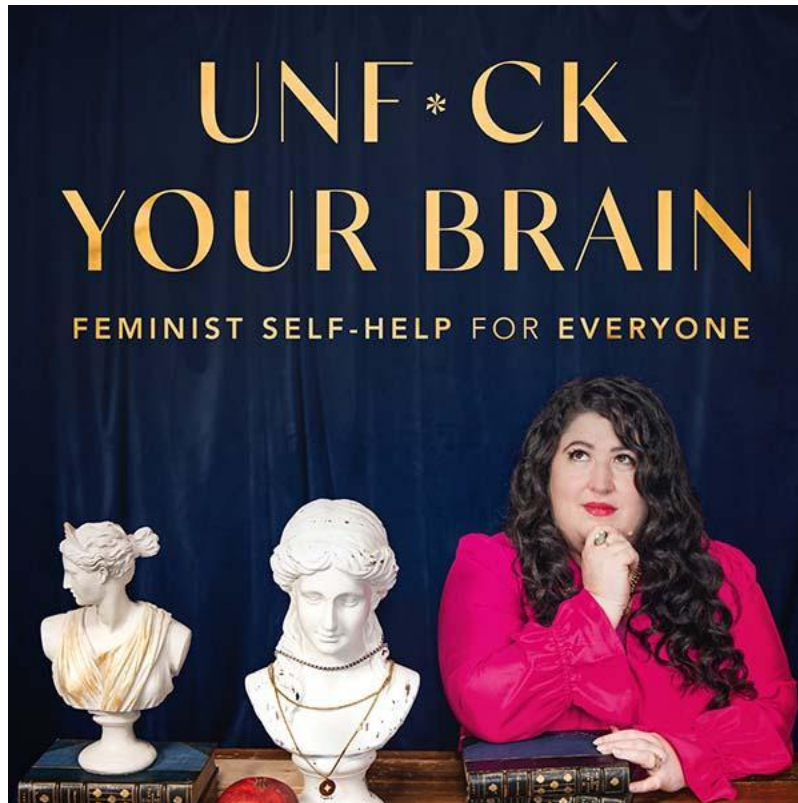


UFYB 386: Defying Ageist Stereotypes: A Conversation with Susan Hyatt



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms. One that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Kara Loewentheil: Hi, Susan, welcome back to the show.

Susan Hyatt: Hi, Kara. I'm delighted to be back.

Kara Loewentheil: Tell everybody before we get into it. Tell them who you are. Who are you? What do you do?

Susan Hyatt: I'm Susan Hyatt. I'm a master certified life coach, author, speaker, and community builder.

Kara Loewentheil: And not all of you can see this if you're listening to the podcast, but Susan's shirt matches her chair. She's got like a fuchsia chair and then a fuchsia shirt and then a blue blazer and it's just like extremely well coordinated. I'm very impressed.

Susan Hyatt: That was a happy accident. Most of my wardrobe has this color in it. So I'm often matching my chair on accident.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, someone told me I was matching my I just hosted a mastermind in my house. They're like, "Oh, you're matching your your like, decor." And I was like, "Yeah, cause I have the same colors I like in everything. It's all the same."

So Susan was on the show last in March 2022. We talked about women's invisible workload. And I wanted to talk about, I don't know if it's related, I

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feel like it's sort of related in the sense that women become, I feel like more and more aware of that invisible workload as they get older, as they have kids, as they start to take on more responsibility at work. And then I think sometimes our people's reaction to that is to sort of be like, "Fuck this noise, I'm doing something different," right? Like, I really want to just shake up my life.

And so I wanted to have you back on again to kind of talk about this topic of making like unexpected bold kind of moves in midlife, because I feel like women are so socialized to think that it's like you get married and you have kids, then you're a mom, and then you just sort of like fade into irrelevance and obsolescence. When in fact, we know that like women, especially like post-menopausal women, post-child-rearing women, if they are women who had children, obviously not everybody does, like have some of the highest happiness and life satisfaction ratings and are doing some of the most cool shit, we just don't really talk about it.

So I'd love to hear, like, let's start with the personal. What is an unexpected bold move that you made in your life more kind of towards middle age? Like, what was it? How did you implement it? What was your thinking around it?

