

Season 4: Episode 9

New Beginnings

SPEAKERS

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Sarah Lawrence 00:00

Wow waterskiing and rejuvenating old electrics! My goodness!

Mike Sparks 00:08

I try not to combine the two

Sarah Lawrence 00:09

That could be interesting

Berenice Howard-Smith 00:21

Welcome to the full stop, a podcast for the childless community presented by Sarah Lawrence, Michael Hughes and me, Berenice Smith. A podcast delves into the many stories and dynamics that make up the childless not by choice identity. With the help of our guests, we aim to help you craft your own narrative, and what it means to be part of our community. We also aim to inform those who are child free or parents, so that they can begin to understand and support those around them who may be facing a life without children. This episode is about beginnings, January can feel like a challenging month to build up to the holidays and the festive season is behind us. And we may feel relief or sadness. Our inbox is full of goal setting and new starts. And it could be overwhelming. We always take care with our January episode, so we don't add to these feelings. But we really hope you enjoy this episode. Please extend a warm welcome to Caroline from the Kitsch hen. Michael from Sparkies Lighthouse, and Vicky from Clem's Garden. They are business owners who just happen to be part of our community to share their stories, and tell us why they do the work that they do. And shared some inspiring advice that you may find useful, whatever your employment status is. oh, by the way, I am missing from this episode COVID And I finally caught up with each other, and I wasn't well enough to record. So like you, I'm listening along with you. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

Sarah Lawrence 02:03

This, this episode, we're gonna be talking about new beginnings. You all have all got very different very varied backgrounds, to people in our community. So we were kind of interested in how you got into what it is you're doing, and sharing your stories because obviously, as a community, we have

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this this thing where we have got to have a plan B. And sometimes it can feel like this, you got to do this huge life changing thing you got to give everything to to the outside community to make yourself not feel better, but feel as though you're you're contributing in some huge way. And so we were interested in having a few people on that have got a very varied backgrounds, but also are doing something different with their lives, if that makes sense. So I was wondering if we could start by perhaps introducing you all because I think you may all be sort of new voices, which is exciting. And if you could tell us a little bit about yourself and what it is that you do know what your what your side hustle is whatever it is that you're doing now, would that be okay? Okay, who is there anyone that particularly and would like to go first?

Mike Sparks 03:15

Happy to breaks the ice.

Michael Hughes 03:18

Perfect.

Mike Sparks 03:19

Yeah, well, why not? Yeah. So Yeah, I am, Mike Sparks aged 64 and a quarter now and sort of semi retired just a brief potted history of what I've done with my life 30 years in the City of London as a stockbroker and fund manager. And in fact, the last year as I did there was working for a small asset management company Company, which was wholly owned by QBD which I think you guys on the other side of the world might know about in Australia. So that career came to an end after about 13 years. And then I ran a charity local to here where I live just northwest of London for about four or five years, always had been interested in antiques throughout my life and that group has grown as I've got older, and then actually got involved working selling online bidding systems for a company that the actually the antiques trigger set and then through that kind of fell into doing what I do now. I'm sort of semi retired as I say, but what work I do is antique restoration and I specialise in lighting. So I've got the right surname. When I give people my business card, they just don't believe me that is my real name. Sparks People do not believe it! It literally I fell into doing this. It was via an antique dealer who I was shadowing really because I want he was very good. And I wanted to learn a bit. And I just used to go to antique fairs with him, and just listen to what he would say about stuff. And then one day he said to me, I bought all these light lamps in Europe, do you think you could make them work I said, Well, we'll have a go. And without boring you, it just, it just took off from there. So I love using these I've always loved using my hands always been into mechanics, and I get a great thrill from somebody, most of the work that I do is restoration, I do do a bit of sales, as you may have seen from our website. That's because I can't resist buying things, antique fairs and making them work. But nothing gives me greater kick than actually, somebody's given me some of the beaten up and it doesn't work and it's broken. And then I put it all back together making work, test it and give it back to them. And that's a really good feeling. I feel I've done something. So that's what I do to earn a penny or two to keep me in beer and crisps. And the other thing I do which really floats my boat is excuse the pun is I'm for 40 odd years I've been a very keen water skier and I now coach and boat driver and I work at a local club and got a great kick from doing that I really do particularly working with youngsters which kind of fits in with the being childless thing. And that again, that just kind of went that way. So I specialise in sort of the novice area and getting people off

one ski onto two skies and then getting on into slalom. I used to compete, but I'm too old and grey and fat now. But I do still ski. So that's me.

Sarah Lawrence 06:39

Wow, skiing and rejuvenating old electrics! Goodness me.

Mike Sparks 06:47

Try not I try not to combine the two

Sarah Lawrence 06:51

Could be interestesting! Fantastic. Thank you, Mike.

Caroline Stafford 06:56

I'm Caroline, I have a business called the Kitsch Hen. So I've been baking my biscuits, in my business for seven and a half years now. We bake hand stamp biscuits that we call edible inspiration. So the idea is that we send them through the posts, people order them to our website to send to people to kind of drop through their letterbox unexpectedly to brighten their day.

Sarah Lawrence 07:25

Wow.

Caroline Stafford 07:27

Yeah, it's, it started with one set of biscuits that I was actually sending to a friend who was going through fertility treatment as we were at the time. And then it's evolved over the next seven years. And I started on my kitchen table and I now have a little bakery. And we send biscuits for all sorts of occasions, but predominantly, it's hugs and biscuits. So I kind of like to think of it as I'm aware, kind of, we're kind of the facilitator that just allow people to do kind things for each other. And it's lovely, and it brings me so much such a sense of purpose, and so much joy. So I didn't mean to do it for seven and a half years, I really love it, I find a lot of meaning and a lot of a lot of a lot of joy from it. But I'm just embarking on another new beginning because I'm just at the moment training to be a health coach, which again, is sort of come directly from from the last 10 years that we've been through. So working, hoping to work with people alongside the desk getting working with people to help them kind of find their, their own joy and their kind of purpose in their optimum health, really. So that's kind of another new beginning that I'm about to embark on, which took me a while to work out how to marry the two. And the few people have said, but you sell biscuits, and then you want to coach people how to be healthy. Which is a point I get and I did grapple with that for a little while. But to me health is about so much more than what we put in our bodies. That's super important. But it's such a bigger picture of how we connect how we communicate, how we how we live, you know, our whole kind of holistic lifestyle. And I qualified as a yoga teacher last year. And I love teaching I only teach once a week. And that's kind of led me to think about more about well, this thing whole thing and to me the biscuits fit perfectly because they're kind of an act of of care, self care, they encourage people to stop, put the kettle on, take five minutes for themselves and kind of just have that space create that space in the day. So I've decided to to actually work really beautifully

together. So yeah, I don't know where it'll go. But I'm excited to see where the next new beginning takes me, I suppose.

