



0:00: Hey, it's your friend Sarah, and welcome, welcome to Stories of Survival in the Modern Age.

0:14: Today I'm chatting with Dr Charlotte Garbutt.

0:17: Charlotte spent around 30 years working in education, moving from Scandinavian studies into primary education and teacher education, and then at 56 she did something that plenty of us might think twice about.

0:31: She retrained, stepped into an entirely new career, and set up her own business as a personal stylist and colour analyst.

0:39: Her approach to styling isn't about telling women what they should or shouldn't wear when they reach a certain age.

0:45: In fact, she has some pretty strong views about the so-called fashion rules and the insecurities that they can create.

0:53: For Charlotte, clothing is about self-expression, confidence, and authenticity, and her work is rooted in being pro-age, body positive, inclusive and sustainable, and she works with clients of all genders and ages.

1:09: And there's another really interesting thread to Charlotte's story, that idea that being true to yourself doesn't mean staying the same.

1:17: Sometimes being true to yourself means having the courage to change.

1:21: And so today we're going to talk about identity, age, authenticity, and perhaps along the, along the way, a little bit about what we choose to put on our bodies.

1:32: Charlotte, welcome.

1:33: Welcome to Stories of Survival in the Modern Age.

1:36: Thank you very much, Sarah, and yeah, thank you for having me on, on the podcast.

1:40: Oh, you're very welcome.

1:42: Before we move into styling, I'm keen to explore your rather extraordinary background.

1:48: A PhD in Swedish literature, master's in inclusive Education, and over 30 years in academia as a published writer and lecturer.

1:57: But I'm interested to know a little bit about Charlotte.

2:00: Charlotte, who spent those three decades in education, before we move on to Charlotte now.

2:05: Right, well, that was, so but it is a, it is a strange journey and it is something when I do my talks, I usually ask the audience, for starters, whether they've ever met a Scandinavian studies lecturer, and I haven't met an audience yet who's said yes.

2:21: I then move on to whether anybody's met a personal stylist, and sometimes there will be people, maybe they've had a colour analysis or they've seen somebody hanging around John Lewis or something.

2:32: but usually, nobody has ever met somebody who's had the same kind of career path, that I've had.

2:39: But my interest in Swedish actually, I tell different versions of this story to different people.

2:46: So, one version is that, I liked languages at school, which is all, both versions are true, by the way.

2:54: I very much liked languages at school.

2:56: I did French and German A level.

2:58: I went on to a university in Wales where at the time we had to choose three subjects to study equally in our first year.

3:06: So I needed a, a third string to my bow, as it were.

3:09: And at the time, this was the 1980s, my friend and I, who, she came along to an open day with me, like.

3:17: tennis, but in particular we very much liked Swedish tennis players.

3:22: So actually, the woman I am today and where I've been in my career is probably all thanks to, Stefan Edberg and other Swedish tennis players, because I went along to the open day, went along to the Swedish section, and as, session, as you can imagine.

3:40: a small university, there were only 750 students there, and an even tinier, obviously Swedish department, but it was very welcoming, very friendly, very different, language and literature.

3:53: And so although I just picked it up thinking I would just do it for my first year, I ended up, with a 4 year degree there and then also, as you mentioned, staying on doing my PhD there.

4:07: So, all thanks to Swedish tennis players in, in some ways.

4:12: And, and are you still a fan of tennis?

4:14: I am still a fan of tennis, yes, and, interestingly enough, my son who's more, he's very much into football, he will still support Sweden, internationally as well as England, so he's kind of got that little, little bit from me as well, but yes, so, and then I ended up, Having that as my career really into this century, moving to Hull where or the Hull area where I live now to have a a job in Scandinavian studies, doing things like at my interview being asked whether I speak Norwegian, whether I'd be prepared to teach Norwegian when I didn't speak Norwegian.

4:55: and all sorts of things that you, you talk yourself into, but, a very happy career there.

5:01: And are you, are you now fluent in Norwegian as well as Swedish?

5:04: I wouldn't say that, no, I can, certainly read the other Scandinavian languages, and probably understand Norwegian the better.

5:15: Danish can be a little, a little trickier too.

5:17: The Swedish ear, certainly to the English ear.

