

Welcome to *How to Hold a Grudge*. I'm Sophie Hannah, bestselling crime writer, creator and host of this podcast, and author of the world's first ever book on the specific subject of grudges. Many of us believe it's always wrong and bad for us to hold a grudge – but what if our grudges, when handled correctly, can be positively good for us, and for others? What if grudges are actually great: not a cause for guilt, but exactly what we need to lead a happier, safer, more fulfilled life? If you're intrigued and want to know more, you can listen to a new episode of this podcast every Thursday between now and 27 December. Join me and guests to find out how to use grudges to transform your life for the better, and to make the world a more peaceful and compassionate place.

And now ... Episode Seven: Grudges are About, Not Against.

In this episode, we're going to talk about the word 'about.' Normally, when we talk about grudges, the word that we use in connection with them is 'against': 'I hold a grudge *against* Natasha for doing this,' or, 'Do you hold a grudge *against* me for that thing that happened last week?' A grudge usually has an 'against' attached to it.

When I was writing my book, *How to hold a Grudge*, in which I explain that grudges needn't be negative and in fact can and should be very positive, I realised very early on that I didn't want to talk about grudges *against* people, because I don't think it should be an 'against'. There's no – or there should be no – sort of big black book, leather-bound volume in which you score everybody that you know. You know, you give them a mark in favour and a mark against if they do something wrong. And a grudge against definitely suggests that.

So, I didn't particularly like that. And, since I'm saying and arguing that grudges are stories that we want to remember because they have a live relevance charge, that's what they are. They are not negative feelings. And that's my distinction, so because I'm thinking of grudges as stories, it makes sense to use the word 'about' where most people would use the word 'against.' So, I try now, wherever I can, to say, 'I have a grudge *about* Natasha,' or 'I have a grudge *about* Fiona,' or whoever I've got a grudge about. And what I mean by that is, I have a grudge story, involving that person, also involving me, and nobody needs to be against anybody.

And I think this really matters. The language we use around things really matters. It's gonna be very difficult for the world to start thinking of grudges as a good, helpful, positive force if the word 'against' is always hanging off the word 'grudge'. And yet, it's really easy to slip back into saying 'grudge against,' because that's how we've all been trained to talk about grudges.

So, I just want to explain why a grudge is not against anybody. In my book, I argue that a grudge should never harm anybody. So, if you have a grudge story that you want to remember, that still feels relevant, and you want to sort of bookmark it in your mind because it teaches you something or it reinforces a particular value or something that's important to you, that is a great thing to do, and it won't have any negative impact on someone else. So, to use an example from my life, I have a particular acquaintance who is quite blunt, and will say things that, if I were to say those same things, I would be deliberately trying to hurt people. He isn't ever deliberately trying to hurt anybody. He just opens his mouth and says what's in his mind, unfiltered, and it can sometimes come across as very blunt.

So, I have a grudge about that because he's said things that have had a negative effect on me several times. But my grudge just takes the form of remembering that this is a thing he does and, you know, reminding myself to stay away from him if I'm feeling particularly sensitive. And my grudge doesn't do any harm. It's not a moral judgement against him. It's not a negative feeling against him. It's just something I want to remember about him, so that I can choose how I want to behave in relation to him.

So, I think if we talk about grudges being about rather than against, we remind ourselves linguistically and by lots of repetition ('grudge about, grudge about, grudge about') ... just saying that and getting used to saying it, we remind ourselves that there needn't be any *against* in a grudge, and there shouldn't be. If any of your grudges are going to be doing harm against another person, then that is not a good grudge. That is not a healthy, processed, safe grudge to have.

So, in fact, one way to think about whether your grudge is good and safe and beneficial or potentially harmful and perhaps in need of more processing is to work out whether it feels like it's *against* somebody, or whether it feels like it's just a story *about* somebody. That is a quite useful to think about it, I think.

The other reason why grudges are not against people is that actually, your grudgee – and that is the word I've invented for the person you hold the

grudge about – your grudgee can potentially benefit from your grudge about them. And that's another reason why a grudge is not *against* them, because if they can actually improve some aspect of their life or behaviour because of your grudge, well, then in a way your grudge is doing good work *for* them.

