



So...podcast – Episode 34 Grace Tame and Max Heerey – Guest Organisation

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Greetings, John McKenna, So...podcast. For those people that have ever heard of the Australian of the Year, well I got someone on my show who's going to be talking about that. But before doing that, I'd like to just remind my audience that some of our conversation today may trigger a little bit of trauma, people might start feeling a bit uncomfortable because of the content that we'll be covering, there could be a little bit of swearing, could be talking about sexual abuse. So I just want to remind the audience that there's a website called Respect, and that's 1800RESPECT.org.au, their phone number 1800 737 732. There's another great organisation called BeyondBlue.org.au. So please, I know you love listening to my podcast, but if any of this conversation starts to make you feel a bit uncomfortable, please switch off, self-love, and do what you need to do.

John: G'day, thank you very much for coming on So...podcast.

Grace: G'day. Thanks for having me, John.

John: All good, all good. What do you know about the Australian of the Year awards?

Grace: The Australian of the Year awards? Oh, I don't know. No, the Australian of the Year awards programme is a programme that recognises inspiring people from all over our great nation and gives them a platform to further their message for the greater good.

John: So Grace, you got the award, do you want to share with my audience please, why did you get this gig?

Grace: So I was recognised for my advocacy for survivors of child sexual abuse. Myself, a survivor of child sexual abuse at the hands of a calculating paedophile 11 years ago, almost 11 years exactly, I was motivated from day





one by a want to help and protect others, and also educate, because I realised from my private conversations that not a lot is known about things like the psychological grooming that underpins the physical abuse, nor the lasting impacts of trauma. So I set about wanting to tell my story and then realised that there was an archaic gag law in Tasmania that prevented survivors of child sexual abuse from self-identifying in the media, even with their consent, which I saw as another example of a culture and a system that enabled predators by keeping the truth silent, because obviously it's survivors who have the lived experience that's imbued with crucial information to educate properly around this issue. And so I joined forces with an incredible journalist by the name of Nina Fennell, who started a campaign called #LetHerSpeak, and I leant my story as the foundation for that campaign, and we were then joined by 16 other brave survivors. And after relentless campaigning for years we actually succeeded in having the law changed to allow people a voice.

John: Cool.

Grace: Cool. Yes. It was cool, it was cool.

John: Okay, I'm going to really slip this on it's head because sitting next to you is a really hot looking guy, his name is the great Max, Max Heerey. You can't see him guys, but I'm on the software that does podcasting and they're on the couch.

Grace: He looks like a, he looks like a Roman god, I think. He looks like he's been carved out of marble.

Max: Looks fade, looks fade.

John: I'm just looking at the hat at the moment, it's a bit weird, but it's okay.

Grace: Do you know what that hat is? It's the Betoota, it's from the Betoota boys, the Betoota Advocate.





John: Never heard of it. What do they do?

Grace: Oh, they actually do a podcast as well, but they do satirical... no, I shouldn't say that. They're real journalists and they write about real issues.

John: Fine. Well, okay, that's all going to stop right now because I'm here, it's my gig, back off Grace.

Grace: Yes, yeah, sorry.

John: Max, join us please, join us. Thanks for coming on the show. It's truth, I was the one that tapped you on the shoulder when you were visiting Melbourne last week and said, "Mate, I want you on the show."

Max: Yeah, that is correct, and that is the first time that anyone's ever asked to speak to me about this, yeah, up until now.

Grace: Yes.

John: Cool. And I said you can bring the sidekick if you want to.

Max: Yeah.

Grace: Wachaw.

John: Atcha.

Grace: I said, wachaw. I sort of did like... I don't know, like a sidekick noise.

John: Yeah, Max...

Max: I got it, I'm with you.





John: Okay, thanks for explaining that. So Max, Max it is, there are questions I'd like to ask you, but I'm just going to let it go flow. You are the person who's been... how long have you been hanging out with each other?

Max: We've been hanging out for, what, a bit over seven months now? Almost eight months, yeah.

Grace: Yeah.

