

00:00:00 Michelle Obama: Barack knows the story when we were engaged, I got mad at him about something, and I took my engagement ring off, and I said, forget this, who needs this, and I threw the ring. We were in my car, I wasn't really throwing it out, I threw it where I would know it would go,

Conan O'Brien: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: I didn't mean it, I wasn't like, this is it, I just, it was, it was a fast,

Conan O'Brien: You, you threw it strategically into a cup in the back seat, where you knew you could get it back.

Michelle Obama: Exactly, right, it's like, bloop!

00:00:30 MUSIC

00:00:50 BREAK 00:01:15

00:01:18 Michelle Obama: Hello everyone. I am Michelle Obama and this is The Michelle Obama Podcast. On this episode, we're going to be talking about a beautiful and challenging and one-of-a-kind relationship: Marriage.

My guest is the one and only Conan O'Brien. And as you probably know, he has his own TV show, aptly named "Conan." And he also has a wonderful podcast of his own, called "Conan O'Brien Needs A Friend." While you run into a lot of different people when you're First Lady, you don't run into a lot of people like Conan. Obviously, he is very funny. But when get to know Conan, and spend a little time with him, you get to also see his warmth and his charm.

00:02:07 He is incredibly down-to-Earth and unpretentious. And that's why I wanted to talk to him about a relationship that demands honesty, authenticity and being your full self. And that relationship is marriage—when you've got to share your life, your whole life, with another human being. It's always good to be able to laugh at some stuff, once you're married—and Conan and I do a lot of that.

00:02:37 Michelle Obama: Conaaaaan!

Conan O'Brien: Hey how are you?

Michelle Obama: Good, how are you?

Conan O'Brien: I'm doing great, I uh, I'm letting my hair grow

Michelle Obama: It's, it's very cute,

Conan O'Brien: Thank you,

Michelle Obama: You've got a lot of, lot of bang action going on there.

Conan O'Brien: Yeah I do, I do. It's going to get curly soon, and,

Michelle Obama: That'll be good. Or do you blow it out? Is that a blow out you've got going on?

Conan O'Brien: I have a whole team, I have a whole team

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

00:03:06 Michelle Obama: Did you always know that you wanted to get married? Because, you know, not only is there misinformation, but I know from our generation, our parents just didn't talk about their marriage, it was just sort of, no one, it was like they just sort of woke up, and you didn't think about your parents or your grandparents in the context of their marriage, it just was.

Conan O'Brien: Yes!

Michelle Obama: There's no advice, there's no training, for it, yet it's one of the hardest things you'll ever do,

Conan O'Brien: You know it's amazing you brought up the generation thing, because I think that is key. There is a generational gap, I grew up very Irish catholic, in a very religious household, nothing about this was ever discussed, and I remember, when I was about, 15, up til that point, the only information I had was from my friend, Jake Fleisher, [laughs], who explained it to me in the driveway, and explained it to me in a very confusing way which made no sense, and my parents, never ever, ever, ever talked about sex in any way, it didn't exist, the six of us, we just showed up.

00:04:10 Michelle Obama: Showed up!

Conan O'Brien: Don't talk about it, there's no talking about emotions, there's no talking about feelings -- No! You don't talk about anything, so, it's kind of a miracle, I think, it is, I hope, somewhat easier for young people today.

00:04:23 Michelle Obama: I mean, I know for me, and for a lot of women, we're socialized as young girls, to think about, and I don't think it's thinking about marriage. I think it's thinking about, the wedding. You, envision, the dress, the music, the, storybook, of marriage. But I always knew, that I was going to be married. I always knew that that's something that I wanted, um. And I came to learn, as I grew up, that not everybody, came with that perspective. When Barack and I started dating, we went back and forth about the importance or the value or the necessity of marriage, and

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmmm, Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: And, some of that probably came from how he was raised, the fact that, you know, his grandparents sort of had always stayed married but had a rocky marriage, his mom, was divorced. You know, he had a different view, whereas I came from as he called it, "The Black leave it to beaver scenario."

Conan O'Brien: <laughs> Are they ever going to make that show, by the way?

00:05:23 Michelle Obama: Yeah, I know, it's uh, we're working on it.

Conan O'Brien: Good good.

