

The Full Stop podcast

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With Berenice Howard-Smith, Michael Hughes and Sarah Lawrence

Our guest are Nina Thair and Danielle Hines.

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0:00:00 - Danielle

And some ways I wonder if it's more than that. I wonder if it is because I am dealing with the grief and because I am starting to love myself and having these friendships. Could that also be a part of what is making me feel better physically? It's interesting, the mind and body connection in that way.

0:00:20 - Nina

Yeah absolutely, yeah, no, I agree, and that's really I like what you're saying there, because I haven't really thought about that side of it, but I, yeah, my life has really sort of improved emotionally over the last couple of years from the connections I've made, and certainly, yeah, the end of last year and this year I am a lot happier within myself and, yeah, it is due to the connections. So, yeah, that's a really lovely thing to have said and I hope that you will enjoy it.

0:01:01 - Sarah

Hello and welcome to the Full Stop Podcast, the Childless Community Podcast, with Michael, Berenice Smith and me, Sarah Lawrence, if you're new to this podcast. We're here to delve beneath the surface of the Childish 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 support those people in their lives who are facing life without children.

In this episode, we're joined by Nina Thair and Danielle Hines. Both of them are friends and have shared experience of physical disability. We speak to them about what impacts them and how their lives have been affected by their childlessness. This is a powerful episode and, as with all others, is unscripted, and this conversation went in many different directions, a lot of it unexpected too. I won't give any spoilers, but this episode affected us all and those of you that were in the live audience. So sit back, relax and enjoy this episode, all about how we can have a little bit more understanding for those of us in the community that have physical disabilities.

0:02:13 - Michael

So, Danielle and Nina, who are you and what do you do?

0:02:18 - Danielle

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Okay, I will go first. I'm Danielle and I am based in the southeastern part of the United States, in the state called North Carolina. And so how I came to be childless it started. My story probably goes back to like age 12 is when I became chronically ill. I attended a bonfire with friends and, unbeknownst to them, they were burning poison ivy and it turned into poison ivy inhalation a pretty severe reaction to that, where I was hospitalized for about a week and they weren't sure if I was gonna make it. And from there it just kind of spiraled into chronic pain. I was missing a lot of school and it just became very hard for me to move around to keep up with my peers. I ended up graduating high school a year late, did a lot of homeschooling, college was much the same. It took me 11 years to finish my four year degree. Just so much starting and stopping. And at that time I was diagnosed only with fibromyalgia, which it took three years to get that diagnosis after age 12, so I was 15 by that point and some of the symptoms just did not fit. As I got older I knew that there was something more going on. I didn't know what it was and, seeing specialist after specialist. I wasn't getting the answers that I needed Until 2012, when things just took a nosedive for lack of a better word I got to the point that I was just unrelentingly dizzy.

I was working at the time full time, and it got to where I didn't trust myself to drive. I was just walking around my home, bouncing into walls and having trouble bathing, and I didn't know what was going on. And I remember flying out of the Dallas airport to Texas to visit some family members, actually for for a belated wedding reception there, and I wasn't feeling well during that trip. But on the flight home in the airport I got to where I just couldn't stand. I just collapsed on the ground and I realized I cannot walk to the bathroom. I just can't make it, and I just kind of had a puddle of tears on the floor and that was the first time that I had to use a wheelchair. And from there the diagnosis just kind of piled on.

I was diagnosed with postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome that leaves the abbreviation POTS for those of you who have heard of that and it is basically a malfunctioning of the autonomic nervous system. So it controls my heart rate, my blood pressure, bladder function, digestive functions. Anything your body might do automatically, Mine does it a little differently and from there some of the episodes that I was having started not fitting with that diagnosis and then it was okay. Now you have chronic migraine with brainstem or which doesn't look like most people's migraines, because you're not experiencing piercing head pain, You're experiencing passing out, you're experiencing slurred speech and drooping face and in coordination where you can't hold your body upright, and these were happening multiple times a day. And then the times that they weren't happening, there was that hangover effect right Of, I've just had a migraine, even though I didn't have the head pain and I can't function the rest of the day and I have the POTS. So work was out of the question, walking far distances was out of the question. Anywhere I went it was with a walker, a wheelchair.

