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**NOT LIKE THAT YOU DON’T!**

***Interview***

**Announcer**

I’m Celia Fielke and this is Messages of Hope. How do you feel about raising your children as a mum?

**Yvonne**

“I think you’re always learning. See what you've got I suppose is what I think mothers have to do, and just be there to sort of pull them back on the path if they are jumping off.”

**Announcer**

Parenting isn’t easy and it’s sometimes hard to see the forest for the trees , especially when your child is asserting their independence! Today my guest is Yvonne Coppard from the UK. She's an accomplished writer and mother of two adult daughters. Yvonne you've had a variety of roles over the years from a petrol pump attendant, secretary, teacher and now writer. When you look back at those experiences what jumps out is important for shaping who you are today?

**Yvonne**

I think all of them were important in different ways. I mean actually the petrol pump attendant taught me a lot about superficial conversations and contacts and how much I love those. People come into a petrol station from all walks of life, from the top executive in his Jag to the little old lady who lives next door and just wants a loaf of bread. And I became very good at superficial conversations and picking up people's lives as they came in. So I knew that this person had had a cold or that person was cross with their daughter. Completely forgot them when they weren't there and picked up that conversation as they came back. Which in a way kind of formed my view of life and my social contacts became much wider. And was good for my writers notebook as well for characters and things.

**Announcer**

What about the teaching?

**Yvonne**

Teaching taught me discipline and to try and work out where people were. Trying to start from where the child is and move on to somewhere you want them to be is actually a lovely thing to be doing and teaches you a lot about human nature generally. And we were foster parents as well and I think that was immensely important to my ability to connect with children and teenagers which was good as a teacher and good as a writer because I write mostly for children. Yeah they're all good.

**Announcer**

You've published almost 20 books mostly as stories for primary school age children covering issues like self-esteem trust and bullying. What inspired you to begin writing these books?

**Yvonne**

It's a question I’m asked a lot and the only answer I can give is that for me writers just are writers. I was always a writer. I started writing when I was about eight and if no one had ever bought a book and I'd never become a professional I would still be a writer. So I think by the time you're 10 or 11 you know and it's only then a question of are you going to make it your job or are you going to write in an amateur way.

**Announcer**

One of the books you've written is based on mother daughter relationships with the title not dressed like that you don't tell us more about it.

**Yvonne**

Well “Not Dressed Like That You Don't” ended up being three books. It was supposed to be one but it became a bestseller actually which was very lucky. And it's the diary of a mother and her daughter side by side. So you see the mother writing about her own life and what she thinks is happening in her daughter's life and the daughter is writing about what's really happening in her life and what she thinks her mother is thinking. It's supposed to be humorous and you watch them grow together really. The title came from basically just pooling ideas with children, teenagers, the top things that they hate their parents to say. And “Not Dressed Like That You Don't” or some variation on that, was the top one. You know, “you're not going out looking like that, not dressed like that, you're not coming out with me. I gave you money for clothes and you spent it on rags”. It's all that kind of stuff. So when they wanted a second book. Which is the next year in Jenny and her mother's life, I got parents together and said “what do you most hate hearing from your children” and what they said was a variation of what became the title. ‘Everybody Else Does, Why Can't I’? And parents will I'm sure be sighing about that one. When it came to the third book, ‘Great, you've ruined the rest of my life,’ that's the one that's actually most based on our family. Only in a very shadowy way but we went to Canada for five weeks and our daughter was 17 at the time and very much in love. And we told her that she had to come with us. We weren't prepared to leave her home. And that was her comment, “Great, you've ruined the rest of my life. You know you'll have a great time”. And in fact she didn't come out of her bedroom for the first two weeks that we were in Canada and wouldn't talk to anybody and was so awful that we said to her “you know we're going to pool our credit cards get you back home on the first plane you can go to grandparents you can go home. We don't care. You've won. You can go home”. Whereupon she said “oh I want to stay I'm quite enjoying it”. And we all had a great time. But as a sort of punishment for those two weeks I have sort of put her into that book.

**Announcer**

What have you learned from your experience of raising children?

**Yvonne**

Well I have two daughters and we've had a variety of teenage foster daughters and foster sons. What I've learned? I think you’re always learning. I think what I've learned is to let them grow, let go, let them do what they have to do. See what you've got I suppose is what I think mothers have to do, rather than play out your own dreams and your own ambitions, see what you've got. See what time, talents they've got to try and nurture them but stand back and just be there to sort of pull them back on the path if they are jumping off. But hands off I think is what we've both tried to do as parents.

**Announcer**

How do you get through the tense times?

