



TRANSFORM U

EDITING YOUR LIFE STORY

With Jordan Peterson

TRANSCRIPT

Welcome back to this ongoing influx of insight. This bacon of light in a world of spam, *The Patrick Coffin Show*. So glad to have you back. I'm very happy to welcome back to the broadcast Dr. Jordan Peterson. He is a professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, and an author, and a clinical psychologist.

He was on the show on February 3rd, and it got a big round of interest, and stat spikes, so I'm very grateful for his help in launching what you're now enjoying across the world. I was looking at the Libsyn stats, and it's very humbling to see how many people around the world are downloading the show and enjoying it—and today, you're gonna really enjoy it, because we're going to go away from left-right conversation *down* into the self, and talk about an effective way of envisioning a future that is full of productivity and meaning.

Dr. Peterson is the developer of a program called the "Self Authoring Suite"—we'll talk about the website again and again—and it focuses not just on past/present, and future, but on virtues and how you can, in writing out your story, come to terms with things that have happened to you: the self that you feel you are now, moving forward. So Dr. Peterson, so glad to have you back.

JBP: Thanks for the invitation; looking forward to it.

PC: Maybe before we dig into the "Self Authoring Suite" , we can get a little update on the situation we first discussed, and that is the University of Toronto's mandating the use of certain pronouns for non-binary and trans people. I know your initial lectures on YouTube went viral, and generated a lot of media interest, but also personal blowback against you—and also, you know, counter support; it's a complicated world. Where do things stand now?

JBP: Well, I would certainly say that the counter support has overwhelmingly counterbalanced the criticisms and critiques. Back in December—well, so I launched those videos, and at the end of September and they cause tremendous furor of newspaper articles, and more online commentary and views than through conventional media. But they also resulted in the University sending me two warning letters taking me to task for my announced refusal to use made-up pronouns, or what I regarded as made-up pronouns, like Ze and Zir, yet I felt were vanguard terminology for the radical post-Modernist Left, which is exactly what they are.

Normally speaking with the disciplinary process; you get three letters and then something more final and determining happens, but the university stopped with at the second letter, and it wasn't obvious for a few months whether I would be able to continue teaching, but in no small part because of the overwhelming public support that I received from journalists throughout Canada and then from the general public, as well, the University has...the University was responding to public pressure; let's say both ways, you know, when they first sent me the warning letters.

That happened as a consequence of their consultations with their lawyers, but also because there was internal pressure on the administration brought to bear by these professional social justice warrior activists types, who are unbelievably good at that. It's all they do. And so when that was counterbalanced by public outrage, I would say, the University responded to that, as well, and decided politely (I would say) and I'm saying this without rancor or anger. I mean, the people that I was dealing with were by no means, evil people or malevolent people. They were administrators trying to find a peaceable road through—peaceable and conflict-free road through whatever that might be. Now, you can debate about whether or not that's the best way to handle such things, but it doesn't matter; I started teaching again in January.

I do all my teaching in the first semester, and so I wasn't teaching undergraduates in the fall. It's just my graduate students, and doing my research, and so on. But I started again in January, and I was very nervous about that. I didn't know what would happen if there would be more protests, or if there would be people trying to back me into a corner and give me a rough time. But what happened was that the students were exceptionally welcoming, and they've been very positively inclined towards me, and happy to be in my classes, and so that calmed me down fairly quickly, and I would say apart from the fact that I now have far more public exposure than I did before—which is good, given that I want to have the opportunity to educate as many people as I can on psychological matters, things have returned to something approximating normal.

PC: In our household, normal is a setting on the dryer.

JBP: Yeah, well, yes, I can appreciate that.

PC: One thing I noticed is your willingness to put yourself in very uncomfortable places. I don't know anyone on the left side among our social justice warrior brethren who routinely put themselves into a forum where they're outgunned (just numerically in the opinion breakdown of the panelists) and you seem to almost enjoy doing "Yosemite Sam" pushback against people. I've watched you in several different (I guess debates is the right word for it) but the other side don't want to do that. They want to silence people they regard as evil. Your approach is let the marketplace of ideas work itself out, and we disagree, and let's get the first principles.

JDP: Yeah, well, the funny thing about that is that it's not out of cowardice, philosophically, that the people on the on the post-modern side of the table shut down dialogue. They don't believe in dialogue. Philosophically, I mean it's one of the tenets of post-modern theory, that the idea accord can be reached between groups of different identity through dialogue is actually part of the patriarchal substructure.

