

00:00:00 Michelle Obama: One thing that I appreciate is that you guys were always good sports about, following me on my various health journeys.

Kelly Dibble: Oh my gosh, what about Camp David. That was,

Michelle Obama: Don't look like, don't roll your eyes. [laughs]

00:00:12 MUSIC

00:00:39 BREAK 00:01:04

00:01:07 Michelle Obama: Hi, I'm Michelle Obama and this is The Michelle Obama Podcast. And in this episode, we're going to be talking about friendship.

Michelle Obama: Well, hey you all,

Denielle Pemberton: Hey girl hey, [laughs]

For this conversation, I thought it might make sense to bring in some of my closest girlfriends.

00:01:25 Sharon Malone: Let me just turn this off,

Michelle Obama: All right, my phone's over there,

Kelly Dibble: You know what, let me just make sure to check, I know I've turned mine off, but you're just making me like crazy. Making me crazy.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

You'll probably recognize one of them—and that's Sharon Malone, who I'm so glad to have back on the podcast. We are also joined by our good friends Danielle Pemberton-Heard and Kelly Dibble.

Denielle Pemberton: Hi, I'm Denielle,

Kelly Dibble: Hi, I'm Kelly,

Sharon Malone: Hello and this is Sharon.

Michelle Obama: Now these three have all got great careers in medicine, business, and public affairs, and I met each of them at various points of my life. We got into all that during the episode, so I won't spoil it here.

As it always does when we're together, the conversation ends up in a number of different places. It's a pretty good window into what I love about my girlfriends—we can reminisce, we can talk and laugh with each other at each other's stories.

00:02:21 But most of all, we can talk about the important stuff: what's going on in the world, in our families, whatever we're thinking about, really. We're just there for each other when it counts—for a laugh, for a hug, for whatever we need.

Now, the four of us recorded this conversation not long after the police killing of George Floyd and so all those feelings—grief, anger, outrage—were top of mind.

00:02:55 Michelle Obama: We're in the midst of, not only a pandemic, but, we've just witnessed a, a murder of a Black man, in public. And I know that we talk about race as a group of friends, all the time. There's a level of pain, and and frustration, you know, just, fatigue, with bein' Black in America. How are you all thinking about these things?

Kelly Dibble: We're Sharon and I were talking about this, on the way over, about. We just witnessed a murder by suffocation. And, and they're like, Black people are you OK? Keep doing what you're doing.

Denielle Pemberton: Right, and oh by the way, and oh by the way, continue working and, can you now draw up a diversity and inclusion plan? We need your help.

Kelly Dibble: It's just like unreal.

00:03:42 Denielle Pemberton: You kind of get tired of being the fixer. You know, everyone looks to you, I mean, you can relate to that, everyone looks to you in the party, to fix it, what, what is, Michelle doing, what is she saying, what is she going to do, can she, fix it? And bring people together, and people are looking to us in our respective roles to do the same thing. And, you're just tired, you're trying to, you know maintain, your sense of self, you're trying to hold up your family, you've got kids that are frankly traumatized, because as Kelly said, they've watched on live television, someone suffocate someone, with their hand in their pocket, looking at a camera, and knowing in their heart, that nothing's going to happen to them. And that's a very scary thing for these kids to process. And you're trying to be there for them, but also be there for the young people that you work with, the people you lead,

00:04:38 Michelle Obama: A lot of people look to us, as, now senior people in our lives, not just as mothers, but, as mentors, and everybody like, it feels like everybody lays this at, sort of the feet, of, [laughs].

Denielle Pemberton: Right.

Michelle Obama: Of, and I'll say it. Black women. You know, it's like, make us feel better. Help us understand,

Sharon Malone: You know it's almost as if, you know, these concerns that we have, and knowing what goes on in the community with young Black men. Young Black women, for that matter. We've all known it. And you feel it, and we process it when we send our children out there in the world. But then there's been this, people don't believe you. You know. They think, oh you're just being overly sensitive, or, you know, it's not really like that, that was years ago.

00:05:28 Michelle Obama: And and when you say people you mean white people.

Sharon Malone: I do. I do. Well, I do, I do, because.

Michelle Obama: Our white friends, our white colleagues, people who don't experience this in their lives.

Sharon Malone: And even when you see it. There's still a asterisk, well it wasn't really what you saw. Don't believe, don't believe your lyin' eyes, you know, that's kind of the story of, Black America being gaslit, for, forever. Just simply because no, no no no that didn't happen that way, he was resisting, she was, you know,

Denielle Pemberton: Or they were imperfect, and therefore, they, they, they deserve what happened to them, or somehow it diminishes the horror of what happened to them.