Sarah Lawrence 09:49

Thank you. Oh, just I'm just sitting here thinking yeah, you could I guess you could do the biscuits. You don't have to eat the biscuits today, I guess. No, but you know what I think anything, even within kind of health and wellness, we all and never one for suggesting anything should be cut out of everyone's diet completely and I think we do a lot of sort of the single biscuits that are just kind of perfect size to junk any cuppa and I just think actually, we're not you know we don't want to eat a pack in one sitting but mindfully sitting down

Caroline Stafford 10:27

Yeah, exactly. So yeah, so yeah, yeah, it's a lovely thing to do.

Sarah Lawrence 10:33

Thank you. I'm really struck by eclectic everything is at the moment, electrics, health coaches making biscuits. It's amazing.

Michael Hughes 10:43

So, so Vicky House, it's your turn.

Vicky House 10:46

Yeah, hello, hello, hello. I feel connected to both Mike and Caroline really in different ways, I suppose. My story is that after losing a baby and then finding out but we couldn't have kids, and a fair amount of time grieving, and trying to come to terms with that, my husband and I just decided to make a bit of a clean break a bit in a sense, and we left our home in Brighton and we decided that we were going to look for a building to adopt. And we eventually found an amazing arts and crafts building. in Huddersfield, in Yorkshire, we didn't know anyone in Huddersfield. But this building, we decided needed the love that we might have put into our family, very frayed edges needed lots of work. And that is at the centre of our lives now. That's what gives us meaning. And with this building, there was a pretty big garden, the building used to belong to the local council, and they ran it as a de centre. And in the grounds, there was the ragged remains of a gardening project they had at the day centre, with poly tunnels that were absolutely shredded. In fact, in one of the poly tunnels, there was filing cabinets, or they'd obviously just strip the building and just dump stuff everywhere. And it was completely overgrown. And it took a bit of time to decide what we were going to do with this land. But the idea came of starting up a social enterprise, for volunteers, we're all volunteers. We've called it Clem's Garden, because Clem is the baby we lost. And it's a place where we grow and sell organic flowers. And it's a place particularly for other people who are childless, come and be part of this social enterprise and find a role and a place for their nurturing to go as well. And we raise money from the sales of our flowers to support other local community projects. And just like Caroline, we are begging to trying to inspire kindness in the local community. So we often donate jars of our flowers for people who are going to visit neighbours or friends who might be going through a tough time in their local community. So cleanse is very much where most of my time and energy goes this at the moment, and over the last five years. And then in between times, I kind of

feel like I might have seen Mike's business online. Because as we renovate our labour of love, love this this building. We were interested in you know, bits of furniture and stuff as well. So I may have seen you online like, so that's that. I did. That's good to have a look if I can help you. Do let me know.

Sarah Lawrence 14:23

Wow. Inspiring. Yeah, really isn't that? I'm curious. So was it a building initially then that you were interested in and then it turned into the garden?

Vicky House 14:36

Yeah. It was one of those. I don't know. Sometimes you just need a long car journey. To have converse, a different sort of conversation with your partner if you've got a partner. And we have one of these long car journeys and we're always into watching these kinds of property programmes and people doing buildings and that kind of thing, just to chill out. But my other half dunk was saying, you know, when when eventually he gets to retire, you're quite interested in this idea of taking on a building and working on it. I mean, what we didn't take into account is that we have very few manual skills between us. But the idea seemed like a, a lovely one. And I thought that was the end of conversation. But he's one of these people that once he gets a bit between his teeth suddenly, I'm getting links from property, websites and things in my inbox. I'm thinking Hang on a minute, this was just like one of those conversations, those dream conversations you have. But it just shows I mean, once if you've got an idea, and there was nothing tying us, because you know, the whole family thing And we just thought, well, let's give it a go. Let's try something different. And it's been a really brilliant kind of opportunity and for saying, we we moved here and didn't know anyone, and we didn't have the school gates to meet new people and our adults job is elsewhere, the building, and then establishing Clem's Garden on the back of that has just opened up so many new relationships and opportunities and joy. And you know, it's just been such a brilliant move for us.

Mike Sparks 16:31

How long have you been doing that?

Vicky House 16:32

So we moved to Yorkshire in 2014. So we started on the building then. And then Clem's Garden had its fifth birthday in 2022. And there was a bit of setting up behind you know. I don't have a business background at all. You know, I come from working in the NHS, I worked in mental health from the NHS. That was my career. So there was a lot to learn. I'm not a gardener and on the business side. But yeah, five years is how long has Clem's Garden has been up and running.

Mike Sparks 17:13

And you say you're established as a social enterprise.

Vicky House 17:16

Yeah.

Mike Sparks 17:17

But I don't wish to pry, but I wonder how you've, you knew fund certain things? And don't answer that. But the reason I'm asking that question is the charity I ran, after I'd left the city was actually a community foundation. It was the one based in Buckinghamshire, and it's just that sort of the Community Foundation's very briefly. They match local needs with local donors. So they're like a conduit, really, they don't focus on one particular thing. It's very, really rewarding job, I loved it. But if you ever did need help, or it need not necessarily be financial, it might be advice or something like that. I know that there is a think there's a community foundation for the whole of Yorkshire you may have heard them, but always worth approaching.

Vicky House 18:07

Thanks very much like I mean, we did start off with grants from funding from our local community foundation called one community, right?

Mike Sparks 18:15

Okay.

Vicky House 18:16

But now, and this is what we always wanted to be, we didn't want to be reliant on grants. But the ethos of Clem's is that we take it and we find a role and a sense of purpose when we don't find that in our families. So we always wanted to be self sufficient. So the flower sales have to support the running of the business, as I say, where none of us are paid, so we don't have wages to pay, and then the profits, at the end of the end, there will always going to be very modest profits, they always get donated to the Community Foundation, so that help other local community project. If Clem's gets to the point where we can't be self sustaining, then I think we walk away we don't want to be we don't want to be dependent on you know, charity or whatever. We were quite proud people really I'm struck by calm streak running through all these stories that you're telling you know, your stories of how you do, what you do and how you can do it. Community is really is sort of in my face at the moment you know, in terms of this is what we're doing this is this is what I'm doing giving back you know, the skiing, the biscuits, the garden as a business, it's all about it seems to be about support and letting people know that actually, there is a community that they can go to and the need to doesn't matter what it is based around. But there is this sense of community and putting people together. We have a hashtag at Clem's which is community is family and when you don't have family of your own, then community is is everything. And I think there was a sense that we wanted to be a beacon within our local community. When we moved to Huddersfield, I just remember, you know, you talk about bingo. And one of the bingos, for us was ;oh this is you've moved to a brilliant place, it's a great place for families'. And I was thinking, 'Oh, that's good'. And I want there to be a place where people who were childless, knew that they could find a safe space where people weren't going to be talking about their families all the time. So it's partly that, and it's partly for me, having a stake in the local community, so that people within the local community can see the value in what we do. And maybe we challenge some of the lazy assumptions that you hear from time to time that childless people have no stake in the future, or the world or are selfish, or the Andrea Leadsome kind of effect, that we wanted to show that that actually, we're all about nurturing, and kindness and community, because community really, really is meaningful to us. It's a lifeline at the end of the day, kind of chosen family. Isn't it really be that? .

