

Lisa Corduff:

Here we are. Samantha Sutherland, one of my all-time favourite people on the planet, taking our private conversation to the podcast is what's happening today. I am super excited to have you here, but you're not just an amazing friend of mine, you're also an extraordinary person doing amazing work in the world. Would you like to just share with everyone a little bit about you so they know who this voice of wisdom is, in today's podcast?

Samantha Sutherland:

What a welcome! What a welcome. I'm so excited to have this conversation as well, because as you said, this is really taking our private conversations out to the public, and I'm pretty sure people want to listen to us chatting to each other.

Lisa Corduff:

Surely, they've just been waiting for this.

Samantha Sutherland:

So my sort of more professional introduction was that I am a workshop facilitator, change expert, diversity and inclusion expert, and I'm doing a lot of work in the gender space. You actually, recently sent out a survey to your community about Australian mothers in the workplace and the impact of COVID on them. I got 1300 responses to that, and I'm currently doing the analysis on the findings, and then we'll be taking that out to the public and taking it into companies.

If anybody is listening and they're interested in that, do let me know because I'll be taking the results to companies just for free information sessions so that people know how working mothers have actually been affected by COVID over the past year. That's not what we're talking about now.

Lisa Corduff:

That is not what we're talking about now.

Samantha Sutherland:

I'm excited to get to the juicy chat that we're about to have.

Lisa Corduff:

But you have juicy chats all over town, like that work is really important. As you're talking, whether working mothers or how working mothers have been impacted by COVID, it's like, "Oh, lord."

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

No one's getting through that sort of unscathed or unimpacted, so it's fascinating, the results of that.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
I've some sneak peaks at results, as you've shared your, "Oh my god, guys, guess what." Sam and I met, how many years ago? Would it have been back in... I mean, I did B school in 2013

Samantha Sutherland:
I was pregnant when I did B school, so it must have been like seven years ago that we met.

Lisa Corduff:
Right, okay. So we've been around the same sort of friends. You had an amazing business you were actually running with your ex-husband?

Samantha Sutherland:
That's right. He came in towards the end of it, yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
Right. Yes. I was like, "Wow, this girl's amazing, she's an adventurer," like your business was basically just adventures. Your personality definitely does show that but then things started to change in your relationship, and as we got to know each other, and over the last however many years, we've both experienced separation from our husbands. Are you officially divorced?

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah, we're divorced.

Lisa Corduff:
You're divorced. Okay. One child, so just giving people context, living in Sydney.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yes, that's right, living near the beach in Sydney.

Lisa Corduff:
Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:
One seven-year-old son.

Lisa Corduff:
Who is-

Samantha Sutherland:

One ex-husband. One boyfriend too, but that'll come up later.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes. I'll be talking about boyfs. What I found was that when I was going through my stuff, the people who had been through this became hugely important to me. Not only people who had been through it, but people who had also done work on themselves to understand things, which is my guiding light. You were one of them, and we were meant to be having this chat today also with our amazing friend Shalome, who got called into a meeting. Rude.

Samantha Sutherland:

Rude.

Lisa Corduff:

Who would put that above this juicy chat? I feel like we can go into the whole sort of ins-and-outs of the separation. This is not what the discussion today is about, because anyone who's been through it knows, it's brutal. What I'm more interested in, and where I think we're both at now, is that we have some perspective on it, and we both learned such amazing lessons that we're still learning as we're moving into new relationships and healing happens, and as you take five steps back, and as you get triggered by things, and as you look around and you question life in general, there's this perspective now.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

We're not in the full blown pain of it, just the ashes.

Samantha Sutherland:

The reverberations.

Lisa Corduff:

This conversation is really about those lessons. People often ask me, "What were the lessons that you got from your marriage? What do you wish that you knew? What have you learned going through what you've gone through? What wouldn't you do again?" So that's what we're going to talk about today.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes.

Lisa Corduff:

I know when I shared some of my key lessons, you're like, "So weird, totally opposite," or not opposite-

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes, not opposite. That was actually one of the things I was going to say. But actually, before we jump into that, what I wanted to share with what you said about talking to women who'd been through it and done the work was a huge part of the healing, and it really reminded me of an Elizabeth Gilbert quote that I just love, and she said, "The women I love and admire for their strength and grace did not get that way because shit worked out. They got that way because shit went wrong, and they handled it. They handled it wrong, and they handled it. They handled it a thousand different ways on a thousand different days, but they handled it. These women are my superheroes."

One of the things I've noticed in the people who are in my life now, so I'm four-and-a-half years post the initial separation date, is that the people that I really value their friendships with the most now are the people who have some depth to them.

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

So we were talking recently about duality of emotion and being able to hold grief and joy and a million other dual emotions at the same time, and I noticed that I wanted to be around people who could do that. I want to be around people who have some kind of understanding that they've gained through going through something.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

And choosing to walk into the fire at that stage.

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah, because it's so hard and you have to get so brave. It does, it changes you.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

And you can't, then, not have done that.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
I feel like that's totally you. You've been there for all of the lessons in this and all of the growth in this, and when you find yourself at a point where you're like, "What am I doing? Why am I here again?" It's like, "Okay, I'm off to get some kinesiology."

Samantha Sutherland:
I've got an appointment booked in next week.

Lisa Corduff:
Yeah, I know you do, and I know exactly why. I love that. Liz Gilbert, totes BFFs, even though she doesn't know it.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah, exactly. We love each other.

Lisa Corduff:
We love each other.

Samantha Sutherland:
In a one way kind of way.

Lisa Corduff:It's real.

