PODCAST TRANSCRIPT · SEASON 4 · EPISODE 29

Why didn't anyone tell me this?

The Menopause Party

With Debbie Baisden

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> **JOYCE HARPER** 00:22
>
> It's brilliant to be talking today to the brilliant comedian, Debbie Baisden. She has a fantastic show called The Menopause Party, but she is actually a real Essex pub landlady, an actress, a writer, and as well as being a brilliant comedian. She writes the show, she performs the show, and I first saw it many years ago when I was running our first UCL Menopause Cafe and someone said, I need some comedy about menopause.
>
> And I heard about Debbie and we booked her in and I've loved her work ever since. She makes this educational and fun and people will leave the menopause party with more information about menopause, but also feeling good, which I think is great. So I hope you can all catch the show somewhere very soon.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 01:13
>
> Welcome, Debbie.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 01:14

Hello, Joyce. Hello, Joyce. How are ya?

> **JOYCE HARPER** 01:17
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> I'm great. It's always great to see you. Have we been having a laugh already? Now, you are a real pub land lady, and I was at one of your events recently, and the woman next to me said to her friend, She's not really a pub land lady. And I said, Yes, she is. So tell me about your career starting with being a pub land lady and how you ended up in comedy.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 01:38

Yeah, do you know what we've always done pubs. I've always done pubs since I was like eighteen. And so then it obviously it started off as bar staff, then just developed into becoming a bar manager and then a you know, a pub landlady. And what is hilarious, I I always think people get confused with me as a pub landlady in real life and in my on stage persona because I think they think that is the pub landlady they're gonna get in the pub.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 02:06
>
> God forbid.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 02:07

You know, like Dolly Slateman appears and for people listening in, Dolly Slateman is like a a c a a cross between Kat Slater, Bet Lynch, all Peggy Mitchell, all those soap pub landladies that have been there in the past. And also the fact people that I've met along the way, because their characters are amazing. You know, I'm pretty dull Beyond the Bar I'm pretty dull compared to some pub landladies I've met. But it's I I think when I I might be like saying things you've got to ask me later but it's kind of weird when you when you bring that subject up and when I think of Dolly Dolly really

was the person that could say things that I would never say and especially in especially in banter with the lads she would kind of like say well bring it on rather than whoa whoa whoa I'm gonna walk away from that conversation so it's and it was the natural thing for me to do because what I've done most of my life. So when it came to comedy the public and no one else has done it.

No one else has done a publay and lady character in comedy. So it just seemed natural to do it.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 03:12
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> My sister's was a pub landlady for for many decades. I know it's like being the other side of the bar.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 03:19

Yeah, and it's is but isn't it fascinating though, Joyce, how they have this I'm be I'm doing a bit of research on the moment actually, how they have this authority in their own world, e.g. within that pub world, and then you take it outside, then something happens. You know, something happens that they haven't got that authority anymore. So it's and it's almost accepted. It's accept and I I I thought I find it more fascinating, especially when they've got like public bars and very working class environments.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 03:47
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> Yeah. And

DEBBIE BAISDEN 03:47

What was your sister's pub like? Or sister in law?

> **JOYCE HARPER** 03:50
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> She had a few pubs. Yeah, no, it's my sister. It's my sister. Yeah, she had a few pubs. yeah, it was it was a interesting and and something that people don't realise. It's a relentless job. You're working twenty four seven, aren't you?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 04:03

Yeah. Yeah. And it's kind of and that's that's been a challenge to be fair with comedy, trying to do the both. Because obviously most comedy gigs are weekends, our busiest times are weekends and it was kind of like they they never cross over. Dolly

> **JOYCE HARPER** 04:22
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> Ha ha.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 04:25

doesn't turn up down the the Rayleigh Arms, my pub at the moment. Maybe she does, but I just haven't realised it.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 04:34
>
> sure some of it's autobiographical, but we won't go there yet. so the the comedy, I know that you've you've told me that performing was always your child a dream. So when did you start doing comedy and acting?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 04:49

Yeah, because I mean like when I was a kid, my gosh, that was my I remember crying to my dad saying that I want to be an actress. Used to watch Shirley Temple and Lassie and all these things. And I remember getting really upset one night with my dad saying to me, I want to be an actress, and he went, Well, I always wanted to be a lorry driver. He obviously was lying at the time. And it was like that was gonna be my dream. But all of a sudden, I think I got to sixteen, seventeen and

I guess you start work, you start going out on a Friday night and all those sort of things, you just all of a sudden get sucked up in the stereotypical image of a working class girl. What you do, you could w you know, I worked up an office in London and that kinda like all evaporated. And then I had this realisation we was running a pub that I wanted to stu go back to studying and I went back to university and thirty six and started studying film history. And even then performing was never on my radar. It was more writing and it wasn't till EastEnders asked us to do a beer cake in their set because we should we should set up mobile bars, Joyce I got so excited. I had my hair done, I got a new jumper, because I really thought I was gonna be like Lady Gargar and they was gonna go, We want you. So Tony was like, I went a lot like my husband, I went along to because he used to set up all the beer cakes.

And I went along with Tony, he's like thinking, what are you doing? Why are you coming with me? And and it was so exciting. I got to see that the little set of EastEnders. And that's and the next day I went to Lakeside Shopping Centre and there was two characters at the time, Shirley and Heather. And I saw them at Lakeside and I was like, This is a sign. So I started doing I I I rang out the poor school, done a week's acting class, and I would see how it was hooked. It just all come flooding back.

So this was after the degree. This was like in my forties. well after the deg I done my degree in my f about thirty-six. And comedy came about because it was far easier to perform comedy than to try and get involved in a play with a young family. and someone said to me, You should try comedy, try doing stand up and I was like, What are you having a laugh? How the hell could I do stand up?

