

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: So, Wendy, thank you so much for joining me. It was such a pleasure reading all of your books. And I just wanted to ask, how did it feel writing this final book then?

Wendy Mitchell: Well, I see the obvious place to start with it being my final book. You know, death and dying is the one thing that is going to happen to 100% of the world's population, and yet we give it so little airspace, so little value in this country. And I hadn't realized that until we started writing it. We seem to fear in our country, in our culture, to talk about this uncertainty. And so I wanted to just as I took away the fear of dementia, I want to take away the fear of talking about dying. because if we don't, we're left with we leave our loved ones with such massive problems that we wouldn't want our loved ones to feel, to have to cope with. So talking is a very underestimated medium.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: Yeah. And I also wanted to ask you exactly why you think we have such a fear of death and talking about it?

Wendy Mitchell: Oh, I've heard all sorts of excuses. Oh, if you talk about it, it's going to happen. Oh, don't be morbid. It's not morbid, it's reality to me, it's giving your children the greatest gift you can give them. To talk about what you want when you die, what you want in the future, if you can no longer talk for yourself. because otherwise they have to make those decisions at a time, they're often incapable of making them. It's so stressful, and I've had so many emails from families that siblings have fallen out and never spoken again because they haven't talked. I wouldn't want my daughters never to talk again just because they didn't have that same idea of what I wanted. That's a dreadful thing to think of. Absolutely.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: And what do you think is just the general impact of denial when it comes to death in this country?

Wendy Mitchell: The general impact is you have to make the decision of, well, what would Mum have wanted? And if you haven't talked, you haven't a clue, really. You can only guess. And usually you guess with the actions of what you wanted. And that's where the arguments start. That's where the stress starts if two siblings think something opposite. And the consequences of finance, if you haven't taught, if you haven't, I've already given over my voice to my daughters because assets are frozen. Yeah. and then again, such complications arise if you haven't completed a lasting power of attorney for Health and finance, that one document that simply gives over your voice. So, yes, it can seem daunting and it can seem complicated, but hopefully my book can unravel that complication and tell people what they need to do in order to avoid those unpleasant and complex situations. It will create if you absolutely.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: And you know, I read Kathryn Mannix's book as well and she's wonderful. I spoke to her too, and she had very similar thoughts. In the end, it just becomes so messy because no one talks about.

Wendy Mitchell: Just ask yourself, do you want to leave your children with a mess? And if the answer is no, then you have to talk.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: definitely.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: And I was, ah, wondering because obviously there were some beautiful moments in your most recent book, and I was wondering one last thing. What is the philosophy you live by? Because obviously you went skydiving and all.

Wendy Mitchell: Dementia has taught me to live in the moment. The only certainty any one of us have is this moment. Because no one knows what's around the corner. No one knows if that proverbial bus will come along one day and either take your life away or turn you into a vegetable to restrict your voice. No one knows. So the only certainty we have in this life is this moment. So I enjoy this moment and it actually allows you to look at this world in a different way. I was as guilty as anyone when I worked on wishing for the weekend, wishing for the next holiday, wishing for tomorrow. But dementia has slowed me right down and taught me the value of time because I don't know how much time dementia will give me.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: definitely.

Wendy Mitchell: But nobody knows that.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: And I also wanted to ask just a side question, which is, how did it feel to have Julianne Moore say your name in her Oscar speech?

Wendy Mitchell: Well, I missed it completely. I was asleep and I woke up to hundreds of messages the next day to tell me. And it was so humbling. The whole experience of meeting her was so humbling because she is an ordinary person. and we forget that in superstars like that. We forget they're ordinary people. And the conversations we had about time were just so poignant. Even in her life, she realizes that time is very precious. So it's very humbling to think that dementia has given me the gift of meeting so many wonderful people and I call them gifts because I know dementia would hate to think of itself as giving me anything nice. So I like to call these tiny chinks of wonderment gifts from dementia.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: Yeah, your book just sums it up perfectly because I know that you mentioned in your book that you wouldn't have dreamed of going skydiving and being an advocate and all sorts of things, and somehow you're here doing those things. What do you think the impact has been on you generally?

Wendy Mitchell: I used to be such a quiet person, such a reserved person. I wasn't shy. I just like my own company. Well, dementia isn't just about memory. It can affect personality, senses and so many other things as well. And again. It's giving me that, my daughters call me the Gregarious Alien because they obviously know what I was like and now I'm just somebody

totally opposite. But I quite like this. Gregarious alien. I've had the best of both worlds. So at least it means I can speak out and help other people.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: Yeah, absolutely. And you have. And it's wonderful to see all the work that you've done and those books are such, it's just really moving to read from your point of view, what are the biggest things that you want people to take away from your books?

Wendy Mitchell: From all my books? Ah, I want people to take away the fact that you should never give up on yourself. Other people will do that for you in life. But no matter what curveball life throws at you, never give up on yourself as you never know what may lie around the corner. But I also want them to realize that dementia is about so much more than memory. If you only concentrate on the memory part of a loved one, you're missing out on supporting them in so many other ways. Our gait will change our sight, our ah, hearing our smell taste buds. So many other things that we need help with. And they're all covered in my books. But also the biggest lesson me and my daughters have learned from day one is the power of talking. Because I'm still a mum, I want to know what they're struggling with as well as them, knowing what I'm struggling with. So conversation is a two way process. It is never just about me, it is always a two way conversation and people need to remember that. If you're the care partner of your mum, your dad, your sibling, remember, conversations are two way. Don't, don't think that we don't want to know what you're thinking as well because then we can help one another. Don't take it on all by yourself.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: That's huge. and it's so true. I think those conversations definitely break down when someone gets ill and then their voice is taken away.

Wendy Mitchell: yeah, but also the other person fears saying what they think because they don't want to upset them. Both parties don't want to upset one another. They don't want to hurt them, they don't want to don't look at it like that. If you both say what your struggles are and you can both help one another come through it. I've met so many couples that the husband has dementia and he'll say to me, oh no, I don't want to burden my wife with more problems. But if you don't tell her what you're struggling with, she can't help you. And if she doesn't tell you what she doesn't understand, you can't help, you know, two way conversations, never one way.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: Absolutely.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: So Wendy, thank you so much for speaking with, know it's such a you know, honestly, your books are such a marvel. And I read somebody I used to know quite a long time ago when it first came out, and honestly, I was just so moved and I was so excited to see honestly, I saw your other two books were out and I was like, absolutely brilliant. so it's wonderful just to hear from you directly. So thank you so much for speaking with me.

Wendy Mitchell: You're very kind. It's been lovely speaking to you, too.

Suswati Basu at How To Be Books: Fantastic. Well, Wendy, I'm just going to.