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With Your Host

Jen Riday

You are listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. I'm Dr. Jen Riday and today we're talking about how to help ourselves and our teen and tween girls to be authentic, and real, and let go of those social shoulds. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey there, I am so excited you're here because I have a fun episode for you today. I have invited on three guests who are talking about the phenomenon, the experience of launching their kids into the world. And you might be thinking, hey, Jen, I only have small kids, or my kids are tweens. Well, the fact is this episode applies to all of us because we are all as mothers at least, on this progressive journey of allowing our kids to become independent humans, humans who think, and feel, and want to live in alignment with what feels true to them.

There are a lot of pressures from society telling us how we should parent, what our kids should know when they launch. There are also a lot of emotions that come to us as mothers when we launch our kids. So if you're a mother this episode is absolutely for you. My guests today are Tara Romney, Natalie Bubak and Nicole Blanc. Tara is one of the women on my team, I get to interact with her all the time. And I love and adore her. She also used to live in Madison, Wisconsin with me, has since moved to Parker, Colorado.

Natalie and Nicole are both Soul Circle leaders in the Vibrant Happy Women Club. They are coaches, they are fantastic. And I'm so honored that they would come on and share their stories today. So I was talking with

Nicole a while ago and she was telling me her story of launching her first son who just went to college in Scotland. And she said, "Jen, I'm so surprised that no one talks about this, how this feels." And I thought, you know, you're right, nobody talks about this.

So we decided to talk about it here on the podcast. I think you'll find this fun and informative, these women are amazing. And it's always fun to hear a group of women talking together so let's go ahead and dive in.

Jen: Hey everyone, I am here with three awesome friends of mine who are going to talk with us today about empty nesting. Maybe not just empty nesting but sending kids out the door into the adult world, whatever phase in that they might be. So I'm going to let each of my guests introduce themselves. I have Tara Romney, and Nicole Blanc, and Natalie Bubak. And so we'll go in that order, introduce yourselves and then we'll talk about how you successfully sent kids into the world without having an emotional total breakdown. So go ahead Tara.

Tara: I am Tara, I'm a mom of five. I've sent two out into the world. And with my third getting close, she's a senior. And I live in Colorado.

Jen: Alright, thanks, Tara. And Nicole.

Nicole: I'm Nicole and I have two boys, and I just launched the first one about two months ago. And then my second son is 16, so that's also kind of the up and, changing, and driving and stuff.

Jen: Yeah, it's coming up, yeah, great, thanks. And Natalie.

Natalie: I am in Lincoln, Nebraska. I'm a mom of four that are all launched. So two are officially in the working world and two are still in college.

Jen: Okay, excellent. And I have sent two of my six kids out into the world. So between the four of us hopefully we can cover all the bases of what this has been like. The reason I wanted to do this topic is I was talking to Nicole recently. And she was saying that it was shockingly emotionally traumatic for her. And I remembered Tara had said the same thing when her first son left the home. And I thought, nobody talks about this. So let's just kind of share our experiences with it.

So, Nicole, I was just talking to you, tell us, your son is in Scotland, and you're just on the tail end. I mean he left what, eight weeks ago, two months ago.

Nicole: [inaudible].

Jen: Okay. What has that been like for you?

Nicole: Yeah. It was really, like you said, it was surprising to me because I just kept thinking, how does everyone do this? I'm not the first person to send their kid to college and I went to college. I'm like, "How did my parents do this, how did all of that?" And it really didn't feel – more traumatic than I thought, I guess, I kept crying out of the blue, I would start crying. And he's in Scotland.

And fortunately I was able to go with him to get him there. I don't know if that was harder or not, to have to go and then leave him, rather than, I kept thinking, with COVID, there was that question of, am I even going to get to go? And I did. But there was almost this side of, well, if I just take him to the airport, it's not quite the same than if I actually go and get him. But I did, I got to go and get him settled. And he's been there for about two months

and he's doing great. But I did, I kept crying, I kept crying to myself, just like my world changed.

Jen: So did you cry every day? And how many weeks did that last?