Sarah Lawrence 21:23

So Caroline, I was gonna ask you up. You said the biscuits were born out of the fact that you kind of send in kindness to somebody else that was going through fertility. I was curious. So what sort of messages do you usually get asked for without obviously breaking confidentiality, what sort of things are you sending out in biscuit form?

Caroline Stafford 21:46

So we have a lot of messages we grow out, sort of range on the website all the time, often inspired by the messages that people are asking for. So one of our most popular ones, which I love is, I don't know who invented sending flowers, when times were tough biscuits are far more practical, which I really like. And they all we always said that one that goes out with a tea bag. So it kind of just has that real nice encouragement for people to just kind of stop from home. But we do an awful lot of hugs and biscuits, which during the two years of COVID, where we were struggling to keep up with demand but things like just to let you know, we're thinking of you every day like can be really, really simple messages. And then we have a new range that are a little bit more like almost like a tiny, not not a poem but a bit longer, a little bit more, a little bit more of a message, just a lot of them are about friendship, but lots of them are just as one that says, one of our best sellers says I know, this gets can't even begin to make things better. But I hope this just brightens your day with a bit and reminds you that you are loved. And I just love the thought of just this unexpected. It's exactly you know what you say it's that it's that sense of community and that sense of connection and that ability for somebody to just reach out to somebody let them know that they're not on their own, and that somebody's kind of with them whether or not that can be kind of with them in person. And yeah, we offer. We have like a range of biscuits where people can choose their own messages, which are always really, really lovely to, to read as well. And we're really sort of adaptable. So we'll we will edit our range, depending on what people what people ask us for, I suppose. Yeah, it's just a different way of sending that message, I suppose of just making somebody feel thought about and cared for and valued, I guess, isn't it?

Sarah Lawrence 23:55

Yeah, yeah, nothing. So there's, you know, flowers, biscuits, chocolates. It's all it's all valid, isn't it? I'm curious, though. I was wondering that. I'm gonna credit Berenice for this one. She was asking - we're all part of this child's community. She was curious, how is it for you if you get asked to do christenings and things like that? Is that tricky for you? Are you kind of like, no, it's just a biscuit. I'm fine with it.

Caroline Stafford 24:25

It totally depends on how I'm feeling on that day. Sometimes it's, it's fine and I have got a lot better. I've really struggled initially with things like occasions such as Mother's Day, and things like that. Because there's a point where this is a business, you know, this is what I do to pay my mortgage. So I have to have a business hat that I put on sometimes as we do do occasions that I always make sure we have a part of the range that is, with people in mind who perhaps don't find the day as easy for whatever reason, there's myriad reasons that aren't the why Mother's Day is hard. So whenever we're doing any occasion, Father's Day, even at Christmas, I really try and make sure that there is

something within that range that that's always in my mind is thinking or, you know, sort of making sure that there are there, there's something to kind of with, you know, for that. More of that, but yeah, sometimes it's fine. And sometimes, sometimes it's, it's really hard. And it just depends on how, you know, how I'm feeling how my weeks going, what's been happening, for me is the same, I think, generally with, with the situation we're all in with not having children in general is it never goes away, you know, it's never something that we get over and one day, we're fine. And, and we've moved on, which is one of the hard things, I think, isn't it as accepting that there will be those days I have days when I'm just completely blindsided, something will happen. And I'll just have that feeling of I'm that's not, you know, this has never, I'm never going to experience that or whatever it is. And I think it's, we just have to learn to be kind to ourselves. And when we do have those days, and when I have them at work, I quite often will just walk away and say well, that I'm not doing those, you know, that sounds silly for me to do today can wait, I need to just, I think we all learn as time goes on. We develop those ways to listen to ourselves a bit more and be kind to ourselves and kind of and make that space for ourselves. When things don't feel easy, I guess I can completely relate to that in terms of that expression uses one I use which is Be kind to yourself. Yeah, there are times when

Mike Sparks 26:52

Yeah, it just for whatever reason it comes down on you like a tonne of bricks, it's never going to change, it's always going to happen occasionally you hope that the frequency of that reduces but when it does happen, I always say to just be quiet, just do something you want to do. bother everyone else, excuse the language. But if I want to go and do this, as long as I'm not breaking the law, I'm gonna do it. And I go off and do it. Or don't do it. Like you say something to them. I'm not doing that today. That's not gonna stop work. I don't want to do that. Like, I'm gonna sit and watch football on the telly. And that's what I do. I can completely relate to be kind to yourself.

Caroline Stafford 27:26

Yeah. It's hard, isn't it, though? Because I think we are. We live in a world that encourages us to just push through, you know, whenever, you know, push those feelings down crack on because we've got to keep moving forward. And actually, no, we don't, we need to listen to them and acknowledge and feel those feelings when they when we feel them and, and they like a bit understanding with ourselves as you say kind and just without a doubt, without squashing those feelings just, it just doesn't work because it just they just fester and grow and grow and grow. And then and then there's an explosion of fun.

Vicky House 28:05

So I think it's maybe easier in a sense for us being a community project, and no one's relying on the income in a way that in small ways. In order to protect ourselves, we also put a few boundaries in place as well. And I think that's okay to do. So for example. I mean, I do have some days at Clem's, where all comers are welcome. And we do have some days that are ring fenced for those of us who are childless within the volunteers, where all comers welcome, we have a rule that we don't have children on site. Because for me, at the end of the day is the garden that's part of my home. Having parents and kids on site is too much for me. It doesn't matter how old the kids are, it will be always be a milestone that reminds me of Clem and where I would have been within my parenting journey

had things turned out differently. So I draw that boundary to protect myself. And some people might not understand that. But as Mike says, Bugger it, you know, you have to just do whether it's self care in a different way or drawing a boundary or finding someone else to take on a particular task. If it's too much, then I think it's playing the long game and thinking what is going to sustain you in the long term, rather than jumping through every hoop that everybody presents to you from day to day. I think self care is, as everyone's saying is it's vital, isn't it?

