

It's a Long Story

Kate Bolick | Making a life of one's own

Edwina Throsby: From Sydney Opera House, welcome to It's a Long Story, a podcast exploring the lives behind the ideas. I'm Edwina Throsby.

Kate Bolick: We're all shaped by the socio-political context of our time and place, and we react to it in different ways.

ET: As a middle-class girl from a happy family, Kate Bolick's life was on track: go to college, get a job, and then, become a wife. But after losing her mother, Kate began to question this predictable trajectory. In 2011, when she was in her thirties and still unmarried, Kate wrote an article that wove together her personal story with an economic analysis of singledom in the 21st Century. It was called "All the Single Ladies" and it became an online sensation. It served as the catalyst for Kate's first book called *Spinster: Making a life of one's own*. The memoir reflects on the intergenerational lessons and legacies of feminism, and is a call to arms for autonomous women everywhere.

ET: Kate Bolick, welcome to It's a Long Story at the Sydney Opera House.

KB: Thank you, I'm so excited to be here.

ET: Really pleased to have you. What does feminism mean for you?

KB: I tend to think of feminism as being the basic definition of equal rights for everybody. That is what feminism is to me. And being conscious of that, too. To have a conscious feminism rather than a taken for granted feminism.

ET: What do you mean by that?

KB: As a third wave feminist, I grew up taking for granted the gains of the second wave and taking my feminism for granted as well. So, I thought of myself as a feminist, I called myself a feminist, I don't even really know what I thought that that meant. It just was something I did without putting too much critical thought into. And I think that was unfortunate in that there was a lot more that needed to be done in terms of the progress of feminism, and I'm so glad that there were people who were being so much more conscious about feminism than I was at the time, who were pushing that conversation forward. And so I feel grateful that I eventually grew into being not only a de facto feminist but also a conscious feminist.

ET: Excellent. So, let's just go back to the beginning. Your parents' love story is kind of a foundational text in your life, right? Can you describe that for me?

KB: They met in the 60's and my mother was at the time working for the newly founded Job Corp in Washington DC and my father was training to be an officer in the United States Army. And they married in 1968 or 9, I'm kind of forgetting, but in their 20s, very much of their time getting married. And my mother was a feminist and my father was, and still is, a feminist-minded man in the sense that he was, even though he'd grown up in the South of America which is a more sexist culture, he himself was progressive. And they, together, had what is called a companionate marriage where they were really both considered themselves equal partners in the raising of us two children and keeping the household and so forth. And really had a partnership marriage that was very stable and a really nice way for me to grow up.

ET: How did that affect your life as a child?

KB: I think of myself as just having had a very solid childhood, it was a happy one. You know, we lived in this little town on the coast of Massachusetts and could walk everywhere, I walked to all of my schools, it's a pretty tightly knit community. My parents were both very involved in the politics of the town, and so we were very active in the community and I really grew up with this sense of community.

ET: You know, living in the nice town, having the two kids, being active in the community. Your mother didn't follow a typical career course, but in many ways she ticked off some of the markers of successful femaleness for her generation. Was she fulfilled by that?

KB: Okay, she loved my father and loved our family and loved being a mother, I have no doubt about any of that. She was very frustrated with her work life. So, when I was growing up she was working at a school teacher and she wanted to be a writer. She had aspirations to be a writer but was not confident enough to pursue them and then was busy raising us. And then when she was in her mid-30s she finally decided enough was enough, it was time for her to try to pursue that. And she walked down to our daily newspaper, the Newburyport Daily News, and said you don't have an art section and you need one and I'll be the editor, even though she had no experience at all, and they hired her. And so she began her freelance writing career.

ET: And your dad was completely supportive of that from a domestic sense, he stepped up and do they call domestic labour, or--?

KB: Well that's an interesting question, I've never thought of that. I mean, he was certainly supportive. He had started his own law practice, so he was definitely very busy with that, but she definitely did more of the child-rearing in a sense that she arranged her writing life so that she was writing from home and she was home when we came home from school every day and was cooking dinner most of the time. She was doing a little more of the work than my father was, but it didn't feel grossly out of balance.

