

## **Minisode: What do we do now? Mom Character**

JAN: Carson.

CARSON: Janielle.

JAN: Crazy to meet you here.

CARSON: I know.

JAN: Are you also here for the free gift that is a Minisode of Untitled Dad Project?

CARSON: I sure am, and I can't wait to hear who it's with this week!

JAN: It is with a incredibly special guest, someone we haven't heard from in a while. And it's a conversation that kind of demands to be heard before we reckon with all we're going to reckon with in the finale. It is none other than my beloved Mom Character.

CARSON: Mmm.

JAN: I brought her back in the studio because while we were breaking Chapter Seven and having all these realizations, we were also putting our finishing touches on episodes 1A and 1B. You remember, Robert McKee shows up, I learn my whole life is a lie, I try to interview my mom, I fail miserably. It's a adorable and concerning. I wanted my mom to listen to those with me for a couple reasons. I wanted her to have some agency to hear how her voice existed in the world in this art project before I shared it with everybody else. And give her a chance to maybe say that's too personal, I'd like you to cut that. She didn't. But I mostly wanted her to hear all the realizations I had about how hard it was for me to ask her questions and give her a chance to sort of catch up with me and be present with me, and for us to have an honest conversation about why that was so hard. I also secretly had this like fear, I don't know what it was, that my mom would like, this would be like what broke the camel's back. My mom would be like this is too much! No more art if you're going to be my daughter! Or something. I don't know what I thought. She didn't do any of that. She sat in a room with me, she listened carefully. She gasped once at Robert McKee. She laughed a couple times, a real hearty laugh. And took copious notes about things she wanted to talk about with me. So my Mom Character, her thoughts, her feelings, her response and a conversation that I'll probably cherish the rest of my life--after this break.

## [AD BREAK]

Jan: Um, so we just listened to episodes 1A and B, which talk a lot about this mysterious Mom Character.

Carol: Sure.

Jan: How, um, was that for you as the person who is a person who isn't that character, but it kind of is that character?

Carol: Well, I felt like there were some misconceived notions, particularly by Robert McKee. But um, and

Jan: I had a feeling you just wouldn't like him

Carol: No. I like him. I like I, he was a little blunt, but I just wanted you to know that I hope that - I didn't lie to you. I believe the first two years of when I had you is that I could do this. I can do this by myself. I didn't need anyone. And then I thought, no, it's not fair. It's not fair to Rick, your dad, and it's not fair to you. And so, um, there were people that knew about you, maybe not his buddies at the yacht club, but your grandfather knew about you. In fact, when you relate this story of what I told, he raced me to the car. He wanted to see you.

Jan: You're talking about the "Would you like to meet the fourth?"

Carol: Right. Like I struggle. Like what do I say to him? What if he calls me names? What if he kicks me out? You know, what if he doesn't believe me? And so he welcomed us with open arms. He said, oh my brother, Stewart, and my family is gonna know about this. And so he, his, his brother Stewart knew about you. You're, you know, of course, your dad did, your Aunt Lisa knew about you. So there were people that did know about you. And the first few years of your life, I tried to make arrangements for him to be there and to do things and um, so, but it got hard when Grandpa was dying. I just, I thought I'm doing, I was always the one that was creating that intimacy or creating the, and I felt like he had to step up to the plate, and then he disappeared. He abandoned us. Totally. So it--

Jan: Was that an event for you? When he abandoned us, here I was, because I listened. I like sat down with you. We just sat down in a conference room and listened to episodes 1A and 1B together. And I was thinking, I was noticing how much in that conversation I have with you, I was wanting an event like that. There was like an event you hadn't told me of him slamming a door or declaring "That's it. I'm abandoning this child."

Carol: He just really didn't step up. He stepped away, you know, gradually I was grieving, you know, we were dealing with Grandpa's, you know, multiple Myeloma and I was dealing and flying in and out. And then I just realized he kind of disappeared. And then what he did is he sent me a letter and said, "Oh, I'm moving. Um, and kinda thanks to you, I'll probably be living under a bridge," because I was trying to get child support. Well, I think he maybe, he stayed in the same building. He may have moved apartments, but he would never give me his address. His phone number changed. So at that point he shut the door. And it was really,

Jan: That was when I was?

