

Building a Childfree + Childless Movement for Meaningful Change

New Legacy Radio-Episode 4: Laura Carroll

15 March 2022

VoiceAmerica 00:05

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 00:31

Welcome, everyone. This is New Legacy Radio, and I'm your host, Christine Erickson. I'm also the founder of New Legacy Institute, and I founded the Institute with the intention of bridging initiatives and dialogue between the childless and childfree communities to make meaningful impact. And so today's conversation is one that is near and dear to my heart. And we have the privilege of having Laura Carroll with us. Laura is an internationally known expert on the childfree choice. She has published many wonderful books that I hope many of you have read, and if you have not that you will, including 'The Baby Matrix: Why Freeing Our Minds From Outmoded Thinking About Parenthood and Reproduction Will Create a Better World', and most recently, '25 over 10: A Childfree Longitudinal Study, which we'll discuss a little bit later today. Her books have been used in college curriculum, and she has been featured in a wide range of media, including Good Morning America, NPR, Canadian CBC Radio, Fortune, the Wall Street Journal, New York Magazine, and Women's Health, in the UK and South Africa. She is also the founder of International Childfree Day. Welcome, Laura. We are so happy to have you here today.

Laura Carroll 01:50

It's my pleasure to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

Christine Erickson 01:53

Yes, thank you for accepting. So your work has spanned a couple of decades at this point. And we are so excited to hear more about how you got started. Can you tell us a bit about

how your work in the childfree choice began, and how it's evolved over these last 20 plus years?

Laura Carroll 02:13

Well, it began with a curiosity—a personal curiosity. I'd been married, happily married 10 years at the time, in the late 90s. And I went looking for a book on childfree marriages longtime marriages, and what made them go the distance. Everyone around me was having kids, and they were happy. But you know, where were couples like us that we're happy and wanting to go that distance too. And I didn't find it. So I did the, you know, crazy thing. So I'm going to do it myself. And it turned out to be you know, really a great project that many, many childfree couples, which were harder to find them because the internet was really not up and running. Like I did ads and newspapers, magazines, they called me and left messages on my answering machine. But in the end, it was really well received; it got lots of great media, and it told me that society was ready to talk about this. I began communicating with 1000s of childfree people that contacted me helping them with their challenges. I really saw there was a need to talk about it and to study it. So that created the passion to you know, get on that that road and go. It also ended in or began a blog called La Vie Childfree, when blogs were kind of starting to be in vogue, and that because super popular. And I didn't just talk about childfree issues. I was talking about abortion, politics, even pronatalism was butting its head in already right there. So on that, as I kept doing this childfree work in conversation, I asked myself so much like why is it so hard for society to accept this choice, which got me down the rabbit hole of pronatalism deep, and that's what landed me to write 'The Baby Matrix'. So that too in writing it, I learned about overpopulation, you know, and how pronatalism fuels having too many people on the planet. And then that ended was a curiosity going to meeting Dave Foreman and then doing a book on overpopulation, and it ended up in a lot of classrooms. So, you know, in my career I was going with my curiosities, and also, you know, helping everyone learn along the way, and it's continued. I've got a couple chapters in textbooks. One's already out, and one's coming out in April. And so it's really been a journey of being a social activist of sorts, through research, writing, helping childfree navigate the challenges of that choice over a couple of decades, and also really in the process fostering more childfree voices and childfree leaders to get out there and speak. So it's been quite a great journey, and I'm still on it.

Christine Erickson 05:06

Excellent. Yeah, I want to go back to something you said from the beginning, that you thought about studying it, you know, so often the credibility of movements or especially something so personal, we don't always have the academic or the research to back it up. And I love how, especially with your recent publication that we'll talk about a little later, how you have done that all along. And I would love to hear a little bit more about how and what your work, how your work is being used in education, because I think that's so important. And I don't think it's widespread enough, either from community voices in general. So it's been a long time that it's been used right, and you're just doing some new things with it?

