

The Full Stop

Boundaries and Words of Comfort

Episode 58

December 2023

Presented by Berenice Howard-Smith, Sarah Lawrence and Michael Hughes

Sarah (00:00:09) - Hello and welcome to the Full Stop Podcast, a childless community podcast with Michael Hughes, Berenice Howard-Smith and me, Sarah Lawrence. If you're new to this podcast, we're here to delve beneath the surface of the child's identity, to cover 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 is just us when reflecting on our year. And then we talk about Christmas. Yes, the dreaded C-word and all that it conjures up for us in the childless community as usual, because it's unscripted. This episode went in directions we hadn't expected, but one thing was clear we all still struggle with Christmas.

Sarah (00:01:06) - So sit back, relax, and enjoy this episode all about how we come to terms with Christmas and what it represents for us.

Berenice (00:01:15) - Good morning. Evening, wherever you might be. Um, this podcast is the December podcast of the Full stop. And it's me, Berenice with Sarah and Michael. We have no guests on this one. Um, because usually it tends to be the three of us. And we will be inviting people in via a recording, a little gizmo gizmo on our website where people can record a message, and then we can pop it into the edited issue of the edition publication, whatever of the full stop. So it's just the three of us, and we're going to be asking each other some questions about the year, and then we're going to be talking about boundary setting, the complicated issue of boundaries, particularly at this time of the year. And as we go into New Year and the start of the year, that at all times, really boundaries are important. Yeah, particularly.

Sarah (00:02:09) - Around Christmas, though, isn't it? I think what can we or can't we do.

Berenice (00:02:13) - Yeah.

Sarah (00:02:14) - Pesky expectations.

Berenice (00:02:16) - So Michael has given us some questions because he's on a long drive. Weren't used to use it.

Michael (00:02:22) - Much to your your your horrors. Yeah. I had seven hours in the car yesterday, so came up with lots of stuff. Lots of questions. I was wondering, how was your year, though? And, you know, if he was around up here, how was it?

Sarah (00:02:38) - One word.

Michael (00:02:40) - One word, one sentence. It's up to you.

Berenice (00:02:43) - Oh, you see, Bindi does this sometimes. Yeah. It's. How was your how are you doing any sort of, like in a sentence or a word. Ah, there's a few of us of not verbal diarrhea, but. No, I can't do it. You know, it's a really.

Sarah (00:03:01) - Pointed statement, isn't it? It's kind of. I know when I start my when I start counselling session, I go, how are you? And everyone goes, oh, that's a really pointed, loaded statement, I think.

Sarah (00:03:11) - Yeah, it is really, isn't it, that it's putting people on the spot.

Berenice (00:03:16) - Now I got to say roller coaster really. Um, but out of my comfort zone a bit. But then actually in it. Yeah. And actually a lot about boundaries. Yeah. Actually going back to sort of you know, what we're going to talk about later. Definitely doing some really firm work about boundaries, but actually myself and my boundaries and not staying in my lane as well. It's been very challenging to do that sometimes. And so quite difficult decisions as well. I think the year I grew up, there you go. That's what it was. Yeah, I finally grew up.

Sarah (00:03:57) - Year of a doubting.

Berenice (00:03:58) - I know, I know, I'm not doing that again thanks to.

Sarah (00:04:03) - I don't do you know, I don't think my years been the same. Really. But the. I had a lot of change this year, I think. I think it's, um, predominantly. Trialing, going back to employment, which was, um, a shit show of epic proportions, is about all I can say about that.

Sarah (00:04:24) - And then, um, I guess a few months recovering, um, I don't I think I was saying it to my husband the other day. It's it has been a bit of discovery. Boundaries. Realising that I don't deal well with dickheads is a big one for me, I think. And actually not being not being too upset by that discovery, I'll be honest. It's, um, I think it is boundary setting, isn't it? And when when I say dickheads, I mean, um, in a corporate world, I don't mean out and about. I don't generally come across people like that when I'm out about as myself or in the counselling realm. It was just. Go. Trying to go back into something corporate was a big no no. And I realized very quickly that it was a mistake. But it took a few months to get my myself back on an even keel. I guess so, and Bernice has been very instrumental in that, in helping me with my website, because that was almost like me coming back and going to the I'm here where I was actually, I spent quite a lot of time hiding and not really being hundred percent sure how I'm turning up.

Sarah (00:05:33) - So yeah.

Berenice (00:05:34) - I love doing that with you. It was brilliant. It's been so lovely. Really fun. Oh, this is so funny. Yeah, a lot of a lot of talk about trees.

Sarah (00:05:43) - And you sign stuff, huh? You are. You can translate that for me, please. Yeah.

Berenice (00:05:50) - It's a short factory. And his tall tree and his. His blue trees. Yeah. What are we going to call this tree? Um. Yeah. That was brilliant. What? You do that. Sara, I think you're amazing. Really, really brilliant. Yeah.

Sarah (00:06:04) - And obviously, I think Chester was a highlight for me as well. So that was in that voyage of discovery. But what about you, Michael?

Michael (00:06:13) - I'm going to have to say. You know, I'm going to have to say roller coaster as well. Sorry, I'm not very creative. The first half of the year, I'm just I'm going back, you know, things are going along swimming, you know, fairly well.

Michael (00:06:30) - And then I've got a new boss at work that's always a bit unsettling. My work has been somewhat, um. It might unpredictable. Very unstable, let's put it that way. So there's been lots of movement, lots of people moving, leaving. So that always leaves you very, um, unsettled. So there was an undercurrent of that. And of course, as much as I don't want work to be part of my identity, it pays the bills. And, um, there's there's a is an added incentive. Because I've made it very. I'm very open about the fact that I want to retire at 60 and. Yeah. So there's that, um, incentive to just last out three more years. Three more years. Which creates which actually creates a little bit of anxiety because you're sort of. Oh, yeah, just just three more years. Don't change anything for three more years. But then of course. Um, you know, with the pod, because one of the reasons I want to, I want to retire is because I want to I want to do more stuff with the podcast, with the childless community.

Michael (00:07:42) - But, yeah, just haven't got the bloody time. And then, you know, we've got aging parents, um, which is, which is another level there that that adds to that roller coaster. Then um, then of course, starting our online community. Chester, the build up to that. And now, um, suddenly I'm like, I have to say, I don't think I can speak on his behalf as well. But we're feeling really flat right now. Really flat. And, um, you know, I think I think there's a, there's a whole there's probably a whole episode about coming back from, you know, being overseas, seeing you guys going to Chester and, and the hype of all that and then coming home to the realities of. Oh. Here we go again. So. Yeah, it's it's been quite a roller coaster for me as well.

Sarah (00:08:39) - Yeah. I mean, I've got to be honest, I've noticed you felt a bit flat lately. It's felt. It must have been hard because there was all that build up, wasn't there? It was such a thing.

Sarah (00:08:48) - We were all really excited about meeting each other, meeting Vicki and and then it's kind of like, oh, it's done, it's finished, it's done, it's finished.

Michael (00:09:00) - Yeah.

Sarah (00:09:01) - Yeah, completely get that.

Michael (00:09:03) - So yeah, it's been a bit of interesting time. Interesting.

Berenice (00:09:07) - Let's throw something in here that's a bit kind of like off ball. But one thing that. I felt that's been important as well was how I think we've all got to know each other better. The richness of going to Chester and actually meeting lots of people, people that we've seen before. Um. People we've known before, but actually in a different way because like last time we probably all gathered together was Fertility Fest and we weren't doing the podcast and it was not even an idea the first time when we met Michael, and then when Sarah and I met, we'd got the little cards. And what I find now, having met you both and having met Vicki. And everybody else is that, you know, that's to counteract the flatness of tiny bit is actually that feeling of knowing you all better is just amazing.

Berenice (00:10:05) - You know, I think that that's probably, you know, it helps. Maybe you and I shared with the website a bit, you know, not necessarily. We're close, I think, anyway. But it was nice to, you know, I knew who you were. You better. And to just catch up again and spend time with Michael and Vicky, but with also with other people as well. There's a big richness there and that hasn't gone away. It's still there. It's still, you know, settling in here today and we know each other better to pick up on those vibes. And that's quite a lovely and special thing that we actually did or meet that we're still quite committed to the podcast. Nothing fell apart. We didn't go, oh God, I don't like you. It's. Gone off you. Even when you said Michael, when we were down that story house in the air, having a cup of tea. Do you remember when you were sitting there with. You had the beer and I had a cup of tea.

Berenice (00:11:01) - We sat with Bindi and a few other people. Um, and Helen Louise Jones was there as well, on the other table, and we all sat there in story House and like I said. So I'm the ideas person. Bowness does the details. I was like, do you remember that? You said, And I've got a long drive coming up when I go back and I'm like, oh. My God, so you are going to come over to Australia and I'm going to go up to you. Okay. He was asking. She might mean that. And it's just lovely. I just remember that so vividly. It was so funny. But yeah, it was lots of memories. You know, we're going to go back and revisit them again, I'm sure, and it's painful. But isn't it lovely that we all are still. Yeah. And it's brought the podcast so much closer. I think we, you know, it's a it's a commitment now. But the adulting I was referring to earlier and.

