

Episode 45 - Single - 18_11_2022, 9.07 pm_Berenice_01

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SPEAKERS

Berenice Smith, Penny Rabarts, Elaine Ritchie, Sarah Lawrence, Michael Hughes

P Penny Rabarts 00:00

I'd like to see more confidence and conversations coming from the singles in our community. So that we are heard and that being single and childless comes out into the open so that people behind us can say that that is a legitimate experience and grief that we go through. It's not just having gone through a procedure or trying that guarantees your spot as a childless person. You've gone through something as a single person. And your grief is just as legitimate as the next person.

S Sarah Lawrence 01:00

Welcome to the Full Stop with Michael Hughes, Berenice Smith and me, Sarah Lawrence. If you're new to this podcast, we're here to delve beneath the surface of the childless identity to uncover what's going on in the wider community. And to look at the topics that really affect us. Our goal is to help and support those of you out in the community by sharing the stories and the voices that make up our narrative, so that you too can begin to find yours. We also aim to inform and educate those who aren't members of our community so that they can begin to understand and support those people in their lives, who are facing a life without children. In this episode, we are lucky enough to be joined by Penny Rabarts of the Childless Wanderer, and Elaine Ritchie who is a new voice in our community. We spoke to both Penny and Elaine about their experiences of being childless by circumstance. And as you'll hear, we didn't say much because both Penny and Elaine were both eloquent about their feelings, and their thoughts about finding a voice within our community. This was a powerful episode. So sit back, relax, as you listen to Penny and Elaine raised their voices for the unspoken majority in the childless community.

B Berenice Smith 02:15

Thank you very much, both of you for joining us today on episode...

M

Michael Hughes 02:37

44? No, no, 45. I edited 44 yesterday. That's right.

B

Berenice Smith 02:44

Yeah, that Christmas in July feeling! One of the things that is important to us on the podcast is giving everybody an authentic voice. And to cover stuff that we don't experience as presenters in how we live our lives. We are coupled. Each of us have partners. And it's important to us that we are diverse, inclusive, and welcoming to all the stories because we're all capable of creating our own little mini bingos along the way, phrases that we want to avoid from the wider community who have children. We can also create spaces by not listening to all of the stories that come under the broad term of childlessness. And it's an important part of our ethos on the Full Stop that we welcome everybody. We can hand the pod over to anybody who wants to curate an episode of their own, and we stress that you can come to us with ideas and thoughts. One of the biggest requests that came through since we've been going is single and childlessness. It's another part of our community that often doesn't get a voice. And it's important to allow that space. So we're really delighted to welcome Elaine and Penny on to the podcast. Good morning. Good afternoon.

E

Elaine Ritchie 04:29

Good morning. Thank you for having me.

P

Penny Rabarts 04:32

Good morning and good evening, depending on for those that are down under or in the UK. Thanks for having me.

S

Sarah Lawrence 04:45

Oh, it's a pleasure to have you on. So would we be able to start with introductions just so we know who you are and our listeners can get to know you as well? Would that be okay? Who would like to go first? Who's Who's feeling ready?

P

Penny Rabarts 04:58

Um, I'm gonna go. I came in into this community probably early on in the COVID space, when things were closing down at the beginning of closing down in Victoria. And we have since become the owner of the title of the World's longest number of lockdown days, which I'm not extremely happy to have lived through. I also started my connection in this community as a couple. I do want to talk a bit more about that, because I think it's really important in the difference between my experience as a single, and I have, but over, over my my years of

dating years, I've been pretty much a fair 50/50 mixture of being coupled or single. But I have been single for the last year. Having found this community and people who have a shared experience thinking that we would have one life and then that not happening, there was a real difference. The number of people I heard with a single voice compared to those who were part of a couple...I could go down a whole path of conversation. But I'll finish talking about who I am. I met someone else in this community. And we did put out a podcast into the world. I set up a group Down Under for childless and child free woman in Australia and New Zealand and just started building connections through them, especially during a lockdown period. There was a lot more activity that happened online. I found The Full Stop so I listened to you. And I created a community, with another friend, bringing women together in Melbourne in Australia and w've held social events. It's probably an excess of 20 events that I've personally done; between 30 and 40 events that have happened in the last year for just women in Melbourne who don't have children to come together. And it's so awesome. Yeah, that we have one there's one thing in common, but it is more than that there is a shared experience of how the rest of the world see us and feel about us. But we all know that and we don't. And yet that's unspoken, but we can have conversations that are not focused around our the children that we don't have. Instead, it's focused on the things that we do. And it's awesome, all the diverse conversation that happens. But even that has been the product of my becoming single in the last year and dedicating so much more time to that sort of activity and giving my time into it. I'm a Kiwi. I moved here to Melbourne 20 years ago, but I did spend seven years in the UK, so I can get some references. And I left because I really wanted the sunshine to be honest, and I was meant to go back to New Zealand but much to my mum's disappointment. I met someone and ended up here in Melbourne. That relationship did last a year. That wasn't that wasn't the end of my story.