Samantha Sutherland:
If I can actually give a tiny bit more of my background that kind of led into the separation, because there always was this period of learning that came before that. I got pregnant with my now seven-year-old son, and I think there were already the murmurings within me that I wanted to do something different with my life, that I wanted to live differently, because I'd joined B school and started trying to figure out if I wanted to have my own business and stuff like.

Samantha Sutherland:
Then I had quite that... I had terrible insomnia during my pregnancy, and looking back, I actually think I had depression during my pregnancy and then I developed postnatal depression, and I ended up going into a short-term residential care to get help connecting with my son and went on to medication and things like that. Also, when my son was three months old, my best friend, bridesmaids for each other, shared a room at college, told me she didn't want to be friends anymore, because she thought I was really selfish and she didn't want me in her life.

I was already starting with postnatal depression, that happened, and I remember walking on the beach one day with a friend of mine, saying, "I've hit rock bottom. There's nothing to do now except to look at who I am and how I show up in the world." Got the rock bottom bit wrong, but that work started then. I did quite a lot of work with a woman who you've had as part of teaching people in your community, Sam Nolan-Smith, who's just amazing.

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

I do a lot of work with her and all these other types of healing modalities. Then, when my son was not quite three, my husband told me that he wanted a separation. And so, it was really like this period of what felt to me like a lot of that walking into the fire. Yeah. Then, when that happened, I just kind of doubled down on all the stuff that I'd been starting to do. I had started to investigate how I showed up in the world before the separation happened.

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah. Things were opening up to you, but... And this is the thing, I used to get so annoyed when people are like, "It's a gift." I'm like, "I don't want the gift."

Samantha Sutherland:

I don't want the gift.

Lisa Corduff:

Take the gift. This is way too hard. I don't want the gift. I just want my life. I just want what I thought it was going to be, all right, I don't want any of this.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. For someone who might be listening who is in that phase where it's like, "Fuck my life, it's awful," I got asked, not that long ago, because of how much I've changed, and I like myself more now, would I go through all that again, knowing the outcome. It was probably about a year ago that someone asked me that, and I was like, "I don't know if I could say I would go through it again."

But then, more recently than that, I was doing these questions with someone else, and one of them was, "What age was the best age that you were?" And I was like, "When I was living in London, that was a really fun time, and I was just travelling all the time and no responsibilities and stuff," and I said, "But I like who I am now more, and I feel like what I'm doing is more meaningful. I guess I have to choose this age." That, to me, felt like a massive step to be able to say, "I choose this, I choose who I am now, even if I wouldn't necessarily want to go through any of that stuff again."

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah. I know. If you look at the whole world right now, the pain that we're all going through, it's like that wildly optimistic Lisa, something good is going to come out of this. This is hard, and it's going to be okay. We have to go through some hard things, because we're so off track with the way things are anyway, like it was going to be painful to shift into a better way of being. We're just going through that right now, accepting it as part of some sort of natural cycle of things.

But I would be the same, I don't know, well... I think my perspective is that it was all kind of chosen. That it was always going to be what it was going to be so to think that it was going to be another way, or that I didn't have to go through that, I think I came here asking for the experiences that I've had.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. I think I feel like I would phrase it a little bit less fatalistically than that, in that I don't think everything is predetermined. But I do think-

Lisa Corduff:

Well, there is free will.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, there's free will, but I do think we come... I follow a lot of Buddhist teachings, I think that we come to learn some things, and so I do believe... Even when I was in my deepest grief, sometimes I could think, "Well, maybe he and I were meant to come together to create our child."

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Maybe that was what it was all about, because actually, obviously you have problems in a relationship before anyone decides to split up. We had decided that we were going to stop trying for a baby and just try and work on our relationship and reconnect and then I almost immediately found out I was pregnant. I think he was slipping in there. Little Charlie knew that if he wanted to be born, this was his chance and then he slipped.

Lisa Corduff:

I just got tingles all over my body. Yes, I look at my children and think, "That was our job." Nick and I needed to make those babies. Those babies needed him. Yeah, anyway, so let's talk about being able to sort of look back. What have you learned from your marriage?

Samantha Sutherland:

So I think I learned a million things, right?

Lisa Corduff:
Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

But I think that there are two major lessons that I've taken away that I really am trying to take forward with me to the future. One is that you always have an opportunity to turn towards or turn away from your partner. I think I turned away more than I realised even at the time. I think with a bit more maturity and some of the other things I've learned along the way, I can recognise a bit more when I'm starting to do that and try and turn towards more, or even say, "I'm feeling disconnected, I feel like I'm turning away, how can we come back together?" So you're always making decisions to turn towards or turn away from your partner.

And then the other is that I wish that I had focused more on the things that we did have than the things that were missing. I think one of the things I've realised as I've gotten older as well is there's always a compromise in a relationship. There's no such thing as a person who has every single thing exactly right, there's no conflict and nothing you have to compromise on. I wish that I had focused on all the things we did have, at least as much as the things we're missing, because I also think when you focus on the stuff you do have, what you focus on, it grows.

Lisa Corduff:
Right.

Samantha Sutherland:

It makes the things you don't have diminish, but I think it also, sometimes, even makes them disappear. One of the things I felt was missing was a level of intimacy, and I don't mean just sex, but like an actual deeper emotional connection. If I had been much more grateful for the things that he did bring to my life, which was like an amazing friendship and a lot of fun and adventure and stuff like that, and he knew that I was focusing on that, then maybe that other intimacy would've come, as well.

Lisa Corduff:

Okay, so if you've learned the lesson of you're always making a decision towards or away, how do you then practise that in your current relationship?