Michael (00:12:06) - So I'm interested to see how sorry he, uh, how you guys reacted to, you know, um, some of our audience approaching you and going, you know, really loved the podcast and that sort of thing. Did you did you find, because you've both admitted that you're both introverts? How? How did you find that?

Sarah (00:12:28) - You know, it was. I, um. I wasn't like people running up going. Can I have your autograph? Which is for me, that would be the ultimate IC. It's kind of like because

that's not really for me what it's about, but what I liked actually, and I think it carries on from really what Baroness was saying, like when we met in London as well, you know, we had Chester and then we had London as the podcast. And what I really loved about it was that actually there wasn't that it was just a bunch of people meeting, and it was very, um, egalitarian, if you like. There wasn't the fact that we were all, oh my God, you're the podcast.

Sarah (00:13:02) - It was, oh, hi with the podcast, and we're the community. And everyone was sort of I remember looking around, you know, when we was out, um, we were at the pub, weren't we? We had that area and I remember looking around at one point going, there isn't one person here looking really sort of out on a limb or like they're struggling or, you know what I mean? It was just a really lovely, all sort of inclusive atmosphere. And people were sort of changing and sitting with different people. Naturally. For me, as an introvert, the worst thing you can do is when I'm sat somewhere and you say, right, everyone get up and shuffle around and talk to someone different, that for me that you know, my stomach drops because it's like, I'm very comfortable here. Thank you. I've just built a rather lovely conversation, and now you're going to move me to somebody else that I don't know, and I've got to start over. But that didn't happen.

Sarah (00:13:52) - It was just a really gorgeous atmosphere, wasn't it, where everyone was just chatting. There was no one looked like they were left out, and I think so that that for me, that my that fear never materialized. So I didn't have to think about it.

Michael (00:14:06) - I think it's interesting when you. Interesting when you look through the photographs.

Berenice (00:14:11) - Mhm.

Michael (00:14:11) - They're all smiles.

Berenice (00:14:13) - Now.

Sarah (00:14:14) - Yeah. It's lovely.

Michael (00:14:15) - So Vicky took a lot of photographs and when you look through them everyone's got a smile which is beautiful. Really really nice.

Berenice (00:14:22) - Same for me as well. I'm just going to say this. Yeah. What you said Sarah was the same. I think for me, it just brought home that it's nice to have the full stop as a thing. So I find that I find for me because I don't know whether it's because, you know, doing design and doing bits and pieces, I get kind of not, not roped into things. It's not an unwilling thing. It's a general pleasure and delight to help people, if I can.

Berenice (00:14:46) - And I like to do that. But I often sit in the background or the periphery of things, which I'm quite happy with, you know, it's where I'm best at. I quite like doing all of that stuff sometimes. Not always. But, you know, the creative stuff is where I'm happiest. But what was lovely was being able to go to something like Chester or the last few years. I suppose really anything that we've done online or wherever, and I guess the focus groups for

story House as well, we'll say, okay, I have a thing that has an identity. But is this part of my life called the full stop? And it's nice to be part of a collective, but it brought home to me going to all these events and all these conversations that it's it's not ours. It was everybody's. So everyone that turned up in London, everyone we've met, everyone we've spoken to, and the full stop is very much about everybody else. We're kind of like I always say, onto the Guardian and gatekeeper for the moment, until such time as maybe somebody else comes in and wants to do the full stop.

Berenice (00:15:46) - It's it's a yeah, it's a guardianship, I think, at the moment. But it's nice to have that. So for me going along and seeing everybody there, it felt like people were quite happy to turn up and, you know, literally have a piece of the podcast and they take it away with them and keep it. It's theirs. It's not mine, it's not ours. And I loved that. That was just amazing. I really, really enjoyed that. I think for me, being an introvert, my my thing with being an introvert is that I have to sort of recharge in my own company. I can't keep going on and on. That's where I'm an introvert. I go to bed. Jon is a stand up comic and an introvert, and he's always said the introvert isn't for him is the same. It's the retail recharges. So I've been able to go out and do the party thing after after a gig. It doesn't work like that for him. And it's the same with me.

Berenice (00:16:35) - I have to go and sort of sit somewhere quietly and. Yeah, it pushed my boundaries of it because I didn't feel like I had a great deal of time to recharge. But that was me having to own some stuff and work with that. And that was okay. You know, there was some lovely moments, I think, in all of that where I was able to do that. As well, sir, and I you went out to that pub and the Saturday and we just sort of sat and watched the world go by and had a natter and it was just recharging. That's just two introverts together. That was the highlight of introvert ism. It's just yeah really what? You can stick a label on us and go, look, stay. Um, but yeah, it was just needing a bit of chill time and that was okay because that's managing kind of expectations. It's managing boundaries and going okay for me to do better later will to do better tomorrow. I need to recharge. And that's a nice kind of thing that I hadn't thought of before and actually benefit really from from knowing you and, you know, this stuff.

Berenice (00:17:38) - And I've sort of gradually start to learn this stuff from you. So thank you for that.

Messages from our community

Hi, it's Anne Barrett here from the Blue Mountains, New South Wales in Australia. And firstly, I'd like to extend my deepest thanks to Michael, Berenice and Sarah Lawrence of the Full Stop podcast for creating a space where voices like mine can be heard. Your thoughtful content and genuine empathy go a long way to supporting the childless community, so thank you. I also want to take this moment to express my gratitude.

Anne Barrett (00:18:09) - To two remarkable individuals who have been instrumental in supporting our cause here in Australia, Sarah Roberts and Judy Graham. Their dedication to advocating on behalf of the childless community is nothing short of inspiring. Both Sarah and Judy volunteer their time to educate businesses, fostering understanding and empathy

towards our unique journey. Sarah, I want to personally thank you also for not just your advocacy, but for your friendship. Your understanding, ear and support have been a source of comfort during some of my challenging moments. I am grateful to have you in my life as a colleague and friend.

Anne Barrett 4 (00:18:49) - As we approach the holiday season, I wanted to share some words of encouragement, especially for those who may find this time of year particularly challenging. The holidays can be a complex tapestry of emotions, and it's okay to navigate them at your own pace. To everyone listening. Remember that your journey is uniquely yours, and it's okay to acknowledge the mix of emotions that may arise. Allow yourself the grace to feel and don't hesitate to lean on your support system. Reach out to friends like Sarah and Judy, or connect with the broader community. In shared stories, we often find solace and strength. May this holiday season bring you moments of peace, joy, and unexpected beauty. Your worth is not defined by your family structure, and there is a wealth of love and connection waiting to be discovered in the most unexpected places. Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a wonderful new year.

Michael (00:19:51) - So what was challenged you this year?

Sarah (00:19:54) - Actually, this ask you first.

Berenice (00:19:56) - Yeah. You go first. Right back.

Sarah (00:19:58) - At you.

Sarah (00:19:58) - I'm sorry.

Berenice (00:20:01) - You were thinking. Well, I was thinking, Sarah, I like this.

Michael (00:20:04) - Fair enough. What continues to challenge me is. And it gets I think it gets easier every year, but it's still the biggest thing. It's a try not to be that typical bloke, as we know. As Jodie said when we went to story House, did I bring more waterproof mascara that my my emotions, you know, they, they sit very close to the top, so to speak. And that does continue to challenge me, I'll have to admit, because, um, I can't say that I'm comfortable. I can't say I'm comfortable with it. But I can say that I am becoming comfortable with it, if that makes sense. And so that continues to challenge me. And I think some pancreas comes to mind. So I had a couple of remarks there by a couple of gentlemen who said that, you know, I've really made a difference in their life. And yeah, I, I had to sort of not police don't you.

Michael (00:21:03) - Thank thank you I know really appreciate that but yeah. That, um, it started the emotions off, and I was a little bit uncomfortable because I'm around, you know, a lot. Don't get me wrong. I know the people around will totally understand, but it's about what goes on inside my head and, um, you know, still hard to let that out at times. Obviously, I've become more comfortable with it with when we're doing the podcast here. Um, but yeah, when when you're around a lot of other people, it's a little bit different, a little bit different. So it's a challenge, but not a bad one. That makes sense.

Sarah (00:21:40) - I was going to say it must be hard. Um, I don't know how you feel about this, but you are kind of a role model, aren't you, for guys in our community. So I wonder, is there does that does that put an extra pressure on? Because you are kind of, I guess front and center, aren't you around the the men's community, within this community?

Michael (00:22:02) - I know what you mean.

Michael (00:22:04) - And I, I accept what you said that. Yeah, I'm probably the most vocal, let's say. Um, but for my point of view, I just, I just see myself as, as a, just an ordinary bloke just being visible. And that actually gives me, um, courage. That's probably the best way of putting it. So from that male perspective where you want to be, you know, bravo and courageous and that sort of thing that actually plays into that. So it plays into put guys looking towards me. I kind of feel Ron Walters. I feel uncomfortable about that term, but. But if they're looking towards me, then that empowers. That empowers me in a way that I'm doing something right and I'm doing, you know, I'm I'm leading, perhaps leading the way and showing other guys it's not that bad. So it plays. It really plays into that. I hope it makes sense, but it plays into that macho part of me because it doesn't need to be emotional.