And I went to Funny Women, which is a great organisation for anybody, any women that want to get involved in comedy, and very supportive and encouraging platform. And I started doing stand up. And I wouldn't say I was hooked because it's terrifying.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 07:17
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> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 07:18

But the sense the sense of achievement is amazing. And that relationship with an audience has just developed over the years. That's what I love. I love that.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 07:30
>
> I've got some mates who've done comedy stand up and actually my my son, we went to see some one of his friends do a stand-up the other day and I just really feel it's it's hard and I I give talks a lot. It's hard to remember what you need to say. And when you're also trying to be funny, that's that's a really tall order, Debbie.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 07:53

Well you never stop learning. And I think that's the incredible thing about it. Incredible thing about Santa or performing. because you are the performer and it's what you bring to it and how that is how you analyse your experiences and then project that to somebody else. So but you never ever stop learning, whether it's about the audience, whether it's about yourself. And I think going into doing I mean I do find stand out terrifying. I think the reason why I find it terrifying.

A lot of time is when you're doing like a bit of the circuit, you go out and do ten minute gigs and things like that. And you have to get them bang, right? I want their attention straight away. You've got to make you laugh straight away and it's like bomb bomb bomb and then you go again. But with the show, I found because the show's like an hour and a half and it you know, I do an hour show for fringes or an hour and a half for a big show, it kind of you can settle into it. Although the script never changes, I can feel the audience out a bit more and that is what I've really enjoyed doing developing that kind of relationship with it. And then I play around a bit a bit more then.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 08:53
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> So how did you decide y I can see now why you decided you wanted to do comedy, but how did you decide you're going to talk about menopause?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 09:02

Yeah, God, what? If you'd have said that to me even when I first started, I'd be like, what are you talking about? And it was so funny because I remember I went to Edinburgh and I met this the first time I ever went to Edinburgh, which was the whole family's like, what is she doing? Why is she going to Edinburgh? and it was kinda like I don't know what happened. It was like it was a it was a thing I've got to do it. I started doing I started doing it extra work and getting up at three o'clock in the morning. Remember like imagine you've got young family.

I'll be out the door by four o'clock in the morning 'cause I'll be all over London. But anyway, what was your question again? As I got all excited then. What was your question? What did you just say then? menopause.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 09:39
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> When you went to any yeah, menopause. Why menopause? Which I think I think is brilliant. And how we met is because I was doing the first menopause cafe years ago at UCL. And someone in someone there said, I said, what do you want? How do you want to take this forward? They said, we want to laugh about menopause. It's all doom and gloom. Let's make it a comedy. And then I heard about you and I thought, she's done it. Somebody's done it.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 10:05

Do you what was fascinating? Because when I when I looked to fight first start doing I'd already written a show called Red Hat No Knickers, and that was Dolly's sort of life story above her pub, which I must go back to actually. but when I did, it started off as her and the change in me, and I was teaching at the time, and I couldn't believe I'd always had this longing to teach. so we came out of the pubs for a few years when the boys were slightly younger, and I had this longing to teach, and when I got there, I thought.

I was letting myself down. It wasn't that I didn't want to be there. There was something going on in my head that was obviously brain fog, like flushes, I was getting water infections. It just you know, I just felt really rough. And I started realising this is like menopause. And then I'd already started doing the comedy and the the most natural thing to me again, progressing as a performer, is to write about your own experiences and what you're going through and try and make them funny to get other people to get through their situation. And you know, that's that's the great thing about arts, isn't it? It's either the tragic or the comical side of it. And that's been going on since the Greeks. But and I started looking at it and I thought, my God, this is hilarious, really. You've got someone like me. And I had aged about 20 years, Joyce. I started wearing lasicate skirts and all sorts of I thought, what the hell is going on here? And and it was fascinating because then I don't know if I said this to you before, every time I did anything about menopause, doors opened. Something happened.

And someone would say, Yeah, come and see us. And I started working with Leicester University. And at the same time, Leslie University was one of the first people to install a menopause pol policy. And I started working with them, like in the public engagement area. They just encouraged and you just need one little for anybody, isn't it? You just need one little nugget of encouragement. And if it's something that you love doing and you found a bit of a purpose, you you're off because right, okay, well thank you very much. I'll take that now redevelop that. So and the material was amazing. And what the what I also realized was that I'd actually got I wanted to learn stuff. I wasn't learning anything. Now that bear in mind this is like eight years ago. This is I think the only person that'd been started talking about it media wise. Mariella Frostrup done a programme about it. But there was hardly any shows. I tried to research it. Menopause Musical was out. I went to Menopause Musical. I enjoyed it was a certain genre of entertainment, but I didn't learn anything. I came away feeling, My God, is this it now? I've got urinary problems for the rest of my life and I'm just gonna go from being a really active woman into someone who's like, Well, that's it, old age. I couldn't

understand that because I knew there was something in me that didn't want to be like that. So and I then thought to myself, Well if that's just me, there must be so many other people in the world or even in Essex Who feel like it. And then that's when the comedy started. And that's when Dolly really found her niche.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 13:06
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> As you said, it's comedy and education, which I think's brilliant. And I I think they're

DEBBIE BAISDEN 13:10

Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 13:11
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> really important. In my talks now I try to bring some laughter into what I'm talking about. But it as you said, the material is that say dry vagina and everyone's laughing.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 13:24

Yeah. But they make it a laugh then and make it kind of My boys here drive John so many times though they say like leave it mum But it's like you say it so many times it then becomes I mean I can't believe I even talk like 'cause I'm such a prude as you know in like real life. No, no, please don't because I'll

> **JOYCE HARPER** 13:43
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> You are a prude. We won't discuss what I've been t t teaching you about, but you are such a prune.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 13:50

just die. But what is hilarious, I can't believe I had these conversations now because it's become so diluted. But then when you think about it, that's what's that's what's the problem at the moment. It needs to be diluted in the sense it becomes acceptable and it's a norm in society. We compare it to like puberty, you know, so then people talk about it more and then people don't feel it's such a so alone on the subject. But the comedy element of it is then yeah, go back to the comedy.

