The Divorce Club with Leyla Hussein

Sam 0:12

Welcome to the divorce club hosted by me comedian and divorces Samantha Baines. You might be starting a new chapter due to your divorce. Maybe you have a friend who's going through a divorce or yet just plain curious. I recently got divorced age 32. And it was a bit of a whirlwind doing it so young. Yes, I still believe I'm young. Don't ruin it for me. I felt confused, free and lonely. So I decided to interview some interesting people about their divorce experiences in the hope that it would help me get out of house mainly, and maybe help you too. Don't worry. I am a comedian so it won't be all doom and gloom. Welcome to the divorce club.

I am joined by Leyla Hussein OBE, a psychotherapist and activist. Hello, welcome to the divorce club.

Leyla 1:05

Oh my God, I've been so excited about this conversation. So I'm glad to be here.

Sam 1:11

Welcome. What made you so excited about it? People don’t normally say that.

Leyla 1:13

Well, it's interesting. As soon as you asked me to do it, I quickly said I wanted to do it because it's like, there's like a shame connected to divorce, which it shouldn't be. I mean, the way I got divorced a long, long time ago. I separated 18 years ago and then the divorce didn't happen until two years later, but it was… I will always say I'm happily divorced and people will be shocked by it.

Leyla 1:37

Because people say happily married right? Yeah. Why can I be happy? Because I'm happier. After I was actually we were nicer people.

Leyla 1:47

So I don't there's always a stigma and I organised a divorce party for our friend. Because you know, we always have wedding parties, but no one celebrates the fact that you left a very shitty relationship. Which that should be the case, in my opinion. So that's I'm really excited about we're having this conversation, but there's no space. Let people think you're crazy when you say I'm happily divorced.

Sam 2:09

Yeah, that's I mean, that's what this is all about is kind of changing the conversation around divorce and kind of delving into that taboo subject. And so did you say you got divorced 18 years ago?

Leyla 2:21

so I separated from my ex husband when my daughter was three months. That was 2000. God I have blocked us out.

Leyla 2:30

My divorce papers didn't come through to 2006. So I'm officially divorced for 14 years. I was separated for a couple of years.

Sam 2:37

So you separated 17 years ago, and then it took you three years to get the divorce papers through. And why was that? Was that just kind of the admin of it all or?

Leyla 2:48

No, no, he didn't want to divorce.

Sam 2:50

Oh, wow.

Leyla

He's been a pain in the ass about it. Yeah, yeah. He was avoiding the whole thing. I think he still wanted to work it out. But it was too damaged. I mean, I think I actually didn’t want to be in the relationship, and I had a little girl at the time, my daughter was three months. When I wanted the first divorce it was because I didn't want to bring her into a toxic environment. So that was a no, no. And for him it was like, I mean, he's from Somalia where I'm from. So pride was a big part of “why do you want to get divorced?” Like, you know, his family never got divorced, so it was like a big deal. And he dragged it on and I think the reason he dragged it on as well - it was because I didn't care. I just got on with my life. I'm like, is a piece of paperwork, I'm gonna do whatever I want. I didn't let it control it, which is really interesting, because a lot of things control my life. It was just I needed to get out really, but he dragged it out. I think my mom was the Saviour in that situation. One day, she just really had an honest chat with him and I said, listen, it's like a scene from the mafia or something. She was like, you must give her divorce right now so she can get married again, because my Mum wants me to get married again. That was her. That was her reasoning.

Sam 3:57

Wow. Oh my gosh. There’s so much there.

Sam 4:00

So, so you made the decision to get divorced. And do you think having your little girl was a catalyst for that decision? Or was it something else?

Leyla 4:12

Um, there was two. I mean, my dad never liked him. I mean, I was I met him when I was a teenager like teenage love. He lived in the US. I lived in the UK, I packed up and left. And it was like that kind of a situation. And actually what was missing? We were introduced by family. Actually, his family really wanted me to be with him. And my parents didn't want to be rude. They were like, you know what, just act like you like him. They were to say she's not interested.

Sam 4:42

Lots of pressure.

Leyla 4:43

And then I genuinely liked him. I really fell for him.

Leyla 4:47

But it was a very toxic relationship, like emotionally. And my dad was the one who saved me.

Leyla 4:53

I got sick a few times during my early part of my pregnancy, and there was no one to look after me. So my dad was like, You know what?

Leyla 5:00

Put her on a plane. So we can look after her while she's carrying his baby.

Sam 5:05

So were you in the US at this point?

