

## Chapter Six: Character Development

[Spoke audio logo]

JAN: Okay, so confession that's not really confession because this is my confessional, so you already know it - you know?

CARSON: Yeah

JAN: Yeah. So just like re-confession, um, I have realized that I have actually been - super brave about like: I'm going to make work and I'm braver as a writer than I am as a daughter, whatever. And over the past four years, the thing I run up against and smack my face into again and again is that I am still really afraid to look at my dad character and maybe make some calls about who he was, what I might've meant to him and what he may be means to me...

*[Audio of past interview drops under Carson PU]*

CARSON: Alright Carson here -

JAN: Jan here too -

CARSON: But mostly me, because I want to interrupt - I think we need to stop right here.

JAN: We don't even get to the sparkles this time.

CARSON: No no no, no questions, no theme song.

JAN: Radical edit from Carson McCain.

CARSON: We're stopping right now. So Jan and I always sit down in the booth and do a thing we call the pre-brief. The pre-brief is where we download all of our thoughts about what we think the episode might be about. All of our sort of fears about what we're gonna do. Usually that becomes part of the intro. So in this prebrief, we defined character development, what we thought it might be, you know looking at Janielle's dad as a full human being. What are his contradictions? What are the things he cared about? What are his motivations for doing things. Which as you might imagine could be really painful for Jan. So, in this prebrief, Janielle and I concocted a game, which as you also might remember is a way of protecting us from looking at the pain.

JAN: Us from pain.

CARSON: Yeah

JAN: The royal us.

CARSON: The royal us. The kind way to look at that

JAN: Mmm

CARSON: And that's why I don't think we can start this episode here. This episode hasn't been working, we've gone through several iterations of it.

JAN: Yeah we're on version 4 right now.

CARSON: It's not really working. And I argue that's because you weren't ready to look at your dad as a full character in this pre-brief. I think you were ready to look at your dad as a full character the next day. You texted me in the morning and said, can we hop in the booth first thing. We came here, it was just you and I, we sat down. And that's what I'm going to play for us. That's where I want to start this episode. Welcome to Untitled Dad Project. It's Chapter 6 Character Development.

*[Theme song]*

### **[AD BREAK 1]**

CARSON: To set the scene, we had finished the pre-brief on character development, and Janielle and I went home. Jan had some homework where she was supposed to pull out the uh, relevant papers so we could use them in our UDP artwork. And she was on a mission to find that birthday card-- the one that was labeled Dad/Rick. So the next morning, she asks to hop in the booth first thing--

JAN: --here I found this and I have been in a weird funk about it ever since. Okay. Open this up and read it please.

CARSON: Okay. So it's a blue envelope -

JAN: There's a little envelope inside and it says on the front it says -

CARSON: There's that there's a white envelope inside the blue envelope and it says, send me a picture wearing their results, um, with an exclamation point, uh, signed Rick.

JAN: And that was presumably inside there's was a card-like a gift card somewhere like to like the gap, I think.

And it was like a pretty large increment, like 100 bucks, which feels like so much.

CARSON: Oh yeah.

JAN: And because this was sent in 2006 - so it was when I was 16.

CARSON: Oh my gosh.

JAN: Yeah. So this is the last correspondence I have from him. So there's a note inside too that I -

CARSON: Janielle slash Carol, I sent this to your old address, lost the letter that you sent way before Christmas. They didn't forward it saying that the forwarding time had expired. Anyhow, Merry Christmas. Merry late Christmas Dad/Rick.

JAN: Okay. So it wasn't a birthday card. It was a late Christmas present.

And listen to that message. He's like working so hard to tell us that he didn't miss Christmas.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: Um, and then also, yeah, I have heard f - . I don't know why I remembered it as a birthday card cause cause it was really late Christmas. It was right before my birthday.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: So I guess I was thinking of it as that -  
But he like, I don't know, I'm feeling like I, I -- like do I remember everything wrong - because it wasn't my birthday, it was a - a late Christmas thing.  
And like, he sounds so like: oh my gosh, I would've gotten this to you earlier. Like kind of really considerate. Like that note sounds really considerate, right?

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: And then he says, send me pictures with the results. Which I don't remember ever doing and so like what if he was waiting to hear back from me, and I never responded to that. And that's why he stopped talking to me.

Like I never sent him photos cause that would have been like weird. This was a man I like. I don't think I had heard from him in many, several years at this point.

But I dunno.

Like what if in his mind this was like Mia Thermopolis and her distant dad who sends her presents every so often and everything's fine. And I never responded to his message and that's like why he went quiet for - and then died.

Um, I like, I feel like I'm crazy. I don't remember him caring, but this kind of sounds like he cares, right?

CARSON: It, it does. It sounds like, like, it sounds like he cared that you got this.

JAN: Yeah.

And I never responded -

CARSON: But I don't think that, that, I mean the thing that, the thing that I think we've said over and over, it's like, it's not your job. It wasn't your job. You deserved a dad who showed up even if you didn't send pictures, because it is kind of weird. It is kind of weird.