Nicole: More leading up to it, I think. And then while I was there with him, I was there for almost a week with him. And every day we'd be walking along, and we'd say something and then the tears would just start to run a little bit. And he'd be like, "Are you okay?" I'm like, "Yes, I'm fine, this is just part of it." And then the plane ride home I was really grateful that we had to wear masks. And they give you those eye masks so you can sleep, so nobody could see me crying. But I think once I got home, I think it was the leading up to it more.

It would be just kind of out of the blue when I'd think something, and the tears would come. And then once I was home it was probably just a couple of days, but it got better. It got better.

Jen: And are you typically a crier, would you say?

Nicole: No. I think I have a lot of emotions and I keep them all in a lot. And I think, honestly, to toot your horn a little bit, I did a lot of feel it to heal it. I kept going, "Okay, these are these feelings. What am I feeling? Where is it? Where in my body am I feeling it? Allow that feeling." And really trying to work through that a lot so that I didn't just hold it in. But now I don't just walk around crying a lot. But yeah, it is interesting.

Jen: Yeah. And that's a valid experience. You had your tears before, maybe a little bit on the way home and then you had moved it through. Every emotional experience is valid, so thanks for sharing yours. And we'll jump over to Tara. You've launched two kids. Tell us kind of each experience and how they're different. That might be interesting.

Tara: Okay. I feel like I need to echo a lot of what Nicole said. I think there were definitely times before anticipating them leaving, that you would get a little – I don't know if it is nostalgic, or sad. But I've kind of realized it's a little bit of a grieving process. You're starting this new chapter, they are and so are you because they're not going to be there with you anymore. And so you kind of grieve a little bit. I think that's part of it. And so with my first son, my husband drove him out. We were in Wisconsin, and they drove out to Provo, Utah.

And so we packed up the car and everything. And I got to see them drive away. And oh, now, the tears are coming right now, just remembering that and just having a heavy heart for a few days. I'm so sorry. And then just when we would talk about things or remember funny things and Tyler wasn't there to be there. But that's when I would kind of get teary. The kids would look at me like, is she going to cry? Always [inaudible], well, [inaudible] sad. But it does, it gets better. And you stop and realize this is their adventure and it's so exciting.

But you just miss having them there. And you resist the temptation to text them every too often, "How's it going?" Because you're just dying to know, what are they experiencing, who are they meeting? What are they doing? Because again you just always had known that when they're there with you.

Jen: How long did you feel emotional with Tyler launching?

Tara: Well, I still do, my tears.

Jen: So how many years ago was that, so that was three?

Tara: Four, it was four years ago, yeah.

Jen: I love that, Tara, your heart is so close to the surface, and I think that's beautiful. I don't know if you remember this, but I remember you telling me that it had been six weeks and you were still crying most days a little bit.

Tara: A little bit, I mean a little bit less. It's not like I was sobbing every day. But there would be times when it would just tug at your heart and you'd just get a little, like Nicole was saying, little tears kind of well up in your eyes. But it got easier of course.

Jen: What does your husband think of the crying, how did he respond to it?

Tara: He just gives me a big hug and he listens too, he listens as well.

Jen: Yeah, okay. And then for Scott, how was it?

Tara: It doesn't really get easier I think with subsequent kids leaving. In fact I felt like it sped up. I think your oldest child kind of paves the way a lot for different experiences all growing up. And then it just seems like the next kids follow so fast and it just speeds up. So it just seemed to come really quick. It's kind of the same thing. But this time he flew out so I took him to the airport, and I couldn't even go stand with him at the gate like back when I went to college and watching him as long as I could, watching him going through the security line.

So anyway, yeah, it was, yeah, just missing, they're my buddies. And so it's just hard to not have them there. And now they're both missionaries. And so I haven't seen either of them for about a year. I get to see them, I FaceTime with them every week, but they're gone for another about 10 months. They're doing great stuff, but we miss not having them here. But they're doing awesome and that makes me happy.

Jen: Yeah. awesome, watch out, Nicole, it's speeding up, she warned you. Alright, thank you, Tara, that's great. And Natalie, you've launched four. I can't even imagine. And you're empty nested essentially, tell us about that.

Natalie: Oh gosh, I think just listening to you guys talk it's bringing back a lot of emotion too. I just remember those sweet moments, one of my favorite things is all of my kids were leaving. My oldest went to Pennsylvania, and then my second went to Arizona, so they were just spreading everywhere. As they were heading off to their first class or to the end of the apartment, I took a picture of them kind of walking away from me. And I have that on my phone, and I remembered, I would look at it a lot just because I would think, they're heading off into the world.

