

Molly Chanson Interview

MollyChanson.com

Doug: Hey everybody, this is Doug with Emotional Affair Journey. Thanks for listening today. I've got a great guest this morning. It's Molly Chanson, and Molly has a website appropriately called molychanson.com. Molly, how are you doing today?

Molly: I'm great. How are you?

Doug: I can't complain one bit. Thanks for asking. I know you're up in the Wisconsin area. Is that correct?

Molly: I am. It's still summer here a little bit.

Doug: It won't be for long.

Molly: Right.

Doug: I appreciate you joining us today. You had written an article for a blog a few weeks ago, and you and I kind of connected a little bit as far as you agreeing to talk with me. I really appreciate that. I want to kind of get into your story a little bit.

Molly has bit of an interesting story. She suffered from infidelity. How long ago was it, Molly?

Molly: It was about five years ago now.

Doug: We're going to talk a bit about that and what you've done since then to kind of help yourself heal and move on from it. Does that sound good?

Molly: Sounds great.

Doug: Awesome. With that said, if you could just share some of your story with respect to being betrayed, and we'll go from there.

Molly: Sure. I had been married for ten years. I started suspecting that my partner was having an affair. I did all the digging around and searching. I asked him and he said no. I felt really crazy because I kept looking for all this proof and wasn't able to trust myself and trust him. The more I searched and didn't find anything, I really started to feel crazy. So it was a lot of putting on me, self-blame and kind of wondering what was wrong.

At that time, I started doing yoga again. I was 37. I had a yoga practice since I was 15. My mom taught me. I kept going back. I remember really not knowing why I liked it, but I liked it and did it. Especially in Wisconsin, there weren't a lot of opportunities to do yoga. It wasn't really around when I was young. But I found some teachers and classes and kept up my practice. It was really difficult. I liked it better than exercise. It was my favorite type of exercise and I kept doing it for that reason.

When I was so unsettled in my marriage and what was happening, I started doing yoga again as a way to have relief and peace, and I didn't really understand why, but I went back to the practice and it turned into a spiritual and healing practice at that point. As much as it was still a form of exercise, for me, because of what I was going through personally, it really became a ritual of self-care and a healing practice, and a way for me to learn how to trust myself, learn how to feel stronger.

I think when your husband is lying to you, maybe there's gaslighting going on or you feel crazy, all of these topics that you cover so well on your blog, at the time the person is going through it, there's a lot of confusion and you don't understand all those things. Yoga helped me to really become stronger as a person and regain a sense of my identity.

So when I did find out, eventually I did find e-mails and the proof I was searching for, then I went through the process of dealing with that, and in the end we decided to get divorced. It was shattering, and I'm really glad I had my yoga practice at the time, because without it, I'm not sure where I would have gotten that strength to get through.

Doug: Right. Absolutely. So you said your marriage didn't make it, and then you're also now a single parent.

Molly: I am. We coparent, so we have shared custody. We have a really great relationship. It's taken a lot of therapy and a lot of effort, but we have maintained a good coparenting relationship. We have two boys.

Doug: What would you say are some of the things that you kind of learned about yourself as you went through your recovery and healing process as a result of your ex-husband's infidelity? Or from the experience.

Molly: First, I learned that I'm a lot stronger than I knew. I think anytime we go through anything that we are forced to overcome, we realize that we're all stronger than we know and we think. We're all more capable than we give ourselves credit for. So I learned that about myself.

I learned that I could deal with ... I didn't picture my life this way. I pictured being married for the rest of my life, and it was kind of this big sigh of relief. "Oh, I don't have to worry about being alone or dating, I'm just here forever." So things didn't work out that way and it forced me to put myself first, which I hadn't done for a long time, it forced me to ask what I really wanted, and it forced me to make decisions on my behalf, which I wasn't used to doing.

Overall, it made me learn more about myself, and also that my identity and self-worth aren't wrapped up in someone else's actions or even in the appearance of how something looks on the outside. If the marriage had been wonderful and nothing had happened, and you have the marriage, the house, the kids, the career and the stuff, that doesn't define you either.

On my healing journey and with the yoga and doing more training, becoming a yoga instructor, learning more about yoga philosophy and the spiritual side versus just the physical side, all those things that we think are part of our identity but they aren't really who we are at our core.

Doug: Great. Did you just kind of come to all these revelations, if you will, through yoga and through that practice, or was it a combination of things? You

mentioned therapy, so you did some therapy, and I imagine you probably read a bazillion books and things like that as well. So it's kind of a combination of a lot of different things, I assume.

Molly: Oh my gosh, yes. That's such a good question. And yes, of course, it was a combination of so many things. My house and my car, I had self-help books all over the place and I was reading like crazy. The therapy was a big part of it, and I still see my therapist once a week. I've been through a few different therapists, but I still do it.

And then of course, the yoga, but when you asked that question, the other piece that was really big to me was writing. I guess I was always a writer or drawn to it. I can think back when I was young. But I never did it. It was one of those things about myself that I just put aside, ignored or didn't think about much.

After I found out about my husband's affair, I had this really strong desire to write. I started journaling and writing. I signed up for a writing class in Madison, which is a city near me in Wisconsin, and I wrote a book which I'm working on getting published now.

Doug: Nice.

Molly: That first year and a half of not having my husband anymore, him moving out, us going through the divorce, I was feeling really lonely. It was precious time because I wrote. On the weekends, I was alone and without my kids—because we share them—I wrote. And I wrote every day.

So a lot of the insights that I have come through my writing and my yoga together, and that's why now I have an understanding of that power of the combination of yoga and writing, and now I lead retreats that use yoga and writing as a combination of tools to gain insight about yourself and to heal and overcome things. That's been a wonderful gift that has come out of all this.

Doug: Yeah. I'd seen on your site, I think it was the blog about when your son left the bathtub running or something like that, that it fell on your journal. So I know

that you had worked with journaling, and I know that's an important thing and it can help. I think most people really need to do it.

Whether you're the faithful person or the unfaithful person, I think it's important to journal so you get those thoughts out on paper, because I know a lot of times you can think things, and if you don't write it down, you may forget, even if it's some sort of revelation about yourself or whatever. I think it's helpful to dig deep and investigate into some of those feelings and thoughts that you're having and write those down for future reference.

I don't know if you've gone back in time and reread a bunch of your journaling and stuff, but I imagine that's had some influence on what you do and how your healing has transformed over the years.

Molly: Yes. It's scary to look back, in a way. And it's scary that I have all these journals and when I die, everyone's going to find these and think that I'm insane if they read any of them. Like, "What was wrong with her?"

But no, it's healing to write it and get out, like you said, those thoughts and feelings, no matter how ridiculous it sounds or how stupid you feel, to just put it on the page. And then, yeah, to look back, you really can see. As you know, it's hard to see our progress because healing is so slow and cumulative. It takes both time, action and effort. When you have your journal to look back on, you really can see, "Wow, I've come really far." And then that's motivating to keep going.

Doug: Right. Exactly. It gives you a reference point, and like you said, how much you have improved or gained in knowledge, or whatever it is you're doing. That's good stuff. And then what gives you the inspiration to write? Do you just sit down every day and start writing, or does some sort of event have to happen that gives you inspiration? How does that work?

Molly: When I started writing and journaling, I would just write what was on my mind that day. I would do a meditation, and then kind of ask my heart and myself what's going on right now today, what do I need to know today? And then I would journal a little bit around that and get more clarity, because sometimes during the meditation, it's not in words, it's more like a feeling.

And then, a really helpful thing I tell my clients who want to start writing. When I took my writing class, what the instructor told us and the way I do it now is to write from pivotal experiences. And this can be your whole life. So maybe it was, I wrote about the day I found the e-mail, because that was so lifechanging. I wrote about what happened, how I found them, and then I wrote about all the emotions and sensations that were happening as I was reading them and having this obviously lifechanging, pivotal experience.

And then as you're writing about something like that, you learn things. Your soul and your subconscious will write things that you didn't maybe plan or intend. It's not like you go into it with an outline, like school or something. It's more like spiritual writing.

And then I've gone back, and you can pick moments from your childhood that maybe you haven't thought about. I have this memory of laying on a hill near a creek and I was looking at the clouds. We all have those memories that just stick out for some reason when we think of our childhood.

So I started writing about that and as I was writing, more comes back. So I had more memories of where I was, why I was there, who was with me and what I was thinking when I was laying on the hill. I was just starting a school year at a new school, and I think I was nervous because we had just moved to a new town.

So all these things came back. Writing is that way. you take a memory or an experience that touched you, that your body remembers, and you'll get back in touch with that too. Your body holds the memories even if your brain isn't actively thinking about them. And when you're writing, the same thing happens where more will come up. I think our stories share so much insight about the human experience and all of our fears, insecurities, core beliefs and things that we carry with us but we don't understand how they're affecting us today because they're so embedded in our past.

