

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([00:05](#)):

Welcome everybody. Today my guest is Tonya Carter. She's an author, speaker and relationship transformation coach. Her specialty is helping women navigate through the process of uncoupling by providing support, advice, resources, and tools that will help mitigate interruptions in their business, work performance, and household obligations. She's written a wonderful book called *Divorce Your Story: A Woman's Guide to Heal & Thrive After Divorce*. She also facilitates a 12 week masterclass that I highly recommend. She's in the middle of it that walks women through the process of overcoming divorce and healing. She also has a podcast called the Reinvent You podcast, which focuses on mindset, emotions, finances, health, faith, love, parenting, and building meaningful relationships to become the best version of yourself in your personal lives, families and professional environment. She's from Atlanta, where she resides with her two children. Tonya, thank you so much for being here and for being willing to share your story.

Tonya Carter ([01:14](#)):

Thank you. Thank you. I'm very happy to be here.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([01:17](#)):

And thanks for all your amazing work that you're doing. And we'll talk a little bit about the, and about how people can find out more about you. I'd like to start the podcast by asking everyone the same question, which is, what's the one word or two words that you would use to describe your divorce?

Tonya Carter ([01:36](#)):

Oh, I would definitely say relief. That was, and then I also would say failure. I know that sounds crazy. How are you going to be relieved and failure, but it was the truth. Yeah.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([01:57](#)):

Yeah. I'm so glad you're bringing up both of those words because so many times the experience of divorce is that dialectic. It's the, both, it's the pain and the glory. So can you share a little bit, I always talk to clients about how at a time between when we first start hearing that inner voice, that something might not be right. And when we actually end the relationship, there's usually a lot of time. So when did you start kind of hearing that internal voice that something might not be right in your relationship?

Tonya Carter ([02:30](#)):

The very first day we got married. That's just the truth. I cared for him a lot. I loved him too, but marriage was just a level that I knew that we just weren't ready for. You know, if I can be honest, it wasn't later. It was the day. It actually was probably before then, but I know on that day I was like, this isn't the right thing to do for either one of us. We weren't mature. We weren't ready for that next step. And it's not about being a hundred percent ready, but we weren't, we still had some individual growing up to do. And I would definitely say that's what it was for me.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([03:18](#)):

And, you know, Tonya, you're not alone. So many people that I've interviewed say the day of my wedding walking down the aisle, and I think this is a very common thing is that we haven't listened to that part. Right. So what do you think you said to that part? It was like, maybe we shouldn't do this, but you just kind of push that down. Is that what you did? Pushed it down?

Tonya Carter (03:37):

I got married really young and at that time I think it was more about seeking a level of approval from my parents. I think it was, I know it was that. And I'm thinking because we did love each other, it should work well. We love each other, that it should work, you know, we'll figure it out, love conquers all, and it just that wasn't it. And that's pretty much it, in a nutshell.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (04:07):

Did the two of you kind of slowly grow apart? Was it just this kind of slow fade or was it more intense? What was that like?

Tonya Carter (04:17):

I think it was more intense. I can speak for myself specifically that I didn't like the concept of giving up my life to pursue marriage. I didn't like that part. I know when we got married, one of the biggest things I had, I left my job, my first corporate job to go move. He was military at the time and, you know, just giving up that part of me, I just wasn't ready for that yet. And again, it wasn't, it's no jab to him. It was just me being honest with myself, as opposed to just doing what I thought looked good or I thought was the "right thing" to do. It made me a very unhappy person. It made me a very, probably difficult person to be with too, because no one can make you happy, no matter how much you try to believe that. No one truly. And I know we say it, but no one could make me happy. That was my responsibility to do. And part of that was coming to my level of truth, no matter what it costs me. Yeah.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (05:28):

Yeah. I appreciate your honesty, Tonya. Also talking about how when we're unhappy, it's also not fair to the other person. I talk a lot about that, right? It's like giving them the dignity to be in a relationship with someone who sees them, who they are, how they want, and really is totally supportive. People deserve that. And when you're not doing that to another, for another person, it's not right for them either.

Tonya Carter (05:52):

No, it's not. And then I think for me, I was trying to change him so much to the unhappiness I had and that wasn't fair. Now, I'm not going to paint a picture and say that I believe we both played a part in our marriage. I'm not working. But one thing I take pride in too is really just taking ownership of my life. It took a hard time to get to that level of awareness, but that's what changed my life around, just owning everything in my life, my choices, the things that went well, the things that didn't go well. Yeah. That's one thing that I really, really put a lot of emphasis on, is taking a high level of ownership.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (06:30):

Yeah. And that sounds like that was a real moment of taking the focus off of him and turning it on you, the person that you can change.