Michelle Obama: But he always joked it's like you guys have this sort of perfect, the mom, and the dad, uh, so, he had a different view, about marriage. And I, I never knew whether that was because of how he was raised, was that because of his gender,

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, it's interesting, because, I can sum up, the difference between how it's built up for women and how it's built up for men in one story, which is when I uh, when my wife and I got engaged, we went to a jeweler, to start looking at her wedding ring. And we talked to this nice woman in Manhattan, for about two hours, about her ring. And, what her wedding band could look like, and how it could match the engagement ring I had got her, and how it would, and I swear it was two hours of talking about this ring. Then at the very end of the conversation, I said to the woman, I said, so, I'm supposed to get a ring too, right? What about my ring? And she went, oh yeah, that,

Michelle Obama: Laughs, right,

00:06:22 Conan O'Brien: She reached behind, and this is a very high end place in Manhattan. She reached behind her desk and took out a coffee can, and turned it over, and 45 or 50 rings that all looked kinda the same just went clattering out, and they looked like pieces of a washing machine, and she was like, just take one of those like, screw you, buddy, this is like, it's not about you it's about her.

Michelle Obama: Right, and it's like why are you even here?

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, why are you here? We don't need you?

Michelle Obama: Just, sit in the corner, let me give you some champagne, you know, drink up, just shush.

00:06:59 Conan O'Brien: I think, for men, and this is me, I can't speak for all men. But my sense is that we have to come to it a little later. It, you know, I've always thought, my wife, Liza, is the perfect person for me, but I also had to meet her at the perfect time. I was ready for the moment,

Michelle Obama: You were open,

Conan O'Brien: I was open to it, and I was ready to meet her, and then the almighty, stage, gave her the stage direction, to like, walk through the scene, and we're, it's everything's right.

Michelle Obama: The same is true for me, and I, I think, a man's inclination to wait and to kind of go out there and search and get himself ready, I think is a good instinct that more young

women should think about. Because who, you have to know who you are, to know who you're looking for. 00:07:52 And I always thought, you know, if we approached a marriage and family like we approached, particularly, men, like you would, picking your basketball team,

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: We'd have better marriages, because if you're looking at a team, the people you want to win with, then number one you want everybody on your team to be strong, right.

Conan O'Brien: Yep.

Michelle Obama: You don't want any weak links, you don't want somebody that you can dominate, you don't want somebody who's kind of a loser, right. And also, if you're on a team, you've got to be able to do everything, especially in basketball, it's like, you would never pick somebody that says, I only dribble. You know.

Conan O'Brien: Right, right right,

Michelle Obama: I don't, I don't shoot, uh, I don't defend, I just dribble. You know, if we looked at marriage as a real team, you want your teammate to be a winner, then you want LeBron, you know,

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, exactly,

Michelle Obama: You don't want the guy, third row on the bench, who didn't make the team, but we often don't think about, that.

Conan O'Brien: Now you've got me thinking about marrying LeBron, and this i uh, this is, this is taking a turn,

00:08:53 Michelle Obama: You have, what you're supposed to say, is, I have married LeBron, My version of LeBron.

Conan O'Brien: Yeah. My wife, Liza is LeBron James, she's, uh,

Michelle Obama: She is the LeBron James, in your life,

Conan O'Brien: Yes. Yeah, she is.

Michelle Obama: That's the equivalent,

00:09:12 Michelle Obama: Michelle Obama: So, how did you guys meet, what was your meeting love story?

Conan O'Brien: I, part of my job is to go out and shoot remote pieces. And so, way back in, late 1999, I had to shoot a remote, at a top uh, advertising agency, and I'm just supposed to go into this room and be a wise guy,

Michelle Obama: Well that's unusual,

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, exactly. And I walk in to this room, and I'm bringing this up because people can google, 'Conan meets his wife', 'Conan meets Liza', because, cameras are rolling and I walk into this room, of eleven people.

[CLIP] Conan O'Brien: So, we're sitting here with the creative team, uh, for FCB and everyone here is in black, which is I guess a New York advertising thing....

00:09:51 Conan O'Brien: I immediately start talking to her, and then I'm not even trying to be funny. I'm just saying, wait so, so where'd you go to school, uh huh, oh that's interesting. And I'm not even trying to be funny. I'm just trying to find out more about this woman. And my producers are listening in the next room, and they're watching this and they're like, what the eff is, what is he doing?