Susan Hyatt: Well, I love the way that you're framing this because I work with women who are absolutely in this space where they're like, okay, if they were moms, their kids are out the door or on the way out the door. They are not beholden to some of the obligations that they had earlier in their lives.

And correct, like we've all been fed this narrative that you should just, as you hit a certain age, fade into the background and knit. I don't know. I have nothing against knitting, but just be quiet and who needs to listen to

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you and you're out to pasture. And a lot of the books that are written by men about midlife are written from a male perspective and the examples they use are men in history and the things that they give just like when you talk about being a working mom, these are the people who have spent their lives wearing this invisible workload backpack.

Now that we're sort of smartly putting that backpack down and deciding we want to do something else. We've done all these things and we now have this wisdom where maybe we were innovating before or we didn't have time to innovate. Now is the time for us to look ahead and say, okay, well, what's my legacy going to be? Would I like my obituary if it was written today?

And it's almost like an obituary audit. It sounds kind of morbid, but it's actually very exciting to say, I have more money than I've ever had or more time than I've ever had, And I have this wisdom, what do I want to do with it? And so for me, some of the bold moves I'm making in midlife are writing another book.

Scott and I, that is my husband, the Silver Fox, who, you know, we joke about him a lot. And if you follow me, his antics are hilarious. He is a middle-aged white dude that has a lot to learn. But we love him anyway, because he wants to learn and he's always self-correcting himself in the process. But we love the water and we love to boat and one thing that a big bold move I'm going to make is I want to boat the world and I want to document it. So live on a boat with my six pets, which he keeps saying, what are you going to do with these animals? I'm like, we are taking them.

Kara Loewentheil: Also, what about your wardrobe? It's hard to imagine you living like you've seen Susan traveling. It's not usually a tiny suitcase. Like, how are you?

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Susan Hyatt: Well, we all have multiple sides to us. And I know you know the other side of me is a hiker and a boater, and I absolutely can do with less. But listen, my goal here is to like, there's something called the Great Loop, which is interlocking coastal waterways that cover like multiple countries. And you can start where I am, which is in the middle of the country and through the locks and dam system, go down to the Gulf, go up the East Coast, but I want to go everywhere. I'm like, why would I limit myself to that?

I could boat the world. But my goal is to like maybe I cruise into New York Harbor and do an event and fly home for a couple months and then go back. So my wardrobe still [inaudible].

Kara Loewentheil: Still confused about the six pets and how they're going on this.

Susan Hyatt: Right. When you have these bold ideas in midlife.

Kara Loewentheil: And naysayers like Scott and me are like, what about your 400 pound Corso Como dog?

Susan Hyatt: Yeah, what about, Connie Corso! Connie Corso,

Kara Loewentheil: I don't remember the name.

Susan Hyatt: He's 100 pounds and he currently doesn't like the boat. So that is an obstacle. But right, like Scott's like, what about these animals? I don't know the answer to that, but I know I will figure it out. But it's sort of like, in my younger years or decades, that wouldn't have appealed to me at all.

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Like, what in the hell? But now I'm like, why the hell not? And I want to document it and have a YouTube channel about it and write a book about it.

Kara Loewentheil: I love this new era for you. Boating like expert and influencer.

Susan Hyatt: I'm into this. Listen, I want a boat sponsor.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah, that makes sense.

Susan Hyatt: Like I have a whole sponsorship list I am going after. But you know, it's an unexpected thing because I'm such a homebody. And I like my space. And I like my space aside from Scott Hyatt. And so right, I'm now essentially going to be in a tiny house on the water with him. You don't know what's gonna happen. We don't know.

Kara Loewentheil: That man can swim. You just put him in a life jacket behind the boat. I think this is an interesting thing, though, because I've been thinking about doing a podcast on this because I feel like I'm making the opposite flip. I mean, you also always love to travel, but I am somebody who has historically always wanted to travel and always wanted to go away and love to do that. And this year in particular, I have just been like, I don't want to go anywhere.

I just want to be home. I'm so tired, I think, from last year and the book and getting married and all this stuff. I was coaching someone on this recently in the Society who had had a kind of really high – not high-powered career exactly because she was in an unusual field. So it wasn't like a corporate thing. But basically just you know in her 20s, she had been like a real go-

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getter and like super motivated and like the top of her field and blah, blah, blah.