Tonya Carter (06:39):

Not even just with him, with life, everything. It's easy to just find everything to blame. Cause I did go through a lot with the divorce and losing jobs. I lost five jobs in four years, two weeks after we separated, I lost my job. And then that was the recession period. So I lost, from '08 to 2012, I lost five jobs. I was a single parent seeing him get remarried and he moved out of town. It was still a lot, even in me saying that I knew it was the right decision and it was easy to blame and point the finger because it made me

look like a victim and it also took the responsibility off of me. But you know, you wake up five years later and you find yourself kind of still in that same hamster wheel. Exactly. You know, the story hasn't altered. And so I had to rewrite the narrative and I had to really do that on purpose. And it took work, but you know, six years later I'm in a whole different place in my life now.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (07:40):

I love that about rewriting the narrative. And I can really relate in my story. I had so many dramatic stories that I could have focused on with him. And I just thought one day, is this going to be my legacy? Just telling his story over and over, or am I going to focus on me? And it's really tempting, right? Because you know, you got remarried, he moved, you were by yourself, probably doing most of the parenting. There's a lot to feel like the victim

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (08:07):

Right. But it does take that strength to say, okay, those things are true. And what can I do to heal? So how did you? Tell me a little bit about your healing process through the divorce, the ups and the downs.

Tonya Carter (08:22):

You know, honestly, I didn't even think healing was something I needed to do. If I can be honest, healing was something that I was never taught to do. I was very, I was taught to be strong, you know, you'll be fine. That's always been the pep talk in my family. That's pretty much how we roll. And I never knew that you were supposed to feel something. That was like, well, who does that? What does that look like? You know, that ain't what I'm supposed to do. And I used to be like that because I did not know anything else I was told. I've always been taught to keep it moving, going. And so five years post my divorce, I realized that my story was still the same after my father experienced his heart attack. That's when his heart attack awakened something within me.

Tonya Carter (09:14):

My father had a heart attack back in March of 2015. I got a phone call from my mom and I'm not gonna lie. I broke down cause you know, that's my father. Like, hold on. I just saw my daddy yesterday. How you in the hospital the next day? And I went there. All was well, he's still here. Everything is good. But when I left the hospital that night, I just really, really thought about my life. And I just didn't like it. I didn't like the outcome. I didn't like the box that I put myself in because of what took place in my life, if that makes sense. Because even though I knew it was the right thing to do, I didn't allow myself to rewrite the script from making that decision. I sat in it, I sat in regret, resentment, anger, feeling like, well, I lost five jobs. Let me just take whatever I can get. Feeling like my worth really wasn't valued. Let me entertain a relationship that I know I don't have no business entertaining. Just, you know, taking whatever life handed me. And as I tell everyone, life is not going to just give you what you want. You really have to create yourself up for success to have that. And so that awakened me and ever since then, I just never looked back.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (10:40):

Wow. And you're really trailblazing this, it sounds like, in your family, about the feelings. Like you're the one who's like, oh, we're going to feel the feelings here and I'm going to share my feelings and I'm going to talk about my feelings. Right?

Tonya Carter (10:50):

Absolutely. I had to really get to what was really going on, like knowing how the mind works and how the emotions work and how the results impact your thoughts and your feelings. I had no clue of all that stuff that wasn't nothing I was ever taught. So learning how to reframe my mindset and learning how to really feel unapologetically and really naming it, calling it for what it is. Like how are you really feeling as opposed to saying I'm okay and I'm fine. What's really going on, girl, are you really upset? I am. I feel, I got some regret in me. I feel resentful. I was angry because, you know, I felt like he left me to parent here while he moved out of state. And that bothered me a lot. I'm not going to put on a front. It made me angry. And just working through that anger and actually calling it more than just anger because anger is so valid. Anger is an emotion we all can identify. But then just going down of resentment, just other words to describe the real feeling was something that I just allowed myself to do without anybody's permission.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([12:02](#)):

That's so great. And what a gift for your kids too, right? Because absolutely for you to own what it felt like for him to move was an opportunity for you to feel the feelings and not hold onto the resentment to him, which of course would have leaked out to the kids. Right? That's what I always think about. We need to feel our feelings so that it doesn't come out sideways on to other people. And of course you were. I mean, I know I am similar, I had all the child rearing responsibility and I was so angry, but I didn't really let myself be, because I thought a good mom just took it, kind of, or something like that. Like you just parent. But yeah, I was angry.