Doug: Right. That's great, and I think that's helpful for people. Did you do a lot of journaling when you were going through the divorce and what led up to the divorce, all that sort of stuff, or did it start afterwards?

Molly: It was definitely during all of that. And actually, now that I think about it, it started before. It started before I found the e-mails, before I knew about the affair and the divorce had started, kind of in conjunction with my yoga practice where I was just like, "Something is wrong, I don't know what to do."

Doug: It was your gut feeling at that time?

Molly: It was my gut feeling saying, "Start journaling," because I knew it made me feel better. Every time I did it, I felt better, so I kept doing it.

Doug: Did you do it every day?

Molly: Every day, yes, and I still do.

Doug: I know journaling helped Linda quite a bit. I don't think she's really gone back to read a lot of them, and I don't know that she wants to at this point, but I can tell you that during the process, it was very helpful. If nothing else, it helped her to organize her thoughts, maybe helped her get a little bit of courage to approach me on something or ask me a question, or confront me or something, that sort of thing. It does work, and I encourage anybody out there who's considering it, or poopooing it, to give it a try. It'll be helpful.

Let's transition a little bit to the actual yoga aspect, because I know a lot of people maybe have a misconception about yoga. I know I did when I first did it. I haven't done it in a while. I think I told you that the last time we chatted. But Linda and I did it for several months a couple of years ago. I think going into it, we thought it was more like an exercise. We wanted to maybe help to alleviate some muscle soreness, joint soreness, all that kind of stuff that's just a fact of life, especially when you're in your 50s.

It worked from that respect. It was a beginning class, so I have to admit I never really got into the spiritual aspect and the mind aspect of it, although at the end of each session, we would do a little meditation, which I always found enjoyable.

So, kind of walk me through, if you will, without getting too involved. I know it's a pretty involved practice. But what does yoga do, what's involved with a typical

session, and how can it help somebody heal from trauma, betrayal, and that sort of thing?

Molly: Sure. And yes, most people start going to yoga because they have an injury or they're feeling sore, and yoga helps with that, obviously, a lot. And then you walk out of the class and you're like, "I feel better. I wonder why. Not only do I feel better physically in my body, but my day today was easier. I wonder if yoga had anything to do with that." So you come at it with this sense of curiosity because you start to notice.

Yoga isn't just the body and the poses. Another big part of yoga is the breath. This is where the real power comes in. You brought up misconceptions about yoga, and one really big one that keeps people away from it, unfortunately, is that you have to be in really good physical shape or you have to have a certain body type, you have to be able to do all the poses. If you go to a beginner's class or you tried for a few times and you're not mastering it or you don't feel very good at it, then you stop going.

But the truth is that even if you had a body that for whatever reason couldn't do any of the poses, yoga is breath. Our breath controls our nervous system, and it controls our stress response and our feeling of safety. For example, for a person who's gone through trauma, the brain kind of stays in this fight or flight mode, like they're still experiencing the trauma even though the trauma is no longer happening.

So there's been a lot of research and things done that have proven that when you regulate the breath through—in yoga, it's called pranayama, but it's really just either lengthening the breath or controlling the breath, or quickening the breath, or even just sitting and focusing on your breath.

When you do this, it immediately triggers your brain and your central nervous system to calm down, get out of that fight or flight mode, and it tells you that you are safe, so your body will feel more relaxed, you feel less anxiety. That's why you immediately feel calmer after you sit for a few minutes, especially at the end of a

yoga class where you've fatigued your physical body a little bit and then you come back to the breath and it brings your fears and anxiety way down.

That's a really basic way to explain the effect of the breath, and then beyond that, when we're talking about not just feeling safe but recovering from trauma and getting a good sense of our own identity, who we are, the breath is really powerful in accessing stuck memories.

There's a book I mentioned in my blog post called *The Body Keeps The Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, and it's phenomenal if anyone's interested in learning more about this in detail. His theory is that our body and our **souls [? 23:33]** hold our trauma, and not only that, but they hold our beliefs about ourselves.

For example, if we're talking about infidelity, whether it's the person who cheated or the person who's been cheated on, obviously, both of those human experiences bring up a lot of core beliefs about ourselves and who we are. So with yoga and the breath, we can access those core beliefs, those traumas—if you can call them that—that are stuck in our bodies, stuck in our souls, and your body can release them physically through the poses. You might release something and not know that it's been released. Maybe you just have some blocked energy there that needs to come out, and a certain pose and a big exhale, it went.