Leyla 5:08

Yeah, I was at the US at this point, I guess when I moved to the US? This is where it gets interesting. September 10 2001. This is literally the day before September 11. Wow. So in a way, I was gonna never compare my relationship to September 11. But it's like it exploded from that moment. It was like it just got even worse.

Sam 5:26

What was going on in the outside world you sort of saw as a metaphor for what was going on...

Leyla 5:30

and you're literally it was like, This is exactly why I'm like what I'm experiencing. And literally was my Dad that got me out. And actually I didn't realise I was in an abusive relationship, emotionally abusive relationship until you leave you don't notice it.

Sam 5:43

Yeah.

Leyla 5:44

So my father was like, Oh, you know, when you're ready to go back, let me know. I had an open ticket, a one year open ticket. And then the more I stayed, the more I was scared to go back. I kept getting panic attacks. And my dad was like, Listen, you obviously don't want to go back.

Leyla 5:58

You don't want to go back. So he waited for me to make that decision, and I didn't want to go back. And obviously I had my daughter here and I, we tried to work it out. It just wasn't going to work. I knew I wasn't going to be in that relationship. And yeah, so my family was big, especially my father especially, it is very rare.

Leyla 6:17

Such a patriarchal system. You know, Somali communities are very patriarchal communities where the father supports his daughter is very rare. That rarely happens. So I was very lucky in that way.

Sam 6:26

Well, I was gonna say, because it sounds like your family really helped you and supported you. But you mentioned that your ex husband's family and his upbringing meant that he didn't want to leave the relationship. What is the kind of, for people who don't know a lot about Somali community and the patriarchal system there, could you give me a bit of background on you know what you're supposed to in inverted commas happen when you get married?

Leyla 6:52

Yeah, no, I mean, in a Somali community, when you get married, you have to be the dutiful wife, you know you, you're there to give children. Any shit your partner does, you know, you're the wife, he's supposed to forgive and learn from it. And there were a lot of forgiving, but it just got to a point where I couldn't take it anymore. So Somali community is a very patriarchal, very religious community, where men are the leader of the household, the women bear the children, look after the house, actually, you you may or need to do all of that, but also, you're also someone who's taking the brunt of the whole honour of the family. So you're the one who's the honour of the family is on you as the woman. So me getting divorced. In theory, my parents should have a lot of shame. That's how it should work. But for him, it was more of you know, my family doesn’t get divorced. So there was a lot of pride but there was also a lot of control. The idea of someone leaving him wasn't great. So that was a unique situation with me and that kind of stress with his family. However, though, his family and his mom, she hated the fact we got divorced, she genuinely liked me as a person. I mean to the day she died, she kept reminding him of what he did. Like, “you lost a good woman”, you know, she was always reminding him about it. But luckily I also had their support, which is very unique like that rarely happens is usually when the divorce happens, families really have a big falling out. But his family actually stepped in. And because now there's a baby, Uncles, Auntie's really played a big part in her life till now and she's going to turn 18 soon so I was lucky in that way. But obviously in a society the moment you are divorced in the Somali community if you get divorced, you lose all your married, friends, married people don't want to hang with you anymore.

Sam 8:39

I mean, I feel a bit like that in my where I live as well, is that all of a sudden you divorced and it's like, oh, you're not you're not a couple. So you can't join our crowd. Obviously, not as extremely as in the Somali community. But did you actually lose a lot of friends from that?

Leyla 8:55

Yeah, I mean, it was like they didn't say hey, we don't be friends with you. I was just cut away. from social gatherings, and I didn't understand it until my mom really actually explained to me like there's a tradition of like, a divorced woman is more likely to entice your husband. So the women are worried about me now. And these are my friends, like some of them were my childhood friends. But all of a sudden, you're cut away because their worry is you might take their husband away, because now I must be that desperate to get another man because usually it's like the moment get divorced, your next step is to get married.

Sam 9:27

That's so interesting, because I've spoken to some other divorce women who, from different backgrounds that say a similar thing that all of a sudden, they feel like their friends think they're gonna steal their husbands, even though they’ve been hanging out with these people for 10 years.

Leyla

Super common. Like I can't tell you how common that is. I had a friend who was telling me the other day actually, she was actually engaged to the guy and a lot of their friends were married. But also they went ahead and got married. They broke up while they were still engaged. And there was was cut off by everybody. But they still treated it as you know, she was in a potential relationship. So that was quite interesting. But I remember I got dumped by all my friends. They're literally like, slowly I was cut out from, you know, the dinners we get together, which is really weird.

