

I Wish I Was An Only Child: Liz and Ruth Madeley

[Guitar and flute music]

[Rain sounds]

CATHY MASON: Today we spoke to actress Ruth Madeley and her sister, Liz.

RACHEL MASON: Lovely. They were absolutely lovely, weren't they?

CATHY: Oh, you fucking say that at the beginning of every podcast. Uh, what would we say about them? They were, though. They were really nice. They talked about doing – they got on so well, they talked about doing a podcast together. Um...

RACHEL: That would be a mistake.

CATHY: Yeah.

RACHEL: As evidenced by this.

CATHY: I was going to say. [laughs] As our podcast –

RACHEL: It seemed like a good idea.

CATHY: It seemed like a great idea. Uh, no. We would advise them –

RACHEL: Ow.

CATHY: After Rachel's just smashed her head on the duvet. We would advise them heartily –

RACHEL: Smashed her head on the duvet! [laughs]

CATHY: To not do a podcast.

RACHEL: Yeah.

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: Action! Good morning.

RUTH MADELEY: Morning!

LIZ MADELEY: Hi!

CATHY: Hello! You know each other.

RACHEL: We did – well we met, didn't we? At the BAFTAs?

RUTH: Yeah, Rachel, we met. Well, is there a better place to meet? We met Rachel at the BAFTAs.

RACHEL: Yeah, exactly. What a night. So yeah.

RUTH: I know.

RACHEL: And I spent quite a bit of time with your boyfriend.

RUTH: I know, but –

CATHY: Oh!

RUTH: He was so cross. He was like – because you know when 'Don't Take My Baby' won –

LIZ: Yes.

RUTH: And we were asked to go up on stage and I said, um, I said to the security, 'oh, go and get Joe for me!' And he was like, 'that was the one time I wasn't on pins! Me and Rachel were having a lovely chat and you came and tore me away!' I was like, 'okay, sorry!' But yeah.

LIZ: Aw.

CATHY: Aw, that's nice.

RACHEL: Well, the plus one, as we know, always gets sort of left behind. It's a fact. But anyway –

CATHY: People don't give a shit about plus ones.

RACHEL: No, they don't. Exactly.

RUTH: I do. I genuinely do.

LIZ: You pushed me out of the way in a photograph!

RUTH: No, she did ruin a photograph.

LIZ: I didn't ruin a photograph!

RUTH: She did.

LIZ: I did not! That's very rude. And you did! You went, 'no, not you.' She did!

CATHY: On the – on the BAFTA photos?

RUTH: No no no no.

LIZ: No, not on the BAFTA photos. It was Idris Elba.

RUTH: It was Idris Elba – now, she tells a lie. There is a very nice one of all of us, and I wanted one of just me and him. I thought it was a perfectly acceptable request.

LIZ: No, first because you went, ‘no, not you.’ And then you went, ‘right, you can come on now.’ That’s how I’m treated.

CATHY: Aw.

RACHEL: But that’s the sort of thing you can do with a sister, right? I mean that’s –

CATHY: Exactly.

RUTH: I mean, she’s still here. She’s not that hard done by.

[All laugh]

CATHY: Was Idris Elba nice?

RUTH: He was lovely. I think he thought I’d won a competition and I think he thought I was from the Make A Wish Foundation.

CATHY: Oh no. Oh no, how embarrassing!

RUTH: Yeah, I mean – but to be fair, because afterwards he was up for best actor at the same time that we were up. And he um – he actually came up to me afterwards when he realised that I wasn’t from a dying children’s charity.

CATHY: Was he really patronising?

RUTH: And he was – yeah, at first he was like, ‘oh, lovely to have you. Oh, well done. Great that you managed to make it.’

CATHY: Oh no!

RUTH: And then afterwards he came up to me, and fair play to him – afterwards he went –

CATHY: Yeah.

RUTH: ‘Mate,’ like that’s him. And then he – then he hired me for a job. So I can’t actually be that cross at him. But so –

CATHY: Oh wow!

RUTH: He redeemed himself. But yes, the initial feel was –

LIZ: ‘Oh, the five by five?’

RUTH: Yeah, the five by five. It was after the BAFTAs, so the initial feel was – to be fair, from a lot of people, the initial feel was we were from a charity.

CATHY: Oh god!

RUTH: And that Liz was my carer and that she had let me out for the day, um, we all had a lovely time.

RACHEL: This brings us neatly to finding out about the family dynamic.

RUTH: It’s just us two, isn’t it?

LIZ: Yeah, all we have is us. Mum and Dad and us. We have a cat every now and again.

RACHEL: What pets?

LIZ: What pets did we have?

RUTH: We had guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters.

LIZ: Was the cat – no, the cat went when you were born. Because it pooped on the carpet after you were born.

RUTH: Yeah, the cat – the cat didn't like me.

LIZ: He didn't like you. Guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters.

RUTH: There was a lot of hamsters.

LIZ: There was a short stint with a dog.

RUTH: Yeah.

LIZ: A week.

RUTH: Yeah, but I think after that – no, we're from a really small family.

LIZ: Yes.

RUTH: So we've always been small but really tight knit.

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: And me and Liz have just grown up as best mates.

RACHEL: Who's older?

RUTH: No no no no, Rachel.

LIZ: [laughs] Who do you think is older?

RUTH: This upsets me.

CATHY: Oh, we get asked that. That's not fair.

RACHEL: Okay.

RUTH: This upsets me because for so long, everybody knew I was the younger sister. And now people question it. And this greatly upsets me because she doesn't age. So Liz is three years older than me.

CATHY: Three years, okay.

RUTH: Yeah, so – but now people will – it got to the stage where we went out, you know, drinking and stuff, and I wouldn't get ID'ed and Liz still would.

RACHEL: There is 18 months between us.

CATHY: And I'm getting really old.

RUTH: 8 months?

LIZ: 8 months?

RACHEL: 18. 18. Oh, no no no.

RUTH: I was going to say, 8 months is very very small. 8 years –

CATHY: 8 days.

RUTH: Oh, 8 days? Oh my god! Oh, stop it!

CATHY: No, I'm joking.

RACHEL: There's 18 months between us.

LIZ: 18 months.

RUTH: 18 months.

LIZ: I was like, '8 months isn't physically possible.'

RUTH: No, that's very very very short. But anyway –

CATHY: And we're from Oldham. So we have that –

RUTH: Amazing.

LIZ: Oh, that's amazing!

CATHY: Yeah, amazing. Uh, next door. Exactly. But I'm always viewed as the younger one. I'm not talking physically.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: So, who's the funniest?

[Liz laughs]

RUTH: Funny as in humour? Or funny as in does embarrassing things that everyone laughs at?

CATHY: No, humour. Who makes people laugh the most?

LIZ: I think I'm funnier.

RUTH: I think I'm funnier.

LIZ: Do you think?

RUTH: Yeah. I think I'm funnier.

CATHY: Oh, well that's gone nowhere.

RUTH: That's – yeah, that's died a death, hasn't it? I think I'm funnier.

RACHEL: Yeah.

LIZ: You are funny.

RUTH: I am funny.

LIZ: You are funny.

RACHEL: But I think you're probably both equally funny.

CATHY: I'm trying to work out how to take my jumper off and I've got my headphones in.

RUTH: We're worse when we're together. But no one laughs at us as much as we laugh at us.

LIZ: To each other, yeah. Do you know I was speaking to you on the phone, doing one of our funny voices, um, my little boy Daniel. And I came off the phone and carried on the funny voice and he said, 'why are you still speaking like that when you're not talking to Auntie Ruth?'

[All laugh]

RACHEL: And what is the funny voice, Liz?

LIZ: I can't remember!

RUTH: We don't even know. It just – I don't know we're doing it.

LIZ: No, I – I don't think I could replicate it now.

RUTH: No.

RACHEL: Okay.

LIZ: It's just something that I carried on and he was like, 'no, you only speak like that when you talk to Auntie Ruth.'

RACHEL: So there's a lot that just you two – makes you guys laugh? Even thinking back to childhood, is there music or just stuff that you two just lose your shit to?

RUTH: Yes.

LIZ: Yes, lots of stuff.

RUTH: 'Gladiators'.

LIZ: 'Gladiators'. 'Men Behaving Badly'?

RUTH: 'Men Behaving Badly'.

LIZ: I don't think it was – I don't think we were an appropriate age to watch it, really. But we loved it.

RUTH: But things like 'Gladiators' and – we used to, um, you know, Saturday night was always, you know, homemade

McDonalds. So burger, chips, everything in the front room on a Saturday night watching 'Gladiators'.

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: And then we would replicate 'Gladiators'. So we would get in our swimming costumes and –

RACHEL: Brilliant.

RUTH: Climb up the banisters –

LIZ: But what did I have on my head?

RUTH: Right, now I will tell you this story. Because Liz always had short hair. Liz wanted long hair like Jet. Even though Jet was my favourite. But Liz had to be Jet because –

LIZ: I had dark hair, though. You have blond hair, you had to be Lightning.

RUTH: Yes, yes.

RACHEL: You had to be Hunter, didn't you?

RUTH: I had to be Lightning. So Liz would put a pair of tights on her head, which would replicate a long ponytail.

LIZ: Long hair, yeah.

RUTH: Now can I just point out also, Masons, that Liz has just said on audio and visual that I had –

LIZ: [laughs] I know where this is going.

RUTH: She had dark hair so therefore she had to be Jet, because that was – that was – right, so what's your argument with Danny and Kylie Minogue?

LIZ: I was older.

[All laugh]

LIZ: Danny was the younger sister.

RUTH: No, you said Danny – yeah, that was – that was –

LIZ: [imitating Ruth] De – de – de – de – de –

RUTH: Danny was less successful and Liz wanted to be the popular one. So I sadly just went along with whatever she said.

RACHEL: Well that's – yeah. That's the young – that's the dynamic.

LIZ: She makes out like she was so hard done by.

RUTH: I really was. It'll all come out in the wash, you'll see.

RACHEL: We did Abba.

CATHY: We did Abba, but we also used to build toilets down the side of the house. That's what we did. We used to get old chair frames and stick toilet roll on the side and build toilets.

RUTH: That is very very industrious. I like that.

RACHEL: Yeah, or we played libraries. Barbara and Sandy. So we played – that was a bit more –

CATHY: So square.

RACHEL: Yeah. Exactly, that is really square.

CATHY: So square.

RUTH: I love that. I don't think I have a single childhood memory without my sister in it.

LIZ: No, we did everything – when we did, um, 'Home Alone' and we made plans for if people broke into the house like on 'Home Alone'.

RUTH: Yeah, I remember we did it in my grandad's greenhouse. I remember sitting here –

LIZ: Going into an elaborate plan.

RUTH: Yeah, and I mean, for crying out loud, it was that intricate that nobody was passing the floor. Everyone was just going to get killed if they came into our house.

CATHY: That's amazing!

RACHEL: That's amazing. So you got on – so you really – you're still clearly really close. You were really close as kids. What was your worst row?

LIZ: We really didn't.

RUTH: We didn't argue as kids at all. I mean, I – I admit I am the one that like – you love a good like conflict.

LIZ: She's trying to say I'm bossy.

RUTH: No, I love the term bossy. You know, I've spoken about this term. I love the term. I'm bossy.

LIZ: I am bossy.

RUTH: But –

LIZ: I think – I think she's not someone you can scrap with really though, is she? So, you know, I couldn't –

RACHEL: Why?

CATHY: Why?

LIZ: I can't beat you up, can I? She's so – she's so small!

RUTH: No, I'm a lot stronger than you.

LIZ: Well, you are stronger than me now.

RUTH: Like Liz would have more arguments with our parents than I would. And I hated the fact that Liz would get shouted at. So I would literally sit and cry in my room. I hated it.

LIZ: Yeah, you did.

RACHEL: Liz, you're much more confrontational.

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: Yes, she is.

CATHY: That's weird. You – I think my reading is that you look really laidback.

LIZ: I am, but –

RUTH: She's high.

[All laugh]

RUTH: She's drunk.

LIZ: No, I am laidback. But also confrontational.

RUTH: Like I never needed – I never needed a big brother to stick up for me. Believe me, if anyone said anything to me it was – she's like a rabid dog. She's –

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: She was like a Rottweiler.

LIZ: I'm very protective of you.

RUTH: Fiercely protective of me. So, you know, once you see that side of somebody come out, you're like, 'I don't want to mess with that, so I'm just going to agree with everything you say.'

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: But did you not – Ruth, did you not ever feel angry with her?

RACHEL: No, because they got on really well.

RUTH: Yeah, I mean we've had scraps as we've got older and stuff.

LIZ: Just little, yeah, but nothing major.

RUTH: But over silly things. Silly things like – and the good thing is, because we know each other so well, like if Liz is on – if she's having a turn where she is in a particularly bad mood, or I'm having a day where I'm particularly bad with pain, we kind of leave each other alone.

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: And kind of –

RACHEL: Yeah. That was a question: in terms of knowing how to cheer each other up –

RUTH: Oh, no. So yeah, I know how to cheer Liz up. Yeah. And Liz knows how to cheer me up. But usually –

LIZ: I would say so.

RUTH: Yeah, she is the person I would go to if I needed cheering up. So yeah.

LIZ: Yeah.

RACHEL: But she's the person that knows when to give you space.

RUTH: Yes. Yeah, definitely. Even if –

LIZ: Oh yeah. Don't ring her at naptime.

RUTH: I'm like an infant. I'll get really cross. So cross. Like for example you had a bad day yesterday just because things were – it was just a rough day, things were –

LIZ: Everybody did everything wrong!

RUTH: Just everything kept –

CATHY: You have a child. It's a nightmare! It's a nightmare!

RUTH: So yeah. So yesterday I rang her up because we were both really excited about doing this. But I knew she had literally just sat down last night because she'd had a rough day a bit.

LIZ: It was quarter to 9.

RUTH: So I literally just said – because I spoke to my mum and she said, 'oh, your sister had a rough day' – so I literally just said to her, like I knew she needed a bit of come down time, you know, a bit of space. So it was like, 'I'm really – you still good for tomorrow? I know you're having a bad – you've had a bad day, so just chill.' It's not a long conversation. Just wanted to say, 'love you and I'll see you tomorrow'. That was that, so I knew that she needed like to –

RACHEL: So you're very open – so you say that you love each other?

RUTH: Oh yeah.

LIZ: Oh yeah.

RUTH: Yeah, I mean it's like she pushes me out of the way a lot.

LIZ: You push me out of the way!

RUTH: I know, it's so funny. Um, but yeah, we are huggers. We're very tactile.

RACHEL: Yeah. Oh, that's so nice! And you phone – that you phoned her up last night and just said, you know, 'I'm not going to keep you. I know you need your space. I love you. And that's it, speak to you tomorrow.'

RUTH: Yeah, and that's the thing of like if I'm stressing about something, like Liz is a lot more business minded than I am. I'm much more emotional. So when I was changing my agent – how many times did I –

LIZ: Oh, yes, yeah.

RUTH: Because I know I'm more sentimental and emotional in the business sense. Whereas Liz is like, 'it's a business decision, you need to do this this and this.' So I'm able to ring her with that. And Liz will ring with her technophobe stresses.

LIZ: Oh yeah, I'm a technophobe.

RUTH: Tomorrow she's setting up her Instagram. We're all very excited about it.

LIZ: I'm not. I'm nervous.

RUTH: She's not going to sleep tonight but I'm excited.

LIZ: I need to do it before she disappears on a job because I will ring her on set and be like, 'drop everything, I don't know what to press!'

RACHEL: Oh god! What do you do for a living?

LIZ: Well, there's a story. Um, nothing.

RUTH: No, she's not a nothing at all.

LIZ: No, no. I'm going to tell the story properly. I am a qualified mortgage advisor, but I don't do that anymore. Um, but no. I did come out of work to care for my little boy and to make sure he got all the educational rights he's entitled to. I've trained in special educational needs and disabilities law. I volunteer for a very prominent charity, if I can say them I will.

RACHEL: Yeah.

RUTH: Say them!

LIZ: Am I allowed?

CATHY: Say them, of course!

LIZ: I volunteer for IPSEA. They're an independent charity that give legally based information and advice to parents of children with special educational needs, and young people themselves, you know, if a young person wants advice themselves. Um, yeah, fantastic charity that I sought help from and now volunteer for. They're – so yeah, I've kept my professional side alive by doing that and advocating for him. It's a murky old world, special educational needs.

RUTH: She's so good.

CATHY: How old is he?

LIZ: He's 8.

CATHY: Oh, I've got an 8-year-old. Uh, it's tough.

RUTH: I'm obsessed with him. He's just the best kid.

LIZ: He is, yeah.

RUTH: He's so funny. He's so blunt and there's just no – he's loving and he's – as he gets older, he's so dry and so funny. I just love when he insults you without – it is brilliant!

[All laugh]

LIZ: He's his mother's child.

RUTH: He is definitely – well, you know what? When like he has a tantrum, especially over technology, something's not working. And you just see Liz just come out in full force in him, and you're just like – and I say it to her, 'you can't even get mad at him for that because that's you!'

LIZ: Oh, when he loses the remote. He walks around holding the TV remote and he'll put it down and go, 'where's the TV remote?'

RUTH: That's my sister. But Liz is – with all Liz's professionalisms. I'm much more creative in my work. Liz is such – so clever.

LIZ: That's very kind.

RUTH: I'm not saying it again. But she really is so – her professionalism and the way her mind works with stuff like legal things and mortgages – her brain is so different from mine and it fascinates me how good she is.

CATHY: Because we want to know what you're jealous of in each other.

RUTH: Oh, I wish I could stand up for myself more. Like Liz – there's nobody she won't take on and win.

CATHY: Oh, interesting.

RUTH: Whereas I – I'm the queen of, 'yes, whatever's best for you.' So I'm learning, especially in this industry. Especially with um, the fight for better disability representation, accessibility, all of that stuff.

LIZ: Accessibility, equality.

RUTH: In 'Don't Take My Baby,' it was my first proper job and I had a nude scene in it. And I literally – I remember ringing you from the toilet and you were kind of like, 'now, now, we don't have any time for this. Go and do it. You owe it to every single 15-year-old with a disability watching.' And so –

LIZ: Did I say that?

RUTH: Yes. And you – 'do not fuck this up.' I'm like, 'okay, I'm so sorry!' And she – that's what – and I need that. So –

RACHEL: Yeah.

RUTH: And I think that's why we get on so well and our relationship works so well because we are quite opposite. But then at other times we're really similar.

LIZ: Similar, yeah.

RUTH: But in the things where I wish I was better, I also don't feel like I have to get better because I have you to talk me through it.

CATHY: Were you ever scared of Liz?

RUTH: I wasn't scared of her. I was frightened to upset her because I didn't want –

LIZ: You're making me sound like a monster!

RUTH: She's not a monster, no.

RACHEL: No, you knew what could be unleashed. Yeah.

RUTH: The worst thing in the world is – not just because of how good she is at arguing, because you could never win – but the one person I'd never want to upset – the person whose opinion I value the most is hers. So that was like – so if I'd known that I'd upset her or anything, I can't sleep, I can't anything like that. and I have to – and obviously if you have an argument, you – the other person does need a day to cool off. I can't stand that. I'm, like, 'no, I have to –'

RACHEL: I can't stand that!

RUTH: I have to fix it now! And I'm like, 'I know, but I have to say it now. I know I'm going to make it worse, but I have to – you have to know that I'm not just sat here being nonchalant about it, so I have to' –

RACHEL: Yeah.

RUTH: I can't stand – so anything like that. The fact that the person I would least want to upset is her. Not because I'm terrified of her, but because I'm terrified of her thinking bad of me or me upsetting her. Because she's the one person in the world I'd never want to upset.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: So Liz, do you never feel angry with Ruth, then? You never –

LIZ: Yeah, we've –

RUTH: I'm annoying.

LIZ: You're not annoying.

RUTH: I am.

LIZ: No, you have – the best way I can describe it is every now and again, we might have a falling out or a difference of opinion. But it is rare, isn't it?

RUTH: I think that's – and that's why it feels so big when it happens.

LIZ: Yes, yeah.

RUTH: To me, because you know some siblings are like, 'oh, I'm not talking to us today.' I'm like, 'why? Oh my god, what's happened?' So to me it's a massive thing to be in any kind of –

RACHEL: To have that ruptured.

RUTH: Yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah, and I'm the same. Cath will – Cath will need time to cool off and I cannot cope with that either.

RUTH: That's like me.

RACHEL: And it hurts like nothing else. No one else can, you know – an argument with Jack, whatever. It just doesn't compete in terms of –

RUTH: Yes, like imagine you're with your husband and you're like, 'yes, yes, I'm mad at him today!'

RACHEL: Oh, yes.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: Do you like each other's partners?

RUTH: Oh god, yeah.

LIZ: Yeah. Very much, yeah.

RUTH: I love my brother-in-law.

LIZ: Yeah.

RACHEL: Of course they do! Of course they do! This is turning into the Waltons!

RUTH: But no, seriously. But after saying that, Liz has not always liked the boyfriends I've been with and I've not always liked the people she's been with.

LIZ: No, no. That's very true.

RUTH: So – so yeah. For example, like the people Liz has been out with in the past – and you just, I mean, you look at them and think, 'he's punching something chronic', it's like, 'what are you doing?' And I remember when like – there was one person and you were so excited to go out with him. It was like, why?

LIZ: Yeah, you set me up with some dodgy people.

RUTH: Have I? Who?

LIZ: I won't say.

RUTH: I don't remember setting you up with anybody!

LIZ: You did.

CATHY: Give the first initial. Give the first initial.

LIZ: G.

RUTH: G? I don't remember this at all!

LIZ: Oh, I'll have to say.

CATHY: It was Geoff. It was Geoff.

RUTH: Geoff!

[All laugh]

CATHY: I'm sorry.

LIZ: No –

RUTH: I don't remember that. We'll talk about that. I genuinely don't remember setting you up –

LIZ: You will when I tell you. Um, but no.

RACHEL: Oh, intriguing.

LIZ: You go into a young phase, don't you?

RUTH: Yeah, of course you do.

LIZ: When you're sort of young you see inappropriate people that you'd never end up marrying.

RACHEL: Yeah.

RUTH: I very much approve of James, Liz's husband. He is hysterical and it is just – I just – they are so funny together.

LIZ: He doesn't know he's hysterical. It's not intentional.

RUTH: No, they need their own show because they are just so funny together. It's – it's just brilliant. Their dynamic is hysterical to watch.

LIZ: No, yeah, they are – they are funny.

RUTH: And you like Joe, don't you?

LIZ: Of course! I love Joe to bits. My bro Joe.

RUTH: Yeah, and they've – Joe and James – will do stuff together as well.

RACHEL: Aw!

CATHY: Oh that's brilliant. No, yeah that's good!

RUTH: My Joe, he's always been a biker. And James has just got his – just passed his test.

LIZ: His first motorbike, yeah.

RUTH: So Joe is like – they're like biker buddies. It's really quite cute.

CATHY: So if they go off, what will you two do? Do you two think, 'great, we've got time to spend together?'

LIZ: She'll have a nap.

RUTH: Yeah! To be fair we don't actually – we don't wait for them to do anything. If we want to do something, do it.

RACHEL: How often do you see each other?

LIZ: We don't go more than a couple of days without at least speaking.

RUTH: Talking.

LIZ: Um...

RACHEL: The point is it's just effortless, isn't it? That's what it is.

LIZ: Yeah. And we don't plan to do anything, do we? We don't have to say, 'oh, we'll go and do this today or do that today.' We're just in each other's company, aren't we? Yeah.

RUTH: Just sitting in each other's houses.

CATHY: Would you put – would you rather hang out with your sister than hang out with your mates?

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: Yeah, oh god, yeah. Sorry, friends.

CATHY: Yeah, same as us. Yeah, no it's the same as us.

RUTH: Like if there's – I remember you said that when she had a baby, you were like, 'I don't want to see anybody, I just want to hang out with family.'

LIZ: Yeah, yeah.

RUTH: And like with my disability, I get quite a lot of pain. And Liz is the person I'll want to see. Like when you're feeling really rubbish, the last person you want to see – you don't want to have to make an effort. And I never have to –

CATHY: You don't want to try. I know, totally. Yeah yeah yeah. Are you totally honest with each other?

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: Yeah. I think that has gotten better as well as we're older. I think we're more honest with each other now, just about things – it's just conversations change as you get older. Like real life happens and stuff. And we talk – I think we talk more now than we ever did. And I thought we always talked.

LIZ: Yeah.

RACHEL: And I think also it doesn't sound like a lot of underlying – there are a lot of underlying issues. You had a really happy childhood, you got on together, that's –

LIZ: We did, we did.

RACHEL: We're incredibly close but we had a really difficult childhood together.

CATHY: Yeah yeah yeah.

RACHEL: We didn't get on.

RUTH: I mean there were a lot of times – like for example I spent a lot of time in hospital as a kid and that meant I was away from her a lot and Mum would stay with me and stuff and I used to hate that because I felt like the family kind of was breaking up because I had to be in hospital. And you were a teenager – she used to come and sit – you used to come and see me in hospital, didn't you? In your – when I was about 16 and you were 19, so she'd come to the hospital –

LIZ: Hungover. I'd fall asleep in the chair.

RUTH: Hungover. She'd fall asleep in the chair, she'd eat all of my good chocolates. And I didn't care because she was just there.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Were you jealous of her, though? That you were stuck in a hospital?

RACHEL: You always come back to jealousy.

CATHY: I know, sorry. I'm obsessed with it.

RUTH: Do you know what? Never. Never. The only thing I was sad about was that I couldn't hang out with her more. I mean to be fair, I was jealous of everybody in the world who wasn't in hospital.

RACHEL: Yeah.

RUTH: But it was never – I mean, on my part, speaking for myself, no jealousy whatsoever between us.

LIZ: No, no.

RUTH: It was more – we thought – we always laughed at people's opinion of us. Because at school everybody would say to me – we went to separate high schools because there was only one wheelchair accessible school in the whole of Bolton at that time, it was ridiculous. Like everyone used to ask me, 'oh, so is your sister disabled?' And we just used to laugh at people. Yeah, so everyone – and then I would get, 'oh my god, how do you feel about that? That she's not disabled and you are? Does it cause tension?' And it was like – we used to laugh at people. We used to laugh so much at people.

LIZ: Yeah, I suppose what it is is I suppose if you look there were a lot of operations and a lot of things that were different to other people's, um, childhoods. But for us, we didn't know any different. And it was always like managed very well and, um, yeah. And I think probably the reason – because I always thought the reason we got on so well is because I was very very protective of her. And I wonder whether without, you know, her disability, whether we'd have been as close, whether we'd have got along as well. I'd like to think we would.

RUTH: Well –

LIZ: Do you remember when I nearly got you run over? Did you notice that I nearly got you run over?

RUTH: No. She was so drunk!

LIZ: Oh, right. Well. Because obviously Ruth uses a wheelchair and I had to push the wheelchair. Oh, the hill. We stayed – we went on a girls' holiday, didn't we?

RUTH: Liz payed for it. She was the best.

LIZ: Did I pay for it?

RUTH: Yes.

LIZ: That was nice of me.

RUTH: I know.

LIZ: Um, we stayed in Palmanova because that's nice. Um – it was a walk, it was – what was it? About a ten- or fifteen-minute walk.

RUTH: It wasn't that far. I was sat down, so I mean –

LIZ: We stayed in Palmanova, we went out in Magaluf. And the hill – it was a hill like that. Um, Ruth doesn't – she has like a sporty wheelchair. She doesn't like handles, uh, which isn't considerate for the people that have to push her.

RUTH: For tall people.

LIZ: Yeah, for tall people like me. I'm tall! And was wearing heels and very short dresses and trying to – it was down the hill that was worse. Trying to go down the hill. So tuck your bum in so you're not walking with your bum sticking out in heels. Anyway, zebra crossings abroad, they don't work like they do here but I didn't know that. So I just went to sort of push her out into the zebra crossing and a car came zooming.

CATHY: Oh no!

LIZ: And it did only – I had to pull her back quick. I mean, it was a good job I was going and not coming back because I would've been drunk.

CATHY: Which just reminds me – that just reminds me of my partner. When he first did his driving test, he failed because he ran over a pedestrian on a pedestrian crossing. Properly ran them over.

RUTH: I mean, it's a justified fail. That would – that's a –

LIZ: That's not like taking a bit too long with your parallel park, is it? You knocked somebody over. I'm a very nervous passenger because I do all the driving.

RUTH: She's hideous.

LIZ: I'm a very nervous passenger. And everything – when you're sat in that passenger side, everything feels too close because you're used to it being further away.

RUTH: The most annoying, annoying thing.

LIZ: Yeah.

CATHY: Are you a control freak?

LIZ: Um, yeah.

RUTH: Yes.

LIZ: If I'm admitting, yeah, being honest.

CATHY: But that's a good thing.

LIZ: In a good way, yeah. In a good way.

RACHEL: What are your parents like?

LIZ: My mum's very strong, very maternal.

RUTH: But she's soft like me. She's a marshmallow.

LIZ: Yes. And Dad is the one that really voices his opinions. And I remember – he's a good complainer, Dad. And I remember – I can't remember where we were, but we were all together and he was complaining about something in a shop, um, and he was banging his fists on the table.

CATHY: Oh no.

LIZ: So I think the fieriness I probably get from – and the work – work, like work ethic really –

RUTH: Yeah, he's always working. You're very much like Dad in that respect. But the quiet maternal strength, Liz is definitely like my mum. Whereas personality-wise, I'm like Mum because Mum will not – she doesn't like arguing, does she? She's more like – she's like a marshmallow like –

LIZ: Yeah, I think she thinks I go too far sometimes. Like you challenge certain people, maybe medical people. 'Ooh, I don't know about that.'

RUTH: She's like, 'no no no!'

CATHY: Was there any favouritism?

LIZ: No.

RUTH: I don't think – not at all.

LIZ: No, I don't.

RUTH: Our grandma definitely favoured Liz. She was like, when –

LIZ: I think they felt sorry for me because she got all the attention.

RUTH: Because I was in hospital so I was getting all this attention. Before our grandma passed away, I got her a book called 'Dear Grandma' where she could write things in.

CATHY: Oh, we bought that for our grandma!

RUTH: Honestly it's the best thing. And in the section where she speaks about grandchildren – so our grandma had 5 grandchildren, so there's me and my sister, and then our cousins, Patrick, Jordan, and Sam. And she does this big spiel about Liz, and then at the bottom it says, 'then you came along.' And that's it! That was it!

CATHY: Oh no!

RUTH: That was it. And then – and then the next sentence after that was, 'and 9 years later, Patrick and Jordan were born.' I was like –

CATHY: Oh my god, that's really weird!

RUTH: So yeah, Liz was like – because she was first born, you know, and her – Liz is the same person as my grandma.

LIZ: Yes.

RACHEL: Right.

RUTH: You – so you've always – but you were very close to grandma. And I remember when I got old enough to like go and stay over at my grandma's house and things, and Liz would be horrified at the thought that she had to share Grandma and Grandpa with me.

CATHY: Right.

RACHEL: That's interesting, Liz, that you saw that as your space though. You did.

RUTH: Yeah, she did.

LIZ: Yeah, yes. I – I was quite territorial.

RUTH: Yes.

CATHY: I was definitely the favourite to the grandfather. And the – you're not going to believe this, it's a fact. When Mum was pregnant with me, my grandad apparently had the pregnancy.

RACHEL: A phantom pregnancy.

CATHY: He had a phantom pregnancy. He bloated up for 9 months.

RUTH: Stop it!

CATHY: Genuinely. And they think that's why he's so close to me. How weird is that?

RUTH: That is weird.

LIZ: That is really weird.

RACHEL: Yeah, that's weird.

RUTH: I think about what my sister's going to be like when we're in nursing homes. And you are going to be Grandma.

LIZ: You'll be like Nana.

RUTH: I'll be like my – our great-grandma.

CATHY: What would she be like?

RUTH: Yeah, tell her. Go on.

LIZ: Nana? Oh, she was super glamorous. And she'd have – I remember because obviously she was old, I always remember her being old. And she had swollen legs and she'd wear these bandages on her legs. But she would always have high heels on in the house. She was stuffed – her feet were stuffed into these high heels with the bandages around her legs. And she loved everything shiny. And she was only one who – you know when you're like 14 and have your belly button pierced and everyone was like, 'oh, it's horrible', and Nana was like, 'oh, it's lovely.'

RACHEL: Oh, brilliant.

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: What was the last present you bought each other?

LIZ: Would it have been your birthday?

RUTH: I can't remember. Japanese thing? The thing you got –

LIZ: Oh, the Tibetan singing bowls.

RUTH: Liz is really into – she's got a meditation room. A relaxation room.

CATHY: Oh, do you do all that? Do you do yoga?

LIZ: Yes, I do but I've injured my shoulder. I've got too ambitious with my moves.

CATHY: No, I did a – my partner, we split for a while and he basically shagged his yoga teacher.

LIZ: Disgraceful!

CATHY: And, uh, we then got back together. No, it was after – it was after that. And they were together for a while. And then we got back together again. And I panicked and thought, 'well, clearly she's amazing in bed, she's beautiful.' So I did shit – I was doing like 8 hours of yoga a day. And we went on holiday and I just jumped in the air trying to show off doing the splits and stuff and busted my leg. So I was sitting in this bedroom with a bust leg from yoga.

LIZ: Oh no! It is, it's dangerous. It's dangerous.

CATHY: It's a terrible thing to do.

LIZ: I got too ambitious and now I have a damaged rotator cuff.

RACHEL: Can you remember a time where you were naughty together?

LIZ:] Let me get rid of him, one second.

CATHY: Sorry, the dog – the dog has really got asthma. It's hilarious.

RACHEL: The dog's doing everything to get Liz's attention. Retching –

LIZ: I know, he is. He is.

RUTH: I'm so sorry, it's such a distraction.

RACHEL: It's fine.

LIZ: Bless him. Should I tell you what we'd do? One of my memories – well, you might not remember this. When – you know when we'd go out shopping and I'd always notice if people started at uh, you know, in a wheelchair. You might say something or pull faces –

CATHY: What would you say?