They're doing their own thing, this is why I've loved them the last 18 years and tried to train them to be big people. And it kind of helped me on those times where I was feeling really sad. But we had, our kids were pretty close, there was four kids in five and a half years. So as I was launching the first one, the next one was in their senior year, whatever and it just kind of felt like I didn't really have time to let it sink in until they were all gone. So it's been an interesting process.

And my husband and I have tried to meet with a lot of people that were empty nesters and just kind of found out, "What do you guys do? How do you re-engage, there's just the two of you, when your whole life kind of used to revolve around the whole family?" And so yeah, it's been a really interesting experience and good but hard at the same time, yeah.

Jen: What have your friends said about how to re-engage as just the two of you? That's interesting.

Natalie: So this was one of my favorite stories. A good friend of mine said that they were counseled to just grab a legal pad and both of them write

down 25 things that they would envision the two of them doing together, just to kind of reconnect. And then to look at each other's list and see if there's any commonalities. And so she said, "We did that, and we looked down and we both had riding bikes on our list. So we went to the bike store and we both got some really nice bikes." And she said, "The very first time we went out together my husband took off like a bat out of hell."

And she said, "I'm trying to catch up and he kept circling back and going, "Come on babe."" And she said, "I was crying, I was so mad because in my head I pictured bike rides with a little basket on the front, driving to the farmer's market and just sipping wine and my husband's trying to get 450 calories burned." And so I just thought, isn't that so true, in the midst of even finding commonalities we still have different ways that we want to experience it.

And so there's just a lot of reconnecting and even just the things that as a young couple, that you maybe enjoyed doing together but you're such different people, 18, 20 years later. So it is fun. So we just decided, I guess, to move a lot right now and find our own place and just start a new life where it's just the two of us again.

Jen: That's awesome. That's awesome. I have launched two kids and none of it was traditional in any way. I think anyone who listens to my podcast knows that. So we kind of tried college but it didn't work for my oldest because of depression issues. So I kind of felt like we had multipart launches where they'd go and then they'd come back, and they'd go and then they'd come back. And now my two oldest are both in San Francisco, they are launched.

And I can't tell you, for me I don't cry a lot. I feel a lot of relief that the stress that I experienced with them, with some of the struggles they have had, it's kind of on their shoulders now. I've really passed that stress off. And I don't

even feel bad about that. I would say when they first went to the wilderness therapy program, I cried and really missed them then, that was kind of my first launch when they were 14 and 16. So it's just been dragged out much longer for me. And now I feel like, yeah, they're gone.

So I want to share that, not to sound like a horrible mom but that every emotional experience is okay. And to be honest, they're coming to visit soon and I'm really excited and I text them all the time like you guys mentioned. So, Natalie, you mentioned taking the legal pad and writing down joint ideas and finding that thing in common. So, Nicole, you are single but dating. I want to hear how you're kind of approaching what your empty nest life will look life as you launch your second child in a couple of years, what that's looking like for you.

Natalie: Yeah, it's very different. And it's interesting and I'm changing a little on here, but single, I was widowed. And having my son leave, I think Tara mentioned the grieving pain. I had a lot of the same feelings as when my husband died. And it was just like part of my family being ripped away which feels super dramatic. And I'm not a super dramatic person generally, but those were the feelings that kept coming up though, all of a sudden, my family has changed again and how weird that is. And even the thoughts, like you said, I talk to them all the time with WhatsApp and that kind of thing.

But yeah, that was interesting. And then my younger son would say when the tears came, he said something about driving one day and I just started crying. He goes, "That's what's going to make you cry now?" It could be anything. But yeah, looking at that, I've got about two, three more years before he heads out. And I really, I've lived in this house for 17 years now and I'm seriously thinking a move might be in order. I don't exactly know where. I have in my head somewhere more in nature and in a pretty urban

neighborhood and so somewhere more out on the water or something for a while.

And then while he's in – my younger one's in school, it'll give me a couple more years to figure out where in the world I want to live. I have big dreams and then I have, would I really move to Italy? I don't know, but it sounds pretty amazing. And I think having my son in Scotland and knowing he kind of doesn't plan to come back, he'll come back for his holidays and things like that. But I think he wants to live far. And so that might make it a little easier for me to go somewhere else, knowing I could see him easier, but I don't have a clear plan at this point, but [inaudible], yeah.

Jen: Are you adding new hobbies to your life? Do you kind of think, what is my adult self, what does she look like? You know what I mean, adult self after kids, yeah?

Natalie: I do, because yeah, that's been my it for a long time, I'm like, well, I'm raising my kids. Well, they're pretty much almost raised so I don't have that anymore. So it is finding what's good for me and going through the life coaching. And I'm really liking the idea of more developing women's groups or being part of something along those lines. None of it's all fleshed out but the idea, yeah, more women's gatherings or leading women's groups or coaching, along those kind of lines. I really like the idea of that, yeah.

Jen: That's great. And Tara, it just occurred to me, Nicole mentioned moving, Natalie just moved, and Tara just moved, what is this pattern? So, Tara, tell us about your kind of looking to the next phase, what that is looking like for you.

Tara: That's a good question. I feel like I'm still kind of – so I have three at home, still trying to get settled here and get them kind of in the groove of what they're doing. That's kind of my focus right now. But I have been

thinking lately about, I think somebody handed me a get to know you form at church or something, you know where you have to write down your hobbies and your interests? And I'm like, oh boy, I really need to kind of hone in on.

Jen: So you just moved and what made you decide to move? And then also I know you have a hobby we have in common, you have to tell us about it.

Tara: Great, right. We both love [inaudible].

Jen: Yes, we do, yes, we do. That's all I need to do when I'm retired.

Tara: Seriously, yeah, we found a place here pretty close by that we try to get to a couple of times a week and people just drop in. It's just a really fun community because everybody's so welcoming and come play. And so yes, that's been super fun. So we moved about two months ago. My husband got a job offer within the same company but out in Colorado. And we'd been in Wisconsin for 25 years. And we love Wisconsin. It was an interesting move in that we were very sad to leave, but also excited about a change and kind of a different adventure.

And I grew up in Colorado, so I was excited to be back there. But there's been a lot of emotions about just leaving, we'd set down some pretty firm roots I think they'll always kind of be there. But it's been good to have to be out, kind of stretch our comfort zone a little bit and being somewhere new. And having to kind of make our way somewhere new and figure out things. And it's been good. And the kids have been doing really well. I'm super proud of them. One of my kids in particular, really had a hard time wanting to come but was able to get there. And just recently just said, "I'm really glad we moved, I really like it here." So that was good, yeah.

Jen: Good, that's great. So this moving theme, Natalie, you've had a lot of moving, tell us about that. And I'm talking about this because maybe it does kind of relate to this empty nesting phase, wanting our next chapter. I don't know. So tell us why you moved and what that's been like.

Natalie: So we had four kids and then all of a sudden, the house was empty. And I loved our house. I loved our kids growing up there, it had a great yard. And I just kept thinking, there needs to be a family here just enjoying this place. And for me it just kind of had, you know, my husband and I didn't always have the easiest marriage. And I think there was just some memories there that I was ready to start the whole thing kind of over. I really just felt like I was asking us to kind of let go of that house and be willing to try something new.

And so we had, as the kids had been slowly moving out, I was giving them all of our furniture. So the couch downstairs kind of smelled like the boys' feet when they came home from basketball practice. And so he would take the couch and my daughter had whatever. And so next thing you knew, when we went and put our house on the market, you guys, we had our bed, and our kitchen table, and our dressers. It was basically, the house had been cleared out and we were just really wanting to let go of things.

We moved into a place that's half the square footage of what we had. And just kind of wanted to be able to reconnect, let go of all the stuff. And I guess really just figure out what our new life's going to look like, make room for the new. So there still is a lot of sorting, we have some stuff in the garage that is boxed up. So we actually moved into a place, we had a moment of panic because we walked in after closing and realized, I don't know that we're actually going to fit here.

And I jokingly called my realtor and said, "There was five offers on this house, if we decide it doesn't work." And she actually called me 20 minutes

later and said she knew somebody who had been bidding against us and would love the house. So she actually came and looked at it again. And we sold it to her the day we moved in.

