

Mother's Grave Ep 2 Peter

Transcript

[00:00:00] **Dana:** Hi, and welcome back to the second season of, I Swear on My Mother's Grave Podcast. Thanks for being here. If you're new to the show and you just pressed play for the first time. Ah, it's so exciting and, and you might be nervous. You might be thinking, oh my God, am I gonna cry the whole time? And am I gonna just have to take the rest of the day off work cause I'll be in a puddle on the floor? The answer is, I don't know, but I'm pretty sure that you won't be, and we've got you. And this is a safe space and I promise that we will laugh at least once or twice. So thanks for being here. And this show is not just about our moms. My mom gets enough attention.

[00:00:56] You know what I mean? This show is about us. It's about you. It's about the living. It's about the person listening. It's about the child, the mother, the daughter, the son, the friend, the aunt, the person left. This show is for you. So thanks for being here. This week's guest is married to a colleague of mine.

[00:01:16] Her name is Mara. She's an amazing stage manager in the Chicago theater community and a new mom. She loves dogs. She's beautiful. She's sweet. She's smart. And she is married to Peter Sagal. I remember seeing Peter talk about the loss of his mom on Twitter. He's usually ranting about Alex Jones or politics, but in the summer of 2021, he announced the death of his mother Reeva who passed away two days shy of her 85th.

[00:01:44] I had met Peter at a play or two in Chicago. And he was as sardonic, witty, intelligent, as I had assumed he would be, but he was also really generous and kind. So in the spirit of wanting to practice, talking to more high profile people on this podcast, Anderson Cooper, I'm coming for you. And especially people I don't know as well.

[00:02:03] I thought, well, why not ask Peter? And he said, yes, we had to move this interview twice due to COVID and new baby sleep schedules, but we finally got together over the internet in August. If you don't know, Peter is the long running host of NPR's fun, weekly news quiz show called wait, wait, don't tell me.

[00:02:23] And along with some articles and a few plays, he also wrote the incomplete book of running, which you should totally buy, regardless if you're a runner or not wink. There's a link in our show notes. In this episode, Peter and I

chat about dealing with grief on a public stage, running divorce, new marriages, new babies.

[00:02:42] Chronic pain, Jewish mothers, and a word called forgiveness. This is Peter Sagal.

[00:02:58] I'm grateful to be able to do this with you. I'm also trying to practice talking to more high profile

[00:03:03] **Peter:** people. Well, I hope I look forward to being able to do that someday. Meanwhile, I'm here. Yeah.

[00:03:11] **Dana:** I mean, learning of the loss of your mom when I saw it on Twitter and then knowing that I had met you and I just wanna just to talk so first off, thanks for being here.

[00:03:25] You've been recovering from COVID as a family. You've been away from the show. Yeah.

[00:03:29] **Peter:** I have been, uh, hosting the show for almost 25 years coming. It'll be May of next year. That will be my 25th anniversary of the host of the show. And of course over those 25 years, I've missed a show or two mm-hmm . Uh, but this is the longest I've ever been away from it while it's been in production, uh, a total of four weeks.

[00:03:48] And it was weird. It was genuinely weird not to do it. It's the, the rhythm of my life every week I get up on Monday and think, oh yeah, doing a show this week. Uh, and I didn't, and it was very strange. And of course the show went on, so I got to listen to it on the weekends and it was very weird, just like, wow.

[00:04:06] I mean, I think it's something that everybody experiences, uh, in, into various levels ranging from, as I did missing my job because I was ill or my family was ill to dying and looking down from above. And that you find out with a shock that the world goes on without you. And that doesn't seem right.

[00:04:28] Here's something I just read about this in the ancient Incan, civilization, powerful leaders Kings, whatever they were called continued to rule after they were dead, which I find really appealing, I guess, as long as you get to be one of the rulers, the idea was like, if you had a, a king again, I don't know the inking term, but, uh, if that king would die, that king would still be perceived to be in power and would have his sexist society, his own followers

and his own factions who would literally follow around or lead around a really good move, his mummy.

[00:05:05] So like, like king Inca Inca Du would still be ruling. He'd just be a mummy. And Inca Inca Du's courtiers and followers would still try to rule in his name. This got really weird, fairly quickly.

[00:05:19] **Dana:** but maybe it didn't, maybe

[00:05:21] **Peter:** that's the segue. Maybe. I guess what I'm saying is I found out that the world functions. Even when it is not revolving around me and I object to that.

[00:05:32] I want that not to happen. Yeah. I want, when I am not there, everybody to fall to the ground and stare at the sky and not have any idea what to do themselves and sadly, that's not gonna

[00:05:42] **Dana:** happen. Do you think your mom, whoa

[00:05:46] **Peter:** segue,

[00:05:47] **Dana:** baby, she's going for it. Do you think your mom feels that way, right? Or this is she the queen in, in her next life or the ruler and wanting all of you to stop and not be able to go on

[00:06:00] **Peter:** without her?

[00:06:01] No, I think I can say I haven't spoken to her recently from beyond. Uh, but I think I can say that wouldn't be the case because the first thing, as we slowly ease into this discussion, uh, about my mother is that she was a Jewish mother and she wasn't just a Jewish mother. She was a Jewish mother. I mean, there were mothers who were Jewish mothers.

[00:06:22] There are mothers who were Jewish, who were not Jewish mothers. And presumably I think there are mothers who, there are people who are neither mothers nor Jewish, who are Jewish mother, but my mother, in addition to being a mother and Jewish was a Jewish mother. And what that means is, and I'm sure you know, this, uh, the classic joke, which sum sums up the attitude of the Jewish mother.

[00:06:47] How many Jewish mothers does it take to screw in a light bulb? Don't bother. I'll just sit here alone in the dark and that very

[00:06:57] **Dana:** much was her attitude. I haven't heard that I was raised Luther that's that's good. That was good. Yeah. I grew up in Wheaton, most churches

[00:07:04] **Peter:** per square mile. I understand all your jokes were made up in the last 20 years by Garrison Keillor.

[00:07:08] Right. We have a long tradition. You see we years. And so the idea of the Jewish mother is to be simultaneously the most important person in the family group and by way of being by self profession, the least important person. Oh, I don't matter. I'm just here for everybody else. And because of that, everything will revolve around me.

[00:07:33] That's sort of the attitude.

[00:07:34] **Dana:** It's kind of like when you said you tweeted that on your first mother's day with your mom. Yes. You know, without her, you said you used to text your mom every mother's day or call her. Yeah. And you would call her and say, have mother's day mom, and she'd immediately respond and say, who cares?

[00:07:49] How are you? How are you? And you'd exactly how are you? And you'd say, I'm fine, mom. And I'm wondering today, like if your mom called you and said, how are you, what would you say today?

[00:07:59] **Peter:** Oh, well that's a, another excellent question. The answer, what I would say is I'm fine. What I would probably say is I'm fine.

[00:08:10] Because another hallmark of the Jewish mother is this constant concern, uh, is wearing. . And so one of the things that children of Jewish mothers learn is to be like constantly on the guard of allowing their mothers to think that anything is wrong. Mm-hmm , mm-hmm and, and you do that in two ways. I mean, in a weird way, it's kind of a passive aggressive response.

[00:08:38] It's like, oh, you're God. You're just like, so constantly worried that something has gone wrong. Nothing has gone wrong, mom. Everything's fine, mom, please. Yes. Yes. But of course I realize that something going wrong, would've been in a weird way. My mother's greatest wish because she had spent her life preparing for disaster and a disaster occurring is her moment.