Michael (00:23:13) - You know? It just says, just look at what I do. But the weight comes on when you take in. Uh, you know, other people's stories, and you become intimate with that. That's where the white comes from. So in our last episode where we talked about why no one was no one talking about childless men, the weight of that does. Yeah, the weight of that weighs on me. That's shocking English. But I was never good at that. Um, yeah, that weighs on me. Yeah, if that makes sense.

Berenice (00:23:48) - Yeah. Completely boundaries again, isn't it? It's that fine line, isn't it? Between. Between taking on that emotion but also empowering others to do. To share that voice in some way as well to to engage. How did you feel about the men at childlessness? The story has rather because there was an awful lot there, wasn't there, doing different things, which is interesting to see.

Michael (00:24:13) - Um. Yeah, it was great. I mean, I don't want to call out names because obviously I don't have their their permission to do so.

Michael (00:24:21) - But you know, the, the guys that we've all met was it was fantastic. It was really good. And and it was also interesting to see it. Story House there was a lot of younger blokes there as well, which was quite interesting. And I sat next to a Dutch couple who were quite young. And, um. Yeah, they. They were a bit more. I don't know what a word is. I wasn't a valence, but I wasn't in the same place they are at their age, you know. And they were they were young. They know they've got they've got some issues. So they've come here to see what what's on offer, what what support they can get. And I thought it was fantastic and but and I think that is testament to. Yeah to the whole childless community that as we, as we become more visible. We as a whole community, you know, doing something with.

Messages from our community

Lui (00:25:23) - Hi Full Stop. It's Lui. I just wanted to say I'm so pleased the community exists.

Lui (00:25:32) - And it's been really good this year to have another area to meet more people, um, and to talk to more people. Although I love the childless women's spaces. I do think there's such a fantastic range of possibilities having men and women together. I've I've really enjoyed the community calls and the, um, being able to listen to the podcast and then ask questions, and I've felt really welcome and I'm really grateful for that. Um, I wanted to say a huge shout out to my wonderful meditation teacher and different Bindi. She's absolutely fabulous, as I'm sure you all know. Um, take the day and we'll know that. Um, but she's such a support to a meditation group throughout the year. And holds a real space for us. Um. For experiences and. Events that have nothing to do with the meditation class, but she thinks very carefully about how things affect us and how she can help. And I just wanted to say a huge thank you to her for that. Um, and thank you for stock for creating the community.

Lui (00:26:52) - And thank you to all you lovely people that are the community because, um, it's just really lovely knowing. Other people get it and that. Um, okay. I wish you all a happy Christmas. Um, happy Hanukkah, a happy eat, and certainly a happy New Year. One. Thank you.

Berenice (00:27:18) - What was the question again? And what changed you this year? Yeah.

Michael (00:27:23) - What's changed?

Berenice (00:27:24) - Everything. I don't know, so many things. So many things I don't know.

Michael (00:27:31) - What was the first thing that popped into your mind?

Berenice (00:27:34) - Oh, something did, but that was about five minutes ago, and I've forgotten. Um, I saw that that was five minutes ago. Oh, I think probably. Yeah. Confidence. My ongoing issue with confidence. But that all being said, one of the things that's been interesting was kind of taking this kind of idea and, and I know I've spoken to the two of you about it often is about okay. But how do I kind of deal with that? And.

Berenice (00:28:02) - As some people might know, and doing a coaching course. And it took me a long time to kind of like work out what coaching course. And I'm really glad I'm doing. The one I'm doing is with the University of Cambridge, which sounds like, ooh, and actually it's a bit as well because it is really good. Um, I'm glad I'm doing this one because it really, really is. Um. Challenging. Actually it is. I'm learning a lot. There's an awful lot more to coaching than I thought. It's a bit like how you get graphic designer. You can get these courses that are for a designer in six weeks, and they don't do those. They don't work. Um, it's not teaching your design at all. And it's the same with coaching. And you've got to go quite deep into this. And it's a really good, good course to do. But what I realized was in doing that, and it challenged me to admit that, yeah, okay, I want to get better at certain things.

Berenice (00:28:49) - Is it? Actually, I know more than I think. So I've gone in and I thought, oh yeah, I am. I certainly in a design sense I coach a lot because and this is kind of formalizing that, but I'm starting to realize that it's going to lead to other things, not necessarily podcast full stop related, not necessarily that, but other areas as well. So it's really interesting in that regard. So. Yeah, that's been a challenge, but it's been a good one. It's still a challenge because I still got to find the time to study again. That boundaries again. And I think there's lots of stuff. I mean, setting up the online community was a leap of faith, a massive leap of faith for all of us and setting it up as a challenge. Keeping it going and keeping it vibrant is a challenge. That's kind of like the full stop in a way has presented new challenges. You know, the actual process of recording an episode now is still. Challenging, but we're getting to be a bit vaguely more professional at these things.

Berenice (00:29:53) - Yeah, it's a challenge. There's also other stuff around. You know, when we launched the podcast and things and talking to you too and saying, look, actually, can we do this? Can we try that? And is there an easier way to do it at the moment? My challenge is it's taking a bit longer because I'm getting to learn new bits of stuff that will ultimately make it quicker and more seamless, but right now it's taking a bit longer to do so. I've got to kind of be aware that around the boundaries as well. So yeah, this it's been challenging and emotionally it's been challenging as well. You know, the enormity of going to story House, you know, all the focus group meetings and. The week after Wall Street finished with me when, um, I went to Wales for a week and I struggled. I did struggle. I think I did. I wrote about it actually in the last newsletter that I went through a period of grief. You know, still sort of lingering a bit.

Berenice (00:30:49) - It's been hard and really tough. You know, and I think it is I think it's a sense of sort of grief that that's done obviously looking forward to next year, but next year will be different. So it's it's a bit of grief there too. And I'm kind of struggling a bit with that still. Yeah, a lot of emotional stuff. But I'm learning to recognise that now. I'm not sure I'm handling it any better, but I'm learning to recognise it. Um. Yeah, there's some mental health stuff going on as well around stuff to do with them. Probably the perimenopause. Maybe it's not, I don't know, but there's stuff going on with that that's been worrying me quite a lot for the past year, and also kind of my thoughts around that. And um, yeah, some of those have been a bit dark. And I'm starting to recognize those dark thoughts and. Yeah, and that's hard. And that's as much as I want to say about that because. But yeah, that's something I'm working on.

Berenice (00:31:45) - And that is an ongoing challenge. And. Yes, I'm starting to realize I've got to start factoring that challenge into my life and handling that a lot better, because it's been a problem that I've been ignoring over other things.

Messages from our community

Bindi Shah (00:32:04) - Hello everyone, this is Bindi Shah. I am constantly reminded of the bravery and courage there is in our childless, not by choice community. Yes, we have come together under circumstances none of us wanted, but just look at us. We're creating communities. We're creating workshops and classes. We're creating art and webinars. We're

using our gifts to help in the world and to help us feel less. Less than. Because often childlessness can feel less than enough. But I think that we are enough. And actually, we are more than enough. The support I've received has been incredible this year. I'd love to thank everyone who wrote into Stephanie at World Childless Week and suggested me for the People's Champion. This recognition has been so impactful for me and I'm so grateful. 2023 will be a year I remember for a long time. The connection, the friendships. If you're new to your childlessness, do gently come into the childless, not by choice spaces. Start adding in connection and understanding to your life. All of our spaces are so welcoming. We'll be happy to have you.

Michael (00:34:07) - Don't, Sarah. No. You can't. You can't get out of it. Now it's your turn.

Sarah (00:34:11) - So how do you follow that? Um. I don't know. Perimenopause is a bastard, isn't it? It does do a number on your mental health. I can I recognize what you're saying? Um. I think my challenge this year was all around visibility. If I'm honest with you, I think the the the the foray into employment. Really? Um. I had to do a lot of self-reflection afterwards as to whether what was mine and what was theirs in terms, again, ten boundaries really. You know what was. When I went in and I did that, that, that just shy of three months working in that organization, I realized how triggered I was by people and I had to work out what was my trigger and what was their stuff, really.

Sarah (00:34:59) - And I think it took a it took me a good five, five, six months really to get over it. Um, and I didn't really feel myself until a couple of months ago, I think. And it was it's not that I felt that actually, I wasn't, uh, I wasn't good at what I did. I was, but it was a reassessment of who I am and how I want to turn up. And I think a big part of that was, how do I want to turn up for the full stop? I felt at times I've hidden, uh, hidden away. And I do it a lot. I deflect to other people, and I think that's probably why I'm a counselor. Don't look at my stuff. Let's look at yours. And I think I can do that a lot in my personal life. And I think this year has been really, uh, a sort of basically working very hard on myself and being more authentic and being honest with people. I think there was a lack of honesty from me.

Sarah (00:35:51) - I think sometimes when. Things didn't sit very comfortably with me, and I think I've started working on that, and I think an awful lot around sitting with other people and fears around, you know, do they like me? Do they think I'm an idiot? And a lot of that came up in that organisation. There was a lot of politics, and it was like trying to separate whether they had a problem with me, professional, whether it was me personally. And that's what really did a number on me. So yeah, I think for me, the challenge this year has been shaking that off and reassessing who I am and just being more honest about who I am and how I turn up. And actually, it turns out that I'm, you know, I'm not the person the bank was telling me I was on completely different amount. So yeah, it's it's been it's a challenge and I'm still working on it, if I'm honest with you. But it's it laid bare a lot of my, uh, insecurities.

