

## I Wish I Was An Only Child – Tiff & Gayle Stevenson

[Guitar and flute music]

[Children playing]

RACHEL MASON: Welcome to I Wish I Was An Only Child, with me, Rachel Mason –

CATHY MASON: And me, Cathy Mason.

RACHEL: In this podcast we speak to other siblings about the dynamic of their relationship to see where we're going wrong.

CATHY: This week we spoke to Tiff Stevenson, stand-up comedian, actor, and writer.

RACHEL: And her sister Gayle, who works in legal and intellectual property.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: Who is the funniest?

GAYLE STEVENSON: Oh, Tiff.

TIFF STEVENSON: Ooh.

CATHY: Really?

TIFF: Yeah, yeah. I would say.

GAYLE: Absolutely, yeah. Absolutely.

CATHY: So you think – no, it's not necessarily – it's quite interesting. When you interview comics, sometimes they will think that their sibling much is funnier.

GAYLE: No.

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah.

GAYLE: No. I'd definitely say Tiff.

TIFF: I – I think that we would – I think we share the – the same sense of humour. So if we see a situation, she's going to go, 'oh, you'll write about that.' Like if it's something we see when we're out and about or if it's something that Mum does for example. We're like, 'that's going in. That's going to be a bit.' Right? Um, but –

GAYLE: Yeah, and that's hysterical laughter, isn't it? That's – been crying with laughter, both of us, because we've seen the same humour of it.

CATHY: So what's your, uh, tell us about your set-up. Who's the eldest, what's the age difference? Uh, what was the set-up when you grew up?

GAYLE: Okay, so I'm the oldest. I'm the oldest, so I'm 55.

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: So, um, and obviously Tiff's 12 years younger than me. I was –

CATHY: Oh.

GAYLE: Um, yeah. So, um. [laughs] So yeah, so when she was born I was 12. So, you know, I was, yeah, I'm sort of big sister then. And then we have a younger – another sister who's three years younger than me. So –

CATHY: So there was a middle one in between?

GAYLE: Yes, yeah.

CATHY: Ah, okay.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: Okay.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: And also I like that you – you said 43 there. I'm actually still 42 until next week.

GAYLE: 43 on Tuesday.

TIFF: And – and you got really annoyed when you were like, 'Wikipedia's got your date of birth wrong.'

GAYLE: Well it has. It's got you in your 30s.

TIFF: It's got – it's got the year wrong. They've knocked a year off and it really annoyed you and I found that really funny.

[All laugh]

GAYLE: You wait until you get to my age. You'll be like, 'ugh.'

CATHY: So what was it like having that age group? That age difference? I mean how does that work?

TIFF: So we, um, we have the same mum, different dads. So –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: So we, um, so I grew up with my – so we didn't live together growing up. So we saw each other every weekend pretty much.

CATHY: Oh.

TIFF: Um, uh, so yeah. So it means that because there's that slightly protracted gap, I guess Gayle is as much like a mum as she is like a sister a lot of the times.

CATHY: Right, right.

TIFF: So we have that quite protective relationship I guess. I think.

RACHEL: So you're very close?

GAYLE: Yeah yeah, absolutely.

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah. And I sort of, you know, I always – I always, um laugh about Tiff as I was saying when she – she's always late and she's never on time for things. And, you know, so much so when we've been going on holiday I've had to tell her we're on an earlier flight so she gets to the airport on time. Otherwise she's to the wire, do you know what I mean?

RACHEL: Yeah.

GAYLE: Um, but having said that, when – when there's been something, you know, um, you've had a trauma and something happened in your family, you know, I've known Tiff to go, 'okay, I may be here but I'll drop everything and come.'

CATHY: Yeah.

GAYLE: And I think that and vice versa. And I'd do the same. So – which I think is really nice, you know? That you can sort of count on one another when you need to.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: But how does it work with the different dads then? I mean do you get on with each of the dads or see the different dads?

GAYLE: Yeah, absolutely.

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

CATHY: Oh wow, okay.

TIFF: We've done Christmases together and stuff and I'll see –

CATHY: Really? Wow.

TIFF: Yeah yeah. Yeah. Um, so I'll see – in fact last time I was over, your dad was on – you were Zooming with your dad and your step-mum. So Gayle had – I am a step-mum and Gayle has a step-mum, so that's quite interesting.

CATHY: Oh, okay.

TIFF: But um, yeah, so your dad – your dad was on – yeah. So we chat and then we're all – yeah. Yeah. I love Mic, so –

GAYLE: Yeah, and my dad – my dad and step-mum have been to see Tiff's gigs quite a few times when she's been down their neck of the woods, so yeah. They'll always go and see her. So –

RACHEL: And what – and what about the middle sibling?

TIFF: Claire, yeah.

RACHEL: Do they – yeah, sorry, Claire. Are you as close again to Claire?

GAYLE: Yeah yeah yeah.

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: We are, yeah. And she's the only one who's got a child as well. So – which is quite – quite different as well. But although he's an adult, yeah, he's 24. So, um, but yeah. So and she lives – she's not – well she's probably nearer to Tiff than I, uh, than I am now. So yeah. So we just – it's quite difficult when you're all so busy. But yeah, we all sort of get together as often as we can.

TIFF: And Gayle's the one who sort of, um, is the, um, the mum of the sisters or the one who kind of instigates or organises the get-togethers. Gayle is the organised one and the, um, yeah.

RACHEL: And the oldest. So she –

TIFF: Yeah the eldest, the organiser, uh, the connective tissue between everyone I would say probably.

CATHY: Aw, that's nice.

TIFF: You know?

RACHEL: Are you happy with that role, Gayle?

GAYLE: Um, I am, yes. Yeah. I've done it for so long it's just sort of second nature really. Yeah.

RACHEL: Right.

GAYLE: And it's always easier I think for me to – to do it. Because I'm probably a little bit more relaxed.

CATHY: So what – so what do you do? What's your job and what does the middle sister do? Claire?