ET: And I suppose against the backdrop of probably a lot of the other families in the town, he was doing a lot more?

KB: Yeah, and a very present father. You know, home for dinner every night, at all of my track meets and soccer games, that kind of thing, yeah.

ET: You write in your book *Spinster* about your own adolescence and a growing awareness of the way that you were perceived as a girl and as a young woman. Do you remember a moment where that sort of crystallised for you?

KB: About how I was perceived?

ET: Yeah, and what that meant.

KB: I mean, my first memory of it, and I put it in *Spinster*, is being in something like second grade and realising that the gym teacher flirted with a bunch of the girls and not with me. And then I realised, oh, they're all pretty and I'm not pretty. And so that was my first understanding of that kind of market value. So I grew up with this idea of myself that I was not pretty, but then it turns out I was very athletic, and because of that I had a really, you know, "hot" body, I was uncomfortable with it. I didn't want that kind of attention, I wanted to be pretty, you know? But that was like, oh, I don't get to have that but I have this hot body

which means that boys are always looking at me and talking or thinking sexual thoughts and I felt really weirdly violated by that.

ET: Right, like pretty was okay and aspirational but sexy was--

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah sexy was something sort of dangerous and a little bit shameful.

ET: So much of what we understand about adult partnerships are formed in childhood narratives. What sort of sort of archetypes of relationships were you consuming throughout your childhood and teens?

KB: You know, I really felt shaped by my parents and watching them create a partnership together. And so I really believed that that was the way to do it, that was the way to have some kind of relationship or a marriage or whatever it was. And, you know, because I wasn't reading romance novels. All that said, I was totally romantic, you know, I was obsessed with boys. I had a boyfriend all through high school, I totally assumed I'd grow up and get married someday and have kids. And just never thought at all to question any of that.

ET: Who was your first crush?

KB: Oh, my first crush? Brent Lingerman.

[Laughter]

I hope you're out there Brent! I was in love with him all through middle school. I'm a real long-term person, you know, so like I fall in love and that's it. Oh, actually the first one was Jared Lens in first grade, so first through fourth grade was Jared Lens, then he moved away. Fifth through eighth grade was Brent Lingerman. Ninth through twelfth grade was Brian Beck, then college was Sam White.

[Laughter]

ET: So really, we're at a point where you're at college and you've never really been single.

KB: Right.

ET: How did that play into what your longings were?

KB: Well, you know, I think the reason I did that, the reason I would sort of lock in with a boyfriend, there are a lot of reasons, but one of them was what I was talking about earlier about being sexualized. I wanted to be able to feel my own sexuality and experience my sexuality and I wanted to do it in private with one person. And it felt really safe to find a boy who I felt comfortable with and just stay with him and be off the market and not have to worry about all of that "pretty" stuff or blah, blah, blah. And I think also it had to do with the stability of my family, I just was very accustomed to being intimate and responsible to another person. That was very comfortable to me. And, these boyfriends would become part of my family, it was all very domesticated. It felt good to be with young men who fit into that family unit with me.

[Music]

Chapter 2 – 9.50

New York, singledom and the importance of space

ET: But the family unit didn't stay the way that you thought it would. Your mother got breast cancer, survived the first bout, but then succumbed to it when you were in college. How was that moment in your life and that pivot?

KB: I mean, it was just terrible. It was so sudden. She'd had her first mastectomy when she was 40, and then it reemerged when she was 50. And during that time she just lived as if the cancer didn't exist. We were all kind of lulled into an idea that it would never return. When it did return and kill her so quickly, we were all completely taken by surprise. I was 23 at the time, it was my first year out of college when she died. And I, you know, how do you even put it into words how terrible it is? It's just, you know, it was an awful time. And so many things fell apart, I guess. Like, my own sense of self had been so grounded in this family unit that I-- what's the word? I just totally lost myself. I didn't know how to be. I didn't know how to be without my mother to talk to. That's how I made sense of the world was talking to her. I knew right away that that was going to be one of the biggest challenges of my adulthood, was learning how to replicate that conversation some other way.