S

Sarah Lawrence 09:26

Thanks, Penny. Thanks for sharing. What about yourself, Elaine?

E

Elaine Ritchie 09:29

So I feel pretty new to this community, to be honest, but I've been very warmly welcomed in by everybody. I am childless is not by choice. I'm single, not by choice. I had a hysterectomy one year ago, and I'm now 50 And I think I was all that time in denial. I was still believing that I would have a child even though I was past my fertility years. So I also have no family. I was an only child, I have lost both my parents. My mum was an only child. My dad had one sister, she is still alive. But she's she's ageing now. And she's child free. So a random Google search after my hysterectomy led me to Gateway Women. And that led me to the Full Stop. So in my life, I'm a full time, urology oncology nurse specialist. And I'm a part time Zumba instructor as well. So that's me.

S

Sarah Lawrence 10:49

Oh, wow, thanks. It is so nice to have a new voice in the community, then. It's like, it sounds like it's really fresh for you? Getting out there seeing what's available to you and meeting up with people?

E

Elaine Ritchie 11:01

Yeah, I have I have grabbed it. I think with both hands as well, I've done a lot of in person meetups which have been great. And joined most of the Gateway Women online things that have been going on. And I feel really a real part of the community. I've never met women like it. So I'm really happy to be here.

S

Sarah Lawrence 11:26

I really love that Elaine, that you've embraced the community. That matters so much that when we create different things, different people doing other things, to actually have that feedback, and to be so warmly welcomed from you as well since we obviously appear in your space. And Penny as well, you've both been such cheerleaders for the podcast, and for the Full Stop over the time that we've known both of you, and Penny for quite a number of years now. It's really lovely to actually have you in our space. So thank you ever so much for being here. It's really great. There's the elephant in the room? A question probably from the three of us that's kind of sitting there probably in the space is bingos, that we experience collectively as childless people, but we have them within our spaces, too that may exclude people who are single, childless, too. And I wondered if we might spend a bit of time talking about our actions and better kind of communication that we can put together to share with our listeners, is that something you'd be comfortable to talk about?

E

Elaine Ritchie 13:06

Yeah, I think for me, yes, there's the child has been goes. But I'm not too much aware of the 'we', as opposed to the I. But there are things - if you're at work having a chat, about what are you doing at the weekend? Whether that be 'we' as a couple, or 'we' as a family, 'we're' going to do this, 'we're' going to do that. And then you've got the after that as well. You know, what did you do at the weekend? 'We' did this, 'we' did that? Sometimes I find that quite that triggering. You know, when you come home? I come home to an empty house. And if you've had a tough day, that can be quite hard. You just want to come in and offload and there is no one necessarily to do that with. What's quite triggering is when people say you should have asked or why didn't you say? And actually, that's quite hard. All of my friends are married with children or partnered with children. And that's really hard to bring up and say, 'Hey guys, I'm having a bad day today. Do you fancy going here' and then you get the 'Oh, sorry. We are doing this.' Yes, I appreciate people have lives. It's quite hard to hear rejection in general conversation It's not something that worries me too much. It's just in the deeper conversations, it's a little bit harder.

P

Penny Rabarts 15:13

I have to agree alone about that asking for help. I think that going from being in a couple where you have your person who will always be there, and then you want to go somewhere. Couples have someone to go with. I talk about this one a lot - an emergency contact too. Who will be my emergency contact? Or who do I ask for help from? It's a whole different life. When you visit, not having to think about it and an automatic answer compared to putting a lot more emotional investment into reaching out and asking for help from someone.. And you know,

Elaine, totally get it when you say that people are like 'Oh, why didn't you just ask?' Well, sometimes when you ask, it's not it is uncomfortable, but you know, we aren't the first priority for a lot of people, you know, just generally we're not. And that that is the way it is. But if you're in a emotional or a sensitive space, that's also really hard to hear from someone and not react. It reinforces that you're not the number one priority in asking for that help. This exactly happened to me just about a year ago, when generally pretty good health and I had a health scare, and ended up in hospital on Christmas Day. And within four or five days, we're locked down here in Melbourne. So my family in New Zealand so they couldn't come across to be with me so I had to go through this with those people that are close to me here. And I needed someone to come and stay, as my good friend could only stay for a certain amount of time. And I was in that position of having to ask a new group who would do that. And they stepped up without a beat. And they came and I had a week and a half of people in rotation coming to visit me or stay with me. And it was it was beautiful. And it was so heartening for me. I touched on before how much I've given back this year into that community because in that moment when I needed something that was very difficult for me to do, I felt very emotional about having to ask for that kind of help. But they did. My takeaway from that is people want to help people. They are waiting to be asked. I love it when someone asks me for help and if I can, I will because of that fact. I want to add, straight up those other people in my life whether they're male or female; we want to know their friends. Their partner is also a friend.