JAN: But here's - but that has a return address. It doesn't have his like condo or apartment number, but it has like the building number.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: And I guess I just hadn't realized like I had his building number. I just always thought he could come find me and he never did. But. I - I could have sent something back. I could have sent a thank you note, I could have, I guess I'm just wondering like did I flatten everything in my grief, like did I pdf everything down to a much simpler thing that is: my dad abandoned me and didn't care about me and didn't tell anyone about me, but did he, like, care about me and - and like kind of try to reach out in his way and that I never sort of reciprocated. And so he just eventually tapered off. Like -

CARSON: I mean I don't, I don't think so because the whole - what he says versus what he does. Right. Like he said, send me a picture of the results and he said, I wanted to get this to you before Christmas and I didn't. And um, you know -

JAN: Yeah -

CARSON: He doesn't really say he's sorry, but like he says, Merry Christmas and - But that doesn't change the fact that he still abandoned you.

JAN: Yeah.

CARSON: Like that, this was 10 years before he died.

JAN: Yeah.

CARSON: A grown man does not hold a grudge.

JAN: Yeah.

CARSON: Or shouldn't hold a grudge that you didn't send a photo of something you got at the Gap.

JAN: Yeah, I get -

Yeah.

Yes. Okay.

So if I'm thinking of him as a larger character, I guess I didn't realize that allowing for the fact that he might've also been like a kind of thoughtful sweet guy. Would also just hurt so bad.

I didn't think about that part or I didn't expect it.

Um, I didn't expect finding out or realizing that my might be kind of also capable of great love. Uh, would hurts so bad.

Why does that hurt so bad?

I guess cause it's something else I lost.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: Maybe I could have had like a fourth of a good dad. Instead of none at all.

Like maybe he wanted to know me too.

Why hadn't I thought of that till now.

What if he would have been thrilled to hear for me when I sent him an email.

What if he would've been so happy to know me before he died.

Why didn't I think of that?

I feel like it would have been easier if he was just an asshole.

Or maybe he was an asshole who really would have loved to hear from me.

I never responded or never reached out.

I wish so badly I would have tried something.

CARSON: I just, like when I read this I just wish he would have tried something.

Because, like I think everything you're saying is true and I think this does sound like a man who probably would have liked to know you, and maybe he would have been thrilled to get an email from you.

Um, but he's a man who Googled you and you're not hard to find.

JAN: Yeah. I'm not hard to find at all. I'm the only me on Facebook.

CARSON: Yeah. And I, I think I want to give validation to everything you're feeling because like it is an immense loss and an immense regret. And also like he might've been thrilled to hear from you, but he's still enough of a bad dad that he didn't take the initiative. And I think that was still his responsibility.

JAN: Yeah. I hear you saying that we don't need more blame in the story?

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: What I do think is useful is like maybe considering things about this man that I might've missed, I might've missed some stuff. Whole people are a lot more painful to reckon with than like concepts. And just flat out irresponsible narcissists are a lot easier to understand than like people who are capable of like putting this much thought into a little message. I also just like, can I figure out my story if I remember stuff wrong?

CARSON: Yeah. You can

JAN: But can I though?

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: What am I'm wrong about my own life and so many and what I've seen,

CARSON: I don't know that it... matters.

JAN: How so?

CARSON: Because just like we talked about with Robert and your mom, a story isn't what happens. It's how it happens.

JAN: Okay, so what, what: the card I might have misremembered but the how it impacted me, I remember

CARSON: Yeah,

JAN: Which is I felt like, oh this guy's popping into my life and he's doing it in a way that makes it seem like this is normal. When it wasn't. And I didn't ever know if he, if or when he was going to show up.

CARSON: Those things that you're saying right now, your experience of this is far more important to the truth of your story than the fact that this was an actual Christmas card, you know?

He also, he doesn't apologize in this note, he doesn't say sorry. He says this is what happened and anyway, merry Christmas.

JAN: Yeah. This card is like both super thoughtful and super invalidating. At the same time. It's both like I'm a thoughtful dad and also, slash - I'm not going to explain any of why I'm not in your life. You're welcome. Rick.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: The both and-ness of like being a person. People are so confusing. Like if you think someone's worthy of your attention at Christmas and they're giving a

gift and you think they're worth an explanation for why it's late. Why wouldn't you think they were worth telling people about or like talking to or explaining yourself to or making yourself known to. That's really confusing. I understand that his behavior doesn't dictate my worth. I just... find that disorienting. And I'm just a different kind of sad today. And I wish I had known him, and I wish he had known, made himself known to me.

*[music]*

CARSON: Janielle I think this is where we actually start. I think before maybe you wanted to play this game that would have protected you from the pain, but after I think you were ready to look at the painful parts, the parts that might have been good about your dad, that might have meant you missed out.

JAN: Yeah I thought of this interruption as a regression, like I turned back into this little creature that thinks they're responsible for their Dad's absence. But I don't think it was a regression, it was an integration, a word you've given me, of a new kind of loss, if you don't look at some of the good parts of somebody, some of the stuff that you missed - you're missing out on your real loss, but also um missing out on some potential gain.

CARSON: Let's take a quick break, we'll be right back.