5:20: Yes, and I only ask that because my nephew has been in Norway probably coming up on a decade now, and he's going for Norwegian citizenship, and, and, you know, comes across that language barrier, and he's doing his, his best to, to adopt that because that's his adopted home.

5:38: So, so, clearly, you know, So, from, from education and, and, and, and Scandinavian studies then to moving into, into stylist, being a stylist and a colour analyst, they don't naturally fit together.

5:55: So what was happening for you at that time in your life where you thought, you know what, I'm ready for something different.

6:01: I'm ready for a new challenge.

6:03: Right, well, this has happened twice, so this seems to be, a pattern and, and, know when we've been chatting previously we've been talking about, sort of reinvention.

6:14: And that seems to be the, the pattern, but my first change doesn't seem now to have been so drastic because, I did move slightly more naturally from Scandinavian studies lecturing to, being a primary school teacher.

6:29: So I really in primary school teaching.

6:32: and was a, a teacher for a number of years.

6:35: And then an opportunity came up to combine languages and.

6:42: being back at the university, and so that ended up being the career that I did for over 10 years.

6:47: it was training local primary school teachers, but, you know, people know anything about the education sector at all.

6:57: You will know that it's prone to change, it's prone to, you know, influences from politics, DFE and all the rest of it.

7:07: And, there have been, you know, very tricky times in terms of education, higher education, and there was, a time when, decisions were basically taken out of my hands and and those of colleagues.

7:23: The DFE had decided which institutions, were going to be training teachers.

7:28: We also had, an Ofsted inspection, which, I would in many ways prefer not to talk about.

7:35: So I had the choice.

7:36: I remember distinctly being, actually being in the, in the ladies' loos at work, washing my hands at the hand basin with a colleague, and she said, you know, I just feel so disempowered, and I thought, yes, that's the word that I feel.

7:50: and I think if I was younger than I had been, I would have been 55, I think at the time.

7:58: coming up to 56, I might have thought, well, I'll wait this out.

8:01: There are things that I can do, but a little bit like a more drastic version of what I did when I changed to become a primary school teacher.

8:09: I just thought I could wait for things to happen.

8:11: they're often cyclical.

8:14: or I could try to re-empower myself and go for something completely different, and colleagues were saying, well, you know, you could do more or less what you're doing, you could do mental training, but you could do it on a freelance basis, and I thought I could do.

8:29: There are reasons why that might not have been successful, but I thought, well, if I'm going to do something different, I want to do something really different.

8:37: Last hurrah of my career, so, why I thought, oh, let's set up a business at the age of 56 in a completely different sphere to something you've ever worked in your whole life.

8:48: Charlotte, why do you think that might be a good idea, but the, the idea around colour and style, I've never been, until recently, had any formal training, but I've always been drawn to colour.

9:03: She's sitting here wearing a bright red top and a pink skirt, and, I'd actually, it's thanks to Instagram in many ways.

9:12: I joined Instagram in that same way that a lot of middle aged people do or older people do.

9:18: I gave my phone to one of my sons, who would have been a teenager at the time and said, can you get me on Tinder?

9:25: Instagram, I've heard about this Instagram, can you get me on there?

9:28: And, I developed quite a following.

9:30: I've got over 10,000 followers, and I was engaging with women who were like me, who were simply, posting pictures of what they were wearing every day.

9:40: And.

9:42: It, I've formed actual real friendships with people through that.

9:47: And I also came across people who were doing what I'm doing now, which is working as personal stylists and working as colour analysts, whereas before, I probably didn't even know what that was.

9:58: I was also becoming more interested in.

10:01: The sustainable side of fashion, so becoming more drawn towards buying secondhand clothes, following slow fashion movements and so forth.

10:10: So, that little seed then when I knew I wanted to do something different, it didn't take me very long at all for that seed to, to, to drop in and me to think, if I'm going to do something different, I'm going to pursue this colour and style direction.

10:24: and, found out from contacts on Instagram where might be a good place to train and so forth, and, that's why I'm, I'm here now.

10:34: And is that I, I find it interesting that you referred to it as a seed because, you know, the a thing I talk about quite often is, is seeds for the soul, or because, you know, out of those little seeds, out of those little acorns and my.

