

Dive Deep with Carlos and Rosemarie Evans

Jill: Well, welcome to this month's Dive Deep interview. Mark and I are so excited to have Carlos and Rosemarie Evans joining us. Carlos and Rosemarie are the authors of a brand-new book out called *Standing Together*. Now, this is a preview copy of the book because when we were doing this interview, the book actually hadn't come out yet. But now it has, and you can order it. This has been such a good read, and we really wanted to allow Carlos and Rosemarie to share their story with us. So, Carlos and Rosemarie, welcome to No More Perfect Date Night!

Carlos and Rosemarie: Hi!

Mark: We're so glad you're here!

Carlos: Oh, we're very happy and excited about this meeting.

Jill: Thank you! Well, tell us just a little bit about yourself, where you live, how long you've been married, and about your family.

Rosemarie: We live in Florida, and my family is Carlos and our two little daughters. Nairobi is 13 and we have Genesis, the little one, who is 9.

Jill: 13 and 9.

Carlos: And we have Starky that's 2.

Mark: I was going to say, you've got to include the dog.

Rosemarie: The baby boy!

Carlos: We grew up together in Puerto Rico. We met when we were 7 years old.

Rosemarie: We share the same birthday.

Carlos: October 17th, so all the gifts are welcome!

Jill: Oh my goodness! How fun!

Mark: That's cool! That's unique, actually!

Carlos: We've lived in North Carolina, Washington, DC and now here in Orlando, Florida.

Jill: Gotcha! Wow, that is so neat! Well, you guys have quite a story and one of the things we like to do in our interviews is to share real life stories of people that have overcome very difficult things in their marriage. When we saw your book, asked for that preview copy and read it, we thought, "Yep, these guys have overcome a lot in their marriage!" Tell us a little bit of your story so that our members know the context of what you have faced and what you have walked through.

Carlos: I can start. Like I said, we grew up together. I was in the Marine Corps for 8 years, the last two were in the hospital at Walter Reed Bethesda. One of the biggest challenges, I'll say, in our relationship, was coming back home from my deployment in Afghanistan without any legs,

missing my left hand, and with a very wounded heart, mind and soul. I was trying to figure out, “Am I going to be able to be the husband that I promised Rosemarie when we got married? Am I going to be that father to Nairobi and Genesis?” Facing all those challenges was very hard. It was 9 years ago.

Mark: You’re about to celebrate your 10th anniversary, so your injuries happened in your marriage?

Rosemarie: Our first anniversary was in the hospital.

Mark: Before we dig more into that, tell us a little bit about that first year. What were some of the challenges before your injuries?

Jill: Because we all have challenges. Marriage is not perfect.

Rosemarie: One could be the timing. At least for me, the woman is always cleaning and doing a lot of stuff and sometimes we forget to have time for the husband. When everything happened, I was thinking of all the time I spent doing other things and didn’t take the right time to be with him and enjoy him because I was so busy cleaning the house or so busy with the girls.

Carlos: I think the challenges we had before the injury as well was separation. I was in training and I wasn’t home most of the time. Being in the Marine Corps training before deployment, I was away for months. So, just adapting to this new life. We knew each other for many years, but we are so different.

Jill: Totally. I think until you live life under the same roof, you have this commitment, and you are bumping into each other’s differences on a regular basis...

Carlos: You’re trying to adapt to a new life with someone else that you love, but you need to work it out. Getting to know each other, that communication, and since we had a lot of time of separation because I was in the Marine Corps serving our country and she was doing her part at the same time, we just had to work around that.

Jill: That is so hard. I know some of our members may not be in the military, some may be, and they have to navigate those separations, but sometimes people are on the road for their jobs and that kind of thing. What are some of the ways in that first year that you guys intentionally connected? Where there places and ways that you tried to stay connected even though you were apart, and what did that look like?

Carlos: Even when we were apart, we were writing letters to each other, calling each other, and prepping in advance when I knew I was going to be away. I’d leave little notes or letters around the house just to remind her that I’m thinking about her and that we got each other. She was doing the same thing. When I was far away, I had notes.

Rosemarie: Or I’d send you a scrapbook or something to remind you.

Carlos: Yeah, reminders. That helped a lot.

Jill: It really takes some intentionality when you’re apart, doesn’t it?

Carlos: You've got to be intentional.