Sarah (00:36:48) - And then coming on a podcast and pretending that I was all right was very, very hard. If I'm honest, that might be why in some of the episodes, I'm quite quiet or I'm deflecting a lot. Um, you know, so sometimes when Michael, you ask me a question or you're here that I don't answer it as me, I answer it and I almost like the third person. I'm not. That's a bit weird, but I just wasn't prepared to be honest at that point because of all

the shit with the bank. Which I don't miss. I'll be honest, it was. It was the worst decision I ever made, but also the best decision, because it meant I gave up financial services and just focused on what I'm really passionate about, which is my counselling. So, yeah, the best of times and the worst of times. Who said that? That's a that's a quote, isn't it?

Michael (00:37:35) - What is a song? Somewhere.

Sarah (00:37:37) - It was the best. It was the worst of times.

Sarah (00:37:38) - It was the best of times. Something like that. But yeah. So it was a.

Berenice (00:37:42) - Dickens tale of two cities.

Sarah (00:37:52) - So, yeah, I think that's been my challenge this year. Being authentic.

Michael (00:37:58) - Hmhm. Well, thank you both for being so open and honest.

Sarah (00:38:03) - Um, well, thank you as well, because you're honest.

Berenice (00:38:05) - Yeah. You are. It's kind of where we show up. You can't. You can never fault us for being authentic. I did put onto the social media today, um, yesterday when I was, it went up and it was about the invitation to come along. And if Michael said to you. And are you feeling festive? We went, nah, we can't really hide the episode. We've got to keep going. And you couldn't revolt us for never being authentic. We we're very good at it.

Berenice (00:38:30) - And I think again, that ties into stuff around when you said about what did it feel like when people were sort of going up to us and asking us about things and that that being present, not about you, Sarah, but I was just like, oh God, no one, no, no one do the fangirl thing because I just am me. I'm just boring, you know, slightly kind of crazy haired me and as authentic as it gets. And I'm kind of so pleased that people kind of saw that. It's just, you know, I get nervous as the next person. Um, isn't that the loveliest in a way? Not the loveliest thing. It's hideous when you're nervous. But. I think it just probably. I hope I really hope it goes to shows that anyone can do this stuff. If you want to, then you can. You don't have to be professional. There's a thing that that I advocate so much as just launch the damn thing. And that's it. I think I've said that a few times, Sarah.

Berenice (00:39:31) - That's so. Come on, sir, a lot of damn thing. Come on. You know, because at the end of the day, particularly with websites. Yeah.

Sarah (00:39:40) - Well, I think I said that to you didn't. I mean, because I was getting so pissed off with it. I said, Donald, let's just launch the damn thing. I'm sure sage said that. Yeah you did.

Berenice (00:39:47) - You emailed me that. I want to see you around the launch of them saying no. And I'm like, yes, yes, I'm here. Yeah. You know, that's the thing, isn't it? It doesn't have to be perfect. Really, really doesn't. And I think that's the issue with the podcast. You went back to a past episode, which I've done. And hilarious because we really are like, oh,

hello. Well, I like that. Hello. It's so funny. We had to get to know each other without knowing each other, and that's really hard. And then to turn up the sugar and go out, she has to like you.

Berenice (00:40:21) - That's that's good.

Sarah (00:40:23) - You know, that was the weirdest thing. I remember when you go, we were going to go over to see you won't be there at least that evening. And it was kind of like, it's going to be this big reunion almost meeting thing. And it's kind of like Europe. You turned up in the car, Michael, and we just sort of. Oh, hi. And then we just started and I was just like, there was no no fanfare, no drum roll. It just was. And I was like, oh, we.

Michael (00:40:44) - Just pulled up. We pulled up the side of the road. Quick, Sara! Get in. We're off.

Sarah (00:40:48) - And then we just started chatting.

Berenice (00:40:51) - That's that's absolutely how some cop show get in the car. We're taking you away. Podcast. Yeah. No, I got heckled in the street by him. I was walking back from the car with something I've forgotten. It was just like, I can't remember what you said, but it was just heckling.

Berenice (00:41:06) - And I thought, oh, I know that voice. Oh. It's you. It's a little bit like that. It was all very casual. Then you walked into the kitchen. You were like, I need a beer.

Sarah (00:41:16) - Was that what, Michael?

Berenice (00:41:17) - No, you. Oh, no. Sorry. You were just gonna have a beer. Yeah, and that was that. And it was just like it was, you know? Yeah, just.

Messages from our community

Katherine Verrall (00:41:31) - Hi, everyone. Katherine here. Now, everyone knows that I'm a great cheerleader for our amazing community. And this is true. And I always will be. I just felt I wanted to say that before I say all my thanks and how grateful I am. Um. I think the best way to put this is that since joining the full stop online community last summer, I've just really enjoyed getting to know you all better. And I've even discovered that Berenice and I are twins. How amazing is that? The monthly community conversations have been just so lovely as we not only discuss the profound and, you know, obviously very emotional issues that relate to our childlessness, but also just as all good friends do, we just sit and chat about what's going on in our daily lives.

Katherine (00:42:26) - I think from my point of view, I've sometimes got interesting things to say about my daily life. Um, and then other times it's a lot more mundane from me. So that's what you get from me, I'm afraid. Um, but I am looking forward to more of these great chats in the new year. Of course, the icing on the cake was our October in-person gathering. What a day! Five exclamation marks. I had some lovely chats with dear Berenice and dear Sarah,

and really got to chat with you and learn more about you, which was absolutely wonderful. And these things really matter, I think, and help you, uh, you know, sort of it helps you sort of, you know, in the future with bonds when you, when you actually, you know, get to know people so much more. Of course. And dear Michael and Vickie dear Vickie were over from Australia. And of course my dear friend Janine flew over from Copenhagen. So many precious memories and I'm just so glad that I've got many photos to treasure and to look back on.

Katherine (00:43:36) - Now I just want to say a little special thank you to Janine, my dear and true friend, Janine. Uh, you know I love you to be its buddy. And for lots and lots and lots and lots of different reasons. Um, but the one I'm going to, the main one I'll say here is and, and I think the one that strikes me the most probably is being able to share my love of nature with you. And we've just shared so, so many photos over the past two years, and it's just been an absolute joy. I've never met anyone who shared my passion of nature so completely, although there must be many people out there who do. But meeting you was just such, you know? It was my good fortune. And here's to load more pics in the future. Finally, Paul and I would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas and much peace, joy and happiness throughout 2024. Take care of your kind and gentle hearts.

Berenice (00:44:36) - Do you have any more killer questions for us? Mr. Hughes.

Michael (00:44:39) - Is this something that stands out for your year a highlight?

Berenice (00:44:45) - Not one thing. There were so many things I couldn't. If you. If I had to do, like some sort of show reel of the year, then the. I don't know that there is, because there's been so much of it specifically for this community than I would say. I think all the focus group meetings have been fun. Working on Robert's book, but also working with the, um editor on that, who I won't mention that's going by the book and then you will find out. But anyway, for privacy reasons. And just knowing that she's around in my in my space, in another part of my life is incredible. I'm actually probably just being a bit more open about the fact. Yeah I do. Oh, yeah. Full stop. And actually, I think no, actually I'm going to second backtrack a bit. There is a highlight. There is. Becoming a CIC. But because it felt emotional, it felt like this thing was a real thing.

Berenice (00:45:52) - It feels sometimes to me like the full stop is actually like another person in my life. I can't touch and hug them or anything, but the full stop. It's actually a proper thing. Not to say that anything that isn't a cross isn't, because obviously it is, but I think having done it for so long. And then it's the CIC. It meant that. Although it meant like a big thing, it meant that it felt like it was sort of something that, you know, if people sort of say, what are you doing to podcast? Which is great, but let's face it, everyone seems to have a podcast these days about something, um, which is great, but. People have podcasts and they disappear. But when you turn around and you say. Full Stop is a podcast. We've had 57, eight, nine whatever episodes.

Michael (00:46:46) - This'll be 58.

Berenice (00:46:48) - 58. Thank you. Um, chief counter and stats guy. Then we've got that. It's amazing, isn't it? You see, I see.

Berenice (00:47:02) - I've got a community and they're lovely. I just think that's been amazing to do that, because we don't have to see our city wouldn't have a community, and I do love our community. Just being able to have more information and just have people kind of. But yeah, guide us a bit and chat to us. And I've actually got people that are part of it so it doesn't feel like we're just going out. We're kind of going there's like a backwards and forwards with the podcast now. It's brought something quite unique and special. So I want to just give credit to everyone in the community and just say thank you. Thank you. You're my highlight. See? I see the the full stop. That's just my highlight. They're not quantifiable things. They're not things I can pick up and hug, although I've had a lot of the community. But yeah, genuinely just thank you from the bottom of my heart. Just being there. You're amazing. And I'm going to get emotional. So I'm going to put myself on mute now and have a little cry in the corner.