So because logos which is the root word for logic and the root for dialogue is the most entrenched principle upon which the patriarchy operates and so to engage in dialogue with an opponent is merely to demonstrate that their position has some validity. There's no marketplace of ideas. That doesn't

belong in post-Modernist theory. There's nothing but the competition, the cutthroat competition, between groups of different identities for power. That's their landscape, and someone once said that everyone is an exponent of some dead philosophers' ideas, and these Postmodern-authoritarian types are the puppets of Derrida, and Foucault, and those terrible French intellectuals of the late 60s and 1970s who figured out how to market their Marxism under a new disguise.

And they act that out with complete consistency. Even though you can't say that any single activist, let's say, is a full-blown incarnation of postmodernist ideals, if you take a hundred of them and watch them act, they're like pixels on a screen. They act out the pattern. Maybe each of them only carries 10% of the pattern or 20% depending on how indoctrinated they are, but as a group, it's all driven by these underlying ideas. They don't value debate or discussion.

PC: And if you add in Saul Alinsky to that cocktail, then you get the default position of most undergraduate environments in Canada and the U.S., it seems to me factories of this idea of shouting down dialogue as worthless or even dangerous and not showing up, because you don't want to even legitimize someone's position by being in the same studio with them.

JBP: Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, you know, one of the things I've tried to puzzle out is how in the world young people ever got captured by the idea that the proper way to go about transforming the world in a positive way is to wander around outside with signs on sticks and make noise. I mean, it's such a strange idea. It's like a medieval dance of some sort. It's so distant from

reality...the idea is that's the way that you can change complex systems for the better. But we have entire disciplines continually promoting the idea that social activism is the highest form of human activity, and it's pseudo-activity. It looks like effort, but it isn't. It looks productive, but it isn't.

PC: I think you're leaving to be fair I think you're leaving out the black masks and the car burning, which I think is the peace de la resistance of effective dialogue.

JBP: Yes, yeah, well, that also, you know, that the darker end of that allows people to revel in their resentment, well, simultaneously telling themselves the story about how virtuous they are, you know, it's absolutely appalling behavior.

PC: And the anonymity is that doing it at night and with the black mask to solve.

JBP: I figured out how to never have protesters at my talks. It's real easy. I can't recommend this. Hey, all you social conservative types that are listening. Always schedule your talk early in the morning because the protesters their late-night preachers. It's not over. So, if you have your talk at 8:00 in the morning, no protesters will ever show.

PC: Laughs.

JBP: They don't roll out of bed till 2:00, and they're not even organized to go protest until 5:00. That's really comical. I suggested to the university when we did the debate there that we have it in the morning for exactly that reason. We had one government elected members show up, to distribute a few pamphlets, and that was it for protests.

PC: Well, let's go from anonymous to disclosure, and talk about the Self Authoring Suite. I've begun the writing of it. I started at the present and present virtue because I'm a chicken. I didn't want to go too gnarly, because I frankly even writing so kind of openly—as a Catholic it felt like a written confession without absolution—but just the act of disclosing things about even something positive, and I think the virtue I'm working on now is comfortable being the center of attention, and I began to think about why you or the way it's been developed has described that as a virtue, because growing up that was always thrown back at me as, "Oh, you're just the class clown, you know, you've got to always be "on," and that's hardly a virtue, but it *is* in a way I could not do any communicating.

I couldn't speak in front of a large crowd I couldn't be sitting here if I wasn't comfortable being the "center of attention". So now I've just changed my mind about that, and then I'm really just at the beginning of it.

JBP: Oh, good. I'm really glad to hear about that.

PC: I want to get into the data. I want to talk about the 85 students at McGill and your work with James Pennebaker and the Rotterdam research because data like that gets my attention. How did this the idea of writing down your past, present, and future, and almost you're editing yourself, your filtering the memory of the event, too, aren't you? How did this idea begin?

JBP: Well, it had two sources conceptually, I mean, I've been working on the idea that people's perceptual frames are basically how the structure of stories for a very long time, and so you look at the world through a lens and the lens—if you describe that lens to someone else, you're basically telling them a story. People really like listening to stories because we like the opportunity to have multiple lenses because they each serve a different function. Which is probably why it's so useful to listen to people who don't agree with you because they might tell you something you don't know that you can then use. If you talk to people who agree with you, just hear the same old thing all the time. Okay, so one of them one source was the observation that people inhabit stories, and find them valuable. And so it's a psychoanalytic idea in part that you act out the story of your life; something like that.

