**Interview with Bernadette Wright and Liz Wright**

Liz

This is a Women with Disabilities Victoria podcast.

We acknowledge that these podcasts were recorded on the traditional lands of the First Nations Peoples of this country. We acknowledge their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and that this is, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

From the Outskirts is a series of podcasts featuring women with disabilities who live and work in regional Victoria.

I’m Liz Wright, a disability activist and advocate. I’m also the Manager of Community Inclusion and Women’s Empowerment at Women with Disabilities Victoria.

All the interviews were recorded in each person’s home or workplace, so from time to time there is unexpected background noise.

Bernadette Wright has been fighting for the rights of children and young people all her life.

From co-parenting her younger siblings (full disclosure, that includes me), to a career working with children and young people as a counsellor and educator, Bern has always had a passion for social justice.

Bernadette

Hello. My name is Bernadette Wright. I'm speaking to you from Dja Dja Wurrung Country. And I acknowledge the Elders past and present. And want to say that their land was never ceded. And it always was, and always will be.

Liz

Hello, Bernadette. It's great to see you today. How you going?

Bernadette

Pretty fine, thank you.

Liz

That's good. I wanted to talk to you because I think you have some interesting stories to talk about as far as being someone that's lived in rural and regional areas your whole life.

Can you tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up in Bendigo as a young person and moving into adulthood?

Bernadette

Well, growing up in Bendigo, a suburb called Kangaroo Flat, yes, Kangaroo Flat. It was pretty idyllic. I loved it.

I was, I am, I am the eldest of six siblings and…although there are only five living, and we had a pretty dream life. We had a creek that we caught tadpoles in and made cubby homes, houses…and we had a big neighbourhood of kids, and we played on the street, and the big kids looked after the little kids, and it was pretty lovely.

We had a mum when we went to school who would pick us up in the blue kombie and take us out to the bush to pick wildflowers, which you’re not meant to do these days…and have picnics after school. It was lovely. Lots of many happy childhood memories, definitely.

Liz

Would you say you were from a family that had lots of money and resources and stuff or, you know, six kids nowadays is seen to be the sign of, you know, affluence.

In our day at Catholic school, it wasn't really, it was kind of her sign of fertility and…

Bernadette

Well…our father was in the army and often the children coincided with…Mum's pregnancies, coincided with when he returned from trips away with the Army.

So, there's, you know, a few age gaps. There's myself, 13 months…15 months later, twin boys, then I think four years later, a girl, thirteen months later you, four years later another one. So, there was, you know, quite a distance in us.

I certainly think we would be…and I consider that we were working class. We lived in an Army house that was just newly built when our parents came up from Melbourne with me. No, we certainly we were working class, but I, I actually liked that.

Liz

Do you think your childhood and being from a big family shaped you as a person?

Bernadette

Of course, I, I believe so. I, from a very early age, loved children. I loved all my siblings, and I was very…I don’t know… responsible, and a very hands-on elder sibling. And that was the sort of family we were. We did things mainly with our Mum. We made our own fun. Yeah, I think for anybody…how their family of origin stuff is…does shape you.

Liz

Well, you know, Bern, I was thinking as the eldest who had a big role in, in mothering some younger children during a time when you were a young person, that's a lot of responsibility that doesn't seem to occur so much nowadays, but it was often the role of the oldest child to be, you know, chief bottle washer and cook….

Bernadette

It was in our case, but I enjoyed it. I mean, at times it could be very frustrating…

Liz

Really? (laughter)

Bernadette

With our twin brothers… and our parents had a…I don't know what sort of relationship you'd say…they seemed to fight a lot, and then there would be times when they were very close and sometimes as a kid that was quite confusing.

So, I think in lots of ways I played a role somewhere along the line as helper, supporter, peacemaker, childminder. But…but I didn't mind it.

Liz

So why was that confusing for you? Was it because there was conversations between you and our parents or what was confusing about hot and cold with them?

Bernadette

Growing up you know, like…in, in those days, I think our mother was a very clever, clever woman, as was Dad. But Mum had all these kids, and she was, she was intelligent. She read, you know, every night, you know, every Saturday, all the time. She was a reader. So, I think she was very frustrated having six kids. And this brain that was interested in so many things.