S

Sarah Lawrence 18:58

Going back to your emergency contact. Penny, to find your emergency contact will that differ as to what the reason may be?

P

Penny Rabarts 19:11

I go through a list of who is the most appropriate person for this occasion. This is emergency contact for a charity walk. That's not that's probably not likely the person who can see me in hospital. It can't be someone oversea. I remember going through this scenario of trying to work out who would it be for a hospital visit. Who was the most appropriate person who would know my family contact details if they needed to? Would they know where to find my undies? My phone charger if I needed them to bring them into the hospital. It has to be someone who's reasonably close to you to know those sorts of details. And time changes all of that alone. Over 2020 who that person is who knows that information for a single person - well that period has changed for me, you know, a few times.

B

Berenice Smith 20:17

It's important stuff as well? Where are all your documents? Where is your will? Where is everything in your house? That takes a lot of trust in someone that doesn't live with you? Or is not partnered with you?

E

Elaine Ritchie 20:34

Yes, that can change over the years. And I think it depends on as to say what the situation is. A charity walk then, you know, I can give someone's number, but that person may not be

charity walk, then, you know, I can give someone's number, but that person may not be appropriate if I was taken into hospital. If it's a lot more of a personal nature, then my emergency contact might not be the person that I actually want involved. And there isn't that one go to person.

P

Penny Rabarts 21:05

Yeah, 100% agree with that. Totally agree. So it is working out. And that's the other bit it comes back to having to go to reach out and have those conversations, which sometimes feel like you're, you're going to be stepping in line like, you know, asking someone that that sense of you know, breaching, you're taking a step, you're taking a leap of faith to ask someone that you wouldn't normally feel like you would you would do? So? Yeah, it is there is a lot of taking, taking those leaps of faith as a single person asking for help on any number of things. And being told, why didn't you ask me? Wow. I totally get that. As easy as that is? No, no, I haven't you know, I had a family, a younger family member, say, once during a single phase. Aren't you lonely? And I thought offer hasn't come from a 10 year old, that's come from the adults. And I thought, why, why? Why do you think because I'm on my own, that I'm automatically lonely. Everyone can be lonely, whether they're single or not, you know, some people can be lonelier in their relationship than on their own. And yes, sometimes I am lonely, but not because being single. There might be something going on that in that moment you want someone to talk to about it. Elaine, I saw that you've got a cat so you don't come home to an empty house. Can I just say that? I debunk the whole cat lady thing. I had a cat for ten years and now I've got my dog Livi who I hope you can't hear making a noise outside. And they have become like my total stock gaps during the last period of COVID for talking to I quite openly have conversations with them. I'm disappointed that they don't give me You know, sometimes the advice that I want to hear, but they're very demanding friends, honestly. Anyway, as sort of a side note, you're not coming home to an empty house. Was my point okay?

E

Elaine Ritchie 23:42

Very, very true. It's something living that you back into the house to see. He is an animal, and still something living that is happy to see you. You know, welcomes me. I can come home and they're sitting on the drive waiting. That that means so much doesn't it? Just something that's just happy to see you. Especially after a tough day.

B

Berenice Smith 24:10

Another heartbeat in the house?

E

Elaine Ritchie 24:12

Absolutely. That's right. And sharing COVID. You know, it was all families; the talk was all about families with lots of Zoom calls that came into their own. Lots of children in the background partners dipping in. I worked right through COVID. I was nursing patients and I would come home and you know after a tough day. I might want someone to speak to or not speak to but

just have that choice. Have a hot bath put your pyjamas on, pop on a movie and just snuggle on the sofa. I might not need to say anything but that person isn't there. But you know, I can come home and have a snuggle with my cat Oscar. That's good for me.

P

Penny Rabarts 25:07

How did you find it during lockdown alone as far as being able to have people in a community to talk to? Did you have a very big Zoom group? I know that when was great for me, and I love doing the Zooms for catch ups for being able to talk to people. Did you get that?

E

Elaine Ritchie 25:27

Well, I wasn't I wasn't part of Gateway. And during COVID, I was I hadn't had my surgery by then. I did go to work every day, I was working with palliative patients that were dying of COVID. The way we got through basically was we set up a WhatsApp group that was NHS people. So I think it's a bit like being lonely, as we were saying, where you can be lonely in a couple. A friend of mine is married with children. And another, she's a nurse and another friend of mine is a nurse is separated, but has a child. And my friend that was married would go home and want to offload to our husband, but he didn't understand at all. Because he's not in the situation she was in. He didn't see what we were seeing. So he had nothing to relate to. That's how we just, we glued really well during that time. It's just people to, to sound off against and have a cry or just be silent together if need be. The weekends were tough, and days off. Because you know, you heard of the whole thing, didn't you about? Oh, as a family, it was great. We went off into this, we went and did that. And we've been cooking together and you think ah, what are we what am I going to do? So yeah, Zoom calls came into their own. But again, a lot of people that are can't do that, because we're doing something with the children or with my partner. So I find it really, really isolating.