So you need to know what your story is, and this is something that Carl Jung stressed particularly because he said if you don't know what your story is, there's always the possibility that it's a tragedy and that you're the fool. So you don't have the option of not being in the story. You have the option of determining, in part, what that story will be. So you can be the hero of your own story we might say or a bit player in someone else's story. You're not

going get a very good part if you pick bit player in someone else's drama. Now you can forfeit responsibility if you do that, so it has some advantages. The next piece of the puzzle was James Pennebaker's work, and he's a professor at the University of Texas at Austin. And Pennebaker was interested in testing Freud's theory. Freud had this theory that if bad things happened to you when you were young, that might have a determining effect on your personality and that you were likely to repress those events to the detriment of your well-being.

Freud believed that if you brought those events forward, and discussed them, that that would produce an emotional response that he called catharsis. Often be accompanied, say, by tears and that that catharsis released the emotional pressure associated with the events and was curative. There's something about that that's true, even though I think Freud's formulation was flawed. A flawed formulation that moves you in the right direction is a lot better than no formulation at all. Pennebaker decided to put this to the test, and so what he did was bring university students in, and had them write 15 minutes a day, three days in a row, about the worst thing that ever happened to them. A control group just wrote about the things they did that day, and what Pennebaker found was that over multi-month follow-up period, the students who engaged in that, call it expressive writing, because he was working on the catharsis model at that time. Their health improved, they visited the doctor less frequently, and Pennebaker was very curious about why that occurred, and so he went back into the writings of those whose health had improved the most, and coded the words they used, and he coded words for emotional expression, so that would be the catharsis hypothesis.

But he also coded them for indications of cognitive transformation like, "Well, I now realize," or "I've come to understand," or that "I now know," or "I can now see," and what he found was the emotional words didn't predict improvement, but the cognitive words did. And so his hypothesis was that the reformulation of a traumatic or uncertain event into an understood sequence reduced the overall stress load on the person.

So a way of thinking about that is imagine that your brain is trying to compute how stressed you should be, and it wants to make you as stressed as the situation is dangerous, and so you might say, "Well, how dangerous is your situation?" and the answer is if you're a street alcoholic who's on the verge of starvation and it's really cold, you should be really stressed, because you're barely clinging on to the underside of life, and so your brain is going to produce a lot of cortisol, and it's going to put you in a position of emergency preparation. The problem with that is that burns up your physical resources faster than you can replenish them.

So it basically *ages you* across all the dimensions of aging you could imagine. It makes you more likely to be obese, more likely to develop Alzheimer's, more likely to be depressed, more likely to get cancer, more likely to develop diseases, you name it. Because cortisol suppresses immunity, for example, whereas if you're in a comfortable position, and your job is something you've mastered, and you have lots of friends and family around you, then your brain is going to notice that pretty much wherever you go things turn out the way you want them to, and it's going to assume that you're safe, relatively speaking and that you don't need to be in a state of emergency preparation.

Now imagine that it's very different called computational act, and so your mind seems to do something like imagine that each situation that you've moved through in your life could be considered a territorial, an element of territory, and then imagine that there's a proportion of territories where things went well compared to where they went badly.

The higher the proportion of things that went badly to things that went well, the more stressed you should be because it's an index that you failed to master your environment. And the more that you failed to master your environment the more nervous and agitated and prepared for emergency you should be. When you go back and write about a situation that you didn't master what you're trying to do is extract out an account of it that's causally accurate, so that you can avoid such circumstances in the future, and then if you do that properly, your brain will think, "Okay, now you know what to do. We can code that little territory as mastered, and that decreases your overall stress load.

PC: I want to focus on logos here just a minute, because I'm looking forward to going through it in my own past, and things that have happened to me. I found great solace in Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, and his coining the phrase, "logotherapy."

JBP: Yeah.

PC: Is it possible for someone when they externalize some traumatic events, say some negative scary thing that happened to them, and they “mind dump” it by putting it on paper, or in this case in the software. Is it possible that those dark times, those times of pain, can paradoxically become sources of insight and greater courage because you realize it was distressing, but it wasn't dangerous. I'm here. I'm writing about it, and I can move forward with greater strength.

