

Jean Reveals All Edited by Jean 170623 with Sally Stanley-Jones

Interviewer: Onwards and forwards. Jean, welcome. Thank you. Jean, can you tell us you are Jean Macdonald.

Jean: That's right.

Interviewer: And you are the author of,, I don't want to say this on television, but love Sex and the Midlife Woman

Jean: You just did.

Interviewer: I know! And Empowering Intimate Relationships with foreword by Raymond Aaron. Who is a New York top 10 bestselling author.

Jean: Yeah.

Interviewer: We're just gonna talk about your life and how you come to be in Disdbury,, and a little bit about the Women's Equality Party.. And so on, right?

Jean: Yeah.

Interviewer: So let's start from the beginning.

Why did you write your book?

Jean: Well, it was my intention to write a book for some time about sex, particularly sex and love for older people. Because if you've got children, you'll know that they don't believe that their parents still do it.

Audience: They don't.

Jean: And it's a very embarrassing topic for them.

Audience: Yeah.

Jean: So, having been in that age group, I know there's so much rubbish talked and so much suppression of sex. But sex without Love is pretty limiting. So Love and Sex, and I myself believe of the two, the most important word is love. Sex, that's just part of it.

Interviewer: Yes. Well, I agree.

Jean: So it was my intent to write a book on this topic, but in the course of doing that, I became aware of midlife women.

Interviewer: Now that's a concept. Who are they?

Jean: Well, the word says it. The word isn't mine. I didn't invent it. The term comes from Marianne Williamson. Who here has heard of her?

Interviewer: Marianne Williams?

Jean: She's an American, a very upfront philosopher and very well known feminist, but she's a mellow feminist.

She wrote a book in about 2005 called the Age of Miracles. About the new midlife. And it applies to men as well because in the old days we died at 50-60, so by the time we completed having our children and bringing 'em up, we were just sitting by the fire waiting to die. Now we've got as long to live again, if we keep ourselves healthy.

So this is a great opportunity and that's what she calls midlife. So the midlife woman, I believe, has a great opportunity and you see a lot of it already, a lot of really powerful women are doing great work already in our society, but there's so many more hiding in the shadows, afraid to come out. And I think the big job is to help more of them come out so we can change our society so it changes for better.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for that. So I want to just talk a little bit about what you are really passionate about. And I said, talk about the Women's Party Party now? Why are you a big supporter?

Jean: I just came across it and my initial thing was to say it sounds very interesting, but I'll hold back from involving myself in it until I know what is the flavor of it.

Yeah. Because if it was a bunch of stride feminists, then I wouldn't want to know. So I went to the annual conference. Which was in Manchester, the first one that they had, about three years ago now. And I was very impressed to see a whole range of both ages and social backgrounds. Women who were really committed to trying to make things better for women.

And then the other thing I learned was what a rough time so many women had and how they are disadvantaged. and how tough the system is on them. I mean, the Manchester branch is doing a conference on Women's journey through the penal system. And they I tell you that women get much tougher sentences than men and much worse treatment just because they're women.

All this stuff has been buried. They say all women have equality and so forth. Well, technically that might be the case on paper, but in real life, that ...

Interviewer: isn't the case. Yeah, well, equal pay will be 50 years away.

Jean: How often is that abused or not?

Interviewer: Oh, extremely. I don't want to get into my day job, but just stick on the the Women's Equality Party.

Jean: Yes.

Interviewer: Can I ask you, do you see any relevance? Because really it's a great party, but the policies are unsustainable and they should really, shouldn't they really be part of a mainstream party because they still haven't got anybody nominated, elected in parliament? And I just wondered what your own view was.

It is a bit like the Green Party, great policies, but shouldn't they form part of a mainstream party? What's the attraction?

Jean: Well, I'm afraid it is that women need to speak up themselves because if you go to any main parties and ask them what their view on women's issues are, they all say, oh yes, they are all for women.

But what are they doing? If you look on the women's equality website, what they have achieved in the last two to three years is significant, particularly in areas like abortion and things like that. Abortion is still a criminal act. I didn't know.

Interviewer: No, but as a first of my point is that these points are great, but where is the impact? The work is good, but I don't see anybody in parliament.

Jean: I agree. I agree. Well, my view is that as a pressure group, they can achieve much more because they use this phrase non-partisan. I'm not sure whether that's classic, but they'll say they will work with any MP who is prepared to work with them, from any party.

And so they're able to go along to people and say, okay, what are you doing about this? Rather than have to say, well, our side, when we get in, we'll do this, that and the other. Old style politics has not served women well,

Interviewer: No, no it hasn't. Um, now Jean, I need to ask you some personal questions and I hope you can cope.

Jean: Okay, good.

Interviewer: Um, so I want to talk about gender, and your journey within gender? Yes. Um, were you always Jean?

Jean: Oh, no, no, no. Jean only came along when I was in my early forties.

Interviewer: Oh. Right Now, I don't want to guess about the midlife woman. Uh, but when Jean came along, were you ready for Jean? And so who were you before you were Jean?