Sam

And how did that make you feel? Because obviously, at the time you just lost your husband of your own choice, but it's still a difficult thing to do. And then you're losing your friends.

Leyla

Oh, I was heartbroken. It was heartbreaking. I don't think I've ever recovered. I don't think I've ever recovered from that. And I think you will actually I think that can scare people. And especially for me, I guess that those are my early relationships. And I mean, I still see some of them around, but it's never the same, the relationship has never been the same. And also till now I get when friends get divorced. I'm always making sure to reassure them, they're not going to lose me. I'm like, Hey, I'm here. And I'll try to make sure the rest of the people don't dump that person that just because their divorced which unfortunately tends to happen. It’s heartbreaking it really is it. This is why I really wanted to have this conversation because and no one talks about it. There's a shame around divorce, especially on women. Men get divorced and it's like, the whole world is looking for his next mate, you know, he's ready to move on.

Leyla 11:15

Rarely do men get really get dumped by their married male friends rarely happens, but the women do. Yeah.

Sam 11:22

It's so interesting because I found that when I started telling people that I'd got divorced, people would say to me, you know, do the pity face and be like, you know, you will meet someone else. And actually, you worry, that's not what I want. Not what I was thinking about straightaway. I was thinking you know, I've got out of this, you know, difficult time and me and my ex still get on really well, but you know, we weren't happy and now we're both happier and, and actually people, that automatic kind of go to is that you must feel awful actually be crying alone. Actually, I felt great.

Leyla 12:00

yeah, you're right. Because I remember thinking, oh god, I was so relieved. I didn't want to be in any relationship when I got a divorced. I was like, I am glad I'm out of this situation. Like, I don't know if I'm going to be one again, like, I never remarried. My family wants me to get married. And I didn't avoid marriage at all. I went with the idea of if it happens, it happens. If it doesn't, it doesn't like I'm not gonna let let it control my life. And I come from a patriarchal again, my family, every wedding I go to it's like anxiety attack, because they're only walking to the wedding. They're like “oh when i's your wedding? then when is your wedding happening?” You know, “your ovaries are shutting down”, like you know, my reproductive health. It's part of the conversation.

Sam 12:43

Well, and you already have a child, I don't have any children. So people are like, Oh, you're running out of time. gotta meet someone else.

Leyla

Well, I have a daughter. I don't have a son.

Leyla 12:55

like, literally they tilt their head every time I say I got divorced. “You only have one child” because Somalis, we have like 10 kids, I have one child. And I said, I have a daughter. It's like, “Oh, you don't have a son”. Is always the response I get. My sister has two sons, my sister will always be seen in a hierarchy of women because she has sons.

Sam 13:15

How crazy is that? Considering you have no control over the gender of your child.

Leyla 13:21

It’s so fucked up. So now I have to like me, my daughter, when we go to family weddings, we have to mentally prepare ourselves because they're having this conversation in front of her as if like, it's not a big deal, so we now laugh about it.

Leyla 13:31

It's the only thing to do.

Leyla 13:33

I'll just not go to certain weddings anymore.

Sam

How do you prepare yourself if you get that wedding invite? Does your heart just sink straight away? Or is it?

Leyla 13:44

It does. It's more like Oh God, like it's never like, “Oh, so great”. It's like, I'm like, Okay, I'm gonna have to explain that I'm not a lesbian that I'm you know, just choosing not to be with a guy right now. Or I like life alone. That's how I found out.

Leyla 14:01

But I have to live to prepare myself. I have to emotionally psychologically prepare myself to respond to those crazy comments.

Leyla 14:08

But sometimes I always respond with humour as well. Like I think that's always helpful.

Sam 14:12

Well, otherwise you're called an aggressive divorcee.

Leyla 14:15

And yeah, I know you're the angry one. She's angry because divorce Oh, that's my favourite.

Leyla 14:19

Oh my God, that's my favourite one. Like, oh, she's only mad at you because she's divorced. She wants you to be alone, especially advising married women in toxic relationships. It's a no no. Because apparently you will only be seen as somebody who's only giving advice because you just want her to be sad as you or something.

Sam 14:37

You want everyone to get divorced because you've got divorced. Like you get Commission on divorce or something. A little bonus every time your friend gets divorced.

Leyla 14:49

Can you imagine?!

Sam 14:52

So the divorce procedure for you took three years. How practically did that happen? Obviously you had to get your ex to agree to the divorce, and then did you kick things off? Did you get a solicitor? Did you do it yourself?

