

Episode 11: An Inspiring Conversation with Kim Clairry and William Miller

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SIMON BUEHRER: Hi. Welcome to inspiring conversations. Bonus content from OCALICON's *Inspiring Change* podcast. I'm Simon Buehrer.

Last November, I had the good fortune to meet Kim Clairry, an occupational therapist, international speaker, consultant, poet, and self advocate with unique experience in understanding the intersection of autism mental illness and trauma. I also met her husband and writer and novelist William Miller. Both Kim and William participated in episode five, "It's Different for Girls, a Conversation with Four Women on the Spectrum." It actually should've been called "a conversation with four women on the spectrum and one guy not on the spectrum," but that's a way too long and far too complicated title for a podcast episode.

Anyway, the day before that interview took place, Kim and William join me for the open mic session that we're about to share with you. It's a short conversation that ends far too quickly, so we're definitely going to work on scheduling a follow up chat with them sometime soon. In the meantime, enjoy this sweet story of how two people met and how they make their relationship work. I think right now, given everything that's happening in the world, we could all use more sweet stories of how two people make things work. Here's Kim Clairry and William Miller, recorded in front of a live audience at OCALICON 2019.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SIMON BUEHRER: William, I've heard a lot about you.

BUEHRER:

WILLIAM MILLER: You heard a lot about me, huh? That's unusual most people heard a lot about Kim.

SIMON BUEHRER: That's how I heard about you. First, I heard about Kim.

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: There's so much I want to talk about I'm trying to narrow it down.

SIMON OK.

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: Can I start with a poem?

SIMON Sure.

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: OK. I wrote this poem when I was in and-- I was in and out of psychiatric facilities for over 10 years, and I was completely misheard, misunderstood. And I had been told I needed to go to hospice. I've been told I needed to live in a nursing home, that my autism was moderate to severe. And I wanted to communicate the things that I needed because of my autism and I couldn't, and I became at a point of despair. And one day I wrote this poem.

Stop. Open your eyes. I am not who you say I am. Plainly, I am just Kim. I am not a diagnosis code in a book.

Take a step back and look. Stop. Pause. Give me time to process what is said. Too much too fast is not good for my head. I just need a few minutes to hear what you say. Please be patient with me, OK?

And--

SIMON Thank you, Kim. That was beautiful.

BUEHRER:

Thank you. And for me, what helped me turn around was William. He was the one who was patient with me. And he came into my world first without expecting me to come out into this world where it's too loud and too busy and too confusing. He came into my world and just sat with me and held my hand for a little bit, and then slowly, he brought me out. And I-- in the past three, four years?

WILLIAM About four years now.

MILLER:

KIM CLAIRY: I've been able to enjoy things like going to the botanical gardens at Christmas and

looking at the lights, and because of William because of his patience and understanding.

SIMON So you couldn't do that before?

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: No. Well, I would go, but then it was too loud and too busy that I would dissociate and I wasn't able to enjoy it. So now I go and I close my eyes, and he can lead me with my hand. And then when I can handle it, I open my eyes and I'm able to be present and in the moment so I can engage.

SIMON And then when you need to disengage again you can do that.

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: Mhm.

SIMON How did you two meet?

BUEHRER:

[KIM LAUGHS]

WILLIAM We've got two different versions of that tale. You want to go ahead?

MILLER:

KIM CLAIRY: So my version is-- my version is I was trying to get into a Bible study, and I was having a hard time because of the environment. It would be loud. And so I contacted somebody, the head of a singles group, and told them about my autism. And he set me up with a lady named Diana who came to my house and got to know me, and I told her about the autism and what it looks like when I'm getting overstimulated. And she asked if I wanted to go to a game night that evening, and even though it was last minute, I said OK.

And so she drove me there. And I was really disappointed, because people were just eating and talking and there were no games, and I wanted to play games.

SIMON Wait a minute. What kind of game night was this?

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: Yeah. So I was really confused. And after about 30, 40 minutes. Then a game started, but by that time, I was too overstimulated. And I sat down and William came and sat next to me, and he was trying to talk to me, but I couldn't talk.

WILLIAM MILLER: I thought she was playing hard to get. [LAUGHS]

SIMON BUEHRER: Is that version two?

KIM CLAIRY: No.

SIMON BUEHRER: Or we haven't hit that yet. OK.

KIM CLAIRY: And so Diana came and got me, and-- because she saw I was overstimulated. And we left. And then William contacted me by Facebook. But his story is much more funny.

WILLIAM MILLER: I was-- at the time, I was working in a warehouse in Florida with no air conditioning.

