

I Wish I Was An Only Child - Sam and Sara Barron

[Guitar music]

[Flute sounds]

[Music stops. Ocean wave sounds]

RACHEL MASON: Come into our podcast: I Wish I Was An Only Child.

CATHY MASON: [laughs] Oh my god.

RACHEL: Where we –

CATHY: That's amazing.

RACHEL: Yeah. This –

CATHY: Welcome to our world.

RACHEL: Hold on, hiya –

CATHY: Hiya?

RACHEL: Cath...

CATHY: [laughs] [imitates Rachel] Hiya!

RACHEL: Hold on.

CATHY: Hold on.

RACHEL: I Wish I Was An Only Child.

CATHY: [laughs] Panic attack? [imitates Rachel] I Wish I Was An Only Child? I fucking do. I've never wished it more.

RACHEL: Hello, this is I Wish I Was An Only Child –

CATHY: Hang on, hang on. I would never say I've found a kindred spirit in Sara.

RACHEL: Change it then.

CATHY: Sara and me are like bombs. Rachel and Sam are like –

RACHEL: No.

CATHY: I'm not saying kindred spirit in Sara.

RACHEL: Fine. Hello, this is I Wish I Was An Only Child, where we, Cath –

CATHY: That's me.

RACHEL: And me, Rachel Mason, speak to other siblings about the dynamic of their relationship so we can see where we're going wrong.

CATHY: Today we spoke to comedian Sara Barron and her incredibly laid-back younger brother Sam. I found many similarities in Sara.

RACHEL: And I struggled to get a word in.

[Flute sounds]

SARA BARRON: Because Sam got all the looks, but also we – as a family, nobody looks similar in my family. It's very weird. Like if you met my parents, none of us look particularly alike. That's the weird thing. Sam, do you agree?

SAM BARRON: Mhm. Yeah nobody – I wouldn't say either of us look like Mom or Dad.

SARA: Yeah, we're just all a weird hodgepodge. Um, Sam do you want to take the – I feel like if I can, well maybe I'm projecting onto you now...

SAM: [laughs] Please!

SARA: ...And I'd be more comfortable talking but I won't. Why don't you answer the question?

SAM: Well we grew up in Highland Park, Illinois. It's a lovely suburb about a half hour north of Chicago [Sam and Sara laugh] on lovely Lake Michigan. The uh... I don't know, how do we... Sara's four years older than me. So I don't know, she has a good perspective on the earlier four years. It's just the two of us.

SARA: It's just the two of us, yeah. Those are the facts, right? I think you covered all that.

RACHEL: And parents still together?

SARA: Parents 50 years married this June.

SAM: Oh, yeah.

SARA: They hate each other, but they're sticking together.

SAM: [laughs] My mom asks us frequently, 'was there ever any worry that we would get divorced?' And I'll just... in order to not humour her, I'll go, 'I don't know, I don't think about it much.' And then she'll go, 'oh, because we certainly... there were periods when we would... it was an option, but for *you* we've always stuck together.'

SARA: [imitating mother] 'I think you stay together for the children.'

SAM: [imitating mother] 'for the children.'

CATHY: Sara, I can see the pain in your face with that one.

SARA: Awful. Um, yeah they're still together. Sam has three kids all under the age of five.

CATHY: That's tough.

SARA: I know, he's not kidding around.

SAM: All sons. Really relaxing sons, yeah.

SARA: Can you imagine? And I have the one and I of course have a son as well. So no granddaughters for our parents.

RACHEL: I'm filling the picture, so...

CATHY: Can you describe each other?

RACHEL: In a nutshell.

SAM: Oh... okay. [laughs]

SARA: [gasps]

SAM: No, I didn't mean that like, 'let me get ready.' I just uh... want to get Sara accurately.

SARA: What would you say if someone asked you about me?

SAM: About my sister Sara, I would say she is um very... hardworking and smart and talented.

SARA: Oh!

SAM: I would say Sara's talented, hardworking, smart, um...

SARA: Really?

SAM: Yes! But she's also very... you can only judge things based on your own self, so I only have my own dynamic. She's a bit more emotional than I am.

SARA: Mhm.

SAM: She likes to wear her emotions outwardly, where I like to bury them deep down.

SARA: Bottle them in and punch the wall once a year!

SAM: Get angry once in a while. Um, you know Sara is emotional and talkative and a performer.

CATHY: But hang on Sara, you look shocked.

SARA: I don't think he would. I don't think he *really* would describe me as talented.

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: Not because you don't think so. But I think... a thing my grandmother, RIP recently –

SAM: Gone too soon.

SARA: But... gone too soon! She died at 99 and we'd all been counting down for 20 damn years. But um she said, one of the last times I saw her, and I thought, 'I bet that is'... I think she's one of those people who says the thing that no one is... that everyone is... when I think about her, she said the thing everyone thought. But you know, she said, 'oh, you're always just trying new things' about my career. Sort of like, 'you know, you're always trying something new.' And I thought, 'oh, I wonder'... like to Jeff, my husband, who is British and lives here, he has a context of understanding that like Sara doing the comedy thing is working a little better than all my previous endeavours. But I just assume that my brother and my parents are like, 'we hope this one works!' You know, I would've thought Sam thinks that I'm sort of knocking around trying stuff.