**[AD BREAK 2]**

JAN: Now that I actually feel quite motivated to know my Dad as a multi-faceted character, the next hurdle is: that's really hard to do since I have such limited information about him, so few memories about him, and he's no longer alive. So we're going to rely on what other characters say about my Dad, and we're going to rely on the box of my Dad's things that I inherited after he died. And hopefully in words and objects we can get new dimensions on him. I want to start with the first interview I ever did with my mom actually, before we get to my dad's friend. Way before we ate grapes on my mom's couch or I'd talked to any experts. It was a month or so after my Dad's funeral, and I had not gone to therapy yet. I was hard core in coping-mode, and I had just decided to make something. And this is the first convo I properly recorded -

JAN: Okay can you hear me??

CAROL: Testing 1-2-3. Can you hear me?

“Properly” recorded is a loose term -- I had just bought mics on Amazon. And Carson, you hadn’t joined me yet.

CARSON: No.

JAN: So I just set them up myself.

JAN: This is the normal level we would talk. Just like talk talk talk.

CAROL: Talk talk talk talk talk.

JAN: And we went through a folder labeled “Carol Kastner” that was found in my Dad’s possessions - inside of it are a ton of cards sent from my mom, on baby-Me’s behalf:

CAROL: #1 Dad did we send that to him?

JAN: I need you to read this card because -

CAROL: Dad God sure must love you a lot ... to have given you someone like me.

JAN: Was that like the most passive aggressive thing you’ve ever sent?

CAROL: No, I didn’t mean it passive aggressively.

JAN: My mom swears that she didn't pick these cards and Bible verses passive aggressively. There was just a limited selection in the church bookstore.

CAROL: I don't even remember doing all this at all,

JAN: Look at all this - he saved every single one.

CAROL: It's just so. Yeah, it was just good to know. He saved it. The just man walketh in his integrity.

JAN: Every single one -

CAROL: It was so hard to find a card Janielle. So this one it was like, TADA, Happy Valentine’s Day to the world's best dad.

JAN: First giant dash of nuance I want to consider as we think about my Dad Character: There’s something in him that was compelled to keep all of these cards. What would you call that - a softness, a tenderness?



Whatever it is that wanted him to keep these cards in a manilla folder is maybe the same thing that wanted a photo of me in my Old Navy gift card purchases. There was some, some tenderness, some desire that made him save all this. Whatever that tenderness is, it is real, it is not bigger than his choice to not be in my life. But it is real. And it is complicated next to that choice.

CAROL: I just. Rick was just a, um - what do you say where there's... not a paradox, maybe a mystery. I can't - the word i'm thinking of - But Rick was kind of like a - a mystery to me. I think one time he said he was ashamed that he didn't have a job, so he would stay away. I don't know. I think that was part of it that he. Because he couldn't provide and he couldn't, he couldn't do it all. Um. What's her name? Um. She said Rick is the kind of person, if he couldn't do it all the way you wouldn't be where he wouldn't do it at all.

JAN: But just really funny though.

CAROL: He procrastinates though -

JAN: But then like, wasn't that exactly what we saw in me when like I was going to reach out to him, but I wanted to do it perfectly so I kept putting it off and I kept putting it off and I didn't want to like, you were like, it's father's day, reach out to him, I'm not just gonna call him on Father's Day. Like I want to send them like a really thoughtful email. And like I was like, don't worry, I'm gonna do. I'm gonna do it for like six months. But I didn't want to do it unless I could do it perfectly.

You know, I just, I just wonder if that perfectionism, if I got that from him -

CAROL: Perhaps.

JAN: Yeah

CAROL: Perhaps.

JAN: In a classical story structure you talk about a protagonist's "hubris", which is their "fatal flaw", usually almost always related to their pride. And I think my Dad Character and I have the same hubris. I know the desire for perfection and excellence that is so palpable in your body that when you screw up you're filled with all this shame that washes over you. So then you decide of course you have to fix it - but you want to fix it \*perfectly\* and excellently, and you'll fix it better and more thoughtfully later - and then it's later and then more later happens - and then so much time has gone by that you better fix it even \*more\* perfectly to make up for the time gone by - and you can't and the shame is eating you alive. And meanwhile there's just a person out there in the world - while you're in your shame

spiral of hoping you can eventually be perfect, they're just wondering like, where did you go? You just left me hanging. I know that exact feeling, well. And when I think about a thing I failed and hadn't fixed yet, like a text I haven't replied to and I know it's in my phone, and I remember it all of a sudden while I'm washing dishes. The shame that washes over me from like the back of my neck down into my belly and then it lodges back up in my throat. And I want us to imagine for a moment if that text message we hadn't sent was a human child. What might that have felt like for my dad, when he thought of me when he was washing dishes. And I know now that the freedom from all of that shame-cycle is not him being perfect and better later, it's in being completely honest about where I am now. But I did not know that then. My mom and I actually discuss what I would have said, and I am full-hubris, it would have been perfect you guys. It would have been noble, it would have been honorable, it would have been excellent.

JAN: The biggest regret I have is that he never, will never know that I wasn't angry at him. Like I had no anger towards him - I have a beautiful life and I have a wonderful family and I have amazing friends and I, I walked through the world. Glad that I exist in it. I don't walk through the world sort of believing that my life could have been better had this man had provided for me or been a part of my life, you know, it wasn't that at all and I just wanted to sort of take a weight off of him.