Mike Sparks 29:55

Oh, absolutely. Definitely. Society is geared towards the family. And that in some of my posted on our site, you'll see that it one I'm not feeling particularly great about this it really makes me angry because I deliberately will go to Tesco's and park in the mother and child space. Why shouldn't I? You know, why am I got to have a child to park near the door? Either? My 95 year old mother and then we tick the box sorry. I don't anymore because she's actually in the home now. But when she was in the late 80s, I did I used to take her shopping. And I parked she can't park it. Yes. Okay. Mother Child, they got your ATA on 58. So what? So but we did it. But yeah, it's society so geared towards the children and families with children. I mean, the whole tax system is and it just, it really grinds me down and at times, and I just have to do with it my own way. And so I'm not doing that. And I'm not going to join in on that, because you're not thinking about us. Although I think I get the impression that awareness of childless adults not through choice is, is becoming is growing a little bit. I mean, it's painfully slow. But I certainly bang the drum on I feel in the mood. And it's funny how people just sort of sit upright and listen and not understanding.

Caroline Stafford 31:35

Yeah, you're right, though, because it's difficult because we are that that narratives so strongly that the point of us is to have family, children, you know, this, like, this is the legacy we leave. And whilst we absolutely know, because we all feel the meaning we feel and the purpose we feel in a completely different way, in a completely different set of circumstances. We know that there can be joy and meaning and purpose without having children. But when we're fed that narrative, so consistently from every single angle, I find sometimes I have to really step away, kind of talk myself back through the fact that it's okay, you know, because it's, it's, it's really hard not to be not to feel it when we are so bombarded with it. It's a chess, it's a daily, I think it's a daily choice, we have to have a daily thing we have to be aware of,

Mike Sparks 32:35

isn't it?

Caroline Stafford 32:35

Yep. And it's hard

Mike Sparks 32:39

Yeah it is, you get, I think there are so many things in life that are geared towards the family and beautiful shows, I think that I'm not anti children, we were all children. But, but you just think society in itself is just not thinking about us. And you know what, it ain't easy at times. And, and that's why I would like to do my bit to raise awareness. And I'll do a try anyway.

Caroline Stafford 33:13

Yeah,

Sarah Lawrence 33:14

I love that. I love that message. We're not anti children. We aren't Oh, you know, we were doing our bit in our ways. And but we have to have as Vicki said, we have to have those boundaries. Because we can have good days not so good days. So I love that and it feels to me that actually in various different ways we are well, you are claiming your your your bit in society. So you know, Mike, you'd do any water skiing with kids, you know, Vicki, you're doing the garden, but you're very, you know, you have to have boundaries, because obviously that garden has specific meanings to you. So it's actually no actually this has got to be a bit protected. And then Caroline, obviously, you'll be biscuits, you know, some days it's going to be no and can't do that today, or do something different. But I love the thought that actually for every biscuit that has that sort of that sort of that child family slant, you've got the the anti, the anti one as well, that that to me really appears that must be great. You must have to do a couple of them and then sure I need to I need to rebalance here and do one that's not

Caroline Stafford 34:20

it was well for Mother's Day and Father's Day we did like cat biscuits and dog mums biscuits which was so popular. And that was really Yeah, that was quite a nice a bit more kind of a lighter way to do it. I suppose. You know, we always see them that are kind of, you know, sort of ones that sort of thinking of you today especially type thing, but the cat and dog mum ones were just a plant moms because that's, you know, it's it's nice to have that kind of sometimes it doesn't have to feel sometimes it doesn't have to feel so heavy does it it's lovely to be thought of but it can be a little bit lighter I think sometimes as well and there are days when that's just what we need. Isn't it? You know, it's balance, isn't it? I suppose.

Sarah Lawrence 35:04

Yeah, I'm definitely going to take my mum shopping with me next time like, actually,

Caroline Stafford 35:08

yeah, that's a great idea

Mike Sparks 35:15

unfortunately, I was too big to get in the trolley. So stick around.

Sarah Lawrence 35:21

I can, I'm only 5-2.

Mike Sparks 35:23

Yeah.

Sarah Lawrence 35:26

But I love that. So it's kind of, for me, what I really feel is that the fact that we all sit with the heaviness, but actually, we can do different things with it, because obviously, we're not given an instruction booklet are we on how to handle this. And it's kind of really taken by each and every one of yours different ways of coping with it, I think our listeners are gonna get a lot out of that, because it can get very heavy can't it? A bit uh. But actually, we all find different ways to deal with it.

Caroline Stafford 35:57

And also, I think, there's, I know, and we were coming to the end of our I really dislike the word journey, but I find it so difficult to find an alternative. I remember talking to a few people who had done gone off and done huge things, you know, they've, they've sold everything, and they've travelled the world or they've done and I remember thinking, I don't really want to do something huge and massive I want. I need to feel like I'm having an impact and need to feel like I'm I'm doing something but but it doesn't have to be this huge, life changing thing that I could only do if we didn't have children, you know, and I think that's been a real learn for me is that it's sometimes we don't have to have we don't have to do huge things. And I know, you know, Vicky, for you moving up to her. That's, that is a huge thing. And it's beautiful. So brave. Yeah. And I think and that works, you know that? That's absolutely right to some some of us, isn't it? And for some of us, it's a smaller, smaller thing, I suppose. And it's just interesting, isn't it? We're all we're all different. And we all kind of need to create something different in our lives in in so many different ways, I suppose.

Mike Sparks 37:26

And Sarah, I think use the key word about fine. You said how can we find another way. And, and I think that's, that's quite a key word. Because sometimes, if you look too hard for it, you won't find it. And from my point of view, I suppose the two things are the water ski coach. And that was kind of natural, because I'd been a very keyboard skier for so many decades. And that was just a way of putting something back into the sport. And it just so happened that I tended to, as I said earlier, tended to concentrate and be quite good with youngsters. But the entry lighting restoration thing that literally just fell into my lap, I wasn't looking for it. It just kind of happened. And this guy said Can I can I try to fix these? And I thought, well, I'll have a go. And actually what happened was I started having to buy parts Cade new cable, new bulb holders, etc. And I was going to a local lighting shop in Georgia crossing back and I'm sure and I kept going back in there to buy the bits and then manager in them. I now know very well he said to me, what is your new again? What are you doing with all this stuff? I said, Well, I'm repairing some old lights. He said, Oh, well, we used to do that we don't do anymore. Give me some of your business cards. And I'll give them out because we still get loads of inquiries for restoration work. I said, what don't have any business cards, he said, we'll get some printed, you idiot. So I did. And the business took off from there, and is still going in fact, I went in to give him a box of chocolates for Christmas Day for yesterday. And still 70% of my business comes from that one shop. And that just fell into my lap. And I get such such a sense of achievement as a same from from using these two things and a load of tools. And yeah, so sometimes it comes to you when you're not even looking for it.

Sarah Lawrence 39:17

Obviously, Vicki you with gardening, you said 'I'm not a gardener'.

Mike Sparks 39:20

Yeah.

Vicky House 39:21

I know. Now, yeah, I am now!

Sarah Lawrence 39:27

yeah.