SAM: Oh, I think the misunderstanding is that, uh, I just don't reach out or communicate in any way unless it's absolutely necessary. So I like see my sister having this success and doing these things, and then I don't say to her like 'good job!' or 'I saw that, great!' I just go, 'oh, look at her! She's really doing' –

SARA: No, that's not true. You do tell me you think I do well. But when I think about myself, like if I have a thing where it's like, 'oh I got to do a professional thing that was on TV and my husband can send the link to my parents and my brother and say Sara did a thing' – I'll think but like... those things aren't ever that good at like, it's not like, 'oh you can come and see me do a show and I had a great show and you can see I'm great in this way in this context.'

CATHY: Sara, describe Sam.

SARA: [gasps] I would say he's the greatest person who ever lived!
[laughs]

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: I think he's the best person. He's very likeable, he's... everyone loves him. So I think that men are divided into two categories: men who have female friends and men who don't. And I think that broadly speaking, the wonderful men of the world have close female friends. My brother is not in that category, but I... so I think of him as sort of the one... he's a real guy's guy, he's got, you know, all his best friends from high school and all his great friends from college. He's... I think he's the one in the group that gets the call –

RACHEL: Yeah.

SARA: If some shit hits the fan, which I think speaks well of him. Um, and he's got a... you know, I think he's like married to this really – this is such a fucking problematic term, so pardon me for using it – he's married to a very strong woman, which is like ew,

but actually properly she is. And I think that's the measure of anyone, is like are you guys really properly equals? And he chose that for himself, so I think that reflects well on him. So I just think he's like the best person ever.

SAM: Aww, I love you very much. [laughs]

SARA: But I say that behind his back. I'm trying to answer this as if we were just talking and I'd be like, 'oh yeah, he's...' And I'll say to Jeff, I'll be like, 'do you think my view of my brother is weird, or is he sort of great in the way I think he's great? Or like, would his employees say he's sort of an asshole? Or like, what am I not seeing clearly because he's my brother?' And Jeff will say like, 'no no no, I think your brother is really top of the line.'

CATHY: So are you both totally honest with each other?

SARA: No I don't... we don't... I really think, and I've had therapy sessions about this. My lack... my brother is one of the only people that I don't feel rage toward. Like I can feel real rage towards my mother or my husband, all of my close friends, and that just doesn't happen to me with Sam. And I think it's... I hated him so much when we were children. Like I remember thinking it was my prime emotion towards this little brother, was just fucking hatred.

RACHEL: Why?

SARA: Because he... I really think he's the more... he's the favourite one. We both know it. My parents admit it. I thought maybe I was my dad's favourite. I'm not. They just both prefer him.

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: And I think he's gotten... I think boys get an easier ride. I think second children get an easier ride. So I think Sam just had it so much easier and was so much more liked and he... he was like a beautiful child. He was prettier. So I just think there was a lot to resent. You know what I mean?

CATHY: I was exactly the same with Rachel. 100%. She was very controlled and together. I was a mess. Everybody thought she was amazing. Everyone thought I was a freak.

SARA: Yeah, it was like Sam was sunny and Sara's just a little bit harder, you know? And it was like... and that was true. But I didn't hate him by the time I was a teenager. I just didn't care when I was a teenager. But as a child I hated him.

SAM: I think it helped the... I think we have a more functional relationship as adults because from my perspective there wasn't like a... I was just kind of going about my thing and um so that childhood – like 0-18 – my sister was like a central character, but was kind of, you know, our worlds didn't... there was like a little Venn diagram centre thing but we both... there was not a lot of the usual – I think – sibling like rivalry and this and that. It was just kind of like Sara was over here doing her thing and I was over here doing my thing and, you know, sometimes in the middle we'd meet.

RACHEL: So did you have any... any major rows?

SARA: Yeah, it was more like... I'm talking as a kid, like one of my famous in the family diary entries from age 9 was like... it was as though I was going to like kill someone. Literally scrawled with my

pen, 'hate! Hate! Hate! I hate my family! I'm supposed to love but...'

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: I think there were a lot of rows but it wasn't... but there have been almost no rows in adulthood. But um...

RACHEL: I'm fascinated by that. But what... you can't remember one specific one?

SARA: In terms of childhood, it would be, you know, um Sam did something, I went screaming to my parents and they took his side.

CATHY: Oh the same!

RACHEL: Oh, well, no...

CATHY: It's the same!

RACHEL: I – I stole a...

CATHY: Because we look unhinged, so they blame us.

RACHEL: Well, because you are unhinged. But I took a lip liner. Remember that one? And I used to... she wouldn't let me read More magazine, which was like a teenage magazine. Cath kept telling me I was too young.

SARA: But you guys are like a year and a half apart.

RACHEL: Yeah, I was absolutely old enough to read about periods and things like that. But Cath would hide it away from me.

Probably tortured me and sit and read it in the lounge in front of me. But I wasn't allowed to look at it. So there was that kind of... and if I took it she'd go ballistic. But yeah, I did steal a lip liner once, and I think you always maintain that mum blamed... that I was in the wrong but she blamed you.

CATHY: I'm like you Sara. I'm the loud shouty one, so we'll always get blamed for everything. Everyone will say, 'where is the nice, sensible, together, calm, cool...'

RACHEL: Well there's a reason for that, because we are nice, sensible –

CATHY: Okay –

RACHEL: And calm and cool, right Sam?

SAM: I'm... I think I'm reasonable. Yes, reasonable. [laughs]

RACHEL: Do you remember a time as kids where you laughed really hard together?

SAM: I think uh... I think the times we would make each other laugh would be just mostly discussing –

SARA: Our mother. Right? Or –

SAM: Our parents, right. Making fun of our parents' –

SARA: Yeah.

SAM: Idiosyncrasies together.

SARA: All that, yeah.