10:50: can grow, it already knows what it, it, what the acorn already knows what it's gonna be, the rose already knows in that seed what it's gonna be.

10:57: So the fact that you had this seed of an idea and you just went with it and now you've got 10,000 followers and it's absolutely flourished is, is all credit to that passion that you've brought from throughout your career.

11:10: That's how I see it, just you know, only knowing you, a little bit and recently.

11:15: I'm just gonna read something here, a good friend of mine, back in California, I used to live in California, my husband's from the US and she's a, she's a big fan of, Iris Apfel, who, often talks about dressing for your age, and she said, and, and, and this is what reminded me.

11:35: She, when she was asked that question, she she just said, what do you mean one's age?

11:41: And and Julie and I often have conversations about dressing for one's age, what does that mean for you?

11:49: well, absolutely, I'm, as you said in your introduction, I do have strong views on this.

11:54: it helps that I have, lived for, I'm almost 60, so, I've had lived for several decades, so I've got that experience of, of aging, is that, There is no such thing as age attached to the things that we wear, the actual garments, to the actual style.

12:13: I've had, I had a, a woman in her 70s who came up to me at a clothes swap and said to me, she found a, a little denim jacket which fitted her perfectly, but then she said, am I too old for a denim jacket?

12:27: Well, the answer is absolutely no.

12:30: It fitted her, she liked it, and, Particularly because of the field that I work in, I get things, popping up on my, my feeds, not as notifications, as articles, but so many headlines, preying on women's insecurities.

12:49: It's largely women in these headlines, things like women over 40 shouldn't wear this.

12:56: Rules for women over 60, hairstyles for, but very often it's not even on things that are suggested positively.

13:04: More often than not, it's don't do this, and it's putting fear into us as to and expectations and it can be really damaging to people's self esteem, to their sense of confidence and probably as we age anyway, we feel a little bit more vulnerable because we're seeing a different person in the mirror very often.

13:27: just another little anecdote around this, my husband and I were.

13:33: in London visiting my, son, and we were coming back from Hampton Court, I think it was in a boat.

13:39: we were exhausted, hot sunny day exhausted, but we were really enjoying this boat trip.

13:44: We were outside, lovely evening, and there were some young people, youngsters, probably late teens, probably, on.

13:53: The bank, and one of them shouted out, old people, look at me, and then jumped into the water.

13:59: And I tell this story because to her, she was probably thinking, poor old, old people, they're just sitting around, whereas I'm young and vibrant, and I can jump into this water if I want to.

14:11: What she wasn't understanding is that we.

14:13: Actually were very happy doing what we were doing.

14:16: We were happy being who we were.

14:18: We didn't want, we'd been her, well, although I don't think I've ever done that, jumped into the Thames, but she was perceiving that we wanted to be like her, whereas we, we very much didn't.

14:30: So it's, it's that sort of expectations and whether it's over age or whether it's other things in relation to our style, we need to.

14:41: Think about how we present ourselves that's true to and right for ourselves and nobody else, and that's the thing, isn't it, we do it for us, we do it, I do it for me, you do it for you, I'm not doing it for the masses out there.

14:57: I do what I wanna do.

14:58: Now, anybody that knows me will tell you that I am colour adverse, so I would, I'm usually need a longer conversation than Sarah.

15:05: I know, let alone style adverse.

15:10: But I'm curious to hear from you, if you can, we talked about empowering and re-empowering and reinvention.

15:16: Do you believe that we can actually reinvent ourselves through what we wear?

15:24: yes, it's complex, obviously.

15:28: I think there are two sides to it, and I think this goes with, confidence as well.

15:33: So when I speak to people, when I'm doing a personal style assessment, or talking to audiences, it's around, it, it should be easy to say, well, I'm gonna dress for myself, I'm gonna express myself.

15:47: People don't always know how to translate how they feel inside to the things that they're wearing.

15:53: So that's my job as a stylist, is really that kind of coaching conversation.

15:57: Well, you see yourself as this kind of.

16:00: Person, how could we express this so that it brings you a sense of confidence, but that feeling of joy and that feeling of authenticity.