GAYLE: So – so I've always worked in legal. I work in intellectual property. And, um, and I've done that for over, oh, 23 years I've been doing that. And, um, Claire actually works as, um, she's an office manager for a catering company.

CATHY: Is she in London or by you?

TIFF: Surrey.

GAYLE: Um, no, she's in Surrey. She's in Surrey.

CATHY: Right.

GAYLE: So yeah. She works locally, so.

RACHEL: So Tiff, you went very off-piste basically. In terms of career, sorry.

TIFF: Uh, yes, I did. I did, yeah. I, um, I guess because my dad's side of the family, my dad's sister was an actress, so that's sort of come through from that side. But yes, um, I'm trying to think what else –

GAYLE: And – and our uncle as well. He worked in, uh –

TIFF: Oh yeah, our uncle was a producer out and, uh, worked on 'The Thunderbirds' and stuff like that. So, um, so yeah. So that side of the family actually, forgetting our mum's side, there's that as well. But yeah, I think you came through – because Gayle came through – Gayle's quite inspirational in her route that she took to –

GAYLE: Go on then.

TIFF: To working in kind of like legal. Because she came through legal secretary route.

GAYLE: Yes, yeah.

TIFF: And then took all her exams and did all of that, so now that she's –

RACHEL: That's impressive.

TIFF: So now she's like a paralegal.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Wow, nice.

CATHY: So what did you think, Gayle, when Tiff went into comedy? What did you think – did you expect she'd do something like that?

RACHEL: Did she always feel like she was going to perform?

GAYLE: Yeah. Because I think even – I think even when she was younger there was always that element to her. Um, and do you know – and when she first started doing it, I was like, 'oh wow,' you know? It's – you know, and I've sort of always thought, 'oh, it's going to be hard.' Because obviously when you're a woman in comedy, you know, it's always much more difficult. But I – especially when she – when she did show me the funny, I was just, 'oh my god, how is she standing up there on a stage with all those people?' Um, yeah. So very proud of her. But it – but I could never, never have done that. And I don't know how she still does it every day. I just don't know how. It's – you – I just think you've got to have this unique talent to be able to, you know, throw back comments when people are, you know, shouting at you from the audience. And she just seems to handle it, you know, in the best – the best way. And so – so easy, you know? It just doesn't seem to – to phase her. Because I remember early on you had quite a few people heckling at you, Tiff, didn't you? Um –

TIFF: Yeah, yeah.

GAYLE: Um, someone quite famous at one point. But she'd get back so quickly. You know, so it's just great to see. So, um, but yeah. I just don't know. I think it's amazing what she does, you know?

TIFF: Um, I think we always had me performing, didn't we? Because if we'd go on holidays and stuff it was always I would get up and sing or I would do a thing or I did – I'd do impressions when we were younger, do you remember?

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah.

TIFF: Like do so and so. Do –

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: Who did you do? Who did you do impressions?

TIFF: Oh, I'm sure I did like Margaret Thatcher when I was younger and stuff like that.

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah. I'm sure she did.

TIFF: I kind of wouldn't even be able to remember how I – how I did that. But I would do – but I danced for years so it would always be like – watch me dancing. I mean how tedious was I? Watch me dancing, watch me singing, and then watch me telling jokes. Watch me acting, watch me telling jokes. So there was always an element of like, you know, trying to perform and – yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah and her singing – her singing voice is amazing. Absolutely amazing singing voice. I remember we were on holiday and there was, um, there – one evening we were in Lanzarote I think, and, uh, there was a karaoke. And they would like – nobody would go up and sing. Nobody would go up and sing. And, um, Tiff – Tiff went up and sang. And I'll always remember – and the guy was just – it blew the guy's socks off.

TIFF: I did a residency, guys. That's what –

CATHY: Oh.

GAYLE: Well she sung – she sung – I think it was Oleta Adams, you know? 'Get Here', which is –

TIFF: Yeah yeah yeah.

GAYLE: It's a really powerful song. And the guy actually taped her. And afterwards he went, 'oh my god, that was just fabulous, you know?' Um, and he played the song back again. Because I think he was just so shocked at how good, you know, how good she was. Someone who's just like on their holiday having a drink come out of the audience, 'okay, I'll go do a bit of karaoke.' But it wasn't, you know? It was done so well. Like a – like a pool shark.

TIFF: Oh, did you want me to sing? Oh, I can try.

GAYLE: And I think Stevie – your Stevie Nicks impersonation has just got to be the best, hasn't it?

CATHY: Oh, really? How do you do Stevie Nicks?

TIFF: Oh I do a bit on stage where I do Stevie Nicks turning into Cartman.

CATHY: Oh, okay.

TIFF: Through – through excessive drug use, um –

CATHY: Yes, I knew there was the man at the side of the stage that used to put the straw in her bottom.

TIFF: Yeah, put the straw in the gold straw, yeah, so because – because she basically destroyed her septum, so –

CATHY: Oh no.

TIFF: So that's where I do the singing and eventually she turns into Cartman. So it's a – it's a kind of set piece that I do. But sometimes I might just sing the song like Stevie Nicks would sing the song. But it's much more fun to do Stevie Nicks Cartman.

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: So what makes you two laugh the most together? You were talking about that shared history when you were kids laughing at your mum. But what TV shows? What do you both really giggle at together?

GAYLE: Um –

TIFF: I think we giggle at the dynamics between – in our relationships and our – and our family. Like – because us women, like we love – we love our partners. We all love our partners but we're also like, 'I could be on my own.' Um, which – Paul has literally just walked into the room and burst out laughing at the idea. At the idea of it. But I do think – I think that's how we make each other laugh. I was thinking of one of the times – do you remember when we were, um, this was probably about two years ago. We came down to visit you and we were going to go to the beach and, um, and Barry was trying to find out what the – what the weather was.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: In like Boscombe or something. And he was like, 'no, not that Alexa, you stupid bitch.' And then Gayle got really upset and was like, 'don't talk to her like that.' And I was like, 'oh my god, there's three people in this marriage.' My – my sister's getting defensive of Alexa in this conversation.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: So –

GAYLE: He treats her terribly. When I – for the last two years I've commuted so a couple of nights a week I've not been here. So like Alexa's been his friend. And I said, 'but you just – you need to be nice to Alexa. You can't talk to her like that.'