Leyla 15:06

No, we both had one. So he just didn't sign, we had everything ready. Like within months. He just wasn't signing it. Just avoiding, like, literally avoiding it. So my mom took it said, sign it, sign it now.

Sam 15:19

I love the sound of your Mum.

Leyla 15:21

Oh my God, my mom made him sign it. Oh, wait, when I say she made him sign it. She knew he was gonna be in Kenya. And she was gonna be in Kenya. She found him.

Leyla 15:29

Oh, no, it was like crazy. And my daughter was so he actually that was the first time he met his daughter like she was five years old.

Sam 15:35

Oh, wow. So I think sometimes for some people, that it's getting that letter through the door saying this person wants to divorce you, sign here to agree that is the moment that they realise.

Leyla 15:51

Exactly. It was Yeah. It was so weird. That was the bit I rarely give a shit about actually my mum. My mum only chased him up because she doesn't like the idea of me not being able to marry someone else. But when that happened, I still didn't get married. So she's a little bit disappointed.

Sam 16:08

So how did that make you feel though? Because obviously you're like indebted to your mom for getting him to sign. But she only did it so you can get married again. So do you feel pressure?

Leyla 16:21

Every wedding we go to she reminds me, every time there's any baby in the family, she's like Leyla. And she said to me even adopt, I don't care just have more kids. I really don't want to look after another child or I don't want to, I have survived one. I feel like the whole raising kids is overrated. It's fun for certain people, but actually, it wasn't. I mean, I was a single mom and I was quite young when I was 21 when I had her, and it wasn’t fun. It was not a fun experience. I loved raising her don't get me wrong, and I absolutely adore her. But it's not something I would recommend people to do.

Sam 16:54

Because you were in the US with your husband. And were you in the UK that raising your daughter?

Leyla 16:59

Yeah. She was born here.

Sam 17:00

So obviously you've got this pressure from your mom and at the weddings and stuff. And why do you think that is? Do you think it's a tradition thing? Or she just wants you to be happy and she sees that as a sign of happiness?

Leyla 17:13

Yeah.

Leyla 17:14

Well, my mother was happily married, her my dad they were not just you know, married there were lovers great friends and I saw tha,t I saw my parents’s marriage, it was a beautiful I think she wants that for me. She's like, “Oh, you need someone you know Leyla not this feminist life.

Leyla 17:34

you know, it's okay to have a husband and you know to be looked after by someone else. That's fine. Hey, someone's gonna look after me great. But you know, if they come they'll come if they don't come, I'm going to continue my life.

Sam

That's funny, this feminist life because my ....

Sam 17:50

My mom is a strong feminist and that's where I got it from. So what do you think your mum imagines this feminist life is?

Leyla 17:58

But my mom she doesn't she might not call herself a feminist but she's someone who holds feminist values. She just never used that term. I guess. She left him at the age of 16. Joined the US Army, you know, ended up becoming work for the Somali government. She became an economist. She was making more money than my father when they met like he was. She had me at 26 and in the Somali community that's very old, very old. People remind me, like your mother gave birth to when you were old.

Leyla 18:23

Like how 26 Okay. So this is how the kids are people who have kids at 15/16 so she's progressive in that way. I think she's never seen. I don't think in her lifetime. She's see a woman with a child living by herself. So that was quite new for my mother. Traditionally Somalis, if a woman gets divorced, she's only divorced for like three months. And the reason they do that, by the way they keep the three months is to make sure she's not pregnant with the ex husband's kid. Just in case

Sam 18:50

so you'll see them growing before the next wedding?

Leyla 18:52

Right. So it's like you need to wait for three months to ensure she's definitely not pregnant.

Sam

So you were meant to get married straight away again?

Leyla 19:01

Yeah, no 2016, 2007 I should have been married. But...

Leyla 19:06

so I was back at university training to be a psychotherapist, so I didn't have time. And it wasn't like I didn't want to be in a relationship. It's just never happened.

Leyla 19:16

Oh, well, there were times when I didn't not want to be in a relationship. Definitely. But yeah. I'm also still heartbroken.

Sam 19:23

Do you think having a child comes into that as well with the new relationships?

Leyla 19:28

Absolutely. Oh, goodness, yeah. Whoever dates you, he will have to be part of your child's life.

Leyla 19:35

And you want to make sure whoever this person is, and I personally I have kept our home safe for her. I mean, since my divorce, I've been in like, three, four serious relationships. And she's only met one briefly and it was like in a group of friends actually she’s never met, where I said, “Hey, this is my boyfriend”. Like she's never heard me say that ever. And she's encouraging me to go out and date, I'm too busy fighting patriarchy. And especially when you have that label on you. It's very hard to date, by the way, just saying.

