

The Mid-20th Century Movement for Childfree-Parenthood-by Choice

New Legacy Radio-Episode 2: Joan Eisenstodt

VoiceAmerica 0:05

Welcome to New Legacy Radio with Christine Erickson. Are you someone who doesn't have children by circumstance, choice or chance? This show is for our collective community. Are you someone who influences policy, DEI initiatives or media narratives? Learn how you can co-create inclusive, equitable policies and environments for people without children. Now, here's your host, Christine Erickson.

Christine Erickson 0:31

Welcome everyone to New Legacy Radio. I'm your host, Christine Erickson. I'm the founder of New Legacy Institute, which was created to work for social equity, inclusion and policy change for people without children. Today, before I begin, I must take a moment to acknowledge the current atrocities in Ukraine. This is nothing less than devastating. It is difficult to not set aside all else in the enormity of this impact on so many lives. We are with the Ukrainian people in heart and everyone suffering from this invasion. We encourage you to offer your support in any way you may find appropriate. Today, we have a very special guest with us. I'm honored to welcome John Eisenstodt to New Legacy Radio. Joan is a social justice advocate and entrepreneur, who has had a successful career in the hospitality industry. Joan was an integral voice in the foundational childfree-parenthood-by-choice-movement. She has appeared on many TV and radio programs, as a spokesperson for NON, the National Organization for Non -Parents. We are honored to have Joan here today to share their experiences and insight regarding the status of people without children, then and now. Welcome, Joan.

Joan Eisenstodt 1:54

Christine, thank you so much. I'm grateful. And I am also grateful for the statement you made about Ukraine, and the people and the frustration, and so I add my heartfelt emotions and actions. I am one of the people who is donating and I will do a brief shout out for José Andrés and the World Central Kitchen, who got to the border to feed people, which is as we know, is a critical issue. So we won't deviate except that it does deal with helping others. And that's what we're going to talk about today.

Christine Erickson 2:32

Absolutely. Thank you for that, Joan. So in our meeting and our conversations, I have been so moved by your story, by your activism, by your insight. I just could not be happier to have you here today, and to thank you for your generosity in sharing your story with us.

Joan Eisenstodt 2:56

And let me say this, because I think people need to know that I came to get to know you and to be here today, as a result of a little bit of hostility, that those of us who were and we clearly weren't not the frontline of the childfree movement, because there are people who have dealt with this for centuries. I was however, as someone very involved in the 70s and 80s and onward, especially in the 70s. As I saw the newer generation, talking about how in essence, this is all theirs. This is new this is aren't we wonderful for thinking this. And I thought well wait a minute, there are people Ellen Peck and Shirley Radl, in particular, we'll talk more about them. And those of us who went through went through hell in order to remain childfree by choice. And so grateful that we that you reached out after I did a little bit of Twitter slamming of you all you all weren't the first ones.

Christine Erickson 4:16

Yes, I'm yeah. I'm so grateful that you said that, that you connected, that we recognized each other in that moment.

Joan Eisenstodt 4:25

Thank you for that. It's, you know, I think it's interesting. And one of the things that I see and I see with women who are older than I and that is that those who came before us, and those who were the pioneers in a lot of different areas are often left out of the conversation. I think that the country us is talking about what we're going to teach children in school, about our history, and there are painful issues. I think that the whole issue of childbearing or not childbearing, and certainly ties today into the issues that we're dealing with legally, in states at the Supreme Court level, around laws of whether or not people can make their own choice about it. And I think we have to acknowledge the people who do choose to be parents. And for me, you know, it's really interesting, Christine, for me, and we'll go back in a second to the founding of NON. For me, the issue is making a conscious decision. And I know there are people who want children, and can't have them for a variety of reasons, and I do feel for I feel for anybody who can't have the life they want. It's a matter of educating and helping people understand the choices they're making. Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

Christine Erickson 6:05

And I think, for me, after connecting with you, and having our conversations and thinking about NON and those founders, you know, the real distinction in that, and at that time, was choosing to become visible around that conversation of a conscious choice, let alone just talking about not having children, not having children on purpose, by choice. Can you share a little bit about what that was, like, navigating that?