CATHY: So do you like each other's partners? Have you always liked each other's partners?

GAYLE: Yeah, absolutely.

TIFF: Yes.

GAYLE: Yeah, absolutely. You know I'm sure there's –

RACHEL: Who's – who's partnered? So Gayle, you're with Barry and Tiff, you're with Paul.

GAYLE: Yes.

RACHEL: Is that right?

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: Yes.

TIFF: Yeah, um, but, um I was bridesmaid, obviously, at Gayle and Barry's wedding. Oh, have you got the – I don't know if you have – I was doing a livestream recently where Gayle like managed to humiliate me because I brought up the fact that when Gayle and Barry got married it was in the 80s and they had matching shaggy mullets.

GAYLE: Barry's hair was a bit George Michael and – you know when he had it long?

CATHY: Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah. Lovely.

TIFF: And – and then Mum did my hair. So I was talking about this on a live and then you brought out the picture of me as a bridesmaid.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Which is shocking because Mum did my hair. So basically she permed – did she perm? I think she permed it.

GAYLE: I think she permed. She permed Tiff's hair, who was like 12, you know? It was like – yeah.

TIFF: But then – but she left my fringe like dead straight. Just like in the –

GAYLE: It was. It was horrific, wasn't it?

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: I'm just trying to find the picture, but yeah, it was.

RACHEL: What about other horrific childhood sort of looks or obsessions that you remember of each other?

GAYLE: Oh, Tiff – I remember Tiff as a – as a child, probably only about five. And we were out shopping one day. It was absolutely adamant that Claire and I had – I don't know if you remember, you used to have the jeans that used to have the striped piping down the side. And we were out trying to buy Tiff jeans and she was adamant and was kicking and screaming that she wanted, at the age of five, the same jeans that Claire and I had.

C: Yeah.

GAYLE: So I mean, very determined and knew what she thought was in.

CATHY: That's very cool.

RACHEL: Fair enough. Fair enough.

GAYLE: So – and would always run off and hide in the clothes when you're in Marks & Spencer's. Could never find her.

RACHEL: Right.

TIFF: Oh, and C&A. I remember that.

GAYLE: Or C&A. Could've been C&A, yeah.

TIFF: Well the other things that you had were you had rah-rah skirts.

GAYLE: Yes, we did.

TIFF: And there was a picture of Claire in a rah-rah skirt that really used to annoy me because I wasn't allowed to have a rah-rah skirt at that age. So I think it was seen as like the downfall teenage girls to have a rah-rah skirt or something.

GAYLE: It was. Yeah yeah yeah.

TIFF: Um, so you had a rah-rah skirt. And then I just – but I just – I would always try to like copy whatever – whatever Gayle and Claire had. Um, and then I remember specifically the – the time that it worked out so badly. Do you remember when Claire got a step haircut?

GAYLE: Yes. Yeah.

TIFF: And she got her hair shaved up the back. How old was Claire then maybe when that happened? Maybe 20?

GAYLE: Probably, yeah. Could be, yeah. I remember her hair short around about then, yeah. Probably was.

TIFF: Yeah, so I probably would've been like – maybe I would've been like 11 or 12. Um, and she'd had this – she'd have this haircut. So – but she has totally different hair. So like my sisters both have really thick hair that you can do a variety of hairstyles with. And I have this, um, 'fairy hair', we used to call it when I was –

CATHY: I've got that. I've got that. I call it pubic hair basically.

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. It's kind of not developed beyond –

CATHY: It's awful and you get the fluffy bits at the front.

TIFF: Yeah, the wisps. But I was determined to have the same haircut as – as Claire when she got this wedge. So I went and got that cut and it was awful. And I just had this –

CATHY: And how old were you?

RACHEL: About 11.

TIFF: Yeah, ten or 11 I think.

GAYLE: Ten, yeah.

TIFF: Yeah. And so I got it all like shaved up at the back. So I just – there's pictures of me with my dad actually and I'm wearing a waistcoat. I think – yeah. I think I am – it might not have been 11 because I went to high school and then I had a perm then. So I must've been – it must've been nine or ten. And there's a picture of me with my short hair in a waistcoat stood next to my dad. And I'm like, 'yes, my dad and his son.' Because I just look like a – like a nine year old like boy. Whereas Claire – because Claire at that age would've been a teenager or just entering early 20s, she – that kind of haircut – she had makeup and she had like clothes that were like, you know, she could be like, 'I'm going to have the androgynous hair and feminine clothes,' whereas I just look like a little boy.

CATHY: So Gayle, were you ever embarrassed by Tiff?

GAYLE: No, well I'm not – I mean sometimes when I've been, um, not when she was younger. But I think once –

[All laugh]

CATHY: Exactly.

GAYLE: But when she's – when I've been – I've been to quite a few of her gigs and – and, um, you know, and what's really great is all my friends, um, really – you know if I said, 'oh, Tiff's doing a gig,' and it's near where they live and if – they'll all go, 'yeah, we'll be there.' And of course then I'll drag all my mates along as well and stuff. So there's been – there have been times when I've been like, 'oh my god' at some of the things that she's been saying. But then, um, and Tiff's done quite a few, um, corporate things which are through some friends of mine as well. So I've always been thinking, 'oh my god, what's going – what's going to be like' – but then, you know, everyone's come up to me afterwards and it's always been so, 'oh my god, you know, wow, she's great.' So yeah, I wouldn't ever say I've ever been embarrassed. Some of the things she'd be talking about I'm like –

TIFF: Or if it's about family or if it's about Mum or something then you'll be like –

GAYLE: Oh yeah yeah yeah.

TIFF: Oh yeah, these are my –

GAYLE: She does some classics.

CATHY: So what's your mum like? And then Tiff, have you ever been embarrassed of Gayle?

TIFF: Uh, our mum is – is, um, she's –

GAYLE: Where do you start?

TIFF: She's – she's like a leopard print whirlwind.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: That's probably the best way to –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: To describe Mum. She's got kind of that old-school like – she still does a posh telephone voice. 'Hello.'

GAYLE: Beside her sometimes it comes out a bit like the nan in Catherine Tate.

TIFF: Yeah yeah yeah.

GAYLE: You know? She'll – she'll be, 'alright love, that's alright, don't you worry.' And the second they walk out the door she's like, 'well.' Do you know? It's – there's that side of her.

TIFF: Um, but she's fashionable. We definitely get like a sense of like there's a touch of we both love a bit of leopard print. That comes from Mum.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Um, but Mum will – often will provide comedic gold. So your family are often just a source of – a source of humour. Like and one of my earliest jokes I think I ever wrote was about Mum – do you remember this? Going into a coffee shop.

GAYLE: Yeah, I do.

TIFF: This happened. Asking for two cappuccinos and one of those punanis. And that was one of the first bits that I ever wrote, like, you know, or her telling you about her cystitis loudly across a crowded room.

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah. It's like –

TIFF: Mum is – Mum can be massively inappropriate.

GAYLE: Yes.

TIFF: So I think that side of my comedy, it's – so that would be – that's probably where I imagine I've embarrass Gayle, where there would be – there would be slightly sort of indelicate situations that I would make a joke about or do a thing – Mum would do a thing and you'd be like, 'oh god.' But I tend to save mine for onstage.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Rather than –

CATHY: You don't do that outside of the stage? You're not like that off stage?

TIFF: Um, no, I don't think I – Gayle might disagree. I don't think I am, I mean –

CATHY: Is she, Gayle?

GAYLE: No, I don't think – no, I don't think you are, no. No.

TIFF: No. Um, I sort of could reign in my tendency to say maybe the first thing that pops into my head. Whereas I think sometimes Mum doesn't. She just says it.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: And then if you try and ignore it she'll say it again. She'll say it again just in case you didn't hear her the first time.

GAYLE: Then you'll say, 'did you actually understand what – how that came across?' And she'll go, 'no.' But it's just – it's just like water out of a tub spout with her, you know?

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: Never ever be, 'oh, okay, that did sound a bit bad.'

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: So how did – so how did it work with growing up? So did – were you both in London? Because I know Tiff, you're North London, aren't you? Did you grow up there? Did you –

TIFF: Yeah, I live in – I grew up in West London and then Gayle –

CATHY: Yeah. Okay.

GAYLE: I was in West London as well, so I was – yeah, I was in West London, so it's not – we weren't too far from one another. And like Tiff said we probably – I would say we always saw each other at weekends, so yeah.

CATHY: So every weekend you'd see each other?

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah, we did.

CATHY: Did you dread it or did you really look forward to it? Be honest.

TIFF: No, we looked forward to it.

GAYLE: No, we looked forward to it. Yeah, looked forward to it.

TIFF: I think we –

CATHY: So you never disliked each other?

GAYLE: No. No. Not at all. No.

RACHEL: Never had any massive rows? You must've had some rows.

TIFF: Um, we've had –

GAYLE: No. I don't – do you know what? I – no, I don't think Tiff and I have ever had any falling out.

CATHY: Wow.

GAYLE: I mean even if you've had something in your family – but to get – both of us together we haven't, no. Not at all.

TIFF: No. No, I can't –

GAYLE: I mean we'll have disagreements about certain things and, you know, you tend to, um, you know, you might have a different view on something. But then you're always – I – always quite respectful of, that's your view and you're entitled to saying that. So you might not always agree on things, but not to the point where you would have a falling out over it.

RACHEL: But Gayle, it sounds like you're very laid back as well.

CATHY: Yes.

TIFF: Yeah.

RACHEL: So do you think maybe you're quite accepting of things?

CATHY: Yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah yeah, that's probably true actually. Yeah. Yeah, it's nice of you to say that. Because I don't – you don't always know that about yourself, you know?

CATHY: You can see – you can see it.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: You can see. Absolutely.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: Yeah yeah yeah.

TIFF: I think as well Gayle was often the peacemaker if there was any kind of –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: I think when I was little little I would maybe argue with Claire a bit more. But not even really. Like in that kind of bratty like kind of someone being younger and annoying. And I think Mum was like, ‘you and Claire used to fight a bit.’ But I never really fought with Gayle. But I do – Gayle has big maternal energy. Uh, but –

CATHY: But if she has maternal energy, why, Tiff, did you not have a rebellion? Did you not have a point where you hated her and you were rebelling against that, as we all do with our mothers?

TIFF: I think I gave all of that to my mum.

CATHY: Oh, right. Okay. Oh no, okay.

TIFF: So I think, um, I was thinking about this the other day because I was – I’d just written a new bit of stand up and I think Gayle will really relate to this, of like – and this is not in a bad way because, you know, uh, but I was thinking about pick up artists who think they invented the idea of negging women. Like, you know, um, but they haven’t met mums talking to daughters, who are the GOATs of passive aggressive compliments, you know?

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah.

TIFF: That kind of thing. Like I wore a jumpsuit the other day and my mum went, ‘that’s brave.’ You know, like that kind of like – she’ll comment on you putting on weight or your um, you know, whatever you say.

GAYLE: Well she’s terrible for that. I mean god, yeah.

TIFF: Yeah.

CATHY: Really?

GAYLE: And it's like, 'do you ever hear how that sounds,' you know? It's like, 'oh, thanks for just reminding me,' you know.

TIFF: Yeah. But you know how mums do in that sort of slightly passive – they compliment you then also at the same time you're like, 'was that a compliment?' Because something – you know.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: So, um, and so – so I think that I always had a bit more of that kind of clash of personalities with – with sort of Mum. Because our mum is very, um, glamorous. Like, you know, she – she's quite – she can be sort of quite tough to live up to in that sense, couldn't she, Gayle?

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah.

TIFF: Because she – when we were younger she looked like a film star, you know? She would just – and so she has this idea about kind of like what relationships should be like and what women should be like and, you know, I kind of, you know –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Sort of went against that. I think when I was younger she was like, 'you should probably marry a footballer,' you know?

GAYLE: She did, yeah. That was her big thing, yeah.

TIFF: That was Mum's fantasy.

GAYLE: Yeah, it was like, 'you need to marry a footballer and have a big house.' And that was the aim.

RACHEL: Like a sense of, Tiff, a man to look after you, right? That's what she's suggesting.

TIFF: Uh, yeah. A little bit, yeah. Yeah, there's a little bit of that.

RACHEL: And then occasionally says, 'use your brain. Oh, go and do something.' But fundamentally, 'marry a footballer and he can look after you.'

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah.

TIFF: Yeah, just to make – to make sure that you are – that you're safe, I guess.

RACHEL: Right.

TIFF: And that – that probably, you know, maybe a sense of her not feeling safe or, you know, going back way back when. So yes, um, rather than going, 'I'll provide that for myself and I always have' – and similarly with Gayle. Like even though, you know, we could be with partners or we could be married, we could also, you know, independently, you know, like we sometimes – we're like, probably when we're older we will just live together.

GAYLE: We're just going to live together in a commune, yeah.

RACHEL: Did Claire live with – Gayle, who did Claire live with? Gayle or Tiff?

GAYLE: Oh, with me.

TIFF: With Gayle.

GAYLE: Yeah, with me.

RACHEL: And did you ever have any rows with Claire, Gayle? Because you –

GAYLE: Oh god, loads. Yeah, yeah. Loads.

CATHY: Oh.

RACHEL: So there's the element of the fact that you only saw each other at weekends.

CATHY: That's what it is.

GAYLE: That's probably – yeah.

RACHEL: There's the age difference.

GAYLE: Yeah. Yeah.

RACHEL: You were closer in age to Claire.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: So it's slightly different and – yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: And what does Claire do?

TIFF: And sharing – and sharing a bedroom as well.

GAYLE: And we shared a bedroom.

CATHY: Oh, no.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: So you never had to go through that?

TIFF: Oh, we – we –

GAYLE: Oh, but I've shared – we shared – oh gosh, when we go on holiday – when we've had a girls holiday, the three of us, so, um, we've shared like the three of us in a room. And so like – so Claire

and I are quite – we hang our clothes up, you know, and then Tiff is the complete opposite. So you –

CATHY: I'm with you, Tiff.

GAYLE: We used to be like –

CATHY: I'm with you.

GAYLE: And she'd be like – and Tiff's constantly trying to find stuff because she can't remember where she's put it. And – but then –

CATHY: Me too.

RACHEL: And it drives me mad. I'm trying to get Cath to put Apple Pay on her phone because she always loses her credit card.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: Never has it. I said, 'just put it on the – yeah. Have Apple Pay.' She's like, 'no, that's too many things.' What do you mean that's too many things? It's another app.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: But yeah, Cath is chaos.

TIFF: I have to, um, I have to explain the, um, I don't know if I said this at the beginning. I don't think I did. But Paul gets frustrated at my lateness as well, and I – being late for one of these Zooms and he was like, 'how can you be late for something in your own house?' And I'm like, 'chronic tardiness is a state of mind, not a destination.'

CATHY: Totally with you.

TIFF: So it's kind of like disorder of everything else. It's not even about where you're going. But I think there's – I think we've got a scale of like tidy to messy. And I think Claire is on the end of like

extreme like tidiness, Gayle is in the middle, and I'm on the other end. Because when you shared a room with Claire, you said that there was one messy side and one tidy side.

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah. Because when I shared with her I was the messy one. Yeah. She was the one – her side of the bedroom was immaculate. And mine was quite messy. So, you know, I used to put everything on the bed so it looked tidy on the floor. Then when I'd come in, when I'd been out all evening, just throw it all on the floor and get in bed. So yeah. And then just get up in the morning, put it all back on the bed again. So yeah. It's quite – it is quite strange, but yeah. And – but when I've shared with Tiff I just – if, you know, I just push things in the wardrobe and shut the doors. I don't – it doesn't bother me. But, um –

RACHEL: In the way it would bother Claire?

TIFF: Oh, yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah. She finds it really tough, yeah. And she's a – she's a stickler for being on time for things and it really stresses her out if she's late for anything, she's stuck in traffic. Whereas I'm like, 'okay.' Because when you're working you have to be, you know, if I've got to be at a meeting then I'm always on time. So I sort of relax a little bit when I'm not working. So yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah.

TIFF: I think – um, yeah, Claire will – Claire's organisation – she'll Hoover before we go on holiday or whatever.

CATHY: What?

TIFF: Whereas – yeah yeah, she would like be like, 'I need to know that I've left it in pristine condition.' Whereas we'd just be like, 'more

importantly, I want to get in the shops at the airport and so I want to have a look around there like so that – yeah.’ Or go and have a glass of, uh, go and have a glass of fizz.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: But Claire is very very organised.

CATHY: So Gayle, were you envious of Tiff? Because I mean you’re in a room with your other sister. Were you envious of Tiff for sort of being – there wasn’t any other siblings in your house, Tiff, were there?

TIFF: No, no, it was just me. Yeah.

CATHY: No. So were you envious of that? Because I’m envious of only kids.

[Flute sounds]

RACHEL: Who would be most likely to fall over?

GAYLE: Probably me.

TIFF: Probably.

RACHEL: Gayle, but you’re the sensible one.

GAYLE: Yeah but, you know, you get, um, perimenopausal symptoms, you’re going to do all sorts of things like –

TIFF: Here we go. I knew it would come up. I knew it would come up.

CATHY: Oh boy.

GAYLE: Of all the things that I say, these are the things I say to Tiff because she’s that bit behind me. But yeah, no, it would be me. I would honestly – I fall over. I’m terrible.

TIFF: Um, I – I’m interested that Gayle says, ‘because I’m perimenopausal.’ Because any – anything that I say that happens to me now, I – that’s perimenopause. I’m like, ‘who is this Peri, she sounds like a bitch.’ But sometimes it’s actually really interesting because it makes me – it makes me think, you know, because I’ll often write about feminist stuff in my sort of stand up. So sometimes Gayle’s perspective on things being that bit ahead of me can make me see comedic opportunities or like injustices where they might exist. So you were saying about going to work –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: That they were talking about when people go back to the offices, that they were going to put temperature checks in place. And you were like, ‘what about all the –’ like and if you don’t – if you don’t pass the – if your temperature’s high, then they put you in a room. Like a pen.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Which is just just going to be all these perimenopausal women.

CATHY: Oh god, of course.

TIFF: Who are just like hot.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: Yes.

TIFF: Because your core body temperature –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Or is it your basal temperature – rises and stuff.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: I didn't think about that. That's awful.

RACHEL: And they'll have another room for when you're irritable.

TIFF: Yeah.

RACHEL: With the perimenopause. And another room – yeah, exactly.

GAYLE: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

TIFF: So that's – but that's one of the benefits of having older sisters. You kind of, you know, they get to – they're experiencing these things and then I can get to have that kind of like foresight or understanding of something beforehand. And that's quite nice for – for being able to write material and stuff.

CATHY: And are both the step-fathers quite submissive? Because it sounds like you had a very – we had just three of us, us and our mum. So it was sort of – I think we're quite strong women.

RACHEL: Yeah, but also Mum's more like a sister.

CATHY: Yeah. Yeah.

RACHEL: When I hear you talking about your Mum, um, with the comments she would make of an outfit or anything, Mum is not like that. Our Mum is just like, you know, totally, totally different.

CATHY: But we're like siblings. And we sort of –

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: So are both of the step-fathers – the fathers quite submissive and quite quiet, sort of in the background? And it's women? It's very much women?

TIFF: Um, what do you think?

GAYLE: Well I'd say – yeah. I'd say – I'd say I think my dad's quite reserved, actually. Yeah. Um –

TIFF: I – I would say the opposite with my dad.

GAYLE: Yeah. Yeah. I agree. Yeah.

CATHY: Okay.

TIFF: Yeah, yeah. So he's quite – yeah, he's quite – they're both – Mum and Dad, in my case, both Mum and Dad are very big personalities.

GAYLE: Yeah. Yeah.

TIFF: It's fair to say, I think.

CATHY: So do you think you've got a big personality to try and sort of shout above that?

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah, sometimes. I think so. I think, yeah. They're quite – they're quite – quite big, full people. And it's – it's interesting. Because when you're younger you view your parents in a very different way to when you're older and you kind of begin to get more of an understanding of who your – that all humans and parents and people are flawed and trying to do their best.

CATHY: Sure.

TIFF: And, you know, that's – and in a rounded, a more complex understanding of who they are as human beings. So I think – yeah, I think Mum and Dad both being quite big personalities means that if you want to get seen or you want to get, you know, um, you have to be big as well. And then also if any conflict or anything arises from whatever family situations being the smallest, the littlest I think, comedy often can diffuse anything like that, you know?

CATHY: Yeah yeah yeah.

TIFF: So you learn to do that. You learn to be funny, you learn to be entertaining and stuff like that. So – but they're still, you know, they're still together and your dad and Tina are still together.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: So, you know, like – yeah, go on. So yeah. But I think, yeah, I think your dad's more chilled. You are like your dad, I think.

GAYLE: Yeah yeah, I am. Yeah.

TIFF: I think Mic is chilled. He's quite a chilled personality. Um, whereas, yeah, Mum and Dad are quite sort of heightened, um, yeah, they're big. They're big.

[Flute sounds]

CATHY: Are you jealous of anything in the other?

TIFF: Um, I'm jealous of Gayle's hair.

CATHY: Okay, I'm jealous of Rachel's hair. I'm with you.

TIFF: I'm jealous of Gayle's – yeah, so, um, jealous of Gayle's hair, jealous of Gayle's house. Uh, not in a bad way. Not like she shouldn't have it, but yeah. Um, having Barry, have – no, but you have a nice life and nice holidays and they have a nice lifestyle and, you know, so, um, I don't know whether one is jealous or one is – I don't know the difference between jealousy and envy, actually. It's an interesting thing.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: Because I think one of them is like, 'I wish I had that.' And the other is, 'I wish that person didn't have that.'

CATHY: Yes.

TIFF: Um, so I look at it and go, 'oh, I would like that. That's nice.' I'm sort of envious of – of that sort of, you know, and, um, and then I'm sort of proud that she's built a career from coming from, you know, from a position of being a secretary or an assistant to someone to then building, you know, doing all of that without – without going to, you know, how – did you go – you went to college, didn't you?

GAYLE: Yeah, I went to college but I didn't – I didn't go to university. It was just different then. It was just different, yeah.

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah, so – so doing that, um, and building that and doing that all for herself without it having to be through, uh, you know. And I'm someone who's done that as well. Because I didn't even go to college, you know? So I just left school after my GCSEs and bailed on my A-levels like a day before. Because I didn't want to do it, you know? Um, so – so from that point of view. But also Gayle has been so – a sort of ballast as well sort of when I've been having to work through stuff or I've been auditioning and stuff hasn't been landing or it could be a different time and stuff like that. And Gayle, you know, has – has – and, you know, my mum and dad have been supportive as well. But Gayle has also been someone who is like truly supportive. So whether that's emotionally or financially, or, you know, has been someone that I know I can kind of go, 'oh shit,' you know, and pick up the phone.

CATHY: And are you totally honest with each other?

GAYLE: Yeah, I'd say so.

TIFF: Yeah.

GAYLE: Yeah, I'd say. Yeah.

TIFF: Yeah.

CATHY: There's nothing you'd hide from the other?

GAYLE: No, not at all.

TIFF: No.

GAYLE: No, No. Not at all.

TIFF: Brutally – brutally honest. Well, not even brutally honest. Like because brutal would suggest we're not kind.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: But yeah, we know – we know everything there is to know.

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: So yeah.

CATHY: That's probably from your mum being so open about everything.

TIFF: Yeah.

CATHY: But Gayle, are you jealous of anything that Tiff has?

GAYLE: No, I don't – I wouldn't – sort of, no. I don't have anything that I'm jealous of her. I mean I'm envious that she can stand on stage and perform like she does, um, I'm envious of her lovely singing voice. Um, but that – but that's, yeah, there's no jealousy. I don't have any jealousy at all. Not at all. No.

CATHY: Who do you think's the happiest?

GAYLE: Oh wow. I – wow.

TIFF: I would say maybe you. Do you think? Although I am happy. I go through phases, I suppose.

GAYLE: Yeah, and I don't – you know, and I can't say that everyone's 100% happy, you know, all the time, are they, you know? You'd like to think you'd want to be in that place, but I don't know. I think we probably both – both similar I would've said, you know? If you – if you look at everything in the grand scheme of things about, you know, your job, and your life, and your home, and your partner and things, I think you'd say we're both relatively happy in that. Wouldn't you?

TIFF: Yeah, I think I –

GAYLE: I wouldn't say one more than the other.

TIFF: No, I think I've sort of consciously tried to work on – on my happiness and joyfulness. Because I think in my 20s and stuff, and maybe a bit in my 30s as well, I was slightly more depressive. So I was looking for a little bit more of a, you know, emotional balance. I would say – I would probably say consistently I think Gayle's probably happier over the years. But then I think – but then I think, you know, in the last few years I've sort of, yeah. You know, um –

CATHY: It's because you're heading for the menopause.

GAYLE: Yeah, yeah.

TIFF: Because I'm heading for the menopause. I'm just – I'm getting happier and happier, yeah.

CATHY: The menopause.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: Exactly.

TIFF: Because sometimes my – my darkness can be quite bleak. So and Gayle’s obviously like when periods of that have happened –

GAYLE: Yeah.

TIFF: She’ll – she’ll sort of know, you know? But yeah, I think in the last sort of five to ten years I suppose I’ve probably been, you know, consistently aiming towards happiness being – should be the most important thing above everything else. Yeah.

CATHY: But isn’t it a nice thing to know that you know that Gayle is more sort of level-headed? Because I’m like you, Tiff. And I’m –

TIFF: Yeah.

CATHY: Slightly nuts.

TIFF: Yeah.

CATHY: And, uh, Rachel is exactly like Gayle. And I just think it helps knowing that you have somebody who – because you sort of know that somebody can be level-headed and – yeah.

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah.

GAYLE: And I think it’s a different perspective from a parent’s support versus a sibling.

CATHY: Totally. Totally.

RACHEL: That was what I was interested in. How is it different, Tiff, the – Gayle’s support? Because you said your parents are really supportive as well.

TIFF: Yeah. Yeah, they are. They are. Um, I think the support – I think over the years, I mean it’s interesting. I think my dad really got into stand up comedy and that’s one of the things where like our

relationship really flourished. Because I think it was much more fractured and difficult in my teens and twenties, you know? Because my – my parents themselves have quite a big, dramatic relationship.

CATHY: Yeah. I guessed that.

TIFF: So – so, um, so I think my dad has found like that's been our sort of commonality or our common ground. I think –

CATHY: That he's doing it or likes it?

TIFF: No, that he likes it and he engages with it and he comes to shows and he loves comedians.

CATHY: Yeah.

TIFF: And he would, you know, he knows them all and he like – he'll come up to the Fringe. Mum doesn't come to the Fringe. Mum has come to see shows, though, you know. And so – and I think she gets an understanding of – she'll see an insight or something into a show. I think sometimes when I do shows there will stuff in it that's revealing to my parents. That they're like, 'oh, I didn't know this.' Where that will be stuff that Gayle knows inside out because she kind of lived that.

CATHY: Yeah. Yeah.

TIFF: So it's, you know, whether sometimes it might be revealing about something that happened when I was younger and I have to prep my Dad with, 'there's going to be stuff in the show.' And then actually afterwards, really surprisingly, he's like, um, 'I'm really proud of you and I think this is amazing,' you know? Um, but I think with – with your parents you worry about letting them down or them – it reflecting on them. Whereas with your sibling you're like, I know that

that support or love is going to be there. It doesn't – it doesn't really matter.

CATHY: So are you more uncomfortable if your parents are in the audience, but if Gayle's in the audience you're completely – it doesn't even –

TIFF: Yeah, yeah. I don't have to worry about, uh, what I'm going to say if Gayle's in the audience. Um, do I have to worry about my parents? There's been some times. I'll be like, 'this is, you know, I'm going to – I'm going to delve into stuff.' And to be fair to my Mum, you know, if I'm talking about reproductive rights or anything like that I think she worries that she's like, you know, 'people are going to be shouting at you and you're going to get backlash over being a woman who supports, you know, these things openly.' And there are people who are anti-choice or, you know, I think she gets a bit frightened by that kind of stuff, Mum. Um, however having said that, you know, sometimes – she came to see my last show, which is sort of all about being a step-mum and the, you know, the idea of what biological motherhood is and our essentialism towards that. And that being the type of mother that we respect. And so I think she – I think she got quite a lot from – from that and, um, and kind of because she had three kids so the pressure is there to kind of have kids, so – but, you know, she loves my step-son and she's like, 'that's my grandchild as well.' So – but it – her getting to – I think for her to see a fully realised version that she can understand sometimes is almost easier to – to write a stand up show, have your parents see it, and then understand – understand it from that like – from an artistic – almost separating it but I don't feel like I have to do that when it's my sister, you know?