Vicky House 39:28

I mean, I was just just thinking, I think there's a danger in being asked to tell your story, that it sounds very simple. Sounds as if it's just well you set out with this idea and then you go and implement it. And then before you know it, you know you've got this set of the other that's that's your plan B. But I think well I know the reality is very different. If I look back and if you were looking through my window Over the last 10 years, you would have seen so many ups and downs, you would have seen days where I was unable to do anything days or as on the able to leave the house because I just couldn't face. Seeing people, there were days where I couldn't put the television on, because I thought if I see one more bloody nappy advert, you know, I'm just not going to have to deal with it. So we're looking at, well, I'm looking at this sort of 10 years, more than 10 years since our last claim. And I'm looking at it through the lens of where I'm at today. And I think, as Caroline said, I can still have shitty days, where everything doesn't seem terrific, and everything seems a struggle. Luckily, those days are far more few and far between them than they have been. But it is about as Caroline was saying that the little victory sometimes. And I think that the move towards doing something like Clem's was about reclaiming some confidence, I felt that my sense of self had been eroded. I also sort of stepped away from my career. So that was another loss for me. And it was about just trying to rebuild a life in some way, just brick by brick, step by step. As I say, you know, 13 years on or whatever it is, suddenly you've you've, you've actually built a bit of a thing. But if I thought of doing any of this, at the time of trying to have a family, I would never have imagined that it will be possible and that there would be a life beyond that. So yeah, I just just to, I suppose, be aware that this plan B thing isn't this magical rabbit, you pull out of a hat on from, you know, just taking baby steps, sorry for the language there. But I think it also comes from finding other people to support you along the way, a big milestone in this for me, rebuilding confidence, and finding support was joining gateway women. And in fact, one of the CO directors of Clem's was my best friend who I met there, and I wouldn't have been able to navigate the journey without her. So it's not this monumental journey I've made on my own it's and it continues to be about having a network of people that understand. And part of that is about being brave enough to speak about how you're feeling and what it's like to be childless as well, I think

Michael Hughes 42:53

Wise words, wise words, Mike, I'm really interested to understand with your waterskiing and coaching the youngsters? Are there times when that's tough? Is it? Or is it just purely you're focused on the on the activity and helping these open these kids? Because, you know, I could I could imagine, in my, in my mind, I'm trying to picture this scenario. And I know that because I've done this in the past where I'll be looking at the interaction of a father and son, let's say sorry to just

speak on the my house, but there's just comes to mind. And watching that interaction and get that pang of of grief come through. So I'd be interested to hear you know, how that's for you.

Mike Sparks 43:49

I'm smiling really, Michael, because that's actually a very, very good question. One, I'm actually doing it in the boat. And sometimes on the land particularly with with complete beginners, just completely focused on what I'm doing. And the task, I get such a kick from it, love the school scheme for forty years and more and get great feedback. And I'm a member of a small number of coaches at the club. And I can I can coach up to competition standard, but we all seem to focus you seem to specialise in one particular area and it just so happens I seem to be better with with novices and particularly youngsters and I get a great kick from that. So yeah, when when I'm doing it. Yeah, just focus on what we're doing. Great kid gets the kid or youngster gets to do something they couldn't do last week. Big smiles big round of applause. Love it. Just join in with it. But then you Yeah, the wry smile came because you mentioned About near then seeing the interaction between the parent which of course you get. And actually, that was there was an actual occasion where that happened where it was a real turning point for me. And I knew I needed help. As a couple who used to come at the weekend, we're still do great friends of mine now. He's actually a very, very eminent QC or Casey now King's council. So it's a barrister, very well known anyway, he would come with the, with the youngsters and I actually taught both the son and daughter to ski I used to do Saturday mornings. And yeah, that's, that was 10-15 years ago that I first started to teach them. And so those children have grown up now. And this friend of mine, who I better remain nameless, actually, because of his prominence. He had a 60s birthday, shortly after mine, and we got invited to his party up in a swanky club in London. And it was, it was a fantastic evening, and his daughter came in, because she had just come back from university and I obviously remember her as a little youngster to holding her in the water, etc, etc, and turned out to be quite a good skier. And she just looked cleverer than that, while she was 2021. Maybe she was absolutely stunning. And don't get me wrong. I'm not saying this wrong, but actually, I looked at Wow. And this friend of mine, obviously gave his daughter a huge hug. And I just witnessed it. And I was so jealous. The tears just started pouring down my face. And I had to look disappear. Thankfully, in terms of embarrassment, nobody saw it. There, and then I thought, you're not coping with this. I need help. So yeah, I mean, I think it was particularly prominent, because this chap and his wife have become very, very close friends of mine I see them a lot. And it was just, it was just jealousy. I thought Christ, I'm never gonna get that. It didn't happen on my 60th birthday. I think it's to come to them and have a lovely time. But with all my friends and I always say, and I think this is actually a part of the situation we find ourselves in. But for me, my most prized and valuable possession. And anything I've got my friends, I've valued them more than anything I own or anything I've got. Even more than family. Choose them. With no disrespect to my family, but my friends. I chose them and they chose me. So yeah, that was I had a lovely time. But yeah, that occasion of when I called him his first name's Richard, you want to work it out from there. Richard 60th birthday. Yeah, I just, it was instantaneous. Nothing What the hell's going on? What happened? Just then, why did that happen? And I did then go get some help, which, yeah, was a help. It doesn't cure anything, didn't change anything. Gives you some different tools of dealing with stuff. So yeah, it does happen.

Michael Hughes 48:12

Now, look, thank you for sharing that, Mike. Because look on speaking on behalf of, you know, a lot of mentors, as we see the stories in our group. It's not, it's not easy for us to admit those things. It's not easy for us to talk about them. So thanks for having the courage to do so. Really appreciate that.

Mike Sparks 48:30

Pleasure. .

Michael Hughes 48:32

Mind you I'm sitting here thinking I was gonna give you a challenge about getting me up on the ski getting this fat ass up on the ski. Funny story. My my mate took me waterskiing many years ago. And it was one of those sports I've vowed never to do again, because I just could not get this lump out of the water. Okay, sorry. I'm laughing at myself

Mike Sparks 48:59

let me ask you two questions. Can you swim?

Michael Hughes 49:04

I'm in Australia course I can swim. Right. And you ride a bike? , Yes, I have done many times.

Mike Sparks 49:12

On that basis. I'm confident I can teach you to water ski.

Sarah Lawrence 49:16

It's a challenge.

Mike Sparks 49:18

I've only ever had one person I could not get out of the water in 30 odd years. Sometimes it takes a while but your equipment you got to have a proper competition boat with a boom coming out the side. Yeah. Which is how we start going. But yeah, go to Mike if you want to do it. Go to a place. It's got the right equipment. In fact, we're abouts in Aus are you?

Michael Hughes 49:43

I'm in a place called Woolagon So it's about 80 kilometres south of Sydney. So we're on the coast.

Mike Sparks 49:48

Oh, okay. All right.