Tonya Carter ([12:41](#)):

Yeah. I took mine out in other ways. Like just my energy, my voice, my delivery. I remember my kids even told me, mom, you was angry. And I didn't even know that I didn't pay attention because it was so routine. Yeah. Autopilot. You're not really aware of what you're doing, right? And my daughter and I, we had a conversation about this and she told me, and I said, really? She said, mom, you were. And I was like, wow. I didn't even realize it at first. I didn't see that. And they brought it up to my attention.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([13:16](#)):

Right and then how did you, what kind of, I mean, you learned so much. You taught yourself what, who did you, did you read books? Did you talk to someone? How did you do the healing process?

Tonya Carter ([13:27](#)):

I read a lot of, I read quite a few books. I'm not going to lie. I did not go to therapy, not because I didn't think I needed it. I just didn't go to therapy, even though I am an advocate of it, because I believe based upon how you are and what's going on, you may need to go there. I definitely did a lot of personal development coaching. And so that's what helped me quite a bit, is just doing that part. Then of course spiritual.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([13:56](#)):

Yeah. So you brought in your faith to your work?

Tonya Carter ([13:59](#)):

Absolutely. I can't even act like this was done without it. It was a huge part of my rebuilding of a new foundation. Just knowing who I am, within the person, within the God that I serve. And, you know, just giving myself that real grace, over myself, over my choices, because even in all of that, I wasn't proud of

some of the choices I made. And I didn't like the woman who I had become, I didn't like her. I was like, man, I don't like you girl. You're not doing right. You know, and just forgiving myself over, over all of that.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([14:37](#)):

Yeah. And did you have a crisis of faith at all around the divorce? I know some of the people I've interviewed have talked about that. Did it make you question your faith when you were going through the pain of divorce?

Tonya Carter ([14:48](#)):

Definitely made me feel like God hated me because I went through a divorce. How we grew up, divorce was probably one of the most, it was almost as if you can get crucified, if you got one, you know, I mean, and that was the thing. So there was a part of me that felt that way. And I held onto a lot of guilt because of that shame, all that type of stuff. And then, but what helped me was building my own personal relationship. And so that personal relationship helped me overcome that, as opposed to just going off what someone else thinks or believes like when you let that overpower what God says, that becomes a problem. And so I had to do it and it was the best thing that ever happened.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([15:37](#)):

Okay. I imagine you have a deeper relationship with the God of your understanding because of that, because you were pushed to really find that.

Tonya Carter ([15:46](#)):

Absolutely. I decided to open up the Bible and do my own reading and research as opposed to just allowing what another human says or dictates to be the story over my life. And because sometimes we can just be taught maybe incorrectly, not on purpose, but just because some people honestly just don't know better. And so when you can be so naive to believe anything that comes out of a human's mouth, you won't do your own due diligence. And so one of the things that I have always told myself is, if I'm really unsure about something, it's my job to go seek it. And that's even in the spiritual space.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([16:29](#)):

Yeah. And it's exactly what happened in the marriage, right? Like you couldn't stay in something where you couldn't seek your best self, right? That your relationship was not holding your possibility of your best self anymore.

Tonya Carter ([16:43](#)):

No, it wasn't. There was a season in our life where I believed that we complemented each other when we were a lot younger. However, as you grow, you realize that this probably truly wasn't the best decision at the ages that we were. I mean, I was 22 years old. I didn't know who I was at that time. I was just graduating college and still just new to the whole adult thing. And, however, I was still angry because I made a decision. I went against what my gut told me and, just wishing that if I didn't do this, my life would have been like this, just staying in that level of regret and that short-term can turn into long-term regret and you could find yourself being bitter over it. And you can't do anything about what's been written. And so rewriting the narrative, that was the game changer.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen ([17:39](#)):

That's what I was going to ask you, I'm curious about the best, what the part of your divorce that changed you for the better, but that you couldn't see coming, you know, when you were full of the resentment, just thinking it was going to be one way, but what was the part you couldn't see coming? But it was the best?

