

## Making the Impossible, Possible, Within a Relationship: An Interview with Lisa and Mike

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Lisa and Mike dedicated their life's efforts towards the pursuit of excellence. Lisa trained at very high levels in gymnastics (state champion as a child), dance (professional ballet, jazz), and acting. Mike's educational efforts had been aligned with studying and living a life of personal excellence, as well as developing programs to share this vision with others. Both sought excellence, whether it was through physical training, education or personal growth. This story is about THEIR RELATIONSHIP and how they brought it back to life.

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### Abstract

I am very interested in the process of how people face something that seems totally impossible, and change it into something that becomes possible. How do you go from believing that something is not going to work, that it won't be successful, that it is finished or you are finished, to living the very thing that you thought was impossible?

In the following interview, we explore this process within a relationship. Lisa and Mike, a bright and energetic couple from Southern California had been married for 8 years. Their marriage was on the verge of total collapse. Somehow they were able to turn that relationship around, to make the impossible, possible. How they managed to do this is the focus of this interview.

### Interview Transcript

#### Terry

Is it true that you both thought that your relationship was finished, and that there was no way it was going to work?

#### Lisa

I did, I was just done, I was done! So we were going to counseling. I made a commitment to go to counseling because I felt I owed it to me and I owed it to Mike, to see if we could get it back. I didn't know, and I didn't go in with any expectations. I basi-

cally just sat there and thought I just don't have the strength to continue, I'm just done.

#### Terry

What do you think were the pieces that ultimately helped your relationship come back together?

#### Lisa

I think one of the pieces was that we were both open to it, Ok let's just see what happens. I think the second piece was our counselor because she was very good at letting us say and stay in the moment, like don't worry about what's going to happen tomorrow or

next week, but just try to be as comfortable as possible with the unknown. So there was no pressure on us, this doesn't have to be done at this time or by that time, so that was good.

One night we had gone out with our friends and that was like the twilight zone for me. I had a woman who I didn't even know come up to me and say that she was divorced and so happy to be divorced, and that the guys in LA are horrible. I had a high power agent tell me that I sucked (as an actor) and I was never going to make it. It was just a flood of information that I took in and thought it out. As the time progressed and we were working things out, things just started to become maybe a little bit clearer.

It was a slow process, nothing had to be done right at that moment, which I think allowed me the space to kind of just work through my stuff.

### **Terry**

So you didn't feel pressured at that time?

### **Lisa**

I think the pressure I felt was coming from me, like I felt I had to make a decision but there was no pressure from anyone else, and I think that was important.

### **Mike**

Something that Lisa would often say, was I feel so guilty for this, so guilt was a big factor because there was not a specific incident that caused this in our lives, like one of us screwing up by infidelity. It was more taking a look at the hard questions. Am I happy and can I be happy in this relationship? Can I be who I want to be in this relationship, was something that Lisa started with. And there was pressure from my perspective because there were times when we would talk and I was saying, I moved out of

the house and I'm having a hard time out here. I said I don't want to put any pressure on you to make a decision but at the same time I was kind of pressuring her because she was witnessing how much difficulty I was having. It was *my* struggle and *my* challenge to not pressure her and not pressure myself, and to let go of all the things I wasn't able to control, which was the most challenging thing I have ever done. To really truly not try to hold on to something.

Two things I really recognized and Lisa will say Yah. Lisa, how many times do you think I said, *Lisa, I'm not mad at you. I really respect the courage that you have.* I must have said that a million times, because I was in awe of her courage to really take a look at and be responsible for her happiness. As she often said, 'you know the safest thing would be to stay in this relationship. You're well liked by people, you're a young professional, people will think I am crazy for questioning this'. And I didn't see that. The whole time I was amazed by her courage, which also gave me the courage to ask what did I want at this point.

### **Terry**

Who was initially asking the questions about what do you want in your life, and your happiness, and who you really are? Lisa, do you bring that up first?