Max: So we started dating a couple of months before this Australian of the Year award sort of blew up, and so we were just living our subtle Hobart lifestyle and then we got sort of thrust into the, into the limelight.

John: Okay. Where were you, Max, when you found out? Do you remember that moment?

Max: I was... we were sitting in Canberra in the...

Grace: Arboretum.

Max: Arboretum.

John: Okay.

Max: So we were there with all the other nominees and the Prime Minister and yeah, and that's when we found out. And with Grace's mum.

John: Okay. What went through your mind when you heard that? Were you sort of... did you have any money on it? Are you a betting man?

Max: No, no. A couple of friends did have some money on it, but no, I didn't have any money on it. It's a good question, what went through my mind. Everything sort of stood still for a moment there, it was quite overwhelming, I shed a few tears, and I was, yeah, I was just sitting there going wow, this is, this is an incredibly lady and it's an incredible moment.





John: But you knew that before the award, hey?

Grace: No.

John: No, no, no. You... no, no.

Grace: Oh.

John: You knew she was an incredibly lady before the award.

Max: That she was an incredible lady.

Grace: I should shut up.

John: Are you telling me you waited for the award?

Max: I knew that the first time I met her.

John: Oh, good words.

Grace: Aw.

John: Yeah. No, it is all about hearing how you're feeling, the journey and stuff like that. There is so many people in the world where there's that other very important person who's part of their life, whether they're in the shadow, whether they're... you know what, it reminds me a little bit like advocacy. I do a lot of advocacy work, and Grace you might appreciate this, is the golden rule with advocacy is knowing when to stand beside, stand in front, or behind the person that you're advocating for.

Grace: Yeah, yes.

John: So... and I think a lot of people get that mixed up sometimes.





- Grace: Yeah.
- John: So Max, obviously you're... get away from advocacy for a minute, you're Grace's partner, you're looking at Grace, you're talking about Grace, Grace is talking, talking, talking, blah, blah, blah, do you zone out? Do you say, "Yeah, I've heard this bit before?" Or... and if you want to talk offline, not in front of Grace, we can, but... no, you can't. I just want to hear... yeah.
- Max: No, no, I wouldn't say... I'd never zone out. The way Grace articulates things is quite incredible and encapsulating, so no, I never zone out. There are certain parts of her story which are difficult to listen to, especially someone that you love, so there are sort of times when I do try and take it, like I wouldn't call it zone out, but I do do certain things to sort of numb myself a little bit just when things are getting a little bit tough. But no, I still try and stay fully engaged every time she speaks and try to get to all the events that I can get to.
- John: Yeah. I think that's a really beautiful point you raise, Max. And I said the word zone out, but it's about you remaining resilient and, you know, media's not always good.
- Max: Yeah, no. And I think, like for me to be a good support for Grace, I've got to be able to support myself. So I... we've both got to remember, like I've got to look after myself properly so I can help Grace when, you know, things are quite turbulent.
- John: Sure.
- Grace: And vice versa.
- John: Yeah, oh yeah, for sure. It's all about self-love.
- Grace: Yeah, a team.
- John: What's that?





Grace: We're a team.

John: Team. Max...

Grace: Yes, go on, John, block me.

John: Could you get your hand off his lap, please. What's going on here? You lovebirds. Okay.

Grace: I don't have my hands...

John: Good, good. Max, go back to self-love, so obviously you're watching journos and they're doing their job, they're chatting to Grace. Do you ever get situations where, what a stupid question that was, Mr Journo, or Miss Journo? Do they frustrate you at all with regards to how their questioning goes?

Max: Yeah, yeah. I think that all the time, but I think the way that Grace handles things and takes thing onboard and then moves and directs the question into how, like the direction that she wants the question to go in. So I think, yeah, there are... you do hear some very odd questions, but then that's people's own experiences and lack of understanding about certain topics, and so that's why, you know, it can sound odd to us, but yeah.

John: If you were to pull aside one of the journalists after listening how they've just done their interview, grab them by their ear, whatever, say, you know what sort of coaching would you give them to say they're missing the point? Or, yeah, do you know what I'm trying to say? If you have to... we're all, we're all experts afterwards.