P

Penny Rabarts 27:27

I am I was thinking about that before I came on that I was feeling a little sensitive, perhaps about talking about this topic, because it is something that we don't; there isn't a voice. I came into this community coupled. And that's really important. I've gone through what I thought was my grief in my my 30's significantly and for a much longer period of time when I was single because it was not by choice. It didn't happen for me. I didn't find my partner. I made some decisions about looking at IVF on my own, got to a certain point and decided that that wasn't the right thing for me personally. But having having done that, and then in my mid early to mid 40s meeting someone, I fell pregnant and had a miscarriage. I had 'an experience' that I could talk to people about. And I know that people say we don't talk about miscarriages enough, but there's still a conversation out there because even people who have miscarriages may go on to have children. There's a wider group of people who are in that cohort that have this experience. And I found that that was my voice. I found my voice through that miscarriage experience. But I kept falling back to the fact that an experience that happened within a short period of time. It wasn't until I had a conversation with Steph from World Childless Week that I even learnt the term 'disenfranchised grief' and realised that that's what happened in my thirties. This community gave me those words for what I went through and the elongated period of grief, frustration and not knowing what on earth I was going through. Why did I feel like I was so

disconnected from what was happening with my friends? The tough bit was when I was single, and in my late 30s, and realising that the wall was coming, and I was hurtling at it thinking, I'm gonna smash into this, and I've got nothing. What on earth am I doing? This is when I made those choices. Okay, I'm going to look at IVF on my own. It felt like I got some control back. But I didn't have anyone to talk to. I didn't even think that there were other people to speak to at that time. When I had the miscarriage, found the community and started talking more, I really felt like I wanted to share the experience from my 30s. And single, because that's what I didn't hear. That's where I felt the most lost, and that there was no voices for me to listen to. I don't know how that happens, how we make single and childless louder?. But I was really pleased that it was acknowledged this year with World Childless Week and I know that the Full Stop have done an episode before about it [Single and Childless during the pandemic] which was awesome. I want that voice of the single experience to be louder. We are probably a larger cohort than those who IVF failed, with illness or circumstance. It's not just about having not met someone or never had the opportunity to try. It's different to medical reasons that we as generally as a society talk about. The IVF was an attempt. What have I got to talk about? There's not a tangible thing, like I didn't go through. I didn't go through IVF I don't understand that process. I don't know what it's like to try to fall pregnant. So am I not really here? I failed even at that point but we're part of the same group. There's so much talk about not having success with IVF. It's terrible, the experience that people have with it, but I haven't got that. I haven't got that comparison to even make. The fact that having a miscarriage was my entry have something to talk to... I had a voice and I got to share it. I felt so isolated before. I have no idea what's happening to me that I suddenly had the slight door that something to something to say, and I just let everything out. More than probably needed. But it was because there was probably all this unresolved stuff from before. Being single, that was coming into it as well. I just needed somewhere to share it and let the world know, 'Hey, this stuff happened to me'. Everyone has stuff that's going on, but because it's you, you feel like it's much bigger. I was going through all this stuff. And nobody knew what was happening to me. Because we don't talk about it. Elaine, that you've done this later in life and have the courage to talk about it; that's phenomenal. And talking about it now, I haven't in the past, you know, I think it was something that was always very buried. But you know, I, I've never been pregnant. I've not miscarried, and I did the wave of light last night with Gateway Women [Baby Loss Awareness Week November 2022]. Hands up, I was in absolute bits last night. But you know, there were people that were grieving, lost children and miscarriages. And I thought, I haven't been there. Do I have a right to be here? But, you know, I was still grieving about what I haven't had, and that's disenfranchised grief. That's why I'm talking about it. I was the one that hit the wall running. And I was just completely overwhelmed by all and not only the grief of childlessness, but I think the grief from being single.

E

Elaine Ritchie 36:17

I was asked by a friend if I would go shopping with her one day. Great. I'm a woman, I love shopping! But it was for her daughter's wedding; to shop for a wedding hat. Yeah, of course I will. It was no problem until I walked into the shop. I don't even know what went through my head. But I just stopped. I never gave my mom this privilege. It led to thinking that I never gave my dad the honour of walking me down the aisle. I thought, you know, this is exactly the same as my childlessness. It's grief. It's grieving for something that you haven't had. And some things that you never can have. Yes, I can get married. But I can't give that to my parents now. They're not here. It's too late. So yeah, I am. I'm coming out of it now. And it helps to talk about it. So I think it's time I found my voice.