[00:09:00] I mean, in a weird way, Jewish mothers are all highly trained paramedics, EMTs that never get to do anything. They're entirely trained to arise to the moment of disaster.

[00:09:10] **Dana:** How do you deal with that anxiety then as a kid? Cuz you talk about that a lot in your book too, the incomplete book of running, right?

[00:09:16] You talk about that anxiety of like your mom worried about an attack or making sure you call home or continue to the doctor when you lost weight. Yes. How do you take that in then as a Jewish child? Like all that anxiety that's coming at you...

[00:09:28] **Peter:** What do you do? You inherit it like a sponge. Yeah, it is inherit.

[00:09:33] Well, it's not inherited. I mean, it's not inherited in the sense that I have passed on that anxiety and I absorb that anxiety and pass it on. Yeah. It's not like I worry terribly about. My child. In fact, if there's a, if there's a reaction it's perhaps too much in the opposite way. Okay. One of the things I find myself doing, and I did this both in my prior marriage and in my current marriage.

[00:09:56] And since both are and vastly different, I have to say that the fault here is mine, uh, is something would happen. And I would say, it's fine. I am sure. It's fine. I'm absolutely sure. It's fine. Don't worry about it. I'm sure. It's fine. Mm-hmm mm-hmm and 98% of the time I was of course, right. To convince

[00:10:16] **Dana:** yourself and to

[00:10:17] **Peter:** conv-, it's because in a weird way, I would, I mean, lemme put it this way when you are growing up with a Jewish mother, and again, you don't have to be Jewish or a mother to have a Jewish mother mine was.

[00:10:28] Somebody who is constantly worried about the worst possible case, the worst case scenario coming true immediately, your reaction becomes to deny that that is the case. It's just so much easier. Like it's fine, mom, I'm fine. Everything's fine. It's okay. You don't have to worry. Right. Because it's sort of a, a pushback against the constant anxiety that something has gone terribly wrong.

[00:10:49] And so you carry that into life. Like nothing, well, at least you performatively carry that, right? You're like, well, nothing, everything's fine.

Nothing's wrong. Uh, and yet at the same time, I think that, uh, beyond the performative, uh, lack of concern, there's concern. I mean, part of it comes, I mean, if you really wanna get into it, part of it comes from, uh, the Jewish.

[00:11:08] Now we're getting to the broader sort of Jewish experience, Jewish mothers traditionally, and historically have anticipated disaster for good historical reason. There has been disaster. And one of the funny things, uh, that I love to do well, One of the things that I love to notice if you will, and love talking to my friends about is how the ethos of Jewish mothers Jewish parenting has been recapitulated again and again, over the decades in new immigrant families, right?

[00:11:34] Like I had, uh, still good friend, but once my colleague, uh, uh, a young woman who was, uh, first generation American born to two Vietnamese parents, uh, both people who had been refugees from Vietnam. And it was hilarious, cause I don't think you could find ostensibly any more different population than Vietnamese people and Jewish people.

[00:11:55] And yet it was exactly the same experience. They sent her food because they were concerned she couldn't get good food. In

[00:12:03] **Dana:** Chicago. Wow. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:12:05] **Peter:** A food drought. Yeah. A food drought. I mean, what if you can't get these? Because I don't know if they have this. Yes. We have food. We even have Vietnamese food here in Chicago.

[00:12:14] It's a very cosmopolitan city and they would be worried. They would be worried about her. It's just constant concern. And, when you think about it, you go back far enough in any of these immigrant lines and you find the reason for this expectation of disaster, cause these disasters occurred. I mean, yeah, it's real.

[00:12:34] It's real, you know, think of the circumstances under which my friends, Vietnamese parents loved Vietnam and came to America. It was pretty bad. And if you go back 40 or 50 or 60 years or more now maybe actually a hundred. Now the circumstances under which my Jewish immigrant parents or grandparents or great grandparents came to America was also pretty bad.

[00:12:52] So, you know, they learned not to be particularly trusting and that got passed down and outlived the circumstances requiring that kind of paranoia. Yeah.

[00:13:03] **Dana:** I was gonna say that when I first emailed you, I asked you to come on the show and you said I'd be willing to talk, but I'm intimidated. Yes. Yeah. I think I know what you mean.

[00:13:13] I think it's around grief and talking about your mom and talking about loss, but yeah, maybe it's not tell me what you mean by that. What, or do you feel intimidated today? Do you feel hesitant? Do you feel nervous? Do you feel like you don't wanna talk about her? You don't wanna acknowledge that she's gone.

[00:13:31] Where, what do you feel today?

[00:13:33] **Peter:** I feel that this is how I feel that, and maybe this isn't universal, but it seems pretty common from my experience. Everybody. I know. And I include myself cements their relationship with their mother. Maybe both parents sometime in early adolescence. Mm-hmm I mean, obviously, you know, I can see it in my son right now and that he is get very affectionate toward his mother.

[00:14:06] His mother is almost literally the entirety of his world. I am a small adjacent element. it's like his mother and then me and then some dogs and that's gonna change, right? Yeah. Yeah. Because he's a little kid and he's gonna grow up. It's gonna change. It's gonna change. It's gonna change. But when he gets to be about 13 or 14, it's gonna set.

[00:14:28] And that doesn't make sense because as you, and I know you don't stop getting older at 13 or 14, but your emotional outlines of your emotional relationship with your parents, I think get set. It's very hard to change it. Yeah. So I grew from 15 to 25 to 35 to 45 to 55 with a relationship with my mother that was really set at that time.

[00:14:55] And now it's over and it's only, now that she's gone, that I can look back and say, okay, uh, did I need to be, uh, a recalcitrant adolescent in my 40s with my mother? Was that necessary?

[00:15:13] **Dana:** Recalcitrant? I know you have a big brain. Tell me what that

[00:15:16] **Peter:** means. Recalcitrant means in this particular case, that because of my mother's, you know, constant neurotic worry about me and mine.

[00:15:25] I became very uncommunicative with her because I didn't want to feed her anxiety. I mean, let me give you a very small, but I think telling

example. If I got sick or God forbid injured, I really didn't wanna tell my mother about it. Why? Because, oh, the worry. Oh, ma how are you? Oh, I'm worried. The, instead of calling me every day, she'd call every three times a day, though.

[00:15:50] If you get sick, you're like, no, mom, I'm fine. I'm fine. Don't tell mom, don't tell mom. In fact, one of the hallmarks of my particular family dynamic is the phrase. Don't tell your mother, my father talking to me or don't tell mom, but... because the idea of her worry was a little bit of, we need to be, we thought, I think that we were trying to protect her from worrying when in fact, what we were trying to do was to protect ourselves from the back splash of her worry.

[00:16:15] Yeah. So that's what I mean now was that the wisest choice was there a way of recognizing that she had every right in the world to be concerned about us, that she deserved to know if we were having difficulties or problems. Yeah, maybe. And, and that's the sort of thing that I'm sort of coping with dealing with now?

[00:16:35] I mean, my relationship with my mother is now over. That's not an unusual experience. Uh, and now I'm sort of spent the last year. It's been just a little bit more than a year since she died, trying to sort of sort it out and the stuff that made sense to me in the context of talking to her, oh God, oh boy, no mom, I'm fine.