### **Lisa**

Yah. It's going to sound so strange but it pretty much started in an acting class by a simple exercise, a repeat exercise. I have always kind of lived a guarded life, like not real open with people, and this exercise forces you to break down those walls and communicate from within, what's coming from within you. From that point on, it was, ok what do I want, what am I doing, where am I going?

I've been with Mike since I was 15, so I know nothing else, and the holidays came and I was feeling really stifled, like decisions were being made for me, maybe they weren't but that was how I was feeling. So I was making decisions based on what people expected me to do. So nothing I did was for me. It was like Mike will be mad if I do this or my parents will be upset if I do that. So I was just unhappy because I felt like I wasn't living my life and I wasn't contributing anything because I was like a puppet for everyone else.

**Terry**

Can you tell me a little more about that acting exercise you were doing that brought out some of your feelings?

**Lisa**

It's called a repeat exercise and basically what you are doing is reading peoples intentions. Like I say, Your eyes are green, and you say My eyes are green, Yah your eyes are green, You agree, Yah I agree. You're smiling, Yah I'm smiling, You're happy, Yah I'm happy.

Like you just have to strip yourself down and show people you are there, and your emotions. And the other person has to see who you are and it could be by picking up on just little things.

**Terry**

Would they be trying to read emotions about how you might be feeling, like happy or sad or troubled?

**Lisa**

Yes exactly, and the other person repeats.

**Terry**

How does it shift back and forth?

**Lisa**

It could be an inflection. If someone says, You look mad, I look mad, Yah you don't agree, No I don't agree, You sound annoyed, No I'm not annoyed, You're not annoyed, No I'm not annoyed. It comes from the Misner technique.

**Mike**

It brings in the need to be totally focused, totally centered, totally here, and then totally raw. And that was huge for Lisa. That started her process.

**Terry**

What did you get from the repeat exercise or where did the repeat exercises take you?

**Lisa**

The first couple of times I had gone up to do that exercise, it was just a very superficial thing. I would just repeat and I wasn't really looking at the person or really understanding what I was feeling, so my teacher stopped me and said, well sometimes we just have walls, and she kind of fluffed it off, like you're someone who has walls and you're just going to have to break them down. And at that moment it was like, well I don't want to have walls, I just don't know how else to be. It was at that moment that it all just broke down and I started crying, and she asked for another partner to come up, and that's when I was able to kind of let go, and that partner said to me, You look sad, Yah I'm sad, Yah I can see you're sad, Yah I'm sad, and it just went on and it was just my emotions.

For the first 3 weeks of the class that's all we did, because it just breaks you down and gets you in touch with you. Then you are able to take a nursery rhyme and create this whole story you want to create, by emotions and feelings.

**Terry**

So you kind of opened the door there.

**Lisa**

Yah, and then it continued for the whole 4 months (of the class). Acting is all about reacting, but you have to know yourself and your feelings in order to emote what you are wanting to. And I was so closed off, I don't know what from, that I was just like a parrot, just talking words instead of feeling words.

**Mike**

Therein is the courage again. I have heard this story many times and I am constantly reminded of the courage it took to do that. She did this in front of a group of 15 people, and that courage was inspiring, and was one of my anchors in this process (we were going through). This was also the scariest part of it because I trusted that Lisa would be able to say, no I don't want this (relationship) which was the scariest part and the most inspiring part at the same time.

**Terry**

What was it about Lisa's courage that touched you most or that you fed off?

**Mike**

I think it was realizing that I don't know if I have ever had the courage to do something like that. I was sure that there must have been sometimes when I was a courageous person but this was so profound to me and so rich in meaning and so painful an experience for her. So I am watching this and I am going, oh my god, I am in this as well. So seeing that courage, just being around it. I can't quite describe it other than being in awe. It was her ability to express her feelings and emotions.

I don't think we express feelings too much. That she did it in front of a group of people,

I thought was incredible. And the courage to say, hey I don't know if this is what I want (this relationship) and to tell me that.

In the context of our life, one of the problems was that she felt insignificant in the relationship because I was taking more of the light. So she stood out from the light. That was scary, it was new and she said, I think I want to walk out to the other lighted area and not be in this lighted area.

