

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([00:06](#)):

I'm so happy to welcome Ilyssa Panitz to The Divorce Doctor Podcast today. Ilyssa is the only journalist out there who exclusively covers divorce from every angle. Ilyssa writes a daily column, entitled Five Things You Need to Know About How to Survive and Thrive During and After a Divorce, for Authority Magazine on Medium. She serves as the content editorial producer for the National Association of Divorce Professionals, and recently launched an amazing, may I say, national radio show called The Divorce Hour with Ilyssa Panisse that airs weekly on CRN digital top radio, all the links in the show notes. Ilyssa, thank you for being here. You are an expert. You are wonderful. I'm so glad you're here.

Ilyssa Panitz ([00:53](#)):

Oh my God. I'm so honored to be with you.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([00:55](#)):

Oh, I'm so excited. So I always start the podcast by asking people to share one or two words that would describe your experience of divorce.

Ilyssa Panitz ([01:09](#)):

Correct? I think I just repeat that over and over. There are no words to describe it. Yeah.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([01:18](#)):

Right. So we're going to get into that a little bit. I want to hear before the divorce, you know, I always talk about how we hear the messages maybe for a long time before we're ready to actually do something about it or something happens. So when did you start hearing the quiet whisper that something might not be right in the relationship?

Ilyssa Panitz ([01:41](#)):

Probably going back to 2006, I think, and I wanted so desperately to believe that the things I had seen or the things that I heard were just a figment of my imagination. Because I was so happy with this individual. I was so happy being with them. I was so proud to say I was married to them and I loved when I could say, let me talk to my husband. It was just, it was just this wonderful honor. And so you really talk yourself into believing? No, no this isn't what you think. You're crazy. Right?

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([02:29](#)):

Very important point, Ilyssa, that I just got chills when you said it, you are crazy, right? That is something we do. These red flags are these moments of this quiet voice that we don't want to hear. We make ourselves feel like we're crazy. And tell me a little bit about kind of when the voices got louder, like, was there a moment where you really just couldn't? I was looking for people's moments when it was, cause it's usually not what you expect when you think, oh, I have to start listening to this voice.

Ilyssa Panitz ([02:58](#)):

Yes. It was through a phone call, through a friend of mine. I always say it's the day that will live in infamy. I got a phone call from a friend of mine who told me a friend of hers, saw my other half on a dating website and we were married. And they took a screen-grab and they sent it to me. But the epiphany before that actually happened was when my friend was desperately trying to reach me. And she said, do you know, so-and-so my single friend? In that split second before she could get out the next sentence, I

said, did you ever hear what I said before? You can get, she goes, no, what did you say? I said, here we go. And I think that was the moment I knew. You keep sweeping it under the rug. You keep putting the band aid on it and there's, you're done Ilyssa, this is it. And it was, it just shatters everything. Um, but at the,

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([04:07](#)):

Can I ask you a question about that? If you don't mind? So first of all, I so appreciate, your saying the, here we go, because it's so right on. I mean, I can relate to that, it's not a surprise. It's not a surprise. It's more of this. Oh God, I guess I can't push it away anymore. Right. I guess it's coming up and I'm just curious, were there any feelings about your friend telling you? I know a lot, sometimes you will reach out to me and say, do I tell my friend this is happening? Like, can you share a little bit about what that was like?

Ilyssa Panitz ([04:38](#)):

I applauded both of them. I told them it took such guts. Some people can't do that for so many reasons. They don't want to be involved. They just think it's easier to turn the cheek. What if, you know, I call for example, Ilyssa, and she doesn't believe me, and it's this battle between all of us. Especially when you have a long history with people. And so I get it. You don't know when you make that kind of phone call or you go to talk to somebody how that individual is going to respond. So I say, you're walking this fine line. And a lot of people are scared and I don't blame them. You know it started a conversation amongst me and some other friends. What if that happened to you? Would you make that phone call to that individual? And I say I will forever be in their debt. And every day that January 29th comes since 2018, when they called me, I always send them an email like this day, one year later, this day, one, two years later.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([05:48](#)):

Right. And also in some ways, Ilyssa, it sounds like they set you free from your own internal self doubt and work because it probably wasn't a great space to be pushing it down, but worrying all the time. Right. It wasn't like the right, so they also kind of set you free.

Ilyssa Panitz ([06:05](#)):

For me, I suffered a lot of panic attacks and anxiety attacks for many years. I think I wasn't a person I was meant to be, because I think I always lived with something I didn't want to accept. And that's a big thing, even when you're going through the divorce, is you are all these different stages to get to acceptance. And it's not an easy place to get to. It takes a lot of work, a lot of searching and a lot of tears, but I think the greatest, most euphoric feeling is when you turn the corner and you start feeling so different about yourself when you start liking yourself again. But it does take a while, of course.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([06:57](#)):

And I think that's really important what you're pointing out, which is, and I certainly went through this with the denial of my ex partners drinking, that there's pain in that. Denial actually does erode you like, it isn't, it might not look on the outside, but it's actually doing something to you. And so the fact that you were able to release that and then really heal is phenomenal. So before we get to the healing, can you just share, because people here are going through different experiences. What was the hardest part for you of your divorce? Like, what was the part that had you on your hands and knees?