SAM: You can really be like, 'oh I get that one! [laughs] That sure is representative of... that's part of their craziness!'

SARA: Yeah, but not a lot as children. Because four years is a big difference.

SAM: Yeah, we didn't have like inside jokes that we would... [laughs] Just not our, yeah, it wasn't our vibe.

SARA: A thing that I always... like a sort of a thing that always goes off for me is when people are like... because we're both at the age, you know, where people are still having kids a lot. And I hear people say, 'well we wanted two that are two years apart because they can be best friends.' And I'm always like, 'fucking no.' Like there was not – in a way that I think was really good – there was nothing. There was no friendship. And I think that there's not supposed to be. And I think that when you're little, it's like, go out in the world and meet people. And you've got to do it that way. And I think that is why there's a more functional and sort of natural, uh, relationship as adults.

RACHEL: Cath and I hated each other through childhood, so we did go and find our own routes. And then I suppose we've come back together.

CATHY: Were you ever embarrassed of each other?

SARA: Oh, I bet Sam has been embarrassed of me at some point.

SAM: No, I don't think... I don't think so.

SARA: What about when... as an adult, never?

SAM: No!

SARA: Not when you had to come to those dance recitals? The dance recitals!

SAM: Oh, I liked the dance recitals. I was going to say, it came through my head earlier that I... when Sara was in high school and I'd be like in middle school, and I'd go see her do something. And then she'd come out of the dressing room afterwards and I'd like... Mom and Dad would like give me the flowers or the candy to be like, 'good job!' I'd be very in awe of her because she'd still have her stage makeup on and be like in a leotard. And I'd be like, 'there she is! What a star!'

SARA: 'The star!' [laughs] Interesting! I would've thought it'd be like, 'well this is fucking uncomfortable for everybody but let's pretend like it's fine!'

SAM: [laughs] No, I don't think I've ever been embarrassed.

SARA: Were you embarrassed... I had a real breakdown. This was like, whatever, a year ago when I was in Chicago because Jean had had a broken leg. I was travelling alone internationally, he was being impossible, I –

CATHY: Jean is your son?

SARA: I arrived to my brother's house, let's just say, it was his mother-in-law's house. And I was so defeated by the day that I collapsed into my brother's arms, who then had had to

inadvertently hold me while I sobbed. And I assumed that made you sort of embarrassed in front of your –

SAM: No, I'm not embarrassed. I feel like, 'boy, my sister sure feels her feelings acutely, doesn't she?' But the... [laughs]

SARA: You don't feel embarrassed though. I think you can feel a little embarrassed.

SAM: No! Trust me, I didn't even remember – I don't even remember that. [laughs] The uh...

SARA: Just another day.

SAM: Just another day with your sister!

RACHEL: What about some of Sara's material? I mean Sara, does he know the handcuff?

SARA: I don't think he knows. Well, he's never seen me do stand-up really. But he might've... I wrote about that in a book. I mean, that's a little uncomfortable. See that's so funny, that makes me feel uncomfortable to talk to him about. But um... but um... so I don't know if he knows that. We've never... we've never discussed. We've never discussed that.

RACHEL: Or [laughs] I can keep going. Some porn? Some porn Sara wrote when she was younger?

SARA: Yeah you know, because I wrote... that was in my first book. When I wrote that porn diary.

SAM: Oh, the porn. I think our mother is very, I guess looking it didn't seem like it, but she's pretty sex-positive and open about it. I feel like there wasn't... well I'm not... she'd just be like... I think Sara talking about sex, if this is what this is alluding to, wouldn't make me *that* uncomfortable.

SARA: I don't think so.

SAM: No...

SARA: I think Sam and I also are similar...

CATHY: Sam is so uncomfortable right now!

SAM: I've joked with my... well, never mind.

RACHEL: Go, no, please!

SARA: Go on with your...

SAM: It doesn't reflect well on me as a person.

SARA: It's fine, everyone's interested. They can cut it out if you don't like... if you don't like it. But just say it now.

SAM: Basically there's like three people in the world I don't sexualise in some way and it's like you, Mom, and Grandma.

[All laugh]

CATHY: That's brilliant!

SAM: They... at least the strand of a thought I've ever met of every woman has just trickled through the back of my head like...

SARA: Do you know what's funny about that? What I was going to say was I did this bit in my most recent show about where I make... I do sort of an auction where I make people guess how many men I've slept with. And the number is so much higher than anyone's ready for. And I don't... I genuinely cannot compute with people having shame around their number, like their sex number. Like it seems so sad to me that people don't fuck more people. And without knowing I was like, 'I think that's my brother.' Like you met Sara by the time you were 25. So you were out of the game pretty young. But I think... because when Sam just said our mom is sort of sex-positive I was like, 'is she?'

SAM: I guess that's – yeah, that's not true, I don't know.

SARA: No no no, but I think maybe it is true. Because I think both of us went *ballistic* with... with that when we were single.

SAM: But for me that was always about... I've always thought that was an emotional thing. Because I blossomed very late.

SARA: Yeah, same.

SAM: Like I couldn't lose my virginity in high school no matter what. And so then when it finally became like an option to have sex with people, I was like 'holy cow!' And um... then because I watched other friends for so long – like four years – be like, 'well, that's what a girlfriend looks like' and all that stuff. And that I equated so much of that like... validating my sense of self-worth and attractiveness could only be done by sleeping with as many people as possible.

SARA: Yes, same. So that was something that our parents did somehow.

SAM: [laughs] So some... yeah, that was uh... their fault.