And so, I think we were talking about their conflictual relationship at times. So, there was the element of frustration. Dad would go off to work and sometimes he’d go to the Army mess and Mum would be furious and he'd always come in the door and say: Have I got a story for you Mor. And that would sort of somehow, you know, break her annoyance and then they’d have a discussion. So, sometimes as a kid, and I think for lots of kids, it's confusing when your parents can be seeming at odds and then lovey-dovey as you would say.

Liz

Do you think your responsibility and your love of your siblings and, you know, you have a very strong memory and history of the family, has influenced the way you've worked through your careers?

Bernadette

Yes. Yes. But the way my life has worked out, things have been by chance. All my jobs have been by chance.

Liz

So, give me an example.

Bernadette

All right. So, when I left boarding school…

Liz

Where was that?

Bernadette

North Goulburn, New South Wales.

Liz

Why were you there, from Bendigo?

Bernadette

Well, a great aunt was a Joseph…Black Josephite nun, and they were…in those days they were in Tasmania and New South Wales, and I used to go to Tassie to visit her with Dad and our grand...his parents, my grandparents and I loved it. And I was very holy, very holy indeed.

(laughter)

Liz

Yeah.

Bernadette

So, I had this bit of a thing that I would finish my schooling there. So, I ended up in North Goulburn. I couldn't go to Tassie for some reason. I can't remember why. I already had been diagnosed, you know, five or six years earlier with my eye disease, so…

Liz

What was that? What’s…

Bernadette

My eye disease is Stargardt Disease. In those days you didn't have a visiting teacher service or an education support worker. The old name for them was an integration aid to assist children with disabilities. So, I was doing… in those days it was you had levels, so four first level subjects and it was third level mathematics and I left school about three quarters of the way through year 12, which infuriated our mother immensely because education was everything to her.

Liz

Why did you leave?

Bernadette

Maybe because I was a bit of a snob…

Liz

What do you mean?

Bernadette

So, first level is the highest level you could do. And I had no real assistance so I couldn't see the board. I couldn't, barely read the textbooks and you know, that became, you know, quite hard….

Liz

So, we're talking seventies? What year are we…?

Bernadette

71 and maybe two. Yes, 72. And so, when I came home because mum was so furious, I went to the Blind Institute for I don't know how long, six months or something, which was a very interesting place to be.

Liz

Did you live in?

Bernadette

I lived in. And there was no room in the girls dorm, and I was put in the boys dorm.

Liz

God.

Bernadette

And the first well, we had a matron, this is…

Liz

(laughter)

What happened…?

Bernadette

It was the old, you know, paternalistic, patriarchal sort of system that existed, that thankfully that place doesn't exist anymore.

So, the first night I came out and there was like a games room and one of the boys said hello. And I got reported because I was speaking to a boy and, you know, my room was in the boys area…

Liz

And you had twin brothers.

Bernadette

Yeah.

Liz

So, you were used to talking to boys.

Bernadette

There was no fraternising, sort of, of a night time…anyway, in those days you could do switchboard, you know, you could do basket weaving, floristry, things like that. And that was a really.

Liz

So, we're talking sheltered workshop kind of learning.

Bernadette

Well, there was a sheltered workshop there, but I was not part of that. And also, it was a way of…I, I found that people, other residents there had more sight than me, but because they had been what I would say, institutionalised, they, they appeared more blind than me.

Liz

So, less capacity, less social kind of admission to a certain extent because they'd been cotton wooled a bit?

Bernadette

No, no. They were definitely institutionalised, you know, in, in that old sense of every aspect of their life sort of dictated to. And you know, we had the nurse there and all the staff and so some people…I guess are just going back a bit, when I lost my most of my sight, there was no discussion…

Mum was so brave because at the Eye and Ear Hospital there was one particular optometrist actually….because, because it was seen as very rare in those days. I had…when I went there, I saw, you know, there would just be a parade of doctors and optometrists and all that coming through. And there was this one optometrist who kept saying to Mum: She needs to go to the Blind School. And Mum would keep saying: No, she's not. And one day he put on a pair of glasses on mum, and she couldn't see anything, and she became quite emotional.