Part of what I thought was important was bearing witness and being part of Lisa's courage, and the other part was a very spiritual process that allowed me to be open. I don't know if I believe in soul mates but we are both very spiritual and we want to be good people, and I trust that in the deepest part of my heart that Lisa wants to be a good person and so do I. And the right thing to do is to accept each other. So there is a very spiritual part of this for me.

A big moment was when Lisa called me after almost a month apart. We had agreed soon after we began counseling that we needed time apart. But not going out partying and being wild but we needed time apart to do our own work for ourselves and come back together. That was scary. We had been best friends for 15 years, married for 8 and in a monogamous relationship for those 8 years.

She called and said, I know we still have a week to go but maybe we could go to church together (for Easter mass) because that had been a part of our life together, so we went and Lisa cried the entire time. I was so choked up by it. I can't remember much of it.

It was so hard after that to leave each other because we had another week apart that we wanted to honor. And we both needed that

space and wanted that space but it was so incredibly hard, and that for me was when the flood gates were really open, and I was really crying and really sad.

Then there was another time when we went to a new church (about 3 months later) when things felt good. Something lifted from us. I felt it. There was something that happened there for me.

**Lisa**

Yah I definitely felt that. But for me it goes much deeper than that because the reason why I was so upset in April at church mass (Easter) was because I didn't know what I was doing. Mike is my best friend and how can I be doing this. I don't know if I want him, I don't know if I want to be married, because at that moment I didn't.

For so long I felt like ... my family thought, Oh Lisa is a success because she married well. You know, Mike's so smart and he's good looking, and this and that and the other thing. I was just Mike's wife. Yah, I was talented in certain things, but Gosh Mike's is so great, take care of him. I wanted to be the Lisa who could stand on her own feet, and to be something other than Mike's wife.

Going through that phase of not wanting to be married, I was feeling this (marriage) sucks. I've lost my independence; I can't do whatever I want. It was just too difficult. I just couldn't, I was just lost. I just didn't know who I was or where I stood or how I wanted to dress in the morning, because I always felt I had to be at a certain expectation.

**Terry**

Once you decided to be apart for that first month, what was happening then? How were you feeling?

**Lisa**

I was relieved to have space.

**Mike**

Yah, I knew that and it freaked me out. That was really scary at the time.

**Lisa**

I liked my time by myself. I would just get up for work and go to the gym, and I would come back and could spend time with me, and with what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go.

**Mike**

To add context, Lisa was living at home, she moved back with her parents.

**Terry**

Did you have enough personal space there?

**Lisa**

I had a lot of space. I didn't have to do anything that had to do with him (Mike). So it was nice, it was a relief. That's why I said when we went back to counseling, I want more time than this because this felt like a vacation, you know I need more time.

**Terry**

So you were feeling pretty good in terms of freedom and getting re-energized and doing some stuff for you.

**Lisa**

Yes.

**Terry**

What inspired you to call Mike that 3<sup>rd</sup> week when you had planned to be apart for 4 weeks. Why did you call?

**Lisa**

We've done Easter together since I've been going to church so I was thinking, what's going to happen this year? I just called him

and said, are we going to church together. He said I don't know, are we? And I said, yah, I think that would be good. It can't hurt. So we went and that whole episode happened (the crying) and that was a tough day cause things were so up in the air and we were so unsure. We didn't know what was going to happen.

**Mike**

Can I jump in? She called me on Thursday and Easter mass was on Sunday. I remember that phone call. I really wanted to go to church and I really wanted her to go for the right reasons. I remember acting purposefully. I just wanted to make sure she was not going out of guilt or any pressure that was happening, but it really was for the right reasons.

Those next couple of days (of waiting) were just a complete blur. Up and down and up and down. Anticipation and hope, and back down to what the hell is going on here. I had no idea and I was just trying to be myself as well.

**Terry**

Mike, were you feeling a bit out of control?

**Mike**

Yah! Because the one thing I knew in my life for sure was that Lisa and I were great friends and that we were there for each other. That was part of my identity. At some point in our relationship, our identities fused. In hindsight this (period of reflection that we have been going through) has been the best thing that has ever happened to us, independently and for our relationship.

**Terry**

Lisa, what was happening with you during that time between Thursday and Sunday?

**Lisa**

I was fine. Obviously I was going through whatever we were going through but I just thought, I am going to see him Sunday and see how it goes. Just take it day by day.

I think the reason I felt so relieved moving apart was there was so much tension between us, and I didn't want to have to go home and deal with what was going on with him. Because there was so much going on with me, that I can't give you anything because I am not happy. So I really enjoyed my time away.

**Mike**

We said we were going to move away from each other, and that was a tragic event for me, and then we started counseling. Ok we're away from each other but let's do counseling. We scheduled a counseling appointment about a week after we stopped living with each other. I remember going to that first counseling meeting after we hadn't been around each other for a about a week, thinking, this hasn't been enough time apart but I wanted to see what it was about (the counseling).

**Lisa**

I said I need more time, this is like a vacation.

When we first went to see our counselor, I thought there was just no way it was going to work, because I'm done. There is just no way that this woman is going to be able to do anything.

**Mike**

The first couple of times we went to counseling, we just kind of looked at each other. We'd go into counseling and Lisa would be screaming at me and I've never been screamed at in front of anyone. I was feeling, this is so bad. We were engaging back and forth, and I'm hurt and I'm scared and

I'm angry and the whole thing, and I'm not yelling, and Lisa's yelling and I'm frustrated. I put my hands in my head and I said, my god, this is really bad, and it's really hitting me, this is really bad. And the counselor said, this is really bad, and Lisa said, you're damn right this is really bad. And it was bad, the worst it's ever been.

**Lisa**

Our counselor was so good because in all this turmoil and all this craziness, she kept saying, 'It's ok, there is no time line, there's no pressure, you feel this way, great. She made Mike understand that it's ok to be left in the unknown. Just take it day by day, which was really nice because I then didn't have that added pressure that I have to do something now.

**Mike**

Yah I think that was really important, that we didn't add pressure to pressure.

**Lisa**

Yah she helped a lot with that. Just take it day by day. You don't want to be together, you don't have to be together. You're fine. You're where you are. If you're not happy where you're living, move somewhere else, it's fine.

**Mike**

And we had to agree to that though. People can make the suggestion but we had to work at that.

**Lisa**

And it was more you, I think. Because it was me saying, I need time. And it had to come from Mike for him to say, ok well I'll give her the time, I guess.

**Mike**

Yah, and during this process a lot of people expected me to be very angry and I had gone

in and out of some anger. I can remember one vivid time when I was talking to a dear friend of ours about it and I was pacing in my office, I was very upset but that was very minor. People expected me to be very angry about this. I did get angry, I just didn't stay that way for very long. I was hurt and scared and identified those clearly. I never really stayed angry at Lisa and we talked about that quite a bit through the process. I think it was really important that I understood what was behind it, if there were to be anger, there was something deeper than that which was me being scared and hurt and sad.

**Terry**

During these trying times were you thinking it's not going to work, or were you still hopeful, or was it up and down?

**Mike**

It was not good. My line was, if this was an investment, I would be pulling my money out left and right. But I knew when I said that, that I'm still keeping 5% of my money in, and so for me it was never 100%, I'm done. It was, this is really bad, I don't think it is going to work. I really don't think this is going to work and I need to cut my losses. And I didn't cut my losses, I tried to move through this in the most open way I could. But I did not think it was going to work.

Lisa, did you know that I thought it was not going to work?

**Lisa**

No. I don't know if I thought about that. You kept saying to me over and over again, 'you're going to have to do this, I'm not going to make it easy for you and say I walk away because you're going to have to walk away'.

**Mike**

Right, because I think something easy was like, all right you're going to give me this

shit, well piss off. I don't have to take this. And that's what Lisa is saying now, I was not going to make it easy because I was going to be as genuine with my process and open as I could, which I think made it tougher for both of us (to leave).

