



**Glenn Livingston, Ph.D.  
And Kate Kaufmann  
Do You Have Kids**

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**Dr. Glenn:** Well, hey, everybody. It's the very good Dr. Glenn Livingston at Never Binge Again, and I've got a different kind of interview for you today. Kate Kaufmann is one of my Toastmaster buddies. For those of you that don't know, I've been going to Toastmasters as we've been preparing to do higher level of publicity because despite my outward appearances, I'm kind of a nervous wreck when I get on stage, and Kate is not. She is fantastic. But Kate is also an author. Have a very interesting book which is called *Do You Have Kids?: Life When the Answer is No*. And I've heard her speak several times, I think that she's got a meaningful contribution. And I think that regardless of where you are with children in your life, whether you have them or you don't, that this is relevant to having a more meaningful dialogue with the people around you. This is relevant to having a better more well rounded adjustment to society as a whole as you are more present and overeating less. That's one of the things that you'll find yourself looking

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GLENN LIVINGSTON Ph.D.



at is, well, what contribution can I make to the world and how can I make the world a more well-rounded better-adjusted place? And for that reason, I have Kate here with me. Kate, how are you?

**Kate:** I'm lovely, thank you.

**Dr. Glenn:** Oh, it's really my treat. So how did this book come about?

**Kate:** Well, actually, it came about because of marginalization. And I was reflecting on all the different ways that were seen as not being okay, whether it'd be appearance or education or how much we earn, whether or not we have partners, what they're like, and whether or not we have children. And I'm one of the five or six out of every woman over 40 who doesn't have kids.

I realized that I didn't know very many people like me that didn't have kids. I lived in a rural area and it seemed that everyone there had children. So I started asking questions, started noticing if people had kids or not, and then I had a friend, a new friend. And she and I were walking along a beach and I asked her and she did not, and so we started talking about it more regularly. And then we would invite people to come to conversations, casual conversations, women who didn't have children, and I found that it was very rare that women spoke much of at all about it. And so I thought, this is good for me, but I suspect it would be good for a whole variety, a whole host of other people. And I can talk more about how that is iterated over the time I've been working on my project.

So I started interviewing women and gathering stories and ended up weaving them into a book that includes my story and a growing body of



research on what we found about the not very often studied population of people who don't have children.

**Dr. Glenn:** I love that. I think it's a really good mission and I'm just curious, how come just women?

**Kate:** I love that question. I pondered that for quite a long time and I realized that, well, first of all, I'm one of four girls so I know the domain of women much better than I know the domain of men, and I realize the perspective of women is quite a bit different than the perspective of men. And at the time, I discovered a wonderful book called "Nobody's Mother". It's an anthology put together by a woman in Victoria, B.C., and I noticed that a few years later, another editor who was a male put together an anthology called "Nobody's Father". And that was a light bulb for me that said, "My work is with women and I hope that there will be a man that will come forward or multiple men that will come forward and say, hey, this is a pretty nice model for a book. I think I want to write one of those for men." Glenn, maybe you?

**Dr. Glenn:** I've got no children either, but 95 percent of my audience is female. And most of them are over 40, so you're speaking to the right crowd, but just as you were speaking, I was thinking, "Hey, I don't have kids." So okay, tell me what you learned. I know that there are all sorts of interesting insights and there are ways that you speak about the issue now that you had no idea you are going to talk about 5 or 10 years ago, so tell me.

**Kate:** That was one of the ways I decided how to organize my project and I consider it a project, and the project is to seed conversations, and the book that's going to be published is one route to having those conversations. But I looked at the full lifecycle and what are the



