

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #254: What Do You Do When Suddenly He's Home (Part 2)?

Amy Carroll

As I may or may not know from personal experience –

(Both laugh)

– when your husband's retired and continuing to work from home, things can get a little hairy.

Cheri Gregory

It can feel like you're losing control of your domain.

Amy Carroll

Today, Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House*, give practical advice for rearranging our attitudes to make room for all we love at home.

Cheri Gregory

Well, this is Cheri Gregory –

Amy Carroll

– and I'm Amy Carroll –

Cheri Gregory

– and you're listening to Grit'n'Grace: The Podcast that equips you to love who you are not love who you are, and live your one life well.

Amy Carroll

Today we're talking with Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*.

Cheri Gregory

Cynthia Ruchti tells stories hemmed in hope through her novels, novellas, devotions, and nonfiction; and through speaking for women's events, retreats, writers conferences, and workshops. She's also a literary agent with Books & Such literary management. Cynthia and her husband Bill live in the heart of Wisconsin, not far from their three children and six grandchildren.

Amy Carroll

Becky Melby has authored more than 20 novels and novellas. *Spouse in the House* is her first nonfiction book release. The Melbys have four sons and 15 grandchildren, and make their home in southeastern Wisconsin. When not writing or spoiling grandchildren, she may be found touring the country with Bill in their camper or on their Honda Goldwing motorcycle.

Cheri Gregory

Two's company, especially for those who love each other.

Amy Carroll

So what happens when due to retirement, working from home, or even running a business together spouses find that being in the same space all at the same time is awkward, complex, annoying, and just plain challenging.

Cheri Gregory

How can partners coexist without co-exhausting each other?

Amy Carroll

Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby know all too well how adjusting to a new all-the-time closeness can cause the bliss of marriage to form blisters.

Amy Carroll

I love that.

Cheri Gregory

That's hysterical.

Drawing from their experiences, and from men and women across the country in the same situation, the authors take a deep breath and dive into the root causes of the discomfort.

Amy Carroll

They dig into the ways God's word addresses the topic, and they offer practical tips for learning the spiritual, emotional, relational, and even physical steps that can help readers replace irritation with peace.

Cheri Gregory

For the Christian woman who wants her home to be a refuge of peace and serenity for all,

Amy Carroll

and who wants to know that she isn't alone in the mental and physical claustrophobia of too much togetherness,

Cheri Gregory

Spouse in the House is a vulnerable, charming, and pragmatic breath of hope.

Amy Carroll

It sounds like there's a lot of overlap between the age ranges where – you all are dealing with retirement, but so many people are either homeschooling by choice or by necessity, or they have spouses that have come home. So if both parents work jobs from home, where's a good place to start discussions about division of labor? When you talked about that – that was a huge deal when three of us were at home instead of one, was that division of labor? How would you advise starting those conversations? Because that can be sticky. I think sometimes if you haven't been doing those jobs, you just don't think of doing those jobs.

Cynthia Ruchti

One thing that strikes me in that regard is that a visual picture kind of has two people who are working from home, husband and wife working from home, and their office chairs are back to back and they're bumping into each other, they may have to share the same desk, they may share the same computer, sometimes they may share the same room that needs to be quiet during an important phone call or an important online visit or negotiations that, even some negotiations through some businesses that have to be private.

So I think one of the places to start is with the two columns: of what is negotiable, movable, adjustable; and what can't be, what has to be. If there's a staff meeting that always takes place at 12:30 on Friday, then the other spouse might say, "Okay, good to know, then I won't schedule something that needs our office, I won't schedule something during that time period, I can be more free to work with the children on their homework at that time or make lunch for the kids." or whatever. And there will always

be, for all of us, some of the things that are non-negotiables, it might be as simple as “This is my guy’s Bible study time.” and we work around that, or “This is a non-negotiable because this particular report has to be in by noon on Wednesday, every Wednesday.”

So if we look at that, then – and so we can map out a little better, even things like, ‘I’m really not hungry for breakfast at seven in the morning, I know you are. So let’s just make sure there’s plenty of stuff in the fridge that you can grab and warm up on your own. But I’m not ready yet for breakfast at that hour.’ Our sleep patterns may be different, our rest times, when we feel is our prime time to have some quiet time alone with the Lord. And it that may be vastly different as well respecting the have-tos. And then what are the things that can be moved and shifted around? Let’s do that. Let’s write down the things in maybe permanent marker, what can’t be moved, what it has to be, and then write in pencil the things that we can adjust and move around.

Becky Melby

I think starting with a family meeting where the children have input too, and looking at, you know, looking at the positive side, you know, I think having everybody contribute to a conversation where you’re going, ‘Well, now that we have this time together, what can we do that we couldn’t do before?’ You know, ‘Can we can we take a break and everybody take a break in the afternoon, we go sit outside and have a picnic?’ Just anything we can do to make it more fun and even silly. You know, break up your day with a sock fight, just get out, make it as fun as possible, especially in this, you know, situation we’ve been in the last little over a year and a half where it wasn’t something we all wanted. It wasn’t something everyone planned.