I can certainly think of many occasions where I've thought to myself, 'Right. That person has a grudge about me because I did X, Y, or Z. Let me think about that. Can I see why my doing that might lead them to have that grudge about me? Yes, actually. I can. And, so, probably, I shouldn't have done X, Y, or Z, and in future, I'm not going to.' And if they hadn't let me know that they had that grudge about me, well, I might have just sailed blithely on, not questioning whether I was right to do that thing I just did, or whether I could possibly improve my behaviour.

The problem with a world in which we all just move on and forgive and act as though the thing didn't matter and almost didn't happen ... the problem with that kind of world is that it doesn't give us those opportunities to realise that we are the grudgees of other people's grudge stories. And it's always useful to realise that. You know, it doesn't mean that you always have to worry about it. But it does give you an opportunity to think, 'Okay. I am the grudgee in So-and-So's grudge story. They think I shouldn't have done *this*. Let me have a think about it.'

And often, you will decide that the thing you did was absolutely fine, and that they're completely in the wrong. But, possibly more often, you'll think, 'Yep. I can see why they didn't like that. I can see why they have that grudge, and so in future, I'm going to be different in my behaviour so that I don't end up being the grudgee in another identical story.'

If you have a particular kind of behaviour that creates a lot of grudges – well, I mean, if you're totally fine with that behaviour and you think all your grudge-holders are wrong, you should absolutely carry on behaving in that way. But you might think, 'Okay. I am now the grudgee of four separate grudge stories about me turning up late so that an important flight was missed. I'm gonna resolve to pay more attention to punctuality in future.' So, for that reason, I don't think a grudge is or should be against anybody.

However, a grudge can still be invalid. I've talked already about invalid or unfair kinds of grudges that we might potentially hold. Obviously, we should all try not to hold invalid and unfair grudges. And, usually, what makes a grudge invalid is that it's based on some kind of flawed premise.

Now, I want to talk a little bit more, though, about valid grudges that are nevertheless about people who've done nothing wrong. How can it be valid to hold a grudge about somebody who's done nothing wrong? Well, if you believe, as I do, that a grudge is not against anybody, and is just about somebody, and if you believe, as I do, that your grudges absolutely should do no harm – they should not negatively affect other people or make the world a worse place in any way – well, if you accept those two premises, then you can, in theory, hold a grudge about someone who's done nothing wrong. And that won't have any adverse effect upon that person. They might not even know about your grudge. It won't damage them. You're not attacking them because of it. You're not doing anything unpleasant to them. All you're doing is acknowledging in your own mind, with your grudge story, that you feel this is significant enough to have a grudge about. There's no blame with those kinds of grudges towards them.

So, you know, I have some grudges where, not only do I not have any negative feelings about the person, but I don't even think that the grudge-sparking incident is one in which they were blameworthy. So, let me give you an example of that.

I'm gonna introduce, now, a really weird classification of grudge. This is a very rare grudge-type, I think, but it's probably one that we've all experienced a bit. And I call it the Linking Person Bypass Grudge. I'm gonna say that again because it's so weird. The Linking Person Bypass Grudge. I will illustrate this with a little story.

I recently went to a friend's wedding, and these are friends who I've known for many years. They got married, and, at the wedding, I met the sister of the bride, who I'd never met before, and discovered that she and I had an interest in common. And so, I said to the bride, 'I'm gonna send you an email, for you to forward to your sister about this thing we have in common, but before I do that, is that okay with you? Or would you rather I... If you'd rather I didn't do that, then I just won't do anything.'

[laughs] And so the bride, my friend, just thought I was bonkers. I mean, she thought I was completely mad. She said, 'Well, just get my sister's email address. Just email her directly. I mean, you know, you don't need to forward it to me, and Why are you asking permission to contact my sister?' She thought I was completely insane. And I explained that, you know, the reason I

was proceeding in this cautious way was because I did not want her to incur a Linking Person Bypass Grudge about me.

Because I always have a grudge, when I'm the linking person. So, if I have people round for dinner – friends of mine who've never met each other before – I invite them all round for dinner. If one of them then wants to meet up with another one, subsequently, I would kind of expect that they would contact me and say, you know, 'Is it okay if I get, you know... if you give me that person's number or if I get in touch with that person?' And I've had examples happen to me where I realise that a friend of mine has kind of bypassed me as the linking person and just directly kind of made a move on someone who was *my* person originally and not their person.

