**P1: [00:00:00]** It's recording. Um, maybe, a good place to start is to check in with you if you had any thoughts from the last interview, anything that was left over. I know it was a few weeks ago.

**P2:** Um, yeah, no. I mean, I -- I did worry that I had spoken a bit much about my relationship with husband and not enough about my relationship with Olivia which is really [crosstalk 00:00:41] [laughter]

**P1:** No. I mean, I was reading through the transcript, I'm just putting the heater on. Um, I was reading through the transcript, obviously for today, um, yeah you did speak about him, and it was interesting. It was in the context of Olivia. So…

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** [laughter]

**P2:** I mean, it's -- it's interesting, it just fascinated me how much, um -- how kind of intertwined the -- the -- we are as a -- as a threesome.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** I mean not as a threesome, as a three-person unit.

**P1:** Yes. [laughter] Yes -- yes -- yes. I do have --

**P2:** And how difficult it is to sort of extract my feelings and interactions with Olivia from my feelings and interactions with husband. It was very interesting to me how difficult it was.

**P1:** Yes. Had you thought about that before? Is that something you previously thought before this came up in the interview?

**P2:** I mean, I had -- it sort of had been in the back of my mind about my interactions with him and -- and how difficult I had found it interacting with her when he was around.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** And it had come up, sort of, every time and again, not -- not consciously but sort of just it was there in the back of my mind. I hadn't really had course to examine it in any details. So…

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah -- yeah -- yeah, um, but the way that it had come up, was it more like organic? Like, "Oh, you know she's upset, he was upset now I'm upset," like that kind of thing?

**P2:** No, it was -- it was sort of reflection, after the fact.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** Yeah, it was more sort of meta than -- than organic, yeah.

**P1:** Mm-hmm. Okay, yeah it's interesting, I wonder -- I mean, do you think it's more than other families or it's the same as other families or?

**P2:** Yeah, I feel like -- like all families are different. I mean, all -- all people are different and the -- the sort of dynamic in families just depends on what kinds of individuals you get. So, um, I'm sure there must be other families around like -- like what husband and I have, but, um, I'm -- I'm not sure what -- I mean, I can't really say whether I'm sort of the average or more than -- more than normal **[inaudible 00:03:23]** than.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** Sorry, **[inaudible 00:03:27]** came into the room. Um, so, yeah, so I just kind of try -- I -- I mean, one of the things that I have found very unhelpful, just in parenting in general, is to try and compare yourself to other kinds of families. Because it's just -- like there's just too many…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …actors that are different and create different kinds of circumstances. So, it's actually really unhelpful, kind of, try and compare yourself. And, I mean, just in general, I found that really unhelpful about things like parenting books and parenting blogs and all sorts of stuff as well. Like, there's just this abundance of information and it's -- it's often like about the average child and there's no such thing. So, it just -- it just makes things more complicated in the end because you feel completely overwhelmed by the information that you're getting that is not applicable to your child.

**P1:** Yes. Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** Or your circumstance or anything. So…

**P1:** Yes -- yeah -- yeah -- okay. Um, and there was something else I wanted to ask you about that. Um, about your feeling like you guys are quite interconnected. I don’t know, and then I think I wanted to ask you if you were surprised as if you expected it to be that way before? I don’t know if that was my question, but…

**P2:** I guess -- I -- I kind of -- I've found it quite surprising that we're so interconnected, because I grew up in a family where my dad was not around very often just because of the nature of his work.

**P1:** Yes -- yes.

**P2:** So, my mom was -- was basically the primary caregiver and she was the one who was there the most often.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** Um, and in my mind, I guess, on some sort of subconscious level…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …um, I -- I was modelling my parenting on -- on the sort of assuming that I was going to be the single primary caregiver. Not a single parent as such, but just that, um, you know, this was secondary to that, rather than…

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** …the sort of co-pilot, if I can put it that way.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah -- yeah -- yeah. Um, that's so interesting that you mention that because one of the things that I was reading, so obviously I read the transcript and I was going over things, and I had wondered, I wanted to ask you if -- um, sorry I'm just looking for my notes so I can get the exact wording of what I was thinking. But I wondered if you do often let other people know your needs, um, or if you take everything on yourself? [laughter]

**P2:** So, it's really interesting that you ask that. Because it's come up a few times.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** So, I don’t. I'm very bad at letting people know my needs.