Jill: So, let's talk post-trauma. You've been hurt in Afghanistan, it has transformed your body, your body is not even the same, and as you said so well when we started, your mind and your soul were also greatly affected. Talk about those two years in the hospital. Initially, when you think of those early months where you were having to navigate this new normal that you don't want, what are words that describe what that was like for your marriage and for each other?

Carlos: Well, I'm going to be very honest. I wanted to die. I wanted to commit suicide. I was addicted to the narcotics as well because of the pain I was feeling. I think the main thing was that I didn't love myself. I wasn't happy with myself. I loved my family and I loved my wife, but at that time I didn't love myself. I couldn't look at myself in the mirror. I couldn't look at pictures. It was a very bad experience. I was happy to be alive when I woke up in the hospital and saw my wife, but just facing all those changes, it was very hard for me. She can tell you what her experience was.

Rosemarie: For me, at the beginning, it was uncertain about what was going to happen. They told me he was injured. I had to spend time in the house just thinking, "Is he still alive or not? Is he going to make it?", until I saw him that night in Walter Reed, and I got hope. I just felt like, "He's alive, we're going to make it through." That was what I asked God. When they told me he was injured, I just thought, "God, I don't care if he doesn't have legs, I don't know if he has hands, but bring him alive. I need him alive." And that's what He did for us. We work it out! It was hard because I had to be a mother, to be a wife, to be with him all the time, and had to leave my daughter with my mom for a time. It was a little bit of a dilemma, but we made it through.

Jill: Rosemarie, let's talk about that for a moment because I remember reading one story in your book, and it was when Carlos had an infection, your mother wasn't there, and they were talking about maybe having to amputate more of his leg. You were faced with this issue of, "What do I do with my kids? I need to take care of my kids and I need to take care of my husband." Years ago, I read a book written by a woman who was on the mission field, and her husband became very ill and had to be airlifted to a hospital. She had 4 little ones, and they would not fit on the helicopter that was taking them out. Only she would. She faced that question, "What do you I do?" The title of her chapter was *Wife First, Mother Second*. As I read your story, there was a woman that actually saw you broken down at the hospital, and she ended up offering to take care of your children because your mother wasn't able to get there quick enough for this new crisis. I'm thinking you had to face this wife first, mother second scenario.

Rosemarie: Exactly. You have to prioritize. I'm going to focus first on my husband who is injured, then I'm going to focus on our daughters. It's not that you're going to forget about them in this moment, but you need to choose what you have to do. I'm going to do the right thing.

Carlos: I think it's very important to surround yourself with people that care about you, that love you, and that you can get that support when you need it. It takes a community to raise a family. We're surrounded by great people that saw our needs and helped us. We couldn't have done this for ourselves. I could talk about this all the time, but there are just times that I get very emotional looking back to all these experiences.

Jill: Right! We always say that hindsight is 20/20. We can see things clearer when we look back. It's almost like that *Footprints* poem. "God, where were you? There's only one set of footprints." "Well, I was carrying you." Sometimes we look back and realize, we couldn't have felt it then, but that's when He was carrying us. So powerful!

Carlos: I had an experience like that once. Especially that day that they told me they had to amputate more of my limbs. I'm a triple amputee. My amputations are above my knees. So, when they told me they had to amputate even more, I just went crazy at that hospital that night. For me it was the end. I was asking myself, "Where is God in the middle of all this?" And I got an answer. Not at that time, but I got an answer. You know, we know that God is everywhere, but we want to know, "What is He doing in my life right now? Why this? Why me?" Through this process, I understood that God was always there. God was with Rosemarie, giving her the wisdom, the strength, and the love to take care of me. That's where I saw God in my darkest moments.

Jill: Beautiful.

Carlos: So, those were the footprints in the sand.

Mark: You see it. When we're in the midst of what life throws at us, so often we get confused by that. I certainly have asked those questions when life isn't playing out the way I wanted it to. It's so frustrating, but then to see that the Lord is there, it's just deepening our faith.

Jill: One of the things you said in the book, and I loved this, was that you've come to understand that faith, family, and friends are the three most important parts in life. Losing your legs and losing a hand, we would think those are really important things, and they are, but it's the faith, the family and the friends that really bring that richness to life. Talk about how you moved to that perspective, because you were in a very dark place, Carlos. When did you start to see even the tiniest light and what was that journey like?