I had just bought a house a year before I got these diagnoses and my bedroom was on the top floor and it was no longer feasible to walk upstairs, so had to downsize there. It just changed my entire life and I think, like most of us, I had dreamed of being a mom from a very young age and there was always that hope that whatever illness I have going on is gonna get better at some point. Right, it's gonna get better enough. Because I'm seeing all these doctors, I'm seeing some of the top doctors in my area. For these things, I'm traveling places to see specialists. And then, when the diagnoses just kept piling on, it was how do I

deal with this? How is my life looking so differently than I thought it was going to, and how am I ever going to take care of someone else if I'm needing help taking care of myself? And that is basically how I came to the realization that I couldn't have kids. In 2021, my sister-in-law was pregnant for the second time and I just remember feeling like there's this stark contrast between her life and my life.

And I'm on the outside and I'm observing that and she had had a child my niece in 2015 or 2016,. Sorry for getting the right, but I remember thinking at that time it's probably not gonna work out for me to have kids. But I was like, okay, I'm still pretty young, I've got some time, and I'm just gonna hold out that little sliver of hope that I'm gonna get better. And by 2021, I was like I've been holding out a hope for a long time and things are not. They're not getting better enough. Any improvement is too small.

And I just felt like I was living in this limbo space and there was a part of me that felt as much as it pained me to think of not becoming a mom. It was also very painful to just keep hoping and hating my life as it was, and I remember just Googling frantically one night is there anyone like me, Are there any other childless people who are struggling with illness or who are struggling in some way? And I stumbled upon Jodi Day's work, read her book cover to cover, probably in a span of like three days, joined Gateway Women at the time and found you all and listened to all the back episodes and I just, yeah, I just kind of fell into the community and it felt like, oh, this is where I fit and maybe, even though I can't see it now, because I'm in this complete depression and struggling to just even sleep and function, maybe there will be a time where I won't feel this way, that's my story.

0:09:31 - Berenice

Thank you, Danielle. Thank you so very much. Nina Would you like to share your story?

0:09:38 - Nina

Yeah, thank you, Danielle, for sharing all of that. That's kind of given me the confidence to go for it with mine. I'm not sure I'm going to do it quite so eloquently, but yeah, I'm Nina, I've got secondary progressive MS and I kind of I'm childless and I happen to be disabled. I'm disabled and I happen to be childless. I feel that people presume I'm childless because I'm disabled. That's not the case at all. I'll talk about my childlessness journey in a minute. But yeah, the two are definitely intertwined. But the reason I'm childless is because my ex didn't want children and two years into our relationship I started I developed MS. So I met my ex in 2000 and a few months into our relationship I talked about wanting children and he said, oh, I don't want children. And I just was just like no, that's not going to be the case, I'll change his mind, he'll change his mind, it will all be fine, and stuck with it, thinking I would change his mind. And I spent 15 years with him until I was 42. All my child bearing years and he never changed his mind. And yeah, it was difficult. We spent the whole time with me desperately wanting children and arguing about it. I've never, ever, had a positive conversation with someone about getting pregnant and wanting children. I've never been through a process of trying to have children and all the rest of it, so that's something that I feel I've really missed out on is the opportunity to share the journey. I've got no idea whether I can become pregnant. I could have had children. I have no idea. I never had the chance to try.

And then so, 2002, I was 30. I was on a ski trip and so I was a teacher and I was taking a whole group of 16, 17 year old skiing in America and actually it was Canada and my right leg stopped working from the knee down and I just presumed it was a ski injury. And obviously, because my leg was in a ski boot the whole time, it actually, unbelievably I was rubbish at skiing but unbelievably I could still ski, despite the fact that my leg wasn't working from the knee down, and got back and two weeks later I was falling over and all sorts. So I went to the doctor and said, look, I hurt my knee when I was skiing. And the doctor said to me oh, I don't think it's a ski injury, I think it's something to do with your spinal cord, and it then took two years to get a diagnosis of MS and it developed very slowly and I just continued with life as normal, worked full times a teacher and did so for 22 years with MS.