I stopped writing for four years, I just couldn't-- it was the first time I'd ever experienced feelings that I didn't know how to articulate, and that was devastating and I just completely shut down, stayed that way for about four years and then slowly started to climb out. But I'll say, it took me a very long time, still, to recover from that. And I'm so relieved that I finally did eventually, but it took a long time.

ET: After that long period of devastation, what were the first steps that you took towards getting out of that pit?

KB: Well, ironically enough, it was through the help of a boyfriend. So, that college boyfriend and I broke up through all of this, which was also devastating. And eventually I got together with this other guy who I was working with in Boston, and he was just a deeply wonderful generous person who gave me the space to think and talk about my feelings in a way that I hadn't for those four years. And I knew that I would someday return to my sense of self, I just didn't know how or when it would happen. I finally had a desire to write something four years later, and that experience of writing an essay which ended up being about my mother was so exciting and it made me feel reconnected to myself. Around that time, I decided that I wanted to go to graduate school and move to New York City and so I started putting these steps in motion, putting my adult life in motion rather than being stalled in this place of grief and not movement.

ET: Did you have a sense at the end of it, though, that that grief and not movement period was something that you needed to go through in order to get to a better place, or was it just too confusing?

KB: It was too confusing. And I'd say when I got to New York it got worse. That boyfriend moved with me, I cheated on him, I went through a major identity crisis. There are a lot of different ways to think and talk about infidelity and what that means, and of course I wasn't married to this guy, but I was living with him, I was-- you know, he was a wonderful person. And that period of time it was like I needed to become a monster in order to become myself, and that is something that I understand now. And I almost understood a little bit while it was

happening. But it was like a complete shedding of everything I had been before because that was all gone.

ET: So he eventually found out that you cheated by reading your diary, but that wouldn't have necessarily been the end of your relationship.. You chose that moment to end your relationship.

KB: Well, when I started realising that I was cheating on him, which I was in denial about at first when I did--

ET: What do you mean in denial about?

KB: I would see the guy and I would say never again, I'm not doing this, that's not who I am. And then I would see him again and then I'd say well I'm never doing that again. You know, so that like went-- that happened maybe two, three, four times, and then it was like okay Kate, you're doing this, and this means you have to end your relationship. So I said to my boyfriend we have to end this. And he just felt so confused by that, that's why he went and read my diary and found out about what was going on.

ET: But it wasn't so much that you were ending your relationship to be with the other guy, you were ending your relationship because you wanted to end your relationship and this was the tool by which you could do that.

KB: Right, right. It was abundantly clear from the outside that I was not in love with this guy, it was nothing about love or romance, it was purely primal, it was just sex. And so, yeah, it was just sex and it was also a signal saying yes, Kate, your relationship that you're in is not doing it for you, so you have to end it. And who knows what will happen, nothing will happen with this guy you're cheating with. Like, this is just the weirdest match of two people that could ever exist. So, yeah, that was that.

ET: So then you find yourself living in New York City, single. When you look back on that era now, the few years that followed that, what are your strongest memories?

KB: Let's see, I mean, I was in graduate school at the time, at New York University. I was experiencing life on my own for the first time in my life and it was totally thrilling, every single thing that I did. I was ecstatic. I was also an anxious wreck. I made a million terrible decisions, I was totally panicked about money constantly. So much doubt and insecurity during that time period, but so much excitement. Seriously, just walking down the street was a complete thrill to me, just being around the energy of New York City and the endless meeting people that happens there and that sense that your life is constantly expanding and will never stop expanding. It was a really wonderful time.

ET: I mean, do you think you would have had the same sort of journey as a single woman if you'd moved to, I don't know, Kansas?

KB: Most likely not, yeah. New York is a really good place to be single.