And then, as you know, our Mum could be very angry…she was furious and she said: How dare you treat us like this, and I will never set foot here again. And off we marched out of the hospital and didn't go back.

I went to see a professor privately after that, but that was really horrific for Mum because we never really discussed what I could see and couldn't see. And this fellow said that.

So, when I went to the Blind Institute, all those years later, in those days, because of the institutionalisation of people with what I believe of people with disability, and I don't mean that to be offensive to anyone who hears this…

Liz

Oh God. We're not going to go into language.

Bernadette

What do you mean?

Liz

Like, it's OK to say disability.

Bernadette

No, I mean, I don't want to offend anybody who went there and perhaps had a really good experience.

Liz

Oh of course. Yeah, yeah.

Bernadette

So, that's what I mean. I mean that, you know, life living under that sort of regime diminishes you.

(Music playing)

Liz

What about the hardship that there is when this kind of a masking level, like a coping level of being very mainstream, when you don't have the supports?

Like, if we think back to 72, 73, even up to, oh, probably not long ago, having to bluff and do everything, like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, she's doing it all backwards on heels and he's doing it forwards, you know…like it's difficult. So, you know, for you, you've done it hard to a certain extent, like if you don't have the assistance.

Bernadette

Well, I did, but I was lucky I was pretty smart. So, I did…I was able to bluff my way through for a long time. But also, there was a sense of pride, especially in Year 12. And, you know, I did not want to drop levels, so I left.

Anyway, getting back to the story and my career, no one would employ me when I came home. After that, I went for many jobs.

Liz

What sort of jobs?

Bernadette

Receptionist jobs, working in an architect's, you know…I applied for whatever I could, and people weren’t…well, I guess in those days they didn't have any understanding of what, what, what a person with vision…low vision could do, and they weren't prepared to give you a chance. So, I ended up working as a nurse's assistant at a local aged care facility.

(laughter)

Liz

That's kind of funny…in a way…

Bernadette

Which I loved.

Liz

You can't be a receptionist, but you can look after sick, sick or potentially dying people…

Bernadette

And I was asked to give insulin shots…

(laughter)

Bernadette

Which I said to the person who asked me: You know, I can't do that because I can't see, it would be really wrong…

Liz

Dangerous…

Bernadette

And they said: You could practice on an orange…

(laughter)

Bernadette

So, I didn't do it. So, I did that. Loved that. Working with the oldies, it was quite lovely. And then after a few years, our mother got sick, and I was able to nurse her. So that was my first job that I sort of fell into. Then later on…

Liz

So, a bit of kismet in a way.

Bernadette

You, you, you could call it that, I…

Liz

What would you say?

Bernadette

Oh, I don't know. It's just, just the way it just the way it played out, you know?

Liz

So, you're still very young at this time, though. So how old are you if you're nursing our mother?

Bernadette

I'm 21 and then nearly...

Liz

And were you married?

Bernadette

Yes. I married young. I married at 20.

Liz

So, you worked as a nurse's assistant and then your mother got cancer, our mother got cancer. And you nursed her, and you were married.

What was that period like? And how were you managing that as a really young woman?

Bernadette

Well, I think again, it goes back to Mum. She was quite extraordinary for her time. She wanted to be at home. She wanted to die at home. I was living in Bendigo, and they…you had all moved down to the Bellarine Peninsula. When you love somebody, I could not be parted, so initially when you know, she first was diagnosed, I would go down on weekends and then the more ill she became, I gave up my job and went down and lived with you all.

Got you kids off to school, looked after Mum… also to let you know that my dog has just arrived home from a walk and she's panting and, and she's not a guide dog just to let anybody know that she's just an ordinary pet.