Samantha Sutherland:

I think probably the big one is recognising... One is not attributing meaning, right?

Lisa Corduff:
Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

We can feel like a big disconnect and we're like, "I think this means we have to break up, it's all over, we don't love each other anymore." None of that's true, that's all story. You talk a lot about the stories we make up and the stories that we give ourselves, so one is not falling into the story. But then also, for me, I don't know if you know the five love languages, but my top one is physical contact. Just for anybody that doesn't know, they're physical contact, quality time, words of affirmation-

Lisa Corduff:

Acts.

Samantha Sutherland:

Receiving gifts and acts of service. My top one is physical contact. I actually literally physically will turn towards him and just be like, "I just need you to hold me. I need you to hug me. I need you to kiss me." Most people like being asked to kiss their partner, so he's always happy to oblige. What I feel, like I'm actually thinking, there's one particular night about a month ago, it was an evening, and I was feeling a bit meh, just a bit kind of itchy in myself for no real reason. First of all, I didn't make it mean anything, I was just like, "I feel a bit meh."

I was feeling, energetically, a bit distanced from him, and then we were standing up on the top of this lookout thing south of Bronte and then we just started hugging. And then, a kiss, but not like a big passionate tongue of a kiss, it was just like a lovely kiss, being really held. I actually felt myself soften into him. It took a few minutes. Sometimes I'm like, "Maybe it's just oxytocin, is it even real? Who even knows?" But also, who even knows, but it doesn't matter? The story could be it's just oxytocin, or the story could be I really softened into him, and I felt that change in myself and I felt us move closer together, even though we're physically already close together.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes. This is the thing. I feel like, and I know we're the same, we can massively overthink now because we know so much about relationships. We've delved right into attachment theory and trauma responses and all of the things. It can be like, "What is going on here right now?" We can actually just miss the simplicity of just a hug and kiss and reconnection.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

I think that's definitely a thing. Someone said to me recently, "It can't be all about sex or something like that." I'm like, "Can't it?"

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Why can't it be?

Lisa Corduff:

But also, why can't that be a beautiful point of reconnection?

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

Get that happening and then have your discussions. There's no right or wrong way to do things, but if your learning is true, it's like, well, is it better to sit and seethe and intellectualise and do the silent treatment or is it better to come together in a way that works and that almost doesn't need to be language?

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Actually, Sam Nolan-Smith, who I mentioned before, I remember her talking about sex before my ex and I broke up, and she was saying it's a real energetic reset. I think that's true. Of course different people will respond differently and need different things. For me, it's so true. One of the things that's actually been happening with my current boyfriend, is I've been having a fair number of tantric responses to having sex, where there's this really big energy shift. There's a time a little while ago where I was feeling, I call it itchy. I just am not content in my own skin. It's an energy thing more than anything else.

We had sex and then, at the end, I ended up bursting into laughter, and so I was pissing myself like, this is while he's still inside me, laughing. You know when you're really laughing hard and then you burst into tears so then that happened. I burst into tears, and so he was holding me and, at first, he wasn't sure if I was still laughing. Then he realised I was crying, and he's also still just inside me and holding me and it's like, "What's going on here?" Then it all just came out and then I started laughing again. It was like, "Oh, now I feel better, I don't feel like shit anymore."

Lisa Corduff:

I'll just never forget that messenger voice message with like, "Yes, something happened." Shalome and I were like, "We are so here for this." Oh yeah, feeling it with you, not really, but yes. All about it. There's so much that's possible. I feel a way different freedom sexually on the other side of my marriage than I did inside it.

Samantha Sutherland:

That's actually something I've heard from a lot of my friends who've gone through it. A friend of a friend found out that her ex-husband was cheating on her for 20 years. They split up during COVID, she found it all out and they split up. She started seeing someone else, and my friend was like, "Yeah, they had sex four times in an hour-and-a-half, and her vagina's broken now." Then another friend of mine, dating, she's got two children, and she was like, "I love being in my 40s, I love being in my 40s."

Samantha Sutherland:

Because there is this level of liberation, and I think because we have been through things and you learn so much from it, that there's a lot more clarity around what we want, what we don't want, what we'll accept, what we're willing to compromise on, the kind of life that we want to build for ourselves. I actually told you about a conversation I had with my boyfriend recently where we were trying to organise a trip, sort of wasn't happening, it wasn't happening, and then the morning before we went to the gym or whatever, I was like, again " Are we going to do that?" He's like, "Yeah, let's do it."

He went for a run, I went to the gym and came back and I was like, "I need to talk about this more because I feel a bit aggrieved. My experience is we said we're going to do it and then you said you needed to find out about work and then your boss is gone and come back and quarantined," because his boss went to America, come back, quarantined. We still haven't booked anything, I was like, "One, do you want to go, because if you don't want to go, I'll just stop talking about it. Two, if you do want to go, I have no interest in setting my life up so that I have to hound my partner to do things. And this is a fun thing, and I'm feeling like I have to hound you. Is this what you think is reasonable communication? Is this what you want in your relationships, because I know I don't."

He was like, "No, no, no, I think you know I don't manage my life like that." We had a really good constructive conversation, but one of the things from it was like, it was really clear to me, that's a firm line.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

I'm not setting my life up so that I have to hound someone to do something ever. So then, saying that, it didn't feel scary, it wasn't like, "Oh god, what if he doesn't like me anymore." It's like, "If that's what he wants, that's not what I want. That's it."

Lisa Corduff:

Right.