Max: Yeah, yeah, I don't think I would. Because a part of Grace's message is that everyone's, you know, welcome at the table to discuss these sorts of things. So I think if you start trying to monitor what questions can be asked about





the topic then you're sort of excluding people from being able to talk about the topic.

Grace: I know I'm not supposed to talk, but can I just, can I just...

John: Yeah, hang on, hang on a sec, we'll just check. Max, are you okay with Grace saying something?

Max: Just for a minute.

Grace: Oh, okay. Oh my God, trigger, trigger, I have to ask for permission to speak.

John: I love that.

Grace: I'm joking. No, I... so with curly questions, rather than attack the person who's often just... I mean, look, there are cases where the media are trying deliberately to prod you for a sensationalised headline, but a lot of the time... like I would say the majority of poorly worded questions or ignorant questions are actually quite well-intentioned, and so I always respond by saying really calmly and politely like, "That's probably not the greatest question to ask, and this is why..." Rather than create sort of, you know, antagonistic situation where we could potentially lose the support. You know, because media are important in the end. They are conduit for information between the person with the information and audience. So, you know, it's about working together to move to the next step.

John: Thanks for taking over the podcast, Grace. So Grace, while you've got the microphone, and I say this with respect...

Grace: Oh, okay, bye now. I'll shut up, I'll go away.

John: No, no, no, no. No, no. I want you to ask, I want you to ask Max a question please. Don't argue, right, I'm just... serious.





- Grace: I actually... okay. Can I ask him, Max, can you please hold the laptop while I go and get banana bread out of the oven? Thank you.
- John: That's a cool question.
- Max: It's come to that time where she has to go and get the banana bread out of the oven.
- John: Oh, yeah, it's cool. So I've done some googling with you, Max, and I know you're involved in the finance area. Are you a sporting person?
- Max: Yeah, yeah, I am. Yeah, and that's part of... that's how Grace and I actually met. I'm not sure if you've heard about this app called Strava, but it's a social media running app. And so when I saw Grace going for a few runs in our local area, I sent her a message saying, "Oh, look, do you want to go for a run?" You know, sort of catch up and go for a run and have a chat, and we did that. And, yeah, the rest is history.
- John: Okay. Do you ever reflect as far as there's you and Grace and there are other partners in the world which are in a similar situation to you, do you have a mentor? Do you look at a couple of a couple of famous people and sort of say...
- Max: Yeah. As far as... no, I look to my parents. I think usually when Grace and I have, you know, difficult situations or we're not quite sure about something, especially when things are so turbulent, yeah, I usually call my parents and we discuss things as a team and, yeah, and that's... yeah, there hasn't been really like a big, famous mentor for me. It's more people that are close to me and that's where I get my inspiration from.
- John: Sure. Have you heard of any terrible whispers that you weren't meant to hear about... because you know, not everybody knows you of course, so there are times where you're sitting back in the crowd. Are you able to share just with us stuff where you've gone, how dare they say that, or think like that?





Max: Yeah. Well, I definitely do hear things and even like, even from places where you really wouldn't expect to hear them as well. But I always sort of pause, I don't like to have a kneejerk reaction to these types of things because I feel that people that are saying those sorts of things don't have a full understanding of the situation and that's, that's why they have those certain opinions.

John: Yeah. Yeah, it's a really interesting journey that you're on. That's, once again, why I thought I'd got to talk to you, and that's what this is, it's a chat. So you are an interesting person and we joked about it earlier, put your name up on Google and it doesn't come up often, but you've got Instagram, which is cool.

Max: That's how I like to keep it, keep a low profile.

John: Well, hello brother, you've just come on the most amazing podcast in the world, John McKenna So...podcast, that's all going to change. So yeah, so Grace is still getting the cake, is she?

Max: She is just come on her way back now.

John: Is she bringing it back with her, because I like, believe or not, I have butter and vegemite on my banana cake.

Max: You have butter and vegemite?

John: Yes.

Max: Grace has peanut butter... not peanut butter, almond.

Grace: Every other type of butter.

Max: Every other type of butter apart from peanut butter.