So… so that’s what I meant. Mum was quite extraordinary. So, if we're talking…this is now 1977, and in those days for somebody to want to be at home was unheard of. Everyone, you know, died in hospital as far as I knew. And so, Mum chose where she wanted to be buried, you know, so she could overlook the sea one side and the rolling hills the other. So, from diagnosis till she died was about four months. And it’s not a sad story. It was a privilege to look after her. And that was it.

Liz

And then what happened for you, as a young woman at 21?

Bernadette

So, I turned 22 after Mum died. Oh, and because our dad had been a bit of a wanderer and away a lot in their marriage, you know, he went away to Vietnam for a year, which nearly broke their marriage up because Mum took all you young children down to the moratoriums protesting against the Vietnam War.

Liz

Yeah. Yeah.

Bernadette

And used to stick stickers on Dad's car that he drove to the Army…Stop the War…and he’d take them off because you're not allowed to do that in the Army.

Liz

No.

Bernadette

Not allowed to have a political view. So, because he'd been away well, through a lot of their marriage, six-months at a time, 12-months at a time. Lots of six-months at a time. Mum was very worried about the young…youngest in the family. So, she and Dad asked myself and my then husband, if you girls, you and two other siblings, could live with us. And of course, we said yes. And that January you all came up to live with us in Bendigo.

Liz

What was that like as a young couple with a second family and a baby on the way?

Bernadette

Oh yes, I forgot to say that.

Liz

You were pregnant.

Bernadette

Then I found out that I was pregnant. Well, because I like living with family…it wasn't easy because we didn't have much money, but it was easy in so many other ways. It was…and hard at times. I think the hardest thing for me was that because we were young, when you all went to school, all your friends parents were way older than us, and and I think….I, I, I…

Liz

Judgy…

Bernadette

I felt judged - they were like: You know what, what would you know about raising teenagers?

Liz

Which was kind of hilarious because you two were the strictest parents. Stricter than my own parents.

Bernadette

Yes.

Bernadette

Because you were all little buggers.

Liz

Well, no. We were just really smart (laughter) at escaping and doing stuff. But all those older parents were so judgy and it was unbelievable.

Bernadette

In that time, our youngest sibling came up to me and was…she did grade six through to year 12. You did, Year Nine…

Liz

Year 10.

Bernadette

Year 10 through Year 12 but then went overseas…as an exchange student…

Liz

I went overseas…yeah.

Bernadette

And then our other sister did Year 10 through…

Liz

Year 11 and 12.

Bernadette

Yes. So as each of you…I mean you know, I did parenting groups and things like that to try and be always a better parent. But there, there things you, you know, you wouldn't do now, and hindsight is wonderful thing…

Liz

Like block someone from seeing Bette Midler.

Bernadette

No, I'm not entering into that, Elizabeth.

Liz

(laughter)

Bernadette

This is my interview.

Liz

Yes. Sorry.

Bernadette

I think, you know, one thing. I mean, you know, because hindsight is a wonderful thing. You know, I thought that everybody, you know, left home at 18 and went to uni and that sort of thing.

And in hindsight, I would never…I would have said, stay as long as you like. And by that stage we were, we were becoming more financially, you know, my, my…

Liz

The 80’s.

Bernadette

My husband was starting his own business and so yeah.

Liz

Lots of people in the 80’s made money and it was a very different time. Like the seventies seemed more…

Bernadette

This was the middle 70’s, 77 onwards.

Liz

Well, late 70’s.

Bernadette

Yeah. So then…so that was it, and I fell into some other jobs.

Liz

So, what other jobs.

Bernadette

I did some work for…we had an organization called St Luke's, which is now Anglicare, and I was a family group home person. We would go in and when the group home leaders had holidays and things like that. So, relief, we did the relief work.

Then I worked in an early adolescent unit, always with young people. Then I was approached to go and work in community health. So, I went out there and I spent ten years out there.

Liz

And what did that involve?

Bernadette

Well, it started off as being a family support worker, so you would go into people's homes and support them in their goals for what they wanted to change and improve and do with their families. And then we had referrals for young people. So, I would go to their schools and see them at their schools. So, working with young people, I then did an Advanced Diploma in Clinical Hypnosis and Psychotherapy, and which was great. I really enjoyed that.