Caroline Stafford 49:50

Mike, you got to get a trip over.

Mike Sparks 49:54

There so young lass, well I call her young. She's just become a mom who used to ski with us and my local club and she, I don't quite know why she emigrated to America with her husband. Anyway,

she did have an absolute ball down there. She's a brilliant skier and she's a coach, and she's somewhere on that East Coast.

Michael Hughes 50:15

It's a very long east coast. Sorry.

Mike Sparks 50:18

Well, yeah, okay. She's somewhere anyway, I will email you her contact details. Bet Sarah can get your other water. That's challenge for you now.

Sarah Lawrence 50:32

We need regular updates

Michael Hughes 50:36

Talking about why not challenges, we're talking about other things. I'm just sitting here listening to you guys is as affected me quite profoundly. And I'm trying to find the vocabulary to talk about it. And I think Sarah has really done a great job in as she does is encapsulating what's been going on here and talking about, you know, the, the need for community and the how you guys give back. So I'm a bit gutted the pandemic stopped me from coming from the UK in 2019. Because I was going to come and see you, Vicki.

Michael Hughes 51:06

And you know what, I don't want this to sound bad. But I'm sort of glad that we didn't because now I know your story my Vicki would never have left. Because she loves her gardening. She is dying to get an old house to do up because every time I walk every time I come in, she is looking at a show about somewhere in the UK or somewhere in France or Portugal, an old house, so I would have had to come home by myself. I'm sure.

Vicky House 51:40

It sounds like we're kindred spirits as Vicki's definitely have to come over. Yeah, that would be great.

Michael Hughes 51:48

We intend to we intend to which which brings me on to another thing. So one of the things that I liked and I just don't want to talk about myself too much because this is your show, but I love doing the family tree. So Caroline knows where I'm going with this, because she said to me that she would she would do some research because my Vicki's family we've traced to very close to where Caroline lives. And although it's her married name, Stafford that was the name of my wife's family in that area of UK. And so I really love the whole investigation thing with with the whole family tree. So I'm dying to know, Caroline, is your husband's family related to Vicki? I've just dying to know.

Caroline Stafford 52:45

I haven't found out.

Michael Hughes 52:47

I would have told me

Caroline Stafford 52:49

I would have told you Yeah. I will I will put that back. When so my Christmas biscuits are on their way, I will get back looking back into that. Yeah,

Michael Hughes 53:03

I'll send you a message with where they were situated. And you can ask your in laws, it's on the podcast, so you got to do it.

Caroline Stafford 53:13

Yeah, got to do that send me that because they're away on it. They're cruising. My husband's parents drop on a cruise at the moment. So they won't have much to do. So if I send it them on WhatsApp, a little bit of research while they're setting themselves. Sure.

Mike Sparks 53:30

That's the weird thing, though. I mean, I don't think that there's that many degrees of separation true. Most people are said, weirdly. So my husband's love my sister in law's. She was married before I don't wanna give too much away. But her her then partner was related to me. For I was just like, I was a bit a bit old in it. I said to me, he said we're about to get married because we related striking how closely, you know, not looking at these things. It's a scarier thing, isn't it? I've been doing my family tree for a long, long time, decades. And I started it really made before even nine before I knew I wouldn't have children, because I'm the only one carrying the name. My father was an only son. I'm an only son and I have no cousins carrying the name. Well, I didn't until very recently I found my second cousin with the same name. He's a couple years older than me. He's also into antiques. But sadly, he doesn't have children either. I don't know why because we've only just sort of found each other literally within the last six weeks and we haven't met yet so I don't know why doesn't have children rather than father names gonna die. But the interesting thing is that I did a DNA test with Ancestry UK to try and help with this process, and actually, that wasn't how I found him, but it's kicked up something else is kicked up this lady who really, really, oddly enough, lives very close to me. And apparently, we're first or second cousins, and we cannot work it out. And now then we started looking at geography of where her parents came from, and my parents came from then our grandparents. And it looks like there may have been some dalliance somewhere with my maternal grandmother and her maternal grandfather. Getting my mum to do a DNA test to see if there's any linkers like, oh my god I don't remember her because she died when I was about four. I think my maternal grandmother, she was a bit of a girl apparently she Yes, mum. Even my mum now will say she was always the first one to get up at a party and start dancing and this and there's some other stories that yeah, it's totally believable. Let me put it that way. She sounds phenomenal! you think about you see what I didn't do that sort of thing in those days, don't we? Yes, they did. And before and forevermore, it just goes on? You know, you just got more chance getting caught now God, that's interested in it. We had asked traceback and I was hoping I was hoping for some

blue blood. I'm not gonna lie. I was hoping, you know, go and tap some cash, and nothing. It was literally servants and farmers.

Caroline Stafford 56:39

Mine's pretty much like that. On a few bakers in my family, which is really interesting. My mom said a lot of research and not far from as in Peterborough. We found some I found what relative is that had like a bakery in a confectioner's, which I thought was quite nice. Yes.

Mike Sparks 56:58

But yeah, yeah, certainly isn't it

Sarah Lawrence 57:01

is another bizarre thing.

Michael Hughes 57:03

I've got family tree envy because. This wasn't the maybe our family trees but anyway. So I've got family tree and cos all I've got us, Scottish and Irish rebels, and then people in skirts and digging potatoes. Whereas, Vicki, on the other hand, it's it. I get really excited talking about it, as you will see, because hers is so vast and rich, it is unbelievable. So we've been able to trace back someone to the Americas, we're actually no roundabout the time of the Pilgrim Fathers about a decade or two after they left. Some of we've been able to trace her relatives following. So they've gone to Massachusetts and obviously, the family has grown so they've have history in the American South American War of Independence, the American Civil War. There's potentially she's related to a number of American presidents because of course, yeah distantly, because of the fact that you know, that that part of her gene pool has been in America for so long. Then when you look around in this particular area in Australia, the Stafford's who came from England, he was a in the British Army, went to India, and then from the foothills of the Himalayas, ends up down here in Wollongong and that was a big landowner. Part of that family started with local paper Another one was laying down on her father's side a bit further up the coast, which is now worth millions so of course, the question is, where's all the money gone? Because I want some and another grandfather four times removed one or four generations back was a ship's captain that delivered product all the way down the coast to you back in the day so I love loved it. Love researcher that one and just got envy.

Mike Sparks 59:16

I've got in envy!

Michael Hughes 59:18

Yeah, DNA test. They're awesome. Because they they kick up so much stuff. There's so many stories that have come from it. And and the reason I brought that up is because for me, I hope that what all that research that I've done, is there for others.

Mike Sparks 59:39

Yeah, yeah, quite agree with that. Like, in a weird way, that's kind of what I've been talking about today, isn't it legacy, I guess. You know, the community. And as Vicki rightly said, it's not you don't

go look, you don't go questing for this. You might fall into it. You You just don't know what your skill set is until you're, I guess, you know, those, you know, traditional, you're going to be parents fall away. And then you you are, it's kind of incumbent on you to go looking at your skill set, isn't it going? Well? How do I build myself back up? Again? I guess that's kind of what we've been talking about today. Now, in a roundabout sort of ways now.