And there's absolutely no reason whatsoever why they shouldn't do that. They are completely free to do that. Of course, I know this. I'm not, you know, completely deranged. But I do have a Linking Person Bypass Grudge in situations like that, or a kind of etiquette-related grudge, because I just think, if you want to get to know somebody better and there's a linking person in between you, then it's just polite to sort of initially at least go via the linking person, rather than just, like, suddenly go straight over their heads and plant yourself in the life of the person they've linked you to.

I would genuinely love to know whether you are all sitting there listening to this, thinking, 'Okay, you've really lost me now. That is just the height of unreasonable,' or whether that's actually a quite legitimate kind of grudge to have about somebody, as long as it doesn't affect that person adversely. I'm joined by Helen Acton and Anne Grey, and I'm gonna ask them what they think about Linking Person Bypass Grudges, and other things.

Helen, do you have a view on Linking Person Bypass Grudges? It's a bit of a cumbersome term. What's your take on it?

HA: *Well, I've certainly witnessed it. It's not something I feel myself because, for me, I love the thought that I might have brought people together and then they go off and have a life of their own. That's something I enjoy. But I have a friend who is a great one for bringing people together but then has felt very – actually, very wounded – by finding out that people he brought together have gone off and formed their own little group or formed close friendships that don't include him.*

If they include him, he's still part of it. Fine. If they've gone off and made their own friendships, he really does feel wounded by that. Those people have not officially done anything wrong. It's difficult having conversations with him without wanting to defend the people, but it's very real for him. He really does feel pain about it.

And that's very interesting. Because when I have Linking Person Bypass Grudges, it's not that I mind at all the idea that two people who I introduced or who met in my house might then meet separately and without me. I wouldn't mind at all the thought that they might go off and do something together and not necessarily invite me. It's more the initial transition.

So, if they become friends and they have as separate friendship, that's absolutely fine. But I guess I would feel that there was something grudge-worthy about them not ... Just in the initial first phases, I would maybe expect them to say, 'Hey, you know, your friend Trevor who I met at your dinner party. You know, I got on with him quite well and, you know, I was thinking of getting in touch with him, you know. But do let me know if you feel funny about that, because, you know, he's your friend and I'm your friend.'

Now, in that situation, if someone said that to me, I would instantly say, and I would mean it, 'Absolutely fine. Here is Trevor's email. You know, have a great friendship.' But I feel, and this could be just some nonsense that I've invented, I feel that some sort of respect should be paid to the linking person factor. So, what I wouldn't do is ... Say if I came to your house, and I met fourteen people that you'd invited round for dinner. And if I got on really brilliantly with your cousin Derek, I would not feel it was okay for me to just get his number, without you knowing about it, ring him the following week, and go, 'Hey, Derek, let's go to the theatre together.' I would feel that that was a real Linking Person Bypass Grudge waiting to happen, and I would feel it was very bad etiquette on my part.

Anne, what do you think about this?

AG: *Well, actually, I do think that, you know, there is a role for etiquette, isn't there, in our relationships with others? You know, and there is a role for courtesy and consideration, absolutely. And I think – and I know that there are quite a lot of people who do feel this Linking Person Bypass wounding, you know, if we're calling it a wounding or a grudge.*

I suppose the step, really, is looking at whether there's a distinction between feeling wounded and holding the grudge. And so, it feels like what you are doing is saying holding a good grudge – and even a grudge in the way you're advocating means that a person's woundedness, if you like, the hurt around it, can be diminished by creating the grudge in the way you're suggesting. I would hope that it might be possible to move on and actually not feel the need to be holding the grudge at all, in all of these examples. But actually, from everything that you've described, it certainly is covering the first steps that could be really helpful for somebody in that healing process.

And I mean, if a grudge isn't a bad thing, if a grudge doesn't have negative feelings associated with it, but you would find it useful to remember that a certain acquaintance of yours feels no need to go via the linking person in order to make a new arrangement, you know, that might be something. You might, for example, think, 'Well, I'm not going to invite them round when my other friends are round because they might do that again. They might make a non-linking-person referential overture to ...'

[general laughter]

I mean, I know it sounds crazy....

HA: *It's snappy.*

It sounds crazy, but what's interesting that people feel this. It's not just me.

AG: *No, absolutely.*

You know, your friend feels that it's a thing, where people sort of think, 'Oh. So, one minute I'm introducing them to them. The next minute, they're suddenly independently friends.' A lot of people feel that something has been taken from them or that some appropriate respect has not been paid to them.