SIMON BUEHRER: Oh.

WILLIAM MILLER: So by the end of the day I was--

SIMON BUEHRER: Is that legal?

WILLIAM MILLER: --just gross and-- unfortunately, yeah. And so at the end of the day, you know, I was gross and nasty. And the girl who was doing this game night, Sarah, she had designs on me. She really wanted me to be there. And I kept saying, no, no, no, you know, I'm going to be gross, I'm going to be sweaty. And she finally said, you know, if you're not there, nobody else is going to be there.

She said, I'll tell you what. Why don't you take a change of clothes with you to work? And you come to my house right after you can shower here, change your clothes.

Nobody will ever know. And you know, course I says, well, you know, OK.

So after work I go, and I get in the shower and there's no soap. And I'm wet and I wrap a towel around me and I step out into the hall to say you know like, hey Sarah, where's the soap, you know? And Kim had arrived early. And she--

SIMON With a bar of soap.

BUEHRER:

[KIM LAUGHS]

WILLIAM There I am in a towel and Kim is standing there. And I said, this isn't what it looks
MILLER: like.

[SIMON LAUGHS]

But the great thing is Kim had no clue what it looks like, you know? Because she has autism she--

KIM CLAIRY: I don't even remember it.

WILLIAM You know, she took it for what it was, you know? And I'm sure there was a whole lot
MILLER: of talk going on in the rest of the group, but Kim took it absolutely in stride. And she didn't even understand why it was funny until years later when we told it to a conference and her mom was there at the same time.

KIM CLAIRY: And everybody was laughing. I was like, what is so funny about your story?

[LAUGHTER]

WILLIAM So that's how we met.

MILLER:

SIMON That's beautiful. Yeah. I like both versions. I thought I would like one over the other,
BUEHRER: but I like both of them.

KIM CLAIRY: William was going to share-- he did a really good blog about relationships and autism.

SIMON Oh, yeah. Let's hear some of that.

BUEHRER:

WILLIAM MILLER: Yeah. Well, of course, it's a pretty long blog. I don't remember the whole thing off the top of my head.

SIMON Paraphrase.

BUEHRER:

WILLIAM But I will say that--

MILLER:

KIM CLAIRY: What do you like about me?

WILLIAM --this was-- yeah. This was in--

MILLER:

[LAUGHTER]

This was in response to some negative things we have been hearing on the internet about autistic and neurotypical relationships. And you know, my push back against some of those voices--

SIMON What were the negative-- like they can't work?

BUEHRER:

KIM CLAIRY: Stay away from it.

WILLIAM MILLER: You know, yeah, a lot of people just saying, stay away from it. It is a really, you know--

SIMON Oil and water.

BUEHRER:

WILLIAM --volatile relationship. It's not gonna--

MILLER:

KIM CLAIRY: People with autism are conceited. Just a bunch of negative stuff.

SIMON Wow.

BUEHRER:

WILLIAM

MILLER:

You know, and I put up a blog post basically saying that, you know, I find my relationship with Kim very refreshing. I don't have to play any of the neurotypical games with Kim, right? When she says she's going to the store to get a bag of chips, it means she's going to the store to get a bag of chips, not we need to re-evaluate the relationship, right?

With a neurotypical person, they'll say one thing and then you have to parse their words and try and figure out what the meaning was at the bottom of all of that, and I don't have to worry about that with Kim. She's just going to tell me what she thinks. And so that's just-- that is very refreshing to me, right? It's all right there on the surface and I don't have to play the games.

But beyond that, you know, Kim just brings to our relationship such a unique perspective. I tell people all the time, she's the problem solver in our relationship. If there's a problem, she's the one that's going to come up with the fix for it.

And I just do the typical male thing and sort of dig in my heels and be grumpy about it and not want to talk about it, but Kim's the one going, well, how do we fix this? How do we meet in the middle? What can we do? So it's just been a real delight.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SIMON

BUEHRER:

You're listening to *Inspiring Conversations*, bonus content from OCALI's *Inspiring Change* podcast. I'm Simon Buehrer.

I was speaking with Kim Clairy and William Miller during an open mic session recorded live at OCALICON 2019 in Columbus, Ohio. You can read more of Kim's poetry on her website. It's at kimclairy.com. That's K-I-M-C-L-A-I-R-Y, all one word, dot com.

And you can find more episodes of *Inspiring Change* at ocali.org/podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. While you're there, check out our ongoing series "Voices, Visions, and Victories." Snapshots recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, they're available at ocali.org/podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

Thanks again for listening. I'm Simon Buehrer. See you soon.

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