So, yes, so the childlessness and the MS I feel are very much linked. I feel the development of my MS and the progress are linked to the grief of childlessness and that's something I can look at with hindsight and something I've learned from other childless women with chronic illnesses that, yes, the symptoms worsen when significant things happen in your life, and just the grief and the pain. So, yes, I had a very difficult relationship with my partner and we argued a lot. And then, of course, as soon as I was diagnosed with MS, it was another reason for him not to have children. You know this kind of idea that I wouldn't be able to cope with having children when I believed I best, still believe, rightly that I would have been absolutely fine. You know, I could have had children. I still don't know. Part of me is unsure as to whether I would have developed MS and whether it would have progressed as it has if I had children. I'll never know, but there's always that question.

And then 2018, so my ex left me in 2015. And I then got a job as an assistant head for a pupil referral unit, which was amazing. It was a non teaching job and by this time I was kind of using a powered wheelchair. So I'd spent 20 years really with my MS developing before that I could walk. And then 2018, I had a friend who was in a group that gave me a job, gave each other a lot of support for his own reasons, and I was like I want that. I want a community around me that is going through what I'm going through, which is childlessness.

And so I Googled childlessness, an up-popped Gateway Women and there was a Reignite weekend in London and that was the first thing I did was go on to the Reignite weekend. I didn't join Gateway Women, I had no real knowledge of what it was. I just went straight onto the Reignite weekend, which was amazing, and then three days after I got back from that, I was hospitalised and I never walked again. So the grief that came out I mean I cannot, I can't imagine that there is not a direct link between all of the grief that came out through that Reignite weekend and me ending up in hospital and never walking again. You know my MS was progressing and getting worse but all of a sudden it was just like I just couldn't cope. I couldn't live in my flat, so yeah. So that was well five, six years ago now and yeah, so I went from being sort of you wouldn't know I had MS to using walking sticks, to walking framed, to a wheelchair occasionally, and now I'm quite severely disabled.

And, yeah, happened to be childless and I'm much more connected with the childless community than I am with a disabled community. I know very few disabled people. I've never really connected. I do sort of have friends with MS, but I have far more friends that are childless and I'm much closer to the childless community and it's really important to me. So yes, that's kind of my story. I hope that makes sense. But yeah, it's that going back to the

beginning childless and happened to be disabled, disabled, happened to be childless. But there's no doubt that the two are also intertwined and connected.

0:18:08 - Berenice

So yeah, Thank you, Nina. Thank you very much for that. I was avidly reading your [blog](#) again. It's incredible and I love your honesty. In fact, one of the things that came across in that was when you were talking about going on holiday because you're extremely well travelled. You were talking about sitting away from the people that you were travelling with, and that worry about that comes across as well and your individuality and it does feel like both of you, despite what you've been through, have you found these connections within the childless community powerful?

0:18:56 - Nina

Yeah, absolutely Definitely. I mean the best friendships I have. Now I sort of realised I turned 50 last year and, yeah, I've made friendships through so Bindi's meditation classes so I know Berenice and Danielle through those classes and yeah, so I turned 50, realised I've made all these friendships and in my late 20s and 30s all my friends were making new friendships through being new mums and it's taken until my 50s to be able to make new friends that I really value and connect with. Not that I don't value and connect with my mum and friends of course I do. I love them to bits. But to have come to this new sort of community in my 50s is amazing and, yeah, it's really special. It's a very different kind of friendship that I have with my childless friends, definitely.

0:20:08 - Berenice

I love how we will know each other through Bindi's group, but also, actually, what I love is that occasionally there'll be some theme or pop-up, not just a theme, but it will be perhaps some sort of life event going on in the wider world. I love that we rebel in our own way and that makes me laugh. We're more than our childless.

I have that connection which I get through your blog as well. I'm kind of sit there and read some of the things you write about, certainly about the love and the rage post that you posted a while ago. I love that completely and there's a lot there as well.

0:20:50 - Nina

Thank you, Berenice. Yeah, I really appreciate that. I do love writing. When it comes, it just kind of it's really cathartic just to get it all out.

0:21:02 - Berenice

You write beautifully. I have to say it's you. I hear your words, I hear your voice when I read it. I know it's you writing it. You write very authentically but it's very moving. But some of it just makes me laugh as well. You've got this beautiful sense of humour that just makes me laugh, so yeah.