AG: *You see, in that way, I think this may not have been identified. I mean, I haven't actually heard it identified before. I've heard people experiencing it.*

There's not a lot of research in the area of Linking Person Bypass Grudges, it has to be said.

[general laughter]

AG: *For those people, for those listeners who are hearing this now, it actually is making someone feel exactly as we want them to feel, which is that it's okay for them to feel that.*

Yeah. And we've all felt it at some point. But, Helen, do you not feel that at all? I mean, in the example I gave where, you know, you suddenly find out that people who only met via you have suddenly gone off and started a friendship...?

HA: *I don't feel like I would want a veto on that, or to give some kind of permission. For me, if I found out about that afterwards, actually, I would feel like, 'Oh, wow! The two people who I like, they liked each other. I've brought them together!'*

I might mind if I was then cut out of their lives – if I'd suddenly ... you know, if they'd replaced me by each other, and yet I'd introduced them, I think, probably, I'd mind then. But I...

What about the moving-in-on-your-street example? Let's say you worked very, very closely with a colleague or a member of your family, just bought a house on your street.

HA: *Well, I think that's an intrusion, so I do think that ... I would mind about that. It's territory, still, isn't it? You know, it's a territorial thing.*

Yeah. Though, technically, they've done nothing wrong.

HA: *Technically, they've done nothing wrong.*

They're allowed to buy a house on that street.

HA: *But there is ... That's ... To me, that's about an intrusion into person space, I think.*

Yes. So, would you argue that, actually, they have possibly done something a bit wrong?

HA: *Maybe it comes down to etiquette? Again, I'm not sure. But I think the empathic thing to do would be to have a conversation with them. My sister moved to Cambridge last month, a few streets away from London, and, although it was something I was very supportive of and I'm thrilled by, I was*

given the option of a veto. And that did feel important. I had no need to exercise the veto. I wanted her to move. But just the fact that that area was recognised by my family as my territory, felt – it brought me on side with the whole thing.

Yeah.

HA: *So, I think ... I think it's difficult, though. Because, what if the person is asked and wants to say 'no'? What happens then?*

I ... My view on this is that as long as the person who wants to move to your street asks you if that's okay with you, if you then don't have the verbal dexterity and tact to convey to them that you'd rather they didn't ... but it's nothing against them, but you'd just rather they didn't ... And so if, as a result, you go, 'Oh, yes, it's absolutely fine and I'd love it,' that is kind of on you. I think when...

HA: *It's putting you in a difficult position, actually, though, isn't it?*

It is, but I think the fact that they're asking you acknowledges that there is this territory issue, which kind of then does give you the permission to say, you know, 'Much as I adore you, I think this is a bit strange.'

HA: *So, it's almost the acknowledgement that there could be an issue, is the most important thing. You've been recognised as somebody that might have a stake in this situation.*

Yeah. Anne, would you mind? Can you imagine minding if somebody you liked moved in a few doors down from you? Is there anyone who, however much you love them and like them, you'd rather they didn't move in a few doors down?

AG: *I can't think of anybody I'd feel that way about. But, I think the – what we're talking about is kind of going into a slightly different area here. Because what we've been talking about now is grudges where the person – the grudge-holder – is certain that the grudge was ... that the original sparking incident was something that it was appropriate or okay to feel upset by, hurt by, angry by.*

Yeah.

AG: *Now, we're kind of questioning whether certain incidents are grudge-worthy, if you like.*

Yeah. Though I would argue that it's always okay. If you feel that something is grudge-worthy – because holding a grudge isn't a bad thing, in my view – then you can absolutely have a grudge about someone who's done nothing wrong, and you *know* they've done nothing wrong. I have many grudges about people who've done nothing wrong but something about that incident in which they did nothing wrong, I want to remember because it feels relevant. And so that would be a really good example of that. If somebody that is a part of my life and a close part of my life just bought a house on my road without saying to me, 'Hope this is okay, please do say if you feel funny about it,' I would just regard that as something I needed to remember, because I often feel a need to have a sort of protective awareness of somebody who doesn't respect territorial issues.

AG: *Well, I think that's the key thing, isn't it, that you've identified? And I think it's really helpful that you've identified it. That your good grudges, your grudge-holding system is one that's protective. And so, that may be different for different people, although there may be common ground in the way we identify with the link... I can't even remember how we describe that person.*

The Linking Person Bypass Grudge.

