

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([01:55](#)):

Welcome everybody to the Divorce Doctor Podcast. I'm so excited today to have Jen Cipllett here to share her story, her experience, and her strengths. Jen is interested in the personal and societal transformations that are possible when we step out of our comfort zones when we approach life with courage and curiosity and lead with our best selves forward. She's a certified divorce coach and the co-founder of Avail Divorce. After 14 years of marriage with three children, Jen and her husband divorced three years ago. And she has been so kind to come to the podcast today to share a little bit about her experience. So Jen, thank you so much for being here.

Jennifer Ciplet ([02:36](#)):

Yes. Thank you for having me. I, as I was just telling you, before we started recording, I just, I love the concept of this podcast. I think it's the kind of thing that would have helped me so much, you know, three, four years ago when I was at the beginning stages of my own divorce and I hope it's helpful for other people now, this conversation.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([02:53](#)):

Yes. Great. And I love, I mean, so many of the people that I've interviewed are like you where they've taken their divorce and use it to heal other people. So I can't wait to talk more about that, but I like to start the podcast by asking everyone the same question. What is the word or words if you want to choose to, is that you'd use to describe your divorce experience.

Jennifer Ciplet ([03:13](#)):

Oh wow. I'm going to say I'm going to choose transformation and freedom and maybe peace if I were to add.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([03:25](#)):

Totally. I love that. And even as we say those words, I feel kind of grounded in those words. Right? Transformational freedom. So beautiful. So I like to share with people that, you know, this whole process takes time. And usually we had a little kind of little hint in our head at some point way before we had the divorce. So I want to know from you, Jen, when did you start kind of hearing or not hearing, but not listening to, or acknowledging whatever that voice that's, something might not be right here for you in your relationship?

Jennifer Ciplet ([03:59](#)):

Yeah. You know, for me, the transition to motherhood was really traumatic and I have three children. I had three children in less than two years. So my oldest daughter was a little bit less than two when my twins were born. Wow. And so I went from this relationship, I met my ex-husband and graduate school. We, um, we were in an international masters program. We both had just come from living abroad. And, you know, I had come from living in Latin America for several years, doing international international non-profit work in central America and throughout the region and coming out of nonprofit management

of international organizations. And my world was very big. And the process of meeting Dave, my ex husband, where his world was also very big and we shared values and connected on all of these different levels about what we cared about in the world.

Jennifer Ciplet (04:53):

And then, you know, we made the decision to have children, which was always my dream. I always wanted to have kids. And then suddenly my world was so small and it was like me and these three small people that needed me all the time on my body. And I was just like in this duplex and Providence, Rhode Island where I was at home with them and we had help, I was so fortunate to have a nanny, but I felt so trapped by that. And I think, um, and Dave, my ex at the time was getting a PhD at brown university. And so of course, you know, he, he was a very participatory father, you know, in the nighttime and whatever, but he did get to leave and go have adult space during the day. But during that period of time, I didn't and looking back, I didn't recognize that at the time it's something that was breaking our relationship or something that was creating a resentment in me.

Jennifer Ciplet (05:40):

And, uh, a sense of feeling trapped in me that I would later have to recognize in our divorce process. But that's what it was. It was like, my world just got too small and I felt like, God, like, this is what marriage is like, I have everything I've ever wanted. I have children, I have a husband, I he's on an academic track. And that lead to a really nice life for us. Then I am miserable. I was depressed, anxious. I had terrible postpartum depression. And so I think I just lost myself. I got real lost.

Jennifer Ciplet (06:08):

So looking back, I think a huge part of my divorce story that I have come to understand is that the structures of modern day marriage and nuclear family life in the United States under the conditions of capitalism that we have. I mean, you know, to be honest, like just the lack of affordable childcare, the lack of opportunities for women to not be isolated and alone with small children, the way that I was, I think that creates resentment between men and women. You know, I mean, Dave was, he was busting his butt. I don't know if I can customize this white guys, but like, he was just, he was doing everything he could do. And, um, I was still just resentful. I was resemble, he got to go to brown university every day and live in a world of ideas. And I was at home with spit up running down my underwear, like grabbing my breasts, like my underwear in the diapers and the breast milk. And the, you know,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (07:05):

I know I really am. So I'm so grateful that you're sharing about this because I think that so many women can relate to what you, what you're talking about yet. There's so much shame of actually saying it right. What you said about the need. I remember I had two kids under two, not twins and they were their needs. And as someone who also just didn't have a great marrying of my own needs met growing up, it was, it felt like I was suffocating all the time. And I think there are a lot of reasons that my relationship didn't work, but I do think becoming parents together, which I of course thought would kind of magically make things better, put so much more strain on our relationship.