[00:16:58] Should I have taken that attitude? Should I have gotten upset at this, that or the other thing? Maybe not. And so that's something I'm sort of working through and, uh, and some of the conclusions I'm reaching are not particularly flattering to myself. So what are they,

[00:17:11] **Dana:** what are some of those conclusions?

[00:17:12] Well,

[00:17:13] **Peter:** let me put it this way. I, I'm not 15. I haven't been 15 for a long time. 42 years in fact, and maybe, uh, I could've modified my reactions to her and it's something that I learned. I'd like to say that I, as we got toward the end of her life, and I finally got older and a little wiser that I got a little better about one of the great ironies is you, you're not once.

[00:17:38] You're only allowed to have regrets about something once you're out of it. And that seems to be how it works. Right. I mean, in the middle of to take another fraught, relationship it with my marriage. I can look back at my

marriage, my first marriage and see that I did and said things that I'm not particularly proud of.

[00:17:53] But at the time I did them cause I was in the middle of it. And I couldn't necessarily see with the perspective of time and distance, what I was exactly doing. I was reacting to an immediate provocation or an immediate stimulus of good, bad or indifferent and same thing, you know, with your mother. But uh, the significant difference between those two situations, my prior marriage and my mother is in my prior marriage, I can and have look back and said, oh wow, I'm outta that experience now, what did I do?

[00:18:19] What could I have done better? What could I have avoided? And then I can take those lessons and apply them. I think, I hope my wife would tell you profitably and successfully to my new marriage, which I think is much healthier for a lot of reasons, but that's one of them mm-hmm but you can't do that with your relationship with your parents.

[00:18:34] Not like, oh, I had my relationship with my mother for my entire life up to last year. That's done. I can look back on it, get some lessons. And now with my new mother, I will. Nope. You're kind of, you're kinda left with you're left with you only get one. You only got one. Yeah. If that's a message to, well, only

[00:18:50] **Dana:** one biological,

[00:18:51] **Peter:** I guess.

[00:18:51] Yeah. Yeah. And that's, if there's anything that I would say to people, uh, about this particular topic is yeah, you only got one, you only get one parent or two, maybe depending on your life and, and good, bad or indifferent, that's what you get. I think you need to figure out a way so that when the time comes for you, as it has for me as it has for almost everyone, when it's all over that you can look back and feel as good as possible about it.

[00:19:21] Yeah.

[00:19:21] **Dana:** Or at least have compassion for yourself. Like I'm trying to have a lot of compassion for how I reacted to my mom in a later years of her life and how I wasn't a great daughter and I didn't call enough and I was angry and I was mad. But that's where I was at at that time in my life. And my mom did the best she could with what she knew.

[00:19:38] And I did the best thing.

[00:19:39] **Peter:** Oh, I'm sorry. Are you talking about forgiving yourself? I've never heard of that. Really? Is that a thing that, is that a thing that people can do?

[00:19:47] **Dana:** Well, people can, I've read about it. Brené Brown will teach you how, I don't know what an interesting idea did you

[00:19:52] **Peter:** Come up with that yourself?

[00:19:53] **Dana:** Yeah. I'll send you notes on it myself. No, I'll send you notes on it. I'm not familiar with that kind. Well, sometimes I feel like even on this show, I feel like a fraud about like, well, I'm saying all this stuff, and then I'm not always honest about how I was a shit kid to her. Like in my adult life, I'm saying I'm like, oh, she's an a, she dealt with addiction.

[00:20:10] She this and that neuropathy pain. But Hey, I tried, I was a good kid. I was nice. No, that's not true. I sometimes didn't call her back and I didn't wanna talk to her, you know? So I struggle with like how much I can be honest with how not great I was.

[00:20:25] **Peter:** Yeah. Wow.

[00:20:27] **Dana:** Yeah. Forgiveness. I wanted to shift slightly. I want talk about.

[00:20:32] You being the host of a fun trivia based radio show. That's lots of jokes and frivol and hahaha, that's what you're known for. Yes. And now you're going through or you ha or you're going through a monumental loss of your maternal parent. Yes. When grief kicks in and you're live on air, a story comes on about a mom who loves playing tennis and she's a docent, some story and it triggers all these things about the things your mom was or it triggers something inside you.

[00:21:05] How do you manage those moments? Live on air or has a moment like that happened for you moving those pangs of grief that might trip you up? You've been doing this a long time though. Maybe this doesn't happen to you. It

[00:21:18] **Peter:** doesn't, but not because I'm just been doing it for a long time. Although doing something for a long time does have its benefits.

[00:21:25] Like, yeah. Like for example, people often ask me, are you nervous before you go on stage in front of some of these very large audiences? And I'm like, I don't know. I've been doing it for 25 years. It's worked out pretty well so far. I think it'll be okay tonight. So yeah, there's advantages. I have mentioned my prior marriage, which was not successful mm-hmm in the grand scheme of things, uh, nor was it easy, uh, and nor did its ending bring much relief.

[00:21:53] It actually was a disaster, a catastrophe, uh, the details of which I won't get into, but it was really bad. And so I'm going through this terrible experience and I had to go and do this show, this dumb radio show. This dumb, funny radio show about hilarious trivia. And if I were to walk on stage with everything I was carrying around.

[00:22:27] From that experience, I would never have been able to do the show and I needed to do the show because I'm not sure if you've had any experience with this. This again might be something you've shared something to me about a possibility of self forgiveness. Let me share something with you that you might not know.

[00:22:42] Lawyers are very expensive. Oh, I gotta write this down. Yeah. Lawyers, lawyers expensive just like lawyer, then dollar sign, dollar sign, dollar sign, dollar sign. Got it. And so I needed to keep my job so I could pay all these lawyers. The point of the story is I needed to keep my job and I needed to do my job.

[00:22:58] And uh, if I were to like, actually like carry what I was carrying onto the stage with me, I couldn't do my job. So I had to put it down. I just like, go over here. Mm-hmm like compartmentalize, like, oh, not compartmentalize. Absolutely. Like absolutely. Like take it off, like, like, like shed the skin, leave it over there.

[00:23:15] Okay. And I'm gonna do the show without that. And then I'm gonna come back when the show's done. I mean sometimes literally I would do the show and then I would like have, I would go back to my dressing room and sit and just like, hang my head as everything came flooding back. But I didn't bring it out on stage with me because I couldn't.

[00:23:35] And that had, first of all, that was a learned skill. I had to learn how to do that. And secondly, it was also kind of therapeutic. It turns out, and it turns out that the idea of distraction is actually good. It's an elaborate version of the cliché, which I think is actually based on some science that if you smile, a lot. If you just force yourself to smile, you will feel better. I'm gonna try it. Like not

like yay, but I just made a grimace. But if you like, actually just try to smile you'll it has like a feedback effect. So what I discovered is forcing myself to be cheerful, had the weird effect of making me more cheerful.

[00:24:23] So getting back to your question, it turns out that not only was it not difficult to manage stuff that has come up in the last year, that reminded me of my mother good thing, bad and different, but it actually was great. It was good to be able to put aside. So yeah, a story of some somebody coming on and talking about their mother, anything that might have reminded me of it.

[00:24:41] And I just had to train myself to react in a positive way and it works. It's very, I highly recommend it. In fact, I recommend for anybody dealing with trauma or depression become the host of a popular, uh, comedy show that lots of people listen. Great. Uh, it works really well. Yeah.

[00:24:57] **Dana:** but does showing your vulnerability on that show, like, let's say a moment like that did happen and you were tripped up like leaning into anything that's personal like that.

[00:25:06] Is, would that be dangerous? I mean, I've listened to the show. I know the show, but I'm just curious like that the authenticity or vulnerability of a moment like that. Could you not like break down, but. Could you acknowledge it's happening? I wonder, I think the answer

[00:25:23] **Peter:** is no. Yeah. Okay. And I'll tell you why, because I think I have a job and my job is, uh, and it's shortest description to make other people feel better.

[00:25:39] Hmm. That doesn't work if I'm not feeling well, I guess is better to put it. I mean, one of the things I, I have admired about, I won't call them my peers, but sort of other people in the business, people like say Stephen Colbert or people like, uh, Jimmy Kimmel, Stephen Colbert, when he talked about his mother when she died.

[00:26:05] And I'm pretty sure that happened. I can't be certain, I'm pretty sure that happened when he was doing the Colbert Report, as opposed to his current show i.e. he had to drop their persona in order to do this. Or maybe because he dropped the persona, I've just assumed it was actually his current show where he's himself or Jimmy Kimmel when he was talking about famously his child being sick.

[00:26:28] And there are other examples right. Of, of people like that. People who are comic figures, all of a sudden becoming serious. And I don't do that on my show. I do it as in other venue... there's kind of a reactive effect that a lot of times people will like invite me onto a podcast or invite me to come speak.

[00:26:47] And what they want is the same comic persona that I do on the show. And what they get is sort of this depressive obsessive overthinker, because I'm like, finally, I can, I can let, I can let the facade down and tell people what I really think I do it in social media a lot as well. Where, I mean, as you say, I mean, mm-hmm, , I don't think I spoke about my mother on the show.

[00:27:09] I did talk about her a little bit on, on Twitter and so on and so forth. So why don't I do that? Uh, partially it's because when I have tried to do that and I it's been so long, I can't even really think of a good example. It just doesn't fit because, and I think it's partially because I host, I am the host of Wait Wait Don't Tell Me. I am not the host of the Peter Sagal show. It's not my show. It's our show. Yeah, among and by our, I mean, disparate groups of people. I mean, the people who are on stage with me are panelists, our guests, Bill Curtis. I mean, our staff. Because I'm speaking for all of them, what we present every weekend on stage and on the radio is a collective thing.

[00:27:56] And it's like, why am I it's like, I'm

[00:27:57] **Dana:** they can buy your book. Yeah. They can go find other ways they can exactly the Incomplete Book of running everyone. You can find it now. Thank you. On Amazon, you can get forgiveness, you can get forgiveness there, the book.

[00:28:10] **Peter:** And if you've ever wanted, if you've ever wanted to know what I really think.

[00:28:14] And as opposed to my comic persona, you can find out there and it's great. And I'm okay with that. I really am don't. And another thing is I'm a radio show we're on once a week. We're an hour a week. We're not every day. Uh, I'm not one of those people like rush Limba or Joe Rogan or people like that who people are tuning in because they're just really invested in this brand character.

[00:28:39] Mm-hmm want my show and they wanna hear my panel and they wanna hear our guests and they wanna hear our jokes. I don't know if I tuned into Wait Wait Don't Tell Me for a weekend. If I was a listener rather than the host. And we started with five minutes of Peter being sad. I don't think I'd be happy. I'd be like, come on, I got an hour a week and my daughter and I, we got

in the car cause we do it every week. Right. The farmer's market. And we listen to Wait Wait Don't Tell Me on the way. Right? Why are you wasting my time with your sadness, Peter? And I don't know, maybe people listening to this would be like, no, Peter, we wanna hear about you being sad.

[00:29:09] **Dana:** Thinking of your mom doing a lot of things. She was a docent. She was a right? Teacher. She was worked with students with disabilities. Yeah, she

[00:29:16] **Peter:** was.

[00:29:17] **Dana:** She did a lot of things. Those are all true. Yeah. These are all true. I was looking online at the, some of the things people said around her obituary, which were beautiful comments about how wonderful she was with her friends and with your father, Matt and the kids and playing tennis.

[00:29:31] She loved people. Yeah. Somebody said that we never knew about the grave health challenges that she overcame because she never spoke about them. Cause she was so worried about all of you, but how interesting that she never talked about that with others or wanted to burden them. And my mom dealt with chronic pain, we can go into a whole conversation about, so talk to me about that.

[00:29:48] Yeah. First

[00:29:49] **Peter:** of all, I'm gonna guess. Because you brought it up a couple times now, your mother's chronic pain. That's something she talked about a lot. Yes. That's something she made you aware of. Oh, it's like a martyr. Um, how are you? Oh, oh,

[00:30:00] **Dana:** like a martyr, like a martyr. Yes. And, or you're not call. Yeah. She's just all the time.

[00:30:05] Yeah. It was a lot. You

[00:30:06] **Peter:** don't understand, uh, you don't never call me and you understand that I'm gonna making little stuff that you're, I'm just lying here and I'm such, such pain and never hear from you. You make it worse. yeah. My mother was not like that. My mother was neurotic. My mother could drive me crazy, but never, ever like that.

[00:30:21] Hmm. In fact, I'll tell you a story, which is very telling every year I go away to this kind of camp where you're not allowed to have a cell phone on you. I go for a weekend sometimes, maybe longer and while I'm there I am obsessively calling and checking my voicemail to make, see if I'm missing anything. And I, one year I went away, this was about 10 years ago.

[00:30:40] And uh, I said to myself, you know what? Nothing ever happens that I need to know. I'm just gonna be here. I'm gonna be disconnected with the world's gonna be great. As soon as I left this place, got my phone back out, turned it on. Bing, Bing, Bing B Bing, Bing, Bing, Bing bang, Bing 25 voicemails to my father.

[00:30:54] Hmm. So I called up my father and it turns out my mother had a heart attack. Oh my God. Oh my God. So I say, can I talk to her? Yeah. Her first one. Oh, who at that point, I think was her first heart attack. Yeah. She had a lot of problems physically, which I'll get into in a second. And uh, I says, can I talk to her?

[00:31:10] Yeah, she's right here, mom. How are you? Nevermind me. How are you? That was her. When it came to her various physical ailments. That was her style. And I'm sure, even as I'm telling you this, you're probably going, oh my God, how wonderful. Tell me more. Do you want me to tell you more about that? About my mother who would never complain physical moments?

[00:31:28] No part of

[00:31:28] **Dana:** me slowly, right? No part of me is going, no, that doesn't I go, mom, I'm asking you how you are. Like, I want the opposite of what I ha like, I'm almost like yearning for that. Like I'm running for that, but I'm also going, that's just as frustrating, even though I'm jealous of that. Do you know what I mean?

[00:31:45] Like I'm doing both at once.

[00:31:46] **Peter:** Yeah. I mean, it was frustrating, but it was, I mean, let me put it this way. Uh, I'm well aware, not just through your sidelong anecdotes, but through other personal experience of the opposite side of that, of, of the complainer and the hypochondriac and the martyr. And that's not any fun at all.

[00:32:01] So I don't think that I, I don't think that I missed out. I'm very grateful for that. And it's true. She had a tremendous amount of physical ailments in fact, so much so that we actually aren't sure what finally killed her

because she had so many things going on. She had various cancers and other ailments.