And then she just like didn't feel motivated to do that anymore. But she was beating herself up and imagining that her 25-year-old self would be looking down on her and thinking she wasn't cool and she was being lazy and not trying. And we did a lot of coaching around being willing to let yourself change and evolve and like shift that identity, right? Like the thing that seems like it keeps people the most stuck in with getting older is being attached to like, this is the kind of person I am. These are the only things I like.

I'm not gonna try anything new. I'm not gonna change anything. And women especially it feels like because we're so socialized around like women are inconsistent and fickle and everything we do is wrong. It feels like, I feel like it comes up in coaching a lot that women don't want to make a different decision or change their mind because that means they had it wrong the first time and now they feel like beat themselves up and doubt themselves or like they weren't really committed or whatever. So I was like, no, maybe you just changed.

Maybe that was a really good relationship for you for 20 years and now it isn't. Maybe That was a career that was really meaningful and now it isn't. And that's okay.

Susan Hyatt: Yeah. Like, change doesn't have to make what was before bad. I have really loved all the different eras of my life, except maybe when I was a stay at home mom.

Kara Loewentheil: It didn't seem like a good fit for you, honestly.

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Susan Hyatt: It wasn't a good fit, but I was willing to try it and admit that I needed to change my mind, right? But I think part of this Obit review is being willing to say the secret thing you're scared to say out loud, which is the person you were coaching admitting that, like, maybe I don't want to do this anymore. You know, maybe I've identified, I work with a lot of entrepreneurs like you do, and maybe this entrepreneurship thing, maybe I want to do a little, maybe I want to open a franchise or maybe I want to like whatever.

But being willing to say the secret thing, like what I really am afraid to say out loud is I love this house. I love this community. And for a certain amount of time, I want to leave it all and go boat the world and maybe it'll blow up in my face. Maybe it won't. But like being willing to say the thing and then also being willing to make a bold prayer, if you will, that, hey, I'm gonna ask for the whole thing. I want a yacht sponsor. Okay.

Kara Loewentheil: I feel like one of the things that comes up a lot is and this is of course, if you're a coach, you know that you hear this from women who are 21 and 81, right? It's the same thought, which is like, I'm too old. It's too late. For like, whatever it is they want to do.

So I'm curious kind of how if that comes up for you and how you deal with it or why you think it hasn't, how do you deal with other clients? Because I know I feel like I'm constantly pushing back against this. And also it's so like you watch someone say it for years and years and you're like, well, maybe now you weren't 20 years ago when you started saying you were too old.

Susan Hyatt: Well, I think you've hit on something really important is that a lot of these mental obstacles are universal. We all think them at a certain point. The I'm too old one is comical to me as a coach because like you I

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have heard it over and over and over again from women across the ages and what I witness on a daily basis is that no one is too old for whatever their bold dream is because we see them doing it. If you think you're too old, then you are. If you don't think you're too old, then you aren't.

Kara Loewentheil: And I don't think you'd have that dream. Like my dream isn't like, I wish I could date a 21 year old. You know, like my dream is not like, it's like my dreams are going...

Susan Hyatt: But you could! Let me tell you, honey!

Kara Loewentheil: I'm not saying that's not a dream a person could have and they're allowed. And yes, you only have to be on a dating app for a few days as a woman in her forties to know that men in their twenties are perfectly into you if that's what you want. I just mean that I don't think – this comes up a lot even without age in coaching women around dreams and goals is that I really believe we don't really have dreams or goals that we aren't suited for.

Susan Hyatt: I agree with you.

Kara Loewentheil: I was never like, I just hope I win the Fields Prize in Mathematics. That is not inspiring to me because that is not a thing I'm interested in. But I did want to write a book, and I did. But we don't trust ourselves, of course, because we're socialized as women. And so I feel like age is an easy thing to sort of be like, oh, it's too late, it would be too hard.

I just saw this thing that I think this is related. It feels related. We might just have to build the little bridge. But I think it's sort of misconceptions about aging. So I just was showing my husband, I saw this thing online, of course, there was like a crosscut of like an MRI, I guess, of scans of people's legs.