Laura Carroll 05:53

Well, I think 'The Baby Matrix' has been used in some classes that are sociology based, women's studies based and honestly with the book on the overpopulation, called 'Man Swarm: How Overpopulation is Killing the Wild World', you know, my co-author Dave Foreman's a conservationist, renowned, and so he saw it through the lens of how too many people really destroy biodiversity. And why is it that humans think they're on the top of this heap anyway, with all the beings on the planet; it just blew my mind to begin to think about it like that, and help him and us craft the book from that vantage point. And we then got some foundation money once it was published, to pitch it to professors in environmental studies, environmental ethics, population classes, sociology classes, and pitch it to them say you need to use all are part of this book. And we had a really good hit rate of getting it into the classrooms, not even to mention, when we did visit classrooms, and we got up and talked about it to undergraduates just like as a special class, there were kids who came to us afterwards, I say, kids, they were college kids. We were offering the book at cost. And kids were coming up with their \$10 bills and saying I want to buy this book. So we knew we were on to something. And then as far as just textbook collections, I've been part of two that are designed to be multi-disciplinary and resources for scholars, activists, even just you know, the general person who's interested in this. So I've been fortunate enough to, in one, have my 5000, you know, in a sample of childfree, married people that I got some data on that I was able to discuss in a chapter in one of the textbooks. So that's the theme, one of the chapters in textbook and one that's coming

out in April, is I have a chapter on the history of International Childfree Day. There is stuff in this book where they're talking about some hardcore issues. It's all important. But Childfree Day is something that's contributing to the development of an overall movement in a positive way, and in a celebratory way. So I pitched you know, somebody needs to talk about the good that's happening along this movement train, there's so easy to get bogged down in what's wrong, and what's stuck. And I was like, no, there's also this time, when we celebrate something. So I'm really excited to be part of that book as well.

Christine Erickson 08:25

Yes, that's so wonderful. And thank you for sharing that. I wanted to bring that up about International Childfree Day too, which is on August 1st, every year. Yes. Wonderful. Oh, I forgot what I was going to ask you about that education piece. I'm just so I'm just so grateful for that. Whether it's from a childfree voice, it speaks so deeply to have it in the education space, because as you're saying, "kids", for college students, I was thinking, I was a Women's Studies major way back when, and obviously it was more than 20 years because there were no books. And there really were no conversations. We were talking more about, you know, the annual saving of Roe v Wade, and pro-choice issues were high on the top of our list in our activism, but for all the things I led on campus and that I started this really wasn't a conversation.

Laura Carroll 09:14

No, I mean, and in the women's movement and studies at that time to like I know what you're saying that there was a lot of emphasis on the power of when we want to have children you know, birth control and we can control our reproductive lives, but very little about the "whether"; let's talk about whether you want them at all. There were more women out there not having kids-look at Gloria Steinem. She was out there and she's not even interested, and she's just kicking ass out in the women's movement, right, but it wasn't addressed so directly. And that's definitely happened more and more over the last couple of decades. It's I would say I think we've I think been part of like initial stages of social movements. I think we've kind of been in that stage, and I think we are now poised to do some work to go to a second stage that not only would the movement say mature, but it would be more powerful and be even more and more seen not just for childfree people, but for women kids, together. So that's where I see, you know, to move beyond

the initial stages we've been in, which has been great. In forms of community, powerful community, collectives that are doing cool things that are, you know, more organized. We had our last Childfree Conference. The first one was last year on International Childfree Day, which is, you know, something more organized. It's now gone almost 10 years. So there are things that you can see that a community in a collective is formed and active. But to really move to the next stage, I think there's some like social change action that really needs to thrust it forward. At least that's my, view, my perspective, my opinion as I've watched it over time.

Christine Erickson 11:05

And how do you assess that readiness?

Laura Carroll 11:09

Well, I see some seeds in readiness, because there are people out there who are not happy with some things about how their choice is respected or not, in various realms of our society. So the obvious one is in the workplace. There are a lot of people who are not happy about inequitable policy. Okay, so there are some rumblings of people trying to do something about that, but they run up against some tough, you know, challenges. So I see the desire, but what I don't see, and maybe it's out there, and we just need to get more organized about it, is how to go about growing the collective in a more formal organized way to solve issues like that, for example.

Christine Erickson 11:59

Yes, yes. So it can be said, and I have been in these conversations recently as well, that the childless community and the childfree community are in two different camps, so to speak. How have you experienced that, over time, in your work, in your own conversations? I would like to get your thoughts on that.

Laura Carroll 12:28

Well, certainly, to piggyback on what I was just saying, I think we have to address this separate camp thing. Before we can even move to the next stage to formally organize and to make some real, tangible social change, we as a group of women without children, need to have more conversation amongst ourselves. And so I feel that, you know, I've

obviously talked to 1000s of childfree people over the years, but I've also been contacted by childless people and people who are everywhere in between, okay, it's a lot of gray-zone there. And I've known childless people in my own life, people who have suffered with infertility, and I've been their friend, you know, with them through all of this and experienced myself that we're very different on certain channels. But you know, what, in the end, we're bonded, and we're friends. So from that at least, it's obvious that we differ in one huge area of life. Some really, we want kids we want that parenthood experience and others don't. Okay, so that's the big thing that we don't have in common, but I would say, I would opine that we have what's not talked about enough is we have more in common than we think. Alright, so where we do connect, is we all without children, childless or childfree, we all have experienced our being ostracized, criticized judged, because we don't fit into pronatalist norms. You know, what the stereotypes are, we don't have to go in any of these. But to me the big commonality that society sees all of us who don't have kids for whatever the heck reason is, there's something wrong with us, okay. There's something wrong with us because of our reproductive reality, or our choice. And this one, too, they both just like, the messaging is that we're not real women, because we haven't become mothers. And I'll even go to even further to the childless communities, where it can go even further, that if people choose to adopt even, that's fine. But really, the real is if you can have your own biological kid, because the bent on bio is best.

Christine Erickson 14:49

Yeah, there's definitely a ranking system.

Laura Carroll 14:53

Commonly, we all have this, that we go against certain norms and we get flack for it, so to me, that's where we should be bonded, not bonding, because oh, you don't want it, and I do. It's like, it's much more than that. So I think, first is we really need to look at what our experiential commonalities are, and if we see that it's easy to see, it's not a chasm at all. In fact, it's easier to build a bridge to see let's how do we build a bridge that we can build together? That's where I see it. So don't get me started.

Christine Erickson 15:35

I want to. Thank you. As do I see that. I mean, that was my intention, you know, and as you said, you know, maybe there are things happening and there are rumblings, but how do we orchestrate that? How do we harness what is happening? And how do we sort of transcend what differences there are next to our experiences with, you know, the value and acknowledgement of all of those experiences, but for the common space that we experience socially, politically, in the workplace... Those things impact us all, and maybe differently and to different degrees, but it is where we need to be together to create any meaningful change. And that is where I'm hoping to support that difference, you know, that change, and we have powerful voices such as yours in these movements, whether it's childless or childfree, that I think are in a readiness for that.

Laura Carroll 16:35

I agree with you, there's a lot of readiness in people that would consider themselves childless, who have been on a road of I think I do, now I don't, now I do. It's that too. That's not talked about enough. It's like, it's not binary at all. And especially as you go through life, and my book '25 Over 10' really gets the real-life experience of that. But I think to really begin to try to work together to move towards that more formal action, I would say, we need more work on how the childless and childfree have to more fully understand each other. Okay, so I know it's already happening out there, but I feel that there is more conversation, real conversation, that can be had by childfree people about childless people to say, you know what, we need to you know, talk about compassion here. For the shame and the pity that pronatalist society, this trick that it puts on women who have a tough time having kids, we need to get off of that, that's uncool. And we need to respect the grieving process and the loss. We won't, the childfree won't experience it first-hand. But we need to respect that that something deep that other women, other sisters go through, right? So similarly, the childless on their end, to be able to see that the childfree, we have reasons for making this choice that for a myriad of reasons. And some, the childless may not ever get or like, how could you not be interested in in motherhood, in the process of parenthood? How could you not like children, you know? It's hard to understand, but it has to be respect for my personal reality. So to more deeply understand each other, and respect each other, really gets us to realize we can be different, and still totally connect as women, as a collective. If we get there, I think even emotionally as a

collective, the power to change really starts, because when we're together, we see eye to eye, we get a goal now on what we want, we're going to be bigger. A bigger group of women without children, you know, and have a goal. So to me, that means we need to, we need to get the group bigger to do that. We need to really understand each other first. So that's not talked enough. We need more of it.

Christine Erickson 19:10

Yeah. And be in acceptance. It's really, you know, and I understand it, you know, when you're going through a space of your own acceptance, of whether that's choice or not having had a choice or circumstances, you know, it's like a direct ping off of somebody else; it activates all those other things. However, the spaces that we're talking about, and what is needed to resolve some of those things, both socially and otherwise, is to have that acceptance and acknowledgement. Often times, is just acknowledgement. You know, we don't have to fully get the whole journey or agree, but we have to be in acknowledgement of one another, to accept one another, in order to get some things done.