Carol: It was, Gosh. How old were you?

Jan: When grandpa died? That was,

Carol: It was around when Grandpa died. Do you remember how old you were? Nine or 10?

Jan I think maybe nine.

Carol: And as I was making demands for child support, I, at one point I did, I got back child support for several years. And then after that, he went underground.

Jan: Mm. Ok.

Carol: So he was underground for years. And so I did not know how to get a hold of him and I didn't have a good phone number for him. And even after you turned 18 or 19, he owed me a whole bunch of back child support. It probably about \$80,000, \$90,000 back child. It was a lot. And so I decided to go through, um, the attorney general's office, and they couldn't find him. It wasn't right what he did and I was trying to make him accountable, and he just stepped away from the, he stepped away from his responsibilities. So, um, but it wasn't that he didn't love you. I feel like I indicated earlier is that he, I don't think he could provide for himself. He couldn't keep a job. So I think there were other issues that he had. So that, does that help you?

Jan: It does. Do you know what helps me, Mom?

Carol: What?

Jan: As we were listening to this together, I realized that I wanted the question I'm asking underneath like what is the scene like? Can you tell me what his face looked like? I'm realizing

the question I was actually asking was did he want me, and why did he abandon me? I think I'm realizing that he is actually the only person who has the answers to those questions. And I've been waiting for a moment where he slammed the door or ultimatumed, or yes no-ed. And I thought maybe you had that answer, but the question of when did he decide to stop being my dad? It kind of feels like he-- he decided that 100 million times in 100 million ways. Right? Just slowly over time he could have...

Carol: That's a really interesting question. You had asked, did he want me to abort you? He didn't ask me to abort you.

Jan: Oh.

Carol: So I want you to know that, that you were wanted and loved. Um.

Jan: Well, okay. But mom--

Carol: By me, at least,

Jan: Yes.

Carol: And he, I guess people, people vote by their feet - by jumping in or jumping out, and he just did not jump in. Does that answer your question?

It wasn't because you weren't good enough. It's because he wasn't good enough. He didn't make the right choices. Does that make sense?

Jan: It does make sense. I, I, you've told me that before. Like you actually have told me that before. I got to say, I don't think I heard that all the way or believed that all the way until I first let all this pain in. So you've told me all this and I've just had this locked door where all the abandonment and the pain lives and acknowledging that not having a dad is a source of pain, you telling me that I don't think I could ever really hear it, um, until I was actually processing through the closet and those feelings and, and got to hold up the clutter that said, um, "You're a bit fundamentally abandonable" and got to say, "Oh, oh, that's not true." Put it away.

Carol: Good.

*[MUSIC MOMENT]*

Carol: It was a very codependent, I felt like I was a stronger person, and that he was my child, my big child. And you were my baby. So I felt like I had to be the strong one at all times. I felt like I had to be the caretaker of all this, and um--

Jan: Mom, have you ever mourned that?

Carol: That I didn't have a husband or--? Yeah.

Jan: That you had to take care of, that someone didn't take care of you?

Carol: I think I'm, I'm thinking I'm dealing with it...now. I think that, I think that's why I'm able to declutter. I think it's, yeah, I think I'm dealing with it. And I think in a relationship that ended badly, a year or two, I had to deal with another abandonment.

Jan: Yeah, that was a bad breakup.

Carol: And, um, I think that it really helped me realize that, you know, um, I'm glad he came into my life because I hid under a rock for like 20 years.

Jan: You did -

Carol: And so this person helped me open my heart.

Jan: Buy some sexier shoes.

Carol: Yeah. Buy some sexier shoes. And he helped me open my heart and realize that it's okay to allow someone into your life. It's okay to, um, need what someone and have someone take care of you. So, um, yeah, so I think that was - you know me, I always look for the silver lining in every dark cloud, but that's how I survive. And I think that that was a really important part of my life and just letting go.

Jan: Yeah. I, um, I started facing the idea that I deserved a good dad--

Carol: And you did, and you do.