JAN: I want to like gently hug and throttle past me. Like she feels all this pain that she didn't let him off the hook. That seems so noble, doesn't it? I want to shake her and be like, we're not that noble. We have anger towards this man. Like, God bless. I believed that.

CARSON: Yeah, you did.

JAN: And I wasn't ready to forgive him. I still now am barely ready to forgive him. What was I thinking? You know what this is - I think this was me trying on a story. What if my story is: my life was fine without him, and everything was great, and I'm actually doing amazing you guys. But I do have this searing remorse and regret in my belly that's opened up and I don't know how to explain and it's going to swallow me all up - that must be remorse and regret that I didn't let him off the hook and I never sent - it's somewhere on that email. And so that's probably it.

CARSON: Yeah. I have deep pain. And it was that I didn't... tell him that I didn't have any pain.

JAN: Yeah. I can hear past Jan equating not being sad as being safer and better and nobler as if the anger and the sadness were something that we wouldn't even consider that we have because we're happy we have a wonderful life, right? Oh. And now I'm painfully aware that the whole point of my story is that a wonderful life can contain tremendous sadness and pain. Wow. That was the first draft of this story. Thank God we've been revising it.

*[music]*

JAN: One more nuance about my Dad character, and then we can move on from my mom -- I didn't apparently just inherit his hubris, I also got another quality:

CAROL: He had a beautiful laugh. He had a beautiful deep hearty laugh. And when you were like, gosh, you were just a few months old or something. This deep hearty laugh came out of you. And I'm like, gone. Oh my gosh. Sounded just like him.

JAN: There are a lot of things we're learning about the connection I have -- Jan character to her Dad character, that are maybe tricky and knarly and need some examining or conquering or whater. But when all that is said and done this is just a nice one for free. You inherit someone's pain, but you maybe also get their laugh. That part's nice.

*[music]*

CARSON: Let's take a break here for some ads. And when we come back, we're going to talk to one of Dad Character's friends about the Rick he knew.

**[AD BREAK 3]**

JAN: The next place I want to look to figure out "what other characters say about my Dad Character" is an interview I did with my Dad's friend Charley. He's an old sailing friend of my dad's. Charley's actually one of the people who

checked up on my Dad and realized that he had died at his apartment, and Charley's the person that cleaned out my dad's apartment afterwards, so I inherited my dad in a box because Charley went through all his stuff, apparently his apartment was floor to ceiling stuff, and sorted out what could be thrown away versus what might be sentimental, put it in a box, and gave it to me at a coffee shop. Charley's the only one of my Dad's friends that I interviewed. And it was such a big deal to me. It took me forever to email him, but I finally did and we sat down at my house - me pretty nervous and scared, him cool as a cucumber and really prepared:

JAN: I was trying to find the list of questions I sent you.

CHARLEY: Would you like me to give it to you because I brought it with me.

JAN: Did you print it out?

CHARLEY: I did, and I triple spaced it.

JAN: You're so prepared. I really appreciate that you took the time to do that, and took the time to meet with me. I know this is kind of an odd request, but I appreciate you being..

CHARLEY: Not really.

JAN: Thinking about that terror I felt has made me realize how much I've changed, since I sat down to do this interview with Charley.

I was so scared to talk to him because I now realize I wasn't just asking: What was my Dad like.

I was also asking all these questions underneath those questions:

Which were like: Can you give me any facts that can give me answers for why did he abandon me? And will any of these new pieces of information you have about him give me answers, or an explanation, or some kind of closure? And that's so unfair. I now realize that none of my Dad's friends can give me that. They don't have answers. They have a series of anecdotes, that contain within them information about my Dad Character. I was also afraid of sitting down with Charlie because I was terrified of that violent thing: my dad's friends' version of him as a great guy and their inability to acknowledge that he abandoned me. But I now no longer feel like it's a zero-sum game. Like here we are, four years into this, and I am real. And my pain is real. I am legitimate. His friends' narratives don't have the

power to invalidate mine anymore. Or make me any less real. And here I am, with the information I need to be able to hold a space for an earlier me. Who just thinks at any moment someone's gonna have an answer for her that could destroy her or could heal her. And no one has the answer, and there actually is no answer... she's just going to start to heal. Huh. What a small miracle. Anyways, here's the Charley interview.

But for real though, for real what I want to do is listen to this interview with Charley as a person who has information about my Dad... kind of no more no less. I also have all the stuff - my favorite of the stuff that Charley saved for me in a box of my Dad's things, so I thought we could go through them for information about my Dad Character. Or I guess we can call him Rick Character? We can just call him Rick.

CARSON: I think we call him Rick.

JAN: Okay the first thing about Rick. Rick was a sailor!!

CHARLEY: When we were sailing together....he worked to sail....really wonderful sailor....sailor....typical sailing type of stuff....

JAN: Charley talks so much about sailing. Unrelated questions, some of them deeply emotional to me - all lead back to sailing!

CARSON: Everything

JAN: What was something that you knew he would go on about if--?

CHARLEY: Well, aside from sailing, um,

JAN: Charley tells me about his late ex-wife, who grew really close to Rick through sailing. Charley would try to take his ex-wife out on his own boat, but she didn't like being bossed around by her husband, she'd say -

CHARLEY: Well you're not very good. She said, he's much better. He always wins. And I said, well, that's Rick I said, he's a good friend of mine, um, why don't you go talk to him, you can go sail with him. And she did and it was just the most perfect relationship. I mean, she was a sponge for learning and he was a great teacher and they had so much fun and they beat us all the time.