I have four sons. And at one time or another, they have all homeschooled. So it’s been fun to watch how they, you know, with some of them working from home, and the kids are home, my one son and daughter-in-law have three children and they bought desks

so that each child has a desk in their room. And you know, mom has a desk and everybody can do what they, you know, what they need to do, and they're separate spaces. But then when I've been there watching the kids is just fun because one at a time they come down for their breaks when they were doing virtual school and you know that we can have a stack together, we can take a walk, we'll just, you know, try to bring as much enjoyment into something that maybe you weren't even asking for as possible. Look at it as a season where you can enjoy things you couldn't do in your 'normal' life.

Cheri Gregory

I love how you keep bringing joy and fun into things. I know for me, for so long, I was just waiting for things to get back to normal, it was very much the grit my teeth and bear it. And so I'm thinking I need to watch for that tendency. Because once retirement happens, grit my teeth and bear it till we get back to normal probably isn't going to work.

Cynthia Ruchti

There's an awful lot that can be said to for that idea of looking for the humor, as opposed to looking for offense. If we're watching for the humorous moments, there are a few things that really bond a husband and wife or family members together as strongly as being able to laugh together and not in a fake way, not pretending. But that whole idea that's 'If I can either approach what just happened with my husband's collision with the deer with our car as something that was 'Oh, there's the money' and 'Oh, my poor car' and 'Oh, that was my favorite color car,' and all that sort of thing. He was fine. It wasn't that big a deal. But I could either look at it as what it was gonna cost us in time or without a vehicle all that, or it could look at it from the humorous aspect. And just from the gratitude aspect, too, he's fine. A car is a thing. And it wasn't even that bad. The fact that – don't tell him this and nobody will ever hear this, right – but the fact that the color he chose to paint when he fixed it himself, not the same color that the

car was before. It's okay. It's gonna be okay. It makes our car unique. And I'll never have as much a problem finding it in the parking lot anymore.

Becky Melby

I think what Cynthia brought up is you know, what one thing that we learned during writing the book was, look for opportunities to give grace. If that's your motive, you know, going into the day you will be instead of, you know, 'Oh, this is an opportunity to be really irritated,' it can be 'Okay, I can step back.' We had had a situation recently where my husband and I unloaded all the groceries and I started putting things away in the kitchen while he brought in the last load and three days later, I wondered where the pizzas were. And they were gluten free pizzas. They were more expensive. And of course he felt terrible because he'd left a bag, you know, in the back of the van and it's like, you know what, let's just laugh about it. I could have been mad. I could have said 'Why didn't you like...' you know, but it was like another opportunity for grace.

Cheri Gregory

My friend Kathi Lipp, her husband once left an entire fruit tray in their car. And they didn't go back to that car for one full week. And it was summer in central California.

Cynthia Ruchti

We won't talk about the fish in the trunk.

Becky Melby

I was gonna say, I have a picture of Cynthia with some fish.

Cynthia Ruchti

Five pounds of cod.

Amy and Cheri

Oh!

Cynthia Ruchti

It didn't get unloaded. And we were on a road trip together, Becky and I, when we discovered it, so we took a picture of me dumping that in a garbage can outside of some grocery store somewhere in a town that won't be named. What was that smell?

Cheri Gregory

I love it.

Alright, so this is not a natural segue. But it could be a funny one. Why is it important for husband and wife to spend time separately with friends of their own? Even if they haven't just painted the car the wrong color or left five pounds of cod in the car? Why is it important that we, after all this discussion of being together, why is some separation important?

Becky Melby

I think one thing is we run out of things to talk about. Just as simple as getting out with friends and seeing something different, you know, and doing things that your spouse doesn't care to do. You know, if you like antiquing, or going to quilt stores, or just chatting over lunch or going to a chick flick, we need to not feel that because we're together, we are joined at the hip. And so now I can only do what he wants to do. It adds vitality to our relationship, if we can each go out and do our own thing. Plus, having a friend that, you know, has got your back and has you know the best interest of your marriage. So in those times when we feel we just have to unload on someone, you know, that person isn't going to be going 'Yeah, I don't know why you're with him. You shouldn't have done that.' You got someone going 'Well, let's you know, let's stop and talk about this. Let's pray together. Let's you know, let's think of maybe maybe you could have responded like this or now that it's already been done. How can you

approach him? How can you humbly you know, apologize? How can you forgive him?' That is just invaluable.

Cynthia Ruchti

I think to have the concept that the one flesh that is such an important concept in the Bible does not mean that I don't still have my own fingernails and my my own hair follicles and my own eyeballs and my own interests and my own different creativity and my own friendships. There are a lot of people – and this is wonderful – who as couples, they have couple friends that are there real tight group and Becky has a camping group that she goes with and some others too where the couples are all really tight together. But she also has individual friendships, and so does her husband, and mine too. My husband has a great fishing buddy. He likes it when I go fishing with him. But he enjoys being with his fishing buddy too, and the conversations that they have, or lack of conversations, just fishing. So everything that Becky said is absolutely true.