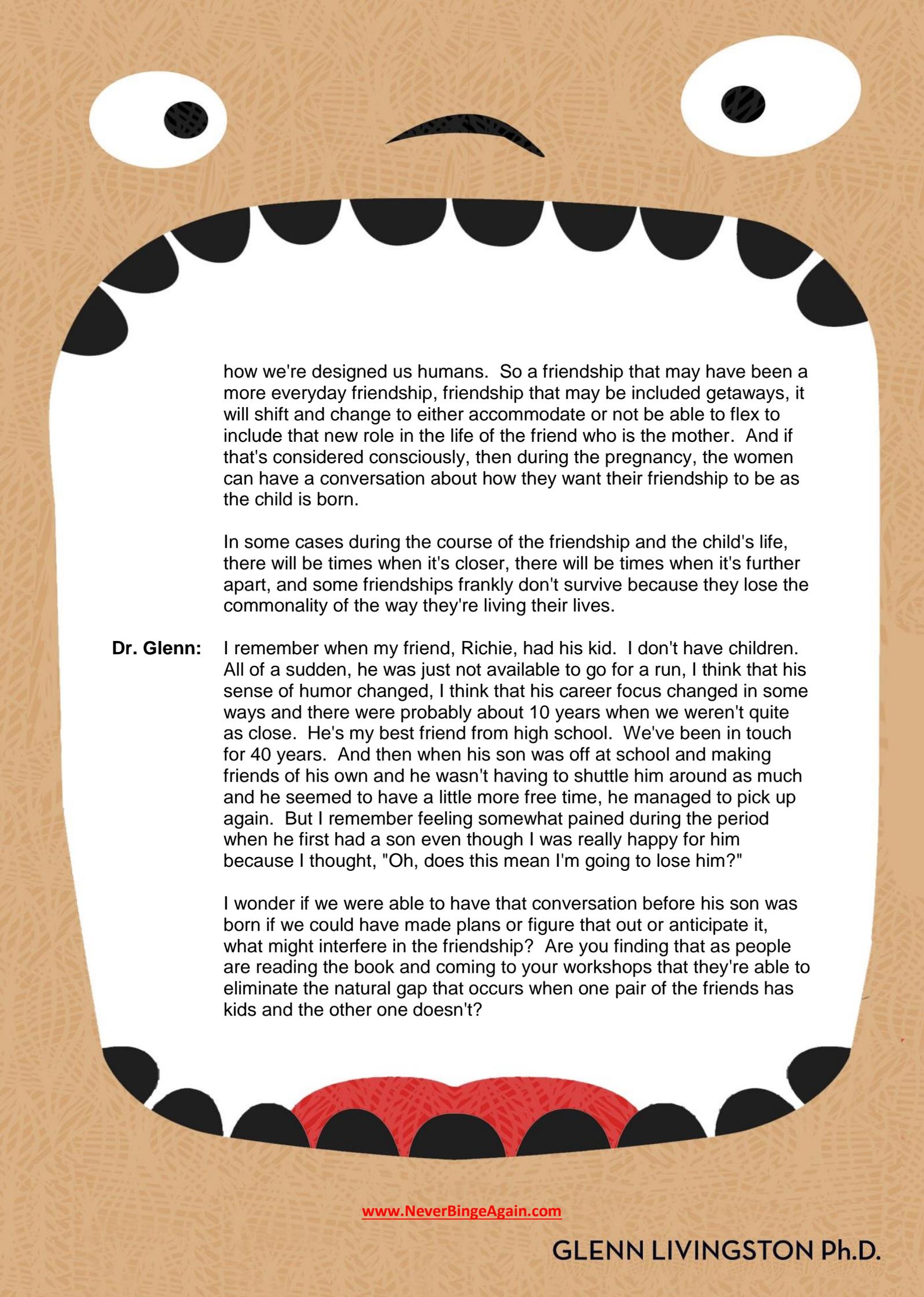
impacts on the world of work? What are the impacts on friendships? What are the impacts on things like where we live and spirituality and end of life planning and what we'll leave behind when we die? Because those are all areas that identity plays a huge role, and a huge part of identity is how we put together our immediate inner circle.

I should mention that in my work, I ended up interviewing women who knew they weren't going to have children for whatever reason and they ranged in age from their 20s to their 90s. And I chose to try to cut a broad section because I know things have shifted, but I was also looking for commonalities.

So for example, in the world of friendship, that one seems to be a charge point for both women who have children and those who don't because when children are born, they enter into friendships and the friendship necessarily needs to morph and shift. And so we have an opportunity to make some conscious decisions as well as knowing that the different ways that the friendships can shift, we can anticipate that and make some conscious choices. And one of my favorite things to throw out in the world of friendship and children is that I have a number of friends who are now having grandchildren, and I was totally blindsided by the fact that the same issues would come up when grandchildren started to be born.

**Dr. Glenn:** So in what way does a friendship morph when children are born? You're talking about children being born to the mothers and then the mothers having a different type of friendship because they have kids? Could you expand on that a little bit?

**Kate:** Absolutely. Yes, the moment the child is born, the mother appropriately is focused on the care and wellbeing of that child. That's