Laura Carroll 19:54

When you think about that, that's what we do already in life with people that we develop really strong relationships with; we work on that, we work through that, to where to really bond, and there has to be acknowledgement, acceptance and understanding. And then that fuels getting stuff done, if that's what we decide we want to do.

Christine Erickson 20:16

Right, and if I look at, you know, the roots of pronatalism of, you know, patriarchal influences throughout all of these conversations about family, about children about women, you know, us being in quote, unquote, "separate camps", is replaying part of that. "I agree with that. I do." (LC) Often, then being against each other, and I don't always think that's the intention. I think we're safekeeping our experiences. So I don't think anyone's out to, you know, maliciously 'other' one another in this, but it's time to consciously come together.

Laura Carroll 20:56

You make a great point that the keeping it in separate camps, almost in a way keeps it in the baby matrix that keeps it so focused on reproductive, you know, status first. That's where it starts. That's where pronatalism wants us to start. So in that sense, to drop it, and to come together for common goals, it does reach past, it puts a chink in the pronatalist narrative. So that's an excellent way to communicate about why the chasm isn't necessarily even there. We make it there.

Christine Erickson 21:36

Yeah, there's what's in us unconsciously is what we're living out, I think, in part of this.

Laura Carroll 21:42

Yes. And all of this is to help make it more conscious. And the more we see it, the more we can, we can unravel it.

Christine Erickson 21:49

Well, and the more we can let go of at the same time, right, for ourselves, in our own unconscious bias and experiences, from that pronatalist lens.

Laura Carroll 21:59

I also find that on the childfree front, the more than a woman fully internalizes it and is good with it herself, it really does foster the acceptance of other people who are making the same choice. Yeah. That some of the work that also needs to be done internally in the internal camp, as it were.

Christine Erickson 22:22

Yes, in both, in whatever camp, in all the camps.

Laura Carroll 22:25

Yes, both sides. In whatever, camp and everything in between.

Christine Erickson 22:29

Whatever camp you're in. Yes, absolutely, yes. And we are, for simplification saying childfree and childless, we know that there are identities and spaces in between. I think we're a movement that will continue to evolve linguistically as well, where we're challenged by language and identity...

Laura Carroll 22:48

I hope so. I keep looking for language, and language, and it's all too weird.

Christine Erickson 22:53

If anyone has the word or comes up with it, call us. We're looking for it. Absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I think my invitation to us and to others who are in readiness, you know, and I do think that place of acceptance is important, that personal place of acceptance, you know, we're not saying, you know, step out of your comfort zone and do something, because that you should. That's not an invitation; the invitation is in that readiness, and people who are visible, who are comfortable being visible, or even in the background, comfortable doing the research, doing, looking at policy, those kinds of things. We need you. Now is the time to come together and have all of those different eyes and perspectives on this. You know, there may be needs in the workplace, for example, that are more particular to someone in the childless space. But that doesn't mean it's a different list. You know, we know sort of the A to Z of what we are asking for. And if we have a collective voice, we can more poignantly do that. We can hone in and we can utilize that as a tool to keep making those requests, so that these conversations remain sustainable. So often, you know, it comes in the news, it goes out of the news, or we're used in the news. There are so many places we can go with the media, right? But to really have our own sustained conversation, not have to be in a conversation where we are having to constantly respond to something that is not working. I think it's time for us to take lead in our own narratives around what we want and how to create equitable and inclusive spaces, the way that we need them to be.

Laura Carroll 24:44

I am with you. 20 years ago, this same talking about not having kids by choice, very similar in the timeline where it was talked about here and there, here and there. And over the

last two decades with the advancement of the digital age, it is allowed for the, growth of that voice to be so much more powerful, so much more known, so much more able to educate about the choice and the people who make it. So there are certain things that thrust it forward, that really help it in this case, too. The power is also in numbers, we can talk a little bit more about that too. And some of the things, little things that we tried over the years or helped try to facilitate, then let's just say were learning experiences. We learned so that when we go forward, when we can, you know, we try to do better.

Christine Erickson 25:42

Yes, absolutely. I know I'm definitely in that learning space with all of this and open to learning from that learning. Yes, definitely to go forward in better ways when you know better you can do better right? And we will draw on that.

