**No One is Listening ( a ghost story)**

**Podcast Two. My Sisters Ghost.**

**In episode two of "No One Is Listening," Emma Williams discusses the non-sensational ghost story by Daniel Defoe, which changed the genre by focusing on human experiences rather than supernatural elements. She also explores the connection between ghosts and memory, particularly in the context of dementia, through workshops she conducts with people living with dementia and their carers. Emma references Wendy Mitchell's book, "What I Wish People Knew About Dementia," which offers practical advice and insights into the disease. She shares personal anecdotes about her sister's death and how her imagination provided comfort during a difficult time, highlighting the blurred lines between reality and hallucination.**

Vic Llewellyn 0:00

No one is Listening a podcast that explores ghosts, memory loss and feeling the fear.

Karen Hayes 0:07

It's so simple. He hasn't explained anything. He's just made it clear, and it's all around a kind of a shaft of light on the water and these shimmering memories.

Emma Williams 0:17

 Yeah, yeah. Agreed.

Emma Williams 0:19

So here I am recording episode two, and in it I'm going to talk about ghosts, but a particular type, one that is linked very much to grief and memory. So in 1706 everyone was reading a pamphlet, a true relation of the apparition of one Mrs. Veal the next day after her death, to one Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury on the eighth of September 1705, now, this pamphlet was hugely successful, and it was written by Daniel Defoe, and it changed the notion of a ghost story, because it was the very first ghost story that was non sensational. And what I mean is that there wasn't any like, I don't know, sort of chains being sort of carried along previously, stories that had things like, she apparently gave birth to loads of rabbits, a guy who threw up loads of stones. And, you know, the kind of skeletons, classic hauntings, but in this one, Mrs. Bargrave was just sitting sewing when she was visited by her childhood friend, and they talked and shared hours together, and when she left, the only oddity was that her friend wouldn't give her a kiss, claiming that she'd been ill. But Mrs. Bargrave discovered that her friend had died the day before of fits. So, this visitation was a ghost, but it wasn't dramatic. It was, in a way, comforting.

Emma Williams 1:56

Weirdly, the bit that everyone he really liked was the HP bottle...

Karen Hayes 1:59

yeah,

Emma Williams 2:00

because it just

Karen Hayes 2:01

because it's real,

Emma Williams 2:02

yeah? And it felt really kind of human in this kind of beautiful poetry

Karen Hayes 2:06

it's real, it's unpoetic, it's well observed. And it's, you know, it takes you to a particular time,

Emma Williams 2:13

yeah? So, it's, there's a memory aspect of it as well.

Emma Williams 2:16

So, part of the project, no one's listening a ghost story, is that we are running workshops with people who are living with dementia and their carers. And Vic and I have both looked after people with dementia, and we sort of thought we knew about the disease, but actually what we knew was the individual people that we were looking after and their individual response to the disease, and it's so different for so many people.

 So, we did start to read a few books, and well, in Vic's case, absolutely, if you know him, hundreds and hundreds of books. I didn't read that many, but one of my favourite books, and one that I just would recommend to anyone who's been diagnosed or is looking after someone, is called What I wish people knew about dementia, and it's by a woman called Wendy Mitchell, who was diagnosed with early onset dementia, and it's, it's like a guidebook about how to survive, and it's incredibly sad, but it's also incredibly useful and very brave and really, really fascinating.

Now, in it, she talks about hallucinations, because some people with dementia have hallucinations, which I vaguely thought I knew about, but didn't really, which makes working and talking with them about ghosts, you know, quite interesting, and you need to be careful, because obviously a lot of these hallucinations can be very disturbing and upsetting. But then in one chapter, Wendy talks about one hallucination that happened to her, and what she would, she suggests, is, when you have hallucinations, try and take a photograph on your phone or on your iPad, because then you can check if it's real, and it just gives you a sense of what is real and what isn't.

 But she one day, she was looking out of the window. She always keeps her curtains open when she had dementia, because she loved looking at the sky and her garden. She never had them shut. Anyway, she's looking out the window, and she caught sight of something, and she realised that she could see standing on the middle of the lawn. Her father and he died 20 years ago, and she said she should have been frightened, but he just looked very ordinary. He was wearing his sort of gardening clothes, a green cardigan and sort of casual trousers, stuff that he would wear for pottering around in the shed, and he was very relaxed and had like a smile on his face. And instead of taking a photograph, trying to get evidence of what was she seeing was real or not, she just stood and looked, because she said it was one of the few times that dementia had given us something that was, you know, that had been kind. It's normally a really, really cruel disease.

It reminded me of a poem that I read to some of in within the workshops that we do, we tend to do them in Memory Cafes. We read poems and create poems and create stories. But one of the poems. Is this chapter in Wendy's book. It really reminded me of it. So I asked Karen Hayes, who is a freelance artist, and she works in the field of dementia, has done for about 20 years to read this poem that I've been reading to these groups and to just have a chat about it.

Karen Hayes 5:17

Eden Rock by Charles Causley. They are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden rock, my father, 25 in the same suit of genuine Irish tweed his terrier Jack, still two years old and trembling at his feet. My mother, 23 in a sprigged dress, drawn at the waist. Ribbon in her straw hat has spread the stiff white cloth over the grass. Her hair, the colour of wheat, takes on the light. She pours tea from a thermos, the milk straight from an old HP sauce bottle, a screw of paper for a cork slowly sets out the same three plates, the tin cups painted blue, the sky whitens as if lit by three suns. My mother shades her eyes and looks my way over the drifted stream. My father spins a stone along the water leisurely. They beckon to me from the other bank. I hear them call see where the stream path is. Crossing is not as hard as you might think. I had not thought that it would be like this.