Jennifer Ciplet (07:44):

Yeah. Yeah. I mean our, you know, our division of labor and our relationship, I mean, I, I would say it worked really well before kids because we, you know, we, we both worked full-time jobs outside of the home. We, we, you know, we, we had date nights, we had freedom. We had, you know, like I had my spaciousness, he had his spaciousness, whatever. And just kids, our marriage dynamic changed at that point, which it does for a lot of people. And I just kind of kept telling myself, it's going to get better. They're not going to be babies forever. It's going to get better. And I kept, I kind of kept waiting. I just kept waiting. And it kept feeling. It was like years after they were born. And I was like, I still feel like I'm drowning or I'm suffocating. I just couldn't get air. You know?

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (08:21):

And there were, you said you got divorced many years later. So there was a lot of time in between when you were talking to yourself. Oh, I should just try that. I make, you know, kind of not listening to that, to your intuition. It sounds like. Right.

Jennifer Ciplet (08:35):

And I felt like a really bad person. I really felt like a deeply bad person because he was so, you know, he was so good. This was what I created in my mind because of the shame and the guilt and the way that I think mom's not given permission to be like, this is fricking hard. Nobody told me it was going to be this hard. And I think, especially for moms who spent their twenties and early thirties with careers and with, you know, in my case, like an international career where I was traveling a lot in it, you know, my, my world, like I said, it was very big, like, so shrunken down to my living room and my bathroom reality was I wasn't prepared. I don't think, you know, and it's, it bumps me that it is this way. You know, you think about other countries where, you know, both parents have like a year of like guaranteed employment and parental leave.

Jennifer Ciplet (09:19):

And, um, there's, you know, supports for healthcare and, you know, ways to support families with young children where I don't think that this kind of resentment between, especially between men and women in heterosexual relationships, you know, builds the way that it did in my relationship. I had such shame. I just thought, God, Dave is such a good person. He's busting his to get this PhD for our family. He's doing everything. Like it was all in for his career for both of us. That was my Mo I was like, I'm going to do the kids and put all the balls in your career court. You're going to do your career. You're going to crush it. We're going to crush it together. I mean, we were very much on the same team and, um, but it was all for his career that was going to help us. And I think that just eroded something in me that I was too ashamed back then to, to recognize was actually going to be the demise of my relationship. Looking back, I see the ways, but it was like a thousand little paper cuts all the time.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (10:12):

And that you, it sounds like also because of our society and what makes me so angry, this kind of work-life balance idea, complete. There is no work-life balance. It's impossible to have a perfect balance. And that you felt so much shame for not living up to that, you know, perfect balanced mom or perfect, you know, basically supportive wife. Right. And that you your needs. I mean, I think a lot of people can relate to this, like your needs didn't matter.

Jennifer Ciplet (10:42):

Yeah. They didn't. I and I, I was, we made a decision, like basically put my career and my professional needs on the back burner and I wanted to stay home. Like I also was, you know, a player in choosing that. It wasn't, that it was, I mean, I would say it was imposed on me by the structure of our economy in our country, but it wasn't imposed on me by my ex-husband. I mean, I, you know, I think had I been a woman who was like, Nope, they're going to daycare and I want to go back to work. But the thing is with three under three, I mean, childcare would have been right more than I could have earned. I would have been, it would have been a financial loss for sure. And I wouldn't have been with my kids, which made me feel guilty. So I, you know, I had a mom blog. I blogged about all my little crafts because I needed something. I got into photography. I was so fricking bored. I needed something creative to feel myself. And so I started writing on this blog and I started taking photographs, you know, of how the lights would like hit the blueberry stains, running down. My children's like, you know, like I just tried to find

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (11:42):

Beautiful. I mean, it sounds like you tried so hard to make, in some ways you're talking about working within a system that is unworkable, right. This is financial system in this country for, for working parents and that were not supported. Right. And that you weren't supported and you weren't supported. And that had bleeding effects, which of course no one ever talks about on the relationship.

Jennifer Ciplet (12:05):

Absolutely. Right. Yeah, no, it did. Because then we got, so we moved 2015. We moved to, um, Dave got, uh, he actually came out of brown and landed a wonderful tenure track position at CU Boulder. So we moved to the Boulder Colorado area, which is like, you know, coming out of academia mean that's a dream, he's a sociologist. And like, you know, we thought maybe we'll do a postdoc in Mississippi. We don't know where we're going to, you know, and we were very lucky to land here. So again, I had the guilt of like, I should be grateful. I have everything I've ever, this is our dream. I should be grateful. I should be grateful. And that the disconnect between being like, I am married to a good man, he's a good father. He's a good person. I have three beautiful, healthy children that I love so much. Um, you know, we're, we're in a financial position where we can buy a house, all of these things. And I, and I just felt like I was dying inside and it made me feel like a terrible human being. I just like really didn't like myself because of the shame.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (13:01):

Yeah. So how did you finally shift to liking yourself enough to giving yourself what you deserve or shifting out of it? What, what happened for you?