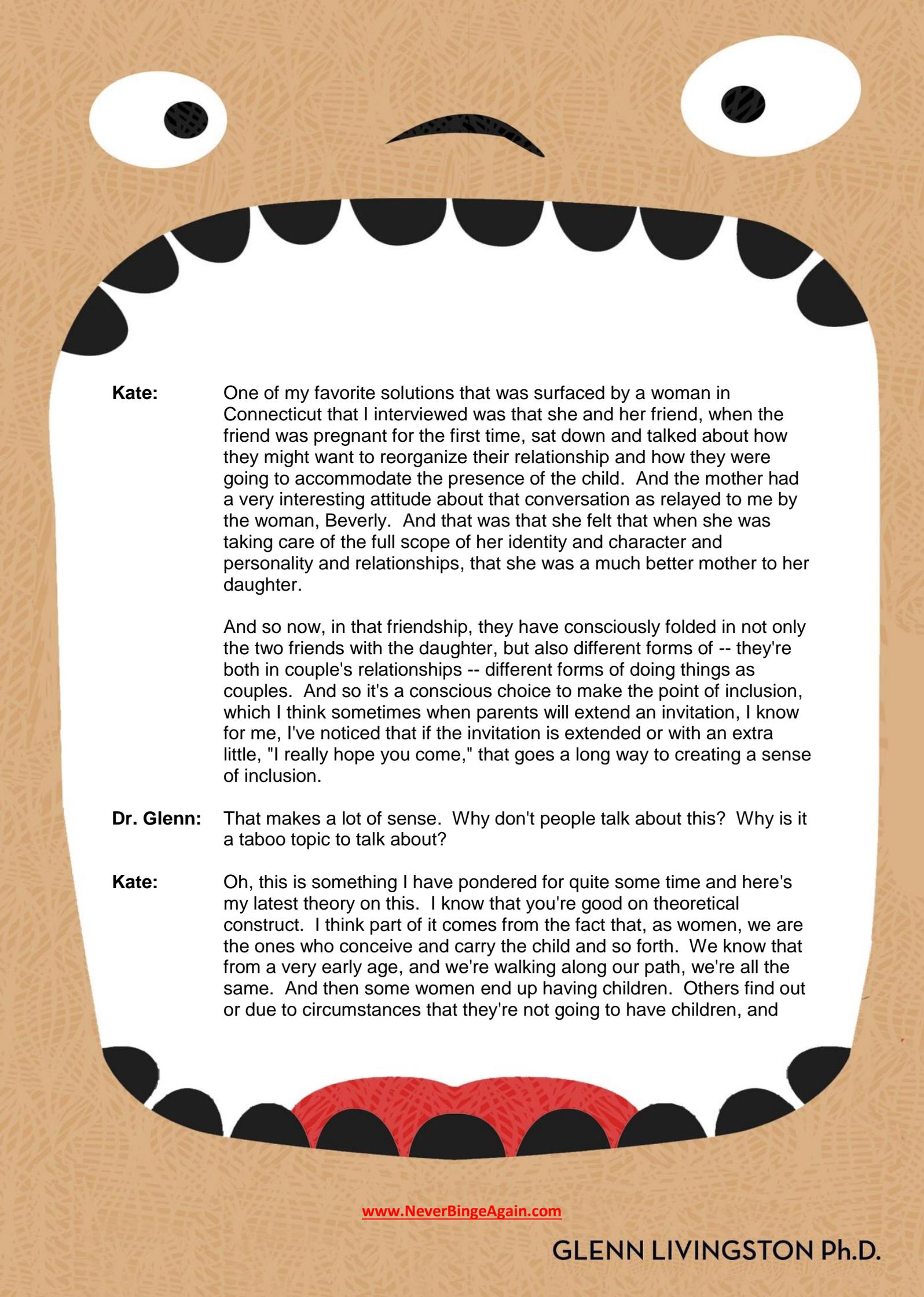


how we're designed us humans. So a friendship that may have been a more everyday friendship, friendship that may be included getaways, it will shift and change to either accommodate or not be able to flex to include that new role in the life of the friend who is the mother. And if that's considered consciously, then during the pregnancy, the women can have a conversation about how they want their friendship to be as the child is born.

In some cases during the course of the friendship and the child's life, there will be times when it's closer, there will be times when it's further apart, and some friendships frankly don't survive because they lose the commonality of the way they're living their lives.

**Dr. Glenn:** I remember when my friend, Richie, had his kid. I don't have children. All of a sudden, he was just not available to go for a run, I think that his sense of humor changed, I think that his career focus changed in some ways and there were probably about 10 years when we weren't quite as close. He's my best friend from high school. We've been in touch for 40 years. And then when his son was off at school and making friends of his own and he wasn't having to shuttle him around as much and he seemed to have a little more free time, he managed to pick up again. But I remember feeling somewhat pained during the period when he first had a son even though I was really happy for him because I thought, "Oh, does this mean I'm going to lose him?"

I wonder if we were able to have that conversation before his son was born if we could have made plans or figure that out or anticipate it, what might interfere in the friendship? Are you finding that as people are reading the book and coming to your workshops that they're able to eliminate the natural gap that occurs when one pair of the friends has kids and the other one doesn't?



**Kate:**

One of my favorite solutions that was surfaced by a woman in Connecticut that I interviewed was that she and her friend, when the friend was pregnant for the first time, sat down and talked about how they might want to reorganize their relationship and how they were going to accommodate the presence of the child. And the mother had a very interesting attitude about that conversation as relayed to me by the woman, Beverly. And that was that she felt that when she was taking care of the full scope of her identity and character and personality and relationships, that she was a much better mother to her daughter.

And so now, in that friendship, they have consciously folded in not only the two friends with the daughter, but also different forms of -- they're both in couple's relationships -- different forms of doing things as couples. And so it's a conscious choice to make the point of inclusion, which I think sometimes when parents will extend an invitation, I know for me, I've noticed that if the invitation is extended or with an extra little, "I really hope you come," that goes a long way to creating a sense of inclusion.

**Dr. Glenn:** That makes a lot of sense. Why don't people talk about this? Why is it a taboo topic to talk about?

**Kate:**

Oh, this is something I have pondered for quite some time and here's my latest theory on this. I know that you're good on theoretical construct. I think part of it comes from the fact that, as women, we are the ones who conceive and carry the child and so forth. We know that from a very early age, and we're walking along our path, we're all the same. And then some women end up having children. Others find out or due to circumstances that they're not going to have children, and



others choose not to have children. And when that nexus of those three choices occur, they're such different outcomes that I think that sets up a distance that unless there is a very sensitive, open, curious, accepting exploration, it goes silent. And I think it goes silent for quite some time, and then overtime, there's a chance to bring it together because after all, we're all leading our lives and there's no need for either pity or judgment or exclusion.