Carlos: I remember it very well. This was a breakthrough in my life. I was taking a shower, and it was one of the first times I was taking a shower after my injury. Like I said, I really love my body. I wasn't happy with myself and all of the changes that I was going through, so I was getting ready to give up. I remember, I left the bathroom and I'm crawling in the apartment where we were living in Washington, DC, dragging myself on the floor, and I'm ready to see Rosemarie and let her know, "I just can't do this anymore. Why don't you take the girls with you and continue with your life?" I just thought it wasn't fair for her. I loved her, but I didn't think it was fair for her to be with me. At that time, I was ready to give up because a lot of couples that we met and were surrounded by at the hospital went through situations like this, and it didn't end very well. We saw a couple that left a letter in the hospital and went away. It was very hard. At that time, I'm dragging myself along the floor in the apartment and I see Rosemarie with the girls, and I tell her, "I want to tell you something." She's looking at me, and she's like, "What? What do you want to tell me?" I'm like, "Why don't you continue with your life, go to North Carolina, go to Puerto Rico, and I'll stay here." My plan was just to end it right there. I remember she was standing looking at me and she sat down and got at my level. That meant so much to me because she came to my level. She looked at me straight in the eyes, and she said, "I

am not a widow, and your daughters are not orphans. When the Marines came knocking on the door and I got the call, I prayed to God and I asked the Lord to bring you home alive, and you are here alive. I love you for who you are today and the man you're going to be tomorrow."

Jill: You're going to make me cry.

Carlos: Right there I was in shock. I told her, "But, you're only saying that because you have pity for me." A lot of people looked at me that way. I told her, "You can't love me because look at all of my wounds. I have a lot of scars on my body." Rosemarie is a nurse. She's an ICU nurse. She looked at me and she told me, "That's the difference between you and me. I don't see your wounds. I only see your scars." That took me. That shook my heart. Like, what do you mean by that? She told me, "When a patient with a wound goes inside a hospital room and sees a doctor, the doctor looks at the wound, cleans the wound, closes it, it heals, and it becomes a scar. When I see your wounds, I see who's your Healer, and your Healer is Jesus. I don't see wounds, I see scars, and when I see your scars, I see Jesus. I see that He healed you and that you're here alive. I sleep and I wake up with a miracle every day." Right there, I was like, "Wow! That is the way God looks at me." That was a breakthrough in our lives. I remember she was telling me, "Christ is the center of our family, and if Christ is the center of our family, we're going to make it through...and we're going to go to church this week!" It was a Friday...

Rosemarie: It was in North Carolina! We'd drive from Washington, DC to North Carolina just to go to our church. We were going to go to church, and we were going to praise God! That's what we were going to do!

Carlos: Yeah, that was a breakthrough in my life to be able to accept myself, accept my wounds, accept my scars and accept my body. Just her looking at me the way God sees me.

Jill: Wow, you really spoke life to his heart at that moment. What a reminder to us, that we need to speak life to each other. I think sometimes it's really easy to get pulled down by each other, but we have to rise above that and know where it is that we need to speak life. You certainly did that. Let me just ask Carlos this. I sense that Rosemarie is a strong woman. Am I correct?

Carlos: Yes!

Jill: All the time that you guys were growing up together, and you were dating, and then eventually you had that year of marriage, did her strength ever bother you?

Carlos: No. We were not dating as we were growing up. We knew each other, we were friends, I knew her family, but she was the smartest girl in the classroom. You know, you could be a little intimidated by that! But that was something I was attracted to. I was attracted to a strong and independent woman.

Jill: And you needed that being in the military.

Mark: And even for your healing.

Carlos: Yeah, to answer your question, I was attracted to her being strong and independent.

Jill: Good! Obviously, that really played an important role in your healing process because you needed somebody that wasn't going to throw in the towel.

Carlos: At the same time, sometimes men can be intimidated by that, but the way she manages it is that, "Yes, I am strong, I'm independent, I'm Rosemarie, but *I'm* Carlos Evans." She gives me that space.

Rosemarie: And the husband is the head of the family. "You're injured, maybe you're a little bit weak right now, but you're still the head of our family. It's not that I'm going to go above you and that every decision is going to be made without you. No, every decision is made together."

Carlos: That was something very important for us to go forward. When you go through a situation like we were going through, you need that. You need to feel that, "Yes, I am a father. Yes, I am a husband. Yeah, this is my family. Yes, I can do this." She could have just taken over everything, but no, she didn't. She inspired me and she motivated me. "No, let's do this together."