**Lisa**

And we've grown up together, so its not just Mike, it's Mike's whole family. I've always said through this whole thing, it had nothing to do with Mike. I didn't want to change Mike. It wasn't like, oh you're horrible, it had nothing to do with him. It just had to do with if I could be the person that I wanted to be in this relationship. So I think it just boils down to respect, really.

**Terry**

His respect or your respect or both?

**Lisa**

Both, my respect for him, and this relationship.

**Terry**

And that is going to help you be what you want to be or at least not interfere?

**Lisa**

Right.

**Mike**

Absolutely. I never put it that way but I've always had tremendous respect for Lisa. And when it's time to put up or shut up, it was like, I really have respect for what you are doing here, I'm really scared, but I respect this. I think that was huge, that we did respect each other in that way.

**Terry**

Lisa, during these emotional exchanges were you living on your own or back living together?

**Lisa**

We were still separated. And I go and see a psychiatrist. I was just really anxious and depressed, and my thoughts were just getting out of control.

During this whole process I had spent a full month without sleeping, maybe an hour or two hours, but I was not sleeping, so I was just, crazy. I would just wake up and then I'm awake, thinking about what am I doing, where am I going, what are my parents going to think, what is Mike going to think? So I had to get sleep. I went to the psychiatrist so I could sleep, please give me something so I can sleep. I started my medication (Zoloft) the end of May. I was just, I can't take this, it's just too much. And then during that time I said, let's just date, and let's just see how it goes, and we don't have to think about the other pressures. Then I got on medication and it seems to have really helped and balanced me back out and I don't have the highs and lows.

**Terry**

How long did it take to start to feel something?

**Lisa**

Probably a month, maybe a little longer.

**Terry**

What felt different?

**Lisa**

I was calmer, I was a little bit more grounded, and I think it just allowed me to see things clearly, because I had been sleeping, and I wasn't feeling so anxious, and I was feeling more confident in myself and just being ok with, well if it doesn't work, I will go on and I'm ok. Let's just see where it goes, maybe it will work out, maybe it won't. I was just more comfortable in myself. I was ok either way. If I left, I



was going to be fine, and if I stayed, I was still working through that but let's just see where it goes.

**Terry**

That shift from you feeling, it's finished, there's no chance, I'm out of here, to maybe there's a little opening, maybe a chance, maybe let's date, and feeling ok with yourself, do you know where that happened?

**Lisa**

No I really don't. I did it because we have been friends for so long and I owed it to Mike, and I owed to myself to see if I could. We had been together 15 years and we have a lot of ties woven in, family, you know, we're Mike and Lisa and everyone thinks we're just perfect. So I thought I really need to see for myself if this is really over.

What I think really helped was having no pressure and allowing me to come to my own conclusions on my own, and what I really wanted. I mean bottom line is Mike's a great guy. He's intelligent, he's amazing, so there is no reason for me to leave because he is so amazing but I had to see that for myself. I had to feel like I want to stay here because of me. Like I WANT to be here, not just because he is so great.

**Terry**

I know that some of these questions are difficult and maybe you can't answer them but I am asking you to just give me what you can. You went through periods of wanting to be together initially, to losing yourself and thinking I can't handle this, to thinking we are great friends, I owe it to him to at least see how I am feeling, to actually wanting to be back together. What do you think influenced that last step – 'Now I want to be here in this relationship'? Was there anything in particular or something you were thinking about, or experiences that you had or

thoughts about what you might miss? Or was it just that you were feeling better about you and knowing that things will be ok whatever you do?

**Lisa**

I think we started having fun again. We weren't living together. He was in a new scene. We weren't dealing with the day to day pressures, so we were just having fun.

**Terry**

Doing things you used to do?

**Lisa**

Yah, we would go to dinner, go to dinner with friends, and we pretty much spent the whole summer together, it was like lala land. It allowed me to see Mike having a good time and laughing and not worrying about relationship stuff and school and whatever, our responsibilities. We were just having fun and laughing and enjoying each other. And I think that the more time we spent together and the more fun we had, even though we had our arguments because obviously we were still dealing with everything, but it was like a process of, you know I want to be with that fun person.