Because if you make people laugh about it, and it's been proven, hasn't it, that, you know, a barriers drop when we laugh, information comes in and whether you realise it at the time you've absorbed something of that and that's gonna become a useful, you know, you really hope as a performer anyway, for that viewer, that they walk away with something.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 14:39
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> It it's brilliant and I I'm totally, totally with you. Now, before we delve a little bit more into I'm gonna get you to explain a bit more what happens during your brilliant show, which I've seen many, many times, and it's just every time I see it's got better and better and there's been more education and more laughs, and it's got longer and longer.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 14:57

I know. And I've got more confident. I think that's what it is. I've got there's something else gonna happen now next year.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 15:03
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> well, we might talk about that in a minute, but if you if you're allowed to. but first you mentioned a little bit about your menopause experience. So obviously you started fighting this as you were going through it and you were having some of these symptoms, the hot flashes and the nights I've got the the brain fog and things. So d how was actually your menopause?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 15:22

Well, I I when I was younger I had severe endometriosis

> **JOYCE HARPER** 15:26
>
> Mm.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 15:26

and I'm only slightly going off this for a second because what happened was I was given I was very lucky in the sense that I was working for Bass Brewers and I had private medicine and we weren't fully and I'd I'd always had bad periods, I just I just thought everybody did. And it was only when we were trying to have a baby it wasn't happening.

And I went in, they had laproscopy done, and they they realized I had endometriosis. Anyway, I was given more or less like an HRT treatment to go into, it was only like 20, 26, whatever, to go into a a false menopause to stop everything so they could operate. And I just felt so low. I I I just never ever, and that's not me. I remember really dark thoughts and I hadn't told anybody.

I remember going round to my mum, she wasn't in and I ring up the hospital saying that this is wrong, I this is not me. And got over, you know, not got over it, that's another that's another conversation actually. But when I started going through the menopause in the sense what happened with me was I had two dodgy sort of periods that weren't normal and then stopped, completely stopped. And it was like bang, I was in it. And I was getting so upset everything was just such so massive and I always when I talked to people about it, I always felt like it was wading through mud. I you know, I just couldn't see the wood for the trees. And we were having a very stressful time at we were set up a new business. We were building a house with a young family. So you just took it all into that kind of thinking that I wasn't dealing with stress very well. That's how I felt about it. And I'd gone to my GP and I said, This isn't right. I said and I know I feel exactly the same way that I felt when I was given the HRT treatment.

'Cause it only ever happened once to feel that low. With that was uncontrollable. They straight away prescribed antidepressants. I got the I always remember getting it. I got the packet of medicine and I put it up on my shelf in the kitchen and I thought, I'm not gonna take that, but it's there. It's there if I need it. 'Cause I just needed that kind of you just feel so out of control, I think. Your own that's what happens in menopause, isn't it? It's all like everything goes wayward like this is not me, whatever. But it was there as a backup. I never did take it. Not that I've got anything against anybody taking it, obviously, but it's just a matter of your if you're I guess really if you're advised in the correct manner and what it was all about. And that was my experience. And then it's slightly thinking, then I getting re bad water infections. I've the brain fog was awful. That was just and memories I just couldn't no memories were crystallising for me.

And that's when I started thinking this is when it how I made a comedy out of it, Joyce, I do not know. I think the fact that I was driving to a college, crying my eyes out on the way, being being quite approachable for the students at the time. And I guess in the right that was my outlet to express myself through writing and and trying to make it a comedy. But yeah, it was it was hard. It was a hard experience, I must admit.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 18:37
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> You have you have made it into a brilliant comedy and I think the title of Menopause Party is perfect. It's it's brilliant. And you so you mentioned Dolly Stateman, and she is publan lady and is the main character who takes us through this this journey at on your show. So tell tell us more about how the show works and you've been building in loads of other characters who are are really great. tell us tell us about them.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 19:06

Interestingly enough, when I first went to Leicester University, I knew what I wanted to do. I had to present to them they had load of academics in the room, whatever, and whether they w they were gonna help me fund it. And I thought I had Al Murray in my head, I had Bet Lynch, I had Kat Slater and I had do a presentation. And I thought, you

know what? I've I've got to do a couple of people in this show. This is the night before I had the presentation. I've got to do a couple of people in this show that show some sort of social authority. And I thought, let's chuck a doctor in there a judge. Let's chuck a judge in there. And then as I started to research it, because I I'm I love researching a bit too much sometimes. Performing should come before researching at times. And I started to realise the characters that could have this kind of different perspective compared to what we do as a society. And so with Dolly, I guess Dolly's really the community character.

She's kind of someone everyone identifies with. She's like the pub landlady you see on the soap operas and things like this. But she's got her own little world. So if you step you're stepping into Dolly's world when you go and see a show or if you have a conversation. Because she doesn't care. And what's what's hilarious is when Dolly brings that world outside of the the Mankey Bush, that's her pub. Yeah. And that's a little name by the regulars, by the way. so

As I developed these characters like Dr. Meno Pause and Judgmental, Judgmental was actually a judge I saw on jury service. This lady in this this judge inspired her because she came into the court, which I was just like blowing away. I was writing Judgmental, but I didn't have her yet in my head what she looked like. And this late this the the judge came in and she know hello everybody.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 20:52
>
> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 20:52

Welcome to my court. And I thought, my god, that's judgmental. So it was so rich.

So I had that. And then I started looking at the educational side of it. And I thought, my God, like work. And all these sort of things were starting to build now. People are starting to look at like work policies, which is really exciting for the show and and for the world, obviously. And then the doctor keep bringing that in. But it was about making it comical so people would accept, like you know, and the doctor's part of it, that's quite an in depth part of information I give across.