Grace: Nut butter. I have almond butter, I have hazelnut butter, I have cashew butter, I even have pistachio butter, and sunflower seed butter, and pumpkin seed butter.

John: Well, you're just butter, butter, butter, butter, butter, aren't you?

Grace: Yeah, butter bing, butter boom.

John: Got it, got it, got it. Okay, I want you to put your reporter hat on please, Grace, alright, because we did talk about this before, and...

Grace: Oh, okay.

John: It's a really unique opportunity where the world is going to hear this message, but you know, not getting too heavy. But throw a question here to the great man Max that you'd like to ask him publicly.

Grace: Throw a question.

John: Well, put my hat on, you're the journalist.

Grace: That I would like to ask him.

John: Ask Max a question as a journalist about his journey.

Grace: Okay. Tell me what the, I don't know, the most surprising aspect of this journey has been since January.

Max: Oh, that's a big question. There's been, you know, because it's been such an unprecedented year, there's been lots of surprises. Like you are incredibly intelligent, smart, and resilient, but one of the surprising things is how you're able to get yourself ready to front up to big events and address a large number of people consistently about this topic without basically, you know, falling to pieces, which is...





Grace: Yet, being the crucial word. We're all waiting for the moment.

John: Interesting, interesting question. So I don't reckon you nailed the answer, I'm going to push back a bit more. Grace, dig deeper, alright, because he's talking through the love lenses on his eyes because he loves you. But I want to dig a bit deeper, what sort of...

Max: But that's how we do things. Like...

Grace: Okay then, dig deeper. So have there been any negative surprises, negative, unexpected things that have happened as a result of this, you know, whole event at the beginning of the year?

Max: Well, like our time together, which has been put under quite a bit of stress, that's definitely a negative aspect. But as far as how things have gone, I think we've handled everything quite well considering the scrutiny and the stress and, you know, the lack of sleep and all the travel and being out of routine. But I think the way that we've handled it has been a testament to us and our relationship and our, and our understanding of each other.

John: I'd agree with that.

Grace: Yeah, I would agree.

John: I'd agree, yeah, totally. Hi-five, Grace.

Grace: Thank you.

John: Yeah. So Grace...

Grace: Hi-five to... three-way five.

John: Let's do it. Got it. I feel it from Melbourne and you're in Tasmania. So Grace, the old saying, if you had your time again, if you guys had your time





again, and experienced all this, ask both of you, would you approach it differently? Would you change a few things?

Max: Like it's a very hard thing to look at because there is no rulebook for this year, we didn't see... we don't have a crystal ball, we can't see into the future. We didn't know how big things were going to get, we didn't know like how things would fit in with work and how we would be able to support ourselves. So there's definitely things that I probably would have done differently around my work and I would have probably resigned early, which I've resigned now, and I would have been there to support a lot more, but those are things that we couldn't understand at the time or we couldn't...

John: Sure.

Grace: Yeah, it's hard to... because I mean, hindsight's 2020, so of course when you look back you can sort of, you know, go, oh well, I would have done this differently or that differently. I think, you know, Max touched on one thing that we would both change and that was, you know, the level of pressure and the sort of the impact on the time that him and I have together, you know which has been sort of shortened and mucked around a little bit. But also, we both understand that this platform is not always going to be like this. You know, obviously the tenure of Australian of the Year lasts one year, and I'm not just going to drop off the face of the planet, but it will evolve and we're both pretty utilitarian in our philosophies and our approach to life, we both are doing things for the greater good, and we are there to support each other at every turn. So we sort of try to be glass half full, I suppose, and see the negatives as potential fuel to turn into another positive. Yeah.

Max: And like every situation and every relationship has speed bumps and we, you know, cross things, cross these speedhumps together as a team as we approach them. We just take it one day at a time.

Grace: Yeah.





John: Has there been times where the probing's got a bit much as you as a couple?

Grace: As in, do the media ask personal questions about us, is that what you mean?

John: Yeah, does that get too probing sometimes?