Joan Eisenstodt 6:37

I can, and I want to go back, let's start with my early life and my own expectations. So I thought I was born in the 40s, late 40s, after World War II. And like, my mother before me, and her mother before her, there were there were roles that we all thought we'd play, right? For my age group, it was we'd go to grade school, we'd go to high school, we'd go to college, we would then marry, quote, "marry well", and we would have children and we would stay home and be the Dona Reed/Harriet Nelsons for those who are old enough to know, or you can, search it, in our pearls and our short ways, raising children who were all even if they were bad, they were still perfect. And there was never any discussion that I ever heard as a child that was, you have a choice. You don't have to do any of these pieces. We probably had to go at least to grade school and high school. Beyond that, there were choices, but we weren't told there were choices, at least a lot of us, certainly those of us who were lower middle to middle class. And so I think that there were discussions that we didn't have. So I went to high school, I did go to college. I dropped out of college, because for a lot of reasons financial being part of it. I did get married very young. And I made an assumption that I would have children, at some point. I actually thought I would-I read The Population Bomb by Paul Ehrlich- like, before, I knew that I had a choice. And I thought I would have the sanctioned 1.9 children, and that I would adopt, I'd be an earth mother; I was like a hippie. So I would adopt the world's children and take care of them. Okay, so then I did, I'm married. We're living in married student housing on a university campus. And I loved the kids around me. They were cool kids. And it was fun to be around them. It was lively. It was interesting. There were children from birth to their teens. It was great. Okay, so then I pick up Time Magazine, and I see this very tiny blurb that talks about this new organization and talks about the choice of having children and uses the term "childfree". And never in my life would I have thought that that was anything I think about so I began to think about it and to talk with my then husband. We are divorced, I'm remarried. And we'll talk about that part, the part of the remarriage because that's an important piece too. And so we talked about it and like a lot of women of my generation, I was on birth control pills and the planning was for later. So, when I found out about this organization, I immediately-I obviously didn't email I must have made a call or written a letter to Ellen Peck. And I said, I'm fascinated, I want to be part of this. There were a number of people who were early members of the organization, and early activists. How I became a spokesperson is sort of beyond me. I honestly don't remember how that happened. After I had joined, and I was outspoken, it may have been that I was comfortable being public about it. And so my first struggle, in being outspoken was trying to have a tubal ligation. And I think that that's probably what propelled me to be more outspoken. It was, and those listening really need to hear this number. At the time, most hospitals used a rule that the woman's age times the number of children she had, had to equal 120, in order to have a tubal ligation. So I was what in my early to mid 20s, mid 20s, by then. I would have had to have almost six children in my mid 20s, in order to make the choice to have no more. And remember, this is still, abortion was barely legal, a lot

of things birth control was still not as easily available. There were a lot of a lot of pushes, to have children. And so because of the struggle that I went through, the hospital that I would have used said that I had to go to a psychiatrist and get approval, in order to choose not to have children. At the same time, anybody could just have children, nobody licensed them. No one said, we want to make sure that you're suited to have children, that you can support them and all the ways not just financially, that you can emotionally support them. So that's probably it's funny because I don't remember what but I think that that's what pushed me to do that. So I began to take a greater role with the organization, and being quote "a nice Midwestern girl", as we were thought of then, as opposed to women, being married at the time having to look quote, "acceptable." I had changed my hippie look to a more probably acceptable look, so that appearing on television would be acceptable. However, the hate, the misunderstanding and hate that the appearances generated, surprised me. I got hate mail. When you have a name like Eisenstodt, you're fairly easy to find. So I got hate mail, I got questions when I would be on a radio show or on television. I did appear on Phil Donahue. And people would ask me pretty intimate questions that they don't ask people who have children. You know, they don't say to people who have children, what if you decide you don't like them, and that it's not working, and you don't want them anymore? They don't ask that. They asked me what if I changed my mind? What would I do? What would take care of me when I got old? It was a very, I would say in a sense, it was an empowering experience, because it allowed me to think deeper. It allowed me with my NON colleagues, to delve deeper into why we had chosen not to be parents, and those who were active in the organization who were parents. Shirley Radl, one of the founders had two children. There were others who had children. We had support from an interesting coalition of people. I think that it was-I remember the first conference that we had, it was in New York. And Isaac Asimov was one of the supporters. Hugh Downs was a supporter. We got to meet them and talk with them. And to talk about why these were important decisions. And for a lot of us it was about environmental issues. I don't know that we said that, we did talk about overpopulation. If we look today at what those issues are, it is environmental. That's the beginning.