Laura Carroll 26:00

Learn from your mistakes, and hopefully you make them only once, and build on it as you move forward.

Christine Erickson 26:07

And I am grateful for the expertise such as yours, you know, that has taken those risks, and has done that learning that we can build on. Yeah, we'll talk more about some of that learning when we come back and how we can more boldly build this movement. We'll also hear more about Laura's latest publication '25 Over 10', which is fascinating. And we will be back after a short break. Thank you so much.

VoiceAmerica 26:45

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New Legacy Institute is committed to equitable and inclusive change for people without children. We invite you to become a member of New Legacy Institute, and to share what matters most to you. Participate in our research surveys, upcoming webinars and efforts to influence policy, media narratives and DEI initiatives that fully recognize our community. Check us out online at newlegacyinstitute.com. Join us today.

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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 28:12

Welcome back, everybody. I am Christine Erickson. I realized many times we say that (my name). Thank you for listening today. We are here with international childfree choice expert, Laura Carroll, and we are going to continue our conversation on how to come together to make a difference, and looking at what in the workplace, how can we really make a difference and some of the experiences that she can share with us going forward. Laura?

Laura Carroll 28:39

Well, I want to speak to one, just one time over the years where a group of women came to me. They worked for different organizations, but they all were very riled up about how the parental leave policy felt very unfair to them. And most of them identified as childfree, but there were a couple it was more like well, I don't want kids right now. So they didn't have kids and they felt that these policies were unfair, and said, how can we go to our employers, and, you know, create a beef, as it were. And so we together came up with a way to present something to their individual HR departments. And the short story is that they really backed off, the women did, because they started to fear that their job might be in jeopardy. So they got a lot of push back for, can we talk about why these policies start with people who choose to have kids, what is that? Even just asking the questions made people part their hair the other way and close the door. You know, so it was very interesting and they backed away and we of course talked about that. And when I look back at it now, I feel that if I did it again today, here's some thoughts about how, you know, I'm no expert, but I think to just noodle on how would we actually go about doing

something formal. I think I first would advise that, let's say those same six women just for illustrative purposes, each woman in each of their companies, they'd go out and find, as many other employees who are nonparents as possible, in their own organization, and talk with them, if that just means go on to lunch, having them over to their house on a weekend, you know, to say, how do you feel about this? Does this bug you? Does it bug you enough to where maybe we need as a collective now, we can create something, even if it's a white paper of sorts. Certainly people in the eco-activist world have done this, and quite successfully in then approached executives and corporations. So it could be something that lays out the inequities, why they're there, why are the policies so child-centric, and almost most importantly, what would be the positive outcomes to the company itself, if those policies were fairer across all and not dependent on reproductive choice, in their personal life. So if that could happen internally, that could also happen that whatever document could be taken to executive management, and then what happens with it can be shared in the more public domain, now that the digital world is so huge, to take it, pitch it to the media, get it on social media, get people talking about. Well, in my company, we said this, and you know, this is what my EVP said, so get it out there. So that will help other people learn about what these women in these companies are doing that then fosters the development of a larger alliance that would then be intercompany, and allied. So you see where I'm going, it's like, how do we build it across companies, together as women without children or men, it's not just a woman thing, of men want to get in, I'm all for it. So this way, the alliance builds to a point, it then needs some sort of, I want to say conduit where all of them can get can begin to go to discuss what's going on, and to build it further. And a conduit could be a network that could be created, it could even be something like the New Legacy Institute, for example, but it has to be somewhere people can go, that feels like a larger entity that they are a part of, as their building this. So rather than what we tried years ago to say, okay, all you ladies go, you go in and speak with your HR person, and you see what happens. It's more like, no, we need to gather the people within first, then create some momentum to better present to management and make it known in the public domain, what is happening.

Christine Erickson 33:12

Yes. I think that, you know, pro-family policies, they're needed. We support parental support and policy 100%. And we are we still fall short in this country. However, I think

that that push, I'm almost wondering whether many organizations today even know off the top of their head, their HR person, how many people within those organizations actually have children, and not; regardless of if they're people who are going to have children maybe in the future or not, or their childfree their childless? Just even knowing that number. That's a start. But let's look at that. Do you know that about your organization? You know, I'm speaking from an HR and DEI perspective.