AG: *Yeah [laughs]. Merely, you know, if there is common ground, and there are other people who would feel upset by somebody moving in a few doors down, or the Linking Person Bypass, then, in a way, that's kind of enabling ... it's simply giving you back more of a sense that it's okay for you to have felt hurt by that.*

Yeah.

AG: *And, so, I think, what Helen and I were saying from the start, and what I think you're saying as well, is, however you're feeling is okay. You know, whether or not other people would agree with you, and would feel the same as you, actually, however you're feeling is okay.*

Yeah.

AG: *But, you know, hopefully, if it's uncomfortable for you to be feeling that, then there are things you can do to help. And your book is actually one way of*

doing that. Your book is actually outlining for people how to deal with something that's uncomfortable and distressing.

HA: *And it's interesting, because, you know, the friend I mentioned to you has a Linking Person Bypass Grudge of, you know, maybe fifteen years' standing. I think, probably, you – going by your definition of a grudge – you wouldn't even call that a grudge. Because it is bitter, and it is painful, and I don't think it serves him very well to hold it. Now, that wouldn't count for you...*

What I would say is that, there is a grudge. So, there's the grudge there, because there's the grudge story that the friend wants to remember. And, in addition to that, there's still present negative feelings.

HA: *Okay.*

Yeah.

HA: *And, for you, he hasn't yet processed his grudge through the process you advocate to get to a place where he can hold a grudge, but it no longer has that charge.*

Well, not all grudges can be processed so that the negative feelings go away. So, one thing I say in the book is that, if a grudge is causing you misery years after the event, and if every time you think about the grudge story, the misery and anger intensify and no amount of processing according to the process [laughs] described in my book changes that, then that is probably a grudge that might do you some emotional harm, and might potentially harm others if you behave to them in a way that's spurred on by your negative feelings.

So... but what I would say is that it's possible that your friend has those negative feelings still, because, maybe, he thinks he shouldn't hold a grudge. If, all this time, he's been thinking, 'I shouldn't have this grudge, but I do. I shouldn't feel negative, but I do.' It could be that. And it could be that, if this friend read my book and gave himself permission to do all these things and to formally induct the grudge into their grudge cabinet, then ... you can't ...

If you go through that process and you enjoy the whole grudge-processing routine, it's very hard then for the negativity not to be disrupted by the humour, the creativity, the analysis ... there's all these things that are likely to shift some of the negative feeling.

AG: *Yeah.*

HA: *Absolutely. And I think that's not a process he's yet bought. But he hasn't yet read your book, so that might change.*

My book could change his life!

[General laughter.]

HA: *But, I think, for him – actually, thinking about it now – the holding onto the negative feelings around this grudge ... It's, I think, fifteen years. For fifteen years, he hasn't felt that anybody has really said to him, 'It's okay for you to feel this way.'*

Yeah.

HA: *So, he hasn't been validated. Actually, most people sort of say, 'Well, you don't – you shouldn't – you don't really got a right to feel that. You know, it's okay for these people to have gone off and made friends or whatever.' And so, he holds onto it. He's still fighting the fight to be heard.*

Yeah.

AG: *Yeah.*

HA: *And I think that's what the grudge processing...*

Yeah.

HA: *... allows.*

And if I met him and he told me the story of what happened, I would respond as I do to almost everything these days, with, 'Yeah. That's grudge-worthy. That is majorly grudge-worthy. I would have a massive grudge about that.' And the minute you say that to someone, they kind of go ...

HA: *It's releasing.*

...'Yes!' You know, it's so ... yes, you should introduce him to me.

HA: *Well, I may...*

And I will not trespass on any Linking Person Bypass issues. [*General Laughter*]
Thank you very much, Helen Acton and Anne Grey.

That's all for this week. Thanks for listening. Please write a review if you'd like to share your thoughts. I won't hold a grudge if you don't because that would be an *invalid grudge*.

If you have a grudge which you'd like me to analyse in the next season of this podcast, please email me – I'm sophie@sophiehannah.com – or tweet me at @grudgesaregreat. Remember, just because I'm currently the only person attempting to be a grudge guru, that doesn't mean I've thought of everything. I'd love to hear your ideas.

If you want to read all of my grudge-related wisdom, as well as my personal top ten grudge stories, all of that is in my book, *How to Hold a Grudge: From Resentment to Contentment – The Power of Grudges to Transform Your Life*.

Thanks again for listening, and I'll talk to you next week, when we'll be looking at six concrete ways a grudge can enhance your life. See you then.