Maybe it needs to be peeled back a little, it needs a little more effort and work to undo, and you start to access your truth, really. All these things that you think about yourself, like, "I'm a horrible person, I'm a liar, I'm a cheater," or, "I'm a victim, I'm unworthy of love, no one's ever going to love me." All these things we tell ourselves, yoga kind of puts a spotlight on all of that. And then we ask ourselves, "Wait, is this really who I am? Is that true, or have I just behaved this way and I can change it?"

Doug: Great. That's good. For instance, I'm a betrayed spouse and I'm suffering from a trigger or something like that, can I use the practice of yoga or any of the benefits of yoga to help with that?

Molly: Absolutely. I myself was triggered a few weeks ago and did this, used my practice. When we're feeling triggered, our brain is going into this stress

response, and then our body is reacting to that, and that's why we're feeling anxious, flustered, confused, and maybe we're paralyzed, we don't know what to do next, or maybe we feel like we need to run around.

What we need to do is come back to our body and our breath. And yoga obviously does both of those things. So if we can't sit still and focus on our breath, we can do a few yoga poses. We can ground ourselves. We can walk, like walking outside. Doing a walking meditation and focusing on our breath does wonders for calming ourselves down. I don't know if that's answering your question. It always sounds so simple when I talk about this. "Oh, you're having a bad day. Just breathe." And everyone's like, "What? That's dumb."

Doug: Right. "What the heck?"

Molly: There's more to it than that, but yes, a few minutes of controlled breathing or yoga pranayama is going to make a huge difference.

Doug: Yeah. And also, as you know, you can't really control triggers and you may be in a situation where you can't just bust out a yoga move at that point in time. So you need to have some other kind of technique to be able to calm yourself down and get away from that. So certainly, the breathing can be helpful.

I've done some meditation over the years and I still meditate, and that's a big thing in meditation as well, the breathing and coming back to the breath, focusing on the breath. It kind of helps you calm down and maybe clear your mind a little bit. Is that kind of what you're talking about?

Molly: Exactly. And you brought up a great point. The breathing, you can do anywhere. You can do it in your car. It really doesn't matter. Go into a corner, a bathroom, or somewhere. And there are techniques for grounding yourself, which I love, that always bring me right back and give some relief. They really give relief, which we need when we're being triggered.

Doug: Absolutely. Very good. Thanks for that. That's good advice. In reading your site, I've read several articles on your blog. You're a great writer, by the way.

Molly: Thank you.

Doug: I noticed that you talk a lot about things other than just yoga. You talk about being true to yourself, finding inner strength, letting go of fear, even taking time to have fun and stuff like that. It's kind of self-care focused. Would you agree to that?

Molly: Yes.

Doug: We talk a lot about self-care, and there's a million different things you can do for self-care. How, in your opinion, do you feel that's beneficial for those who have experienced infidelity.

Molly: My gosh. That's a great question.

Doug: Loaded question?

Molly: Yeah. I think being on my side, the person who experienced the infidelity, I had a complete loss of self, looking back. I would have done anything to change what was in front of me. When I say a loss of self, I also mean a loss of faith. Not tied to religion—if it is, great, but a loss of just kind of faith in something outside of me.

And the combination of those things, I wanted to control my situation and I thought that it was my fault that it had happened, because I thought it must have been something that I did wrong or wasn't able to control, because I didn't get the outcome that I wanted.

So when we're living in this sort of terrible place of trying to control our circumstance and people around us, in our relationships—I was really trying to juggle all the balls. I'm a mom, I'm a wife, I've got little kids, I want a happy, healthy marriage, I'm trying to keep everything up in the air. And in the meantime, I have no idea who I am, because I'm just trying to manage this chaos.

So for me, self-care and learning more about who I am became so key to me being able to move forward, whether it would have been to stay or to leave like I did, or whatever your choices are, we can't make the best choices for ourselves unless we know what we want, and we can't know what we want if we're just trying to control outcomes. It has to come from a place deep inside of us first, and

then our outcome will match our deepest knowing and desire. But if we're controlling the people, the places, the things on the outside first, it's the opposite way to go about it, if that makes sense.

Doug: Sure. It's basically kind of learning how to control the things you can control and let go of those that you can't, in a lot of ways.

Molly: Right, and still be okay.

Doug: Right. Did you find that that whole process and learning what you learned empowered you?