And I think our whole process in counseling too. Mike was open to seeing the flaws that were really getting to me. And little by little he started to understand me more with certain things.

**Mike**

Your flaws or my flaws?

**Lisa**

Umm, Like you're, like I'm one way but (pause) I can give you an example. I felt like if I wanted a hamburger I couldn't have a hamburger because Mike's like, 'You're eating a hamburger'! And it may not have been done in a condescending way but it felt

like a condescending way. And so our counselor helped him understand how that could be taken in a condescending way. So then he wasn't doing things like that as much, he was aware of it. Because that had happened all the way growing up. I did a dance show and it was a kind of a stripping number but obviously I had clothes on. He flipped out. 'I don't want to be with you, this is too much, I don't want to be with a girl' (who does that). Ok, well I won't do that anymore. It didn't come from that I didn't want to do it. It came from, if I wanted to be with him I couldn't do it. And then it came to I don't want you dressing that way. And then I was wearing long sweaters and his best friend came up to me and said, you are putting on some weight and if you gain anymore weight Mike is going to leave you. Ok, so I've got to lose weight. It's like I became what he wanted me to be. I didn't become Lisa. Because that's where I wanted to go.

**Mike**

It's very hard for me to hear that because while I was doing those things, I did do those things, I never realized it, and it was out of a scared place for me and at the same time there was some naivety there. We were both in high school and then I also did in college too. So it's really hard for me to hear that now. I acknowledged it and wow, it sounds really sick. Thank God I am doing less of that now, hopefully none.

**Lisa**

It goes back to my dancing days. We'd be weighed and we had to be a certain weight so I have always had an issue with food.

**Mike**

Lisa was a state champion in gymnastics, she was a professional dancer, both had had body image things and boy was I insensitive with those things. And as an actor she would always say, I want to be thin, I want to look

like this and so I would say "you're eating a hamburger", that's kind of like you are saying one thing and doing another.

You can't do both, eat that way and want to have a certain build.

**Lisa**

And it just got to be too much, and my response would be, well what do you care what I am putting in my mouth!

**Mike**

And really I shouldn't have. That was not right.

**Terry**

So once Mike knew what was happening in those areas, are you saying he was adapting, and actually doing something, changing something and not just talking about it?

**Lisa**

Yes. Responding differently I think was huge.

**Mike**

Prior to going through this whole process we are sharing, we would talk as if our relationship was good. There was some tension right up to the event where she said I need to be by myself, but we would talk like oh, that poor couple over there, I'm glad we're not having to deal with that. Like totally blind to it.

**Lisa**

But I was dealing with stuff inside me.

**Terry**

Which you didn't express.

**Lisa**

Right. And so it got to the point where I couldn't even stand to hear him talk, or eat, or breathe.

**Mike**

She would tell me, please stop breathing (both laugh).

**Lisa**

Yah right, cause I had so much stuff going on inside of me, and by the time all that started evolving with Mike wanting me to do this or that, I had lost complete touch with myself. That's where it goes back to I needed to do things for me and not because of what they saw me as or they wanted me to do.

**Terry**

So because of some these changes you have told me about, you started to think more about what you really wanted to do.

**Lisa**

Yah, things were getting better and we were getting along and I think we were both making positive changes and keeping our identities, and it just evolved into where we are at this point. We spent all summer apart, actually we were apart five months.

**Terry**

But seeing each other a couple of times a week?

**Mike**

Yah, two or three times a week and towards the end of the summer we would spend the night together.

**Lisa**

It first started like on the week-end, like I'd come see him on Friday and then as time progressed he'd come to watch me dance on Tuesday nights.

**Mike**

Yah I really reinvested in her activities. I felt so lucky to be able to do that again, like I didn't want to miss a thing.