00:06:09 Kelly Dibble: Well and, the other thing, too, is, you know, this, um, i. e. working in a corporate setting, and where everyone's well-educated, and they think, well this is something that doesn't happen within, you know, our purview. I mentioned, on a call that I had last week, with my legal group, about an incident in central park. Where a woman, who uh, was walking her dog, dog was not on a leash, she was a university of Chicago Booth graduate, so smart woman, felt threatened by a Black man who said get your dog out of the way.

Michelle Obama: Oh this, was this the the bird

Kelly Dibble: This is the bird watching, yes.

Kelly Dibble: And who was a Harvard grad, and he was a birdwatcher.

00:06:49 Kelly Dibble: So you're talking about two people who are both very well educated, so it's not an issue around ignorance, you know where prejudice is just limited to the ignorant. These are two well educated people, but her perception of him, was a Black man, who was attacking her. And she knew that she could call the police. Knowing that anything could happen afterwards, right. But she was willing to bring that on, because he said something to her, about,

Michelle Obama: Well she, well she weaponized.

Kelly Dibble: And, so she weaponized. And she knew that she could do it. So it's almost we're going back to, I don't know, I mean you can look at Emmett Till. You know knowing that you, soon as you call foul, right, with a Black man, introduce the police, anything can happen, even

the worst. But it was just, it's not as dramatic as seeing a murder, but the fact that she knew that she could bring harm to him, and that the, and that the police wouldn't question, her.

00:07:48 Michelle Obama: That incident in central park, which infuriated all of us, as we watched it, it was not unfamiliar, I mean this is what, the white community doesn't understand, about being a person of color in this nation, is that, there are daily slights. You know, in our workplaces, where, you know, people talk over you, or people don't even see you, I know Denielle you talked about being in meetings with people, who can see you as a professional but then you step out into the street, and those same people don't even see you.

Denielle Pemberton: They walk right by you. I've had it, several times. Where I've presented to, um, members of my team, people that I've worked with, peers. Go downstairs in the elevator, go out to lunch, and they walk right by you on the street. You're standing in line next to them, at, sweet green. And they look right through you, they assume they don't know you, um they have no use for you, and yet, um, you just helped solve their legal problem. 00:08:48 Or helped make them some money, or saved them some money. But then, when you're out in the world, you're just an invisible, person.

Michelle Obama: Denielle and I, when the girls were little, this was when I was First Lady, I, I am Michelle Obama the First Lady of the United States. And,

Denielle Pemberton: Of America.

Michelle Obama: Of America, and we had just finished the, taking the girls to a soccer game. We were stopping to get ice cream, and, I had told the secret service to stand back, because we were trying to be normal, trying to go in, it was Haagen Dazs, wasn't it.

Denielle Pemberton: Exactly, Haagen Dazs.

00:09:23 Michelle Obama: Um, and there was a line, and once again, being, when I'm just a Black woman, I notice that white people don't even see me. They're not even looking at me. So I'm standing there with two little Black girls, another, Black female adult, they're in soccer uniforms. And a white woman cuts right in front of us. To order. Like she didn't even see us. And, I litera- the the the, girl behind the counter, almost took her order. And I had to stand up cause I know Denielle was like well, I'm not gonna cause a scene, with Michelle Obama,

Denielle Pemberton: That's exactly right, I was like, mmm, I do not want the news story.

Michelle Obama: So I stepped up and I said, excuse me? I was like you don't see us four people standing right here, you just jumped in line? She didn't apologize, she never looked me in my eye, she didn't know it was me. 00:10:15 All she saw was a Black person, or a group of Black people, or maybe she didn't even see that. Because we were that invisible. I can tell you a number of stories like that when I've been completely incognito, during the eight years in the White House, walking the dogs on the canal, people will come up and pet my dogs but will not look me in the eye. They don't know it's me. And it's, it, you know, what white folks don't understand it's like that, that is so telling of of how, white America views people who are not like them. You know, we don't exist. And when we do exist we exist as a threat. And that, that's exhausting.

00:11:02 Sharon Malone: I live, you know, a rather diverse life I think, you know, and I have white friends, and I have my Black friends, that I've known,

Michelle Obama: We all do,

Sharon Malone: But very few of my white friends have Black friends.

Michelle Obama: Mm hmm. You are the,

Sharon Malone: Like I'm your only Black friend. And, I said that's interesting, it's always amazed me that we've lived in Washington D.C. for as long as we have, and I've been here for thirty years, and I said, and, my husband and I will go to, a party, and it will be like,

Michelle Obama: Still just us.