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** And one of the questions that I hate the most is, "What can I do to help?" Because I never really know how to answer.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** Because the minute someone asked me what can I do to help? Like I've been thinking about stuff the whole day where people could help me, and the minute they ask, it all just disappears and I have no idea how to answer the question.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And in fact I read about this, um, in an article, a couple of years ago.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** Um, and so one of the -- one of the suggestions that came from the article, so to say to people, "Please don't ask me how you can help," because I -- I sort of -- I freeze. Like I just get this like, "Oh, my God, I've got so much going on. I don’t even know where to start," kind of vibe.

**P1:** Yeah -- yaeh.

**P2:** So, the -- the question that they suggested that you tell people to ask you is, uh, "What are you thinking?"

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** And from that, in answering what are you thinking, you can create a dialogue where they can also take a bit of responsibility for trying to, um…

**P1:** Think of…

**P2:** …think -- think of ways to help, yeah.

**P1:** Yes -- yes.

**P2:** Instead of -- instead of putting all of the responsibility for instructions onto you.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** The question then creates a dialogue instead of -- instead of an instruction, and -- and it then -- you know, you develop -- it sort of develops into, "Okay well, if that's what you're thinking then maybe I can do X, Y and Z to -- to assist that, or free you up," or whatever the case may be.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah, because is it when people say to you, "What can I do?" Then you freeze and then you're like, "Uh, nothing. I'm fine."

**P2:** Yeah, that's exactly what I do. Because actually it's just easier to do it myself than -- because to try and verbalise…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …what people need to do in order to help me, will actually take longer than me actually doing it myself.

**P1:** Yeah-- yeah.

**P2:** And I have to admit, I am -- I am very much controlling in that way. Like I'm not -- I'm not easily able to let go and let people do, uh, things. And I know that about myself and I'm very willing to admit it. It's a real flaw, but, um, it's very, very difficult for me to answer the question what can I do to help or what can I do?

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah, um, because I was thinking about -- we were discussing your work and your maternity leave and, um, the amazing flexibility and while I was reading it, I was thinking it's such a blessing and a curse because it means that you still take on everything and it's harder to put down a boundary, which I think we actually discussed. But it's harder to put a boundary and say, "No, I'm not going to take that on."

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** "I need this space for myself."

**P2:** Yeah. So, in one way, it's the -- like I put down -- it sort of like I put down the wrong boundaries, right? Because I put down boundaries where I don’t let people help me.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** But I don’t put down boundaries to say, "Actually, I'm not taking this on in the first place."

**P1:** Yes -- yes.

**P2:** So, it's just -- it's the wrong kind of boundaries in that sense.

**P1:** Sorry, did you say you put down a boundary to say you're not taking it on in the first place?

**P2:** No -- no -- no -- no. Sorry, I said, um, so I'm very bad at putting down boundaries **[00:10:00]** to say, "I'm not taking things on." I'm very bad at saying, no.

**P1:** Yes -- yes -- yes.

**P2:** …to things.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** Uh, but where I do put up boundaries is -- is in letting people in…

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** …to help me.

**P1:** Oh, I see -- I see. Okay.

**P2:** Like and -- so -- so for me it's easier just to -- to put up a wall and say, "Don’t worry about it. It's fine, I'll deal with it on my own."

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** Instead of saying, "Actually I need help."

**P1:** Yeah yes.

**P2:** "This is how I need help."

**P1:** Yes -- yes. Um, and then I was thinking about -- I was thinking about the dynamic that that maybe sets up at home, where you -- because we were speaking about -- I was laughing at the ghost -- what did you call it?

**P2:** Ghost management.

**P1:** Ghost management, exactly, that's what I was thinking about, and I wondered if the dynamic of like not being able to -- not knowing where or how someone can help you set up a bit of ghost management where you're doing all the things.

**P2:** Yeah, I mean, I think that's probably true.

**P1:** I wonder -- okay, um, so the other follow-up question is like where does it come from, do you think?

**P2:** So, I think my -- my mom was a -- was always quite a difficult person emotionally and my dad was very distant, emotionally distant.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And they often ended up miscommunicating about things.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** And I could see what my mom was saying and I could see what my dad was saying…

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** …and I felt like if I could just step in and say, "Dad, this is what mom is trying to say." "Mom, this is what dad is trying to say."