Ilyssa Panitz (07:35):

I guess seeing the many texts that were written for other people that I only wish were written for me. Knowing that, and I think I had admitted this in therapy. I felt my whole life was a lie. I thought I was so proud of what we accomplished, not only professionally, but personally. And I have said this a million times, when you looked at my life on paper, you would want it. We accomplished and we rose through the ranks in our careers, and we were able to get this beautiful home in the suburbs. We had money. And the best part was we had these beautiful children. I quite like the sprinkles and the icing on the cake, and everybody's families got along and who wouldn't want my life? And then you realize, but that was a lie you're telling me. And I've been living a lie. And what I thought was real isn't, and the person who I gave my whole heart to betrayed me and in such a way that I, I thought I wasn't going to recover.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 (08:58):

And I just imagined that trying to heal from that deception must've been a really slow agonizing process. Not that you can trust people in general. Yeah.

Ilyssa Panitz (09:10):

There were days that I couldn't even get up off, I had a walk-in closet and I couldn't even get up off the floor. I would be able to muster up the energy to get the children off to school and try to keep it together. But the second they would leave. You know, then I would usually lock up the house and jump in the car and head to the office. And there were days I couldn't even get off the floor and, my weight dropped dramatically because I couldn't eat and everything. I was just constantly in this fog. And I would just sort of like tune out, like people would be talking to you, but you'd be like, wait, what? Because there was, you're trying to learn all this stuff and process this while you still have to continue your life and function at the job, keep the team moving, be present at meetings, be there for your kids.

Ilyssa Panitz (10:07):

We were all still in the same home, so even that was another layer. But I think it was an interview. And I say this all the time with my childhood idol back way before I got divorced, Maria Jasmine. It was in 2017 and we were sitting at the NASDAQ in New York City. And I said, here you are, this woman who's overcome so much heartache and so much grief. And oh my God, more things than we will ever see in a lifetime. And every time she walks in the room, she is gorgeous. She's on top of her game, she's successful. And I'm like, how do you do it? And she put her hand over mine and she said, it always makes me cry. You know, Ilyssa,

Ilyssa Panitz (10:55):

sometimes life's not meant to be fair, but it's what you do with it that makes you who you are. And I think after I got done with my pity party and everything else, I had to really look at myself and decided who I was, and it wasn't that. And I knew I didn't deserve that. And I knew what I wanted to be, and it wasn't that. And then it was a matter of working on yourself and believing in yourself and it doesn't matter what somebody else tells you. It's always reminding yourself and checking in with yourself. And that's what I learned along the way. And listening to the compliment somebody may give you at work or things you may hear from your friends or from your own children. And there were so many people who were really rallying behind me. And when I looked over my shoulder and I realized, oh my God, I have an army, really. And I don't mean the teams that you formed during the divorce, like lawyers or accountants. I mean the people who are in your life, the people that you have intimate relationships that you share all

that stuff with were there for me, would show up at a drop of a hat that started to really find the strength within myself to start rebuilding. But it took a while.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([12:16](#)):

Of course it does. I mean, you have to feel the pain. And so how did you, what was your kind of first step into healing? What were some of the healing practices that you tried beyond? Of course it sounds amazing to lean into your army.

Ilyssa Panitz ([12:30](#)):

I think a lot of it had to do with the work that I do now. I think that that really kind of catapulted me very differently. Also starting fresh and starting over and go back to the word acceptance, I didn't keep the marital home. My girls and I wound up going somewhere new and I remember it was another mom who took me out for coffee. We kind of knew each other through town, but briefly, but she had gone through a divorce and she told me how when she lost her home, the way that I was losing mine, she said, but then I got this small home Melissa that I was able to afford by myself and I would do well on my own to put my kids and you know what? I am prouder of this than that big, big, big house I had to give up. And that's the way I feel when I turned the key every day. And I walk into where we live. Now, I do it on my own and you know, my kids are doing great. And not only that, did we start over and start fresh, but I got to build something that nobody has done before.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([13:50](#)):

Because you weren't doing this work before. Right?