Sharon Malone: Just us, you know, and, but it allows people to accept Black people one by one. Cause it's you. I like you, but that doesn't change my view generally. I still feel how I feel about them, Them. Oh well those people. And them. And somehow you have allowed me to be an honorary white person.

Kelly Dibble: Exception.

Sharon Malone: You know cause you get to be in the group, but you're not like the rest of them.

00:11:59 Kelly Dibble: It's still like the talented tenth. You know you can't take the whole group. There's just like you've got some exceptions. And unless you're, you know walking around with your title on your sleeve, um, they really don't distinguish you from them.

Michelle Obama: But this is also why, my girlfriend group, while it is diverse, it it has been so important for me to have Black women, in my crew. Throughout my life, professionally, because there's just a certain, There's a certain relief that comes when you don't have to walk into your friend group and explain yourself. My group of, female friends, aren't calling me to say what can I do? They're, you guys are calling me to say how you doin' girl? You know, let's talk.

00:12:50 Michelle Obama: Let's roll back a bit, and talk about how I met each of you, because each of you represents a different phase in my, particular development, But Kelly we, we met in city government, but our friendship developed because we were pregnant.

Kelly Dibble: The same time!

Michelle Obama: At the same time, with Malia and Kelly has twin girls born almost a month apart.

Kelly Dibble: Right, so July 4th and July 22nd. So, the same month, um. So, as a working mother, um, the first thing was like how do you balance, you know your work life, and, motherhood. But the main thing was, what's the model of a mother? So part of it was getting the girls together for play-dates cause we knew moms did that. Our kids were six months, years old, sitting, on the floor, back to back, were, and oblivious of each other. 00:13:44 But we had each other. And it gave us a chance to, you know, have brunch, have a bottle of champagne, you know, and talk about what was going on in our lives, and the adjustments we

were making, you know to our home life, you know, the responsibilities between a husband and wife, around the kids, you know, and we progressed through, you know soccer games, and um, getting museum

Michelle Obama: Oh, the birthday parties!

Kelly Dibble: Birthday parties! You now, and we had summer babies, so we had, like the first birthdays were crucial, cause, you know, they, they survived! Us for a whole year, right.

Michelle Obama: It was a big deal! And we were hot!

Kelly Dibble: Bid deal, and we were, you were still in the condo on Everett so you had the barbecue, obviously for July 4th.

Michelle Obama: Yeah that's when you learn, you know, that when you have, the ba- the first baby, cause we, we all went through this, oh, we can organize this birthday, it's just a birthday party, in the house, and I remember Barack goin', we don't need to rent a facility, you know, it's like why would we spend that money, why don't we just do it ourselves?

00:14:42 Kelly Dibble: Right!

Michelle Obama: And then, you're exhausted,

Kelly Dibble: ... exhausted!

Michelle Obama: With food, and you got all these people and folding chairs,

Kelly Dibble: Oh my god,

Sharon Malone: That's right,

Kelly Dibble: We do have, and we did Adams playground for our first, for the girls' first, and I still have pictures where everyone was, it must've been a hundred degrees that day. And people were just melting.

Michelle Obama: That was the first and last at home, birthday

Kelly Dibble: It was. That was that. [laughs]

Sharon Malone: Well, you know what, cause you realize, when you have a kids' birthday party, you've got the parents. So you've gotta entertain, the children, and the moms, and the dads and it's like whoa, that wasn't quite, but for gods' sake, don't leave them. [laughs] Please, stay here and watch your own child, whatever you do,

Michelle Obama: Stay here, I'll feed you,

Sharon Malone: It's a double edged sword there, I'm like.

Michelle Obama: That's where those little uh, birthday parties, see the Chuck E Cheeses, those, you know I would pay any amount of money to be able to go somewhere, pay somebody, for two hours,

Kelly Dibble: My gym,

Michelle Obama: My gym!

Denielle Pemberton: Gymboree,

Kelly Dibble: Right, Yes!

Denielle Pemberton: Yes in and out!

00:15:36 Michelle Obama: You know, they had that stuff, organized, and all you had to do was bring some pizza, and you would leave, wouldn't have to clean up. But we went through, Kelly,

Kelly Dibble: A range of those,

Denielle Pemberton: Pizza and a goody bag, that's all you need.

Michelle Obama: Pizza and goody bag, that's all you needed.

00:15:53 Michelle Obama: I always feel for these, um, mothers, parents, who try to do this stuff by themselves, cause let me tell you, my, our girlfriend group, when our kids were infants, all the way up through teenagers, we, there was a group of mothers in Chicago, and we did everything together. When Barack was on the road,

Kelly Dibble: Well that was really, important.