Berenice (00:47:52) - Thank you.

Michael (00:47:57) - What about you, Sarah?

Berenice (00:47:59) - Um.

Sarah (00:48:00) - I pretty much I think I'd probably echo what Bernie said. I think for me, the highlight was meeting people at Saint Pancras and and Chester. It was kind of. I think with, um. You know, we do a lot online. And then we had Covid, didn't we? And then it kind of made it very real when we met people. And actually, for me, I remember walking away from Saint Pancras feeling quite emotional, going, wow. Not not that we've done it, that it just that it was lots of people that were childless coming together. You don't often you never see it, do you really? And there was not and I just I loved that there was not one person sitting there filling out on a limb. Or, you know, lost or. And we all sort of came together, didn't we? And it was just it was just a really lovely day and I, I, I would love to have been bottled that up and, you know, just have a little, have a little sniff of it every now and again so I can remember it.

Sarah (00:48:58) - And it's kind of that, that really stayed with me. And I think, you know, having you and Vicky come over from, um, I know you said America, Australia was really special as well. It's kind of actually, I mean, obviously we know you, but we'd not get we haven't got to meet you both. And I think that was really special, but I was glad there wasn't a fanfare around it. I would have found it really. Auks. If on our first meeting we had photographers and it would have been fake and it wasn't. It was just we met up and we were just chatting and that for me was just really valuable. Rather than us all going, oh my God, we're all together and let's have photographs and pretend that it's this thing that it's not, when actually all it was, was, you know, four of us meeting up for the first time, but just really getting on. It was really good. And I will never forget the bag of Vicki standing at the the end of the session with the term plan.

Sarah (00:49:52) - Tim. Tam. Sorry. I'll pack up and go. Please, Sarah, please take some of these Tim Tams.

Berenice (00:49:59) - Please. Oh, I wonder if one of our members are still got her two Tim Tams. Do you remember? I'm not going to name names because again. But there is one one person in in the last community. No, the previous community conversation. Who turned up to it? I still got my two Tim Tam. So we're just like, wow, he's still got the kind of main line in there. God, God, mom, God.

Michael (00:50:22) - So for those for those who are not Aussie and we didn't meet in the UK, uh, Tim Tams are a chocolate biscuit. Um, cookie that is. If you come to Australia, that is the chocolate biscuit you have. And so we, you know, we we tend to. Well Vicky especially, she tends to buy a heap of them, take them overseas when we go. She should work for the Australian government as a trade envoy.

Michael (00:50:51) - I'm absolutely sure of that. But, um, yeah. So we, we found where we could actually buy individual ones. And so we bought them over for, for story House. So at the end of our session, Vicky was giving out Tim Tams at the end of our session, just as that little Aussie thing.

Sarah (00:51:07) - They're not penguins, but they're better than penguins, you know. Not. They're chocolate penguin biscuits. We get over in the UK. I've been on social media.

Berenice (00:51:15) - I did put them on Instagram, took pictures of them, but we kind of need a video of some sort of challenge now. Um, yeah. Challenge? Yeah we do.

Katy (00:51:30) - Hi everyone. It's Katy Schnitzler here from MIST Workshops Limited and I just wanted to wish a very Merry Christmas to well first and foremost, the full stop team. Thank you for all that you do. I find your podcast inspiring, innovative and of course one of a kind. Also, merry Christmas to all of the listeners and thank you to those who came to listen to the workplace panel discussion, which I was part of.

Katy (00:51:57) - I was honoured to be part of this at Story House Childless back in September, and I have just been overwhelmed with the wonderful messages, responses and also opportunities arising from this event. So thank you for putting me in touch with your HR teams. Um, I should say for those that don't know miss workshops, we provide training and different supports at work for people who are childless, not by choice, and also related issues of pregnancy loss and infertility as well. So positively. We've provided more training than ever this year with. Yeah, more work in the pipeline for next as well. Um, also, and I'm sure you noticed this as well, but I think there was more engagement than ever before during World Childless Week. So thank you so much to staff for organizing this and working so tirelessly to make change. And, um, yeah, I think one of the biggest and maybe more challenging things that I've been trying to do with workplaces has been to get recognition.

Beyond this time frame, World Childless Week for recognising it as something that's affecting people every day. So I'm going to continue that work into 2024. And I wanted to say thank you to everyone for bravely engaging with your own organizations to better support

childless, not by choice employees. I do think it's incredibly brave, um, you know, to speak out about something so personal. And lastly, just thank you to those working in this space. Inspirational thought leaders that you are. Um, there's so many to mention, but obviously the Full Stop podcast team, Jody Day, Jessica Hepburn and Robin Hadley there are many more, but I've only got three minutes, so apologies for that. Um, uh, but yeah, I recommend your amazing work in my workplace training and please just keep doing what you're doing. Um, and of course, big shout out to Steph for World Childless Week again. And Merry Christmas to every one of you who's listening. And I really hope you can find some time for rest and also have capacity for positive experiences wherever you can at this difficult time.

Katy (00:54:29) - Thank you so much.

Michael (00:54:37) - Ah, look, I have to say, um. You're growing up, adulting and starting the CIC and starting a community. And, um, I get it. I get a lot of satisfaction from from hugging our community. I did that a lot. Well, well, while we're, while we were over there, um, and then just picking up what you said. Very nice about after Chester, how you felt quite flat, um, that week afterwards. And I'm sitting there thinking I didn't have a chance, you know, because we were on that whirlwind tour, meeting all different, different people. And that was that was fantastic. That was really, really good. But I'm on echo. What you said to Sarah about Saint Pancreas and. And how comfortable, how far it was. And. Yeah, like you say, bottle it up. But I think there's also something in there where if if we could have somehow, I don't know, visually captured that it would, it would go a long way to help those who are struggling right now, you know, to see that, that what's possible.

Michael (00:55:55) - So how how I don't know how we could do it, how we could do it. But yeah, that would be fantastic. And that was a real highlight. Just meeting everyone, meeting you guys know, and you got legs, you know, that sort of thing. Meeting Ticker, meeting Jim as well.

Berenice (00:56:10) - Don't forget the dog that's all.

Michael (00:56:12) - Molly.

Berenice (00:56:13) - Yeah Vicki and Molly have been exchanging messages. So it's not like cheating.

Sarah (00:56:18) - On you then.

Berenice (00:56:20) - I think there's a loyalty problem there.

Michael (00:56:53) - So before we go to boundaries, I just want to say a big shout out to our community, to the people we've got in our circle community.

Michael (00:56:59) - You are. You are all awesome. You have made me grow. And, um, there are some of you that have had personal messages from me will understand that even more

than others. So thank you. That's really privileged. I feel really privileged to be part of a group with you all, and that's you too included.

Berenice (00:57:19) - That you sent me off again. I'll start crying. I mean, stop crying.

Sarah (00:57:24) - And so let's get to boundaries. Let's get to boundaries.

Berenice (00:57:26) - Yeah. Come on.

Michael (00:57:32) - Now, Vickie. No, we're having a chat today, actually, because as I said, we've been feeling quite flat and we've been trying to figure it out. And one of them, one of them is, yeah, this time of year. And, you know, what are we going to do? Um, yeah. And we don't know the answer. We don't know the answer to it, but it is around how do you protect yourself? But at the same time, how much do you expose yourself to the things you don't want to?

Berenice (00:58:03) - That's true.

Berenice (00:58:03) - I think boundaries I've inferred probably in the past, in the previous bit of the podcast, about about boundaries. I think, and I think it's a lot of it I'm quite sure it's tied up with with worse as well and trying to show up to, I'm quite sure of that. I've been terribly bad at it in the past. I remember I worked in an agency. It's kind of going back to what you're talking about, about working in, in, in going back to that job that you had an awful time you had over the, the summer. Sarah. And I've been in that position to empathise very much with that, that I've worked in places that have been terrible and we're going through, well, going through IVF. I worked in this agency. I took hours of my life and it wasn't actually even my own business. That was a bit. And I was often there like 911 at night, passing proofs. And then through some kind of conversation, I worked out that the person, the editor who was keeping me back because they just weren't particularly organized at what they were doing, was earning twice as much as me.

Berenice (00:59:06) - Mhm. Yeah. And. I think I was just like, you know, they were suddenly going home and having a life and trying to do the IVF alongside it. And a lot of that actually tied into the fact that I didn't think anybody else would employ me. So again, I felt like I had to show up and work more and proves that I could do it, because at one point they tried to demote me because they thought I wouldn't be able to cope with my job. Wow. The job that they demoted me to was going to be any better or less. Kind of, like, intense. Um, just kind of. I was managing editorial and design teams at the time, and the guy that they got into replace me by. Yeah. Um, you lasted about a month and then back again, and I thought I let it play out. You know, they'd get more money for it, but it was still. Yeah, it left an impact. Yeah. I mean, there's the happy news is that I did end up working for a very big, lovely book publisher.