Liz

What is it that you love about working with young people?

Bernadette

I think that young people often are treated in the most patronising way.

Liz

Agree. Yeah.

Bernadette

And I think if we give them space, and honour their, their integrity and their intelligence, you can have the most amazing discussions. I still meet people that I had from working in a different job in schools, now, some of them in their thirties, which makes me feel just, oh god, so old.

Liz

Yeah.

Bernadette

And it's just like we were talking…all those years ago…

Liz

Yes. What was that work?

Bernadette

So that was another job. So, I left community health and then I was approached by an agency in town which was called EASE, which was a domestic violence agency, and they wanted to do a program of violence prevention for young children at school, up to Year Seven, and they sort of said, would I come on and be like an adviser?

So, they employed someone else, and that person couldn't cope…well, found it very hard in the classroom. So, after three weeks I had to go in and that was my first experience of whole classrooms.

Liz

So how does that go with you and eyesight stuff in a classroom of 20 plus kids?

Bernadette

Sometimes 28. I was terrified. I just thought how on earth can I do it? I mean, but then I don't know, I'm probably bossy or something. I don't know. But I guess I learnt fairly quickly and banged on about respect. And so, and also the kids loved it. It was just fabulous. So that's how I ended up running and developing a program. So…

Liz

Which was called?

Bernadette

It was called Solving the Jigsaw.

Liz

So how did you develop it?

Bernadette

Because the person who was employed to do it, write it and do it, left. You know, I got together with the then Manager and…

Liz

Said: I can do it.

Bernadette

Well, no, I just, you know, I had to do it. So, and I had lots of ideas about how to do it.

So, it was a program that evolved until I left working in schools a year and three quarters ago. I still practice that same philosophy in the classroom. It's just an amazing way of working with young people.

Liz

Well, you have to talk about this to us because…how is it? How do you work with…how does it work?

Bernadette

Well, it gives children a voice from prep, or I believe even pre-prep, kinder, kids should be doing these sort of programs, but they get to listen and hear other people, feel and show compassion, explore the issues of the world in a very respectful way, that sometimes even means exploring their own lives and also building their skill base as well, to be able to speak up, to not tolerate abuse of any sort, to understand the concept of consent and things like that. It was pretty amazing.

Liz

Oh, is very before its time.

Bernadette

Yeah. I think that in education, programs come and go, and depending on you know, who picks…you know who in the echelons of the Department of Education pick them up or take… you know they, they take their fancy it's what's in and what out.

Sometimes what's you know current overseas as well. But I do believe in that way of working. Well, I always do…I have a private practice, small private practice for counselling. And that's just the way that I operate.

Liz

So, you've finished working in the education system and now you're in a different chapter of your life. What's your… what are your big passions right now?

(laughter)

Bernadette

So, I'm just going to go back one bit, to working with people and say that our mother was very politically active. And I guess for me that has informed a lot of… all our lives in our family.

So, for me, the rights of children, the rights of people with disability, refugees, indigenous… our indigenous…our First Nations people. My God, hearing that Boyer speech, the other…oh, that was fantastic.

Liz

Which speech?

Bernadette

Noel Pearson doing the Boyer speech.

Liz

Yup. OK

Bernadette

It was remarkable. So, social justice is I guess very important to me. Really important.

(Music playing)

Liz

So how many children do you have, Bernadette?

Bernadette

I have three.

Liz

And are you a traveller?

Bernadette

I have travelled. I would love to travel more. In recent years because of having very low vision…And you know, I walked for many, many years in the in the mornings for an hour every morning and had some pretty spectacular tumbles…

(laughter)

So, I've had two knee replacements. So, I'm building my strength. I would like to travel again. You know, I've been to …Italy, I loved France, been to Geneva, New York. You know, there's many places…. I haven't been. But I do like travel. I like the experience of being in places where people walked thousands… you know…years ago.

Liz

Course. Of course.

Bernadette

And my youngest daughter and I are talking about going to the Northern Territory. I really want to go there.

Liz

You have a social justice background, but you're also a serial writer to the local Bendigo Advertiser.