Christine Erickson 15:17

I think as I listen to you, and I think about, you know, what we're trying to do more of or what my concept even was for the Institute, or why we're here today, is that that coming together, not only as the diverse communities within our community of people without children, but parents as well, people; people having access to knowing that there's a conscious choice the next generations, girls,

Joan Eisenstodt 15:47

and boys, and boys

Christine Erickson 15:48

Absolutely all genders Yes.

Joan Eisenstodt 15:51

Here's what's interesting. So I am divorced, I remarried 25 years ago, and to someone who was younger than I, and he was grateful, he said, at the time, and I think, and I know still, that he found someone who didn't want to have children. Women his age, expected to have children. I don't know if they had given it that much thought, but they expected to, and he was grateful that there was someone that had made the choice. And we didn't have to even, it once it was discussed, it was done. It was this is fine, and this is where we are. So I think for men and women today, it needs to be a conversation that you have. You know, I look at the horror stories of the people who abuse their children, who have killed their children, because they can't handle it. I don't condemn them, I can't, because choosing parenthood is an incredible responsibility. And because we don't teach it. I know that there were, I don't know if there still are, there were classes that were publicized for a long time where children, I guess took home, an egg, and or a doll baby, where they got to take care of them for a weekend and you know, just see what parenthood was like; that's not going to prepare you, to me, for much of anything. And so I think that we don't, as a society, we don't talk about what does it mean to be a parent. I'd look at the what's happened with COVID, and the children who have become orphans who've lost both parents, or even one, because of COVID. I look at what goes on in the world. You know, I think that anybody who does decide to marry, does so in a belief or to partner, I think that there is a decision that you'll be together forever. And there are no guarantees in life of anything. And so I think that I don't know why we aren't teaching. And that's why I'm grateful to you for doing this. To talk about these issues in schools and families in religious settings. You know, it's really interesting when you talked about at the start about part of the why of this is all of the policy issues, the employment issues. And what I hear, and have experienced as a non-parent, in a work situation, I've been an entrepreneur, I've had a company for 40 years, so I've not been in house for a while. However, what I know is that nonparents often are asked to work the longer hours because the parent needs to go pick up the kids. And so a resentment comes in. So why don't we create policies that are equitable for individuals? Why in the whole issue of DEI and inclusion and in equity, are we not talking about the roles of parents and nonparents, of people who choose and don't choose parenthood? That's not brought into it. And I know that under DEI, there are so many issues we're not talking about, and we need to; we simply need to have those bigger discussions.

Christine Erickson 19:36

Absolutely. I see it as so many missing conversations. And as you said, there are so many layers and circumstances but this one has really not been named in that space. Sometimes I think the

most I've seen is like a checkbox, you know, these may be some differences in the workplace. Some people have kids, some don't, you know, but what that means is not where the conversation is.

Joan Eisenstodt 20:03

And I think that there are a lot of issues, it's also the issue of marrying, not marrying. It's the issue of the people that I know, who have chosen single parenthood. The couples that I know who are gay couples that have married or not married, partnered, and their choices that are limited, in some cases. We have a very, we have like a I don't know the right word to use, it's a very strange attitude in the United States, about what roles people should play, and how they should play them and with whom they should play them. And so I think that as we look at the issue of parenthood, to me, it's the greatest responsibility that anybody could ever have. It's certainly more than buying a house, buying a car, choosing a job. You're responsible for other people, and, how they live and how they grow, and how to care for them. And it's a role that I didn't want. I have been called selfish, as most of us who choose not to have children are frequently called. And first of all, selfish is not necessarily a bad thing. My motivation was not because I want more in life, and if I don't have children, I'll have more. It really was more altruistic, and more about how can I better the world? In other ways, something funny, and since we've started talking, I've had other conversations. I had one earlier today, I asked a friend, who would just saw the post about the show, and she said, "May I share this with my group of people who are who are not parents by choice?" And I said, "I had no idea." Right, I didn't know you had chosen that, I had no idea. And so we started talking. And so I said, "Did you play Mommy or Daddy, when you were a kid?" "Did you have dolls? What did you do?" Because a lot of girls are given dolls, and said, "these are your babies"; not these are your dolls, these are your babies. So I said to this friend that I had dolls. I adored them, all different kinds, and they were my pupils. I was an educator from the start. I would line them up, and I would teach them something, right? I had a little chalkboard and I would teach them. So clearly, I knew that there was a place in my life for children. But it wasn't necessarily as a parent.