**P1:** Right.

**P2:** I felt like there could -- there could have been so much less miscommunication between them.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And so I feel like I grew up sort of ghost managing my parents. Not ever kind of explicitly mediating…

**P1:** Right.

**P2:** …but managing my mom and managing my dad. And I -- and I think that that kind of expanded to -- to other people, and what I do. Because I -- I think that I do it in a lot more than just my personal -- my sort of close relationships. I think I do it all the time.

**P1:** Okay. [laughter]

**P2:** I think I do it with friends and I do it with acquaintances and I do -- I just -- it's like it's this constant thing. It doesn't stop…

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** …with certain people.

**P1:** Yes -- yes okay. And do you know that about yourself? Are you aware of it?

**P2:** Well, so I -- I -- I haven't been explicitly aware of it until right now. Like…

**P1:** Okay [laughter].

**P2:** But actually just like well it sort of -- sort of percolating in my brain since the last time we spoke. And I have noticed it quite a lot more since -- since we last spoke.

**P1:** Wow, okay. Okay, it's such a beautiful term. I think we should, um, copyright it. [laughter].

**P2:** Okay.

**P1:** Yeah. Okay, it's everywhere. It's everything, it's everywhere, um. Yeah.

**P2:** And it's -- it's -- again it's to do with the control thing, right? So, it's -- it's me trying to make my environment easier for myself and easier for everybody else.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And -- and it's me trying to anticipate problems…

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** …and avoid them if at all necessary.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** I knew that about myself actually.

**P1:** Right.

**P2:** I -- I -- I always knew that I was -- I was -- I've always anticipated problems and tried to avoid them where I can.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** Because, uh, when I was younger…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …the sort of emotional problems that came up with my parents…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …when they exploded, they exploded badly. So -- so my coping mechanism was always to try and diffuse the situation or avoid it or like it was always management.

**P1:** Yeah. Um, I was going to ask if you think that managing problems was linked to -- I mean, I guess, my question was going to be what -- what would you be afraid of happening and you -- I mean, you've answered it because it's linked to that -- that parents fighting and…

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** The sort of blow up.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** Um, yeah, I mean, also thinking about your mom as the one who does everything or who did everything. She's the model, I suppose, of the mom who does everything, who runs everything…

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** …and manages everything.

**P2:** She was.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** Because she -- she was the one who, um, for the most part, managed our lives. So, I mean, she was always sort of -- so dad used to take us to school. That was like his moment, but mom would manage extramurals. Mom would manage like food, breakfast time, supper time. Um, mom would manage doctor's appointments. Mom would manage like everything else.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah, absolutely. Okay. And it's funny -- it's funny how even though we don’t consciously decide that that is what we're going to do, somehow we -- yeah internalise that and then do it.

**P2:** Take on the mantle yeah.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** And I -- like I -- the funny thing is I sort of actively rebel against it sometimes as well, which I think confuses husband entirely. [laughter] Because I -- and it's not -- I mean, thinking about it now, it's not really fair to him, but, um, like because that was how I grew up…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …and I sort of internalised that, for me it's a very natural stance to take. But even on again, I sort of catch myself and I go, "Actually this is rubbish. Why is he not doing A, B and C?" Like, "You must be doing A, B and C. Why are you not doing A, B and C?"

**P1:** Right -- right -- right.

**P2:** Which is not really fair on him either, because -- but you see, he also grew up in that kind of very, um, mom-does-everything family.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** More so than me even.

**P1:** Oh, okay.

**P2:** So…

**P1:** But it sounds like a bit of push and pull, because it sounds like you can do all the things and then get hurtful with doing all the things and then say like, "Why am I doing everything?" And then.

**P2:** This is a modern 21st century family. What is wrong with you? [laughter]

**P1:** And then he's like, "What? What am I supposed to be doing? I don’t know" [laughter] okay.

**P2:** Exactly.

**P1:** Yeah, it's hard and I guess change is hard. It's -- it's -- it's conscious and then all of that stuff is -- is on autopilot, so you have to consciously switch off to autopilot to then be different but it's hard to maintain that.

**P2:** And my autopilot is very strong and I know that also. I'm very resistant to change. So, like routine is big in my life. Like routine -- things must work smoothly. Like don't -- don’t try and change my systems man. Except then I sometimes try and change my systems that is just a disaster. [laughter]

**P1:** Um, and then I was thinking about it as well, and I was thinking why does your ghost management only stemmed to say husband for example, um, but not to Olivia because you're so, um, I don’t know if relaxed is the right word. But you really like don’t have any major expectations of her…

**P2:** I know. It's so weird and like -- so my -- another big problem that I've had my whole life has been expectations, my whole life. And, you know, my mom has spent her whole life going, "Don’t have any expectations. You can't be disappointed. Have high hopes, low expectations," you know.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And I think perhaps it was that she has come into this situation so clean for want of a better word. Like, there -- there is nothing coming from her side.