Jen: I love this story.

Natalie: So we had eight weeks to find something new. So anyway, it's been a really fun thing I think for my husband and I to go through together too because all the creature comforts we kind of had to let go of. And my husband was so great, I mean about just saying, "Wherever we are it's going to be awesome." We don't have any grandkids or any in-laws in the picture yet. So maybe someday we'll buy the house where all the grandkids can gather. But for now we just love the small footprint and the ability to leave whenever we want and go visit people.

So that's kind of how it started. And it has been chaotic, I'll have to admit. I don't recommend moving twice in two months.

Jen: Oh my goodness. Well, thank you for sharing that. I love that story, yeah, three houses in about three months, that's good. So one more piece, I want to go around one last time, identity. We each at some point had a role as a mom. And we begin to launch these kids, I sometimes wonder if part of the panic and emotion is the loss, not just of the children but of the relationship and of the role of being a mom.

So, Natalie, I want to start with you on this one. You have fully launched everyone. What do you call yourself now? What did you used to call yourself? What do you call yourself now? What's your primary identity?

Natalie: I would still say my identity is a mom. And by that, I mean, it just means that my responsibilities have changed. It's still probably my greatest joy in life is watching my adult kids thrive and fall down and make their own

choices and get up. And I just love the people they've become, I love. I can't wait for them to come to our new house and celebrate the holidays together. So I would still say that would be – I don't know, I hope that, you know, for me, that's I guess how I would identify. I still feel that. And I still I'm really proud of the people that they've become.

It's just been interesting. I want to put a plug in for this book that I read with some friends, and it's called Doing Life with your Adult Children by Jim Burns. And the subtitle is Keep Your Mouth Shut and the Welcome Mat Out. Just kind of reminding myself how much my role has changed. I'm no longer in charge. But you still are there to encourage them and then you're always available if they ask for help.

Somebody had told me once that you're like a mentor only when they ask for it. And I think that's just a really smart thing because one of the things, kids do hear our advice as criticism, I think, as they're first launching, even if you don't mean it that way. It's just the way it plays itself out has changed for me.

Jen: So you're the mom hostess instead of the mom advice giver now?

Natalie: Yeah. I would say life giver in a sense of just pouring encouragement into them and just becoming the people they are to try to give them feedback. There's just so much in the world, they're comparing themselves to everybody and to everything. I think kids are feeling so inadequate and overwhelmed these days. And so when I see them kind of stepping into their positions of strength and things that they're good at, just trying to encourage that. So it's like giving in a different way, I guess.

Jen: Yes, okay, that is great. So you're a life giver more than an advice giver, that's kind of a mantra we all need. Be a life giver, not an advice giver, okay. It's so true because when I first had kids my mom has learned

that same principle but there was more advice coming. And I finally had to say, "Mom, I will say these things to myself already, I don't need you to say them. I need you to say all the good things about me." And she grabbed onto that quickly as soon as I identified it for her. And she's been really great.

The last two times I saw her she said things like, "You're such a good mom." And my jaw dropped and I was like, "Thank you." She always thought it, but she never really quite said it. So if you're doing that, Natalie, your kids have to love you. Very good. Nicole, how about for you?

Nicole: Yeah, I love what Natalie's saying and it's striking me as I know my kids hear it as criticism and especially with it being my first one. And I'm like, "Oh my God, he's not prepared. He doesn't know how to do this. Or what if he's not prepared?" And he's super smart and he's doing fine but I would still like, "I've got to tell you this. Okay, and I've got to tell you this. And you're leaving in a month, so I've got to tell you this and don't forget." And all those things that I'm imparting wisdom and I'm sure he didn't hear it as wisdom.

So we had a lot of strife over this summer before he left and it was kind of that he was ready to go and I was ready for him to go, even though I didn't want him to go. So there was a lot of that. And I think all those feelings played into that of I need to make sure he's prepared, and I'm scared for him. And partly because he was starting college but he was also moving to another country so there was that combined amount there. So yeah, that's speaking a lot, what Natalie's saying, I'm hearing a lot. And it's so hard.