Jan: And so I was able to mourn the fact that I didn't get a good dad. And in mourning it, like feeling the pain - it's allowed me to feel other feelings after that. And so I guess it didn't occur to me until I'm looking at you right now. I didn't write it down in the questions I sent you. But, um, you deserved a really good partner. You're a wonderful mom.

Carol: Thank you.

Jan: And you deserved a partner who supported you and let you take a nap and took care of me when you needed to rest and um, made sacrifices for you instead of you making sacrifices for them.

Carol: Thank you, baby girl.

Jan: I just wanted you to know that, if you want to mourn that, um, I'm getting kind of good at mourning.

Carol: Maybe we can have a mourning party.

Jan: Yeah. If you want. And more than that, in small ways, and just acknowledging that um, I have space for you to do that if you want to.

Carol: Okay.

### **[AD BREAK]**

Carol: I didn't realize that I didn't talk about your dad. Um, I only wanted to, I had read somewhere to cause, and I only wanted to say positive things about him. And even the child support issue, I didn't want to bring that up because as a child growing up, mom, my mother would always talk to me about Oh, your dad just bought this giant trailer and we're not. We're not going to have money, and so she would. I didn't ever want you to feel the pressure of not having the money or finances. Um, I felt it was an adult thing not a kid thing. So um, maybe I should have. But, but when you said the thing about "it's not your story to tell," I think what I meant about it is, I vaguely remember what I was trying to say is that you were the innocent in this. You were the innocent victim in this. Maybe I was too, but you did nothing wrong. That you should not be in a position to have to explain. He needed to explain. Your father had some tall explaining to do, not you. That's what I meant by it. Not that you don't have a story, you have a story to tell as a, uh, as a single, you know, as a child. I mean, I think there's, we talked about father loss. There's such a thing called an orphan's heart too where, you know, not having that dad, you know, it has an impact. It really has an impact on you. So I want to apologize to you, that if I wasn't sensitive of if I misunderstood that question. Um, and I just want to tell you that that's what I meant by it. I was open to discuss, and I am open to discuss anything you want to know about your father, anything about your past that I can share with you. Because I really

think our life is an open book. Um, one of the reasons that I let people believe I was divorced, as you say, is because--

Jan: I was right about that hunch, that you just kind of didn't want to talk about it, and let them make--

Carol: I didn't want to talk about it to strangers or other people, because I felt like, A it's not your business. But I think that the reason is I just didn't want rejection for you or for me. I didn't want people to think less of either one of us. And maybe I should have just been more v--I'm learning to be more vulnerable. And understand that um, but always you had to be careful who you share things with too. There, there's wisdom in, there's a balance in holding too much back and then not, and then who to share with when saying too much. So I guess maybe I'm just learning that balance now. But, I felt very vulnerable when people would ask me that question. Or I'd let them believe whatever they chose to believe.

Jan: Yeah I -

Carol: And, and maybe that was the wrong thing to do. And, and, and I think it would have given me more freedom, because I operated in a lot of fear.

Jan: Yeah. I think I, um, definitely picked up on how scared and vulnerable you felt when people asked you that question. Um, and I, I do wish you could have told me that it's nothing to be ashamed of. Um, having kids feels like a very hard thing to do. Just having a little sponge that's next to you as you do everything you do. It's a real tall order to not screw them up.

Carol: I know.

Jan: I um - definitely felt that you didn't want to talk about it. And it sounds like you didn't want to talk about it with strangers or nosy PTA moms at the very conservative, wealthy Christian schools that I went to. Or in our tight-knit religious community. I guess what I missed was that you didn't want to talk about with them, but you would be okay talking about it with me.

Carol: Absolutely. I'm so sorry.

Jan: I forgive you.

Carol: Thank you.

Jan: Did you know that you're not a perfect mom? But that you're a good mom?

Carol: Thank you. Thank you. I've known that for a long time. That I'm not perfect, but thank you. I've tried really hard. To be the best

Jan: I think you did a really good job as a mom.

*[MUSIC]*

Jan: Um, I want to know what you're, like, hope is for this project. What is your hope? Like what do you think is the best thing that can happen?

