

EPISODE TEN

ON MY OWN?

**AS I
AM**



FILM SUMMARY

When Katherine Black of L'Arche Australia was 57, she lost her mother. This was the year when everything in her life changed. She felt her aloneness in a new and deep way and decided it was time to take care of herself by herself. For Katherine, this meant moving out of a flat in the L'Arche community, where she had lived until then, and moving into her very own apartment. She worked out a plan to live independently at last. Her desire to stand on her own two feet, all on her own has led her down a rousing road of busking, gambling, and kitchen disasters. Statistics may indeed show that independent living can be particularly difficult for people with disabilities, but Katherine relies on her resourcefulness and her relationships with friends to avoid the usual pitfalls.



"I WAS THINKING OF
WANTING TO BE ON MY
OWN FOR A CHANGE."

-Katherine Black

FILM THEMES

- **Independence**

In the past, people with intellectual disabilities have been confined, segregated, and altogether deprived of their independence. In the film, the line in the popular TV show "Gilligan's Island" refers to this reality. "Skipper, it's against the law to lock somebody up without telling them what they did." These words are a lighthearted way of drawing attention to something that is deeply unjust. One response to this injustice has been to support the movement that promotes independent living for people with intellectual disabilities. While this would appear to be the logical response to such injustice, statistics in Australia have revealed that it is not always the better solution. Independent living can also expose people to harmful levels of isolation. The loneliness that accompanies independence can be just as dangerous as the constraints of dependence.

- **Community**

Just as a person's right to independence must be respected, so must their relational rights also be respected. Katherine's story deals with the experience of living in community. There are many values in community life: receiving support, nurturing relationships, avoiding isolation; L'Arche communities

are defined by a shared experience. Even so, many efforts have been made to support its members' aspirations for independence. There is no formula to create a perfect balance between shared life and independent living. Katherine's community has supported her efforts and, together, they work to accomplish her plan.

- **Lonely vs. Alone**

Being lonely is largely considered an unpleasant emotion, but Katherine delights in her alone time. This draws attention to a distinction between being lonely and being alone. She enjoys certain activities with others but upholds her right to decline invitations and visitors. Mainstream media tend to pathologize behaviors that minimize social interaction, but Katherine needs freedom to choose when to be social and when to enjoy just being by herself. When she describes being as "free as a bird" she is referring to a freedom to exercise her will not a freedom from social activities. Yet, Katherine's pet birds, in their birdcage, can subtly remind one that certain challenges and restrictions may indeed limit one's freedom but in fact they are there to protect, not confine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to put a question mark at the end of the title of the film? What other titles might be well suited for this film?
2. Her mother's death prompted Katherine to imagine a life on her own. When have you been prompted to make a change in your life? What led to that change?
3. Katherine had a plan to live independently. If you had a similar plan, what activities would you include? What activities do you do that make you feel independent?
4. In the cooking scene, Katherine writes "No" in every box that asked if she needed help when in fact, she does call for help. She is determined to prove herself independent. How does this differ with the end of the film?

BEHIND THE SCENES

Katherine's decision to not organize betting among her friends in the community was a challenge for the film crew. The crew even considered for a while doing an alternative story with a different protagonist, but they kept running into her around town, practicing her independent living. One example was washing her laundry; she had access to a washing machine in her apartment in the L'Arche community, but she still preferred to go out to do her laundry in town. In many situations, Katherine insists on her independence and then asks for the assistance of another person. It is not contradictory to be independent and yet need help. Another example of this is when Katherine missed the bus and got lost in town. She decided to handle this situation "on her own" by going into a nearby movie theater and asking to use their phone. In fact, she did not have the phone number she needed, and yet she was able to get the theater employees to reach her friends in the L'Arche community. Her ability to obtain assistance from others is part of the success of her quest for independence.

IMAGINE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

The vulnerability that comes from relying on others can be uncomfortable, but it also reminds us that we are not alone. How can you create space to experience the benefits and joys of both dependence and independence?