Samantha Sutherland:

It doesn't mean anything about anyone. It just means we don't want the same thing.

Lisa Corduff:

Right. You know also, for me, it's been a huge learning curve to actually just state and claim what my needs are and what I want. As a chronic people pleaser and in a codependent relationship where I was solely focused on what Nick needed, it was what I thought about from the time I woke up, how to make him okay.

All the things with having small kids and that sort of stuff, that I just wasn't in practise of being able to... As an individual, I knew what I needed in order to be able to show up for my work or I was definitely starting to practise self care, and I was asking myself interesting questions about my own happiness and all that sort of thing.

But within the context of a relationship, to be able to actually say, "Hey, that's not okay," or, "I'm not going to tolerate this," or, "I need this right now." Totally foreign concept.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
Absolutely a new idea for me, and it's like one of the most liberating things to have a crack and just be like, "I'm just going to put this out there." Here's where I'm at now, I think what I've learned is I have quite a high tolerance for other people's bullshit.

Samantha Sutherland:
Oh.

Lisa Corduff:
I think I can justify it. I think I can dance around it. And now, I'm conscious to what I'm willing to tolerate and what I'm not willing to tolerate. A part of that is I'm actually not willing to put everyone else first. I actually need to continue the work that I've done to honour what it is that I need. I'm good at doing it on my own now. I'm good at doing it in this house, communicating it to my children, switching off when I need to, all of that sort of thing, but in the context of a relationship, it's totally new.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah, and you know what else is interesting about that, too... So I think we're probably coming at it from the opposite ends of that scale, where I have been accused of being really selfish by not just my old best friend, but then also by my ex-husband, because I do ask what I want, and I think that's not typically how women are expected to behave. I think it's much more common that they need to put everybody else first. In fact, their survey responses have confirmed that. It was like 72% of women strongly agreed that they're expected to put everybody else before themselves. I kind of always rebelled against that.

Lisa Corduff:
Flying the flag against patriarchy.

Samantha Sutherland:
I mean, it comes at a cost too, though, I think.

Lisa Corduff:
But this is the big thing-

Samantha Sutherland:
That's one of the things that I feel like I've learned is how to soften that side of me too.

Lisa Corduff:
Well, and that's the whole, that whole feminine energy, our responses to Julie Tenner's book "Flowers and Honey" is really, really interesting, because you find it massively triggering. I'm like, "Oh no, this basically explains everything that I've sort of been experiencing," like she talks about how motherhood is us in our masculine, because there's things that we've got to get done, especially those early years of motherhood. It's goal-oriented, it's like, "Bang, bang, bang, bang." When we're in that zone then, we can't sort of step back out and be in our feminine, just able to receive, able to let somebody else lead. We kind of lose the balance.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yes. That's actually what I was thinking before was when you and I were talking recently about, with that, the feminine energy and sitting back and receiving, allowing someone into your life. I was single for three-and-a-half years before I met my current boyfriend. I had some short relationships and stuff but not what I would consider a really deep relationship. He said this first to me, and I think that's why we were talking about it, was that he sort of feels like I don't need him. And it's like, well, that's kind of true, right? I've been living this independent life for a while.

I've built my support network, and so I have people that I call about work stuff and people that I call about boy stuff and people that I call about kid stuff. I've got a really close network of friends, but also quite a big network of friends. You were saying it could be hard for someone to figure out how they fit into that, because I have this full rich life, and I have to let stuff go to let someone fit into that. I expect them to come on this journey with me, because they have to be adding to my life for them to be allowed in.

Lisa Corduff:
It's a really, really interesting thing. I think, for me, I know what it feels like to give everything to a relationship, and I'm not willing to do that again. How are you all in, in a relationship, but also still prioritising your amazing girlfriends, your alone time, bonding time with your children. It's sort of just like...

Samantha Sutherland:
Yes, that's interesting too, because as you said that I was like, "I don't think I know what it is to do that." I was definitely all in. So don't get me wrong, when I was with my ex-husband, I was 100% all in. I never thought we would break up. I thought we were absolutely the perfect match.

That's actually something that would be interesting to discuss, too, is trusting future relationships. When he and I broke up, my best friend from school said to me, "Oh my god, if you guys have broken up, what chance do the rest of us have?" And it's like, "Yeah."

Lisa Corduff:
People were shocked with Nick and I.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
So was I.

Samantha Sutherland:
So was I, exactly. So was I. I couldn't believe it. Actually, what I'm playing with is how do I give more of myself to the entity of the relationship, I think. When it comes to that masculine/feminine energy stuff, for me sometimes that looks like stepping back as a way to turn towards my partner. I have a push energy, I think, often. So how do I let that rest? We're currently booking to go to his friend's wedding, and my tendency would be like, "Jump online, check the flights, and we'll sort all that." How do I just step back and let him do that? Not as a way where I'm like, "I'm not looking after it," but as a way of not just leading with this pushing energy, which is my natural response.

Lisa Corduff:
I feel like the act of being able to receive and allowing to be led is a massive gift to us and to them.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah. Well, talk about your trip to Tasmania.

Lisa Corduff:
Well, yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:
Because you were talking about it...

Lisa Corduff:
We just had the best trip to Tasmania. I haven't really shared all that much about my relationship, only because, well, I mean it's a big thing to do, put it out there, when you're like, "Hmmm." But he's been around and been a part of my journey now for two years in different capacities. We've really moved through so much stuff. It's been a big two years, let's be real. There was always just something with this guy.