Carol: My hope for this project is that by facing those gremlins in the closet that you've so bravely faced that you'll get healing out of this. My hope is that you and others listening to this realize that they are more than enough. They are good enough, and that it wasn't their fault to - survivors of, you know, relationships with parents where a parent has abandoned them or just left them, started a new family, forgot about them. That, so that's my hope that whoever listens to this will realize that "I am good enough. I do measure up, and I'm not the one that was lacking."

Jan: What's your fear for the project?

Carol: Well, my fear for the project is that, um, there are haters out there, you know. And I believe that sometimes people hurt people, hurt other people out of their own pain

Jan: So you're worried about what other people are going to say?

Carol: You know what, I really actually don't care. I did my best and in my life scenario. And so my concern is that there are haters out there and they're going to hate no matter what. But I would just ask them to be kind and put themselves in somebody else's shoes. Put yourself in our shoes. But um -

Jan: Do you remember the, the motto I gave you?

Carol: What was that?

Jan: I gave it to you the other night.

Carol: That's right. Well remind me.

Jan: Don't read the comments.



Carol: Don't read the comments. Okay

*[MUSIC]*

Carol: And in the end he really realized, I think when I told you that he, we went to court and he was telling me all these things about you.

Jan: This is the time before, six months before he died, when you've got his email address.

Carol: Yes. When we were at court and um, he said, here's my phone number, here's my email address, have her contact me. And he asked for your number. And I said, I have to get her permission first. And I think you needed time to process that. So I don't ever want you to beat yourself up for not contacting him right away. It wasn't time for you. And I know it may feel bad, but you know what, I believe that it, it was all for a greater purpose. It may have even been harder for you. I was like, how do I make sense of this? It would've been harder for you to actually have him in your life and to lose him so quickly too. I don't know.

Jan: Maybe.

Carol: That's, that's just something that's come across my mind.

Jan: I, go ahead.

Carol: But he was very proud of you and he, I had no idea that he followed you so closely on the Internet and you know, he was telling me all these things about you and--

Jan: Do you remember the things that he told you about me?

Carol: He, that you went to SMU, you know, that you are a Hunt scholar that you, uh, worked for Egon Zehnder, like he knew that you went to Europe. He, um, he basically would Google you and anything that had your picture in it. I think he knew about different plays you were on at church, you know, anything that was on the Internet, he would, he would search for you. So I, and he really wanted to, I think it was too little, too late, but he wanted to, you were wanted, he wanted you to be in his life. I think that he, um, he realized that.

Jan: Maybe.

Carol: So...

Jan: Maybe. I wish he was... I wish he had been brave enough to reach out.

Carol: Yeah. Well I think he did in the end, but he had no way of contacting you because I wouldn't give him your phone number, because you wouldn't give me permission to do that. So it's, just--

Jan: I mean, I'm on Facebook, you could find me.

Carol: You're right. You're right. He could have looked for you on Facebook. He could have been courageous.

Jan: Yeah, I, um... There are a lot of, could have been's.

Carol: Could have, should have, would have.

Jan: There are a bunch.

Carol: Yes.

Jan: Um, and I, this one's my story. It's crazy, Mom. My story is growing to be a warm blanket, and I never thought it would be. I didn't think I could actually do this, and yet here I am in this story, the way things have happened, the sense I've made, I'm making of it, as much pain as it's been. It does feel like mine.

Carol: It is your story.

Jan: I'm, I'm, I'm, I think I have a story.

Carol: You do.

Jan: Isn't that crazy?

Carol: No, it's not crazy.

Jan: Well it's crazy to me. It feels great. It's sad but it's great. Can I tell you one of my secret hopes for the project?

Carol: Sure.

Jan: There's some like woman who will be listening to it, and she'll hear like you talk. and she'll be like, "Oh my God, my born-again, spirit-filled, widower father would be perfect for her mom character." And she like works for like, I dunno, like Nordstrom or something, and you can get me like really incredible discounts on clothing, and you, I don't know, find a partner who you can, like, will help you pick up the heavy stuff at Costco.