Laura Carroll 34:00

You should also know it's a moving target. Check childfree, as a 24-year-old, and two months later, go, oh shoot, I'm pregnant and think I want to have it now. You know, it happens.

Christine Erickson 34:14

At any given time, though, I'm really curious about that. Because I think the move toward family policy or pronatalist policy, that continuum was to retain people, it was looking one population, and a status quo population. But the way that our community is growing, and if we're one in five, one in four or more, because most of the statistics don't even look at all genders and you know, in the Institute, we talk about all genders. So if we're really surveying things that way and looking at people just from the perspective of not having children in an organization, I'd be very curious what those numbers are, and I bet they're higher than we would guess.

Laura Carroll 34:56

I think my end game, and I'm just thinking about off the top my head, I agree with all you're saying, but in the visionary end game, I would love to not have to talk about that at all. I would love to not have reproductive, whatever, status be the lead in so many conversations on how we structure things from a human resource standpoint, because when it comes down to it, it's a personal choice you make in your personal life.

Christine Erickson 35:24

Right. Right.

Laura Carroll 35:26

And that's not to say it's inappropriate to bring it into your business, environment, but it shouldn't be driven by it. The playing field to me, that would be super powerful, it would really reflect some major change.

Christine Erickson 35:39

Yes, I absolutely agree. It's daunting, it's exhausting, and it's disappointing to have to have those conversations. I mean, things like universal leave, should not be questioned. With universal leave it shouldn't matter if you want to go sit in the corner for 30 days, or whatever you want to do. I just, to that degree, it should not be questioned, but it should be equitable. So when we tried to get into those conversations, and the well, what would you do with that time? Well, what would anybody do? We all have lives, you know, whatever that is.

Laura Carroll 36:12

That too, it's your personal life, like your choice to have a kid? Yes. It's your personal life.

Christine Erickson 36:16

And going into the while it's a great conversation, also having to enter that conversation. of well, now, if you're a caregiver, that is an absolutely important thing, and there should be time for caregiving. But again, it is personal, it is family; just make it across the board. You know, and we could bypass this and people could not have to, you know, offer testimonials about their private life and why this impacts them. But in the absence of that, how do we have these conversations, you know, in the way that least impacts people personally, and best supports them policy-wise.

Laura Carroll 36:58

I think I loop back to that all people without children need to, they need to want to coalesce. If they if this is important to them, this end game, if that's most important, then to be able to try to better understand and connect and work with people who don't have kids, for whatever reason. That collective needs to get strong, in order for this conversation to really be had with any kind of oomph, or power to get anywhere. There needs to there needs to be more of us. And we need to be together not separate, based

on our choices. So it loops back to what we talked about at the beginning of the hour, is that the collective is just that, it's a building something bigger that we all have our differences, but our end game, we're all on that end game. That's what needs to be most important. And I think if we make that a priority, there's a lot of smart people out there that can figure out campaigns, get people organized. We can look at some powerful campaigns that have been out there and the women's movement, the environmental community. How do they do it? How have they done the ones that have really done well, and we can take what we think applies to what we needed to in this situation and see if it will apply here. At least what we're talking about here, that as an example. Yes, I think we can take with what's worked from other activists for loss of better word, it's not doesn't need to be that word. Maybe it's like an advocate, a passionate advocate for change. You don't like the word activist, I don't care, let's use something else, but passion for the change has to really be the priority. Work together.

Christine Erickson 38:48

And I think another conversation, not for this conversation, but that comes into it is really parents as well. We were advocating, you know, for ourselves because it is non-existent. But we are also advocating along the whole spectrum of personal choice and time off and equitable benefits, so that those choices can be made when people want to make them, if they have the choice. You know, better childcare, parental leave, those things. Absolutely. I mean, those are a no brainer. So we we're not against that. And I'm not saying that because I feel I have to, I I really mean that. And it's something that we have struggled with for so long in this country, and now post pandemic (not that it is over, but that we are so far into it, with people leaving the workplace because of those very issues. I'm also curious about how many well, we've talked a lot of the resignation with women because of those ideas. And I'm curious how many women without children, you know, are also leaving the workplace because they have options or because of a lack of equitable policy? You know, I'm very curious about that space.