Jennifer Ciplet (13:11):

God, you know, it was, I still don't entirely know, but I do know that there came a point. So, so tenure is a seven year process. And so we were in the graduate school process for six years and then it was like, we got to Boulder. And then it was like, just hang in there, like support in my career and, you know, doing all of the other things for another seven years and then we'll arrive. It was like this constant, like, and then, and then, and at this point, our dynamic, like our kids were actually, you know, in, you know, in school and I was working full time. Um, I also, I have a job doing communications at CU Boulder and I was working full-time and he was working full time, but I was doing everything else. I was doing all of the laundry, all of the grocery, shopping, all of the coordination with the kids' preschool teachers.

Jennifer Ciplet (13:53):

If there, you know, if they needed something for lunch, I was the one who had to think about that. I was coordinating Eliza's schedules. And so all of the other labor of household management and family fell on me because it wasn't my job. Wasn't our family career focus, if that makes sense. And so that just layered the resentment on top. And I think, you know, we went, um, we were on a family vacation in 2017 and I finally kinda got out of my environment enough. I think I was, we actually went back to Nicaragua, which is the country where I had lived in my twenties and I just connected to a part of myself while we were there. And I remember just one specific night just like laying next to him in bed. And I thought something very radical has to change or we're done.

Jennifer Ciplet (14:38):

I can't do this anymore. I can't just hang in there, chipping away at myself on the inside anymore. I need some freedom and I need some peace and I need, I need to put myself in my own driver's seat. So something really has to shift. And so, you know, that was the beginning of, I was the beginning of the end, frankly, for us, it was, um, we kind of made some decisions to shift some things that, you know, we went to couples counseling, we, you know, started, started having some harder conversations and it led to, it led to me, you know, six months later knowing in my bones, my marriage was done. I just thought it's done. Yeah. It was beautiful. I'm so grateful for it. It was so painful to know that because of course, like all of us we can make pro and con list about, do you stay or do you go in a marriage? Like how long do you try? Sure. And I think when I started to realize, oh, wait, I've been trying, I've been trying a long time. I've been trying a long time. And I can't, I can't breathe in this relationship and structure, you know, and I got to get out, I got to get out because I gotta, I gotta put my own oxygen mask on, you know,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (15:46):

I mean, think it's so poignant. Jen, thank you for sharing all of this vulnerability that you went back to Nicaragua where you probably the last time you really felt deeply connected to your, your essence. Yeah. That's something about that kind of shook you into really questioning whether the like, am I really okay with all of this? Like you were saying, you were okay with it, but it sounds like inside you were not, which then just led to more shame. And so it's amazing. It's an amazing story. And I've, I've heard other women share the story of like connecting somehow to this part of them that really felt most alive. And I think

that you need to be able to be like that in the relationship and for whatever reason, no fault of anyone that can exist. And in that dyad. Yeah.

Jennifer Ciplet (16:35):

That was it. That was it. It was realizing like there's a vibrancy to me and I reconnected with that. There's a vibrancy to me that's been missing for a long time and I deserve that vibrancy in my life. It's not dead. It's just asleep. I got to create the conditions structurally in my life that allow it to flourish again. And that's what divorce did for me.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (16:59):

Yeah. I think about that a lot. Like the not dead, just asleep. I think about that a lot. I felt like that too. Like I, you know, just rolled out. It's like, no, no, she still in there, it's such a powerful experience. And so how did you, once you moved through it or while you were moving through, you mentioned couples counseling, but I'm just curious what other kinds of healing you pursued to connect more to that vibrancy?

Jennifer Ciplet (17:22):

Yeah. Wow. I've done a lot of personal work in addition to therapy, like a lot, I've done a lot of therapy with wonderful therapists, like several different ones. I mean, starting from when I had the postpartum depression, I did go to therapy then and got mental health support when I was at home with the three kids under two. So starting then, but you know, and it's interesting. I had, um, I had a therapist once during that time when I was pretty attached to like making everything work. Like I was really trying to kind of control the way I was a young mother, you know, and like the, or the, you know, mom of young kids. And, you know, I think living up to that ideal that we all see on Instagram or whatever, you know, and just like it has to, you know, am I, and the therapist said, he said, you got to get comfortable with chaos. He said, you are so uncomfortable with chaos. And it was like, I remember the timing, like you got to know me.