SARA: So this is the thing: that Sam says sex-positive but I think that we were both... I think that Sam and I both have it in our head somehow that we're disgusting. And we are so lucky to have anyone that will have us. And I think that, and I think that that's more... like if you... so my number is 53. I don't know what Sam's is, but I was like, 'get [clap] some [clap] d [clap].' And I don't think that's about sex-positive parents. I think that's about...

SAM: [laughs] Yeah, that's probably right.

SARA: We're disgusting! Will you have me? I think that's in both of our heads.

RACHEL: Are you surprised by Sara's number?

SAM: No, not particularly.

SARA: Not particularly.

SAM: I mean, I just go, 'huh!' It makes me go, 'huh!' [laughs]

CATHY: Sam, is there anything that surprises you?

SAM: [laughs] No, I'm really... I... no, I think I'm pretty good at just being like, 'hm!' Yeah, I uh... [laughs]

RACHEL: You're so chilled and so laid back and calm. But so, your number... I'm doing the maths here. Sam, your numbers, you were both late bloomers as you said. So you fitted in... you got married at 25?

SARA: No, he met his wife at 25.

RACHEL: Okay but basically, if my maths is right, you did a lot of banging in a short amount of time.

SAM: That is correct. [laughs] The math checks out.

SARA: Well he *really*, you got very attractive very quickly. Something happened and my friends would be like, 'oh, your brother's, you know, your brother's hot!' Or like even once he was married, people would be like, 'oh, Sara's brother!' And um... and you fucking went for it! You used it! The window opened and you went for it. And at his... this is so dark but it's so funny because it reflects on our parents and how they respond. Sam, his wife's father passed away right before his wedding. So there was this funeral in the months before the wedding. And at the Shiva – very Jewish – I was at the Shiva, and all these people were meeting Sam for the first time, right, who were there for his deceased father-in-law. And I was there with my dad. And my dad kept turning to me and going, 'are you watching people when they meet Sam? Are you watching? Everyone can't believe how handsome he is! Are you watching that? Did you see that? What's in their eyes? They're going, "look how handsome he is!"' And I always say about my brother's looks... as I say that if I don't mention his looks, people will be like, 'oh, your brother's quite good looking!' Whereas if I say my brother's good looking, people are like, 'he's not *that* good looking! Like we didn't need to talk about it beforehand.'

SAM: [laughs] I can live with that, great!

SARA: But it's my parents'... it's like their thing that they have this handsome son and they can't believe that it happened to them.

SAM: They're very looks-focused. I didn't realise that until later in life when somebody pointed that out.

SARA: They're so looks-focused!

SAM: They were like, 'Mom and'... maybe your friend Maggie was like, 'your mom and dad are obsessed with looks!'

SARA: It was Jeff. Like I didn't think about it, and then when Jeff and I got together, he's like, 'your parents mention people's looks in this way that's obsessive.' Which suggests that they're like, you know, the prom king and queen and that's not their type.

SAM: It's very unexpected, yeah.

SARA: They're pleasant looking people, you know what I mean? Like they're good looking.

CATHY: What's that about?

SARA: I don't know, but it has to do with our self-loathing and needing – using sex for approval. That's what... I think it's all connected.

RACHEL: What qualities do you think – good or bad – do you think you've got from your parents? I mean, I got gum recession from our father, so...

SARA: I think... so I think, um, I have come to understand as an adult, but I think our parents have a borderline... borderline very high anxiety levels. So I think I've got some anxiety stuff that I didn't realise until I got older that I have. I think um... I think we're both... I mean this is not... I think we're both pretty funny. And I think our parents are both properly funny.

SAM: They're funny. Yeah, they're both funny.

CATHY: Who is the funniest of you two?

SARA: In a way I think Sam is the funnier one. He really is very crazy.

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: Like he's always singing! Like he's always singing to himself and he's very funny. Mine is laboured, whereas Sam's is a little more effortless. Um... and my dad is really... I think also our parents are like high-functioners. Like we're those kids who had so much done for us. Not... like we always had to have jobs and stuff like that. But it was like they were so high-functioning that I think Sam and I both married people who are really high-functioners. Like neither Sam or I has ever booked an airplane ticket. Because someone else... we're going to find someone else to do that because that's the shit our moms do, or our mother does. Um, my father is really really really smart. Like he would win game shows. If he had the personality to go on a game show, he'd be the person who wins. He wins Trivial Pursuit. He's smart like that. Sam is not... you're not as intense with that stuff.

SAM: No, I'm not as smart as Dad, yeah.

SARA: He's not as smart as Dad, but he's pretty... we're both you know, he's bookish. So I feel like we're both sort of different mixtures of... we're both pretty funny, pretty smart, but not unbelievably smart. But both pretty funny.

SAM: I agree. I think Mom... Mom is very funny and outgoing, and I think there's... whether it be kind of belaboured on my part or not, I think we both at least can be pretty socially functional and outgoing. And um, I think... I mean I've thought sometimes about, especially more recently, like why... it's unusual that we both have these uh, slightly creative jobs and that neither one of us ended up just you know, with an office job.

CATHY: What do you do?

SAM: Uh, I started... I was a chef for a long time and then I started food trucks and now some food trucks and restaurant with my wife. Um, so... you know it's a little bit uh... outside the usual. I don't know, I wonder is that... Mom and Dad, neither one of them did that. But I think they're both... are they creative?