Anyway, we're in now, we're doing this thing. We plan a holiday with our five children, collectively, to Tasmania. It's a bit daunting, taking five kids away, that was a bit daunting. I was like, "It's going to be really interesting to see who takes what role and how this all kind of works out." I was very curious about it, because I manage my children... I think I just always have. Nick was a hands-on dad, but I was always doing the thinking about all the things and the planning of all the things, like this is where we're going and blah, blah, blah. I liked it, I like maps.

Samantha Sutherland:

I like being organised and saying everything.

Lisa Corduff:

I like to be the front in a convoy. I'll set the pace. Anyway, we went away, and I just thought, I'm just going to let him... I didn't feel like being the one who was coming up with ideas for things to do every day. I just experimented with just not being in control, not having a plan, and he just did stuff. Like, "Hey, do you want to do this? The walk is this long, do you think they'll be able to do that?" We'd just get packed up. I'd follow him in the car. He'd take us on a great adventure, feel like the king of the world. I was just there for the good time. It can be like that. I said this to you, I remember Nick saying I emasculated him. I made him feel less than a man. I mean, he had a lot of stuff going on.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, because my immediate response to that, right, is yes, feminine/masculine energy is a thing, and I think for both of us, exploring that feminine energy is a useful thing to do. I also think that these men pick strong women, and then instead of rising to meet them, they expect you to pull back, and I think that's bullshit.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes. But I did in Tasmania wasn't pulling back.

Samantha Sutherland:

Well, yes, that's the thing. The exploration, what does it actually look like?

Lisa Corduff:

What is it? There's also other times where I'm very sure about what needs to be done.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

And that's that, but I'm also open to things feeling easier and finding a natural groove and exploring what it feels like to let go of the reigns sometimes.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
I actually don't, and if any of us do we're deluding ourselves, I don't know the right way to do things. I think that's where it was just that nitpicking with Nick. "Have you packed? Okay, so we're going to the beach, where's the sunscreen? You said you packed the bag?" I didn't...

Samantha Sutherland:
Oh, yes.

Lisa Corduff:
It's just more like I thought I knew what needed to be done. I liked it being done in a certain way, and he's like, "Well, you asked me to do a job, and now you're telling me I've done it wrong." I'm like, "Why can't they just?" You know? But we're also the ones who were doing that day in, day freaking out.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
And-

Samantha Sutherland:
On that, because you know actually I'm coming at this from my own personal angle, but also I follow a lot of research about all of this stuff, because it's what I do for work as well.

Lisa Corduff:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Samantha Sutherland:
What you're talking about there with that example of packing the bag for the beach is called maternal gatekeeping. There is this theory that to get men to step up, women need to stop doing that. They need to stop the maternal gatekeeping, so we don't think they do it the right way, so then we do it. We need to step back to let them do it.

But what that whole theory ignores is the fact that there is a minimum standard that needs to be kept in a house to keep children not neglected. They need to be fed, they need to be clothed, they need to be clean, they need to have their hair washed. The house needs to not have bugs in it. They need to have clean sheets and clean clothes to wear to school. They need to have enough food so they can grow and their brains can work.

Samantha Sutherland:

A lot of the research actually shows that when women step back from that maternal gatekeeping role, actually stuff just doesn't get done. It's hard to trust, right? So it's hard to just go, "I'm just going to sit back, I'm going to let my feminine energy in. I'm going to receive and allow them to do it." And then you get to the beach for the whole day, and there's no food or there's no sunscreen or whatever. And it's like, that's a minimum standard that's just not being met, and I think it's okay to have clear agreements on that minimum standard.

One of my friends, actually, who's in a relationship. They've got three children. He's a very involved dad. I wouldn't call him the kind of guy who's just doing it out of laziness, but she was like, "I think we need to agree what these standards are," and she said, "I think at a minimum, you have to give the children what you give yourself before you leave the house. You brush your hair, you wear clean clothes, they need that stuff." Still, every day, he's like, "Do you think we really need to brush the girls' hair?" And she's like, "Yes, minimum standard, and I don't want to keep talking about it. It's just the minimum standard of what we agree we're going to give to our children."

I think more than just the step back, I think maybe there's an opportunity to talk about the minimum standard you as a couple agree on for your kids, and then you can feel more comfortable about stepping back.

Lisa Corduff:

I remember you sharing that with me, and I absolutely loved it and totally agree with it, and I must say, I think it's a total bonus being with someone who's had to parent their own children.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

So they know what's required here. It's not a question. It's just the things that need to get done. He's thinking the same thoughts as me, "Am I going to make something for dinner or is it Uber Eats?"

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

During the lockdown, or whatever. I think that, for me, another big lesson has been in you just have things that you accept about yourself that you think are, like it's who I am.

Samantha Sutherland:

Oh yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

Actually starting to sort of challenge that. I think, for myself, I rate harmony in my house really highly. I like it to feel nice and peaceful, harmonious, but what I've realised is, now, is that I know what it feels like to sacrifice myself for that.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes.

Lisa Corduff:

And I thought that's who I was, and now I'm starting to flex new muscles, and I'm like, "Actually no, that's not who I am." I do, absolutely, rate harmony, but I will never sacrifice myself for it, and if I find myself doing that, that's a really cool indication that the balance is off. Samantha Sutherland: You know what's so funny, which I don't think that we've talked about before, is because we do actually often come at these things from almost the opposite end of the spectrum. We met when we were starting to do the work, and we really became really close in the last four years, I would say, when we both had started to do the work and were really deep in conflict in our marriages and starting to be these women that Elizabeth Gilbert talks about. I wonder, if we met 10 years ago or 15 years ago, I wonder whether you'd be like "I was so selfish and brash," and I would be like, "I was just so weak, just steps back and gives her whole self to the family." Isn't it funny? I wonder whether that would've happened, because I think we've both changed towards each other and become so much more wiser. We've become so much more understanding of different approaches than... Yeah, I don't know any answer, I don't know anything.