Laura Carroll 40:06

Well, I know just certain stories, I know just from some acquaintances and colleagues for whom that situation is true that they also chose to use it as a springboard to go to the next chapter in their careers. When you don't have kids, you can take more risks, but also

others, they really were having a tough time having to work more. Because the parents at home were busy, and they understand that, you know, but yet they too, can't work 17-hour days, because it's assumed that they're the ones who have the time. And sometimes they can make that time, but they can't make that their work life. So a lot of them are saying, hey, there's this assumption I can't be dealing with right now. And so they resign and move on for that reason.

Christine Erickson 40:56

Absolutely. Well, we need to carry these things forward. Absolutely. I think you've given a lot of great, not only enthusiasm, but specific examples. You know, we do have examples of movements, initiatives, that, you know, that have been successful, as you said, and how do we start naming this in a positive way and in a truly aligned way? That's what I'm looking at. I'm interested in all perspectives. We need all perspectives. We all have different experiences in the workplace. However, policies are carte blanche, they are saying, none of you this, you know, so it doesn't matter what your story is, really. That's not what they're looking at. And again, as you said, I love the example that you shared about the six women in the workplace, because I've heard some of those stories separately. And I think, you know, asking someone to be the carrier of that torch, so to speak, can be a real emotional setup, and also put them in a position to fear for their job, as you pointed out, you know that's not a feel good. People need to go in supported and they need to go in with tools. Like you mentioned, the example of a white paper, those are things that we want to do in the Institute, so people have a tool to work from. They can reframe it for themselves and for their purposes, but that's what we want to build. And that's why we need different perspectives to do this. You know, it can't be from one experience, and it's absolutely necessary.

Laura Carroll 42:34

Yeah, the not being alone, and maybe feeling like you have your cohort within, is super powerful. And that white paper or whatever that document looks like to be presented and best if it can result in educational opportunities within the organization for people to say, "Well, why do we have these policies anyway?" Get employees, executives, HR people to go, "Let's step back here, why is it that it's always been like that?" Well, why? So it really opens the door to people seeing pronatalism as it is working in the workplace.

And as Jody said it so beautifully in your time with her the other day, is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. And it can be helpful in the workplace, even if we're all at home, you know, it's how we interact as an organizational structure, and the policies that we have to use to kind of keep structure within it.

Christine Erickson 43:33

Yes, absolutely. Can't unsee it. Can't unsee it. Yes, and I think it works to, you know, alleviate some of those perceived and real divisions, whether that's parents and nonparents or childless and childfree. I just think that can only be a great thing going forward. So thank you for that. That was great insight, Laura. So I want to talk a little bit about what you have been up to for the last 10 years

Laura Carroll 44:03

How long do you have?

Christine Erickson 44:05

And this particular publication, could you share a bit with us about '25 Over 10', and summarize some of your research and what inspired it and what was the outcome of it? You don't have to give everything away. Everybody please read this.

Laura Carroll 44:21

No, I won't. I don't want reader to at least not know everything, before they actually buy the book in some form. Well, it started with the bingo I'll call it out there is with the childfree always being told that they're going to change their mind or you're going to meet the right guy, and you're, you know, you feel that way now. So it really ticks off a lot of childfree people. I mean, a lot of you know, emotion around it. So I said, well, okay, why don't I just, let's see, let's track 25 women over 10 years, and I not only tracked; they all started one 100% decidedly childfree, and they were in their 20s. And I chose that deliberately because I feel like that's when, you know, in your 20s, that's when we're thinking about this, women tend to have their first babies around late 20s, we're thinking and becoming more into our own, of starting that process then. So I found a little over 30 (women), knowing that a few might drop off over time, and they did. But I landed with 25. And they stuck with me as volunteers for 10 years. And my promise to them was that

