth: Well, yeah. And so like, for you, it's shame. For me, it's self-doubt. And so, for me, whenever I do something that like launching the Feel Good Sisterhood or my group coaching program or anything like that. I feel like, I shouldn't be doing this, I have this self-doubt. And so, when my purpose is greater than the thing that I'm doing, that's what gets me out of it.

Karen: So yeah. That concept is obviously not new, I didn't make it up. But yeah, to be able to recognize that this is just a sensation in my body that I don't like.

Elizabeth: Yeah. And the thing with shame is that at least, I've learned this through coaching. That none of our problems are really that unique. Like, when you tell someone, I'm ashamed that I did X. The other person isn't going to think that it's nearly as shameful as you do. You know, to quote Brene Brown, again, like shame cannot live to be spoken. Right? And so, once you speak the problem that you feel so shameful about, it loses all of its power.

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Karen: And that's why I think this work is so important, especially with what's happened here in the United States, lately. That the more we can talk about this and normalize it, maybe we won't be so mean to each other.

Elizabeth: Well, yeah. So, as we're recording this, we've just had a number of shootings in the United States that are terrible. And as of the release of this, I'm not exactly sure when it's going to happen, but the Supreme court ruling will just have come out about abortion.

What we really want to do is love ourselves through this entire process. And yeah, it's a really heavy time right now in the United States.

Karen: Yeah. And the thing that you had asked earlier about what is it that we can do if you're a mother or if you're an adult daughter, and you have this issue with your mom. And you think it's so personal, right? As you said, it feels like we're the only ones.

Sometimes I say to my client, I'm like, you are so unique and different in so many ways, but this is not one of them. Yeah, this is universal.

We hear so often to ourselves, well, she did the best she could. Yup, she has her own traumas, whatever, right? We have that understanding. And I think what happens is again, different thoughts work for different people. And for some people saying, she did the best she could, may really be helpful.

And I think it can be more helpful when we can acknowledge both and which is yes, she did the best she could. And you suffered. And you don't have to suffer for the rest of your life with this.

Elizabeth: The one thing that really got me when I was in coach training was this idea that I had a lot of resentment towards my parents for the way that they parented me.

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And one day, I don't know what all happened. But I realized that the reason that I had resentment towards them and felt like they should have parented me better, right?

Because I had this belief that if they had parented me better, then somehow, I would be a better person today, or I would be in a better place, or some line of that thinking. And I think that what all of this boils down to is when we can accept that our past happened for us, as opposed to, to us.

And we don't have to be grateful for our experiences, especially if there was any violence or traumatic experiences that we grew up with. We don't have to be thankful for those. But we can say, it happened like it was supposed to and I am who I am today because of it. And I can still love myself in spite of what happened.

Karen: Yeah. Interestingly, I have thoughts about that. Again, I think it's so personal. In this particular instance with this particular subject and other subjects. If that works for you and you've got checked it. And you like how you show up as a result. Absolutely.

For myself and some of my clients that thought doesn't work. There are other thoughts that do work. This whole self-concept thing, it's important to say that it's not just like positive affirmations that you can refined in a book. It's very personal and it's like, when you land on a thought that supports your self-concept, you feel it in your body and you're like, yes.

And some of mine are things that I've borrowed, I've gut checked that one. Others are just very unique, and I could say to them, and you'd be like, wow, that doesn't make me feel very good. I hate to say that I don't mean to make it sound like I'm being critical here.

But some platitudes, oh, she did the best she could. We just repeat that thinking that that should make us feel better. And it might.

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Elizabeth: Yeah.

Karen: But check. That's my point.

Elizabeth: Well, and I guess my point to saying that it's just about arguing with reality. Like the past happened and we can't change it. And so, getting to a place of acceptance with it, not validating that it was right. But getting to a place where it happened, you can't change it. And so, holding resentment and blame towards the past isn't necessarily serving you.

Karen: No, it isn't. I do have a little bit of rebellious resistance about the whole sort of gratitude thing and like toxic positivity. I guess that's the point, right?

Elizabeth: I didn't mean that at all.