But even then I call the Ovaries film and Louise. So people will assa will associate with them and just try and make it more my thing has always been try re learn it at the h highest level I possibly can and then regurgitate it that I can actually explain it to somebody. And Dolly does that great.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 21:50
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> I I do think it's so it so important. I mean, I've been working for years in fertility and in the fertility field. We I was working with a brilliant person called Jess Jessica Hepburn, who's an arts director, and taking theatre into any environment and sharing it is so powerful. We didn't did we have any comedians? I don't think we did have any comedians. It was all it was all a bit heavy, but I mean taking that into schools I think was you always remember when the play came to the school, don't you? You remember years and forever Remember the play. And I think for women going through or wanting to learn about menopause and seeing you there, as you highlighted about the comedy of it, calling Thelman Louise with the ovaries and things like that, is is just such a brilliant way to learn and for it to stay in their head. So you've really thought about that with your characters and and it will stay in their head. What what's the feedback that women are have said, what have you heard them say after they've been at your event?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 22:49

Do you know what does I have a character that was new this year was Boo Delicious? So Boo Delicious.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 22:52
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> yeah, yeah, pretty delicious, yeah, yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 22:54

Yeah, Boo Delicious is based on Boudica. And so she brings in the historical element of female health. And when you say about feedback, I talk about Boo Delicious goes back does a timeline through history. And she mentions that women were not included in clinical trials till around nineteen ninety-three, and that's you know the USA started speaking about it. And you can feel a pin drop in the theatre because they realize and it's hammered home and she says like you were alive, you do know this this happened in your lifetime, you were not included in clinical trials before then. So your parents would not have been included or your mothers would not been included in clinical trials. So the feedback I think is they always say they didn't realise how educational it's going to be. And I'd to be honest Joyce, I didn't write it to be educational. I just wrote it, it was a way of I guess at the time for me to express how I was getting dealing with my menopause and to be able to explain it to somebody else. Through the through the through the words of someone else. So th the main feedback is that one they didn't realise it'd be so educational and they thought they were the only ones they felt very isolated and what's lovely which I'm developing even further now is the word clouds so the audience get involved with the show and even if somebody you know people are private of course they are even if somebody doesn't want to get involved in actually contributing to how they feel if they see other you know I I don't say symptoms anymore now what I say is what words do you associate with it and it's brilliant the things people come up with. and their words will all come up on the word cloud

So even if you don't contribute, all of a sudden you don't feel alone because you'll you'll see your word there. Something will be there that makes you think, my gosh, I'm not the only one. And I started bringing that into colleges. I'm working with USP College and Classview. I don't do all the characters to the students because I think that that'd totally blow their brains. But what I do do is talk about the show as a vehicle, and then they do the word cloud. And it's very, very similar. It's fascinating.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 25:05
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> It I I love it. I love it that you and me are so much on the same page because when I give a lecture, I don't well, number one, I try to make them laugh a bit. and normally shouting out Vulva or Dry Vagina works. but also I want to hear from the audience and I exactly what you've just said, getting them involved, it's not like you're talking at them anymore, you're involving them. And I d I agree with you. I think they

DEBBIE BAISDEN 25:29

Yeah, but then

> **JOYCE HARPER** 25:31
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> love that. And I often use Mentimeter, I've got enough time. I use it with my students all the time to give everyone in the room a way to write something down. So those that don't know, there are various. I think you use Mentimeter, don't you? Yeah. So Mentimeter is

DEBBIE BAISDEN 25:47

Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 25:49
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> a it's a it's a really good system with a just a you can scan a QR code or just write in a number. It's really easy for the audience to log in. And then when you ask them a question, they can put that on. So when you ask them about what words they associate with menopause. I say that exact question. I've got loads of those word cards as well. But I think it's such a great way to involve them and to hear what they're saying because I know that you react to what they've put in there. So I think that's an it's that's incredibly powerful and making them really feel part of the menopause party and making each menopause party a bit different as well. yeah you've had a great response on that, haven't you?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 26:31

Yeah, well it it reflects it reflects the the the little mini community unit at that time, which is fascinating. You know, and the dream is to bring that all around the country. Let's do it regional. Let's see if we can compare, you know, how some you know, in in more less economical structured areas, look at class, 'cause I'm a great believer in that, as you know, is that we're not reaching everybody cross car class and culture.

And I think this is really important because that's the that's the majority of the country and the majority of women, you know, a lot of women don't even won't speak about it. Which is fine. Of course it's a it's you it it's it's it's down to them. But to create communities and spaces that they can hear about it and feel less isolated, I'm all for that. I think it's and joining if they want to. And Mentimeter definitely allows and to be honest with you, Joyce, I think more of a performer sense of of you, audiences want to get involved now. Didn't matter what show you do. You know, it's become very immersive and they they want to be part of the show. And that becomes part of their show. That is their show, basically, because they've actually contributed towards it.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 27:44
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> Yeah, I I love it. I love I most of my talks now with the public, I say they're conversations and I and as you say, yeah, as I've said, everyone's gonna be different because it depends what they're gonna say, and and I need to react to that. And and you do you do that in the show. But let's talk about men. So there are normally some men in the audience, but I wanna ask first, because I know the answer to this. And you did say it a little bit earlier. What do your husbands and sons think about the metaphors party?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 28:11

Yeah. 'Cause I am the only woman in my family. Like the dog boys. Do you know what it's so interesting 'cause we've spoken about this and when I was going like I said, we've been together for years, so the endometriosis I just kinda like got on with as a younger woman and dealt I just thought everyone had that. That was just something you you'll you know, everyone had to get deal with. So I've I've I think I've always dealt with things quite personally.

And just got on with it. And at the time when I was going through the mail, I really did think it was stress. I think my partner thought it was just stress that we were just getting over it and it was just one of those things. now I think I mean it confused everybody, Joyce, for so many years. What is she doing? Why is she going out on stage? Why is she talking about dry vaginas? And and it's like

There there's been a big level of acceptance of what I do. Like my boys know about menopause now and it actually they are so supportive. Tanny, I think Tully just thinks sometimes, where this where happened to the woman that I married because he didn't, you know, he didn't marry into this. I didn't marry into it. That wasn't me at the time. But the support has always been there. Whether I think we've learned about it all together. You know, because it's I didn't realise that as a woman you could share things.