JBP: Sure. That is part of what you're doing, you know, like let's say that you had a history of being bullied when you were ten. Well, you might be carrying that with you. I mean you made a comment earlier today about the fact that you sort of reflexively regarded your ability to be at the center of attention as a fault. That was a crystallized story, micro-story, that you've been carrying built into you all the way along, and it's tagged part of the manner in which you exist in the world as negative. Well, now you're much older than you were when you developed that micro-story, but it hasn't been updated. Now, you can think, "Well, wait a minute, obviously, that made me bad at sitting down, and shutting up, and listening, but that why does that constitute of virtue anyways?" It does it in the classroom where everyone is supposed to sit down, and shut up, and listen. That is not by any stretch of the imagination a reasonable sample of what you might need to move forward in life successfully. The school system was set up to train obedient workers back in the late 1800's. That's why everybody's arrayed in desks and rows, and why there's alarm bells that go off. It was explicitly designed to make people obedient. Really? That's still what we're teaching children to do? I mean you should be disciplined and all of that. You should be able to follow a planned

sequence, but there are very few people who work in 19th-century factory anymore.

So anyways you go back into these memories that have been codified in a particular way that leave you with a particular view of the world and the self-representation. Reconsider them, and update them.

I had a client once, this is a good example of because you think the past is fixed and unchanging, but it's subject to reinterpretation, so I had a client once who came and told me that she had been sexually abused by her older brother. She was very young. She was about four, and she was telling me the story, and being quite distressed by it. I had this vision in my imagination of her suffering at the hands of, you know, a 15-year-old or a 16-year-old or something like that, but I asked her, "Okay, well, how old with your brother?" And she said six. She had about twenty-seven, and she told me this story, and so I said to her, "Well, look you know one story is that you were sexually abused by your older brother, and the six-year-old is a lot bigger than a four-year-old, right?"

I mean from a four-year-olds perspective, the six-year-old might as well be an adult, but I said well maybe you were too really badly supervised children. I mean think about a six year old, you know, and it came as quite a shock to her because, she had always conceptualized her older brother as this sort of menacing older force, but she also has a 27-year-old knew what six-year-olds were like, and so you could say "Well it was the same event either way," but that's not exactly true.

So there's lots of parts of a person that are stuck in the past, and you can tell that roughly speaking if you remember something that's more than about 18 months old, and then causes emotional distress when you remember it. It's as if the part of you is stuck back there in the past. Here's a way of thinking about it. So imagine when you face a threat, or something unknown. Okay, you learn from that. What does it mean that you learn? Well, it means that that's a domain of information, and you acquire the information and you rebuild your own interior structures of interpretation, and you elaborate and update your model of the world. So you turn the anomalous or unexpected experience into a slightly different view of the world and a slightly different personality. Now, if you hit a wall that you couldn't get past, your body signifies that as threatening.

You've been unable to transform that threat into usable information which basically means you haven't been able to get the gold from the dragon. It really does mean—that's what that story means, and so what you're doing is going back to your past, and saying well where do all the dragons sleep, and is there something I can do to roust them out now and gather the treasure that remains.

A lot more people worked on Pennebaker paradigm over the years, and it was basically found that regardless of what you wrote about, as long as it was uncertain, the same and curative benefits seemed to apply, and so the future is uncertain. You can say the future is uncertain. The unattended future is a source of continual anxiety. So you want to map it. Okay, then there is another line of research showing that if you get people to write out a plan for their life—not for their job—if they write out a plan for their life, their job performance (their academic performance) improves substantially: 10% on

average in corporate environments. In our research, the average is being about 25% for university students.

And we also show specifically with the future authoring program, which we'll get to in a moment, that it increases grade point average by about 20% and decreases dropout by about 25%. Especially for men. Especially for lower performing men or ethnic minority men for that matter.

So the future authoring program asks you first of all, to put yourself in sort of a meditative state of mind or daydreaming state of mind, and then to imagine that you were taking care of yourself the way that you would take care of someone you cared about. That's not an easy thing to do, because people are often very self-critical, but extend to yourself the same courtesy that you would stand to someone that you cared about. Then ask yourself: three to five years down the road what do I want my new friendships to look like? What sort of people do I want to be around? What do we want from an intimate relationship? How should my family be constituted? What do I want for my career? How am I going to take care of myself mentally and physically? How am I gonna cope with the temptations of drug and alcohol use? So you think about that, then you write for 15 minutes about what your future could be like. Three to five years down the road, if it was the way that would be best for you *if* you were taking care of yourself.

PC: I've got every sentence you say, I've got nine follow-up questions, but I want to just go on ahead and keep unspooling.