Bernadette

I used to be. I haven't written many lately. I'm too angry to write at the minute....

Liz

But were you writing about political issues or what? What was what was the the gist of the or the breadth of your writing at that time.

Bernadette

I’ve had some funny letters. So, because I feel very strongly about family and domestic violence, I remember I commented on an article once that caused a bit of a storm. I wrote a big response to a quote from someone from my former workplace, which elicited a response where they said I was being mischievous…

Liz

What?

Bernadette

Which was not my intention at all. I just really believed…I believe that often in in the world of community services and government agencies, we talk about…we used to talk about unit cost funding, and I think that we need to always be mindful of people, talking about people and things like that. So…so that created a bit of a storm. I have written on my local community pool. I've written at times of elections. I do like a bit of a letter.

(laughter)

Liz

Oh, do you think it's familial or hereditary?

Bernadette

Oh, yeah. Because our mother…

(laughter)

Bernadette

Was very political, and actually, she was pretty amazing…because she was the first woman…well, we were raised Catholic and there was a co-op and Mum was the first woman Director of that co-op. Then she joined a political party…

Liz

What was the Co-op?

Bernadette

St Mary's Co-op. It was a co-operative where it was like a bank where people paid in money and then you bills were paid. So that started way back, way, way back. And then Mum joined political party, the Labor Party, it was the 1972 election. She and other Catholic members of the Labor Party wrote an open letter to the Bishop of Bendigo, the Catholic Bishop of Bendigo, and that was even documented in a book that one of us has got somewhere in our treasure trove of family history. So yeah, Mum was part of…was a signatory to that letter calling on the bishop to not get involved in politics.

Liz

Because they were preaching from the pulpit to vote DLP.

Bernadette

They…yes, not to vote for the Labor Party...so yeah, that's…and also, I love the written word, you know….

Liz

What do you like to read Bern?

Bernadette

Well, the reading thing is a bit interesting because the journey through my loss of vision has been I could read…print and then I could only read large print, then I couldn't read that. So, I've gone to audio books, but I love the printed word and I think as a person of my age…an ageing person, it's absolutely true that the less you see in print, your word usage goes down…

Liz

Oh yeah.

Bernadette

Oh, and your spelling…

Liz

Oh yeah, really down. Because I have to ask people all the time, how do you spell that? How do you spell that? And I was brainy, like I was very English literate as far as spelling, grammar, all of that stuff.

Bernadette

Yeah, I remember in…I think it was in Grade 2, it wasn’t Grade 1, even though I could read, I had a reading…in those days, I had a reading age of 15 point something, and I used to do the dictation and correct it.

Liz

And same with me in my year.

Bernadette

For the teachers, for the nuns.

Liz

They would give me the same thing. They would give me, here you correct all of this, and I'll just sit at the back going: nah, nah, nah.

Bernadette

Yeah. Just going back to letter writing. Yeah, I like that. And I… and I like a cause.

With audiobooks, even though you can get some wonderful narrators…to me, there's no comparison to actually seeing the written word. When you I believe when you say the written word, you…then…it happens in your brain, the context of it. You make what you want of it. Whereas when someone's narrating, you have all their nuances and the tone that they read it, the inflection, their interpretation. And even though you know that that's what you live with and often they're quite lovely, I would prefer to be able to see it myself.

Liz

So do you…

Bernadette

I miss it.

Liz

Yeah. So, do you think you will ever get over that?

Bernadette

No.

Liz

So that would be a grief for you forever?

Bernadette

It's not grief in the… you know, if we had it on a scale, a catastrophe scale…it's not way up there, but it is…it is a sadness, an annoyance, because I do love the written word. And I…and I think if I could see the written word and it wasn't so bloody hard, you know, with enlarging and all that sort of stuff, even when, you know, I'm doing emails and things like that, you know, I wonder what I could achieve. I wonder the possibilities, the possibilities, and what, what difference I could make in the world.

(Music playing)

Bernadette

At my age now, you know, I would have to say I am the most disheartened I've ever been in my life. I think our treatment of First Nations people is appalling.