**Lisa**

It was just kind of like, as time went on we would come together and we'd go home apart. It was almost like reintroducing our relationship. And then it came to the point where, like I don't want to leave. And then we started to talk about, ok should you move in, and it was just evolving.

**Mike**

I want to go back to provide a framework. Lisa pursued me tremendously in high school. I think the entire school knew that Lisa was just crazy about me. So I got chosen, so part of the thrill is the hunt, I didn't get to hunt. I always knew that in the back of my head. It felt really wonderful that somebody wanted me and wanted to be around me. And so as we moved through our lives together I kind of had that in the back of my head. When we split this past summer part of my hope was that this needed to happen for both of us and that kept me with that 5% of hope that I previously spoke about.

And I knew I was going to be ok, I knew in my heart Lisa would be ok, even though she didn't know that or feel that. I really knew that. Then towards the end of the summer I'm going, now what are we doing here. I wanted to say no one time, that you can't stay here. And it was a big deal for the first time. It allowed me to feel that I had a say in this process. For me that was a major step in us getting back on a different path.

**Lisa**

It was getting to the point that we were seeing each other every Friday and Saturday and going out. So he said what if I don't want to see you tonight and I want to go out with my friends. And I said ok – go.

**Mike**

Her genuineness gave me a tremendous sense of freedom.

**Lisa**

I think it goes back to just both of us making changes along the way and not staying rigid, so that we evolved and we intertwined again, but we were not consuming the other person's identity.

**Terry**

So what was the next phase.

**Lisa**

The end of the summer. Mike had to make the decision. I either had to get my own place or are we ready for me moving back in. We had already been talking about me moving to the beach or him moving back in. We decided, I think we are ready, we are getting along. I still want to go to counseling and we are still going to counseling. So let's try it out. Let's go back, live together. There was definitely anxiety with that, just because we want to get a house and we want to do this and that, and our counselor was good to say, 'ok just slow it down, you don't have to think about that, just reintroduce everything slowly. And it has just been a process of being aware of the other person's feelings and respecting the other person and still doing your stuff, still living life separate but together.

**Mike**

One thing I think is important to log here. When we moved back in together, it got bad again, not really bad, but we regressed in some ways and that was I think a critical time for us. The next time we went into counseling after we moved back, it was like we were cats and dogs.

**Lisa**

Oh yah he was driving me crazy, this and that.

**Mike**

Yah, frustrated with each other.

**Terry**

What sorts of things were creating that?

**Mike**

I think it was the original things coming up in different ways. I can't remember to tell you the truth, but I just remember it regressing back to some of the frustrations that we had been experiencing.

**Lisa**

Because I guess old patterns are hard to break, and you are kind of doing the same things, like I don't want to talk about a house, I am not ready to get a house, that kind of thing.

**Mike**

I guess it was the stress of dealing with the day-to-day things. I think what was really important in getting through this was that we didn't get stuck in a right way.

We didn't get stuck in one right way. We also had very strong role models which I think was important in this process too. My parents have been married 26 years.

**Lisa**

33 years.

**Mike**

Oh yah, thank you. 33 years and her parents have been married 33 years and both of our grand parents have been married their whole lives as well, so we had role models but I don't think we are like any one of them. We found our way.

**Terry**

Later today, you and your family and close friends are going to the chapel to renew your marriage vows with the same priest who married you 8 years ago. How did that come about?

**Lisa**

I think it is more for us. Like I wanted it to be very small and now it is bigger. But I think we made a decision to come back together and when you say your vows, they mean so much more now because you know what they all mean.

**Terry**

What it actually entails now.

**Lisa**

Exactly. I made this analogy this week. When we first got married it was like a prom for me, whooo, I get to marry my high school sweetheart, this is great, just get me to the church. But this time around it is like, yah, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer. Those words mean something. I think a lot of couples don't think about that.

**Terry**

So how have things been going in the last little while?

**Lisa**

They're good.