16:09: Part of it is also that kind of maybe aspirational sense that who, who, I dress like this, and this feels very me because I always dressed like this, but also what's that person I would like to be?

16:22: How would I, would like to present myself if I had that confidence to do so.

16:28: so for me it's, around that too, and also, I've been reading, around the topic of, enclosed cognition, which is the theory that the things that we wear.

16:42: can, you know, impact how we feel, but it can also impact how we think and how we behave.

16:48: So there are various different, experiments that have happened around that.

16:52: But I think it's so true.

16:54: I know from personal experience and from, clients that how we dress can make us feel something different, but actually.

17:02: Feeling something different can give us that confidence, and that sense of authenticity to act in a different way, I think, for, for the good, hopefully.

17:14: Yeah, no, I, I agree, I agree, because, you know, I know as well as, as, as, as anyone that if you put something on that you feel very good in.

17:23: You walk differently, you feel more confident.

17:27: I was out a couple of weeks ago.

17:29: There's, there's 44, old friends from primary school from 5 decades ago, and we always go out once a month, and we were going out, and one of the gals, she always looks effortlessly put together, and the rest of us are always like, almost like green with envy that she can do that, seemingly.

17:50: Just with ease, but it's the confidence that she carries with that as well, and, and so, so that's what I aspire to, yeah, and, and, colour can do it too, colour psychology, the colours that we wear can impact on others' perceptions of us, but also on how we feel, just as another little little story, when I, first started my business, I went to possibly my first networking meeting, certainly one of the very earliest, and it was a new group as well, so we all knew from the Facebook group or whatever it was, that there was going to be, let's say a solicitor there, there was going to be me as the personal stylist, somebody who was a magician actually, all sorts of different careers, in this women's group, and they, the people waiting outside saw me coming along.

18:39: And they guessed that I was the stylist, not necessarily because I looked any more stylish than anybody else, but I was pretty much dressed head to toe in orange.

18:49: And I learned that orange is the colour of confidence, so it can give the impression of being confident, but it can also make you feel confident.

18:58: So I had on my, secondhand, orange knitted dress, orange trench coat over it, and, It makes sense, doesn't it, you know, if somebody wearing orange isn't hiding away from the limelight, are they?

19:11: So, anyway, I looked more confident than I, than I felt, which is half the battle sometimes.

19:18: So, so are you saying then, Charlotte, that in terms of psychology around colour, it's as much as the person that is looking at you and how they interpret those colours as you as the person wearing those colours, it's almost.

19:32: like a two-way street.

19:33: It is, yeah, I would, I would definitely say that, yes, yeah, and so that there are certain colours that are going to be perceived in a certain way that, you know, might raise the blood pressure or whatever it might be for when we see different colours.

19:49: so certainly it can have that kind of, oh well, we put people into boxes because we think they're a certain type of person because of the way that they're dressed, yeah, right, right, interesting.

19:59: You mentioned there that we talked earlier, and when we talked earlier we were talking about your relationship with your trans son-in-law, weren't we?

20:08: We were and I'm wondering how that has influenced the work that you do and has that relationship changed the way and that identity is portrayed.

20:22: Absolutely and yeah, my, my wonderful future son-in-law Ollie has really influenced, me as a person and he has influenced me in my work.

20:35: I wanted when I set up my business to.

20:39: Put a marker out there right from the very start, even before I had my first transgender client, that I wanted to work with trans clients as well as, you know, anybody else.

20:49: And, partly as you say that is down to Ollie and how he, you know, lives his life with dignity despite all the transphobia in the world and so forth.

21:04: But also, knowing Ollie and many other transgender people now myself, it's that, link between identity, authenticity, And the work that I want to do that, that where that link is really.

21:21: So, reinvention, yes, trans people will be reinventing themselves in the sense of the way that they're presenting themselves to the world when they transition, but actually they are actually just presenting that person they have been or that they've always been.

21:40: So in the sense.

21:41: It's it's very different from my career saying, well, you know, Scandinavian studies and then a now personal stylist.

21:47: But actually I carry with me the things that I've always been, and, that's very much the sense with the trans people that I now work with is that sense of authenticity and how we express that.

22:02: And as with clients of any other gender.

22:06: it's, there isn't one way to do it.

22:09: It isn't about making, helping people to become more feminine, more masculine.

22:15: it's, it's that personal style, and again, it's making people, giving people that kind of permission to feel that they can express themselves, so.

22:27: For me, trans people understand that sense of how identity and authenticity and how we present ourselves to the world, the importance of that, and that's something that I want to share with, with all clients.

22:40: And that's, and that I think Alan we said this earlier, is so super worthwhile, and, and yes it is.

22:47: but it is a niche that that still needs to be catered for, isn't it?

22:51: Absolutely, and, even more so I feel this as, a client that I've worked with in the past, she actually went to another stylist or contacted another stylist and was told that the stylist doesn't style men.

23:07: And so.

23:10: I am there for all those people who are getting that misgendering, that knockback, who are, it's a vulnerable position to put yourself in any way to go to somebody for styling.

23:21: but to feel that there are people like me that will provide that kind of safe space, for them and that genuine, safe space, I think it's really important.

23:32: Yeah, and we said something else and we, we put it in the introduction and we talked about, or you talked about being true to yourself doesn't mean standing still and staying the same.

23:44: Absolutely, yes, I find that really fascinating because, you know, sometimes we're so afraid of what change means, that, that we don't do it and so for you to say that, so you know, I want, I want to just dive into that a little bit if we may as well.

24:01: Yeah, I mean part of it I think is that experience just from my career, that when I first started in business at you know, late 50s, I would be very apologetic if I was going to a networking thing and introduced myself.

24:17: I would say I've only just started and, you know, I did this before.

24:23: whereas now I realize that what I do now, has got all those elements.

24:29: I'm, I'm still that same person that I've got all those experiences that I bring into it.

24:33: So, I feel that I've been true to myself.

24:37: I can see myself in the Scandinavian studies lecturer, in the primary school teacher, and so forth, So, yes, I've reinvented myself, but I've been true to myself as well, so the other way around that I feel I'm still being true to my values in what I do.

24:57: So for example, you know, we're talking about.

25:00: Trans community, when I was working in education, I had a range of children's books because it was primary education, with, trans and non-binary characters that I would share with my students.

25:13: so my values have remained the same even if the, method I'm, I'm sharing them is, you know, completely different.

25:21: So I think that would be, a message to, Everybody, and it's the same with our personal style as well, that, although I'm saying express ourselves, be true to ourselves and so forth, our lifestyles change, how we, you know, we progress as human beings.

25:38: So the way that we dress in 2026 is going to be different from how we would express ourselves in, I don't know, 1988 or something or other.

25:47: I, I'm giggling because I was thinking about 1986 and I can see myself now in 1986.

25:53: I was just thinking a couple of years ago, yeah, right, can you believe how, how long 1986, I know, I know, it, it trust me to jump into that year and not, you know, 2006 or something.

26:04: I know, I know because my mind immediately, immediately went there as well.

26:12: if someone's listening today, Charlotte, and they feel that perhaps they've lost themselves a little bit, perhaps they've spent years being a mother, a partner, a teacher, a professional, or simply doing what's expected of them, where do you.

26:27: Where, where's a good place for them to begin if they, you know, listen to this and they, they recognize that, like, like I do, you know, I am, I am, I have a style, but it's probably the same style I've had for three decades.

26:40: Where do you think is a good place for them to start?

26:46: I would say the, if you can't tell immediately what you feel is that kind of authentic self-expression, -huh, -huh, how that's translated, is maybe to start with the joy.

26:59: So I'm all about dressing with joy and authenticity.

27:02: So actually try things on in your wardrobe and.

27:07: Think about how they make you feel, we were talking about that, and maybe if.

27:14: You're not sure about something, experiment with different things that you have in your wardrobe.

27:19: Too many people, I think, have, well, I wear that one, that top with, and those trousers.

27:24: They don't even think that that top could go with multiple things, or what would happen if I added a belt or a necklace or whatever it was, or changed the colour of my bag.

27:32: So it's often those little things and actually taking that time, it might seem like a frivolous activity, but unless you're going to invest in personal styling, and you know, we, we personal stylists would love it if they did.