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: This is, what, what is it? And then I left the room after this twenty minute conversation with only her, and I said, well, I think that went pretty well, and they're like we got nothing we can use, and then I, and then I said, um, we should probably get everybody's like, name and number. And my head writer, Mike Sweeney, said, it's that, it's that blonde woman, isn't it?! And I went, No no no! No! And he said, Why would we need their information?, and I went, For editing?

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

00:10:41 Conan O'Brien: He was like, Editing, what are you talking about? So then, we were breaking down the equipment, and she walks out, and we start talking some more, and then we end up talking in the lobby. And, she said everything a woman is not supposed to say, leading off with, yeah I saw my uh, my gynecologist recently, and my gynecologist said I need to start having children within the next two to three years if I really want them to be healthy. And me, rather than being panicked, I'm thinking, yes, you should have children, your children should be my children!

00:11:23 Michelle Obama: You, you said something that rang true for me, about Liza, and it's like, she wasn't a game player. And, I found that to be, one of the things that stood out, for me with Barack, as well. Once we started talking and became friends, he was very clear, just like you, it's like, I want to date you. At least in my experience up until then, men would be coy, they would, you know, sort of look around the room, it was all so, complicated, and it felt, a little immature. What struck me about Barack was his, lack of pretense, I mean, he was, he was somebody who knew what he wanted, and wasn't afraid to say it. And, I thought, well, if he's that in tune with his emotions that he can say out loud to somebody that doesn't know, he didn't know whether I liked him back. He was like, look, let me tell you, this is what I think about you I think you're special, I think you're different, and I would like to take you out.

00:12:25 And that was rare. And it was attractive.

00:12:37 Conan O'Brien: I think, one of the things, that, that you hit on, um, I never know how to refer to your husband, so I just,

Michelle Obama: Barack, what's his name,

Conan O'Brien: What's his name, yeah. Cause I feel like I can't say Barack, but uh, [laughs] It just feels weird to me, but uh, but when you met that guy, uh, you're in a situation where, yes,

initially it's going to be really nice, let's walk, let's get an ice cream, let's go, to this really nice restaurant in Chicago. And so, everything is, who doesn't have a good time, when they go to a nice restaurant,

Michelle Obama: That's right.

Conan O'Brien: Who doesn't have a good time when they've had two glasses of wine, for me, 6 to 8, [laughs] I have a tolerance, but anyway, you know, that's all the easy stuff. You know when you think about it, it's the same thing with the wedding, it's one day, it's all about you, uh, there is a band, uh, everyone's giving you microwave ovens, and you're thinking this is great, 00:13:36 It's one day, none of that tells you anything.

Michelle Obama: Mm mm. This whole notion of love at first sight, I, I believe in infatuation, at first sight, I believe in attraction at first sight. But, marriage is intended to be long, it's full of ups and downs and highs and lows, this is the person you're going through life with. So it's going to take you a minute to see this person in an array of situations.

Conan O'Brien: Yes, yeah.

Michelle Obama: To see yourself with this person in an array of situations, it's like, you wanna, you wanna see them when they're down, you wanna see them when they're angry, you wanna see how they treat their mother. And it takes time, um, to get to know that about somebody.

00:14:22 Michelle Obama: People aren't perfect. Marriage is hard. It's a struggle for everyone. But, the question you have to ask is do you want to spend this life with somebody? Do you want to build something with someone? And there's no magic way to make that happen, except getting, the basics of finding somebody, being honest about wanting to be with them, to date them seriously, to plan on making a commitment, to date them, seeing where it goes, and then making it happen. And there's work and practice that goes into, I'm going to get off the apps, and I'm going to actually ask this girl out, and I'm going to take her out for a few months. I'm going to invest in this other person,

Conan O'Brien: Right.

Michelle Obama: And then I'm going to see where that goes, and if it doesn't go anywhere, then, OK, we'll break up. Because that's what dating is. You can't Tindr your way into a long term relationship.