Michelle Obama: When your husband was traveling... he was on the road, mm hmm. Yeah.

Kelly Dibble: And he was on the road for a long time because he was at Springfield, before he ran for US senate. And presidency.

Michelle Obama: But all of us were in some state of, professional need, and having a group of women that we could call on, each other, and just, you know, it wasn't like we were leaving our kids, but just having another adult in the room for the day, that you could go, is this working for you? Or just,

Kelly Dibble: And also with the girls, I mean they still feel, a comfort level, almost as,

00:16:46 Michelle Obama: With each other,

Kelly Dibble: As a family as a cousin, you know, um,

Michelle Obama: An extended, you know, yeah. Our girls, see themselves more as cousins than they do, well I think all of our kids,

Denielle Pemberton: Yeah, all of our kids,

Michelle Obama: Cause Denielle we, you were one of my White House moms.

Denielle Pemberton: I was the newbie!

Michelle Obama: You were the newbie!

Denielle Pemberton: I had no prior history. And just sort of, um, you know, we came together really over the girls, um, just by chance being, um, in the same school. And then being assigned to the same basketball team. And I think the first time I really reached out to you was um, you know, the most important thing of basketball game is snacks! And, we were assigned

randomly, to be snack parents together. And I said, now how do you, serve snacks with the President and the First Lady of the United States.

00:17:36 Kelly Dibble: How's the First Lady make a costco run?

[laughs]

Denielle Pemberton: Right, and I literally sent, you know, because again, in the early years, getting to you was, through intermediaries, and I sent an email and said you know, Hi, I'm a parent at the school, we've been assigned to snack day, um, and, as I would with any parent, let's divvy it up, and figure out what we're going to do, and um, the person who worked for you at the time said, oh my gosh thank goodness, thanks for reminding us, it would've been really embarrassing,

Michelle Obama: To show up, to be, the President and the First Lady and not have snacks!

Denielle Pemberton: To show up without snacks! No snacks!

Michelle Obama: They would've talked about me like a dog,

Denielle Pemberton: Yep, the sure would have.

Michelle Obama: You saved me.

Denielle Pemberton: So, I, I thought I was doing something

Michelle Obama: And what did you bring that day.

Denielle Pemberton: I thought I was doing something, I went to trader joe's,

Kelly Dibble: Was it nutritious?

Denielle Pemberton: It was! It was nutritious, I went to trader joe's and got those killer clementines, and I was very proud of myself.

Michelle Obama: What did we bring? [laughs]

00:18:31 Denielle Pemberton: Well you guys showed up with um, coolers marked, you know, West Wing, President of United States, brought in by, armed men. And wheeled up. Um, wheeled everything out, and um, you had a very diverse group of um, beverages. Waters, gatorades, all, all high end stuff.

Kelly Dibble: Oh, nice. Bet the kids loved that.

Sharon Malone: Everything just your choice.

Kelly Dibble: Just your choice,

Sharon Malone: What would you like, children?

Michelle Obama: Well see, back in the day, it wasn't, like you said I wasn't doing the Costco runs, I would you know, go approach, the White House chef, or, and then they wouldn't know how to like, just, just chill out, you know. If I brought cookies, they were freshly baked White House cookies, individually wrapped, with bows.

Denielle Pemberton: And packaged,

Michelle Obama: In packages. And you're kind of going, oh, you know, this is kind of overboard, and even Sasha and Malia would be like why can't you just bring regular snacks? Why couldn't you just get some chips ahoy cookies and just bring 'em up, and it's like I can't shop?

00:19:28 Sharon Malone: Well, and see, I was always the mom forgetting snack day, so I'd be at the soccer game and I'm like damn! I was like Eric, Eric, OK could you, hold here, I've gotta run to the store, and come back like phew, yeah just got these, I would so forget the snack.

Michelle Obama: Missed the game.

Sharon Malone: And I, you know, and when you have,

Kelly Dibble: Three kids though!

Sharon Malone: Three kids, and have had so many different directions people are going, and, you know, and I just remember being a mom, and feeling, and having to work, and I used to just have moments of just feeling just woefully inadequate. You know, because there would be the mom who'd come in with the home, the decorated cupcakes, or whatever, and I'm like, is it that day?

Michelle Obama: I am failing.

Sharon Malone: Is it Christmas, was I supposed to bring those?

Michelle Obama: It's like did, are you still playing soccer? It's still soccer season? Aw, no.

00:20:29 Anna Holmes: More on the Michelle Obama Podcast after the break.