27:44: you can do a little bit of DIY with that.

27:46: It is actually having taken that time to play with things in your wardrobe and actually see what makes you feel good, what makes you feel happy, and in particular the colours, you know.

27:59: take the colours up sort of close to your face, you know, natural daylight, see, you know, how those colours actually make you feel.

28:05: It doesn't even matter whether you think they suit you or not.

28:09: it's all about that feeling of, do they uplift you, do they make you feel confident, are you going to feel happy wearing them?

28:19: can you remember when, you know, is that a top that somebody paid you a compliment when you were wearing?

28:23: And so the other thing is just don't save it for best.

28:26: Those things that you really like, the colours and so forth, how many things, you know, are actually dry clean only or you can't wash, so, even if you're working from, from home, nobody's seeing you, why not wear that lovely green jumper or whatever it might be that makes you feel really happy and uplifted.

28:44: so that would be, a message for anybody, hm, and if anybody does want to reach out and contact you, Charlotte, how can they find you?

28:52: They can find me in various different places, so, my business is called Transformed Styling by Charlotte.

28:58: So I've got the plans in there, I've got the edit in there from Education.

29:02: So Transformed Styling by Charlotte, so that's the business.

29:05: So you can find me on Facebook with that name again.

29:08: You can find me on Instagram as at Transformed Styling.

29:12: I'm on LinkedIn as with my name, so Doctor Charlotte Garbutt, and I have started, a new YouTube channel which has some.

29:21: Interviews with people including some style stories with trans voices that I've interviewed, and that is probably called the same thing transformed style stories or transformed styling will get you there.

29:34: It's been an absolute joy to, to, to, to sort of start to dive into this subject.

29:38: I know, you know, we could talk all day about it, but before we go, Charlotte, I want to do my quick fire 5 questions, if you're up for the challenge.

29:47: Yes, yeah, yeah, your best comfort food.

29:52: Oh, Yorkshire pudding.

29:54: Oh, lovely.

29:56: I don't know where that came from.

29:57: I had one on Sunday, that's why.

29:59: A book or an audio that you're currently enjoy, and I know you, you referenced one earlier.

30:04: Oh, I am reading the latest Richard Osman, and, I, I love his books.

30:10: How delicious.

30:11: We, we chase, we chase shadows.

30:13: That's the one, that's the one, I saw it on the bookshelf just the other day.

30:17: What's the one thing in this moment, Charlotte, that you're most grateful for?

30:22: I am most grateful for.

30:26: Family.

30:27: Fantastic.

30:29: And do you have a go to self-care practice?

30:34: Probably would be reading, just giving myself that distraction, you know, alright, and lastly, what's the one thing if you can go back and talk to a 21 year old version of, of you, what would you tell her?

30:51: It's, it's going to be alright and that you will.

30:55: You will find things that you love doing and you will continue to have a, a positivity and a positive outlook so that you will always make the best of things.

31:07: Marvelous.

31:08: Charlotte, thank you so much for talking to me today.

31:11: OK, thank you very much, it's been lovely being here and chatting to you.

31:15: There was something there about my conversation that stayed with me after Charlotte and I had finished chatting, and it's perhaps it was the idea that we don't have to become smaller versions of ourselves as we get older.

31:29: We don't have to follow somebody else's rules about what we should wear, how we should look, or even who we should be.

31:36: And I loved her reminder that being true to yourself doesn't mean standing still and saying the same, because we change, our circumstances change, our priorities change.

31:50: Sometimes our confidence changes too, and sometimes if we're.

31:54: Brave enough, we decide that the person who we're becoming deserves a little more space than the person we used to be.

32:02: Charlotte did that, didn't she?

32:03: Not because she'd suddenly discovered she was someone else, but because she allowed herself to explore who else she could become.

32:12: And perhaps that's a lovely thing to remember is that whatever your age, you are allowed to change your mind, try something new, look different, you're also allowed to surprise yourself.

32:24: You are, after all, still becoming.

32:28: Thank you for trusting me and thank you for sharing this with the people you care about.

32:32: And when you come back, I'll be here, ready to meet you where you are.

32:37: And so until next time, stay safe, be well, and as always, be your own definition of amazing.

ENDS