Sam 20:07

The divorce label?

Leyla 20:09

divorced feminist. It's like, the craziest, you know, fighting patriarchy all the time, like go on dates and you want to know people's views. That's what you do at my age when you dating people and the moment they find out that “Oh, really, bye. I'm like, I'm like, bye”. I'm not even entertaining this conversation. Like, I don't have time. I really don't.

ADVERT BREAK

Sam 20:32

You're listening to the divorce club with me, Samantha Baines interviewing Leyla Hussein. So in your new relationships, you said you've had like three serious ones since your marriage - Do you feel that you bring any sort of lessons that you learn from your marriage, or is it just a completely new thing?

Leyla 20:50

I guess, my marriage I hardly had a voice. I didn't have a voice in my marriage. So I guess for me in a relationship it is important I have a voice and I'm also heard. And actually, every relationship that I've been in the one after that I will bring lessons learned from the other one, you grow. I mean, there are things I look back now like, relationships from 10 years ago and it's like, oh my god, that wasn't something I really should have freaked out about. I could have had this conversation that way. But I guess, with experience and age comes wisdom. You know, I'm going to be wiser. I turned 40 this year, which is interesting.

Sam

Congrats.

Leyla

I know I'm gonna have it. I'm gonna have the quarantine you survived Corona, virus party.

Sam 21:32

I think we're all gonna have that party. So you've, you've had some serious relationships since your marriage, and you brought lessons that you learnt from each of them into the next one. But is there one or a couple of things that you learnt from your marriage that you think could apply to other people as well that you'd wish you knew before you got married?

Leyla 21:53

Oh, yeah, having a voice is very important. Being financially independent was very important for me like that because I wasn't bad at independence, I had a little job but nothing like where I can look after myself so I find that independence and also have your own identity in a relationship because I think sometimes what happens two people come together who have different identities and then they merge into one person. And when I say that, I mean like, we'll go on holiday together, but I would like to go on holiday with my friends, because I have a separate identity to you and I have different interests to you. Or so I think it's important you have some independence as a as a person in relation I think those three things are quite important in a relationship, which I wish they taught me that in school,

Sam 22:38

Yea. We should get relationship lessons and communication,

Leyla

Oh, God, you know,

Leyla 22:43

I would have avoided a lot of things but I guess for me, those things are quite key having your own voice, having a separate identity because you know, you could somebody who could be putting a couple all the time, actually not been seen as an i, as an individual and I think you have to put in the work to be an independent. I've seen my friends, one of my really close friends. She's not always with her partner. She hangs out with her friends. She goes on holiday with her friends. She has different activities outside of her marriage. And it's something that I admire people who do that because I know it's not easy because usually you automatically just become a couple everything together. I know now at this age I couldn’t be with somebody 24 hours. I couldn't. I might get married and live in separate homes then the marriage might survive.

Leyla 23:29

I love that, it’s like Tim Burton and Helena Bonham Carter they have separate homes.

Leyla 23:33

Yeah. Oh, I love it. I love it. I mean, when I told that idea to my mother, she was like Leyla. That's not a marriage. And I said, Yes, it is, it’s surviving it.

Sam

I totally get the kind of being an individual thing and I think it's especially with like young love. And you meet that person that you fall head over heels for and then you marry them and it's so easy to just get so wrapped up in all of that and I feel like I did that as well. You, you lose yourself in the relationship. And then it's so hard to kind of pry yourself away afterwards because you're so entangled with that relationship with that person.

Leyla 24:12

Absolutely. It's so important. I said to any of my friends who are getting married, I'm like, do not lose your identity, and you're going to grow to a different person anyway, in that marriage. So just always remember to and be financially independent. I cannot stress that enough.

Sam 24:28

And having your daughter as well, and obviously you divorced her father. And you said he didn't see her, he met her for the first time when she was about five, how was managing that? Because, you know, I am divorcing my ex husband, and then I don't have to see him again, if I don't want to, whereas you'll forever be connected with him. How do you manage that?