B**Berenice Smith 37:33**

We're very quick to put labels on experience. Listening to both of you and acknowledging as you both know, that I went through IVF. And hearing you and acknowledging your words., Penny. There's a lot in having an experience, like a miscarriage gives you a way in, and that that's wrong. And I know I've had this conversation with Steph too, and with other people, too. When people arrive in this community through a circumstance that's not an experience they aren't heard. Because that's not what miscarriage it's not what IVF it's not what failed pregnancy in some form is or a loss. But something maybe beyond our control by circumstance of life? Jody Day speaks about the 50 ways not to be a mother and a majority of those aren't medical, loss or treatment. I just want to acknowledge that. And thank you just for bringing that up. Penny, I think it is so important to talk about that and to hear the disenfranchisement within our own community when we don't say something or talk about this more. We certainly learned from the previous single and childless episode, when we were talking there about lockdown. Elaine, I can't begin to imagine what you've been through in your capacity at work. But also just going through that experience of nursing other people. That whole family narrative was so strong, during COVID. It's all very much family, family and the implied definition of family, as we all know, is the children It's the labelling isn't. We're victims of it ourselves as a community, but also within our community if we try to define and categorise. And actually what I've learned in all of the podcast episodes from our guests, and from the listeners, as well as that we can't label stuff. Our circumstances are too vast, childlessness is a contentious word in itself. Everyone I've met is more, not less of what they've been through. But it's the term that we tend broadly to be, again, a label with defined by, that's sometimes not good enough.

S**Sarah Lawrence 40:45**

I was wondering if I could ask you both something. Because, you know, obviously, I work with our community. And I have this real felt sense sometimes, when I'm working with people that, obviously there's my story, and there's a whole list of stuff. And then I sometimes get this sense when people are single, that they feel that they're not worthy that they've not been through enough or anything to justify being part of this community. I was wondering if it's not too painful, if you'd be able to talk a little bit about that, because I always feel that people regardless how they get here, it's not it's not Top Trump's. I was wondering what what that fit that that that kind of that felt sense is amongst people who feel at the moment they're not being properly seen? Because you are the majority of our community, you genuinely are - the stats back that up.

P**Penny Rabarts 41:52**

It's a really, it's a really good question, Sarah. How do I feel? I think I said before that I felt a little, like, coming into this, how would I feel about talking and I really wanted to be as honest as I could, without feeling like it's a difference between couple and single. There is this experience of talking about the things that are often coming from being a couple, whereas the situations where you're single, are, how much can you talk about how many? How many things are there to be said? I get old to pull my socks up and get on with it? Yeah, thanks. I didn't find someone, I didn't have a have a child. And it's not the life that we thought or intended. But we just need to get on with it. Because I come, I'm Gen X. The baby boomers who were all getting

on with it. But they were also the ones for whom everything was about finding your partner and having children. When that wasn't happening for me, and I was failing. I didn't think that I could talk to anybody. Who was I going to talk to this is. Everyone is aiming for this golden chalice and, and I just didn't feel like I had a voice to talk about it. For for your point, Sarah. I didn't even think about going and talking to someone like you, because I didn't even know what I was going to talk about. I couldn't even identify for myself what was going on. I'm only just having this conversation now. At 50; I'm nearly 50. And it's only really in the last three years. So for the majority of time, I never had a voice to talk about it. Or thought that I had one or thought that I had something to talk about that would be worthy of a conversation. So yeah, 100% I would have felt a bit silly talking about it. I would think that people will be like, 'yeah, and, okay, next,' There's other things, but that's where I feel like we don't give enough credence to the grief that we go through as being single and not having an opportunity and a whole life that we had thought we would have and all the ceremonies and milestones that we would get through that. None of it happens. It sounds like it's a failure. And that's the habit to say, I failed at that. And I tend to because of that I overcompensate. And we'll talk about all the great things that happen from my single life and the choices that I get to make and the things that I get to do when whenever at my choice and my leisure when I want to. But that doesn't mean that there wasn't really shit times. Not having the opportunity to be able to talk about it when I wanted to, when I needed too.

E

Elaine Ritchie 46:40

I've had therapy in the past, but I think like you, I didn't know what to voice. I just knew there was something. I wasn't happy and something was distressing me. But I didn't know what that was, there was nothing tangible that I could say. But I felt, yeah, I just felt I'd failed. I now can say what I'm not happy with. That it's quite tough being on your own. And I think I'm beginning to come out of that now because I am starting to talk about it. And I think that's what you need to do. I've done a lot of meet-ups now with other childless women and single women and women in partnerships. But it's never an issue. That's what's lovely. Everyone is accepted for whom they are, and what they are. You can sit there having coffee or lunch or whatever. And if you want to tell your story, then that's fine. And if you don't, that's fine, too. You're still accepted for who you are. And I just think that's lovely. You know, I come away feeling really quite nourished from these from events. So yes, it's nice just to for it not to matter now.