JBP: We'll finish this, and then we can have a discussion. I'd like to do that. You flip the situation around. You think, "Okay, I have a lot of a variety of faults, and a set of vengeful thoughts, and some arrogance, and some desire to make things worse, and everyone knows about that part of them that would go downhill if they let it." So then we ask you to write for 15 minutes about just exactly what kind of hell you could find yourself in three to five years down the road if you let all your bad habits and resentments, and so forth take the upper hand. So then you might say that gives people something to run away from, and something to run towards. You're sort of maximally motivated, so you might be facing a difficult decision in your life, and you think, "Oh my God. I don't want to go through all the effort it would take to make that change," and then that little hell that you conjured up that you might be heading for will come to mind, and you'll think, "Uh oh, I better not go there. I better do the difficult things, so I can stay away from that outcome."

And the last half of the program asks you to take the positive vision and to articulate why it's valuable. Like, what are you aiming for, more specifically? Like what are the top eight goals, let's say? Why would it be good for you, if you attained them? Why might it be good for your family? Why might it be good for the broader community? What are the micro steps? What are the obstacles?

So partly you do that because you're gonna have doubts about your plan, and other people are going to have doubts about it, too. You need to have more reasons for doing it than you have doubts about why you shouldn't do it. Articulation, writing, really helps with that so you can quell those demons in your head that are always trying to undermine your movement forward. You can out argue them basically, because as smart as you might be, you could

probably only come up with about five doubts, and so if you have six reasons for moving ahead, you win, and you win in the discussion with someone else too.

PC: So you're propelled from the hell, but you have a heaven so to speak. Just to keep the analogy clean. You're free *from* something, and you're free *to* something.

JBP: Exactly.

PC: It's interesting—you were talking about the virtues and changing your mind about the way certain traits were labeled by others. When I first ran into the definition of humility, just a couple years ago, I always assumed the humility meant, "Oh, woe is me. I'm just a little worm. I have no gifts and talents. That's humble." That's actually a false humility. Humility is the truth about yourself. No grandiosity but also know no BS about how horrible you are.

JBP: Right!

PC: It's interesting how we can be ruthless with ourselves in ways that we would never be with someone we cared about.

JBP: Oh yeah, that's very common. People almost inevitably have a self-destructive critic. You know, Freud talked about that as the negative part, the tyrannical superego. That's just me down all the time, and of course, you know, your flaws more than anyone else does. So you can really go after yourself.

PC: I'm sure you've heard of the concept of critics math. It's a story told by comedian Larry David, the creator of TV's *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. He found himself at a Mets game, and someone saw him in the stands, and they showed his face on the jumbotron, and you know 30,000 New Yorkers said, "Larry! Larry!" You know, the local boy who went to Hollywood, and became hugely successful, and he remembers, (he said this in an article in *Rolling Stone Magazine*) he's walking back to his car after, you know, feeling the love of 30,000 New Yorkers for him, and this gang of yahoos drives by, and they recognize him, and they say, "Larry David, you suck!" Guess which event he ruminated over for weeks? The Yahoos...completely obliterating a stadium full of palpable affection for him.

JBP: Yeah!

PC: I think there's there's a temptation to do that. So the critics' math is 99 complements + one criticism = one criticism.

JBP: Well, part of that too is that you know we're wired up basically so that we feel a loss of a certain magnitude more keenly than we feel joy at a gain of the same magnitude, and the reason for that is because we err on the side of caution, right?

Something that hurts you can kill you; whereas something that's good for you can just make you happy, so pain hurts more than pleasure feels good. It's self-protective, but it can really go astray in exactly the manner that you just described. People also often radically underestimate how much trouble other people are or are in. They look at themselves, and the problems in their life and they're embarrassed about it. They don't talk about it, and so they think that everyone out who's on the street smiling—which is only a tiny fraction of the population, to begin, with because there's lots of people hiding at home—those people are wandering around, and they're completely successful, and they don't have a care in the world, which you just have to scratch the surface of someone, generally speaking, to find out that's the farthest thing from the truth.

PC: Yeah, it's part of the success in the "Self-authoring" suite with underperforming men and freshmen generally at the undergrad level. Is part of the success rooted in the fact that they begin to pick different friends when they see their own promise? There's a famous phrase by Jim Rohn, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with."

JBP: Right, right!

PC: Do people recalibrate who do I want to hang out with?

JBP: That should, yeah, that should happen whenever you make a big transition in your life, right; if you're aiming upward.

PC: Like alcoholics don't hang out at the tavern anymore, and they realize half their friendships were just booze bonds which are no bonds.