Jill: That probably also helped you to feel needed.

Carlos: Yeah!

Jill: I mean, at a time when you were feeling like, "What do I have to offer?", that self-pity, it just gets in there, and that's when the enemy whispers lies. Her actions were saying, "No, we still need to make decisions together. I need your input, I need your thoughts, I need your leadership here." And you were still capable of that.

Mark: So, when I was reading your book, I was really struck by 1) you talked about depression, 2) the chronic pain of those ghost pains and how you really had to accept that you had to live with that pain, and I think what was even more powerful towards the end of the book though was how your faith was really deepened and strengthened through all of this. How did the Lord deepen your faith in the midst of all those struggles?

Carlos: Very good question. When I was growing up, I had an image of God. God is supposed to be this way. This is God in your life. In our journey as time went by, I started seeing a God that was in my suffering...that was in my pain. I didn't have to even feel God to know that He was there. I could do even more things than I used to do before if I surrendered everything to Him. When I put my trust in Him, everything is much better. I think my faith grew a lot just looking at the past. If Carlos would have been dealing with this by himself, Carlos would have been dead a long time ago. Carlos would have run away from his family or from his marriage. When you surrender your weakness to the Lord, then it doesn't become an obstacle in your life, it becomes a stepping stone. So, when I look at my injury today, I don't look at it as an obstacle, I look at it as a stepping stone...a platform. Especially when we meet so many people, we see that we have things in common. Everybody goes through pain. You don't have to go to Afghanistan and step on an IED so we can have something in common. Everybody goes through pain. Everybody goes through changes in their lives. Everybody goes through situations where you have to cry, where you ask yourself, "Where is God?" So, seeing the Lord throughout this process in our lives. Seeing that I'm a better husband than what I was before my injury, I'm a

better father, and I'm a better person. I don't regret the experience, I embrace it. Embracing the experience, it just brings us God's grace. It brings us closer to the Lord. It's the image of God that I didn't know.

Jill: Right! You know, several years ago, I wrote a book called *Real Moms, Real Jesus*, and it looks at the human experiences of Jesus when He lived on this earth. I knew He was fully God, He was born of a virgin, He turned the water into wine, He rose from the dead, so I knew that He was God on earth, but He was also *fully man*. When I began to look at those fully man experiences, wow! My relationship with Christ became something completely different. It says in the Bible a lot of times, "The crowd pressed into Him." I'm like, "That's my life as a mother!" These children are constantly needing me, you know? When you get to His suffering on the cross, here we have a God who has experienced incredible physical pain, and that's what you're talking about there.

Carlos: Yeah! I relate to Scripture when Jesus, in a glorified body, comes to Thomas and He's like, "Here are my scars." In a glorified body! You know, a lot of people tell me, "Don't worry about it! When you go to heaven, you're going to be alright!" But here is Jesus in a glorified body and He is showing His scars. I'm like, "Wow! If there are scars in heaven, I'm going to embrace my scars because He was wounded so I could be healed." I'm not a victim of these scars. We embrace them. When we talk about PTSD, depression and mental health, it isn't something that I'm going to forget. I'm not going to forget about May 17th, 2010, the day I stepped on the IED. I have to learn how to live with that experience, because I'm reminded of it every day that I look at myself. You know, I don't have my legs. I'm missing my hand. So, what I have to do every day is that I bring it to the cross, and when I bring it to the cross, I see God's grace and we can overcome it.

Mark: Wow! That's cool!

Jill: Exactly! This has been so good, you guys! Thank you so much for being willing to share. So, we have one more question for you. It's how we like to end all of our interviews. We love and believe that every couple should be taking date nights, but they can look a variety of ways. So, we're curious, what is your favorite date night activity? It can be a favorite for both of you, or you might each have your own favorite.

Rosemarie: Eating, eating, eating, and going to eat! Food always makes everything happier! And going to the movies! We love movies, so that's something that we like to do together.

Carlos: Yeah, movie nights and just being by ourselves and enjoying each other. Like she said, having dinner together and trying new things together.

Jill: I love that.

Mark: That's so fun.

Jill: Very cool! Well, thank you guys so much for joining us. This has been a great conversation.

Rosemarie: Thank you!

Carlos: Thank you very much. Take care!

Jill: And this is Mark and Jill Savage along with Carlos and Rosemarie Evans with a reminder that a real marriage is not perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected.