S10E3- Mother's Day – It Only Takes One Person

What did you do this Mother's Day? I started mine with breakfast in bed, which — let's be honest — is always a bit of a juggle, isn't it? With crumbs and cups of tea or coffee balancing. But the kids love it, don't they? They absolutely love doing that for you.

And then what did I do? I spent the morning decorating and the afternoon cooking, but that was all my choice. I wanted to get the painting done. I wanted it to feel like I was moving that on for us. And also, I wanted everyone round in the afternoon. I cooked a roast for the extended family — my mother-in-law, brother-in-law, nephews, sister, my dad, and us.

The house was full. It was a bit chaotic. It was a bit noisy. But do you know what? It was full of love. It was full of laughs, and it got me thinking about my mum.

I know Mother's Day can feel tricky for some. It's a complicated one, isn't it? For some people it's very joyful. For others, it's painful — for many reasons. For some, there might be a distance. For others, there's often a loss. But for many, it's a mix of all of it.

And I think sometimes when we focus on the everyday things — the lunches, the lifts, the routines, the "have you brushed your teeth?" kind of moments — that's what we think about. But today I found myself thinking about something different. Not the everyday.

The courage. And the idea in this podcast — that it only takes one person. One person to change the direction of a life. One person to make a different choice. One person to say, "This isn't how my story ends."

Because my mum, she was one of those people, and she was just 22. She immigrated to South Africa. Now, you've got to remember, at this time — the early seventies — this wasn't like today. People didn't go to Spain on holiday. There wasn't a phone in the household. I know that at that time there was one phone in my nana's entire street. So if a phone call came, somebody would run down — which would be costing money — to hang on at the other end, then run down to my nana in the hope that she was in, to get her to run to a neighbour's house.

It was a time when we didn't go to Spain on holiday, and my mum had a one-way ticket. A real leap of faith. She went with her then-new husband, my father, who was an electrician. They were part of building something — the foundations of a newly developing country — where they went to help put in the infrastructure: electricity, phone lines, all things like that.

They stayed with some people from work, made friends, and eventually built their own house. Now, this house was on a plot of land that they'd saved and saved for. The building of the house was slow, and my dad Ian used to have to work away quite a bit — he would go to a certain part of South Africa and spend the week there putting in the electric lines and so on.

But because he was an electrician and he was quite canny, they used to hook their electric up to the mains. And so if there was an inspection, they used to have to climb the telegraph pole and unhook it so they didn't get in trouble. Basically, he was stealing electricity because he could — he knew how — and because they were building, they didn't have a lot of money.

So if he was away, my mum used to have to do that. She used to have to run up the telegraph pole and unhook it so that they didn't get in trouble. Hilarious. There are lots and lots of stories of courage and bravery — and probably stupidity — that I have from those times.

Anyway, back to the story. They built their house, they created a life, and they built a community around them — many of which I am still in touch with. I have a godmother who actually works here in London now. I have family friends in South Africa who were my mum's best friends there: Ken and Sheila, people like that. And I also have family there — my father Ian is still there.

A few years later I came along, but within a couple of years the marriage broke down, and she had a decision to make: to stay or to come home. And she chose to come back to England.

A very courageous decision at the time — a single mum in the early seventies with a toddler and a suitcase full of my clothes.

Now, where my grandparents lived was a small working-class town. It was based around steel — we had steelworks and we had the margarine works in this little town. But it was the kind of town where everyone knows everyone. She came from a big family, well-known and rooted in the community. My granddad worked in the steelworks. I had aunties working in the margarine works, and I had my nana who used to run the pubs in the local area. If a pub wasn't doing very well, she would go in, turn it around, and move on to the next one. So you can imagine — everyone knew my family.

Now she came back to that. Where everyone knew her. She came back to that family that loved her, but she came back to a community that knew everything about her. So not only with a marriage that hadn't worked out — which wasn't her fault, by the way — but as a single parent. People talked. There was judgment, assumptions, a sense of "who did she think she was, going off like that?" And yet she knew that's what it would be like before she came back, and she came back anyway.

I often think now — what if she hadn't? What would my life look like if she'd chosen the easier option? Because staying would've been easier. It would've been less judgment, less explaining, less starting again. But it wouldn't have been happier.