JBP: Right, it could be *all* their friendships. This is one of the reasons why it's very difficult to stop drinking, because you have to stop being with all your friends; it leaves a big hole in your life. But I think we've puzzled over why it works better for men a lot. Part of the issue is that on average now men are underperforming women in most academic domains. Right, from junior high through university. But I think that because men and women have different personalities, men are more disagreeable than women; they're not as compliant, they're not as compassionate, they're not as polite—although women have higher levels of negative emotion. Men are more what would you call it? more competitive and more self-determining, in a sense.

PC: More overtly combative.

JBP: Yes, exactly, so my sense is that men just won't do anything unless it's their own plan.

PC: Yeah.

JBP: So I think that's how it should be. If you're gonna motivate a young man, you don't necessarily say "Well, you should do this, because it's a good thing, or you should do this for others." Some mental response about the more compassionate types, but the more competitive types and will say, "No, I'm not interested in that. It's like I'll just do what I want. I'm gonna do what I want." Well, they don't know what they want, so they play video games, and they don't go to university, and they don't go to college. But if you get them to think through what they want and why that all of a sudden that disagreeableness is given a direction, and then they can be unstoppable under those circumstances.

PC: Can I tie this back to the notion of story in life as a story? It seems to me that I just want to look at my own past, my own times, when I was very sad, and sometimes unremittingly sad, maybe even dysthymic depression-type sad. It didn't seem to have an object to it, and looking back at those times, I felt in retrospect like I've lost the narrative thread of my life.

JBP: Yes.

PC: I'm in the stands and who's that? Oh, that's Patrick. Wait a second! I'm supposed to be in the game. I'm supposed to be the protagonist in the story. Is this a correct reading of the tea leaves here—that when you lose your narrative thread of your story? You're gonna be prone to feeling depressed.

JBP: Exactly right. Look there's a fundamental story which is something like a person was somewhere, and they wanted to be somewhere else because it was better and so they went there. That's the most basic story, and you're always inside that story because you're always where you are, which isn't quite good enough—trying to get to somewhere else that's better, and you have behaviors that will make that transformation, and you construe every environment through that lens. Okay, but then the question is well, that's your story, and it's nested inside another story, so you're doing this interview in principle because you want the show to go well. You want to post it on YouTube so lots of people can see it. You want to do that, because it's a public service, and because it'll further your career. You want to do that because you're trying to make your way through life, and maybe you're trying to be a good person, so each of those stories is nested in a larger story.

When those stories collapse, which is what happens when they fail repeatedly, the higher the level at which they collapse, the bigger the pit that you fall into, and that's a mythological journey to the underworld. So the meta-story is you're in a story, something comes up and blows it into pieces, and then you fall into the underworld, and down there, there's chaos, and hell. And the chaos part is just not knowing which way is up and being swamped by

uncertainty, and anxiety, and depression, and the hell part is the bitterness, and resentment, and anger, and homicidal impulses that sort of suffering will generate.

Then you wander around down there with any luck and put yourself back together you pull, you know, you pick up the pieces, and you move on. You generate a new you that has learned from the collapse if you could manage that, and then you move to the next stage of your life. But our lives are punctuated by these descents of different magnitude from order into chaos. Order, fragments, chaos, and sometimes that can be enough, so you're just done, but most of the time it's not. You learn something from that dissolution, maybe you learn not to be so arrogant, so narcissistic, and you learn some new skills, you broaden your viewpoint, if you've been beat up a bit, so you're wiser. You put yourself back together. Hopefully, you're more robust the next time, if you didn't get hurt too badly.

PC: Could you say that the elixir is in the hell, and you have to do the gold from the dragon thing? I'm a very amateur student of Joseph Campbell, and *The Hero's Journey*, and how it applies to screenwriting, and storytelling, and he talks about the descent into the inmost cave where it's the darkest. Blake Snyder calls it the "whiff of death" scene. Every film if you time it just within five minutes of the midway point, there'll be the all's lost, "Christ on the cross moment," it can't get worse.

JBP: Yeah.

PC: It's just the utter rock bottom, and that becomes the first note in this new symphony, this new acquisition of hope and a perspective you didn't even dream it could have, but through going *through* that hellacious experience.