Leyla 24:48

Ah, well, in a way, he made it easier. I think. He didn't have any relationship with her for many years. So I didn't have to force but I was willing to co-parent. I think he was just so angry at me about the divorce that he lost that time with his daughter. But recently, I think from the age of 15, they reconnected. And it's been really good. We went on holiday for the first time. Well, he invited us both to spend Christmas in America. So this is 2018 going into 2019. Yeah. So in a way I didn't, I wasn't in a position where I have to see this person every weekend. I also know what it did to her not having him around. So that was heartbreaking to see. And I will say this to any parents in my situation. Never ever use the parent to attack the other parent. That's one thing I was very clear on. I was never going to use her to attack him. Because for me, it was important, loving her first is what I chose. I love her first like that was it. I had to do what was best for her. Hence why she kept a very good relationship with her grandma from her dad's side, her uncle's, you know, really, and I and I definitely facilitated that and encouraged it and made sure it happened because it's important that she knows and connects to the side of her family. I never wanted my child to feel like she was rejected. I mean, you will, to a certain extent, because your father's not part of your life, but they're working through it now. It's been good. I have to say the last three years, it's been regular communication between both of them and with me too actually.

Sam 26:20

And how was that going on on holiday going to stay with him, presumably for the first time since you were together? You'd been on holiday together?

Leyla 26:30

Well, my daughter made sure he booked me in a hotel, and there was no way in hell I was going to stay with him.

Sam 26:35

I hope it was a nice five star one.

Leyla 26:36

Oh, no, she made sure.

Leyla 26:40

It was scary. Actually, I remember telling a friend because I dropped her off. I didn't want to stay there for the whole two weeks. I have other friends in the US where I was like, you know, I'm gonna drop yoou with your dad, you know, just hang out. She doesn't know him. She didn't know him that well to hang out with him. So I wanted to make sure it was all okay. But I remember saying to a friend the moment I arrived, I felt like that lost 18 year old and married him all of a sudden are struggling to speak when he picked us up, I literally could not breathe. I became a scared 18 year old again, which is really interesting.

Sam

Wow. And is that the first time you'd seen him since?

Leyla

No, I've seen him before but not where he lived Minneapolis. I met him again in New York. My daughter's gone to hang out with her uncle, his brother who lives in New York, this is like 2009. So he came over, which is fine, because that's not his area. That's not his space, where as this is Minneapolis where he's from. Yeah, it was really weird. But it was a reminder that I actually needed to go back to therapy and work through some of that stuff. And that's what it led to, that I had still had some work that I needed to do on myself.

Leyla 27:44

Yeah, so that's that was my experience.

Sam

What do you think it was about being in his space? That was so scary for you? Is it a lack of control or?

Leyla 27:52

Yeah,

Leyla 27:53

yeah, someone taking over control. Actually just been scary. I didn't really like physically felt it but because I used to be scared of him. So it was that fear again. But I did the thing where you just pretend it's not happening, you know? And I had to tell myself, you know, no one's gonna control you, you'll be fine. This is on your terms. I had to literally tell myself this. It was really interesting. And I had friends who I would call in the middle of night crying sometimes I was up I did really get scared.

Sam 28:21

And you know you talk about crying in the middle of the night, I think we've we've all been there, when you're alone in your room in the dark and the thoughts come to you. Do you remember your hardest moment or a hardest moment during the kind of whole divorce/relationship?

Leyla 28:39

Oh, oh my god there's one. You know, I have never publicly shared it but I will share it with you actually.

Sam:

Only if you feel comfortable.

Leyla

No, no, I think it is important. So I'm a single parent. I'm trying to get the divorce, it was not happening.

Leyla 28:53

22 my daughter's like, eight months. We live in a councill flat which is like, you know, those studios where you have the sink in the room, in your bedroom. This thing I mean, it's that tiny like I'm trying to describe a very tiny little kitchenette, like he was so tiny. And it had one of those electric keys where you top up your keys, which I never used before. I never kne, my parents they never used. I forgot to top it up. And it's two o'clock in the morning. My daughter's crying. She wants milk that has freezing cold. I put her in a pram two o'clock in the morning and took the pram to a shop that was like 15 minutes walk, I'll never forget that fear. Like dragging a pram I mean, it was one of those moments when I thought, Oh, it can't get any worse than this. It was a cold night.

Leyla 29:43

And it was just, I still remember that moment. I remember feeling like I wanted to die. That moment it was just like, I felt so alone. But it was one of those moments whenever I'm having a shitty time I always go back to that moment. I'm like, you know what, Leyla, you survived that day. That night, at two o'clock in the morning, young mom with a baby, I lived in Walthamstow so behind me is a forest. So I'm walking just the edge of this forest, trying to get to the high street, which was like 15/20 minutes walk. And there was only one shot that was open that could charged this because you know, and I think it was the first and also realised I was a grown up. Finally. Yeah, so that was...