Ilyssa Panitz ([13:52](#)):

I was a red carpet kind of gal, celebrity interviews in people's homes were doing photo shoots and you know, and dressing them. But when I was going through my divorce and working from home, I had noticed that we had correspondence for everything, but we didn't have correspondence for divorce. And I realized this as you know, attorneys are calling and I'm like, wait a second. I don't care about working out from home. And I don't care about taking care of my pets and how to shop online. I'm going through. It's helped me. And didn't matter what time I woke up to look at the TV because there's always news on there was nobody else out there doing this. And I went back to that comment that Maria Jasmine gave, life sometime is not meant to be fair, it's what you do that makes you who you are.

Ilyssa Panitz ([14:50](#)):

And I took everything on my desk. I went on and I threw it on the floor and I just started sending out emails. I'm now a divorce journalists. Nobody knew what it was. Everybody thought I was crazy, especially my mom, not the good time to be starting over. I listened to the horse and I said, no way, I have built things before for companies. And I'm going to build this because nobody should have to go through this. And we have books on what to expect when we're expecting a baby, but oh my God, this is like, your whole life is unfolding. Your whole life is unraveling. Everything that you know is changing and nobody's out there explaining this to you and telling you all the different scenarios, how to plan for the divorce, during the divorce, there's an afterlife after divorce.

Ilyssa Panitz ([15:40](#)):

And just because you and your ex-husband, your ex wife are done, you're really not done. You're just kind of beginning just in a different direction, but nobody explains this. And my job as a journalist is to

kind of be scattered and always be thinking about new angles of stories, how to advance stories, new ways to direct stories, always with new voices. And I said, I've done this for years. I can do this now only anything and everything I talk about is going to have to come back to divorce. And the work I'm doing is not even a year old yet.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([16:15](#)):

And you know, what I love about this, Ilyssa, is that you had to heal from deception and secrecy and you, where you are now is the complete opposite of secrecy. Like you are out there sharing stories, sharing the real experience of divorce. And you are someone who has really taken the experience and said, what can I learn from this? And how can I give back? And that's really powerful because that's trusting in you, which again, trust was something you really had to work on. So it's really phenomenal.

Ilyssa Panitz ([16:47](#)):

You do. And you know, you have to learn how to, you know, trust friends again. Then you start guessing, did any of my friends know about what was going on? I'll get wind of stuff. Did anybody else see things that they didn't say to me? It's when you want to become open to, let's say dating, can I trust this person who I'm sitting with? And I think we have a connection, but can I trust this person? If I decide to meet them again, am I allowed to share with them or are they going to do something with it? They can, there's so many different levels of it, but I think one of the greatest pieces of advice I ever got was really from my parents.

Ilyssa Panitz ([17:34](#)):

And my parents said, don't ignore your gut anymore the way you did for so many years, really listen to it. And if something doesn't seem right, it's because it's probably not right. I still heal. I mean, every day I still heal every day is another step forward. And I always tell people, don't look back. You're not going in that direction that we want to talk about it so we can help other people. But when I do glance over my shoulder and I see how far I've come, I use that as taking another step to where I want to be. I'm still not a hundred percent where I want to be. Every day it's work.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([18:27](#)):

Did you have any psychological healing, or did you have any coaches or like, what was some of that?

Ilyssa Panitz ([18:33](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I'll give credit where credit's due. One of my very best friends, I grew up with this therapist. So they were on speed dial for a very long time. I also worked with different counselors. I worked with a fantastic one at an organization called My Sister's Place, which is designed to help women who've been the victims of domestic violence. So that's a subject very near and dear to my heart. And when I started working with a team in different areas and they really started to bring things, get me to bring things out. I learned so much, and I think I broke down again because that's your awakening. I think the greatest moment of that is then all of a sudden, the positions use to lay down the foundation of this is who I'm going to now be, and continue to build on that. And I think the foundation now is I say it's like titanium, like the song. And if I can, if I can continue to build a better version of me, then I can be a better version for my kids, for my family and for the work I do to help somebody else who's going through a very difficult time.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 ([20:02](#)):

What would you say was the part that you could never see coming, but change you for the better,

Ilyssa Panitz ([20:11](#)):

The part I never saw coming? Um, um, I think, I think how broken the legal system was, and trying to get the people that were the decision-makers or the voices to believe me. And that's the part that fuels my anger, which fuels a lot of what I do. But when I say anger in a good way, because we're programmed to believe the system is to help us and to get us through this process. So we can go about and live our lives, however that new reality may be. And for that to be so, so cold, to be treated the way that I felt that I was, and that everybody, of course I did have credibility, was for me, I think one of the worst things. And that, again, it goes back to, this is what fuels the work that I do. I need people to understand if you're going to be in the system, so to speak, that we gotta do a reality check. So you fully understand what to expect and keep those expectations at a realistic level. So you can get through this process in the best way possible, kind of thing.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen¹ ([21:51](#)):

And I love that, your experience, I mean, I think one of the things is it's just supercharged you into this amazing profession that you're doing this important, groundbreaking work, that is so impressive and amazing. And I'm just wondering, the question I ask everyone at the end of the podcast is, if you could go back to your old self, like even your younger self, even if it was when you got that call from a friend, or even before that, and you could whisper something in your ear with everything that you know now, what, what would you tell yourself back then?