**Mike**

You know, they're good. It is not perfect. It would be silly to say with 100% certainty that when we renew our vows tonight that we will absolutely stay together for the rest of our lives. This may sound like I'm not sure if things will work out, but that is not the case. The reality is that I'm more aware of the fallacy of permanence. There is so much within this relationship that I don't have control over, it's scary, but I do, with

all my heart, trust that Lisa and I are in love today, and I DO have 100% faith in our relationship as a loving union. Things are really good. I feel really connected to Lisa. I feel very comfortable in my skin around her. I feel like I can become further who I want to become. And I think we've got a great chance at it. We are going to say 'till death do we part' and I am fully 100% committed to that. But I don't want to put the pressure in the same way that we had to deal with before. It's like I accept Lisa for who she is and I believe in those statements we are going to make tonight, I am awake when I say them this time, I am really fully awake when I say them.

**Lisa**

I think that is what people lack when they get married, they kind of just look at, oh, I am getting married, it's the knight in shining armor. But how could you possibly know. I think the work has to come from the individual first to then be able to really work on a marriage, and people don't. And when we stand up there we don't know what it entails, I know someone right now whose husband has (a life-threatening illness) and her statement is, I didn't sign up for this. Obviously she's got work to do on herself. But how can we know, how can we tell someone that.

**Terry**

I guess some things we can't really know until we are into them. But the experiences you have had and the way you have grown as a result of them, makes your chances of having a great life together much more probable.

**Mike**

You know I can't even fathom a situation in my life, in my relationship with Lisa, a situation that would cause divorce. I just can't picture one if we work through this,

which was major, a huge deal. I can't imagine one that we couldn't negotiate because the core elements of us respecting each other and trusting and being really genuine, we can kind of put in our back pack and take with us everywhere we go, in every situation.

**Terry**

And maybe you can be open enough with each other so that if things are getting a little bit off track, you can kind of talk about it, like reminders.

**Mike**

We are still going to counseling and it's wonderful. Like that hour together just totally focused on the relationship has been great.

**Terry**

It's interesting because probably most people never make time for that. When are you going to make time for an hour to talk solely about your lives, and your connectedness or lack of it. Everybody is too busy.

**Mike**

We missed a counseling appointment about 2 weeks ago. And we said to each other why don't we do it ourselves. We met earlier in the day over lunch.

**Lisa**

Ah it was fine.

**Mike**

We didn't get into anything heavy but it was just making time for each other, knowing our time is good. It was cool.

**Terry**

I am honored to have been able to hear your story. I think it's great. Both of you should congratulate yourselves on doing something that so few people do. They usually face

some obstacles and say, I'm out of here. It's too hard, too much energy and want to start fresh. I am not sure that starting fresh is any better (unless it is really abusive) because you don't know what you are getting really.

**Mike**

That was big for us. We didn't believe in starting fresh because I am bringing my same stuff to the relationship and that investment I wanted to reinvest with Lisa. That was a key concept.

**Lisa**

Cause I think being single at least on my end was not what I wanted. I didn't want to go and do that whole thing. There was just no way.

**Mike**

So it wasn't about that, it was about finding ourselves. And for the record we don't think it's that extraordinary.

**Terry**

Some people who do great things don't think they are great things, it's just what they do. When you step back and look at other people where everything is falling apart on a regular basis and they are not capable of doing anything about it, and make comparisons, then it becomes exceptional. In relationships that probably has to come from both sides.

**Mike**

This is also the first time that somebody has taken an interest in my process in anything. Like I have never been interviewed, other than things I have done with work, but not my personal process. So this was quite an opportunity and honor.

**Terry**

I was kind of reluctant to ask you and Lisa to do the interview. I was thinking, what is

Lisa going to say when you ask her about doing this interview. Here is this guy who she doesn't even know asking her to share some pretty intimate things. I didn't want to create any anxiety and that's why I kept saying to you, make sure she is ok with it, otherwise it's not worth doing.

I am happy that you both agreed to sit down and share some of your journey with me. I am sure you are both going to end up doing lots of great things in your own lives. Sometimes it just takes a while for doors to open. But if you are ready, when the door opens you can do some amazing things. Thank you.