That sounds really dim. But that wasn't my thing. It wasn't about sharing. I've never really shared anything like that. I always thought that's too personal. I was brought up that you didn't share anything. And I think this is what's really important now, that we do need to crack that mould, that people should be able to share things. So it's I would say I dealt with it very personally. but that was my own fault.

And I think

> **JOYCE HARPER** 30:06
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> This is not

DEBBIE BAISDEN 30:07

it's it was Go on.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 30:10
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> I no, I just gonna say it's just so important and the fact that even for the period talks at school they are still in some schools in England separating boys and girls, it's ridiculous.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 30:24

Yeah. Well when I was teaching, one of the boys would say to the girls and it really wasn't said in a derogative manner, one of the girls might get a bit shirty with me and they would one of the boys go, she's on her period and she went, Yeah, you know, you know that, don't ya? And I was like The word period. And I was horrified. But yeah, it's because we've got to dilute that. That's got to stop And being a person that came from that background, like my family was Irish, Catholic, went to convent school, that wasn't spoken about. Wasn't spoken about.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 31:03
>
> And the men in your audience, have you heard back from any of them about how they felt about it?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 31:09

Yeah, do you know what they're starting to see p they're starting to come through now, which was I mean, obviously the way the show is, people say, it's just for it's just for women. And I remember Chris Head, when I worked with Chris Head, he's really good director. Chris said to me, Debbie, look, just build up your group of people. He said, When others want to come along for the ride, they will come. He said, But you just gotta you just just go with what you think is the the right the right trajectory for the show, whatever you're doing. And every time, that's another thing women do come back with I wish I brought my partner. I'm bringing him back next time. Because that was originally written for men and for younger people. In the sense that I wanted everybody to go. You can't direct it to everybody, of course you can't. But the idea was that make it understandable and accessible to the people I wanted to reach, men, younger women. Cause I knew women would understand it there was in the show. And that's a that's the other problem we've got, isn't it?

The majority of people that show empathy for menopause are people that are still in it. And they get through it and they go, Right, okay, I'm off. Thank God for that. I'm okay. Never want to speak about it again. And that's not fair on the generations coming through.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 32:28
>
> Yeah. And and you've performed in many places, obviously in pubs, theatres, workplaces, universities. We did a festival together this year. Do different audiences react differently?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 32:43

Yeah, that's I I think what has become very interesting. Corporate is different. When you go into corporate, I did Westminster Council three times, the same show. This is before Boo Delicious came along and it was hilarious. They rang me up the third time and they said, Debbie, we're having menopause day and we put it all to the staff and they said, Bring Debbie back. I said, Listen, the show is the same at the moment. I haven't developed it any further. No, no, they wait to come back. And that was hilarious because it there's a bit about Tourette's in in the best possible way, obviously, folks, that the character talks about. So Dolly swears. And it was that was such a surreal moment watching the London Eye in the background, the windows at the top of Westminster Council building, and having this open office and actually swearing, which was hilarious. So it's yeah, it it does change, but I think as I developed, 'cause I didn't start I started learning to perform in my late forties. So I'm still learning. That's how it's a lifelong, you know, pursuit. So I think I've changed as a performer. And what I look at the audience now, how I feel for me it's like one voice. It's when I'm when I'm when I'm talking to an audience, I'm talking to one person. And if they laugh, it's one person's voice. And I I don't know why this is how it's developed with me. So I guess really it's a give and take relationship all the time.

So it does change. You do pick up on the the sensitivities of an audience. You will pick up on the atmosphere or the ambiance or you know, but I'm learning that that it's a bit like when you go to see on you on a plane. If you see the air hostess get a bit nervous, you're gonna be nervous. So

> **JOYCE HARPER** 34:28
>
> Ha ha ha.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 34:29

if you look at the performer and they're not quite cracking on with it, it's it's gonna go rubbish. So I think for me I've I've just developed my professional side as well what I want to achieve out of the show for the audience.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 34:43
>
> Have you have you got a favourite gig and a least favourite gig? You don't have to be specific about them.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 34:48

my god. I will be specific because but it was most it was the most life learning gig ever. First time I went to Edinburgh, I went into I was done a gig for funny women. It was my fur I my second gig I'd ever done. Yeah. Went to Edinburgh. What the hell? And I was on stage and when you first start performing, I did anyway, got a bit crass because I think that's nerves. You you sort of make it more crass than funny. And

No one told me how bright the lights are, Joyce, on the stage. If you ever did performing, folks, just make sure you realise the lights are really bright and you won't be able to see thing. So I'm there on stage, can't see a thing, and as the smoke cleared, I could see this woman protecting her two like twelve-year-old children, girls, and she had her arms around them and I completely just buggered the whole thing out. Came out of there, felt so disappointed in myself, ended up crying in the bush in Edinburgh, ringing up my sister saying I don't know what I'm doing here. She replied, None of us know what you're doing now. So that was my worst one. And I thought if I get over that, I'll get over anything. But what happened, funny women obviously thought, Well we can't have her on stage again. That was awful. So I died, literally I died on stage, yeah, massively. And you will die if you go on stage performances. Of course you do. And but I thought I haven't come all that way not to do dolly.

And I went out and I went flyering as Dolly on the street. Best thing I ever did because I learned very quickly that was her skill. She could talk to the community on a face to face. And again, a a massive learning curve for me. That was that. best one. I would sat up with so many I had so many lovely gigs. I really have. I loved doing the big retreat recently. That was fabulous because it was absolutely pelting down with rain.