I wouldn't use their names in there, you know, keep them confidential. They created fictitious names for themselves, with the exception of one woman who's like, "I don't care, I'm going to use my own name." But to keep their identities confidential, it really inspired candor. And that's one of the things you're going to see in this publication is candor about how they felt all the way, along the way. I mean, I did this with 'Families of Twos' (book), real talk real people, couples, and this takes it, you know, over 10 years of a woman's experience, not only of her choice, but being a woman in society. So it was about the childfree choice, but so much more about their lives, and how they evolved over a decade. So most, I will say, did stay childfree. But we also for the first time, we learned the reasons why over time, how what happens over time on how they digest around how they feel that way. That's a first. We've never seen that tracked, other than like in a study and they say, here's the reason and in a study, and it's published in, you know, 2009, whatever. So this is over time. We also learn about those who started childfree, of course, but over the course of the time, they were no longer 100% childfree and they waffled because of a whole variety of reasons, and were really candid about that. And I'm so grateful that they were able to tell us their stories, because they're here too. We don't hear these stories. We tend to think it's like, oh, she's childfree and she wanted kids and she couldn't have them. This is like this mush that happens in life over time. And then also we learn how, yes, you can start childfree 10 years ago, and you can end up a stepmother, you can end up a mother, here's how it happens. Well, in the end, it's more like well, not to say 'well see, people don't change their minds', it was more like no, here's all the ways that can unfold in women's lives. And thank God, they were willing to be so expressive about it and let me be their shepherd. So it's a bunch of stories that we can really, really learn a lot from. I'm indebted to them, to a bunch of great rocket women from Australia, the States, Canada, and even one from Romania. I think about her a lot these days. She's in a world that's really going through a terrible time. So I hope that that gives you a sense. And it's on Amazon. And please, you don't just have to be interested in childfree issues to appreciate this research. Anybody who's interested in research on women, how our reproductive choices evolve over time, how our reproductive identities evolve as women over time, all of that's got some really cool nuggets in this in this.

Christine Erickson 48:36

It's really powerful content, I would recommend it too. '25 Over 10: A Childfree Longitudinal Study', by Laura Carroll. So what is next for you? What do you do after a 10-year study?

Laura Carroll 48:51

Well, I'm going to lighten it up a little bit. I am working on something for a young adult audience. So it's my first crack at going to a younger audience. And I have been researching women without children going back in history, and so it's going to be short vignettes of 175 I hope, women. So short vignettes of women going back, it's from 400 AD, with the idea that kids, young women can read it and see in a beautiful, fun way that 'oh my gosh, women have not been having kids for variety of reasons for centuries.' It's okay, it's really okay if that's how I feel and if that's what's happened to me, going to happen to me, or does happen to me. So it's a lot of unsung heroes' stories, again for young women, which I really do want to reach them before I decide to retire at some point.

Christine Erickson 49:45

Oh, I love I love that so much. Yeah, we always say or it was in an article and then we repeated it I think in an interview with Joan Eisenstodt, but you know, women have not had children for centuries. That's not what's new. How we respond to that and how we embrace that is what needs to change.

Laura Carroll 50:04

Absolutely, and young women today, they still think that that's what you do, and you grow up and you have kids. This is to help them see, well, not really, you know, the world is your oyster, you have a lot of powerful choices, and whether you want to reproduce is one of them.

Christine Erickson 50:20

Right, and how do we tease out again, our own unconsciousness around the awareness of how we're making choices around that, or the pressures around us to do that. You

know, how do we dismantle pronatalism in sharing these stories, these visible stories? Oh, I can't wait to see that. It's absolutely fascinating.

Laura Carroll 50:44

I think all avenues are trying to do that, you know the childless community, World Childless Week, and what the childfree are doing. 'The Baby Matrix' is really about that, trying to chip away at it. So as an onlooker, I think the chipping away is happening, because more people now see it. Yeah, once you've seen it, you can't unsee it. I love that quote, because it's so powerful, and more people have seen it. So we're on the road.

Christine Erickson 51:12

True. Yes. And not on seeing it is a truth in my life. It is a very powerful truth. So tell us, your blog, your websites, the books, you said that '25 Over 10' is on Amazon. Just let us know how people can find you.

Laura Carroll 51:31

Everything is at LauraCarroll.com. It links to my books, and even La Vie Childfree, all the posts for 11, 12, now 13 years, are still there. It's still a collection of writings going strong. I'm on Facebook, Families of Two: Childfree and Beyond (page). I also have The Baby Matrix page. And you'll see daily posts on people who had kids from history and today at the International Childfree Day page on Facebook and on Twitter.

Christine Erickson 52:02

Excellent. Thank you so much for being with us today. Laura.

Laura Carroll 52:06

My pleasure. It's been great talking with you.

Christine Erickson 52:08

Thank you. Please take our message and our conversation from today, and let's find a way to dialogue and move forward together. We're only stronger together in a real way in a real sense. Let's take our movement forward collectively. Thank you everyone for listening today. And tune in again next week, at the same time. You can reach us or

continue this conversation on any of our platforms, and we look forward to speaking with you soon. Bye-bye.

VoiceAmerica 52:42

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.