SARA: I don't think that's what it is. I think that parents project, without knowing it, so much onto their kids in terms of what they want them to be. And it's either explicit or implicit. And I just don't think our parents did that. I think there was no expectation on us. I was thinking about it today because I'm in a WhatsApp group now for my son. My son is starting reception. And it's like, 'oh, football. Who wants to do football? We can duhduhduhduhduh...' And I'm like... if my son said to me, 'Mom, I want to do a football course,' I'd be like, 'okay.' But I would never put him in anything he didn't ask me for. And I think... I think that's atypical. And I think that's my parents' approach.

SAM: Yeah, that's true. They were kind of like, 'do whatever interests you.' Yeah.

SARA: There was nothing about... it was like, you know when people talk about, 'oh, I'd love to but my kids are doing this thing with school so I have to be around for that.' I'm like... the idea that my mother's work would've been affected by the fact that I had a test to study for is like – they were just – they were not putting anything onto us in terms of what we were supposed to do.

CATHY: I can't work out if they were disengaged or...

SARA: No.

SAM: No.

SARA: I love criticising my parents because I think it's annoying when people are complimenting their parents. But I don't think it was disengaged. I think it was like, um, I heard someone say recently 'benign neglect.' That overstates it, but it was just like super super present.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SARA: But not at all...

SAM: It was never like expectations... there were never expectations put on us.

SARA: Well you know I think that's sort of the thing, is I think like the older I get and the more I sort of watch people's lives shake

out, the more I'm like... it's so rare to have a properly present father.

RACHEL: Yeah!

SARA: Most people don't have it. And like, our dad is...

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: I mean there wasn't a day, the man never took a... there wasn't a day he wasn't home from work by four.

RACHEL: What did he do?

SARA: He worked as an editor for like a.... was he editing... like a publishing house.

SAM: Textbooks, yeah.

SARA: He edited like dictionary definitions and then he changed in the mid-90s and he went I think and did something sort of similar at another job and retired at 65. And just you know, sits at home and reads his books. And I think that like, we're both fucked up in different ways and they've done different numbers on us. But when I'm like... Sam and I are pretty normal. Like if I think of siblings collections, I'm like, 'it's because we had a dad.'

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: You know? And even people where I'm like... where they're like, 'my dad is amazing and my dad my dad my dad'. I'm like, 'yeah, but your fucking dad like... you didn't see him during the week because he had a big big job and showed up home from

work at 9:00.' And that's fine, but it's a different thing from a generation ago when the parents were splitting childcare pretty equally, you know? I think that's a big deal.

CATHY: I was the first kid in my school with divorced parents, so I was a complete freak. Because you know, in those days people just didn't get divorced. So I find it fascinating hearing from people who had two parents. I –

RACHEL: Right, I'm going to completely change tacks, sorry. Um, so –

CATHY: Rachel likes all the shallow shit.

RACHEL: I do like a bit of shallow! Give me a bit of shallow!

CATHY: I don't, I'm sorry. I'm only interested in the heavy stuff.

RACHEL: I know, we've had a whole row about how we approach this. As you can probably imagine. But also, do your partners get along with – Sara, do you get along with Sara?

SARA: Very much so, yeah.

RACHEL: Sam, do you get along with Jeff?

SAM: Yeah, we are uh... we are like peas and carrots, Jeff and I.

SARA: Yeah. Yeah it's... I know, it's very...

RACHEL: Do you spend Christmases together?

SARA: Well, no. [laughs] You want to answer this one?

SAM: Well, we aren't like believers but we were raised a little more Jewish than anything else. [laughs]

SARA: Well, but can I quickly... because this is a cultural issue. So in Britain, every person in Britain, there is absolutely no religious association with Christmas over here. Is that a fair representation of Christmas in the United Kingdom?

RACHEL: Yeah, totally. Everyone does it.

SARA: And there... it does still sort of feel like a Christian thing in America. We grew up... my mother's Jewish, my dad is sort of Catholic. But neither of them is sort of practicing, so we always had a tree. Sam has married – can I say – a very Jewish woman?

SAM: More Jewish, yeah.

SARA: More Jewish.

SAM: I would... I've de-Jewified her a little bit I think.

SARA: De-Jew.

SAM: De-Jewed.

CATHY: How have you de-Jewed her?

SAM: She now eats pork, we don't keep a Kosher household. I've... whenever we do have religious talks, I'll rage against religions in general and she'll go, 'well, you make some fair points, I guess that's right.'

SARA: Will you talk about the conversations you've had regarding Bar Mitzvah-ing your sons?

SAM: That's kind of the... that's a bridge still to cross. But one of our big arguments was she... the um [laughs]... there... got to be a little careful...

SARA: Hey!

SAM: Hey, got to tread lightly here. Um, I would not like to Bar Mitzvah our children. It's a conversation because I think ultimately my wife Sara would feel lukewarm about it. But there is a bit of pressure I think from her parents to be like a... well, if you don't, that would be a big deal and maybe grounds for you know a real dust-up. But I mean I'm...

SARA: It's between Sara and her mom.

SAM: In our reality I'm not Bar Mitzvah-ing my children. So it's kind of a done deal.

SARA: I thought Mom said that there was some... that you guys had made an agreement, you and your wife, that you would agree to a Bat – or a Bar Mitzvah, but it had to be in Israel so –

SAM: Oh, that's our working compromise. Is that apparently... because usually you'd have to go to, you know, Hebrew school for four or five years and then learn Hebrew and then you'd do it. But I guess... and so it's not... you know, it's like you go to school for it. But if you go to Israel to like certain ceremonial spots, you can just go, you know, 'hey, I'm here!' And then you're Bar Mitzvah-ed. Whereas my problem wouldn't necessarily be the ceremony. My

problem would be, as I describe it, indoctrination into the system of belief.