Berenice (01:00:05) - Um. And they took me on and I got different. Well, yeah, boundaries were better because it was a proper company. But often that's the thing with some of these agencies, I think because some jobs they do stretches with boundaries, you know, because. So certainly my experience in design, you get a lot of design startups and it's just like, yeah,

from the front side and we can do this together. And actually behind it, it literally is that typical iceberg where it all looks glossy and lovely with the shiny logo and what they do, and underneath it really is just chaos on all wheels. It's awful. And the staff welfare is really bad and the players tend to be really crap. Yeah, yeah. And I think a lot of that was for me at the time, connected to worse and lack of self-care, not feeling I needed self-care because I was failing at IVF and failing at being a parent. And that I think, does affect boundaries. Me. Anyway, that's my kind of personal reflection on where I was.

Berenice (01:01:04) - That's not necessarily related to Christmas, I know, and and the holiday season, but I think just generally it's a kind of an attitude. My attitude towards boundaries was very mixed up at that time. I've learnt a lot this year about it, but that's how I feel about boundaries or have done in the past.

Sarah (01:01:20) - No, I actually think you're right. I mean, my boundaries were always pretty appalling. Um, they either were incredibly leaky and I'd put up with all sorts, or they were very rigid and I'd shut myself away from people. And I never seemed to get a happy medium because it was all. I think when you've got low self-esteem, which I very much did, it's kind of linked to how your mood is in that moment, and it can be very erratic. Mine was, you know, my mental health was all over the show, I think, and it's kind of intrinsically linked, isn't it? So I'd put up with all sorts of nonsense at work, and then outside of work, I'd be very lonely because I wouldn't want to be.

Sarah (01:02:04) - I'd feel sapped, dry by prattling around people that hadn't. I had no business prattling around and accommodating. And then I was tired. Because I'm an introvert. I had no way of sort of. I don't like the word self-care. I used responsibly selfish. I wasn't responsibly selfish because I didn't believe that I deserved it. And then so my boundaries were very rigid and I was very lonely outside of work because I didn't think, um, well, I didn't think people would like me, basically. So I had people pleasing and then not able to accommodate outside work. And I think, I think what you're saying is absolutely spot on, because I recognise how I used to be around my boundaries, to the point I've got a big family on one side, um, big Irish Catholic family. Uh, so lots of children, um, to the point that I would go to family dos around Christmas or anniversaries or whatever, when actually I didn't really want to be there. I would rather have said no, but I was people pleasing and so I didn't.

Sarah (01:03:10) - So I'd go and I'd get really upset, and then I'd feel like shit for weeks afterwards because I didn't have it in me to say no. And I think that is intrinsically linked with how you feel about yourself.

Berenice (01:03:25) - Greatly agree that. I think it's one of the things I've stopped trying to stop doing is. Doing? Yes and no. Whether? Because. The one thing that. Yes and no one feelings. The statements. Yes, I can do this. No, I can't do that. See. But what I've done is, no, I can't do that because. One example actually is is actually going out to my dog. No, I can't take her to the pub because. She's too old to lie on a hard floor. It hurts her bones. She's too old. In pain gets very stiff, very sore. If I put that in, there's room for a fix. But you can do. We just go for a short while, we can. We can, you know.

Berenice (01:04:29) - No, it doesn't matter if it's five minutes, an hour, whatever. And a drink isn't five minutes in the pub anyway? It still hurts. Another very simple example is the first one that comes to mind. I can't think of another one right now, but there's other things, you know, like, you know, I can't come to your your Christmas party because there's too many children there and I find it too upsetting. But. No no no no no no no I can't come. And I think also just acknowledging probably in that sort of, you know, that complex thing of self-care is kind of what is what is that to somebody. I personally, I personally feel that it's perfectly okay to um. I have a stack of books. And that's an appointment, in my opinion. You know, I don't watch television a great deal or anything much unless it's the Muppets Christmas Carol. I don't tend to watch anything much at Christmas. Um, because I don't particularly. I find it too triggering, too upsetting, most of it.

Berenice (01:05:30) - I don't know what's going to happen, so I just get a whole stack of books no more. Book club is a really good place to go to, to look for recommendations and ask in the community as well. Um. Yeah, I got myself a world of books delivery. Stack them up. That's my. That's my appointment. No, I can't come along. If I said no, I can't call long because I'm actually sitting in bed reading a hall of books, and I play with that people. But you can't do that. Why not? I'm not telling people what I'm doing, I just can't. But that's that's hard because I think that yes or no, there aren't feelings and people will. You unleash feelings in other people, don't you? I guess people get angry and hurt and disappointed, but that's their feeling. It's not yours to fix or ours to fix. Rather, you know, we can't relieve uncomfortable emotions in other people. It's really hard to sort of sit with that discomfort if you aren't empathetic and caring, which I think everybody in this community that I've ever met is so empathetic, so caring, and so kind.

Berenice (01:06:38) - But sometimes that can feel like you've got to kind of like, I don't know. We have to. Sponging somehow other people's emotions when they think, you know, they. They can offload their feelings of hurt and anger because we've said no to something. I think that can be really hard and that also you sort of feel like there's a bit of guilt. I certainly do, I feel a bit of guilt that I'm not doing certain things, but I've tried really hard this year to go. But see, I there's only one person that's going to look after me. And that's me, literally. I, you know, I have to do that. That's what I need to do. And that I find. Yeah, I find that really hard. I do, I find that quite tricky, but I'm getting better at it. I started off in a work sense. In a business sense, I suppose, because I run my own business, because of course, because of the staffing and things, it was quite easy.

Berenice (01:07:36) - And it wasn't easy. It was really difficult. It was really painful. But. Clients can come to me and go certain. It's design. It really isn't going to sort of, you know, I don't think I've ever worked on anything that's been so life changing and life threatening in design in my entire existence of my career. It's not urgent, but actually what I now do is I have a thing, right? Okay. If it's urgent, here's the rush fee. And it's this much and it's a lot, because that basically means that I have to then pass on any current work to somebody else. Um, and if someone brings something in. Now, that isn't the way that I work. And these are my tried and trusted systems. They're my trusted systems. Because actually, I know my job well, and I've done it for years. I know these systems work, and if someone comes in and goes, I'll be going it my way. I'm not your person. I'm not your person.

Berenice (01:08:34) - You're not working with me because I know my job well enough to know that this works. You can go find somebody else. And that's. That's what you do, because I've done a lot of that in the past where people have come and they've given me just stuff and. We do it my way. Some people give me stuff and they go, it's this way. And they might not know the tech or they might not know how to do something, in which case coaching comes in actually in this part. And it's kind of like, okay, we can do this together. Are you open to being coached and to learn with me? And usually they are. Nobody had one person that just literally overstepped the boundaries on that. And I learned hard from that because I've had a tough time with that, and it rattled me an awful lot and changed my perception of that person and about how we were working together. And but it mostly changed my perception of myself. And I felt dreadful. Afterwards because I knew I hadn't set my boundary.

Berenice (01:09:31) - What I should have said was, no, we're not. We're not working together. But here's someone who could probably do that with you better. And that's what I should have done at that time. So I kind of practiced it in that regard. I'm not quite so good, I suppose. Perhaps, um, personal stuff, but I've gotten better because actually, what I know is that if I don't do those things and I don't set those boundaries, I'm back to working all week. I have to work weekend sometimes. I know, Sarah, you and I both work for ourselves and the people that you do. That's kind of the nature of what we do. But I'm now realizing that if I do that, I need to take a day off during the week. And that might be, you know, like a Tuesday or Wednesday and I'm going something completely different. I might go and see my friends, I might go see my parents are going to do something, or it might just be half an hour or afternoon, rather of just taking my dog out or sitting on the sofa reading a book.

Berenice (01:10:23) - But that's my time, and I need that. And that means I have to be quite firm and acknowledge that I'm living with. The relief of setting my boundaries, as opposed to the guilt that might come from carrying and absorbing somebody else's feelings, because that's their feelings. They'll get over it. That it. That's their problem. It's not mine. But that's a really tough lesson to learn. Um, I'm sitting here with my hand on my my my chest because I'm feeling well, this is sort of okay in here because it's hard. It really is hard, particularly, I think, when it comes to Christmas and to families, because like you said, Sarah, the expectation is so high from people that you know are doing these things, whether it's a family dinner. You know, and and we've got to turn up and be something we're not because. Because it suits them, not us. You know, I advocate a curry on Christmas dinner when we time alone. I think, you know, I think Christmas is not.

Berenice (01:11:32) - Christmas is a bit like. It's just can be anything. It doesn't have to be anything at all, actually, in my book. Um, I think that's okay too.

Sarah (01:11:42) - Thank you. Michael. Did you find it?

Michael (01:11:46) - I doubt that our family will listen to this this podcast. I, um. Christmas is always a difficult time for us. Always wise has been. Um, we have we have people in our family that don't understand. We don't want to understand our position, and it has been explained to them many times. But it doesn't matter. When I think about when I'm telling someone about boundaries, I actually do give them a reason. Because for me, the way my

brain works, it's like, right now I can't. Here's the reason why. Then you gotta deal with that. You deal with that. I'm telling you what it is. I'm telling you I can't. Now it's your issue. It's. It's something you need to come to terms with, you know, to deal with.