P

Penny Rabarts 48:27

I always say after a really good catch up with the, the girls in that community here in Melbourne, that my cup is always filled after a really good catch up. And yeah, and I think come away and I can that will sustain me for you know, a period of time; it feels good. Like I know that were at times where I've felt isolated. And I wasn't getting that you can it's like anything in life when you're feeling crappy. You shut the doors, and you hunker down and you stop seeing people and doing the things that you you need to do. And then when you go and when you get to meet up and do those things with people how much it does nourish you and fill your cup. So I've been very aware of that in this last year I've just how how good it is to have community and do stuff with them alone.

E

Elaine Ritchie 49:31

I think for me in the last six months even what's changed for me is that yes, we can get out there now we can meet up with people. But through the community I've befriended three other single women and we have a minimum of a weekly zoom call now. Two of them I physically met one, I haven't but that doesn't matter. There's no barriers. It might be "I'm having a really tough day today". And you would just close the curtains and go to bed and hunker down. And that's your jam. We can message and say I'm having a bad day. And someone will suggest a Zoom call. And they all have the same outlook from a single perspective. And it may be nothing to do with that. It's just that you might have come home and said to a partner, this happened today. And I'm really upset about it, you know, you have your community now, and they get it. So it's opened up a new world to me. I love that.

S

Sarah Lawrence 50:50

There's a real sense in that communities that I guess for people that single you need that kind of chosen family if you like, so people that you can check in with, and people that are going to be there and get it rather than somebody that says, Oh, I can't right now, because I've got to do X, Y, and Z.

P

Penny Rabarts 51:09

That's exactly right. And there are people who understand, so I can catch up with women in this community. And it's those probably that are single, that I have extra connection with or more. I don't want to say I understand why, but there's the our way of life at this time than the season is matches more. But you know, I say that. And then just this last week, I went to see some old neighbours. They are maybe a few years older than me who have had their kids, they've grown up, and I had the best night. And that was a total 'Fill my cup', because they saw me as a human being. I've lived across the road from them for 12 years. And we just got to share stories and commonalities that reminded me of the community outside. That bigger world that's outside of this community. Because I didn't realise at the end of COVID, that I had spent an awful lot of time just kind of totally immersing myself in the childless community. And that at some point, because lockdowns were ending, I was going to have to integrate myself back into the wider world of seeing other people and hearing conversations and being ready for some of the comments and stuff that would happen that I was a bit nervous about. Because I'd got so used to having catch up so with people since I've come out, I call it my 'coming out'. Since I've come out I could say all of those things about I wanted to, about living a childless single life that they would understand completely. I call it Gen Pop, and you're like, gotta be ready for the stuff will come back again.

S

Sarah Lawrence 53:30

That's like a real sense, then it's like, our cue? So a community of single women who fills your cup up. And then slowly, you can go out into Gen Pop, which I adore, I love that I'm stealing that. And you know where to recharge your batteries, if you like if you have a not so positive experience.

P

Penny Rabarts 54:07

Penny Rabarts 51:02

100%. It's knowing where you can get that from, but that as human beings, we all gravitate to people. There's an older guy around the corner who I stop and say hi to with my dog. And just the joy that he gets out of saying hi to us is part of what makes my day you know. We get it from all kinds of places. But that reliability of having people that align with you - like the Zoom with you- reliability is really important. Knowing that that's something that you can count on. Or if I've gone quiet for a couple of days someone will reach out and ask me what's up what's going on? And just knowing that's real, it's really important.

E Elaine Ritchie 54:55

It is it's just knowing there there isn't it? You don't want to be in everyone's pockets all the time but you can just reach out if they are quiet for a few days, with a hello, are you okay? And that you know they're there for you. And that means the world.

P Penny Rabarts 55:12

I'd like to see more confidence in and conversations coming from the single in the group so that we do here and that becomes comes out into the open so that people behind us can see that that is a legitimate experience and grief that we go through. And it's not just having gone through, you know, a procedure or trying or that guarantees your spot as a childless person that you've you've gone through something as a single into your grief is just as legitimate as the person next to

B Berenice Smith 55:12

That's reassuring to the coupled community who might worry about sticking our feet in it sometimes but to know that we can be part of that healing process with you is a really lovely thing. I guess it's giving that confidence to have those conversations and get some reassurance together; learning together from each other. Is there anything you'd like to see in the community if you had a request - a change that you wanted to see? What would that be?

S Sarah Lawrence 57:01

What about you Elaine, do you have any wishes?

E Elaine Ritchie 57:07

Well, I think we spoke about this a little while ago and this is a real wacky thing out there. But I think that the childless women should integrate with childless men's community. That would be great.

S Sarah Lawrence 57:29

We were sort of talking about this - us three too

we were sort of talking about this - as three too.