JAN: You get this picture of Rick as this precise, excellent, perfectionist who could command a ship and boss someone around but they wouldn't mind because they were killing it.

CHARLEY: And she, she'd laugh about it. In fact, he was so precise on all this stuff. And this boat is, is a very difficult boat to sell- to sail

JANIELLE: What kind is it

CHARLEY: A shields

JANIELLE: Shields

CHARLEY: one design. I mean, he's got a national championship in this boat, which is a big deal for somebody from a lake

JAN: So I've got this box full of his sailing trophies, and I don't know if I picked the most prestigious or valuable ones, but I picked out the coolest looking ones.

JAN: This one's a big sailor, The Old Man of the Sea 1981 Regata. He got fourth.....Rick Tears blitz crew 1970....1990 Shields Fall Regata, he got second. I would have been maybe 8-10 months old. I don't know anything, but the trophies are really cool.

CARSON: The trophies are really cool.

JAN: I went through and picked all the prettiest ones and now they're just sitting around my house. And if people ask me about them, I say Oh my Dad was a sailor and he won all of these. It's just kind of nice.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: The next thing I learned from Charley - Rick was fun. Charley's late ex-wife liked to get Rick and Charlie's friends all together -

CHARLIE: She was a collector of, as she called it, difficult entertaining men. Which Rick certainly fit into that category. And she, she liked to cook. So we used to get together pretty often during the week, and you know, she'd cook a roast or something like that, drink lots of wine. And we also smoked pot a fair amount.

JANIELLE: My Dad smoked pot.

CHARLIE: Oh yes.

JANIELLE: A lot??

CHARLIE: Well he would when he was with us.

JANIELLE: Oh my God. That's so great. Like what was he like when he was high.

CHARLIE: Oh he was hilarious.

JANIELLE: Oh really, how so?

CHARLIE: He christened the device Dr Bong.

JANIELLE: Okay.

CHARLIE: And we just, you know, I can still see him just coughing, you know, trying to keep up with Pat and stuff and it was just, it was a very, very happy thing.

JAN: And so, a dimensional snapshot of my dad, I just didn't think this was going to be a part of it just him with his buddies around a pot roast, smoking pot, having a, Oh, I hope they called it like a pot roast.

CAT: Ehhhh.

JAN: Ah, if not, that was a missed opportunity.

CAT: With Doctor Bong.

Yeah. He just seems like a kind of fun, a difficult entertaining man.

JANIELLE: How was my dad a difficult entertainment man?

CHARLIE: Well There was no lack of opinions in the group

JANIELLE: Okay

CHARLIE: And expressing them and you know, it was, this was not a bunch of shrinking violets.

JANIELLE: What was, um, my dad really passionate about or what, what was something that you knew he would go on about, if -

CHARLIE: Well aside from sailing? Um, the other thing was art, which always surprised me, very interested in all that. And he, in fact, when she and I came back to Dallas, he was always trying to get us to go to various art things. And that's kinda when I found out about, about his mom.

JAN: So his mom, Ruth Tears, is like a kind of famous oil pastelist. Isn't that cool?

CARSON: I love it

JAN: So you can see here this: do you see "Jenny"? Oil? By Ruth Tears? So this is a tiny picture of this giant painting I inherited. It's not a painting, it's a vinyl replica of a painting. Cause it got, it got inducted into the permanent collection at the Dallas Museum of Art, this painting. And so, there's like a replica that my dad had that I wonder if they made or he made.

CARSON: It's stunning, it's beautiful and like gosh, you can tell she just

understands how fabric moves.

JAN: Yeah. It's gorgeous. Yeah. I like that I belong to this fabulously talented woman.

CAT: I'm glad this gets to be a part of like the legacy left.

JAN: Yeah she has all these - there's an envelope called "ricky" - of my dad posed in all these, begrudgingly posed, the look of a teenage boy who doesn't want to be doing this. That she then turned into paintings. She made art out of Rick. So maybe he'd forgive me that I'm making art out of Rick.

CAT: Yeah.

JAN: Maybe he's used to his mom doing that and now his daughter's doing it. She's so talented. We should go to the DMA and see if we can find it. I mean it's tucked away, the permanent collection isn't like on display,

CARSON: Yeah

JAN: But maybe they'd let us look at it. We could say, "I'm Ruth Tears' granddaughter". That'd kind of be cool to say.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: Yeah that'd be cool to say. I've never said that before.

CARSON: I've never heard you say it before.

JAN: That would be a cool thing to say. It's like when people get married and use their new married name for the first time - it'd be nice to use my "I'm Rick Tears' daughter" name for the first time somewhere. Carson am I a difficult entertaining woman?

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: Am I really?

CARSON: Yes.

JAN: That's great, maybe I get that from him.

CARSON: Yeah.

JANIELLE: How interesting did Rick talk about his mom at all? Her art making?

CHARLIE: A little bit. Not a whole lot. Um, more about his dad. I knew that his dad, and I don't know whether you know this, but he was on the Manhattan project.