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So it's like you can see the muscle, the bone, the fat. And it showed the legs of like a 30-year-old triathlete, the legs of a 70-year-old triathlete, and the legs of a 70-year-old sedentary person.

Now I am somebody who like lives in a fat body. I have chronic pain. I'm not saying everybody's supposed to be a triathlete. But what was so fascinating to me about this as someone who's thinking now in my 40s about like, okay, how am I going to age? What do I want to, how do I want to take care of my body in the ways that make sense for me?

The 70 and 40-year-old or 30-year-old triathlete legs looked identical. And the person who was not, you know, didn't have as much movement looked completely different. And the post that it was associated with was actually, was not even about being a triathlete. It was saying that one of the biggest reasons people go into assisted living is that they can't get down and up from the toilet unassisted, which essentially means they can't do half of one body weight squat and back up, right?

So again, it's like they were using the triathlete as the comparator, but you don't need to be a triathlete. It's just talking about how do you maintain your sort of basic physical abilities to the extent you're able to.

And the reason I found that so fascinating is I think we just would assume, well, a 70-year-old's legs or a 30-year-old's legs are going to look totally different because aging is this thing that kind of determines who we are and what we can do and what we're capable of. And obviously, I think some people, I am not genetically able to be a triathlete. I'm not saying that that's what everybody needs to be doing. Everybody's going to have their own version of that.

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For me, it might be like take a little walk or do a little dance. But I think the most powerful about it to me, and my husband also not a super athletic guy, but I think what's powerful about us is just being like, oh, as you get older and start to think about aging, what are your assumptions going into it? Is your assumption like, well, just a slow shuffling decline off this mortal coil, right? Or is your assumption like, well, if I focus on maintaining things that matter to me and being, taking care of my mind, whatever that means to me, take care of my body, whatever that means to me, I actually have a big say in what aging is going to feel like.

Susan Hyatt: 100% and I see this a lot in the work that I do because I talk a lot about, you know, breaking your transactional relationship with your body and breaking free from diet culture. And as I've made bold decisions in midlife, I've taken up heavy weightlifting. And gym culture, right, it's hilarious to me, like all the super diet culture stuff that's part of the weightlifting industry. And so I'm coming into it as somebody who's anti-diet culture, who's there for the reasons you're saying. Like I understand that as I age it's important for me to maintain muscle mass etc.

I have become a woman who loves to lift heavy weights, which is completely different than how I ever thought of myself before. I have had women at the gym say to me, you're gonna injure yourself. Like, aren't you scared you're gonna injure yourself? Aren't you? I didn't think women our age were supposed to be doing that.

And so there's so much out there as a woman ages telling her like here are your rules and your time is up and we now know the opposite. Like yes, absolutely get in there if it excites you and start lifting heavier things. Figure out how long you can hang because your grip is what goes first. And for the record, I can hang for 60 seconds and the minimum needs to be 90. So I'm not like, I'm still in there like, you know, I am humbled on a daily basis.

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Kara Loewentheil: Well, the minimum for what needs to be 90?

Susan Hyatt: So they say like, if you can hang from a bar, like maintain that grip for 90 seconds, then you're going to maintain the grip that you need to just like do different things in life. Like that's the first thing they say for an aging woman that can go, that impacts your life where you can't open things, you can't lift things, there's certain things. And I'm like, oh, hell no, I'm going to hang. I'm going to hang here. Listen, I'm going to be able to flip tires, lift my luggage, whatever I need to do.

But right, like we make these assumptions that, oh, you know, don't hurt yourself, Be careful. And I actually think women in midlife, we need to do the opposite of careful.

Kara Loewentheil: That's so wild because you can't imagine men in the gym saying to each other, like, sir, you look kind of old. So I don't think you should be... Well, I don't know, maybe a 22 year old would say that to like a 70 year old. But in general, I don't... Men don't get the same message that their bodies are frail and they need to be super careful, right? And they can't, but women get those messages so much.

Susan Hyatt: Right. And I haven't finished creating it yet, but I'm working with the woman who designs my workouts and I'm creating this program called Own the Iron which is like mostly about women gaining confidence in the gym to take up space and then other things but correct. Like there's no special kind of weightlifting that's just for women. I'm doing all the same stuff the guys are doing in there. I'm squatting, I'm overhead pressing, I'm doing all that kind of stuff.