Christine Erickson 22:53

I love that, and such vivid knowing.

Joan Eisenstodt 23:02

You know, it's something I haven't thought about for years. And I have realized later, as I've gotten older, that everything I do is around educating. And so there clearly was a foundation for it with the dolls that nobody probably would have pointed out to me. They wouldn't have said, "look, you've got dolls and you're a teacher." Although that was one of the few occupations that

were suggested to those of my age group. I think that, maybe flight attendants, what else, nurses, yes, you could be a nurse. And those were our choices.

Christine Erickson 23:42

Wow. Yes. So many, just powerful points, Joan. I don't even know where to begin to respond back.

Joan Eisenstodt 23:53

We talked this weekend because I read that Sunday, New York Times. And now of course, I'm trying to find the number, and I can't find the number, but they're doing a series. The article Sunday was 12 women on gender roles today. And it gave statistics and that I of course cannot find. I underlined. But now I can't find.

Christine Erickson 24:15

It was toward the very end. Is it at the end? Yeah, it's at the very end.

Joan Eisenstodt 24:21

Do you have it handy?

Christine Erickson 24:23

I don't, but I'll try and grab it during the break if I don't find it. Yeah. And there were two different versions of so maybe it was in one and not the other.

Joan Eisenstodt 24:31

What was interesting is talking about the number of women in current generations, the X generation the Y and the Z, who are choosing not to be parents. And it surprised me how many there were choosing. So clearly, there is an awareness that we, that my generation didn't have.

Christine Erickson 24:53

Yes, yeah, we'll come back with those statistics. We'll find them but yeah, it is a very good article. I think it ran originally digitally about a week ago, and then again in print this weekend, if anybody is going to reference that. Yeah. I think yeah, it was one of the last things I posted about Europe too, where 30% of the women reaching age 30 now not having children. You know, when we're focusing a lot on US statistics, because that's where we are and the movement that we're acknowledging today. But this, this is shifting in so many countries, so many countries, and with so many different influences and circumstances going on, some are new, some are not.

Joan Eisenstodt 25:44

And I think that one of the concerns is either forced non parenthood, involuntary sterilization, forcing people only have so many children, or the issue of replacement. And so all of these, to me come into play as we begin to think about what our choices are. They are both to me individual choices, and they are societal choices. I can't separate those. My life has been devoted to issues of justice. And so I think that we have to be able to find some medium of some sort, where our choices are respected, and where our decisions have a positive impact on our world.

Christine Erickson 26:38

Yes, very important. I often say that we don't have to fully understand each other to accept each other, and our choices. And I think that I approach things with that. It's like, I believe you, if you tell me, Joan, this is your choice, and this is what you want. I believe you. I support that. We're going to take a short break here and we will be back with Joan Eisenstodt, and we will talk more about reproductive justice and what is next for our community. Thank you again, Joan, for all of that informative, wonderful storytelling and sharing about your experiences. I so appreciate it.

Joan Eisenstodt 27:21

Thank you.

VoiceAmerica 27:35

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You are listening to New Legacy Radio with Christine Erickson. Now back to the show. Here is Christine Erickson.

Christine Erickson Speaker 29:02

Welcome back, everybody. We are going to continue this wonderful conversation with Joan Eisenstodt today, and we're going to talk a little bit about the personal and professional spaces and what that means being a nonparent in those environments.

Joan Eisenstodt 29:19

And you know, I do a lot of things in my life. And I don't connect them until later or like in our conversations I go, oh, yeah, that was what happened. So there's some interesting issues professionally and I mentioned earlier in the segment, the last segment about it is often expected by employers that those without children will work longer hours, that they're going to be available nights, weekends whenever and that a parent who clearly has important responsibilities that include going to a child's play or going to the game they're playing. And I was talking with a client yesterday afternoon about our schedule for the next months, and what we to do, and we talked about their daughter getting onto a softball team and what that means in terms of after school time, right. And I get that, and I want that to happen. I don't think anybody wants to say ignore your children. And I think that we have to find a way to do that. So going back to NON, and my involvement. I had worked for an art museum doing events. And my role was more logistics, it was putting things together for an opening of a new exhibit. This has happened now, twice, interestingly, when they knew that, and they said, we want to put on a conference. This is something you seem to know how to do, will you help us? And I did, and I couldn't tell you how I did it. I just did it. It was probably the beginning of my career meeting some hospitality industry. So if I had had children...my divorce was very amicable. In fact, my former husband and I are still very good friends. He's friends with my current husband. There was nothing icky about it. And so I however knew I was married too young, in my opinion, and I hadn't found myself. I think that that happens. And when I finally had a realization, interestingly, at a NON conference it was in Washington, DC, where I had never been. I came to the conference, and I met all kinds of interesting people. And I thought, I want to be in Washington. I want to work for at that time, I wanted to work for reproductive health issues. So I'm going to apply for jobs. And when I came back from the conference, I talked to my then husband, and I said, you know, I care about you deeply. And I want to go, I need to go. And so we had an amicable split. I moved to DC without a job, without an apartment, without money, with pretty much nothing. I had a desk, if I remember. And I may have had a chair, and some pots and pans. I had interviewed for a job with the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL). And the job was to be a volunteer coordinator. I didn't get the job. My way of dealing with bad stuff is to go into it. And so while I was still job hunting, I would go to NARAL to volunteer. And I give thanks to this day, and I could get emotional because

we just had a conversation recently. The executive director at that time Karen Mulhauser, called me in one day to our office and said, I think you're a meeting planner. And I'm thinking, I have no idea what that is. And I said, "So are you offering me a full-time job?" And she said, "Well, I'm offering you a job." She said, "You know we don't we don't have a lot of money. We don't know how full time it'll be." So I, I got a job as a meeting planner, and I jumped into it with every part of me.

And with the experiences I'd had planning the conferences for NON, I was able to use those skills and build on those skills. So as a professional, I found both within an issue that mattered to me, reproductive health, and skills that I had begun to build, I was able to take that and create a very different life than I ever envisioned. Remember, I envisioned I was going to marry have children, wear pearls and a shirt waist and be a mom. And so it started, it was really the progression. There's a movie that I quote often. I don't know, have you ever seen "Defending Your Life" with Meryl Streep and Albert Brooks? Because if you haven't, you must, oh, you must, "Defending Your Life." And it's what happens when you die, and you go to a place that in my opinion, it looks like Epcot Center, and you have to sit and watch at that time when the movie was made, tapes, of your life and defend your decisions. Okay, so I'm thinking as we're talking, that if I were defending all these decisions, I would say that I did these things, because they all seem right at the time. And looking back, I know they were. I know that every choice that I've made, has been the right choice. And so I think that professionally, and for women in particular, although we're now seeing certainly many more men who are single parents, men who are in same sex relationships, who are having children, I have transgender friends with children. I think that we have to look very differently at the makeup of what a family is. And we then begin, because right now, in I live in DC, I have a chosen family. I have a wonderful biological family, cousins that I adore. And I have a chosen family, people have known since I moved here almost 50 years ago. So I think that what we have to do is say that there are impacts on our professional lives. Employers have to think about their policies, the government has to really think about its policies. Because when I look at it, COVID brought it to a head. COVID made everybody realize we don't have a good childcare system. And all the statistics from that showed that women were the ones who were losing out. Women were the ones who are losing their jobs, stay home with the children, not going back to a job. And so we don't have childcare in this country, or we have childcare, that is so unaffordable. And so what we're doing is we're forcing people to make decisions that they might not otherwise make. It's really interesting, Christine. I tie this all together. I think that my choice not to have children allowed me to make other choices professionally. And to continue to make those choices. If I now were a parent, if I were a grandparent, probably doing math, I could be a great grandparent. I know there are people from my high school class, who are great grandparents. The thought gives me the shivers and the idea of it overwhelms me. No, I wouldn't be good. I'm a really good great aunt and an aunt and a

friend to a whole bunch of children. And I donate to things that benefit children and I care about children. I just don't want them in my house. Yes, I have cats, we have cats. The cats are not our children. We view them as our cats, right? So I think that people have to broaden their thinking about all of the things. So individually, every choice you make about whether or not to have children, should be supported by policy, supported by a government. What I fear for Gen Z, and the generations that follow, and anybody right now of childbearing age, is what's happening around the right to choose abortion.