JAN: Rick's father was an engineer who was apparently really intelligent, intelligent enough to work on the Manhattan project which you've got to be smart to get that gig. And he was an award-winning, record-holding chess player. I did some Googles, he played Bobby Fisher, he lost, but he still played him.

CARSON: That's incredible.

JAN: So he's like a very smart, meticulous dude.

CHARLIE: So I knew that he was a pretty phenomenal intellect and his mom was a successful painter. I'm going, well, that's an interesting genetic background.

JANIELLE: How did you see that-

CHARLIE: -going on in his head?

JANIELLE: How did you see that? Do you, did Rick seem to you as somebody who is like a kind of genius or.

CHARLIE: Oh yes, absolutely.

JANIELLE: In what way?

CHARLIE: I mean the whole- I mean the whole to read wind and stuff and to know the depth of his sailing knowledge. I'm mean, it just really. His Dad got him into that big time, but Rick got better than his father very quickly. He was truly gifted at it and it's a very difficult business.

JAN: And if you can't do it well, or can't do it perfectly, don't do it at all.

I wonder if Rick inherited this from his parents who were excellent. A meticulously talented painter, a genius chess-playing engineer bomb building father. He comes from people who are excellent, and sailing is the one thing he does perfectly, and so it becomes his whole life.

CHARLIE: He worked to sail. I mean, some people live to work, other people work to live. He definitely was in the work to live mode. That was what he liked.

You know - he frequently had money issues with the people that he worked for in the data, you know, for IBM and various other things. But it was his focus was that hobby.

JAN: As Charley was talking about my Dad's lack of interest in work and complete dedication to sailing ... I asked him a question that definitely had a bigger question behind it.

JANIELLE: Is it really expensive to be a sailor?

CHARLIE: Oh my God yes.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

JAN: I remember weird feeling in the back of my throat when I asked that question. Because the question behind the question I'm actually asking here - that I know Charley is not picking up at all - so if he wasn't paying child support, was he finding ways to pour buckets of money into this hobby. And making sure that he didn't have to show up in court, so it never went to supporting me. That's the question I'm asking behind this question. And Charley's not picking that up. Not picking that up. He does explain though that my dad wasn't somebody who was pouring buckets of money into this. He wasn't like a millionaire participating in a millionaire's hobby. He was like on people's crew and Charley doesn't think my Dad ever owned a boat, he just borrowed other people's boats.

CARSON: Yeah, I remember being really angry about this answer. Because even if he wasn't independently wealthy. And he like didn't own a boat, he still chose to put his money there.

JAN: Or his time.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: His resources.

CARSON: And zoom out, he chose to focus on the thing he could do perfectly. As opposed to the thing he was - he had some shame attached to.

JAN: Yeah, that sounds like a person to me. It feels like two things next to each other and you can feel so much anger at the man who's sailing, when he could be supporting you. And you can also enjoy the hell out of how big his smile is when he's on that damn boat. That tension is starting to feel more like--how am I trying to say, what is it? The tension's not gone - is the tension gone?

CAT: I don't know that like the tension has gone by. I'd say that maybe discomfort and with the tension is gone.

JAN: Mm. That's exactly right. Yeah. It's a tension that feels awfully human. It's a tension that no longer feels like it's trying to destroy me.

*[music]*

JAN: Back to Charley, I ask him if he was making a film and casting a Rick Character, what would he tell the actor portraying him? What is essential to getting “Rick” right?

CHARLIE: Nobody in a room who met him would forget him.

JANIELLE: Hmm.

CHARLIE: Would never happen. Very polite, very gentlemanly, very interesting to talk to. Would seek people out who are not terribly talkative.

And his laugh is probably the most infectious thing of them all - I mean in this question. It's like, you know, what do you, what's something characteristic you remember well it's that one.

JANIELLE: His laugh.

CHARLIE: Proceeded by a look.

JANIELLE: What was the look

CHARLIE: It was kind of an arched look and then he'd look sideways and just do that laugh of his that you could hear all the way across the room

JANIELLE: What, what did, what did it sound like?

CHARLIE: It was like, ha ha. I mean, just a real honest belly laugh that would just go on and you just, you could not help but laugh even if you were the butt of the joke.

CHARLIE: He would have enjoyed- He would have enjoyed you very much.

JANIELLE: You think so?

CHARLIE: Oh yeah.

JANIELLE: How so?

CHARLIE: I mean, just if he could have gotten you out on a sailboat, I think he would have just gotten a huge kick out of you because I find you quite an engaging, nice, smart, funny person.

JANIELLE: Hmm.

CHARLIE: Um, I mean it's just, it's a nice bit of him that's still with us.

JAN: He seems interesting. Not as a dad. Bad dad. But like a kind of cool Rick. And I wish he had been brave enough to decide to be in my life. I think we would have had fun going to art shows.

CARSON: I think you would have too.

JAN: I would have loved to go on a boat. That would have been cool. I would have instagrammed the hell out of that, taught him what Instagram was. Like it would

have been fun! And I wish he had been brave enough to be in my life. I wish he had been less ashamed.

CARSON: Me too.

JAN: That would have been cool, huh.

CARSON: I wish he would have been brave enough to be an imperfect Dad, instead of pouring all his energy in being the perfect Rick.