**Yvonne**

It is very difficult when your children are not like you. I mean it's easy when they're like you so they're agreeing with you and do what you'd quite like, kind of like them to do. But both our daughters had a very definite sense of who they were and where they were going. Our older daughter is a nurse. She's just finishing training as a health visitor so she works in the community with mothers and babies. She wanted to be a nurse right the way through from the time she was three or four. And our younger daughter is just finishing up her Phd in stand up comedy. Now here's a good example actually of standing back. She did a degree in history and drama, announced that she wanted to go maybe into the theatre, directing, possibly writing. Now I'm a writer so there is nothing I can say about that. But we used to sit in bed, Reg and I at night and say how can you sort of try and persuade her to go into teaching or something, something secure. Well we can't, can we, because that would be wrong. We've got to support her. And then when she changed her mind and decided that she would go into stand up comedy, we were sitting in bed saying theatre would be good. So it's a good example I think of how we try to parent. And what I've learned from foster children particularly is that actually that is the way to do it. Express an opinion when you're asked, draw a line say thus far and no further, but try and make that line as far away as you can and then they'll come to you and ask your opinion. That's my theory anyway.

**Announcer**

Has being a Christian had an influence in how you raise children?

**Yvonne**

I think there, for me there are two views of looking at your children. The view that we have, well start with a negative view. If your child is your possession, no less your possession than your car, then it's up to you what you do with it. And you know my car is my car. If I choose to beat it up, not wash it, put litter all over it, crash it, that is entirely up to me and is none of your business. That is entirely in my control. So when people, pastors, social workers, doctors, teachers come along we say, “You know, butt out, it's my life, my child. I'll bring my child up the way I see fit”. But I think for the Christian and for us, children are a gift from God. They are not your possessions, they are yours to be held in trust and when you're there to nurture them, in the way that you nurture a garden, they're not really yours, they are in trust until they're adults and they can make their own way. And if you really believe that and I think both my husband and I really believe that, you parent in a completely different way. They're not your badge, they're not your accessory. They're not there to show what a lovely person you are. They don't have to get a university degree or be the pop star or become the doctor, you know they are their own people. They are in trust and you see what you've got and you nurture what you've got and you're very thankful for it. And I think that's the Christian view.

**Announcer**

What is it about Christianity, God, Jesus, that gets your attention and captures your spirit?

**Yvonne**

That's an interesting question. I don't know. I wasn't brought up a Christian. We were kind of sent to Sunday school. I was dedicated in the Baptist church as a baby but my mother picked preachers as she picks politicians, by how nice their eyes are. She looks at a photo and decides whether they're trustworthy, which isn’t a bad way to do it, i've discovered. So I wasn't brought up with a regular sort of churchgoing thing. I came into the Lutheran Church through the youth club actually and making friends there. I think for me what is rock solid about God and what never changes is that he is always there. And I talked to him in the way that I would talk to a very good friend. I get cross as well as thankful. I always start my prayers at the end of the day with thanks for this and by the way this was really bad and if you can put that right I'd be really grateful. So I don't have sort of posh prayers. God is there, he's always there. He walks with me and at times he picks me up and carries me until I can walk again.

**Announcer**

Can you explain more about how God is there for you?

**Yvonne**

At the end of the day I try to end the day in my own private prayer. I don’t kneel or anything. I'm lying in bed actually and quite often I fall asleep in the middle of it all. But I try and start with looking back at what I'm thankful for. Move on to what I'm worried about and what I'd like some help with. And there are times when I'm just so cheesed off with God that I just can't, you know, I don't think you're there at all. But I have enough faith that at those points I say, “so you pick me up now and when I believe in you again I'll let you know”. And I can feel that happening. And the other thing that I have a sense of is just what I call jumping, taking God's hand and jumping into the unknown. For me that's really important when I'm really worried or frightened of something that might happen. I mean, actually we've been going around the world. This is the fourth country we’ve been to and this is amazing to my family and friends because I hate travelling. I'm a very timid traveller and I very much took God's, God's hand and jumped before I started this trip. And it's a feeling of I've got your hand. OK. I'll jump. I don't know how deep. I don't know how dark but I've got your hand so I'll be OK.

**Announcer**

If you’re feeling tired and struggling as a parent, it’s not a sign of failure or weakness to ask for help or for some ideas to make things better. Parenting can be tough at times, and can leave you feeling like giving up. If you’re looking for some fresh ideas about how to bring back the fun in your family, today I’m offering you, or someone you know, a free booklet, PARENTING- FINDING THE FUN. For your free booklet, PARENTING- FINDING THE FUN, contact us by calling 1800 353 350, that’s 1800 353 350. Or go to messagesofhope.org.au to order your free copy. That’s messagesofhope.org.au.



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