[00:32:18] Her medications list was huge and it never slowed her down. I think she played tennis the last time was two weeks before she died. Wow. My mother though, did have a particular difficulty in a particular incident that was, uh, more important in, in, in, in her life than any of the others. And actually it might be in the end, what did kill her when she was about 50 years old, I'm thinking exactly 50 years old.

[00:32:42] Uh, she developed an infection in her brain that we never found out what it was. It was a lot like encephalitis, although it wasn't encephalitis, they tested it for encephalitis. And because of this infection in her brain, her brain swelled, and she went into a coma from which at least one physician did not think she was ever gonna recover.

[00:33:04] Uh, she was pretty much on death store, uh, and it was the whole nine yards. She was on a ventilator head was shaved for biopsies. It was bad. And then she just got better. Don't know how she just did. She got better. It was a long and slow recovery. She had to go spend some time in one of those rehab places that you get sent to as if she had experienced severe head trauma, because she had, and that was hard that, I mean, the analogy I used to use was it's a little bit like bending an iron bar.

[00:33:41] You can never bend it back to get it exactly straight. And she suffered the after effects of that to a certain extent for the rest of her life, which ended up being 30, 35 years, she had terrible memory problems. Did it

[00:33:55] **Dana:** change her brain chemically?

[00:33:57] **Peter:** It of who knows or physically, I mean, I don't know if you've had any experience, but people who go through brain trauma change.

[00:34:03] Yeah. Yeah. Uh, even if they return to good functionality in terms of like getting through their day emotionally,

[00:34:08] **Dana:** they can change their emotions can change their right.

[00:34:11] **Peter:** Yeah. She got emotion. She got emotionally more vol-, more volatile. What happened to her is that her prior attributes became exaggerated. She had been neurotic.

[00:34:22] She became really neurotic. Hmm. She had been sort of sometimes emotionally dense or not. She, my mother had a hard time understanding, like, like a moments, you know, she had a hard time adjusting herself to on the emotional tenor of a room. She could say the wrong thing. Or she, she had a hard time focusing on other people.

[00:34:44] One of the things that my mother would do a lot after her illness is a conversation would be going on, uh, may not perfectly and she'd be involved. And then all of a sudden like her brain would go someplace else and all of a sudden shouting about something. But I dunno, and that would get difficult sometimes.

[00:35:01] And sometimes my reaction to that was not like, mom, please. Mm-hmm we're actually talking about X I'll answer your question about Y in just a second, but that was sort of a thing that she had to deal with. And what was interesting about all this is none of these things were terrible. None of them were awful.

[00:35:18] None of them again were malicious were manipulative. They were just annoying. And when I think back upon my relationship with my mother, the thing that I regret much, most is I got annoyed with her as much as I did when, especially since, because of the circumstances I just gave you, it really wasn't her fault.

[00:35:35] Right. She had been through this terrible thing and we were very lucky in that she was able to feed herself and work her job and do all the other thing, play tennis and enjoy your travel and do all other things. But the only detriment was it made her more annoying. Mm. And maybe, definitely I could've handled my own annoyance a little bit better.

[00:35:51] I'll send you some forgiveness.

[00:35:53] **Dana:** Thank you. Did you're welcome. Did your dad feel that way? Did he get angry and was he cuz he's prime front and center married to her? Seeing

[00:36:02] **Peter:** this? My father was extremely devoted to my mother and as her challenges increased, especially over the last 10 years, he just rose to meet it.

[00:36:12] In fact, if you really wanted to make my father angry during the last 10 years of his life, or rather, excuse me, not his hers, uh, just suggest that

maybe he can get some help caring for her because no, that his, he was her husband and that was his job, but it was very aggravating. I mean, one of the things that's hard to talk about, uh, because it doesn't make anybody look good.

[00:36:36] Is how incredibly annoying and wearing it can be to care for someone who's having various kinds of mental problems, even if they're not their fault. Yes, mm-hmm , I mean, we all want to be that saintly caretaker yep. That we have read about and seen in movies. But the fact of the matter is it's really hard.

[00:37:01] And one of the many, many, many ways that pop culture lies to us is the expectation that when the opportunity for sainthood arises, we will claim it consistently. Nobody does. No. The reason we call them saints is because they did something that is actually kind of impossible for normal humans, which is that they maintained a positive and helpful attitude indefinitely.

[00:37:24] **Dana:** Yeah. I mean, I couldn't care for my mom. I knew that I knew I didn't have any capacity. Did you

[00:37:29] **Peter:** at all, did you ever like take a shift?

[00:37:32] **Dana:** Uh, sure. I came over and had dinner with her, but I pretty much was like, beep bopple beep I'm gonna help you find someone. And I called and hired someone for her. cause I knew that.

[00:37:43] Right. It couldn't be people.

[00:37:44] **Peter:** Beep is

[00:37:45] **Dana:** beep bopple beep is a phone beep bopple beep yeah. It's like, okay, gotcha. I'm dialing. Um, I knew I needed that help. And your dad, like, so anytime you suggested it, he was just like, no, don't even bring it up again.

[00:37:57] **Peter:** No, I don't even bring it up. I am her husband. I've got this take care of her and he did.

[00:38:03] He did he, well, he's an engineer among other things and engineers solve problems, but what's interesting is. That, when she died, finally, I hope he never listened to the list, cause well, I think among the many things he felt was relief cause he was off duty and it was exhausting. Absolutely. He was absolutely exhausting and it got increasingly exhausting as time went on.

[00:38:28] And uh, and I think that he, and that's hard to

[00:38:31] **Dana:** admit too, like that's so

[00:38:32] **Peter:** hard. Yeah. I mean, and you can say this without casting any aspersions, cuz he was devoted to my mother. He was married to her for 63 years. Incredible. Um, and you get all the points in heaven, you get an a plus, you know, you get, you get Summa Cum Laude, married guy, you get, but at the same time you get to say, okay, that was really hard.

[00:38:54] And I'm kind of glad that I don't have to get up and worry about her all day every day again.

[00:39:01] **Dana:** But then you also like lose that identity. A lot of caregivers. Talk about that. Like that's oh, he's

[00:39:06] **Peter:** fine. He's fine. He's fine. He's fine. he's fine. Yeah, he's fine. He, he put down that particular burden and went dancing off.

[00:39:14] He's fine. He's good.

[00:39:16] **Dana:** Your mom did die shy of her 85th birthday and I was gonna ask, what kind of, what did she like to do on her birthdays?

[00:39:22] **Peter:** I, I will tell you a joke. I told at her funeral, she died and the night before her birthday, the family of course came to gather for the funeral. Almost everybody was there, her three sons. Her three daughters-in-law and most of her grandchildren. And I remember looking around the room and this house we'd rented north of Boston. And I could imagine this so easily. I looked around the room and I said, I bet if some dark figure appeared to my mother out of an alley with, you know, steam in the scent of sulfur.

[00:39:58] Arising from his obscure features and said, Reeva, I have a deal for you. I can get the entire family together to celebrate your birthday. Everybody will be here together, but there's one catch my mother. Would've gone for the deal. . I really, I mean, that's what she wanted. There's nothing she loved more than seeing her family.

[00:40:27] There's nothing, she loved more than having everybody together and made her incredibly happy.

[00:40:32] **Dana:** And she got to do, she got to do that at a lot of birthdays.