I think for all of us who believe in reproductive choice, it doesn't mean we think abortion is the end all and be all, we just know that it is an important choice. And when I read a story, I think it was I read a lot, so I never remember everywhere I read it. But about the women, women in Texas right now we're being prosecuted because of miscarriages. So to me, if we don't support people in making the choice not to have children, or in their inability to have children, then we are not doing a job to support children or to support what this country says is the right to all of the issues are on quote "family values", then we're not doing a good job. So it's funny, when you started off today, and we started talking about my commitment to justice, until I just articulated all this...I think I knew it all in my head about my dedication to where I've gone and what I've done. I don't know that I could have easily put it in towards otherwise. So I'm grateful to you for being my therapist on all the issues around why the choices we make, we make.

Christine Erickson 39:51

I so appreciate that layered, systemic, structural insight and perspective that you bring because it's all interconnected. And even from language, you know, what does family mean? We have family policy, but it really means people with children, and married people with children generally, is what that policy means. And within the community, there are things even this week about language, how language gets in the way, you know. Are you childless? Are you childfree? Are you a nonparent? Are we people without children? How do you take that out? Well, who are we positively, because we have positive lives? And how do we take the negative out, while we're trying to put ourselves into something? You know, I look at that as well, from policy or universal leave within the workplace. Those kinds of issues are very real. And how do we become equitable in that? And as you rightly mentioned, COVID, brought so many things to a head. And I remember reading about those things, the articles and talking about them, and then it just kind of quieted, you know. And it's another reason, whatever shape this takes this Institute, these conversations, it is to take it in that direction, to sustain and build on those conversations to actually influence policy, and have change; not just continue looking at what isn't there. It's to create what we need there.

Joan Eisenstodt 41:20

When I was active with NON, and then later with NARAL, I also worked with Planned Parenthood and other organizations, and had I not been supported in my choice of non- parenthood, and this goes back and we didn't talk about this, when I finally was able to get a tubal ligation. It was because of Planned Parenthood. The psychiatrist refused, giving me permission, or my husband and me, giving us permission for me to have a tubal ligation. So I was sort of at, I was at the end of my choices, and I didn't want to be on birth control pills for the rest of my life. And so we made the choice that I would be the one, that he would not, for reasons I honestly don't remember, although my guess is knowing me, it was to make a point, because I was being refused. And so I finally went to Planned Parenthood, and I was the very first laparoscopic tubal ligation in the state of Ohio, thanks to Planned Parenthood. I have never regretted it. I have never, and I have actively worked for the rights of people who want to choose not to have children and on top of more children. And I think that we have to as individuals, think about our communities, think about a world think about what this means to the future. I just read an article in today's Washington Post about women who have postpartum depression, and how for black women, it is particularly difficult to get support, that there is a neglect, which goes back to the equity issue. So we are not, across the board, we are not an equitable society when it comes to issues of parenting, non-parenting, all kinds of different life issues. And I feel fortunate that I was able to make this decision and choice. One of the things we haven't talked about that my friend earlier today asked me-I don't remember that my parents, who were alive at the time, ever questioned my decision. They must have, they must have just said are you sure? They generally supported decisions I made. They knew that I was thoughtful and that I would have done research. I don't remember them ever saying "Oh, no, we won't have grandchildren." I am the older or am the older two children. And so I had that support. And because I had this group of people in the National Organization for Non -Parents, which became, by the way, the National Organization for Optional Parenthood, because everybody thought we were totally against parenting, which we weren't. And so either NON or NAOP, as they later called it. I had a group of people who supported the choices. And all we were saying and all I still say is make a conscious decision. Judy Senderowitz was also one of the people who had great influence on the organization, on me, and the book that she wrote, Shirley wrote a book, Ellen wrote a book, Judy wrote a book all of which really confirmed the issues and took away and questioned the issue of the maternal instinct.