But I think there's another element to it. There was one of the early reviewers of the book *Spouse in the House* had said, "I wish I'd had this when I was 27 and newly married and wasn't sure how to go about enjoying my marriage without losing myself." And that idea really resonated with us as well. That concept of the marriage that God is assigning to us and gifting us with is one of the arenas in which we serve Him by serving one another. But we also have a relationship with the Lord, we have a relationship with family, with sisters, with friends, sisters, those need to be cultivated as well, not to the detriment of a marriage. In fact, many times in the relationship between Becky and I is one of those friendships that our marriages are stronger because of one another, because of the friendship that we share and looking for those kinds of friendships and nurturing them. But then also being able to come back together having had separate experiences, you have these wonderful adventures to talk about. You're a richer person. You've been enriched by the experiences that you have. And like Becky sometimes says too, if I come home happier from being with my girlfriends and I have

more energy and I've got some ideas and I am full of joy when I come home from that evening out maybe with the girlfriends that helps to to create that atmosphere in the home that we want to have which is nurturing that place where home feels like a safe and welcoming place for our meet.

Amy Carroll

So good. Okay, well, I'm almost always assigned the last question. But I have a question before the last question. And it's for you, Cynthia. We met each other, I don't know, five years ago or something at a conference. And ever since then I have been a fangirl of your Christian fiction. Is there a Christian fiction book in the works? Or have you already written one about this retirement stage? I want to know.

Cynthia Ruchti

That's a great question. This book actually was sparked by a scene from a novel from a few years ago, in *Song of Silence*, there was a woman who had lost her job just when she got back into the workforce, she had taken over her father's music department at a small private school, and her father passed away. And she'd been longing for that for so long. But soon after she lost the passion, the drive the dream of her heart, shortly after her husband had retired early, so he could do nothing with the rest of his life. And he was really, really good at it. And she and he were in the same house where she had had her dream ripped away from her and he was experiencing and living his dream every day, eventually, that sent her into a deep depression. And her counselor had suggested that she joined a hat club, which she assumed was, you know, the people with the purple and the red hats and they meet and they chit chat and whatever they do, but instead, it was a club of women for those who say 'He's home all the time.' H-H-A-T-T. The counselor suggested she go sit among those women who were looking for the ways that they could bless their relationships, strengthen their relationship. So then there were readers who would write and say, we started a HATT club at our church and it's really great or in our neighborhood, it's really wonderful. And Becky and I

thought about what we were going through and realized We need a HATT club of our own, we need to write about what a HATT club might do all the time. And now we've changed that a little bit to W-H-A-T-T, we're home all the time.

Amy Carroll

That's wonderful. Okay, so now my curiosity is satisfied. And we'll go look for that book too, as well as *Spouse in the House*.

Cheri Gregory

Okay, but hang on a second. The acronym 'We're Home All The Time' is 'Whatt?!'

Becky Melby

Exactly!

(All laugh)

Becky Melby

We have an online group called 'WHATT now? So anyone is welcome to join.

Amy Carroll

Fantastic.

So for each of you, we would love to hear what single piece of encouragement that you want to offer someone preparing for life with a full time spouse in the house.

Becky Melby

I guess mine would be what Cynthia mentioned earlier, is just embrace the words 'we' and 'our.' And if it means taking a walk around your house, and going this is our refrigerator, our television, our remote, and just looking at the at the house through

fresh eyes, if you've you know, decorated in a way that suits you so that everything has a feminine touch. Maybe you want to bring some buffalo plaid into your house, and just, you know, realizing that your spouse, hopefully as we are assuming they are their men with good intentions, your spouse is not the enemy, you are not in competition. It isn't a stranger coming into your world, and doing anything you possibly can to be as grace-filled and welcoming as you possibly can be.

Cynthia Ruchti

This may not sound as deeply rich as what Becky just answered. But I decided a long time ago to pre-forgive my husband, for whatever he was going to do in the future. We're in this together. If I come to a moment where I think, oh my goodness, what has he done, I'm reminded by the Holy Spirit, I pre-forgave him for that. I might need to work a little bit on the actual living out of that moment at the time. But that concept of pre-forgiving is just modeling what Jesus did for us. And that has changed a lot of situations that could have turned into something ugly and made them instead something that was an opportunity to be overtly and generous with grace and forgiveness.

Cheri Gregory

Friends, we so appreciate you tuning in each and every week.

Amy Carroll

And we're especially grateful to Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*, and their publisher, Kriegel Publications, for making this week's episode of Grit'n'Grace possible.

Cheri Gregory

Check out this episode's web page at gritngracethepodcast.com/episode254. There you'll find this week's transcript and a link to Cynthia and Becky's book, *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*.

Amy Carroll

Be sure to join us next week for part two of our conversation with Cynthia Ruchti and Becky Melby, co-authors of *Spouse in the House: Rearranging Our Attitudes to Make Room for Each Other*.

Cheri Gregory

For today, grow your grit,

Amy Carroll

embrace God's grace,

Cheri Gregory

and as God reveals the next step to live your one life well,

Amy Carroll

we'll be cheering you on!

Cheri Gregory

So –

Both

take it!