I think women think, here's our area of the gym. Our area of the gym is cardio and these very light weights. And I have done that for years, but this

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is a different era. And let me tell you something, there is an amount of confidence that happens when you see yourself being able to do something that you didn't think was possible for you.

You know, I'm 5'2.5", okay? But I'm like, I was talking to this guy at the gym because I was deadlifting, and there are certain like benchmarks in deadlifting and I'm now between intermediate and elite, I guess you could say. And I'm actually not deadlifting a super heavy amount of weight, but it's compared to like your body weight, you're this, you're that. And like these dudes are doing, you know, triple what I'm doing. And I'm like, oh yeah, well, I am almost elite.

Kara Loewentheil: You should get yourself a little sweatshirt. I think that is such a like – there is so much programming to women that we aren't physically strong. I've had this with like my own trainer that I work with that I lift with like of not – just sort of assuming that any amount that I'm lifting isn't a lot or that I'm not strong or that my body is like, I think there's such that fragility.

It comes in also so much with chronic pain, which is something I do a lot of coaching and thought work around of like, I mean, chronic pain is essentially about your brain being kind of stuck in a hypervigilance about sensation in your body and having a threat response to something that isn't actually dangerous.

But I think, I mean, there are lots of reasons that women have more chronic pain and obviously like, you know, shoving down the emotions and experiences of oppression as one of them. But I also think that there's probably a piece of it that has to do with, if all that programming is that your body is kind of weak or fragile or whatever.

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I just saw this stat that I haven't really decided what to make of it. That was about the number of women in the C-suite, the percentage of women in the C-suite who played college sports is like insanely high. And I'm, you know, maybe part of his network stuff, part of his team cooperation, but I also just wonder if some of it is like seeing yourself as sort of strong.

Susan Hyatt: I do. I saw some of the criticisms to that like, oh, yeah, well, they all-

Kara Loewentheil: [Crosstalk] pounding Instagram nonsense.

Susan Hyatt: Right, right. They also had, you know, money and privilege. But I do think there's plenty of research that shows that girls who are in sports have a higher percentage of leadership later in life. And that's not the only place you can get leadership.

Kara Loewentheil: For instance, I was major in sports and here I am still.

Susan Hyatt: Right, right. Hey, like actually I was in grade school cause I went to parochial school where you didn't have tryouts, everybody was on the team. And I was the best bench warmer you ever saw, Kara. Like I was the kid they put in in the last 15 seconds.

Kara Loewentheil: And think about what a cheerleader you are for other people now, though. You're very supportive.

Susan Hyatt: Totally. I had the Spirit Award every time. I was at every practice. But what you're saying is true. Like the messages of you're going to get hurt for women is like, that's where it's like, be careful, don't get your hopes up, you're gonna get hurt.

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And it's like, guess what? Sometimes athletes get hurt. It's okay. Like if I sprain something or like, I don't want to, I don't want to get hurt. But like, you know what, I'm willing to get hurt, because I'm an athlete.

Kara Loewentheil: Right. And that's where I think that confidence comes from, right? To kind of bring it full circle is like being, it's that like willingness to fail, knowing that you're gonna, that you can recover from failure, that you can be resilient, that really, that is like what propels you.

And I feel like that's the thing, you know, the sort of, if you're looking for something intentional, you can bring into your life, really, if you're in midlife or in any part of your life, right, the sort of like, it's okay to try new things and fail at any age, right? Like you don't have to be, there's also that perfectionism I think of sort of like, well, it's too late for me to be like the world's best boater. So I would have had to start when I was three. So there's no point now.

Susan Hyatt: Well, right. Like, let me tell you something, Kara. I've read all this stuff about like, cause I'm sort of also playing with, do we want a sailboat instead of a motorboat, you know, and you know, people who've been sailing, they've been sailing since they were three, you know, and like, guess what? I don't give a fuck, okay? Listen, I might end up in the Bermuda Triangle.

Kara Loewentheil: I was gonna say, now we cut to Susan and the six animals being rescued off the coast of Madagascar.