JAN: Yeah. Yes, thank you for putting that to words. If he had ventured on the other side of that slash. We would have had fun. I let Charley in on how awful the funerals were for me - hoping I think, the question inside the question in my timorous little Jan heart, that he could make sense of it for me from the perspective of my Dad's friends...

JANIELLE: ...and then I felt like I walked in and sort of wrinkled the like beautiful bow everyone wants to tie someone in after they've gone, you know, you want them mourn someone -

CHARLIE: I mean it's just you know the whole way he died and all that stuff was just terribly, terribly sad to all of us.

JANIELLE: Yeah. How?

CHARLIE: I mean just by himself.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Yeah. Didn't want to bother anybody, wouldn't call anybody because he was, he was in trouble. I mean his throat cancer had come back and was just in bad shape and he just was stiff upper lip the whole way.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CHARLIE: I never knew that, that that was going on.

JANIELLE: Yeah. That must have felt. I imagine that was a hard thing to have- mourn somebody when you realize you could have, you could have been there at the end with them, but they didn't call.

CHARLIE: Right. Right. Or at least said, you know, I've got a bit of a problem but, you know, wouldn't let me in the house because he was embarrassed about it.

JANIELLE: Mm.

CHARLIE: It was just like, you know, there was no - none of us had talked to him for several weeks

JANIELLE: Yeah

CHARLIE: and that was unnerving. I was like, okay, what's going on here?

JAN: Again, that horrifying scene at the funeral, I've been focused on my point of view. I hadn't considered that his friends might've also been feeling really disoriented too - wondering how come he didn't let us in at the end, the way he died, how come he couldn't tell us that he was dying? That group of characters on the dock, they were reaching too.

CARSON: Yeah it's occurring to me now that maybe the question that they asked hasn't "How come we didn't know about you?" That was really hard for you to hear at that time was actually maybe a horrible horrible phrasing of the sentiment of: "I wish my friend would have told me he had a daughter".

JAN: Mmhm. Yeah. How come he kept us out from his life. How come he didn't let us in when he died. Yeah. They must have felt such a disorientation too. Wow. "How come we didn't know about you?" What if I could have responded? "I don't know why he didn't tell you about me. How strange and painful that must be for you."

*[music]*

JAN: In my conversation with Charley, still in my I need answers that are bigger than the questions I'm asking you, I steered him towards motives - Like why wasn't my dad in my life?

CHARLIE: My vote would be with embarrassment and feeling inadequate as a provider-father.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CHARLIE: And it just kind of got easier is not the right word, but it became like, you know, you're busy with the rest of your life. You're busy with sailing, you're doing this and all this stuff and you just come put it out of your mind.

JANIELLE: Yeah I can relate to that.

JAN: Like when this many people say something about a character, you're kind of inclined to recognize a pattern or a trend.

CARSON: Yeah

JAN: I think it was the shame that kept him away. I was ashamed of... myself.

Soap opera scene was right.

CHARLIE: You both missed out.

JANIELLE: Yeah?

CHARLIE: Both of you. Him as much as you.

JANIELLE: Well, I guess, uh, what do you mean

CHARLIE: He missed out on, on growing up and watching you grow up his own daughter.

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CHARLIE: And I think you're very cool.

JANIELLE: Yeah

CHARLIE: And he just missed out. And it's just, it's a real shame that, that connection was never made

JANIELLE: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Because you would have gotten so much from him, just so funny. So smart. So wonderful. So... you always learned something with him and you were always mentally challenged. You just couldn't be slack with him.

JANIELLE: Yeah I um.

CHARLIE: And You would have enjoyed that.

JANIELLE: Yeah. I think I probably would have

CHARLIE: because you're pretty intense.

JANIELLE: Yeah yeah I've got a lot

CHARLIE: And he's very intense.

JANIELLE: Yeah. That's interesting. That's, that's an- a thing you don't, I don't know what I got from him. So it's interesting to see how much of him you see in me.

CHARLIE: Yeah, I see a lot of him in you, which is a good thing.

JAN: Rick was intense and I am intense. I like that. Um I want to go through - this is my favorite thing I found in his stuff: it was his Report card.

CARSON: Oh my gosh.

JAN: Okay last thoughts on Rick. Report of Ricky Tears for term ending May 29, 1951. So,

CARSON: So he would have been 5?

JAN: So is that, is this Pre-K?

CARSON: You start kindergarten at 5.

JAN: Kindergarten. So this is his kindergarten report card.

Okay you get marks for less than normal, normal, and more than normal.

Big muscle coordination - normal.

Eye-hand coordination - more than normal.

Humor... normal

Joy, he's more than normal.

Language expression - normal.

Mechanical ingenuity - more than normal - he turns into a sailor you know he can do the sails and the ropes and the knots.

Dance - more than normal

Music - normal

Art - normal

Interpersonal relationships -

Co-operation and planning - normal.

Willingness to follow suggestions - normal.

Willingness to take consequences of own actions - less than normal.

CARSON: Mmmmm. So on the nose.

JAN: But look at him, look at this character. Rick, my Dad character.

Look at how consistent he is -- as a little five year old.

Willingness to take consequences of own actions - less than normal.