**Dr. Glenn:** But do you think that women feel less than if they haven't had a child? I don't think that they should feel less than and I think if it's true that we need to eradicate that, but do you think that they do?

**Kate:** I think that there's huge potential for that and I would point to, you watch television? How many ads include a happy family running around and doing things with the little boy and the little girl and the mommy and the daddy, right? I mean, we live in a pro-natal society. It makes sense from a continuation of the species.

**Dr. Glenn:** I remember when I was in my 30s, people talking to me and like, I almost felt like they're telling me I was not doing my job. "You're supposed to make some people, Glenn. You got to make a couple of people."

**Kate:** Yes.

**Dr. Glenn:** Yeah. You said that this has an impact on spirituality, what did you mean by that?

**Kate:** I looked at different religions and I talked to women from a variety of different religions and I would tell you, this is the last topic that I wrote about because it was very difficult to get to people who were willing to



ponder their religious backgrounds, their spiritual approach to the world, and their belief systems because I think it's so deeply personal. And you were talking about why we might feel less than is I don't know of a world's religion that doesn't espouse having more humans to become members of that religion.

I remember my husband and I tried to have children and it didn't work and I remember going back to church. I had been active in the church when I was a kid and it was my big social group when I was a teenager. And when I was trying to get pregnant, I went back to the church with the ideas like, "Hey, maybe that would give me a little pump up and potential having things come out well." And I remember feeling very, very different. And I listened closely to the words that were said and I found that it wasn't as supportive as I would have hoped.

In the women that I spoke with, that had some resonance. And yet, most every woman that I spoke with had a spiritual life that included a broader understanding of meaning and purpose, whether it'd be through yoga or meditation or service.

**Dr. Glenn:** I keep talking about my own experience 'cause that's what I have to relate to, but I'm understanding what you're saying because I've lived an unusual life. I don't have kids and I've also never commuted. I always work for myself and I've always worked from. And so I've had a lot of time. And naturally, that time gravitates towards introspection and reading and journaling and developing yoga practice and hiking and having the luxury of thinking and developing myself in that way to find meaning and purpose in the world.



That's really interesting that the organized religion would facilitate us to think that we are not really as much a part of things if we're not procreating when really what happens is that there's more time to develop your spirituality and make a contribution. Children are one contribution to the world. I think children can be a wonderful contribution and I love children. And I don't know if you know that I used to be a child and family psychologist with a large practice on Long Island.

**Kate:** No, I wasn't aware of that, Glenn.

**Dr. Glenn:** Oh, yeah. I saw hundreds of couples and used to see people after an affair, and then the aftermath of the affair typically included the kid so I would work with the kids. I once heard William Durkheim interviewed. He's a famous historian, sociologist and he said that historically, the societies that won are the ones that were the most populous. That there are an awful lot of factories that went into the geography and the military strategy and everything like that, but the real determining factor was the population of the country. And so it would make sense that all of our cultural mythology would surround procreation, that we have to build up the tribe because we were facing these other tribes that might have more people than us and so there were some kind of a survival advantage to having kids. And I wonder if that's not part of the underlying discomfort that we have like you and I might feel like we're not doing our jobs by not having kids.

**Kate:** You have hit on a number of absolutely key points, and I'm sitting here trying to decide, do I want to throw out some statistics or do I -- I think I actually first want to go into what you're talking about gets to the gist of what is the perspective that we take? And when I think about how we can look at our places in the world regardless of whether we have kids



or not, earn degrees or not or make money or not, all of those perspectives are different. They are not positive or negative.

When it comes to kids, I like to think about the perspective of both scope and depth. Like when I think about scope, I picture when you have kids, you have a microscope. Maybe it's a telescope, I don't know, that where you have the child or the children that have your attention and you have the constellations of their friendships. And when you don't have the children, you can be more like a drone that goes up and circles around and looks at everything and drops in and drops back out and comes back up.

And then from a depth perspective, we can look at it as people sometimes are fond of saying, they're inch deep and a mile wide. I say that sometimes about myself, but then I realize no, I'm much more than an inch deep, but I'd like to think of myself as a mile wide. And that goes into some of the statistical stuff that I was just mentioning, is I thought, "Okay, when you care for kids, that takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of money." These are such rough calculations. But I found a statistic through the Pew Research Center that said, "A parent dedicates on average a little over 20,000 hours to caring for a child from birth until age 18." And so then doing some very clever math, which is not my strong suit, I determined that not having them means that technically or presumptively, we, without them would have 20,000 hours available to us that we're doing something else with, right?

**Dr. Glenn:** Right. Right.

**Kate:** And 20,000 hours is 10 years' worth of full-time work. So I'm not saying that we're running around being slothful or hedonistic. Well, that certainly is one of the stereotypes that attach to us, but that I think it's



kind of a cool retrospective as well as a prospective look at how do I spend my time when I see my friends who are running around at PTA meetings and sports activities and so forth? What am I doing with that time because that's my opportunity to create a purposeful intentional identity in the world to pursue those things that matter to me? Not that parents don't because they absolutely do. I just think there's a little more capacity there.