CATHY: Yeah yeah yeah.

TIFF: I feel like she gets and understands the frustrations or – or what those are. So, um, yeah. It's – it's difficult because your – yeah, your parents you do want to rebel against and also my parents were really strict when I was a teenager and in my twenties, you know? Really really strict. Um, my dad's side –

CATHY: In what way? What kind of stuff?

TIFF: Oh, in like curfews, in like not – me not being allowed to be on the phone to my mates, like I remember very specifically, once too many people called the house to speak to me when I was about 14. And my dad pulled – ripped the phone out of the socket and like threw it in the garden.

CATHY: Wow. Yeah, wow.

TIFF: And then shut me in my bedroom, you know? And he's – he's not like that now. They're much more mellow because they're in their, you know, they're in that – of that age where that's just different, you know? So –

CATHY: But Gayle, did you not get protective of Tiff? And did you not start disliking her dad? Because did you not feel, you know, and you protect your sister. So if anybody was funny with Rach, I'd – I'm like a bulldog.

GAYLE: Yeah, I mean and I – and I – you know, certainly with my mother on several occasions, you know, I've taken her to task on something, you know, that I totally disagree with. And her view about what Tiff's said or done and I've – I've said – but, you know, I've given her my view of things and said, 'you need to look at it from this perspective.' And I have defended –

CATHY: And does she listen?

GAYLE: Um, probably for about five minutes and then, you know, her view – her view's more important. So do you know what I mean, you know?

CATHY: Right.

GAYLE: So –

RACHEL: That comes back to your role as the peacemaker.

GAYLE: It does. Yeah yeah.

RACHEL: Which –

GAYLE: Yeah. It does, yeah. I did stop doing that when I – when I got to 50, I made a conscious decision that I wouldn't be doing that anymore in terms of – on a bigger scale, you know? Doing – small, but, you know, I've been doing – I've been doing that for a long time and I sort of made a decision that I'm not going to be the peacemaker anymore, you know? It's – it's quite strange because my – Barry always – Barry always says to me, I – he says, 'I find it amazing how I'm always optimistic.'

CATHY: Yeah.

GAYLE: And I am in that sort of personal and I would say in work, I'm always just trying to remain optimistic and see the positive things.

RACHEL: I am – and I am too.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: It's inherent in me.

GAYLE: Yeah.

RACHEL: I just am buoyant. That's just the way I'm built. You're not.

GAYLE: Yeah.

CATHY: No, I'm not at all.

RACHEL: Cath is, you know, up and down and –

GAYLE: Yeah. Yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Mentally ill.

RACHEL: Yeah, but – but it's not, you know, it's not – is it a choice, Gayle? I don't know. Or is it just the way we're built?

GAYLE: I just think just the way we're built I think, yeah.

RACHEL: Yeah. Yeah.

GAYLE: I just think it is.

RACHEL: Definitely. Definitely.

GAYLE: I just – it's all about and I – and I think that that to me I think to me that has been a big turning point when you get to my age now, you know? And I'm not saying that that happens when you get into your 50s, but I think that's been a massive thing about when you are in your 50s, the – you are trying to pull the positives all the time. And keep that optimist – optimism. You know? Because so many things I would say in my 50s – you know, where I've lost friends my age and stuff like that. So there's – there's lots I feel you need to be thankful for, you know?

CATHY: That's exactly what Rachel's like.

RACHEL: Yeah.

CATHY: Whereas I'm not thankful for anything. I want more, Tiff, don't we? We want more.

RACHEL: You keep lumping Tiff in with you. You're not even giving her a choice.

CATHY: Sorry, Tiff. Sorry. She looks horrified.

RACHEL: She's much more level-headed than you. Yeah.

CATHY: I know she is. Okay.

RACHEL: So that's – I think that's probably a good place to end.

CATHY: Is there – well, no, I just want to ask, is there anything you've, uh – want – are you – have you not forgiven the other for something? Or I guess –

RACHEL: I can answer that. No. They don't. They don't.

CATHY: No.

RACHEL: They're – you don't have that kind of relationship.

GAYLE: No. No. There's – no.

TIFF: No.

GAYLE: Not at all. Is there, Tiff?

RACHEL: So is there anything – before we go, anything you want to say to each other that you've never said before?

GAYLE: I don't think – no, I don't think there is. I'm quite – I think, you know, when all the successes that Tiff's had, I've always sort of said about how proud I am of her, and, you know, and how amazing she is to do what she does, you know? Um, so no, I don't think so. I think if there was anything we'd probably tell one another.

TIFF: Yeah, I was going to say, um, 'I like that.' Which in our family is code for, 'give it to me.'

GAYLE: Oh sorry, yeah, yeah.

TIFF: Your Instagram, 'I like that top' or 'I like those shoes'. 'Ooh, I like those shoes,' which means –

GAYLE: Yeah, that is something that when Tiff's on –

TIFF: 'I'm having those.'

GAYLE: Yeah, when she's – when she's posted like, um, she's posted something on Instagram or – or Facebook and it's normally – she'll have all about her outfit. I do normally go spying, going, 'oh, I like that top and I like them shoes. Could I have them when you're done with them?'

TIFF: Which was less poignant. But I do think, yeah. I do think Gayle knows that again saying I'm proud of her and that I think what she's achieved is great and, you know, and that – yeah, that my, you know, family and I love them and, you know, with Barry as well, you know? That's – it's nice to –

CATHY: I love Barry. I love Barry. I'm in love with Barry.

GAYLE: That'll make – that'll make his day.

[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: I like that jumper.

RACHEL: It's – I've given it to you.

CATHY: Oh.