ET: So in the middle of this, you find an apartment that, it kind of-- it's almost like a character in the book *Spinster*, this apartment that you find and that you move into. And it makes me think about the sort of spatial aspect to being single. What do you think about that? Like how much of the experience of being single is being able to control your own physical space?

KB: I mean, for me, absolutely it's a huge part of it. I had always longed to live alone, and to finally be able to do it and in a place that was so exceptionally beautiful, it really was one of those one of a kind apartments that you find, was very exciting. And, yeah, controlling your space. It was really fun when I was doing extra research for the book to be reading back through history about single women writers writing about the single female experience and about how much for them it was about their space and control of their space. And yeah, it's a very powerful feeling to have your own apartment, no matter how tiny, it was tiny, this apartment, you know, but it was beautiful but tiny. And to be able to make it look and feel the way I wanted it to on my tiny budget, you know, no matter, I felt so much pride.

ET: What do you think it is about that control of your environment that is quite female?

KB: Whenever I'm doing stuff like making my bed or folding the napkins, I'm thinking of my mother. And that's stuff that I learnt from her, that she learnt from her mother. Her side of the family is Irish, the Irish are really into textiles and linens.

ET: They've got a lot of linen.

[Laughter]

KB: And so creating that kind of domestic space has been a historically female occupation and we are still acculturated to do it. And it's an important one too, to know that it makes us feel organised and rested to have a place to come home to that is the way that we want it to be. So, yeah, I've always been interested in creating a sense of a home wherever I am, and I 100% inherited that from my mother.

ET: But when you think about how your Irish ancestors would have viewed that, they would have been building the home for the husband and the kids.

KB: Right, right. But, they also would have been having control over that domain, so it's still a space where women were given and found control.

[music]

Chapter 3 – 19.10

On writing *Spinster* and how literature informs the present

ET: So then you write this article. In 2011, you write an article for the Atlantic magazine which turns into a cover story, it's called "[All the Single Ladies](#)" and it goes nuts. Where did that article come from?

KB: So at the time I was working freelance and Scott Stossel, my editor, called me up and said would you be interested in writing a cover story about changing marriage trends and how men's worsening economic prospects are changing the future of dating, marriage and the family. And could you write this in the first person drawing on your own experiences on a never married woman? And I said absolutely yes, yes I'll write a cover story for you, Atlantic Magazine, sure! I have no idea like what this contemporary situation is about, but I'll find out. And as I started the reporting I was really anxious about figuring out my way in, how was I going to write this story in the first person. Because men's worsening economic prospects has nothing to do with the reason why I'm still an unmarried woman, so what would the

intersection be? It wasn't until I came across the statistics around single people, which I hadn't come across that information before. And--

ET: You mean the statistics of single people, how many more there were?

KB: Yeah, that we are living at a time when there were more unmarried people than married people in the United States. And when I saw that statistic, it really blew my mind that that was the case, that I hadn't known that. And then what was that, how had that happened, what was the reason behind it? And I also realised this is my way into the story, this is what I'm going to find out is why am I 38, about to turn 39, why am I never married? And to me the answer had everything to do with the second wave of the women's movement and the gains that had been made had given my generation a kind of power and ability to live with agency in the world that hadn't happened on a mass scale like this. And because of it, we were pushing marriage off. So that's the story that I wrote. And it, yeah, and it just, as you said, went nuts. I was not predicting that that would happen, and it took, you know, whoa, god, yeah, that was wild.

ET: I mean, what was that period like?

KB: It was terrible! I mean, it was like-- Well, you know, it's also what, 2011, viral-ness was different at that point in time, it was still possible for one thing to go viral and have everybody be talking about it. And now, I don't know exactly what the dates are, but now so much stuff is happening that I think it's less possible for that. So, things going viral was not something I'd ever thought twice about before. It's kind of like television, you know, I never watch television, I never think about it. Things going viral, what? I'm just writing this article hoping people read it. Actually, I'm writing the article hoping my editor likes it, hoping they don't kill it, hoping it runs in the magazine. Okay, now it's there, well I hope people read it. And then to all of a sudden have it just explode. And suddenly on gazillions of news shows; TV, radio. I had never been in the public eye, so having my personality in the public eye was very confusing for me. I didn't know how to protect myself, I didn't have any barriers, I still don't. I don't have any like protective walls between myself and the world. So to be in the public eye and be so permeable was really weird.