SARA: [laughs]

SAM: So um... you know, if someone wants to take our kids to Israel and have them, you know, say some words. As long as the kids don't uh protest too much, it would be alright with me. So it felt like a workable compromise.

CATHY: Yeah, we're bringing ours up as a Catholic because my partner's Catholic.

SARA: But how did that...

CATHY: I mean it's just ridiculous.

SARA: Did you essentially go, um, 'I think it's ludicrous but I'll sit this one out and you can do what you want and then...'

CATHY: We're going to let him make the decision. I think that's really important.

SARA: Is Buzz... is your feelings... so Jeff is vegetarian. So it was really important for Jean to be vegetarian. The idea... not that he has to be vegetarian his whole life. But as long as he is a small child and we're making the choices, he's vegetarian. And if he wants to eat meat at a kid's house when he's six, he can do whatever he wants. Is that your thinking? Like we'll raise Buzz Catholic and then he can...

CATHY: I stick my head in the sand and just let them. I mean I find it very strange, very weird. He goes to a Catholic school. But I just

sit it out. And when he asks me what I think, I said, you know...
Buzz knows I think it's ludicrous.

SARA: I think that's right. I mean I think that's... I think if there's
someone who really wants the religion, I think you kind of have to
let the person who wants it have it.

CATHY: I agree, I agree.

SARA: And then you can say, 'here's why Daddy or Mommy
doesn't come, but you're going to figure this out on your own.'

RACHEL: So Sara, what... Sam is so calm, and –

CATHY: Yeah, and that's stressing me out. I want some shit, Sam.

RACHEL: As I keep saying, he's... you know, what makes Sam lose
his shit?

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: Okay, so I... here's when I've... I've only seen Sam lose his
shit as an adult once. And this was our one adult argument. And it
was so many years ago I don't even... so we were... I would've
been –

SAM: I remember very clearly what it was about. [laughs]

SARA: Okay, do you want to tell? From my perspective we were
on a family vacation. It's sounding like... then we were in Mexico
or wherever. But my mother's thing is travel, that's how she
spends her money. She's a self-made lady. But we don't have that
much money. Anyway... but we were fine, middle class. Okay so

basically I would've been like 23, Sam's 19. To celebrate my dad's 60th birthday, we'd go on this family vacation. And I remember making fun... Sam had this girlfriend. Sam has a real type. He likes them... it's so funny –

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: He likes them tall and blonde. Like if Sam could meet an actual Amazonian princess...

SAM: Sara gave me a hard time once – my sister Sara – because she asked me who my celebrity crush was. And I said Brooke Hogan at the time, and she was disgusted and disappointed.

SARA: I was disgusted. There are things about my brother that are disgusting. Just because I've said some nice things about him, he has these... I mean you've got a lot of tattoos that he's doing that aren't quite my thing.

SAM: [laughs] They're all terrible. They're all bad.

SARA: They're all bad.

SAM: I had half of them... half of them were done in drunken youth, and they are –

CATHY: So it's on his penis, that's embarrassing.

RACHEL: It's on his ass.

SAM: There's one on my ass, there's one right next to... on my lower hip that I didn't remember getting until the next morning

when I had to go unveil it to myself. And it was a little alligator head that my... [laughs]

RACHEL: An alligator head?

SAM: An alligator head. I thought it was an alligator head for like 5 years until I was with my um... my now wife in the early stages of courtship. And she asked me one morning, like, 'why do you have that Native American woman's head on your hip?' And I said, 'what do you mean?' And she... it was like a magic eye. One of those things if you switch perspectives. But I didn't know that until uh, until like years down the road. I have a... I have a no snakes tattoo on my uh... I can't show it, but on my ankle. It's a snake with a... can you see it?

RACHEL: Oh my god!

CATHY: Why have you done no snakes?

SAM: I was surprisingly very drunk with my friend, and we were discussing a personality trait of mine that's very representative for my next tattoo. And we said how much I hate snakes. So then I went that night to get a snake with a red circle through it. Oh I... only one minute... you know, coral snake, Mexican bro and snake black mamba, green mamba, articulated python.

RACHEL: I went out with a snake man!

SAM: Ugh!

RACHEL: I lived with snakes and um... I used to sit on an exercise bike in my flat and there were vivariums all around me. I used to cycle and it used to set the rattlesnake off and its vivarium.

SAM: Ugh! Wouldn't that ruin your life? [laughs]

CATHY: So she's in a flat, in a tiny flat, with 65 poisonous snakes. The guy used to milk the snakes and then inject the venom into himself.

SARA: [laughs]

SAM: Oh, this guy sounds like trouble. [laughs]

CATHY: She lived with him for 13 years and I had to deal with it.

RACHEL: Yeah, so...

SAM: Ayayay.

RACHEL: That's a whole other story.

CATHY: She's told me to shut up.

SARA: Sam, just to remind you, Rachel is the normal one.

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: Because Sam is... because we were talking about Sam's rage, because he is so calm and so jovial. He's got... but he's crazy, as evidenced by some of his tattoo stuff. His butt tattoo says 'your name'. So he could tell girls that 'your name'... like he's real crazy. So he got... basically he got mad at me for making fun of him and stormed out of a restaurant. So he kind of wouldn't punch me. That happened.