Michael (01:12:41) - And I find that helps again, the way my mind works. I find that helps a lot. Now, it takes a lot of courage to do that. Um, because. Um, yeah, I can do that. I. Vicky finds it very difficult to do. Because, um, she tends to like, you know, she tries she tends to take, you know, very empathetic and tends to take on that, that feeling of guilt, I guess, um, whereas I'm a bit more of a bastard and, I don't know, uh, I just said, I just think, okay, I've told you, what are these deal that there you go. And I'll go and walk away from that. Um, but, um, having said that. Then you've got to also navigate the fact, though, that like family, for instance, you know, you don't want to actually be isolated, you know, from other members of your family because not not everyone in your family is, you know, the bad person, shall we say.

Michael (01:13:50) - So then it's a how do you deal? How do you deal with that to make sure that you're still being, you know, the the brother or the sister to those other other members of your family? Um, yeah. It makes it very difficult. So what? So from a practical sense, what we do is at Christmas time, um, we may have the morning for ourselves, and then we do evening with family. And, um. Or it may be. Yeah. And usually what will happen is that even with family will be without the people that we don't see your tie with. And. Yeah. And that's what that's, that's what we do. But it's still stressful because you worry about what people think about you. You worry about, um, you know, people saying bad things about you. Do you worry about how you are perceived or if people are not telling the truth about you, you know, there's all those things that come into it. So, yeah, it is it is not a good time for us.

Michael (01:15:00) - But, um, yeah, we don't have, uh, we don't have the magic answer, but, you know, we muddle through, support each other. But she can do. I think.

Sarah (01:15:13) - Yeah, I think, I think you're very, very right. I think it's so individual, isn't it, for someone to turn around and say, these are the three steps you need to take it. You can't. It's not a one size fits all. I mean, no the way so I, I struggle Christmas as well. To be honest. It's some years I don't bother celebrating at all. You know, I do the present thing and we don't have any decorations up. You know, sometimes I just don't want to. And other years I'll do, I'll do the whole shebang. But every year, Christmas Day is on our own because I don't want to be surrounded by triggers. I, you know, we used to do the thing where we'd go around the family and that and it was it was hellish.

Sarah (01:15:57) - And it's it's not fair, I think on other people to witness you feeling like shit or having to pretend that you're okay and, and dash to the toilet. So it's. And I think sometimes we lose sight of that. We think we're being selfish when actually we're helping ourselves out. And we're also stopping people seeing our pain as well, because people will see it. They know you, don't they? And actually, I found going, actually, no, we're not doing that anymore. We're just going to spend the day on our own and maybe, you know, do family stuff later on. Um, but I think actually I found that I stopped caring. Other people think I had to because otherwise, you know, we're all very empathic, and you tie yourself up

in knots kind of thinking, oh, well, I'm disappointed. So and so. Oh, God, I'm gonna have to make that up to him. I think you've just got to focus in on what you need at that time.

Sarah (01:16:49) - So if it's not celebrate, don't celebrate. If it is to celebrate, then do it in your own way. But I think you have to. It's hard. Don't get me wrong. The disappointment you see on people's faces when you say no, I'm not doing that is hard to sit with. But I guess it's part of adulting. Every adult has to go through disappointment, don't they? And if that's me, say no. Because actually my mental health is very important to me. And then I'd rather be selfish than actually put myself through it. So. But it's a one size fits all. I think not a one size fits all. Forgive me. It's. You have to make your own way through it, don't you? Sometimes.

Berenice (01:17:30) - Yeah, I think that's that's it. There's a lot of stuff I've noticed coming up on social media. And three stops to boundaries and all the rest of it. It's not because people that we're spending our time with, they're all very different. Yeah.

Berenice (01:17:45) - We have people in our lives who want to fix us. We've got people in our lives. You probably would listen if we had half the chance. We've got people in our lives to avoid us as well. They don't want this around. They're just like, oh, no, I can't deal with that too. Um, as well as all our own mixed emotions as well. And this is lovely, this expectation too. I go very inward on Christmas Day, I mourn. Wow, I'm really emotional today. This is really ridiculous, but I mourn. I mourn the Christmases I had as a kid. You know, we have this routine. I don't know if I've spoken about. I probably have on the podcast, and if I have my apologies to boring you again with it. But we had a routine. You know, my grandparents invited everybody. If you married in the family, they'd invite, you know, you all those in-laws in as well. It didn't matter who you were. So there'd be just piles of people around the house and my grandmother cooking, and they had another kitchen upstairs.

Berenice (01:18:48) - It sounds very posh. It sounds it really wasn't. It was a ragbag of the house, but it was a big house. And so everyone used to pull around, though it was noisy and we had a routine to the day. That meant Christmas presents weren't until the afternoon. Is it the whole day? Was something going on and that. When I'm now Christmas, I'm like, oh, I don't need to do the Queen. I think the Queen's Speech might have gone on somewhere else, but it wasn't something we all sat down and watch. But I can the day I'm like, oh, this one would be doing this, and this time we'd be doing this, and this time we'd be doing this and that, that, that it's still ingrained in my memory because it was timed. Yeah. Not you know, it's nuts, but, you know, it's a big thing. And I think probably, you know, certainly one member of my family would have really struggled with that. And I know she would have done.

Berenice (01:19:44) - And I was too young to know about these things and too young to know. And their life is now changed and they now are now a grandmother. So. But that story comparison sits in our family too. So I found that really hard, um, to deal with, I have. That kind of, you know, I always feel like people you've not got over it yet. So I've gone from that sort of thing where it was nice to kind of now being going very, very inward, very inwards to the point where I can be completely uncommunicative on Christmas Day. I find it hard and I have to put on a big act, which is very exhausting. So by the time Christmas evening comes

around, I'm at home and I'm crashed out. I'm literally I've got nothing left to give at all. It's really hard and I've tried so many things I try. Suddenly, the day completely on my own. I've tried spending the day with my dog. I've tried doing variations of everything. I thought Molly would fix it.

Berenice (01:20:44) - It's a huge weight to levy on a dog and she's just a dog. It's a lovely one, but no, it doesn't fix it. It's a really tough day and I think for me, one of the things that I've probably dealt about better is actually just to largely kind of ignore it. Um, yeah. It's had a message in the chat. Yeah. I think childhood Christmases. Yes. I think they can be so odd. Like I feel myself welling up now, you know, I they must be very difficult on my family because they literally were like, you have to come. There's no choice in the matter. You were kind of like, you come along and you had to be really bloody good excuse to get out of that.

Sarah (01:21:23) - Uh, we were the sign and, you know, the whole day. So you'd have your presence. And then you go around, my grandparents and my nan would put on a spread. I don't know if you've seen it. It was an Irish.

Sarah (01:21:36) - Irish salad. She put on like an Irish buffet. So you'd get you get your iceberg lettuce, your cucumber tomatoes, your ham.

Berenice (01:21:46) - That's what you used to have for tea. That was Christmas tea, which literally followed Christmas lunch.

Sarah (01:21:52) - The first thing, and you could try and replicate it at home, but it was never the same. But yeah, that's what we used to do. And it's kind of there is a there is a grief in that, isn't there? Because it's kind of like, you know, I sit in doors and we do presents and then we have something to eat and that's it pretty much. And, you know, you might sit and watch films and stuff, but it's not the same. And there's a real grief in it, isn't there? You know it. It's a real loss. And it's kind of, I think we can make our own traditions, but you're still going to have that loss of. Well, actually, if we'd had kids, would we be more sociable? Would we go out and do this stuff?

Berenice (01:22:30) - Yeah, that that popped into my head the other day.

Berenice (01:22:32) - I was. I again, like you, Michael. I don't think any of my family will listen to this, but if they are, then I'm still going to go on with the authenticity here and say that I don't tend to get invited to stuff. My cousins have dos with their kids. And. Are. I kind of think it's that the Secret Santa exclusion as well, which I've talked about before, is that, you know, there's a whole secret Santa going on in my family that we've been excluded from. Um, we found out about. About a year or so later. And that was tough, man. That was tough. That was really tough. I was like, that hurt. No one thought to ask us. Yeah, someone made a decision on our behalf that we wouldn't want to be involved in actually ask. Just ask. But anyway, aside from that, yeah, I was I was thinking, like, if I had kids, would I? I wouldn't. It's not the morning of childlessness.

Berenice (01:23:36) - So much at Christmas for me. It's not morning, children. Because frankly, sometimes I listen to stories from friends of mine who are parents and it just sounds

idiots. It's the fact that not having children means don't get invited to things. And if I did get invited to things, I wouldn't quite know what to do. So the boundaries are there to protect myself. But then I think, why should I just go and test it out? But I know that probably it's going to be pretty crap. Um. I'm not sure what the safety net is that I need in place for that, so I kind of just avoid all of it. Um, but then. This popped up, I think. I can't think where it popped up. The one thing that occurred to me also is that I'm not an aunt. What about. Yeah. When the conversations we had in the community and it's about I'm not alone. So. My parents aren't grandparents, so that's another thing where I don't have that kind of connection either.