[00:40:35] **Peter:** Not every time. Well, not as many as she liked. I mean, remember she was a Jewish mother and nothing could ever be good enough. I mean, and one of, one of her habits was when we all get together, she's like, oh, this is so great.

[00:40:44] Maybe we all, I hope we can just do it next year and be like, mom, we're here now

[00:40:47] **Dana:** we're in the middle of doing it. Stop, worry about it. I just, yes, exactly. I just got married on the patio of my grandma's nursing home, which I like to joke is every young girl's dream, you know?

[00:40:56] **Peter:** Um, sure. Yeah. That's what she imagine when you're like dressing up your Barbie, is it?

[00:41:00] Yeah,

[00:41:00] **Dana:** I was like, oh, I'll be on a nursing home patio off of Manchester road in Wheaton, Illinois. But my grandma is my mom's mom and she's 90. And every time I visit her now, she says, I wish we could do that all over again. I wanna do it next weekend, the wedding, like, and you're like, we just did it just did.

[00:41:15] And I'm not wearing those spansks again. You know, , she's like, let's do it every weekend. I'm like, no, that was it. That's but she loved it so much. And

[00:41:24] **Peter:** I gotta say, I'm I'm sympathy. I often say to my wife, I wish we could... Mara who, you know, I was like, I wish we could get married again. That was a lot of fun.

[00:41:31] **Dana:** I mean, speaking of, I saw a picture, you posted on Twitter with your mom the night before your wedding, and she looked amazing. Your mother happy, joyful. Thrilled. She looked radiant. She'd be very happy to hear you say that. Okay. Yeah. Listen up Reeva. Yes. But I was gonna ask you like some of, about that second marriage and how your mom felt and what kind of advice she gave you towards this newfound love.

[00:41:54] Uh, I know you were talking about patios and nursing homes and now we're advice

[00:41:59] **Peter:** it advi advice was not my mother's strength. Okay. I have to be very careful here. And this is, and you can broadcast me saying this. I'm not saying to you don't broadcast this. I'm saying that I have to be very careful here because as I have indicated, my prior marriage was difficult.

[00:42:18] I think she had a very good sense of people ultimately, and she just got a sense from my ex-wife. That was not entirely positive. Let me just be very circumspect and leave it there. All of that by prelude to saying is that she absolutely adored, Mara my wife. And since you know, Mara, I can, uh, I can say to you, that's not surprising.

[00:42:40] No, no, no, my, my, my wife I've somehow been blessed by, by just the kindest and best person in the world. I don't know what she's doing with me, but not only is Mara just admirable and kind and loving and affectionate and good in every way. But she was also really, really nice to my mother. She loved my mother.

[00:42:58] She thought my mother was just delightful. Uh, she, you know, having not grown up with her, having not suffered my neurosis about her, she was able to see my mother with fresh eyes. And what she saw was the person who, as you found out, all of my mother's friends talked about this incredibly kind affectionate, open person who was interested in everybody and loved everybody and always had time for everybody and was just an eager person, just loved people.

[00:43:26] And one, one of Mara's great gifts -this is my wife- is that she is not shy about expressing her feelings in the way that people like me who are cynical and ironic and cool, uh, try to be she, if she loves somebody, she will tell that person, Hmm. A lot. , you know, she'll go over at the top about how much she loves that person.

[00:43:47] And she was very, very affectionate towards my mother and my mother responded to that very positively. And in fact, I mean, one of the many things that I'm happy about, I have referred to some of the things that I regret in terms of how I treated my mother or how I talked to her or how I lost my patience with her.

[00:44:07] But one of the best things in a weird way I ever did for her was marry Mara, because not only did I give her as if it was like a gift for anyone else, but me, not only did I give her the daughter-in-law or a daughter-in-law that she. Absolutely deserved. And she had two others married to my brothers who were like that, who were very affectionate and kind.

[00:44:32] So I gave her a third wonderful daughter-in-law who could be like the daughter she always wanted, my mother had three sons. Not only did I give her that, but I also gave my mother the lived experience of seeing me happy again. Mm. Because, uh, as I, as you might have gathered from my very vague, uh, references, uh, I was not very happy in that marriage and certainly unhappy and devastated by its ending.

[00:45:00] Uh, so my mother, we began this conversation by my talking to you about how my mother always, uh, anticipated disasters and that become kind of overwhelming and difficult and oppressive. Like, no mom, everything's fine. Well, when my marriage fell apart, everything wasn't fine. And there was no way of hiding it.

[00:45:22] I mean, it's one thing when you like have a cold. Or you sprained your ankle and you don't wanna tell your mom about it, cause she's gonna be constantly, uh, asking you about how's your ankle. And I'm saying, this is fine. I'm fine. Nothing happened, mom. Fine. I'm fine. Well, that's one thing. It's another thing to try to hide or deny the fact that your entire life is exploding.

[00:45:41] Yes.

[00:45:42] **Dana:** You tried though. You still tried. No, no.

[00:45:45] **Peter:** I mean, there was really way, no way. There was really, really no way. And what happened was, and this will come as no surprise to have anybody I think is that when the moment came or moments, really my mother rose to the occasion, right. She handled it because she had been practicing her whole life for a disaster.

[00:46:06] And so when the disaster came, she was great. She was supportive and nonjudgmental. I mean, there were so many things she could have said to me. like, why did you ever marry that person in the first place? Or I knew you were just being a fool, like I told you. So, like I told you so, or a thousand other things.

[00:46:26] Yeah. Or, or any level of judgment, believe me, I was busy doing that to myself, but she didn't, she was incredibly supportive. And so she and my father and the rest of my family lived through this with me. And then I was able to give her, I mean, I'm grateful for her too, but I was able to give her a happy ending.

[00:46:48] And so when you look at that picture that I posted, you know, a lot of people say, oh my God, the way she's looking at you, she's so proud of you. She loves you so much. That's true. She was very proud of mm-hmm me. If you listen into her in any context, you would quickly find out who her son was and maybe ask if you were a fan.

[00:47:04] Uh, but what

[00:47:05] **Dana:** you're really seeing and then ask how I was and then ask how I was. So she would eventually get there, but you might do that

[00:47:10] **Peter:** first. What she would do is you'd say, oh yeah. So, oh, tell me about yourself. Oh really? Oh, you live in Traverse City. That's nice, Michigan. Michigan's nice. And then she'd work her way around to it.

[00:47:18] Did they have public radio in Michigan? They do. They do. They do. They do. The point I was gonna make is what you're seeing in that face, in that picture is, is those things she loved me and she was proud of me and she was happy for me, but she was so happy that what had happened to me. Hmm. I had arrived at a happy ending.

[00:47:35] I had arrived at the kind of, of life and marriage, especially with the kind of wife that she had always wanted for me. One of my mother's lines, one of her catch phrases. Her entire life was, I only want you to be happy, which we would grumble and say, well, if you also want it to be happy, stop calling me every day to ask me what's wrong.

[00:47:55] But she meant it. She really did. She only wanted for all of us to be happy and she knew that I finally not only was, but would be for the foreseeable future. And I think that's what you're seeing. That's the particular specific kind of joy you're seeing in her face.

[00:48:10] **Dana:** And then you made her another, another grandmother or she's another grand baby.

[00:48:14] And then I gave her a grandchild. Yeah, another grandchild.

[00:48:15] **Peter:** And that's bitter. That's a little bitter because we gave her a grandchild, which she never believed me. She, uh, she could, would never turned down another grandchild, but Elliot, our son. Was born in November 2020 when... Right before the vaccines were available.