00:15:19 Conan O'Brien: You know they've done, uh, I think they've done studies, the chemical that gets released in your brain when you're swiping left or swiping right, on dating apps, is the same chemical that gets released when you're pulling the lever of a slot machine, in Las Vegas. You know, everyone's been to Vegas or walked through a Vegas showroom and seen all those people, just sitting there, pulling the slot machine handle over and over and over again. And the thing I always noticed about them is their expression is joyless. It's these, old ladies, and they've got a giant bucket of coins,

Michelle Obama: Hey that's my mom,

Conan O'Brien: Ok, well, [laughs] That's what this really is, it's an intervention, this is an intervention,

Michelle Obama: Marian,

Conan O'Brien: For your mom, Marian, get in here, uh, I've talked to your mom, and I tried to bring this up, and I was escorted away by your security.

Michelle Obama: So, we did this whole podcast, just to, [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, this whole podcast is, just, to get to Marian [laughs]

00:16:12 Conan O'Brien: Marian, you've got a problem, Marian, and, uh, we gotta straighten this out, but no, seriously. It's like, it becomes joyless at a certain point, and for me, you know, when I, met Liza, I was 36, and I had been through a bunch of relationships. I had lived in 75 different apartments, I had lived in New York, and then LA, and then New York again and then LA and I lived in Chicago briefly and I just bounced around. I went wherever I thought my career needed me to go, and, I, I had been to therapy, because I had been really unhappy, and I had been through a lot. So by the time, I met my wife, I kind of had got to the point, where, it dawned on me, marrying someone, if it's the right person, isn't surrendering something, it's actually a chance to build something. 00:17:16 It took a long time, but I finally saw, wait a minute,

Michelle Obama: 36, 37, years for you, Conan, whoa.

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, yeah, it took a long yeah.

Michelle Obama: You're so loner, no I'm just kidding

Conan O'Brien: [laughs] You didn't know I was that old!

Michelle Obama: It's like, whoa!

Conan O'Brien: I'm 88 years old. I've just had a lot of work done. Um, but no, I, I got to the point, where I realized that, I could do more teamed up with this person than I could ever do alone, and that was exciting to me, and I cannot conceive of having that notion when I was 25. It took me, I've always been a late bloomer, it took me a while to get there, but I'm really glad, I didn't try it before I was ready.

00:18:05 Michelle Obama: Even once we do that, right, and you and I did it, right, having the right partner, at least what I found, was wonderful, those beginning years were heavenly, because we were two independent people. Um, you know, I had my job and career, he had his job and career, he'd travel, do his thing, then we'd come together, and date nights, and, you know, wonderful weekends together. Travel wasn't an issue, because it was actually nice for him to be away, for us to be away, and then come back together. But then for me, all that seemed to change, sort of the first, the first tough years came, uh, with kids. Um.

00:18:52 Conan O'Brien: Yeah.

Michelle Obama: You know, and because I had infertility issues, I was ready, I wanted kids. I worked hard for them, we both did, we were mature, we had, I think we'd been married for, four or five years, so we'd had, a wonderful amount of time together, which was helpful.

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: But even with all of that,

Conan O'Brien: Yeah!

Michelle Obama: When these little people arrive, and the whole process of pregnancy, conception, delivery, and then they're there. That can suck the life out of all of that hard work, and all that wisdom, because it's hard to get ready, for the wonderful joyfulness that is having your children.

Conan O'Brien: Yes, yes.

Michelle Obama: Um, because they are amazing and I would not trade them in, but whew, they can mess up a marriage [laughs]

00:19:40 Conan O'Brien: I have this analogy for this, which is, I read years ago, that, I was reading an article, and it said, that, the BMW car company has, the best standards because what they do is they have this, they have this giant claw, that takes like one out of 20 BMWs, or 30 or 50 or 100. It comes down and it picks it up off the line. And it shakes the BMW really hard, for, two minutes. And if there's a flaw in the BMW somewhere, like a screw that's a little loose, or a ball bearing that's not quite there, or, there's a little problem with the axle, it'll come flying off. And, I read that article and I said, this is what having a child is.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: What a child does, it's a giant claw that comes down, and it picks up your marriage, and it shakes it, really hard, for two minutes, and it shakes it as hard as you can imagine, and guess what, if there is a problem,

00:20:41 Michelle Obama: Mmm hmm

Conan O'Brien: If there is a loose screw, if there is, if there is a little bit of a thing, it is going to come flying out.

Michelle Obama: I love that, yeah.