00:20:37 BREAK 00:21:07

00:21:11 Michelle Obama: Hearing you talk about what it's like, what, what it was like that first time, when I invited Olivia over for a play-date, and you had to pick her up, and,

Denielle Pemberton: So you have an appointed time to show up, it's not like hey I'll just get there and drop off whenever,

Michelle Obama: No, no, can't do that.

Denielle Pemberton: You have to have, you know, license, ID, et cetera, so they have all of your information, down to your social security number, you pull into the gate,

Michelle Obama: And then somebody's gotta ask for that, I mean that's the other thing.

Denielle Pemberton: Right, so, you're going, so there are three or four exchanges, of getting all of this information just to drop your child off, for a play-date. So we get there, I drop Olivia off, again, you don't get out of the car, you just let your child out of the car, and let them go in,

Michelle Obama: Well you said, you'd go and get your car washed,

00:21:55 Denielle Pemberton: Oh absolutely, I wasn't going to roll up to the White House in a dirty car! So I got my car washed, I think I had my hair done, and my nails done. I was not going up there looking raggedy. And, I, made sure that Olivia had herself together. So we go in, I drop her off, I'm told, please be back at, one, again, at that time we lived outside of the city, so I'm killing time in D.C., trying to, you know, just wait, And at about twelve thirty, I get the call, restricted number, hello? Um, yes, is this Denielle Pemberton-Heard, Yes. This is the White House calling. And I'm thinking, heart drop. What did she break? What did she do? What happened, I'll be right over. And they're like no, no no, um, the first family would like for her to stay a couple more hours, they're going to watch a movie. 00:22:53 I'm like Oh, OK. so again, I'm driving around D.C. just went to CVS like three different times, in different parts of the city, I'm like killing time,

Sharon Malone: Read a novel,

Denielle Pemberton: And um, so then finally, at the appointed time I go back, to pick Olivia up. And suddenly I see, security moving around. And I'm getting nervous, I'm like Oh, I'm supposed to be here, I'm kind of standing back. And then this one comes popping outside, and she comes out and she's like Hi, And I'm like Oh, oh, hi! Hi! And that was really like the first time that we, talked one on one. Just quickly. But, now, thinking back and knowing you. It was like you were clamoring to get out of that house. Like you were just like, if there's an excuse for me to just go stand in the driveway, I will do so.

00:23:48 Michelle Obama: Well I also thought, I am still a Black mother. You know, so I figured, this child had just been at our house, I know her mother would want to see me, you know. It's like I can't act like I can just have people's kids over and not know them. So I thought, OK, Olivia's been at our house all day, I haven't even met her mother, I need to go down, like a normal person, and say hey, she's safe, we aren't crazy, you've seen us on TV, but you need to see us in the flesh, and I also need to see you. And so we started talking, and I thought, I like this woman. They are gonna be friends, it was like me building up my posse here in D.C., it's like I need to have some other mothers, who can help me, and sit well, who I think we share the same values, you know I just got a sense of Denielle that she wasn't playing around, Denielle was my first, like, real friend in D.C.

00:24:54 Michelle Obama: Sharon, while our families are very close, I didn't meet you in parenthood. Um,

Sharon Malone: Right.

Michelle Obama: We met each other in the realm of this political beast that was our, that were, that would become our lives, um, and, we talk a lot about the first time we kinda connected across the table, where I was like, your reaction to the situation was the same as mine, this again, was before, the presidency, but

Sharon Malone: Yeah,

Michelle Obama: Barack, was a US senator, and,

Sharon Malone: Well you know, it was one of these, you know, interminable, D.C. dinners. And you know, it's like and people are up and glad handing, and you know, and D.C. is a big, who are you? and why do I need to know you? kind of town, you know. 00:25:40 So we're there, and, I remember there was, and, and I we won't call any names, but there were just people, and, just looking at how people would react, and you know how you look across the table, and not a word was said, you know, you look at someone's eye and you're like, OK. You know, I got it. And it was like this instant, uh, understanding, of the situation. And it was like, OK, yeah. OK.

Michelle Obama: Sharon was as done, with this event as I was. To put it, she's being kind, but. I saw this look of done-ness, that, you know, where everybody else seemed so excited to be there. And I was like who is that woman that feels like me, I can see it in her face, I just wanna know who she is. [laughs]

00:26:23 Sharon Malone: But when we, and, but the first time we had really had a chance to have a real, conversation, was, um, when you were here, you were the First Lady, you had moved here, and you were staying at the Hay Adams, and I get this call, and someone says, I'm whatever, and I'm from Mrs. Obama's staff, and I was like whaaat? And she says, would you like to have lunch, And I was like, I think I can make that work. And we had lunch. And we had, a lunch, which, you know, 12 to 1, what time did we finished like at 3.