It is interesting. I would say we would probably just both have been backpackers in Europe, just probably getting very drunk in the Greek Islands.

Samantha Sutherland:

We would've loved each other then as well.

Lisa Corduff:

Whereas now, we're conscious of way more important things, but we would have been good time gals if we'd met back then. Can I ask you, I would say a massive, massive lesson has also been that loving someone isn't a good enough reason to stay married and that good things can end, what would you say to that?

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Right at the beginning, what you said that was interesting when you put up your lessons, and I was like, "Oh, they're so different, and I think Shalome's would be so different as well," because we have quite different experiences.

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

My experience, I very much felt like I was left, that he did the leaving. I was still probably more of the feeling like, "Well, why isn't love enough? Why can't the love that we have for each other and the things that we have shared be enough for us to decide to get through it?" On that note too, though, one of the things I then thought later, a few years post-breakup, was if you're with someone in a really serious relationship for three years, and after three years, you're still really in love and you still really want to spend time with them, and you want to build a life together and stuff, I think almost any relationship that makes it to that long could make it forever, as long as you keep choosing to turn towards each other.

I do think you can't always control the other person turning towards you. In the case with you and Nick, when you were like, "Love isn't enough," you had this huge love. We both did. We both had these relationships that people are like, "What, you guys have broken up?" At the same time, there was quite a lot of trauma there. I think sometimes we can get too far down a path, either together or as individuals, that means that just love isn't strong enough to bring it back.

For me, there's a big thing around choosing. I think, when you have the foundation of love, if you both keep choosing it, then that's beyond love, that's how do you show up for each other, how do you show up for the relationship, how do you state your needs, how do you not be codependent, how do you balance all the things that need to be balanced? The choice is that you want to keep trying to navigate that, and I suppose, for me, I felt like my ex chose not to do that anymore with me.

Lisa Corduff:

It would have been so good to have Shalome here to put her spin on that.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

It was the opposite for her. And then, for myself and Nick, it was probably the most mutual between the three of us. What do you then think, because I love Byron Katie's marriage vows of, "I promise to love you until I don't." I really like that, because I think it reflects a truth in that, well, now that we're on the other side and we sort of touched on this before when you were talking about trusting future relationships, is - now I know they end.

When I was with Nick, my parents, all my family, I hadn't actually really witnessed marriage separation. I've never experienced it with anyone close to me. I mean, my best friend went through it. It was so shocking.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

What do you mean marriages end? This isn't in my world. Now I know they do, but I refused to not be in something wholeheartedly, even although it scares the shit out of me, because I also know how much it can hurt.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes.

Lisa Corduff:

When it doesn't work out. I like those vows of I will be in this. If it comes to a point that it's not making sense anymore, I'm not feeling it, then it's also okay for it to evolve into something else.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. And I think that's what I love from Byron-

Lisa Corduff:

I'm not attached to never-ending love in the way that I used to be.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. I really definitely feel that. I definitely feel that. I think that the fantasy of... like I think Hollywood... versions of romance from Hollywood are bad for relationships.

Lisa Corduff:

So bad.

Samantha Sutherland:

Because I don't think that's what reality is. I love those Byron Katie vows as well. I think, also though, they come from someone, Byron Katie, who her whole life is dedicated to doing the work, obviously, "The Work". She would not be just like, "Oh, it's a bit hard, I'm out of here." Her promise to love is a real promise to love.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

Until it evolves, not until she just couldn't be bothered anymore.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

I think that's maybe the difference. Because is it Byron Katie who talks about that ring of fire?

Lisa Corduff:
Was it Byron Katie?

Samantha Sutherland:
I think it might be.

Lisa Corduff:
I don't know, but I loved-

Samantha Sutherland:
Oh no, it's Martha Beck.

Lisa Corduff:
Yeah, I loved when you shared that with me.

Samantha Sutherland:
So, the ring of fire, for anyone who doesn't know it, it's from Martha Beck, she says most people live in the shallows. In the shallows, you don't really have the deep end, deep emotions, you don't have deep connections, you don't have deep anything, because you're just living in the shallows. Life is usually comfortable, and it can be sunny in the shallows, and it's really nice.

Then, inside the shallows, there's this ring of fire. A lot of people, they go towards the ring, and they sort of dip their toe in there, "Oooo, that's hot." And then they back out and they stay in the shallows for the rest of their life. Most people live a totally unconscious life, and for some people, that's hard. "I think I need to know what's inside the fire." Often though, as well, a lot of people go into the fire not just because, "I just want to see it, let's give that an explore," they do it because they get pushed there. I got pushed there, definitely.

Lisa Corduff:
I was pushed there.

Samantha Sutherland:
You get pushed into the fire, and you can try and scramble backwards to get back to the shallows and not really explore, or you can just keep going and you go deep into the fire. The thing is, I remember being in what I thought of as that ring of fire, and I was like, "It doesn't feel like a ring, it feels like a circle, it feels like I'm never going to come out of here." And then, I sort of emerged out of it, and it was like, "Oh, this is what they mean," by, "You get through it."

The thing is, the changes that you go through when you go through separation or any kind of major life event where you are changed by the things that you have to do to survive in, is that those changes aren't even necessarily that visible to anybody else.