00:20:55 Conan O'Brien: But it's absolutely true, that I thought, that women had babies and it was miraculous, and they just knew what to do, and my wife gave me the look that I was sort of looking at her, and wife looked at me like, What do we do with this, what do we do now? and I thought,

Michelle Obama: Don't you know?

Conan O'Brien: I thought you would just magically know, and I would go back to work, and then I'd come home, and there'd be like, all these stews cooking, and, a fire in the fireplace,

and you'd hand me a martini, and the baby would be, would have a little pink bow around it. No, it was uh, it was everything. It was my wife, went through a period of depression, she had a lot of anxiety about the child. She had a lot of trouble breastfeeding initially, and my wife is the most commonsense person in the world. And she was having a lot of trouble breastfeeding, and one day, when I was out of the house, she heard through a friend, Oh these women are really great, you gotta use these women they know what to do, uh, they're kinda old school. 00:21:57 It turned out that they were part of some witch coven,

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: They came over, and they're witches like in the modern sense, not in a negative way, I mean they're not wearing black hats and running around on brooms, they're, they look sort of, um, like hippies. [laughs] And, I came home to my apartment,

Michelle Obama: As lo, As long as they are calling themselves witches,

Conan O'Brien: OK, I'm pretty sure they were calling themselves witches, and this is all on me, if I'm wrong, but I'm sure, but I came home, and these women were surrounding my wife, and they had put cabbage leaves on her breasts. So my wife looked like, she looked like a salad bar.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: And so my wife is covered in cabbage leaves, she's miserable, and I thought, what is going, how did this, happen? Why is it this hard? Eventually, we went to a dermatologist, who said yes, use this, salve,

00:22:45 Michelle Obama: Hot heating pad, and the salve,

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, exactly, exactly, and then, no problem off to the races, but, the point is, she was panicked, I was panicked because she was panicked,

Michelle Obama: Well this is just, an example, of how, disruptive, uh, these cute little creatures

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: But the division of labor, in a marriage, also becomes real clear when a child comes, because, if, if your wife is breastfeeding, if she has a career, she's going to have to make a different set of sacrifices than you do. Um, just the act of giving birth creates an inequality in opportunities, you know, not to complain about it, but the truth is, especially, and if you've had a troubled pregnancy, we're not even talking about if you had a C-section, or if you were put in the, or if you were hospitalized, or if you were, you know, and you're trying to keep your career going, and you're trying to, you know, maintain your autonomy, and physically. 00:23:45 The whole structure means that, you know, he's got sort of a leg up because he didn't have to do any of this,

Conan O'Brien: Yep, yep.

Michelle Obama: Um, you know, that, at least in my marriage, that was the first time, I felt the sting, of gender roles, and I had to be there, and I had to go, and it was my body, and my husband was still sort of boppin around, living his life, then you start to sort of, the resentment starts to build up, or it started to, it's like well, what happened to the unit, what happened to

my best friend? What happened to my buddy, who's, at the gym? It's like, how the hell are you at the gym? You know, dude, I, I'm, you know, I've got cabbage on my breast, and you know.

Conan O'Brien: [laughs]

00:24:27 Michelle Obama: I find that a lot of young couples that we know, around this early childhood stage, when they're kind of dealing with these stresses, and dealing with the first time that they have to share roles, really truly share roles, you know, when kids are babies, when they're young, it's not the time, to start grading your marriage paper.

Conan O'Brien: Right.

Michelle Obama: You know, because, these are unique times. And, but a lot of times young couples, they hit these hard periods, and because they're short tempered or they're tired, you, you you know, sex life is gone the romance is out of the picture.

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: Um, they give up. Because nobody told them that this time is hard. You've got to know, that there are going to be times, long periods of time, when you can't stand each other. You know, and I say it, and I said it, you know, on the book tour, as a joke. There were times that I wanted to push Barack out of the window, right. 00:25:25 And I say that, because it's like you've got to know the feelings will be intense. But that doesn't mean you quit. And these periods can last a long time.

Conan O'Brien: Yeah.

Michelle Obama: They can last years. But we don't talk about that, so young couples, they face these challenges, and they're ready to give up because they think they're broken. And, I just want to say, look, if that breaks a marriage, then Barack and I have been broken off and on, throughout our marriage, but we have a very strong marriage. And if I had given up on it, if I had walked away from it, in those tough times, then I would've missed all the beauty, that was there as well.