[00:48:31] So, so my mother missed out on a coming and visiting with Mara while she was pregnant and taking her to buy things for the baby. And she missed out on being at the hospital when the baby was born and she missed out being there, but she did get to meet Elliot. We have a couple of pictures because she just insisted, as soon as my parents got their vaccine in the spring of 2021, they flew out and they spent four or five days with us and they got... and we had pictures of her holding six month old Elliot and being very happy. And then sadly, she never saw him again, because it was only a few months after that, that she became suddenly ill and died. Yeah. And I say, it's bittersweet because yes, she did get to meet Elliot. But the sad thing is, oh man, she'd be so happy.

[00:49:10] She'd be so excited to see the pictures of him. Mm-hmm and FaceTime with him and to see how he's doing and to have a new baby grandson to bounce in her knee and all those other things. And we're, we are every now and then time, we probably will forever, but we certainly do it like once a week. We or we look at Elliot doing something cute and we say, oh, his Safta would've loved.

[00:49:32] She called she was called Safta, which is, uh, a Jewish way of a Hebrew wave of saying, grandma, I've heard it. I would like would loved this. So it's soft. So sad that Safta isn't here for this Safta Safta or Savta. Uh, and that's sad, but that's life, but she at least got to meet him. That's good.

[00:49:47] **Dana:** What do you like about being a dad?

[00:49:49] Like what do you think you're really good.

[00:49:51] **Peter:** Oh, that's a laden question. Um, what am I good at? I'll tell you what, I'm really good at what advantage I have as a father that most fathers don't, especially fathers of young children. I've done it before. One of the weird things about having children. Do you have, you don't have children?

[00:50:07] No, no kid by choice. Yeah. This is something that everybody talks about that you, you, you or your wife gets pregnant or you get pregnant and you go to the hospital and you have this baby, and then they just hand you the baby and send you home. Good luck. Yeah. And you're like what? The fu-, what? You just give them to me.

[00:50:29] And I'm just supposed to like, keep this thing alive. You have no idea. No idea. And, and people have made various jokes over the years that there should be like some sort of driver's test, right? Like it's actually harder to

become a licensed driver than it is to become a parent of a human being. You have no idea what you're doing. None.

[00:50:47] And everybody tries to either recreate the benefits of their own parenting or avoid the mistakes and they never succeed. Right. Right. And so, and so I'm kind of living that joke. Like what if you had a chance to do it practice and then get better at it? So I'm better at it now than I was the first time.

[00:51:07] But the best thing about, about me as a father right now is I know exactly what's important and I know exactly what isn't important. I know what to worry about, and I know what not to worry about and what not to worry about is just about everything. Mm. Basically, things to worry about, uh, open flames falls from a medium or greater height.

[00:51:27] That's it? Nothing else don't worry about. That's it? That's it don't worry about it. That's it heard it here first..

[00:51:34] **Dana:** I was gonna talk briefly about this book, which again, one more time for the listeners, the Incomplete Book of Running, which came out a couple years ago, but I just recently read it. There's so much in that book that obviously you're talking about your love of running as like, you know, to lose weight, but then it just becomes right?

[00:51:48] As you talk about emo survival through this divorce and grief. Yes, yes, yes. Yes. And, and to me, as I was reading it, there's so many paragraphs and so many things that are actually about grief in general. Yes. And I wanted to read one section so that we could talk about it, but I also just want people to hear it, cause it's so beautiful.

[00:52:06] And it feels like what waves of grief feel like you started talking about when you started training for marathons at the end of the book and how the training for marathons has changed through your lifetime. And you said the aches began to fade and then disappeared. I started to look forward to each day's run because each day's run was getting easier.

[00:52:24] My running style under the evolutionary pressure of daily runs began to adapt instead of lowering my head and churning my legs to press through the end of a day's run. I tried to relax, stay upright and tread lightly on the pavement. I imagine my midfoot gently landing on the ground, lifting off a lighting again through miles of feedback and constant revision, unclenching my hands, lowering my shoulders, activating my calves and ankles.

[00:52:48] I started to change my running style to something that could last it wasn't beautiful, but nothing hurt. And that felt, uh, today as I'm, I don't know, like when will it stop hurting though? Sometimes. Yeah. Like grief I wanna say that someday it will end and my breathing will be better. And there are days where I lower my shoulders and I'm on a podcast with you and I'm talking about love and joy and legacy in our moms, but...

[00:53:15] will it ever stop hurting? You know, I just thought it was such a beautiful passage, but I wanted to talk about it with you as a metaphor and as a body of writing.

[00:53:23] **Peter:** Thank you. By the way, did you get the reference by the way? Cause one of the things I like to do is I like to make everything a quiz. Oh great.

[00:53:29] Um, there's a literary reference in that passage to a Kurt Vonnegut story called everything was beautiful and nothing hurt. No,

[00:53:36] **Dana:** I have not read it, but I'm writing that down anyway. Yeah. There's there you're everything a quiz. Hold on. So everything does everything in that book. Every paragraph is in a quiz.

[00:53:45] Do I have to go back to every second?

[00:53:47] **Peter:** No, but I really, I really love having extremely obscure literary references in everything. I fabulous. I don't know why. All right. Uh, because I like when I grasp them, anyway, uh, Yes about that. That's all true. In fact, it's been a while since I wrote that I'm listening to it going, wow, that sounds smart.

[00:54:05] You're like, wow.

[00:54:07] **Dana:** I sound really evolved, which you know, this is at the end of the book, but you got, you got here. I mean, you talk so much about moving through the pain and the pressure and you've gotta feel it and taking out your earbuds. I loved all the advice, even though I don't run. Yeah. But I remember one time when my mom died, somebody said, come to hot yoga with me.

[00:54:24] And I said, I don't wanna. And they were like, your mom just died. I promise you, you can do hot yoga. You can get through this. And I was like, mm. You know, and I did, I cried through it. Yeah. For many reasons, but I don't know something about that was so like, I circled it and I love it. So how do you feel hearing that today, besides that you're really smart or that you enjoy it?

[00:54:47] **Peter:** I feel like I'm a really smart guy and I have so much wisdom. It feels true. And in fact, in a weird way, I, I kind of forgotten it because one of the things. About being very happy as I am now. Mm-hmm is that you forget the skills you learned of dealing when you weren't. It's like people who've been in combat for a long time.

[00:55:09] The, they forget what it's like when they're living in peace. And I've been doing that for a while. So, I mean, what's interesting to me is like the entire book is about how much to my surprise, this somewhat pointless hobby of mine, which was to run long distances slowly ended up being a very, very useful training for a very difficult life experience.

[00:55:34] And the things I learned from running that I was able to apply to this very different situation. Some of which in fact, maybe the core of which you just quoted and that's really true. And yet at the same time, I'm also listening to that going. Yeah, it's been a while since I've had to think like that. Hmm.

[00:55:51] You know, I mean, lemme put it this way. The last thing that I had to go through. That was difficult so that I had, so it's so difficult that I had to break it down into segments and think about just getting through each segment with some level of grace so that I could, uh, successfully tackle the next was a week in Miami, in August.

[00:56:17] I mean, that really sucked. Right, right. But that's what I'm dealing with now. Yeah. You know, I just don't have to think in those terms about like, oh my God, how can I possibly survive this? Well, Peter you've survived, marathons, apply your lessons. So you know that, and so it's weird. I mean, I, I wrote the book because I honestly hope that the lessons I learned are applicable to other people and I have been told that they are, and I'm really grateful to hear that.