0:21:20 - Danielle

Oh, thank you, Berenice, and you're a brilliant writer, Nina, just fantastic. I have often wished that I could capture what it's like to live with illness and the weird experiences that other people can't relate to, the wanting to be separate from others and connected, but not

connected only based on illness. I think that that's one of the things that I have loved so much about the childless community, like you were talking about, I think. Growing up for me it was so much I'm the sick friend.

Everyone knows that I'm the person with illness and as I aged it was just more of that, and so I was left out of a lot of things. And this is, honestly, the first space been these classes, the friendships that I made, where actually I'm like, oh, I feel like I belong here and I'm not only known for my health, and it's just a really special feeling and everyone here is so gentle and kind, and it amazes me how rarely we actually talk about our grief and our childlessness, how everyone is so well rounded and interested staying on their own and we share this deep connection because of the grief and because of what we wanted in our life, and we can touch on that. And yet there's so much more.

0:22:44 - Nina

Yeah, absolutely, and I feel that you and I really connected, Danielle, kind of through our health, through the fact that we both had health issues. But then, like you say, it's so much more than that and you know, everyone's just nice people and friendly and we've got more going on in our lives than having children and yeah, it is a really special connection and I'm really grateful for it, most definitely. And, yeah, I feel I wish you weren't so far away because I feel really lucky to have been able to make connections in Brighton. You know, face to face, in-person connections Again with Bindi, and I'm really lucky to live close to Bindi and so we're really good friends and have started sort of social gatherings and meetups every month with women, not just from Brighton, people come from all over.

And yeah, like you say, Danielle, it's those conversations that are just so much more than the grief and the childlessness and health issues. You know, I kind of everyone helps me out when I'm in a cafe and we're having a meetup and I need my cup but down or I need a drink of water, but I'm not there because I'm disabled and the fact that I'm disabled is, you know, I kind of it's not an issue at all and nobody really. You know, it's not a big deal, it's about friendship and we have a real laugh. And Berenice talking about the coronation oh my God, one of the I think it was just after the coronation we were having a get together, we were having the most outrageous conversation about the Royal Family and just in absolute hysterics about it and being really quite rude and inappropriate, and it was really interesting that you weren't.

oh, my God, it wasn't just me, though, I promise. And you would have loved it, berenice, definitely, but here it is.

0:25:14 - Berenice

That's the funnest thing about it, isn't it that, actually that we've got this thing in common, as you say, that's big, that's completely different and actually it's the only group. You are probably one of the few people to have that kind of honest conversation about what we felt about that occasion and find it uncovers a deeper conversation. Obviously, other people feel differently, which is totally fine, but what's lovely is that you can have these shared conversations and people go. I think you're being outrageous and then you move on and it's fine, it's absolutely different.

There's so much more diversity, I think, in this community. It feels then perhaps out there in the big world because it will be through individually. Everyone's been through enough to not make it worse for people when they arrive in this space, but to welcome them in. I guess I would have loved that conversation, Nina. I know you would I need to adhere it to Brighton as well, because I also need to discuss the flamingos as well, because you obviously want the Faberche flamingo.

0:26:19 - Nina

Oh my goodness, yes, me and the flamingos.

0:26:22 - Berenice

But yes.

0:26:28 - Sarah

I was going to ask. It's so interesting, isn't it? What I hear from you, Nina, is there's this box and then there's this box, but actually being part of this community takes you out of those boxes, so you can have this conversation, which sounds phenomenal. I'll be honest, I'm not a royalist but, as Baroness knows, I've had a rant and a rave about the amount of money that was spent by hey, but it just sounds really like you get to just be then. It's not a. I'm not this and I'm not that. I'm just with a bunch of people and I can just be myself.

0:27:08 - Nina

Absolutely. Yeah, that's completely it. It really is Just yeah. Just a group of women that are all just getting on and having a laugh and having a moan and you know, it's not all fun and laughter, but a lot of it is.

A lot of it is just having a chat and getting on, and I think it's the same within the meditation class as well. We're all quite different and we've all got very different life experiences and journeys, but it's just. You can just completely and utterly be yourself and I think it's the only time I mean I think I'm always authentic but the only time that I can really be totally relaxed and authentic and not have to think about what I'm saying. Maybe I should think more sometimes about what I say about the royalty, but anyway, but I can just relax and say what I want. Yeah, what about you, Danielle? Do you kind of have face-to-face connections or friendship connections in your area at all? I do.