Michelle Obama: Well that's when, you know that was when we were in the midst of the transition, and I would have these lunches, cause I said I just need to meet people, I need to understand Washington, and so, my staff would block out these, like OK you have an hour meeting with this person, and an hour meeting with that person, 00:27:20 so, initially, it was an hour meeting, that they would usually, you know I'd usually be like OK this is over, but when Sharon and I sat down, it was just like, this is another me. And, because, Sharon's husband, is in my husband's administration, Eric Holder, let's just not beat around the bush, that's who your husband is, so you had been in this, world, for so much longer than I had been, and, you were a professional in your own right. And that was something, that I, I saw, I was like OK this is a woman who still has a career, who is raising kids, whose husband is a big deal, but she's an even bigger deal, in her own right. Well, that's what really drew me to you is just your, your attitude, about this place, you were you were unimpressed, but you, you cared deeply. It was that you were straddling that fence that I so often straddled as the wife of a politician, in a world, where women are just sort of, uh, accessories. You were not an accessory. [laughs]

00:28:27 Sharon Malone: There's a lot about this life, and particularly, being connected to people that are very visible, because you take it all on. You have your stuff that you're dealing with with your family, and your kids, and then you have to, come home and try to figure out how to reconcile, who your husband is, with who this person you've just seen on TV, or who you've had, these articles and people have said these really horrible and terrible things. And it's, it's crushing.

00:29:01 Michelle Obama: Both of our husbands had a different temperament for this. I mean, both of them, why they were good at what they did, is that they didn't take a lot of that stuff on. Personally. Whereas, you, and I, were left, with all this emotional energy, that you wouldn't

want to put back on them, because it wasn't phasing them. But I, we would, just being able to say out loud, how hard it was. How hard the, hard this was, to continue to try to find a space for yourself in this world, when each of us was feeling wounded in a way that we couldn't talk about, cause we had to be strong. It's not just the fact that our husbands, are, in the public eye, but I find that in all of us, just, you know, all of us have been sounding boards to each other, just dealing with marriage in general. Sometimes it just, you know, you think you are just done with your husband. You know, sometimes a good ol' conversation over pizza night, or a glass of champagne, brings you to a place of kind of, OK, this isn't so bad.

00:30:11 Michelle Obama: With everybody here, it was a matter of us deciding, OK, I'm gonna, I'm gonna call you up,

Kelly Dibble: Yeah, exactly.

Michelle Obama: Denielle, I'm gonna, I'm gonna, invite Olivia over, we're gonna sign up for something. Sharon I'm gonna ask you to go to lunch, um, we're gonna plan, Kelly, a time to take our kids to go see Disney on ice. It, you have to put as much time and energy into cultivating those friendships but that's something that, women, oftentimes aren't taught. You know, you all are the people that I can go to, for, for just a gut check. Too. Because that's also the beauty of the diversity of my particular girlfriends, because you all are uniquely, yourselves, and I see myself differently, in contrast to who you guys are.

00:31:10 Michelle Obama: One thing that I appreciate is that you guys were always good sports about, following me on my various health journeys.

Kelly Dibble: Oh my gosh, what about Camp David. That was,

Michelle Obama: Don't look like, don't roll your eyes. [laughs]

Kelly Dibble: I mean the Camp David,

Michelle Obama: That's a,

Denielle Pemberton: Look,

Michelle Obama: You know, what I called like a spa weekend.

Kelly Dibble: It's a spa weekend.

Denielle Pemberton: yeah, well, yeah, that, because the first one, that, the nice little, um, binder that we got from your staff did call it a spa weekend. And it started with, of course, meeting at the White House, and then being driven up to Camp David. And where we first noticed, that, the traditional M and M's and snacks that were in the cabins, were no longer there.

00:31:58 Michelle Obama: [laughs] Well, after the first one I had to put wine back on, at least,

Denielle Pemberton: that was thanks to Sharon,

Kelly Dibble: OK thank you, yes! Bout to thank you Sharon,

Sharon Malone: When I, because I missed the first one and I remember when, Mel sent me the thing I said oh, and oh, there's no, and I said, what?!

Michelle Obama: No alcohol?

Sharon Malone: I said, we're gonna have to add some wine back. And they're like OK.

00:32:15 Michelle Obama: I know for me, I was always thinking about, OK, how do I get outside, so finding something that would get me out, and, so skiing wasn't something I knew I grew up with, Denielle you skied way more than I did.

Denielle Pemberton: Mm hmm I grew up, yeah.