[00:56:44] Yeah. Because what's the point of like learning anything, if you can't help other people through that, you can't use it? Right. But I also hope that I never need to apply those lessons again. And so far, knock on, stand down. Here's some wood I'll never have to.

[00:56:58] **Dana:** You said that running has given you a habit of hope too.

[00:57:02] Mm-hmm how has it given you a habit of

[00:57:04] **Peter:** hope? Because, well, it's funny because every day is different. I was about to say, because there's always the hope that you're gonna get better,

but I wrote that as a younger man. I don't think that's true anymore. There.... there's always the hope. Whenever you set out on a run, you never know quite what's gonna happen.

[00:57:23] Uh, and every time you strap on your shoes and you go for a run, uh, it's an invitation to the universe to like give you something good. You know, , uh, maybe this is just gonna be the greatest one. Maybe I'll come across something amazing. Maybe I'll feel better today than I have in weeks. And it's also an expression of hope for the future, cause you're taking care of yourself.

[00:57:42] I mean, the reasons I run have changed significantly since I started running is certainly even since I wrote the book. You know why I run now primarily, uh, so that I can live long enough to see my son graduate from high school. There you go. I am an old man. My son is going, let me think he was born in 2020.

[00:58:04] So that means when he graduates in high school, it will be 2038. And I will be 73 when that happens. Mm-hmm and I wanna make sure that I am going to be healthy and uh, least able to walk into the auditorium to sit there without assistance. So that's an expression of hope. Yeah.

[00:58:26] **Dana:** That's hope.

[00:58:27] **Peter:** Yeah. Not even talk about it was wedding for Christ's sake.

[00:58:32] **Dana:** Well, I've brought you here today to play a game. We like to call wait, wait, do tell me your mom's name. but seriously, Peter, I ask all my guests at the end of my interviews to tell me their mom's name and how they're feeling about her today. What's coming up for you emotionally after this call with me sitting in your home.

[00:58:53] I'd love to hear it.

[00:58:53] **Peter:** I'm staring out the window. Cause I had to think about it.

[00:59:00] My, my mother's name was, uh, Reeva Scholnick Sagal. What's terrifying is that, uh, I don't remember her middle name from before she got married. I find that bad. Although I used to know able, I'm sure I'll think of it as soon I hang up and I feel kind of bad about that. How do I feel about my mother after having this conversation?

[00:59:19] I'm really interested in this forgiveness thing that you've mentioned. It's an interesting idea. I'm certainly gonna Google that when we get off the line. Let's see what I can learn more about this forgiving oneself. Honestly, didn't think that was possible. I didn't know. Nobody told me about this.

[00:59:33] **Dana:** There's that...there's that clever masking you do.

[00:59:36] **Peter:** There it is. Yeah, there it is. You know, this is, this is what I think. I think that what I'm gonna focus on if only for some self-preservation is what we talked about toward the end of our conversation, that photograph and how happy I ended up making her.

[00:59:56] And in the end, as I said, that's all she really wanted from me really in the end, all she, "all I want from you is to be happy." Well, turns out she was telling the truth. And by finally arriving at that place with the help of my wife, uh, I did right by her. So I'm gonna feel good about that.

[01:00:32] **Dana:** Thank you Peter for taking the time after having COVID and being away from your show to talk to me. I so appreciate it. And thank you to Peter's assistant Misty for all her scheduling support and to miss Mara Sagal for making this happen in the first place. You're great. And thank you to New Leonard Media, a family owned recording studio in Traverse City, Michigan for letting me do my interview in their studio because while surprise, I live up there now, so more on kayaking and wineries, another time, but New Leonard Media, they're awesome people.

[01:01:03] And they provide audio and video support to leaders of positive change. And the studio is owned by, uh, a man named Mark whose dad has passed away and he named the studio after his dad. So yeah, I felt like I was in the right place to discuss maternal loss. You could find out more at newleonard.com and as I mentioned, you can find a link to Peter's book, *The Incomplete Book of Running* in our show notes.

[01:01:25] So, you know, I was nervous for that interview. I mean, I would be lying to all of you if I said I was completely at ease and I was confident in feeling myself, as I logged online for this interview, I'm a human being. I have anxiety, imposter syndrome, nerves, and doubts, just like anybody else. I just deflect a lot of it with sass.

[01:01:44] I had questions prepared for Peter. I had notes typed out. I had his book next to me, and I'd been thinking about this conversation for a while. And I also knew that Peter is a professional host himself, and he's a great storyteller.

So I really didn't have to worry. It was gonna be great. And after the interview I logged off and before I could even take a deep breath or be proud or happy that this conversation just happened.

[01:02:07] I started questioning everything. What I said, what I didn't say was I good enough? Did I get what I wanted? Did he like me? Can I use this conversation for my show? Should I even have a show? Is this show garbage? Like it just, it just went on from there. and I realized that this obsession with perfection with already criticizing myself after I'd done something challenging and new was never gonna serve me.

[01:02:33] And guess who also did that a lot? Ding, ding, ding, you guessed it. My mother and hey, maybe your mother does too. I don't wanna immediately berate myself or question myself at every turn. I need to be able to just be in the moment, do the best I can let it not be perfect. And at the end of the day, be proud of myself and tell myself good job.

[01:02:57] As Peter might say, I think the word you might be looking for is kindness. After I looked up forgiveness, I looked up kindness as well. And one of the main ways you can be kind to yourself is to set realistic expectations for yourself in any given situation. And if I'm gonna use the buzz words around breaking generational trauma, then I should have gotten off the mic and said out loud to the empty room.

[01:03:21] Dana, you did your research. You were yourself and you weren't a jerk. I'm proud of you. You did the thing and you did it scared. Good job. I wish my mom had spoken to herself with so much more kindness had told herself it's okay. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be everyone's friend. You don't have to be thin.

[01:03:44] You don't have to be the smartest person in the room. You don't have to be funny. You don't have to be the best wife, mother, daughter, teacher, and neighbor in the whole world. You just have to be. You're doing great mom. Oh yeah. Well maybe, maybe I should have said that to her more. Maybe she needed my validation and I, I didn't give it to her enough or, or tell her that I thought she was see right there.

[01:04:09] Like ugh like see what I did there. Yeah. Yeah. Kindness, forgiveness for her and for myself, look it up. Kindness, forgiveness, try it out.

[01:04:28] I'll do the same.

[01:04:51] **Dana:** The second season of, I Swear on My Mother's Grave Podcast would never be possible without our editor, Amanda Roscoe Mayo, our music composer, Adam Ollendorff, our graphic designer and illustrator Meredith Montgomery, and our copywriter, Rachel Claff. Thanks as well to Tony Howell and Austin Heller for all their work on the website and to Heather Bodie for her emotional, spiritual, social, and physical well, for, for all the help.

[01:05:15] Thank you. And to all of you, thank you for listening, subscribing, reaching out and just being a part of this community. I'm so grateful you're here. And if you haven't signed up for our newsletter, you can do so at our website, which is danablack.org. You can hear all about this incredible season and some upcoming live events.

[01:05:33] We're curating just for you. I hope you'll come back, come back, come back. Don't leave me like my dead mom. You know what I mean? Come back.

[01:05:42] Talk to you soon.