And the and the marquee got and they weren't there that they were the sort of audience that weren't gonna stay if they didn't like it because there were so many fantastic things going on that they would move around and they stayed. And it just got bigger and bigger. And I couldn't see outside. There were so many people actually run all fools into the marquee. So that was wonderful. And I did an event once at Whittam Town Hall, and the reason why it was so special to me was I'd never performed at a hometown. I'd always gone miles away to form and I came back to Whittam and it was just I've done that about I I've done it twice now, but the first time the first we're both fantastic, but the first time was a real eye opener and the whole audience was just loving it. And you you feel it's such a buzz. You can't I can't get that buzz anywhere else. I really can't

> **JOYCE HARPER** 37:34
>
> Yeah, it it feeds us, doesn't it, Debbie Debbie? It fit that that performing

DEBBIE BAISDEN 37:37

Yeah, I love it.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 37:39
>
> and for me in lockdown I found that really hard because I got really depressed because I was like, I'm not being fed anymore by my audience. I need my audience.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 37:47

Yeah. Yeah. But for me lockdown was great because what I did was it was very reflective. I met Chris Head for a writing class and when we could get out and you know we had those odd times in where lockdowns were going, you know, in and out, I'd meet up with Chris, started shaping the show and it it it became different. There was something about it, it became more professional. so for me it was quite a reflective period that I was able to do that. but

The way things are now, I'm loving that. I'm loving that I'm actually I've got more confidence in myself, or it's more confidence or I guess I believe in more what I'm doing. There's a connection now. And then when I do go to do a show, I know the audience, they want to be there. Not that I mean George, when I first started, I didn't care if anyone turned up. Because I just wanted to be able to do it.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 38:41
>
> Yeah. Yeah. I'm I'm happy if I've got a couple of people. It's fine. It's fine.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 38:46

Yeah. not that no no no I want loads now.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 38:52
>
> But what what

DEBBIE BAISDEN 38:52

Okay, greedy now.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 38:54
>
> about what about criticisms? Have you had any people getting upset that you're joking about menopause? I mean, I just say comedian comedians now can't say anything and they people don't understand its satire and and they're you know, you're you're raising the conversation about these things by making it funny. Have you have you had criticisms?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 39:19

No, I I haven't really in that sense. But I don't think it's because I don't you've seen the show, I don't particularly dig anybody out

> **JOYCE HARPER** 39:27
>
> No.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 39:28

unless they become a pain as you as a heckler or something that. So and I I don't I don't I hope I don't. I don't feel I dig men out. The the whole idea was to make them feel welcome and that it's a conversation for everybody.

But criticism I mean I have criticism sometimes about when you thought about doing it this way. And I I take all that on board because I think that's great to get a different perspective and look at it. I might look at it and go, No, I'm not. But I might look at it and go, Yeah, you know what? I I feel

> **JOYCE HARPER** 39:55
>
> No.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 39:55

that I feel I'm in that situation now, that I'm in that perspective, I can go right. but no one has ever said to me, Why are you doing it on menopause? Just menopause and no one said that. Because I think maybe because there's such a lack of material out there. Maybe that's the reason. I don't know. Well have you heard something I haven't heard?

> **JOYCE HARPER** 40:15
>
> No, no, no. I just I just no, I just thought with comedians now, they all get criticized. Every day you're on social media, there's a comedian being criticized for something. And I just thought there would have been some people that said to you, that, you know, that wasn't funny, you know, got on their high horse and said that

DEBBIE BAISDEN 40:34

But yeah, yeah, but I'll no, I'll get that. I'll get that. Someone put a comment, I've started doing review page now, which I was a bit late in the day about doing this, and someone didn't get quite get all the characters. So you'll get that, you'll get somebody, I didn't really that didn't sit with me. But comedy is like any art form, it is so subjective that we're all gonna have different perspectives on it. who's the guy recently who done the really silly comment about women in the gym? Yeah, he's just he's

> **JOYCE HARPER** 41:01
>
> Yeah, yeah, I can't remember his name. But that was the one I was thinking of.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 41:04

Been Yeah, he's been caned, isn't he? you know, rightly so to a certain degree. But it's kinda like but that's just that's kinda like easy material to cane, isn't it? The the material he's used, that's an easy observation. It's not really comedy, I don't think. I I think when you there's gotta be some sort of intelligence behind comedy, good comedy. Whether it creates a talking point for something. And that's one thing comedy does really well. And I think we have to be very careful in society that we do c overcriticise comedians because they're reflecting whether it's right or wrong. They're creating a perspective that someone's thinking about. And it's very easy to imagine that that school of thought doesn't exist when it does. And sometimes that's better out there than in. So 'cause you can you know you're dealing with.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 41:54
>
> Yeah, I I always think comedians are geniuses because I think I think to well I think number one to stand up there and do a show like that. I mean your show is that like you said it's it's one or one hour or ninety minutes and it's you. I mean it's amazing that they can you all remember everything. but also as you said, that you are bringing up topics that are important and you're getting them on the table. You're and you are talking about a really taboo topic That a lot of people we've said dry vagina several times, but lots of people don't want to talk, don't want to hear dry vagina or you this listen,

DEBBIE BAISDEN 42:29

Yeah. Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 42:30
>
> look, you you get you take on quite a lot of you take on all of the taboo around menopause and you lay it on the table. And yeah, I'm I'm really pleased that you haven't really had criticisms. Obviously, the odd joke or something, but there was a few that I thought, ooh, I can't remember what they were now, but there were a few and

DEBBIE BAISDEN 42:51

Yeah, you see but it's so weird, isn't it? 'Cause and because I do it all the time now and I've had such good response with it, I haven't found it that bad. So

> **JOYCE HARPER** 43:00
>
> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 43:00

maybe that's why. I don't know. but what's interesting now, Debbie's gonna go in it. Debbie's gonna go in the show.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 43:07
>
> Prechei.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 43:09

Yeah, which is gonna be I don't know how that's gonna go.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 43:14
>
> Wow. Okay. Love it. That's intriguing.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 43:21