It's all about who you are at your core and the things inside yourself that you have access to. I think that's the big difference for me, having been through it. One friend said to me at one stage, "Sometimes the only way through is through," and I decided not to scramble back and try and live life in the shadows. I went through. That's the difference. That's on the other side of that, everything is different.

Lisa Corduff:

I recorded a podcast about how 2020 was a pretty dark year. That's just a few episodes back, if people haven't heard it. One of the biggest lessons is that hardness, that grief... I was pretty gross, I mean, it's been gross for a little while, but I feel like literally the fabric of my being, it's like the stitches are different. It's a more interesting texture. It's made me more... I'm just not a straight pattern, and that's a good thing.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. Mari Andrew, who's a cartoonist, has a great cartoon of grief. It's "Act One," and there's a woman holding a vase that's perfectly formed. In "Act Two," the vase is smashed all over the ground. In "Act Three," she's holding a mosaic of the pieces made from the vase. Glennon Doyle talks about that, too, you get ripped apart, and then when you put yourself back together, you can't put yourself back together the way you were before.

Lisa Corduff:

No. I'm kind of grateful for that.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, me too.

Lisa Corduff:

I think I was definitely a surface skimmer. I was definitely in the shallows. I liked the shallows, let's be real, most people like the shallows.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

I do also feel that richness of beingness. It's a good thing for my children. I look at myself and the shit I was saying a few years ago, was I even? What? This is what I love about getting older, in a few years time, I want to do the same thing I am right now.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes.

Lisa Corduff:

I want to look back and just be like, "You did not get it, you thought you did." Remember Sam and Lisa when you did that podcast interview where you were like "Oh, all the rich lessons, 41, weren't we wise! Didn't we know shit!" And now we'll be like, "Oh my god, we had no idea."

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

Kind of want it to be like that.

Samantha Sutherland:

Well, yeah, because I think one of the things that's interesting, a lot of the lessons that you learn have to do with relationships, but then you're often not in a relationship with anybody to practise the learnings. I certainly had that. I felt like I changed so much, but then I was single. How do you really test it? Where do your edges get tested? Where's your growing edge? It doesn't show up in the same way, which is not to say that growth only happens in relationships at all, but I think things get tested in them.

We're both still fairly early in our current relationships. I'm just almost at one year. At this stage, we don't have kids together, he doesn't have a kid, we don't live together, we don't share money. It's still easy for it to be like, "And then I said 'That was a clear line in my life'."

Lisa Corduff:

And then I just had 14 orgasms in a row.

Samantha Sutherland:

But five years down the track, when there's more shared responsibility and more opportunities to practise all the things we think that we have learned about ourselves. That will be interesting to see what that looks like and what other lessons come up and where we get challenged. I do feel confident in the fact that I won't go through what I went through before again, not because I'm avoiding anything, but because I think I have learned enough that I might go through something painful, but it would be different.

The other thing, one of my friends, oh Sam again, Sam Nolan-Smith, said once you've been through a relationship breakdown like that with a really big love, the worst thing that could possibly happen has happened. You realise that you can survive it. Then you kind of realise, well, you can survive anything. Maybe I don't want to have to, but I feel confident that I would.

Lisa Corduff:

I mean, I can't even tell you. I thought the worst thing was the marriage breakdown and then he died. The actual very worst thing happened, and I'm okay. I wasn't okay, but here we are. The kids are doing well. I'm doing well. I'm experiencing happiness. I've experienced a depth of feeling I didn't even know was possible for me, and I was able to navigate it. The very worst thing has happened, and it's still okay.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:

Even although it's fucked up. A lot of people listening to this are probably in their marriages, and maybe they're not thriving in the way that they would like them to be. We're not advice givers, because obviously ours didn't work out.

Samantha Sutherland:

If you want to go for divorce, all you need to do is...

Lisa Corduff:

Tell me maybe even what you would have told yourself or what you wish you'd known. What's something cool? For me, I'd say whatever you want out of your relationship, be prepared to put in 100%. That was a really cool thing I started to practise. Like, don't expect and wait and don't expect everything from one person.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, interesting. I would say be really intentional, like what do you want? Do you want to be together? Do you want to find a way to be together? What does that actually look like? What do you need from them to make that life look like that? Like you said, what do you need to give to it to make your life look like that?

The other thing that I would say to myself was it only takes one person to change everything, because I felt like he is not giving me what I need. I can't get through. I can't reach him, and I can't get the level of intimacy that I want. I could've given him things that I knew he wanted. I didn't know everything he wanted. I don't think he's a good communicator, but I did know some things, and I could've done those things. I could've decided to be the one who tried to change everything.

The thing is you never know if it's going to work. You don't know. I had regrets at the end of it, and I wish I didn't have regrets.

Lisa Corduff:

Interesting. I remember when it got to the end, I remember consciously thinking, "I know I have tried everything." I will never ever be able to sit and say, "There was something else I could've done." I took this to the max.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
Now, it's done.

Samantha Sutherland:
The irony is that my ex thinks that. He thinks we did everything we could've, and so I wonder whether there's an element of if you're the one who's choosing to leave, you've done everything. You can feel safe in putting it in rather than just throwing your hands in the air. I felt like I could've given more. I wish I had given more. I wish I had chosen to be the one to try and change everything.

And then, other things that I've said before, always making a decision to step towards or step away. I think with that intentionality, it makes it a bit easier to decide how to approach things, because I think stepping towards and stepping away, or giving more to relationships, I'm in no way talking about ignoring your own needs or reducing the standards of how your children are treated or anything like that.

Lisa Corduff:
No.