ET: Because identifying as a single woman at that point, you were also lining yourself up with some cultural archetypes which in 2011 was still, you know, super fresh. Like, Bridget Jones, the kind of tragic single, or the Sex and the City women who were all kind of screwed up in their own way, and the way that single women were viewed, and possibly still are viewed, is a super complex thing, you know. It's not an ambiguously powerful or independent, it might be sad or an object of pity or, you know, almost 39 and not married, you poor thing!

KB: Right.

ET: So, how did that play?

KB: So there were waves of responses. The first wave was death threats from angry men who were saying like who do you think you are, do you think you're too good for marriage, you think you're too good for men? Or they were saying you're not married because nobody wants you, you're just ugly and used up. I hadn't known about this whole underground of men on the internet. And there really wasn't a public conversation around that at the time yet either about trolling and so forth, so to be trolled was really unsettling. To feel all of that male hatred coming at me. And then the next wave was of women who were really offended and saying, you know, I'm happily married and you're just making the wrong choices for yourself,

you're going to regret it someday. And then, meanwhile, the biggest wave was women saying oh my god, thank you, I have felt so invisible, and for the first time I feel visible and like I'm not alone. This is incredible that there are so many people like me. So that felt really gratifying to be able to give that visibility to other women, I liked that a lot.

ET: Yeah, I mean, it was like you were firing a salvo in some sort of war against what you call singleism.

KB: Yeah.

ET: Prejudice against single women. I mean, where do you think that comes from?

KB: Oh, I think it's absolutely because our society has long been and is still organized around women being homemakers and child bearers. So, on the one hand we have women all over the place who have incredible careers and are doing huge things in the world, we know that women can live beyond the domestic sphere, but we still don't really want them to. I get sloppy when I'm using the word "we", I'm just talking about society is still threatened by single women. And so that was really surprising to me that even then in the year 2011 that a fact that a woman was just questioning the primacy of marriage was so threatening to so many people was-- it really did surprise me, I didn't understand that we were so retrograde in that respect. And I do understand it now, because people still feel threatened by it seven years later.

ET: There was a big pressure on you after the success of "All the Single Ladies" to do something next. You know, turn it into a book. And you kind of did but you kind of didn't. What was the process by which your book *Spinster* came about?

KB: I absolutely did not want to turn the article into a book, I just thought that it was fine as it was, as an article, and that if I were to turn it into a book I would be patting it. Okay, that was one reason. Another reason is that I've always wanted to write a book, and if I was going to finally have the chance to write a book I wanted to be able to do it in a reflective and literary and historical mode, which I did not think turning the article into a book would allow me to do. Also, I felt that this conversation is only going to keep growing because the numbers keep growing, and so I didn't want to write a journalistic book that would be suddenly outdated. I wanted to write something that would be valuable to single women, you know, like three years, five years, seven years from now, and that in fact maybe people would be so sick of the conversation happening in the media, they would appreciate this more idiosyncratic take on it. So those are a bunch of reasons. Another reason was that when I was doing all of the press around the "All the Single Ladies" article, I was really struck by how newscasters and so forth were acting like this was a totally bewildering contemporary phenomenon! Who are these people who aren't getting married? What's happening now?! And when in fact this was all the result of centuries of change. And so I wanted to return the conversation to its historical context so that we could all understand better where we are in the present. And so that was the book that I ended up proposing and, as you know, ended up writing.

ET: So for those who are listening who haven't read the book, it's got a kind of particular structure. Can you explain that?