Carol: That'd be great.

Jan: And maybe he has like some background in medical stuff, so that like I can know that as you get older, you have somebody who will like notice the signs of a stroke really quickly. Not that you'll have one. Just wouldn't that be nice to know?

Carol: Yes.

Jan: And um, I don't know, it's a secret. It's not at all the point. And it didn't, I don't know. It was just a secret hope.

Carol: Well, my secret hope for you is that you will have a wonderful, wonderful husband, and that maybe out of that you'll get a father figure, and that hopefully that, um, you'll have a wonderful life with your children.

Jan: You think I'm going to get my dad after all?

Carol: I do think you're going to get your dad after all.

Jan: Oh my God.

Carol: It's always been my shtick.

Jan: That's so funny. That's so funny. Mom, you secretly think that you're going to be right about,

Carol: Yes, I think I am.

Jan: That there's a dad coming. That's funny.

Carol: I'm usually right about these things. I hate to say that but.

Jan: Yeah, you are. Your premonitions are usually right.

**[AD BREAK]**

Jan: Is there anything else you think it's important that we know about this mom character?

Carol: I think mom character, um, really, really loved you. Loves you. Is really proud of you. And I think mom did her best.

Jan: I think she did too.

Carol: She probably could have done better, maybe braver in facing her fears and emotions. But at the end of the day, I couldn't be more prouder of you. And I thank God every day that he chose me to be your mom, your mother.

Jan: I'm glad God chose me to be-- you to be my mom, too. Thanks mom.

Carol: You're welcome. Is there anything else you want to ask me?

Jan: Let me look through my post-it notes. While I've got you here. I didn't realize until this project where I had to explain to the world that I go by Janielle, that I grew up as JANielle and everyone calls me Jan, how like confusing my name is. It's it's it's it's it's added a bit to the feeling of like illegitimacy. Like I don't even have a legitimate name.

Carol: You do have a legitimate name.

Jan: What's my name, mom?

Carol: Janielle.

Jan: But everyone calls me JANielle growing up.

Carol: Well, you know it's kind of funny, because um, I was a teacher. And I had a student, uh and a corporate trainer and she was French Canadian. And I couldn't come up with a name and she goes Oh, my mom was French Canadian and she would get my name mixed up with my sister, Danielle, and she'd sometimes with like 11, 13 kids, and she said Janielle! Janielle! And I thought, that is her name. Janielle. And so I tried Janielle for the longest time, but people just

kept calling you Janelle, Joan, Jan, you know like they couldn't get. So I thought, you know, when she goes to Paris, they'll get it right. So,

Jan: They did. I went to Paris recently and they were, they had no problem.

Carol: And so your name is Janielle and so, um. I love that name. I don't like Jan.

Jan: I don't really care for that.

Carol: I cringe whenever I hear it. So you're not a Jan. It's a lovely name, but it's not you. You're Janielle.

Jan: But I have. So I grew up as JANielle, and so like the sound of like my mother saying my name sounds like JANielle. And like my childhood best friends saying my name sounds like JANielle. And I decided in college, ok I'm going to go by like my real name, I guess. Janielle. But that name doesn't hit me with that feeling you get when someone says your name. Because it's not like, the name I grew up with. So Jan is the chosen name that um, that gives me that hit that feels like that like, part of your brain that lights up when you hear your name. And Jan gives me that feeling because it's like what my childhood friends called me and now my adult friends call me. And it feels like, I don't know. In all the illegitimacy of what my name is, it's the name I've like chosen for myself. I've legitimized for myself. And I know you don't like it, but.

Carol: Is it ok if I call you Janielle or JANielle?

Jan: Yeah, yeah. You can call me either.

Carol: But, that's fine then. If you want people to call you Jan it's your name.

Jan: That's true. Look at this look at this exercise in boundaries.

Carol: Yeah, it's your name.

Jan: And figuring out how we can

Carol: Well my name is Carol Marie, and I've just changed it to Carol, it was easier. And cause

Jan: I just really feel like if you were gonna have um, a child who was. If you could see into the future that you were had, gonna have a child that doesn't struggle with like these letigimacy

issues, you could throw her a bone and name her like Kate. Or even Kate has C's and K's you could, you could name me like Anne.