Ilyssa Panitz ([22:27](#)):

What would I tell myself? Keep your eyes open wide.

Ilyssa Panitz ([22:39](#)):

I constantly turned away from what was staring me right in the face. I always say, and I think you're probably the first person I've ever telling this to. I always knew something was going on. I didn't want to know what was going on, if that makes any sense. And although it's a crushing and it's a devastating blow and it's a lot, it's a lot more layered than what I can talk about. Things that I really legally can't, but to learn how deep everything was, was awful. And I beat myself up for a long time. I should have kept my eyes open wide and rather than turn the cheek & and try to act like everything was okay.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen¹ ([23:39](#)):

Yeah. I mean, I just have to say to you and to anyone listening, who is in the same position, cause I'm sure that everybody does the best they can in the moment. So there are reasons to turn the other cheek. There are survival reasons. There are emotional reasons having to do with experiences in the past. The fact that your eyes are open now and you are young and you have so much of your life is a gift. And so just like you said, not having to stare at the past and not having to feel shame or guilt that you, you did the best you could at that time. That's what you could do. And then the moment came or you could look and you did. And I think that's a really important thing for you and for everyone listening, who might be in this situation to know that at some point you did decide to look, it doesn't really matter when it was now, you're going to always look, but you did decide to look, that's what brings you here.

Ilyssa Panitz ([24:34](#)):

No, it's true. And you know sometimes it takes something like that. Yes, it's really got to shake you to the core. But if it's not the path that you're supposed to be on, don't fight it. Just experience whatever it is, everybody's got something, and I know this sounds really crazy. And I was saying this to a friend of mine and she told me I was nuts, but I'll tell you anyway. I said, I'm forever grateful this all happened. And that was her exact response to me. She goes, are you nuts? I said, no, because if it didn't happen to me, I'd still be on red carpets. I would still be doing palms, but now I'm making a difference teaching my girls about taking charge of your life and being the line leader and everybody following in your footsteps and being the one that, you know, that promotes change.

Ilyssa Panitz (25:37):

And now that my kids see what I'm doing, especially with the show, they love getting involved with it. I need scripts or I'm rehearsing for, cause we have to have everything timed, but as a friend of mine taught music, divorce, coach there's messages in every mess. And I think that's what they got from all this is that what I'm doing now, I'm trying to make a difference for, for everybody, not just women, but for men. And even I hope that people use this to teach their own children. I did a column about when you lose hair for your family, that's crushing, especially when you're close with the other side. And maybe this will allow everybody to see divorce differently, not be so ashamed of it, but know how to manage it.

Ilyssa Panitz (26:28):

And I say, navigate, I use the word navigate all the time. So they can be better prepared, get out and work on themselves and be a better version of themselves. So we talked about earlier, I think for the first time I actually liked myself, my parents and my brother once cornered me. And they said, we've always loved you, but now we really liked you again. They're like you're fun again, your energy has come back. Your spark is back, your face lights up. And it doesn't mean that there's not forever hurt, but it means that you start learning who you are along the way and what you will no longer accept. And I will not accept being in something like that anymore. I know what I deserve. If I have weaknesses, I hope that somebody else has those as their strengths. And there are my strengths and that's what a team is all about.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen1 (27:45):

So great. Thank you so much for sharing that and being so vulnerable and sharing your story with us. I'm so grateful. I know that there's so many people who can relate to what you said, and we'll learn so much from you, and we'll continue to learn so much from you from your columns and your radio show. So can you let people know how best to find that?

Ilyssa Panitz (28:07):

Yeah, absolutely. Instagram and Twitter are really what I do the most and it's just easy. It's just my name, Ilyssa Panitz. Come listen to the show. We are on every Saturday, one o'clock Eastern 10 o'clock Pacific on Sierra talk radio. You can just go right onto their website, scroll down to our show. And if you go to the bottom of the screen, you'll see a little live webcam with an arrow that goes to the right, click this on. We have experts come on every week to help people. I use the words repeatedly in every episode, survive and thrive, which is really how it started. And through my column, which is right on Authority Magazine, on the Medium platform every day, there's a new column, and I was honored and thrilled to feature for you. You were a dynamo, you are so informative, so fantastic. You are just, you are just so good at what you do, and I can read in the column, your, your article was huge.

Dr. Elizabeth Cohen¹ ([29:14](#)):

Thank you so much. And thank you so much for being here and sharing your story with the audience. I'm so grateful.

Ilyssa Panitz ([29:21](#)):

No, thank you.