Molly: Definitely. It's such a gift. I am most grateful for that, and even to my ex husband for me going through this. I have never felt more empowered. For that, I'm really grateful, because I never knew I had it in me. So, that can come out of this, and I think for both people. I love how your blog covers both sides and both people's experiences.

Whenever you overcome something and you're healing, or you're in recovery from something, the gift in all of it is this feeling of empowerment.

Doug: Right. Very good. Wrapping things up just a little bit here, what would you give a person who's going through this in the way of advice? A couple nuggets that you think are important for a person who is struggling from their spouse's infidelity, based on your past experiences or what you've learned since then.

Molly: I think reaching out for support is huge. Whether that is trusted friends and family, depending on what you have available to you, if that's a professional—I really believe strongly in therapy, so I think a professional therapist or counselor is a great resource—however you can get support. I felt support from my yoga community and from my writing group.

So, sharing it. And when you get support, it does a couple things. First of all, you're not alone, and that's really important. Second of all, sharing your story and experience gets rid of this really ugly thing that's like the big secret. "I'm ashamed of this, I have to keep it a secret, I can't let anybody know." And you don't need to

go and flab it around to everybody, but some trusted people so that you don't have to carry the burden or the weight by yourself.

And that's why your blog is so great, because it gives people permission to share. And every time someone reads something, it's like, "Oh, she feels like me," or, "He feels like me." It's really healing.

So I think sharing your experience in the way of seeking support is the best thing you can do right away, not keeping it inside, not keeping it to yourself and not keeping it a secret, because that just adds to it.

Doug: Very good.

Molly: Obviously, my other recommendation is going to be yoga, and it's going to be listening to what you need in that moment, moment to moment. I remember having to go through every single day, sometimes every hour, of just, "What do I do next?" So that breath and yoga piece or just the breath and meditation, treating yourself extremely kindly and really being able to ask yourself, "What do I need to do right now to make myself feel better?" That would be my other piece of advice.

Doug: Great. Good stuff. Molly, I appreciate you taking time out of your busy day to talk with me for a little bit. Want to let people know how they can get in touch with you? If you could share your site and all that information, that would be awesome.

Molly: Sure. my website is mollychanson.com, and on there, I have all my offerings, my yoga membership, my writing retreat. And everything is virtual now, really, because of everything going on. So wherever you are, that's there.

And I am offering a new course this October called A Return to Self After Infidelity, and we will use everything I talked about today, the breath, the yoga. I'll go into more depth on concepts of grief, forgiveness, resilience, returning to your identity. There's a link on my site for that that they can see, and I'm looking forward to that. So, thank you for the interview.

Doug: No problem. It's a pleasure. I believe in what you're doing, and we try to talk a lot about self-care and stress a lot. And people that are going through this, whether you're the cheater or the one that's been cheated on, there's some skepticism about self-care. It's either, "Oh, it doesn't work," or, "I can't do it, I'm too much in a funk right now," or whatever the situation might be. But it's important.

And I know from my own experience, and certainly from Linda's, the newfound strength and empowerment that she received from the things that she did, it's life-altering. It really is. So I believe in what you're doing.

I also want to throw in that our yoga instructor was 85 years old. So you don't need to be a spring chicken who can put your legs behind your head or anything like that. So just throw that misconception out the window.

Molly: Right. Exactly. And talking about self-care, the worst thing that can happen is if you go to yoga and you feel worse about yourself. It's meant to be a compassionate, loving experience for your body and your soul. So no, it's not about being able to do all the poses and whatever. Whatever the ideas are that are spewed out at us all the time about yoga.

Doug: Yeah. And especially in the beginners class. You see some of these poses on YouTube videos or whatever, and it's like, "How in the world even do they even do that?" It's nothing like that. It's manageable for just about anybody in any type of physical condition.

Molly: Right.

Doug: Great. Well, Molly, thank you so much. I appreciate it. And again, everybody check out her website. Like I said, she's a great writer, she's got great articles on there that I think everybody will find useful. So, I appreciate it so much, Molly.

Molly: Thank you so much, Doug, and thank you for your blog. There's not many like it, really hardly at all, and I think it's such an important topic and really helpful for people. I'm glad to be part of it.

Doug: I appreciate that. Thank you. And we're glad to have you. Thanks so much. All right. Take care.

Molly: Okay. You too. Bye.

Molly has created a calming and healing 15-minute meditation for you. It can be downloaded here: [A Return to Self](#)