Vicky House 1:00:21

Definitely.

Michael Hughes 1:00:23

One of the things that sorry, Sarah, but one of the things that we see in the community of childless men is that there's a lot of men say, Well, what is my purpose? Now? What are what what do I do? How do I get or contribute? And I think this conversation has really shown that it's just to be open to what's around you, be open to what falls in, you know, falls away, falls in your lap, use whatever metaphor you like, you know, I think that's important.

Caroline Stafford 1:00:52

My friend always says, My friend always says, it's about looking for the arrows. So there can just be really small ones, but you see a little arrow and you follow that. And then you follow that, and you take that step, and you take that step, and, and then, you know, it leads to something leads to something and it's just so small, you know, things like, like he was saying, you know, it's easy to, to look, I always associated with marathon running, which I used to do, and I don't do anymore, that we start at the beginning, and we look to where we want to go. And we think there was no way, how can I ever be there? Like, how can I ever do that. And we, we have to come back to remembering that it's those tiny, small steps, following those small arrows taking those little steps, day by day, and it might be two steps forward, and three steps back sometimes. But it's those small steps and checking in all the time, I think in ourselves, and what is this? Does this feel right? Is this bringing me a sense of meaning is this what I think I might want my life to feel like rather than look like I think, isn't it and then and then we kind of suddenly were somewhere. And we realised that we have created that. I like that sort of legacy. Because if sometimes it feels quite big. And sometimes you can bring it back and thing but it is just it can be the smallest thing that we don't know the impact those small things that we're doing, having, like, you know, with Mike and his coaching and, and Vicki and her communities, it's, it feels sometimes like a small thing we're doing, but we have, we have no idea sometimes if the huge impact it can have. And we don't know how far that travels down the line for people to really, it's so important to remember that I think,

Sarah Lawrence 1:02:42

Vicki, I was gonna ask you ran through with your garden Clem's garden? Did you have that as your ultimate goal? Or did you just take one step at a time and see and see where it took you?

Vicky House 1:02:57

When we moved here, we had a completely different plan.

Mike Sparks 1:03:03

Right? Good.

Vicky House 1:03:06

We came here. It's a substantial building. You know, we're really lucky to be here, it's all about the vagaries of the housing market in the UK, you move from Brighton and you sell your semi and suddenly you can afford to buy something that's a bit special. And I suppose we moved here with the idea of setting up a business within the house, an art space business probably. And but I think we have the luxury of not having any deadlines to work towards. And you can't imagine how it is to renovate a property until you're actually in amongst it. And then we realise how much we bitten off. And so this these grand ideas, what we were going to do with the place, they suddenly kind of got further and further away. And we had to take the renovations a step at a time and as money was available as well. And in doing that, and taking a breath. And within the process rather than just chasing something that was further away. I think I became more aware of the garden, and the garden is an opportunity and enjoy enjoyed being in the garden and then began thinking well, actually, this garden is too big for us. What could we do? We've got this cracking infrastructure that the council left behind, we've got outdoor labs, we've got a car park, we've got all kinds of random bits and pieces. What can we do with that and you know, little little piece of the puzzle fall into place and it's not something that you We woke up one morning thinking we would do. It's something that's come, as you said, Michael, about being getting to a place in your life where you can be open to opportunities. I think there was a long time where I was blinded by my grief and and in particular, feeling angry, and seeing the opportunity to have a positive future. And I think it's only by for me getting beyond that point by looking after myself by finding some more people who understood by having conversations by time moving forward, that actually you can begin to think, well, there are positive things and there are little bits and pieces that I can be doing. And maybe this is possible, maybe this person can help me and maybe I can build a confidence, maybe I can learn new things. And so it kind of evolved. That was a very long answer to your question. No, no, we didn't. We didn't plan Clem's

Mike Sparks 1:06:04

also made me think that as you what you've done there then is well, Caroline was saying, you just you just spotted the little arrows. It wasn't a great big one.

Vicky House 1:06:11

Yeah,that's it. Absolutely. That.

Michael Hughes 1:06:16

I'm just thinking about how inspiring you three are really, your individual stories, because there's so much so you know, when we when we emailed? You know, Mike wanted to talk about waterskiing. But there's so much more to that waterskiing, and just outage preventable, waterskiing. You know, there's so much more to Caroline your, your biscuits and, and and what the story is behind that beautiful, beautiful story, and so rich, you know, that, again, would be inspiring to, to our community, I think because there are those who feel quite lost. And it doesn't have to be the big things. And Vicki look, I mean, I've renovated this small house, I know how hard that was trying to live in it. So I take my hat off to you. But you know, I just Yeah, look, I'm struggling with the words to just say how

inspirational you are with what you've done and how brave you are. But also there's, you have a lot to teach people in that, you know, that they can trust our community they can they can find solace in our community. Like, there's so much they can find in the so I'm really looking forward to come over to England and seeing you through likewise, yeah. I'd make sure that Vicki spends a very limited time with the other Vicki!

Mike Sparks 1:07:57

This has been so lovely talking to all three of you as as Michael said, when we sort of put this together we're going waterskiing, electrician, gardening, where's this gonna go? And I think that's what I love about the podcast, we just have a conversation, and baking and life coaching it just - I love it when we get new voices together, and just see that connection start to sort of happen, you know, because the community as you've already said, that communities, it's so important, isn't it that you're not doing it on your own?

Caroline Stafford 1:08:29

Basically. Yeah. So thank

Vicky House 1:08:33

you starstruck being here. Because I think when you're Michael have have also had your journey. Some of Yeah, did something incredible with this podcast and the workload beyond that, so thank you very much for the opportunity to to meet you. And, and Mike and Caroline too.

Mike Sparks 1:08:55

Exactly. Just,

Michael Hughes 1:08:56

it's just a pity Berenice wasn't there, because she would have loved this gas. We're thinking of you, Berenice.

Caroline Stafford 1:09:02

Yeah, absolutely.

Mike Sparks 1:09:04

Yeah.

Michael Hughes 1:09:06

Please now look, let's have, let's take this this time for you guys. So just what do you want the community to know? What is it you're up to? Because, you know, it's also part of the thing that I think is missing is that from our communities that giving people the opportunity to support each other? We have you great guys here who have taken that step forward. So tell us about what you're up to. What's next, so that the community can perhaps if they choose to get behind, you guys would like to go first?