LIZ: Just things like, I don't know, just wind people up.

RUTH: So Liz will be like – she'll say things loudly like, 'oh yes, yes, burden of my life.'

LIZ: No, something else.

RUTH: Oh yeah, that's it!

LIZ: Yeah, so we'd say – we still do it now –

RUTH: Yeah, that's what I mean.

LIZ: 'Oh, you're such a burden. Stop being a burden.'

RUTH: And like she's brought me out the care home for the day. 'I'm not paid enough for this.'

LIZ: Yeah. And do you not remember, though, when we were in that shop and – well, I mean it was her own fault because she was in the way!

RUTH: Not me.

LIZ: There was a collision with a lady. And I mean she really was in the way and it wasn't my fault. But she ended up sat on – she sort of fell onto your chair –

RUTH: She sat on me, yeah.

LIZ: And sat on your knee and she was really cross.

CATHY: Oh no!

LIZ: You were in the way. Yeah, you were in the way.

CATHY: What did you say to her?

LIZ: I think I said, 'well, you were in the way.'

RUTH: Liz is very – there's no apologies. Like, blunt. But as well she's very gung-ho with the pushing.

LIZ: Yeah.

RUTH: And so if she pushes people's ankles, I would get the filthy looks because obviously I'm the one sat in the chair. But she wouldn't stop, she'd just plow.

LIZ: She used to say that if we went to Trafford Centre with a friend and – [laughs]

RUTH: Yes! Yes!

RACHEL: You're a bad driver! You're a good driver but a bad driver of prams and wheelchairs.

RUTH: I mean she – I mean I love the fact Liz says she's a nervous passenger now, I mean can you imagine – what about me?

LIZ: Oh, I –

RUTH: Don't you even mention – the curb doesn't stop you from squealing every time I pass –

LIZ: Oh, you get too close.

RUTH: See? To be fair, someone could be like on the other side of the road and she'd still squeal going, 'watch them, watch them, watch them!'

[All laugh]

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: So what's your Instagram going to be?

RACHEL: Yeah, why are you doing it now?

LIZ: Because um...

RUTH: This is exciting.

LIZ: Um, yeah. I want to support other parents who might've come out of work, you know, to do similar things that I did with their children. Um, and I think for me when I did that, I was completely burnt out, trying to be all things to all people. Um, and it was the mental challenge. I've never not worked and it was the mental challenge around the – took the longest, really, to overcome. And it was necessary and I'm so much better in myself and it was absolutely the right thing for our family that I did that. Um, but of course we've had to learn to cut our cloth, you know? Our household income went down about 2/3, and it's things like – I Youtubed how to unblock a toilet, um, it wasn't my blockage.

CATHY: I should hope not.

LIZ: However – it wasn't!

CATHY: It was Ruth's!

LIZ: It was Ruth, yeah, she had visited actually. Uh, I need to stop her from putting her toys down the toilet. Um, so because a plumber's call out charge is obviously very expensive and it was Christmas, I Youtubed how to unblock a toilet. And I found how to unblock a toilet with cling film. It really works. Um, but it's silly things like that. It really really works.

CATHY: What, you just poo on the cling film?

LIZ: No, you don't poo on... and obviously the support things and the things that I've learned along the way that people just don't know about, like special educational needs law and if you know these things –

RUTH: You're quite hostile as well.

LIZ: I'm not hostile!

RUTH: No, I said – you said it can be hostile and you want to bring –

LIZ: Oh, the um – world. Yeah, it can, and I'd like to bring a bit of, you know, a bit of humour.

RUTH: Humour.

LIZ: And lightheartedness. But also informative. Like things that I've learned along the way that, um, would've made my journey easier. So to try and just try and provide information and support to other parents. And it's – I think it would be a nice platform to do it on and it's one that, um, it's something I can do to, you know, sort of give to other people. Yeah, but something that I'm not going to get overly frustrated – it's not a job, you know, where you get stressed and you've got people relying on you to meet deadlines.

CATHY: I think Daniel's going to take over. I think he's going to have clips up on there. Seriously.

RUTH: I think Daniel's going to take over. I genuinely think he's going to be like –

RACHEL: He's going to hijack the Instagram.

CATHY: He's going to totally hijack it.

LIZ: I think he would, yeah.

RUTH: He's a lot more technological than you as well.

LIZ: He is, yeah. Yeah, he is actually.

CATHY: Live from the Meditation Room. Daniel, live from the Meditation Room.

LIZ: Daniel, live from the Meditation Room! Oh my god.

CATHY: We still need to work out a way of getting the people that loath each other.

RACHEL: But you are absolutely the happiest –

CATHY: Yeah, you're the happiest.

RACHEL: Loveliest, balanced.

RUTH: Aw, we're the happiest. She's literally going to go and lock me in a cupboard now that we finish this.

LIZ: I can't lock you in a cupboard, I need your help!

[All laugh]

[Guitar and flute music]

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: Today we spoke to actress Ruth Madeley and her sister, Liz.

RACHEL: You are so bad at accents!