0:28:23 - Danielle

Yeah, recently within, let's see, I think I've met up with a few women who are childless. It wasn't organized by me, it was organized by another woman in our in Lighthouse Women, so there's four of us and we have met together, I think, three times now and it's fabulous. I love it. It's just it started with us talking so much about our childlessness and then it really did expand to other things and we do have so much laughter when we're together. That's not to say that if given the opportunity, I would move to the UK, because I would be there in the heartbeat if I could, and I'm looking into possibilities of that in the future. But yes, I do find that I do have some strong connections here as well, which are really lovely, and it is, you know, it was really touching when you were talking about the meditation, because I think what that has brought out for me is not only the sense of community, but it's the first time that I really feel like I've started to like myself, and I think part of that is going deep with the

meditation, but a lot of it is just being around people who see something different in me and who not only bring out the best in me but kind of reflect who I am like the words that you all have about me and the encouragement that I receive from you and how loved I feel. I'm like. Oh, maybe, maybe there is something in me that's lovable and it has really expanded for me my idea of myself and just made me just a happier person.

And I found it so interesting, you know, when you were talking about how you really feel like your MS and your grief are linked and how your grief, you know, played a huge role in kind of progressing your MS to the point that it is, you think, and I can see where that might happen and I think for me, what I'm noticing, and we can get more into it later if we want to that I am starting to feel better physically lately and you know I've had a surgery which helps a lot with the migraines. But I think and some ways I wonder if it's more than that. I wonder if it is because I am dealing with the grief and because I am starting to love myself and having these friendships. Could that also be a part of what is making me feel better physically? It's interesting the mind and body connection in that way.

0:30:56 - Nina

yeah, absolutely, yeah, no, I agree, and that's really I like what you're saying there, because I haven't really thought about that side of it. But I, yeah, my life has really sort of improved emotionally over the last couple of years from the connections I've made and certainly, yeah, the end of last year and this year I am a lot happier within myself and, yeah, it is due to the connections. So, yeah, that's a really lovely thing to have said and hearing. Yeah, we do, we sort of support each other and it's nice to hear nice things and be able to say nice things to others as well, because I think as a group we're pretty bad at recognizing our own value and we do point it out to each other and I think that's really lovely thing that we do for each other and it's not kind of contrived, it's just genuine of like, yeah, you are amazing, you really are amazing, and it is quite inspirational to see other people's journeys and hear about other people's stories.

0:32:13 - Danielle

Yeah, absolutely yeah, I was thinking. Yesterday I wrote Berenice and Nina, or maybe it was the day before, and I said, oh, you both make my heart so happy. And I thought, oh my gosh, is that overboard? Like are they gonna think I'm nuts for saying this? Because with other friendships I'm like I'm not sure I would feel that comfortable expressing how happy you both make me. And I knew that I could put it out there with you all and you would understand you wouldn't think I was crazy for for loving these connections so much.

0:32:46 - Berenice

Sometimes I think it works in in a different way for us, because what we found when we were doing the podcast, before we started the online community that supports it, was that we're also talking to our guests and we had a connection at the time we did the recording and probably in some emails back and forth beforehand, we might have met them somewhere in that way that we all kind of bump into each other sometimes, but there was. It's so quite isolated. And now what we've found is that, of course, the community means that people get a chance to talk to us behind the scenes, actually in the community, and interact with some of the stuff that goes on in there as much as little as they want to, but

also it becomes more like it's more of a two-way thing because we get the benefit of that too. It's reinvigorated us.

This episode feels so very special to me because it's you both. It just does. You know, I'm sitting here trying really hard not to get too emotional, because it's really not, because actually you made such a difference to my life as well. I think that's the wonderful thing. We all turn up to do meditation, and if one of us is missing, so for example, this week, Nina, I know that you last week rather you made a different class to me and I was, and actually there's another person who goes to it too, so Nina's not here or Danielle we miss you.

I guess there's something out there for everybody. If it isn't meditation, there's something else out there that it does something. And you know, we welcome all through our doors to learn more and to hear the stories as well. This is very powerful one. So, thank you, it landed beautifully, Danielle. Making your heart happy is just. I'm going to take that and they're going to put that somewhere for the days when I think what am I doing here? Because it is a lot to me too.