So to answer your question on my role now and my identity now, I do still have the one at home, so I am still mom. But he's also very mature and growing, and like I said, driving now, so he can take himself where he needs to go. So my taxi role has fallen off, my identity [inaudible] and it's

really changing. So I regularly go through the, what do I want? Who do I want to be? What's important to me? What are my values? And all the things we've learned in coaching, and club and all of those.

And I don't have any answer, I think that's the thing is I'm only seeking, and I haven't landed on anything particular. And I think somebody said once, "We're always a parent. We're always mom. We're always here to be that soft place to land." And I want to be that mom. And honestly, I think the more true I am to myself, whatever that looks like, the better mom I am the better I'm able to then also let them be that way, and let go of the control of you need to look a particular way.

Jen: So you're still seeking and nothing wrong with that. I like that. And for you, Tara.

Tara: I think I'm the same way. I'm still trying to figure it out. And I think as you kind of are going through this time of life you kind of are seeing your role shift as a mom, kind of like Natalie, Nicole said, more as a guide, guiding them but supporting them a little bit. And it's a little bit tricky because you do see some things that you think, I know if they did that thing it would be easier for them in the long run, kind of thing.

But I found this post the other day and I didn't write down who it was from but gist of it is basically, it's tempting. I'm going to kind of paraphrase. Tempting to believe what you know what your child's life should be and to believe you know what they should become. But it's their life and you get to be a part of it, and you were never meant to control it. But you get to experience watching them create their own path and that that's a big gift.

And that was a kind of a good mindset shift for me, that I think growing up when you have little ones, they're kind of a little bit almost like appendages of you. They're part of your life and you kind of do your thing. But as they

grow, and especially this time when they're leaving home and things, you realize wow, you've helped this person grow and guided. But now they really are kind of taking off on their own. And when you kind of step back and say, "That actually is a real gift to see. What are they going to do? Who are they going to become?"

And now I'm trying to see that a little bit earlier with my other kids so that I can be more of a guide for them and not telling them what to do basically, if that makes sense. So I'm still trying to figure out my identity there because it does shift a little bit into that mode when you're launching them off.

Jen: That's well said. And for me, I have been on a journey of learning to really see the good in my kids. And sometimes I think my oldest with the struggles he has, he doesn't have a big social group currently and hasn't for a while. I know that I am the one, maybe with my husband, we are the two people on this planet that can, like Natalie said, be the life givers for him and to see his greatness.

And my greatest intention for all of my kids is to increasingly see their greatness, speak about their greatness, help them see that amazing version of themselves and step up into it. And that's not the easiest parents when we're trying to launch them and help them adult. It's a fine line. So that's my intention for the future. Well, any last little nuggets of advice either any of you want to share with our listeners before we close up?

Tara: I was just going to say really quick, just enjoy all the time that you have with your kids. And there can be frustrating days and hard days, especially as you're filling out college applications, or getting all of that stuff. But just to enjoy that time because it does change a little bit. And not that it's necessarily all a bad change, it just changes so just enjoy the time you have with them.

Jen: Good advice.

Nicole: And like Natalie said, it's their path, [inaudible], and we get to kind of be along for the ride, let them choose, and we support.

Jen: Be the support, the guide. Anything else from you, Natalie?

Natalie: I don't think so. It's just so fun to talk with you guys though, I just love. I mean maybe that would be what I'm thinking is just having other women that can encourage you and that you can be honest with along the journey of launching your kids, whether it's finding just an older woman who's been through it, or just girl friends with kids your age. Whether you're relieved to see them go or sad to see them go, that you feel free just to talk about that and to let loose, just all that.

Jen: Great. Great advice. I appreciate all of you sharing your experiences and your wisdom. You've all done such a great job. And I feel like each of you, Natalie, Tara, and Nicole, you're each such a light, and an example, and I'm so grateful you would share that with our listeners today, so thank you.

So there you have it, the feelings and experience of launching your kids is a real thing, it's an experience. And every feeling and emotion that you might have throughout it is valid wherever you are in that process, whether you have preschoolers, or teens, or your kids are all already launched. I think the moral of the story is honor your feelings. Allow yourself to feel them, let them pass through and know that this is normal, it's part of the experience.

My friends, I love you, I think you're amazing, I hope you enjoyed this episode, and I will be back again next week. Until then make it a vibrant and happy week. Take care.

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