M Michael Hughes 57:32
A dating agency?.

P Penny Rabarts 57:39
Oh, my goodness, yes!

M Michael Hughes 58:01
I think that's a bloody good idea.

P Penny Rabarts 58:04
How many singles have you got in the Childless Men's Community? Quite a few of you I guess?
And all over the world, Michael?

M Michael Hughes 58:16
Yes we are global. America, Europe, Australia - quite a lot of Australia, Zimbabwe. Thailand. I've been listening. I think the silence shows that Berenice, Sarah and myself have shown is that we realise this is a big topic. It needs to be talked about. When we first started the podcast in 2019 we were gobsmacked about it; it's quite an education. Single and Childless in a pandemic is the highest listened to episode. What I can tell you is that all those things that you feel are reflected in the men's group too. We talk about feeling of failure because like you say, Penny, there is that golden chalice that we must subscribe to. Because there are a lot of single men out there who want to meet someone.

E Elaine Ritchie 59:55
I'm serious - at our age, the chances of us meeting somebody who is childless is probably not a very high percentage. And whereas, okay, meeting somebody who has got children can bring a whole new dimension to your life, I understand the challenges that would go with that as well. But it doesn't stop us. I still want to meet people. And I mean, go to the cinema with someone and, you know, go on holiday, that kind of thing. See the world. That doesn't stop, because I haven't got children. And if I can meet someone that is, has that same point of view? That would be fantastic.

P Penny Rabarts 1:01:00
I add something in just on this, this topic of dating, because I think it's an awesome idea alone. But I want to give another side to that is that when I've gone from, you know, being a couple to

But I want to give another side to that is that, when I've gone from, you know, being a couple to single I, you know, there's a painful period where you go through the change of being a couple to being single. But there's also an element of it, I really enjoy. I might enjoy being single and do this or feel good things and find I really love it. And then I'll get to a place where I think I'd like to do something and share time with people or a person. But I find it - well, offensive feels like such a strong word. But when people as if I'm dating. Or 'I wish my husband had a brother that was just perfect for you'. I think no because all I hear is, I'm not acceptable as I am. That's what it feels like. I tell them I'm not looking. If I was looking, then I'd be having that conversation. And you'd know that. You know, I've had I've got some terrific dating stories. And I have great fun when I'm in that place. And that season is here for me. But yeah, right no, I am in a place where I don't want to have someone else right now. That doesn't mean I don't think this it's an awesome idea alone. I do. I think it's great. Because it even piques my interest if someone who was childless who's had the same experience. And who hasn't necessarily felt like people have looked at them maybe felt them thinging what's wrong with you? They've got kids and and they must be something wrong with us. Or people say to us about as woman because we're both women, about guys who haven't who haven't been married or who haven't got kids to read 'red flags'? I wonder what's going on there? And I think, well, they're saying the same thing about me. I've not been married. I've not had kids. So what red flags you're raising about me? And I laugh, but I'm not laughing? Because it's offensive. It's an awesome idea.

M

Michael Hughes 1:04:06

I'm quite privileged to be in the company of four women having a conversation about this. So I want to ask you both how do guys not put their foot in their mouth? You know, by coming up with those bingos we talked about before. Like, I'm quite wary about what to say here because it's not my lived experience. What sort of language should I be using to not trigger? Does that make sense?

P

Penny Rabarts 1:05:20

I totally understand what you're saying. And I think for me, it's it's never a straightforward answer, because it's just like being childless. There's so many different things in different places where people are at, and on the journey, that you feel different things will trigger different people at different times. What might trigger one person and might not trigger the next. The same same could be said, for me as a single person, that something that might have really triggered me a year ago, I might not even notice today. So it's, that's not really helpful at all.

M

Michael Hughes 1:06:09

What was the first thing you come to your mind when I said that?

P

Penny Rabarts 1:06:12

I thought you were gonna say that you're really privileged to be in a loving relationship. Before you said that you were really privileged to be in a room of four women, which was beautiful that you said that. And I was I was about to start feeling worried, but you didn't do it. That was

a beautiful thing to say, Michael. So I think that some people are just good at reading a room and knowing what to say. And some people will say the wrong thing and not know it. And I think we as individuals know when someone says something that was felt with intent, or it wasn't meant with any intent, and that we might be able to say something. And we were here, you know, Elaine and I are here talking because we obviously feel comfortable about it, or more likely to say something. I hope you know, I'm still working on that strength in the space of being single. But it's a tricky one. Did you think of anything, Elaine?

E

Elaine Ritchie 1:07:49

I did, but I've got a menopause brain!

S

Sarah Lawrence 1:08:04

Oh, I recognise that. Honestly, I do.