KB: Well, I mean, it's a hybrid of my own experiences as an adult single woman, the lives of five women from the turn of the last century whose lives and writings influenced my own thinking around marriage versus not marriage as I was going through those years of singledom. And then also I was trying to put together a history of single women in general.

And then I was also trying to kind of organise it so that each woman that I was writing about would be speaking to one of five themes that I thought was very important to the single life. And so that was a way of organising the ideas. I just felt tired of the body of literature that exists that's telling single women what to do, or it's single women complaining about their love lives and how terrible men are. I didn't want to do either of those things but I also didn't want to write something that felt kind of boringly pedantic about like here's what singledom is, here's what to think about. So if I thought if I put these five women in, I could really be putting a lot of ideas through their mouths, you know, through the things that they had said, and that that would make for a more dynamic reading experience than if it had just been me and my voice the entire time.

ET: That also helps you get away from it being sort of self-helpy. It could have been, again, a kind of, you know, it's okay, you're okay, be independent, that's great, and that's not that at all, although it advocates for those things.

KB: Yeah, and also, I mean like there are like a thousand reasons for why I did the book the way I did, but you just reminded me of another, which was that after the "All the Single Ladies" story, the way the media was packaging me as this woman who had it all figured out and who was just this like badass, you know, forget marriage, I don't need it, and I think that that's really damaging. I think that that kind of figure doesn't actually inspire women, I think it makes them feel bad about themselves. And it's not real! That's not who I am, that's not who I was. And so I wanted to wrest back my own self and show that, yeah, I'm of a generation where we were coming of age with old messages that did not match the on the ground realities of our own lives, and that's a very confusing landscape to navigate. And so I wanted to show that anxiety and confusion, so that, yeah, that felt important.

ET: What were the five themes?

KB: So the five themes that I decided to focus on are work, the importance of employment so that you can afford to live by yourself. Love and sex and how to navigate those tricky waters. Space and creating your living space in such a way that it feels like it's serving you and your needs. Autonomy and the importance of holding on to your own autonomy. And then finally, a kind of montage theme at the end that brings all of those ideas together and shows that all of these aspects aren't just personal or sociological, they are also political, and so I wanted to end on a more political note.

[Music]

Chapter 4 – 31.22

The single life and generations of feminism

ET: You came to all of these women through reading, through reading what they'd written. So really what the book is, as well as an exploration of the history of single women, of being single yourself and of negotiating that kind of space and living an independent life. It's also a meditation about the power of reading and the power of literature to reach across timespan, space, generations, and help you make sense of a life that might be happening in a different spot, but you can still learn from them.

KB: Absolutely.

ET: How conscious was that?

KB: Very, only because that's how it had happened for me. And because I was also showing that I was living at a time where I couldn't find examples that made sense to me and that I had to go into books and history in order to find them, and I wanted to just have that be put forth as a reminder that there is so much information and knowledge packed away in all of these books and so much of the past that is useful to us. That the past and history isn't just dusty, it can really inform the present.

ET: You write about Edith Wharton "What Edith taught me was this: to live happily alone requires a serious amount of intentional thought." What do you mean by that?

KB: When I first started living alone I just thought this is amazing, I have my own place, I can afford it, this is great, life is good. And then quickly realised that I had no idea how to do it, that living alone requires a lot of work. You really have to figure out how to spend your time, you have so much time. And you are not responsible to anybody else. So how do you structure your days and your weekends? How do you structure your work life and your social life? How do you find a balance that feeds you? And that's not a process that we usually have to go through. You know, we grew up in our families or whatever, we just kind of live the way that we live. And it took me several years to really find the right balance for myself. So that was tricky.

ET: So, at the end of *Spinster* you talk about meeting S. And you're still with S now?

KB: Yes, yeah.

ET: How did you meet?