JBP: Doing that in a micro-way when you go back into your past, and find places that are still bothersome. Those descents can be of different magnitude. In a screenplay which is a pseudo-mythology like it's a story on its way to being a myth. There's a crisis point, and if it's a tragedy, you know, the state falls apart, and stays that way. Like the hero doesn't always recover, right? I mean you get a story like Hamlet where things start off bad and just get worse. There was a famous musical, "Dancers in the Dark." That was out about ten years ago; that was like a reverse Busby Berkeley musical, because in the Busby Berkeley musical everything started out pretty good and got way better. He didn't need the Depression. This was Lars von Trier if I remember correctly, and he started out with this girl, who was going blind and working hard, and things went from bad to worse for her in the most horrible possible way. And then the movie ended!

PC: It sounds like *Manchester By the Sea*, starring Casey Affleck. It's a movie for people who don't care about hope at the end of really horrifyingly sad movies. They'll never make it into a musical. Reverse Busby Berkeley is a good metaphor.

JBP: Yeah, and so but the typical story is challenge, fragmentation, descent, confusion, and maybe an encounter with evil. Then, the acquisition of new wisdom, and maturation and the reformulation of the new identity, and that's a death and rebirth. That's why part of the reason why that there's a very old idea that the Redeemer is someone who dies and is reborn because that's what people are doing in small ways and big ways throughout their life if they're going to maintain their progress forward. You have to let the old part of you that is no longer properly alive die, and that's painful. It's really a small biological death, but allowing that to occur enables something new to flourish.

PC: So *die*, not negotiate with it, not have it hang around and distribute; it must die.

JBP: Well, it's complicated, because there's always a process of death, but if you keep yourself updated on a day-to-day level, and you're really attentive, the deaths and rebirths can be small but continual. The reason something else that die is because if you make a mistake, then the way you looked at the situation was wrong. At minimum, it has to be altered at its microstructure. Transformed its microstructure so that it becomes a new thing; you have to let the old die off. Yeah, it's painful. I think that's part of the reason we experienced emotional pain.

PC: Is coming to terms with those small deaths—sort of dying each day, you know, Christ says take up your cross not weekly, monthly, or yearly, but daily...

JBP: Yeah.

PC: Can that lead to at the end or or a secession of the fear of death itself? Does that put your relationship with death on different footing? Because it's been somewhat domesticated, because you've practiced it and you've seen the fruits of it. Does that make sense?

JBP: Yes, absolutely, and I think the evidence for that is quite clear. If you take people and expose them to things that they're afraid of and that they're avoiding—but these are things that are causing troubles in their live—you know, it's not just random exposure to danger. Although there are conditions under which that might work too because that's a challenge you find that the more people expose themselves voluntarily to small dragons, the better they get up dealing with big ones. The reason for that is not so much that they become less afraid; it's that they have more courage and ability than they thought. They become aware that there's *more to them than they knew*, and so you could say in some sense that process of encountering the unknown is part of the process by which your possibility reveals itself to you. Because if you're a very sheltered, you have no idea what you like, because you haven't been

tested. You're gonna think you're harmless and useless and it's possible that you're neither.

PC: Sometimes it seems that well we can also misgauge traits of ourselves that we've always assumed were negative, and see the positivity there we also I think misjudge other people in their virtues. I used to think that you were, you know, some people were just born patient. Well, I don't really believe that; I think that people who are patient are the ones who are dealing with the feelings of impatience, but they wear the mask. They don't display, "Oh, this is so annoying." Whereas, you know, I'm more, you're ticking me off, so I'll just say it. I'll kind of blurt it out, and therefore, I live with myself as impatient, but aren't the virtues those strengths, those powers, that kick in the presence of their opposite, so someone who's chaste is chaste really they only know that when they're when they're experiencing some sexual temptation, but they're saying *no* to it. Therefore, you can't really be chaste when you're alone surfing, or when you're reading a magazine somewhere.

JBP: Right, I think you're given some virtues as gifts, but they come with their accompanying vices. But you also have to earn others. And so it's something that Nietzsche actually concentrated a fair bit on in his discussions of morality as cowardice, and Nietzsche said quite frequently that morality was cowardice, but he didn't mean that there's no difference between being moral and being cowardly. What he meant was that if you're afraid to do something, then it's best to mask that in a cloak of virtue, so if you're chaste because you're terrified of the opposite sex, that doesn't constitute a virtue, but if

you're fully functioning sexually, and you're also attractive to people—which is also an element so you have to be sexy and dangerous to some degree—and then you decide that you're going to take control of yourself, well, then that constitutes a virtue. So yeah, the temptation has to be there for a virtue to even exist.

It's easy for people to deny that. and so they confuse....I never get angry. It's like, well, that doesn't make you peaceful; it just makes you weak. You know, so you have to be capable of the vice before you're capable of the virtue.