CARSON: Yeah, when we think of the first chapter of his book.

JAN: Mm. The scenes that are foreshadowing his future. There's some scene where he knocks over someone's blocks. And the teacher sees him do that. And he won't admit he did it, or accept the consequences of his actions. I don't know, I kind of love him as a character. Look at his consistencies. Oh oh Normal consideration of others: safety, rights, feelings - less than normal....

Group leadership, initiative, inventiveness - normal.

Self assertion, self-defense - normal.

Self-confidence - less than normal...Hm.

Look at my Dad, a little kindergartner. Look at him. He's great at hand-eye coordination. And he can appreciate dance and have a good sense of humor. And the thing he struggles with, his willingness to take consequences, a normal consideration of others, their safety their rights, their feelings, and self-confidence.

That's my dad. That's what he was bad at. Those are his weaknesses. Yeah, just that just checks out. Throughout everything we talked about.

CARSON: Yeah.

JAN: It takes a lot of self-confidence to be imperfect and let people in. My Dad died alone. Completely alone. And if we look at that scene of this character's life. I wonder if he thought - I should have let people in. I wish someone was here right now. I wish I had a daughter who I had just tried to, -- and she could be here holding my hand right now. And I could tell her some final things. I wonder if he thought: I wish I had told my friends and just asked if someone could come over and be with me. Or I wonder if he thought: Yes this is what I wanted. No one will ever see me... in pain. They'll remember me as perfect. They'll never know. I don't know. But I know which one I'm going to do. This process has been so imperfect. And I don't know what I'm doing and I'm not always doing it well. But I've let you in, I've let other people in. I'm braver than he was.

CARSON: Yeah. I think that's undeniable.

JAN: I'm going to die having been known. And having been loved for my imperfections too. I don't know how I'm going to do but I will get to be known, which is a gift. I think he would have really liked me. I know I would have been there if he needed me at the end. He would have gotten that had he been braver. And I wish he had been. I hope we all are. Braver. Do you want to know his play and past-times indoors?

CARSON: Please.

JAN: Trains, blocks. Screws and bolts. Puzzles. And dramatic play. I love dramatic play. God bless my sweet little baby dad when he was five. I can picture him and I can love him. This Rick Character. He's just awfully human isn't he. Robert said that really good characters teach us tremendously what it is to be a human being. I think my dad has taught me tremendously what it is to be a human being. And I'd like to be a different human being than him. But not entirely though. Some of these I'll keep with me.

So I know how I want to activate all of this. I can't do it today, but I can start. I want to do the funeral for my Dad. I was too afraid to do that back in Script when Rev. Yoder had brought it up to me, or we had brought it up as an idea. Because I



was too afraid to do it then because I couldn't think of the perfect thing to say. But now I think it's the best way to honor, like our shared hubris. Is to not think of the perfect thing to say and to not be able to do it perfect, and to do it anyway. And I want to honor him.

*[ Skype ring ]*

YODER: Hello.

JAN: Hello? Oh hey, hello.

YODER: Hey!

JAN: Hey, Reverend Yoder, how are you?

YODER: I'm fine, how are you Janielle?

JAN: I'm well. Um, as it turns out, several years later, finally ready to plan my own funeral.

YODER: Yes.

JAN: Um, because, um my dad finally feels like my deceased loved one.

YODER: Yeah.

JAN: Um, and you talked so meaningfully about...

CARSON: Next time on Untitled Dad Project, Janielle and I do whatever it takes to wrangle her elusive third-act-breakthrough:

JAN: Well I read it to myself, now I know that Strawberry Shortcake has the very best of friends.

JORDAN: The only things I've ever heard you talk about repeatedly were french fries and pizza.

JAN: Is spinning shit into gold a happy ending? Cause if so, I might actually have a happy ending by not trying to find a happy ending!

CARSON: But art, but like \*Jan screams\*

CARSON: But before that, another minisode involving cats, metaphors, and what falls on the cutting room floor.

*[Jan and Carson meow the theme song]*

CARSON: It will make sense soon. See you next week!

JAN: Untitled Dad Project is co-hosted by me, Janielle Kastner and Carson McCain. By now I'm sure you've already gone to Apple Podcasts and given us stars and a review that's really thoughtful. If you haven't done that yet, we won't know you haven't so just go do that now. But next we'd love it if you could share us with one of your friends. Maybe that friend who's going through something right now, or could really use some dedicated space and time to breathe and maybe cry. Let them know about us. We'd love to have them. And we'd love to hear how "Character Development" is relevant in your life, who in your life have you been called to look at with more nuance? Tell us @untitleddadproject on insta, or email us at [untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io](mailto:untitleddadproject@spokemedia.io). Your story matters.

Untitled Dad Project is a Spoke media production. We're produced by Carson McCain, with Associate Producer Kelly Kolff, our "sweet baby intern" Lauren Floyd, and thanks for the social media assistance, Jenna Hannum. Special thanks to my mom, again. And many thanks to Charley for the hours he's spent talking to me, and giving me the gift of new perspective on my Dad. I'm grateful for that report card, and everything you put in that box for me. This episode was mixed by Evan Arnett, Our head of post production is Will Short. The music you heard today was composed by Rat Rios. Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds.

Thank you for listening. It means the world.