KB: Oh gosh. We met after my "All the Single Ladies" article came out. And it was after I'd started the book. He emailed me on Facebook and said I, like everybody else in New York City, read your article and I thought it was smart and in an exciting way. And I liked how he phrased that. And as I told you before, I was hearing from all kinds of men, and I actually went on dates with three of them. And I chose those three because they contacted me on Facebook, so I could see a picture and could see that we had at least one person in common, so they weren't going to be serial killers. So went on these three dates, and I liked Seth, so I started dating him. So at the time-- he's about eight years younger than I am, and because of that I just thought this will never last, like this is-- he's a brilliant and kind man and this will be nice and fun, and sort of who cares, like, I'm working on this book, this is my main job right now. But yeah, it stuck.

ET: So, I mean, there's a slight generational difference there, very slight. But I'm interested in the way that generations play into your story. You know, your mother was of her generation very strongly second-wave influenced, had her set of concerns, you followed with yours. What do you think the role of generations are [in feminism], what are the shifts?

KB: Well, you know, I'm feeling kind of concerned about generational differences in terms of "me too" because I think it's amazing what the millennials are doing. Overall, I think that millennials do not get the respect they deserve, they are an incredible generation. And, you know, that's because they've inherited, or because the socially progressive ideas that have been in the works have finally permeated to such an extent that they can live them out in a way that our generation couldn't. And so when I hear women of our generation or above casting aspersions on the younger women, it really bothers me. I think it just shows a lack of curiosity and also an ageism.

We're all shaped by the social political context of our time and place and we react to it in different ways. And so when you're of a younger generation being more progressive than the generation that came before, you didn't do it on your own, you know, you got help getting there. I wish there was a way that we could sort of just erase generational divides and make there be more of a cross-generational conversation where just actually talking about the ways that ideas move through culture and move through time. And when we are lucky enough to be around for certain ones or not and how that affects our relationship to those ideas.

ET: Completely. And where do you think that we're headed with that? Do you think that this is a time that we're in?

KB: Well, I mean, it is an extraordinary moment, and I have no idea what will happen with it, but it's so exciting. Nothing this exciting has happened in my lifetime in terms of women's lives and conversation. And to think that industries are actually changing because of what women are saying, it's just like, it's astonishing and exciting. But as we know, progress is not linear, it's circular. And who knows what kind of force could come along and drag us back in a different way. There's really no way of predicting.

ET: You live in New York, so does your president, or did.

KB: Oh right, I forget that about him.

ET: How do you think that this administration has played into the way that millennials are forming their feminism?

KB: Well, I mean, I think it's the only positive thing to come out of this administration, which is otherwise completely terrifying on every level. But because it is so grossly terrifying it has enabled people to organise against it and make resistance a present day reality. So I think that "[me too](#)" would not have happened without Trump and that Harvey Weinstein ended up being this kind of locus of hatred for grossly unearned male vanity. And that's been good.

ET: There's just one more thing that I wanted to ask you. A few years ago you had your own breast cancer scare. How did that play out for you in terms of the way that you thought about your mother?

KB: It brought me closer to her in a new way and it showed me that when people die, our relationships with them continue to evolve. And, you know, when I was wheeled into that operating room to get a tumour removed from my breast, it was incredible to think that my mother had been in this exact situation. And at the time I was nine years old, I was too young to understand it or know it, but to now be having this experience put me in contact with an experience that she had had and made me feel close. And then I learnt that I had learnt how to have cancer from her, that that was not something I'd ever thought of, but now it's a reality, it's something I have-- you know, I take a cancer drug every day, I have to go every six months to get MRI's and mammograms. And this was her life, that's what she did for all of those years during which we as a family pretended that everything was fine and okay, and it was, and that's like the only way you can do it is to keep moving forward as if nothing's wrong, but I feel grateful to her for that. But I will say that like those days, those every six months, it's really weirdly painful in a new way, the way that it makes me miss her and just be in contact with the loss of her. I feel closest to her then but in the most sad way.

ET: Kate Bolick, thank you so much for coming in and talking to us at the Opera House.

KB: Ah! Edwina, thank you so much, this was really fun, I really enjoyed it.