Sam 30:25

You survived.

Leyla

And I survived it. Yeah.

Sam

If you now could go back to that time to you then and say one thing what would you have said to Leyla then?

Leyla 30:36

I would have said to her. There were times when I needed help. And I didn't know how to ask, go to just ask for help. It's fine. There were people willing to help me I just didn't notice that at the time. Just ask for help. It's okay to ask for help. I came to this country as a refugee at age of 12. So it was that constant surviving. So I just wish I would tell her ask for help. It's fine. Ask for help. There were people who were willing to help, but didn't know how to accept it.

Sam 31:04

I think that's such great advice. And is there any other advice that you, because you said you speak to some of your friends who get divorced and tell them that you're not going to abandon them, like your friends did. Is there any other advice that you give to people who are getting divorced? That you meet or know.

Leyla 31:22

I'm very honest with them, I'm always like, you are getting a divorce, it's gonna be tough. It's gonna be real tough, but you have to take care of yourself. You really have to create some time for yourself. Yes. It's like getting to know yourself all over again. It's like going on a date with yourself for the first time and getting to know yourself.

Sam

Yeah, definitely.

Leyla

Yeah, it really is like that. And I feel like that every time I broke up with somebody, it was like, I have to go and really figure out who this person is. It's like, and I think you have to create time for that. I always said to my friends gonna be tough. It's gonna be very tough. You're gonna have nights we're gonna cry. You can call me I think it's always good to actually identify friend who's just going to be on the other side of the phone. I think if we just talk about it, you're better anyway. You feel a little bit better when you talk about it. And I've been on the other side of the phone with few friends and listen, nothing beats a good divorce party. It's the best. I love divorce parties. It's coming from the heart. Like, I'm fucking out of this shit. I remember a friend who

She organised her party and the cake said What the fuck was I thinking?

Sam 32:26

I think this is a new thing to me. Divorce parties.

Leyla 32:31

I said to my friends, I still haven't had mine because when I got divorced, it was like, no one's even like... And I was so young. I didn't really think like that. But I'm like, why do we celebrate weddings? Why do we celebrate those things and engagements. But when someone leaves a shitty... especially those who produce shitty relationships, it's like you're free. I think people should celebrate when they get divorced. It was only two, you know, consenting adults. I mean, in your situation, you get on really well with your ex. I think that's a that's a great party to say, Hey, we're remain friends. We still care about each other.

Sam 33:02

So what does a divorce party look like? Does there have to be a cake with a slogan?

Leyla 33:09

Well that was an example - what the fuck was I thinking? Lots of cheap alcohol, right? I don't think it's very trashy. I mean, I don't remember what happened most those nights but it's fun. It's like a hen do just the other version.

Sam

Do you do you wear things with penises on them?

Leyla

No, we haven't done that yet.

Sam

No vaginas on them mabye for your own bits.

Leyla 33:32

Maybe that's the next one maybe that will be yours?

Sam 33:35

I'll invite you

Leyla 33:36

Please do. I'm encouraging more divorce parties. It'd be a thing after Corona.

Sam 33:42

Like cuz I think for me divorce party. Just sounds like someone who's very angry with their ex and, you know, wants to get really drunk and wear leopard print. Like that's the stereotype for me of like a divorce party, but I totally get what you mean that like we celebrate weddings like if you get a new job you celebrate like life events we celebrate. So why wouldn't you celebrate the new chapter?

Leyla 34:08

Yes. I mean, my suggestion is always have the divorce celebration, after you know that you've taken care of yourself like you're like, coming out of the darkness is the best time to do it. I mean, I've seen like divorce cakes where they call the exes heads like, hang out. Yeah, I wouldn't recommend those.

Leyla 34:26

Oh, yeah. Oh, well, Google divorce party cakes is quite hilarious.

Sam 34:31

I am going to spend like an hour doing that now after?

Sam 34:35

well, I have some questions. So hopefully get your advice of what I'm going through right now. And I'd be interested to hear what you did. So I have a wedding dress, and it's lace, so I can't dye it to repurpose it. And it's in my wardrobe and I don't know what to do with it. Did you have a special wedding outfit and what have you done with it?

Leyla 34:57

I donated mine, to a Somali, she's a hairdresser. She got, you know, every Somali bride I know, ready for her wedding. And few times she said to me there were girls who couldn't afford, you know, like proper wedding gowns and stuff. So she's so I donated it to her, that's what I did. I didn't I didn't burn it.

Sam

At the divorce party.