Yeah. And I wonder, like you just said there, as you were talking, character comedy gives you it's so weird doing character comedy. It gives you freedom on one hand because you're all you're you're almost ala i it's your own it's it's your own permission, it's your own freedom that you're actually exploring. But it does as a performer, it gives me freedom to like look at subjects, say something I wouldn't necessarily say. I mean obviously, you know, thank God Debbie has not got every single symptom Dolly talks about or the judge talks about because I would be severely, severely, you know, miserable. But at the same time, when you do something as yourself, you think about something. So when you do it as a character, you have to think about it as yourself and then go right, okay, then you have to rethink it again because then you've got to put it in the characters' heads. So I I am sometimes jealous of performers that do it as themselves. Because they obviously get a bit material and they'll exaggerate, yeah, or whatever they want do the play around bit like a bit of plasticine and go right, how do I want this to go forward? So he's I wonder if the character comedy stops the criticism as much. Don't know, maybe.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 44:26
>
> Yeah. I I I think it's I think it's such a hard job. Anyway, now I've I've been asking quite a lot of my guests, especially that been doing anything on menopause and this podcast is coming out as part of the World Menopause Day series for this year. what about things that you see on social media and in the media in general? Are there things around menopause that really get your back up and are annoying you?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 44:56

Well, I would say the biggest thing against my back up, which I really hoped and hope women don't do, in it's creating this lifestyle that doesn't exist for a lot of people. So I I think I smoked when I was younger and then when I replaced it with buying magazines so I could still go into news agents. So I didn't buy cigarettes, but I'd buy a magazine. And then when you think about that, you think about okay, you've got you know, good luck to these people that have done brilliantly, I love that. But there is sometimes about chasing an image that I don't like and I've I do worry that we're doing the same thing again. We've got this opportunity going through menopause, etcetera. You have this new revitalisation of life, which you do folks, you you really do, if it is you're not there at the moment. It's revitalisation of life. And then you're met with all these images of women that are like perfect. That's not life.

And that I that gets my back up. That we're doing it again. We're going into that system. But this didn't exist before. Of women in of you know, menopausal age or the normal menopausal age.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 46:11
>
> What can you get a bit more specific? What sort of lifestyle things are annoying you?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 46:17

What sort of last time I feel do annoying me? I think money is just image. It would be that we're making women feel they had to look younger than what they are. That worries me. And I think because then what are we doing then? I don't wanna I don't want to be younger. I wouldn't want I wouldn't want to be in my twenties again of after that and I really mean that. I really mean that. But then again I you know, touch wood, I'm relatively fit.

So maybe that's why and I still do I'm doing things now that I want to do in my twenties that I didn't do then. Do I necessarily want to look 20? No, I don't want to look like a scared tambourine. Do you know what I mean? I I don't but I don't knock I don't want to knock someone who does either because if that's what they feel makes them happy out of life, but if that becomes the norm, that worries me. You know, I do acting as well. you gotta have an expressive face. You can't not just be there without having expression.

But I've got friends that do treatments and things like that. So I you know, I'd never knock it, but it's not it's just not for me. But I do as long as we keep a balanced view on society, that it's a woman's choice that she wants to do it. It shouldn't become the choice of the society that you have to do it to get a place in to get above or, you know, to move on. It's a tricky old subject, Joyce, isn't it?

> **JOYCE HARPER** 47:41
>
> Yeah, yeah. I mean, for me, it's the fact that society are bombarding us is that this is what you should be doing. So it's

DEBBIE BAISDEN 47:50

Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 47:51
>
> you know, it's a social media saying and and I agree with you. I think a group of women in their fifties and sixties that haven't had anything done look so beautiful. I mean, I was I had a men I was organizing a menopause ceremony yesterday. Everyone in the room, their faces were just amazing. And we don't want to be 30 again or twenty again, God forbid.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 48:13

Yeah. I mean the thing is you I'm not one of these people that go, I've never you know, I would never say never, but I've never have. And I think when when I was younger people say to me, do you have anything done? I had so many operations with endometriosis. I thought why would I go in willingly to have something done when I

> **JOYCE HARPER** 48:27
>
> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 48:28

had a load of rubbish done before? but I do get that gives someone a bit of confidence or gives them something to move to the next step of their lives and they feel they need it, then so be it. But then you do have to question, well, why do they feel like they have to do that in the first place? Because it hasn't been accepted. And we're feeding back I do worry we're feeding back into it again. That

> **JOYCE HARPER** 48:51
>
> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 48:52

we have to look into it a certain way. And if you don't look into that certain way, you're not in the club.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 48:58
>
> We're in the lovely face aging lovely face club.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 49:04

I'm in the crack face. Look, I got a crack. I did some filming with Dolly recently. I thought, my god, it's like valley. It's not a crack as a valley.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 49:14
>
> We love a crack, we love a crack. And are you allowed to say you mentioned a little bit about your new character, Debbie, who's gonna be in the menopause party. Anything

DEBBIE BAISDEN 49:23

Yeah, yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 49:24
>
> else we're allowed to know about what's next or any gigs that are coming up that you're really looking forward to?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 49:31

right, so gosh. I'm towards Northumbria University at the moment. That could be exciting. So we're looking at hopefully moving forward of working together and me bring some shows to Newcastle. So I'm having a bit of a rethink 'cause obviously I d I am a real pub landlady in real life and Christmas period is coming up. So I am looking now at doing next year's tour, which will be quite extensive.

So I'm looking at doing that. Debbie is a revelation that's happened quite recently because I want to bring everything 'cause because the thing is, since I've been doing this, there's been like menopause party, her and a change of me, Dolly Slaytman. we've got all these new characters coming along now. And I've realised, you know what, I've been hiding behind all this when it is actually me that's doing it.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 50:23
>
> Well.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 50:24

Which there's probably a big psychoanalysis subject we could have. So but we're not gonna go there.

So I feel now I'm coming home to me. So it's like, right, let's represent this. And I'm quite excited about him. I'm really excited about that. Who knows what that's gonna bring? Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 50:42
>
> that's great. That's great. Now this might be before we go to the very final question that I asked all my guests, the last question about the menopause party, this might be quite hard. Is there is there one particular joke that or said something that you say that you feel really always works and always gets everyone crying with laughter?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 51:07

I c I don't want to say it you won't you won't hear it in the show. whenever a good test line for me is always when Dolly mentions the Manky Bush.