SAM: No, that's – it was – my girlfriend at the time had made a mix CD with like a little cheesy love note on the front cover. And Sara Barron came across it and was like, 'pfff, that's cheesy.' And I was like, 'yeah, alright.' And then she would recite... she was every so often reciting it during the family trip to just kind of grind my gears. And I just kept being like, 'err, shut the fuck up.' But then um, we were at a lunch with like our group of like... our travel group. And I was in a booth against a wall with like a table that was hard to get out of. And Sara, this I think is part of what really set me off, was that Sara was doing the thing, which got me angry. But then I was like, 'I gotta get out of here.' And then something that will often trigger me is somebody tells me – when I'm already in a rage, someone says, 'oh, calm down'. Or something patronising of the rage. And so then, I think I was like, 'I'm getting out of this table, move the table back.' And Sara went, 'calm down,' and I think I almost turned the table over at the restaurant. I was like, 'move the fucking table! Move the fucking table!' And then like stormed out onto the streets of Cuzco to walk it off.

SARA: And to return to the question about parents and all this stuff, and then it was sort of tense and then it was fine. But my parents' attitude about me was, 'what did you do to him? What did you do?' And I was like, 'hold the fuck on! You've raised a son who just nearly turned a table over in a restaurant and we're asking me what I did? Are you out of your damn minds?' So that's very – the whole family dynamic. I did something which I shouldn't have done, it was provocative, Sam explodes with violent rage and my parents blame me. Sam, the other things I have had an awareness of as an adult, if I may – Sam, remember they can take this out. But I think these things are interesting. Um is uh... when Sam was still sort of dating his wife, so before there were children, I was in Chicago visiting. And we went to pick Sam

up. I went to pick Sam up at the train station with his wife. So she and I go to pick him up, and he just seemed a little weird. And she was like... so it's like this dynamic where I'm the sister but she's the girlfriend. So even though I'm the sister, I've been around the whole... like she knows him a little better. And she's like, 'what is it? What's wrong?' You know, and he's like, 'oh I just, you know, rough one at work but uh...' And basically it turned out that he had had... he was a sous chef, so he was expediting the food at this fancy restaurant, you know, trying to get all the plates out. And this waitress had given him some attitude about it. Which you know, in the culture of the high-end restaurant, you don't fucking do that. And he had been sent home from work because this girl gave him lip and he took a stack of plates and threw them on the ground in front of her feet. So that's a lot of rage, that's not –

SAM: But that's true, 100%. Also though, yes. But to some context, because... it is more explosive and bottled up in the sense that like, if you talked to anybody at that job, they would've been like, 'Sam's the chilliest guy ever! Like he never says anything!' Which is then why, you know...

SARA: Right, right. And then there's the explosion, you know, there's been lockdown, there's no childcare, he's got three young children. You know, there's uh... did you punch a wall? Didn't you punch a wall at some point?

SAM: That was because of Grandmother. We were having like a 3rd birthday at our house and she would only come to the birthday party if I would prepare some special low-sodium food for her. Specifically a soft-boiled egg. So soft-boiled eggs needed to be served if she was going to attend her great-grandchild's like 2nd or 3rd birthday. So I think we were having like... you know at this

point we had two toddlers and I think we had like 25 people at our house just to have a brunch or a lunch. And she walked in and then, you know, I'm running around trying to get this out and trying to do that. And you know Tom needs a glass of wine or something. And she just comes in on her cane and was like, 'do you have my eggs?'

[All laugh]

SAM: And I said... I said something like, 'yeah, I've got them going.' And so I... she stands in the kitchen while I prepare soft-boiled eggs. And then I'm being pulled in different directions and I, you know, a soft-boiled egg's a little trickier than a hard-boiled egg, it has to be just so. So I take them out and I start peeling them and they're not peeling easily. And this makes me super frustrated because, you know, I'm a chef and I know how to do an egg. So I'm like failing myself, and she's standing there on her walker going, 'no no no no no no no. Stop! Stop! You don't know what you're doing! Stop it!' And then looks at me and goes, 'and you know, you think you're a great chef, but you still have a lot to learn from me.' And I walked to the backyard and then I think I might've broken my hand a little bit against the back of the house. Because I just started socking that wall just to feel a little bit better. [laughs] But in all fairness, that was her fault, not me.

[All laugh]

RACHEL: That's incredible!

CATHY: That's incredible.

SARA: So just... he's never punched a person and never would.

SAM: Never hurt anybody.

CATHY: But there's rage in there.

RACHEL: There is rage.

SARA: The rage. The rage comes out, which... I don't have quite that thing. And our mother does.

CATHY: No you don't.

RACHEL: Yeah, but you said you release it. You release it on a daily basis.

CATHY: No –

SARA: Yes, I'm always screaming.

CATHY: Is there anything that you haven't forgiven the other for?

SARA: I don't think so.

SAM: No, not really. I don't think so.

CATHY: Wow.

RACHEL: Is there anything you want to say to each other that you've never said before?

SAM: Sometimes I'm very withholding of certain emotional responses. But I think that like, once every seven or eight years I'll send an email or say something to my sister along the lines of like, 'hey, I love you.'

CATHY: But why do you withhold it?

SAM: Because it makes me uncomfortable to talk about it. I don't want to have a talk about anything. And then I feel like I'm putting on her something that she needs to respond in a certain way with. I wouldn't want somebody to come up to me and be like, 'hey, I want to tell you that I have feelings...' I wouldn't want someone to say that to me, even if it was nice stuff.

SARA: Very, very empathetic.

CATHY: But Sara, do you want him to say it to you more?

SARA: Nah, I don't need it.

CATHY: So Sara, when you had... when you were 27 and you had the breakdown, how did you feel, Sam?