Jennifer Ciplet (18:14):

And he introduced me to the Hindu goddess, Kali he's like, you gotta read up on Kali just to go read up on her and like, maybe like, get, get a picture of her and put it somewhere that's meaningful to you. Because to me she's the embodiment of like, just bring it, like, just bring the chaos. And I think that was an opening for me. It was a door that I could start to go through for myself and my own healing of like, oh, I'm not failing. If things aren't tidy, like there can be both and there can be good mothering and terrible days. There can be all of the, you know, all of the daily ways that things are hard and still there can still be beauty. Like it's, you know, started on that process. I would also say I went to a Tara Brock retreats who have people don't know Tara Brock. She's a wonderful, wonderful teacher and healer. Um, and the insight meditation community, and a lot of her teachings have really helped me. I would also say I've read all of [inaudible] books and the sort of 10,000 foot view of like putting ourselves in the context of the mystery of the universe. And the, that is, it sounds, sounds sort of like metaphysical, but honestly

that has been really important for my feeling too, to like see myself as part of belonging to a larger whole and not a small personal failure.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (19:38):

Yes. I went to a Tara Brock retreat when I was going through my divorce. It was one of the most powerful experiences. And based on exactly what you said, like this ability to get out of the minute idea of what was happening to me, because it just brought me so much shame and to step back and see this as, you know, a process in the world that was not going to break me, my children, or even my ex partner, like shift that perspective. Because I, I can hear in your talking that when you were in the relationship, this feeling of you having to be, you were the doer of all things. And so if you take you out, well, everything fall apart. And we, we have to learn like, no, actually it won't. I have a fantasy. And right now in this moment that your separation also allowed your ex husband to step up even more deeply to your family

Jennifer Ciplet (20:35):

A hundred percent. So that's actually, I'm so glad you mentioned that. So he is remarried. Yeah. He's remarried. And our co-parenting this lovely. Like he, I mean, he, on his days, I don't even think about what time the kids have to be, where he does it and he did. And he didn't in our marriage. Like, it's so interesting. Like I, like, I don't want to diminish the grief of the divorce. It was so painful, but he was my best friend. He was my best friend and I lost my best friend. And I would not say we're friends now. I would say, we're amicable co-parents and we're on good terms, but we're not close. You know, I think I had this dream, right. That like, we would go through this divorce and like still go on camping trips together. And like, and I know that there are some co-parents who can pull that off or whatever.

Jennifer Ciplet (21:18):

I, that was not our case. Um, I, you know, the truth is when I finally realized I needed to leave the marriage, I think, um, because it was so painful to be leaving my best friend, but saving myself. I, I like look back on that person who I was it's that time of exiting. And it's like, I was like this feral cat in the pillowcase. Right. I was just like climbing my way out. And I, and I heard him, I heard him and I don't know that we'll ever be able to be friends, you know, but life is long. It's like, there's

Jennifer Ciplet (21:51):

But I think that, you know, the pain of losing my best friend, but gaining myself was very hard and I'm still glad I chose myself because now he, you know, he has found his next chapter. He's got a beautiful, smart, amazing wife for his next chapter of life. And I, you know, I'm in a relationship I've, I'm in a relationship with my co-founder actually, um, for, at a bale mate, we've been together and, you know, co-parenting our kids and it's a beautiful second relationship for me. Um, and not even, you know, like a post-divorce relationship and, and I'm bringing everything that I've learned. I'm bring, I bring my whole self to my relationship. Now. I don't bring shamed parts of myself. That is what I think I was doing before. So yeah. Yeah. I just, for any women listening to this or people listening to this, I, when you choose yourself, you don't go wrong. I guess that's for me, I just like, I chose myself and it did give, I think my ex-husband's

space to then choose himself too. And he's done, he's done that really beautifully. I mean, from what I can tell, like, again, we're not

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (22:59):

Right. I mean, that's what, that's, what I think is so important. I say to people too, that, especially when you're the person initiating it, that everyone deserves a dignity view to be with someone who's fully there and not full of resentment for them. And now being in the relationship that we're in now, post divorce, do you know what it feels like to just not have resentment? It's so much for you, but it's so much better for the other person there was living right. Without these eyes on them. And so just know that it's a gift for you, but it's also a huge gift for the other person.