And then talking to this friend earlier today, who said she never wanted children, she never played mommy. I don't think she even played school like I did. She is younger than I. And I think that she had a greater option. She said that her parents supported her. And so we have to give people the education to make the choice to understand that they can do different things. You know, I could have certainly if I changed my mind adopted children. There was that option; there would still be that option, although much more difficult at this age. You know, I look at the

number of children through interesting circumstances that I've gotten to know, children who've been patients and St. Jude, and how I have continued to support those children through sickness and health, whose parents I became friends with; one of them, thank God, she was diagnosed at about four years old, with a brain tumor, and they thought she was going to die. She's now a thriving 15-year-old thanks to St. Jude, the hospital, and probably the Saint, and Danny Thomas, while we're thanking people. And, so there are ways for those who want children in their lives, who want to be a supporter of children, who want to be an educator of children, who want to use the energy and to help kids. There are lots of ways to do it. It doesn't have to be that you have them. You know, I will tell you the only thing I was curious about that I that I don't say I missed it, but I was curious. I wondered what it was like to be pregnant and give birth. I think it's sort of, I think it's fascinating. I'm a real science geek. So the process of that, to me was fascinating. But what the end of that, I didn't want to have the result, right? Not that I wouldn't, no, I didn't want to have the result. I wanted to say not that I wouldn't have loved the child. I don't know that. I had a wonderful, aunt, who would no matter what the child looked like, instead of you know, everybody says all babies are adorable, my aunt would say now that's a baby. And so that was how she dealt with it. So, you know, I'm close to the children of my cousins and the next generation of cousins and the next generation. I just sent birthday presents and cards. There are things that if you care about children, you can do. You know, my supporting of these children at St. Jude, communities. I am a donor to Donors Choose, because I believe in education. And no, I don't have a lot of money because I'm a non-parent. I have a very limited income. And I believe that there are things that I can do and that I should do, my obligation, to continue promoting the idea of parenthood by choice.

Christine Erickson 48:33

Yes, absolutely. And I will just say one caveat to that, because we are not today, but as we're talking about the whole community. Sometimes those great ideas, all the beautiful work that you're doing are suggested to people who are childless, not by choice, right? Why don't you become a teacher? Why don't you do-x? And so I just want to acknowledge that, you know, people are on their own journeys and their own stages of grief or sometimes you know, that there's just not a readiness or desire. But it's so beautiful that you have demonstrated also the impact that people without children make on the world. We are part of the communities; we are active in them. We are teachers, we're educators, we're doctors, we're everything. And I think that's what's so incredible about the numbers of people without children, because it's a necessarily, intersectional diversity of people.

Joan Eisenstodt 49:25

And, let me add to that. For those who have chosen not to be parents, and they did it for reasons because they wanted to have nicer shoes or nicer clothes, or more vacations. That's their choice.

And I get that. It's just not a choice I made. And I'm not saying that everyone has to be as altruistic as I. I think the only issue for me, is consciously think about whether or not this is the right decision for you, you and your current partner, your future partner, your no partner, if you choose to have children. And again, my friends who have chosen to be parents, single parents, I applaud them. They are amazing human beings, as are their children. I think that it is a matter of, we have to create better policies, we have to help people who choose to be parents, and those who choose or are not given the choice of non-parenthood. And I think that we have to create education around all of these issues, and elect the people who are going to support these policies.

Christine Erickson 50:46

Yes, and who will even speak to them. Yes, we need to open up the dialogue and all of those levels. Absolutely. Thank you so much, Joan. This has just been so wonderful and a privilege for me. I, this is I could not have wanted for more for what I want these conversations to do. So you know, from my heart, thank you. And I hope for our listeners today, this has given you something to think of, what whatever perspective you come from, whatever experience of parenthood or non-parenthood, you have journeyed, we support you, we support you, we want you to be part of the conversation, and we want to make the necessary changes. For the things that impact all of us the most, where we have crossroads in that and where it's different. Those are the kinds of conversations we want to bring forward. Do you have a closing comment, Joan?

Joan Eisenstodt 51:47

Just thank you for opening up this conversation, and allowing me to be part of it and allowing me to acknowledge Ellen Peck, Shirley Radl, and Judy Senderowitz, for their initial actions that helped all of us.

Christine Erickson 52:01

Yes, I have heartfelt gratitude to all of you. Thank you so much. And join us next week and continue this conversation on any of our platforms. We'll be posting something on Twitter. And if you want to email us, it is radio@newlegacyinstitute.com Thank you and we will be back next week.

VoiceAmerica 52:27

Thank you for listening to New Legacy Radio. We hope Christine and her guests have given you the context and insight to connect with our community in new ways. What personal or professional change might you consider to acknowledge and include our diverse community of people without children? Until we speak again, we invite you to engage with us on any of our platforms.

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