Berenice (01:24:44) - That's another kind of bit where it's kind of like another level of exclusion as well. That can be quite hard to live with. I think I don't get that sort of. And not being an aunt, an aunt and an uncle. These are really hard. I'm sure that it is. I don't have that experience. I'm not even going to attempt to talk about that because it's not something I know of. But I do know that I have sort of the dread of, oh God, what if they have kids hangs over me, and now that's gone because of age. But it was always there. But not having that connection means there's no kind of way in in that regard. And this completely light up. Baroness has nothing like that. So we don't need to come over so often. Actually, sometimes not having being asked means I don't have a boundary to say it's just exclusion. And that's really quite tough as well. Yeah. Different experience. Not perhaps one that's for everybody. But I want to throw it in there because I know that it came up and I feel that isolation very much.

Sarah (01:25:51) - I think it's a good point. It's kind of boundaries. It's all tied in with where we see, where we feel we fit, isn't it in a family unit because it changes, doesn't it, if if no one's had kids, but there's a like a network going on that you're excluded from, there's that, isn't there? And it's like, well, where do I fit? And I also think there's our own feelings around what how we're turning up and who we are after not having kids. But I also think that there's like a. An amount of an unsaid, isn't there? So if we can't sort of say, for me, what I struggle with is sort of explicitly saying, um, sometimes what my needs are, you know. You know, some days I'll talk about stuff with my family, and then other days I'm like, I don't want to talk about this shit today. Thank you. And it's kind of that moveable boundary, isn't it? And helping people, I guess, adjust around it because they're like, I don't know what I'm doing here because Sarah was fine with it last time and now she's telling me she's not.

Sarah (01:26:52) - And I think sometimes we we kind of lose sight of what our needs are in this. You know, there is a mourning, but there is also. Well, what do I want here for Christmas Day? Do I want to be on my own? Is it going to change? You know, like I said, some years I celebrate, some years I don't. It's very, very confusing. I think even for us.

Berenice (01:27:15) - Oh, God. You don't quite know what you're going to feel like probably until the morning.

Sarah (01:27:19) - Know exactly that. You know.

Berenice (01:27:21) - That's really hard if you're trying to sort of make a plan, but actually it's also a narrative people want to know, do I put a, you know, just like another Yorkshire

pudding in the oven or whatever, those sort of boring, practical things, and you can't really answer until that morning. Then your son, I've seen is also being the perception is unreliable. Um, people are generally better at dealing with kind of stuff like, you know, a broken leg than they are about the, you know, about emotions.

Berenice (01:27:48) - It's really hard. And particularly emotions, I think that they don't necessarily.

Berenice (01:27:54) - Or can empathize with. Best in the world. I think that's hard. I think it's hard for us as a community. You know, I think, you know, I have this lovely idea in my head. Each year that I'd like to do a Christmas thing here. These friends were childless. So come around. Do something here. But actually, I didn't know that I could do that emotionally. I don't know that I could.

Berenice (01:28:24) - Despite everyone being at the table, being, you know, we don't have children, I'd still probably find that hard. It's a lovely thought, but maybe someone might go off and do that. But I don't think I'm that person because I think it's too difficult because the day itself is so loaded with with past memories. If they don't go away and they don't leave us either. I sort of try to run away from them before I kind of now realizing I've just got to accept them and go.

Berenice (01:28:53) - These are the memories I have and this is the grief. But actually, maybe today I can do something else. That's. You know, somehow acknowledge that grief. Maybe that's a rich or maybe it's something else that isn't necessarily going away and doing something, but it's maybe just sitting. Maybe it's meditating on that and going, okay, this is the grief I've got. I think I'm doing something else, I think. You know, I know we've done stuff in the past, in the past. Because what else can you do on Christmas Day? But actually, it's not that easy to do because I know people have volunteered at foodbanks and done stuff like that, but there is still the Christmas, you know, and it's still there. It's still the tinsel out and the need to wear a stupid hat and a jumper, which not everybody can do. Yeah, yeah. And I feel like we've kind of been quite, sort of. More info about this, but I think it's realistic and honest.

Berenice (01:29:56) - Um. We could offer some practical stuff, but again, I think it's individual.

Sarah (01:30:05) - This is very tricky. I think I'm. You know, it's it's got lots of triggers involved in it. And we're our triggers can be quite individual can't they. So you know we've had a sort of everyone sort of saying, yeah, I mourn the Christmases of my childhood. So there's that. Some people may not they may have had, you know, miserable Christmases going back. And so there's that real difference, isn't there? And can we all sit with it? But I guess as well, it's the it's the invisibility of it, isn't it?

Berenice (01:30:35) - Yeah it is. I think it is. And I and I think also we need you. You also got a new year as well. And it was like one after the other. And that gap in between can be really weird. But New Year I think is also a tough one too. We had about you too. I just, I just go to bed and ignore the whole thing.

Berenice (01:30:55) - That was one day. That was another day. And that's it. It's just other days. It's it's another day. It's just what it is.

Sarah (01:31:03) - Since we tend to go off, see friends who also don't have children. And we, we, we play ball games and ah, nine times out of ten, it's, it's 2:00 before we realize that midnight at midnight, it's been and gone, you know, because you're.

Berenice (01:31:18) - So when they come do that with you. I like we talked about ball games before haven't we. Yes. Quite good at ball. We like the ball game thing I. Yeah.

Sarah (01:31:27) - Yeah. But I guess it's kind of it's individual isn't it. It's whatever's going to make it feel more comfortable for you.

Sarah (01:31:34) - You can do really.

Berenice (01:31:35) - I think my only, my only advice would be just to ramp up that again. Like you're not comfortable with words self-care, but but self-care. Really really really dig into it. Really dig into it. Because, you know, it's we look after ourselves and to lean into others as well.

Berenice (01:31:55) - Um, it's probably a good time to mention that the podcast, the full stop in our community, we've got a chat community conversation at 1:00 on Christmas Day. We have a community conversation at 1:00 on Boxing Day as well, and they'll be hosted by us, um, or a combination thereof as well, because that is something we want to do. We're trying it out. We're going to see. But if you want to join the community, um, then do that. You can just join for a month. We've also got gift memberships as well. So if you are listening to this and thinking, I don't know what I want, I want to ask for something, but I don't know what it is. And you can on our website. Find the gift membership to. It'll be in the show notes as well, and make sure that it's all in there. But you can buy a membership. For somebody else. Or you can ask for it for yourself that I would express. Use wisely.

Berenice (01:32:50) - If people are listening to this and they are parents and are thinking, oh, I know so-and-so and they don't have children, they might like this. Ask first. Don't just assume people want to join our community. I probably just wouldn't do that. And this is disclaimer because it's a very sensitive thing. It's not for everybody. And it might well be that they perhaps aren't unless they've told you they're childless, not by choice. They might not be might be child free. They might have made all sorts of different decisions behind it. It's complex, as I'm sure you know, as listeners. But for those that would like it, it's there and come along as long as you want and join them with us as well. That's cool. We will then welcome you into our space and we'll be having other community conversations as well. There's also a Christmas gift, um, Christmas card exchange as well, which takes place within our community as well. So this all sounds very community centric, but it is a safe space.

Berenice (01:33:42) - So those of you who are listening and thinking, I'm not a member, you know, we offer different ways in. So please do come and find us if you want to. But one of the great things about the community is that it is safe, and it's for everybody who is

childless, not by choice. So there's all genders welcome, regardless of race, age, sexuality, all those things. Everyone is welcome, providing you identify as childless, not by choice. Or we do check and make sure that that's the case for everybody. We're very careful about that, and we honor and treasure everybody in it. We look after you as you look after us. It's reciprocal.

Sarah (01:34:21) - Yeah. So it wasn't all teeth and tinsel. This one, was it?

Berenice (01:34:26) - It wasn't. But it's great to have the support there as well. Would you like me to end recording or is there anything else you would like to add?

Sarah (01:34:36) - I guess. Um, I'd just like to wish listeners, uh, a peaceful and restful time, uh, as peaceful and as restful as you can make it.

Michael (01:34:45) - Did I? Well done.

Berenice (01:34:48) - Look after yourselves. Be kind to yourselves. Don't feel that you have to do things you don't want to do. It's your time to.

Speaker 11 (01:34:58) - Yours.

Berenice (01:34:58) - Your time is very precious. Look after you. You're important. Important? All of us have a peaceful time.

Sarah (01:35:07) - Thanks for listening. We hope you found our conversation comforting. We'd love to hear from you if you found this topic interesting, or how you've been able to get to grips with Christmas yourself. If you find yourself needing support this coming Christmas because it can be a tough time of year, we're going to be around over the Christmas period in live chats, both within the community and to those that aren't in the full stop online community. As we have an open house chat on Thursday the 28th of December. If you'd like to join us for any of these chats, we'd love to see you. All the details, including how to register, can be found on our website at the full stop pod com forward slash event.

Sarah (01:35:47) - If you'd like to find out more about our podcast, or you have a great idea for a topic we've not yet covered, or you'd just like to revisit one, let us know. We'd love to hear from you! We want this podcast to have as many voices from across our community as possible, so something's missing. We just want a deeper dive on it. Let us know! You can find us on Facebook, Insta, Twitter and LinkedIn. You can also become a member of our brand new online community, which is a safe and inclusive space for anyone that's a member of the child's community. For more details, see our website at the full Stop pod. Com. You can also sign up to our listeners list at the website, which keeps you up to date on what we're up to and if you'd like to. You can also donate to our work too. As always, it's important for us to remind you you're really not alone.