Yeah. So Dolly says, so when you're from a pub background, and maybe if you go down the pub you'll notice if you've got a regular pub that you visit, everybody has got a slang name, and everything is created there's a bit like only fools and horses, which was very, very on par with real life in pubs. So whenever Dolly mentions the Mankey Bush, 'cause that's her pub name, but she's very quick to say 'cause obviously Dolly's pub to her is Gastro.

But I'd say that line and it's always a tester. If they love if they if they're gonna enjoy the show, they'll they'll really laugh at that. And there's a s there is a sh there is a line the judge says, and the judge, people love the judge. They love her. Honestly, that that is one big bit of feedback that I get. so there is a joke in but I don't wanna tell you because then you have to come to the show, folks. Sorry. There's a there's a joke about

> **JOYCE HARPER** 52:20
>
> That's all right.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 52:21

the gentleman in you.

There's a joke about the gentleman in the audience related to pelvic floors. And someone heckled a little bit at the last show and it was fabulous. It was a gentleman. And as he heckled, I knew what line was coming next about the gentleman in the audience. And it was like, thank you. Inside. And he heckled just before I said that line, and it was like it was like a gift.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 52:47
>
> I love that. I love see do you mind a heckler? Because I know some comedians have got really struppy and like, don't you heckle me and blah blah and they've really got anger. I've seen a few live comedians that have and I've seen some on TV that have got really angry about hecklers.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 53:00

Yeah, it can be annoying. It can be annoying. The reason why I say it can be annoying, you you know, you've worked really hard to do this performance and people I mean, Jimmy Carr is just a legend. Harry deals with heckles. I couldn't do what he does. It's just amazing what he does. and I don't f but then people go to that show for that reason because they know what he's gonna do, he's gonna absolutely rinse them. do I mind them? I always thought heckling was someone shouting out something really negative, but then I soon learned Heckling is actually any shouting out. So it could be anything. So bear in mind you might have someone who's had quite a lot to drink and they might shout out and you have to deal with that. But it's when you get people to carry on shouting out, carry on shouting out, and you can't do anything with that. It's like and and as you know, there's quite a lot, because if I do the judge and a doctor, there's quite a lot of information I I get in there that I don't want to get wrong. I don't want

> **JOYCE HARPER** 53:52
>
> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 53:53

someone to come back to me, well, you said this. And it's quite easy if you're on stage, you're only human, that you, you know

We're not robots. You come out at the word sometimes, it might be you might forget something. So but then it's very difficult for me to say that because I invite the audience in. It's a it's a big part of the show. So I have to accept a certain amount of heckling.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 54:15
>
> Yeah. Yeah. It is and listen, we we all I I've sometimes, you know, done something and you know, said something in public or on live radio or something and thought, Ooh, that didn't actually quite quite come out as clear as I wanted it to be. So yeah, you don't wanna lose that train of

DEBBIE BAISDEN 54:29

Yeah. Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 54:30
>
> thought if you're in the middle of the the that specific piece. Right, Debbie, we're

DEBBIE BAISDEN 54:35

Yeah, or even that you know that go on, sorry.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 54:38
>
> No, carry on.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 54:39

I say even if when you're in the character, you know something's come coming up that underlies

> **JOYCE HARPER** 54:43
>
> Yeah.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 54:43

the character and can be more funny and you know that's coming out the minute that heckle comes in, you're like, no, you've just you've just ruined that moment. So it's not about that person, it's about everybody in the audience.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 54:55
>
> Yeah, but I'm giving a talk I can say, that's gonna come up in a minute, but you can't in the middle of your show really, it's a bit harder.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 55:03

Yeah, just stop there for a second, would you? Just shut up for a minute 'cause I ain't really funny's

> **JOYCE HARPER** 55:05
>
> Ha ha ha.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 55:06

coming.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 55:08
>
> Say that heckle again in 10 minutes. right, Debbie,

DEBBIE BAISDEN 55:11

Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 55:11
>
> it's been absolutely brilliant. I I I I always say every podcast, I learned something. I've learned something today. Learn something about, well, I knew I knew how hard it was to be a comedian and how how hard you work on this show. So I will put the link to your website in the show notes. Anyone that wants to see Debbie or book Debbie for the brilliant menopause party, please do. It's a it's a laugh a minute. But my very final questions, Debbie, that I ask all my guests.
>
> And I'm really gonna be intrigued what you say. So what makes you happy and where is your happy place?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 55:48

My happy place. I would say it wasn't all the time, but stage now is my happy place. and yeah the stage, but that wasn't that wasn't all the time. It was like a big massive challenge before. yeah, that is my happy place, I would say. And being with my family. Anything to do with my family. We're all busy people, we if we all get together, that's like that's It's more like a personal happy is the stage and a community happy is my family. That sounds

> **JOYCE HARPER** 56:24
>
> Lovely, lovely.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 56:25

really weird now. It's that back to front, isn't it?

> **JOYCE HARPER** 56:28
>
> No, no, not at all, not at all. And the very, very final question, what advice would you give your younger self?

DEBBIE BAISDEN 56:38

I I would say really don't wait to thirty, forty, fifty thinking you've got to have life sorted out. There's no age barrier to life being sorted out. I used to always think right, get have the family, get the job done, get the business sorted out. And then by the time I'm forty I I'll know exactly what I've got to do. You you never do. Keep learning, keep being curious. And if you find yourself creating boundaries yourself There are bound there's plenty of boundaries for us to see you know, for us to be locked into. There's an unspoken rule book and once you realise that exists, start changing it. Always be curious.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 57:22
>
> Debbie, you are a very wise woman. You're a very talented woman. You've made me laugh many times. You've educated so many

DEBBIE BAISDEN 57:29

Yeah.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 57:30
>
> hundreds, thousands of people. Keep up with the Brilliant Menopause Party. Keep up your comedy. And thank you so much for chatting today.

DEBBIE BAISDEN 57:40

thank you, Joyce. It's been absolutely lovely. Always is. Always is.

> **JOYCE HARPER** 57:44
>
> Was a laugh.

Listen to the full episode on Professor Joyce Harper's website, or wherever you get your podcasts. More episodes: joyceharper.com/podcasts