0:35:56 - Nina

So, yeah, and I know it will do to Michael and to Sarah, yeah yeah, the minute I read that, Danielle, I was just like oh my god, that's it. Those are the words that say it. That's exactly how it makes me feel. Yeah, it was perfect. It was really perfect. So thank you for those words.

0:36:18 - Berenice

Yeah, really lovely you write good words too, Danielle. You do you write beautifully as well. I was worried about reading people to say do right more, because I think you know storytelling it's. How do you do it. It's just a wonderful thing, because people learn in all sorts of ways. I think in one of the messages we had it was that your words will chime with somebody and they will. They always do. It's surprising how many people come to this space with so many different stories. We always uncovering them and asking people to come in and share them, because that's the one thing about the full stop is we can do that for you yeah, amazing.

0:36:58 - Nina

Yeah, I was gonna say when you were talking about started talking about writing, Danielle, that I mean I very much write for myself. I can't write imagining anyone's gonna be reading it, although I know that I am gonna click publish and people are gonna read it but I just write in the moment, I'm kind of writing for myself and, yeah, it feels so good to get it out. And then you kind of find a voice within your writing. You just kind of find your voice within it and it is a really amazing process. It's exhausting, there's no doubt about it, because I have to dictate as well. I can't type, so I'm dictating, so it's speaking out, so it's a really. And then editing it is complicated and all the rest of it, but it's yeah, it's a really rewarding process and, yeah, something definitely worth doing. I would say yeah.

0:38:08 - Danielle

Yeah, I have always had an interest in writing and I tend to, on social media, especially Facebook and stuff over the years write these snippets and I get all these, all this feedback of

you should really do something with this. You should have a blog, you should write more, and I was an English major and I thought that one day I would write, you know, and do something with it. I think it was just overcoming the brain fog and overcoming the fact that it does take a lot of extra effort, and I don't know how it is for most writers Perhaps everyone struggles with getting words out but I feel very much like this is taking so much energy from me, and is it worth it? And then the times that I have written and shared things that were very personal to me, especially about my childlessness or something like that.

I realize I experienced this vulnerability kind of hangover, as Brené Brown would say, where I'm just like I have shared too much of myself with an audience that I am not sure understands what I'm saying and I don't know how much of myself I want to put out in the world, and I think that that's something that I probably just need to sit with a bit more and figure out where are the safe spaces for me to share and what point am I at where I might be comfortable sharing more of myself, not knowing what I'm going to get back in return.

Because I think, you know, I put my story out there to all of my friends and family pretty early on into my grief and then I needed to take a step back and realize that was too much. I'm not ready for that yet. I'm not ready to have people on the other end read it and not respond, or read it and respond in a different way than I am expecting, and even if they had a great response, it felt like it was forgotten so quickly whereas I was still living with the grief and I think that, yeah, I think I will just need to give some more thought to it. But I do like the idea of writing for myself, and not writing necessarily with the idea, you know, at least not at the forefront of whether it's for someone else. Perhaps just it might be cathartic, just to get things out on paper.

0:40:30 - Sarah

I'm very struck by kind of what you said. I'm trying to find a way to synopsis. I was really struck by your both of you sort of talking about connecting with your emotions and your feelings and connecting with people and being able to be almost heart led. What you said, Danielle, and Nina, felt very heart led rather than cognitive, if that makes sense. And there's this sense of you both, I guess, in a way finding your voice, your words, turning up as you without all of the other boxes, and being seen and accepted.

And you both sort of have alluded to the fact that in your body you kind of feel better or there's a sense of rightness around it. Is there a sense then and this is going to sound odd and put me back in my box if it doesn't sound right but there's a sense that your childlessness and what predates your childlessness, you know, your health problems has kind of brought you to a place of being more complete in a weird way.

Does that make sense? I couldn't find the words.

0:41:45 - Danielle

It does make sense. Did you want to speak first or?

0:41:49 - Nina

No, go for it, Danielle.