**Dr. Glenn:** And you've heard the statistic that it takes 10,000 hours to master anything?

**Kate:** Yes, I have.

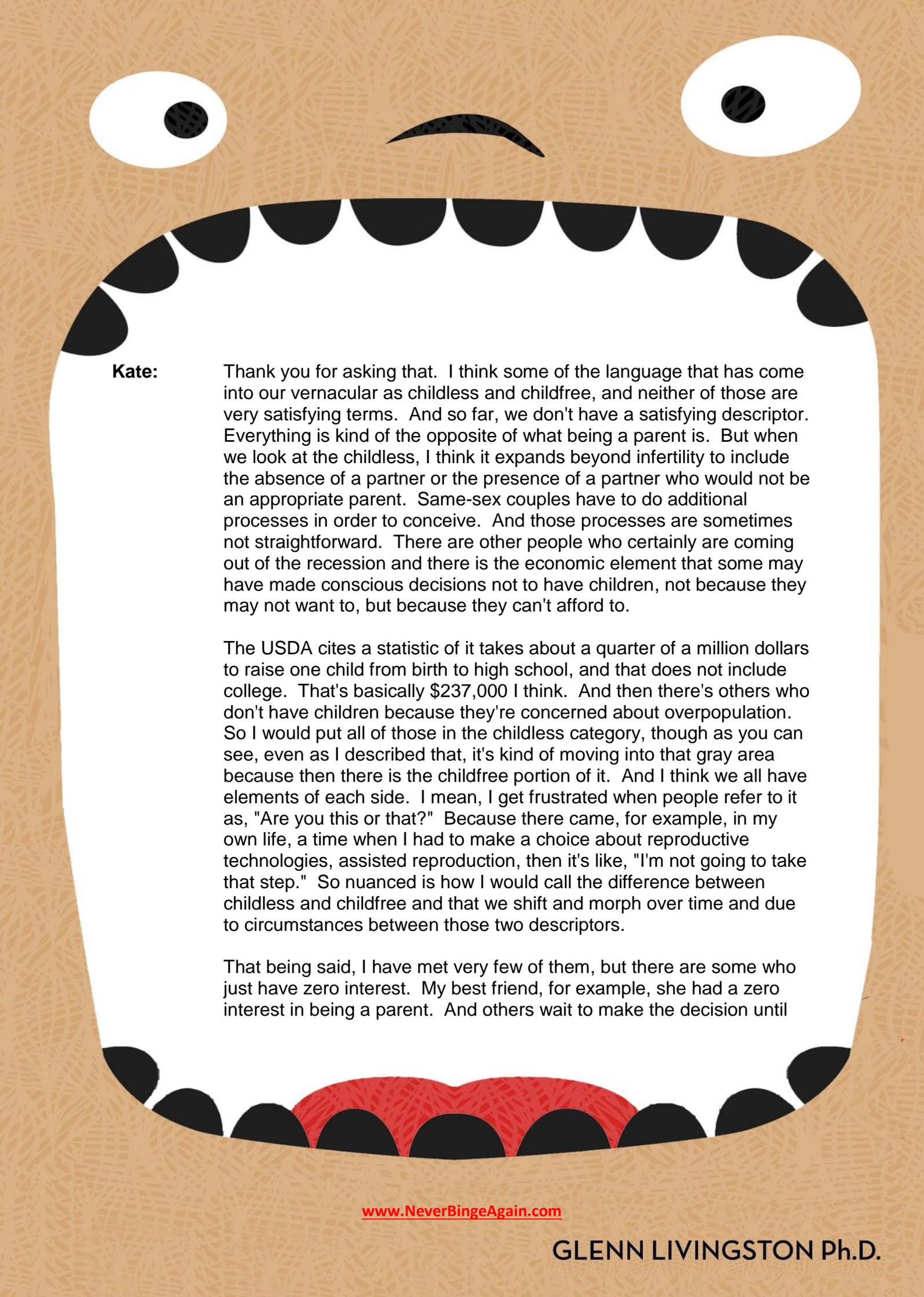
**Dr. Glenn:** If you want to become a violinist, you need 10,000 hours. So if you don't have kids, you can master violin and piano.

**Kate:** Right. So technically, we should be able to just spit out those two things that we've both been able to master. I can't. That causes an invitation for more reflection on my part. Can you?

**Dr. Glenn:** It would be psychology and business for me.

**Kate:** Yeah, there you go.

**Dr. Glenn:** That's where my 20,000 hours went. Oh, that is so interesting. Under what circumstances do people not have kids? When I heard you speak last time, you had, remember, a very interesting categories and I don't know if people were aware of all the different reasons that children might not come into the fray.



**Kate:**

Thank you for asking that. I think some of the language that has come into our vernacular as childless and childfree, and neither of those are very satisfying terms. And so far, we don't have a satisfying descriptor. Everything is kind of the opposite of what being a parent is. But when we look at the childless, I think it expands beyond infertility to include the absence of a partner or the presence of a partner who would not be an appropriate parent. Same-sex couples have to do additional processes in order to conceive. And those processes are sometimes not straightforward. There are other people who certainly are coming out of the recession and there is the economic element that some may have made conscious decisions not to have children, not because they may not want to, but because they can't afford to.