SAM: I don't think I was really looped... I don't think I was looped into that so much.

SARA: Yeah, no. He wasn't... it wasn't... it wasn't a formal breakdown. It was, 'oh, I'm... this is the closest I've gotten to struggling to get out of bed.' I still did it. I think like when my son was born and my... and it was so hard, and everything's so hard and I didn't know it was going to be so... so my brother came with my parents. And when they opened the door, it was just like immediate collapse onto my brother. Because with my parents, it's like they're too um... like this thought that I've had because I just have one... so you both have one child.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SARA: And for both of you, that was always going to be the thing.

RACHEL & CATHY: Yeah.

SARA: Sam has three, for me it's one. I really wanted two but it's not going to happen and I can handle that. It can be a manageable sadness, but it's a sadness and a loss. And I was... and I think, like this thing that I think is that this is... I'm going to try to present this in a sort of funny way. Like my big fear now... my fear is sort of like that Jeff will drop dead. That's my fear. The reasonable fears, right, like all of our fears is something happening to your kid. And it's like, but the likelihood is duhduhduh, whereas I feel I know so many people who like lose their husbands in their mid-40s. Like they go for a walk and die.

RACHEL: Yeah.

SARA: And um... I also get worried about that happening to Sam. And that would be terrible, but it would affect my life a little less than if my husband died. But anyway, so I think about the way... like I have to have a strategy for that. Oh, I have a question. I remembered what my question was for Sam. And basically I'm like if Jeff... if today is the day that Jeff is like, 'okay I'll see you at four' and then dies, what do I do the minute I get the news and then broadly speaking what happens to my life? And I... it would be, 'send my brother. Get Sam over here. Get Sam here and he will deal with me until I can kind of lift my head up. His wife... I'll have a dead husband so his wife and my parents will have to deal with the children and deal with the business, and he will have to lift me up, literally, and then get me to Chicago, where I will then live out the remainder of my days. So that's... so then I'm thinking... and that's what I've deprived my child of by not having a sibling. But

actually most people don't actually feel that way about their sibling. Even if they say they do, I don't think they do.

RACHEL: That was incredibly moving. That was really beautiful.

CATHY: But I would be the same with Rachel. Yeah, I would be absolutely the same.

RACHEL: Yeah, we both would.

CATHY: Totally.

RACHEL: That's the first person we'd call. But –

SAM: I'll do it, by the way. Sounds good. You can... I approve of the plan.

SARA: We were talking about, if you had an affair... it was like, if your brother had an affair, would he tell you? Or if you had an affair, would you tell your brother? And I thought... And I absolutely... it wouldn't be... the way that it's like, if my husband dies, get my brother over. It wouldn't be like that, but at some point if he and I were alone and having some wine, I'd be like, 'well here's a fucking thing that went down in October!' And then as to whether or not Sam would tell me, I thought... what my answer... not that you ever would –

SAM: Yeah, I know my answer. [laughs]

SARA: You wouldn't tell me?

SAM: Why would I tell you?

SARA: Because I would be a sage advice-giver!

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: You wouldn't tell me?

SAM: Let me just... here's some good advice: don't do that!

SARA: Would you tell someone? Who would you tell? Would you tell David Lazarus?

SAM: Uh, would I tell David Lazarus? Uh –

SARA: It's his best friend. Along with Jeb.

SAM: I wouldn't call... you know, I wouldn't call any friend and be like, 'listen, I need to talk.' If I were to see them at Thanksgiving and we were to be drinking, I might say like, 'well, you know...'

[All laugh]

RACHEL: Basically you're a completely different person when you've had a drink.

SAM: [laughs]

SARA: Oh, wait. If the same situation was true about us, be honest or you risk affecting the quality of the Mason podcast –

SAM: Yeah.

SARA: Would you um... if we were drinking at Thanksgiving, would you tell me?

SAM: Um...

SARA: You wouldn't.

SAM: No, I don't think so.

SARA: Oh.

SAM: I just don't feel like A, I... I think your estimation of me would diminish and –

SARA: No, not at all! It would not! I really hope, you know, I hope for the sake of your sons and our parents and your wife that doesn't happen. But I would never judge it. I never... I'm so not judgemental about that stuff. A sweet thing is Sam has these two best friends, Jeb and David, right? I think those are the two best –

SAM: That's true, yeah. Yeah, that's right.

SARA: And he never emotes, he never emotes, he never emotes. Sam doesn't in that way. And then at his wedding... at Jewish weddings they have a pre-wedding thing that happens. So you get your best friends to sort of stand with you during a part of the ceremony. So Sam was in a chair and he's got these two guys behind him. [Sam and Sara laugh] And at one point, they didn't have to, it's just what happened – they both put their hands on his shoulders and kissed Sam on his head. And it was the most moving thing I've ever seen in my life!

SAM: Really? I don't even remember that.

SARA: Oh, it was my... when I just want to feel warm I think about David Lazarus kissing your head at your wedding. It was so beautiful.

SAM: No, it sounds nice. Hey listen, I love those guys. Good guys.
[laughs]

[Guitar music]

[Flute sounds]

This has been a Little Wander production. Local artwork from Cathy Mason. Voice from Melanie Walters. Music from Rhodri Viney. With special thanks to Beth Forrest, Steve Pickup, Sam Roberts, Henry Widdicombe, and Jo Williams. Other podcasts from Little Wander include Here to Judge and Welcome to Spooktown. Subscribe now on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.

CATHY: Ugh...

RACHEL: That's because you talk more.