**P1:** Mm-hmm. Yeah.

**P2:** And I don’t want to say she's an empty vessel because that's -- that's -- she's got her own personality and that's a whole different story, but…

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** …she's -- she's sort of unbiased and she has yet to kind of form any crazy psychological issues. [laughter]

**P1:** Yeah, so there's no agenda when she interacting…

**P2:** There's no agenda.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** So, it's very easy for me to have few expectations about her.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** Exactly. I mean, that's what I was wondering about that as well. I think I had made a note somewhere similar, you know, she -- it's easy to -- to meet her where she's at because she's so little and -- and you don’t expect much from her anyway. She's not going to…

**P2:** Yeah.

**P1:** …so you don’t expect it.

**P2:** Yeah. So, it's easy -- it's easy for me not to have expectations of her. Because I mean, it's not like she wouldn't meet -- it's not -- it's kind of not fair. I can't say it's not fair of me not to have **[00:20:00]** expectations because it's not really fair of me to have expectations of anybody really. But -- but I don’t know, for her it's just been so easy not to have expectations.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** And, in fact, that's been true since the birth, not the pregnancy. I had quite a high expectations about the pregnancy and that was a very difficult process for me…

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** …uh, to deal with. It was a very disappointing process, and I think that also kind of shook me into, um, realising that -- that if I continue the process with expectations…

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** …the whole thing was just never going to work.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah, that reminds me because somewhere else you had written about -- sorry, you spoke about changing. You said you changed. Sorry, and I can't remember where I read it but that you had -- um, had to let go of expectations somewhere along the way or let go of something. Um, and I wanted to ask you about what happened that you felt you had to let go of these things. I mean, I don’t know if…

**P2:** Uh, no, so, um, my best friend and I have basically been very synchronised throughout. So, we've been to the varsity.

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** And we're the second -- we're about six months in age difference. She's six months younger than me and, uh, we got engaged within three months of each other. We got married within three months or six months of each other. We had our like 30th birthdays within six months of each other. Like we -- our lives have been very -- we -- we've moved up to Joburg at the same time. We graduated at the same time, although we've done very different things. So, our lives were very synchronised. We ended up in the same friendship group up here, so we did like -- there were times when we just spent like every night of the week together like doing stuff. And then, um, just before her wedding…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …she and her husband to be, decided that they were going to start trying to get pregnant.

**P1:** Oh, okay.

**P2:** And Esther had had, uh, issues with falling pregnant so they -- that's why they decided to start a little bit early and see if there were problems. Uh, and there were problems. And she had several miscarriages.

**P1:** Uh, that's awful.

**P2:** And I -- then I had decided to wait. We were not -- we were not ready to have kids straight after we got married. So, and we know that, and that was fine and that was always part of our plan and then we decided, um, like 18 months after we got married -- well, in fact, it was a year after we got married that we wanted to try but then there was the whole Zika virus and we had just been in Thailand so we decided to wait.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** Our gynae suggested that we wait. So, we waited another six months and then we tried, and in the meantime, uh, my best friend had had another miscarriage.

**P1:** Oh.

**P2:** And I got pregnant on the first shot. There was no like -- nothing. Like it was just like all systems go from the very beginning. And she -- she got pregnant just after I did…

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** …and miscarried again.

**P1:** Oh, no.

**P2:** So, she by this time had had three or four miscarriages and I was sort of progressing through my pregnancy. Uh, I had very very bad morning sickness. And I realy -- like the first trimester killed me.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** Like I was sick every day. Uh, and it was like multiple times a day. It wasn't quite as bad as the super bad, morning sickness.

**P1:** Sure.

**P2:** It was really unpleasant and I was tired and I was miserable and where previously we had discussed everything -- everything. Like there was no taboo subject between us. We were talking about vaginal discharge and we were talking about like -- I mean it was like everything. Uh, and now we could talk about nothing, because I was having such an unhappy pregnancy or just a very uncomfortable pregnancy and she was not having a pregnancy.