The USDA cites a statistic of it takes about a quarter of a million dollars to raise one child from birth to high school, and that does not include college. That's basically \$237,000 I think. And then there's others who don't have children because they're concerned about overpopulation. So I would put all of those in the childless category, though as you can see, even as I described that, it's kind of moving into that gray area because then there is the childfree portion of it. And I think we all have elements of each side. I mean, I get frustrated when people refer to it as, "Are you this or that?" Because there came, for example, in my own life, a time when I had to make a choice about reproductive technologies, assisted reproduction, then it's like, "I'm not going to take that step." So nuanced is how I would call the difference between childless and childfree and that we shift and morph over time and due to circumstances between those two descriptors.

That being said, I have met very few of them, but there are some who just have zero interest. My best friend, for example, she had a zero interest in being a parent. And others wait to make the decision until



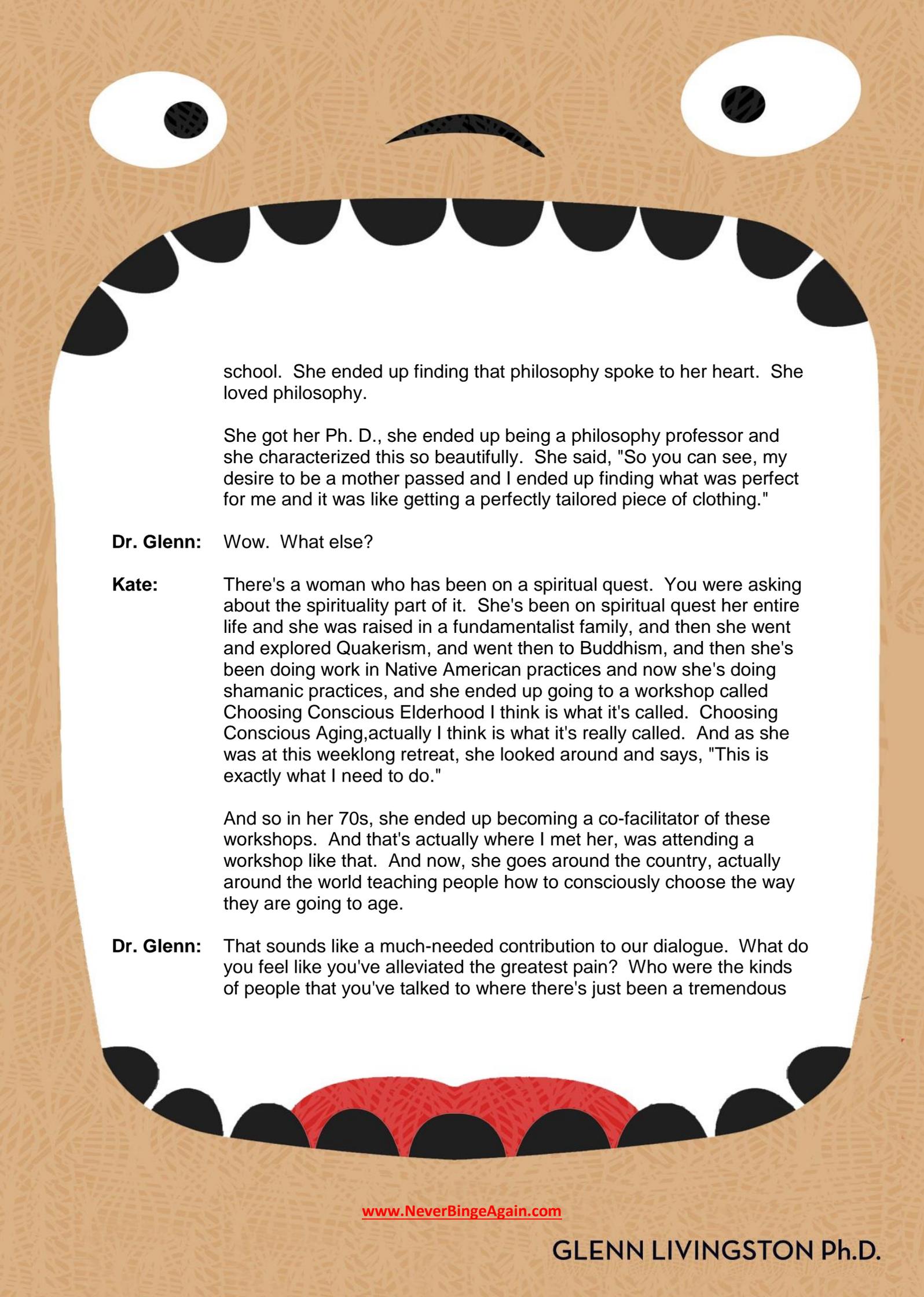
biology has a way of bringing us into menopause and so then nature makes the decision for us. And others choose to dedicate their lives and their talents and their treasures to other parts of life and other parts of identity.