Susan Hyatt: Listen, I'm gonna have the stories though, not the regrets. And I think that that in midlife is the mantra that women need. I want to be the woman with the stories, not the regrets. And I think so many of us, not that I am totally regret-proof, of course I have regrets, but I think that if you

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look at the rest, how many years do you think you got left? You want to sit around and do nothing?

Or are you going to be like, you know what, Susan Hyatt out there in the Bermuda Triangle, Kara's deciding she's got this whole new era of her life. She's did that book tour. She's sick of that shit. Right? Like you get to change your mind, you get to take bold action and you get to like, okay, so you drop a weight on your foot. Guess what? Bones break and they mend.

Kara Loewentheil: Right, you'll survive. I think that that like, do you want to have, would you rather stay home and have no story? Or would you like to have a story about how you tried to sail around the world? And then your six animals capsized the boat and then you were rescued by the Coast Guard, like still a much better story.

And the other thing that I always think about is that there is a subjective experience of time and that doing basically novelty, doing new things makes time feel longer, right? So like, if you want to feel like you're getting more out of your time, doing new things, doing things you haven't done before is the way to do that.

Susan Hyatt: I didn't know that research.

Kara Loewentheil: Don't ask me for a citation, but I looked this up once because haven't you ever noticed like if you walk somewhere and it's a new route, the way there feels longer than the way back? Yeah. It's because it's new and novel. It's like when you go on vacation, you go to a new place and the first day feels like it's a million hours long. And then by the last day, it's like time has sped up.

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It's like the more novel something is, the more kind of conscious and aware you are of it and your perception of time changes. That's why if you go on an adventure for a week, it feels like so much happened. You can have a staycation for a week and it's Saturday and you're like, oh, God, what even did I do in the last week? It's all gone. It's just like seamless.

So when you think about that with your life, it's like, do you want to live in the same place and talk to the same people and do the same things for 40 years or do you want to mix it up? And there isn't a right or wrong. If you're happy the way you are, this is not a should. I don't want to sail around the world, personally.

Susan Hyatt: Right. Most people listening to this is like, she's crazy, but I also would watch that YouTube show.

Kara Loewentheil: Yeah. But whatever your thing is, like you want to pick up rugby, you want to take up pottery, you want to open up your relationship, like whatever it is you want to do, like what is the kind of novelty you're seeking and not tell yourself that you're too old, it's too late, you should have started when you were 20.

Susan Hyatt: And listen, the thing of it is, is most of our best work is ahead of us, if we believe that. And, and by work, I mean, you know, what we learn, what we experience, the relationships we have. Some people who are going to love you the most in your life you haven't even met yet, potentially. And I love to think of life that way. Like, wow, I have more best friends.

Francis, my best friend, probably listen to this and be like, no, you don't. I'm in. But right, like I have more friends like waiting, maybe in different parts around the world that I haven't met yet.

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Kara Loewentheil: We're in the Coast Guard going to pick you up.

Susan Hyatt: Listen, that would be Scott's friend. He'll make friends with the Coast Guard. I'll probably curse them out.

Kara Loewentheil: You'll be like, everything's fine. Just because I'm currently floating on top of a raft made of three dogs tied together doesn't mean I need your patriarchal condescension coming to rescue me.

Susan Hyatt: Listen, you're manhandling Mork the Beagle. I don't like that.

Kara Loewentheil: Do you have a woman on your team I could talk to? Where's the lady?

Susan Hyatt: I was talking to somebody today who uses Chat GPT. And she was saying she probably listens to your podcast. Hi. But she said she named her Chat GPT robot Chet that it was a man and I said, your Chat GPT robot is male. And she goes, what is that face about? I said, I don't want a man living or robot telling me shit. Like what? Anyway, that's a side note, but like correct.

Kara Loewentheil: All right, Susan, where can people find you if they want to watch you try to sell around the world or get coaching on midlife or whatever else is going on with them.

Susan Hyatt: They can find me at my website is SusanHyatt.co. I'm on Facebook and Instagram, Susan Hyatt. And if you like a good salty rant every now and again, you can see that on social.

Kara Loewentheil: All right, my friend. Thanks for coming on.

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Susan Hyatt: Thanks for having me.

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