00:26:07 Conan O'Brien: I thought it was great that you brought this up in your book, you talked very openly about uh, marriage counseling. And my wife and I at one point decided, we should go talk to someone together, um, not because we were thinking at all, about going our separate ways. Not because anything was in trouble, but because I found that the biggest, and you've brought the word up before, the biggest cancer to me on any relationship, is resentment. What Irish catholics do, is that, if I'm mad at you about something, I don't bring it up, but complain to everyone, but you about it. And it's a very, it's human, but I think the Irish Catholics are very good at it, cause we polish, resentments, to, they they become jewels.

Michelle Obama: Mmm

Conan O'Brien: And, I early on, decided, I don't want to resent my wife, and I don't want her to resent me. 00:27:01 So, we have this pact, almost, that if I'm, I can make a lot of jokes, sort of passive aggressive jokes, and she's really good at saying, Ok, you've made that joke three

times now, are you really? You really don't like the way I make the broccoli? And then I'll, you know, let's have it out.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: And we have it out. And we've had fights, and we've had fights where we're both emotional, and then afterwards, when the storm clears, we're better than we were before. And, so I'm on a mission in my marriage, to fight resentment.

Michelle Obama: That goes back to why it's important to have a whole person, to have two whole people in the marriage, right.

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: Because, in order to have that out, to have that communication, both people have to have a voice, and they have to know themselves well enough. A lot of women aren't taught that. Um, in fact, we're taught the opposite when it comes to our marriage, our relationships. 00:28:01 Don't tell them the truth, don't let them see you get angry, don't sound like a nag, you know,

Conan O'Brien: Mmm hmmm,

Michelle Obama: You know, and all of those are just code words, for, keep it in, right.

Conan O'Brien: You were also, you were in a position, you have this very real, healthy, but real relationship with your husband, and then you had that put under the biggest microscope in the world.

Michelle Obama: Well, it's it, it goes back to the BMW example with children. You know, a presidency, is like taking that little shaking period and doubling the intensity of the shake, [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: Yeah!

Michelle Obama: And the time of the shake, it's the same thing, I mean if you go into a presidency or a public life, and your marriage isn't solid, right, that experience will shake it, and anything loose will fly off. Um, and the presidency is, you know, you magnify that because it's, as, the First Lady, I am married to, the Commander in Chief. Ok. 00:29:02 Now that right there, just like, OK. Who says. Um.

Conan O'Brien: [Laughs]

Michelle Obama: This is, this is a marriage. What is this title, you know, Commander in Chief? Everybody, everybody, saluting this guy, you know. What is it like, when your partner, is the most powerful man, in the house, in the world, you know, and everybody salutes him, and the entire presidency, rightfully so, is set up to protect, and make life easy, for, the President. Which means, that in a marriage of equals, the other partner, is second. Because the entire institution says no, you're First Lady, which means you're second person under all the rules, of life, the Commander in Chief takes precedent. So it's the ultimate test. And it's unique, but the truth is that, that, in our world, men and women still aren't equal. 00:29:59 Women still get paid \$0.77 on the dollar compared to a man, that can put a stress on a marriage.

00:30:08 Conan O'Brien: I've had the experience of, you know, doing a week of shows at the Chicago theater and I walk out every night and there's lines around the block, and people are screaming, in the audience, you're doing a tour, and you get this kind of, rock star reception, and then walking into a room with my wife, and she's not having any of it. And, I find it to be life saving. I find it to actually be, the fact that, that, your husband has this relationship with you, and with your daughters, where you guys are not saluting him,

Michelle Obama: Absolutely,

Conan O'Brien: You guys are not, you know, none of that's happening. In fact the opposite,

Michelle Obama: The opposite is happening, right,

Conan O'Brien: Yeah, yeah, You're trying to push him out a window occasionally. And he

Michelle Obama: Right, he, he is the butt of every joke at the table, I mean,

Conan O'Brien: Yes, yeah, as am I,

Michelle Obama: I mean, poor guy,

00:30:55 Conan O'Brien: As am I, and so, you know my point is that I have found, that one of the things that you get from a marriage, that's magical, is gravity.