Carol: But that. Yeah. But you're.

Jan: Laura.

Carol: But those are common names and you're not common. And so Jan, Janielle or JANIelle or Jan, I don't know. Gotta, I guess I felt like you had to have a special name because you were a special child.

Jan: I suppose. Oh I had a question. You, I saw you get physically distressed and do that thing you do where you need to put your hands to something so you started like looking through your purse. Um, around the part where I said like "my mom's story is that I am a miracle and I'm going to figure out my own story now. Or maybe I have like regular sadness, not like super like special." Did that make you feel uncomfortable?

Carol: No, it did not it,

Jan: Why's that?

Carol: Well, I, I wrote it down. Um, I guess for me it was a miracle and that was my story. But it has to be your story. You're the child, so you need to create your own story. But I, yeah, I believe in miracles. I've had so many miracles. I've had so much trauma and so many miracles in my life. And so, um--

Jan: So you're comfortable with me having a story where maybe I think of myself as regular human capable of regular pain?

Carol: Absolutely. In fact, I wrote that down.

Jan: What'd you write down?

Carol: Sad little girl with regular pain. I think I was looking for the pen maybe. But, it's ok to be a sad little girl and to have regular pain. I think that you can be a sad little girl with regular pain but my story was this person told me that this sad little girl with regular pain is probably going to do great things in her life. I believe that. So I think that's how those two come together. Does that make sense?

Jan: Yeah, that means a lot to me.

Carol: Thank you.

Jan: It's nice to not have to be a miracle.

Carol: You don't have to be a miracle.

Jan: Just be a regular daughter you love regularly.

Carol: Yes, I do. Unconditionally.

Jan: With a weird name. It's a special name. Whatever.

*[Music]*

Jan: That's all. Thanks mom.

Carol: You're welcome.

Jan: Thanks for supporting me while I do this thing that felt very scary to me. It's a weird thing that me being honest with my story also means um having to do something with parts of your story, because there's a Venn diagram in the center where our stories are eclipsing each other. Um, I'm trying to be trustworthy and honest with my story and um, I appreciate, I don't know. It feels like you're becoming even more and more willing to do that with yours.

Carol: Absolutely.

Jan: I really appreciate that.

Carol: Thank you, sweetheart. I'm so proud of you and this, I think that this is wonderful that you took your pain and made art out of it. And I think that, I think it's going to speak to a lot of other people. A lot of other children, adult children or children-children, and even their parents.

Jan: Yeah. A lot of my friends who are moms now, um, hold themselves to really superhuman standards. They aren't allowed to like put a chemical near their kid or they're bad, and they don't know how to do anything right. And it just feels like it's completely impossible to be the kind of mom you're supposed to be. And, um,

Carol: It's hard nowadays.

Jan: You are not perfect. And I love you so much.

Carol: Thank you. And you won't be perfect either. And my mother wasn't perfect either, but I knew that she loved me. And, um, yeah. And that's what counts. And I think though, that's the legacy of love, that love that we've had. You had, I've had a great mom, mother, you've had hopefully a good mother.

Jan: Yeah. I've had a great mom.

Carol: And you'll be a great mom to your kids.

Jan: Hmm. I wonder how I'll screw mine up.

Carol: Um, I'm sure they'll let you know.

Jan: They'll make a podcast about it! I love you, Mom.

Carol: I love you too, baby girl.

Jan: Ok, let's get out of this booth.

Carol: I know.

Jan: It's hot.

CARSON:

Thank you for listening to this week's minisode. Special thanks this week to Ms. Kastner - thank you for raising Janielle. She's been a miracle for me too. Up next, a conversation with death educator Jeanne Denney that crystallizes some themes that've been in this story the whole time.

Untitled Dad Project is created and hosted by Janielle Kastner. Our production team is me, Carson McCain, Kelly Kolff, Lauren Floyd, Jenna Hannum, Evan Arnett, and Will Short. Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds. We'll see you soon.