Michelle Obama: But I thought, well when it gets cold outside, and we can't go for walks, or go on the Potomac, it's like well what are we gon' do? Um, so, one year we went up to Camp David and Liberty Mountain was really just a short drive from Camp David. And, so we started there, on that, on that hill, um, the kids started learning there. I remember my agents, none of them could really ski. [laughs] not, none that were on my detail, so everybody was taking these crash skiing courses, uh, before we went skiing, but then we put it on our radar screen for every, every winter, and we, you know, went went went to Vail, and

Kelly Dibble: We started in Vail, first

00:33:13 Michelle Obama: And Aspen, and that's when we learned what a mountain was. Or at least I learned what a mountain was.

Denielle Pemberton: You could see the the, the joy that you had when we were out on the mountain. Because, once you put on the ski helmet and the goggles, she's pretty anonymous, right, so there's the ability to sort of be out there and do your thing and be free and you're outside, and we spent hours on the mountain,

Kelly Dibble: You start an hour early, before the,

Denielle Pemberton: We, we'd go up an hour early, she starts out on Liberty Hill, and, you know, one year we go to Vail, the next year we're at Aspen Mountain, and next thing I know, she's you know, progressing, through the hurdles, you know, lock step, with, what we affectionately call her ski husband.

Michelle Obama: [laughs]

Denielle Pemberton: Um, because he's the ski instructor that's sort of instructing her, as opposed to us, though we're in the group. And you just see, that she's getting better and better. Secret service frankly could not keep up, and there's this one time where we're taking this long run. 00:34:18 She doesn't even know what's happening, right, because she's at the front of the pack, with the ski instructor. You've got all of these secret service agents skiing behind her, sort of flanking her, and zig zagging, crossing themselves as we come down the mountain. And I sort of ski a bit behind her, to give her room. Well, on this particular run, it was icy, she was flying down the mountain. One by one, agents started wiping out. One who will remain nameless because he got so much smack from the secret service for wiping out, because he was like her detail lead. Other people falling, you know I'm looking at bulletproof

vests, and snow going up backs, you know everyone's wiping out. And at, one point I look, all of her agents are down. And I'm still standing, and I yell to them, I got her guys, I got her! Thinking to myself, now, if anyone needs, me to do anything, we are sunk, but, that's my girl, I'm gonna trail her,

00:35:21 Kelly Dibble: I'll take a bullet.

Denielle Pemberton: I'm gonna do my best, if I have to take my ski off, and slap someone upside the head, we're going to do it.

00:35:30 Michelle Obama: For me, one measure of, like, finding my crew, is not just sort of how do I relate to them, but are they open enough, and are they, kind enough? And are they secure enough, to be friends with my friends. And slowly over the course, the course of many many years, you guys have come to know each other, as, as well if not better, you know, than, than, and connect even better than you connect with me.

Sharon Malone: Right, and you know, and it's the sorority of, it's that circle of trust, I should say, that we had, because, you know, we had this really tight group of people who knew you could say what you wanted to say, you could do what you want to do, and it was going nowhere. To this day, you know, no one, nothing has ever leaked out, from this group, about what was going on. Because we understood, how important it was, to guard, your privacy.

00:36:27 But that's the way it is, with, you know, with your girlfriends that you trust, whether they're First Lady, or they're, anybody. You know, I have, girlfriends that, you know, honestly, that I would say, if I killed somebody, she would, they would say, girl, lemme get a shovel. OK.

[laughs]

Sharon Malone: Let's just, let's just go. You know. And, you know, I mean, because, that, you know and to be able to have that kind of relationship with somebody, where, you know I could say something really terrible, and you know I don't mean it, about the person, like my husband, but you know, but I'm just sayin' alright I feel that way today, but you know, that you're not gonna sit there and look at 'em and say mm hmm, yeah, you right,

Michelle Obama: That's right,

00:37:15 Sharon Malone: No, you just know that that's how it is. That's the cycle of, of, of how you're feeling and to let someone vent, and it's, it's an amazing pressure release, because I can say it to you, so I don't have to say it to the person.

Denielle Pemberton: Really, to have a safe space, I think you're I think you're right,

Kelly Dibble: I think you're right cause you're still trying to protect him, right, you know, in all of this, in terms of managing your emotions and how you're feeling, to, so you aren't burdening him with it. You know, he already had, the weight of the world, literally, you know on his shoulders. And so, I think, I think you developed a plan, I mean, I think you took it as, you know what this is my job to figure out, and, um, in a healthy way.