Tonya Carter (17:57):

Actually doing the work that I'm doing now. Knowing that I have purpose, my divorce helped birth the authentic me, all of me. Right? So it wasn't just a marriage. Unfortunately we're taught and I believe this goes for men and women too. I do. However, because I work with women, I feel like many of us are always attempting to be something we're not to be approved and validated. If we're more like this, we will be accepted. If we're more like this, if only we did this. And what happens is when you conform to fit into everybody else's world, you lose yourself in the process. And so for me, I realized that the life that I had, wasn't the life I wanted. Anyway, it wasn't about just being married. It was, it was going to college. It was everything. I was like, this is not me. Like, why am I doing this? And so it just really birthed the authentic me. Wow. I mean, it was a chance for me to really say, you know what, I get a chance to hit the reset button and I now can choose how I want to live. And so knowing that I had that choice and stepping into that power is what gave me the ability to really allow the real Tonya to show up in the world, and I wouldn't trade her for anything.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (19:23):

Thank God she's here because man, she's here to help and shift and change. And what a powerful experience that through the pain of your divorce, which of course had pain in it absolutely, came your purpose of helping other women, the reason why you're here in such an authentic way. So that's so great. And I just want to conclude the podcast. I always ask people this question, which is, if you could go back with all the information, your amazing, authentic self that you are now and all the work from your books and your courses, and you could go back to that young woman either at 22 or right when you're going through the divorce and your grandma and your father is in the hospital. What little message would you whisper in her ear knowing everything, you know now?

Tonya Carter (20:14):

Ooh, that's actually a really good question. I think one of the things that I would say is follow your intuition. I think that's how I feel for me. My discernment has always been high, very high in discernment. That's a good superpower that I have. And what I realized in having that superpower is that it was scary because it was so accurate and you can easily against it knowing like, why did I do that? I knew it. Like I knew it. It had nothing to do with me being oblivious to anything. I wasn't created that way. I have so much discernment and the fact that I didn't use that superpower, I think for me, that's what bothered me the most is going against what I knew I should have done or should not have done. And so that part for me was something that I would say, because I actually say that to my daughter now, because she has that high level of discernment and she's only 14.

Tonya Carter (21:27):

And I said, always listen to that. It's like I'm re-parenting myself sometimes through her. So that whole, listen to her, she is important. She's telling you something and it's important for you to listen to her. Don't go against her because you'll appreciate her as you get older. And I wish that that would have been said to me. And so I said to her, so there that's the re-parenting that I do now. I do that all the time with myself. But that is, that is something that I, that's something that I'm very, very strong about.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (22:01):

So beautiful. What a wonderful message, should be changing the legacy. And then of course, you know, telling yourself that too, when you tell your mother, so anything else you want to share before we finish up? Any sort of message for the audience here, people at different stages of divorce, things that you've learned, something we didn't get to cover that you might want to share?

Tonya Carter (22:24):

Yes. I forever, for anyone who's listening, I think it's important to really, really understand that you have a choice. You have a choice. I know when you're in it, it may not seem like you do. It's like I don't have a choice, not choosing is a choice. And so it's important to really know that that's your power to make a decision and say, you know what? I choose not to stay here. I choose not to accept this being the final chapter of my life. I always tell people we're putting periods where only commas should be. Your making that choice to step into your power gives you the ability to write a new narrative. You are a creator, you are, live your life by design. And so just knowing that you have that choice helps you step into your power, you know, because life can knock the wind out of you. Sometimes some people have some very ugly situations and I'm not here to minimize any of that. But even in all of that, you still have a choice.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (23:33):

I love that. I love that also that not knowing what you want to do is also a choice. I love highlighting that too. Like being unsure is a choice, such wisdom. Thanks so much, Tonya. And can you let people know how they can find out about your book and your course and all your amazing work, because I know people are gonna listen to this and think, I need to talk to that woman. I need to change my periods to commas.

Tonya Carter (23:59):

Yeah, absolutely. You can find me on Instagram at @mstonyaspeaks. That's Ms. T O N Y A S P E A K S. I'm on Instagram. I'm on Facebook. I'm on YouTube as well. You could go to my website, TonyaCarter.com. That's where I have my information about my course. I won't be launching my next program until January, however, I will be opening up for a waiting list soon.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen (24:28):

Great. And we'll put all that in the show notes and this podcast will be around that time. So that'll be perfect timing. Thank you, Tonya, so much for sharing your experience, your humility and your story with us and the audience. I think it's really inspirational and I love following you and watching you help women change their experience. So thank you so much for being here.

Tonya Carter (24:54):

Thank you. I appreciate it.