She didn't choose the easy path. In fact, what she chose wasn't easy at all. She came back in debt, because she had to ask my granddad for the money to come home. At that time, the flights were about £2,000, I believe, which in today's money is about £20,000. And at that time, everyone got paid in cash. You got a little brown envelope on a Friday, and you didn't really have bank accounts. So he had to go to a local bank manager and say, "I need to get Leslie home. Can I get a bank loan?" It was courageous all round, really. So he'd taken out a bank loan — for the first time in his life — to bring his daughter and granddaughter home. And she paid him back every penny.

She came back rebuilding everything from scratch, but she also came back to family, to support, to love, to connection. And for me, that changed everything.

I grew up surrounded by people who knew me, who loved me, who heard me. And all of that came from one decision.

As much as those people judged, as much as those people talked about Leslie — the single mum — when my mum was out working to try and build a life for me and her, I would be with my nana. And we would go what we call "down the road" — that's like going into the little town. So we would walk into town, see my great-nan, and we would meet different people on the way. We would stop and have conversations all the time. What would be a 10-minute journey would probably take us half an hour, because everybody would stop and talk.

Now, what's really funny — and I do tell this story in my book right at the beginning, because I think community is everything when a child is growing up — is this: if I fell, if I did something wrong, the same people who talked were also there. If I fell, there would've been a crowd of adults around me. Whether they knew my name or not, they knew who I belonged to. So over my head I would've heard, "That's Margaret's granddaughter," or "That's Leslie's daughter," and I would've got help and support immediately. I would've been helped home. They would've found wherever I needed to go.

Now, don't think that if I'd done something wrong that wouldn't have happened too — that news would've got back to my grandparents quicker than I could have. But how amazing. It keeps you to account as a young person, but also — somebody has your back, even if you don't know their name.

And all of that community — the love, the life that I had growing up, with cousins where I could stretch my boundaries and work out how far I could go, work out who I was in comparison to them. The learning of all the songs and dances to Motown because of my Auntie Pat, who I adored.

Because when my mum came home — one of the things I haven't told you — most of her siblings were still at home, because she was the eldest. She'd left and they were still there. And so when we came back, I had to share a bed with my Auntie Pat. It was definitely that "there were ten in the bed and the little one said rollover" scenario. But I grew up with lots of love.

And do you know what? It only takes that one decision. All of that change for me, in that one decision my mum made. That one person choosing something different. One person who chose happiness over appearances. One person who chose long-term wellbeing over short-term ease. One person who said, "This might be harder, but it's going to be better — a better life."

And as a mum now, I look back and I don't just see what she did. I feel it. The courage that it must have taken — not just to go, but to come back. To walk back to a place where people had opinions, where she had to start again from scratch, but this time with a child. She chose that harder life because she knew she deserved a happier one.

And that's what I think we don't always talk about on days like Mother's Day. It's not just the everyday things — although we are thankful for them. It's about the decisions that shape a family.

The quiet bravery. The moments when someone breaks a pattern and changes everything for the people who come after them.

This is not an easy one. I know it's not an easy one. But for those who have the courage — it is amazing.

So today, if Mother's Day felt lovely for you, I'm so glad. If it felt heavy or complicated, or brought up feelings you weren't expecting — that's okay too. Because motherhood, and our relationships with our mums, aren't always simple.

But maybe, if you are listening to this today, you can also notice something deeper. The one person who made a different choice. Maybe the one person who changed your path, your life. Because for me, that was my mum, Leslie.

Thank you for listening today. If you want to tell me a story about your mum, or if you want to be a guest on the podcast, please reach out. I'd love to hear from you.

One of the reasons we've started this series is because we are getting feedback from our coaches and from the young people's lives that we're changing — families saying, "You've changed our life." And it's not because we are bragging. It's not because we are saying we are the ones who can change your life. But simply, we want to recognise those people in your life who make a change — that might change the way that you are. That might, with just one simple decision or one simple sentence — like Ruby's podcast last week from Jack — completely change someone's life.

So tell us. Email in to ashley@theresilienkid.co.uk and tell us about that one person.

Or, if you want to become a coach and have a franchise of your own of The Resilient Kid, then please get in touch. Because by God, we need more people who will see and hear young people.

Take care, everyone, and lots of love. 💛