PC: And how marriage complicates all this, too.

JBP: What are you thinking about with regards to marriage?

PC: I'm thinking about how helpful it would be if my wife were to do the "Self-Authoring" suite as well. So we would kind of be tracking this self-disclosure. My wife and I have this...I'm sure you've heard of this..if it's not written down, it doesn't exist. It hasn't with to-do lists. Well, the "Self-Authoring" suite seems like a *to be* list.

JBP: Yes, exactly, well, and it is I think very useful for couples to have to each have member of the couple should have a vision, because that may keep each person alive and interested. And then there should be a joint vision which is the way those two visions tie themselves together across time. That is what

the bond is. You're laying out that story across time, and you have someone to reflect it back to you and to perfect it as you move through time. And that gives you two brains which is really one of the major advantages to having a stable long-term relationship is that you actually have someone you could talk to.

PC: Yeah, hence the phrase the “two become one” where get out of the dual track of “I'm for you, and you're for me,” into that there's this mysterious third thing that we call “our love,” that almost Trinitarian bond between you. Just, well, having the same thing together.

JBP: Right, well, one of my friends from Northern Alberta went to Scandinavia to get married, and they had an interesting ceremony. I only heard about it, but in the ceremony the bride and the groom held a candle above each other jointly held a candle above each other's heads. It was a Christian marriage ceremony, the candle signified Christ. Okay, so the question is what does that mean? Well, who's in charge of a marriage? The man or the woman? It's like no wrong. The better being that both them could be that's in charge of the marriage, and so that's signified by the candle, a symbol of illumination held aloft is we're both subordinate to a higher third principle which is what we could be if we got the information flow working properly between us. Because you can see my blind spots. I can see your blind spots. You can help me learn to see. I can help you learn to see, and the two of us together seeing will be a different being than the two of us apart are blind.

And you need to know that about a marriage in order to take it properly seriously, because otherwise, it's more merely an act of convention. I'm not putting it down as an act of convention, or anything like that—it beats the alternative hands down, but to also do it consciously, and to understand that you now have someone to whom you can and should tell the truth. And then undergo the transformations that will produce, because it will produce plenty of transformations that's for sure!

PC: There's a book about this by Fulton J Sheen called "Three to Get Married." It's beautifully summarized by this candle held *aloft*, and notice not equalized and not down on the table somewhere. That's a lovely tradition.

JBP: Yeah, it's very intelligent. It's associated with the idea of the candles in the Christmas tree which is, of course, the rebirth of the Sun at the height at the depths of the winter.

PDC: Yeah.

JBP: It's illumination and vision, and both people should be subordinate to those principles. It's exactly right.

PC: And aren't both freed by submitting to that higher thing, because I think a lot of parents have a view of marriage is a little bit askew. Their relationship

with their kids is a little bit askew. If you think of a higher principle as your bond, then children actually come third in that arrangement, so you're dedicated to this, to Providence, to God, whatever label you want to put on it. Then you're in that union; you're united to your spouse, and then both of you are able to self donate to your children. Rather than separate invisible threads of love which can be cut and retried.

JBP: And manipulated. Yeah, it's definitely the case that what the child needs to see well is some variability between the parents, of course, but they need to see what's essentially something monolithic and united because children will of course separately torment each parent looking for cracks in that unity to play off against one another.

PC: Sure.

JBP: It's part of their social exploration, and if the bond between the two parents isn't primary and elevated, then the children find weaknesses and can exploit and even drive wedges through the structure of the family. They play one parent off against the other.

PC: Looking for cracks in the dam.

JBP: Absolutely, they should do that, because it's part of their exploratory behavior, even though if they're successful at it, it's certainly not good for them.

PC: Well, this has been very good for me, and I know it's been good for our listeners. I always learn a ton when I speak with you, Dr. Peterson. Thanks for creating this "Self-Authoring" suite. The website, by the way is www.selfauthoring.com. I'm going through it myself. I'll be journaling from time to time with you about my progress, and regress, and how scary, and fun, and ultimately insightful it all is. It's always a pleasure. Thanks so much for being a gift, and keep on punching, and all charity, of course.

JBP: Yes, well, thank you. Look, thanks very much for the second invitation. It was very good talking to you, and as soon as you have it up, let me know, and I'll tweet it, and all those things. We'll get a chance to talk again.

PC: That would be great. From your lips to God's ears. Thanks very much, Dr. Peterson. This is *The Patrick Coffin Show*. Stay connected. Be a saint, what else is there?

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