I…the game that is played by politicians and having grown up in a very staunch...you know…for example, the Labor Party that lies to the roots of who I am, what I grew up with, where I believe the seeds of social justice were perhaps sown. And also, you know, as kids, we you know, we we never watched much commercial TV. We watched things like Four Corners, Monday Conference, This Day tonight…

Liz

This Day Tonight. Yeah.

Bernadette

We watched everything political. We grew up in it. It's in our blood. And I think there's a lack of commitment to long term planning and policy. It's now… I think things run on election cycles. So, I think that… the tax system is unequal. I think that people are living in poverty, and they are. They absolutely are. Is a travesty in our country.

I think that the way we treat our migrants is appalling. You know, those sort of things, I find…like if I was wanting to write a letter to the editor at the moment, it would be an absolute rant. It would be 20 pages long. So, I'm not doing that. So, I think a lot of that goes back to our roots, I'm very big on that.

Liz

But do you think it was grassroots Labor Party stuff in a regional area or do you think it was broader than that?

Bernadette

Broader than that, because our mother, went… you know… was just not regional, she, you know, went more central, I suppose.

So, for me, I just think we've lost the plot…and we don't actually care. You know, there will always be people we need to take care of. That's just the truth of it. There will always be generational poverty. There will always be, you know, people with disability and they should never be compromised, I don't believe. But anyway, that's just me having a bit of a rant,

Although I have just given a big rant about how disheartened I am, I want to say that I think life… has so much…I think there is joy in the world. I think… and, you know, if we say climate change… and where I live, we've had a lot of rain. But the joy for me of that, is that my garden has gone berserk. And that's not taking away from the flooding that's happening…and that's not even reported.

But anyway, I wanted to say that people are amazing. To engage with people, to have a conversation…I'm doing a new job at the moment that I fell into.

Liz

What's that job Bern?

Bernadette

Which is a retail assistant. Now I was…every job I've ever done I've been terrified about because I like to do things perfectly. That's my big hook in life.

So, when I was asked to help a friend out in retail, I thought oh bloody hell, I could only think about everything possibly that I could not do. Anyway, I'm doing it. Working in retail with an EFTPOS machine and a till and price tags and all sorts of things.

But you know, you meet people, and you connect, and you have conversation and that's wonderful. And for me, that's the joy of life. That, that is the joy.

You know notwithstanding my gorgeous children and extended family, and the many loves that I have with family and friends and, you know…I think for me, even though I spend my time, much of my time enraged about what’s happening in the world and especially what's happening for people with disability at the moment, there's joy.

Liz

What riles you about people with disability at the moment? What's…what’s…what’s your…

Bernadette

Well, I am so utterly…you know, we've just had the budget and, you know, for many of the news bulletins, because I listen to the news, the first thing that came up was the blowout in the NDIS. And, you know, I feel outraged about that. I absolutely feel outraged about that. And I think it's unfair and I think if that's, you know, it, it is not the people with disability who are rorting the system.

Liz

So, it's the over inflation of prices and that service providers are now being given liberty to use.

Bernadette

It's the rorting of the system. And also, as a person, you know, I have a very modest NDIS plan, I believe very modest. And I was in review for three years before I went to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Now this is where the rorting is happening.

For me to get two pieces of assistive technology, it took two solicitors from the NDIS against me and the registrar from the tribunal, and I think there was another person… that's such a rort for such a small, you know….

Liz

Piece of…

Bernadette

And there's so much wrong with that system. The theory behind it is so fantastic and so… I'll use their words: reasonable and necessary.

Liz

Value for money…

Bernadette

But if, but if… in this, in the washout of this, because of, you know, it's blown out of its budget, if the washout is that the people who bear the brunt of the responsibility are the people with disability, that is outrageous. And that's what I'm fearful of.

Liz

Yeah, ditto.

On that point. Bernadette, I'd like to thank you so much for being part of this series of podcasts. It's been really enjoyable and interesting hearing about your life and what you do. Thank you.

Bernadette

Thank you.

(Music playing)

Liz

To find out more about Women with Disabilities Victoria go to: wdv.org.au