Michelle Obama: Mmm, well said.

Conan O'Brien: Because, gravity is this incredible, gift to us, yeah, it causes our back to ache, yes, it causes all these problems. But gravity is the gift, you want gravity, and I get gravity from my wife, and I get gravity from my kids, because, I could go out in front of an audience and have an amazing transcendent experience, where people are bowing to me and saying that was so, and not that this has ever happened, but, like, wow, a great experience, and then I can walk into this room, and these people, are my gravity. They're saying, no, we know you, we've seen you be, really unfunny, at the breakfast table.

Michelle Obama: Right, [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: [laughs]

00:31:48 Anna Holmes: More on the Michelle Obama podcast. After the break.

00:32:01 BREAK 00:32:31

00:32:34 Michelle Obama: We talked about how important it is to know enough about yourself, to have a voice, to be able to communicate, and make sure, that resentments aren't building up, but sometimes they do, [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: Really?! Really!

Michelle Obama: In a marriage, some times,

Conan O'Brien: Not my marriage! Not one argument! Not one. Ever!

Michelle Obama: This is where we're gonna, you know, I've already written about, our, our, our lawyerly way of arguing, you know, because we each, are, you know, we know how to win an argument, and sometimes, I, we can feel ourselves, just, lawyering ourselves to death.

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

00:33:09 Michelle Obama: And, we both like to win. I know that we've had to learn how to argue differently. Because I, I hit fast and hard, and then I forget, it's like, oh, did that cut you deeply? I, I oh, yeah. I remember, Barack knows the story when we were engaged, I got mad at him about something, and I took my engagement ring off, and I said, forget this, who needs this, and I threw the ring. We were in my car, I wasn't really throwing it out, I threw it where I would know it would go,

Conan O'Brien: [laughs]

Michelle Obama: I didn't mean it, I wasn't like, this is it, I just, it was, it was a fast,

Conan O'Brien: You, you threw it strategically into a cup in the back seat, where you knew you could get it back.

Michelle Obama: Exactly, right, it's like, bloop! You know, it was on the floor, I knew where it was going, but, you know, whenever he gets the chance to relive that, as an example of, you know, how, where how fast and quickly I can go there, um, he does, so, he remembers it and I don't, right.

00:34:13 Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: So I had to learn, that he feels things, much more um, deeply, uh, for over a longer period of time, he remembers the exact words used, the context that they were in, and I'm like wow, was I really, I don't even remember being mad! So I had to learn, how not to go there, you know, you have to learn how to communicate in a way that the other person is actually going to hear it, not just, in a way that's going to ease you of your feelings, um,

Conan O'Brien: Yes, Yes , yeah,

Michelle Obama: How have you guys figured this out?

Conan O'Brien: Well, you know, I think I grew up with this idea, that if something is bothering you, or if someone's offended you, you're supposed to martyr yourself. You're supposed to literally, my mother, used to say, I mean she would tell me about working at this prestigious law firm in the early 1960's, the men all got to go into the lunchroom.

00:35:12 Michelle Obama: Mmm.

Conan O'Brien: And she, they set up a little card table for her outside, because a woman, couldn't go into the, lunchroom, it, it, I mean, it wouldn't ever even happen today. But at the time, I said to my mom, were you angry, and she said well, no, I just offered it up. And I said, offered it up? You know, what is, offer, and and she, when were were growing up would say, I just offer it up, to the suffering souls in purgatory. Which means, if something happens to you,

you don't process it, you just hand it over to a higher power, and you keep marching. And I thought, that just doesn't work.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: It doesn't work, like, if my wife, if I do something and it pisses off Liza, if I told her, look, just offer it up, to the suffering souls in purgatory,

Michelle Obama: Right, [laughs]

Conan O'Brien: And go about your way and let's hear no more of it, I would be, she would stab me, with whatever is in the room. It wouldn't even have to be sharp, she could stab me with,

Michelle Obama: How's this for offering it up? Right in the jugular.

00:36:11 Conan O'Brien: Yeah, exactly, I'll offer this up, uh, and uh, and and it's the same thing, I have found, it doesn't work for her, because it also doesn't work for me. And so, arguments, are, it took me a long time to realize, that if someone's screaming at me, it's because they're scared.