Karen: But yeah, I have worked with people and at the same time, I have to be very careful with the people that I do work with. Some people absolutely, need therapy trauma specialists and whatnot. I don't work with people who are in the midst of processing significant trauma. But yes, the ability to look at what happened and to come up with a story, you can absolutely rewrite that past so that you like the way you show up now.

And the way you tell the story might not look like a happy, she did the best she could gratitude thing. It might. There might be elements of that. Again, the story that I now tell myself about my past is very different than what people might think. Like, I have a thought that I really respect that some coaches might say, that's not appropriate or whatever. And it is that my mother has a tendency to be cruel.

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It's a very specific thought has she has a tendency to be cruel. The way I used to previously say it that she's out to get me and that I'm her victim. And I have no control. So, it's that kind of thing.

Elizabeth: Yeah. And I heard a concept recently that I love which is how we view our past is always based on our experiences from the present. And it's so interesting to think about how we can look back at the past and think about it differently as we evolve.

Karen: Yes. And again, this is why I had a little bit of pushback about what we've been talking about is there are people to whom great harm has been done.

In the beginning, when I first started learning about coaching and getting coached and whatnot. I had this belief that I was supposed to get to some perfect hallmark rainbows and butterflies thing in order to be happy, and fulfilled, and living the kind of life that I want to live.

That's how I'm supposed to feel about my mom and to feel about myself. And I've learned that it's way more nuanced than that.

Elizabeth: Yeah, absolutely.

Karen: And that gut checking of your thoughts is really important.

Elizabeth: Yeah. It's so funny how one thought can work for one person. In one thought, absolutely not work for someone else.

Karen: Yeah.

Elizabeth: But you're absolutely right. Yeah. So, check those intentional thoughts and see what works for you.

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Karen: Yep.

Elizabeth: Awesome. So, Karen, how can people work with you and how do people work with you? So, do you work with people one-on-one? Do you work with them in group? Do you have anything coming up?

Karen: I do work one-on-one. My program is called "The Mother lode," and that is a 20-week container. And I had mentioned, I have conceived this new workshop. I'm going to be running it locally here in Connecticut, in June. But stay tuned for the virtual zoom-based version of that. And I actually have a vision of taking this on the road with some point. We'll see how that goes.

And my website is kclanderson.com and that's where you can find everything you need. And I recommend getting on my mailing list because I send out amazing emails.

Elizabeth: Oh, I might have to sign up.

Karen: Yeah. If I do say so myself, that's like my favorite way to communicate with my people.

Elizabeth: You've talked about your writing and how amazing your writing is. What does your husband say about your writing?

Karen: This is self-concept. This is a self-concept in action. Last summer, my stepfather's wife died, unexpectedly. And they were living in Arizona, I was here in Connecticut. And I had this huge sort of meltdown around the fact like, oh, I'm supposed to go out there to Arizona. And I love this woman dearly, and she's in a coma now, and she's not going to make it. And I need to rush out there and be with her in her final days. But I didn't want to.

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And I was shaming myself saying, you're a bad person, if you don't do that. And people are going to think, right? And so, I was like rushing around here trying to force myself into making a decision that I didn't actually want to make.

And my husband came in and he said, well, if there's one thing, I know for sure is that you're going to write something beautiful about Jane. So, on my self-concept and for my pillar of expression is the thought that I write beautiful things because that is true. That is who I am. That is what I do.

Elizabeth: I love that.

Karen: So, I did write something very beautiful about Jane and they didn't go to Arizona. And yes, I had a twinge of guilt, but that's okay.

Elizabeth: Awesome. Thank you for being here today. This has been just an amazing talk. I hope everyone has really enjoyed it as much as I have. Yeah.

Karen: Thank you.

Elizabeth: Oh, I just love the way that Karen tells stories and the visual that she gives about the generational shame. If you have a complex relationship with your mother, I think it's so important to be able to shed the shame of not having the perfect relationship. And then, also any stories that were passed down to you from your mother's mother and all of the preceding generations before that. Those are not your stories, and you get to let them go.

So, I hope today's episode was useful for you and helpful. Have a great week, everyone. Talk to you later. Bye-bye.

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