Jean: I was John.

Interviewer: Um, and because you've got children and you've got a partner. Mm-hmm. So why did you become Jean?

Jean: Well it wasn't a choice. It was like this person was banging on a door to be let in.

As a child. I had a great interest in girls and women, their behavior, their clothes, all this kind of thing. Um, much to my embarrassment.

Because in those days it was very much, boys were boys and girls were girls, and they shouldn't mix. And particularly, boys should not interest themselves in anything to do with women until puberty comes along. And then, when that arrived I got into just living the normal life and I was expected to, and I played it all out. By the time I was reaching my forties, I'd done most things that I would expect to do in the male life.

And this knocking is coming on my door and a woman came through the door, and once she got into my life, it was very difficult to get her out.

It was like I was taken over by this girl, right? I make it sound a bit dramatic, but it was like that really. And I used to think, what the hell are you doing?

But she was very persistent. But we achieved a balance. I mean, eventually it got to the point where the the masculine and feminine came back into balance. But during a 10 year period, she really took over.

Interviewer: Right. What did you do when she took over? What do you mean?

Jean: Well, I lived as her. I'm so fortunate to live in Manchester with this wonderful gay community, which was so open and provided the facilities for I and other people of similar persuasion to express ourselves. Um, I think one day the history should be written about Manchester and its contribution in this gender thing because it's not yet really recognized, at that time anyway..

I just lived for the time that I could be Jean, the rest of the time I was like Worsel Gummidge. A scarecrow dressed in old unwanted masculine clothes and so forth. So that's what I mean about balance. I now live a life both as a woman and as a man. And in both of them I'm quite happy and in both of them I can put on a respectable show.

So, um, and I'm very happy like that. I've never really been interested in what I call going from one end of the Seesaw to the other because I know so many people who thought once I get to the other end of the Seesaw by going through a sex change and all the rest of it, my life will be perfect. Then it's they find it's not what they thought it was going to be.

Then they've got a disappointment. And also the fact that they're now committed at that other end. They've changed their birth certificate and passport and it's difficult to go back. I'd seen enough disappointment in that area and it just didn't ever appeal to me either. So I've very much gone with the flow, the things that are inside me, have just pulled me forward.

Yeah. and got to a point now where I feel quite content.

Interviewer: Well. Well, thank you for sharing that. I've got loads of questions now as you can imagine. But firstly, how did your family react when Jean took over?

Jean: Well, interestingly enough, my wife was aware in the early stages. In fact, she was always quite interested in how I would look as a woman.

There were earlier occasions when she put makeup on me just to see what I would look like, but I wasn't very interested at the time.

Interviewer: So were you quite open with her about it when it happened?

Jean: Yeah. Well, let, let's say this is when Jean did come along, she was quite open to that. It never really got to the point where I did it in public with her.

I waited till our children were around 18 before I told them. They were shrewd enough to know already, I think. At that point I said, right, well, I've done my job, I hope to the best of my ability as a father. But now I'm going to go and live my own life. They didn't totally accept that but got used to it over time.

Interviewer: Now they pay lip service to it but that's quite a big if my father, who's a big African guy, turned around and said I'm Nicola, not Nicodemus. I'd be like, what the hell?

Jean: When they questioned my decision, I said to them 'You want to have a traditional father with a pipe and slippers?' *Laughter*

Jean: 'I'm sorry I am not able to deliver that and I don't want to.'

But it was never that much of a confrontation. They've both been out with Jean, you know, they've both gone along. Then other times they're a bit more hostile. But they both live their own lives in different parts of the world now.

Um, we have very little to do with them, so I don't know what they think.

Interviewer: You never discuss it?

Jean: No.

Interviewer: Your wife is obviously very understanding. You've been married, so 50 years?

Jean: No, I've been married for more than 50 years.

Interviewer: Yeah. I, well, I don't like to ask people about age and numbers.

Jean: Since you asked that. Yeah. so during that time, we've had a marvellous life, wonderful life. We've done so many great things together and we've been partners in all our ventures.

I mean, there were times when she was a little bit off, of course, as you can understand the the classic husband and wife thing, there is an element of feeling of an intruder is coming in here and a degree of, well, it can be jealousy or it can be 'Are you taking over my role?'

So despite that she was positive for most of the time. We had a lot of other things going on. We had very busy lives.

Interviewer: Yeah.. Gosh, uh, uh, I've lost my train of thought now. One of the things I wanted just to ask you about how you were received in the workplace, for example, as Jean.

Jean: Well, I never really had to do that because my wife and I started a company, which had become successful enough for us to retire from regular daily work when we were both in our early forties. Right. So our involvement with the work was much reduced. I never went as Jean to work, but many people in the workforce knew.

I told a director of the company and asked her to tell the others. I said, I don't want you being told by one of our staff and it is the first time you hear. So now you better know that's another side of my life. It seemed like a hopefully sensible precaution. But beyond that I had no reason to involve them.