Vicky House 1:09:39

Well, I can say that. For the first time in five years, Clem's Gardens have been a winter holiday. So what I'm doing is having a bit of a rest. Amazing, which I'm really enjoying. But from March onwards Clem's will be back up and running, we'll be back in the garden planting and sowing and harvesting our flowers. So if anybody within we're in Huddersfield in West Yorkshire, if anybody wants to support us by thinking of buying local, chemical free, beautiful seasonal flowers from us, rather than going down to the supermarket with a cellophane wrapped flowers, then please consider buying from us. But equally if you're in the local area, and you would like to visit a neighbour who might be not get some visitors, or might be going through a hard time, or a friend who's who's in the similar boat, and would just like some flowers and maybe can't afford to buy them, then please get in touch. And help us spread some kindness in the local community by taking a jar of our flowers on your journey, and leaving it with a friend as a reminder that you've been there and you've thought about them and you cared enough to stop by that will be cracking. And if you're not in our local area, then if you could just spread the word. That would be cracking. Really appreciate it. I think. I've shared the website address with Sarah, so should be available.

Michael Hughes 1:11:29

Awesome. Thank you, Vicki. Caroline would you like to go next.

Caroline Stafford 1:11:35

So yeah, what's up, I got planned, we are on their last leg before the Christmas holidays, actually, also taking a bit of time off, which will be a real treat. And then in terms of what's coming next year, we'll just, we're going to just continue doing what we do and sort of hoping to provide that connection and that, like facilitate opportunity for people to just reach out to somebody that they love, to let them know that they're thinking of them, we've just launched some kind of self care kind of gift boxes. So with a bit more a little bit more themes. So one is a letter writing one, we've got a sort of journaling, one, a crafting one with the idea being that really giving people that opportunity to really slow down and take some time to do something for themselves. So I'm looking forward to seeing how they go. And then with my health coaching, that that's going to be something that I think will be quite tied to this plan B idea and kind of helping predominantly, I think it will be mostly women who have been through similar journey to us and who are at the point not necessarily just women, I guess people who are figuring out the purpose, what what's what's next how how to find that kind of joy in that purpose in that meaning and, and working with them closely sort of to look at all aspects of wellness, I suppose. But I won't qualify for that until about this time next year. So it's going to be a juggling act next year of juggling the biscuits, and continuing to, to learn and to study. But I will haven't sent anything with that email address, website address, but I will do that. So we post nationwide. And all our biscuits are letterbox friendly. So they can just drop on on the doormat. If you know when you want to let somebody know that you're thinking of them. And we do do many, many happy occasions as well. You know, we bake for all sorts of occasions now we have our YouTube biscuits where people can if our messages aren't quite what they want, they can choose to put exactly what they what they want on a biscuit. And I'm always up for a good collaboration as well. So if there's ever I'm thinking about Vicki and the flowers, like whether there's ever anything that a combo somehow that we might be able to do. I don't know. We're up in Yorkshire actually later on in January, so I might have to be in touch and try to see you.

Vicky House 1:14:07

Great!

Caroline Stafford 1:14:07

Yes!

Mike Sparks 1:14:11

I'll carry on doing what I'm doing and getting the rewards from that. But two things I think worthy of note for this is that my wife, she's an HR. She's a director now for finance house up in London, and has done that for 40 years and she is now going to retire she's given the notice of that. So come May next year she she will be retiring from full time employment. Sadly, she's still gonna have to do some consultancy work to keep the water from the door but she's happy to do that. And that, that she's looking forward to that because she can she can then pick and choose what works. She does and she's already had loads of inquiries about about that. And one of the things that's going to spin off of that is we're both keen snow skiers as well. And we've always wanted to have a whole season in a ski resort and of course, never been able to do it. So we haven't we've probably think we know where we're going. But we're not quite sure for how long we argue about that. I say the whole season, she says four weeks, but so not not this winter. But next winter, we what we've got hope to do is find a place, somewhere relatively cheap, and just go there for at least four weeks, hopefully 12. And just enjoy it and ski when the sun shines and sit and read a book and drink wine when it doesn't. That's one thing we're going to be doing for ourselves. And the other thing, which actually, I need to follow up on. So I'm pretty sure I mentioned it to you, Michael A while ago, as I am quite an active Freemason. And it occurred to me quite a while ago that basically is this group, how I got involved in it was, was particularly men who are childless. Albeit, I'm very pleased to see it's open out, because we're all suffering and feeling the same thing. But it occurred to me that, you know, there are 1000s of Freemasons all over the world. And I cannot be the only one who is told this and struggling with it. And therefore, could we perhaps within that particular, as men, I suppose historically tend to clam up a little bit about this. establish some sort of helpline. So I found the right route to go through, which is one of the benevolent Institute's so the Freemasons run, and it was grabbed immediately, and they're running with it, and it's going to get funding, albeit, as I say, it does seem to run into the sand. And I'm pleased you've asked that question, because I don't know anything about that for months. So I need to follow up on it. But it initially got a very good reception, just just to, even if it's just a helpline to point people in the right direction, just to say, look, if you're suffering this, then then then Do do do do something about it. And the way to deliver it is that every Masonic Lodge, has someone called the mentor, sorry, the chaplain, who actually is responsible for the well being of the members of the lodge, and his or her family will be his witness. And it could be delivered by just saying at a launch meeting look, this helpline or group or however it manifests itself is available for them. If you are find yourself in this position. This is who to contact and you can declare it here and now in front of everybody. But come and talk to me and I'll point your right direction. So hopefully that'll at some point actually get up and running.

Michael Hughes 1:17:48

Okay, I remember you telling me about that. Yes. I'll be looking forward to seeing where you go with them. Thanks, Mike.

Sarah Lawrence 1:17:58

Lots of arrows. Lots of arrows happening. Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you, everyone. It's been absolutely it's been a pleasure to meet yours. It's been lots of lovely energy around this episode. So thank you for sharing and being so open. I really enjoyed listening.

Caroline Stafford 1:18:17

Thank you. It's been a great, great way to spend a Sunday morning. So thank you so much.

Mike Sparks 1:18:24

I completely agree. Thank you, everyone.

Vicky House 1:18:27

Thanks, everyone. And be lovely to stay in touch as well.

Mike Sparks 1:18:30

Yeah, definitely.

Berenice Howard-Smith 1:18:48

Thank you for listening. We hope you found Caroline, Mike and Vicki stories as inspiring as we did. We'd love to get your feedback. If you'd like to find out more about their businesses, please head to the show notes or to our website, [www dot, the full stop pod.com](http://www.thefullstopod.com) and head to the toolkit where we list all of our guest details. You can also join our listeners list via the website. It's our monthly email that shares what's going on in our world, along with community events and news. The website also lists our social media links, and we welcome your connection to us. We're on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and we have a channel on YouTube. We're also new on Mastodon and we have a coffee account where you can donate to our work and help us to secure our future through our website and the social media accounts. You can also get in touch if you'd like to be a guest, or you have a topic that we've not yet covered. We'd love to hear from you. And as always, it's important for us to let you know you are not alone.