Michelle Obama: Mmm hmmm

Conan O'Brien: That, a lot of times, in life, when someone is really losing their temper at you, it's because they're terrified. And so, you need to address the fear that they have.

Michelle Obama: Yeah.

00:36:50 Michelle Obama: What you describe in your approach in your marriage, you know, just speaks to why we have to learn to cultivate empathy, in people, in our children, because, you need it, to be successful, in life, in relationships, because what you are talking about is essentially, saying, looking at the person you love, in the eye, and going, I have to understand your context.

Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: So I can understand where that frustration, where that anger, where that joy is coming from. And then, speak to that,

Conan O'Brien: You know, one of the things, it makes me think about, is that, when you're in a marriage, you do not, have the luxury, of making the person an other. You just don't have that luxury, because, you have to make this work. Um, yeah, there's the nuclear option of, I'm out, let's get a lawyer, but for,

Michelle Obama: And a lot of people do that,

00:37:42 Conan O'Brien: And a lot of people do that, but, for the most part, even people that have gone through a divorce, have to, still see that other person as a person, and, we've all had, really good friends, that have done really stupid things. And we've stuck with them, because they're our friends, and because that's a human being to us, whereas if we were just hearing about them, on MSNBC or FoxNews, we could dismiss them, if we wanted to. And I

think its just, about being really close to someone and you don't have that luxury, you don't have the luxury, of, you have to work it out. You just have to.

Michelle Obama: Yeah. One of the reasons why I'm having these conversations about the importance of relationship in defining ourselves, is that, the core of who we are, is built up of, of all these pieces, um, our relationship with ourself, our relationship with our family, our siblings, our spouses, our peers, our coworkers,

00:38:38 Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: Um, all of that, uh, contextualizes us. And, gives us substance. But we don't take time to explore that, to understand it, you know, to understand how it impacts us.

00:38:53 Michelle Obama: As a comedian, your whole profession requires insight, right, um,
Conan O'Brien: Mm hmm.

Michelle Obama: You observe and understand, and then interpret, in a funny way, what is going on in the world around us. Um. And we, we just can't take that for granted, that work has to be done, um. I want to thank you Conan, for your, your insights.

Conan O'Brien: Oh my god, this was a, yeah, well I, I, yeah, pick and choose the ones you like, and throw away the rest, but uh thank you. Thanks for having me.

00:39:28 Michelle Obama: I had so much fun with Conan. Hopefully you did, too.

For those of you who are married, maybe you heard something that rang true. And for those of you who aren't, I hope that conversation gave you a sense of what marriage might actually feel like. Or what you might want to be looking for in a partner.

But no matter what, I hope this conversation gave you a chance to listen, not to me and Conan... but to yourself. To that little voice that tells you if there's something you want to work on, or work through—with yourself or with your partner.

Those realizations open you up to journeys that aren't always easy but they are always, always worth it.

So with that, I just want to thank you for joining me, Conan, and thank you all for joining me for this part of our journey together. 00:40:21 I will talk to you again very soon. Take care.

00:40:26 Anna Holmes: The Michelle Obama Podcast is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio, Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes and Mukta Mohan are Executive Producers. Janae Marable is our Editorial Assistant. Adam Sachs is our Consulting Producer.

From Dustlight Productions, Misha Euceph is the Executive Producer. Arwen Nicks and Jonathan Shifflett are the producers. Additional Production support from Mary Knauf. Jonathan Shifflett is also our engineer. Menaka Wilhelm is the archival producer and transcriber. Rachael Garcia is the Dustlight Editorial Assistant.

Daniel Ek, Dawn Ostroff and Courtney Holt are Executive Producers for Spotify.

Special thanks to: MacKenzie Smith, Joe Paulsen, Kristina Schake, Melissa Winter, Chynna Clayton, Alex May, Caroline Adler Morales, and Merone Hailemeskel.

And thanks to: Clean Cuts Studio, Search Party Music, Tyler Lechtenberg, Dylan Rupert, Carolyn Lipka, Young Creative Agency, and D'ara Nazaryan.

Our theme music is by Stevie Wonder. Original music by Andy Clausen and Tele Fresco.

The song you heard at the beginning of this show is "Love Me Right" by Sister.

Thanks for listening to The Michelle Obama Podcast.

00:42:01 BREAK 00:42:21