So it's a full spectrum. And again, going back to one of your earlier questions, that's what makes it so hard to talk about. And if we can approach the topic with curiosity and genuine interest and care, I think there's a huge potential. I have been so excited about being able to bring the topic into relationships now just by when I say what I'm working on. I mentioned I was one of four girls. I'm actually the eldest and my three younger sisters each have two children apiece, I have had the most remarkable conversations with each of them as a result of just opening up the topic because I never had a way in to have those conversations.

**Dr. Glenn:** What are some of the other more interesting conversation that you've had as a result of the work that you've done?

**Kate:** I love speaking with the older women. The women in their 70s, 80s, and 90s because many of them are part of the silent generation that didn't speak about any of this ever.

A woman who comes immediately to mind is a woman in her 80s who's a retired philosophy professor and she was sure she was going to have kids, she married in her 20s, her husband was a little bit older and he died when they were in the process of trying to get pregnant. And he had a small business and she ended up taking over the business, but also her younger brother was one who got to go to college. And her younger brother said, "Look, you're getting sick from working in this business, why don't you go to school?" And so she ended up going to



school. She ended up finding that philosophy spoke to her heart. She loved philosophy.

She got her Ph. D., she ended up being a philosophy professor and she characterized this so beautifully. She said, "So you can see, my desire to be a mother passed and I ended up finding what was perfect for me and it was like getting a perfectly tailored piece of clothing."

**Dr. Glenn:** Wow. What else?

**Kate:** There's a woman who has been on a spiritual quest. You were asking about the spirituality part of it. She's been on spiritual quest her entire life and she was raised in a fundamentalist family, and then she went and explored Quakerism, and went then to Buddhism, and then she's been doing work in Native American practices and now she's doing shamanic practices, and she ended up going to a workshop called Choosing Conscious Elderhood I think is what it's called. Choosing Conscious Aging, actually I think is what it's really called. And as she was at this weeklong retreat, she looked around and says, "This is exactly what I need to do."

And so in her 70s, she ended up becoming a co-facilitator of these workshops. And that's actually where I met her, was attending a workshop like that. And now, she goes around the country, actually around the world teaching people how to consciously choose the way they are going to age.

**Dr. Glenn:** That sounds like a much-needed contribution to our dialogue. What do you feel like you've alleviated the greatest pain? Who were the kinds of people that you've talked to where there's just been a tremendous



insight and people who've felt like they were disenfranchised suddenly feeling like they had a place in the world?

**Kate:** Oh, Glenn, I'm so glad you asked that question. I'm finding myself getting a little emotional because I was on a panel that was for AARP and the local community college. It was really interesting. It was about women and how we thrive. And I told a bit of my story on the panel. And afterwards, one of the coordinators came up to me and said, "There's a woman at the top of the auditorium who really wants to speak with you, but she doesn't want to come down to the floor here." And I said, "Please, let her know I will be there as soon as I can if she can wait for a few moments."

And so I talked to the people who were in front with me, and then after not so long, I went up to her and she said, "Thank you so much for bringing this out in the open. I don't have a partner, I'm in my early 40s, I don't think I will, I can't picture what my life will be like for the next 30 years and you have helped me understand some different ways that it might look." And I ended up having coffee with her and we talked for a really long time. And to make it so that she didn't feel so alone and that she was okay also made me feel like I was more okay. And so I think the answer is it's opening doors that people can walk through and discover that they're not alone.

**Dr. Glenn:** Kate, if people want more from you, do you facilitate discussion groups? Do you offer some type of a coaching relationship? If someone is trying to find their place in the world without children, how do they get help from you?

**Kate:** I host small group discussions, and so if someone has some people they want to get together with, I can facilitate those discussions. I've



never done one over Skype, but I imagine that that would be a possible way to do that as well.

**Dr. Glenn:** Zoom is easier, but yeah.

**Kate:** Okay. I have interactions on email and through my website. I will always talk to people who have needs and interests. Also, once this book is out and finding its way in the world, I have on my future agenda to put together retreats.

**Dr. Glenn:** So the best thing for people to do would be to get in contact with you at [KateKaufmann.com](http://KateKaufmann.com)? [K-A-U-F--MA-N-N.com](http://K-A-U-F--MA-N-N.com)?

**Kate:** Yes.

**Dr. Glenn:** And do you have an email list or something you'd like to do when they get there so they can keep up to date?

**Kate:** Yes, absolutely.

**Dr. Glenn:** I want to encourage you all to do that. I know Kate personally. She is someone who's definitely coming from the heart. She is trying to make a difference while she makes a living, and I trust her. I trust her implicitly, so I'd really encourage you all to do that. Kate, is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't ask?

**Kate:** You know what we didn't talk about is sources of community.

**Dr. Glenn:** Okay.



**Kate:** I threw in that ratio, it's like we're one of every five or six women. And I mentioned earlier that I knew very many people that didn't have children, but as I started thinking about it and looking around it and including that in my awareness, I ended up making a list of some acquaintances. I made a conscious decision to deepen those friendships. And I did that by asking some questions. Sometimes people would engage with the questions. So I encourage people to do that, but I also encourage you to go easy on yourself as well as on the people that you're talking to and just notice if people spark to the conversation or not. And because we're talking about the experience of not having an experience, it takes a little while for your mind to wrap itself around that concept and that identity.