Samantha Sutherland:
There are conversations that you can have, and there are agreements you can make as a couple and you can go to therapy together. You can do a lot of things that are turning towards each other whilst you're trying to make things different, not how they are. The other thing is-

Lisa Corduff:
But then also-

Samantha Sutherland:
Oh, sorry. The final thing is that I would continue, as much as I could, to really focus on the things that were good. Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
That's awesome. I think for me, also, I consciously don't put my hands all over his stuff. I don't take responsibility for other human beings. I think codependency and understanding codependency and how that can really play out in all sorts of different ways has been a key learning for me, like be responsible for yourself in your relationship and don't try and control everything or be responsible for someone else's health and happiness. That is not your job.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yes.
www.LisaCorduff.com

Lisa Corduff:

It is not your job to make someone else feel something, make someone else's life easier. That's actually their job. It doesn't mean beautiful love can't be created, it's just that, for me, I really needed to look at what I believed love was, and I thought it was caretaking and fixing and doing everything I could for someone else, when really my responsibility was to myself first.

Samantha Sutherland:

Right. That has also made me think of another thing from my perspective, which is, you sort of joke that we can both intellectualise stuff, because we've done all this work and learned so much stuff, but attachment style is one of those things that we learned about. I have anxious attachment style. I didn't know that. I didn't really know what that meant. I didn't really know how that showed up. One of the things that I definitely do really differently now is when I feel things, or I'm making stories up, I reckon at least half of the time, I'm like, "Huh, that is totally typical, anxious attachment style response to something."

Lisa Corduff:

Yeah.

Samantha Sutherland:

Then it's like, "Oh, it's not real." That's all a story. The thing of being like, "Oh, none of it's real," that helps me a lot. It's all just in my head. This is just my attachment style response. You can't necessarily change it, but you can understand it and then what you do with it changes.

Lisa Corduff:

Yes.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, so I actually think that there is benefit to understanding some of that relationship theory.

Lisa Corduff:

Everyone should follow Isiah McKimmie.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes.

Lisa Corduff:

Sexologist, I had her in the Live the Change group, breaking down attachment theory. It was actually so interesting for me to learn about. Nick and I were both anxious attached. It was just a...

Samantha Sutherland:

I think my current boyfriend is anxious attached as well. Isiah's amazing, so she actually was my flatmate for not long after I broke up.

Lisa Corduff:
Handy.

Samantha Sutherland:
Relationship therapist, very high capacity for tears, without feeling any responsibility for doing anything about them, knew all this stuff, we liked to just talk, and then also she's a sexologist. Then, when I started going out dating, she was like, "Tell me about it, tell me everything."

Lisa Corduff:
You hit the jackpot with roommates. You basically moved in with a therapist.

Samantha Sutherland:
It was an actual angel being dropped on my lap. I didn't know her all that well before then.

Lisa Corduff:
She's amazing.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
She is honestly amazing. I remember the person who introduced me to attachment theory was actually my boyfriend. This was sort of in the very early stages of getting to know each other, he was like, "You and Nick knew about attachment theory, right?" He was hearing all of the-

Samantha Sutherland:
He could just see it.

Lisa Corduff:
He gave me the book, "Attached." He's like, "You need to read this." It's been good, because we've been able to have language around all of that stuff from the start. It was funny, I was listening to a Mark Groves live just before. He was just live on Instagram. He's got a great page.

Samantha Sutherland:
I like his stuff.

Lisa Corduff:
Create the Love, yeah. He was talking about how being in secure attachment, it's possible to actually shift your attachment style once you have awareness and depending on who you're with, and so your level of understanding, just claiming that you're anxious attached and that's how things are, it's not necessarily forever.

I think I actually started as quite a secure attachment person, but because of the nature of our relationship, became this.

Samantha Sutherland:
Oh, right, interesting.

Lisa Corduff:
Him distancing himself started to mean bad things, so I was just like, "Keep it close, keep it close, keep it close, keep it close."

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah.

Lisa Corduff:
It's interesting. I find that whole thing interesting. There's just so much to learn, and there's so much to learn about ourselves, and I think relationships offer a beautiful portal to, instead of just looking at those little triggers and niggly things, it's actually a real opportunity to dive deep into ourselves and what's here for me in this. What do I want? What are my non-negotiables? Who am I right now? So many of us have big questions to ask ourselves on the other side of marriage or, like children, those child-rearing years, it's an amazing time for women, and we're here for it!

Samantha Sutherland:
We are here for it!

Lisa Corduff:
Thank you, Sam, for having this conversation, it's gone on a fair while, sorry.

Samantha Sutherland:
Yes, yeah. Thanks for listening if you're still here.

Lisa Corduff: Thanks for that. I hope it's been in any way helpful, now I'm just looking back, thinking back, "What did we actually say? Did we say anything of value?"

Samantha Sutherland:
Yeah, was there anything in there?

Lisa Corduff:
Sure loved what she was saying, so there's that. And if you enjoyed this, let us know, and if you want us to get our other friend, Shalome, on and discuss more things to do with relationships, I mean, we're here for that, aren't we Sam?

Samantha Sutherland: We are here for that. We do it all the time. All day, every day, in Facebook Messenger, why not bring it to a podcast?

Lisa Corduff:
Thanks for indulging me.

Samantha Sutherland:
Oh no, this was my pleasure.

Lisa Corduff:
Okay, let us know if you enjoyed it guys, you can always leave a review or leave a comment, and we'll see you very soon. I'm sure you're going to be making another guest appearance soon, Sam.

Samantha Sutherland: I hope so.

Lisa Corduff:
Bye.