Interviewer: Can we have a round of applause for Jean?

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Applause

I know I've timed myself out, but I've got two, uh, maybe three questions and I'll open it to the floor. One of them is really about the community question that I've asked you and that we ask all that.

Jean: Yeah.

Interviewer: But specifically for you, I wondered, what the community was like before you were Jean and since Jean, and also really about discriminatory practices. If you can comment.

Jean: We lived a classic bourgeois life in Bramhall, We had neighbors and, and people we knew through our children's school. And we just did the standard issue things that you do. But I'm a great believer in the fact that you've gotta do what I call the biological imperative. We're here, one of our first responsibility is to repopulate planet by having and bringing up children.

So we've gotta have our children do the best job we can for them. And then, as I said, we would in the old days not really have much life left. Now we have, and in that second life, that's up to you. Um, so, sorry, what was the question?

Interviewer: Uh, community, what does community mean to you?

Jean: Oh, right, yes, yes.

So the thing about communities, since I sort of changed my gender, I've lived part of the time in a kind of twilight world. You know, you've had to associate with people who are of similar persuasion, which is a minority of people.

And again, I was very fortunate because in Manchester we had one of the premier groups in the world, called Manchester Concord. People who've some sort of gender fluidity would come huge distances. Some came from other parts of the world as Manchester was famous for it.

So that would be like a convenient community on the doorstep for me.. Today, the web has taken over and that group has closed down recently. It's just not getting the attendance that they used to get.. And that's really because online communities will almost certainly have become an alternative.

And that's what I feel about the community. In an area people come together who agree about certain things. That is great. And it's great for creating a safe space to bring up children and so forth, but it can also be restrictive.

It's moral and can be moralistic. I have to talk about the word moral. Comes from mores, and mores is what the group agreement is.

So people like me and some others are considered by many groups to be not okay because we're different. We do things that are considered potentially dangerous, and occasionally can be discriminated against.

For people who don't fit in, they have to find an alternative. And I'm a great believer in communes now. There are communes of people who have different persuasions. They've got together and formed their own society and they live separate from the rest of society, but they're quite happy.

I dunno what the future holds, but I'm very interested in eco stuff and living closer to the land and going back to a more natural existence..

Interviewer: Um, and what would you spend that thousand pounds on?

Jean: I started a charity about 10 years ago, which I would happily give it to. It was based upon inspiration I got from someone who ran the Bolton Lads and Girls Club. He talked about people who they had helped from really miserable conditions to become successful members of society.

So we didn't have too much money, but we used it for vocational training, particularly for people who are ex addicts. So many of those people had already got cleaned up in terms of getting rid of the addiction but in order to be able to earn a living, they needed the skills.

So we paid for cycle maintenance courses, forestry courses, stained glass window making courses. So these people had a skill that they could go out and earn a living and that really put them in position not to be tempted to go back into whatever their addiction was.

But today, my dream would be to start some kind of educational facility for those people who have been poorly served by our educational system. And some of them are criminals and some of them are just drifting. But so many of those people have skills and abilities which the educational system, and I'm sorry our teachers aren't up to spotting and nurturing. it. The top 40% of children who've got the educational ability get beautiful treatment..

The others in one way or another get discarded. And those are the people I would like to help.

Interviewer: Fantastic.

So the final, final question is this. Nowadays there are lots of children and teenagers, under 18 age, who are concerned about their gender. They feel that they're in the wrong body and so on and so forth.

And so there is a large amount of referrals, for treatment and so on. I just wondered what your view was given that if somebody goes through the whole change at a young age, they're stuck. It must be awful to feel, you know, that I want to be in a male body, for example.

And so I do everything to realize that as my dream. But when they are children, should I really be allowed? I just wondered because if one's child says I want to be a boy.

And it's dark and rage. Should we really be encouraging that or do you think that there's, there's space or opportunity for some time?

Jean: Well, let's go back to something that everybody pays lip service to, which is that we have in our physical, emotional, or mental makeup, both masculinity and femininity. Society in the past said, right, you're a boy, you're over there, you're girl, you're over there and these are the things you can and can't do. These are things you can play with and these are the things you can't. .

And it we call it gender stereotyping which is inflicted from a very early age. So now hopefully we are moving to more liberal ways where if a child originates that they want to do things in the other gender, then hopefully the parents and the school could say, go for it.

Do it. Because the irony is the changes are to do with the body.. You know, you can't see them under your clothes. So you don't need to do that. If you're a boy wanting to be a girl then, dress as a girl.. That's the external stuff. Do it. Go for it. And the same the other way around.

Because in many cases, having done it for a while, they might say, oh, well that was very interesting but I think we'll go back to what I was before. Or on Sundays I'll do that and then Monday to Friday I'll do the other one. So let them dress and behave as they want to. Tell them when they are older, if they want to go for some kind of medical thing, then that's their choice.

When they are an adult, they are old enough to make up their own mind. .

Interviewer: Thank you, that's very helpful.

Applause Applause