B

Berenice Smith 1:08:09

You mentioned about personal contacts and I wondered about men being mindful of behaviours, as well. But that's all men, not just childless men. That kind of privilege of being able to walk down the street at night - my running route, and my walking route changes as soon as the clocks go. Unless I take Molly my dog with me. I don't do. I am digressing but sometimes women who've got used to situations we don't always recognise it sometimes, that we're adapting because of the threats that are out there. I'm moving into a much bigger picture about women's safety. But I think that being safe and being mindful of keeping a safe space and holding it is so important. I think we do better in our community because we're used to the threats that we get but equally there's always room for improvement and sharing knowledge. We've got an awful lot of lessons in the childless community that would impart very well to people who don't identify as childless.

E

Elaine Ritchie 1:09:50

I'm very conscious of my safety as a single person. If I decided this afternoon to take myself off to London, wherever. Nobody knows where I am. I find that quite, quite unnerving sometimes if something happened. Nobody knows where I am. I don't think anyone says anything that would trigger, you know, with intent to say that? I think it obviously depends what said and how the person that you're saying to, to at that point in time is, what place they're in how they're feeling. You know, it's not something nothing that I would take as, as I can't say you can't say A or B. It just depends how I feel that day. But I guess that's the same with everybody. And lots of situations really.

P

Penny Rabarts 1:10:56

I had a thought as Berenice was talking, actually, that I, because you already have the sense of the bigger picture of failing because you're single and you haven't got kids, that I would be much more likely, if something was said, coming back to your your question, Michael, I would

much more likely. If something was said, coming back to your your question, Michael, I would probably say, oh, no, that's okay. Or let it pass. Because for me to bring it up - I wouldn't. I don't even think my first reaction would be to let it go. Or say that was wrong, because I've been ingrained into thinking that I am the bottom of the food chain. And what I know that sounds really wrong. But it's not even it's like this on the surface. We're saying 'it's okay'. But in actual fact, that's where we as singles need to be stronger to say what our voice is, and what is right and wrong. We probably haven't figured that out yet. Like we don't know, a lot of that stuff like we're holding our keys in our hand with the key pointing out for protection, because it's just something that we do. Just as singles, we've got so used to think things being said or done that we, we were, you know, let it slide that actually, all of those little things add up. And that's what makes it difficult, you know, extra difficult, being single, as well as not having kids that if we stopped and went 'Hang on, we've got just as much voice here!' We've moved on in 40 years ago, there was so much of the women having to be in the home, and that they would rear the children. We've come a long way from that with the changes of behaviour and equality. But we're not thinking about this yet from the childless and single experience. So, yeah, I think that voice and that's why perhaps I see so many more couples who are talking because it comes from a place of, you've had an experience, or you've got support and the home that you can come back to and talk to, that you can have those intimate moments that have happened. Because you've conferred, and then got a confidence to share it. Whereas from a single point of view, I don't have that. As I love my cat and dog, they're not telling me 'Go for it Penny!' It has to come from within. Now I've got more people that I can do that with. But yeah, I think there was a long answer, there are probably things that I that should be I shouldn't be able to share with you. But I've yet to identify them for myself and be aware of what what they are. Because we just haven't developed that voice. I haven't developed that voice yet.

M

Michael Hughes 1:14:51

I'd like to think by understanding this perspective because one of the things that that I see in any a men's group is that we're developing our vocabulary right now, about how it how it feels to be childless man. I'm sort of getting the relationship there between the two.

P

Penny Rabarts 1:15:17

I think you are. It's recognising what I'm not trying to say, with many words. .

S

Sarah Lawrence 1:15:37

It's a huge part of our community. But at the moment, there's not that cohesive voice . There's a word Michael uses a lot 'advocated'. It's not there yet. You haven't got that? I guess that vocabulary in that cohesive voice is an issue and we're going to start standing up for ourselves because this isn't good enough. And I really get that sense that 'being at the bottom of the pile' when I work with people that are single and childless, that comes through so strong, like, should I be here? Am I worthy enough to be here? They tell me they don't have a list of things that have happened. Almost like we have to have a tick box when the reality isn't that we've got to jump over a certain number of hoops to be worthy enough but everybody's here. We are joined by that that one reason. Thank you so much for sharing. Really, thank you. So lovely to hear you both.

P

Penny Rabarts 1:16:53

Yeah, thank you for inviting, inviting us inviting me and giving me the opportunity to share a part of my story. I really do appreciate it. And it's lovely to be able to see you guys and have this conversation.

E

Elaine Ritchie 1:17:11

Thank you and and nice to meet you.

S

Sarah Lawrence 1:17:55

Thanks for listening. We hope you found Penny and Elena's amazing as we did, we'd love to hear from you if you're equally blown away by them. If you'd like to find out more about our podcasts or you have a great idea for a topic we've not covered or you just want more of, we'd love to hear from you. We want the Full Stop to have as many voices from across our community as possible. So if something's missing, or you just want a deeper dive on it, let us know. As always it is important to us to remind you you're not alone.