0:41:51 - Danielle

Okay, no, I think it does make sense. It is interesting. I'm not sure you know. I think when you're living with disability, there's a tendency for people to want you to find the good in it and for people to say, oh, you must have learned something from this or it must be worth the experience in the end. Right, and I'm not sure that I look at my childlessness and my disability in that way yet, but I will say that I am starting to see good things that have come from it. So it's hard to say that it led me to who I am and to feeling better in myself, but I do think that the silver lining, so to speak, is that I have made these connections and I have found ways to love myself and to show up as myself. And I love what you said, Sarah, when you're talking about finally feeling like you can really be yourself.

I think for so long for me, it was my illnesses define me. Who am I outside of that? You know, who am I outside of this massive loss of self which is my health, which is not being able to drive or work? Where do I have an identity? And now being able to show up in a space with other childless people and feel loved and be able to start loving myself has kind of led to me being oh, I am more than my physical self and I can develop more of my interest. I can start exploring who I am and in that sense I think I'm not sure I would have gotten there without the childlessness and I'm not sure I would have gotten there without the health issues. So I'm grateful that I'm, that I'm here. I'm not, I'm not grateful for my childlessness yet, I'm not grateful for my health issues yet. I would have liked I would have liked the path to be different, but I do really love a lot of what is here now too.

0:44:12 - Nina

Yeah, that's put it beautifully. It's kind of maybe talking about identity, Danielle. I think that's quite important and for me, my identity was a teacher. I was a teacher and I was a teacher for 22 years and incredibly proud of the fact that I worked full time as a teacher alongside my MS, and my MS progressed along with my teaching. So when I lost my identity as a teacher in 2018 and really just became a disabled person and discovered the fact that childlessness was a thing, I then became a childless disabled person and had to kind of almost embrace that identity as something to be vocal about. And yeah, it's a complicated one, because I spent so much time A being ignorant to the fact that childlessness was a thing and that was what I'd been living for 15, 20 years and that I'd kind of pet going despite my disability for so long, and it finally caught up with me and stopped me. So I then wrote the blog about being a childless mother and that didn't explode in any way. My blogs are not widely read, but the response I got from that made me realise that, yeah, okay, being childless does impact on other people as well and there is community there.

The disability side of it I'm still, I'm out of touch with my body. I feel doesn't belong to me. I don't feel a connection to my body, I don't like it. I could do without it. I'm me, I'm so lucky to be, you know, cognitive and verbal and all of those things. So, yeah, so the childlessness is something that's important to me now because of the connections I've made through it and the voice it's given me.

To be part of something like this podcast is just amazing. You know, I feel really proud to be here talking with you all and, yeah, so it's those kind of feelings that you know Sarah was saying, being in and out of boxes. I feel like I was kind of plonked into the disabled and childless box when I left teaching because then there was nothing to me apart from being

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disabled and childless, and I've kind of embraced that and move forwards from it, I think. So, yeah, it's a, it's a strange one, and I think anything like a progressive illness that you get in adulthood is very different to something that started when you were young.

And I think, in this morning actually, that I actually live in a residential block with nine other disabled people. All of us are in wheelchairs and the block was built entirely for people in wheelchairs, and most of them are younger than me, and I think all of them are likely to be child free or childless, not by choice, and I was thinking about World Childless Week this year and that I might put some posters up around the building, because I'm sure there are people in this building that, yeah, a lot of people are disabled, I think, most of them probably in their 30s and are of an age where, potentially, they're joining the clubs that we don't want to be part of, as well as being disabled, so there's potential for connection there. So, yeah, I don't know whether I answered the question or went off on a complete tangent there. It's interesting.

0:48:54 - Berenice

It's just so interesting to listen to that because it does show sometimes how one thing can lead to another in the most unexpected way and that life is just really complicated journey.

But yeah, putting up posters might then pick up somebody else who didn't know. When you start to roll a coaster, doesn't it into other people being able to find the support that you both required when you were looking for Jodie's work and for other people to talk to and to find that different, that security, I suppose, in a different identity again, an open welcome one. I mean they've been welcomed to childless in, and I'm sure that there's a part of this that goes on and we sort of wish we didn't know each other because the other life had been very different, but actually in this life we'd learn different lessons to the ones that perhaps our other selves might have been living, though they are sometimes difficult ones, but there's a lot of empowerment. I think that goes on in our community.