Sharon Malone: And it's a, and I'm gonna tell you, it is a terrible place to be, as a spouse, when whatever it is that's bothering you, always seems petty, compared to,

00:38:12 Michelle Obama: I know, right, right, right

Sharon Malone: Oh, I've just got to go solve Mideast peace today. And it's like well did you pick those, did you leave that on the kitchen counter, I mean you know it's like, it all means, you know,

Michelle Obama: But yeah that's where your girlfriend group, and again, taking this away from the White House, and from me in particular, I mean, the, the truth is is that, we've all been that way with each other, and with the women, and women friends, in our, in our lives, where, you know, having a crew that you can go to and say whatever is on your mind, and not be judged for it, give yourself a space to blow off some steam, this is why when I, I look at some of these, reality TV, I have a love hate relationship with it, but I, I never like the way they portray women friendships, because they're always so catty, and bickering, and argumentative, in ways that I have never experienced among my women friends. Ever. 00:39:14 Um, and that has meant so much to me to have women who are secure enough to have friendships like that, that aren't possessive, but are, you know, they're broad, and they're open, and they're, you know, they're inviting. You know, if I ever get to a point in a friendship where I can't say, tell the truth, and know that the trust that we've built up can sustain whatever that truth, or whatever that, maybe it isn't even, maybe it's my truth and it's not your truth. But, you know, if the friendship can't sustain that, then, something else is wrong, and at some point in time, it's gonna come out. It's gonna show itself. But you can't do that if you don't have trust, you know, you can't do that if you don't know that you can come back from it. And that there's genuine love, you know, I know for me, the, the people that can get me riled up are people who I care deeply about. 00:40:13 I have such wonderful friends in my life, that it's, you know, I want as much for them as I want for me. But I feel like you all feel the same way, you know. I get that back, that's why these relationships, have sustained themselves over so many years. Because I feel like you guys, have literally, ridden and died with me. [laughs].

Denielle Pemberton: That's what we do,

00:40:39 Michelle Obama: What you got goin' on, Kelly?

Kelly Dibble: I don't know, I just had a moment.

Michelle Obama: Well, Kelly had a moment.

Kelly Dibble: And you know I have my moments.

Denielle Pemberton: A moment!

Michelle Obama: I know, what's the moment.

Denielle Pemberton: We love you Kelly!

Kelly Dibble: I know, no, I just, you know I was just thinking that your, your girlfriends are kind of like the steady, and, even if your personal relationships are kind of going up and down. Um, you guys have been my rock.

Michelle Obama: Yeah. yeah.

Kelly Dibble: For the last couple years.

Michelle Obama: Mm hmm.

00:41:10 Sharon Malone: But isn't it amazing, how quickly though, the time has gone by.

Kelly Dibble: Oh, it has been crazy.

Sharon Malone: Like, you know, because, I, you know I have always thought of myself as the new friend, like you, relative to,

Michelle Obama: New?

Sharon Malone: And I'm like, wait a minute that was thirteen years ago. You know, new relative to, you know, we have sort of moved into a different category, and I tell you, and it is, I, I mean, can't tell you how many happy memories I have, of all the things, collectively, individually,

Kelly Dibble: Yeah, it's true!

Sharon Malone: You know, that we have had, over these past, you know, eleven years,

00:41:47 Michelle Obama: A group of, of good girlfriends, provides a lifeline, that, I, is, is unlike any other.

00:42:03 When we can lean on each other, when we can learn from each other, and show up for one another, no matter what we're going through, that is how we grow.

It's an evolution that happens not just day-by-day, but moment-by-moment. Interaction-by-interaction — all these little sparks of connection that build on one another. And together, they compose the magic of a life. Doesn't have to be anything flashy. It doesn't need to involve flash bulbs and red carpets.

00:42:41 But those sparks we have with the people in our lives keep pushing us forward. Keep helping us evolve. And keep helping us become even more of who we are.

So I want to thank Kelly, Danielle, and Sharon for their time, but most of all, I want to thank all of you for, for being here, for listening. These conversations couldn't be more important. Thanks again everybody. I will talk to you again soon.

00:43:12 MacKenzie Smith: Got multiple episodes here

[laughs]

Michelle Obama: Well, see,

Kelly Dibble: Give us another bottle of that tequila, and we can really go,

MacKenzie Smith: I know! Leave the mics here?

after hours podcast! Oh, this was so fun!

00:43:28 Anna Holmes: The Michelle Obama Podcast is a Spotify Original, presented and produced by Higher Ground Audio in collaboration with Dustlight Productions.

From Higher Ground Audio, Dan Fierman, Anna Holmes and Mukta Mohan are Executive Producers. Janae Marable is our Editorial Assistant. Adam Sachs is our Consulting Producer.

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The song you heard at the beginning of this show is "Friends" by E[^]ST.

Thanks for listening to The Michelle Obama Podcast.

00:45:04 BREAK 00:45:24