Leyla

Yeah, I didn't do that. So I donated mine actually. But I kept so I wore two different outfits. I donated one I gave one someone else but what I did. So Somali’s we have a tradition where the husband gets you a set of gold like earrings necklace ring with bracelets, and it's like it's a thing that they have to get on. It's like 22 karat gold or some shit like that. So I kept that for my daughter. So my wedding jewellery. Now that so I kept that for her.

Sam 35:46

because also I don't know what to do with my engagement ring and wedding band. So to me the wedding band. I'm not that bothered about but the engagement ring. I've sort of kept in a little box somewhere.

Leyla 36:00

Have a funny story about my wedding ring.

Leyla 36:02

So see that's when I got angry. I threw it. I threw it away, like literally threw it out the balcony. Someone found it and brought it up to my mom's house. So I was at my mom's house. I threw it away but someone found it recognised it. It was one of my one of my neighbours, like friends brought up and then one night, I go to my friend's house, I flushed it down the toilet. Next morning she is like “oh who left these rings in the toilet?” I'm like, Oh my fucking god. I can't get rid of these rings. I was trying to get rid of it, but it kept coming back. So I end up giving it to someone else. I was like, No, I can't get rid of this. I tried to flush it out the window.

Sam

It’s like a boomerang rang.

Leyla

It was literally it kept coming back and I think I tried it. I had like four attempts to get rid of it but somehow reappeared again.

Leyla 36:46

It was really weird. So did you give it to someone for them to use for their wedding or just as a ring?

Leyla 36:52

No, she would be like this is a nice friend. She said I don't really care if it's a wedding ring, so she's separated and put into a different things.

Leyla 37:00

I was like you know what? At least you can make sure I don't see it again.

Sam

Yeah, it'll be gone away from you.

Leyla

The rule was when we met up for coffee dinner don’t wear it.

Sam 37:11

I like these gifts with rules attached. What about your divorce certificate?

Leyla

Oh I have that.

Sam 37:18

but do you have it like framed on the wall? Do you have it in a pile?

Leyla 37:22

no. It's like folded up somewhere and um, you know that like all the old paperwork. Yeah, I know where it is. I would have to find it right now. It will take me days to find it but it's somewhere. My mom's been typical admin person all her life. You know, she made copies. She's got one of her in her house just in case I lose it. Because she needs proof that I'm divorced.

Sam 37:43

I love your Mum. I love the sound of her. I really want to meet her one day.

Leyla

She's hilarious. She is She's so funny.

Sam

So now when I say to you that you are divorced, how does that make you feel?

Leyla 37:56

Um, I don't know. I think I always feel like it is a label I mean, all you got to think of is like I have freedom. It is the only way I think about it, I don't have to worry about someone else's feelings, I guess, with the relationship with myself. So it's like, that's how I feel about it. I used to feel when I was much younger divorce was like, Oh my gosh, it's like, it's like that. And I didn't like when people pointed that out to me, but I actually embrace it now like I and I, and I educate people I decided not to be in relationship it is important. When something's not working out for you. Get out. So I'm happily divorced. That's a term I like to use.

Sam

Happily, divorced. I like it.

Leyla 38:32

I am happily divorced.

Sam

Well, thank you. This has been great. Thank you. Is there anything else that you wanted to say or mention if anyone's listening, needs help with divorce or anyone from the Somali community maybe struggling in a relationship?

Leyla 38:50

Yeah, I mean, I just want to say to anyone struggling or think they're stuck, there is help. There are help lines who can go to. Two of my favourite organisations, which always give the women to is Southall Blacks Sisters or Solihull Women's Aid are two amazing organisations. If you're stuck in a horrible relationship, or you want to get out, please do, these organisations will help you. So there is a way out. And even if you feel like there is no way out, just talk to someone who can plan for your way out. Someone will help you.

Sam

I think that's great advice. Thank you. And where can people find you online and find out more about you.

Leyla 39:25

So on twitter at Leyla Hussein on Instagram, at Leyla Hussain, if you Google, my name my website comes up.

Sam 39:35

Well Leyla Hussein OBE. Thank you very much for joining me

Leyla 39:41

Thank you. I really enjoyed this. Thank you for doing it

Sam 39:43

 And welcome to the divorce club.

Leyla 39:46

It's the best. Thank you.

Leyla 39:49

Thanks for listening to the divorce club with me Samantha Baines. Please hit subscribe and do leave us a lovely review - it really does make a difference. You can also tweet us @divorcepod or send us an email thedivorceclubpod@gmail.com

See you soon