0:50:24 - Michael

I was just going to say. I've been sitting here quietly listening to the conversation and I want to thank you both for being so courageous and being here and giving me an education. I'm going to talk about myself here for a little bit, not to be rude, but I've just felt like I've had some profound experience from you both and it's been excuse, my Australian, but it's been absolutely beautiful to listen to you two so inspiring, and I have a question for you both think of me as the masses, think of me as the people that you want to educate about you. What is the thing that you want me to know about you? And that's a big question, but it's an important one and I'd really like to hear what you want people to know about you. Can I? You're right if I go first.

0:51:33 - Nina

Danielle, I think my instant response to that is that I'm a teacher, I'm professional, I'm disabled, I'm childless, I've got an amazing family, I've got an amazing friends, I've got an amazing life and it all fits together and a lot of it is really awful. You know, being very disabled and childless is rubbish, but there's more to life than just that, and this is an absolute example of what there is beyond the rubbishness, of what there is to it. There's

beauty and connection and love amongst it as well. So, yeah, I think that's what I'd like people to know.

0:52:35 - Michael

I just want to tell Nina that, reading your blogs, the thing that comes to me is courage, is strength and courage, and, yeah, so they're the things that come to me when I read those, and so thank you, and thank you for writing them, thank you for giving me an education. So that's now your cue, Danielle, to get writing so you can educate us and me as well. So what would you like the world to know about you, Danielle? What would you like me to take away from this recording?

0:53:17 - Danielle

Yeah, I think I'll probably echo a lot of what Nina said, and you always speak so brilliantly. Anyway, Nina, I think I would also like to just say that there's this I think there's this notion that disabled people would not want to have kids. You know that they would, that that is, if you're living with illness, if you're in pain, surely that dream has died, right? I think that there's this idea of that and I think I want people to know that that doesn't die easily for a lot of us, and it didn't for me, and some of us like myself will look at, I'll look at my life and I'll say it doesn't make sense for me to have kids. It doesn't feel like a choice. But it is a little bit for me to be able to say here's everything I go through in a day, here's what my week looks like, here's how much care I require. I can't add more on to this.

You might have someone like Nina who could say I think I could still handle it, you know, and then it'd be some other factor that she feels it prevents her from being a parent, and for that it might be a relationship like like she said, and so I think that we're just so much bigger than the boxes we get put in, and that would be what I would want to say about myself is that that I just didn't I'm.

I'm a bigger personality. I have more to me than than my illness, and I have more to me than my childlessness, and yet both of those things are part of it and they've contributed to who I am and I'm resilient, but I'm also, you know, have a soft heart, and I love expressing how much I love people, and I think that I just am. I'm filled with gratitude most days that it's not, it's not all bleak. I'm not sitting around sad because because my life doesn't look the way I thought it would, especially nowadays. I think because of, because of you all, because of the opportunities I have to to, to speak up, to share my truth, to connect with others, all of that, I think, has, yeah, has just enriched my life and made it so much fuller, and so I think that all of that Now I get to have as a part of me too, and, yeah, it's just kind of beautiful. So I think that I think I'm finally feeling like there's there's more to me than than all of the loss that I've experienced.

0:56:07 - Michael

I've got one more question. Thank you, Danielle. I'm a. I'm a hugger, so very nice nose. What's coming? Are you guys huggers? Because if, if I ever meet you, I just want to make sure that I do the right thing and, if I'm appropriate, so do you hug, I'm a big hugger.

0:56:31 - Danielle

I don't know about Nina.

0:56:33 - Nina

I love to be hugged and it breaks my heart that my arms don't work anymore, so I can't hug people. But I absolutely love to be hugged and would welcome a hug from you, michael, you, Danielle, Berenice and Sarah. I would love to be hugged. I really appreciate it.

0:56:59 - Berenice

We'll have to make that happen.

0:57:06 - Sarah

Thanks for listening. We hope you found a conversation with Danielle and Nina as powerful and impactful as we did. We'd love to hear from you. If you'd like to find out more about this amazing topic, 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 just want to know a bit more about, we'd love to hear from you. We want this podcast to have as many voices from across our community as possible, so if something's missing or you just want a deeper dive on it, just let us know. You can find us on Facebook, insta, X 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 this childless community. More details are available on our website at www.thefullstoppod.com