Jennifer Ciplet (23:29):

And so my kids that's, God, my kids are amazing. They, I know, I think they have watched their mother come, the person she wants to be, you know,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (23:42):

That is the most powerful lesson in the world and tend to be parented by someone who's really as best one day at a time, one before one foot back like connected to who they are. It's the best gift you can give to someone because it to a child, because then also they don't feel like they need to take care of you because they see right. That you're your best self.

Jennifer Ciplet (24:01):

Yes, totally. And we're really honest, you know, and like the honesty that I have with my kids now, the authenticity that we have with each other and our relationship is part of, you know what I mean? They're just amazing people. They're, you know, now my, the twins are, are 10 and my older daughter's 12. And you know, I love these ages and they're curious and they're, they, you know, I think that they, they still believe in love, but they have the right stories about it. I mean, I think, you know, and they've watched their dad also, you know, have his relationship where he's fallen in love and chosen to chosen to get married. Again, I don't know that I'll ever get married again. Like I said, at the beginning, I, it was a structure that didn't work for me. Right. Like the installation of it, the scaffolding of that structure didn't work for me. So I'm pretty shy about the idea of doing that again, but which isn't to say I'm against love or long-term. I mean, Nate and I are, we're very committed to our long-term partnership. Yeah. He kind of feels he's also divorced and feels a bit the same way. We don't, we don't need to merge everything in our lives to know that we're talking to each other. So it's been a beautiful, unfolding and painful. And you know, you walk through the fire and you realize what you made of. Yes.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (25:14):

And I want to ask you this question that I always ask at the end of the podcast, which is, if you could go back with all the information you have now from experience your learnings, your teachings, your healings, and could go back to that, you know, mom covered in the puke and everything and whisper

something in her ear. What would you, what message would you want to give her from your current college?

Jennifer Ciplet (25:36):

That's beautiful. I, you know, I would tell her, I see you. I see how hard you're trying and you are worthy. This is gonna sound so Bernie brown, but you are worthy of love and belonging, no matter what, no matter what you're doing professionally, no matter what challenges you have, like the experience of being a human being is hard. Nobody, nobody does it the way it looks on social media actually like it, it is actually a difficult thing to be a human being and to be a mother of young children and to be in a system that doesn't support you. And that's not your fault. Yeah. It's not your fault that we don't live in a country that supports young families. You know, I think I would tell her all those things and I, and I would say, keep going, like, you're stronger than, you know. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You got this. You're stronger than, you know,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (26:28):

I love that. That gives me chills. You got this, how much we need that, that method and that the time will be right. And you'll know, and you'll hear. And you'll, you'll do so thank you so much for, um, being so honest and open and sharing your and all the mess that is life and you're right. It's part of being human. And so we either lean into it or we resist it and what we resist persists. So let people know Jen, how they can here, reach out and find out about your app and all your work. So what's the best. We'll have it in the show notes, but just so you can let me know.

Jennifer Ciplet (27:04):

Yeah. So I'm now the co-founder of, um, Avail Divorce, which is a divorce support community. And we offer a lot of different resources for people, both considering divorce, then also going through divorce and then community for people post divorce, who are like, I need some new friends that aren't married, all, you know, cause it's like, you know, you gotta be able to go out on a Wednesday night when you don't have the kids with somebody. And so that you can find us that availdivorce.com and, uh, yeah. And we're creating a co-parenting app and we're looking for people to test it really soon. It's actually, um, in October we're planning to start testing the app. I'm excited about it because it's with me and my co-parent my ex husband, like just having all of our correspondence in one place and all the kids' calendars in one place and all of our like expense stuff in one place is going to be, um, and you know, the kids' insurance cards, all of the stuff that like we don't, you're like, is that in an email? Or is that in a file somewhere? It's like, it's all in the app. And so we've created this app that we think is going to be really helpful to, to coherence that if you want to check it out, you can also go to our website and check out the app.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (28:02):

Great. And we'll put all of that in the show notes. So people are interested in testing out. That'd be great. I think I need the app for my husband. Now my current husband coordinate all that stuff too. Like I'm

always getting texts. Like what's the kids like, remind me of the kids' insurance number and all that, you know, and I'm at work doing it. So like, yes,

Jennifer Ciplet ([28:18](#)):

We need that. Totally. Right. I, yeah. I w I took my daughter to the urgent care the other day she was sick and I, you know, and I didn't have, they needed her social security number. And I was like, oh my God, I don't have that on me. You know? And if, if you have, if I had the app, it would have been in there. Cause that's so thank you so much,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([28:36](#)):

So much for being here and for sharing and being so vulnerable. I'm so grateful. And I know so many people could relate to what you said. Thank you.

Jennifer Ciplet ([28:44](#)):

Thank you, Elizabeth. I really enjoyed our conversation. Thank you so much.