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** And so there was this whole issue with me feeling like I should be grateful because she was not pregnant and had been so desperately trying and yet I was here feeling completely miserable and…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …everybody -- and -- and there was kind of this -- because I was late to the party, if I can put it that way with all my friends. So, all my friends had had babies before me.

**P1:** Yes -- yes.

**P2:** And they all knew how badly I wanted to be a mom and they all went, "Oh, my God, pregnancy is going to suit you so much. You're going to have such a nice pregnancy. You're going to glow. You're going to --" like all that stuff okay. And I was just like, "Oh, my God I can't just wait for the glowing." And there was no glowing. There was vomiting until three days before she was born. Like it was horrific.

**P1:** Uh, awful.

**P2:** And tired and just so horrific. Like there was no glowing. Glowing is a lie that pregnant women were told to make themselves feel better.[laughter] There was no glowing.

**P1:** Yeah-- yeah.

**P2:** And -- and actually, my relationship with my best friend deteriorated so badly…

**P1:** Uh, that's awful.

**P2:** …to a point where we were not even talking.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** And like husband was never going to be my joy person, during the pregnancy. Like he was always going to be the what-if guy.

**P1:** Okay.

M1; He was always going to be like, "What if the baby has Down Syndrome? Or what if this, and what if that and like you shouldn't eat sushi and you don’t drink beer and all this kind of stuff. And she was always going to be my joy person.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** And she just wasn't there.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And it was -- it was a really really really really difficult emotional space to come to terms with. Like, in fact, I didn't for -- for over a year

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** Um, it took us a very long time to kind of get back to any space that could be considered normal. I mean we -- we have, but it's still -- it still -- it feels a bit tainted.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** So, while all that was going on, um, it was sort of -- it was -- it was sort of a kick-start for me to say to myself, "Okay, well maybe I need to stop having expectations then."

**P1:** Okay. Because of expectations that you had had of who she would be during the pregnancy?

**P2:** Yes. Yeah. Expectations of who she would be and how she would be with me.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** Expectations of how my pregnancy would go.

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** Yeah, so I mean, there were -- it was like layers of expectations that just made my pregnancy so unhappy.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah. Um, were there a lot of anger? Was there disappointment? What were the feelings that you had around it?

**P2:** So, I was angry.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** I was really angry with her for, um -- and so like part -- the sort of intellectual side of me said, "She's obviously hurting to a level that you have never experienced."

**P1:** Mm-hmm.

**P2:** "And she -- she can't do this right now. S he can't -- she actually can't face it."

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** And then emotional part of me went, "I cannot believe she couldn't it suck it up for like a moment just to say to me I know I'm really struggling at the moment, but I -- how are you doing?"

**P1:** Right.

**P2:** And -- and I had -- I had sent her a letter really earlier on after we found out about the miscarriage. And I had said to her, "Look like I know that it's very hard. And I know that I'm probably the last person you want to hear from right now because our situation is -- like I am like in the place where you want to be and you just can't get there." I mean, I didn't say it like that. That sounds very **[inaudible 00:28:51]** as I say that. But it was -- it was sort of a very considered letter that I sent to her.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And I said, I'll be here when you decide to come back essentially.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** But it took her nine months to come back and I was about to give birth.

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** And the emotions that I had gone through in those nine months, like she -- she said to me at one point, "You know, I don’t understand your anger." So, when she did eventually come back after nine months, she said, "I don’t understand your anger."

And I said to her, "You just expected my life to stay the same while you were dealing with your issue. And my life has not stayed the same at all. Like I am about to give birth, and I've spent my entire pregnancy wondering what is the last point at which I can get on a plane and fly to England," because she lives in the UK.

**P1:** Okay.

**P2:** "And force you to confront what the hell is going on with us." Like I said, to her, I felt like she was in a house and I was standing outside the **[00:30:00]** front door waiting for her to open the door.

**P1:** Right.

**P2:** And she just never opened the door. And I was -- she knew I was outside the front door, and she just never opened the door.

**P1:** Yeah -- yeah.

**P2:** So, it got to a point where I was thinking, "Well why am I still standing outside the door? She clearly doesn't want to come out or want me to come in."

**P1:** Yes.

**P2:** So, why am I still standing here? And it got harder…

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** …to justify things.

**P1:** Yeah.

**P2:** And to intellectualize things as it went on because I just had no input from her at all. So, it sort of got more fantastic in my mind as it continued and it got more and more emotional.

**P1:** Yes. Hallo -- hallo -- hallo.