Emma Williams 6:46

My sister died on the 28th of February, 2024 so the same year that I'm making this podcast, and she was 57 years old. She was two years older than me, and I spent most of my life, mocking her, saying that, you know, doesn't matter how old she got, I was always going to remain young, which this game. She sort of loved it. And also went, Oh, God, shush, Emma, please.

We lived when we were growing up together, and we were quite little, sort of age between, I don't know. I think we moved there when I was about four or five, and she was seven. We lived in a quite a small house in a village, and it was a very old house, and it was, I mean, it was just, it just creaked and at night, it just made like creaky noises.

I was not keen when all the lights were off. And I remember, there was a there was a group of teenagers that we hung around with, and there was a point where Ouija boards were really in and they suggested coming to our house to do it Ouija board, because it was such a creepy house. And both me and my sister went absolutely not because my mum had told us that an entire family had burnt alive in that house. And if we woke their spirits, she would say they would end up drifting around, smouldering and full of grief. Well, other thing that was actually true, but it was a very good deterrent. I think she just didn't want a load of teenagers drinking cider at her kitchen table.

But anyway, they didn't come. But I was completely terrified by this story. My bedroom, which was always cold, was a sort of, it was like a there was a small extension on the back of the house and where the kitchen was, and my bedroom was above it. And it was particularly at night that I'd get anxious. And it was just weird, you know, you lie there, and then there's a creek on the stairs, anything, and it just, it starts to get louder in in in your head, and the sound of the TV downstairs would, would it would just feel like it was a background to my own horror story. You know, I could pull the duvet up over my ears. I knew something was going to come and get me, and it was something really dark and really terrible.

So, in fact, one night I woke up, I had actually gone to sleep. I woke up. I was so terrified that got out of bed and I turned the wrong way in my room. Is this absolutely true. So instead of heading like, down my room towards the door and the light switch, which was by the door, I turned the wrong way and just headed to the wall that was the head, head of my bed. And I was like, completely disorientated. So I was running my hands along this wall, and I just thought, I've been someone's bricked me in. They've bricked me into my own room. So I started banging on the wall and screaming, let me out. Let me out.

And then my mum came in the room, and she turned on the light on, and bless her, how she didn't just burst out laughing. I don't know. I mean, I was there, pinned against my own wall, facing the wrong direction, saying that I was trapped. She didn't laugh at me. She was very kind, and the next day, she got me a nightlight, put it by the bed. My Nightmare sort of carried on, and I was. And I was genuinely panicking at night, and I had to find some kind of solution.

 So I got up one night, and then I sort of turned the right way out of the room. This time, got to my door, I stepped out, and the house was really weird. Immediately, I had to step up this weird step that shouldn't really be there. I don't know why it was there, and bend down to avoid the beam. That was really weird, that shouldn't be there. And then I'd turn and I just quietly cross the top of the stairs, and then I would just, it was, I think it was 123, steps. And then I was at my sister's door. And now her room was at the front of house, and her room was really warm always, which I thought was deeply unfair. Anyway, I at night, I get to her door, and I just really open it really, really slowly and quietly, and there in front of her door was her single bed, and she was just lying there.

Now, sometimes she would just tell me to bugger off, basically, that was it. Or she would just like, let out this massive sigh, which was extremely crushing. I remember the sound of this sigh, which just made me feel like a complete idiot. But if I was really lucky, she would, without comment, pull back the duvet and let me climb in next to her and I could fit perfectly. I just sort of curl in and she'd be around the outside of me, and in seconds, I was fast asleep.

Karen Hayes 11:28

They're a little bit away from him that they're not right up close, because you think you're right up close in the middle of a picnic, but actually they're a little way away. And then you realise, oh, they're over the other bank of the river. And then you realise, oh, he's got to go to them, and then you realise what it's about, and his kind of humble bewilderment and Epiphany around this is what it's like to die.

Emma Williams 11:55

The day I found out she'd died, I was working away. I was staying in digs. My room was big and empty and it had like a small, single bed. But I had to finish the job I was doing for four more nights before I went home to my family. I didn't tell my landlady that evening when I came home into the kitchen, because I met her, and it was very odd. She was really excited. She showed me a video on a phone of a pond her sister had made out of a washing up bowl with birds and a water boatman. There's even a fish in it, I think. And it was, it was just a beautiful little video. So I watched the video, and I just, I couldn't tell her, really. I just thought, I don't know what I thought, but I didn't tell her. I went up to my room and I did some work, and then I climbed into bed, and I basically just started to panic.

 I felt my breathing got a bit caught up, and I just felt really, truly afraid. I thought, This is so bad. Everything is so bad. I'm gonna be swept away by just the terribleness of my sister's death. So I started to imagine her body curled round me like everything, her sort of warm breath on the back of my neck and her arms, the sort of weight of them on my arms, even her hair, which was sort of long and black, and how it just occasionally, sometimes would tickle my skin. And this, this idea became real. I mean, it didn't feel like a real body, just sort of almost like the edge of a body around me, like someone had, like drawn it, but not filled it in, but it started to feel like it was really there. And for three nights, this happened, I'd climb into bed and she would curl around me and calm me down so I could sleep. It was my imagination. I don't think it was a ghost, but it did feel real in some way, and however hard I tried, after those three days, she never visited me again.

Vic Llewellyn 14:05

Episode Two, No one is listening, has been brought to you by Emma Williams and Vic Llewellyn with music by Sam Halmarack and contributions by Karen Hayes. This project has been supported by the Arts Council England and 10 Radio.