And I have found that people have circled back to me years later to say, "You know, you talked to me about that a long time ago and I see some things that I want to talk about. Are you comfortable doing that?" And it's been wonderful. It's just been great.

**Dr. Glenn:** I love it. Yeah, it's amazing how connecting with other people, developing a little bit of a community for yourself with those who have similar issues and haven't been talking about it. It's amazing what a relief that can bring.

**Kate:** May I add one more thing, Glenn?

**Dr. Glenn:** Whatever you like.

**Kate:** I think because you talked about the different routes that we take to either become parents or not, it's really important to be extra sensitive to self-care. I know I was in social situations when I was trying to have kids that things would come up or baby showers, it's like ahhh. And I



spent a lot of time running to the ladies room to just take some breaths and get my composure back. We all can sense when there may be some other agendas going on. I think it's just really be extra careful to take care of yourself and honor your capacity in that given moment, and life unfolds in different ways and we change in different ways.

**Dr. Glenn:** Well, that sounds like good advice to me. Kate, is there anything else?

**Kate:** That's it, thank you.

**Dr. Glenn:** So that said, KateKaufmann.com. Again, K-A-T-E-K-A-U-F-M-A-N-N, two Ns, .com. KateKaufmann.com. Kate, thank you.

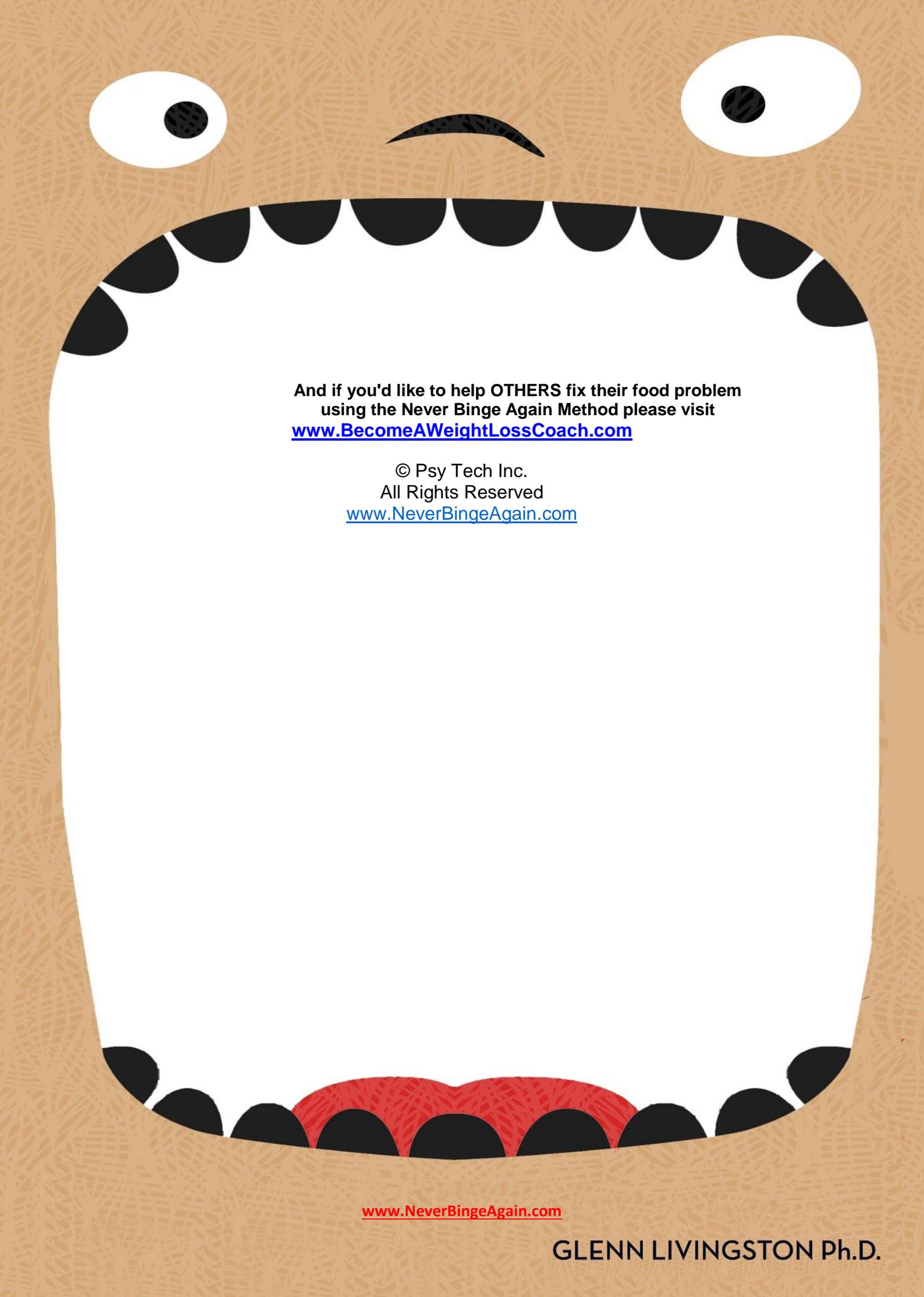
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