Grace: Oh, I don't really think the media have probed us about our relationship really. They tend to just probe about the details of my sexual abuse, and that, that's where it's sort of... I just sort of explain to them it's not very helpful, you know, because if we just focus on those things, like how bad was the rape, or, you know, when you hear about domestic violence stories they're often like, well he only hit you once so it wasn't that bad, or something like that. The focus is on, it's often too much on the wrong aspects, like the sensationalising the physical stuff when it needs to be about reparation and moving forward. So it needs to be about the psychology and how we can shed light on that and turn it into education.

John: I accept that. Well said. You've done this before, duh. Max, is there any advice you've got out there for the next Australian of Year, the partner of, whatever that person might be, any tips you want to share? It's love, it's friendship, it's partnership, it's team, it's all of that. But Max, what advice can you tell other people that need to feel empowered, and you're not in the limelight, you're in the audience, you're sitting beside or behind or in front depending on the situation, what tips have you got?

Max: Open and transparent communication is a big one. As soon as our communication breaks is when miscommunication happens and that's when you can't be there to support each other. So Grace and I have a lot of frank, in-depth conversations about issues when they arise. We try not to let anything like manifest, so we deal with issues on the spot as they arise, even though it might be tough we know that that's, I know that that's what





needs to be done so I can continue supporting Grace and support her when things are getting tough.

John: I can smell that banana cake, I think... is it ready to eat?

Grace: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

John: It is.

Grace: I can express post some to you.

John: No, no, pass.

Max: Oh, and also, yeah, just another thing on that, it would probably be try and, spend some, try... spend some time to try and be understanding of the position and the pressures that they're on, they're under. Because the pressures that they're under is a lot different to the pressure that someone who is supporting is under as well. So I think you both have to appreciate each other's stressors to be able to support each other.

John: Sure. Yeah. I'm just nodding and saying yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think whether we're talking marriage counselling or relationship counselling, whatever, these are all the things we think about, but it's lovely to hear you say it, Max, and Grace, about why you guys are working so well as a team under the spotlight.

Grace: Yeah.

John: So a big thank you from me to you Max for saying yes and thanks for bringing along Grace.

Grace: Thank you.

John: And sorry I'm not there for the banana cake. But it is a hoot, Max, to hear your voice and be so open about your journey. I'm going to remind





everybody if this podcast has triggered anything, an organisation called Respect, which is 1800RESPECT.org.au and also we've got BeyondBlue.org.au. There's going to be a transcript of this amazing conversation, all these episodes are available on my website, johnmckenna.com.au. We're going to throw to Grace for a closing comment, remark, reflection, whatever, if you're okay to do that, and then we're going to throw to Max for closing remarks, reflections. How's the podcast been with John McKenna So...podcast?

Grace: It's been an absolute cracker.

John: What, say it again? It's been a cracker, tell us why. Why have you enjoyed it?

Grace: I love hearing Max talk and I think that maybe he should just take over my job, my role, for the last half of the year. Can we do it kind of like... is Australian of the Year, can it be like a relay, can I nominate like, you know, some other people to, like so I can pass the baton or something and then just put my feet up?

Max: I would not survive a minute.

Grace: I don't think that's true.

John: And I'm feeling his answer right now.

Grace: I've got a wig, I've got a wig that's like my hair.

John: This is getting really weird.

Grace: You know.

John: Have you? Where is it?

Grace: What are your remarks?





John: Yes, Max, you've got to close this, this has been about you and I've done a bit of a word count, you've actually said more words than Grace, which is cool.

Max: Cool. Yeah, no, it's been great. Thanks for, thanks for having us on and listening, yeah, to what I have to say, even though I'm not as articulate as Grace, we, you know, work as a team and like a bit of a yin and yang and help each other out in different areas. So...

Grace: It's okay because Max is a way better footballer than I am, and I think that's more important.

John: Exactly. Thank you both. Stay strong, stay happy, and thanks for coming onto the So...podcast.

Grace: Thanks John. You're a legend.

Max: Thanks John.

Thanks for listening to the So...podcast. I do hope you subscribe for further podcasts. For more information about So...podcast go to our: website <https://www.johnmckenna.com.au/>

